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# Subaltern in France - A decolonial exploration of voice, violence and racism in marginalized social housing neighborhoods in Grenoble (France)

Claske Dijkema

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## THÈSE

Pour obtenir le grade de

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Présentée par

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dans **l'École Doctorale Sciences de l'Homme, du Politique et  
du Territoire – ED 454**

# **Subaltern in France – A decolonial exploration of voice, violence and racism in marginalized social housing neighborhoods in Grenoble (France)**

Thèse soutenue publiquement le **11 juin 2021**,  
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*Litograph produced during the street workshops of Madame Ruetabaga.  
(Photo author 7/05/2015)*

**To the courage of all those that speak truth to power,  
because it is in truth that we can find real emancipation.**

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<sup>1</sup> In the paper version of my thesis I mentioned first and last names, according to the wish of those involved. However in the context of a backlash on decolonial theory at the university, the intention of Minister Vidal to lead an inquiry into "*islamo-gauchisme*" at the university (Le Monde 16/02/2021) and the criminalization of activists in favor of Muslim rights, I have decided to mention first names in the published version for their protection.

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## Introduction

Mais braves gens, vous savez comme moi que les problèmes de la Villeneuve sont les problèmes de tous, de vous aussi, même si vous essayez de vous persuader, oui de vous persuader, que vous allez mettre vos gosses à l'abri! Alors essayez de comprendre la souffrance qui sourd de par chez nous et qui ne veut ni pitié, ni rejet et retrousser les manches avec nous.  
(Anonyme, 100 discours admirables [in answer to Sarkozy], 2012, 5)

Since the images of burning cars in the *banlieues* were broadcasted in 2005, the French marginalized social housing neighborhoods (MSHN) became infamous worldwide. These MSHN are seen as places of danger and otherness, places that are “barely known but vividly imagined” (Gregory 2011, 239).

This thesis seeks to question this discursive articulation from the point of view of those living in these neighborhoods, and in order to do so looks at, through and from one neighborhood in particular, called Villeneuve, which extends across the border between the municipalities of Grenoble and Echirolles.

My introduction is structured according the following five points:

1. It first unpacks the central theme of my thesis, the stigmatization of social housing neighborhoods in France;
2. then it discusses their discursive articulation as lost ground of the republic;
3. followed by a discussion of the contribution critical geography can make to fill the gap I identified in existing literature on neighborhood stigmatization, mainly produced within the discipline of sociology,
  - 3.1. drawing attention to the genealogy of colonialist representations and
  - 3.2. to the dialectic relationship between moments of paroxysmal violence as moments of production of discourse about marginalized social housing neighborhoods.
4. Two occasions of paroxysmal violence in Villeneuve have been moments *par excellence* to produce stigmatizing discourse about the neighborhood.
5. An additional contribution of my research is that it stresses the agency of MSHN inhabitants who have obtained an important voice in my research as a result of my methodological experimentations that sought to make space for subaltern voices.

The introduction concludes with a brief outline of the seven chapters of this thesis.

### 1) *The stigmatization of marginalization social housing neighborhoods*

MSHN have the following characteristics that differentiate them from other neighborhoods in French cities: 1) a high percentage of social housing and therefore a relatively poor population; 2) a higher concentration of immigrants and racialized French citizens because poverty in France is racialized,<sup>1</sup> leading to the racialization of these urban spaces; 3) they are marginalized both spatially, in the sense that they are located in urban peripheries that stand in 'peripheral' relation to an urban center; and symbolically because they are considered as 'other' in reference to norms of what is considered 'normal' and 'desirable'. The term "urban margins" (*marges urbaines*) designates in this context both an area and the people that live in it (Agier and Lamotte 2016, 8).

Factors contributing to the marginalization of these neighborhoods were described by Wacquant (2007) in his thesis on advanced marginality. The marginalization of social housing neighborhoods in France is the outcome of:

- 'increasingly insecure and flexible labor markets',
- 'a disconnection of marginal people and places from general macro socioeconomic trends',
- 'a high degree of stigmatization by outsiders and neighborhood residents',
- 'alienation from one's place of residence resulting in indifferent spaces' and
- 'the degradation of solidarity networks and decreasing possibilities for its inhabitants to express themselves as political beings' (Wacquant 2007 in Nicholls 2009, 2241).

Wacquant's theory has inspired many researchers worldwide to inquire further into the dynamics around the marginalization and territorial stigmatization of certain urban areas (Delica and Larsen 2017; Garbin and Millington 2012; Kirkness 2014; Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira 2014). The English term 'territorial stigmatization' used by Wacquant and his followers poses some conceptual issues when it travels between disciplines and languages [see Box 0.1].

#### **Box 0.1 [terminology]: From territorial to neighborhood stigmatization**

When the term territorial stigmatization was coined by Wacquant, a French sociologist working in the US, not much detail was given to explain the 'territorial' part of the stigmatization, the focus being on the latter. The use of 'territorial' as a synonym for 'spatial' is inaccurate if we take into account the distinction between the terms in geographic literature. Moreover, the meaning of 'territory' changes when translated into the French word '*territoire*' (Gregory et al. 2009). The English concept of 'territory' refers to "a unit of contiguous space that is used, organized and managed by a social group, individual person or institution to restrict and control access to people and places" (Gregory et al. 2009, 744). It

<sup>1</sup> There is no reliable data available on the percentage of racialized inhabitants in MSHN as a result of France's post WWII anti-racism policy which prohibits the use of ethnic or racial categories in statistics.



can be used in two ways, firstly in a political sense, dealing with power and the limits of access to certain areas. Secondly, in an ethological sense, as that of “dominance exercised over a space by a given species or an individual organism” (Gregory et al., 2009, 744). Over time territory has gained the wider definition of a socially appropriated geographical space, not only of space in relation to statehood (Bonnemaison 1996; D. Gregory et al. 2009). It is this latter understanding that has gained particular importance in French geography and its use of *territoire* serves the function of “distinguishing the particular and local from the more general global or national space” (Gregory et al., 2009, 744). The disciplines of sociology and political science have stuck to the use of territory with regard to the spatial organization of States.

To prevent unnecessary confusion about terminology – writing as a PhD student in geography with a background in sociology, working in France but writing in English –, I use the term neighborhood stigmatization to provide clarity about the object of stigmatization. While neighborhood stigmatization is a global phenomenon, there are at least two French particularities. The first is the territorialization of social problems, by which I mean that social policies target certain neighborhoods rather than certain groups of people. The second is the type of discourse that specifically targets these neighborhoods’ racialized population. I argue that the spatial vocabulary used to deal with social problems is currently used as a euphemism for racism in France; MSHN are presented by mainstream discourse as ‘other’ spaces.

## 2) *The discursive articulation of MSHN as ground lost to the Republic*

In 2010, Villeneuve became the stage for public discourse about MSHN that emerged during the Sarkozy presidency, which Epstein describes as fitting with a neoconservative current in urban policy (2016,3) and which Dikeç called “republican nationalism” (2007). MSHN came to be presented as spaces that somehow do not fit; that are dangerous and deviant; that are “differentiated from the majority society” (Germes et al. 2010, 528); that are considered as a form of exteriority that menaces the “integrity of the Republic” (Dikeç 2009, 6). In addition to this, the idea of MSHN (*banlieue*) commonly evokes racial representations (Garcia and Rétis 2011). Politicians repeatedly speak in terms of “*zones de non-droit*”,<sup>2</sup> of “ground lost to

<sup>2</sup> In a press conference in January 2004, Sarkozy affirmed that he wanted to reconquer “*zones de non-droit*” and to wage a “struggle without mercy against urban violence and the parallel economy”: “Nous allons répertorier les vingt villes et les vingt quartiers les plus criminogènes, ceux dans lesquels les violences urbaines sont le plus fréquentes et où la gendarmerie et la police ont le plus de mal à pénétrer.”. Durand, Jacky, “Pas de quartier pour 20 quartiers. Le ministre s’est fixé comme objectif la reconquête des ‘zones de non-droit’.”, *Libération*, 15/01/2004. [http://www.liberation.fr/france/2004/01/15/pas-de-quartier-pour-20-quartiers\\_465293](http://www.liberation.fr/france/2004/01/15/pas-de-quartier-pour-20-quartiers_465293), accessed 18/04/2016

the Republic”<sup>3</sup> (*territoires perdus de la République*) (*Le Figaro*, 14/08/2015)<sup>4</sup> and of spaces that need to be “reconquered” (*quartiers de reconquête républicaine*).<sup>5</sup> The imbrication of racial and spatial borders in the representation of French MSHN is a topic that has recently gained more scientific attention (Roux et al. 2019).

The neo-conservative approach to urban policy of the Sarkozy and Valls<sup>6</sup> years can be understood as the “transposition of Huntington’s thesis of a clash of civilizations on a national scale” (Epstein 2016, 3), which adopted a simplified map of the world that mobilized nationalist passions and that forged an image of the West versus the rest (Vignoles, Owe *et al.*, 2016). It assumes a “rigid separation between cultures and civilizations despite the overwhelming evidence that today’s world is, in fact, a world of mixtures, of migrations and of crossings over, of boundaries traversed” (Said 1998, 9). This opposition of the “West versus the rest” is played out in the representation of MSHN (*banlieues*) versus other city spaces in France (Rey 1996; Garcia and Rétis 2011).

Fear of MSHN is nothing new, but the images associated with it have changed over the years. The stigmatization of these spaces is increasingly articulated through ethnic, racial and religious terms (Bonam, Taylor, and Yantis 2017; Calmore 1995; Neal et al. 2013). “Starting particularly with the 1990s, there has been a strong stigmatization of *banlieues* with references to the formation of ghettos, ethnic separatism (*‘communautarisme’*) and Islamic fundamentalism” (Dikeç, 2007, 175).<sup>7</sup> Its population is always “painted in darker and more exotic hues than their demography warrants” and their “cultural – among which religious – differences are exaggerated, while their vulnerable class position is downplayed or ignored altogether” (Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira 2014, 1274). Negative connotations of MSHN

<sup>3</sup> I translate the term “*territoires perdus*” as “lost ground” for two reasons: it does justice to the martial vocabulary that the term mobilized in French, and because it avoids confusion around the translation of the French term *territoire* (see box 0.3).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/societe/2015/08/14/31003-20150814ARTFIG00245-des-territoires-perdus-de-la-republique-aux-territoires-perdus-de-la-nation-12.php>, accessed 18/04/2016

<sup>5</sup> “Grenoble: 70 Policiers Supplémentaires d’ici Fin 2019 Pour Trois ‘Quartiers de Reconquête Républicaine.’” Place Gre’net, 15/02/2019. <https://www.placegrenet.fr/2019/02/15/grenoble-reconquete-republicaine/229575>, accessed 08/04/2019.

<sup>6</sup> When the political right introduced the neo-conservative approach to urban policy and strongly asserted it in response to the 2005 revolts, the political left mostly remained silent (Mucchielli and Le Goaziou 2007). However, the opposition between the political left and right was tangible in media and academic literature. In the reactions to the terrorist violence of 2015 this distinction disappeared, making place for consensus. Right after the terrorist attacks on Charlie Hebdo and the Hyper Kasher, the first reflex of Prime Minister Valls (socialist party), was to explain the violence as a manifestation of “urban apartheid” (*Le Point*, 20/01/2015). He rapidly changed this analytical prism though to a culturalist one, pointing to the lack of respect of *laïcité* (separation between state and church) as the main problem, which he presented as typical a typically Islamic problem. Misreading the French principle of *laïcité* he indirectly blamed Muslims for the violence and thereby the neo-conservative direction.

<sup>7</sup> Acts of paroxysmal violence that reinforce this enemy imaging were the 1995 attack on the Paris underground in the context of the Algerian civil war, 9/11, the 2012 attack of Mohamed Merah, the 2015 Paris attacks, and the 2016 terrorist attack in Nice.

evolved in the 1990s with references to MSHN as “ethnic” and “religious ghettos,”<sup>8</sup> while these terms were absent in political discourse of the 1970s and 1980s (Dikeç 2007). A center-right politician presented a “grand plan to reconquer this ground lost to the Republic” (*grand plan de reconquête des territoires perdus de la République*) and to “break up these ghettos” (*casser les ghettos ethniques et religieux*).<sup>9</sup> Kepel’s work *Banlieues de L’Islam* (1987) is another example of the more recent fear of MSHN as hotbeds of Islamic fundamentalism.

MSHN are more and more associated with an elsewhere beyond France, and defined in opposition to what is considered ‘French’. There is therefore a spatial dimension to the discursive articulation of MSHN as “ground lost to the Republic” (*territoires perdus de la République*), representing them as spaces that are not entirely part of France: as distant from, or even outside of the Republic. This discourse geographically locates threats to national security in MSHN, and presents them as enemy spaces that need to be controlled, binding violence to certain places. Ingram and Dodds see it as the task of geographers “to clarify the distinctly geographical ways in which ‘exceptional’ spaces are produced” and the “ways in which ideas about security are used to invoke a special kind of politics, involving exceptional prerogatives, emergency measures, recourse to violence and the reassertion of sovereignty to counter threats to the body politic” (2009, 22-23).

### *3) The contributions of critical geography can to the analysis of neighborhood stigmatization*

My research seeks to contribute in four ways to the existing literature about neighborhood stigmatization. First, it looks into the postcolonial dimension of French society by questioning the epistemological sources of the representations of these neighborhoods as ‘other’ (3.1). Second, it takes into account the dialectical relationship between spatial stigmatization on the one hand and paroxysmal violence on the other (3.2). Thirdly it looks at the agency of the inhabitants of stigmatized neighborhoods, which remains under researched (Wacquant 2007). Wacquant identified a literature gap with regard to the performative effect of territorial stigmatization on people living in the neighborhood and their responses to this stigmatization. My analysis goes further and looks at ways in which inhabitants of Villeneuve fight the asymmetric power relations in France induced by colonialism and that result in a particular form of racism in France, articulated around spatial

<sup>8</sup> “Des ‘centaines de Molenbeek en France?’ Eric Ciotti veut ‘reconquérir les territoires perdus de la République’”, *Nice Matin*, 28/03/2016. <https://www.nicematin.com/faits-de-societe/des-centaines-de-molenbeek-en-france-eric-ciotti-veut-reconquerir-les-territoires-perdus-de-la-republique-36062>, accessed 10/01/2020.

<sup>9</sup> This position was published on the personal website of the right-leaning politician Eric Ciotti (LR) (28/03/2016) in response to a statement by the Minister in charge of urban policy, Patrick Kanner, and in the context of the aftermath of terrorist attacks and the security threats that certain neighborhoods, such as Molenbeek in Belgium, present. <http://www.eric-ciotti.com/2016/03/28/une-centaine-de-molenbeek-en-france-eric-ciotti-demande-un-grand-plan-de-reconquete-des-territoires-perdus-de-la-republique/>, accessed 30/08/2020.

identities. Finally, my thesis provides a methodological contribution to carrying out research in MSHN as explained in detail in section 5.

### 3.1) Colonialist representations

The historical and social evolution of working-class context in which Wacquant inscribes stigmatization is only one form of genealogy in which to place the discursive articulation of MSHN. I argue that other histories enter into the vocabulary used in the discursive articulation of MSHN, such as France's colonial past together with its concomitant processes of racialization, subalternization and *de facto* segregation, as well as its more recent history of immigration from former colonies. The racialization of immigrants from former colonies – extended to all immigrants from non-Western countries – is being transposed to MSHN. Wacquant considers that the racialized dimensions of urban policy in France were imported in the 1990s from “a revanchist US” (Wacquant 1999, quoted in Kipfer 2016, 9). Instead I argue that this discursive articulation is rooted in France's own historical trajectory of imperial colonization and class warfare (see also Kipfer 2016). France has its own specific creation of difference which is less based on color and more based on an exclusive definition of the nation and citizenship, in combination with economic exploitation and spatial segregation (Kipfer 2011; Tévanian 2003; Tissot 2007a; 2007b). Critical geography that engages with a postcolonial critique of representations is helpful for understanding the racialized stigmatization of MSHN.

Said's description of the “imaginative geographies” of “the Orient” (1979) and Gregory's adaptation of this thinking from the field of comparative literature to that of geography and to the “colonial present” have put me on the track of seeing the above mentioned stigmatizing images of MSHN as the result of “geographic imagination” (1995, 1998, 2004). Geographers attach multiple definitions to the term “geographical imagination” and many can be traced back to the work of Prince (1962) and Harvey (2009 [1973]), in addition to Gregory. I use the meaning Gregory attributed to the term in order to explain geographical representations as “fabrications in the double sense of imaginative works and works that are made” (Gregory et al. 2009, 284). They are the result of imagining spaces through stereotypical images and metanarratives. The orientalism described by Said functions as “an internally structured archive” that “allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing” and which ends up “producing the effects that it names” (Gregory 2004, 18). The racialized stigmatization of MSHN recycles to a certain extent some of the colonial metanarratives about France and its ‘others’.<sup>10</sup> I encountered this geographic imagination for example when engaging in small talk with new acquaintances all of whom seemed to have an opinion about Villeneuve, although few were speaking from personal experience. A typical reaction to my explanation of the work I was doing in Villeneuve was: “aren't you afraid?”. In return they were not expecting an answer but, in most cases, started to reel off the neighborhood's problems. What struck me was

<sup>10</sup> For a definition of metanarratives, see chapter 1.

that their stories were consistent, citing the same ‘problems’ that the mainstream media regularly cover. When listening to them I recalled Gregory’s explanation that new information is analyzed through an interpretative framework, from a “citationary structure” that functions both as a “an archive” and as “a repertoire”. Despite the belief in France that colonialism ended with decolonization in the 1960s, colonialist and orientalist representations of the ‘other’ are still very much part of the majority society’s archive and serve as repertoire when faced with racialized ‘others’.

Said and Gregory provide some essential tools to shed new light on an old question: the ‘problem of *banlieues*’ in France. Sociologists have analyzed this extensively as a socio-economic problem, and urban planners and architects as a material problem. Applying this analytical framework of geographic imagination to neighborhood stigmatization in France is rather new because it shifts from the habitual application of postcolonial theory to formerly colonized spaces to the French mainland, and from the past to the present. Using these ingredients, I seek to develop a decolonial approach to MSHN which allows an innovative understanding of neighborhood stigmatization in relation to paroxysmal violence (see chapter 1). For the purpose of clarity, I want to underline that I do not argue that the present is the same as the colonial past [see Box 0.2 for a clarification of terms], or that there is a linear connection between the two, but rather that the past gets rearticulated in the present, notably through the representation of MSHN.

**Box 0.2 [terminology]: Colonial – colonialist**

Postcolonial and decolonial studies use the adjective ‘colonial’ analytically in reference both to the period of colonization and colonialism. Activists also use the term for political causes, to denounce a variety of practices in both the past and in the present (see chapter 1). There is disagreement over whether the term colonial can be used in reference to the present. In this thesis I use the term colonialist (from colonialism) to refer to the present and reserve the term colonial (colonization) for reference to the colonial past.

*3.2) Moments of paroxysmal violence as moments of discourse*

There are two main reasons why it is important to take into account moments of paroxysmal violence in the study of the discursive articulation of MSHN. The first reason is that spectacular eruptions of violence in MSHN capture public attention and work as invitations for the discourse about MSHN as problematic spaces. It is particularly in moments of violence that the State produces stigmatizing statements about MSHN. In cases of eruptions of violence, the State is called on to make statements about the violence, statements which will be influenced by three factors: (1) the specific political context in which violence takes place (time); (2) the location in which violence is produced (space); and (3) the theoretical or epistemic framework of the observer through which an act of violence is explained. Right after moments of violence the events are inscribed in timelines and geographies that link the event to other events at different times and spaces. The second reason for focusing on moments of paroxysmal violence is that they give rise to civil society mobilizations: they are

occasions to reactivate, reconfigure and expand networks of community organizing. The meetings organized during these citizen mobilizations make space for discussions among inhabitants and with other actors (politicians, social landlords, and civil society organizations outside of the neighborhood). They are therefore also moments for the production of discourse about violence and the neighborhood, but at a grassroots level (see chapter 2).

For discourse about MSHN at a national level, two moments of paroxysmal violence were of particular importance: the countrywide urban revolts in 2005 and the Paris terrorist attacks in 2015. In 2005 urban revolts broke out countrywide after two racialized young men died in an electricity transformer while on the run from a police identity check. In 2015, the terrorist attacks in Paris on the Charlie Hebdo editorial team and the attack on the Jewish Hyper Kasher supermarket, as well as the series of attacks on places of leisure in November 2015, reinforced the narrative of MSHN as places of danger. This narrative represents MSHN as places to which the Islamist threat is imported and as a fertile breeding ground for home-grown terrorists. For the discursive articulation of Villeneuve specifically, two other moments of paroxysmal violence were at least as important.

#### *4) Paroxysmal violence in Villeneuve, occasions for neighborhood stigmatization*

In July 2010, important riots broke out in Villeneuve, a marginalized social housing neighborhood (MSHN) in the southern part of Grenoble. The riots followed a pattern that has become familiar in France, starting with the death of a racialized young man from an MSHN as the result of a police operation. This death provokes acts of destruction and setting fire to objects leading to further police intervention. Confrontations generally last for a couple of days but can last longer. In this case in Villeneuve riots lasted three nights and broke out on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2010 after a 27-year-old man (involved in a casino hold-up) was shot by the police. Karim Boudouda and his partner in crime were tracked from the casino in the wealthy town of Uriage-les-Bains, not far from Grenoble, to Villeneuve, where Karim Boudouda died at the foot of his mother's apartment building, hit in the back by a bullet, after he fired at the police.<sup>11</sup> That night a group of about thirty young men went out on the streets to express their anger about his death: burning roughly 75 cars, breaking the glass of the neighborhood's tram stops, throwing stones at the police and firemen, and setting fire to street furniture (*Dauphiné Libéré*, 19/07/2010).

The response to this violence was a massive police intervention [Figure 0.1]. Two weeks later, the President of the French Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy, came to Grenoble to address local dignitaries and public officials in a notorious speech that was remembered as “the speech of Grenoble”. His public address was considered as an insult to the neighborhood, both by its inhabitants and by the mayor of Grenoble, Michel Destot (*Dauphiné Libéré*, 30/07/2010); and as an example of State disciplining of the neighborhood, and indirectly of the municipality of Grenoble and the local government of Isère, both governed by socialist

<sup>11</sup> Desnos, M., “Grenoble: Une plainte pour comprendre”, *Paris Match*, 21/07/2010.

politicians accused of lax policy in security matters. As opposed to the position of the political left the President denied any link between urban riots and social conditions in the neighborhood and instead provided a Durkheimian explanation of dwindling norms and values, and lack of education: “what happened is not a social problem” but is a problem of “hoodlums” of “disappearing values”, of “contempt for the fundamental values of our society” and of “parents not taking their responsibilities”, problems he clearly related back to immigration (Presidential address, 31/07/2010).<sup>12</sup> The speech was a typical example of the neighborhood stigmatization described by Wacquant and others.

When a second violent incident in Villeneuve (September 2012) ended up in the national headlines and brought President Hollande and his Prime Minister Valls to Grenoble, it was not so much the Presidential address that negatively tainted the neighborhood but instead it was a TV report on the events, broadcast a year later.



*Figure 0.1 Police presence in Villeneuve during the 2010 riots. (Photo Libération, 19/07/2010)<sup>13</sup>*

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of September 2012 two young men, named Kevin and Sofiane,<sup>14</sup> died in a violent confrontation between two groups of young men. These two victims belonged to the group from Villeneuve in the municipality of Echirolles. The perpetrators were from the Villeneuve in the municipality of Grenoble, with its reputation already stained by the 2010 riots. Kevin and Sofiane died of multiple wounds from a variety of different weapons (hammer, knives, airsoft gun, glass bottle). Their atrocious deaths were the culmination of an escalated confrontation that started earlier the afternoon between Kevin’s younger brother and

<sup>12</sup> Full quote in French: “Ce n'est pas un problème social, ce qui s'est passé, c'est un problème de truands, ce sont des valeurs qui sont en train de disparaître. (...) Au fond, la principale cause de la violence, Mesdames et Messieurs, c'est la permissivité et c'est la démission). (...) La délinquance actuelle ne provient pas d'un mal être comme je l'entends dire trop souvent: elle résulte d'un mépris pour les valeurs fondamentales de notre société. La question de la responsabilité des parents est clairement posée. (...) Enfin, il faut le reconnaître, je me dois de le dire, nous subissons les conséquences de 50 années d'immigration insuffisamment régulée qui ont abouti à un échec de l'intégration.”

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.liberation.fr/societe/2010/07/19/violences-urbaines-a-grenoble-ca-ne-sert-a-rien-d-avoir-la-haine\\_666928](https://www.liberation.fr/societe/2010/07/19/violences-urbaines-a-grenoble-ca-ne-sert-a-rien-d-avoir-la-haine_666928), accessed 10/07/2019.

<sup>14</sup> I choose not to use their last names out of respect for the wishes of one family in particular who prefer to remain discrete.

another young man who felt he had been challenged by a filthy look, “*un regard de travers*”.<sup>15</sup> The Villeneuve (Grenoble) group was 15 young men, some of whom were notorious for being violent: with criminal records for violence and petty crime, who had dropped out of school, and were, at the time of the fight, under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs. The four young men from Villeneuve (Echirolles) involved in the altercation did not share the same problematic background. For a better understanding of the difference between Villeneuve (Grenoble) and Villeneuve (Echirolles), [see Box 0.3].

**Box 0.3 [terminology]: Villeneuve**

The youth who live in the part of Villeneuve that falls within the municipality of Echirolles do not identify with ‘Villeneuve’, but say rather that they come from Echirolles or from one of the sub-areas that the neighborhood is made up of. In the case of the victims and their friends this sub-area is Les Granges. Those using the term Villeneuve for both areas are mostly public actors and those involved in the urban renovation program of “Les Villeneuves”. To distinguish between these two areas, I use the terms Villeneuve (Grenoble) and Villeneuve (Echirolles). When I refer to “Villeneuve” only, I mean Villeneuve (Grenoble).

To express their consternation and send the message that such atrocious violence should “never happen again” the families of Kevin and Sofiane organized a White March in which roughly 20,000 people participated. The State responded to the violent incident by extending its recently adopted security measures to the two neighborhoods of Villeneuve (Grenoble and Echirolles). These security measures involved the mapping of priority zones in security terms (*zones de sécurité prioritaire*), targeting the most “sensitive neighborhoods” (*quartiers les plus sensibles*),<sup>16</sup> an urban policy term for a selection of marginalized social housing neighborhoods [Figure 0.2].



Figure 0.2 State security priority zones. Image drawn from the official website of the French government providing information about the “zones de sécurité prioritaire” measure. (Photo gouvernement.fr)<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cour de cassation, chambre criminelle, N° de pourvoi: 15-80024, 16/11/2015

<sup>16</sup> Official website of the French government providing information about the “zones de sécurité prioritaire” <https://www.gouvernement.fr/action/les-zones-de-securite-prioritaires-zsp>, accessed 10/01/2016.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gouvernement.fr/action/les-zones-de-securite-prioritaires-zsp>, accessed 10/01/2016.



A year later, and in the context of upcoming municipal elections, French national television broadcast a TV report *Envoyé special* “Villeneuve, le rêve brisé” (Villeneuve, the broken dream) (France 2, 13/11/2013). This program took the violent deaths of Kevin and Sofiane as the starting point for an inquiry into the issue of violence in Villeneuve (Grenoble). It presented the narrative of a neighborhood built in the 1970s as a utopian project that has come to resemble the dystopian image of the French *banlieues*, already spread worldwide after the November 2005 riots that broke out in MSHN. The *Envoyé special* report entered the neighborhood as part of a special police unit and the first images it showed were those of a burning car, loitering youth and stones being thrown at policemen; all set against a nerve-racking soundtrack. While the reality of this type of behavior cannot be denied, one has to question what this hypervisibilization of violence obscures from view. Only focusing on dynamics within the neighborhood leaves out of the picture issues of local public policy which have impacted on the degradation of the neighborhood, and economic policies affecting youth unemployment. As a result of this exclusive focus on violence in Villeneuve, its inhabitants felt they were robbed of their voices and that their more complex lived experience in Villeneuve was not heard. For example, there was no exposure of the ways inhabitants are committed to maintaining social cohesion.<sup>18</sup> More generally, the stigmatization of MSHN has the effect of silencing the voices of their inhabitants and the political message their voices may carry. However, Villeneuve’s inhabitants are not exclusively victims. In response to the hypervisibilization of violence in Villeneuve during the 2010 riots, several neighborhood organizations organized a civil society platform to give the neighborhood a voice: Villeneuve Debout. The quote at the beginning of the introduction is one example of people in Grenoble that spoke back to the President at the occasion of the event “*Ensemble imaginons 100 discours admirables*”, organized by Villeneuve Debout. Moreover, in response to the *Envoyé Spécial* report, a group of organizations that were part of this civil society platform took the public television channel to court for defamation.<sup>19</sup> The tension between neighborhood stigmatization and the attempts to counter this stigmatization is one of the central themes of this thesis.

### *5) Operationalizing the theoretical challenge*

My inquiry in Villeneuve was driven by a triple motivation: first by a theoretical interest in what a decolonial approach to MSHN could look like; second by a methodological question on how research could be an asset to struggles that seek to address situations of power asymmetry; and third by an epistemological question about power dynamics in establishing research relations with marginalized people.

<sup>18</sup> Lahouari, Myriam, *L’Avant-Post*, 20/11 2013, quoted in “Dossier de presse le dépôt de plainte contre France 2 suite au reportage d’Envoyé Spécial”.

<sup>19</sup> “Dossier de Presse Dépôt de Plainte Contre France 2 Suite Au Reportage d’Envoyé Spécial” 2013

My thematic interest in MSHN evolved over time. At the outset, I was interested in 'urban violence' (*violences urbaines*),<sup>20</sup> a term used in France for a wide range of disruptive behavior in MSHN, which associates violence with certain spaces. The term 'urban violence' has the function of euphemizing the conflicts that violence makes overt in urban (public) space. The decision to divert from my initial interest in developing a critical approach to urban violence, and to turn my attention to neighborhood stigmatization is the result of a period of methodological and thematic explorations. My methodological exploration of participatory action research (PAR) with civil society organizations (CSOs) and collectives in Villeneuve was driven by the pursuit of research relationships based on reciprocity and of jointly formulated research questions. Neighborhood stigmatization was a shared concern for all ten of the organizations with whom I embarked on thematic explorations.

The geographical perimeter of my research encompasses the area of Villeneuve in the municipalities of Grenoble and Echirolles that was part of an ambitious urban project in the 1960s. Setting out field research with a geographical perimeter is of particular interest, a point I develop in chapter 2. Within this perimeter I worked with CSOs who were predominantly created in a context of crisis that followed an event of paroxysmal violence. What they have in common is that Villeneuve is the gravitational center of their work and activities. I subsequently adopted a rhizomatic approach to space, which means that I did not limit myself to this space, but followed the CSOs and their work. Working together with CSOs led me to other spaces: the Reynaudie neighborhood of Saint Martin d'Hères, the Courthouses of Bourgoin-Jallieu and Grenoble, and the cities of Brest, Amsterdam and Copenhagen. Additionally, the events the CSOs organized in Villeneuve attracted an audience from beyond the neighborhood.

Timewise, my thesis starts with the riots that broke out in Villeneuve in 2010, bringing national attention to the violence in this neighborhood, which once attracted nationwide attention as a modern utopia. The 2012 violence, the *Envoyé spécial* TV report, and the context of the terrorist attacks in 2015 all played an important role in the further stigmatization of the neighborhood. The period of my research ends with the social protests of the *Gilets Jaunes* movement at the end of 2018, under the Macron presidency. This new period of contestation reconfigured activist networks and rearticulated enemy imaging.

The final result of this project is a proposal for a new theoretical framework to approach MSHN. As mentioned, critical geography in combination with anticolonial, postcolonial, subaltern and decolonial theory are at its foundation. I refer to my framework as 'decolonial' as I situate it within the search to undo the colonialist enterprise.

The potential of the decolonial approach lies in making room for subaltern voices through the configuration of spaces of speech. Throughout my research I contributed to the

<sup>20</sup> The inverted commas used for the term 'urban violence' have the function of taking some distance from the term, and to keep in mind that the term is a political construction. It does not translate well into English where the term has another meaning. Having said this, I will not use the inverted commas throughout my thesis.

organization of collective debates (among others in the Université populaire) as a means to make room for certain voices, i.e. to create a space in which MSHN residents could speak out, speak for themselves, and be heard. These events were configured in such a way that speech circulated between a number of people and was not specifically addressed to me. However, this does not mean that I did not take part in discussions: my voice simply became one among others. The configuration of these spaces of speech calls for the art of decentering: of putting dominant representations at a distance, and approaching the other in the most open way possible. In order to be able to do this, I have had to learn to move out of categories and into relations, to get rid of preconceived ideas about the roles of the researcher and researched; about those inside and outside of the neighborhood; about academics and residents and about racialized identities such as “White”, “Arab”, “Black” and “Muslim”. As a result of re-thinking the borders between the neighborhood and the University. Rethinking borders allowed to create a new ‘we’, moving away from the original interest in MSHN inhabitants as ‘others’ towards gradually created collaborations based on shared interests.

A partial answer I found to my epistemological question of how research can make space for subalternized voices has been to make space in my text for the voices of research participants. I intentionally do not reinterpret them, but rather engage with them and bring them into dialogue with academic authors. For the same reasons I adopt a narrative writing style typical in ethnographic research, which allows me to provide ample context and situate the stories that have helped me build my argument. This ethnographic and narrative writing style has as a consequence that I use citations several times when they are relevant to topics discussed at different places in the thesis.

#### *6) Building blocks for a decolonial understanding of MSHN*

The arguments I develop throughout this thesis are organized in seven chapters.

The first chapter provides a theoretical framework inspired by postcolonial and decolonial theory. In this chapter, I rapidly review postcolonial, subaltern and decolonial literature as tools to question the modern/colonial metanarratives that still inform the discursive articulation of MSHN. This literature, in combination with inputs from critical (feminist and anarchist) geography is promising for developing a new way of approaching MSHN. It provides the analytical tools to approach Villeneuve not as a research object, but as a locus of enunciation that stands in relation to wider spaces.

Chapter two translates the analytical and epistemological tools of this decolonial approach into a research methodology. Several years of methodological and thematic explorations in Villeneuve have evolved into what I call decolonial explorations. During decolonial explorations, researchers are attentive to power asymmetries in social relations and to the historical and geographic processes that shaped them. Researchers seek for ways in which research may contribute to undoing these unequal power structures, in my case by working with groups or collectives in marginalized neighborhoods that are involved in some form of

action. My research tried to make space for the perspective of marginalized voices and in particular the racialized inhabitants of Villeneuve, who bear the brunt of both class and race oppression. It is through thinking about the spatiality of both research settings and configurations, that I have developed a research methodology oriented towards the organization of agonistic public debate in the neighborhood. In this research setting, I am part of a larger conversation between people who directly experience different forms of domination. The topics of debate were the outcome of discussion and consultation in the neighborhood over longer periods of time. The debates were aimed at neighborhood inhabitants but drew in a wider audience. Out of all explorations, the debates I organized as member of the Université populaire working group correspond most closely to my definition of decolonial explorations and have generated most data. They therefore obtained a special place in my thesis.

The third chapter is the first of a series of five chapters which are centered around my field material. As I approach Villeneuve as a locus of enunciation, it is important to start with understanding this *locus*. This chapter situates Villeneuve in the socio-historic context in which it was built, and the urban policies that have shaped it, framing it as a special intervention zone. In my description of Villeneuve, I pay specific attention to the lived experiences of neighborhood inhabitants. This is a way to make space for marginalized voices and a way to speak back to stigmatizing representations of the neighborhood that work as semantic prisons. My own perception of Villeneuve is that of a space that is fragile, where the equilibrium between different forces can always slip towards increasing tensions and even violence, for example when the mitigating function of local actors is undermined by changes in external conditions. Lastly, I provide a critique of the ongoing urban renovation program and in particular of the stigmatizing discourse it produces about the neighborhood as a ghetto-like space that needs to be opened up physically to let in a new, middle-class population. Some have qualified this discourse as colonial and as an extension of the discourse about the civilizing mission used to legitimize colonial rule.

Chapter four further explores the issue of the relevance of the colonial past for understanding power asymmetry in France, in relation to MSHN and internationally. The Université populaire explored this question for over a year throughout nine public debates and several other - more informal - meetings. Based on the material collected I answer the question of colonial legacy from the viewpoint of inhabitants that engaged in discussion with our invited speakers who had relevant knowledge on the topic. They were academics, civil society leaders and activists who spoke based on their knowledge and experience. An important part of the chapter thus focuses on the link that participants in the Université populaire (debates) drew between the colonial past and present. I also pay considerable attention to the tensions involved in creating the space for marginalized voices, the goal of the Université populaire. Bringing issues that were taboo, such as the embodied experience of difference, racism, islamophobia, territorial discrimination, the French colonial past and police violence out into public through mainstream debate circles can be understood, in a

way, as creating conflict because it was a means of making heard what should remain inaudible. My experience organizing these debates is therefore also a first-hand experience of attempts to silence marginalized voices. I further build on ways in which the voices of marginalized people are silenced in chapter 6.

In the fifth chapter, I explain what I consider to be the legacy of colonialism in France, focusing on the specificities of racism. Through an extensive discussion of field results, I argue that the condition of nationality without citizenship, which was key to colonial rule, still applies to France in a certain way, as racialized inhabitants are never considered 'really' French, but always remain second-class citizens. Many racialized people in MSHN feel that there is no place for them in France. Through what I call embodied experiences of difference, they are made to feel 'other' in public space. Racism in France takes the form of racialized national categories and makes that 'real' French are considered to be white as a result of which racialized French remain eternal foreigners. Second-class citizens, while having the same formal rights, do not have the same substantive rights as first-class, white, French citizens: they cannot claim the right to have rights. As a result, second-class citizens cannot challenge their marginalized situation through overt political action. One of the consequences of the (im)possibility of citizenship is the (im)possibility of conflict, which is the essence of politics, according to Rancière.

In chapter 6, I argue based on Curle and the work of Modus Operandi that, under specific circumstances, creating conflict is a means for challenging asymmetric power relations and a factor for preventing outbreaks of paroxysmal violence. I look at the political consequences of not being recognized as a full citizen and I question the relationship between voice, politics, and violence, because if political voices are made inaudible, violence may be one of the few means to make dissent visible.

The seventh and last chapter presents an adaptation of the Exit, Loyalty and Voice argument developed by Hirschman (1970), which I have renamed into the Exit, Loyalty, Fight model. Fighting in this context is about the ways through which one can be political despite efforts at depoliticization that seek to obstruct political organizing in MSHN. I describe the creative answers that the Front Uni des Immigrations et des Quartiers Populaires and Agir pour la Paix have found in order to be political, adopting the political imagination of the fist and of the dove respectively. I also describe the dilemmas involved in putting forward racialized identities in the struggle to overcome racialization and stigmatization, and the different choices of these two collectives to deal with the issues.

## Chapter 1. The decolonial promise

In this chapter I develop the argument I put forward in the introduction. This is that the representations of MSHN as other, violent, and closed spaces, discursively articulated as being simultaneously outside of, and a threat to the French Republic, should be understood in relation to the colonial past in France.<sup>21</sup> I also argue that postcolonial theory is helpful for challenging these representations. The decolonial approach I develop provides a new framework through which to understand MSHN, one that challenges the stigma attached to the neighborhood, notably its representation as a violent space.

To avoid any confusion through terminology, in the first section I provide a clarification of the terms colonialism, colonization, decolonization and coloniality; and the adverbs “post”, “de” and “neo” in reference to colonial. I also explain the theoretical currents that introduced and use these themes. The work of the Modernity/Coloniality Working Group on the need to decolonize the relations between knowledge and power are especially relevant for my research (1). I give four examples of modern/colonial metanarratives that continue to influence the representation of MSHN in France today: Eurocentrism, binarism, racism, and evolutionism (2). However it is not so much colonialism that I seek to study, nor whether we can speak of a colonial management of MSHN as some argue (Abdallah 2012), but rather I am interested in the conceptual tools that could contribute to a move away from it. The decolonial approach I develop is an intention with regard not only to ways of doing research, but also with regard to the use of a set of analytical tools that I consider promising for the development of another approach to MSHN (3).

### 1) Clarifications in terminology: post and decolonial

Postcolonial studies offer tools relevant for understanding the discursive articulation of MSHN as specific spaces within the French Republic. Representation is both a colonial and a geographic issue in that colonialism, as an ideology, shaped a particular way of writing the world (Gregory 1998). It was the colonizers that held the pen, therefore the colonized could not represent themselves, and could only exist through representation (Said 1979).

Postcolonial studies have been very important bringing attention to this relationship between the representation of colonized peoples, colonized spaces, and colonial power.

Part of the debate about the pertinence of postcolonial theory to understand the present in France is actually a debate about terminology. To prevent unnecessary confusion, I want to clarify key terms in reference to the adverb colonial.

<sup>21</sup> I use the term French Republic in this context for two reasons: because it the expression employed in the book *Territoires perdus de la République* (Brenner and Corvarola 2002) on which I base my argument, and because it stresses that MSHN are portrayed as a political and security threat. Robine, who used the same expression as a starting point for his analysis of MSHN, considered rather that MSHN are thought of as a threat to the nation in *Des ghettos dans la nation* (2008).

### **1.1) Postcolonial**

Postcolonial is an adjective that can be used to describe a large variety of nouns, but is mainly used in reference to a method of analysis, a means of reading cultural productions, and the way they mirror colonial power relations. Postcolonial theory should be understood as a project that seeks to break with colonialism through a critique and a deconstruction of the ideology underlying colonization (Sharp 2009). In order to make place for alternative ways of knowing and understanding the world postcolonial studies seek notably to create a platform beyond dominant Western constructs for 'other' voices (Sharp 2009). Postcolonial studies have made important contributions to the field of literature (Bhabha 1994; Said 1979), the arts (Hall 1980), history (Guha 1997; Spivak 1988), anthropology (Appadurai 1996; Cooper and Stoler 1997), citizenship studies (Isin 2012), geography (Blunt et McEwan 2002; Godlewska 1994; Gregory 2004; Sharp 2009) and urban studies (Jacobs 1996). It provides a critique of the ways in which Western knowledge systems have come to dominate, and the ways in which the colonial world came to be represented through cultural productions. Notably it attacks "the colonial reason and the production of the binaries of North/South and West/East" (Ali et Dayan-Herzbrun 2017, 6). The "post" of postcolonial refers to a critical aftermath (Collignon 2007, 2), "to cultures, discourses and critiques that lie beyond, but that remain closely influenced by colonialism" (Blunt et McEwan 2002, 3 in Sharp 2009, 4-5). I argue that the representations of MSHN find their roots in France's colonial past and that they continue reproduced in the present.

The spatial focus of postcolonial studies so far has been on former colonies, but it has an important contribution to make in studying spaces in colonizing states. This new focus is helpful for answering the question of to what extent the colonial experience has shaped the representation of racialized inhabitants in mainland France, and of MSHN as spaces outside the Republic which represent a potential danger.<sup>22</sup> The field of postcolonial studies has many sub- or associated fields, such as anti-colonial literature, subaltern studies and decolonial studies. I briefly deal with each in the order stated above.

Undoing colonialism was already a preoccupation for anti-colonial authors and activists struggling for national independence such as Senghor, Césaire, Fanon, Beti, Ouologuem, Memmi *etc.* (for the French context).

Subaltern studies is a specific current in postcolonial studies started by historians questioning the historiography of colonial India. The Subaltern Studies Group, including authors such as Guha (2005) and Spivak (1988), borrow the term 'subaltern' from Gramsci who considers that one is subaltern when one is in a position of subordination to hegemonic

<sup>22</sup> The French Republic is made up of *France Métropolitaine* which refers to European France and Corsica, here referred to as mainland France; and *France d'outre-mer* which is Overseas France, made up of overseas regions and departments (such as Martinique), collectivities (such as French Polynesia) and the territory of the French Southern and Antarctic Lands. The different overseas areas of France have varied levels of autonomy from French central government. I make a distinction between mainland France, Overseas France and its former colonies.

power. Guha and Spivak transferred Gramsci's observations of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Italy to colonial India. Both were critical of elite historiography and sought to write the history of the subaltern: those who are mostly absent from the archives. A debate which remains relevant is how this can be done methodologically, given the fact that history is written by those in power, who typically mis-represent the subaltern and invisibilize their resistance against domination. The work of the Subaltern Studies Group on agency and autonomous subaltern politics in India has proved relevant in other contexts. In 1992, the Latin American Subaltern studies group was founded. Internal disagreements, which led to its split six years later, were related to the relevance of European critical theory for studying the condition of the subaltern. The Latin American decolonial studies group, one of the groups that developed after the split, argued that instead of Eurocentric authors (Foucault, Derrida, Gramsci) prevalence should be given to Southern authors whose voices tend to be subalternized and silenced (Escobar 2008; Grosfoguel 2007). The contributions of Subaltern Studies, and in particular Spivak's work on the question whether the subaltern can speak (1988), are relevant for understanding the claims of residents in Villeneuve, in particular those racialized as Muslims, that they could not speak in the period that followed the attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine. A discussion of decolonial studies follows in section 1.4.

### **1.2) Colonialism, colonization**

The adjective colonial is at the core of concepts of colonization, colonialism and coloniality which are often conflated. Colonization refers to the act of colonizing, the constitutive act of colonialism. Colonialism is a doctrine, ideology (Gregory et al. 2009), or a paradigm that is co-constitutive of the process of colonization (understood here as the physical occupation of a foreign land) and that continued after the period of decolonization. The term can be traced back to its Latin roots, *colonia*, meaning distant settlement. The term 'colonial' thus insists on the historic distance between an empire's mainland and the occupied territory. This is the case of colonization, which involves a physical settlement, but not necessarily of colonialism, which instead involves an ideology. Colonization goes further than imperialism, a term applied to the extraction of resources or wealth (Sharp 2009, 3). Colonialism is that "phase of imperialism in which the expansion of the accumulative capacities of capitalism was realized through the conquest and possession of other people's land and labor in the service of the metropolitan core" (Williams et Chrisman 1994, 2 in Jacobs 1996, 31).<sup>23</sup> While most French historians set the start of the colonial period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, I consider its beginning to be the 16<sup>th</sup> century, following authors in the decolonial current (Mignolo et Escobar 2009; Mignolo 2012; Quijano 2000; Smith 2012). I hence articulate slave colonies and imperialist territorial expansion as different periods of colonization, both of which are based on supremacist racialization [Box 1.4]. An illustration of this articulation is the fact that

<sup>23</sup> Where Williams and Chrisman use the term "metropolitan core" in opposition to colonies, I use the term "mainland". More generally I use the term "mainland France" in translation of the French term "*metropole*", in reference to the mother country or country on which colonies depend (Cambridge dictionary).



the colonial expansion in Africa at the end of 19th and the beginning of the 20th century was justified by the need to repress the slave trade (Weil and Dufoix (eds.) 2005; Weil 2010).

#### **Box 1.4 [terminology]: Racialization**

Racialization is the attribution of race or the subjection of a person or group to racial ideas. It is produced through marking bodies as superior and inferior, and has been a crucial feature of colonial histories in different regions of the world. Racial categories can be based on color, but also on ethnicity, language, culture, or religion (Grosfoguel and Cohen 2012) and they should be understood in relation to other forms of oppression based on class and gender. The specific categories of difference in this human classification depend on the variations in colonial histories. Racial categories should not be seen only as a product of the modern colonial enterprise from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, race is co-constitutive of modernity as a whole (Stoler 1995; Gilroy 2001 *in* Gregory et al. 2009) and racial categories have evolved since their initial use. Racialization works as “a form of alienation in everyday situations” (Kipfer 2007, 717). Kipfer draws on Fanon, who affirmed that “the white man is sealed in his whiteness and the black man in his blackness” (Fanon 2008 [1952], 3) and it is through the appearance of his body in space that he is confronted with racialization. “Racialization is always an imposed category” (Gregory et al. 2009, 215) and should therefore not be confounded with the affirmation of racial identities by racialized people, for example in the case of political organizing (e.g. Conseil représentatif des associations noires de France).

The relationship that is established during colonization between an enslaved or indigenous majority and a minority of colonizers is one of domination, dispossession and racial supremacy (Gregory et al. 2009, 94). As far as its origins and construction are concerned modern colonialism is European. However, colonialism is not an exclusively European enterprise, modern colonial practices have been adopted beyond Europe in countries such as Japan (Bancel 2014). The specificity of modern European colonialism is the fact that it is driven by the economic project of capitalism and by the rise of scientific knowledge (Sharp 2009). Sousa Santos distinguishes between a historical meaning of colonialism as that of invasion and foreign occupation, which I call colonization, and a wider meaning which has continued up to the present day (2014). This second definition of colonialism is that of a “a system of naturalizing differences in such a way that the hierarchies that justify domination, oppression, and so on are considered to be the **product** of the inferiority of certain peoples and not the **cause** of their so-called inferiority” (Sousa Santos 2016, 18). It is this wider definition that considers both the material and epistemic consequences of colonialism that I use in this study. Apart from its existing overseas territories, France is no longer involved in a process of territorial expansion and settlement, therefore the narrow definition of colonialism as colonization no longer applies. However, the wider colonial enterprise of exploitative economic relations, racialization, subalternization, and physical segregation, also referred to as colonialism, is still present and its consequences are very tangible in France, and in MSHN in particular. Alongside the term colonialism, I will use colonial enterprise here

to underline both the idea of a project with an underlying logic, as well as the fact that its implementation varied dramatically from one place to another. The realization of this project on the ground was always through negotiation, hybridization (Bhabha 1994), *métissage* (Claverie 1998) and *créolisation* (Glissant 1997). Moreover, the colonial project created a wide variety of colonial situations, depending on the forms of resistance it encountered. Colonization came to an end for France from the late 1950s and up until the early 1960s<sup>24</sup> when (most of) its overseas lands became independent during a period called 'decolonization'.

### *1.3) Decolonization*

Decolonization is a political and historical phenomenon that ushered in the almost complete end of French territorial domination. Power was handed over from the colonizers to new nation-states and their freshly elected leaders. The granting of political independence did not however mean that colonial power relations were fully dismantled. In French former colonies the designation of political leaders was based more on tacit agreements between former colonial powers and the new national elites than actually decided by the people through the ballot (for in-depth analyses of post-colonial rule in Africa, see Mamdani (1996) for English-speaking Africa and Mbembe (2001) for French-speaking Africa). Parallel to ceding political power France kept considerable economic power through trade agreements to their advantage and military agreements containing secret clauses that guaranteed military protection and collaboration (mostly at the service of authoritarian States) in exchange for access to resources at far below their market price (e.g. Deltombe, Domerque and Tatsitsa 2011; Verschave 1998). The withdrawal from its colonies was painful for the French nation as it not only had to let go of land, political power and economic interests, but also of the idea of empire. It was pushed to decolonization at a time when it was only just starting to recover from German occupation and adapting to its decreasing importance in the world as a result of the rise of the US to superpower status. The decision to withdraw from its colonies was made under the pressure of armed resistance from its colonial subjects in (amongst others) French Indochina, Cameroon and Algeria. It is this context that should be kept in mind in order to understand the amnesia in France with regard to its colonial past. The post-war era was tuned to reconstruction, modernization, economic growth and social progress and wanted to forget about the humiliation of decolonization (Ross 1996).

Historiography has created the illusion of a clear distinction between the colonial past and the period that followed, in which the (former) colonies are no longer part of the national narrative for the colonizers. This distinction has been called into question by Shepard, among others, who speaks about the "invention of decolonization" (2008a). Based on the Algerian case he uses this term when referring to the construction of the myth of

<sup>24</sup> Territories that were not granted independence in this decade were: New Caledonia, Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, Réunion, French Polynesia

epistemological rupture between the colonial and the post-colonial period, that should have occurred after the physical withdrawal from the French colonies.

Despite the physical decolonization of the land, colonialism as an ideology or doctrine has persevered, in particular its aspect of racism (see Rigouste 2010). The colonial imagination continues to justify the exploitation of peoples and territories for private or national gain (Dayan-Herzbrun 2008; Mignolo 2012). Continued French economic and political interference in its former colonies is one aspect of the pursuit of these interests, also referred to as neo-colonial interference [see Box 1.5]. The continued racialization of people and spaces in mainland France is another. The exploitation of racialized bodies that migrated to mainland France in the period following World War II could be seen as an extension of France's colonial past. Despite obtaining the possibility to become French citizens, once they had crossed the ocean or Mediterranean Sea the stigma these racialized bodies carried still stuck. The deconstruction of the idea of the colonial 'other' as racially or culturally inferior is therefore an unfulfilled promise. This process of deconstruction is a struggle that affects both the colonizers and the colonized, due to the interiorization of the respective feelings of superiority and inferiority.

**Box 1.5 [terminology]: Neo-colonial**

The relationship between France and its former colonies can be referred to as neo-colonial with regard to continued French interference in the political, economic and cultural affairs of the ex-colonies. This relationship is based on coercion or dependence rather than symmetric collaboration. Kipfer has mobilized the term neo-colonial to describe the state-led urban renovation program in France as an extension of colonial relations since it reorganizes "territorial relations of domination" (2016, 1). While I agree with his analysis, I prefer to reserve the term neo-colonial to refer to the asymmetric relationship between France and its former colonies after the latter's independence. It is therefore not a term that I will use with regard to MSHN.

*1.4) Coloniality*

Around the turn of the century, a group of researchers from Latin America started to develop new analytical tools to analyze the continuity of racialized and gendered power structures beyond decolonization. These tools were developed as a result of the observation of a certain stability in regard to unequal power structures, both within countries as in their relationship to Western economies, and in regard to the persistence of the idea of racial differentiation. Researchers associated to this group look beyond the colonization/decolonization dichotomy that mainly concerned Africa and Asia in the 1950s and 1960s and is of little relevance in Latin American countries that already obtained independence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Instead they focus on the problematic nature of modern nation-states and argue for a pluri-national concept of the State (Mignolo and Escobar 2009). They also focus on global economic developments around Western imperialism, as

well as globalization and its relation to modernity (Escobar 2007). These researchers make the observation that the majority of those currently exploited and dominated “are precisely those members of the 'races', 'ethnic groups', or 'nations' into which the colonized populations were categorized in the formative process of that world power” (Quijano 2009, 23). They attribute this categorization to a particular power configuration that started with the emergence of capitalist and urban social relations at the conquest of the Americas and continues today. This “coloniality of power” (Quijano 2000; Quijano and Cohen 2007; Quijano 2009) is a “global hegemonic model of power that articulates race and labor, space and peoples, according to the needs of capital and to the benefit of white European peoples” (Escobar 2009, 39). It is entwined with “the concentration in Europe of capital, wages, the market of capital, and finally, the society and culture associated with those determinations” (Quijano 2000, 548). The present is the temporal focus of the Modernity/Coloniality Working Group; the past only explains how we have gotten to this point of asymmetric race, gender, class and human/nature relations that are typical for coloniality of power.

What the Modernity/Coloniality—later “decolonial”—Working Group has in common with postcolonial thinkers is their critique of colonialism/coloniality and of modernity, where they differ is that they seek to formulate this critique from another paradigm. The Working Group draws on different intellectual sources to those which are central to postcolonial theory, such as dependency theory, liberation theology, and world-systems theory. Marxism and political economy are the theoretical framework shared by most of the authors that are associated with the Modernity/Coloniality Working Group (Escobar 2009; Rivera Cusicanqui, Cunin and Hernandez 2007). Moreover they seek to include “the knowledge of exploited and oppressed social groups” (Escobar 2009, 34), leaving aside the postmodernist and poststructuralist literature which are major sources of inspiration for postcolonial studies. Drawing on these different sources they seek to craft “another space for the production of knowledge, another way of thinking and the very possibility of talking about worlds and knowledges otherwise” which is outside of the paradigm of modernity (Escobar 2009, 33). Leading authors in postcolonial theory work within a cultural studies framework, which has led to the criticism that postcolonial theory focuses overly on culture and underestimates the importance of material (and thus economic) factors (e.g. Chibber 2013; Kaiwar 2014; Kipfer 2007; Sekyi-Otu 1996).<sup>25</sup>

They attack the myth of modernity according to which modernity is an intra-European phenomenon, arguing instead that European modernity could only develop in

<sup>25</sup> An argument that is contested by authors working within a postcolonial framework (e.g. Gregory et Pred 2007) who argue that cultural representations should not be understood in opposition to materiality and that an enquiry into cultural representations is a means to get insight into power relations which can never be separated from the material distribution of power: “images and words release enormous power, and their dissemination—or, for that matter, suppression—can have the most acutely material consequences” (*Ibid.*, 9).

interdependence with its colonies (Escobar 2009). This myth of independence obscures the interconnection between Western modernity and colonial subjugation in a nascent capitalist world system. Their main argument is therefore that there could have been no modernity without coloniality, and that the emancipatory promise of modern reason has a “darker side” (Mignolo 1995). The bright side of Enlightenment overshadows other epistemologies and invisibilizes the violence inherent in the domination of those outside the European core (Dussel 1993). It is responsible for the “concomitant subalternization of the knowledge and cultures of these other groups” (Escobar 2009, 38). Different authors stress different aspects of this coloniality, for example the “coloniality of power” (Quijano 2000), the “coloniality of knowledge” (Lander and Castro-Gómez 2000) [Box 1.6], and the “coloniality of being” (Maldonado-Torres 2007).

**Box 1.6 [terminology]: The coloniality of knowledge**

Relatively central to the work of the Modernity/Coloniality Working Group is the question of the coloniality of knowledge, a reference to the link between the coloniality of power and the production of knowledge. The subjugation of colonized peoples went together with the subjugation of their knowledge. The colonial other was denied intersubjectivity and was reduced to object status (on the relation between subject and object in colonial relations, see Quijano 2009). These mental perspectives could only be the product of certain relations: that of coloniality between Europe and the rest of the world. The paradigm of rational knowledge is embedded in power structures and the European colonial domination over the rest of the world (Quijano, 2009).

Over time, the wider project of the Modernity/Coloniality Working Group shifted from a focus on analyzing the relationships between modernity and coloniality to an emphasis on “de-coloniality”.

The interest of the concept of coloniality lies in its focus on the historic roots of contemporary racism, and in linking past and present through a continuity in epistemic and economic power rather than through political rule. In addition, the coloniality of knowledge is relevant for understanding the hierarchies between cultures and the subalternization of racialized inhabitants in MSHN, who are associated with non-European cultures. If coloniality is understood as a hegemonic model of capitalist power to the benefit and in the interest of white men of a certain age, it reduces women, workers, racialized people and nature to inferior positions.

Decolonial as an adjective refers to the process of de-colonization, which should be distinct from the period of decolonization described earlier, hence the hyphen (which I will not continue to use throughout the text) and the term “de-coloniality”. After former colonies obtained political independence, the struggle to undo Western cultural hegemony continued, for example through the “decolonization of the mind” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1987), of language, of bodies, of economic structures, of knowledge, and according to Mbembe

even of the orgasm (2016).<sup>26</sup> The reference to decolonial breaks with the idea, still popular in France, that decolonization was one particular historic moment in time. Between the two prefixes “post” and “de” used by authors in reference to the wider political projects underlying their intellectual enterprise, I prefer the prefix “de” to refer to the ongoing, non-teleological project of dismantling the colonial enterprise. The process of de-colonization entails the undoing of asymmetric power relations that are characteristic of the coloniality of power. To what extent the Working Group’s critique of modernity/coloniality is relevant for understanding the discursive articulation of MSHN is what I consider in the next subsection.

### *1.5) Discussion of the decolonial option*

While the colonial enterprise was about the creation of differences and classifications, the decolonial enterprise is about questioning these differences and stressing the ways of being in relation. Escobar’s work (2007) on relational ontologies is therefore an important source of inspiration, as well as Mignolo’s (2012) work on border thinking, and that of Anzaldúa (Anzaldúa 1987) on the promise of border identities. Decolonial approaches are particularly focused on the experience of indigenous and racialized peoples in settler societies and former slave colonies.

In resonance with the objectives of the Working Group I seek to craft another space for the production of knowledge and another way of thinking about MSHN, and I use the analytical tools of the Working Group for this purpose. Despite its merits, I have reservations with regard to the analytical framework used by the Modernity/Coloniality Working Group, and therefore in regard to its relevance for developing a decolonial approach to MSHN.

First, whilst the aim of the Modernity/Coloniality Working Group is to undo the West versus the Rest dichotomy, its authors create similar kind of binaries (see also Kaiwar 2014) by opposing indigenous to Western knowledge. They do not take into account sufficiently that the “rest” is in the West (see Hancock 2007) and that experiences of subalternization are not limited to indigenous forms of knowledge. The knowledge of inhabitants of Villeneuve, who feel that they are robbed of their voices (see chapter 6) cannot be considered indigenous. Inhabitants who are racialized as non-European do not necessarily identify themselves as non-Western. While an opposition between Western and non-Western approaches to knowledge might make sense in settler societies, it makes little sense in the context of MSHN in France where “there” is here, where those of postcolonial origin do not so much claim the right to live according to non-Western principles and traditions, but rather claim the right both to belong in France and be different. For example, Muslims may claim the right to live according to the principles of their religion, but do not do so in the name of non-

<sup>26</sup> Flagship on Critical Thought in African Humanities, "The University and Its Worlds: A Panel Discussion with Achille Mbembe, Judith Butler, Wendy Brown and David Theo Goldberg," 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s07xFdD-ivQ>., accessed 25/09/2017

Western traditions, but as French citizens claiming their right to religious freedom (see chapter 5).

Second, as twenty years have passed since Quijano's analysis was first published in the 1990s, the point that the majority of resources is still in the hands of a European (including white North American) minority does not sufficiently take into account the rising economic powers, such as Brazil, Russia, India and China. In addition, including North America in "European" hegemony is a form of racializing domination, pointing out "white" domination. The use of this category does not do justice to the shifting power relations globally over the last 100 years. The direct political, economic and cultural domination of European and American powers (see Quijano 2007, 2009) has evolved and, despite the fact that they remain very powerful, it can no longer be called hegemonic. Quijano's analysis of the coloniality of power does not lose its relevance however, on the contrary: it explains the voices all over the world that contest "Western" knowledge's claim to objective truth and reason (see for example Dabashi et Mignolo 2015; Mignolo 1995; Mignolo 2000).

Third, the theory of the Modernity/Coloniality Working Group has been formulated in the Latin American context, in response to the specific history of settler colonization and tensions around indigenous people's rights. Authors in postcolonial studies worked from, or on, issues raised in former French and British colonies. Postcolonial and decolonial studies come from different strands of thought, that arose at specific moments in time, in specific places, in response to specific socio-political and temporal contexts. They can only partially speak to contemporary France which has its own specific trajectory and challenges. This thesis therefore seeks to contribute to a decolonial approach that is specifically relevant for the colonial past-present in France.

The metanarrative of modernity has been called into question over the last 50 years by theoretical currents such as postmodernism and deconstructivism. Post- and decolonial, as well as feminist studies, have created the space for counternarratives, subaltern voices, non-Western perspectives, and for knowledges that have been silenced through "epistemic violence" (Spivak 1988). They have challenged (and still do) Western cultural hegemony and its ideas about universalism by introducing a pluriverse perspective of the world (Mignolo 2000; Grosfoguel and Cohen 2012). Inspired by these theoretical contributions that sought to overcome these binarities, it has become commonplace to recognize that "colonial identities are constructed in relation to both a metropolitan core and indigenous/colonized lands and peoples" (Gregory et al. 2009, 95). As a result, it is now acknowledged that Western identity has not been formed in a vacuum, but 'through a long, stretched and often violent process of colonial exchange' (Gregory 2009, 94).

While these critical theoretical contributions have nibbled at the foundations of a modern/colonial worldview, the latter is still very present in mainstream media and political discourse across the political spectrum, which for example still represents the French nation as White. In the next section I will elaborate on such continuations and provide a brief

presentation of modern/colonial metanarratives and the way they continue to inform the dominant view of **MSHN, as spaces associated with the (former) colonial other**. This view therefore is not limited to spatial representations but also applies to those that live in these spaces. I discuss four metanarratives of a modern/colonial worldview that are of particular relevance for understanding the current representation of MSHN and their inhabitants as 'other'.

## 2) Modern/colonial metanarratives and their relevance for understanding the stigmatization of MSHN

Metanarratives should be understood as overall accounts of things that enable people to find belief, pattern and meaning in their experiences.<sup>27</sup> Colonial modernity produced certain metanarratives about the West and its relation to the rest of the world and thereby invented the colonial other. That other is now in the West and associated with certain stigmatized neighborhoods. I argue that the discursive articulation of these neighborhoods as "other", violent, and closed spaces that are lost to the Republic is to a certain extent a re-articulation of modern/colonial metanarratives. Representations of MSHN draw on ideas about Western versus non-Western identity; progress versus tradition; civilization versus barbarism; and finally lead to ideas about 'our' versus 'their' space. Despite the arduous efforts that have been made to deconstruct these ideas they still influence mainstream representations of MSHN.

The four metanarratives relevant for othering are: Eurocentrism; binarism between the 'West' and the 'rest'; racism, which is responsible for the classification and hierarchization of races and later cultures; and evolution, the idea that societies will necessarily evolve towards Western civilization. I provide some examples of the way in which these metanarratives are relevant for the current representation of MSHN.

### *2.1) Metanarratives of othering: Eurocentrism*

Moments of particular importance in the construction of modern/colonial metanarratives are the colonization of the Americas and the birth of modern science. The colonization of the Americas in the 16th century brought faraway foreign lands into the nascent capitalist world economy and this, in retrospect, can be considered to be the genesis of the modern "world-system" (Wallerstein 1973). This process created a certain dependency (E. Dussel 1993), not only in terms of economy but also in terms of subjectivity (Gregory 2009, 94).

The birth of modern science during Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason, gave rise to the development of new methods to explore a world of mystery and to uncover 'the truth'. One such method was European cartography, whose tools mapped the newly discovered spaces and brought 'others' within view, but from a particular perspective, one that came to be known as Western or, more critically, Eurocentric. This viewpoint became hegemonic and

<sup>27</sup> Oxford dictionary, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/metanarrative>, accessed 20/09/2020.



the subjectivity of non-Western 'others' was lost, the value of their knowledge and languages denied: a process that Spivak (1988) has qualified as epistemic violence.

I consider that Muslim inhabitants of MSHN still have to deal with the epistemic violence of Eurocentrism. Islam is presented as incompatible with Enlightenment and Reason. In mainstream French public opinion I observe an incapacity to recognize that Islam can be of intrinsic value. When Muslim political activists in France demand to be able to practice Islam in France as a constitutional right, this claim is often explained away as a problem of integration, as sticking to religious traditions imported from their countries of origin, or as the result of the aggressive influence of foreign imams (see Kepel 2015 for an example). I further develop this argument in chapter 6.

## *2.2) Binarism*

Together with the expansion of European colonial rule, a binary and dualist perspective of knowledge was introduced (Quijano 2000). The binarism that is involved in the modern/colonial metanarrative forges ideas about 'us' versus the racialized 'other' and about 'here' versus 'there'. One of these key binarisms was the construction of the 'West' defined in opposition to the 'rest'. The construction of Western identity was a result of the mapping of the 'colonial other'. Modernity, for Gregory, has the function of producing the 'other' and the 'self' all at once, whilst privileging the latter (2004, 4). Foucault showed how European modernity constructed the self as the same, rational, and normal through the proliferation of spacings (Foucault 1990 [1966]). While Foucault's analysis was limited to the space called Europe, Gregory takes this thought and applies it to "the production of spacings that set Europe off against its exterior 'others'" (2004, 2). In order to make his point about the simultaneous hierarchization of the West and the subordination of the 'rest' Gregory draws on the analogy of the double-sided coin, symbolic of the binary thinking of Enlightenment philosophy. He puts forward that

If one side of the coin will display the face of modernity as an optical, geometric, and phallogocentric space, (...) the reverse side will exhibit modernity's other as (for example) primitive, wild, and corporeal; as mysterious, capricious, and excessive; or as irregular, multiple, and labyrinthine (Gregory 2004, 3).

Both sides of the coin are the product of an "economy of representation" in which "the modern is preferred over - and placed over- the non-modern" (Gregory 2004, 3-4). The representation of the 'colonial other' did have repercussions on the representation of the spaces associated with this 'other', which I argue is also the case of MSHN.

The project of Western modernity consisted of qualifying, classifying, mapping, and measuring, and served to separate the same from the other attributing to each their own space. Edward Said explains the unequal process of producing the other as the production of "imaginative geographies" that work "by multiplying partitions and enclosures that serve to demarcate the 'same' from the 'other', at once constructing and calibrating a gap between

the two by designating in one's mind a familiar space with is ours and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs'" (Said 1979 in Gregory 2004, 17).

Their space is often seen as an inverse of our space: a sort of negative, in the photographic sense that they might develop into something like us, but also the site of an absence, because they are seen somehow to lack the positive qualities that supposedly distinguish us. We might think of imaginative geographies as fabrications, a word that usefully combines something fictionalized and something made real because they are imaginations given substance. (Gregory, 2004, 17).

Geographical imagination distinguishes the same from the other through a "construction that folds distance into difference through a series of spatializations" (Gregory 2004, 18). Building on Gregory's work, I consider that stigmatizing representations of MSHN cannot be understood independently from the image that the West and the French constructed of the 'self'. Geography has "tended historically to associate the 'other' with 'elsewhere'" and for this reason it "has been slow in acknowledging the presence of the 'other' among 'us' in Western societies" according to Hancock (2007, 73).<sup>28</sup> This is exactly the reason why I consider a post- and decolonial approach to MSHN is both justified and promising for providing a new perspective on the representation of these spaces, not as 'other' but as deeply connected with French colonial history.

I am interested in the presence of the global South in the North and how it is perceived. Piedalue and Rishi encourage geographers to review binaries such as South and North and "to reconsider traditional definitions of the global South, which presume it to be a geographical category identified by the location of a place on the globe". They write that

Rather, we seek to map 'the south' by tracing the operation of imperial power. This means recognizing 'southern spaces' as scattered across the globe - as non-cohesive but recognizable based on parallel processes of historical marginalization, deprivation, and engineered inequality. It requires seeing the 'south' not as a fixed geography or place(s), but rather as a flexible signifier that calls attention to historical and contemporary entanglements of colonialism, and the production and maintenance of inequalities through these power formations (Mbembe 2013, 34).

Their insight is helpful for perceiving MSHN as spaces of the global South and all the representations that go with it in the North. In France I observe a spatial representation of spaces that are 'here' for the French and spaces within France's national borders that are considered 'there': outside of the Republic and generally associated with a racialized 'non-French' population. This is for example the case of French Overseas Territories and MSHN. MSHN in France are placed at a distance and are discursively articulated as 'their' spaces. Through discourse analysis dealing with large social housing projects Germes et al. found

<sup>28</sup> In French: "La géographie a tendu, historiquement, à 'spatialiser' l'Autre, le penser comme nécessairement associé à un 'Ailleurs', et à tarder, de ce fait, à reconnaître la présence de l'Autre 'parmi nous', dans les sociétés occidentales. Notre localisation européenne et le passé de colonisateur de la France joue sans doute un rôle dans la constitution de ces oppositions binaires" (Hancock 2007, 73).

that “the majority society constitutes its identity in opposition to large social housing projects in the *banlieue*, which are closely linked to cultural strangeness and which represent a symbolic danger for the nation, even beyond [direct] security threats” (2010, 533). These findings are similar to those of Lapeyronnie who describes MSHN as “colonial theatre,” where inhabitants live as the colonized did, defined by the “dominant exterior looks and categories” (2005, 214).

The consequence of the West’s narrative about itself and its ‘other’ was that the connections between the imperial heartlands and the colonies were written out of view. According to Mbembe, “the enlargement of Europe’s spatial horizon went together with a narrowing of its cultural and historic imagination and its capacity to think itself in interconnection with the peoples that it discovered” (Mbembe 2013, 34). I argue that this is equally true for a dominant white French viewpoint that considers racialized inhabitants as foreigners coming from separate, distant, and unknown spaces. Inhabitants who have family roots in former French colonies have a very different perspective however, one of connection between ‘here’ and ‘there’, between the spaces where they come from and mainland France, and between then and now. Gregory affirms that this is not only an issue of the past, but that ‘the continued imperialism of Western discipline produces imaginative geographies that continue to shape the ways in which we conceive of connections and separations’ between ‘here’ and ‘there’ (D. Gregory 1998, 203).

The myth of Western self-sufficiency “removes from view the multiple parts played by other actors – ‘subalterns’ - in furthering, resisting, and reworking the projects of empire” (Gregory 2004, 4-5). For example, when the French boast about the ‘positive role France played in its former colonies’ (Boilley 2005),<sup>29</sup> they forget to mention that the roads and railways that led to the economic development of the colonies were built by indigenous forced labor, that thousands died in the process, and that profits were siphoned off to the French mainland.

One of the consequences of writing these connections out of view is that it renders the violence of the colonial system invisible as well as the resistances it encountered. The French historian Stora cites as the example of the Algerian war, which always appears peripheral and exterior to contemporary French history despite the fact that in 1962, at the moment of the Algerian independence, roughly 1,2 million soldiers, one million *pieds-noirs*, 400.000 immigrants and 100.00 *harkis* “returned” to the French mainland (2005, 60). *Pieds-noirs* are people with French or other European origins, born in Algeria during the period of French rule from 1830 to 1962. *Harkis* are native Muslim Algerians who served as auxiliaries in the French Army during the Algerian War. Writing these connections out of view also upholds

<sup>29</sup> The 23rd of February 2005 the French government adopted a law (n° 2005-158) that insisted on the positive role it played during the colonies. Article 4 stipulates that: “*les programmes de recherche universitaire accordent à l’histoire de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, la place qu’elle mérite. Les programmes scolaires reconnaissent en particulier le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, et accordent à l’histoire et aux sacrifices des combattants de l’armée française issus de ces territoires la place éminente à laquelle ils ont droit*”.

the illusion that mainland France has not been greatly influenced by its colonial enterprise nor by its wars over independence, as if what happened in mainland France was separate from the history of the colonies (*Ibid.*). Colonial epistemology thus creates a separation between the mainland and the colony, leading to the systematic occultation of the latter for citizens in the mainland. As a result, “the truth of metropolitan experience is not visible in the daily life of the metropolis itself” (Jameson 2003; Gregory 2004, 11).

I draw a parallel with the way spaces are brought into perspective through “cartographic performances” (Gregory 2004), which contribute to the spatialization of the ‘other’. One such in an example is French urban policy’s exclusive focus on MSHN (Dikeç 2007), notably through the publication of the *Atlas des quartiers prioritaires de la politique de la ville*, supported by statistical data. While the produced maps bring into view the shortcomings of these neighborhoods, the ways its problems stand in relation to other spaces and national and global dynamics are written out of view. The previously discussed observation that connections between mainland France and former colonies are rendered opaque is therefore also true for the connections between France’s central and marginalized spaces. According to Stora, “the ‘banlieue problem’ forces to ask the questions of contact and of refusal of the ‘other’” (2005, 63-64),<sup>30</sup> which I bring in relation with the legacy of racism.

### *2.3) Racism*

The justification of the colonial enterprise throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be summarized as the simultaneous integration of land and the separation of its peoples (Blanchard, Bancel, and Lemaire (eds.) 2005). The separation of peoples into different races associated with certain spaces was, however, a process that started much earlier. From the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century the differentiation of races came into vogue in an attempt to write newly discovered spaces into a knowable world. The introduction of systems of classification that divided not only families of plants and animals in categories but also divided people in human races was another method of modern science, in addition to cartography, and was simultaneously a means of drawing borders and setting apart one from the other, as well as bringing them together in the same world.

Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries philosophers like Bernier in France and Linnaeus in Sweden worked on the development of categories to classify the forms of life in these newly discovered spaces and to compare them to those already known (Stovall 2005). Grataloup for example described how continents were invented (2009). In 1684 Bernier published in the first theoretical attempt to divide human beings into races (based on skin color, among other attributes) who belonged to specific spaces<sup>31</sup> and Linnaeus founded the modern

<sup>30</sup> Other references with regard to the pertinence of the post/decolonial angle with regard to MSHN: Tévanian (2003); Bouamama interview with Ouardi and Simon (2015); Spire (2003); Diouf (2006).

<sup>31</sup> Bernier’s premise was much debated at that time, notably by Leibnitz who was more interested in dividing the world according to language. Variations in “size and constitution of the body” he countered, do not

scientific system of classification, ‘dividing human beings in four taxonomic suborders whose distinctive traits he directly linked to skin color’ (Gregory et al. 2009, 615). The *Europeaus*, for example, was supposed to be white, gentle, sanguine, inventive and governed by laws whilst the *Africanus* was supposed to be black, crafty, negligent and governed by caprice (Krimsky and Sloan 2011, 11). At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of new measuring techniques that advanced anthropometry, the human body also became a space to be mapped. The borders between races came to be more strictly defined and races were supposed to follow their own development paths along an evolutionary line.

Geography has contributed to the process of associating races with certain spaces: historically, “it has tended to ‘spatialize’ the Other, to think of the latter as belonging to an ‘Elsewhere’” (Hancock 2007, 73; capital letters in original version). In reference to imaginary representations of Africa, Mbembe makes a link between our understanding of a certain place and our racist understanding of certain people (Mbembe 2013). We can extend Mbembe’s analysis to the racist understanding of France’s ‘others’ (Arabs, Blacks, Muslims, and more recently Roma (Fassin et al. 2014)) and how this racism influences the representation of a specific space, MSHN or the *banlieue*. From the empirical excursion, described below [Box 1.7] it becomes clear that France is represented as White and that even though racialized people are tolerated, there seems to be a limit to this tolerance. For more information about this “threshold of tolerance” (*seuil de tolerance*) with regard to the presence of racialized in the city, in particular with regard to housing see Boumaza (1983), David (2020), Morice (2007) and Palomares (2008). The market place in Villeneuve is such a space where the presence of racialized people causes concerns among older white inhabitants because they are ‘too many’.

#### **Box 1.7 Racist tensions around the market**

The Thursday afternoon market in Villeneuve is for many older inhabitants a source of discomfort because it attracts racialized stallholders and customers from a much wider geographic area than Villeneuve. It is regularly referred to as the “Arab market” (*le marché arabe*) or the “ethnic market” and it is a reason for some in Villeneuve to avoid receiving visitors that day or to avoid the market altogether. At the Régie de Quartier, Jouda – as community mediator - regularly hears from white inhabitants what they think about the market. One example she gives is of a person saying: “*y avait peut-être mille personnes qui venaient [au marché] et toutes étaient ethniques!*” (field notes, 06/08/2017). I consider the tensions around the market as an expression of racism (see chapter 5). People that come to the market who are racialized and considered as undesirable, a source of concern and fear, whose presence in space needs to be reduced or contained. The exchange below, an extract

“prevent all human beings who inhabit the Earth from being of the same race, which has been altered by different climates just as we see animals and plants changing their nature and becoming better or degenerating” (Leibnitz 1718 [1697] in Keevak 2011, 46). Monogenism versus polygenism is a hot topic of debate at the time but Bernier’s ideas slowly gained ground and racial differences were described with increasing detail.

of a discussion during the UP working group, is another example of this discourse about the market.

Jouda : Il y a des gens, on ne va pas les citer, mais qui disent: "ce marché il faut l'enlever". Honnêtement, ce qu'il se dit sur le marché, ça te fait hérissier le poil. Mais dans tous les marchés il y a des Arabes qui vendent, c'est comme ça, regarde le marché de la Luire, des Buttes etcétera.

Cindy : Mais qu'est-ce qu'ils disent ?

Ali : Il y a trop de voilées

Jouda : Il y a trop de voilées, de barbus, d'Arabes. Comment tu veux faire venir des gens dans le quartier si tu ne veux pas un quartier mixte, c'est trop! (UP meeting, 06/08/2017)

To see so many 'Muslims' and 'Arabs' arrive in the neighborhood is a source of fear for a part of the older white generation of inhabitants. They have the impression that Muslims are a problem (Mounira, interview, 01/05/2017). At the market place, Ali was confronted with comparable racist representations of the shopping center Grand'Place, comparing the presence of racialized people to an invasion:

C'était la dernière fois sur la Place du marché hein, quelqu'un disait: "quand je vais à Grand'Place c'est terrible de voir qu'il y a autant d'immigrés". Je la regarde, une Française [et elle dit] : "oui oui ce n'est pas normal, il y en a trop quoi et ils sont partout". Tu te dis "mon Dieu". Ils se sentent envahis par quelque chose. Ils ont peur. (UP meeting, 06/08/2017)

#### *2.4) Evolution towards Western civilization*

One of the very stable representations of non-Europeans or non-Whites is that they have been imagined to be in an earlier stage of development. In line with Enlightenment thinking and evolutionary theory, Europeans generated a new temporal perspective of history where the colonized population was relocated into the past of a historical trajectory that could only move or develop in the same direction as Western civilization (Quijano and Cohen 2007). The formalization of the racial taxonomy in the middle of the 18th century (Bancel 2014) placed humans therefore not only on a vertical (hierarchization) line but also on a horizontal evolutionary line (time) according to Mbembe (2013). This meant that they were not entirely separate, as early philosophers such as Bernier had argued, but that they could develop into another category according to the principle of assimilation (Stovall 2005). One example of the persistence of the idea of an evolutionary line and different development stages is Sarkozy's Dakar speech in 2007, in which he declared that Africans did not sufficiently enter history (Le Monde, 09/11/2007).<sup>32</sup> For a critique, see Mbembe (Mbembe 2007a).

The French civilizing mission (*la mission civilisatrice*), which served to justify the colonial

<sup>32</sup> The speech is available here: [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2007/11/09/le-discours-de-dakar\\_976786\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2007/11/09/le-discours-de-dakar_976786_3212.html), accessed 18/08/2020.

enterprise, was nourished by the idea that “some races and cultures have a higher aim in life than others which gives the more powerful, the more developed, the more civilized, the right to colonize others in the name of a noble ideal” (Said 1998, 6). It is through cultural practices that distance and difference were set in motion and made meaningful and it is through becoming more civilized that one day the colonized may be considered worthy as French citizens.

The relevance of this discourse about “Eurocentric and patriarchal claims to civilization” is not limited to understanding the French colonies but, as Kipfer argues, its relevance can be extended to “subaltern social spaces in the hexagone [mainland France]” (Stovall 2003 in Kipfer 2011, 1156). Inhabitants are frequently confronted with dominant discourse (*discours du pouvoir*) about their “permanent deficit of ‘civilization’” (Lapeyronnie 2005, 214). The image painted of MSHN as uncivilized spaces that need to be brought back into the Republic (through “re-conquest”) recall a colonial vocabulary according to Tévanian (2003) and Bouamama (interview with Robine 2006, 129). The most prevalent example is the President’s address in Villeneuve (Grenoble) in 2010. About the latter Tévanian says:

Si l'on parle aussi facilement de "reconquête territoriale", d'espaces "décivilisés", de "sauvageons", de "défaut d'intégration" ou de "défaut d'éducation," si l'on parle aussi facilement de "nécessaire adaptation" (..), c'est que ce vocabulaire, et le regard qui le sous-tend, n'ont rien de nouveau. C'est le même vocabulaire et le même regard qui ont eu cours il y a plusieurs décennies, lorsqu'il s'est agi d'inventer un discours sur "l'indigène" - dont les "jeunes de banlieue" sont en grande partie les descendants (Tévanian 2003, 180).

As mentioned earlier, the images and fear of MSHN have evolved from fear of Arabs (Deltombe and Rigouste 2005) to fear of the Muslim threat (Liogier 2012). This started before 9/11, with the Islamic revolution in Iran and then the 1995 terrorist attacks on the Paris underground in relation to the Algerian civil war. This fear continued afterwards with terrorist attacks in name of Islam in 2012, 2015 and 2016. Critical of this discursive articulation of Muslims as threat post 9/11 and of the cartographic coverage of the war on terror, Gregory comments on the split geographies of “civilization” and “barbarism” (2004, 11). Colonial representations of barbaric, violent, fanatical and archaic oppressors of women, impervious to reason are resurrected and recycled on the occasion of terrorist attacks. The qualification of terrorist violence as ‘barbaric’ positioned this violence on a temporal line – helped along by the image that it was planned in caves- and in a historical stage that the West had evolved away from as a result of its civilization process. These images, according to Gregory, are not new but were re-articulations of colonial representations. The term ‘barbaric’ has also been used in France: in reference to the series of terrorist attacks in 2015 in Paris, and to the atrocious violence of the 2012 violence in Echirolles. This representation of ‘barbaric violence’ by Arabs and Blacks has a backlash on the representations of MSHN as a whole since they are home to many French Muslims. MSHN are in some way associated with “the Islamic World”. An illustration is that I was

invited to speak at the forum “Enseigner les mondes musulmans, langues, histoires et sociétés” and present my work on Villeneuve.<sup>33</sup>

Ideas about evolution towards Western civilization provide the necessary background to understand a specificity of French racism, which is articulated around a racialized representation of who can be French and whom not and therefore of the French nation. These ideas about evolution towards Western civilization are connected to universalism, and nationalism as two additional modern/colonial metanarratives. The emergence of modern nation-states in Europe made “the State the new central authority of imperial or colonial domination” and “the ‘nation’ in Europe was mainly constituted of one ethnicity, articulated as ‘whiteness’” (Escobar 2009, 3), which I argue is still true to a certain extent in chapter 5. The French Revolution brought about a turning point of racial ideas in France, aligning them with new ideas about the French nation and the founding of French culture (Stovall, 2005). The French nation became a political as well as a cultural entity and more and more references were made to the French as a race, associating the concepts of race and nation (*Ibid.*). It is for example telling that the movement in favor of abolishing slavery in 18<sup>th</sup> century France defended universal values but did not impede revolutionary France from reserving citizenship for Whites (*Ibid.*). Understanding these metanarratives and recognizing their relevance in the present is important for understanding how to challenge them, a goal to which this research project seeks to contribute.

### **3) The promise of a decolonial approach for epistemology**

As mentioned, the process of de-colonization entails the undoing of asymmetric power relations that are characteristic of the coloniality of power. In the case of this thesis this means that I seek to craft another space for the production of knowledge, and another way of thinking about MSHN. I am especially interested in how they can make space for subalternized voices and how these voices can be helpful for providing a new way of approaching MSHN.

My use of the term decolonial is inspired by the work of Latin American decolonial thinkers, but is not limited to it. In search of analytical and practical options for confronting power asymmetries rooted in the colonialist character of our contemporary societies, I draw on a wider selection of authors that can open new ways for being in relationship. My approach therefore includes also those who would not define their work as de/post/anti-colonial, in particular those working in the fields of feminist geography, anarchist geography, and the geographies of violence. Some of these can at times be more relevant for understanding the case of MSHN in France.

The analytical tools of a decolonial approach seek to deal with power asymmetry in research relations in order to set out on decolonial explorations based on reciprocity between a

<sup>33</sup> The forum was organized by the University of Lyon and the Ecole normale supérieure in Lyon on 3-4 November 2016.



researcher and those embodying subalternized voices. They seek to make space for these voices (3.1). An additional analytical tool that is helpful for doing so is a relational approach to space, stressing the way MSHN stand in relation to wider spaces (3.2). The tools of border epistemology are certainly valuable for this purpose as they describe the margins as a site of radical possibility. As a result, I approach MSHN not as objects of study but as a locus of enunciation. Moreover, I pay attention to the locus of the studying object that moves back and forth between the University and the neighborhood. Subsequently, I came to see the border of the neighborhood as a fringe space that one crosses progressively when one enters the neighborhood. My frequent movement back- and forwards between my desk at the University and meeting spaces in Villeneuve were a kind of border experience, and I gradually learned to think from this border, as do the people I collaborated with in the neighborhood (3.3). The relational approach to space calls into question the idea of rigid borders between in- and outside the neighborhood. Consequently, this approach also serves as a tool to review the representation of violence as typical for the neighborhood (3.4).

### *3.1) A decolonial approach to carrying out field research in MSHN*

Academic inquiry as a form of knowledge production is traversed by colonial relations between knowledge and power (see Hancock 2007 for the application of this statement to geography). If the process of de-colonization entails the undoing of asymmetric power relations that are characteristic of the coloniality of power, what does this mean for research? And more specifically, what does it mean to work with language as a research method if the people with whom one works cannot speak, in the sense of Spivak (1988) that they cannot be heard. Subalternity therefore poses a particular challenge to research.

Spivak's equally enigmatic and powerful statement that "no activist wants to keep the subaltern in a space of difference", and that "you don't give the subaltern voice" but that "you work against subalternity" (De Kock [interview] 1992, 46), has been an important encouragement to think about power asymmetry in research relations. According to the Modernity/Coloniality Working Group, the de-colonial option makes space for "the perspective of [those situated in] the spaces that have been silenced, repressed, demonized, devaluated by the triumphant chant of self-promoting modern epistemology, politics and economy" (Mignolo et Escobar 2009, 2). Spivak's proposal is that working against subalternity, is to work for the subaltern, which means to bring a person into speech: "the only way speech is produced is by inserting the subaltern in the circuit of hegemony" (De Kock 1992, 46). The question however remains of whether, and how this can be done through research. Simply making subalterns speak, for example in interviews, does not address the issue of voice pointed out by Spivak. I have sought for ways through which research can contribute to undoing asymmetric power relations. In this section I first present the issues I dealt with in this exploration, and second the openings I found.

### *3.1.a) Issues when embarking on decolonial explorations*

The central issues I had to deal with when I wanted to embark on decolonial explorations were the risks that field research can be intrusive, can have the function of knowledge extraction and can misrepresent the people and spaces that one encounters. Furthermore, I had to deal with the limits of language in working with marginalized groups and the risk of betrayal when translating stories of marginalized people into academic language.

#### *Reviewing decolonial explorations*

Inquiring, traveling, and investigating were activities that were an integral part of the colonial enterprise, with all its biases, that have been discussed in the previous sections. My dilemma was how to travel and learn in Villeneuve in a way that would both produce scientific knowledge and be beneficial for those whom I encountered. When I shared this question with an acquaintance over coffee, I was given the advice to simply renounce any sort of research intervention (field notes, May 2014). But refraining from engaging with Villeneuve as a research area also implied giving up the establishment of relationships and exchanges that have historically been part of exploration. An explorer is “a traveler into undiscovered or uninvestigated territory, especially to get scientific information” (Oxford Concise English Dictionary, 1998). Despite the fact that a masculine epistemology associated exploration with the penetration of virginal land and the ‘calculated action and intentionality’ of courageous men (Leshem and Pinkerton 2019), I opt for the term ‘decolonial exploration’ as a way to describe my approach to research in Villeneuve. This choice has been inspired by postcolonial, feminist, and radical traditions that offered a new reading of explorations that break with the masculinist epistemology. Rather than seeing it as a calculated action, feminist historiography associates exploration with leaving space for “serendipity, chance and intuitive curiosity” (Leshem and Pinkerton 2019, 8). Radical geographers like William Bunge (1969) proposed a democratic rather than elitist approach through ‘urban explorations’ in Detroit (Merrifield 1995) and introduced “an agenda of socially-committed scholarship with radical explorations of action research strategy” (Leshem and Pinkerton 2019, 9; see also Katz 1996; Merrifield 1995). For those who critically engaged with the legacy of geographical expedition, “learning how to see faithfully from another’s point of view” was a crucial aspect of exploration (Merrifield 1995, 52). I approach fieldwork as an encounter that a researcher provokes, and that opens up the space for negotiation of the terms of this relationship, which can vary from information sharing all the way to being deeply touched and transformed by the encounter.

#### *Resource extraction*

Particularly in cases of power asymmetry classical social science research can function as resource extraction. Knowledge can be considered as a type of resource, and this resource is one of the principle assets of an academic career. A concern about “academics having made careers out of the pain of others by consuming knowledge obtained in marginalized

communities” comes for example from Rodriguez (2017).<sup>34</sup> She points to the political economy of knowledge production in asymmetric research relations. It is difficult to address power asymmetry when one person is getting paid for collective work and the other is not. bell hooks draws attention to the issue of ownership over stories that are exchanged in a research relationship, for example in interviews, and the risk of dispossession in this exchange (1990).

[There is] no need to hear your voice, when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself” taking the role of an academic, speaking to a subaltern. “There is no need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still [the] colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk (Ibid., 241).

She accuses Western academics of seeking the experience but not the wisdom of the ‘other’ (Sharp 2009, 112). She further warns of the danger that the academic then gets to speak in her name.

#### *The limits of language when working with subaltern voices*

Working with voices in MSHN poses an epistemological issue. The condition of subalternity is a serious challenge to research because the tools of language and archives are limited in terms of passing on information. According to Fraser, “subordinate groups sometimes cannot find the right voice or words to express their thoughts, and when they do, they discover they are not heard, [they] are silenced” (1992, 119). Stigmatizing policies directed at MSHN have the effect of depoliticizing those at the margins of society, and therefore of undercutting the residents’ capacity for collective action (Wacquant et al. 2014, 1275). As a result, Villeneuve is a space in which inhabitants are reduced to silence. When Spivak said that the subaltern cannot speak she meant that they are not represented in institutions of power, and they cannot represent themselves; they lack power to do so, both politically and esthetically (Spivak 1988, 279). One’s capacity to speak can be measured through the ability to leave traces in official records; and even more so in the capacity to make one’s claims heard. Being heard means that one is able to attribute meaning to events, and that this meaning is taken into account in the way events are then remembered. Can academic research represent subalterns in a way that is satisfactory for them and that serves their cause, and if so how?

The classic tools of scientific inquiry, such as structured and semi-structured interviews structure the relationship between interviewer and interviewee in such a way that information flows only in one direction. This configuration, which is typical of interview settings, is a face-to-face interaction: an interviewer faces its interviewee on a one-to-one

<sup>34</sup> Rodriguez, Clelia O. "How Academia Uses Poverty, Oppression, and Pain for Intellectual Masturbation", *RaceBaitR* (blog), April 6, 2017, <https://racebaitr.com/2017/04/06/how-academia-uses-poverty-oppression/>, accessed 12/11/2018

basis. In this type of interaction, the interviewer poses the questions following a more or less rigid interview structure and the interviewee responds. This research tool gives the researcher the power to ask questions but it is not expected from research participants that they do the same. It is questionable whether there are any benefits for the interviewee in this encounter.

Language is not a straightforward tool for understanding the other. Lapeyronnie for example found that there is a blurred area between what is true and false: “inhabitants of the ghetto say things that they think and which they don’t think at the same time. They do not say what they think or they think what they don’t say” (2008, 22). I rapidly understood this issue around speech in my first (street) encounters with young men in Villeneuve and in the Agir pour la Paix collective. Dynamics around representation seriously complicate interviewing as research method. This difficulty around hearing, listening and understanding becomes clear through Spivak’s dialogic understanding of “speaking”. According to Spivak the problem is that when subalterns speak there is no transaction between the speaker and the listener, that speech does not reach the dialogic level of enunciation. Giving the subaltern the opportunity to speak in interviews, *donner la parole* in French, therefore does not guarantee that a researcher will be able to hear and understand what they say. One always hears people from where one stands, and there is always a form of decoding involved in hearing the other. During a debate about the freedom of speech organized by the Université populaire one person said that if she speaks, the message she seeks to convey is not heard, that her words are instead interpreted on the basis of assumptions about her social position.

La langue française elle a beaucoup de mots, elle joue beaucoup.  
Quand quelqu’un s’exprime, on lui dit : “Tu t’exprimes comme ça parce que tu es comme ça, tu t’exprimes comme ça parce que tu es comme ça”.  
Il y a des gens qui ne veulent plus s’exprimer parce qu’on les a jugés. (Participant, UP debate, 11/02/2016)

Sayad already warned that words can become “semantic prisons that label, stigmatize and confine” (in Boubeker 2010, 40). If what one says is interpreted in terms of what one represents, choosing silence is a logic consequence.

#### *The risk of betrayal when translating stories of marginalized people into academic language*

If social science is understood as a translation of a social reality made intelligible through a shared academic language, there is always the risk that this translation will be a misinterpretation of the reality being studied. In case of a misinterpretation, the researcher betrays (consciously or unconsciously) the trust that their interviewees placed in them to make a specific social world intelligible. This evokes the famous *traditore, tradutore* dilemma, reminding us that in translation there is always a risk of betrayal (see also Hancock (2007) on the role of researcher as traitor-translator). This is of particular concern in the case of asymmetric power relations, as those in subaltern positions do not have the possibility to challenge these misrepresentations. Mainstream language betrays MSHN residents and they are very well aware of this: they share the feeling that “the words of the school system, state

institutions, dominant classes and media are lies, they say integration when they mean exclusion, they affirm equality at the same time as they justify inequality” (Lapeyronnie 2008, 43). Those that speak from a subaltern position always run the risk that their words will be used against them (*Ibid.*). During early field research I engaged people on the street in discussion, and with hindsight I am aware that this practice can be problematic, that I could betray the people whom I addressed. After all, what guarantees could I give that I would really understand what they said? Here follows an empirical excursion, describing one such moment [Box 1.8].

**Box 1.8 [empirical excursion]: Speech in front of the mosque**

The first Friday after the terrorist attack on the Charlie Hebdo editorial team, I stop at the mosque on my way to a meeting at the Régie de Quartier. Around twenty men are standing outside, chatting. It must be just after Friday noon prayers and I decide to stop and try to engage a group of four young men in conversation. I justify my actions to them by saying that I would like to speak with them because we hear "all these things" in the media but that I do not want to go by these media images alone, and would like to hear from (Muslim) people directly. They are quite cooperative. One of them states that Charlie Hebdo asked for it, the others agree Charlie Hebdo should never have published the cartoons of the Prophet but do not agree with the use of violence. From the rapid exchange of glances between them, I understand that they are quite nervous about their friend sharing his opinion so openly with me. Some things are not supposed to be said to me as White, non-Muslim and from outside the neighborhood. Do they agree secretly with their friend, but do not want to state it publicly, or do they disagree and do not want to be associated to this discourse? I have the impression that the one who gave his opinion was the most naïve of the group, that the others better understood the issues at stake in the discussion, and they quickly take over the discussion. I get a sense of the importance of image management in the neighborhood and the limits of what could, and could not, be said to me. (Field notes, 09/01/2015)

My interpretation of the distress I thought I could read in the young men’s eyes at the mosque could be motivated by the question of whether I would be capable of hearing them, in the sense of understanding what they were saying, and the awareness that what they told me could be used against them. Who was I after all, and were my intentions behind the inquiry sincere? This distrust is understandable in a period following a series of terrorist attacks, when speaking one’s mind can get one into trouble. In some cases we can even speak of a criminalization of dissent: information about students who had refused to participate in the minute of silence held in educational institutions for 11 to 18 year olds were transmitted to the police (Gresh 2015).<sup>35</sup> The risk that I could betray these research participants certainly was real.

<sup>35</sup> <https://blog.mondediplo.net/2015-01-19-Charlie-je-ne-veux-voir-depasser-aucune-tete>, accessed 06/01/2019.

On several occasions people expressed their difficulty to speak and be heard in the period following the Charlie Hebdo attack.

On est dans une société où on ne peut pas s'exprimer, on ne peut pas donner notre avis. Si on donne notre avis, on est ça, on est ça, on est de plus en plus censuré, on n'ose plus. Si je vais dire ça, qu'est-ce qui va me tomber dessus? (Participant, UP debate, 20/11/2015)

C'était déjà avant un peu mais ça [attentat Charlie Hebdo], ç'a tout basculé. (...). Je me suis dit qu'on va arriver en période de guerre mais on n'était pas arrivé en période de guerre. Mais après tout ce qu'il s'était passé en France, là je me suis dit, ça y est, nous on est foutu et ils ne vont pas comprendre ce qu'on est vraiment. Déjà ils ne le comprenaient pas avant mais là c'est encore pire.

(Tina\*, interview, 9/5/2017)<sup>36</sup>

Paradoxically, the space for expression of those designated as “Muslims” shrunk in the name of defense of the freedom of expression, leading to the silencing of their voices. According to Weselby, on the subject of silence Spivak argues that “to truly understand the consciousness of the subaltern, we must appreciate the significance of their silence, instead of forcing their representation by speaking on their behalf” (2014).<sup>37</sup> One way to appreciating this significance is to acknowledge subalterns’ right to opacity, as I argue in the next subsection that looks at the partial answers I have found to the epistemological dilemmas described above.

### 3.1.b) Establishing more organic ways of being in research relationships

What ways did I find to challenge asymmetric power relations and to work against subalternity in research; to avoid the risk of dispossessing research participants from their stories; to establish reciprocity in dialogue; to create, through research, the space that allows others to speak for themselves?

I understood rather quickly that ideas about undoing power relations in research were rather utopian (Dijkema, Gabriel, and Koop 2015). A first step in being realistic about power asymmetry is to acknowledge one’s privilege as a remunerated academic (McIntosh 1998). Initially I was tempted to downplay my privilege, over time I realized however that similarity, in the sense of sharing the same social position, was not what marginalized research participants expected from me. I learned that if I wanted to be an asset to their struggle, I should use my privilege to their benefit, to open doors which otherwise would remain closed, for example by giving access to my networks. This finding resonates with Holmes and Hunt (2015), in that however sympathetic researchers may be to the cause or struggle of

<sup>36</sup> If the name in the text is a pseudonym, I indicate this with an asterisk the first time I use the name. In most cases they are pseudonyms participants chose themselves.

<sup>37</sup> Weselby, "Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, on the Subaltern and Epistemic Violence", <https://magpiecws.wordpress.com/2014/09/13/gayatri-chakravorty-spivak-on-the-subaltern-and-epistemic-violence-study-notes-2/>, accessed 06/01/2019.

marginalized groups they work with, researchers should accept that they cannot be in, nor take, someone else's place or subaltern position. Rather than aiming to get rid of power asymmetries, I therefore opted for the principle of reciprocity in research relations.

#### *Addressing questions of power asymmetry: in search of reciprocity*

I borrow the term reciprocity in research relations from ATD Quart Monde<sup>38</sup> that stressed the importance of reciprocity when bringing together different forms of knowing about poverty (Groupe de recherche Quart Monde-Université 1999). The approach originates in the idea that each person, and particularly those directly concerned by poverty, has knowledge to offer and is in need of knowledge. In an encounter those thinking from different positions can learn from each other. According to this approach there is no other possibility to access knowledge than through collaborative knowledge production between those directly concerned with a situation of domination and those wanting to learn about this situation (Groupe de recherche Quart Monde-Université, 1999). The principle of reciprocity in research relations corresponds to a shared concern, a recognition of mutual interdependence and an effort to comprehend "other worlds without being invasive, colonizing and violent" and to recognize that our lives are "radically entwined with the lives of distant strangers" (Ignatieff 1994; Gregory 1998, 203). Building relationships based on reciprocity and shared interests, where researchers are dependent on research participants, and committed to thinking how their research can contribute to the participants and the community they are part of, is an aspect of the promise of a decolonial approach.

#### *Making space for subaltern voices in research*

The decolonial promise is furthermore about making space for subaltern voices and bodies without making them transparent, and it is about making space for voices without owning them and leaving space for disagreement. To engage in a reciprocal relationship requires both distance and proximity. This paradoxical position resembles the researcher's position described by Rose, as one of difference and similarity (Rose 1997). It is precisely by working through this paradox that a more "connective geographical knowledge" becomes possible, by being in between: "between the 'field' and the 'not-field', between theory and practice, but also between researcher and researched" (Rose 1997, 313). The potential of the decolonial approach is that it allows to establish a relationship and enter into dialogue in which the 'other' is recognized as equal, but not necessarily as the same. To balance out the danger of speaking in another's name, pointed out by bell hooks, Spivak proposes the ethical stance in research of making discursive room for the other to exist in and of themselves and to bond in difference (Spivak, Landry, and MacLean 1996).

<sup>38</sup> ATD (Agir Tous pour la Dignité) Quart Monde

**Box 1.9 [empirical excursion]: Standing side-by-side, operating the displacement**

It was during a journey with the Agir pour la paix collective to Denmark and the Netherlands that I became aware of the displacement that had been operated during the journey. In the period prior to the trip it was I who was a newcomer to **their** neighborhood, (Villeneuve Echirolles), asking questions and I sometimes felt like an intruder. In the preparations for the journey we slowly became a group who was preparing a discourse about itself: who the group was, where it came from, and why it was travelling North. The physical displacement from one place where I was outsider (as non-inhabitant) to a place where we were all outsiders definitely altered my position. We came to stand side-by-side by observing a new situation together: in Copenhagen we were all foreigners observing the city and the people that hosted us. It was during the numerous group photos that our standing side-by-side became most visible [Figure 1.3]. (Field notes, 30/05/2015)



*Figure 1.3 Standing side-by-side after a debate organized at the Brakke Grond, Amsterdam. (Photo Agir pour la Paix, 23/05/ 2015)*

Making discursive room for the other can be operationalized through engaging with the other “in non-essential terms” (Kilburn 1996),<sup>39</sup> approaching the other from a point of “ethical singularity” (Spivak, Landry, and MacLean 1996, 269). I understand the latter as the need to leave space for difference in a relationship and to see the ‘other’ not through the angle of pre-existent categories but as a unique person. Spivak warns against the attempt to recreate the ‘other’ narcissistically, in one’s own image, and instead suggests doing so generously, with care and attention (Kilburn, 1996). I draw parallels between this idea and

<sup>39</sup> Blog Postcolonial Studies @ Emory, <http://144.214.21.63/CCS/core/postcolonialism/frameset/Glossary.htm>, accessed 11/09/2020



Gregory and Prad's understanding of Haraway's manifesto which "was a call to reach out from our different positions, to engage in conversations with others in different situations and to enter into solidarities with them, not so much as to overcome our limitations and partialities as to recognize them for what they are" (Gregory et Pred 2007, 13).

Whether someone is heard depends on an "act of response that completes the transaction between speaker and listener and establishes a dialogue" (Kilburn, 1996). A form of true dialogue is "when we engage profoundly with one person and responses flow between dialogue partners" and is based on mutual action, on give and take (Spivak, Landry, and MacLean 1996, 269–70). Spivak's observations are very much in line with the idea of "*savoirs dialogués*", an approach ATD Quart Monde developed in its "*croisement de savoir*" project on extreme poverty (Groupe de recherche Quart Monde-Université 1999). It stresses the importance of listening to the other with respect for the largest differences, which consists of being able to listen to the ways one is affected by the knowledge of the other. The truths researchers and research participants meet through "reciprocal listening" (*une écoute réciproque*) is what makes them partners (*Ibid.*).

#### *An alternative to interview settings*

One aspect that made speech possible in my research is that I initially chose to avoid interview settings and the unidirectional flow of information from the interviewee by the interviewer that is typical of this research setting.<sup>40</sup> My search to move from hierarchical to more horizontal relations thus had an impact on the physical configuration of my research: from vertical and oppositional forms to circles, round and fluid forms, based on connections and linkages. Box 1.9 presents an example of the movement from a face-to-face research settings to a side-by-side or group setting that involves participants in a collective reflection. Research configurations that promote more horizontal ways of being in relationship are a partial response to the concerns raised by Spivak (1992) of not being audible, and bell hooks (1990) about the dispossession of voices.

A way of engaging in reciprocal relations and to avoid interview settings was to get involved with groups of people organized around issues of shared concern. With these groups I organized group discussions and public debates. We created spaces for public discussion, in which I refrained from posing direct questions.

The following empirical excursion illustrates that my objective of establishing relations based on reciprocity and dialogue has been recognized by (at least one) research participants with whom I worked together in the Université populaire. Although I did not systematically ask for feedback from research participants, I received feedback at times in unexpected ways, see Box 1.10.

<sup>40</sup> I define research in a broad way, as a long and continuing, albeit interrupted, dialogue at the service of collaborative knowledge production. This definition goes far beyond research as a set of methodologies at the service of data collection.

### Box 1.10 [empirical excursion]: Feedback on my research position in Villeneuve

Alain commented on my approach to research in the neighborhood during an interview with Coline Cellier, a student at the IUGA, who carried out a research project on the co-production of knowledge between the University and Villeneuve (2017). Unsurprisingly, Coline and I had similar interlocutors. Alain described my presence in the Université populaire in terms of “accompaniment” and “companionship” and stressed the importance of taking sufficient time. The aspect of reciprocity comes back in his remark on the equivalence of point of view, in the term “cooperation” and a position of humility.

Enfin tu vois l'**accompagnement** de Claske c'est remarquable, parce que ça **vient de loin**, ça **dure longtemps**, ça s'installe dans le temps et c'est vraiment de l'**équivalence de points de vue**. On sent une vraie bonne **coopération**, construite, **humble**. C'est un beau mot. Il y a cette forme d'humilité. De rejeter son savoir-savoir et le mettre au service de... (Cellier 2017, 177) (...) C'est le compagnonnage... Ça demande du temps hein. Faut faire ensemble. Il y a un moment où il faut **cheminer ensemble**. Pas forcément sur la totalité des actions mais... C'est ce qui s'est passé avec Claske. (*Ibid.*, 181)

Of course, this is only one voice, which does not exclude that others experienced my presence in collectives differently.

#### *The right to opacity*

A decolonial approach also comprises the right to opacity, a concept introduced by Glissant (Caron 1998; M'bom 1999) and that I have become familiar with through my discussions with Kenjah. Kenjah is a resource person of the Université populaire who lived in Villeneuve and had been personally acquainted with Glissant.<sup>41</sup> During a debate, Kenjah presented Glissant's idea of the right to opacity.

L'académie occidentale, s'est présentée à nous en ayant cette volonté de transparence absolue: la science va tout dire, va tout montrer et elle va percer l'être humain dans tous ses recoins, dans tous ses secrets. La science a ce projet de la transparence absolue. Et il [Glissant] dit : "mais non seulement c'est impossible, mais je me refuse à ce qu'on me transperce comme ça du regard et tiens à préserver des maquis en moi". [Il dit aussi] "de toute façon cette prétention ne pourra jamais se réaliser." (Kenjah, Rencontres de Géopolitique Critique, IUGA, 6/02/2018).

Glissant grants those that a researcher seeks to understand the "right to opacity". To Glissant, understanding or comprehending implies “taking with” from the latin “com” (with) and “prehendere” (to take), to which he prefers “giving with” (*Ibid.*). In the latter case, the research object becomes a research participant who gives information, which is very different from information or data being taken or collected. Glissant suggests that

<sup>41</sup> The function of resource persons during my thesis is further explained in chapter 4.

information can only be gained through relationships. These different positions of a researcher (who takes or to whom one gives information) do not produce the same results.

[Glissant] rejette cette volonté de comprendre qui serait: "j'ai lu les statistiques, j'ai lu les dossiers, je suis venu" et il dit : "combien de gens ils débarquent dans notre pays, viennent et au bout de deux semaines ils disent qu'ils ont tout compris? Déjà c'est impossible, d'envisager de comprendre comme ça, il faut toujours anticiper un reste à connaître un reste à savoir et un maquis encore à découvrir". Et que "le droit à l'opacité c'est la reconnaissance que l'autre ne sera jamais totalement maitrisable ni à maitriser et que l'autre il y aura toujours une part de mystère qui va faire qu'on aura toujours intérêt à continuer le cheminement ensemble. (Kenjah, Rencontres de Géopolitique Critique, IUGA, 6/02/2018).

Warren, drawing on Khatibi (Khatibi, 1985) and Glissant (1997), understands the idea of opacity as acknowledging that "the 'other' of modernity may not be understandable, may not be amenable to reductive conceptual frameworks" (Warren 2017, 5). The right to opacity thus also means the renunciation of being intrusive. While Spivak does not use the term opacity she defends a similar right, the right to silence, when she argues that "to truly understand the consciousness of the subaltern we must appreciate the significance of their silence, instead of forcing their representation by speaking on their behalf".<sup>42</sup> In case of asymmetric relations between researchers and subalterns, the decolonial promise includes the respect for silences and privacy and the acceptance that researchers do not have an intrinsic right to access the knowledge of the 'other'. The researcher can only invite the latter to share their knowledge and has to accept their refusals. I relate the right to opacity to my experience with Muslim women for whom the choice to wear the veil was part of their private life [Box 1.11].

**Box 1.11 [empirical excursion]: The right to opacity about motivations to wear a veil**

Based on Muslim women's stories during debates I had the feeling that they could provide a new perspective on the choice of Muslim women to wear a veil in a country that is hostile to this religiously motivated practice. Many people find it difficult to understand that practicing Islam and wearing a veil can be a positive choice and not a symbol of submission to patriarchy and a rejection of the French Republic. When starting to explore this topic, I sensed hesitation from Muslim women to make this a topic of our follow-up conversations. I understand the issues at stake in this hesitation as follows. First, while I interpreted the decision to wear of veil in public space as a form of resistance against repression in name of secularism (Sibertin-Blanc and Boqui-Queni 2015), they insisted on their spirituality and their intimate relationship with God. With regard to Islam in general, Aziz said for example that:

La foi est dans le cœur, ce n'est pas possible de l'expliquer. On aime Mohammed plus que notre père et notre mère. Parfois quand j'en parle, j'en

<sup>42</sup> Weselby (2014), accessed 06/01/2019

pleure et je ne comprends pas, c'est la foi. (Informal discussion 23/01/2015)

My interlocutors insisted unanimously that the choice to wear a veil was between them and God and had nothing to do with politics. Second, in an informal discussion with S. she said that it was not a problem for her to talk about her decision to wear a veil, but that it was problematic that it seemed to be the only topic people were interested in, leaving no space for the question of which topics she wanted to address. This focus on the veil was therefore a way of silencing her voice.

Third, questions about the veil were considered intrusive. The Charlie Hebdo attack revived the discussion about the veil, which in France had started much earlier (1989 with the Creil Affair) and can be traced back to colonial times (Fanon 2011 [1959]). Muslims experienced discourse about the Islam in general, but about the veil in particular as an intrusion into their private lives. When people take offense at the veil and bring it into the public domain through public statements, they trespass the space of the private. Paradoxically, those making these public statements claim at the same time that religion is a private matter and should not be carried out into the public sphere. Tassadit said that all these public statements about the veil penetrated her privacy (UP debate, 20/3/2015). This penetration is an exercise of power. For another participant, the negotiation around the veil is a negotiation for a space of freedom in which to auto-define oneself.

I came to question my own motivation to understand and penetrate what was a mystery to me. As a result, I decided to renounce working on a topic that my interlocutors refuted, and privileged instead topics in which we had a shared interest (field notes, 05/04/2018). The acceptance not to fully understand the 'other' is what the right to opacity is about.

Despite the difficulties around speech as translation and the power dynamics involved in language, I have chosen to work with speech. This is not because it is all we have, as Lapeyronnie (2008) suggests, but because language has remained a crucial tool for establishing relationships, as it is through narration that we can relate to the other. Moreover, speech has the function of Ariadne's thread: sharing words is a means of connecting, with words we can weave, create an existence and weave new worlds together. We create ourselves in relation to others as we speak and it is through speaking that we become: in order to exist - and to have our existence acknowledged- we need to inhabit the spoken world. We could say that the limits of language are the limits of knowable worlds (Harvey 2000).

### *3.2) A relational approach to space*

The possibilities that a decolonial approach opens up for new ways of being in and perceiving relationships also has important implications for the perception of space. This promise of a decolonial approach is very compatible with the contributions of Massey (2005), Soja (1996) and Springer (2011b; 2011a) that approach space as open, relational and

heterogeneous. Authors in the decolonial tradition have often been critical of the linear representation of time as evolution. Thinkers about space have insisted in similar fashion that space is rhizomatic, developing horizontally rather than vertically (Dosse 2016; Menatti 2011 based on Deleuze and Guattari 1976) and that we should focus on the lines (Ingold 2007) rather than the dots in order to make connections between the here and there; and between the past, present and future in space.

I would like to argue here the interest of the choice to take the neighborhood as a starting point for this academic enquiry. Delimiting the contours of a research project geographically rather than thematically or through the focus on one particular group, allows the exploration of the complexity and the interconnections of a multitude of topics in a certain space. Through this approach I have come to question the representation of MSHN as ghettos and closed spaces. Indirectly, I have also come to question the representation of certain spaces as violent and of violence itself, placing the spaces of the neighborhood in larger geographical frameworks of connections.

As a result of the importance attributed to space in geography this discipline can make an important contribution to a decolonial approach to MSHN. In addition to information about the historical, social, and economic context of a neighborhood (an analysis that remains limited to a “superficial” approach to space) geographers like Lefebvre, Soja and Massey have developed analytical tools that offer a “deep” approach to space (Gregory 1998, Smith 1984). They allow for the use of space itself, rather than a specific problem or behavior in space, as the starting point for scientific investigation. These tools help to ‘open up’ space, and thereby open up the wide variety of behaviors that space produces and that are produced in space. They propose considering space as the product of interrelations, as a sphere of possibility, as containing the existence of multiplicity, and as always under construction. Space can be a helpful tool to rethink the political, and to re-inscribe MSHN into the nation. Opening up space implies reconnecting a single area on one scale to other scales through pointing out the existing connections between them.

A relational approach to space that pays specific attention to the border - both in a material and a symbolic sense - is a means by which to take the postcolonial critique of representations seriously. A logical consequence of the postcolonial critique on representation (see Asher 2017; Mignolo 1995) is that subalterns and the spaces that they are associated with should never be an object of study in themselves. Instead, the condition of subalternity and its associated places can only be studied in relation to places of hegemony and the processes responsible for subalternization.

### *3.3) Border thinking, a tool for a decolonial approach to MSHN*

Pour aller au cœur du sujet, il faut parfois faire un détour  
(David Gabriel, informal discussion, 13/12/2013)

Decolonial work on knowledge production and subaltern voices problematizes the “where” of knowledge production by asking from which standpoint one thinks and speaks. Mignolo’s work on the geopolitics of knowledge has been an important contribution in this regard (Mignolo and Escobar 2009) as an invitation to think about the tension between the location of the object of study and the “location of the studying subject” (Mignolo 2012, 12).

In this subsection I engage with border epistemology and explain in what ways it has been helpful in developing a decolonial approach to MSHN. After a rapid overview of what border thinking entails, I argue that the decolonial promise is located at the border of the neighborhood rather than at its center (3.3.a). Subsequently I engage with Mignolo’s invitation to think about the location of the object of study and the “location of the studying subject” by describing my continuous movement between the University and the neighborhood and what this taught me about the border between them. (3.3.b). I then turn to one specific mode of engaging in border thinking, which is dwelling in borders and I answer the question whether a privileged white person can dwell in borders and engage in border thinking (3.3.c). Finally, what has been most helpful in border epistemology as analytical tool is that it served as an incitement to shift my focus from the neighborhood as an object of study to the neighborhood as a locus of enunciation (3.3.d).

#### *3.3.a) The decolonial promise is located at the border*

With regard to the “where” question of knowledge production Mignolo identifies the border as a particularly relevant location. He builds on the work of Anzaldúa (1987) that “displaces the accent from the delimitation of geographical spaces to their borders” and to “the creation of spaces-in-between as a different way of thinking” (Mignolo 1995, xiii). Other theoretical sources of inspiration for Mignolo have been the Algerian sociologist Khatibi’s work on “other” thinking (2012, 66) and Glissant on the link between thinking, space and language (Mignolo 2012). According to Warren, Khatibi starts his reflection “at the point of collision between the colonality of power and its resistances, [which] begins in the borderlands” (2017, 5). A person situated on the border is part of different worlds, and she/he can only be in relation with these different worlds through translation from the language of one world to that of the other. Mignolo’s theory speaks in particular for those on the lower end of asymmetric power relations because it is they that are obliged to translate their experience and ideas from subaltern worlds of language, knowledge, and agency to hegemonic language. The dominant do not share this need as they can require that others adapt to their standards and their world views. This location on the border is conducive to a specific kind of epistemology, or “border thinking” that has the potential “to delink and decolonize knowledge” (Mignolo 2012, 68).

The fact that most decolonial authors write in relation to non-Western contexts gives the false impression that this theoretical approach is only relevant to understand these geographical spaces. Warren, however, mobilizes border thinking in the context of intra-European colonization through adopting “other thinking” towards Irish higher education, which challenges “the hegemonic and self-referential character of modernity” (2017, 5). He brings to our attention the fact that knowledge emerges from particular places and that there are also silenced voices within Europe. While the French context is still quite different to the Irish one, I develop below why border thinking holds a promise for a decolonial approach to MSHN in France.

The decolonial promise is to consider “modernity” from “peripheral locations” (Escobar 2009, 35). We can say that MSHN, as peripheral locations in France, are important locations for this decolonial potential as places from where to consider and critique power and subalternization. It is from these places that an ‘other’ interrogation of French society is possible. Therefore, I am not so much interested in the neighborhood as a geographically bounded space, but as a social space. As a result, fieldwork is no longer a territorialized enterprise but an “inductive undertaking” (Gatelier and Dijkema 2017).

Decolonial work on border epistemology was helpful and formative for displacing the object of my study and for making sense of my experience of crossing the borders between the University and Villeneuve.

### *3.3.b) Reflections on shifting my location as a studying object*

Mignolo’s invitation to think about the tension between the location of the object of study and the “location of the studying subject” urged me to question what drove me to Villeneuve, what knowledge I counted on finding there, and to question my position of shuttling between the University and the neighborhood. Letting go of the neighborhood as research object I became interested in the relations between the neighborhood and wider spaces in the city and beyond. Instead of looking for the heart of the neighborhood, an exercise that seeks to describe the dynamics in the neighborhood, I came to focus my attention on its borders as a contact zone. According to this perspective, the neighborhood is a fringe space to which my readings about border epistemology are applicable. As a result, I consider Villeneuve as a “locus of enunciation” (Mignolo 2007, 158), a place from which to think and speak, despite dynamics of subalternization. A border is both a separation and a contact point, a focus on the border therefore allows to stress the links between the neighborhood, the wider area, and the spaces to which it is connected. In the case of Villeneuve it is more appropriate to speak of a fringe than a border, as a border evokes a line while a fringe evokes a transition zone. I further develop the idea of the border as a fringe in Villeneuve in Box 1.12.

**Box 1.12 [empirical excursion]: A personal border experience in Villeneuve**

The location of the Geography faculty, the Institut d'Urbanisme et de Géographie Alpine (IUGA),<sup>43</sup> is just across the road from the most emblematic part of Villeneuve, the Galerie d'Arlequin. This geographical proximity meant that I often crossed the university/neighborhood border. There is no general agreement between research participants as to where the border is located, but the experience of the border itself is largely shared. For me crossing the border means traversing five different zones between leaving the IUGA and entering the neighborhood.

**Zone 1: From the IUGA courtyard to the iron gate**

The IUGA consists of three relatively recent concrete and glass buildings around a courtyard, populated by students and university staff. In comparison to IUGA's neighboring spaces, it is striking that those considered White are the majority by far. The courtyard feels like a protected space where buildings and gates keep the street at a safe distance [Figure 1.4]. Staff and students belong here, but as soon as they step out of the iron gate they no longer seem to belong. Once through the iron gate one is in the Avenue Marie Reynoard. At this point the first thing I do is look left and right at the concrete pillars next to the gate which function as a communication hub between students, staff and the neighborhood.



*Figure 1.4 From the IUGA courtyard towards the gate. (Photo author, 11/01/2019)*

<sup>43</sup> After a reorganization in September 2017, they joined to form the Institute of Urbanism and Alpine Geography.



## Zone 2: Crossing Avenue Marie Reynoard

On the Avenue Marie Reynoard there are fast-food restaurants, shops, and offices, of which quite a number are empty or frequently change owners. Apart from the Simply supermarket, they attract a local clientele. The supermarket caters to a wider audience (students, inhabitants of different neighborhoods) and thus is a place where different groups meet. The Avenue Marie Reynoard is not really a place where people loiter (apart from the older men who sometimes sit on the benches). The Avenue seems to belong to those living in the three neighboring areas (Village Olympique, Vigny-Musset and Villeneuve) and students and staff are just passers-by, by foot on their way to the tram or on their bikes headed to other areas of the city. Those living in the neighborhood are also moving to and from work, bringing or fetching children to and from school, on their way to and from the tram stop. The Avenue connects these neighborhoods to the city center and to the ring-road (*rocade sud*), the way out of the city. My main purpose for being in the Avenue Reynoard is to cross it [Figure 1.5]. Depending on the path I take, I will walk past the “*Zone d’affichage libre*” just across from the taco fast food restaurant to see if there are any new messages posted. In the middle of the street crossing there is a green area with grass and flower beds, which also functions as a space for municipal display. Here the municipality (Green Party) installed huge wooden boxes showcasing urban gardening. Stepping on this green space is like entering into municipal space before stepping on the street again and trying to avoid the cars, and then lowering my guard as I reach the cycle path and pedestrian area.



Figure 1.5 Pedestrian crossing Avenue Marie Reynoard. (Photo author, 11/01/2019)

### **Zone 3: Traversing an office area, the Zone d'activités (ZAC) des Peupliers**

Once one has crossed the Avenue Marie Reynoard, one enters an office area which falls under a specific fiscal regime, the Zone franche urbaine (ZFU) in order to attract business to MSHN. This zone is a block of four streets that led to the tram stops Bruyère and Arlequin. This zone ends at the tramline. While shops on the Avenue Marie Reynoard have large windows and are open to the public, this is not the case in the ZAC des Peupliers where the buildings are more run-down and have large iron bars on their windows [Figure 1.6]. On the northern side one comes across the former police station (burned and closed), and on the southern side the new police station with large windows that were tagged and hit by stones several weeks after it opened. Across from the police station there is a mosque in a prefab building, and another mosque is located in an office building in a parallel street. Both of these mosques are overcrowded on Fridays at prayer time, in stark contrast with the empty or quiet offices. There is usually quite a crowd as well in front of the Secours Populaire, a French non-profit organization at the service of the poor, particularly during the opening hours of the food bank. The office spaces, built to boost the local economy, obviously now serve other purposes. There is also a tiny theater, the home to several theater companies and a waste collection point. The latter stands somewhat in contrast to the brand-new health clinic, Clinique du Mail which was built during the first part of the Villeneuve's urban renovation project that started in 2008 (see chapter 3). I often stop at the end of its main road, the Rue des Trembles, to take pictures of the latest transformations of the urban landscape as a result of urban renewal.



*Figure 1.6 Zone d'activité des Peupliers. (Photo author, 13/11/2018)*

#### **Zone 4: Galerie d'Arlequin, crossing the fortress**

Once one has crossed the tram line, one has left the office area behind. The tram line follows the façade of the 1000-meter-long Galerie d'Arlequin which has the appearance of a fortress. Both the tramline and the Galerie d'Arlequin are juxtaposed with the Rue des Trembles in the office area, which reinforces the fortress feeling. The Galerie d'Arlequin block is very impressive due to its immense size. At the bottom of the building I always look up to check that nothing is falling from the windows, and I always look down to see what has been thrown to the ground. My eyes furthermore scrutinize whether new messages have been left on the pillars that hold up the high-rise buildings. All these tons of concrete feel quite oppressive when one walks underneath them [Figure 1.7], but having passed the block one stands in the bright green open area of the park.



*Figure 1.7 Crossing the fortress, entering the passage at 12-20 Galerie d'Arlequin. (Photo author, 13/11/2018)*

### **Zone 5: In the park, at the heart of Villeneuve**

In the park it feels like I can breathe again [Figure 1.8]. In comparison to the Avenue Marie Reynoard the pace in the park has slowed down. Most people are not in a hurry to go from A to B but are more in a stroll-mode. On Monday morning there is a high chance that I will meet the 65+ walk-in-the-park club.



*Figure 1.8 Out of the passage in the park. (Photo author, 13/11/2018)*

This border as fringe experience, of crossing from the University into the heart of Villeneuve reflects the displacement from a space where being a ‘researcher’ is the norm to a place where it is not, and where on the contrary this is considered rather odd or even suspicious. My blond hair and blue eyes also stand out. Yet it is also a place of immigration, where no grandiloquent claims to Frenchness can be made, and this suits me as I myself am an immigrant in France.

No one asked for my intervention or invited me to carry out research in this marginalized neighborhood, so at times I felt, especially in the beginning, as an intruder. The displacement of the object of study was a way of resolving this feeling of intrusion. It allowed me to enquire not from the exterior, but to include myself in a wider question of the relationship between the neighborhood and wider French society, of which the University is a part. It is for this reason that it is of interest to describe what happens in the physical movement from the University to the neighborhood and to describe the different spheres or zones one crosses before arriving from one in the other. Paying particular attention to the neighborhood as a fringe space is a means of opening up this space and stressing its connections to the rest of the city, France, and the world.

### *3.3.c) Engaging in border thinking through dwelling in borders*

As mentioned, Mignolo's thinking on border epistemology has been largely inspired by Anzaldúa's work about dwelling in the borders (1987). Border thinking is not thinking about borders (although it is a good starting point) but it is about dwelling in borders, engaging our bodies in that kind of displacement where we become uncomfortable because we are meeting an 'other'. By being on the border we open ourselves up to encounters with 'others', open ourselves up to questions, and accept the discomfort of the unknown where we are no longer the norm. While Mignolo's description of a "local decolonial 'I'" that "dwells in the frontiers between local non-Western and non-modern memories and the intrusion of modern Western local histories and knowledge" makes little sense in the context of my explorations of Villeneuve where the terms non-modern and non-Western are quite irrelevant. His observation about migration, that "migrants always reside in borders, whether in the heart of Paris, Berlin etc....." (Mignolo 2012, xv) is relevant. The border here is between dominant/hegemonic society and subaltern spaces. In the box below I argue why border thinking is not limited to subalterns [Box 1.13].

#### **Box 1.13 [empirical excursion]: Can a privileged white person engage in border thinking?**

Mignolo states that "the transcending of the colonial difference can only be done from a perspective of subalternity" (2012, 45). This logic implies that from my position as a privileged white person I cannot engage in border thinking. It is true that I do not share the experience of having a subaltern body and therefore there are limitations to the truth that I can access. There are however three reasons why I think that I can nevertheless engage in border thinking.

The first reason is that I share the experience of migration. I also have migrated from one location to another, to a country where I do not have the nationality, cannot vote, and originally did not speak the language. The difference with racialized migrants from outside of Europe is that I arrived in France with the rights of a European citizen, and that my body, the color of my hair and eyes, and my social class give me access to hegemonic space.

The second reason is that, while my white body grants me certain privileges, my gendered body does not. The links and proximity between decolonial and feminist questions became clear during a public debate, proposed by Kenjah, on the urgency of decolonial thinking held in the anarchist library and café Antigone (see overview map in appendix 7). Selected texts from Frantz Fanon were a starting point for the discussion. The female audience participating in the debate related to these texts through their experiences of being marginalized as women. These same texts, when later debated in Villeneuve, gave rise mostly to stories about experiences of racism.

The third reason why I claim that I can engage in border thinking is that one can learn to occupy a subject position. Spivak asks from the holders of hegemonic discourse that they "de-hegemonize their position and learn how to occupy the subject position of the other" (Spivak and Harasym 1990, 121). Taking the subject position of the other requires a movement from hegemonic to marginal spaces and a lesson in humility. While one can never

really occupy the position of the other, it is through working with, standing side-by-side, and by taking the position in between that one can engage in border thinking. Since my encounters in the neighborhood I do not participate in the same way in meetings at schools, the police station, or the local football club. I have come to observe the white privilege that I am granted. Certainly, I will never be affected in the same way as racialized people by racism and I can never completely bridge the colonial difference, but I can learn in solidarity.

In Mignolo's account border dwelling is a solitary business, but my experience is that one does not dwell or think alone, as I have learned through meeting others at the border who also displaced themselves there. After a meeting with the Université populaire working group on the present of France's colonial past, I wrote in my notebook that what made our collaboration and learning together possible was that: "we were all on the border of different worlds and we wanted to speak to each other. We all had fought some battles to get out of one specific world and claim our space at the border. We wanted to meet each other and be able to speak to each other" (field notes at the occasion that Kenjah first joined a meeting of the Université populaire working group, 12/09/17).

The border has epistemological potential precisely because it is the site of tensions and friction.

### *3.3.d) The epistemological potential of the border as a locus of enunciation*

So far I have insisted on the potential presented by the border's permeability and of engaging in border thinking. In this section I develop an alternative perspective of borders, based on the contributions of feminist (border) thinkers (Anzaldúa, Walsh, Fraser) and the work of bell hooks and Spivak. I argue that Villeneuve, as a marginalized space, has epistemological potential for those speaking from its border.

I understand the border here as that space-in-between, as a fringe. Villeneuve, in this regard, is home to the marginalized who meet the established at its borders and through the institutions present in the neighborhood. According to Anzaldúa, it is that "space-in-between" from where marginalized can start to think (1987 in Mignolo 1995, xiii). Starting to think is a precondition for being able to speak. Anzaldúa's idea is close to Spivak (Spivak, Landry, and MacLean 1996) and bell hooks (1990) on the margins as a site of radical possibility. According to Spivak it is at the margins where "disciplinary discourses break down and enter the world of political agency" (*Ibid.*). For bell hooks, "the margins are a site for radical possibility" as they are neither inside nor outside: "to be on the margins is to be part of the whole but outside the main body" (bell hooks 1990 in Sharp 2009, 112). This position can therefore provide a unique perspective in that it takes its distance from the prejudices of the center.

I argued earlier that Villeneuve is a space in which those at the margins of society are reduced to subalternity and silence and that MSHN more generally are configured as places where inhabitants cannot speak. The above insights have been very relevant for my

understanding of how to approach Villeneuve as a particular place from which to understand wider French society. Villeneuve should also be understood as a place where people can resist dominant definitions and stereotyping. It is a place where it is possible to say things that cannot be said elsewhere. Inhabitants of Villeneuve do not only passively receive the stigmatizing discourse about their neighborhood, but also actively counter this discourse. One can perceive many different forms of organization and 'speaking' in and through space in Villeneuve, both constructive and destructive. One can think of different forms of territorial and cultural appropriation (Dijkema 2019; see also Dubet 2008; Lepoutre et Augé 2008; Lussault 2009; Sauvadet 2006) and the creation of a form of "counter-world" (Lapeyronnie 2008, 20). Subcultures are generally presented as obstacles to integration (Authier 2007) but others have stressed their potential for resistance (Bacqué and Fol 2007; Dikeç 2007; Gilbert 2011; Sauvadet 2006). According to Kirkness "resistance to stigma occurs across a spectrum, with political organized resistance on one end and more discrete, symbolic and tactical resistance at the other" (2014, 1282). The neighborhood is a site for the tactical appropriation of marginalized space and non-discursive forms of resistance (see chapter 3). It is also a site for political mobilization, where space is opened up for politics driven by democratic ideals (see chapter 6). In the latter case, organized inhabitants claim the borders that have been erected by the media, political discourse, and urban policy between mainstream France and its MSHN, and speak and make claims in the name of these neighborhoods (*quartiers populaires*). They use these borders as a means for political organization and turn their marginalized neighborhoods into counterhegemonic spaces.

In reference to Fraser (1992), I argue that Villeneuve has the function of a counter-public or counterhegemonic space where residents can develop a discourse and gain some freedom to auto-define themselves. Nancy Fraser defines subaltern "counterpublics" as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinate social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Fraser 1992, 129). Space is a constituent part of this form of public, hence the term counterpublic or counterhegemonic space. Subaltern counterpublics "help to expand discursive space" (1992, 124). Fraser's findings correspond to those of Bacqué and Fol, as well as Gilbert, cited earlier, that the concept of a counterpublic does not necessarily promote separatism if its discourse addresses a wider public. For a similar argument see Terzi and Tonnelat (2017) on publicization as a process, based on Dewey (1927; 1938). Fraser states that:

Insofar as these arenas are *publics*, they are by definition not enclaves, which is not to deny that they are often involuntarily *enclaved*. After all, to interact discursively as a member of a public, subaltern or otherwise, is to aspire to disseminate one's discourse in widening arenas. [...] In stratified societies, subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regrouping; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides." (1992, 124; italics in original).

It is exactly this emancipatory potential that I am interested in and which I consider as part of a decolonial approach. A decolonial approach seeks to politicize epistemology from the experience of those on the border. The political potential of the border lies in approaching borders as a place from where to contest the exclusionary norms of hegemonic power.

#### *3.4) A relational approach to violence, towards a decolonial feminist approach*

This section explores the potential of a relational approach to violence: understanding violence as something that goes beyond observable physical violence and includes the relationships that this violence is part of. A relational approach to violence provides arguments that contradict mainstream ideas and political discourses that connect violence to particular places. Contributions to this approach come from different disciplines such as peace and conflict studies, feminist studies and, later, from critical and in particular anarchist geography and geopolitics.

The emerging field of peace and conflict studies (1960s) has made a considerable contribution to a more relational understanding of violence, by connecting forms of overt or direct violence to covert or indirect means of violence. Connections have been established between direct, structural (Galtung 1969) and cultural violence (Galtung 1990). In the case of direct violence, it can be traced back to an actor that is identifiable; however this is not the case with structural violence where violence is “built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently unequal life chances” (J. Tyner 2015). The term “structures of violence” might therefore be more appropriate (Graeber 2012, 113). Following on from Galtung’s work, the anthropologist Farmer (2004) has become a major reference on structural violence and has identified colonialism as a factor in structural violence. He holds colonialism, for example, partially accountable for the numbers of deaths through illness in present day Haiti, a former French colony.

Over time Galtung’s attentions shifted from his earlier focus on the structures of violence (Graeber 2012), which correspond to Marxist ideas about violence and world systems theory in vogue in the 1960s and 1970s, to a focus on the violence of cultural representations. This idea of the violence of cultural representations should be understood as close to Spivak’s idea of “epistemic violence” (1988), a term I prefer, and is in line with the cultural- and the postcolonial turn (Slemon 2015) of the 1990s. Epistemic violence is “violence exerted against or through knowledge” and is “one of the key elements in any process of domination” according to Galván-Álvarez (2010, 12). “It is not only through the construction of exploitative economic links or the control of the politico-military apparatuses that domination is accomplished, but also (...) through the construction of epistemic frameworks that legitimize and enshrine those practices of domination” (*Ibid.*). It is Spivak who introduced the term in her seminal work “Can the subaltern speak?” and the clearest available example of such epistemic violence, for her, “is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other” (1994 [1988], 76). This epistemic violence was responsible for obliterating “the trace of that Other” and



invisibilizing its precarious subjectivity" (*Ibid.*). Following Galtung's contributions direct forms of violence are to be understood as being part of broader political, social, economic and knowledge structures that produce and sustain violence (Oksala 2012; J. Tyner 2015).

Feminist approaches have made important contributions to understanding violence. They have given importance to the body, and to the everyday (Fluri 2011), revealing the violence that is hidden from plain sight by cultural values (J. A. Tyner, Alvarez, and Colucci 2012). They have insisted on the need to connect and integrate the levels of the everyday and the private to geopolitical developments (Pain and Smith 2008). Furthermore, the relational approach to violence these authors introduced urges one to take the violence – peace continuum seriously (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2007). The relationship between physical violence in war situations and everyday violence, which should be understood as the daily practices and expressions of violence on a micro-interactional level, should be acknowledged - as well as the reproduction of violence and the sense of inferiority that experiences of violence induce (Scheper-Hughes 1993; Bourgois 1995).

A more recent contribution to a relational approach to violence comes from critical and anarchist geography. This analytical approach helps to break with the idea that certain spaces are inherently violent, and is therefore helpful to call into question the association of MSHN with violence. Springer insists that a focus on the "material expression of violence (..) ignores the complexity of infinite entanglements of social relations." (Springer 2011b, 90). Critical geography has made an important contribution to renewing our understanding of violence as something that goes beyond physical and direct violence (Gregory et Pred 2007; Springer 2011b; Springer et Le Billon 2016). Its contribution lies in integrating the wider spaces involved in the production of violence into the understanding of violence, and the physical consequences thereof (Tyner 2015). Authors such as Gregory (2004) and Springer (2011) affirm that violence should be understood as a processual and unfolding moment rather than as an act or an outcome. Critical geographies help to identify the "relational connections between various expressions of violence" because "even the most seemingly place-bound expressions of violence are mediated through and integrated within the wider assemblage of space" (Springer et Le Billon 2016, 2). This approach of critical geography thus helps to recover the precarious subjectivity that epistemic violence seeks to make invisible.

Concepts such as direct-, structural-, cultural-, subjective-, objective- and symbolic violence (see Bourdieu 1982 for the latter three) are all attempts to bring destructive behavior into the field of visibility and to counter the ability of powerful actors to obscure their own violence (Springer 2016). In other words, these terms are an attempt to bring conditions of subalternity into the domain of visibility and overt conflict rather than remaining covert through forms of domination. Making the dynamics involved in maintaining domination visible is a necessary step for acting on them, and addressing this power asymmetry necessarily involves conflict, as those profiting from this power imbalance will not give up

their privilege voluntarily. Conflict should therefore be understood as an opportunity to review the terms and conditions of a particular relationship.

In spaces where some only see conflict and violence, the geographies of peace approach of McConnell, Megoran and Williams (2014) is a helpful tool to become aware of the everyday practices of weaving relationships that keep communities together. According to McConnell, Megoran and Williams peace and violence should not be thought of as binary or exclusionary categories - where if one is present, the other absent -, but as being present at the same time and as being close in space. As a result, typically, people create space for peace in a context of violence and the two exist side-by-side. Peace is a “fragile and contingent process that is constituted through everyday relations and embodiments that are inextricably linked to geopolitical processes” (*Ibid.*, 11). Peace is multiple, positive, and always in the making; it is made of the (re)production of positive social relations. The geographies of peace approach fits very well with the relational approach of decolonial framework. If it is violence one looks for, it is violence one will find but what might one find, when working with the concepts of hope and peace? What might one find if one privileges analytical tools that look for ties and factors that unite people instead of working with analytical tools that categorize and differentiate?

Rather than focusing on the exceptional (violence, urban uprisings), a decolonial approach focuses on the everyday, on what happens between moments of paroxysmal violence in MSHN, things which remains under the radar of most research. The following theoretical contributions serve as sources of inspiration: phenomenological reflections on the everyday and anarchist theory on remaking the world everyday, on the possible and on the present as the future in the making. A decolonial approach is multidisciplinary and multi-scalar in focus, and unsettles the logic of colonialist categories that render resistance unintelligible. The everyday, according to this approach, becomes a terrain of struggle. I therefore borrow from anarchist theory the idea of prefigurative politics, prefiguration being “a distinctive concept in anarchist thought and practice embedding envisioned future modes of social organization into the present” (Ince 2012, 1645). Additional sources on everyday forms and subaltern ways of being political are Iveson on public address (2007; 2013; Davidson et Iveson 2014), Mitchell on the political nature of public space (2003), and Terzi and Tonnelat on publicization (2017). Terzi and Tonnelat see publicization as a process of bringing together a problem, a place, a sphere and a group of people and making it public, and discuss the problems encountered in this process. These authors focus in particular on the role of space in challenging the status quo.

Helpful for this new approach to violence and ways of being political is the decolonial feminist approach to the body, an approach that feminist philosophers (Butler, Dorlin) have in common, for example, with Fanon and Mbembe. They draw attention to the importance of the body as locus of understanding of power relations and politics (see for example Laketa 2016 and de Leeuw 2016). “Disenfranchised research participants have an understanding in

their bodies of what it means to be exposed to patriarchy, racism, classism, heterosexism [...] and other complex forms of oppression” (Gitlin 2008, 627). It is through the reactions to their bodies (skin colour, religious symbols such as the *hijab*, clothing style) in public space that racialized persons are made to feel different. A decolonial approach opens up towards the body as locus of knowledge, embodied knowledge, and to body politics, looking at the importance of physical resistance rather than representative politics (Dorlin 2017; Dayan-Herzbrun 2008). One form of body politics is what Mbembe called “visceral politics” (2016), and applies for example to the “poo protests” at the University of Cape Town, when protestors threw excrements at a statue of Rhodes to denounce white privilege (*The Washington Post*, 19/03/2015).<sup>44</sup> In this case people used body fluids to express themselves rather than words.

## Conclusion

The first two sections of this chapter provided arguments on why I consider that it is justified to apply postcolonial and decolonial theoretical tools to study stigmatization of MSHN. The objective of this research project however is not so much to prove the relevance of modern/colonial metanarratives in the dominant view of MSHN, but to make a contribution to challenging these metanarratives. The decolonial enterprise is driven by the wish to undo the hierarchies that are inscribed in the colonial power matrix, not to break the connections that were established throughout the colonial enterprise. It wants to renegotiate the terms of the relationship but not the fact of being in relation. It does not want to return to precolonial times but instead turns its eyes towards the promise that the future holds, and lays the foundations for renewed and more horizontal relations. Decolonial literature proposes a new vocabulary that opens up new possibilities and helps us to imagine new geographies. In this chapter I provided an outline of this decolonial approach, which seeks to build research relations based on reciprocity; seeks to make space for subaltern voices; approaches space as open and relational; turns to the epistemological potential of the border; and adopts a relational approach to violence and peace. The final purpose of my epistemological interrogation into the relationship between knowledge and power and the conceptual tools I employ in this regard, is that my research contributes to creating a space in which racialized inhabitants of MSHN can act as political subjects and can make their voices heard.

<sup>44</sup> “South African protesters flung poop on a statue. That sparked a conversation about white privilege”, *The Washington Post*, 19/03/2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/03/19/south-african-protesters-flung-poop-on-a-statue-that-sparked-a-conversation-about-white-privilege/>, accessed 29/11/2020.

## Chapter 2. Decolonial explorations

We must acknowledge the personal embodied commitments and risks that come along with working through and in modes of inquiry relying on relationships and a deep connectivity to geography and place. We know that to work in an in-depth, affective manner over long periods of time can be exhausting for all involved, particularly when an unscripted and open-ended methodological approach is privileged. Indeed, this type of work relies on an unfixed orientation to scheduling, time, and temporality, an orientation that challenges the calendared landscapes within which we are often most comfortable. What we advocate here avoids comfort, predictability, or neat-and-tidy closure, privileging instead a mode of inquiry and co-creation of knowledge that is emotionally resonant, connected, grounded, flexible, creative, and untethered from the constraints of time or schedule—similar to what other feminist scholars have called “slow scholarship” (Mountz et al. 2015). This is not particularly easy work to undertake, and it can oftentimes lead to tensions and worries for all involved. (de Leeuw et al. 2017, 161)

In this chapter I translate the analytical and epistemological tools of a decolonial approach into research methodology. I previously defined decolonial as the search for more horizontal ways of being in relationships, free from the relations typical for the coloniality of knowledge and power. Before even reading Leshem and Pinkerton’s advice of leaving space in one’s research protocol for “serendipity, chance and intuitive curiosity” (2018, 8), I was already convinced of its relevance. The research design I describe here is written in hindsight, the result of my methodological and thematic explorations, driven by the quest for decolonial collaborations with marginalized actors in Villeneuve. The analytical framework and my presentation of the decolonial promise for research methods, laid out in the former chapter, are the outcome of six years of methodological and thematic exploration. During my methodological explorations, I explored ideas of how to be in (research) relationships based on reciprocity and in the case of my thematic explorations, I explored a shared research question with civil society groups that are active in Villeneuve. The concern of producing a coherent set of data and writing for an academic audience only emerged later.

My research can be distinguished into three phases:

- Methodological explorations (2013 – 2015). Throughout this period, I explored together with seven civil society organizations in Grenoble and a (geography) faculty member, research methods that support transformation. In the words of Nagar, I was looking to “produce knowledge across social divides committed to transformative politics” (2019, 83).
- Thematic explorations (2013 – 2017). Throughout this period, I explored five overall themes in collaboration with ten different groups that mobilized for a political cause in the neighborhood (see section 2). My objective was to undertake a collaborative research project and to come to a shared formulation of a research question.

- A decolonial exploration (2017-2018). Throughout this period, my exploration met the conditions for the collaborative production of knowledge at the service of social transformation and the conditions for a shared thematic interest of both political and academic relevance. These conditions were united in the Université populaire project on the colonial past-present and it therefore deserves a special place in my research.

The Université populaire working group was successful in formulating a shared research question; in mitigating power relations between persons with different social positions in the group; in making space for different sources of knowledge; in making sure that the project was carried out in a collaborative manner. It is one of the few cases of collaboration where the ‘writing’ of the conclusions was a joint effort, which took the form of a video document and a theatrical play. These are all characteristics of decolonial explorations, as I will argue in this chapter.

This chapter starts with a reflection on how to translate the decolonial promise into research practice which is the outcome of my methodological explorations, looking for more horizontal ways of being in research relationships (1); it provides a view of the political landscape of Villeneuve which I navigated during my thematic explorations (2); it explains how I moved from participation in existing groups to research collaboration (3); and how, during these research collaborations the working groups I was part of configured spaces of speech where a group, made up of people holding different positions in society, came together to engage in debate (4); it gives an overview of the heterogeneous set of data that I gathered through research collaborations (5); and finally explains my methods of data analysis (6).

## 1) Methodological explorations

If I can't get the ethics right, my thesis has no value at all - it is all in the process.  
(Field notes, 17/10/2019)

In this section I explain how I translated the elements I see as promising for a decolonial approach (i.e; research as being in a relationship, a relational approach to space and violence, the neighborhood as a locus of enunciation and making space for subaltern voices) into guiding principles for my research.

In research experiments the objective is to make research observations in an environment that is as natural as possible, and therefore to minimize the role of the researcher. Many research protocols and ethics in social sciences adopt a “do no harm” approach (Manzo and Brightbill 2007) seeking to prevent any negative impact from a research setting on research participants, warning, for example, that “every precaution should be taken to respect the privacy of the subject and to minimize the impact of the study on the subject's physical and mental integrity and on the personality of the subject” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006, 87). Hugman, Pittaway and Bartolomei argue instead that the latter is “insufficient to ensure

ethically sound research practice” (2011, 1271). In my research I turned the question around, looking at what ways research can contribute to research participants that are dealing with oppressive power relations.

Assumptions behind my methodological explorations were that: 1) because knowledge is power, acquiring knowledge would be an asset for challenging existing power relations; 2) my research activities could serve the cause of those engaged in struggles to challenge those power relations in Villeneuve; 3) struggles to challenge power relations should be driven by those directly concerned by forms of oppression and 4) those engaged in these struggles should orient my research or at least have joint ownership of the research design and definition of the research question; 5) my research should make space for subaltern voices. I have had to review these assumptions over the course of my methodological explorations.

This section is structured as follows: it sets out with a rapid overview of the genealogy of participatory action research (PAR) methods, focusing on French PAR traditions (1.1); it then explains the methodological explorations I undertook with seven civil society organizations in Grenoble (1.2); and the exploration of possible collaborations between the University and the neighborhood (1.3); it subsequently presents the outcomes of these methodological explorations and proposes a roadmap for decolonial explorations (1.4); it ends with a subsection in which I propose a self-portrait to explain from which position I set out on these explorations (1.5).

### *1.1) People’s education and participative research as theoretical sources of inspiration*

The research assumptions I defined above build on a long tradition of people’s education and participative action research, a term used for a wide range of approaches that aim to bring together research and action through the participation of people primarily concerned with the object of research. Some strands of the large diversity of methodologies that fall under PAR focus rather on the action part, such as the action research (AR), and others more on the participatory part. The basic principle of action research is that “the best way to understand something is to try to change it” (Lewin cited in Greenwood and Levin 2007, 19). Whilst the action research tradition started in the 1940s, it experienced rapid development in the 1970s following the revolutionary period around 1968. New forms of research-combined-with-action moved away from the institutional approach of AR, which was often commissioned by public authorities in order to improve the management of organizations and became more oriented towards the interests of those directly concerned with forms of oppression. In search of new tools and conceptual elements to guide fieldwork, the students and academics influenced by the ideals of 1968 and aspiring to emancipation, social progress and social transformation turned to “direct involvement, intervention or insertion in processes of social action” (Fals Borda 2006, 30). Different strands of PAR developed in different parts of the world and in different disciplines of which sociology, education and development studies were the most important. To reach their goal of increasing the power

of marginalized groups through research activities, PAR practitioners adopted the following principles:

- Analyzing the transformation of the existing order requires simultaneously contributing to it through being committed to and involved in existing experiences of transformation.
- Research cannot be dissociated from education and therefore research should be combined, according to Fals Borda, with teaching those dealing with the brunt of capitalist exploitation such as farmers, the Indigenous, and workers (2006, in reference to the context in Latin America).
- In order to guarantee the co-production of knowledge, research participants should be included in the entire research cycle (Reason and Bradbury 2006).
- Research relations should be based on the principle of reciprocity, what Heller called “symmetric reciprocity” (Heller 1989; Fals Borda 2006, 30) and which Mekdjian conceptualized as ‘a relational practice that is the outcome of a series of actions that aim to invent egalitarian and shared situations of enunciation, where both competences and incompetence are mutualized rather than opposed and hierarchized’ (Mekdjian 2017, 203).<sup>45</sup>
- Reflexivity is a very important part of PAR and can be defined as follows: “the dynamic process by which new understandings shift people’s engagement with the world, and how through changing a world, in turn people understand it differently” (Cahill 2007, 183). Cahill’s definition speaks to Nicolas-Le Strat’s affirmation that research work provokes real transformation to the extent that it achieves the integration of new analytical frames and reasoning into reality (2013). It necessarily affects the situation because it modifies the way a situation is seen, read and said.

Genealogies of PAR, written in English, often leave out the traditions developed in French-speaking areas, see e.g. Kindon, Pain, and Kesby (2007) and Reason and Bradbury (2006). To fill this gap, I will therefore briefly mention one form of PAR developed in France that has been a source of inspiration during my methodological explorations.

One of the French PAR traditions is “intervention research” (*recherche intervention*), which is about intervening in and writing about a reality that one helps to bring out. It is through operating change that forms of resistance become tangible and it is in challenging power relations that they become visible. Intervention research builds on two sociological currents that developed in the 1970s, when French students shared the concerns of Latin American students and academics cited above (Nicolas-Le Strat 2013, 177). The first strand is institutional analysis (*analyse institutionnelle*) developed by Lourau (1972), Lapassade

<sup>45</sup> In French: “Une pratique ‘relationnelle’ relèverait ainsi d’un ensemble d’actions qui visent à inventer des situations d’énonciation égalitaires et partagées, où compétences et incompétences sont mutualisées, plutôt qu’opposées et hiérarchisées.”

(1971), and Hess and Savoye (1993) who studied how institutions behave and function according to both empirical and theoretical rules; the second is the sociology of collective action and social movements (*sociologie de l'action collective et des mouvements sociaux*) developed by Alain Touraine (1978).<sup>46</sup> This sociological praxis seeks to theorize the dynamics of "the social movement" (*la dynamique du mouvement social*) and aims to reinforce the analytical capacity of actors and to bring them into, or reinforce their action (*susciter l'action*) (Nicolas-Le Strat 2013, 177–78). While I did not look into institutional analysis and only briefly mobilized the sociology of social movements (chapter 6), the writings of Nicolas-Le Strat about intervention research have been a source of inspiration, in particular the idea that a researcher contributes to realizing a certain situation in order to be able to explore it (*fait exister la réalité pour parvenir à l'explorer*) (2013, 79). A situation never just is, but is always in movement and to be able to study a situation one has to gain knowledge of the dynamics involved in it. Through acting on a situation, one gets a better understanding of the forces involved in producing a certain situation. Thus, according to Nicolas-Le Strat, even more than producers of knowledge, researchers are makers of social realities. The issue therefore is not only which methodology produces which kind of knowledge but also which methodology produces which kind of situations (*agencements*).

The research 'interventions' I carried out fit to a certain extent into the above framework, for the following reasons: first because I developed collaborations with actors that were already engaged in some form of action; second because I joined ongoing processes and contributed to their outcomes; and third because the research configurations I established throughout my research sought to undo the hierarchization of different sources of knowledge and to build on their complementarity instead. Throughout my research 'interventions', power relations became rapidly manifest in group settings, while they were more difficult to capture in other situations such as individual interviews. For example, through my participation in the organization of events or debates I could make suggestions and proposals for debate questions or the words chosen to communicate about the event. The reactions of the working group members to these suggestions were quite telling of their political positions and alliances. In addition, as soon as researchers intervene as collaborators in a group, they position, and therefore also expose themselves, and their contributions may be received enthusiastically just as they may be ignored or rejected.

PAR methods have been developed mostly within the disciplines of sociology, social work and development studies, and have only later been employed in geography (see Kindon, Pain and Kesby 2007). They are still very rare in French geography, albeit there is an increasing interest among younger geographers in research that is socially and politically

<sup>46</sup> Those working with this tradition in MSHN (Dubet 2008; Lapeyronnie 2008) have produced very different results than the ones presented in this thesis and have been criticized for interpreting the rejection of political parties as anomie and for lacking the analytical tools to identify subaltern resistance against oppression (Garnier 2007b; 2007a), like those developed by Scott (2000).



“committed” (*recherche engagée*).<sup>47</sup> This new impetus also fueled my reflections, notably about what it means to be committed: to which principles, to which people, groups and causes, and to what extent the institutional commitments of PhD students are a limit to committing to activist causes.

Looking at the different examples of PAR, I felt that none of the descriptions of how to carry out PAR (Kendon, Pain, and Kesby 2007; Reason and Bradbury 2006; Tremblay 2014; O’Neill et al. 2018; Cope 2008) corresponded exactly to the research I effectuated in the field. Below I list some of these disjunctions between PAR descriptions and my own experience.

- Most PAR projects produced information about the actions and functioning of one particular organization, while I worked with 10 different groups.
- Rather than producing information about the working of an organization, I was interested in working together with them towards the goals they set.
- My entry-point was geographical and not organizational, driven by the choice to engage with a specific geographic area that had recently been the location of paroxysmal violence when I started my research, and not by my engagement with one specific organization that had accomplished something extraordinary.

**Box 2.14 [terminology]: Doing *fieldwork*?**

The University of Grenoble-Alpes provided the institutional framework for my thesis and Villeneuve is “my field” where I was supposed to carry out “fieldwork”. It is the area in which I was supposed to gather the data in support of the arguments that I develop in this academic document. The term ‘field’ seemed alienating to me because what is one person’s field is another person’s everyday reality. My continuous movements from one space to the other connected these two spaces and blurred their clear distinction. As I will demonstrate, during my methodological explorations, the University was also a ‘field’ in which to understand power relations and neighborhood stigmatization. So far, I have not found any other term that could replace the convenient, but problematic, term of field.

*1.2) Methodological explorations with civil society organizations in Grenoble*

During my methodological explorations, I learned from and with seven local civil society organizations (*associations*), in Grenoble. They are listed in the mind map below [Figure 2.9]. For each I mention the participatory tradition within which they work. Research is not their primary objective, but they consider knowledge production as part of the larger societal goal of social transformation and justice. We shared the question of how knowledge could be at the service of political struggles and alleviate power asymmetry in French society. Below I briefly present each of these organizations in order to acknowledge the contribution they made to my thesis. One of the outcomes of these explorations was the organization of the

<sup>47</sup> Methéogéo, “L’engagement dans la recherche en sciences sociales: Réflexions autour des travaux de Claire Hancock”, Doctoral Seminar of the Social Science Research Centre PACTE, Université Grenoble Alpes – Institut d’Études Politiques de Grenoble – CNRS, 16 Juin 2017, CERMOSEM.

Rencontres d'Automne "Les savoirs dans les processus de transformations sociales" (26-29 November 2014) in several places in Grenoble.

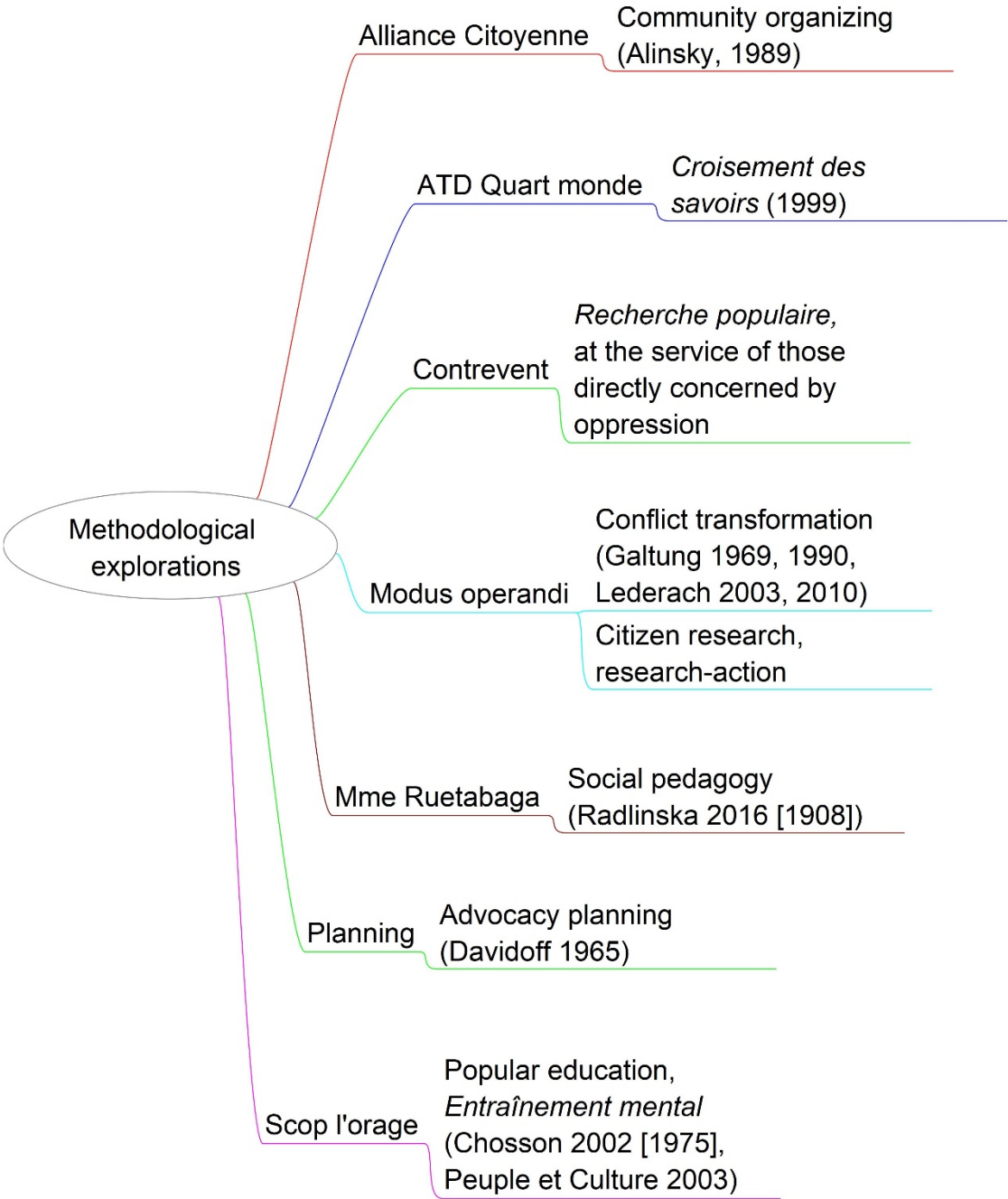


Figure 2.9 Mind map of methodological explorations.

**Modus Operandi** is the civil society organization I co-created with a colleague in 2006. Its original mission was to introduce the analytical tools of conflict transformation in France, developed by both academics and practitioners working in contexts of violent conflict and

that proved to be helpful for working in conflict situations worldwide (Fisher et al. 2000).<sup>48</sup> These were barely known in France and not applied to conflicts and violence in Western-European countries, apart from Northern Ireland. While initially working on conflict- and state transformation in the Global South, and working with an international network of peace-builders (irenees.net) Modus Operandi adopted a more comparative approach, which could be understood as the application of the principles of an ordinary cities approach (Robinson 2006 [2002]) to peace and conflict studies. Over the years Modus Operandi developed its own analytical tools for studying situations of structural and epistemic violence in France (Gatelier and Dijkema 2017), in addition to providing training and carrying out research in different African countries. Its team grew from two to four salaried members in 2013. As a civil-society research institute it embarked on a reflection about what it means to carry out research outside of a university context, to whom it wanted to be accountable, and how research as action could be a tool to contribute to conflict transformation. Together with the Université Internationale Terre Citoyenne (UITC), Modus Operandi initiated the organization of the Rencontres d'automne (2014) that brought together a large group of civil society organizations and academics who shared similar issues but came from different places (ranging from Grenoble to Latin America and Africa). Locally, in Grenoble, Modus Operandi shared its methodological explorations with the civil society organizations mentioned in this subsection. Colleagues at Modus Operandi engaged in similar experimentation around creating spaces where persons that are marginalized in society gain political subjectivity through, among others, radio workshops with exiled persons including undocumented migrants, and creating workshops with MSHN youth in the Agir pour la Paix collective (see section 2.1). Throughout these methodological explorations, I was employed by Modus Operandi, apart from the period covered by my PhD scholarship period (2015-2017) when I was employed by the University.

**The Alliance citoyenne**, founded in 2012, is made up of a group of people called 'organizers' working with the community organizing tools of Saul Alinsky (1989) and broad-based organizing methods of ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) (Talpin 2017). They seek to assist groups of people directly concerned with a situation of injustice and oppression to engage in vertical struggle: they analyze injustice in terms of unequal power relations and seek to address this injustice through direct local action against an identifiable opponent. They are skeptical about creating change through representational democracy. Instead they work with a radical democracy approach and have a "DIY approach" to action (Iveson 2013) in order to challenge a situation of domination through building a balance of power. With the Alliance Citoyenne and a group of students from the University of Grenoble I explored the role of knowledge in building a local struggle, as the latter proved to be important in order to be able to formulate claims. We both decided not

<sup>48</sup> For a presentation of some of these tools and their application in different countries around the world, see the following publication of Modus Operandi, in collaboration with Irenees (2010), [http://www.irenees.net/rubrique13\\_fr.html](http://www.irenees.net/rubrique13_fr.html), accessed 06/06/2020.

to renew this collaboration because of the resistance of some students against grassroots action involving the challenging of power relations.

**Contrevent** was officially created in 2007 but exists in its current form since 2013 when ADRECA (Association pour le développement d'une recherche citoyenne et active) was renamed Contrevent. When I met its key actors (Nicolas Lepin and Gaspard Heysch) at the end of 2013, they had just finished their engineering diplomas and were looking for tools to carry out research at the service of the working and precarious classes, an approach they came to call "*recherche populaire*" (people's research).<sup>49</sup> Their inquiry was very similar to the one Modus Operandi had initiated on the question of how research could contribute to social transformation. Contrevent was the main local partner of Modus Operandi in the Rencontres d'automne (2014). Together we engaged in an *enquête conscientisante*, a popular education tool to raise awareness among workers and the oppressed about their own condition. We adapted this tool for another audience, interviewing around 20 local organizations involved in popular education and PAR that worked with different methods, raising awareness about and learning from their methods.<sup>50</sup> Over the years Contrevent's initial Marxist approach became more and more attentive to racism and the coloniality of power in French society. One of its (male white) members became active in the Fringale/FUIQP collective (see thematic explorations) and inversely, several FUIQP members became employed by Contrevent.

The local **ATD Quart monde** group, that is part of the international ATD Quart Monde movement, was one of the organizations Contrevent and Modus Operandi met in preparation of the Rencontres d'automne. Contrevent had approached them in order to learn from the method they developed, "*croisement des savoirs*", to facilitate the co-production of knowledge among groups with very different social status. The ATD Quart monde movement was founded by Father Joseph Wresinski in squatter camps around Paris in the 1950s, and its mission was to deal with extreme poverty and undignified housing conditions. In the 1990s it initiated an important research collaboration with the University,<sup>51</sup> bringing together those directly concerned with extreme poverty and academic researchers working on poverty. The notion of "most directly concerned" (*premiers concernés*) that they introduced was very important in the vocabulary used by the civil society organizations in Grenoble (Groupe de recherche Quart Monde-Université 1999). ATD Quart monde is also an important reference because of the creation of its Universités populaires that provide a space for people living in situations of precarity to produce knowledge based on their own experience (Defraigne Tardieu and Benasayag 2014). The

<sup>49</sup> <http://asso-contrevent.org/notre-demarche/>, accessed 15/02/2020.

<sup>50</sup> The outcomes of this research are published in the report "Les savoirs dans les processus de transformations sociales entretiens dialogués" (2014) and is available here <https://docplayer.fr/184073503-Les-savoirs-dans-les-processus-de-transformations-sociales-entretiens-dialogues.html>, accessed 18/06/2020

<sup>51</sup> Université de Formation Européenne de Tours

concepts and methods of ATD get to be transmitted through popular education training such as the one provided by Scop l'Orage.

**Scop l'Orage**, a cooperative based in Grenoble, has trained almost every left-leaning civil society organization and person in the region in popular education methods. This training was influential for thinking through power dynamics in Villeneuve, notably their method of "*entraînement mental*" (Chosson 2002 [1975]; Peuple et Culture 2003) that teaches to think in contradictions and relationships. The street debates that are part of the Université populaire protocol are also directly inspired by their training in "Provoquer le pouvoir d'agir" (Provoking Empowerment), in which I participated in 2014.

**Planning** was created in 2012 by David Gabriel with the support of a board to provide methodological, technical and logistical support to the Ateliers Populaires d'Urbanisme (APU). The APU are community-based urban planning workshops that aim to act as a counter weight to institutional forms of participation and Planning describes its methods as advocacy planning (Breynat et al. 2016). The workshops started in December 2012 with the objective of constructing a democratic alternative to the urban renovation project that the City and the State have imposed since 2008. They were the outcome of both the mobilization against the demolition of part of the emblematic social housing project Galerie de l'Arlequin, and the mobilization against elitist culture in Villeneuve targeting its theatre Espace 600 and its audiovisual center.

**Madame Ruetabaga**, is an association that practices social pedagogy (Radlinska and Cazottes 2016 [1937]) through its street workshops in public space. Created in early 2014 by a group of people including Melody Dababi, who previously worked with the social pedagogy group *Intermèdes Robinson* in the Paris suburbs (Dababi, Murcier, and Ott 2012). Madame Ruetabaga has become an important player in the political and cultural landscape in Villeneuve. I got to know the organization through the *enquête conscientisante* carried out with Contrevent for the Rencontres d'automne and through Planning. I participated in their two-day social pedagogy training in December 2014.

Although the people involved in these methodological explorations had been inspired by ideas of the 1970s about social transformation and belief in social progress, they also realized that the context has evolved since then. In comparison to the academics that developed the PAR methods throughout the 1970s, the political and economic context in which these methodological explorations took place in Grenoble was quite different. The optimism that the overthrow of capitalism was possible as a result of mass mobilization withered away with the fall of the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall. Similarly, the faith that the State could redress social injustices which characterized activism of the 1970s (see for example Alinsky) changed with the spread of globalization and the way it limits state power. The rise of neo-liberalism, supported by states, is responsible for their transformation. While many MSHN organizations involved in social activism still target the State as a lever of change (e.g. Pas sans Nous, AcléFeu, FSQP) through for example mobilizing inhabitants to

register on electoral lists, they encounter an increasing feeling of fatalism. The changing representation of the State poses the question of how to build a “*rapport de force*”, who is responsible for racial and social inequality and what are levers of power? In comparison to the 1970s, power is considered to be more diffuse at sub-state level and more concentrated in the hands of multinationals at an international level. The enemy is less clearly identifiable and there is no common agreement on what constitute the levers of power. What distinguished these younger organizations, involved in methodological explorations, from the older generations of political activists that dominated the political landscape in Grenoble is that they adopted an intersectional approach and sought to address both racial and social oppression in the period following the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks.

These civil society organizations in Grenoble demonstrated that knowledge is produced and research is carried out beyond and outside of the university, and with its own objectives. Posing methodological questions simultaneously within and outside the academic institution has made me aware of the limits, tensions, and complementarity of knowledge production in each of these different locations, and from these different positionalities. It has also made me aware of the possible tensions in seeking to bring together actors from different positions.

### *1.3) Exploring possibilities of collaboration between the University and Villeneuve*

It will have become clear by now that these methodological explorations were partially an epistemological inquiry into the role of knowledge and knowledge production in favor of social transformation and social justice. Nagar’s question “how the production of knowledge can be tied explicitly to a politics of social change favoring less privileged communities and places” (2014, 82) resonates with my own enquiry. Inspired by the experiences of universities getting involved in community projects in the Université Internationale Terre Citoyenne,<sup>52</sup> It was logical to turn to the University as an institution that receives public funds specifically for the production of knowledge, funds that are not accessible to civil society organizations. The latter are only eligible for funds for the dissemination of research results.<sup>53</sup> The objective of turning to the University and its different institutes in Grenoble was to collectively explore issues of accountability. The University in this context is the IUGA and the School of Architecture (Ecole d’architecture) which are situated at the border of Villeneuve. A reason for turning to these institutes in particular is that they had been relocated relatively recently to this area of the city to support its dynamism (Dijkema, Gabriel, and Koop 2015). Does this geographic proximity create a need for accountability vis-à-vis the neighborhood? What collaborations currently exist and are desirable and possible in the future? Those were some of the questions we started to explore with a group that

<sup>52</sup> Other stories I read about later and that were important sources of inspiration are: Falquet 2017; Gahman et al. 2019; Nagar 2014; Oldfield *forthcoming*

<sup>53</sup> See for example the eligibility guidelines of EU Horizon 2020.

consisted of members from Planning, Modus Operandi (myself) and an Assistant Professor in geography, Kirsten Koop, occasionally joined by other faculty members and students.

### *Three actions to explore possible collaborations*

The first of three actions conducted by this group was the organization of a series of street debates (2013-2014) at different locations between the University Institutes and Villeneuve in order to reinforce links between these geographically close but socially distant spaces. One afternoon, to symbolize this link, a group of volunteers created a mobile bench on the market place (Place du marché) in Villeneuve that served as a transitional object between different sites [Figure 2.10]. Installing a bench in public was helpful to invite passersby into debate, to stop a moment and take some time to discuss conflicts about the use of public space.



Figure 2.10 Constructing the bench that served as a transitional object between Villeneuve and the Institute of Urbanism and Alpine Geography. (Photo Planning, May 2014)



Figure 2.11 Poster that presents the bench as a participatory research method during the seminar. (Photo author, 13/06/2014)

At the time we explained the experimentation with the bench as a transitional object for carrying out research in the following terms:

Concrètement, il s'agit de poser des chaises dans un endroit public et de susciter ainsi la curiosité des passants afin qu'ils partagent leur point de vue sur une question de conflit d'usage de l'espace. Il débouche sur la création d'un "espace public", même temporaire, dans un lieu qui, parfois, peut être perçu par certains comme un endroit où règne une atmosphère pesante. Ainsi il a été possible de discuter avec des personnes très différentes: jeunes, femmes, personnes âgées, locataires, propriétaires... (Poster for seminar, 13/06/2014)

Above text was produced for the poster presentations during the seminar we organized at the IUGA [Figure 2.11]. This seminar, interested in "reinforcing the links between the

University and Villeneuve”,<sup>54</sup> was the second action the working group undertook and took place on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 2014 [Figure 2.12]. It created the opportunity for inhabitants to exchange ideas in small groups with faculty members. Its objective was to identify research interests of neighborhood organizations and inhabitants and to find possible links with research being carried out at the IUGA. The seminar was particularly helpful for understanding that it requires much more than three hours, the time of the seminar, to build research collaborations and that formulating a research question is a form of political organizing, as it is about identifying entry-points for social change. The latter could equally not be achieved in this time and place but the seminar was a chance to ask the IUGA to position itself with regard to the questions around accountability towards neighborhood organizations. The lessons the working group learned are published in *Les Tours d’en Face* (Dijkema, Gabriel, and Koop 2015).



Figure 2.12 Flyer as invitation to the seminar “Réinforcer les liens nerte l’université et la Villeneuve”. (Working group 13/06/2014)

The working group’s third action was the organization of a workshop “*Identifier et construire les demandes territoriales des et par les citoyens*” during the international conference “Looking for territories” (18/03/2015). The workshop dealt with some of the paradoxes identified in the seminar, such as the fact that inhabitants feel a permanent injunction from public actors to participate but when they express themselves politically, they feel unheard. The workshop looked at different experiences of non-formal political participation, during a tour of neighborhood initiatives and debates both at the IUGA and the Maison des Habitants (MDH) (Galerie d’Arlequin) [Figure 2.13]. This type of workshop corresponded much more to the interests of academic participants than it did to the interests of inhabitants, who did not

<sup>54</sup> Full seminar title in French: “Les institutions universitaires du pôle Sud de Grenoble dans leur territoire. Renforcer les liens entre l’université et la Villeneuve”, Institute of Urbanism and Alpine Geography, 13 June 2014.



see any concrete outcome or benefit from these discussions (field notes, 18/03/2015), which is one of the reasons why I stopped organizing such workshops.



Figure 2.13 Workshop on political participation during CIST conference 2015. (Photo author, 18/03/2015)

The collaboration of the working group on the co-production of knowledge between the University and the neighborhood ended as a result of a disagreement over its institutionalization. Later attempts were initiated to renew the collaboration, after the arrival of new faculty members with both a methodological interest in reinforcing these links and working on questions of urban planning. A number of new collaborations have developed without institutionalizing the experience.

#### *Disjunctions in research and teaching collaborations*

While the idea to turn to the University was logical in principle, during our explorations I identified the following points of disjunction.

- **Different interests in knowledge:** There is an important gap between the type of knowledge production that is relevant for community actors and that which researchers can valorize in academic writing and teaching.
- **Funding:** Even though less so in France than in other European countries, academic research projects should be covered by specific research funding. The large majority of funding sources in France are public, which is an obstacle as public funding priorities are rarely those of local civil society organizations that challenge existing power relations. Additionally, this dependence on the priorities of public actors poses the question of the possibility to critique as well as the independence of research.
- **Time:** The academics that demonstrated an interest in collaboration (by coming to the seminar) dealt with a workload that demanded structural overtime. Their

participation in a professional context, *de facto* meant doing voluntary work as it did not fulfill any of their professional responsibilities. Also, while pedagogical projects proved to be more apt for collaboration, their rhythm of being limited to a short period of time during the year and involving many students was out of tune with the interests of neighborhood actors.

- **Activism:** Tensions have arisen between the confrontational approach of local civil society actors that sought to rebalance power relations through direct action, such as Planning, and Alliance Citoyenne, and a deliberative form of action that most academics were more comfortable with, especially when operating in a professional context. This same limit also applied to pedagogical projects that proposed involvement with a community project during a course. The obligatory nature of the course gave the students very little room to position themselves in disagreement with the proposed projects. Students' relatively privileged position and lack of experience of racial oppression - with obvious exceptions - meant that they were uncomfortable with the confrontational style of activists in above organizations.<sup>55</sup> This is also true for the project I conducted with Kenjah, offering students a decolonial tour of the city.<sup>56</sup> More generally I have noticed that students, but also faculty members, have difficulty understanding and accepting the distance that many inhabitants of Villeneuve feel from public institutions including the University, feelings ranging from abandonment to defiance.

### *Discrepant accountabilities*

My hybrid position between the University and Modus Operandi made me aware of the limits, tensions, and complementarity of knowledge production in different spaces, and the possible tensions in bringing together actors from these different positions. As a result, I could not simply be at the service of community organizations, the ideal I started out with, instead the most that I could do was to search for synergy between different interests. Under community organizations I understand groups of people that come together in the neighborhood for a longer period of time to attain a common goal. They are not necessarily legal entities, which is the case of *associations*.

Over time I came to the realization that while our interests could be shared, the struggles and objectives of the different groups I worked with could never entirely converge. I was institutionally linked to a number of organizations to which I was accountable: the University (produce a text with academic interest), the regional government that had granted me a scholarship, my thesis supervisors to whom I felt personally accountable, my colleagues at

<sup>55</sup> Despite their relative longer-term privilege, it is important to keep in mind the precarity of many students in terms of housing and nutrition. There is a difference in the profile of students depending on the program and the discipline. At the IUGA there is a higher percentage of first-generation students than in other faculties, even though few of them are racialized.

<sup>56</sup> See Kenjah and Dijkema (2019) for a written account of this experience and an analysis of the discomfort that students expressed.

Modus Operandi, and the foundation that funded the latter. The challenge was to see where these interests intersected with other collectives and organizations, accepting that in some cases they did not.

### *Reviewing possibilities for collaboration*

In hindsight I consider that I set out with a rather paternalistic approach, thinking that inhabitants and community organization were in a sense waiting for the University. The assumption behind the working group's collective questioning<sup>57</sup> of the IUGA was that it was paid to produce knowledge and that the neighborhood was in search of or in need of knowledge in order to rebalance power relations. For this reason, naïvely, a collaboration seemed logical, all we had to do was identify the needs. The three actions described above have helped to review these assumptions and adapt the perspectives of collaboration.

In the case of Planning, this assumption that knowledge could rebalance power relations was to some extent justified as it dealt at the time with citizens in need of expertise in order to be able to contest the decision to demolish social housing in Villeneuve. The hope behind Planning's appeal to the University was to incite academics to participate in the Ateliers populaires d'urbanisme (APU), helping to redress the power asymmetry in a top-down and technocratic urban renovation project, and to encourage them to take a stance. The University was seen as an actor that could potentially recognize and reinforce the legitimacy of Planning and the APU to call into question, for example, the demolition strategy defined by the Agence Nationale de Rénovation Urbaine (ANRU) for Villeneuve. However, few academics accepted the invitation to join the APU, and instead proposed pedagogical projects to create learning opportunities for students. In short, pedagogical collaborations were easier to establish than research collaborations.

With regard to the topics I was interested in at the time, the connections between physical, structural and epistemic violence, there was no such clear demand for specialist knowledge from the community groups with whom I established contact throughout 2014 and 2015. It was only later that the Université populaire formulated a demand for specialist knowledge about the legacy of the colonial past. Lacking this knowledge myself, we set out on a joint inquiry during which I served as a bridge to university colleagues working on this topic.

Beyond a demand for knowledge, I identified a demand among some of the people I worked with in Villeneuve to speak to students and faculty, and to share knowledge in a university context. I therefore reviewed my idea about the type of collaborations I should develop, letting go of the idea that the IUGA should go into the neighborhood and instead focused on opening the University to the voices of neighborhood inhabitants and created opportunities for them to share their analyses of the problems they faced. One such an occasion was to

<sup>57</sup> "Our" in this sense refers to the collective questioning of the University Institutes by David Gabriël, Morgane Cohen and Sebastien Breynat for Planning, Kirsten Koop as faculty member based at the IUGA and myself for Modus Operandi.

invite Béchir, one of the resource persons I worked with, to teach a group of students from the prestigious Ecole normale supérieure in Paris about Villeneuve [Figure 2.14].



*Figure 2.14 Presentation “Ville décoloniale” by Béchir to students from the Paris-based Ecole normale supérieure. (Photo author, 14/10/2017)*

Collaborations were particularly successful in two projects: the involvement of academics in the Université populaire cycle on the colonial past (see chapter 4) in the role of resource persons; and the Rencontres de Géopolitique critique that brought together academics, civil society organizations and those directly concerned by oppression in many different spaces in the city. These were not research collaborations as such, but they were moments of joint learning and generosity where each shared their knowledge and looked for ways this could resonate with the knowledge of others [Figure 2.15]. Knowledge here is not purely cerebral but also involves emotions, relations and being touched through encounters.



*Figure 2.15 Rencontres de géopolitique critique, “Déambuler à l’envers de la ville, une lecture décoloniale de la ville”. (Photo Morgane Cohen, 07/02/2018)*

### *Rencontres de Géopolitique critique*

The Rencontres de Géopolitique critique were created in 2016 out of a critique of the Festival de Géopolitique organized by Grenoble's business school (GEM), the latter being co-founded by a person involved in ultra-nationalist and neo-fascist movements.<sup>58</sup> Its nationalist approach to the State and borders which it adopted in its 7th edition (2015) provoked public contestation, inspiring colleagues from the social science research center Pacte and Modus Operandi to propose a counter festival introducing a critical geopolitics approach (2016). I have been involved in their organization from the first edition onwards. Its themes also reflect the thematic explorations that contributed to my thesis:

- *L'Afrique et le postcolonial* (2016)
- *Le droit à la ville* (2017)
- *Pour une géopolitique critique du savoir* (2018)
- *(Non)violence* (2019)
- *Faire monde* (2020), cancelled due to COVID-19

The Rencontres were moments when many different networks came together. Those involved in organizing the Rencontres held hybrid positions between the University and civil society organizations and therefore could reach out to people from very different social positions. The organizers were in the position to open the University to non-academic and non-elite voices as a means to answer the demands I identified during the seminar on establishing links between the University and Villeneuve. I especially heard the following demand: that the collaboration should not so much take place within the neighborhood, with the university entering the neighborhood; but rather that it should take place in the University, with the institution opening its doors for other, marginalized voices, and recognizing the latter as knowledge. The Rencontres provided the possibility to present research outcomes to those who participated in it. Presenting to the parents involved in Madame Ruetabaga's street workshops the paper Morgane Cohen, Mélodie Fournier and myself present at the RGS-IGB conference in London is one such an example (Dijkema, Cohen and Fournier 2018), see Figure 2.16.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Mediapart, Les invités de, Sarah Mekdjian, et Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary. "Pour une géopolitique critique des frontières". Club de Mediapart, 1 avril 2015. <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/edition/les-invites-de-mediapart/article/010415/pour-une-geopolitique-critique-des-frontieres>, accessed 16/06/2020.

<sup>59</sup> Rencontres de géopolitique critique "Ouvrir l'espace public: Les ateliers de rue de Madame Ruetabaga", MDH des Baladins, Villeneuve, 10/03/2017

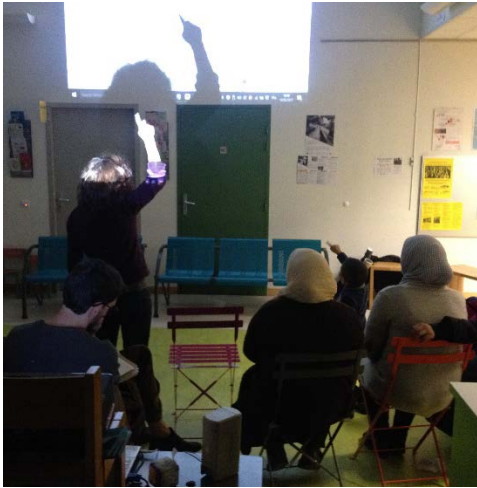


Figure 2.16 Presentation "Ouvrir l'espace public: Les ateliers de rue de Madame Ruetabaga" at the MDH des Baladins. (Photo author, 10/03/2017)

#### 1.4) *Outcome of methodological explorations, a roadmap for decolonial explorations*

The period of methodological explorations allowed me to formulate five conditions to make possible the co-production of knowledge [Box 2.15]. They served as guidance in my methodological choices for field research.

#### **Box 2.15 Five conditions for collaborative knowledge production<sup>60</sup>**

1. Go beyond power relationships
2. Principle of reciprocity in (research) relationships
3. Recognition of the complementarity of multiple sources of knowledge
4. Co-construction of research questions
5. Co-interpretation and co-writing of research results

These conditions pose the question of how to explore and describe a reality together, to formulate and inquire into a research question collectively, and to find a means of communicating these results. A commitment to rethinking power in research relations takes different forms according to the different stages of research. In hindsight these criteria correspond rather well, albeit imperfectly, to what I would call decolonial explorations. What exactly this entails cannot be captured in a neat definition, but instead I have sketched a roadmap for decolonial research explorations (see Box 2.16 below) which reflects both methodological and thematic concerns, as I argue was the case of the Université populaire cycle of the colonial past-present.

<sup>60</sup> Adapted from Dijkema, Gabriel, Koop (2015, 44)

### Box 2.16 A roadmap for decolonizing research methods

- Identify a problem that marginalized people want to address
- Identify in which way knowledge production or research may serve this cause
- Find a common goal and formulate a shared research question
- Make space for the expression of multiple sources of knowledge in the group
- Think about the spatiality of research settings
- Engage in a collective interpretation and writing of research results, integrate feedback loops
- Think about where the voices that emerged in spaces of speech in the neighborhood should travel

From these methodological explorations together with my previous research experience in Zimbabwe (Dijkema 2013), I learned that joint ownership over the research project (which is a condition of decolonial explorations) is a difficult condition to meet when the research question has been defined by the researcher alone. A research question defined unilaterally by the researcher may be quite irrelevant to the people or organizations the researcher seeks to collaborate with. I decided therefore to skip the habitual first phases of any research design that deals with defining a theoretical framework and formulating a research question and instead jumped right into phase three, starting my research by choosing a research methodology that would inform the definition of a research question and orient the theoretical framework that could contain this question.

The first step of my thematic explorations, as I demonstrate in the next section, was therefore to find people working towards 'social transformation' in Villeneuve. 'Social transformation' is a term I used in 2015 to indicate the movements towards more balanced power relations, but that I no longer feel comfortable with. The goal of transforming society, while shared by the groups and organizations that I got involved with, stands in contrast with our achievements which were limited in impact and scope and which can be summarized as creating space to speak. Before explaining in more detail where my methodological and thematic explorations took me, I will provide the information that is necessary to situate myself.

#### *1.5) Self-portrait to situate myself in Villeneuve*

While simultaneously convinced of the importance of situating one's knowledge and uncomfortable with disclosing private information about research participants, in this section I will provide the information I also gave for others: my gender, race, nationality or origins, religious and political opinions, class, education, profession, and place where I live. This position is motivated by the principle of reciprocity, not because I think reflexivity in itself can deal with the "crisis of representation" feminists have called attention to (Nagar

2014, 82). In this subsection I answer the question of what impact my position had on establishing research collaborations with individuals involved in groups or organizations. Which aspects of my position allowed me to enter in a relationship, or on the contrary, were responsible for creating distance?

These were not either/or situations because for example motherhood created proximity with Muslim women I encountered but created distance with the younger people of APLP. I could have been their mother, or rather their teacher. Also, some aspects that placed me logically in a position of power such as having access to hegemonic language were mitigated by the fact that I was a foreigner speaking with a strong accent, making mistakes, and searching for my words. Also, not all the things that set me apart from research participants were a factor for creating distance, these have also created links. For example, the fact that I owned a house in the mountains created opportunities for traveling and sharing. Instead of being ashamed of one's privilege a much more constructive position is to assume the responsibility that goes with it and to seek out how to share it.

Elements that mattered most for understanding my situatedness are my hybrid position between civil society and the University; the fact that I was paid for what I was doing; the white color of my skin in combination with my foreign (Dutch) nationality; my professional trajectory that acquainted me with race theory in the US, institutional racism and racial segregation in Southern Africa, the fact that I come from a privileged family background where university education was the norm, and where I was taught that my opinion counted.

At different moments I was confronted with the privilege of my white skin. Despite being a foreigner, I was easily given a place in France, a place that was denied to racialized French-born nationals. This observation was an important motivation for the direction that my thesis took.

Being Dutch and coming from a country where social peace historically has depended on the balancing of political powers between Catholics, Protestants and Atheists (communists and socialists) has certainly given me another perspective on secularism than the tendency in France to protect the public sphere against any form of religious influence. I assume this different political culture explains why my perspective on the Islamic headscarf often set me apart from colleagues with whom I felt otherwise politically compatible.

Being a white Dutch person also put me in an interesting position with regard to French colonial history: the color of my skin placed me on one side of history while my foreign nationality placed me outside of it. I observed that discussing French colonial history did not affect me in the same personal way as for example other members of the UP working group.



There was no history I had to unlearn and call into question, I did not know the history.<sup>61</sup>

One of the participants pointed out my special position as a foreigner:

*Tu sais, tu es venue d'un autre pays, ce n'est pas de la France. Toi tu es spéciale, tu parles avec ton cœur, tu ne parles pas avec tes cerveaux mais [la plupart des] gens, ils réfléchissent à travers leur passé. (Tassadit, informal discussion, 06/10/2017)*

These different methodological explorations provided me with a variety of tools to navigate the political landscape of Villeneuve in search of community organizations and collectives with whom I shared thematic interests. I present in the next section the groups and themes with whom I worked together based on shared political and theoretical interests.

## **2) Thematic explorations, navigating the political landscape of Villeneuve in search of shared problem definitions**

Parallel to my methodological explorations I set out on a series of thematic explorations in collaboration with community-based civil society organizations and collectives that organized around a theme in which I shared an interest. The difference between organization and collectives is that the former are legal entities and the latter are not. During my thematic explorations I explored a certain theme with a group that operates from Villeneuve (Grenoble and Echirolles). The goal of thematic explorations was to find a shared research question that was meaningful in the field (a theme local groups chose to work on), was political (questioned the distribution of power in society), and had academic relevance.

My starting point, that the research work carried out throughout the thesis should contribute to social transformation, meant that I had to look for drivers of social transformation in Villeneuve. My underlying hypothesis was that civic initiatives (civil society organizations and informal collectives, from now on to be called groups) are drivers of social transformation. If I wanted to do “research with” rather than doing “research on” (Heron and Reason 2006, 144), with whom should I associate? This choice turned out to be a highly political one. An obvious entry-point in the field were those who were already constituted in groups but to what extent did they contribute to social transformation, did they question and effectively challenge power relations?

My thematic explorations resulted in collaborations with ten different groups (2013-2018) in Villeneuve (Grenoble and Echirolles), around five themes [Figure 2.17]. I worked both with existing groups and was part of the creation of new ones. They were mostly founded in reaction to some emergency that urged people to come together and to start organizing, such as moments of paroxysmal violence or media statements. The persons involved in these groups are not limited to neighborhood residents as they were open to anyone that

<sup>61</sup> I also realized however that I knew very little about the history of Dutch colonialism and that I found it more attractive to learn about the English and French experiences than about the colonial history of my country of origin, which affected me differently. I obliged myself to learn more about the Dutch colonial presence in Indonesia, which directly involved some of the older members of my family.

wanted to join. A criterion for working with them was however that they had their meeting place in Villeneuve (Grenoble and Echirolles). This decision corresponds to my statement in the previous chapter that my approach to Villeneuve is that of a locus of enunciation and a hub for activist organization rather than a clearly delimited zone.

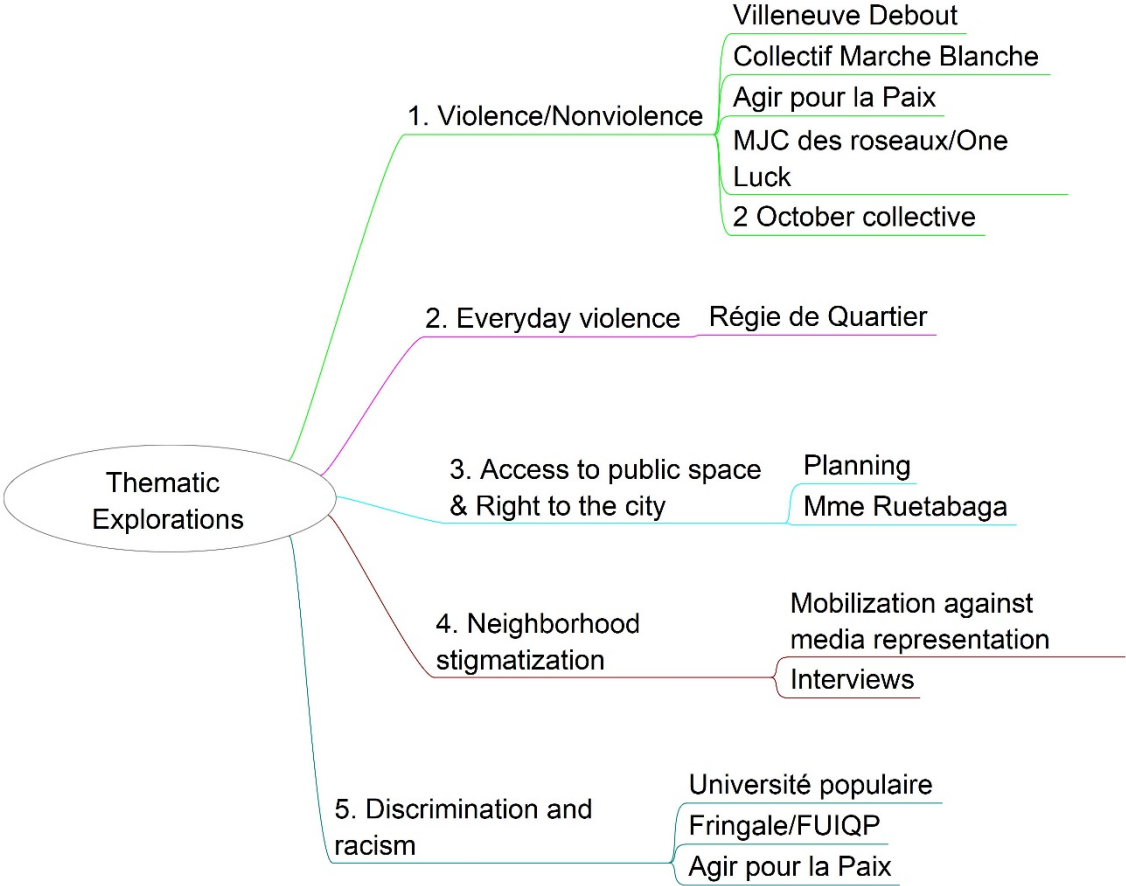


Figure 2.17 Mind map of thematic explorations

While represented as separate themes, in reality themes were overlapping: working on one theme led to another. I illustrate this point by explaining how my initial interest in violence took me to the other issues. For example, the connection between violence and neighborhood stigmatization rapidly became evident with the TV report *Envoyé Spécial* “Villeneuve, le rêve brisé” (2013) that reinforced the stereotypical representations of MSHN. It was not so much the discourse itself as the emotions that it aroused and the mobilization it gave rise to that convinced me to explore this theme. Simultaneously, discussions about paroxysmal violence brought out that forms of everyday violence were a much larger concern for many inhabitants, in particular the occupation of hallways and staircases of housing blocks. This observation is in line with the work of Scheper-Hughes et Bourgois (2007) on the violence and peace continuum, and led to an enquiry into the question of the political stakes of occupying public space in the neighborhood. Questioning the access to more central spaces was a logical next step from my enquiry into access to public space in

the neighborhood, informed by the work of Lefebvre (2009) and English-language authors such as (Harvey 2008; Houssay-Holzschuch 2016; Iveson 2007; Mitchell 2003; Edward W. Soja 1996; Edward William Soja 2010). The observation that it is in space that bodies are identified as different, and where they provoke fear, suspicion, curiosity or contempt allowed the link with discrimination and racism. This theme already arose in 2015 with discussions about rising islamophobia in France (Hajjat and Mohammed 2013), in particular after the terrorist attacks of 2015. Figure 2.18 graphically represents how the themes that emerged in the field (rectangle) resonate with academic literature (circle) and how one theme led to the other.<sup>62</sup>

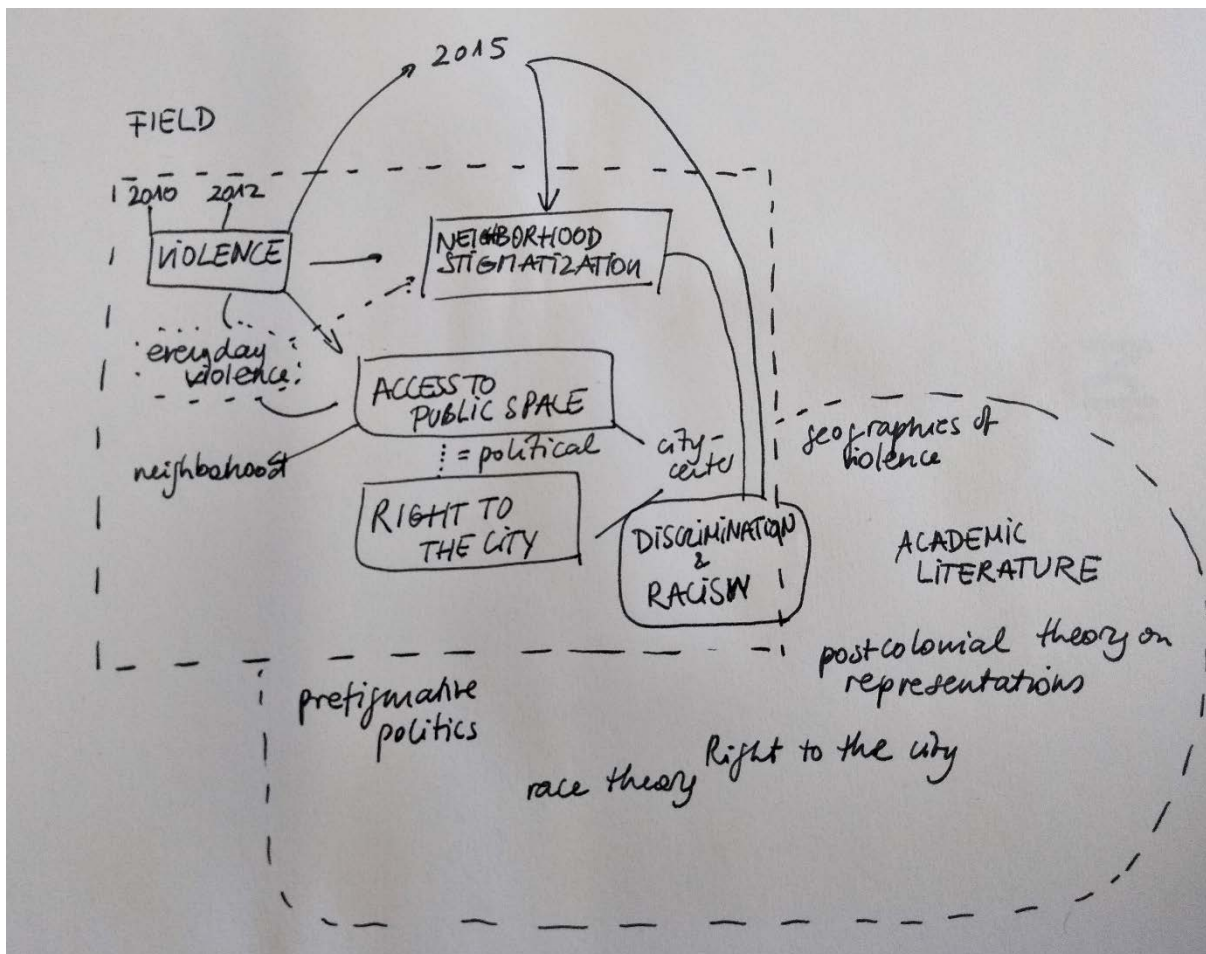


Figure 2.18 Diagram of the relation between themes

In this section I briefly present each of the groups I worked with, their type of action, their political position, and my involvement with them. They are organized according to the themes we explored together: violence/nonviolence (2.1), everyday violence (2.2), access to

<sup>62</sup> I opted for hand-made sketches to graphically represent my ideas or those of research participants in order to give them an artisanal aspect that computer made images don't have. It is a means to recall that my pen is behind sketching this graphical representation. The idea of maps as craft has been inspired by the work of Philippe Rekacewicz (see Casanova et Izambert 2010).

public space and the right to the city (2.3), neighborhood stigmatization (2.4) and discrimination and racism (2.5).

### *2.1) Violence/ Non-violence*

The groups I got first involved with were founded in the aftermath of the two moments of paroxysmal violence in Villeneuve in 2010 and 2012: Villeneuve Debout, Marche Blanche, Agir pour la Paix, MJC les Roseaux and the 2 October collective.

#### *2.1.a) Villeneuve Debout*

The Collectif d'associations et d'habitants Villeneuve Debout (Villeneuve Debout) was founded in 2010 in the aftermath of the riots in Villeneuve following the death of Karim Boudouda and the heavy police response in the neighborhood. It sought to bring together different neighborhood initiatives with the goal of restoring some form of dignity to the neighborhood and to make residents' voices heard. At the beginning it was managed by the Union de Quartier 1,<sup>63</sup> but as a result of tensions around leadership and visibility it became an independent organization at the end of 2013 (28/12/2013). It organized its work through different commissions and the one working on violence was called Vivre ensemble tranquillement (VET). It was in particular the latter that mobilized in 2012, after the "punitive expedition" of a youth group from Villeneuve that led to the death of Kevin and Sofiane (*Le Monde* 05/10/2012). The VET group sought to understand and explain this violence, connecting it to a much larger feeling of insecurity in the neighborhood, and everyday forms of violence such as the nuisance and threats related to the occupations of hallways and corridors by youth groups, as well as violence against Roma families. They sought to address this feeling of insecurity and tensions by organizing consultations and debates in the neighborhood, collaborating with institutional actors in charge of security, and working to raise awareness about nonviolence. The cornerstone of this group, Ariane Beranger, is a retired teacher who taught and has lived in the neighborhood for decades. She is also very much involved with the renters' organization of her housing block and reaches out to individuals and families encountering considerable difficulties. Her capacity to connect with people from different social positions is not shared by other members of the Villeneuve Debout who are somewhat estranged from the racialized precarious and working-class inhabitants of Villeneuve. For outsiders, Villeneuve Debout is the most visible civil society organization in Villeneuve and it has been the most influential in speaking for the neighborhood. This is particularly true about its president Alain Manac'h.<sup>64</sup> However, within

<sup>63</sup> The first Unions de quartier were created in Grenoble at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as independent neighborhood organizations working for the common good and offering sports activities. At the end of the 1960s they were recognized by Grenoble's mayor Dubedout as representative bodies for inhabitants' interests and as interlocutors for public actors, which continues to be the case. In Villeneuve there are two of them, one in the Arlequin area (Union de Quartier 1) and one in the Géants area (Union de Quartier 2) (see Artis et al. 2017 about the latter).

<sup>64</sup> In order to illustrate this point, a selection of three (of many) articles written by Alain Manac'h or in which he is interviewed: France Bleue, "Alain Manac'h président d'une association de quartier à la Villeneuve de

the neighborhood the organization encountered important resistance from persons that felt that its active members (white, middle-class homeowners and retired teachers) did not represent the neighborhood's social and racial diversity. The impression of social homogeneity however hides considerable political divergences within the group. The members mostly share a progressive Christian background, while some lean more to the left than others. Points of view on the veil and Islam in general are sources of division.

From 2013-2014 I participated in the meetings of the Villeneuve Debout's VET group that regularly met at the Maison des Habitants des Baladins, and in the period 2015-2018 I collaborated with members of Villeneuve Debout in the multi-partner Université populaire project. During my work with the VET group (which continued after 2015 with the organization of the International Day of Nonviolence, see below) I came to consider that its approach to "*vivre-ensemble*" (living together) and social cohesion, very much in vogue in urban policy in the 1990s (Tissot 2007a), was lacking in political ambition. Its collaborative approach to institutions, demanding reform without building a power base from which to exert pressure, did not address structural inequality.<sup>65</sup> To their merit, the VET and other groups of Villeneuve Debout - created opportunities for different inhabitants to meet, get involved in community organization and it played an important role in weaving the neighborhood's social fabric. Alain picked up the challenge to deal with the neighborhood tensions provoked by the terrorist attacks through the Université populaire initiative. Villeneuve Debout was a key actor in the latter, developing a discourse that questioned existing power relations within and beyond the neighborhood.

### *2.1.b) Marche blanche*

The Marche Blanche collective was formed as a solidarity network around the parents of Kevin and Sofiane. The collective was primarily made up of those involved in the organization of the White March in their memory, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2012. A white march consists of marching in groups in the street, in silence, to pay homage or to protest against an injustice.<sup>66</sup> The parents publicly expressed their grievances and made a public claim that such an act should "never again" happen (*Plus jamais ça*). A group of around 15 people continued to meet, planning longer term actions to give credibility to the "never again" motto. The core of this group consisted of neighborhood inhabitants (mostly white, retired, and middle-class) that were already members of the Association des Habitants des Granges (Villeneuve Echirrolles), joined by people outside of the neighborhood who shared concerns about youth violence in MSHN. The Association des Habitants des Granges disposes over a

Grenoble: 'En sept ans, rien n'a changé', 2 octobre 2019; Alain MANAC'H, Villeneuve, la vie sous les hélicoptères, 20 juillet 2010 ; Alain Manac'h, Grenoble, un an après, Politis N°1162, 28 juillet 2011.

<sup>65</sup> This statement concerns the VET group in particular but not other initiatives of Villeneuve Debout such as the Ateliers Populaires d'Urbanisme, which did build these means of putting pressure on political actors and created important tensions in the collective and such as Villeneuve Debout's initiatives to speak back to Sarkozy and to the *Envoyé Spécial* TV report.

<sup>66</sup> The term white march derives from the name given to a march against pedophilia organized in Brussels in October 1996.

tiny community center where the Marche Blanche collective initially met. For a more detailed description of the Marche Blanche members, see chapter 7. Linchpins of this group were the mother of Kevin and the father of Sofiane who were both close to a couple with a long track record in social work and activism, Pierre and Françoise Raynaud. In his younger years Pierre had been a worker-priest (*prêtre ouvrier*), whose aim it was to work side-by-side with other factory workers and share evangelical values by example in order to re-Christianize the working class. Worker-priests were also involved in trade unions alongside the Communist Party until the Vatican withdrew its support from this form of social Catholicism. Later, Pierre distanced himself from the Church in order to marry and have children, biological and adopted, and earned his living by giving professional training to young people. Before Pierre died of cancer in 2016 he wrote his memoirs (Raynaud 2016) in which he described, among others, his experience with the Marche Blanche collective. His wife Françoise continued their involvement in the collective after Pierre's death. She trained as a social worker in Paris at the moment of the 1968 social movement, which shaped her political views. As a social worker in Villeneuve at the end of the 1970s, a period when there were space and resources for social innovation, she was able to apply ideas about social transformation with the diverse population in the neighborhood. She was very sensitive to the fact that the essence of her work was not charitable but political. Later, in the 1990s, she worked on social policy for the Provincial government (Conseil général) staying true to her original ideals of alleviating the burdens of the working class. She was very much involved in several activist circles, such as a labor union and the Centre d'information inter-peuples (CIIP).<sup>67</sup> When Françoise died shortly after Pierre, also of cancer, the Marche Blanche collective lost its motor(s) and momentum.

What Pierre and Françoise had in common with Alain and Ariane of Villeneuve Debout is that they were able to overcome cultural differences: the veil was not an issue for them and they avoided the paternalism that was so obvious among other members of both groups. They were true grassroots leaders with important connections and constituencies who were able to build bridges, but were getting older and did not find anyone to whom they could handover to in the community.

I participated in meetings of the Marche Blanche collective (2014-2015) until it became part of the multi-partner 2 October collective in which I represented Modus Operandi. Just as with Villeneuve Debout's VET group, the Marche Blanche collective had limited capacity for social transformation because, even though it mobilized broad-based support and local political actors were disposed to dialogue, it did not have clear political demands.

<sup>67</sup> CIIP is an organization created in 1980 and based in Grenoble that combines international solidarity and solidarity with immigrants in France, defending human rights and the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities. As a result of a lack of younger activists that pursue the objectives of the organization it ended its activities 40 years later, in March 2020.

### 2.1.c) *Agir pour la Paix*

In comparison to Villeneuve Debut and Marche Blanche in which white retired home owners were overrepresented a third group working on violence, Agir pour la Paix (APLP), spoke to an entirely different constituency. The group consisted of young and mostly racialized participants who came together in a collective after the death of their friends Kevin and Sofiane. The initial motive for which the core group came together was to make sure that the memory of their friends would not get lost, and to transform their anger, hatred and loss into something positive (see chapter 7). While violence was the immediate cause for group formation the themes they addressed in the weekly APLP workshops were much wider (neighborhood stigmatization, islamophobia, terrorist attacks, etc.). Most participants in the group were doubly impacted by paroxysmal violence, both personally as friends or relatives of Kevin and Sofiane, and following the 2015 terrorist attacks, as MSHN inhabitants associated with Islam. However, they did not so much want to talk about violence, but rather to act for peace. The workshops were hosted by the Maison de la Jeunesse et de la Culture (MJC) Desnos in Echirrolles, which also provided their institutional framework and obtained funding for the collective. The management of the collective was tripartite, consisting of friends of Kevin and Sofiane, Herrick Mouafo, a member of the Marche Blanche collective and a colleague at Modus Operandi and of the director of the MJC Desnos, Annick Bousba (see further chapter 7). I participated in the workshops and contributed to the group by co-organizing a journey through Europe on the theme “*Comment faire société?*” (how to build a society together). Both the theme and itinerary were chosen in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks against Charlie Hebdo and led to Denmark and the Netherlands, places related to the attacks.<sup>68</sup> Figure 2.19 illustrates this link and shows a “Je suis Charlie” sticker we came across in the center of Copenhagen. Subsequent to this journey I was involved in the hosting of two youth delegations from Denmark by APLP in 2015 and 2016. APLP is the collective where the concerns about paroxysmal violence of death through youth violence and of the terrorist violence were most intertwined.

<sup>68</sup> The cartoons that Charlie Hebdo had published in 2005 and that were the motivation of the terrorist attacks were first published by a Danish journal in reaction to the murder of the Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh one year earlier because of a film he made to contest female submission in the name of Islam.



Figure 2.19 “Je suis Charlie” in Copenhagen. (Photo APLP 22/05/2015)

Two and a half years after the death of Kevin and Sofiane members of Agir pour la Paix were confronted again by the violent death of a friend, Luc Pouvin. Luc played in the same soccer club as Kevin and Sofiane and some APLP members, but was from a different MSHN in the wider Grenoble area. This event opened up the geographic scope of APLP and it was able to challenge the status quo in that it gave marginalized young people a voice through a political approach that I call “the political imagination of the dove” (see chapter 7).

#### 2.1.d) MJC les Roseaux and One Luck

After the violent death of Luc Pouvin his relatives created the organization One Luck with support of the MJC les Roseaux (Saint Martin d’Hères). Members of Agir pour la Paix assisted the family in organizing yet another White March (2015), and this is how I got involved as well. The MJC les Roseaux in the working-class Renaudie neighborhood in Saint Martin d’Hères, where Luc lived, also played an important role in community organizing: making space available in its community center (Maison de Quartier Aragon) for meetings, making banners, distributing t-shirts, and addressing the press (see overview map). It also provided the space to transform the silence of grief into speech. Motivated by the strong drive of the MJC’s youth coordinator as well as Luc’s aunt, Sonia, to ascertain that Luc’s death would not be in vain, this White March was followed by a public meeting in the community center with the goal of collectively analyzing the problems the neighborhood was facing and coming up



with ideas to transform them. The aim of One Luck (2016) was to get rid of dealers on Etienne Grappe Square, to take back the square through animating its social life, and to make the neighborhood safe again [see Figure 2.20 and Figure 2.21]. After Luc's death, throughout an entire summer month, inhabitants shared their meals on the square each evening. I participated in some of the meals and public meetings, and engaged in a collaboration with the director of the MJC, Faouzi Ben Salem. Agir pour la Paix's involvement in the mobilization around Luc's death extended my thematic explorations from Villeneuve to Saint Martin d'Hères, without really integrating the area as a new research field. Both One Luck and MJC les Roseaux became active members of the 2 October collective, and we worked together on a magazine *Marchons*. The MJC catered for the working-class neighborhood of Renaudie and therefore the people involved were less politicized (not inspired by the 1968 movement) and more from working-class backgrounds than those involved in Villeneuve Debout and Marche Blanche, which contributed to the diversity of the group. Until its closure in 2017, the MJC Desnos was very important in bringing neighborhood inhabitants and especially youth together and giving them a political voice.



Figure 2.20 Place Etienne Grappe the day after the death of Luc Pouvin. (Photo author, 22/06/2015)

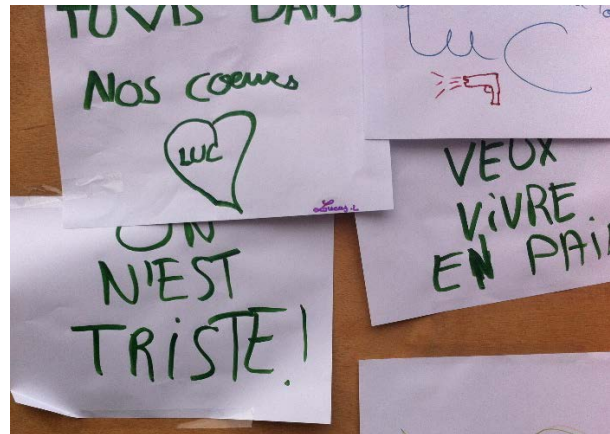


Figure 2.21 Messages left by children in reaction to the violent death of Luc Pouvin. (Photo author, 22/06/2015)

### 2.1.e) 2<sup>nd</sup> October collective

The four groups that I described together created a platform for nonviolence in order to call attention to the damage of physical violence, to promote actions to prevent violence, and to inform about nonviolent practices in communication and schools. The combined efforts of these four community initiatives, each created in the aftermath of an act of paroxysmal violence, were joined by other organizations that supported their initiatives, such as the already mentioned MJC Desnos and MJC les Roseaux. Other organizations in the wider Grenoble area such as Modus Operandi, the civil society organization (CSO) I created with a colleague in 2006, and the Ecole de la Paix, a local CSO working on peace education (for whom I worked between 2004-2006) also joined the collective, as well as cultural and sports organization like the Capoeira association of Pont de Claix and the Batukada of Villeneuve. They worked together on the organization of the annual 2<sup>nd</sup> of October celebration, the day of the White March of 2012, which unintentionally coincides with the International Day of

Nonviolence. These organizations are obviously motivated by different reasons and political orientations, have different concepts of how to define violence, different ideas of where priorities should lie in terms of action, and of whom to target to operate change. As a collective they choose a non-conflictual approach to change, stressing the importance of peace, and they create spaces of solidarity and awareness based on a shared idea that change is possible. They differ in this regard from other, more politicized movements in Grenoble speaking for the MSHN such as local committees of national movements for example Pas sans Nous, the Forum Social des Quartiers Populaires (FSQP), and the Front Uni des Immigrations et des Quartiers Populaires (FUIQP). The latter has chosen a conflictual approach, seeking to confront power structures and address structural injustice. In opposition, the 2 October collective refuses to speak the language of “we the neighborhood” or “we racialized people” and reframes the violence encountered in the neighborhood as a human issue that concerns people of all colors and classes. It makes claims based on humanist, non-violent, and non-racial principles, inscribing themselves as part of a human community. This is sometimes out of sync with the language of a part of younger APLP members who claim a neighborhood and Muslim identity.

The 2 October collective does not seek to directly challenge power relations but has set into motion a constructive energy that draws in a large group of very diverse people, and has been able to create bridges where institutional actors often fail. The movement has been criticized for the sacralization of the two victims and their friends at the expense of the image of the youth of Villeneuve. It is certain that the collective faced the risk of idolization as a convenient narrative in order to depoliticize its claims. However, combining political claims with the celebration of life and community was very important in mobilizing people beyond already politicized circles. Without any star guests or performers, the 2015 International Day of Nonviolence brought together 2000 people in Grenoble’s main concert hall, the Summum (see overview map), combining cultural performances of local groups with political speeches: a mobilization that other initiatives could only dream of.

My participation in the 2 October collective was a consequence of my voluntary involvement with Villeneuve Debout, APLP, Marche Blanche, and my professional involvement with Modus Operandi working on conflict transformation. It consisted of providing logistical and organizational support, participating in the organization of speakers and debates, and organizing the participation of international guests (Denmark and the Netherlands) to the International Day of Nonviolence. My main contribution was the coordination of two issues of the magazine “Marchons pour dire non à la violence” (2015, 2016) which served as a public showcase (*vitrine*) for the collective.<sup>69</sup>

Despite important moments of learning in this group, the diversity of people it mobilized and the moments of celebration, I did not pursue my involvement after the second magazine because of its limited political impact. From my point of view it did not sufficiently denounce

<sup>69</sup> Available online: <https://fr.calameo.com/read/00419037688eddf22a33>

structural and epistemic violence, and the means by which these are connected to direct violence. In addition, its focus on nonviolence was more moral (how can one learn to be non-violent) than political (using nonviolence as a political tool to build power). While the different organizations involved with the 2 October collective wove everyday relationships and were important in holding the community together, their framing of violence as a human issue avoided for example posing the question of whether youth of MSHN and/or racialized youth were more exposed to physical violence, and why. While looking at the root causes of youth physical violence seemed to be a shared concern around 2014, the people who wanted to make time available to continue to work on this issue and collaboratively embark on an intellectual inquiry were predominantly white and middle-class, which posed a problem in terms of representativity. My colleague at Modus Operandi posed the question of the drivers of violence (*piliers de la violence*) a couple of years later with a member of Agir pour la Paix. Together they interviewed many of the people directly and indirectly involved in this collective (Mouafo et Bouhafs, 2021 (forthcoming)).

The initial inquiry I set out with, to understand how people explain the events of physical violence in the neighborhood (see chapter 3), has induced important doubts for three reasons. The first is that entering the neighborhood with a question about direct violence tends to reinforce the idea that the only reason to be interested in the neighborhood is its propensity to produce violence, an idea forged by the media and the wave of academic publications that appeared in the aftermath of the nation-wide social revolts in 2005 (for the latter see Mauger 2006). This representation is often considered very problematic by inhabitants and contributes to the stigmatization of the neighborhood. The second is that asking about violence in the neighborhood during initial encounters was not a good entry-point for a research relationship because it took as a starting point what set me apart from inhabitants (not living in Villeneuve, nor in a MSHN) rather than stressing what we had in common. The third is that a discussion about physical violence was not the best way to understand its connections to structural and epistemic violence, even though it opened up a wide scope of topics. The topic of neighborhood stigmatization was more fruitful for making these connections. Moreover, as an outsider in the neighborhood it was more legitimate for me to ask about neighborhood stigmatization than about violence. Eventually the entry-point of paroxysmal violence in the neighborhood gave way to an investigation into everyday forms of violence and access to public space.

## *2.2) Everyday violence*

Villeneuve Debout's VET group organized a lunch that it called Repas citoyen, in reference to a practice introduced during the French revolution, to discuss violence in the neighborhood. During this event it became clear that the paroxysmal violence of 2010 and 2012 was only the most visible part of a problem that expressed itself on a more daily basis. During this shared meal, participants stressed that one of the neighborhood nuisances was the occupation of public space in the evening (see chapter 3). The Régie de quartier was a good

entry-point for further working on this issue, as its night mediation team was in charge of preventing this nuisance and invited me to share their data and experience.

### 2.2.a) *Régie de quartier*

The Régie de quartier Villeneuve-Village Olympique (hence on the Régie de quartier), one of the most important in its genre in France, is a community development organization based on a triple partnership between residents, local authorities and social landlords. It employs roughly 100 people and its original function, since its creation in 1989, has extended from a focus on the technical maintenance of the neighborhood's built environment to a concern about security and social welfare (see also Donzelot 2011). Its sources of funding are threefold: public funding, social housing corporations, and revenue from private contracts (e.g for cleaning services). I worked with two of its services: the night mediation service, created in 1998 to deal with the unsanctioned uses of public space and the person in charge of social mediation (*médiation associative*), with whom I collaborated in the Université populaire project. In the context of a feeling of increasing insecurity and the declining attractiveness of the neighborhood's real-estate and social housing, the night mediation service was created to deal with these concerns. The night mediation team consists of a coordinator from outside the neighborhood and about eight night mediators (*correspondants de nuit*). The team offers jobs to those with little formal training who live in the neighborhood and who reflect the neighborhood's racial and ethnic diversity. Their role consists of patrolling the semi-public areas (publicly accessible but privately owned) in the neighborhood from dusk onwards, of taking note of technical issues such as broken windows, lights, locks etc., and of approaching groups of young people that occupy communal areas and of convincing them to leave. Every night at the end of their service they produce a report about the problems they encountered and enter these in a software system. When we discussed possibilities for collaboration they offered to put this data at my disposal as a tool to map and analyze the unsanctioned uses of public space in the neighborhood. I also participated in one of the night patrols, and the director of the Régie de quartier provided me with an office space where I worked each Friday (January – June 2016) in order to be able to participate in the informal discussions during coffee breaks and lunch.

What I learned from informal interviews with the night correspondents and from my participation in the night patrol is that occupying public space at night is part of the leisure activities of young people in the neighborhood. The latter deal with a number of structural difficulties such as unemployment, lack the means to spend leisure time in places of consumption, or to afford an apartment of their own. Despite the fact that youth groups who occupied space was a considerable nuisance in the neighborhood, I also learned that, for a number of people that frequently called for the intervention of night correspondents, the presence in itself of racialized young men on the streets at night posed a problem and was a source of fear. So while the unsanctioned use of public space is a main concern for public action, I refrained from making this issue central to my inquiry. The first reason is that through the data of the night mediators I only had access to the correspondents' voices and

not to those of young people directly concerned; second, the inhabitants involved in the steering group of the night mediation team mostly consisted of elderly white homeowners; and third, focusing on this issue might induce the idea that the younger, male population was the main problem in the neighborhood. I renounced trying to have access to young people for two reasons, one being that my initial idea to get access to their voices through the night mediation team (obviously) proved unfruitful because they were a disciplining force, and second because I was seeking to develop research collaborations that went beyond participant observation and in which people collaborated based on a shared interest which would have been difficult in this context. The information obtained through the night mediation team nevertheless resulted in an academic article framing this information analytically in the literature on “everyday politics of public space”. I answered the question of whether these everyday occupations are politically motivated (Dijkema 2019).

### *2.3) Access to public space and Right to the city*

Inspired by the geographies of peace approach (McConnell, Megoran, and Williams 2014) and the work of anarchist geographers on prefigurative politics, I wanted to go beyond the story of disturbing youth groups and the disciplining role of the night mediation team. As a counterpoint I was attracted to the role Madame Ruetabaga plays in opening public space in Villeneuve. While the Régie de quartier is involved in closing the publicity of public space, Madame Ruetabaga seeks to open it through the spatial design of their workshops and their politics of inclusion (Dababi, Murcier, and Ott 2012). Both Madame Ruetabaga and Planning helped me to explore the urban as a terrain for politics, and to reflect on the relationship between the center and the margins. From a focus on public space in the neighborhood, my attention later shifted to participants’ relations to the city center. The right to the city, according to Lefebvre, is “a right to inhabit, to appropriate and to freedom” (2009 [1968], 35) but it is also a right to participation, which “cannot be conceived as a simple visiting right (..); it can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life” (*Ibid.* in Lecoq 2020)<sup>70</sup>. Both Madame Ruetabaga and Planning offered participants in their workshops this right to both the material and the political aspects of access to the city.

The work with Madame Ruetabaga opened up a third theme I started exploring with others, which is the right to the city or rather its corollary, the dynamics involved in denying people this right. Who has access to which material spaces in the city and the neighborhood, and what are the obstacles to accessing them? From the Régie de quartier’s approach to keeping youth groups from occupying public spaces in unsanctioned ways, my attention shifted to the importance of access to public space for (micro)political action and citizenship. A perfect occasion to explore this theme was the 2017 edition of the *Rencontres de géopolitique*

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.metropolitiques.eu/The-Right-to-the-City-An-Emancipating-Concept.html>, accessed 06/07/2020

critique on the “Right to the City”. It was coordinated by Morgane Cohen (Madame Ruetabaga) and myself with considerable input from Planning.

### *2.3.a) Madame Ruetabaga*

In a certain way, Madame Ruetabaga is also involved in the unsanctioned use of public space because it does not ask for institutional permission to occupy central squares in the neighborhood and generally avoids seeking institutional authorization for their activities, claiming space rather than asking for it [see Figure 2.22]. In opposition to the action that the Régie de quartier is concerned with, Madame Ruetabaga opens up rather than closes public space. Each Friday afternoon the arrival of Madame Ruetabaga’s cart heralds its street workshop on the Place des Géants, a place that is associated with the everyday- as well as with paroxysmal violence. Madame Ruetabaga stands out for its hands-on approach and its decision to shy away from institutional meetings behind closed doors, saving time for establishing direct contact with the families (North African, Roma, and working class) involved in the street workshops. As a result, they have established relationships with families that generally stay out of the reach of Villeneuve Debout and other community organizations run predominantly by an older generation of white middle-class inhabitants. Of all the active groups in the neighborhood they are most successful in bridging race and class divides. I participated in Madame Ruetabaga’s workshops and contributed to the organization by proposing to write collaboratively about their work and present it in an academic setting.<sup>71</sup>

The political importance of their work lies in the fact that it offers participants opportunities of emancipation as a result of the libertarian conception of the workshops and citizenship. It is in public space that they become political subjects, through accessing and claiming this space, and through becoming part of a collective and making claims in its name (e.g. use of community gardens, the installation of a swing).

<sup>71</sup> Dijkema, Claske, Cohen, Morgane, and Fournier, Melody. “Ateliers de Rue, Ouvrir Un Espace Radicalement Partagé.” In *Cahier des 2èmes Rencontres de Géopolitique Critique*, 38–44. Grenoble: Atelier Fluo, 2018. ——. “Street Workshops for Children at the Urban Marges of Grenoble: Creating a Space for Prefigurative Politics.” Presented at the Annual International Conference - Royal Geographical Society, Royal Geographical Society, London, August 31, 2016. [http://www.irenees.net/bdf\\_fiche-analyse-1084\\_fr.html](http://www.irenees.net/bdf_fiche-analyse-1084_fr.html).



Figure 2.22 Street workshop Madame Ruetabaga. (Photo Madame Ruetabaga, 27/05/2016)

### 2.3.b) Planning and the Ateliers populaires d'urbanisme

At the time I started my thematic explorations in Villeneuve I got in touch with the Ateliers populaires d'urbanisme, which was another sub-theme and sub-group that fell under Villeneuve Debout, run jointly by an older neighborhood resident André Beranger (Villeneuve Debout, husband of Ariane) and David Gabriel of Planning, who lives in a more central neighborhood of Grenoble (Saint Bruno) (see overview map). The latter is a charismatic and energetic white man in his forties who has a long history in community mobilization. Before founding Planning he was part of the ECHO collective (which became the Alliance Citoyenne in 2013) that introduced Saul Alinsky's ideas about community organizing in France (2010) and applied them to Grenoble (ECHO 2012). Despite the conflictual relationship I maintained with the coordinator of Planning, I do recognize the importance of his contribution to my methodological and thematic explorations.

Planning speaks the language of the heterodox Marxists, mobilizing terms such as the "right to the city" and "empowerment", and takes a position against gentrification and the capitalist city. Its social reading of issues at stake in MSHN, together with questions around representativity, created some tensions with other groups in the neighborhood. In the period I participated in the APU (2014-2015) those attending the workshops were mostly white, middle-class, older home owners. The fact that David does not live in Villeneuve affects his legitimacy in the neighborhood and reinforces the feeling of some that he is speaking for (in place of) inhabitants rather than carrying their voice. Planning's focus on class and the built environment has provoked criticism from those who argue that racial and

gender aspects of domination (in particular post-Charlie) are not taken sufficiently into account.

The association has clear political claims and seeks to decrease the power imbalance between inhabitants, technical actors, and public decision-makers involved in urban renovation. Its activist stance and confrontational approach with regard to public actors, through among other actions the disruption of several municipal council meetings, keeps groups of inhabitants who feel less comfortable with this direct confrontation of power at a distance.

#### *2.4) Neighborhood stigmatization*

In search for a shared research question, neighborhood stigmatization turned out to be a transversal issue for all the different groups and it was the topic of one mobilization in particular, to challenge France 2 in court for the defamatory character of their TV report *Envoyé spécial* "Villeneuve, le rêve brisé". This mobilization, in which my role was limited to that of participant observation, called my attention initially to the issue of neighborhood stigmatization. At the end of 2016 I decided to alter the main focus of my thesis from violence to neighborhood stigmatization without however completely abandoning my interest for paroxysmal violence. It is the issue of the discursive articulation of a neighborhood like Villeneuve that brought me to an inquiry into the presence of the colonial past, and the continuation of orientalist and racist representations.

#### *2.5) Discrimination and racism*

As mentioned, the official start of my thesis coincided with the 2015 terrorist attacks on Charlie Hebdo. Charlie Hebdo is a French a weekly journal that uses satire to comment on news events. The attacks are one moment in a wider conflict about the publication of demeaning cartoons of Prophet Mohamed that started with their publication in the Danish journal *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005, provoking international outrage. To make a point about press freedom Charlie Hebdo decided to reprint the Danish images and particularly the one crystalizing the anger, portraying Prophet Mohamed with a turban in the form of a bomb. The French journal published these images in September 2006 together with a series of new cartoons on the same theme. Muslim organizations in France challenged Charlie Hebdo several times in court, without any success. This event further altered the discursive articulation of MSHN and shifted attention away from the danger of urban violence, and towards Muslim radicalization. Within the neighborhood new initiatives were launched to speak out about racism, with a specific focus on islamophobia and discrimination. The initiative of two Muslim women in the neighborhood to call for a meeting (13/01/2015) was decisive for exploring this theme collaboratively. They both were active in setting up the *Université populaire* and the *Fringale* working group, discussed in more detail below.



### *2.5.a) Université populaire*

Discussions about setting up a Université populaire (UP) in Villeneuve had already started between Alain (Villeneuve Debout), David (Planning), and myself in 2014 on the initiative of Alain who has a very long professional experience in popular education. This Université populaire, according to him, should be a space where inhabitants could learn to think and speak for themselves, a place of training for neighborhood activism, and a space for the management of community organizations. It took form during a meeting with the director of the Maison des Habitants des Baladins, a community center in the Place des Géants in Villeneuve, to discuss possible initiatives to prevent any disturbances during the trial that was to take place against the young people involved in the deaths of Kevin and Sofiane. Both Villeneuve Debout and local councilors feared a renewed outbreak of violence among young people during the trial in Autumn 2015 or following the judgement. Ideas flowed about how to break the symbolic borders that had come into existence between Villeneuve and Echirolles and the Université populaire was one of them. The post-Charlie context seemed particularly suited for creating links through shared concerns about discrimination and islamophobia. From that meeting onwards, the topics of the trial and the prevention of violence disappeared into the background. The Université populaire played a role in opening up a space for debate about discrimination and neighborhood organization with its cycle “Pour comprendre” (Cycle I 2015-2016), which resulted in a wider discussion about the legacy of the colonial past (Cycle II 2017-2018).

The UP functioned as a community-based knowledge project, to which I contributed as a full member of the working group. It embarked on the collective exploration of issues that were proposed by the working group in collaboration with participants, and fitted the goals I set myself for decolonial explorations. It created a space to speak truth to power (see section 4) but the framing of its themes and operationalization were at times compromised by the UP’s collaboration with institutional partners (a.o. through funding) as I will explain in more detail in chapter 4. The Fringale/FUIQP (see below) refused to make the compromises the UP was willing to make.

### *2.5.b) Fringale and the prefiguration of the FUIQP*

In response to the Paris terrorist attacks existing networks in and beyond the neighborhood remobilized to denounce the increase in racism in the political and media reactions to this violence targeting (those supposed to be) Muslims, and MSHN more generally. The meetings convened by two Muslim women and the group that resulted from it proved to be very influential in the political landscape about discrimination and racism in Villeneuve, creating a constructive tension with the Université populaire and the themes it broached. One of these two women is Jouda, who convened the first meeting not in her professional capacity of social mediator (*médiatrice associative*) but in her role of activist, activating the dormant Nous Citoyennes network. This network is a collective of Muslim women that mobilized in 2012 to contest the political measure (*circulaire Chatel*) that wanted to forbid day-care assistants from wearing a veil in their own houses when taking care of children (see

Galembert 2015 for these political measures). The second woman is Scherazade, who was also part of *Nous Citoyennes*, was on the board of the Alliance Citoyenne, and who had played an active role in a community organizing campaign in Villeneuve in order to re-open a school (ECHO 2012). The announcement of the meeting was forwarded to me by David Gabriel (Planning) and addressed in first instance to the Alliance Citoyenne network and those primarily concerned by islamophobia. The working group that came to be called Fringale became at the end of 2015 a local branch of the national FUIQP (see chapter 7). A couple of months after the first meeting Jouda distanced herself from the group in order to prevent the entanglement of her professional and activist involvement in the neighborhood, preferring to limit her activism to other MSHN of Grenoble. In the next paragraph I situate the collective politically speaking.

The FUIQP is a national organization founded in 2012 and its best-known spokesperson is the sociologist and activist Saïd Bouamama, who was invited to be speaker of the *Université populaire* (20/11/2015). It seeks to challenge state, capitalist and colonialist power. The FUIQP has its political and historical roots in grassroots mobilizations in MSHN, which resulted in the joining of two national movements: the *Forum Social des Quartiers Populaires* (2007-2011) and the *Rencontres Nationales des Lutttes de l'Immigration* (2009-2011); anti-colonial struggles; (immigrant) workers' struggles -1960s and 1970s in France); and finally the "*Marches pour l'égalité et contre le racisme*" (for equality and against racism) of 1983, -84 and -85.<sup>72</sup> The FUIQP seeks to bring people together that are involved in autonomous struggles around issues of MSHN: immigration, racism and colonialism. Autonomous in this context means to be independent from public funding and white paternalism (see chapter 7). While the FUIQP is coordinated nationally, it puts emphasis on grassroots work by its local committees, of which the Fringale group became one (FUIQP 38). The local FUIQP group posed the question of how to make the voices of those that are racialized in French society politically heard, and how to increase their power other than through demanding change from political leaders. They opted for political autonomy, which concretely means that they do not get involved in organizing events with other organizations in the Grenoble area if that would require compromises, when writing shared pamphlets (*tracts*) for example. The political orientation of the Fringale/FUIQP is radical left (*Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste*, influenced by Marxism and anarchism and anti and decolonial theory) and does not consider the State as an interlocutor for social transformation. It is close to the very controversial *Parti des Indigènes de la République* (PIR) with whom it should however not be confused as its history is more grass-roots, and more grounded in former worker and immigration struggles. While ideologically close to the FSQP, its decision to take a firmer stance on the racial rather than the social fracture in French society led to their rift. Its outspoken position on islamophobia further isolates it in the political landscape both nationally and locally in Grenoble. Although the strength of the local FUIQP is very limited, it was responsible for radicalizing the debate on racism and islamophobia both in the

<sup>72</sup> FUIQP website, <http://fuiqp.org/lhistoire-du-fuiqp/>, accessed 20/10/2019

neighborhood and in the wider Grenoble area, introducing for example the term “racialization” and non-white people as being “racialized”. While at first these terms met resistance, they gained ground e.g. in the Université populaire working group. The FUIQP, both nationally and some of the members locally, is attracted to the idea of non-mixed meetings without ever really adopting it. The official stance is that Whites can be allies in the struggles of the FUIQP but should remain in the background (field notes 22/11/2015). I have participated in the FUIQP/Fringale meetings throughout 2015, in the debates it organized and in the Grenoble delegation of the 2015 “Marche pour la Dignité et contre le Racisme” [Figure 2.23].<sup>73</sup>

In my field notes I described being ill at ease and feeling out of place in these meetings. In the prefiguration phase of the FUIQP, there was a palpable tension in the group that existed for a large part of higher educated white members. This tension was due to the aspiration of some members of the Fringale collective to privilege the participation of racialized inhabitants of MSHN and to reduce the dominant presence of Whites in anti-racist activism. I also described in my field notes my gratitude for what I learned being part of them. I have deep respect for the courage and the personal sacrifices that members of this group make working towards a more just world.



Figure 2.23 The Grenoble delegation of the March for Dignity and Against Racism. (Photo author 31/10/2015)

<sup>73</sup> The “March for Dignity and Against Racism” (*Marche pour la dignité et contre le racisme*) was organized by a collective of racialized women (MAFED) in order to commemorate the 10-year anniversary of the 2005 revolts, sparked by the death of two youths that ran to avoid a regular police identity check. It placed itself moreover in the tradition of the historic march of 1983 (*Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme*) which was sparked by police violence. One of its central political messages was to denounce police violence, but more generally it was the occasion to speak out about racism, and islamophobia in particular. For a feminist reading of this political moment, see Hancock (2016).

During my participation in the Fringale/FUIQP group (2015-beginning 2016) I contributed to the creation of a workshop with two other members, providing a critical analysis on the news coverage of the 2005 social revolts in French MSHN. No possibilities for research collaborations emerged however due to the resistance in the group against “Whites that came to write their book” (informal discussion with a member, 30/01/2018). The FUIQP is the only group of the ones I collaborated with that decided to be financially entirely independent from public (state) actors, generating the limited funding for its activities through membership contributions and e.g. selling at flea markets. Their political aim is to conscientize the racialized and working class about the dynamics of oppression in order to mobilize people through autonomous organizing, and encourage resistance to forms of oppression.

### *2.5.c) Agir pour la Paix again*

Even though Agir pour la Paix was created in the aftermath of violence and aims to work in favor of peace, working with this group was very informative on issues of discrimination, islamophobia and neighborhood stigmatization; which is the reason why the group/collective fits two thematic explorations. On our journey through Europe and the return visits from Danish youth groups to Villeneuve (Echirolles), in particular during encounters with other racialized European youth from Denmark [Figure 2.24] and the Netherlands they found common ground through their experiences of racialization rather than on being confronted with paroxysmal violence.



*Figure 2.24 Encounter between young people from APLP in Echirolles and the Norrebro Resource Center in Copenhagen. (Photo APLP, 19/05/2015)*

In chapter 7 I present the APLP and FUIQP collectives in parallel fashion because they serve as counterpoints to each other in thinking about violence in MSHN, discrimination and racism. While racialized members of both groups share the same bodily experiences of inequality, they are attracted to a very different kind of political imagination. I worked with both simultaneously but other than that there were no connections between them, they would not meet at public events, and reciprocally did not seem interested in the work and approach of the other. I felt tension and a paradox in being part of the FUIQP collective that spoke about “our voices” (of racialized MSHN), while their positions were not shared by the other racialized MSHN inhabitants whom I got to know during the APLP workshops in Echirolles. When I shared their positions in a FUIQP meeting they were simply discarded as “double consciousness” (W.E.B Du Bois). While Du Bois’ analysis (2007 [1903]) is convincing and I do not contest its validity, this standpoint placed me in a methodological, ethical and epistemological dilemma because, as action research principles state that inhabitants voices count and that they are experts of their lives (as in particular one FUIQP participant did), then one cannot simply discard the voices that are out of tune with one’s political orientation. It is this tension that I have sought to resolve in Chapter 7, taking both voices seriously without choosing one over the other in an attempt to reflect their reality. While my political positions were closer to that of the FUIQP, the quality of human relations I was able to construct in APLP was higher.

These thematic explorations have resulted in both widening and narrowing down the problem definition of my thesis that set with the goal of inscribing paroxysmal violence in the neighborhood in a larger context of space and time: widening because it opened up to a number of themes beyond violence and narrowing because it linked the rather fuzzy concept of violence (Slooter 2015) to concrete events and lived experiences in the neighborhood. Table 2.1 below shows the timeline of my involvement with the different groups in the neighborhood (2013-2018), demonstrating how I worked simultaneously on different themes, being attentive to their imbrications and tensions. Essentially, while I started my thematic exploration with direct paroxysmal violence, I ended it with the structural and epistemic violence of racism.

**Table 2.1 Thematic explorations over time 2013-2018**

Theme	Organization	Period					
Violence/Non-violence	Villeneuve Debout	[Red bar from 2013 to 2015]					
	Marche Blanche	[Red bar from 2014 to 2015]					
	Agir pour la Paix	[Orange bar from 2015 to 2016]					
	MJC /One Luck	[Yellow bar from 2015 to 2017]					
	2 October collective	[Yellow bar from 2015 to 2016]					
Everyday violence	Régie de Quartier	[Green bar from 2014 to 2017]					
Acces public space & Right to the city	Mme Ruetabaga	[Green bar from 2015 to 2016]					
	Planning	[Purple bar from 2013 to 2015]					
Neighborhood stigmatization	Mobilization media	[Magenta bar from 2013 to 2014]					
Discrimination and racism	Université pop.	[Blue bar from 2015 to 2018]					
	FUIQP	[Cyan bar from 2015 to 2016]					
	Agir pour la Paix	[Light blue bar from 2015 to 2016]					
		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018

This thematic exploration took me through collaborative inquiry on the tracks of the colonial past-present in Villeneuve. Without wanting to imply that there is a direct link between on the one hand the moments of paroxysmal violence of 2010 (riots) and of 2012 (death of Kevin and Sofiane) and on the other hand the legacy of the colonial past in present day Villeneuve, I nevertheless see connections. I argue that different levels and forms of violence are nested (chapter 3), and that the expression of violence in public space is more likely in situations of power asymmetry where people are denied a political voice (chapter 5 and 6).

This gradual thematic evolution is a result both of my encounters in the field and my reading of critical academic literature. Both my experience and readings resulted in a more radical view of power (see chapter 6), due to having gained an increasing understanding of power dynamics at play in the neighborhood. This evolution therefore also reflects the development of my political awareness. I gradually let go of my romantic ideals about contributing to social transformation (see Gregory et al. 2009, 5), settling for the humbler goal of speaking truth to power and of creating space to allow subaltern voices to be heard, albeit on a very small scale.

Despite the fact that research collaboration with the Université populaire was the most productive in terms of data, and that it was closest to my goal of decolonial exploration, I have decided to include the entirety of thematic explorations in my thesis. This is because it was in the process of searching for decolonial research collaborations, and the trials and tribulations involved in them that I learned the most. This search was in itself revealing of the challenges of decolonial research collaborations, challenges which I try to analyze here, and are, as such, part and parcel of my results. One level of understanding is informed by working with each group individually but a second level of understanding is informed by the relationships I could observe between them. I navigated Villeneuve’s political landscape through these tensions, affinities and fault lines.

### 3) Going beyond participation, looking for decolonial research collaborations

My actions in the field shifted from participation to research collaboration. Participation is the act of taking part in an existing event or activity. Participant observation is a common method in sociology described by Touraine as a method that aims “to comprehend the other through the sharing of a common condition” (in Moussaoui 2012, 39) and by Bourdieu as the “necessarily fictive immersion in a foreign environment” (2003, 44), which aims to observe a foreign social universe by participating in it. It was introduced as a social science method in early 19<sup>th</sup> century anthropology, as “a means to understand indigenous populations by becoming one of them” (de Gérando 1800, 13), and allowed for a break with ethnocentrism. The method was key to and further developed by the Chicago School, and in particular by William Foot Whyte. Those involved in the development of PAR in the 1970s felt that participation was not enough, and that researchers needed to engage with struggles in favor of social justice. In a structurally unjust world the insistence on neutrality and objectivity in research in effect supports the status quo (Fals Borda 2006, 30) as historically “education, information, research and scientific work have been geared to the upkeep of unjust power structures” (*Ibid.*, 34). This has led to a new strand of research where the researcher does not only participate but intervenes in and contributes to the reality (s)he observes. My work has been inspired by this latter current of PAR, and as a result I speak of research collaborations rather than (participatory) action research or research cooperation. To collaborate and to cooperate both refer to “working with” from the Latin *com laborare* and *com operari*,<sup>74</sup> and are often used interchangeably but they do not represent the same modes of organizing work. Cooperation is associated with international cooperation and the cooperative movement, while collaboration refers to a collective contribution to a common goal.<sup>75</sup> The latter corresponds better to what I did in the field, despite the negative connotation it obtained during WWII as the “traitorous cooperation with an occupying enemy” in reference among others to the Vichy Government in France. I worked together with the groups I got involved with in order to reach an objective we set together. In addition, collaboration leaves more room for competition and conflict in order to achieve this common goal than cooperation, which suggests some form of consensus or obedience.

My involvement in the initiatives described in the previous section was variable. It can be organized in three categories: 1) Participation in existing initiatives (APU, Régie de quartier); 2) Active contribution to meetings and public events initiated by existing collectives (Villeneuve Debut VET, Fringale/FUIQP); 3) Collaboration, in cases where I was involved in the initiation of new projects (2<sup>nd</sup> October collective, Université populaire, APLP). In this third type of collaboration my contribution was formative for the shape the initiative took, the criteria being that without my contribution, the project would not have been the same.

<sup>74</sup> Etymonline.com, [www.etymonline.com/word/cooperation](http://www.etymonline.com/word/cooperation), accessed 15/05/2020.

<sup>75</sup> <https://ordrecrha.org/ressources/revue-rh/volume-21-no-1/travailler-ensemble-cooperer-ce-nest-pas-collaborer>, accessed 15/05/2020

The most common form of action was the organization of public debates, but marches, demonstrations, theater, poster campaigns and group travel were other forms of action. Not all these collaborations were research collaborations, this depended on the extent to which the shared formulation of a problem, the gathering of knowledge and sharing of the latter was part of the objectives of a particular group. Before describing the different collaborations I engaged in I first discuss in the next subsection the (political) stakes in choosing with whom to work and to do what.

### *3.1) With whom?*

Given my aim of privileging the interests of the poorer racialized population in Villeneuve over those of the white middle-class who already weighed heavily in the political representation of Villeneuve, a group's constituency turned out to be a criterion for joining a group.

This was one of the reasons for excluding a (research) partnership with public institutions. The distance and distrust that in particular racialized and working-class inhabitants of Villeneuve felt with regard to public institutions excluded them as partners; fearing that their formulation of a research question would not be very representative of the wider concerns in the neighborhood and basically reflecting the elite positions of those already able to make their claims heard among public actors. Instead, I decided to work with groups that were mostly run by volunteers, with the exception of the Régie de quartier. The latter could be seen as a semi-institutional actor: an independently run organization with public funding that employed neighborhood inhabitants (maintenance, cleaning jobs, construction) and is therefore different from volunteer-based organization.

Collaborating with the older white grass-roots leaders was tempting as we spoke the same political language of 1968 ideas of emancipation and social transformation, but there was an obvious trap in this collaboration. Despite the numerous contacts that grassroots leaders had with working class and racialized people, the public events they organized faced a large difficulty in drawing in a more diversified group. The paternalism of (older) white middle-class persons was an obstacle to the participation of other people, and rigid ideas about *laïcité* were an additional stumbling block for the participation of Muslim women in particular.

During my thematic explorations participating in events was also a means to understand which publics attended which events. My observations confirmed that the surest way of addressing a public was to include it in the organization of an event, preferably in the working group. The audience is often the peer groups of the members of the working group, and the larger the diversity within the latter, the larger the variety of the audience. The social element is an important consideration in the decision to attend an event or not: beyond the interest for a topic, people are driven by the prospect of finding familiar faces and people they like to see.



In my decision on with whom to work I took the following considerations into account:

- Whose interests did the group/collective represent?
- Which constituency did the group/collective speak to?
- The political interest of a group: to what extent did it aim at social transformation, did it challenge the status quo and address power asymmetries?
- Was it interested in a research collaboration? Did it define a (research) question and did it express an interest in putting in place a method to find an answer?

The latter characteristic was decisive for the possibility of establishing research collaborations, which is a specific form of collaboration. Table 2.2 provides an overview of the constituencies of the different groups and their political orientation, the levers of change they target and the type of collaboration we engaged in (participation/collaboration/research collaboration).

**Table 2.2 The constituencies of the groups in which I was involved**

Group	Constituency	Levers of change	Type of collaboration
Villeneuve Debout	White, retired, politically center-left leaning middle-class in Villeneuve (Grenoble)	Inhabitants, local political actors	Research collaboration into the manifestations of violence in the neighborhood, its root causes and possible responses.
Marche Blanche	Diverse. Over time the white, retired, politically center left-leaning middle-class in Villeneuve (Echirolles) stayed while others left	Local political actors, national education system	Participation, for collaboration see 2 October collective
Agir pour la Paix	Core group of young, racialized, working and lower middle-class, different political orientations. Some have sympathies for extreme right but most did not vote. Involvement of young, white students and members of 2 October collective	Peer groups	Collaboration in the organization of a journey through Europe. Shared question how to make/form a society (Faire société), no shared outcomes
MJC les Roseaux/One Luck	Diverse (white and racialized), mixed age, working and lower middle-class, diverse political orientations (left, abstention)	Peer groups and local political actors	Collaboration in the organization of a debate about the role of the police in MSHN, no shared outcomes
2 October collective	Its constituency is the sum of the constituencies of partner organizations and therefore represents a large diversity in which youth, over the years, became underrepresented and professional actors overrepresented.	Local political actors, national education system, individual behavioral change (violence prevention and in favor of nonviolence), civil society organizations, inhabitants, peer groups	Research collaboration into the manifestations of violence in society, looking into opportunities for nonviolence
Régie de quartier	Night mediators are mostly racialized, male, working-class inhabitants of Villeneuve (apart from coordinator). As they are acting in a professional capacity, they have no constituency	Behavioral change of youth groups responsible for nuisances	Participation in activities, informal discussion and data sharing

Madame Ruetabaga	Volunteers are mostly white, young women and men with high social capital but little financial resources, a political orientation on the radical left. Participants come from lower working- and precarious class, immigrant families in Villeneuve.	Emancipation of participants of street workshops	Research collaboration into the question how Mme Ruetabaga opened access to public space in Villeneuve and in what way this was a form of prefigurative politics
Planning	Core group of white, retired, politically center left leaning higher middle-class with exceptions when specific interests are at stake	Increase power of inhabitants in relationship with public and technical experts on urban renovation	Participation in Ateliers Populaires d'Urbanisme
FUIQP	Core group of racialized and white, high social capital, few financial resources, radical left and constituency that also includes Muslim women and undocumented migrants	Conscientization of racialized and working-class persons about dynamics of oppression so they get into resistance (autonomous organizing, they should be agents of change and no demand public actors)	Collaboration in organization of workshop on media coverage of urban violence
Université populaire	Diverse, reflects the diversity of working group members (see chapter 4). It is a challenge to make sure the Villeneuve Debout constituency is not overrepresented	Both conscientization of those directly concerned with race and class oppression and raising awareness among privileged about these conditions	Research collaboration on discrimination and racism, neighborhood stigmatization, islamophobia and the colonial past

In the following subsection I address the third criterion for pursuing a collaboration: whether groups had an interest in exploring a shared (research) question.

*3.2) Doing what? From participation to research collaboration*

As discussed, my involvement in most groups started with participation in meetings, events, and debates. Through this participation, I became part of the group and could propose ideas for new actions. It is when I got involved in the creation of a new event or action on behalf of the group that I consider that my role shifted from participation to collaboration [Figure 2.25]. The figure below lists the typical forms of participation, and the types of collaboration that evolved from them. Not all collaborations are research collaborations.

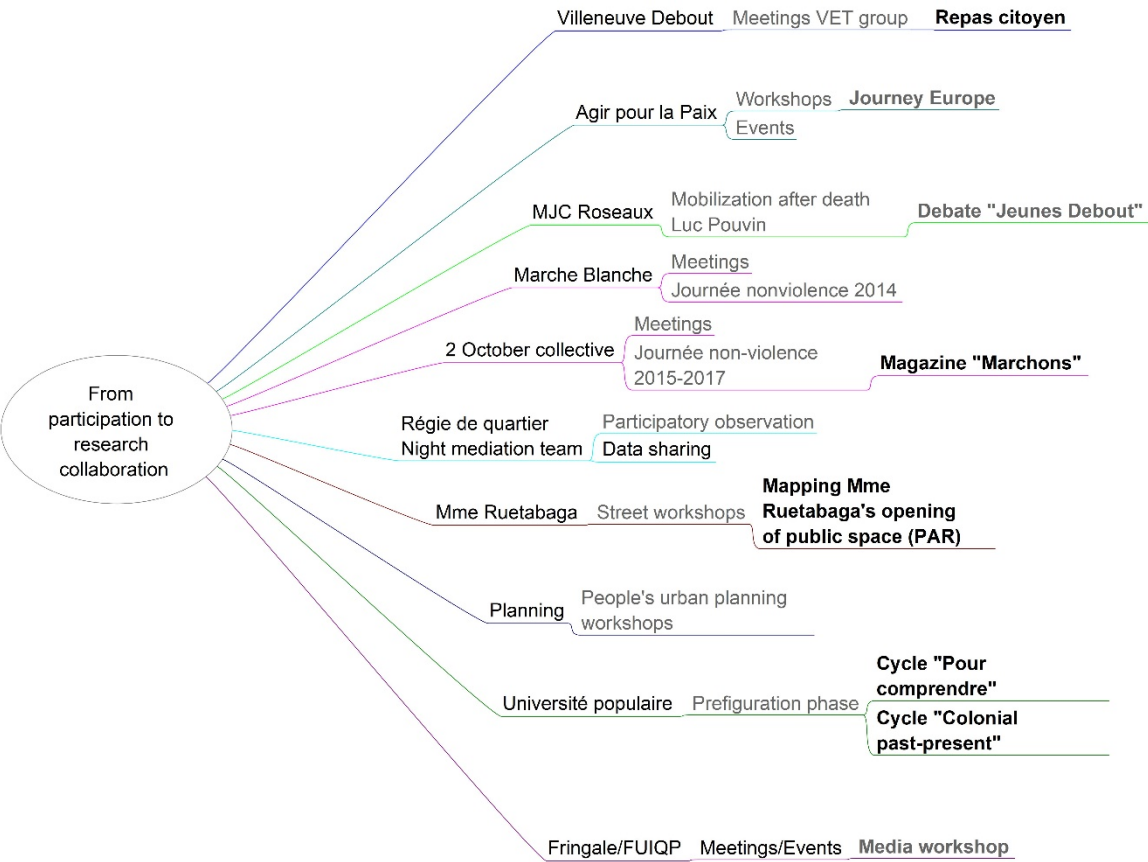


Figure 2.25 Mind map from participation to collaboration

The figure shows for each of the groups I was involved with as part of my thematic explorations the type of participation (in grey) and which collaboration I established (in bold). With the groups where there is no text in bold, my engagement was limited to mere participation in their meetings and events. Collaborations that did not result in shared research outcomes are in bold grey].

With three groups my involvement remained limited to participation. The first was Marche Blanche: when it joined the 2 October collective in 2015 I was active in the latter. The second

was the night mediation unit of the Régie de quartier that provided me with data and the possibility to carry out participant observation, but with whom no shared interest for a collaborative project emerged. The third was Planning, with whom I engaged in a methodological, but not in a thematic collaboration because of the constituency it mobilized [Table 2.3] b) and because the theme of urban renovation of MSHN and resistance against it is already relatively well covered in academic literature (Talpin 2016a; Breynat et al. 2016; Epstein 2014).

As mentioned, not all forms of collaboration resulted in research collaborations. It is however hard to make a clear distinction between the two because problematizing and defining themes for debate and popular education were common to all groups, but to what extent this led to the formulation of a (research) question depended on their interest in systematically gathering data and making results available to a wider public. For a research collaboration to fit the decolonial research framework I developed in the first section, it needs to correspond to the criteria listed in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3 Research collaborations that fit the framework of decolonial explorations**

<b>N°</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
1	Diversity of sources of knowledge in working group (space for subaltern voices?)	Different levels of formal education professional experience diversity of class, race, gender, age, ability
2	Shared responsibility for project (reciprocal relations)	All members of the working group took initiatives tasks were shared
3	Knowledge production goal of the event/initiative	Did the initiative/event seek to respond to a specific question? Did it go beyond the dissemination of knowledge, debate and awareness raising? Did it include ideas about data collection? was there a reflection about the output of the event?
4	The identification of a jointly defined research question	If the initiative/event involved a specific question it sought to answer, how did this question emerge? Was it formulated by one (elite) person or the outcome of a collaborative effort? Whose interests did this question reflect?
5	Collection of data during the initiative/event/action	To what extent were data produced during the initiative/event? What was their quality, based on which methods? To what extent have they been important for my thesis?
6	The co-interpretation of research results	Did the working group look at these data together in order to decide which results were important?

		Did this discussion/collective decision inform the final output of the initiative/event?
7	The co-‘writing’ of research results <sup>76</sup>	Were different members of the working group involved in ‘writing’ the final output of the project? In case one person wrote, was the text submitted to and debated within the working group?

I evaluated each collaboration according to above criteria, attributing 0 when the answers to the indicators were all negative, 1 for little, 3 for reasonable and 5 for high. If collaborations score high on the first and second criteria but not onwards, they cannot be considered research collaborations, they could nevertheless provide interesting insights for my thesis. This was for example the case of my collaboration with the FUIQP working group where we developed a critical media workshop that sought to engage inhabitants in a discussion about media coverage of the national riots in 2005. It was also the case of my collaboration with the night mediation team who were interested in an analysis of the efficacy of their service, a question that did not correspond to the political goals I set for my research. For these reasons they are not included in my presentation of research collaborations.

*3.3) Qualifying research collaborations*

The chart below graphically represents to which extent the research collaborations I engaged in correspond to my ideal of decolonial explorations. The more the figure resembles a heptagon and the larger it is, the closer it is to this ideal as was the case for example of the Université populaire (blue shaped figure) in Figure 2.26.

<sup>76</sup> The inverted commas in ‘writing’ indicate that writing can take different forms and is not only written text.

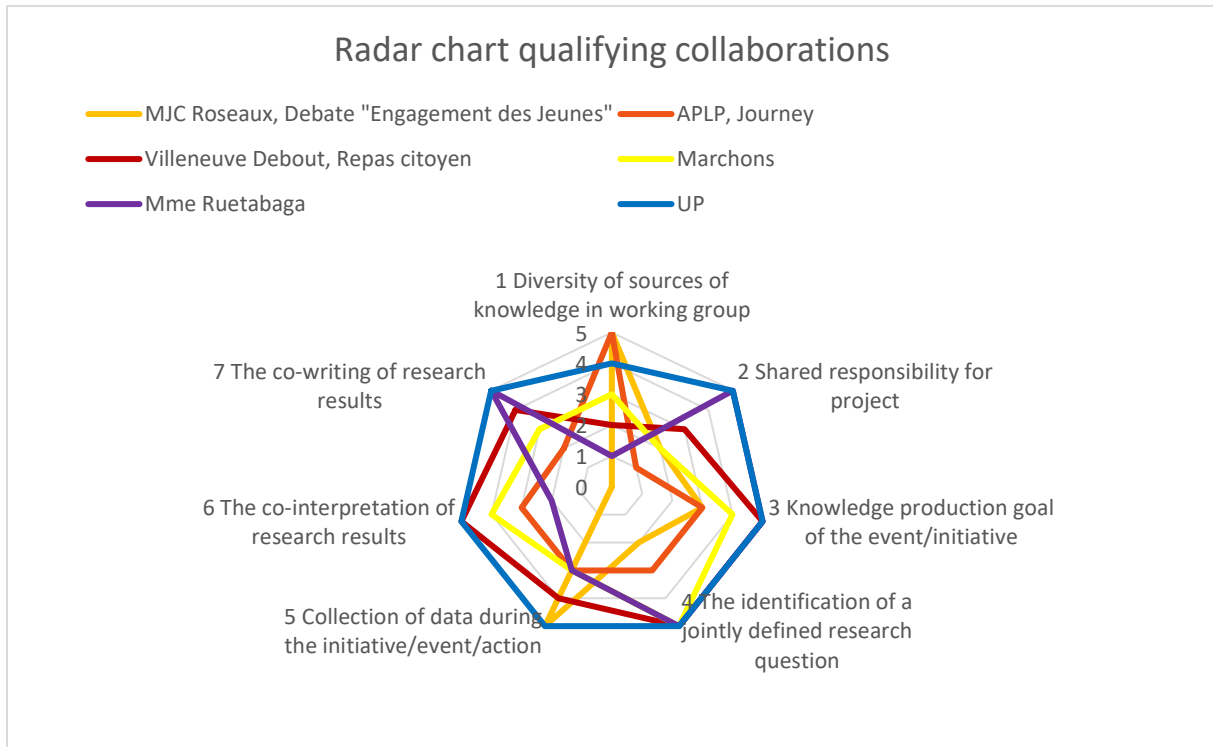


Figure 2.26 Radar chart qualifying all collaborations

### Villeneuve Debout, VET working group

The violence of the death of Kevin and Sofiane created an enormous shock in Villeneuve (Grenoble) because the protagonists responsible for this violence came from the neighborhood. It occurred at a moment when the neighborhood was still recovering from the shock of the 2010 riots and the heavy security presence it resulted in. Villeneuve Debout opened a space to speak about violence in the neighborhood, to think about its root causes and possible responses. In order to create an informal setting, they organized a *repas citoyen* with the title “Responding to violence in the neighborhood, let's talk about it” (*Réagir aux violences dans le quartier, parlons-en*).<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Information about its outcomes can be found in the document *Repas citoyen - Réagir aux violences dans le quartier. Parlons-en!*, Villeneuve Debout, 16 February 2013.



Figure 2.27 Repas citoyen. (Photos author, 13/02/2013)

The chart below is a graphic representation of the strong and weak points of this collaboration. It was a good example of a research collaboration but its weakness was that the working group and audience overrepresented Villeneuve Debout’s typical constituency of older, white, middle-class inhabitants. They still hold the pen and define which problems merit political attention. Ariane’s grassroots involvement in her housing block mitigated this effect somewhat with the presence of among others a Roma family who spoke about the hostility they faced in the neighborhood, and a Pakistani father who came with his daughter to speak about hallway occupations (chapter 3). Ariane was the main motor behind the project, supported by a project coordinator employed by Villeneuve Debout. The latter wrote minutes of meetings and a first draft of the final report. Strong points of the collaboration were that my role was clear from the beginning, that the working group collaboratively identified three questions to be submitted to the participants during the meal and organized the systematic collection of data during the meal (a partially failed audio recording, notes taken at each table on large paper napkins, and a written summary of debates). The data were subsequently discussed collectively in the working group in order to structure the results for the report. The report was written by the program coordinator, while the working group was jointly involved in commenting and altering the report. The VET group brought the outcomes to the attention of city councilors.



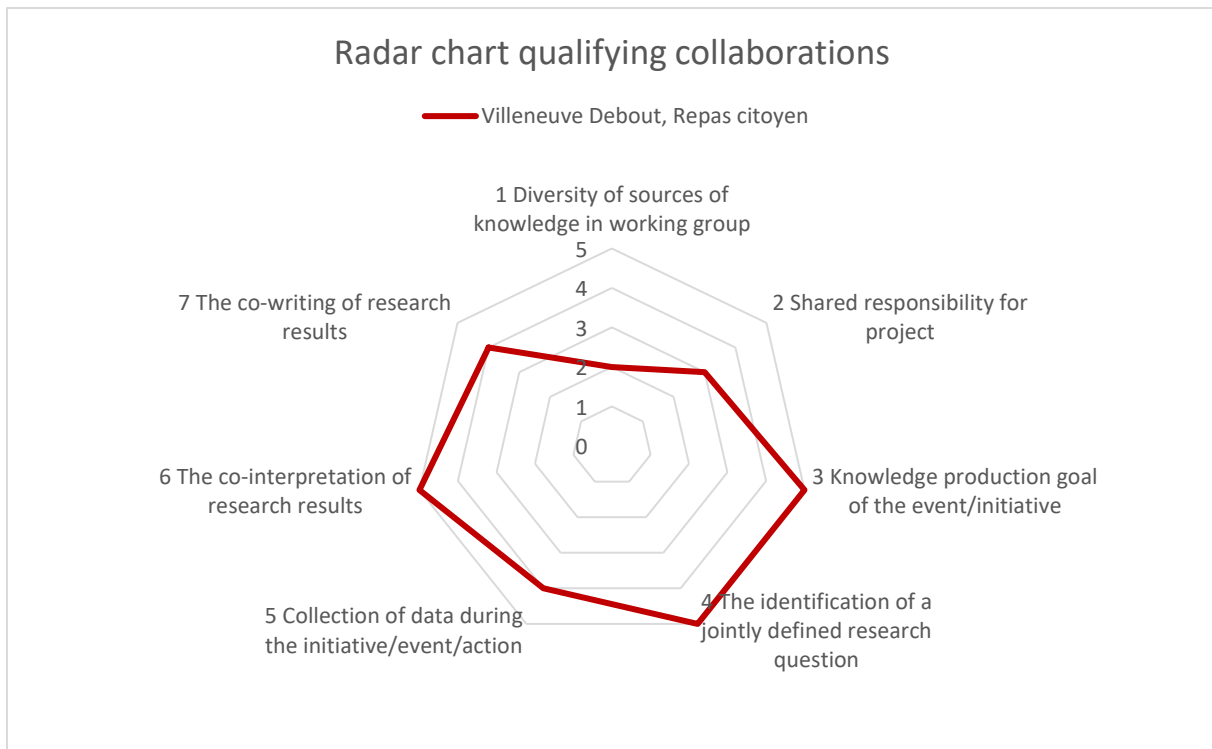


Figure 2.28 Radar chart qualifying collaboration with Villeneuve Debout in the organization of the Repas Citoyen.

### Agir pour la Paix, Journey through Europe

On my initiative, APLP set out on a journey through Europe (17-24 May 2015). The idea arose just after the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks, to inquire how had other European countries coped with terrorism in the name of Islam. The itinerary was both inspired by a thematic interest and geographic affinity: a Danish intern at Modus Operandi, Matthias, was befriended by Julie, a student at the Geography Institute (IUGA) who did her internship with the 2<sup>nd</sup> October collective and who helped me prepare the journey. Denmark was connected to the Charlie Hebdo attack because the latter decided to re-print the cartoons of prophet Mohamed that had been published earlier by a Danish paper, provoking the wrath of Muslims. The more indirect link between the Netherlands and the Charlie Hebdo was that the film maker Theo van Gogh had been assassinated in 2004 to object to the film he made about the submission of women in Islam. The director of MJC Desnos raised the required funds; Julie and myself were in charge of finding partners in respective cities; Houssein (coordinator of APLP) was in charge of logistics; and Herrick Mouafo (motor behind APLP and a colleague from Modus Operandi) was in charge of the group dynamics and of connecting the journey to the wider APLP project, whose workshops had started early 2015. What made this collaboration exceptional is that racialized young people were in charge and that, of all collaborations, it brought together the most diverse group of people (gender, class, race, national, sexual orientation, *etc.*) who collaborated on an equal basis. This does not mean that it was free of conflict, on the contrary: bringing differences together in an equal setting also makes space for expressing the tensions which were unavoidable in the group.

Knowledge production was a stated goal of APLP: during one of the first workshops, participants identified themes to explore collectively: taboos in society, the place of religion in France (*laïcité*), 'living together' (*vivre-ensemble*), (in)justice, solidarity, the gaze of others (*le regard de l'autre*). Prior to the journey, small groups were formed who would explore these themes during our trip. In Figure 2.29 one can see such a group at work, preparing questions for street debates that they organized in public space. Figure 2.30 shows one group that is on its way to carry out street debates with passersby.



Figure 2.29 Learning together in Copenhagen, Ishoj Ungdomsskole. (Photo APLP, 19/05/2015)



Figure 2.30 Street debates in Copenhagen. (Photo APLP, 19/05/2015)

APLP members were trained by the popular education cooperative l'Orage to facilitate meetings and organize debates, among which the street debates that the UP also used to widen its audience. They applied these newly acquired tools in our explorations of Copenhagen and Amsterdam, and during the encounters with youth collectives. It was planned that the final outcome would be a video to be presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2015 celebration.

Issues that arose during the journey did not directly correspond with the topics chosen in advance, or at least were formulated differently. The topics that were central to many discussions revolved around islamophobia, racism, political parties and the police presence in MSHN. This diversity of topics was a challenge for a collective exploration of one question. The lack of systematic collection of data during the journey (apart from pictures and video) was a further obstacle to the collective interpretation of the data gathered. A final challenge in this collaboration were the tensions that arose between those who carried responsibility for the project (see chapter 7). Nevertheless, the journey resulted in collective learning, and several reflexive moments when group members reflected on what they had learned either individually or in groups. I audio recorded and transcribed one such group session (23/05/2015). Participants were also asked by Herrick Mouafo to write an individual report about what they had learned. We received five reports that lacked interest for research

purposes (quickly written, experienced as school exercises, with little reflexivity). The most important forms of restitution of the journey were orally during workshops and a photo presentation on 2<sup>nd</sup> October. The video was never produced because the coordinator gave up. Other outcomes were written single-handedly, such as a final report to meet the requirement of the MJC in order to justify funding (Herrick Mouafo) and an article for the magazine *Marchons* (see below) written by myself. In conclusion, collective inquiry did take place spontaneously while travelling but motivation was lacking for collaboratively writing and publishing the outcomes (albeit not absent).

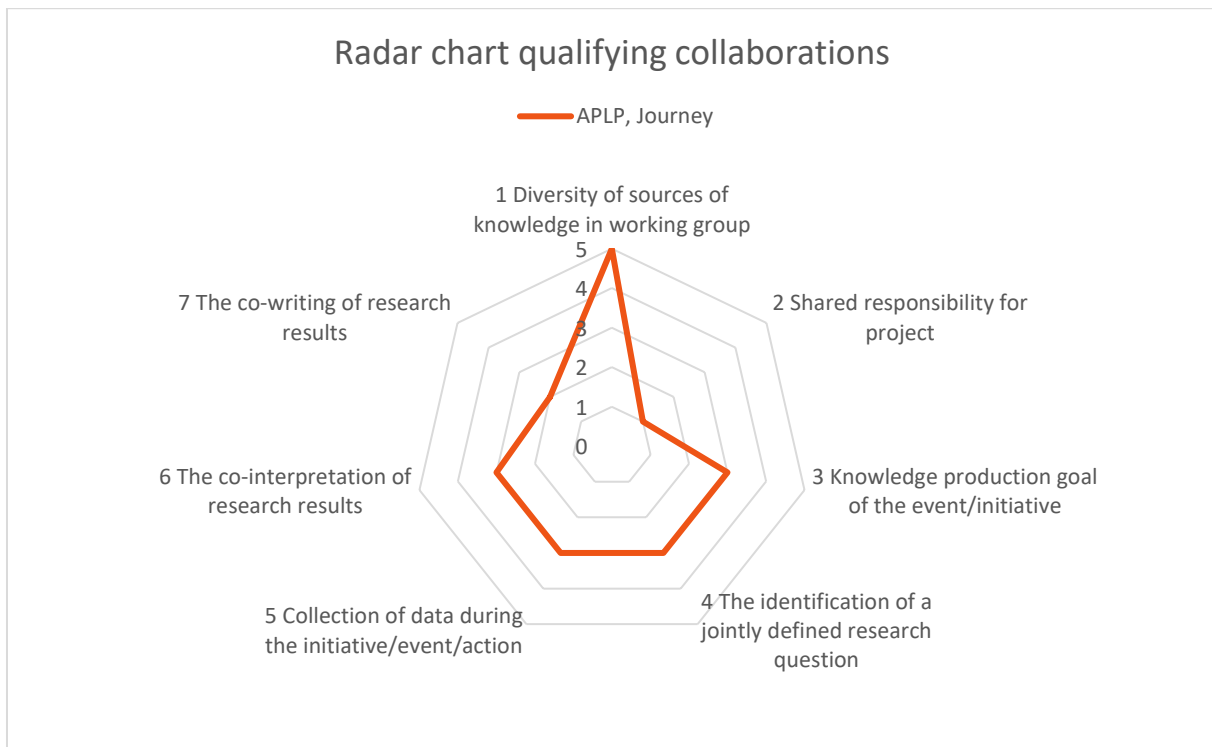


Figure 2.31 Radar chart qualifying collaboration with APLP in organizing journey to Denmark and The Netherlands

### The 2<sup>nd</sup> October collective writes its own story in the magazine *Marchons*

In preparation of the second 2<sup>nd</sup> October celebration (International Day of Nonviolence) Alain (Villeneuve Debout) obtained support from the City of Grenoble's communication team to publish a magazine that could serve as a platform for the collective. I took on the shared coordination of this project as it was an occasion for experimenting with collaborative knowledge production about the paroxysmal violence of 2012.<sup>78</sup> Together with roughly five other members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> October collective we formed an editorial team. Through the organization of workshops we sought to widen the contributions of other members of the collective (inviting them to reflect on what content the magazine should

<sup>78</sup> I shared the coordination with Julie Neelin, student of the International Development Studies Masters' Program (2014-2015), intern at Villeneuve Debout in 2015 and inhabitant of Villeneuve; and Asma Erbek student of Science Po Grenoble, intern at Modus operandi in 2015 and inhabitant of Echirolles.

cover) or to find answers to a specific question through focus or expert groups. An example of a focus group was a workshop on non-violent communication open to all neighborhood inhabitants in order to test this method and resistance against it. An example of an expert group was a discussion circle with medical professionals in Villeneuve (Grenoble and Echirolles) about the root causes of violence. The outcome of the project was the publication of two editions of a magazine we called “Marchons pour dire non à la violence” (2015, 2016), co-produced with the communication department of the City of Grenoble, which was responsible for the lay-out and printing. Each edition was 2000 copies. I did not pursue my involvement after the 2016 edition, following my decision to shift the thematic focus of my research.



Figure 2.32 Cover pages of the 2015 and 2016 editions of the magazine “Marchons pour dire NON à la violence”.

A challenge of this research collaboration was that the core members of the group, those implicated in the writing of the magazine, all enjoyed formal higher education and we had difficulty drawing in different sources of knowledge, especially among APLP youth. A way of making up for this lack was to represent their views through interviews.

Working together on deciding on an outline of the magazine’s content was an opportunity for creating a shared political base for thinking about the root causes of violence and the practice of nonviolence as a tool of power rather than a moral injunction for correct behavior. At times I felt frustrated however that there was limited interest in and possibility for sharing our findings beyond the working group and I left with the impression that most people preferred to act rather than reflect on (non)violence.

Positive points were that the quality of the collaboration within the editorial team was very high, with collectively defined research questions; and a collective ownership of the project, where also the writing was shared.

I undertook systematic data collection (for which it was easy to obtain authorization), I recorded most of the working group meetings and workshops but have not taken the time to transcribe them, relying more on field notes. The clear definition of the end product and a deadline provided an enabling framework for the project. The quality of the research collaboration and the relationship between the editorial team and the wider collective made this project exceptional, its political impact was however limited: despite its access to local political actors, the collective did not formulate clear political claims.

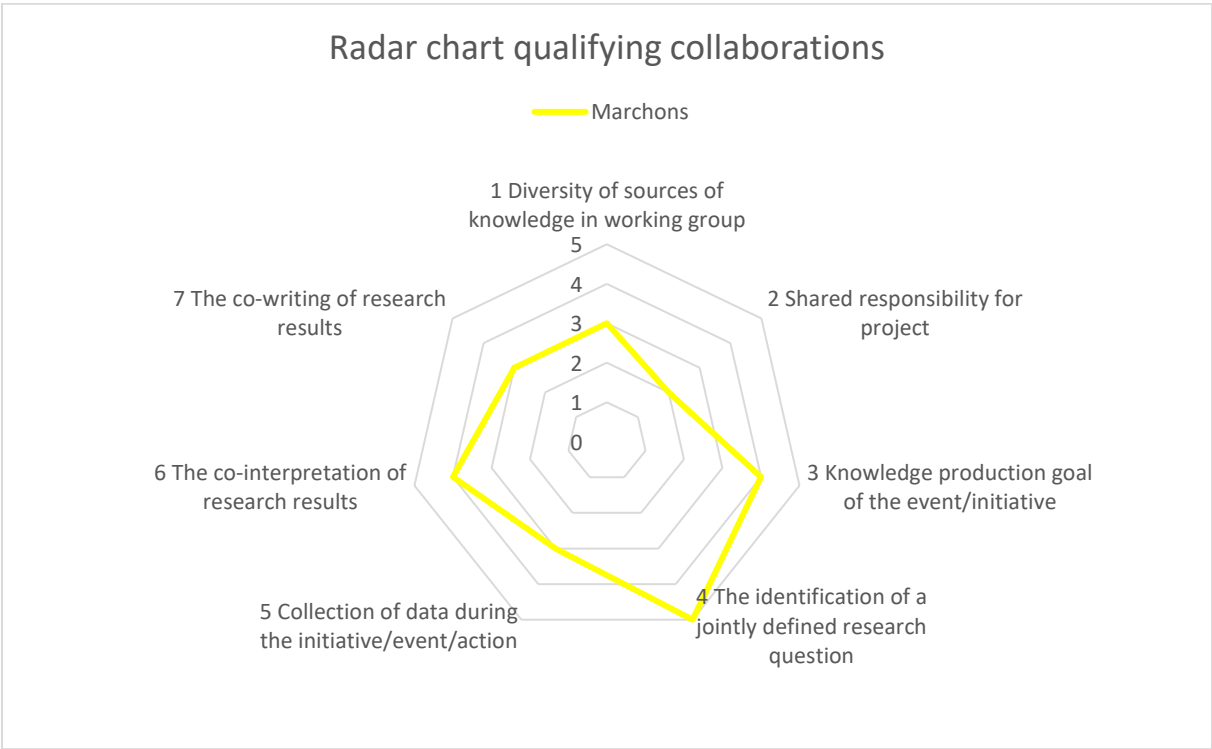


Figure 2.33 Radar chart qualifying collaboration in the publication *Marchons*.

**MJC les Roseaux, a debate with young people about police violence**

Inspired by the collaboration between MJC Desnos and Agir pour la Paix, MJC les Roseaux in Saint Martin d’Hères also initiated work with a group of young people on the theme of nonviolence, leading to the creation of the youth collective *Jeunes Debout* (2017). Just as Agir pour la Paix, they also undertook a journey. Faouzi Ben Salem established an exchange with Molenbeek (in the wider Brussels area in Belgium) for the youth members of his MJC (2016). When the Belgian youth center returned their visit in 2017 Faouzi called on members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> October collective to collaborate in the organization of a large debate, taking example from debates organized by Agir pour la Paix and the Université populaire. It was an occasion for me to bring together the different networks that I had formed throughout my

research.<sup>79</sup> Faouzi had identified the debate themes with *Jeunes Debout* and needed support with facilitating the meetings, collecting data, and producing a report about the outcomes, a requirement of its funders.



Figure 2.34 Debate “Les jeunes et la police” at the Maison du Quartier Aragon in Saint Martin d’Hères. (Photos author, 13/04/2017)

Characteristics of the collaboration were that there was limited shared responsibility of the project as it lay with the MJC. The phases of the co-interpretation of the results and the co-writing could have been very interesting, were it not that right after the organization of the debate the independently run MJC was dissolved as a result of financial difficulties, its director dismissed and the project taken over by the municipality of Saint Martin d’Hères, taking off its political edge (addressing police violence in debate). The collaboration therefore ended prematurely and was limited to the facilitation of the debate and the collection of (highly interesting) data. I transcribed the debates with two police representatives about police violence and draw on them in chapter 5.

<sup>79</sup> The collaboration involved key members of the UP working group such as Alain, who had also been part of the Marchons working group with Faouzi and Jouda; Morgane from Madame Ruetabaga who also worked as a volunteer for Radio Kaleidoscope and wanted to cover the event; Mayare and Herrick Mouafo from Agir pour la Paix; and colleagues from Modus Operandi who agreed to record and take notes with the help of former students of the IUGA.

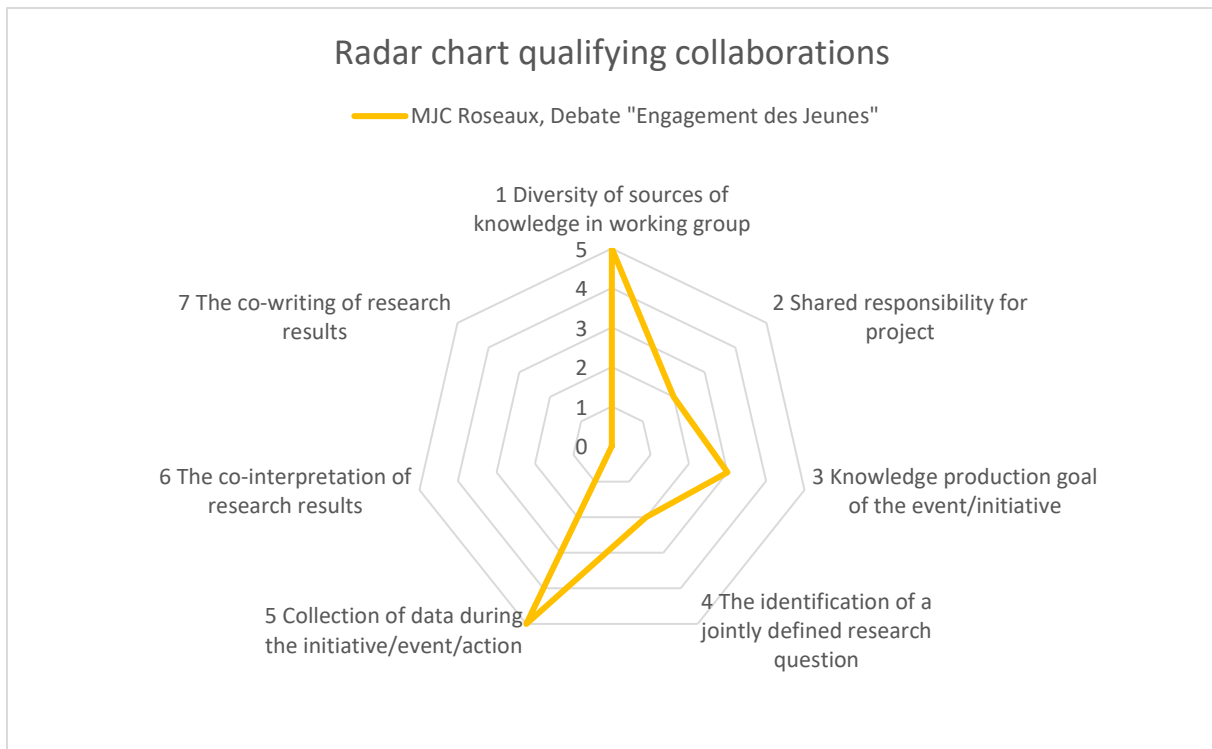


Figure 2.35 Radar chart collaboration MJC Roseaux

### Mapping Madame Ruetabaga's radical approach to public space

At the end of 2014 I participated in the social pedagogy training that Madame Ruetabaga offers. Another participant of the training was Morgane Cohen, who was previously active in APU/Planning and with whom I collaborated in the organization of the 2014 seminar on possible collaborations between the Institute of Alpine Geography and Villeneuve. As a new volunteer of Madame Ruetabaga as well as a participant of the Fabrique de Sociologie of Nicolas-Le Strat in Paris, Morgane Cohen agreed to collaborate on the cartographic representation of the work of Madame Ruetabaga, to present these to an academic audience at the Annual International Conference of the Royal Geographic Society in London in 2016 and in a joint publication (Dijkema, Cohen and Fournier 2016, 2017). A third person joined us, Mélodie Fournier, who at the time worked as coordinator of Madame Ruetabaga. It corresponded to my objective of bringing knowledge, developed by civil society actors, into academic debate. After this presentation to an international audience of geographers, we gave a similar presentation to the adult participants of Madame Ruetabaga's street workshops in Villeneuve (Maison des Habitants des Baladins) during the Rencontres de géopolitique critique (2017, see figure below). During the period we were working on this presentation (March – September 2016), I regularly participated in Madame Ruetabaga's weekly street workshops. We produced knowledge about the functioning of Madame Ruetabaga and thereby about the role of public space in Villeneuve.

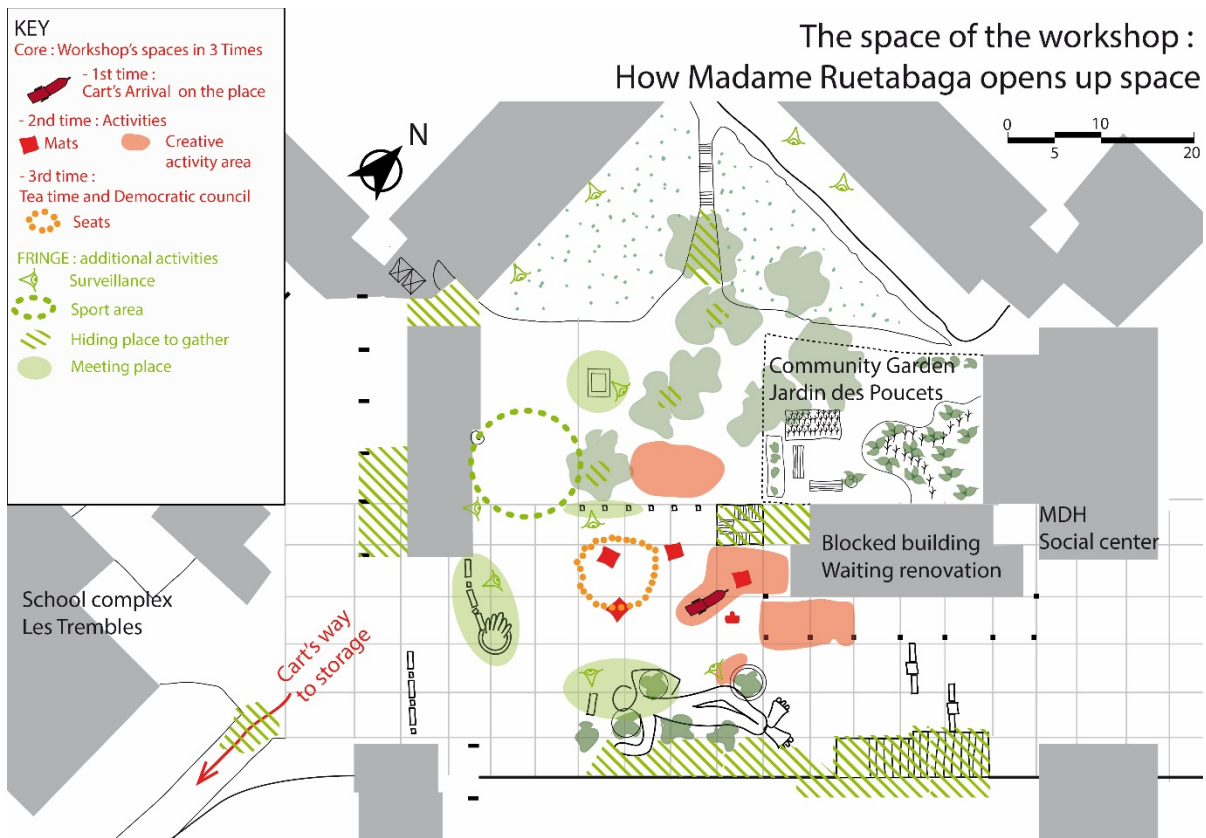


Figure 2.36 A map of how Madame Ruetabaga opens up public space, presented at London RGS-IGB. (Map Morgane Cohen, 01/09/2016)

What characterized this collaboration was the small size of the working group, three persons including myself; and the large degree of shared responsibility for the project of which I had been the initiator but was not the motor. The three of us shared the same level of formal education and political views which guaranteed a smooth collaboration in defining a research question, looking at available data, and writing the results (Morgane made the maps, Mélodie wrote a draft of the text in French and I wrote the English version). The goal of knowledge production in this case was to critically reflect on Madame Ruetabaga's work through discussions, drawing maps, and through collectively analyzing existing data (audio recordings with children during the workshops) and to present it in an academic format. While the interest of publication was shared, writing for an academic format reflected more of my interest. Our collaboration could have gone further by involving Madame Ruetabaga's families and children that come to the workshops in the research.



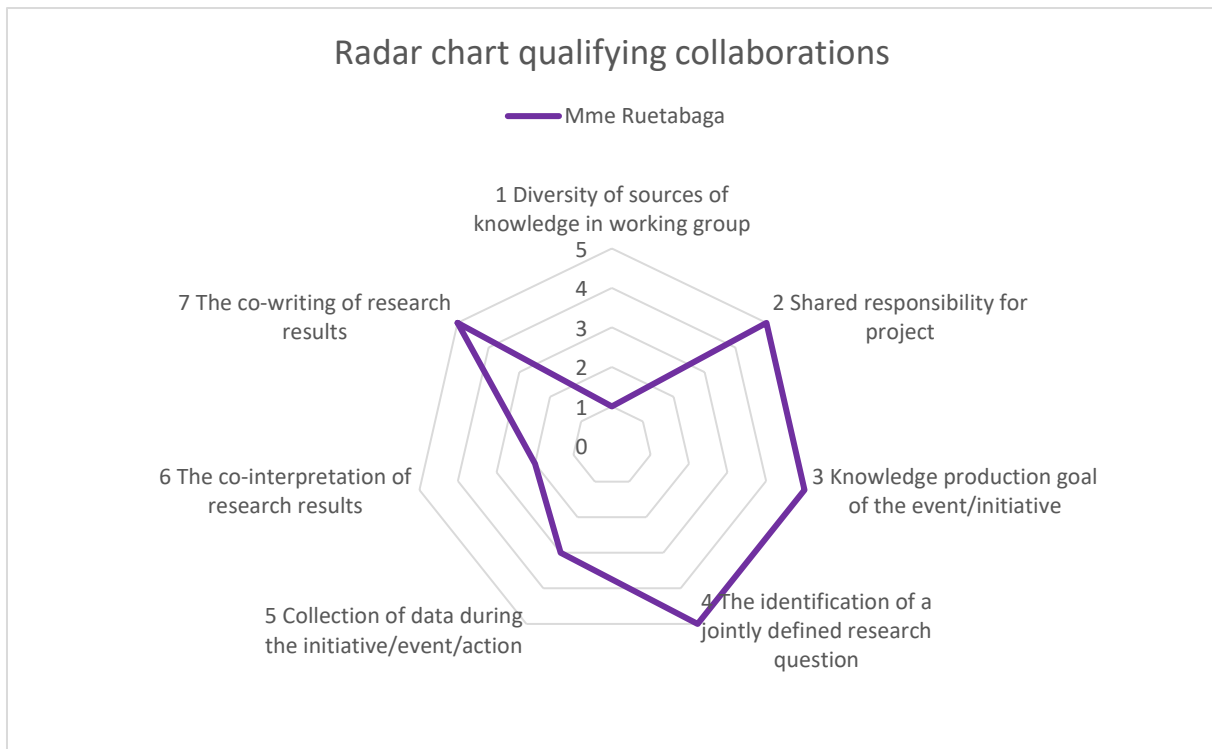


Figure 2.37 Radar chart collaboration Madame Ruetabaga

### The Université populaire: inquiring into the colonial past-present

In comparison to the collaboration with Madame Ruetabaga, the working group of the UP involved more people with different levels of formal education (see chapter 4 for a detailed explanation of the different profiles). There was a high shared responsibility for the project among the working group members, who shared logistical tasks and defined the themes together. Through the organization of pavement debates, discussion circles, and participant-led steering meetings it sought to share ownership of the project with a wide as possible group. Its primary goal was popular education, but from the beginning, Alain, one of the working group members with extensive professional experience in *éducation populaire*, had insisted on the importance of data collection during debates in order to publish results and make them available to participants (and therefore produce knowledge). He video-recorded all public debates, that were subsequently transcribed.<sup>80</sup> In the first cycle the verbatim transcripts were published but it was only in the second cycle that the working group analyzed the transcripts collectively in order to select key themes for the publication of its *Cahiers de l'Université populaire*.<sup>81</sup> The writing was however always carried out by one or two people.

<sup>80</sup> Transcripts during the first cycle were carried out by the working group (Alain, Cindy and I). The same persons were involved in the transcriptions of the second cycle but were helped by Benjamin Butel, coordinator of the *Crieur de la Villeneuve*, who was remunerated for this work.

<sup>81</sup> They can be found here: <https://www.modop.org/espaces-de-parole/luniversite-populaire-de-la-villeneuve/>, last accessed 18/05/2020.

The most successful experience of co-‘writing’ the results of a collective inquiry into one question or theme was the realization of a video document at the end of the cycle on the colonial past present.<sup>82</sup> Writing through speaking and images rather than written text avoids the (self)-exclusion of persons with less formal education that I have experienced in all other forms of collaboration. We proceeded as follows: I printed out all the transcripts of audio recorded meetings, discussion circles, and public debates which we read together in the working group, highlighting the passages that were important to include in a 30-minute video document. I then selected the highlighted sequences in the 36 hours of video recordings and collectively we tried to find a logical order in which to present them. A local organization working with video, La Petite Poussée, assisted the working group in transforming this data into a storyline told through video. Making the video, presenting the conclusions of a debate cycle, was also an occasion for a wider circle of participants and resource persons to reflect on the process of the Université populaire. Its presentation (see next section) both within and outside of the neighborhood provided further opportunities for feedback. On one occasion the feedback was very critical, from a person who felt his voice was not sufficiently represented in the video.

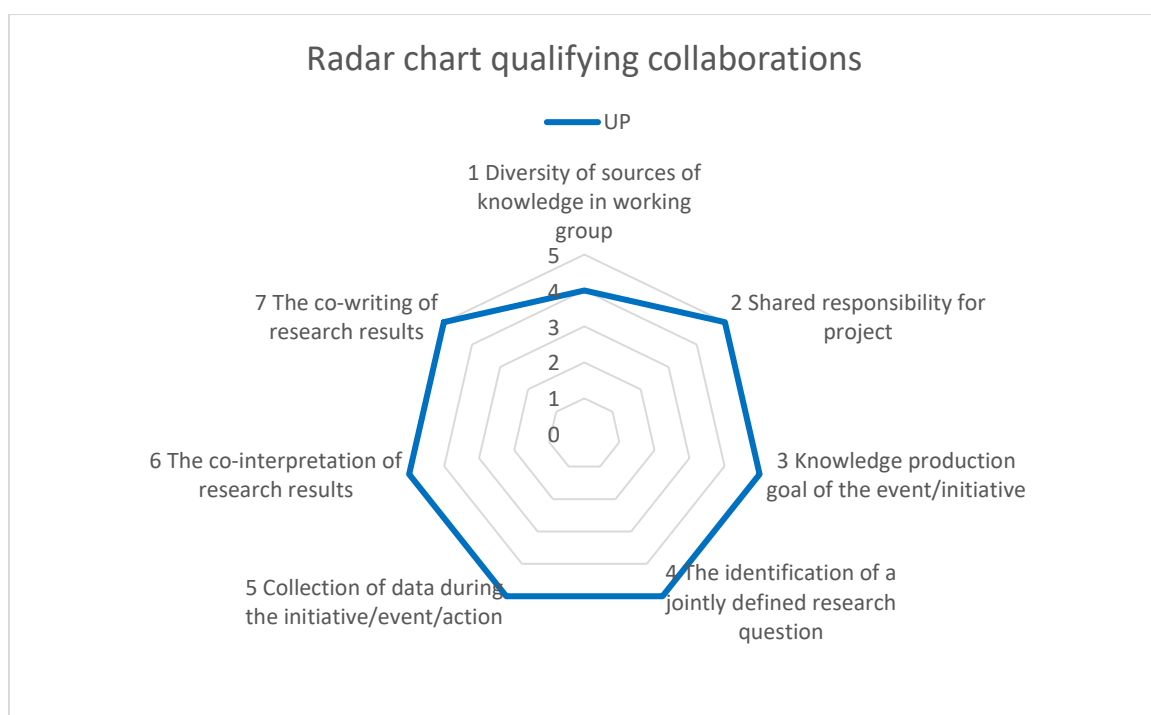


Figure 2.38 Radar chart collaboration with the Université populaire

<sup>82</sup> The video “Sur les traces du passé colonial au présent” is available on Youtube in three parts:

Part 1 “Le passé colonial au present, le projet”

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=5&v=FtUTmAvDS3A&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=FtUTmAvDS3A&feature=emb_logo)

Part 2: “Que reste-il du passé colonial?”

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=14&v=5hca0d0lkuA&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=14&v=5hca0d0lkuA&feature=emb_logo)

Part 3: “Vers un futur decolonial?”

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=2&v=tSTWHUub59QQ&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=tSTWHUub59QQ&feature=emb_logo)

All last accessed 20/05/2020

My thematic explorations have taught me that my research partners in the field and my academic colleagues do not expect the same results. The way in which these results are 'written' cannot satisfy these two stakeholders at the same time. My academic writings do not speak to those I have worked with and my non-academic writings have never really interested my colleagues in university. I have therefore settled for producing different documents for different audiences [see appendix 5 for an overview], reconciling myself partially with the single authorship of this PhD thesis. My position is that of being a connection between different ways of knowledge production in different spaces and of sometimes being able to translate from one world to the other. However, the connections between them have proved more difficult than I initially expected, finding out that good collaborations do not necessarily provide interesting data.

#### 4) Configuring spaces of speech

According to Koopman (2014), peace is shaped by the spaces in which it is made. Can we say in a similar fashion that research is shaped by the spaces in which it is carried out? Peace accords that are drafted in small rooms with closed doors involving few high-ranking persons do not have the same effect as those formed through large platforms that link many networks from different spaces and levels. Could we extend these observations to research? What is the effect of the spaces in which research is carried out on its outcomes? Does research that involves the participation of many people in semi-public spaces have a different effect than research carried out in a one-to-one setting behind closed doors? That has been one of the hypotheses behind my choice to create spaces for debate as a research method.

This method not only presents ethical interests but also interests for data collection. For a researcher to obtain access to the knowledge of others, especially in contexts of power asymmetry, their exchange should meet two conditions: participants should be willing to share their knowledge (4.1) and they should have access to their own knowledge and be able to verbalize it. The reciprocity of their relationship, and the research configuration in which research participants are invited to speak play a part in this ability to verbalize their experience and ideas. One can only speak about the things one is aware of. Many experiences, emotions, and ideas, which are all forms of knowledge remain in the domain of the unspoken, and this is particularly true in the case of power asymmetry (Dotson 2011; Hesse-Biber 2017). What allows people to have access to their knowledge and put them into words?

I explore in this section how the creation of spaces of speech helped to meet the conditions to make speech possible, ethical, and political.

A space of speech refers to a space in which speech becomes possible because it is configured in such a way that power dynamics are mitigated. In this space a public comes together and exchanges with each other about a specific theme. It belongs to the public

sphere and is publicly accessible; it may form in public space but is more often a space that is closed by walls and a door as this closure offers a form of protection and separates the space from the street. Walls and doors help to constitute a group for a particular moment in time and in a particular space.

Organizing debate as research method corresponded to the following ethical concerns:

- The organization of public debates was a way to meet my objective of engaging with inhabitants of Villeneuve without being intrusive.
- Public debates are a means to open the one-to-one relationship between a researcher and a research participant, typical of interviews, to a much wider circle.
- They are an invitation to encounter and discuss: if people come, they do so driven by their own motivation.<sup>83</sup>
- The debate topic was never only my initiative but the result of collective discussions, ensuring it reflected a shared interest.
- Debates are a way to avoid extractive research because they are moments of collective learning. What is said is not only said to me, but is said to all who participate. Speech is brought into the public sphere during the debates, but also later through the circulation for example of paper publications, video, and other productions.

Whether debates also present an interest from a political point of view is a question I answer in section 4.4. I have wondered why most of the groups I worked with decided to organize debates. Why were they the principal form of action? What was their political interest? In what way can the creation of spaces of speech (as a research method) be political? To what extent do they allow people to speak that are silenced in dominant/majority society and what makes this speaking political? Based on these questions, I have formulated the following suppositions:

- Creating debates and encounters has a political importance in a political context where people say that they are not heard.
- The political objective of organizing debates in Villeneuve is to create a space where people can speak out and be heard about issues that are silenced in society (as a result of a process of subalternization).
- In debates, those subalternized can become political subjects.
- Debates can serve as prefigurative politics.

<sup>83</sup> Those that did not come can roughly be divided in four groups: 1) those not informed because not connected to the information channels through which we published the announcement of the debate; 2) those informed but who would not even consider participating for the reasons described above; 3) those favorable to the debates and their framing and that participated at some moment but who prioritized other activities at other moments; 4) those rejecting the debates because they were critical of their framing, of invited speakers or the audience that they attracted (e.g. too white, too conservative).

This section is organized as follows: I start with a field account of the moments I learned that speech is relational and becomes (im)possible in certain spaces (4.1); I provide an overview of the different spatial configurations of the debates I co-organized (standing side-by-side, meetings, street debates, discussion circles and plenary debates) (4.2). The spatial section, covering what the working groups did practically to configure spaces of speech, is followed by a discussion of the conditions that made speech possible in the context of the Université populaire (4.3) and an answer to the suppositions formulated above about the political interest of creating spaces of speech (4.4). The last subsection deals with the scientific interest of creating public debate as a research method (4.5).

#### *4.1) Speaking is relational, in search of reciprocal relationships*

This subsection addresses the problems I encountered in the field with regard to speech as the transmission of knowledge between researcher and research participant.

A researcher that is interested in the knowledge of a research participant has to negotiate the conditions of access to this knowledge. What is the role of power in negotiating this access? Under which conditions are people willing to share their knowledge? Given that speaking is relational, one may refuse to speak, one may not be able to speak, and/or one may not be heard if that relationship is flawed through asymmetric power relations. I will illustrate these affirmations through three field experiences when speaking-hearing was not possible.

#### **Example 1: Chatting in the void, a tour with the neighborhood's night mediators**

The coordinator of the night mediation team suggested that I could accompany two mediators on their nightly tour of Villeneuve so I could see their work for myself and I could speak to them directly. He proposed a date according to the work schedule of Ali because he said Ali was accessible and willing to engage with outsiders which, I found out, was clearly less the case of his colleague. It was obvious that the latter saw no interest in my presence during their night shift and probably categorized me among the institutional partners of the Régie de quartier whom he had to please because the funding of the unit depended on them. He answered my questions politely, out of obligation and out of respect to his superior, but his nonverbal communication told me my questions were boring. I felt naive and a nuisance. No reciprocity could be established in this relationship as it was hierarchy rather than his own interest that drove our discussion. (Field notes, 28/03/2017)

Ali's colleague spoke to me but he did not say anything meaningful. One way of dealing with the power dynamics involved between a person in a privileged position in society wanting access to the knowledge of a person in a less privileged position is to refuse to speak or to refuse to say anything meaningful. When one feels unheard, refusing to speak is a means of power (Dijkema 2016) and is as much a political tool as speaking is. Hence the right to opacity which I introduced in the previous chapter.

Gagné observed in her research with Maaori that there is increasing resistance against research 'on' marginalized people, where the latter are research objects (2008). Mazouz came to the same conclusion when she approached racialized young people in the Paris region who did not want to be used as "laboratory rats" (2008, 81). I have encountered similar resistance in Villeneuve where some inhabitants felt like zoo animals when groups of students were on a mission to collect information (field notes 24/04/2014).<sup>84</sup>

The above experience confirmed my decision to avoid relying on people who spoke to me in order to do a favor to a third person. I rather wanted people to enter speech settings voluntarily and driven by their own interests.

### **Example 2: When our bodies are so tense that they steal our words - a social justice workshop**

Why would people in subaltern positions communicate their knowledge to a researcher through speech if they feel that academic writing cannot represent them (see for example Nagar 2014)? I encountered this position in the Fringale/FUIQP group where some members refused to serve as research material for "white people wanting to write their book" (field notes, informal discussion member FUIQP, 30/01/2017). They also refused my invitation to participate in a workshop I organized with the Social Justice Research Group of PACTE after the *Marche pour la dignité et contre le racisme* (17/11/2015). They explained that the university was not their locus of struggle and speaking to and teaching whites was not their priority. They preferred to invest time and energy in speaking to those directly experiencing (racial and class) oppression.

Two other women, one who participated in the March and one that was part of the Fringale/FUIQP group accepted my invitation to participate in the workshop about the March. The reaction of my colleagues from the Social Justice Research Group helped to better understand the position of those who refused. Indeed, they could not be heard in this setting (Dijkema 2017).

The timing of the workshop was very unfortunate: almost two weeks after the March the terrorist attack on the Bataclan took place, killing a university colleague. The morning before the workshop colleagues had organized an event in his memory. In this mood full of sadness and anger the bridge I wanted to build between my university colleagues and these two Muslim feminists failed.

Lorsque nous nous trouvions tou.te.s, deux femmes ayant participé à la Marche (trois avec moi) et une vingtaine de chercheurs, autour d'une grande table, il était difficile de trouver les mots pour se parler. La salle était remplie de tensions. La première personne (universitaire) à parler disait préférer se taire, pour, par la suite, tenir un discours sur le voile et le féminisme qui était vécu comme condescendant pour mes invitées, femmes musulmanes. J'étais

<sup>84</sup> At times the students also indicated feeling uncomfortable with the missions they were given. See for example Cellier (2017).

entre ces deux et mon corps s'est crispé et est resté tendu pendant des jours, incapable de s'exprimer parce qu'il me manquait des mots. Il me manquait des mots pour défendre mes invitées et il me manquait des mots pour faire le pont, même si dans d'autres circonstances je pouvais parler avec les deux côtés et j'avais accès aux imaginaires des uns et des autres. (Extrait Dijkema 2017)<sup>85</sup>

The working of power has an alienating effect, removing one from what one feels, and impeding one's ability to translate one's experience, ideas, and emotions into words. As a result of the above experience, I better understand the claims of people in underprivileged power positions that they cannot speak. In addition to the peculiar context in which the workshop took place, one of the factors that determined the failure to engage in mutual learning in the above-mentioned group configuration was the number. To make space for subalternized voices, spaces of speech need to be configured in such a way that speech becomes possible, as I will continue to explore in the rest of this subsection.

### **Example 3: Crisps and hummus when speaking became fluid again after Abdelaziz Chaambi's court case**

How power relations determine whether it is possible or impossible to say certain things also became evident during the two court hearings of Abdelaziz Chaambi, the first invited speaker of the Université populaire who was tried in court two years later for his activism (see chapter 6).

On the occasion of the second court hearing of Abdelaziz Chaambi, I clearly realize that what people (can) say depends on the spaces that they are in. The (im)possibility to speak alters as we move, as a group, from one space to the other: from the institutional space of the Courthouse, to the public space of the street and finally to the private space of an association, offered to us by Alain. (Field notes, 25/10/2018)

In the following paragraph I will compare the three different spaces in which Abdelaziz Chaambi spoke the day of his court cases. The field notes I draw from were taken during the two court cases against Abdelaziz Chaambi, the first taking place in Bourgoin-Jallieu (15/02/2017) and the second in Grenoble (24/01/2018). In the highly securitized setting of the Courthouse, it is not possible to speak in the sense of making a political statement and being heard. For example, my placard could not cross the security controls, as if it was a source of danger.

It looks like specific security measures have been taken for this courtcase. I feel the tension of the security personnel. Each of the thirty people that have come to the Courthouse in Bourgoin-Jallieu to attend the trial have to be screened in a prefab building: metal detector, x-rays and questions. They can only enter this building one by one, in an unclear order, picked by the security personnel. I am to enter second while many people stand in front of me. The placard

<sup>85</sup> [http://www.irenees.net/bdf\\_fiche-analyse-1109\\_fr.html](http://www.irenees.net/bdf_fiche-analyse-1109_fr.html)

that I have brought is not allowed to cross this checkpoint and has to stay there. Public officials and police officers treat us with a mixture of fear and suspicion to which I am not used. Have they been briefed about the supposedly Islamist character of Abdelaziz Chaambi and is that the grounds for their fear? (Field notes 15/02/2017)

The highly policed space of the Courthouse contributes to the criminalization of activists and impacts on their possibility to speak. This became particularly clear during the second court case in Grenoble when Abdelaziz Chaambi could not defend himself through words because he was not heard, in the sense that public officials could not relate to what he said.

The sighs, the intonations and silent signs of disapproval of the judges looking down upon Abdelaziz Chaambi from their high seats become clearly audible when he speaks the word islamophobia. In reverse, when the judge speaks of a police officer called "Monsieur Israël", suffocated laughs can be heard in the audience. This is a silent confrontation of forces where words do not have the same meaning for those speaking and do not have the same resonance for those listening.

The conditions of speech become possible again when we leave the Courthouse and move to public space, the piazza in front of the Courthouse where those in solidarity with Abdelaziz Chaambi pick up its banner and placards to make public statements [see Figure 2.39].



Figure 2.39 Public address Abdelaziz Chaambi in front of the Courthouse. (Photo FUIQP, 24/01/2018)

After speaking on the piazza, we move, with a group of people in solidarity with Abdelaziz Chaambi, to Solexine: voices become loud, there is food on the table and juice, crisps are going around, there is bread, cheese and hummus. Those who want to speak, speak, although it is hard to contradict or even interrupt Abdelaziz Chaambi who is filling the room all by himself and clearly needs to blow off steam, to release the tensions built up in his confrontation with the judge. I hear stories I never heard before, people take positions they never have taken in other configurations of speech that I shared with them (Field notes, 25/01/2018)



Additional examples of not being able to speak are discussed in chapter 6. The above experience brings up the question, however, of what conditions make speech possible and how to configure “safe spaces” that facilitate speech (Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007, 21). Debates can be a helpful tool to bring experiences, emotions, and ideas which usually remain in the domain of the unspoken into consciousness through prompts or elicited by the narrations of others. Certain group and spatial configurations of debate allow research participants to tap into their ‘tacit knowledge’ (Polanyi 1962) and express it.

*4.2) Speaking in different spatial configurations*

This subsection provides a description of the spaces of speech I helped to create throughout my research collaborations. They can be roughly organized in four categories:

- Meetings
- Street debates
- Discussion circles and workshops
- Plenary debates

While I will mention examples of different spaces of speech organized throughout my collaborations, I will focus here on the plenary debates created in the context of the Université populaire because they were the most important in terms of numbers (see figure below) and time (plenary debates were part of a longer cycles of debates exploring one theme over a period of one or two years).

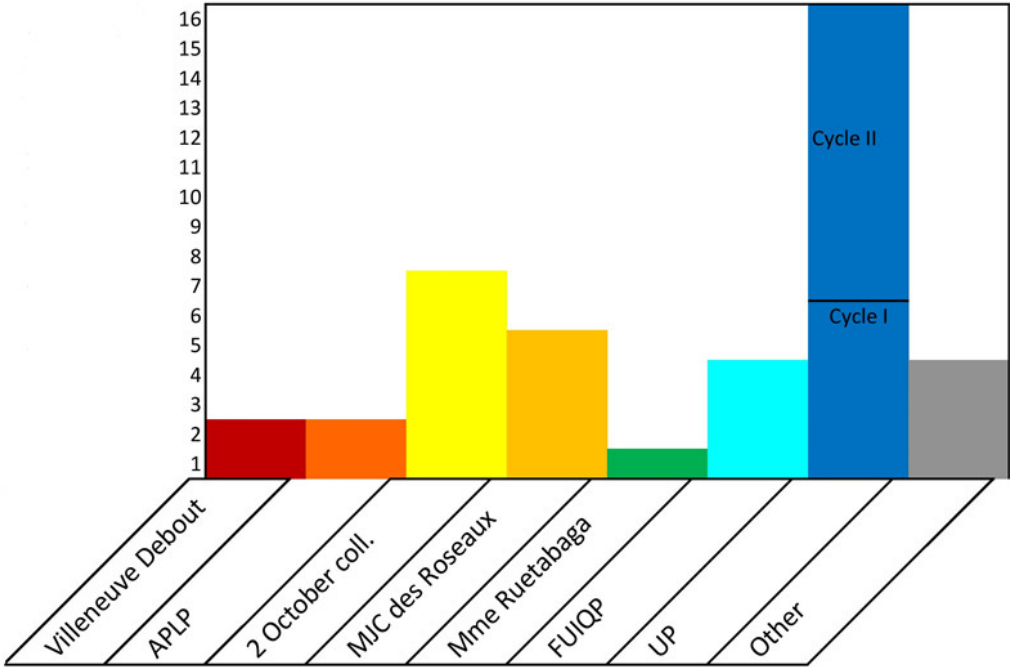


Figure 2.40 Number of debates organized throughout the different collaborations

In presenting each of the following spaces of speech I start from those with the smallest number of people involved and with the lowest level of publicity; and go towards the largest number of people involved and the highest level of publicity.

#### *4.2.a) Working group meetings*

One of the most frequent spaces of speech throughout my collaborations were meetings with a stable group (5-8 people) that came together to move a project forward, taking decisions together, and allowing each person to express him/herself about the evolution of the project. Meetings are important moments for group cohesion. In most meetings there was no agenda and no formal leader. I consider these meetings to be spaces of speech as the time spent together was partly used for discussing the advancement of the project, but also for commenting on the latest developments in the news, the neighborhood or the group. The typical spatial configuration of these meetings was that people were seated around a table with their telephones and paper in front of them. Usual places for these meetings were the Maison de la Jeunesse et de la Culture and the Maison des Habitants.



*Figure 2.41 Meeting APLP in preparation of the journey through Europe. (Photo author, 07/04/2015)*

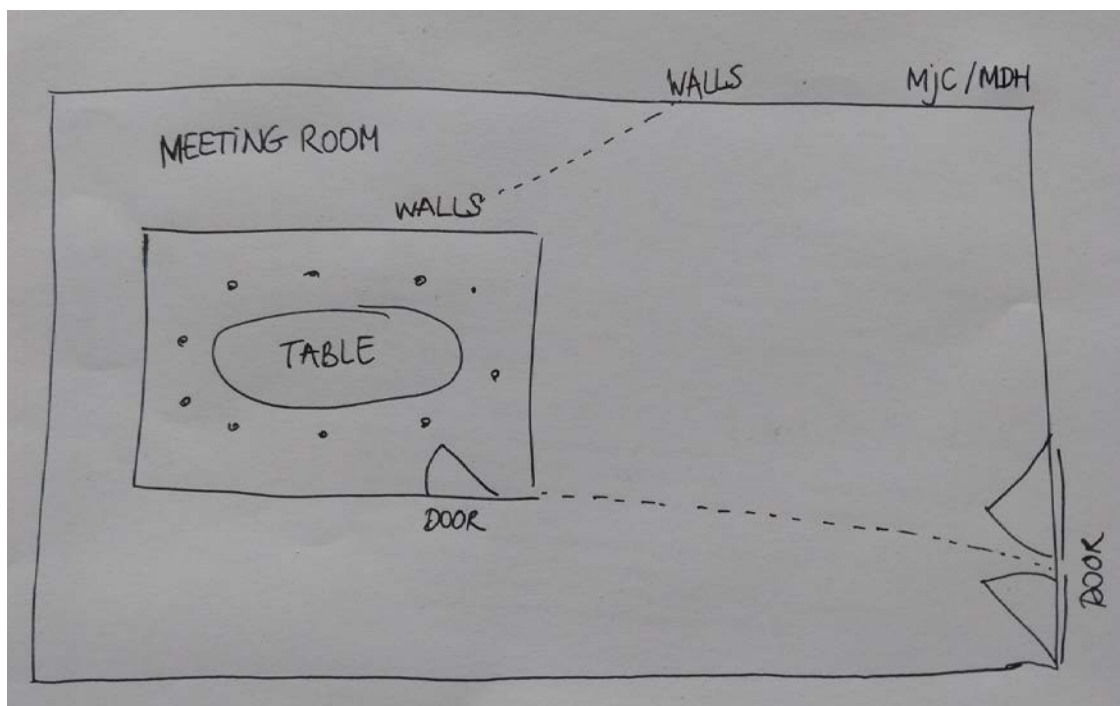


Figure 2.42 Sketch of a configuration of a meeting space

Meetings took place in meetings rooms or, exceptionally, outside [Figure 2.41]. To enter a meeting room one had to open two doors: the entrance of the building and the entrance of the meeting room. Each doorstep crossed acts as an obstacle, a hurdle for voices that have been silenced. The data produced in these spaces are mostly field notes, with exception of the meetings of the UP working group in preparation for the cycle on the colonial past-present.

#### 4.2.b) Street debates

Street debates are short and informal discussions in public space that were part of the Université populaire (UP) protocol during its first debate cycle “Pour comprendre”.<sup>86</sup> Their goal was multiple: first, to extend the plenary debate to public space in order to include a larger number of people that would not cross the doorstep of more institutionalized spaces which each had their own constituency; second, to publicize information about the upcoming plenary debate by handing out flyers; third, to test the reactions to the working group’s formulation of the problem statement that it had prepared to be used for small-table discussions during the plenary debate. They were important in adapting the exact phrasing of debate questions.

The flyer (see figure below) turned out to be an important mediation tool to establish contact. Approaching people in the street always requires some courage, especially if one has to ask for a favor. The flyer helped to turn this situation around and instead of asking for

<sup>86</sup> The working group organized these street debates in preparation for the following two plenary debates: “Pour comprendre les ZEP, ZUP, ZUS, ZSP”, 20/11/2015; “Pour comprendre la liberté d’expression”, 11/03/2015.

a favor one asked whether one could give something, which people generally did not refuse. The act of giving the flyer was a means to establish a relationship, and the act of accepting the flyer was a means of accepting this relationship. Stating the topic of debate was in many cases enough to engage in discussion.



Figure 2.43 “Pour comprendre la liberté d’expression: Peut-on rire de tout?”. (Flyer Université populaire, 11/03/2016)

The spatial configuration of these street debates fluctuated as members of the working group would be walking around the neighborhood, alone or in small groups, going to places where people would come together such as the market square, schools, benches, and main roads. Group discussions ranged from one-to-one to small group settings (2-5). A sketch of this fluid configuration can be found in the figure below. It was interesting to notice that white people tended to look at me while speaking and racialized persons would tend to look at the French/North African/Muslim members of the group.

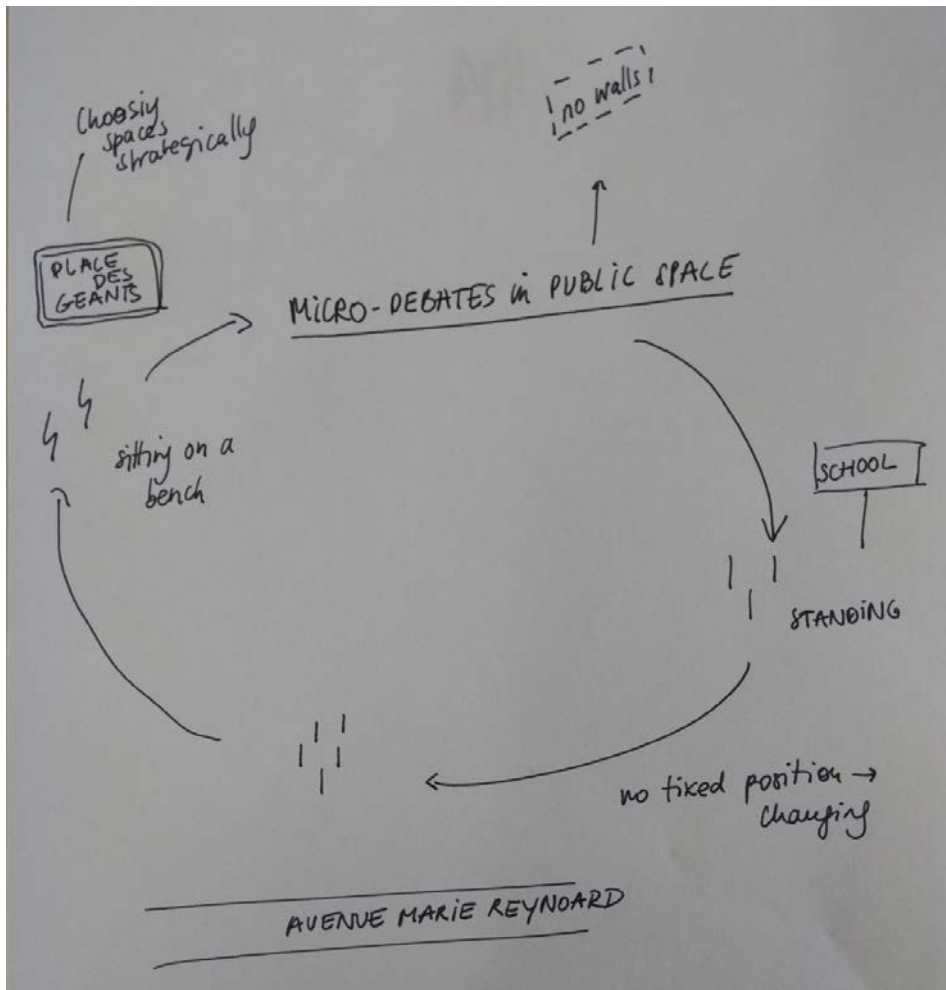


Figure 2.44 Sketch of the fluid spatial configurations of street debates

In order to include these voices in the plenary session the working group took notes after each conversation, discussed and analyzed them, and transformed them into some kind of performance (see figure below) with which we started each plenary session throughout the first cycle.



Figure 2.45 The UP working group rehearses the performance it created to present the answers collected during street debates. (Photo author, March 2016)

### *Walking side-by-side, wandering and wondering with APLP*

Walking side-by-side is a specific form of debate in public space, one I used only in my collaboration with Agir pour la Paix (APLP). With members of APLP I wandered the neighborhoods of Villeneuve (Echirolles), Nørrebro in Copenhagen and of the Indische Buurt in Amsterdam, in preparation of and during our journey through Europe.

Walking has a longer tradition in ethnographic, anthropological and sociological research with communities (A. Clark and Emmel 2010; Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Edensor 2010; O'Neill et al. 2018) and more recently also in biographical (O'Neill and Roberts 2019) and participatory research (O'Neill et al. 2018). Locally, in Villeneuve, it is also a method that is used to consult inhabitants in view of urban renovation projects (Bazar Urbain 2008).<sup>87</sup> Through “walking biographies” O'Neill and Roberts were able to get in touch with participant's “realities” in “sensory, inter-subjective and inter-corporeal ways” and considered this method particularly relevant “with groups who are marginalized and racialized” (2018, 80). Clark and Emmel (2010, 1) use “walking interviews” to understand how their participants “create, maintain, and dissemble their networks, neighborhoods, and communities” (*Ibid.*). Walking in the context of my research has been less formalized as a

<sup>87</sup> [http://dev.bazarurbain.com/wp-content/downloads/Book\\_BZU\\_double.pdf](http://dev.bazarurbain.com/wp-content/downloads/Book_BZU_double.pdf), accessed 19/06/2020.

method but allowed to enter into new forms of relationships by altering the spaces in which we walked:

1. Walking in Échirolles, walking in a space where they were “at home” and I was foreign;
2. Walking in Nørrebro, a space that was foreign to all of us;
3. Walking in Amsterdam, a space in which I was at home and they were foreign.

Walking in Echirolles opened up many possibilities for discussion topics that would not come up inside the MJC where we normally met. It was also a more relaxing way to discuss because silences were less problematic, and bodies behave more naturally when moving than when staying still. Wandering around the neighborhood required an important commitment from the male youth members of APLP however: to be seen publicly, and not in the institutional setting of the MJC, with a white, middle-aged, woman invited some surprised looks. Wandering together in Copenhagen provided a geographical distance that provoked new conversations with APLP members in a space where we were all foreigners: they observed, compared, and commented on their new environment. Walking in Amsterdam where I was at home turned our habitual roles around, where usually I was questioning and the APLP members were answering. Now I was the person who was questioned and could share with them where I came from, what my language is, and my position in the city. Through their eyes, I came to see anew the city where I had lived for ten years.



Figure 2.46 Wandering in Nørrebro, Copenhagen. (Photo APLP, 20/05/2015)

“Picturing the neighborhood” which was part of this research method is further discussed in section 5.

#### 4.2.c) Discussion circles

Discussion circles refer to a semi-formal moment of exchange for roughly 10 people who are invited by the working group to act as resource persons (see chapter 4). The two discussion circles the UP organized took place in the main hall of the *Maison des Habitants des Baladins*, which is a semi-public space: one only has one door to cross and this door is open

for all. This led to funny situations at times when a person entering the MDH would join in the discussion for a while. This is an example of leaving space for serendipity, promoted by Leshem and Pinkerton (2018), and the two times this happened we made an effort to include them in the discussion. It is the relatively small size of the space (in comparison to plenary debates) and the round form of the circle that were factors for creating intimacy. The discussion circles organized during the Université populaire's second debate cycle on the colonial past-present replaced the street debates, which did not work with the highly sensitive theme of the colonial past-present because people felt reluctant to discuss their positions in public space with people they did not know (see chapter 4).

The role of discussion circles is to explore a sensitive topic in a relatively safe environment. Those participating bring in valuable knowledge to help the working group frame certain issues, test questions, and identify tensions in preparation for the plenary debates. During discussion circles speaking time is regulated and follows the order in which people are seated in the circle, this is to make sure that all voices can be heard equally. Initially each person responds to the same question prepared by the working group, without commenting on the contributions of other participants. Afterwards there is time for discussion, led by a moderator. The entire duration of discussion circles was audio and video recorded.

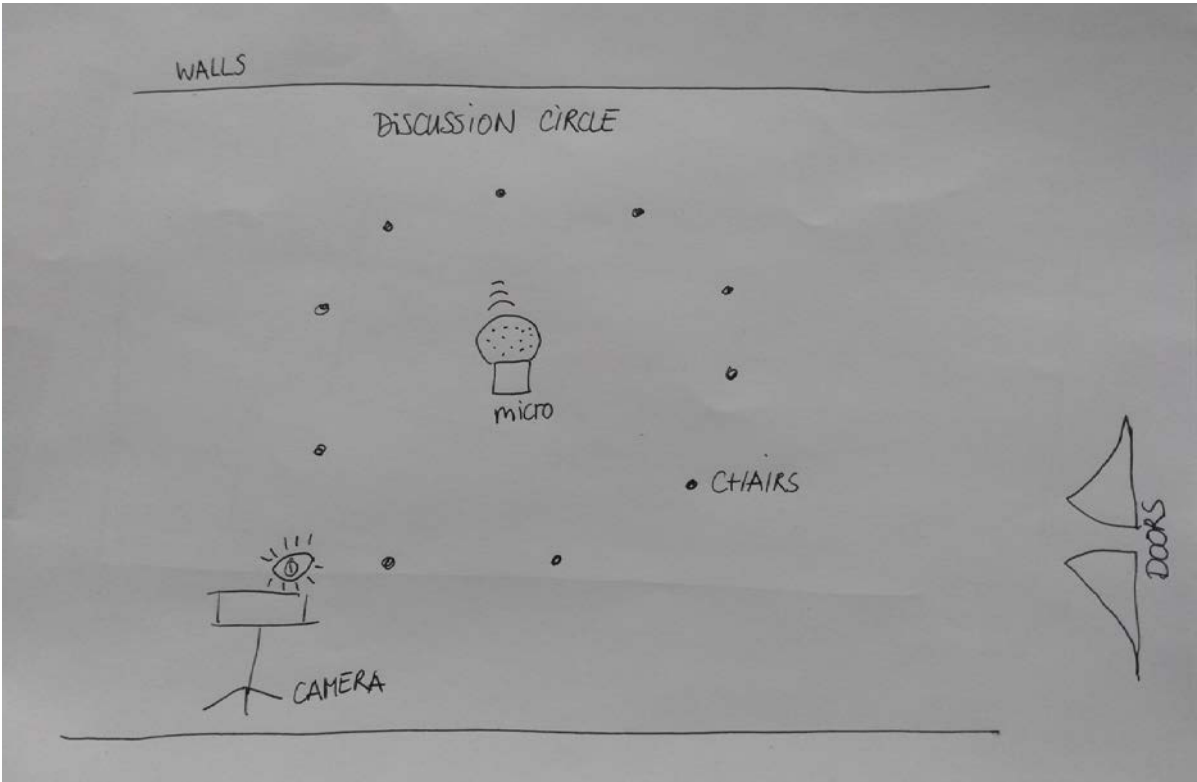


Figure 2.47 Spatial configuration of discussion circles. Walls are absent on the left and right of the circle to represent the idea of a relatively open space where all could enter.



### *Workshops (ateliers)*

The discussion circles shared their spatial configuration (seating in a circle) with workshops, which is a more generic term for a variety of debate settings for 10-20 people that involved both learning and working together and where speech was supposed to be distributed equally among the people in the circle. Discussion circles were part of the Université populaire protocol and workshops were part of the Agir pour la Paix protocol. The latter took place on a regular basis (2015-2016) with a core group that was relatively stable. A list of the workshops organized by the different working groups can be found in appendix 2. The data produced during workshops is field notes.

### *4.2.d) Plenary debates*

While plenary debates were organized by almost all groups [Figure 2.25], here I will only describe the plenary debates of the Université populaire because they were the most important in number (16), in method development, and data provision.

Plenary debates were the result of a longer period of organization to which the other spaces of speech (mentioned above) contributed. Each plenary debate brought together between 40 and 120 people. They took place inside the walls of the Salle Polyvalente des Baladins and later of La Cordée. The Salle Polyvalente des Baladins is a large public venue managed by the Maison des Habitants (MDH) for the city of Grenoble and which can be used free of charge by civil society organizations that have a convention with the City for events that serve the public good. Two such venues are integrated in the architecture of Villeneuve as part of its social project to stimulate public life in the neighborhood (see chapter 3). La Cordée is a former school that it now used as a canteen and for children's after school leisure activities. It is managed by a CSO and therefore has greater independence from the City. Some of its board members are also part of Villeneuve Debout and facilitated our access. The decision to shift to this (less institutionalized) space during the UP's second cycle was partly motivated by the tensions that had arisen around the position of the MDH's director on wearing a veil in this semi-institutional space (see chapter 6) that managed the Salle Polyvalente and partly because it was less logistical hassle.

The Université populaire used two spatial configurations in its plenary debates: a small-table configuration and a public lecture configuration. One of its participants commented specifically on the role of this spatial organization in making the debate a success.

Le concept même de la soirée, la disposition de la salle, le fait de séparer des gens en petits groupes de 5 à 6 personnes pour discuter des thèmes qui étaient proposés, était très enrichissant.

(Fadoua, News FM radio interview, 25/04/2016)

### *Small-table configuration of plenary debates*

The space in the Salle polyvalente des Baladins is pentagonal [Figure 2.48] with two levels, a lower level in which we set out small tables and chairs and a higher level, a 'platform', where one entered. The latter served as a space for informal discussion from which one could

descend on steps (tiers) into what feels like an arena. Figure 2.49 shows the small table configuration in the Salle polyvalente. The photo was taken at the moment when the first participants had arrived and settled themselves at tables in what I call the arena.

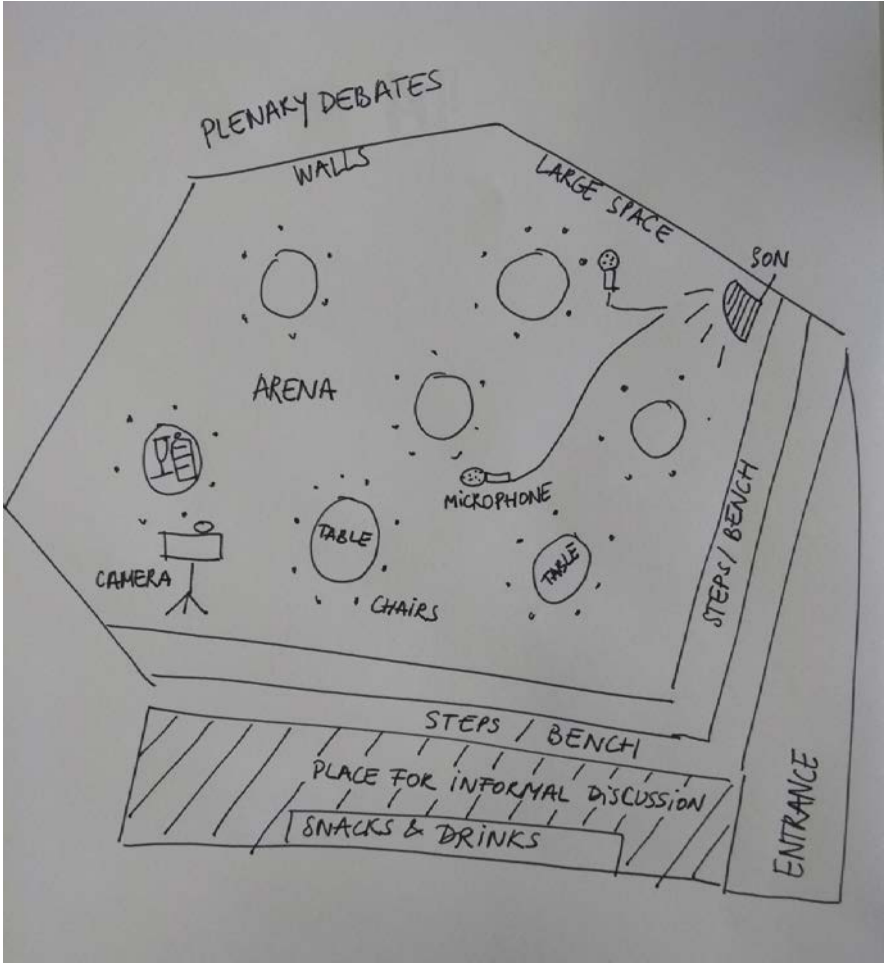


Figure 2.48 Sketch of the spatial configuration of the plenary session using a small-table setting



Figure 2.49 Small table configuration in the Salle polyvalente. (Photo author 11/03/2016)

La Cordée provided the possibility for different spatial configurations: its canteen provided the possibility for the arrangement of small tables and chairs [Figure 2.50] and a second space with tiers lent itself well to a lecture format of debates. In the second cycle of the Université populaire we also used a lecture configuration for reasons that I explain later.



*Figure 2.50 Small table configuration in La Cordée. (Photo author 22/01/2018)*

The following spatial elements were important for facilitating speech in the small-table configuration of both the Salle polyvalente and La Cordée:

- The arrangement of small tables and chairs led to small group discussions that provided some form of intimacy and facilitated speech [Figure 2.51].
- The steps in the Salle polyvalente provided a space that was less engaging than the seating at small tables where one had to directly interact with others. They also allowed a person to observe before entering the 'arena' and to keep some distance from the core of the debate in the arena.
- The seating of the invited speakers: in the first UP debate the two invited speakers were seated behind a table in a panel setting, but afterwards invitations were limited to one speaker only who moved among the public and sat on the steps, which allowed for greater proximity. In Figure 2.54 the invited speaker is seated on the steps and is difficult to distinguish from the audience, apart from the fact that he holds the microphone.
- The platform was a place for informal discussion before and after the plenary debate and had an important function to deal with some of the limits of public debates [Figure 2.56]. Voices that could not express themselves in the plenary debate could make themselves heard more easily in this informal space. It also provided the opportunity for immediate debriefing with some participants.
- The availability of snacks and drinks on a large table on the platform contributed to creating an informal sphere. Shared meals after some of the debates had the same function [Figure 2.53].



Figure 2.51 Informal discussion at small tables (Photo author, 20/11/2015)



Figure 2.52 Informal discussion around the table with drinks prior to a debate, La Cordée. (Photo author, 22/01/2018)



Figure 2.53 Members of the working group cook a shared dinner after the debate (Photo author, 10/06/2016)



*Figure 2.54 Plenary debate at the Salle Polyvalente des Baladins where people are seated both at small tables and on the steps. (Photo author 20/11/2015)*

As a result, we can say that the plenary debate was made up of sub-spaces of speech (small table debates, plenary debate during which invited speaker(s) interacted with the public/audience, informal discussion prior to and after the plenary debate) going back and forth between the intimacy of small group configurations and the public nature of the plenary. Box 2.17 indicates how this alternation between the different sub-spaces was managed in time. It is a blueprint: each debate evening was organized slightly differently.

### **Box 2.17 Typical program plenary debate**

- Welcome drinks
- Opening by a UP working group member introducing the UP, the theme, the invited speaker and the evening's program
- Presentation of the micro-debates in public space
- Small group debates
- Feedback of each small group discussion to the plenary
- Speaking time of the invited speaker
- Q&A with participants
- Conclusion by the moderator and the announcement of the next debate in the cycle
- Informal discussion during drinks and snacks

### *Public lecture configuration of plenary debates*

In the second cycle, only three out of the nine debates were organized in small table configurations. The rest of the debates adopted a public lecture configuration [Figure 2.55]. See Figure 2.56 Sketch of a public lecture configuration in La Cordée. The motivation behind this choice was that during the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle the working group identified a need for knowledge

about the colonial past, something which participants of the debates did not have. When the cycle arrived at the colonial present, it made sense to again return to participants' lived experience in a small-table configuration. In the public lecture configuration the invited speaker was more central and had more speaking time than in the small-table configuration. The plenary format was an obstacle for those less at ease with public speaking (e.g. women). Despite the central place of the invited speaker a large part of the debate took place among participants themselves, rather than taking the form of questions and answers directed at the invited speaker. The latter set the context but subsequently was a part of and not at the center of the debate.



Figure 2.55 Public lecture configuration in the Salle Polyvalente des Baladins. (Photo author, 08/12/2017)

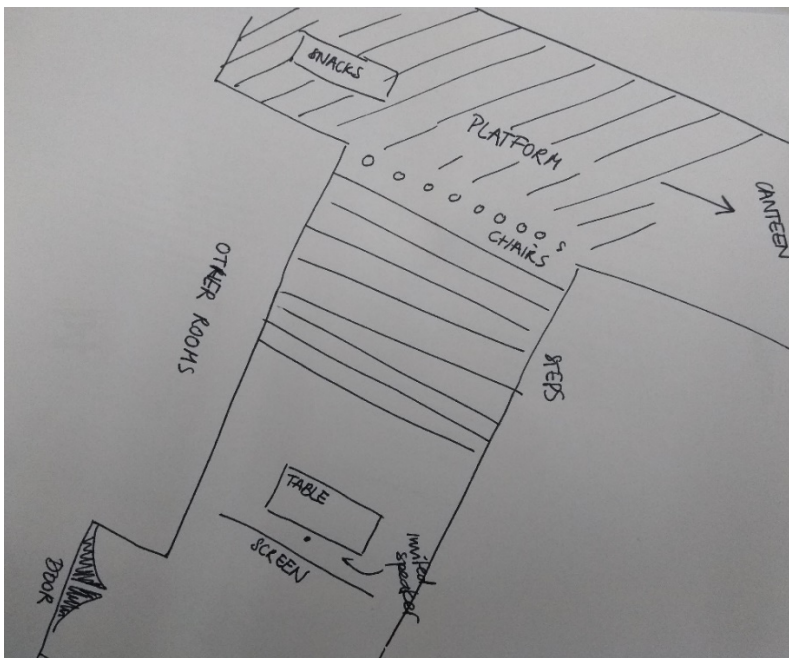


Figure 2.56 Sketch of a public lecture configuration in La Cordée

The public lecture configuration shared with the small-table configuration that it provided space for informal discussion. Changing to the public lecture configuration increased the

time for plenary debate, and was responsible for a changing audience. For critical voices, the fact that the Université populaire attracted less inhabitants and more activists from other neighborhoods in Grenoble and beyond when it discussed the colonial present, was a discrediting factor.

All plenary debates were recorded (video and audio) and these recordings were an important tool for bringing this speech in the public sphere, beyond the space of the plenary debate. Recordings were transcribed and the proceedings were published after each plenary debate, whilst respecting the anonymity of the participants.<sup>88</sup>

### *Making voices travel*

After four years of debates in Villeneuve the Université populaire working group increasingly felt that it was time for these voices to travel. While at first it was a political choice to create these debates in Villeneuve, now it became a political choice that they should leave the neighborhood, but where should they go? Where could they make a change?

Throughout the two cycles, the working group invited local press and radio in order to bring the debate in the wider public sphere; but this did not allow those embodying the voices expressed at the Université populaire to physically travel to other places.<sup>89</sup>

At the end of the cycle on the colonial past-present we experimented with two different places where we presented the video and the theatre play created as ‘writing’: the public library in Grenoble city center, and an independently run cultural center in the rural village that I call home, 25 kilometers from Grenoble. The video provided the images, but only the theatre play could transmit the emotional weight of a colonial past that is still relevant in the present. Given the emotional burden involved in speaking about painful experiences, an important question was that of who should carry these voices. In my village I asked the local volunteer theatre group to perform the text written by the UP working group, based on a selection of participants’ stories that in our eyes were crucial to explain what remains of the colonial past. In a way, this was also a means of taking the position of the FUIQP to heart - that Whites should educate themselves- and I resolved that this could be my role. Telling these stories provoked strong emotions both among those belonging to the majority society speaking them (“we did not know”) and among the racialized participants of the UP who now listened to their own words, spoken by others. In this rural cultural center a lively discussion emerged about how the life histories of the inhabitants of this village had been touched by the colonial past, making space e.g. for the stories of *pied-noir* families and their trauma, but also made encounters possible between the people of these two places between which I had split my day-to-day life for the last four years. I cannot however argue that this made a structural change, and our reflection about where to carry these voices to

<sup>88</sup> These proceedings are available here: <https://www.modop.org/espaces-de-parole/luniversite-populaire-de-la-villeneuve/#uniPopProductions>.

<sup>89</sup> An exception is the radio News FM broadcast after the debate about Charlie and freedom of speech (25/04/2016).

have an impact remains incomplete.

#### *4.3) Discussion of the conditions that made speech possible in these spaces*

The spaces of speech discussed above differed in their levels of publicity (public space versus behind closed doors); of safety (intimacy) versus confrontation; and in their group configuration (number, social position, gender). Power dynamics reproduced themselves naturally in debate settings and needed to be mitigated to make speech possible.

##### *Publicity*

I already mentioned the spatial dimension of publicity that ranged from meeting rooms, which had the least publicity (behind two doors) to street debates, which had the largest degree of publicity because they took place in public space. Throughout my research I reviewed my initial ideas about giving priority to public space as the following field notes demonstrate:

At the onset of my research (2015) I intended to work as much as possible in public space, in places that were accessible to all. I thought this would be a way of being accountable, as learning moments took place in public space, people could learn from each other (and me) at the same moment that I learned from them. I also considered writing in public space (in the Maison des Habitants Le Patio). I had to let go of these initial plans, becoming aware that some things can only be said within the protection of walls and that I also needed delimited spaces, to close myself off from the outside and be able to attain the level of concentration necessary for writing. (Field notes, 30/11/2018)

It was the articulation between these different spaces, from closed spaces that allowed the establishment of more profound relationships to public spaces outside of walls that allowed encounters with the widest range of people possible, people who I would never have otherwise met. In the field notes below is an account of a serendipitous encounter in public space, when the UP working group was installing an exhibition about the colonial period in the Maison des Habitants le Patio (Galerie d'Arlequin).

Je rejoins le groupe de travail qui est en train d'installer l'exposition Images et colonies au Patio. C'est un des beaux moments quand ce lieu sert comme lien et l'exposition comme outil de médiation. Avec l'installation de l'exposition, les membres du groupe de travail qui n'habitent pas le quartier prennent une place légitime dans l'espace, ils travaillent : les élastiques, les crochets, les grilles. C'est aussi un moment qui permet aux passants de nous interroger. Qu'est-ce que vous faites, c'est quoi ? Un homme en particulier me marque. Il commence par interpellier Jouda et annonce qu'il a beaucoup de choses à dire sur le sujet de la colonisation. Jouda continue avec l'installation et je discute avec lui, et Kenjah nous rejoint. On passe 45 minutes ensemble, il a envie de nous faire part de ses connaissances sur l'histoire coloniale au Sénégal. Il cite les noms des personnes, des villes dont je n'ai jamais entendu



parler, que je ne sais pas situer sur aucune carte et dans aucune époque. Je prends la mesure de ma propre ignorance. Je m'excuse de ne pas être française. Kenjah semble comprendre. Il nous raconte l'histoire de 1895 comme si c'était hier. J'entends des noms des généraux, comme Faidherbe, des noms des grands résistants sénégalais, Ahmadou Bamba..., de la ville Touba, Saint Louis.

Beaucoup de personnes passent au Patio et lui serrent la main pour réaffirmer les liens qui existent. Ils serrent aussi ma main parce que je fais partie de ce cercle de personnes qui parle, maintenant il y a aussi des liens qui nous lient. (Field notes, 17/01/2018)

Despite reviewing my initial objective of prioritizing public space in my research actions, I kept my commitment to carry out research in a public setting, in spaces open for all to participate. As a result, the moments where I gathered information were always shared with others and part of a wider collective exchange and learning process.

A second element of publicity is who is invited to these spaces and how is this invitation disseminated. While the participation in meetings and discussion circles was by invitation, plenary debates were widely advertised through the distribution of flyers (see street debates), an e-mail distribution list, posts on online platforms and poster announcements [Figure 2.57]. The posters glued to the pillars in front of the entrance of the Geography and Urban Planning Institute (IUGA) serve as means of communication between the university and the neighborhood. When the working group noticed that the UP debates attracted a large public outside of the neighborhood, it limited its advertising effort to neighborhood inhabitants.



Figure 2.57 Poster announcements of two plenary debates of the Université populaire. (Photos author, 18/06/2018 (left) and 10/10/2017 (right))

### Safety versus conflict

The idea behind the different degrees of publicity was to find the right balance between creating a space in which it is safe to speak and a space where one is able to address others as a means of confronting power. One of the participants stressed the vital importance of conflict in society and explained that waging conflict “proves that people are alive”,

explaining that “conflict is not negative but constructive if certain conditions are respected” (Tchéché-Apéa 2000, 82). Some spaces of speech had the role of safe spaces (discussion circles and meetings)<sup>90</sup> and others had the role of constructive conflict (plenary debates). The plenary debates of the *Université populaire* functioned more as a political arena than a safe space to speak because facing resistance in public debate presents an interest of speaking to power. Mitigating power relations in debate settings, notably through arranging the physical debate session and through managing speaking time, is key to making speech possible and conflict constructive. One of the ways of mitigating power relations therefore is to configure spaces of speech.

### *Group configuration*

The following excerpt from my field notes shows both that the *Université populaire* is not necessarily a safe space in comparison to other spaces, and that the configuration of the group determines the possibility to speak as well as what people say.

This evening, after Abdelaziz Chaambi’s court case, in the office- and meeting space of a befriended association, I hear people that I have known for several years now, take new positions that do not contradict old ones but that shed new light on their positions and make me realize that I access information that has not been shared with me before. It is the presence of others that provokes this exchange and I am tolerated in their midst. Speaking finally is entirely relational. It is the presence of the other that can allow us to speak or that withholds us from speaking. (Field notes, 25/10/2018)

About half of the 15 people present that evening were also present two days before at the *Université populaire* debate that brought together roughly 70 people to discuss how to “rethink the world with Césaire, Fanon and Glissant” (22/01/2018). At Solexine we were a group of 15, the majority racialized, in distinction to the *Université populaire* where we were 70 and where Whites were in the majority. My presence at both debates with partly the same public, a similar theme, but in a different group configuration confirms that power relations and trust alter in the presence of a different public, and that the positions participants defend in debates are circumstantial. Which interventions of the working group allowed for (subaltern) voices to express themselves? Which measures had an impact on the distribution of power within the group? The UP working group sought to mitigate power relations through a balance in the audience, the distribution of speaking time and the profiles of its invited speakers.

### *Balance in the audience*

A white retired middle-class group dominates the public sphere in Villeneuve, their presence is an obstacle to the political expression of racialized inhabitants on issues that concern the

<sup>90</sup> Meetings were generally safe spaces that allowed for a large degree of informality, with the exception of one period when the UP working group decided the contours for its cycle on the colonial past present (April-July 2017) when it became a terrain for profound disagreements and confrontation of power (see chapter 4).

latter more directly. The working group wanted to make space for those who were generally not heard in the neighborhood, nor in mainstream media. In order to do so we had to make sure that minority/majority relations were altered, limiting the participation of those who were part of a majority society and encouraging the participation of those in a minority position. Choosing Villeneuve as the location of these debates was one step in this direction, and what set them apart from debates organized about similar themes in Grenoble's city center.

### *Distributing speaking time*

Distributing speaking time was a second tool to mitigate power relations, hence the importance of the presence of moderators during both the small-table discussions and plenary debates. The working group actively searched for moderators speaking from a minority position, and organized a three-hour training by the Alliance citoyenne (17/11/2015) for a group of Muslim women from the Nous Citoyennes network in order to prepare them for this role and to reinforce their capacity to handle conflict. The strong presence of Muslim women in this role was a cause for criticism: one older white woman participating in the debate felt "manipulated" by their overrepresentation (Field notes November 2015).<sup>91</sup>

While the working group was very attentive to the power dynamics related to class, religion and race, we rapidly understood that we had underestimated gender. The top dogs of the underdogs quickly filled the space that had been created, men of a certain age were systematically the first to take the floor. Women came later and expressed their feelings of having to claim the space and the anguish that went with this. Over time we became stricter with the distribution of speaking time, which resulted in frustration and criticism from some of the usual suspects of the UP. Below I present an illustration of this.

We learned that when people took the floor they often had difficulty leaving it and handing over the microphone. For its last debate on the colonial past-present, the UP working group decided to restrict speaking time to five minutes for speakers and to two minutes for participants. A., a retired high-school teacher, was a frequent and eloquent participant in UP debates. When I gave him the sign that he had to finish his sentence because time was up, he was obviously displeased. He asked for the floor again when I had just announced that we would end the discussion. When I denied him the microphone, he got up and left the room with angry gestures. When I went after him to explain the distribution of time, there was no way he wanted to listen: "I know what it is, you don't want me to speak huh? If it is like that I will leave. I will never set foot here again. You know what your problem is, your prejudice! And you want to work on questions of discrimination?" He addressed these words principally to

<sup>91</sup> This criticism concerned the debate with Saïd Bouamama, 20/11/2015, but cannot be generalized to all debates.

me but he did not exempt Jouda from his criticism. (Field notes 26/05/2018)

This example demonstrates the tensions around speech in the UP. Our attempts to balance power relations making space for women, younger, and less educated participants increased these tensions. A. comes from a privileged background: born to an elite Algerian family, married to a French woman and living in a nice apartment in the city center of Grenoble. As an Algerian high school teacher, he suffered from discrimination (interview, 02/12/2015) which placed him in a victim position in comparison to me. The fact that it was I, a younger white woman, who was distributing speaking time and passing around the microphone reinforced these power dynamics. Thinking from his victim position A. could not see the other power dynamics at play which, in my opinion, was the source of the conflict. This experience demonstrated once more the necessity to adopt an intersectional approach to make (more) space for speech.

### *Experience*

Taking experience as a starting point for debate and “putting everyday life into discourse” (Selmeczi 2012, 508), evened out in some way the power imbalance between those with different levels of education. This choice was heavily contested by some members of Villeneuve Debut who later joined the UP working group (see chapter 4). The decision to speak from one’s experience rather than from one’s convictions also made it easier for different people to relate to each other.

### *Role of invited speakers*

Invited speakers were another means to balance power relations and that is also probably why they were contested. The role of the invited speakers during UP plenary debates was to introduce analytical frameworks to help people understand their own experience, but also to legitimize the feelings and analyses of subalternized participants and give them the vocabulary to defend their ideas. Invited speakers introduced terms and rephrased participants’ contributions in such a way that it provided new tools to defend one’s position with additional terms and arguments. See chapter 4 for additional information about their role.

### *Limits to debate as a research method*

A space is never entirely cleared from power relations, and this is one of the limits of using this method for data collection (for more see section 4.5).

One difficulty of using debates as a research method is how to get access to minority positions, which refers in this paragraph to those who defend a minority point of view during the plenary session or at a small table and may, in this context, represent majority positions outside of the UP. This has for example been the case of Elisabeth\*, a member of the UP working group, who complained on several occasions that she “could not speak” (interview, 08/07/2017).

The informal discussions that continued after the moment when a debate officially ended (during drinks and snacks) in some cases allowed people to express these points of view. For example after the public lecture and debate about the Algerian war one of the participants took the invited speaker aside, the latter having mentioned the bad treatment of the *harkis* in both France and Algeria. *Harki* is “the generic term for native Muslim Algerians who served as auxiliaries in the French Army during the Algerian War of Independence (1954 to 1962)” (Naylor 2017, 135).<sup>92</sup> He wanted to tell her about his own experience growing up in a *harki* family and had not felt safe to speak out during the plenary debate: comments from participants had made it particularly unsafe to do so. The invited speaker had been able to nuance these positions but could not neutralize them. Despite the fact that these stories could not be shared in the plenary, they were nevertheless brought out as a result of group debates. For this reason one-to-one debates and informal discussions before and after the plenary debate were necessary complements, and were integrally part of the research protocol.

*Did the Université populaire make space for subaltern voices?*

One of the political goals of my research was to make space for subaltern voices. Did the Université populaire debate cycles meet this goal? Was this goal compatible with my decision to work with groups that were already organized? While a detailed discussion of the UP participants follows in chapter 4, I briefly answer the question about making space for subaltern voices, taking Spivak’s definition of subaltern, discussed in the previous chapter, as a starting point. Typically, those reduced to a subaltern position cannot be heard by mainstream society, which was the case of Muslims in the post-Charlie period in France. Beyond this context and on a deeper level there is no space for religious convictions in the public sphere, a French specificity that sets it apart from other European countries; an issue that concerns both Christians and Muslims, albeit to different extents.<sup>93</sup> Another part of her definition however states that subalterns do not have access to hegemonic language and are not organized. Pillars of the working groups were grassroots leaders who had their own theoretical, activist and methodological references; had acquired social capital through e.g. activism, professional experience and/or education; and their participation in the working group itself was evidence of their capacity to organize. Racialized working group members therefore cannot be considered to be subaltern, but shared the experiences of marginalization and silencing that more subalternized inhabitants dealt with. With a few exceptions the latter did not participate in the plenary debates of the UP. Could one consider that the participants who shared characteristics of precarity and racialization, but

<sup>92</sup> The term sometimes applies to all native Algerians who supported French Algeria during the war. They are regarded as traitors in Algeria and were subject to deadly reprisals after the Evian Peace Accords (Moser 2014).

<sup>93</sup> This convergence between Christian and Muslims became evident during the debate about Charlie (11/03/2016), when the invited speaker directly spoke to the experiences of Muslims as a Protestant (see chapter 4).

were educated and connected to networks were speaking for this larger group who did not participate and whose voices were not heard? This question raises the issue of the representativity of elite voices, a typical problem of PAR (Reason and Bradbury 2006). I consider the role of racialized working group members as that of “brokers” who facilitate the border crossing from one culture to another, and who play a role in “bridging, linking or mediating between groups or persons of differing cultural backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change” (Jezewski 1990, 497). Their limited representativity was an additional reason not to focus exclusively on the *Université populaire* but on a larger panel of organizations that covered a wider diversity of constituencies. What I understand from this experience is that elite voices on experiences of racism, islamophobia, and subalternity in the UP coincided with the experiences of e.g. more marginalized Muslim women in the neighborhood that were part of Mme Ruetabaga, but that the latter did not give the same priority to these issues in their daily lives as they were dealing with more urgent struggles. They had neither the time, the energy, the confidence, or the language skills to participate.

#### *4.4) The political interest of creating debates: vocal and prefigurative politics*

In this section I argue that the spaces of speech the UP created are also of political interest, speaking in the UP is a political act. To make this point I first draw on Rancière’s work and more particularly on the way Dikeç (2007) and Selmeczi (2012) have applied this work on urban movements of marginalized citizens. According to Selmeczi, vocal politics can challenge the (police) order. Could the UP debate cycles also be analyzed as a form of vocal politics capable of challenging the status quo? Second, I draw on anarchist approaches to geography such as those proposed by Ince (2012; 2019) and Springer (2013; 2014; 2016; Springer et al. 2012) who stress the importance of prefigurative politics in operating change. Drawing on participants’ accounts, I argue that the plenary debates of the *Université populaire* were a form of prefigurative politics.

“Vocal politics” is the term Selmeczi gave to the praxis of the Abahlali shack dweller’s movement in reference to the central role that speaking and listening played in attaining equality, attending to shack dweller’s experiences of suffering, and their power. What Abahlali had in common with the *Université populaire* is that the movement founded its own university,<sup>94</sup> based on the postulate that shack dwellers are “professors of their own suffering” (Selmeczi 2012, 511). There are obvious differences between the two ‘universities’: the *Université populaire* in Villeneuve is not similar in scale, not linked to one particular activist grassroots movement, and brought together a socially diverse audience rather than an audience that shared the same experience of suffering and oppression. They share the fact that they take people’s lived experience as a starting point. According to Selmeczi the verbal articulation of experiences of suffering are important for two reasons:

<sup>94</sup> The University of Abahlali baseMjondolo.

because 1) it allows the emergence of political subjects; 2) it stays close to the lived experiences of shack dwellers, favoring “living politics” rather than “party politics”.

According to my observations speaking in the Université populaire was important because the embodied experiences of inequality, the term I adopt to refer to the experiences of racialized persons in France (see chapter 5), are alienating. They are generally denied by mainstream society, and this creates a gap between what one feels and what can be acknowledged. As a result, and under certain conditions, speaking is a tool in bridging this gap to make one’s experiences real and recognized. When these conditions are met, one can speak of “vocal politics”.

Vocal politics goes against the dynamics of subalternization, understood here as being “distanced - spatially and discursively - from one’s capacity to reveal that the order has no grounds”: people are “rendered unequal” (Selmeczi 2012, 500). Collectively speaking out about their suffering makes this suffering visible and audible, and therefore real. This form of speaking should be considered as a disruption of the (police) order because it “speaks truth to power” (Sium and Ritskes 2013). With particularly strong movements and messages, those in power are forced to acknowledge what they prefer to keep invisible and inaudible. Through speaking out, shack dwellers affirm their claim to the center instead of being reduced to the margins, and therefore claim their equality.

However, there is a risk involved in a single focus on speaking as a tool proposed to those that suffer, as it encourages the accounts of victimhood rather than stressing their agency and making space for their anger (Dorlin 2017).<sup>95</sup> Telling about one’s suffering therefore is not sufficient for becoming a political subject; this practice needs to be accompanied by the enactment of agency. In the case of Abahlali it was roadblocks, occupations, and demonstrations that physically engaged the victims of oppression.

The Université populaire did not propose the same level of muscular engagement but offered other ways of confrontation. While it opened a space to speak about one’s experiences of injustice, the power of speaking in the UP plenary sessions also lay in the fact that those who were depicted as ‘outside of the Republic’ could meet an interlocutor, a person among the participants that incarnated majority society and that would have to listen to them. The context in which these debates were organized was the aftermath of the Paris terrorist attacks in which the media was an important factor of subalternization, giving a large platform to spread islamophobic messages that could not be contradicted. The UP plenary sessions were an occasion for the subalternized to answer: they created

<sup>95</sup> “Les corps sans défense d’Elsa Dorlin,” *France Culture*, 12 octobre 2017.

<https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/la-grande-table-2eme-partie/la-grande-table-2eme-partie-jeudi-12-octobre-2017>. accessed?

opportunities for direct contact in a constructive setting. The possibility to express themselves and disagree is what made them equal and what made them feel human, as the quote below demonstrates.

I turn to participants' voices to further my argument about the political interest of the UP plenary sessions. I have not systematically collected participants' feedback so I rely on the rare instances of feedback available. Two participants (Faouda and Catherine) gave a radio interview about their experience with the Université populaire after the debate about Charlie Hebdo and freedom of expression (11/03/2016).

[Un débat de l'Université populaire] C'est un moment où on rencontre des gens avec qui on n'a pas forcément l'occasion de discuter en dehors de ce genre de manifestations justement, et il y avait un mélange d'origines, de religions, de cultures, voilà de générations. C'était très beau à voir.

[Le débat du 11/03/2016] **Ça contrebalançait ce qu'on a l'habitude de voir** que ce soit dans les médias et là on avait l'impression d'être chez quelqu'un, dans **l'intimité** et en même temps on voyait que c'était possible de **discuter avec quelqu'un qui ne pensait pas forcément comme nous** à la même table on pouvait avoir des **avis différents** sans pour autant s'insulter ou se taper dessus.

Ces soirées-là, en tout cas la soirée à laquelle que j'ai assisté, **ça nous permet de parler en tant que personne**, tout simplement, en tant qu'être humain. (Fadoua, News FM Radio interview, 25/04/2016)

The UP plenary debate was conceived of as a space for difference, and it is in acknowledging mutual difference in a space where none can claim to represent the norm or the order that they can be equal. Catherine's comments bring us to the second way in which the UP plenary sessions were political, stressing that the evening in which she participated gave her hope:

Bon, voilà, on voit que les gens, surtout les personnes âgées ont un peu plus d'inquiétude donc c'est aussi l'occasion de mettre les cartes sur table pour pouvoir rassurer les uns et les autres, pour pouvoir échanger, pour pouvoir s'exprimer parce qu'on n'a pas toujours l'occasion de s'exprimer.

Qu'est-ce que cette soirée vous a apporté?

Ça nous a apporté de l'espoir parce que c'est vrai que c'est un peu dur. [évoque le contexte politique et les élus de droite et d'extrême droite au sud de la France]. (Catherine, News FM Radio interview, 25/04/2016)

It gave her hope because it not only opened a space for the expression of discord, but also for being able to reassure those who fear Muslims in France, and later in the interview she stressed that speaking was vital. It is not only conflict and opposition that people seek in these debate settings, they also seek constructive relationships. This observation speaks to the experience of Gahman et al. 2019 with "desire-based research" in Belize, a method that was inspired by Tuck (2009) who felt that "communities in struggle, particularly Indigenous



and negatively racialized communities should avoid ‘damage-centered’ preoccupations” and should privilege desire instead (Gahman et al. 2019). With the latter, Tuck, according to the understanding of Gahman et al., did not mean that

“the consequences of colonialism are ‘over,’ nor is Tuck suggesting that intergenerational and persisting colonial trauma go unspoken of or be denied. Rather, Tuck is offering desire-based research as an “antidote” to the dangers posed by damage-centered research which pathologizes communities and defines them either by their injuries – or what they are perceived to be lacking.” (Gahman et al. 2019)<sup>96</sup>

This experience speaks to the observation that a second form of politics in the UP was prefigurative politics, prefiguration being “a distinctive concept in anarchist thought and practice embedding envisioned future modes of social organization into the present” (Ince 2012, 1645). Based on participants’ feedback I understand how the UP plenary sessions have contributed to the prefiguration of what society could look like. Participants and invited speakers commented that these gatherings were a reflection of (*à l’image de*) what they wanted society to look like, of a society in the making (for a further exploration of the relationship between imagination and reality for making other futures possible, see chapter 7). Fadoua took the floor in one of the debates and formulated this idea more clearly:

Alors je tenais d’abord à remercier les organisateurs qui nous ont permis de nous rassembler ce soir et saluer vraiment cette belle initiative afin de pouvoir participer à ce genre de rencontre. J’aimerais tellement que le reste de la société soit à l’image de ce qu’on est aujourd’hui. (Fadoua, UP debate, 11/03/2016)

One of the invited speakers, Abdelaziz Chaambi, formulated a similar hope that the Université populaire was the prefiguration of something. Seeing the social and racial diversity of the UP participants during its first debate (March 2015) inspired him with some hope in a further depressing political context.

Et cela [mixité lors du débat UP 20 mars 2015] me rappelle un peu cela [mixité à Villeneuve au milieu des années 1970]. Et cela me donne un peu espoir en disant que ce n'est pas tout perdu ! C'est peut-être un début de quelque chose! Parce que c'est vrai qu'ici vous êtes en train de faire quelque chose d'un peu original, sur Grenoble !<sup>97</sup> Mais peut-être que c'est un début de solution, d'arriver à se reparler, d'arriver à casser ces cloisonnements de classe, de race, de religion, d'ethnies, d'origine. De dire qu'on peut s'asseoir autour de la table et vider son sac. (Chaambi, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

#### 4.5) What is the scientific interest of public debates as a research method?

In this section I will point out what I see as the principal interests of public debates as a means of data collection in comparison to interviews.

<sup>96</sup> Online publication, no page numbers available.

<sup>97</sup> He referred both the newly elected left-leaning and green City Council and to the Université Populaire.

The advantage of meeting in a group is that the invocation of a certain context elicits memories and brings up anecdotes, stimulated by group discussion, which would probably not come to mind in other contexts. This situation corresponds to some extent to the advantages of focus groups. Their difference is that in focus groups, the researcher is in charge of moderating the debate and formulating the research question, and at no point checks whether his problem statement reflects the priorities of the participants.

My experience with the Université populaire confirms the idea that the evoking of experiences in group debate may activate or actualize a person's tacit knowledge and make the latter overt. Configuring spaces of speech are about creating a setting in which the knowledge of the research participant expresses itself in a more spontaneous way than when prompted by the researcher in an interview setting. The interest of group discussions is that the shared experience of group members may mutually actualize knowledge that the researcher otherwise would not have access to. This has been the case for example when participants of the Université populaire spoke about painful experiences of growing up during the Algerian war. They turned to each other for mutual recognition, support and answers, aware of and accepting my presence but not speaking to me. See the extract of field notes developed below.

Danielle, with whom I spoke informally at different occasions and whom I interviewed once, tells one evening at the Université populaire debate, dealing with the Algerian independence war (22/10/2017), that her father had been involved in the Algerian armed resistance movement as *porteur de valise*<sup>98</sup> and had been imprisoned and how this had affected her. Her story resonated with the experiences of others in the audience who started to tell their own stories. It was an invitation for other participants to share how they navigated between oblivion, silence and remembering in the transmission of a violent past to their children. Their stories were destined to an audience that, to a certain extent, could relate to their experience and not to me. (Field notes, 23/10/2017)

Spaces of speech are also spaces of contradiction among people confronted with the same or similar situations: in interviews, it is easy to make a statement if there is no one to contradict it. By getting out of the privacy of an interview setting, and by entering the public sphere the people that I would otherwise interview, did not speak (only) to me but spoke to their peers and other people that could contradict them. They speak from multiple identities (e.g. national, religious, political, class, neighborhood inhabitant, civil society organizations they represent etc.) to an audience that also represents this diversity. The plenary debates of the Université populaire are a great opportunity to hear many different and contradictory voices in one single space. Contradiction and disagreement have highlighted the fault lines in

<sup>98</sup> The term *porteur de valise* literally means "suitcase carrier" and was used to refer to those who carried bags of money from Algerian workers in France into Algeria to support the armed liberation movements (see chapter 4).

the neighborhood and in society at large and they are an important starting point for understanding power dynamics.

#### *Limits of this research method*

Despite its merits, there are obviously also limits to this method of organizing public debates, which I list below.

- Information shared publicly in debates is necessarily concise, as the speaker's time is limited. They do not allow the development of a longer argument.
- The researcher cannot probe the research participant for more detailed information and cannot paraphrase to verify whether he/she understood the statement correctly.
- Statements in plenary debates are made in front of an audience so there is also an element of performance that is absent in interviews.
- As mentioned earlier, speaking in public is a factor of stress and only the most confident will take the floor, so power dynamics still do silence certain voices
- Participation has a cost for observation. Being involved in the organization of debates is an important impediment to the quality of one's observations during meetings and debates. In addition, I was often quite nervous about how a debate would turn out and therefore the quality of my field notes during the debate was very poor. The film recordings of the debates are a partial compensation for the gaps in my observations.

I tried to make up for these limits/biases through interviews, a point I develop in the next chapter dedicated to the constitution of my corpus, based on the data collected in the spaces of speech discussed above.

### **5) Data collected in decolonial configurations**

In this section I provide an overview of the data that I gathered throughout my research collaborations.

#### *5.1) Produced data*

Different moments and places were important for the (co)production of data: spaces of speech (5.1.a); dialogued interviews (5.1.b); the court case of Abdelaziz Chaambi (5.1.c); and taking pictures while wandering (5.1.d).

##### *5.1.a) Spaces of speech*

Creating spaces of speech and public debates as a research method has allowed the co-production of the following primary data: field notes, pictures, video and audio recordings of the plenary debates of the Université populaire. Table 2.4 below lists which spaces of speech produced which data.

**Table 2.4 The data produced by spaces of speech**

Space of Speech	Number	Data
<b>Meetings</b>		
UP meetings April-July 2017	6	Audio recording, transcripts
Other working groups	n.a. <sup>99</sup>	Written field notes, notebook
<b>Workshops</b>		
Discussion circles UP	2	Video and audio recording, transcripts
Workshops APLP	6	Field notes
Workshops Marchons	4	Field notes, partly audio-recorded but not transcribed
Workshops UP	1	No data
Workshops FUIQP	2	No data
<b>Street debates</b>		
UP	5	Field notes, summary document
APLP	2	No data
Villeneuve Debout	1	No data
<b>Plenary debates</b>		
UP	16 (11) <sup>100</sup>	Audio and video recordings, pictures, field notes, proceedings
Other	25	Field notes

See appendices for details:

- List of street debates (appendix 1)
- List of workshops, including discussion circles (appendix 2)
- List of plenary debates (appendix 3)

### *Field Notes*

My field notes fit into two categories: 1) notes written in a notebook during working group meetings and debates, which were a combination of logistical organization, the stories I heard and my own observations; 2) notes written on the computer once I returned to my desk (at home or at the University) after meetings or debates, or other spaces of speech. They are both descriptive and reflective. Field notes are separated in different documents: 10 written workbooks and word documents organized per year (2013-2019).

<sup>99</sup> They were too many, I lost track of their exact number.

<sup>100</sup> 15 debates in total, but only 11 have been transcribed because two debates lacked video recording, and two other debates lacked interest ("Pour comprendre la géopolitique" 03/06/2016 and "Pour comprendre le djihadisme" 03/06/2016).

My telephone served as a recording tool when I could not write, typically when driving back home from events, speaking out loud about them while my memory was still fresh.

When rereading my field notes in the process of data analysis, I could not find a number of the things I was looking for. My notes were silent about moments that took an important place in my memory, in particular the experiences that had been painful, such as the moments when I received criticism. While in hindsight I can say that these were the most important learning moments, they were also most demanding emotionally. I could physically feel their impact in the form of physical tension. Their emotional burden weighed more heavily than the opportunity to learn through detailed transcripts and in-depth reflections. This emotion was due to a fear of being rejected in the field, to do harm after all, and to fall into the trap of adopting exactly the behavior that I criticized elsewhere. I guess I had to hold on to what was working and what was happening rather than not happening, at the time feeling insecure about whether my explorations would lead to something meaningful. In hindsight knowing that at least some things worked, I regret not having more records of these learning moments. Another difficulty in taking notes was that it was difficult to combine my role of organizer of debates and my role of observer. Transcripts of debates have therefore been a much more important source than field notes.

#### *Audio and video recording*

Video, and to a lesser extent audio recording, can be experienced as intrusive tools. This is also the reason why the UP working group did not introduce audio recording at the tables during plenary debates, to prioritize confidentiality and some form of intimacy in the group discussions. My field notes make up partially and unsatisfactorily for this gap.

It is particularly delicate to use recording tools in a context where people have hands-on experience with the epistemological violence of (mis)representation. I have therefore felt very reluctant to demand permission to record working group meetings (plenary sessions were easier). With hindsight I understand this reluctance as an indicator of my own hesitation to position myself in the field as a researcher. Formulating such a demand would clearly situate me as a researcher, with particular interests that I did not share with other group members, and asking the question opened the way for possible rejection.<sup>101</sup>

The fact that I have at my disposal hours of audio and video recording is thanks to Alain whose professional experience in popular education taught him the importance of publishing outcomes and documenting collective work. He was the one who asked at the beginning of each plenary debate and discussion circle permission for filming. The motivation he gives is “to record the activities of the Université populaire”. He did not specify that the recordings would also be used for academic research but I consider that I

<sup>101</sup> Which is what happened when I proposed recording UP working group meetings.

have the permission to quote from them anonymously because these voices were brought into the public domain through publishing the transcripts.

Above mentioned ethical concerns about recording as being intrusive are particularly true for creating images and the risk that the image will get disconnected from the voices behind it, a point I will further develop in chapter 6, drawing on Butler.

### *5.1.b) Dialogued interviews*

I revised my original decision not to employ interviews because they became a means to compensate for the limits of debates. There were several reasons for inviting the people I collaborated with or those that I got to know during public debates for a discussion in a one-to-one setting.

First, when they had shared stories or taken positions in debates that were singular and complementary for building my argument, including contradictory voices. The goal of inviting them was to obtain additional information, requesting permission to record and quote them and, if they agreed, which name they wanted me to use.

Second, in the case of the people with whom I collaborated, the interview setting was an opportunity to clarify my position in the field as both representing *Modus Operandi* as co-organizer of certain events (Université populaire, 2<sup>nd</sup> October Celebration) and as a PhD student representing the University. They therefore also compensated for some of the problems involved in “going unscripted” (De Leeuw et al. 2017). In the beginning of my research, I was unclear about my position and intentions in the field and where I was going. The context of 2015 played a large role in this insecurity because it shifted my research objectives. Unease about this lack of clear direction was not only mine but also that of (at least) one of the persons involved in the Université populaire, as was reported to me by the director of the Régie de quartier.

Third, interviews were a means to integrate a feedback loop in my data analysis, in order to deal with an additional limit of public debates. The latter does not give the possibility of paraphrasing what a participant said to check whether I correctly understood it, as is the case in interviews.

I have used a method of “dialogued interviews” (*entretiens dialogués*), which are interviews that follow a rough outline but that leave ample space for dialogue between interviewer and interviewed. This method is inspired both by Orage’s training in popular education methods and by the Alliance citoyenne principle in one-to-one meetings that speaking time between the organizer and community participant is equally distributed (“50/50”) (for a specific way of using dialogued interviews see also Scharmer et al. 2012). While transcribing my interviews, I made the following observation in my field notes.

Mes entretiens ne sont pas des entretiens, ce sont des discussions.  
Je ne suis pas neutre, je m’engage dans la discussion, je donne mon  
opinion ou je joue l’avocat du diable en invitant l’autre à se

positionner. C'est sur le principe de l'Alliance Citoyenne que chacun parle, dans mon cas pas à 50% mais je m'exprime. Je raconte aussi des anecdotes... [Field notes when working on the transcription of the interview with Tassadit, 30/03/2017]

Dialogued interviews correspond to the principle of reciprocal relationships in which both researcher and research participant share their analyses and the latter are not reduced to speaking about their experience. They are an additional opportunity for the co-production of knowledge.

I conducted three cycles of interviews.

The first took place during the preliminary phase of my research when I started my thematic explorations (2013-2014).

The second cycle of interviews (2016-2017) responded to the objective of acquiring information about the link between neighborhood stigmatization and violence. A topic that was transversal across my collaborations with all groups, but about which I lacked specific data.

A third cycle of interviews (2017) corresponded to the goal of including a feedback loop on islamophobia in the post-Charlie period in France. This need arose when I was asked to speak about this topic at the Forum Enseigner les mondes musulmans, and I wanted to check my conclusions with the persons involved in the UP and APLP debates, on whose stories I based my argument. I invited seven women<sup>102</sup> to meet me separately. After taking the time to clarify my position, I submitted to each the text I presented (in French) and asked them whether they agreed with my interpretation. From that moment onwards the interviews took the form of a conversation. This feedback-loop has strengthened certain affirmations and altered my ideas about the veil as a political statement (see chapter 5).

Interviews took place at the Maison des habitants, as a space of mediation between the neighborhood and public institutions, and in the cafeteria of the IUGA in order to create more clarity about my position and to open this space to those not familiar with it [see Figure 2.58 for a photo at the end of an interview at the MDH]. It was a further means to integrate the Institute into the neighborhood, in addition to the initiative of the Rencontres de Géopolitique critique and the methodological explorations that started to create this link.

<sup>102</sup> Alicia, Catherine, Fadoua, Jouda, Nadia, Tassadit, Zéliha



Figure 2.58 Interview with Fadoua who insisted that I use her own name and who agreed that I took a picture. (Photo author, 19/05/2017)

For an overview of interviews see appendix 4.

#### 5.1.c) Court case Abdelaziz Chaambi

A kind of field data that I have not yet mentioned because it is not part of my research collaborations, but that has taken an important place in my analysis, are the court hearings of Abdelaziz Chaambi as President of the action group Coordination contre le racisme et l’Islamophobie (CRI). My initial encounter with him as speaker of the first Université populaire debate (20/03/2015) continued at these two specific moments and widened the perimeter of my field research, extending it from Villeneuve to the Courthouses of Bourgoin-Jallieu and Grenoble [Table 2.5]. Attending these court hearings was a practical application of the ethical principle I adopted, that research relationships go beyond the moment of information gathering and that the relationship should be guided by values of solidarity.

**Table 2.5 Moments of data gathering for the Abdelaziz Chaambi case**

Abdelaziz Chaambi court case		
Preparation for the debate at Solexine (MDH)	15/01/2018	Field notes
Debate “Quelles libertés pour nos luttes?” in Solexine, Grenoble	24/01/2018	Field notes
<i>Court hearings</i>		
Courthouse of Bourgoin-Jallieu	15/01/2017	Field notes
Courthouse of Grenoble	24/01/2018	Field notes

#### 5.1.d) Picturing the neighborhood

Due to the sensitivity of taking pictures in the neighborhood, I have not relied on pictures as an important source of data. My pictures are restricted to the spaces of speech in which I was involved, and to the changing urban environment in Villeneuve as a result of urban



renewal. The quality of my pictures is quite poor because they are taken with a mobile phone, the tool I felt most comfortable with because it is accessible to all and not unusual to use it in the neighborhood, nor in public debates. The only time I used a high-quality camera was the occasion I went to photograph the neighborhood of Villeneuve Echirolles with APLP members in view of a presentation to our Danish partners [Figure 2.59].



Figure 2.59 Picturing Villeneuve (Echirolles). (Photos author, 13/04/2015)

With members of Agir pour la Paix (APLP) I wandered the neighborhood of Villeneuve (Echirolles) and Nørrebro (Copenhagen) during our journey through Europe. Given the tensions around producing images in and of the neighborhood, a topic I further develop in chapter 3, it was important for me that APLP members from Echirolles held the camera and photographed their social environment in the neighborhood. The photos they took were the occasion for an exchange about the meaning these places had for them. Six months later I presented these photos to another APLP member (Joachim) who had not participated in the tour and I asked him to pick some of the photos. He chose the ones he would like to comment on during an interview about his experience of the neighborhood. Both the pictures and the interview led to the creation of a video document that was presented as the introduction to the Université populaire debate on neighborhood stigmatization (22/11/2015) and served as an illustration of the theme identified by the Université populaire working group, that of the gap between representations of the neighborhood and lived experience.

### *5.2) Existent data*

In addition to the data that I have produced and co-produced during collaborations, I have also relied on existing data, by which I understand the documents produced by neighborhood actors and public authorities, such as reports, photos, statistical and geospatial data. I briefly present the main sources: documents by local actors; night mediation reports; the archival collection of Jean-François Parent et Jacques Joly; and geospatial and statistical data.

#### *Documents by local actors*

- [Book] Raynaud, Pierre, *Vivre, c'est quoi? Parcours et réflexions d'un homme du temps présent*. Paris: l'Harmattan, 2016.
- [Book] Monkam-Noubissi, Aurélie. 2014. *Le ventre arraché*. Montrouge: Bayard.
- [Document] *Décryptage Villeneuve le rêve brisé*, 2013, Association des Habitants de la Crique Sud
- [Document] "*Livre blanc*", Collectif inter-associations de la Villeneuve, 2011
- [Document] Mouafo, Herrick et Bouhafis, Mayare, *Penser la non-violence et agir sur la violence: la violence n'appartient pas à un lieu*, 2019
- Meeting minutes Marche blanche collective (2014 – 2016)
- Workshop minutes APLP (2015-2015)
- Open letter Claude Jacquier (2012)
- Open letter Khaled Satour (2010)
- Press statement *Dossier de presse dépôt de plainte contre France 2 suite au reportage d'Envoyé spécial*, 2013
- Proceedings "Comprendre et agir sur la violence", *Les Actes de la soirée d'hommage à Kevin et Sofiane*, Museum of Grenoble, 17 June 2014
- Report "*Rapport voyage d'étude atelier 'agir pour la paix', le silence et l'indifférence sont complices: agissons contre toutes les formes de violences*," 2015
- [Document] "*Ensemble imaginons 100 discours admirables*", Villeneuve Debout, 2012
- Working documents APLP

#### *Night Mediation Reports*

The daily reports produced by the neighborhood's night mediation service over the period from 2009-2016 provide summary descriptions of 1,439 reported unsanctioned uses of (semi-) public space considered problematic.

#### *Archival collection of Jean-François Parent et Jacques Joly*

The first source of existing data is the archival collection of Jean-François Parent and Jacques Joly that I used for photos and maps to illustrate the conception and construction process of Villeneuve. The collection "Jean-François Parent et Jacques Joly, urbanistes à Grenoble" contains files on which Parent and Joly worked as urban planners in the period from 1966 à 2010.<sup>103</sup> The files are available for consultation at the Archives Départementales de l'Isère and are available there for consultation partially available in digital format on the website

<sup>103</sup> Jean-François Parent was an urbanist involved in the conception of Villeneuve as a member of the Atelier d'urbanisme et d'architecture (AUA) (1964-1978) and was responsible for the creation of Grenoble's Agence de l'urbanisme de la Région Grenobloise (AURG) (1966), and was later responsible for the operational part of the construction of Villeneuve (1971 – 1983), until he was discharged of this function by Carignon. Jacques Joly was an urban planner and Professor, Director of the Department of Social Geography and Vice-President of the University Pierre-Mendès-France in Grenoble.

*InfoVilleneuve - le portail de la Villeneuve de Grenoble* (infovn.free.fr).<sup>104</sup> For a detailed overview of its content, see (2019).

#### *Geospatial and statistical data*

Data about the perimeters of priority intervention zones defined in the different urban policy frameworks come from the open data platform of French Government: data.gouv.fr. I use the GIS data made available on this platform in the various maps throughout my thesis. Additional information about the sources of the specific geospatial information used in a map can be found in the captions.

When I wanted to provide relevant statistical information to situate Villeneuve in the Grenoble metropolitan area (*Grenoble-Alpes Métro*), I encountered some difficulty with obtaining exact data. My study area, the area known as Villeneuve Grenoble and Villeneuve Echirolles does not correspond to any administrative category. The administrative unit of reference for the municipality of Grenoble is Sector 6 which covers a larger area and the data collected by national monitoring of priority zones only correspond partly to the perimeters of Villeneuve (Grenoble and Echirolles) because they focus on the social housing blocks where low household revenues are concentrated. This means that the data of the Observatoire national des zones urbaines sensibles (ONZUS) and the Observatoire national de la politique de la ville (ONPV) for Villeneuve (Echirolles) only covers the Essarts and Surieux areas but not Les Granges, which is of particular concern to me. The data for Villeneuve (Grenoble) also covers the Village Olympique area [Figure 2.60]. The yellow areas in the map are included in the Atlas des Zones urbaines sensibles<sup>105</sup> and the hashed area corresponds to my study area.

<sup>104</sup> <http://patrimoine.vn.free.fr/#urba>, accessed 20/02/2020

<sup>105</sup> Atlas des Zones urbaines sensibles, <https://sig.ville.gouv.fr/atlas/ZUS>, accessed 27/10/2020.

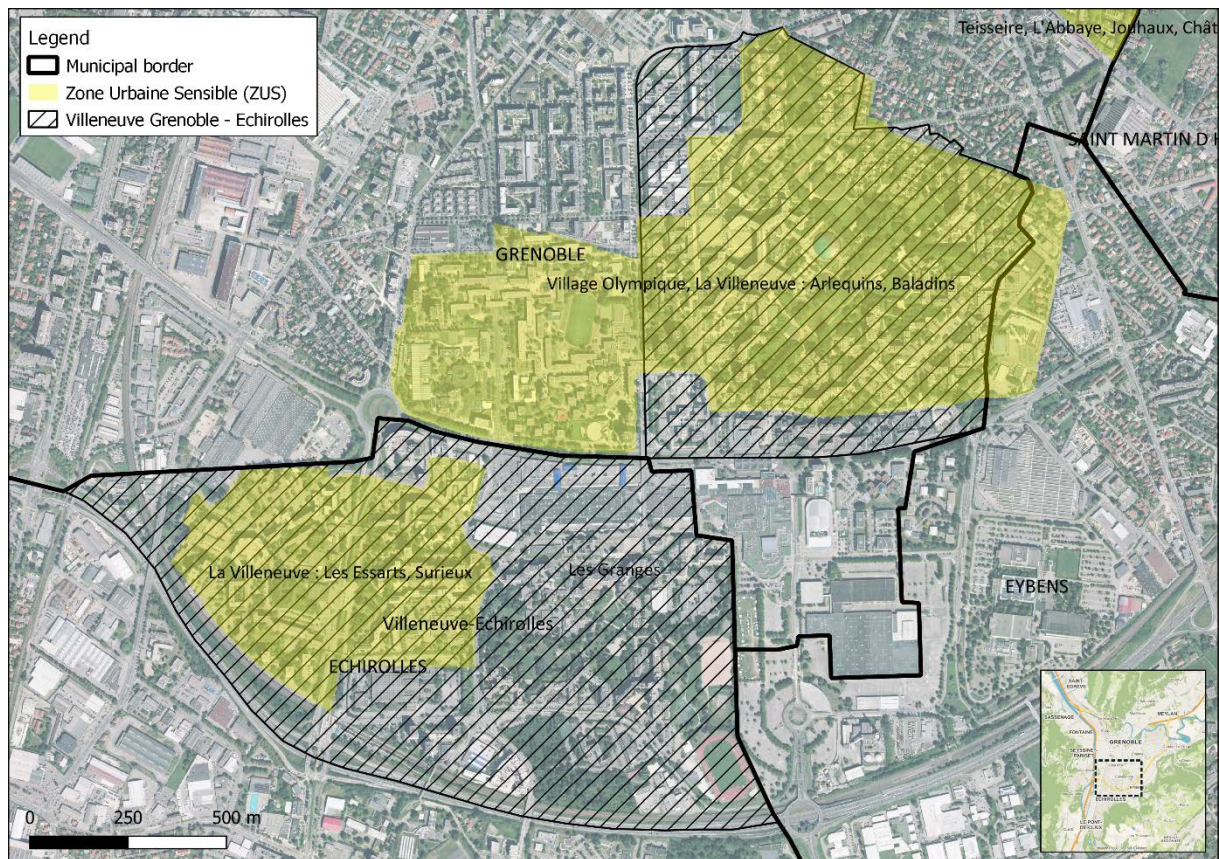


Figure 2.60 Map of ZUS perimeters and study area. (Base map Google Earth, GIS data data.gouv.fr)<sup>106</sup>

In order to give a general perception of these neighborhoods, I resolved to use the Zones urbaines sensibles (ZUS) data of 2013, based on the 2009 census, because the area it covered is less restrictive than the more recent perimeters of the Quartiers prioritaires de la Politique de la Ville (QPV)<sup>107</sup> of 2015. The reservations about territorial delineation have to be taken into account though.

## 6) Data analysis: ethical, political and practical issues

It is at the moment of writing this thesis that my research collaborations ended and that I had to take full responsibility for their outcome. In hindsight, I understand that my drive for seeking shared ownership over the research project and the co-production of knowledge may not have been only driven by ethics but also by feelings of fear and insecurity. Joint ownership provided some sense of security - I was not alone - but it reached its limits during the phase of data analysis. Even though in most groups we reflected together on our joint actions, only I could define the research question and storyline for this thesis. I needed to accept that writing for an academic audience was my responsibility, not for the least

<sup>106</sup> <https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/zones-urbaines-sensibles-zus/>, accessed 10/01/2020

<sup>107</sup> Translation: National urban policy priority neighbourhoods

because I was paid to do so and not others, who were either volunteers or were paid to do something else.

In this section I deal with the ethical, political and practical questions around data analysis, looking into the political function of written text -which story should it tell?-, into issues around permission (ethical) and practical issues (the steps I took to analyze my sources).

### *6.1) Which story to tell, from data to corpus*

Once I had collected my data, which elements to choose from this mass of text? With all these spoken words, it was my responsibility to choose a problem statement, to make a narrative, a story line. My initial hypothesis that during research collaborations a single shared problem statement would emerge has been true to some extent. It was for example true for the issue of neighborhood stigmatization and the issue of the colonial past-present, but there were many other issues that came up in the different groups I collaborated with. Which story and which analytical framework could hold all the different groups and initiatives I worked with together, and explain them in relation to each other? Which story is interesting to tell from a political point of view, addressing an academic audience? Partially, it is a story of unlearning as the following field notes demonstrate:

The story I started with, of differences that struck me, is always the first way of approaching the unknown, an approach in binary comparison -of differences-, but there are other stories to tell. While spending more time engaging with others, we become aware of the things that we share. I learnt that there always is another way of telling a story. Over time I did no longer see differences and learnt that each difference at the same time is a connection and that a story thus also can be told from the point of view of this connection. What did we have in common? (Field notes, 01/12/2017)

The answer to the question which story to tell can be found in the introduction where I present the structure of my thesis. The different steps that helped me in this process are further explained in section 6.3, first I deal with some ethical questions I encountered.

### *6.2) Ethical questions around permission for the use of data*

The most important ethical concerns have not arisen in data gathering but in using and choosing from this data set, for the reasons already mentioned in the previous section about the ambiguity of my position and the unclarity of what I would do with the data (as it had been unclear to me as well until the moment of data analysis and writing).

I obtained different levels of permission for publicizing the information obtained from sources in the field. Permission was most explicit during interviews, agreeing to record and the use of real or invented first names. I consider that I have full permission to interpret and quote anonymously from the transcripts of the Université populaire debates, since video recording and transcripts were explicitly and systematically announced. I equally consider that I have full permission to quote from my notes of the court cases and the speeches in

front of the Courthouse, for the same reason that I consider them to be part of the public domain. However, I am no longer really comfortable with my starting point that any information shared in a public discussion (accessible to all and publicly announced) would provide me with the authorization to use these as field data and quote from them. The people that participated in a certain debate formulated their speech/spoke according to the audience present at that moment in time and space.

The ethical dilemma I struggle with is that people consent that I may hear what they say at that moment in space and time, but they do not automatically consent to my sharing of this information with other audiences. My starting point that everything that is said in public settings belongs to the public and can be cited anonymously has resulted in a feeling of discomfort on two different occasions: when writing about the debate that followed Abdelaziz Chaambi's court hearing, and when starting to write about the FUIQP.

My hybrid position in the field of activist/researcher created ambiguity about who people spoke to at which moments, for example during meetings, but also in debates that were semi-public or took place with a small group of participants. The following notes speak about these doubts.

There is a feeling of unease while I am working on my notes of the debate "*Quelles libertés pour nos lutes?*" which I helped to organize on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 2018, after Abdelaziz Chaambi's court hearing. While, originally, the three of us involved in the organization targeted a public audience of around 50 people, we found ourselves with around 15 people around the table who mostly knew each other because we were all involved in associations or activist collectives that have actions or themes in common. My presence there, that evening, was legitimate because I helped to organize the evening but I am very much aware of the distrust of one of the persons present. She is from the FUIQP and has in the past expressed critique about white academics making a career out of the struggles of the oppressed. I hear bell hooks all the time while I am writing, whispering in my ear, who am I to tell those stories? What am I authorized to write about and what should be kept unwritten, at least by me? (Field notes, 11/10/2019)

My discomfort comes from the fact that, despite discussions being public, the people who spoke did not address the audience of this text but addressed the audience in the room and over time I have become very much aware that formulations on politically sensitive issues depend on the audience. I have resolved this feeling of discomfort by only quoting Abdelaziz Chaambi as a public speaker.

The group in which my presence as activist/researcher was met with most suspicion was the FUIQP, with whom it has not been possible to set up a collaboration due to a general distrust of academics. The latter are accused of speaking in the name of the racially marginalized and getting paid for it, as the following quote demonstrates.

Dès qu'il faut analyser les choses, là on va faire appel à un universitaire blanc qui va faire du beurre là-dessus, pour qui c'est

son boulot, son business. C'est comme ça qu'il gagne sa vie et du coup il vient t'expliquer la vie, et lui on l'écoute alors que toi t'es pas écouté. (Participant, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

There was heightened awareness in the FUIQP group that knowledge is an important tool of domination. In absence of permission from the Fringale/FUIQP group to use the field notes of the group's meetings,<sup>108</sup> my writing about the FUIQP38 has been guided by the decision to only quote from the information the FUIQP38 itself decided to publicize (Facebook, flyers and reports) and to quote the speakers it invited to (semi-)public meetings. It is however undeniable that my presence in the group provided me with insights without which it would have been difficult to write the case that served as a basis for chapter eight. It is during these meetings that I got to know people whom I continued to see after I was no longer part of the collective, and who informed me about the collective's development.

### 6.3) Practical issues around data analysis

This subsection describes the practical steps I took to analyze my data. At the beginning of 2017, I started to code my data sources with Nvivo using in total 130 different codes (called "nodes" in the French versions of Nvivo), and 33 cases. I used nodes between 1 and 128 times to code data sources. Figure 2.61 shows the nodes that I created (left column), the number of sections to which I attributed a particular node (right column) and the number of sources in which I selected sections (middle column).

Name	Sources	References
voix voix parole		128
colonial		110
discrimination ou rejet		97
quartier		86
confrontation et conflit		63
violence		55
identité assignation communautarisme		52
place		39
action associative et autre		39
résistance et transformation		37
(in)visible et (in)audible		31
voile		31
citoyenneté		31
Islam et musulman		29
police		28

Figure 2.61 List of nodes used between 20 and 128 times in Nvivo. (Screenshot, 01/05/2020)

My use of Nvivo was limited to creating analytical categories. I did not use Nvivo to further analyze, for example, the relations between nodes or to identify clusters. The diverse character of my data and the contexts in which it evolved did not allow systematic comparison among the sources. Subsequently, I compared the Nvivo nodes with the list of 50 concepts that resulted from my literature review [Figure 2.62] and which I found were

<sup>108</sup> The decision was taken during one of the meetings in 2015 that, by joining the group, each could only represent him/herself and have no other political or professional interests.

relevant for analyzing my field observations. A cross-analysis of the two helped to eliminate nodes and concepts that did not match, and identify the themes that were both relevant in the field and from a theoretical point of view. This cross-analysis has resulted in my initial thesis outline. Finding a theoretical framework that could hold my entire fieldwork together, connecting my original interest in - and context of - violence in Villeneuve to the dynamics of spatial stigmatization and experiences of discrimination and racism was a challenge. Yet I deemed it important to keep the themes together rather than choosing one because it was through this combination that I felt my thesis could add to existing literature.

*Figure 2.62 List (incomplete) of concepts from literature review (alphabetical order) using Microsoft Word. (Screenshot, 01/05/2020)*

I returned to NVIVO after having organized my field research in five themes [Figure 2.63] corresponding to my thematic explorations in order to restructure my sources accordingly. Each time I started to write a chapter, I returned to the nodes in NVIVO that were relevant in relation to the topic of my chapter and copied all coded text per node in a word document (one document per node). Subsequently I selected the relevant quotes and organized these in Microsoft Excel, using new and more specific keywords. Figure 2.64 below provides an example of quotes I used in chapter 3. The result was a structure that served as the basis for writing a chapter.

The disadvantage of this method of data analysis, typical for inductive inquiry because the quotes of participants formed the main input for a chapter, was that my text often went in many different directions and that I wanted to include too many quotes. My own arguments also got lost at times among the different positions of participants. My choice of theory at times also may come across as eclectic because I looked at what theoretical input might



place participant's quote in a larger perspective rather than which quotes could confirm/invalidate certain theoretical hypotheses.

Figure 2.63 Organizing sources in Nvivo, according to leading themes in explorations. (Screenshot, 01/05/2020)

Frontières quartier		
grand bou Tina		[dessine sur un papier]
LIDL, CAF tina		CD : Et les frontières du quartier pour toi sont où ? Où est-ce que tu dis, bah, je suis sortie du quartier ? Bah quand on dépass
		Après on arrive en ville (là et là, point la carte qu'elle dessine) Lidl, une route qui fait tout le long et là il y a le bus qui a son
	Mounira	05/06/2017
		CD : Quand tu sors de la VN pour rentrer à la maison, à quel moment as-tu le sentiment que tu as quitté le quartier ?
		A quel moment ? Quand je... C'est marrant, car ça me le fait [et je m'en suis jamais rendu compte] [Rit] C'est quand j'arrive à
		CD : Le grand boulevard ?
		Le grand boulevard. Quand j'arrive là...
		Oui. Quand j'arrive là j'ai quitté le quartier. Les quartiers car je ne travaille pas que dans un quartier mais dans des quartiers
Manque d	Joachim	17/11/2015 [ce qu'il fait qu'on reste au quartier, manque de repères quand on y sort]
Grand/Plai	Joachim	17/11/2015 J : A partir de Grand Place clairement. Et même géographiquement c'est limité comme ça aussi à Grenoble. Après Gra
Carrefour	microtrotto	20/10/2015 Claske : où est la frontière du quartier ? R : Carrefour. Claske : Simply ? R : Non, simple c'est New York market, c'est cosmop
	microtrotto	22/10/2015 Frontières du quartier : Carrefour, Echirolles, finit à l'Abbaye)
<b>Tensions entre quartiers</b>		
	Mounira	05/06/2017 Nos enfants ils ont grandi dans le quartier donc on était des familles, des grosses.... Mon ex-mari faisait partie d'une des gr
se défend	Amelle	09/09/2017 Se défendre (voir 2012)
chaque qu	Yassine et k	13/04/2015
violence	Alicia	01/05/2018 Villeneuve et Échirolles ne se sont jamais entendu. Ca date de longtemps des guerres de clans ou je sais pas
	Fadoua	19/05/2017 About fear for her children after 2012
<b>Occupation territoire</b>		
	Médiateurs de nuit	à faire
tension su	Alain	30/05/2016 Voila, donc sur cette violence en disparition, moi je sens que c'est vachement fragile. A nouveau, quand je traverse la place
	Joachim	
appropria	Denis Stebc	2013 DS : oui trop trop, donc cette notion de territoire un peu fermé ce n'est pas bon du tout, c'est bien pour ça qu'il ouvre, il fau
		Non mais ceci dit c'est ça c'est la notion de territoire, c'est terrible. Ils se sont approprié un territoire
traffiq dro	APLP tour	13/04/2015 En France [vente des drogues] c'est organisé par des groupes. Ces groupes occupent un certain territoire. Hiérarchie très for
		Quand on se ballade dans le parc je leur demande qui occupe ce territoire ? Personne, le parc est aux familles.
jour et nu	Morgane	
passer	Zéliha	08/06/2017 (pas traverser le quartier, elle est à l'aise dans "sa zone", à la frontière du quartier, mais pas au coeur du quartier (Géants et
occupations spéc	60 place d	Alain
		30/05/2016 Le 60, en plus on avait une activité pour les petits, c'est-à-dire qu'on avait un lieu pour les activités des moins de 6 ans. Ils éi
		Elisabeth
		30/05/2016 J'ai quand même vécu mais à ce moment on te connaissait pas mais Alain t'en parlera mieux les moments des années 2008
		Alain
		30/05/2016 Plus du tout, mais ça a duré vachement longtemps les conséquences de ça, moi je trouve. Et ce que je constate vraiment, la j'
		60 Médiateurs de nuits
		voir aussi discussion et rapports médiateurs de nuit au sujet du 60
	30-40 Galé	Ariane
		Elisabeth
		autré récit des occupations

Figure 2.64 Organizing quotes according to sub-themes in Microsoft Excel. (Screenshot, 01/05/2020)

In conclusion, I worked simultaneously on:

- “Portraits” of research participants and “cases” that brought together all primary and secondary sources about one event or moment that was important in order to illustrate the general argument developed in the different chapters.
  - # Université populaire exploration into the legacy of the colonial past
  - # Envoyé spécial
  - # Abdelaziz Chaambi court case
  - # Charlie Hebdo case and the impossibility of speaking
  - # APLP case
  - # FUIQP case
- Literature review on certain theoretical concepts
- Quotes in relation to key themes I identified through NVIVO

My methodological explorations are part of my fieldwork but are not part of my corpus. The data that are part of my corpus are those that matched my thematic inquiry, theoretical concepts and provided quotes. The figure below gives an overview of the data I used and that constituted my corpus, as well as an indication in what chapter I used which data.

When analyzing data it is important to keep two things to mind with regard to context. First, that statements in public debate were often related not only to the topic that the working group chose, but also to the political context and events that happened at the time the debate, workshop or meeting took place. I kept track of them in a separate Excel file. For example, comments about the term “bamboula” during the last UP debate (25/05/2018) cannot be understood without a direct reference to the “Theo Affair”, a case of police violence that had happened a year earlier and that involved being called by the depreciative term “*bamboula*”. Second, it is important to keep in mind that positions one defends at one moment in time may then evolve. This was particularly true for those involved in research collaborations throughout my thesis: through encounter and engagement with others and through reading in relation to the topics we explored together, our initial positions evolved. This means that quotes from statements in 2015 do not necessarily represent the views of participants at the moment of writing my thesis in 2020.

I would have wanted to integrate a similar feedback loop as the one I implemented after my first presentation of results in France. The decision to write in English however foreclosed this option, reducing this option to only a few people reading English (Herrick Mouafo, Kenjah, Mayare, and colleagues at Modus Operandi). My decision to write in English is motivated by both personal and professional choices, the most important being that I seek to share my research results with an audience beyond France.

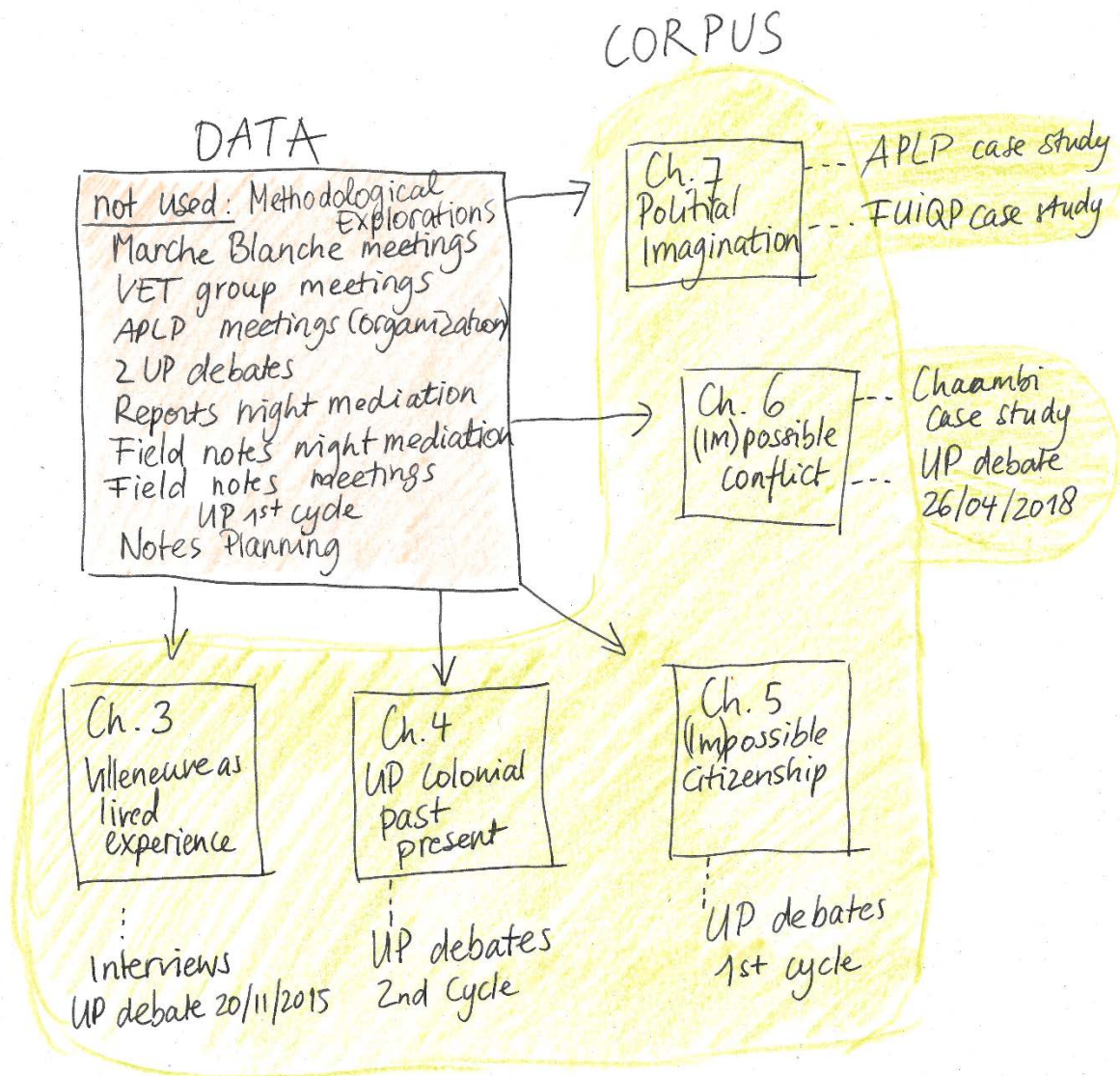


Figure 2.59 From data to corpus

#### 6.4) Writing as a way of weaving different voices together

I wanted to use my position in society to make the voices of those not having access to academic language and networks of dissemination known. But what should be disclosed and when should research participants' right to opacity be respected? How might my framing of their voices silence them? How might disclosing some of the information gathered in Villeneuve hurt the causes that the groups I work with struggle for?

Historically, it was the colonizers who held the pen while the colonized could not represent themselves, and could only exist through representation (Said 1979). Issues around writing and power are still relevant, albeit not in the same way. They have brought me to the question of how to tell another's story without appropriating it? bell hooks' words about ownership of spoken stories – "tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own"- strongly resonated with me while writing (1990, 241-423). How to tell another's story

in writing without appropriating it? How to make space for dialogue in writing an academic text that requires single authorship? To what extent is it possible to leave space for difference and doubt? Since we meet each other in a space of otherness, there is always room for misunderstanding and misinterpretation, not only between the researcher and the research participant, but also between the author and their readers.

A partial answer I found to these questions is to write this thesis as a dialogue between myself and the voices I listened to and collected in the field, and the theories they resonated with. I did not want to erase their voices in my text, or to reduce them to a mere illustration or proof of my arguments. I have given them a relatively large place in this work because it is these voices that have put me on a certain track of thinking, and that have oriented my reading. Many doubts remain about whether I have succeeded in reaching these goals, being taken in from time to time by the academic game of making an argument and affirming ‘truths’. I have tried however to weave a narrative between the voices of research participants, my reflections, and academic literature without wanting to fuse these different voices into one story. I make them distinct from one another through different fonts: Calibri 12 for my writing, in which I have integrated the contribution of other academics following the academic rules for citation; Calibri 11 for longer quotes from academic texts; and *Courier New* 10 for voices from the field. The choice of the latter font is motivated by its association with typewriters – with raw material, minutes and testimony – to remind readers that it is transcribed words, formulated to be heard and not written, that they are reading. It does not have the same status as my written text, which I have taken the time to formulate and reformulate after several rounds of editing. The risk of including these quotes from transcripts is that they fail to do justice to the analytical capacities of the speaker because the spoken and the written word are not articulated in the same way. I have therefore allowed myself to slightly intervene when quoting in this text from transcripts: I took out some repetitions that are common when addressing an audience in speech, as well as moments of hesitation and laughter which I did mention in transcripts, and, at times, I altered the order of the sentence if that would allow a better articulation between a transcript and my text. Another decision I took was to avoid using boxes, and to bring in the field material in my writing by weaving it into the text. In many cases I have not directly commented on these quotes, to allow them to speak for themselves. The narrative writing style for which I opted leaves space to pay tribute to the contributions of all those that participated.

Speaking with and through different voices is also the result of the rhythm and space of my field research which was not limited to a specific time and a faraway space, but was continuous. Over a five-year time span it has been part of my everyday life. The conversations in the field were as much part of my intellectual stimulation as my reading, and they continued to dialogue in my head.

Through my writing for an academic audience I made voices travel from one context to another: the context in which voices were spoken changed when inserting them in my text. Now they speak to another audience, and what has happened in this displacement? Have I been able to make them heard, in the sense of being received, not as poor victims of racism (including islamophobia) in France, but as political agents? Those are the questions I ask you, reader, and on which I would like to hear back.

## Chapter 3. Living in Villeneuve

On ne passe pas par la Villeneuve, on ne s'y engage pas distraitemment au détour d'une rue. On y entre, comme dans un monde.  
(Khaled Satour, Open letter, 28/07/2010)

I approach Villeneuve as a locus of enunciation. It is the objective of this chapter to describe this locus, this space from which participants speak, in order to provide the necessary context to understand participants' discourse about the colonial past-present in the chapters that follow. Throughout the chapter it will become clear that the area of Villeneuve is a racialized space, a space of discrimination and exclusion, but also a space for organization and voice.

Given the discrepancy between mainstream images of the neighborhood and the lived experiences of its inhabitants (see also Kokoreff and Lapeyronnie 2013), and given the power dynamics involved in representing MSHN, I have decided to make ample space in this chapter for participants' voices: how they define a "*quartier*" and what their experience of living in Villeneuve is about. Box 3.18 first gives an overview of terms used for MSHN.

### **Box 3.18 [terminology]: Terms used for MSHN**

Another term for what I refer to as MSHN is the emic term "*quartier*" or "*quartier populaire*". The adjective *populaire* is a reference to the working class (see e.g. *éducation populaire, soupe populaire* etc.) for whom MSHN were historically built. The term 'working class' neighborhood however does not accurately describe the social history of Villeneuve, nor the current population of most MSHN who struggle with high percentages of unemployment, and are a part of the precarious rather than working class.

Other terms for MSHN are the policy terms "*quartier sensible*" and "*quartier prioritaire politique de la ville*"; the urban planning and architecture term "*grands ensembles*" which translates as large housing estates; and finally terms used in sociology and social science literature such as the term "*banlieue*" (Kepel 2015 [1987]) that is losing ground; "*cité*" (Dikeç 2007) or the much debated term "*ghettos*" (Giblin 2006; Lapeyronnie 2008). I use the term MSHN firstly because it is descriptive, and secondly because it stresses that these areas are subject to a process of marginalization. When citing authors I translate the terms they use as MSHN, but I may mention the original term between brackets.

Technically, Villeneuve is a MSHN but is not part of the *banlieue*, a term reserved for those marginalized neighborhoods beyond the ring-roads of major French cities such as Paris and Lyon. Disregarding this technical detail, the *banlieue* literature applies more widely to all MSHN that are part of the State's priority geography, a term I use for the areas defined by the State as zones in need of specific policy intervention in terms of education, urbanization, economic development and security.

In this chapter I first situate Villeneuve within the wider space of Grenoble and its agglomeration, focusing on situating the neighborhood borders (1). To better understand the place of Villeneuve in Grenoble it is necessary to look at its history, the context in which its construction was planned, the ideas behind architectural choices, and how the image of the neighborhood changed over the years. I pay particular attention to the image-makers that were responsible for making and unmaking the idea of Villeneuve as a modern utopia (2). I subsequently turn to participants' stories about their lived experience of Villeneuve, providing a definition of what a MSHN (*quartier*) is to those who reside in it (3). I then give my description of the neighborhood in terms of a space that is fragile, that is under stress from substantial tensions, and is considered by different groups as a place that is worth defending and where one needs to defend oneself. (4). I contrast participants' accounts of lived experience in Villeneuve with the government's attempts to address challenges in the neighborhood through urban policy. In this way I focus on the critique participants formulated with regard to these government interventions (5). Lastly, I discuss the ongoing urban renewal project in Villeneuve and the associated discourse that reinforces neighborhood stigmatization (6).

### **1) Situating Villeneuve as a lived, perceived, and conceived space**

I am particularly interested in the neighborhood as a lived space, a term I borrow from Lefebvre (1974) and Soja (1996), who distinguish lived from conceived and perceived spaces. In accordance with the border epistemology I adopt (see chapter 1), I pay particular attention to the different borders that concern Villeneuve as a lived space. I use several maps to help situate Villeneuve: maps inserted in the text as figures to illustrate a particular point and one separate map in A3 format (see appendix 6) that presents Villeneuve as a locus of enunciation that is not limited to the neighborhood's borders. This map presents an overview of the places where meetings took place, where public debates took place and the places in public space that were important for situating participants' stories. I refer to this overview map throughout the different chapters.

This section situates the area of my field research in the wider space of the city and the agglomeration (1.1); it presents Villeneuve first as a perceived and a conceived space (1.2) and then as a lived space (1.3). Lastly, this section demonstrates where inhabitants draw the borders of their neighborhood: their location is an illustration of the border experience of those living in the neighborhood (1.4).

#### ***1.1) Situating the borders of Villeneuve***

Villeneuve is a neighborhood of Grenoble, a provincial city in the Isère Valley, at the foot of the Alps, the Vercors and the Chartreuse, with 161 000 inhabitants, part of a wider agglomeration of 49 municipalities, Grenoble-Alpes Métropole, with 450 000 inhabitants. Several borders are of interest for this study: the borders of the agglomeration; the borders of Grenoble as the largest municipality of this wider agglomeration; the borders of sectors

within Grenoble that serve as administrative entities since the move to decentralization in the 1980s; neighborhood borders and the borders of my study area [see Figure 3.65]. The administrative borders of the six administrative sectors of Grenoble each encompass several neighborhoods. For example, sector six covers the neighborhoods of Villeneuve, Village Olympique, Vigny-Musset and Malherbe. My study area covers the area of the initial project of the construction of Villeneuve, and is divided between the municipalities of Grenoble and Echirolles.<sup>109</sup>

### 1.2) *Villeneuve as a conceived and perceived space*

Built in the 1960s, Villeneuve is the last large social housing project constructed in France.<sup>110</sup> While at the onset the neighborhood was renowned for its utopian aspects, over the years it has lost a lot of its appeal. According to administrative jargon, the neighborhood is “sensitive,” a euphemism for dangerous. It is one of the Zones urbaines sensibles that is part of the French State’s geography of special intervention zones that are targets of area specific policies (for a detailed analysis see Dikeç, 2007) [Figure 3.66]. The French term for urban policy, *politique de la ville*, refers to a nationally defined policy targeting low-income areas. It is this specific policy that I refer to when using the term urban policy in this chapter. This policy has been developed in reaction to incidents of urban violence in marginalized social housing neighborhoods, Villeneuve among them. Articulating problems in spatial rather than e.g. in ethnic terms, as in other countries, is a French particularity. From the late 1970s onwards and within the frame of this urban policy, a large number of commissions, reports and drafted laws have been set up with the aim of reducing social inequalities between different areas (*territoires*). Since the paroxysmal violence that broke out in 2010 and 2012, Villeneuve is on the list of the French government’s priority security zones and, as a result, neighborhood policing is carried out by a specialized brigade rather than by the local police force due to the tensions between youth groups and police.

<sup>109</sup> My presentation of the making of Villeneuve provides more detail about the construction of Villeneuve (Grenoble) because it is much better known, and this was the information that was available digitally in the period of lockdown due to COVID-19 (Spring 2020), the time at which I researched and wrote this chapter.

<sup>110</sup> The *Circulaire Guichard* of 1973, known for its statement “*ni barres, ni tours*”, ended the construction of the ZUP.

<sup>111</sup> This paragraph has been published in a slightly different form in Dijkema (2019).



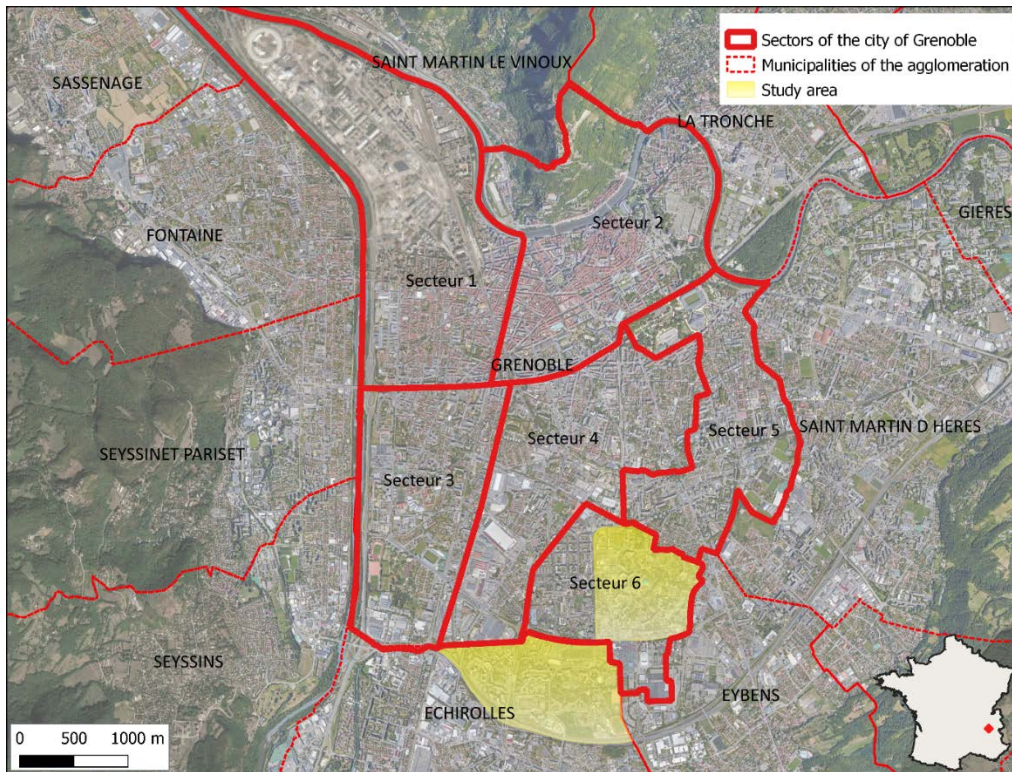


Figure 3.65 The area of study with regard to administrative borders of the Grenoble agglomeration and the Grenoble municipality. (Base map: Google Earth, GIS data ADMIN EXPRESS, data.gouv.fr)<sup>112</sup>

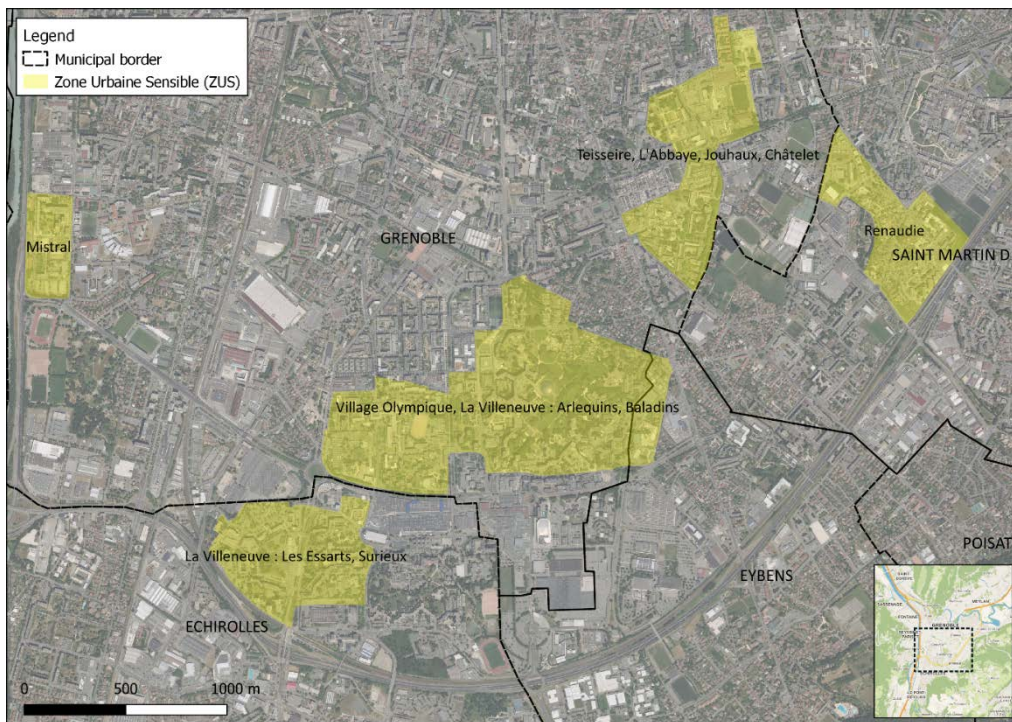


Figure 3.66 Villeneuve (Grenoble and Echirolles) is included in the Atlas des Zones urbaines sensibles (ZUS). (Base map: Google Earth, GIS data data.gouv.fr)<sup>113</sup>

<sup>112</sup> <https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/r/f66ddc0a-8205-4613-b10f-5a99f6f165b0>, accessed 2/02/2020

<sup>113</sup> <https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/zones-urbaines-sensibles-zus/>, accessed 10/01/2020.

### 1.3) Villeneuve as a lived space

Participants' accounts of what it is like to live in a *quartier* and what it is like to live in Villeneuve form the basis of this chapter. I keep the term *quartier* (neighborhood) in my text when drawing on participants' stories as it does not have the same connotation as its English translation "neighborhood". Moreover, participants themselves do not speak of marginalized social housing neighborhoods but speak of "a" or "their" *quartier*. I organized their answers in four categories: 1) what is a *quartier*?; 2) lived experience (of living in a *quartier* such as Villeneuve); 3) tensions; and (4) neighborhood actions, describing the initiatives of inhabitants to deal with the challenges they encountered in the neighborhood [see Figure 3.67].

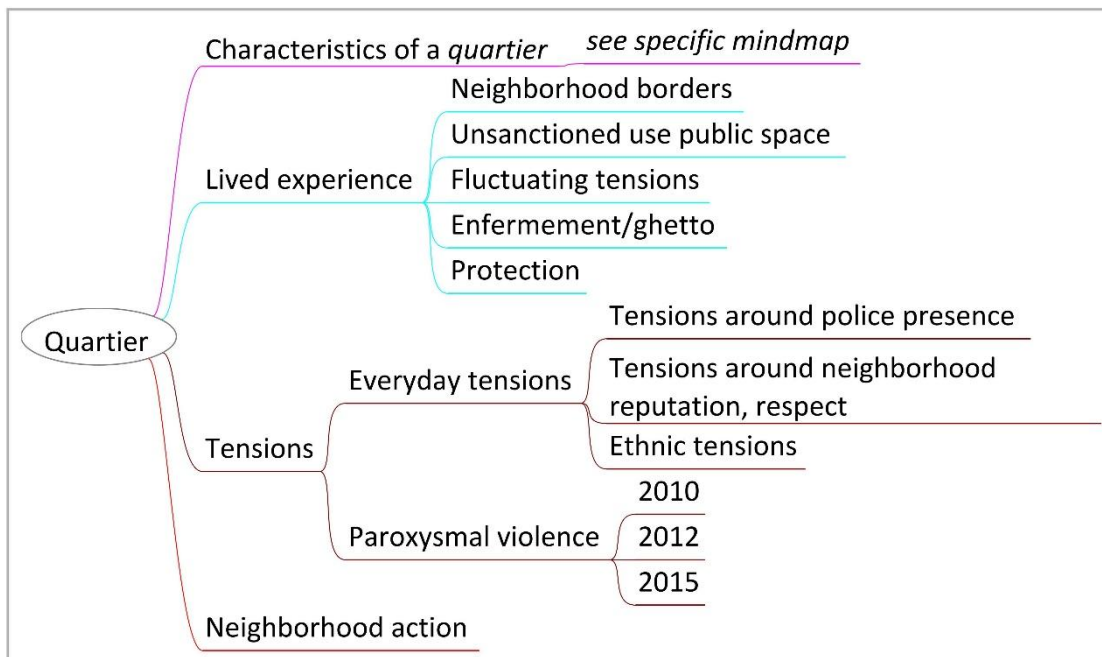


Figure 3.67 Mind map of lived experiences in the neighborhood

In resonance with the account of my border experience when going from the Geography Institute to meetings in Villeneuve, I paid particular attention to where inhabitants draw the borders of their neighborhood, a topic I develop below. From this description of border experience it becomes clear why I approach Villeneuve as a locus of enunciation, as its borders have the function of drawing the contours of a space that is different from mainstream France.

### 1.4) The invisible borders of Villeneuve

Participants described a *quartier* as a clearly distinct space: there is an inside and an outside. The experience I described in Chapter 1 of entering and leaving the neighborhood is generally shared by inhabitants. For example, in the opening quote of this chapter a participant described entering Villeneuve as "entering into a world" (*On y entre, comme*

*dans un monde*).<sup>114</sup> This quote not only means that within the neighborhood there lies a whole world, but also that there lies another world outside the neighborhood. Participants' border experiences, where exactly one enters or leaves the neighborhood and where this other world begins depends on their social position, where they live in the neighborhood, their means of transport, and what draws them out of the neighborhood. Despite these differences, the research participants that answered my question about where they had the feeling that they left the neighborhood agreed first that there is such a thing as a border experience, and second that there is a buffer-space between the neighborhood and the city-center, "*les quartiers*".

The map in Figure 3.68 gives an overview of the border points (red) and border lines (red) that participants mentioned. I call the yellow line on the Avenue Marie Reynoard a non-border line because, while it is a clear demarcation of the edge of Villeneuve, it was not mentioned by any of the participants as a border. In addition, the supermarket (Simply) on this avenue and thus on the border, was not identified as being part of the border either, while the supermarket on the southern border (Carrefour) was. Simply therefore is a non-border point, and I try to understand why some spaces are experienced as constituting a border and not others. The blue line on the map is the tram line, the main connection between the city-center and the southern part of Grenoble and Echirolles.

The tramline functions as a gliding border between the city center and the neighborhood. Mounira observed for example that "the closer you get to the quartier, the more there are [Muslim women wearing a veil] and the closer you get to the city center, the fewer there are" (interview, 05/06/2017). When traveling on Tram A, one becomes indeed gradually aware that the number of women wearing a veil increases when one heads in direction of Grenoble's southern neighborhoods.<sup>115</sup>

Il y a un arrêt là et là je me dis, ça y est, on est à la bordure du quartier, ça craint, la bordure de la ville, comme si c'était une autre ville, pourtant c'est Grenoble. (Tina, interview, 29/05/2017)

A partir de Malherbe, là où il y a la CAF et tout ça, là aussi on est sorti, là on est à la limite aussi. On est juste à la limite, on n'est pas [encore en ville]. (*Ibid.*)

Pour moi, [Villeneuve] c'est une sorte de ville, si on aurait pu tout mettre dedans, il y aurait eu certains qui n'en sortiraient même plus, s'il n'y avait pas l'histoire de Carrefour... (*Ibid.*)

<sup>114</sup> Khaled Satour, Open letter "La Villeneuve de Grenoble: une cite sous état d'exception", 28/07/2010

<sup>115</sup> Master students of the International Development Studies program at the Grenoble-Alpes University made the same observation in a project about the invisible borders in the city, inquiring into spaces of in- and exclusion, and have analyzed the presence of women wearing the hijab in the tram A section between Echirolles, Villeneuve, and Grenoble train station in the city center (March 2018).

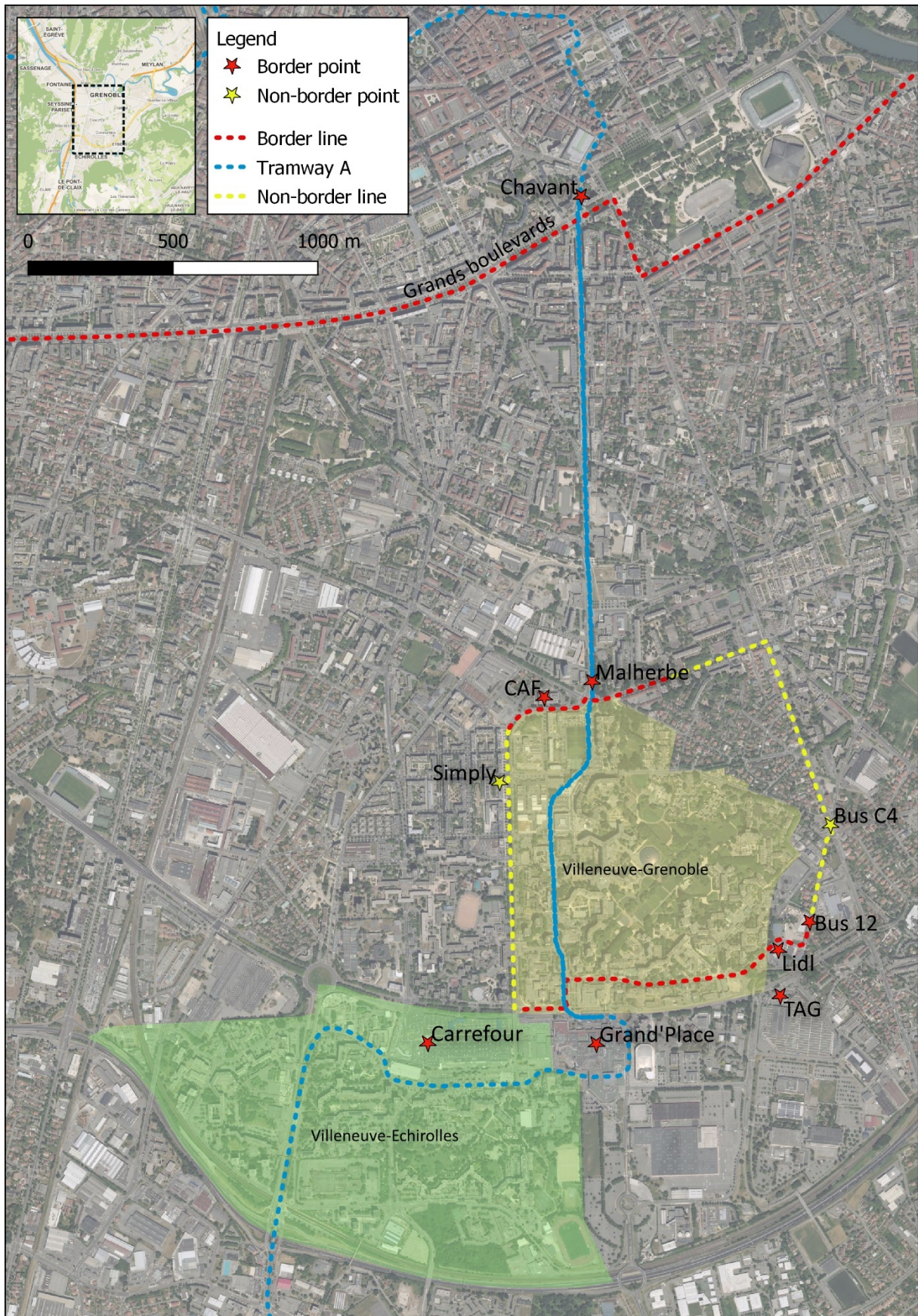


Figure 3.68 Borders and non-borders in Villeneuve. (Base map Google Earth)

### *Border points/lines*

The border points on the northern part of the neighborhood correspond to the Caisse des Allocations Familiales (CAF) building and the Malherbe tram stop, they are directly on the border of the neighborhood. An additional border line and border point that correspond respectively to the Grands boulevards (see northern border line) and the tram stop Chavant, demarcate the borders with the city-centre. South of this line is the area of “*les quartiers*”, a transitional zone between Villeneuve, the largest of Grenoble’s MSHN, and the city-center, the latter being a space that is clearly differentiated from a *quartier* and often defined in opposition to it.

There are several border points on the southern part of the neighborhood: the stop for bus line 12 that takes people towards Mistral (MSHN) and from there to the Saint Bruno area and to the city-center; the Lidl supermarket that was burned down in January 2018; the TAG tram depot; the Grand’Place shopping mall and the large Carrefour supermarket, which attracts customers from far beyond the neighborhood. One participant mentioned the Avenue de Constantine, on which she lived, as the southern border (see southern border line). South of the latter are the ring road and Villeneuve (Echirolles).

### *Non-border points/lines*

One non-border line runs along the north-eastern part of the neighborhood. Participants failed to mention it as a border, possibly for the following reasons: because research participants did not live in these areas with predominantly low-rise privately owned housing, and therefore they do not use this area; because this residential area is separated by a road and connected to another residential area, and lacks the attraction of particular places of public interest such as supermarkets or public institutions; and because public transport does not run along the northern border.

As mentioned, it is interesting that participants did not mention the Avenue Marie Reynoard as a border since it separates the neighborhoods of Villeneuve and Village-Olympique (western non-border line), nor the Simply supermarket on the same Avenue. In answer to my explicit question whether Simply is part of the neighborhood’s borders a young man answers negatively: “*Non, Simply c’est le New York market, c’est cosmopolite, les caissières sont [comme nous]*” (street debate, 20/10/2015). I deduce that for him, New York stands for cosmopolitanism and for the presence of many different ‘ethnic’ communities, to use an American term, and so does Villeneuve. For this reason, it is still part of the neighborhood. For those that stay put in the neighborhood Simply is still part of the world they understand and feel comfortable in, which is not the case of the spaces beyond the neighborhood, according to a youth worker.

On pense que la France commence à partir de Simply. Là c’est un lieu qu’ils connaissent, c’est une habitude, c’est rassurant, ils connaissent les codes, ils connaissent les gens qu’il y a autour, comment les choses fonctionnent et comment jouent les rapports sociaux entre les uns et les autres. Dans d’autres endroits dès

qu'ils sortent du quartier, pour certains, bah ils voient qu'il y a d'autres rapports, d'autres modes de relations entre les gens qu'eux n'ont pas vécus, n'ont pas, et du coup ça met une sorte de barrière quoi. (Tedy, interview, 29/09/2017)

Tedy's comment that France begins beyond the neighborhood is a way of saying that marginalized young people have the feeling that where they live is a space apart, not quite like the France of the established, which is represented as White and not quite so "cosmopolitan" or racialized as the area south of it. For racialized people working in Villeneuve such as Mounira and a market vendor (street debate), it is not the borders of Villeneuve that matter to them but the borders of the city-center. They do not make a clear distinction between Villeneuve and "*les quartiers*".

The feeling of a clear distinction between the city-center and the southern neighborhoods of the city can partly be explained by the spatial features of the city. In a 1989 report this feeling of rupture between the city center and *les quartiers* was mentioned in a social diagnosis and attributed to a lack of urban continuity between the city-center and Villeneuve.

Lorsqu'on se dirige du centre ancien vers le Sud de la ville, la rupture d'urbanisation est sensible peu après les grands boulevards. Un ensemble d'éléments donne l'impression de quitter la ville; présence de grands équipements, voies surdimensionnées, constructions plus diffuses et implantées de façon assez anarchique (DSQ 1989, 22).

In addition to the spatial features of the city, I have found that looks and remarks that express disapproval or rejection constitute the most important elements of this border experience nowadays.

#### *Double working of neighborhood borders, as both confinement and protection*

Participants attributed a double function to the neighborhood borders described previously, which consists of both protection and confinement. Some comments about their protective function:

- Certains disent : "Dès que je sors de mon quartier, je suis moins en sécurité," tandis que d'autres ont l'impression que le quartier est dangereux. (Participant, street debate, 20/10/2015)
- Quand on sort du quartier, on nous pointe les doigts, nos jeunes, nos écoliers, nos mamans, nos frères et nos sœurs, quand on reste on sent l'isolement. (Hosny, interview, 18/10/2013)

Some comments about their confining function:

- Ce n'est pas évident de sortir du quartier. Il faut de la formation, du travail, l'école. (Participant, street debate, 22/10/2015)
- Les politiques veulent nous enfermer dans les quartiers (Participant, street debate, 20/10/2015)
- On nous parque comme du bétail (César, interview, 17/03/2017)

- On est des rats dans un laboratoire (Participant, street debate, 22/10/2015)
- Le territoire [de la ville] est morcellé avec des checkpoints, ça nous pousse vers l'isolement, sur un périmètre bien défini. (Participant, street debate, 22/10/2015)

Research participants have the suspicion that the function of the neighborhood's borders is to contain unwanted inhabitants in certain spaces of the city, in order to preserve the white French population who feel invaded by racialized foreigners. Tina, for example, felt that even administrative services, "to sign papers", were located in the neighborhood to avoid inhabitants "bothering" (*viennent embêter*) those outside of the neighborhood (interview, 29/05/2017). In addition, one participant spoke of the neighborhood in terms of an "open-air prison".

Le béton est gris, il n'offre pas de perspectives. C'est une cité de réclusion, une prison à ciel ouvert, des murs auxquels on ne peut pas échapper parce qu'on n'a pas d'emploi, ni de formation" (Béchir, interview, 01/06/2016).

Race and class are determinant for the extent to which one might become aware of these borders (see chapter 5 on the embodied experiences of inequality).

## 2) The Making of Villeneuve

La Villeneuve était créée pour les classes moyennes. C'était un quartier très fréquentable, il y avait toute de sorte de population qui y habitait et après au fur et à mesure ça s'est délabré parce qu'il y a une mauvaise gestion des lieux. Je ne sais pas comment on est arrivé là. Peut-être c'est le gouvernement qui a délaissé ces personnes, qui les a délivrés à eux-mêmes sans subvention ou sans entretenir tout ce qu'ils avaient entrepris jusque-là. (Joachim, interview, 17/11/2015)

Villeneuve is a space of making. Through their social interaction, all actors involved in Villeneuve have made and are still making this space according to their interests: making as in conceiving (urban planning) (2.1); making as in building (construction and renovation) (2.2); making as in shaping through larger societal factors (demography, economy, urban policy) (2.3); and making as in image-making (2.4).

### *2.1) Conceiving Villeneuve, countering socio-spatial segregation in the city*

In this subsection I develop the making of Villeneuve in terms of its conception, which is part of a larger urban plan for Southern Grenoble, following the launch of a 'ZUP procedure' for this area. A ZUP stands for a Zone à Urbaniser en Priorité, a national planning tool for large-scale urban development (1959-1967) in order to deal with the increasing demand for housing (Cupers 2014). The ZUP of Villeneuve (1961) covered 330ha in the former marshlands of Grenoble's Southern Plain, divided over three municipalities (Grenoble 200 ha, Echirolles 130 ha and Eybens, a tiny part called Maisons Neuves) and was destined to have 9000 housing units and a secondary center (*centre-relais*) [see Figure 3.69].

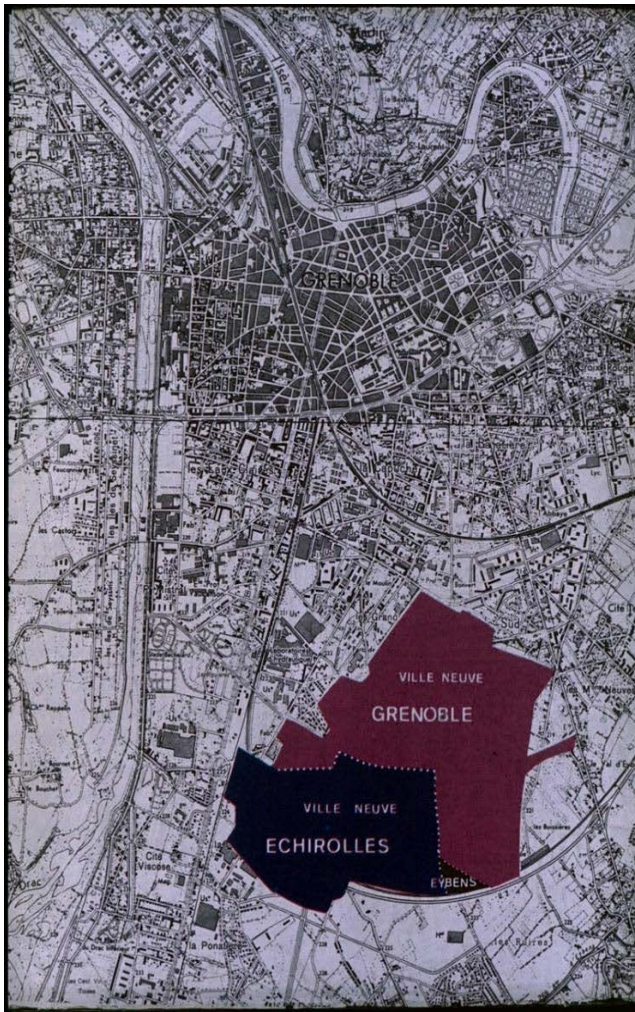


Figure 3.69 The area of land acquired for the ZUP procedure of Villeneuve Grenoble and Echirolles, (Scan of a diaporama, Fonds Jean-François Parent, 1965) <sup>116</sup>

ZUP were a response to the post-war housing shortage and gave rise to the construction of large housing projects (*grands ensembles*) in the 1950s and 1960s, destined for the French working classes. When Villeneuve was built, it took into account the critiques (Lacoste 1963) that had emerged against the earlier construction of large housing projects that were criticized for their propensity to ghetto formation. They were mono-functional with minimal or no attention to landscaping, located at the margins of cities and ill equipped with public transport. Villeneuve was meant to become the counter-example. Table 3.6 lists the points that distinguished Villeneuve from earlier large housing projects.

<sup>116</sup> Published under Creative Commons licence, <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Emprise.jpg>, accessed 15/03/2020



**Table 3.6 The specificity of Villeneuve in comparison to earlier large housing projects**

Criticism large housing projects	Proposal Villeneuve <sup>117</sup>
Dormitory town	Notion of neighborhood, favoring social relations
Monofunctional	Multifunctional
Predominance of social housing	Diversity of housing types to facilitate social diversity
Disconnection from city-center	Public transport connection to the city center
Lacking public transport	Integration of public facilities
Social segregation	Spaces for economic activity
Located in periphery	Educational project at the center of urban project
Authoritarian planning	Favor participation of inhabitants in design and management

A decisive factor in the conception of Villeneuve was the election of Hubert Dubedout as mayor of Grenoble in 1965, heading a coalition of the Groupements d'Action Municipale (GAM) and the United Socialist Party (PSU). The new socialist municipality had great ambitions for the city's urban environment and a new political vision for the place of the working classes in it, in all likelihood inspired by Henri Lefebvre's *Droit à la ville* (1968). The municipality believed action on space could impact the social life of its inhabitants. The newly elected councilors sought to fight the social and spatial segregation that had become a characteristic of large housing projects (Joly 1982). They combined an ideological vision with a local and empirical approach to urbanism, and they were the first to have the responsibility for urban planning transferred from the State to the city level (Bruneteau 1998; Joly 1995). They revised the original plan for the urban planning of Grenoble's Southern Plain (Plan Directeur Bernard) which they judged incompatible with their objectives because it relied on the idea of "segregative zoning" (*zonage ségrégatif*), of separating spaces in the city according to their different functions (residential, industrial, administrative etc.) (Joly 1982, 12). The new municipality imagined a multipolar city, with the ZUP as a secondary center and with the integration of spaces for economic activity and public amenities in its new housing project. This secondary center would join the municipalities of Echirolles and Grenoble and the six neighborhoods that were planned, each with roughly 2000 housing units. The first image below [Figure 3.70] represents this idea, the second how this conception was given form architecturally and the periods of its construction periods [Figure 3.71].

<sup>117</sup> Breynt, Cohen and Gabriel 2015, 31

### Urban project for ZUP Ville Neuve

- Secondary center as junction between Villeneuve and Echirolles
- Three neighborhoods of ~2000 housing units for each city

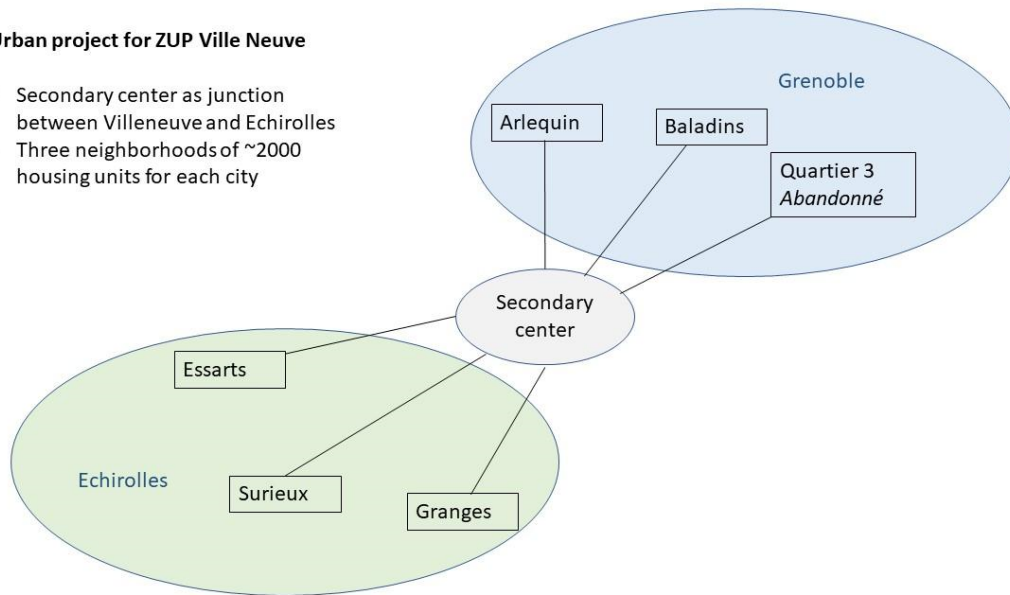


Figure 3.70. Sketch of urban project for ZUP Ville Neuve

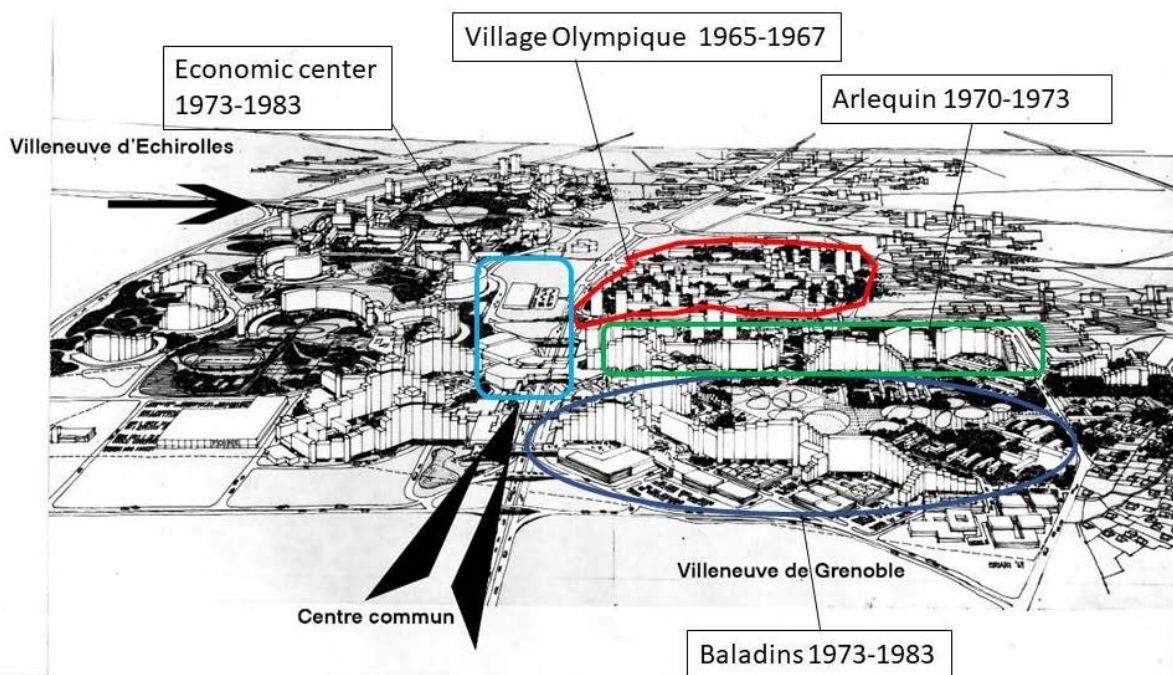


Figure 3.71 Villeneuve Grenoble and Echirolles joined by an economic center. (Fonds J.F. Parent, 1966)<sup>118</sup>

In order to give form to these planned neighborhoods, the municipality entrusted the ZUP program to the local Agence Municipale d'Urbanisme. This Agency initiated a collaboration with an interdisciplinary group from Paris, the Ateliers d'Urbanisme et d'Architecture (AUA), and brought together an avant-garde group of architects, artists, and sociologists inspired by the revolutionary wind that was blowing in 1968. This exceptional collaboration between local actors and professionals from the capital who shared ideas about social progress [Box

<sup>118</sup> <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Dessinvilleneuves.jpg>, accessed 23/03/2020.

3.19] contributed to the reputation of the neighborhood as modern utopia. In summary, Villeneuve is a neighborhood that was built according to very progressive ideas, using a multidisciplinary approach, that was locally rooted and supported by actors who remained connected to the neighborhood once it was built.

**Box 3.19 [empirical excursion]: Large housing projects as material symbols of social progress**

It is important to remember that the currently stigmatized large housing projects were once a symbol of social progress (Cupers 2014). For many immigrant families, they were a major material improvement in comparison to the shack dwellings (*bidonville*) and unfit housing (*logements insalubres*) in which they lived before (Benguigui 1997; Lallaoui 1993). Tina recalls the stories her father, who arrived in France after the Second World War, told her about arriving in a social housing apartment: the moment when for him, real life began.

Mon père disait que quand il venait en France, il était dans les préfabriqués avec des bouts de bois et il attendait d'avoir un truc pour faire venir ma mère. Ça c'est avant que moi j'arrive, avant que les enfants arrivent quoi. Il disait qu'il avait vécu la misère. Quand on a eu le premier appartement, il a fait venir ma mère. Il nous racontait ça, c'était comme si on avait un château et pourtant c'était deux pièces, mais comme c'était du mur comme disait mon père, on n'entendait pas la pluie couler sur la ferraille, le carton n'était pas mouillé, [avant] c'était des baraques qu'on fabriquait nous-mêmes. Il disait que c'était comme si la vie commençait pour mon père, avant c'était plutôt tu te démerdes et après c'était...[she brings up the Algerian war with new difficulties and tensions] (Tina, interview, 29/05/2017).

*2.2) Building Villeneuve (Grenoble) and architectural highlights*

The following elements explain why Villeneuve was often presented as a utopia:

- the urban planning methods that relied on public participation and consultation
- its objectives of social transformation
- the socialist utopia of living together with the working classes
- the decision to create large car-free pedestrian areas
- its pioneering environmental dimension
- its democratic pedagogical project
- community health centers
- the central place given to *animation*, understood by experts and policy makers as “a social and technical approach to create liveliness and foster community life in newly built and often large-scale housing areas” (Cupers 2014, xxviii). For an example, see Box 3.20. For lack of a good translation, I continue to use to the French term throughout this text.

### Box 3.20 Mounira's childhood experience in Villeneuve

Mounira lived her teenage years in Villeneuve in the 1980s, and emphasized the types of activities and *animation* that were organized in that period.

Voilà, j'ai fait beaucoup l'école buissonnière mais dans mes souvenirs ce quartier était quelque chose d'idyllique, de beau. On jouait sur le grand îlot de garages. J'habitais au 50 et maman m'appelait et on rentrait tout de suite. Après il y avait aussi les animations, les MJC, les vacances on partait avec eux. On avait aussi formé un cirque. Tout ça m'amène à des choses agréables. Quand on partait en camp et les animateurs chantaient des chansons ils étaient tous entourés, on avait tous chaud, on se tenait la main. (Interview, 05/06/2017)

Below I outline the neighborhood's main architectural highlights.

#### *Park*

In the 1990s Villeneuve would be accused of not being "open" to the city and of being "turned inwards" (*replié sur soi*) and this is indeed exactly the way it was built, not turned towards the city's main roads but turned towards a 14 hectare park, a green oasis in the city and one of the neighborhood's architectural highlights. The high-rise buildings left space for this park and their construction provided the earth for its hills.



Figure 3.72 Jean-Verlhac Park at the end of the 1970s (Photo ©AMMG)<sup>119</sup>



Figure 3.73 Jean-Verlhac Park in 2012. (Photo Milky, CC)

Other architectural highlights of the project of Villeneuve are its integrated facilities and the way it created places of encounter in public space.

#### *Integrated facilities*

"Architecture and urban design played an increasingly important role as modernist principles were gradually reoriented toward community and street life" (Cupers 2014, xxix). This started with schematic ideas about providing the right kind and number of collective

<sup>119</sup> Postcard published in Gre magazine 31/12/2019 <https://www.gre-mag.fr/dossiers/patrimoine-grenoble-lieux-emblemiques/>, accessed 26/03/2020.

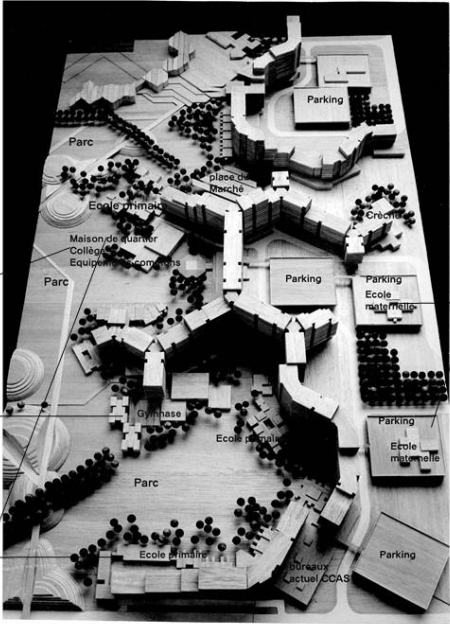
facilities following the grille Dupont (*Ibid.*) and evolved into a sophisticated conception of public life. Figure 3.74 gives an overview of the facilities planned for the Arlequin area.

**Arlequin 1970-1973**  
 1300 meter long  
 1850 housing units  
 high-rise (8-15 stories)

Maison de quartier  
 High school

Sports facility

Primary school



**Facilities**  
 High school  
 Maison de quartier  
 5 primary schools  
 2 sports facilities  
 shops

Kindergarten

Figure 3.74 Model of Arlequin showing its facilities. (Fonds J.F. Parent, 1966)

The same facilities that were considered modern and innovative in the 1970s and 1980s later came to be considered as a factor of confinement [Box 3.21].

**Box 3.21 [empirical excursion]: Facilities integrated into Villeneuve, a factor of confinement?**

Mounira remembers the neighborhood where she moved as a child at the end of the 1970s as a place that had everything.

Quand la Villeneuve est construite et on est arrivé dans un grand appartement. Ce que je me souviens, c'est des fragments, des choses. Ce que je me souviens est qu'il y avait cette liberté et cette insouciance dans ce quartier et le fait d'être à l'intérieur du quartier, dans ce grand quartier, on n'avait pas besoin d'y sortir. Tout y était. Tout était là. On avait les copains, les copines, la piscine, qui est aujourd'hui le lac mais pour nous c'était la mer et ce grand parc, l'école, tout y était.  
 (Mounira, interview, 05/06/2017)

The integration of facilities such as shops, public services and cultural amenities into the urban design, a novelty at the time which contributed to Villeneuve's reputation, is interpreted differently by inhabitants now. During street debates, I found out that many of my interlocutors looked with suspicion upon these facilities in the neighborhood. Some saw behind these facilities the intention to keep people inside the neighborhood. Below are some quotes of those that felt that the facilities in the neighborhood had the effect that

people would not leave the neighborhood and that they therefore contributed to their confinement.

Ici on a tout dans le quartier, une boulangerie, le foot, l'école, c'est pour éviter qu'on sorte. (...) C'est pour ça qu'il y a un **repli sur soi**. On est dans un système autarcique. (Participant, street debate, 20/10/2015)

On dirait qu'on nous a mis tout ce qu'il fallait pour pas trop qu'on sorte, le moins possible hein. (Tina, interview, 29/05/2017)

On ne sort que pour signer des choses (Participant, street debate, 20/10/2015).

The term "*repli sur soi*", refers to withdrawal or an inward-looking attitude and resonates with the discourse about ghettoization that emerged in the 1990s. This interpretation that integrated facilities are a factor of confinement is source of debate though: others looked with equal suspicion upon the intention of the municipality to take them out of the neighborhood. They interpreted these plans of the municipality of Grenoble as part of its urban renewal program, as a form of abandonment of the *quartier* and neighborhood life. One person felt that taking amenities out of the neighborhood was a factor of ghettoization and made the following point:

On crée des ghettos, avant on avait une banque, une superette, mais tout a disparu. (Participant, street debate, 20/10/2015)

#### *Progressive ideas about public space*

The project of Villeneuve was inspired by progressive ideas about public space. The buildings were constructed on pillars, thereby opening up the space under them for pedestrians; facilities were integrated within the architecture, which resulted in large publicly accessible areas and social spaces where people could meet [Figure 3.75]. Despite its extraordinary genesis, its architectural highlights, and other characteristics of this socialist project, it is necessary to add some nuance to the reputation of Villeneuve as a modern utopia. The rhetoric of participation was finally not so different from the language employed by private real estate developers and the "technocratic capitalist system at large" and was therefore not devoid of brutalism (Cupers 2014, 178). The image of a neighborhood where class and ethnic differences have been overcome should be relativized: its community life largely remained "an affair of the left-leaning middle-class" (Cupers 2014, 175) and underrepresented the neighborhood's working-class immigrant populations (Breynat et al. 2016). The latter made up 14% of the population in the Arlequin area of Villeneuve in the mid-1970s.<sup>120</sup> Immigrants did not adhere to the same extent to what would come to be referred to as "the project of Villeneuve" and were not part of its participatory planning exercises.

<sup>120</sup> In the mid-1970s, the total number of foreigners in the Arlequin housing units was 14%, 63% North African, 8% Italian, 7% Spanish, 4% Portuguese nationals and 18% other nationalities, according to Parent's "Evaluations de l'Arlequin 9.12.1976 – Données démographiques".



Figure 3.75 The Galerie d'Arlequin public gallery designed by Georges Loiseau, Jean Tribel et Jean-François Parent. (Villeneuve de Grenoble, Vue de la rue piétonne, 1973. © Fonds DAU. SIAF / Cité de l'architecture & du patrimoine /Archives d'architecture du xxe siècle)

### *2.3) Villeneuve's growing marginalization, from center to margin*

The initial utopian image of Villeneuve slowly waned over the 1980s, in line with national developments. From a rather positive connotation of *quartiers populaires*, as reference to places where a renewal of political and civil life was possible, MSHN increasingly came to be seen as places with problems, in need of the intervention of specialists (Tissot 2006), and as homogenous geographical areas (*territoires*) that were fundamentally different (Tissot 2008). The specificities of Villeneuve saved it from reaching the same level of impoverishment and segregation that came to characterize the monofunctional social housing projects built rapidly, with cheap material, and that were far removed from city-centers. But in 1989 a study of the neighborhood warned that also Villeneuve was “in the process of devaluation” (*en voie de dévalorisation*) [Box 3.22]. In particular its social housing offer presented “very distinct signs of devaluation on the housing market” and observed a clear increase of a population with difficulties (*le poids des populations en difficulté*) “attaining a threshold”: “beyond this point, the process [of pauperization and devalorization] will hardly be reversible” (DSQ 1989, 11).

### Box 3.22 Signs of devaluation end 1980s

- The multi-functional character of the neighborhood proves difficult to maintain
- Shops close
- Physical degradation of part of its building and spaces
- Zones of economic activities bordering the neighborhood deal with vacancy
- The limited attraction of its theatre and cultural center Espace 600
- A degrading social climate
- An increasing feeling of insecurity and tensions
- Drug trade develops in the neighborhood
- Inhabitants invest less time in community activities

Breynat, Cohen and Gabriel add nuance to the outcomes of this study, saying that it mostly concerned the social housing area of Arlequin and is therefore not representative of the neighborhood as a whole (2015). There are important differences between the different areas that make up the neighborhood (Baladins, Géants, Arlequin, Helbronner, Bruyère, etc.) and there are also differences within areas. In some housing blocks of the Galerie d'Arlequin and the Galerie des Baladins 40% of the heads of households (*chefs de ménages*) were unemployed, and this number rises to 50% for foreign nationals (DSQ 1989). The specific perimeters of the neighborhood chosen for this study (DSQ) served the purpose of the municipality to meet the criteria of the national Social Development Program giving access to funds (Breynat et al. 2016, 47). Despite this nuance, the impoverishment of Villeneuve's social housing area was however real.

Several causes can be identified for the impoverishment of Villeneuve's social housing area. A first explanation is the economic crisis of the 1970s and the profound economic changes linked to global developments that led to increasing levels of unemployment.

Unemployment rates in Villeneuve were higher than in the rest of the city, especially among youth (12% among youth 16-24 years and 19,5% among non-French youth). An indicator of the impoverishment it results in are the growing number of households that deal with low revenues, leading to rent arrears.

A second explanation for this impoverishment is the changing population of Villeneuve. The socio-professional equilibrium that characterized the initial project would change over time. From 48% social housing in the Arlequin in the early 1980s (DSQ 1989), this percentage went up to 74% in 2008 (ANRU, 2008). One of the common explanations, nationally, of this middle-class and white flight is the housing finance reform of 1977. This reform changed state financing of construction to state subsidization of rent and the facilitation of home ownership, which opened the exits for middle-class populations with stable incomes.

A third explanation is context-specific: as a result of a political turn to the right in the municipality after the election of Carignon as mayor in 1983, the idea of maintaining a



working class and immigrant population in the city-center came to an end. Under Carignon, the renewal of the old neighborhoods in the city center, of “little Algeria” (Boukhatem 2014), took a liberal turn and made space for middle-class French families at the expense of immigrants and families with low revenues. 70% of the latter could not afford to come back after the renovation and were rehoused in the more peripheral neighborhoods of Villeneuve and Village Olympique (Chalas 1991). In addition, the new mayor defunded Villeneuve, the symbol of the city’s socialist heritage accomplished thanks to Dubedout’s political will. According to a local observer with Carignon “the myth of Dubedout falls apart and the stigmatization [of Villeneuve] begins” (*Le Monde*, 18/10/2016). Under Carignon urban investments were reoriented towards the northern neighborhoods of Grenoble, which resulted notably in a decrease of investment in the management of public housing, infrastructure and animation in Villeneuve (Breynat et al. 2016).

During the 1990s the marginalization of Villeneuve continued to increase. The closing of three schools as a result of demographic changes and a lack of investment were signs of this further devaluation, in addition to the burning down of the Gymnase des Géants (28/11/2000) and of the Verderet public school (Breynat et al.2016). In the 1990s less money was available for the socio-cultural activities that were an integral part of the project of Villeneuve (DSQ 1989) and which contributed to making Villeneuve a desirable living environment, as Mounira's example illustrates. These developments are not specific to Villeneuve. Gradually, MSHN nation-wide lost their socially and ethnically diverse character (Berland-Berthon 2004; Dikeç 2012; L. Wacquant 2007).

#### *A space that is increasingly associated with immigrants*

While the concentration of immigrants is not mentioned as a sign of devaluation in the 1989 study, in the general opinion of MSHN it is. Statistics demonstrate that Villeneuve and other social housing neighborhoods in the city hosted a higher percentage of foreigners than Grenoble overall, but also show that the concentration of immigrants in Villeneuve was less significant than in other social housing neighborhoods, such as Mistral, as the table below demonstrates [Table 3.7]. To see where Mistral is situated in Grenoble, see Figure 3.66. The distribution of the population of foreign nationals varies within the neighborhood, housing allocation policies are responsible for the clustering of immigrant families in specific hallways and blocks (Cupers 2014). This distribution varies also between neighborhoods. Mistral has a larger population of foreign nationals than Villeneuve [see Table 3.7] because the housing it offers is almost entirely social housing (96,6%), which is not the case in Villeneuve (54,1% in Villeneuve-Village-Olympique) [see Table 3.8], based on figures from the 2009 census.

**Table 3.7 Population and households with foreign nationality, 1989<sup>121</sup>**

	Villeneuve	Mistral	Grenoble
Households with foreign nationality <sup>122</sup>	15%	23,5%	10%
Population of foreign nationality	18% (23/25% in HLM)	30%	12%

**Table 3.8 Population of foreign nationality, 2009<sup>123</sup>**

2009	Villeneuve - Village Olympique	Mistral	Grenoble
Population of foreign nationality	15,6%	25,6%	7,6%
Households that rent social housing	54,1	96,6	16,7

Figure 3.66 shows that between 1989 and 2009, the perimeter of the area in which data was collected changed. In 1989 this perimeter included only Villeneuve, and in 2009 this area also included Village Olympique.

Over the next decades these neighborhoods became increasingly associated with a racialized urban underclass: with immigrants and people of immigrant descent, represented as non-French. The French term *immigrant* evokes labor immigrants who mainly came from European countries (Poland, Italy and Portugal) and African (former) colonies, including protectorates and other forms of French colonial rule. While immigrants of European descent came to be considered as French, those of African origin remained “non-French” in the representation of the majority society (see chapter 5).

#### *Lived experience of a changing population in MSHN*

Research participants were witness to this increasing segregation saying that, over the years, there was less “*mixité sociale*”. They often compared the situation now in Villeneuve or other MSHN in Grenoble to the neighborhoods in which they grew up (not necessarily Villeneuve). The term “*mixité sociale*”, literally social mixture or mixing, can be translated into social diversity but the term in English lacks the implicit meaning of the French term

<sup>121</sup> Ville de Grenoble, Mission de Villeneuve. “Opération de Développement Social Du Quartier Villeneuve, Proposition de Charte,” June 1989.

<sup>122</sup> The report did not specify how it defined a “foreign household” and how it counted households with mixed couples, of both foreign and French origin. I assume that the report based its figure of 15% foreign households on the male “heads of households” and female in case of an absent male.

<sup>123</sup> Observatoire social, économique et urbain de Grenoble, “Atlas commenté des trois ZUS de Grenoble,” 2012, based on the 2009 census.

which also refers to ethnic and racial diversity, terms that are taboo in France. The following quote demonstrates this implicit meaning. Tina remembered that when she was growing up in the 1970s and 1980s in a social housing neighborhood in Valence, the daughter of Algerian parents, “*il y avait tout le monde, Français, Italiens, Portugais, on était tous mélangés*” (interview, 29/05/2017). Pierre remarks that Jouhaux, another MSHN in Grenoble [see Figure 3.66], has become almost “*uni-origine*” since the 1980s and points to policies turning MSHN into “ghettos” to explain this (UP speech circle, 07/07/2017). These statements about decreasing diversity point to participants’ lived experiences of ‘ethnic’ segregation. While the 1989 study on Villeneuve confirmed a slight change in the neighborhood’s social diversity, one could not speak of a white middle-class flight yet, which participants described as happening later, after the 2010 riots.

#### *2.4) The making and unmaking of a myth*

The utopian image of Villeneuve was the work of actors involved in image making. Over the years, other actors became influential in undoing this image. This subsection looks at those involved in making these positive and negative images. I approach the construction of Villeneuve as the making of a myth, in the sense of a set of stories about the early history of the neighborhood and the people involved in its creation, who contributed to its utopian image. I am not saying that this set of stories is erroneous, simply that it fit with political forces at a certain time, and that these forces have changed.

##### *2.4.a) Making the myth*

The project of Villeneuve attracted people from different corners of France: architects, urbanists, researchers, teachers and filmmakers were important for creating the discourse of Villeneuve as a modern utopia. Among those involved in the material conception of Villeneuve was Jean-François Parent, one of the principal urban planners and member of the interdisciplinary Atelier d’urbanisme et d’architecture (AUA) who continued to live in the neighborhood until the end of his life. He left behind an important archive (Fonds J. F. Parent) and is author of several publications about Villeneuve (Parent 1977; Joly and Parent 1988). Artists such as the filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard contributed to the renown of Villeneuve. Godard spent five years in the neighborhood (1975-1980) and shot the film *Numéro Deux* in his apartment (1975), showing the modern man in making. Two films about the neighborhood spread a utopian image, *Une raisonnable utopie ou l’expérience de Grenoble* by Jean-Claude Bringuier, Claude Massot and Huber Knapp (1973) and *L’Arlequin ou l’auberge espagnole* by Huber Knapp (1979), which showed Villeneuve as a place where people of many different origins lived harmoniously together [Figure 3.76].



Figure 3.76 Screenshot from the documentary *L'Arlequin ou l'auberge espagnole*, 1979 showing a joyous immigrant family in their apartment at the Galerie d'Arlequin as an illustration of Villeneuve as a "melting pot" (*auberge espagnole*).<sup>124</sup>

The production of images was part of the social experiment that was going on in Villeneuve. Through its audio-visual center, created in 1972, the neighborhood produced its own images of what it was like to live there, notably through its own television channel. Its *Vidéogazette*, was one of the first of such experiences (see Avenier 1978) and lasted until 1976. Two people involved in these experiences are the filmmaker and assistant professor Jean-François Ternay, who started his career working for the neighborhood's video channel, and Claude Collin. Collin taught those living in Villeneuve how to use audio-visual techniques and to create their own images at the audiovisual center (1977-1984) [Figure 3.77].

Figure 3.77 Image of the Vidéogazette workshops organized in Villeneuve (1972-1976). (*Videogazette.net* website, accessed 20/03/2020)

Despite the fact that this image would be increasingly challenged over the following decades, as I will demonstrate in the next paragraph, the utopian ambitions behind the creation of Villeneuve still have a power of attraction if one goes by the number of master's

<sup>124</sup> <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xp9gty>, accessed 20/03/2020]

theses, PhD projects, and academic studies that continue to choose Villeneuve as a research object. Quite some energy is being invested to make sure that the memory of Villeneuve's history is kept alive [see Box 3.23].

**Box 3.23 Those involved in continuing Villeneuve's legacy of producing its own images**

The neighborhood has its own newspaper, *Le Crieur de la Villeneuve*, and continues to make films through the collective Vill9 la Série.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, Vincent Massot and Flore Viénot answered the stigmatizing TV report "Villeneuve, le rêve brisé" with the documentary *La Villeneuve, l'utopie malgré tout* (2015) in order to allow the neighborhood to reappropriate its own image. A last example is that forty years after the Videogazette came to an end, new life was added into this experience by making the images that were produced by the neighborhood's inhabitants (1972-1976) publicly available through digitalization, on the website Videogazette.net. The persons coordinating this project, Gilles Bastin (Sciences Po Grenoble / Pacte-CNRS) and Céline Bresson (Maison de l'Image) make sure that images of Villeneuve's utopian past still remain available.

2.4.b) *Unmaking the myth*

Sarkozy a bousillé la Villeneuve  
(Participant, street debate, 22/10/2015)

The negative image of Villeneuve as a "ghetto" that is "turned inwards" is as much the result of image-making as was its positive utopian image. In this subsection I explain which actors are blamed for the stigmatization of the neighborhood. As the opening quote demonstrates Sarkozy is remembered in the neighborhood as carrying a large part of the responsibility for this stigmatization, as well as those involved in the making of the TV report mentioned earlier, *Villeneuve, le rêve brisé*, which was broadcast exactly a year after the deaths of Kevin and Sofiane.

The association of Villeneuve with degradation and violence, and the representation of Villeneuve as a dangerous space was concurrent with the general discourse about MSHN in the 1990s. The media increasingly treated MSHN as threats to security and a burden for the rest of the country (Bonelli 2008, Hargreaves 1996, Kirkness 2014, Sedel 2009). Moments of paroxysmal violence are opportune occasions for this discourse. In Villeneuve, the moment of the riots in 2010 and the slaughter of Kevin and Sofiane in 2012 stand out in particular. In 2013, a team of journalists from *Envoyé Spécial* wanted "to understand how an outburst of violence" such as the one resulting in the deaths of Kevin and Sofiane had been possible in a neighborhood that was created to be an urban ideal. Their method of finding the answer was to enter the neighborhood with a special police unit [Figure 3.79].

<sup>125</sup> Its film *Guy Moquet* was presented in Cannes (2014) and nominated for the prestigious *Césars* (2016).



Figure 3.78 Screenshot of TV report that corresponds to the voice-over showing the façade of a block of the Galerie d'Arlequin. (France2, 29/09/2013)



Figure 3.79 Screenshot of TV report that corresponds to the voice-over showing a canine police unit intervening at night to deal with unsanctioned uses of public space. (France2, 29/09/2013)

They opened their report with an alarming voice-over, together with an image of the Galerie d'Arlequin by night [Figure 3.78]:

Il est 22h au sud de Grenoble, au pied des tours de la Villeneuve, un des quartiers sensibles de l'agglomération, où se joue une guerre de territoire entre jeunes et policiers. Là, on rentre vraiment au cœur de la Villeneuve, là où les émeutes de juillet 2010 ont commencé. Le soir, des bandes prennent possession des lieux. [...] La Villeneuve est une enclave, le quartier est exclusivement piéton et vit replié sur lui-même. (*Envoyé spécial*, "Villeneuve, le rêve brisé", 29/09/2013)

#### 2.4.c) Tensions around image-making in Villeneuve

According to a research participant, the type of images such as the ones broadcast by *Envoyé Spécial*, are constructed: "*On veut faire dire des choses à ces images. C'est l'autre France*" (Jouda, UP, 19/05/2017). She meant that these images are not neutral but construct a certain image, nationally, that represents the neighborhood as not-quite French and rather as the 'other' and less desirable France. As a result, there are important tensions around the making of images in the neighborhood. I could observe these tensions, for example, when I encountered a camera crew in the neighborhood that was accompanied by several policemen (field notes, 17/03/2017); or when the head of the night mediation unit told me I would be safe in the neighborhood as long as people did not think I was a journalist (November 2013); or again when I observed during my tour of Echirolles with members of the *Agir pour la Paix* that they were not comfortable taking pictures of certain spaces (field notes, 01/04/2015). When Alain traversed the Place des Géants with his camera, a young man threatened him, saying: "*si tu me filmes je te casse la gueule*" (Alain, interview, 30/05/2016). These tensions are understandable if one takes into account the effect stigmatization has on the everyday life of its inhabitants. It is to their experiences that I turn in the next section.

### 3) Everyday experiences of living in Villeneuve

From those forces involved in making Villeneuve, I now turn to the voices of those that live in this space called Villeneuve, or that speak from it because they are involved in one of the civil society organizations based in the neighborhood. To describe what a/the *quartier* is like

I draw on people's answers to my question: "what is a *quartier*?" . Participants expressed these views mostly during interviews but also in debates and informal discussions. In their direct answers participants referred both to the mostly negative representations of MSHN from outside the neighborhood, and to their lived experience in the neighborhood as inhabitants. These negative representations from the outside become part of inhabitants' lived experience, in particular when they leave the area of the neighborhood. I therefore do not clearly distinguish between representations and lived experience.

The definitions of the *quartier* can be organized in five categories [Figure 3.80]: as a place that has a negative connotation (3.1); a place that has a particular form of architecture and a particular geographic location (3.2); a place where immigrants are concentrated (3.3); a place with a specific style of life (3.4); a dangerous place (3.5); and finally as a place that needs to be defended against outsiders (to counter neighborhood stigmatization), as a place against which one has to defend one's children or oneself (defense strategies) and as a place where one learns how to defend oneself (3.6).

Participants do not make a clear distinction between what a *quartier* generally is and what defines Villeneuve specifically. This section will therefore alternate between general descriptions of a *quartier* and specific descriptions of Villeneuve, which all contribute to an understanding of what it means to live in a *quartier* like Villeneuve. I end this section with my understanding of Villeneuve as a space to defend, that protects and that one seeks to be protected from.

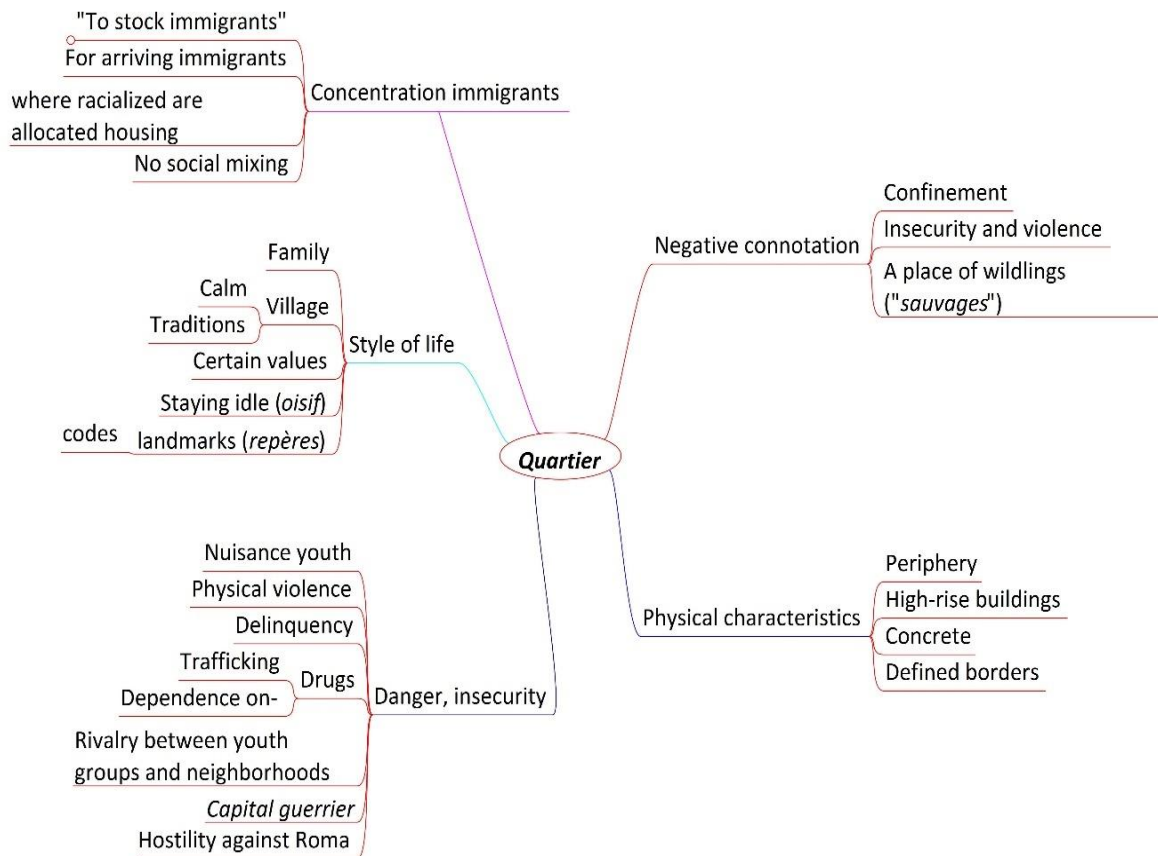


Figure 3.80 Mind map “what is a quartier?”.

### 3.1) The term quartier has a negative connotation

Pourquoi nos quartiers aujourd’hui, quand on les regarde et on est de l’extérieur, on en a peur, pourquoi ?  
(Mounira, interview, 08/06/2017)

Participants reported that the term *quartier* has a negative and “pejorative” connotation, in particular outside of the neighborhood, and is associated with “confinement” (*enfermement*), “precarity” (Mounira, interview, 05/06/2017), danger, fear, immigrants, and ghettos. While all participants agreed on the negative connotation of the term ‘*quartier*’, they sought to nuance this representation or confront it with their own definition of a neighborhood. Alicia for example said that: “*aujourd’hui j’ai l’impression qu’en France, quand on dit ‘un quartier’ c’est quelque chose de péjoratif alors que pas du tout!*” (interview, 01/05/2017). She pointed to a difference between representation and personal experience, but also to a difference between lived experience as a child and lived experience as an adult. The predominance of this negative connotation is such that participants struggle to formulate their own definitions. Fadoua for example indicated that she felt a tension between her own definition, that of a delimited space, and the neighborhood’s connotation: “*Pour moi un quartier, le sens premier c’est vraiment c’est un endroit limité ou délimité. Même si ma définition est celle-ci, ce qu’on ressent c’est que... en fait le mot quartier a pris*



*une telle connotation....”* (interview, 19/05/2017). Participants also reported associations with the *quartier* as lacking civilization: *“on dit tout le temps, souvent en tout cas, qu'ils [les habitants] sont sauvages”* (Amelle, interview, 09/09/2017). An acquaintance of Mounira asked whether Mounira could show him around in Villeneuve (*“tu me feras visiter Villeneuve?”*). She explained to me that it hurt her that he used this specific formulation “visiter” and she said *“on peut aller se promener à Villeneuve mais non, je ne te fais pas visiter”* (05/06/2017). The term “visiter” for me demonstrates the exoticized representation of Villeneuve as a place that is only safe to explore with an ‘indigenous’ guide.

### *3.2) Physical characteristics and geographical location*

Research participants described the *quartier* as a delimited area; as a geographic location associated with the periphery; associated with high-rise buildings and a high concentration of inhabitants per square meter.

A first geographic characteristic of the *quartier* is that of “a delimited area that is part of a larger whole”, as Fadoua already mentioned (interview, 19/05/2017). According to Mounira, the *quartier* *“c’est un ensemble de bâtiments confinés sur quelques mètres”*, the *quartier* is what happens inside these square meters (interview, 05/06/2017). Mounira’s description of buildings being “confined” and being contained by borders was generally shared by other participants.

A second characteristic of a *quartier* is its geographic location on the periphery of the city. It is “where one no longer pays for a parking place” according to Mounira. Paid parking is what separates the city center, the city’s first tier, *“l’hyper centre”*, from its second tier, *“les quartiers”*, among which Villeneuve. Mounira uses post codes as a demarcation between these two areas: *“38000 c’est le centre, 38100 c’est la périphérie”* (interview, 05/06/2017). The MSHN on the other side of the city’s ring road, which are no longer part of the municipality of Grenoble, could be considered as a third tier as they are part of the Grenoble agglomeration.

A third characteristic of a *quartier* is its architecture: large housing projects made of high-rise, concrete buildings. For Mounira *“un quartier c’est des grands ensembles”* (interview, 05/06/2017). The fact that the term *quartier* in France has become directly linked to a certain type of architecture became very clear during the journey that I took with Agir pour la Paix to Copenhagen. In my discussions with these young people from Echirolles I came to understand what a *quartier* was by learning what it was **not** [Box 2.24].

**Box 2.24: This cannot be a *quartier*!**

In Copenhagen, Agir pour la Paix visited a youth center in the marginalized social housing neighborhood of Nørrebro referred to by the locals, including the youth themselves, as the “ghetto” of Copenhagen. The reactions of the Agir pour la Paix members was that this could not be a *quartier* because of its architectural differences with Villeneuve (Echirolles): it did not have any high-rise buildings and the houses were made of brick instead of concrete [Figure 3.81]. During the tour of their neighborhood however they found common ground on the tense relations with the police, the omni-presence of satellite dishes, and the overrepresentation of immigrants in the neighborhood. For the young people we met in Copenhagen the term “ghetto” did not refer to a specific architecture but to a feeling of exclusion (field notes, 20/05/2016).



Figure 3.81 Low-rise marginalized social housing neighborhood in Nørrebro, Copenhagen. (Photo APLP, 20/05/2015)

For Fadoua, the architecture in Villeneuve is “imposing and even oppressive” and that is the main reason why she did not want to live in Villeneuve or any other *quartier*. Architectural differences within a neighborhood lead to internal distinctions and spaces that are not really considered a *quartier* because there are low-rise buildings (for example Résidence 2000 in Villeneuve see overview map), because they are privately owned, or both. Another example is that according to Alicia, Kevin and Sofiane (who died in 2012) did not really live in a *quartier*, meaning a place where one might expect such violence, “*ils habitaient dans des résidences assez correctes ou il n’y avaient pas d’histoires, rien*” (interview, 01/05/2018). They lived in a privately-owned block in Les Granges (see overview map). According to Rachid, a member of Agir pour la Paix, “*Les Granges, ce n’est pas un quartier réputé chaud. Vous y habitez, il y a deux parcs, c’est vraiment agréable*” (radio interview, 01/07/2014). The situation in Echirolles is quite different to the situation in Grenoble as outside observers consider the entire city of Echirolles as a *quartier*. Inhabitants however consider only certain

parts of the city as a *quartier*, such as Les Essarts and Surieux, but not Les Granges. The latter indeed does not correspond to the criteria of a “*zone urbaine sensible*” and is therefore not part of this priority geography (see overview map). These internal differences in and between neighborhoods are not easily discernable for outsiders, but they are part of the experience of those who inhabit the neighborhood.

In Villeneuve, the Arlequin and Baladins-Géants areas are considered to be really a *quartier*, but not the area of the privately owned low-rise buildings of Résidence 2000, nor Bruyère (see overview map). Bruyère is an example of a high-rise building with privately owned apartments that have a certain standing and is called by some the “Club Med of Villeneuve” (field notes, 17/03/2017).

A fourth and last characteristic of a *quartier*, according to participants, is the high number of inhabitants per square meter enabled by the density of its architecture.

### *3.3) A place where immigrants are concentrated*

In addition to its negative connotation and its architecture, participants further associate a *quartier* with immigration: a place historically destined for racialized labor immigrants; where new immigrants are allotted housing, and that lacks social diversity [see box 3.25 for an empirical excursion].

According to Tina, a *quartier* is “a place that groups together all people between quotation marks” (29/05/2017).<sup>126</sup> With the term “quotation marks” Tina refers for example to all those considered ‘others’. This representation of the concentration of ‘others’ is widely shared among research participants, some pointing out that spatial segregation for immigrants is a result of planning. Joachim for example affirmed that *quartiers* were originally created to “pile up foreign minorities”.

A la base le quartier a été créé, ça va être un peu fort le terme que je vais employer mais c’était pour entasser les minorités étrangères qui arrivaient sur le territoire. S’ils ont été créés à Paris, Marseille ou..? C’était pour construire. Il y avait plein d’arrivants, des Portugais, des Italiens, des Arabes, la communauté africaine. Il y en avait plein qui sont arrivés sur le territoire. Et du coup tout ç’a été construit pour leur permettre d’avoir un logement simplement. (Joachim, interview, 17/11/2015)

Like Joachim, Alicia thought that *quartiers* are built to regroup people “*pour que les travailleurs soient tous au même endroit et qu’ils élèvent leurs familles ensemble etc. Je pense que c’est pour ça que ça a fait des gros... blocs on va dire*” (Alicia, interview, 01/05/2018). In contrast with Joachim, she did not refer specifically to immigrant workers but workers in general and her grand-parents from Algeria were part of them. While some MSHN in Grenoble and Echirolles were built for workers specifically, this is not the case of

<sup>126</sup> In French: “Un quartier c’est qu’on a regroupé toutes les personnes en guillemets”.

Villeneuve, quite the contrary in fact. The immigrant workers that arrived in different immigration waves from the end of the WWII onwards lived in hostels, privately rented apartments in the Très-Cloîtres neighborhood (see overview map) and shacks in shanty towns. It is only later that they obtained access to social housing in large housing estates.

New immigrants kept arriving in Villeneuve, fleeing from dictatorship in Chili (end 1970s and 1980s), from Eastern Europe during the Balkan wars (1990s), and more recently Roma people from Eastern Europe. Mounira asked me rhetorically: “And where were these immigrants sent? To the *quartiers* because they are not wanted elsewhere”. What draws people to a *quartier* is that housing is more affordable than elsewhere in the city. Amelle defined the *quartier* therefore as “a geographic zone where people live according to their financial means” (interview, 09/09/2017). Participants have suspicion that ethnic considerations play a role in the allocation of social housing. Fadoua for example applied for social housing everywhere in the city except for Villeneuve and Mistral, and the only apartment she was offered was in Vigny-Musset, caught in between Villeneuve and Village-Olympique (see overview map).

**Box 3.25 [empirical excursion]: What do you mean no social diversity?**

A general representation of *quartiers* is that they lack social diversity, meaning that they lack middle-class white inhabitants. During the preparatory discussions for our journey to Copenhagen one Agir pour la Paix member said that what he liked about his neighborhood (Villeneuve Echirrolles) was its diversity (ethnic, national, linguistic, religion etc.). I realized that the village where I lived mostly with other white middle-class families really lacked social diversity (field notes, 05/04/2015). The image of the neighborhood in terms of diversity calls into question the discourse about the MSHN as spaces of homogeneity and ethnic ghettos, for example in Sarkozy’s speech when he pointed to “the same people in the same neighborhoods” to explain the problems of Villeneuve: “*Parce que si on met toujours les mêmes dans les mêmes quartiers, ne nous plaignons pas ensuite qu'ils deviennent des ghettos*” (30/07/2010). Mistaking the diversity that the APLP participant valued for homogeneity is an effect of racialized representations, placing all racialized ‘others’ in one category.

The experience of de facto segregation is associated with the idea of the concentration of a poor and racialized population in a certain space. In addition, a “ghetto” is a space in which one is confined. During street debates on the question “*certaines disent que ce quartier est un ghetto, qu’en pensez-vous?*” some participants confirmed that their neighborhood was like a ghetto. An older white woman said, for example, that indeed certain places in Villeneuve correspond to the characteristics of a ghetto: “*les zones craintes autour du 50 Arlequin: c’est sale, c’est sombre, c’est moche, des trucs te tombent dessus*” (street debate, 02/11/2015). An older participant from Tunisia explained why he felt the term “ghetto” was justified.

Claske : Vous utilisez ce mot "ghetto". A partir de quel moment peut-on dire qu'un quartier est un ghetto?

Béchir : A partir du moment où les enfants de ce sous-prolétariat se retrouvent regroupés dans des quartiers comme le nôtre [Villeneuve] et où les enfants de France ne vont pas dans la même école, les services publics ne fonctionnent pas. La division du travail commence à l'école, savoir lire et écrire est une chose mais accéder à un niveau d'études qui te permette de choisir ton métier c'est une autre. (Béchir, interview, 02/06/2016)

Based on these answers, a *quartier* is a space with a concentration of poverty, of different 'ethnic' groups, abandoned by the State, and full of dangerous, dirty and dark spaces.

### *3.4) Quartier as a style of life*

Research participants further associated the *quartier* with a style of life mentioning the following terms: family, like a village, calm, working-class values (*valeurs populaires*), traditions, codes, being idle (*oisif*), immobility, and staying put.

#### *Family, village*

Several participants, of whom I quote two, associated a *quartier* with a family and village style of life. When Tina, a middle-aged woman of Algerian origin, exchanged her apartment in the city-center (Place aux Herbes) for a much larger apartment in Villeneuve (2006) she understood from others that a *quartier* stands for family and limited mobility: "*quand je suis arrivée ils m'ont expliqué, t'es dans un quartier ici, or le quartier est une sorte de famille mais qui reste ici*" (interview, 29/05/2018). Mayare, a younger woman, also of Algerian origin, explained that a *quartier* functions like a village: it is a place where there are "many children on the streets", "a lot of young people", "small shops (*commerçants*)", "there is life" and a place "where you greet everyone" (interview, 07/07/2017).

#### *Values and traditions*

According to Mounira's childhood memories of growing up in Villeneuve there was a certain form of solidarity and caring for each other (*bienveillance*) and a shared responsibility for bringing up children. Amelle has heard similar stories from her mother who grew up in a *quartier* in Grenoble as the daughter of Algerian labor immigrants. Amelle's mother wanted to transmit certain "working class values" (*valeurs populaires*) to her children, such as showing respect for others, mutual aid, and sharing despite precarious living conditions. Amelle, who herself grew up in the country-side of Montmélian (a small town 50km from Grenoble), associated these values with the way of life in the *quartiers*. Her own experience in Echirolles changed her ideas about these values somewhat. She found friends in the neighborhood somewhat closedminded.

Je ne sais pas, ils sont moins ouverts d'esprit. Envers les gens qui sont pas musulmans, ils sont vachement plus critiques. Pour moi, ça s'explique parce qu'ils ont grandi que entre eux en fait et ils comprennent moins. (Amelle, interview, 09/09/2017)

Tina, who was taught that the neighborhood works like a family, shares Amelle's feeling that the ties that bind, described positively by some in terms of caring for each other and of solidarity, can also feel like a restraint. Tina feels that cultural traditions from people's countries of origin are being continued because people are all together: "*comme on est tous ensemble dans un quartier, on se comprend sur ces traditions-là et on continue à les perpétuer*" but she feels that they stifle people, and need to be overturned in order to find one's place in French society.

### *Immobility*

In this subsection I come back to Tina's remark about staying put in the neighborhood. Joachim described the latter as being part of the neighborhood's "life-style".

La majorité de mes amis, quand ils sortent du quartier, ils ne sont pas bien quoi. Ils sont là à se plaindre, qu'est-ce qu'on fait là et tout ça ? Tout simplement parce que c'est le manque de repères et ils aiment bien rester là où ils connaissent tout, tout le monde. Ils ont leur petit confort. Ils ont peur de l'inconnu et tout ça c'est problématique parce qu'après ça empêche de faire certaines choses, par exemple... Ce n'est pas les mêmes activités que les autres personnes ont. [...] Ce n'est pas du tout le même style de vie quoi, c'est tellement posé. C'est peut-être ça qui emmène cette différence entre styles de vie, c'est peut-être ça qui fait que quand certaines personnes sortent du quartier, parce qu'il y en a qui ont 30, 35 ans et je ne les ai jamais vu en dehors du quartier, jamais, jamais. Je les ai toujours vus au même endroit, au même endroit, au même endroit. (Tina, interview, 17/11/2015)

When I ask Joachim whether this is a question of financial means, he answers negatively.

Même pas. Ce n'est pas une question de moyens financiers. C'est une question de... Ils ne se sentent pas acclimatés je pense. Ils se sentent à part de la société et à partir de là, quand ils sortent ils ne se sentent pas à leur place, peut-être ils se sentent regardés, épiés et du coup... Bah cette différence en fait, ils n'arrivent pas à la surmonter et ils se sentent trop différents pour être dans l'eau quoi. D'un coup ils préfèrent rester à part dans leur quartier où ils connaissent tout le monde, où ils ont leurs petites habitudes, leurs repères. D'un coup, tout ça vient de là. (Joachim, interview, 17/11/2015)

While Joachim denied that people stayed put for financial reasons, I consider that the latter may contribute to this "life-style" and also contribute, in addition to racialization, to the fact his friends feel out of place when they leave the neighborhood.

### *Codes*

As discussed before, youth workers of CODASE confirm that certain young people, *les "jeunes de quartier"*, lack points of reference outside of the neighborhood and the necessary codes to participate in dominant society. The term "*jeunes de quartier*" only applies to youth

groups that strongly identify with the neighborhood, that adopt its dress, language codes, and corresponding social life in the neighborhood.

Certains sont mobiles, comme nous autres. Là on peut se rendre d'un endroit à un autre et être à l'aise comme on peut le faire nous, d'autres [les "jeunes de quartier"] ont plus de mal. (Tedy, interview, 29/09/2017)

Mobility clearly depends on one's social position in society as well as experiences of discrimination, a point I develop in chapter 5. Youth workers propose outings, but it requires a lot of persuading to leave the security of the neighborhood. "*Quand nous on arrive à les faire prendre un peu l'air, c'est violent hein! C'est violent parce qu'ils se rendent compte que la vraie société est celle qui est dehors et pas celle qui régit le quartier*" (Jean-Pierre, interview, 29/09/2017). When I ask why (some) young people need Jean-Pierre to go out of the neighborhood he answers that, for some, leaving the neighborhood is a violent confrontation with a society beyond the neighborhood, from which they are excluded and where they do not know the codes. Their "style of dress", their "way of speaking", and their "residence in a *quartier*" makes them belong to a category; they are stigmatized accordingly and feel vulnerable and lost without these codes. Conversely, when one wants to be able to speak to marginalized youth in the neighborhood one also needs to have acquired certain codes.

#### *Neighborhood identification*

Identification with neighborhood codes is very varied among inhabitants and probably related to the level of identification with the neighborhood itself (see Sauvadet 2004), which Mounira confirmed when she stated that "*quand on est dans un quartier, on s'y identifie*". The neighborhood identity serves as a protection against the feeling of alienation and existential anxiety with which marginalized young people in the neighborhood struggle.

#### *3.5) Public space as a place of danger and precarity*

In this section I focus on the dangers that research participants associate with a *quartier*, informed by their lived experience of fear or nuisance. Their comments all referred to public space, which is not used here in its strict sense, but applies to all neighborhood spaces that are publicly accessible. One of the main sources of danger and nuisance in the neighborhood is provoked by the unsanctioned use of public space by motor scooters; a second source of fear and nuisance is caused by youth groups that occupy (semi-)public space; a third source of fear and concern is the bad influence the neighborhood may have on one's children, being the place where they encounter those that have a bad influence; a fourth source of danger, related with the former, are the violent confrontations between youth groups in order to defend the reputation of the neighborhood, sometimes with deadly consequences.

#### *Fear is specific according to age, gender, and space*

The fear associated with certain spaces and certain moments of the day is gender and age

specific. Neighborhood residents know which places to avoid and they adapt their itinerary through the neighborhood accordingly, as they adapt their timetable and the moment of the day they go to certain places. For example, an elderly woman who walks her dog every day in the park of Villeneuve does not go out at night anymore, but goes in the morning when “the unemployed young people are still sleeping” in order to avoid scooters in the park (street debate, 02/11/2015). Moreover, young women avoid certain places because they are disreputable (*mal fréquentés*) which means that they are used, for example, by groups of loitering young men to consume alcohol and/or drugs (Mayare, interview, 07/07/2017). Mayare explained that “one can pass there but one should not stay” in order to preserve one’s reputation (see also De Backer 2019; Wijntuin and Koster 2019). Young women adapt their itineraries according to the places young men occupy. For example, Zéliha felt anxious about crossing the *quartier* by night when returning from a friend’s house at the Place des Géants and had to cross a walkway (*passerelle*) where a group of young people were drinking together (interview, 29/05/2017).

### *Motor scooters as a source of fear*

Driving motor scooters in the park is responsible for noise pollution (*nuisance sonore*) and is a source of physical insecurity. People do not dare to complain, according to Alain, for fear of repercussions, in particular when these vehicles are used for dealing drug. This irresponsible driving is a form of unsanctioned use of public space in Villeneuve. The presence of scooters in the park inhibits other's access to this space, such as children and the elderly. Cyrille Jacob, Head of Security for the City of Grenoble, interprets the use of motorized vehicles in the park in Villeneuve as a form of transgression of rules and demonstration of one’s power.

Des fois, tout un dimanche il y a des motos cross qui montent la Butte, qui descendent... et qui empêchent, soit les habitants d’aller dans le parc, avec les enfants notamment, soit qu’ils empêchent de dormir car ce sont des motos cross qui font un boucan pas possible. [...] Le bruit c’est quelque chose de très impactant pour les habitants. C’est aussi la toute-puissance : j’ai pas de casque, j’ai une grosse moto et je nargue la police, puisque la police a des consignes pour éviter l’accident. Cela créé du danger. (Cyrille Jacob, interview, 25/05/2017)

### *Occupations in semi-public space*

An additional source of fear is the unsanctioned use of public space. Nawaz explained the problem he was facing because of a group of around ten to twelve men who occupied his corridor at night over more than four months. People in the group were aged between 22 and 25 years old according to Nawaz, but were younger according to night mediators of the Régie de quartier, who estimated their age to be under 18.

In the beginning boys only came here for some time, like half an hour, and then they went but slowly this increased and now every evening a group is coming in this corridor. They stay from around 5 p.m. until 2, 3, 4 a.m. When they go, they leave cans and bottles behind, cigarette buds on the walls, they piss here... They lie in



front of the entrances of our apartments, for example of the apartment in the corner where an older man lives with his daughter. When he goes out, they do not make space for him to pass, he has to step over their legs to get past. In the beginning they did not make noise but slowly this came. Under the influence of alcohol and drugs, they are shouting and laughing. They break into the doors of storerooms that have the electricity boxes of all apartments of our corridor. This makes enormous noise and they could set everything on fire! We all become mental! (Nawaz, interview in English, 19/02/2013)<sup>127</sup>

The noise in the corridor made Nawaz and his neighbors particularly afraid that the young men might break their doors and enter their houses, and he feared for the safety of his daughters. Nawaz does not really know the boys, but understood that they came from several apartment blocks. Dialogue has proven useless with these young men when they are under the influence of alcohol and drugs.

From my discussions with night mediators I understood that typically those who occupy public and semi-public spaces in Villeneuve on a regular basis are young men, in rare cases women, between roughly 16 and 26 years old but sometimes younger, without employment or in precarious work situations. The English term 'loitering', frequently used for groups of young people that stay in an area without an obvious purpose, does not quite capture the emotional charge of the words that residents, night mediators, and public servants use in French: 'to squat' (*squatter*) and 'to occupy' (*occuper*).

Residents' attitudes towards this behavior vary from understanding, if they see in it an innocent gathering to get out of sight of the police or parents; to tolerant and compassionate if they feel that these young people have nowhere else to go and if they identify with them; and to intolerant if they interpret these gatherings as a violation of the rules and as uncivil behavior. In addition to the direct nuisance of occupations, the latter group of residents takes offense at the image of degradation that occupations bestow on the neighborhood (see Dijkema 2019). Occupations in hallways tend to take place over a certain period of time, as they become a fixed meeting point for a group of people. How long they last tends to depend on the social capital of the inhabitants of a certain housing block, and on their capacity to draw attention from social housing corporations, night mediators, and public institutions. For example, the young people involved in the occupations of the block where Nawaz lived (30, Galerie d'Arlequin) moved to another area because active and well-connected residents, organized in the Association 30-40 mobilized attention and created awareness of the problem. They moved to a block (110, Galerie d'Arlequin) with a relatively high concentration of immigrants recently arrived in France living in precarious conditions

<sup>127</sup> This quote is in English because this was the language of the interview: Nawaz is from Pakistan and only speaks a little French.

and with less institutional connections. In this block, the young people involved in occupying communal spaces were able to stay more permanently.

#### *Parental fear of negative influences on their children*

Parental fear is very much oriented towards the safety of one's children and the threats that they may encounter. Parents' fear that they will become victims of physical violence of youth groups, as was the case for Kevin and Sofiane, and that their children will come under the negative influence of older peers involved in drug consumption, drug dealing, or petty crime. Adults experience difficulty in getting young people interested in low-wage jobs given the attraction of the parallel economy.

Je ne sais plus quoi dire aux jeunes. Avant je pouvais leur faire la morale, il y avait du travail, mais maintenant je ne peux plus. Les boulots il n'y en a plus. Un jeune ne va pas travailler pour 50E, s'il peut gagner 500E. (Participant, street debate, 22/10/2015)

In comparison to outside observers, inside observers have a far more ambiguous position with regard to insecurity in the neighborhood. They feel torn between on the one hand the impetus to give a positive image of the neighborhood and, on the other hand, their desire to be honest about the difficult conditions they face.

#### *3.6) Villeneuve, a place to defend, that protects and that one seeks protection from*

Villeneuve is also experienced by those that live there as a place that is worth defending against the negative influence of outside (3.6.a); as a place of bad influence against which one has to protect one's children (3.6.b); and finally as a place where one learns how to protect oneself (3.6.c).

##### *3.6.a) The quartier as a place that needs to be defended*

Many participants experience stigmatizing images of the neighborhood as aggressions addressed to them, and have the feeling that they need to defend the neighborhood. This is not the case for all inhabitants. Those who do not have a stake in defending the reputation of the neighborhood and in countering its stigmatization are mostly middle-class inhabitants who seek to extract themselves from the neighborhood, which Sauvadet called the group of the "*repliés*" (2006). Their professional and social lives take place outside of the neighborhood and they may even contribute to this stigmatization. Another group that does not have a stake in defending the reputation of the neighborhood are those that Sauvadet calls "the precarious" (2006). For the latter the neighborhood is neither positive nor negative, they are there by default and their struggles are situated elsewhere: notably everyday struggles with making ends meet, dealing with institutions, educating one's children and caring for family.

Those who have a stake in defending the neighborhood can be put into three categories:

1. An older, mostly middle-class, generation of activist inhabitants that adhered to Villeneuve's initial project and that is active in its community organizations (such as the Union de Quartier and Villeneuve Debout)
2. Activists who do not necessarily live in Villeneuve but for whom the *quartier* is the appropriate terrain for political struggle (such as Planning and FUIQP)
3. A younger generation of precarious youth

In this subsection I focus on those who have a stake in defending the neighborhood. I first deal with the modes of operation that the activist groups adopt to defend the neighborhood, and then I deal with the modes of operation of the precarious youth.

*Activists that defend the neighborhood against stigmatization*

Neighborhood activists experience stigmatizing statements as “outside aggressions” as the following quote from an interview with the President of the *Union de Quartier* demonstrates.

On rappelle que la Villeneuve a subi plusieurs **agressions extérieures**. Des événements qui ont fait chuter sa marque de fabrique, sa réputation. Le plus marquant c'est en 2010, le deuxième c'était lorsque France 2 est venue faire sa mission encore un coup, et on voit comment à chaque fois c'est la Villeneuve... Villeneuve... Villeneuve... (Mahrez, interview, 20/03/2015)

Motivations behind getting involved in neighborhood activism are to defend the political project at the origin of Villeneuve, and to level out the negative effect stigmatization has on housing prices. Box 3.26 gives three practical examples of neighborhood activism that challenged negative representations of the neighborhood. These examples also illustrate why I consider Villeneuve as a locus of enunciation and a counterhegemonic space.

**Box 3.26 Villeneuve strikes back**

One form of protecting the neighborhood is the organization by Villeneuve Debout of a contest of 100 positive speeches about Villeneuve during the annual storytelling festival (*Les Arts du Récit*, 12/05/2012) an answer to Sarkozy's stigmatizing speech in 2010. 94 people took the microphone in the central park of Grenoble (Jardin de Ville) and struck back, using their own words to describe the neighborhood, its challenges, and what they expected from its Head of State [Figure 3.82].



Figure 3.82 Ensemble imaginons 100 discours admirables. (Villeneuve Debout, 12/05/2012)

A second form of protecting the neighborhood is that a group of neighborhood organizations organized an *Assemblée Populaire* (04/10/2013) after the TV report “Villeneuve le rêve brisé” and created, among other initiatives, a working group that sued the national television channel France 2 in court for defamation.<sup>128</sup>

A third form of protecting the neighborhood from outside aggression are the struggles against state-imposed demolitions as part of the National Urban Renovation Program (PNRU). Neighborhood inhabitants and housing rights activists organized a long-lasting campaign against these renovations because “what is done for the inhabitants without the inhabitants is often done against them” (*ce qui se fait pour les habitants, sans eux, se fait le plus souvent contre eux*) according to the anti-demolition collective (Breynat et al. 2016, 84).

<sup>128</sup> Newspapers that covered the mobilisation: *Dauphiné Libéré*, “Des habitants de La Villeneuve et France Télévision au tribunal le 15 mai”, 6 mai 2014; *l’Express*, “Grenoble: un reportage d’“Envoyé Spécial” attaqué en diffamation”, 15/05/2014; *Médiapart*, “Médias et quartiers: Grenoble, la réplique”, 23 août 2019, <https://www.mediapart.fr/studio/documentaires/france/medias-et-quartiers-grenoble-la-replique>

Figure 3.83 shows a demonstration against the announcement of the demolition of two blocks of the Galerie d'Arlequin (60 and 190).<sup>129</sup>



Figure 3.83. *Défendons la Villeneuve.* (Photo Le Crieur de la Villeneuve, 28/09/2016)

#### *Precarious youth groups that defend the neighborhood physically*

Younger precarious inhabitants involved in protecting the neighborhood are interested in a different kind of neighborhood defense to that of the activists. These inhabitants organize physical protection against, for example, youth groups from other neighborhoods that come to challenge Villeneuve's reputation; against media reporters that they suspect of stigmatizing media coverage (field notes, December 2013); and against police interventions (field notes, 17/10/2013). Youth workers confirm in the quote below this idea of the neighborhood as a space to defend.

Moi, j'appelle ça [Villeneuve] une enclave. **C'est voué à se défendre.** C'est replié sur soi et on se défend de l'ennemi. Toutes les personnes qui viennent de l'extérieur, [les jeunes qui s'identifient avec le quartier] ils s'en méfient. Et nous, éducateurs, on vient de l'extérieur et au départ ils se méfient de nous. Comme, quand ils sortent, les gens se méfient d'eux. Ça fait un peu les Gaulois et les Romains, ça fait vraiment ça quoi. (Jean-Pierre, interview, 29/09/2017)

The reference to Gauls and Romans is a clear allusion to the Asterix and Obelix comics where the Gauls represent an oppressed but valiant minority that resist Roman oppression and have to defend their village against continuous attacks.

An additional form of defending the neighborhood that I deal with later in my thesis is the political mobilization in the name of *quartiers populaires* in order to defend the interests of their inhabitants (see chapter 6).

<sup>129</sup> Le Crieur de la Villeneuve, mobilisation contre les destructions, 18/11/2016, <https://www.lecrieur.net/mobilisation-contre-les-destructions/>, accessed 22/04/2020

### 3.6.b) *The quartier as a space that one needs to protect oneself and one's children against*

Danger not only comes from outside, Villeneuve is also presented as a source of danger, as I have demonstrated in the previous section. It is perceived as a place against which one has to protect one's children. Participants described different defense strategies such as keeping one's children inside or moving out of the neighborhood.

#### *Keeping children inside*

Alicia wants to keep her child in the private sphere of the home in order to protect her against negative influences that she associates with the neighborhood. She recently moved from Echirrolles to a residential block on the border of another MSHN, Mistral, that has a worse reputation than Villeneuve. In the morning, when she goes to drop off her daughter at the baby-sitter's apartment in a degraded block in Mistral she is confronted with disenfranchised youth dealing with alcohol and drug abuse, which affects parents.

Même si les parents sont derrière et font le maximum, on ne sait pas comment les fréquentations peuvent entraîner l'enfant... Donc moi je pense que j'éviterais un quartier. Je privilégie une petite résidence calme pour mon enfant et je ne voudrais pas qu'elle fréquente trop l'extérieur pour... dériver quoi. (Alicia, interview, 01/05/2017)

Keeping children inside is a common parental strategy to keep children safe and to avoid bad influences (*mauvaises fréquentations*).

#### *Moving out*

Mounira decided to move out of the neighborhood in order to protect her children. She grew up in Villeneuve and moved to Mistral when she got married, but at some point felt a physical instinct that she needed to protect her children against "the increasing violence, levels of crime and the rise of extremism" she encountered there (interview, 05/06/2017).

L'évolution de la société fait qu'ayant élevé mes enfants à Mistral, à un moment j'ai senti qu'il y avait urgence pour eux de quitter Mistral, une urgence vitale. Je le sentais avec mon corps avec ce que j'avais, le besoin de les **protéger**. (Mounira, interview, 05/06/2017)

Even though Mounira took her sons out of the neighborhood, she could not avoid the attraction the *quartier* had on her youngest son who was snatched up (*happé*) by "easy money" (*argent facile*), easily earned through criminal activity instead of the hard physical labor of their immigrant (grand)parents, which makes her feel powerless.

#### *Feeling of powerlessness*

Fadoua shares this feeling of powerlessness, albeit in a different way. She said that the violence of 2012 touched her at a deep personal level, as a mother of several boys.

Ça touchait de manière personnelle, c'était quelque chose de l'ordre famil... c'était comme la famille, même si je ne connaissais absolument pas les familles il y avait quelque chose de... là oui, là on se dit : mes enfants ils ne sont pas à l'abri de ce genre d'événement. [...] J'ai plus fait le lien avec mes enfants pour Kevin et Sofiane que

pour les attentats. C'est justement de dire qu'on ne peut pas les protéger. Ils vont être un âge qu'ils vont grandir et ils vont peut-être être dans un parc tranquillement avec des copains, ils n'ont rien fait de mal et puis il y a des abrutis qui vont arriver, qui vont les menacer, qui vont les violenter. Fadoua, 19/05/2017)

The deaths of Kevin and Sofiane provoked a significant feeling of insecurity because she realized that she could not protect her children against such violence. She prepared herself for the moment that her boys would be of an age when she could no longer keep them in the private sphere of the family and school. Public space can be seen as a sort of barometer for neighborhood tensions, an idea that Mounira formulated in the following terms: "*le quartier va mal et on le voit à la façon dont on n'investit plus l'espace public*" (Mounira, interview, 05/06/2017).

### *3.6.c) A quartier and the need to learn how to defend oneself*

Self-defense strategies in a *quartier* are gender specific. In this subsection I give the examples of a young woman who found some protection by wearing a *hijab*, and two young men who found protection by developing "warrior capital".

#### *Hijab as protection of (young) women in the neighborhood*

Earlier on in our conversation Zéliha spoke about her experience of insecurity in the neighborhood, in particular with regard to passing groups of young men that gathered at dusk on a walkway she had to cross. Later she told me that once she started to wear a headscarf, she observed a difference, and she felt it gave her some form of protection.

À l'époque je n'avais pas encore le foulard et dans le quartier ce n'est pas franchement... Porter le foulard dans le quartier est une **forme de protection**. Je le ressens. Ça fait deux ans que je l'ai mis. [...] Je ne pouvais pas traverser la passerelle toute seule, il fallait un copain ou une copine et elle aussi était inquiète pour moi. Je me sentais en **danger**. Ils ne m'ont pas forcément fait des remarques mais moi j'ai senti que si je passais, j'étais plus en sécurité si je passais [la passerelle] avec le voile que si je passais sans voile. (Zéliha, interview, 08/06/2017)

#### *The warrior capital of young men*

In a *quartier*, you have to defend yourself in order to gain respect. One's place in the hierarchy depends on one's "warrior capital" and one needs to develop qualities of a warrior to impose oneself (Sauvadet 2006). Joachim explained this idea in the following terms: that you have to learn to defend yourself in order to be respected in the *quartier*.

Oui clairement, il faut apprendre à montrer les crocs. C'est un peu fort ce que je dis mais c'est la vérité. Si tu ne montres pas une certaine forme de, comment dire, si tu ne montres pas ton torse face à des provocations et des trucs comme ça et tu te laisses trop faire, tu te fais marcher dessus. C'est **la loi de la jungle** un peu, le quartier. Il faut prouver que tu as une forte mentalité, que tu sais **te défendre pour après te faire respecter**. (Joachim, interview, 17/11/2015)

What Joachim considered in positive terms as learning to defend himself, César qualified as a culture of violence and stressed its salience in Villeneuve.

Il y a un climat de violence à Villeneuve. On ne peut pas se le cacher. Il y a de la violence. Il y a une culture de la violence qui est très présente. Il faut **savoir se défendre**. Il faut savoir garder son calme. Il faut savoir être un peu virulent quand il le faut parce que sinon on se fait cracher dessus. (César, interview, 17/03/2017).

I summarize the forms of protection and aggression I observed at different levels: between individuals, the neighborhood, and the wider city and society in the diagram below [Figure 3.84]. It shows the neighborhood border that needs to be protected against aggressions, varying from stigmatizing discourse, state policies and physical aggression of youth groups from other neighborhoods. The outside border of the neighborhood separates MSHN and the city center and can also serve as a source of protection for racialized inhabitants who are confronted with disapproving looks when they leave the *quartier(s)*. The crosshatched pink layer in the diagram represents this protective function. The inner, orange circle in the diagram symbolizes the physical integrity of inhabitants. The latter experience fear of physical and verbal aggressions and develop defense strategies for themselves and their children.

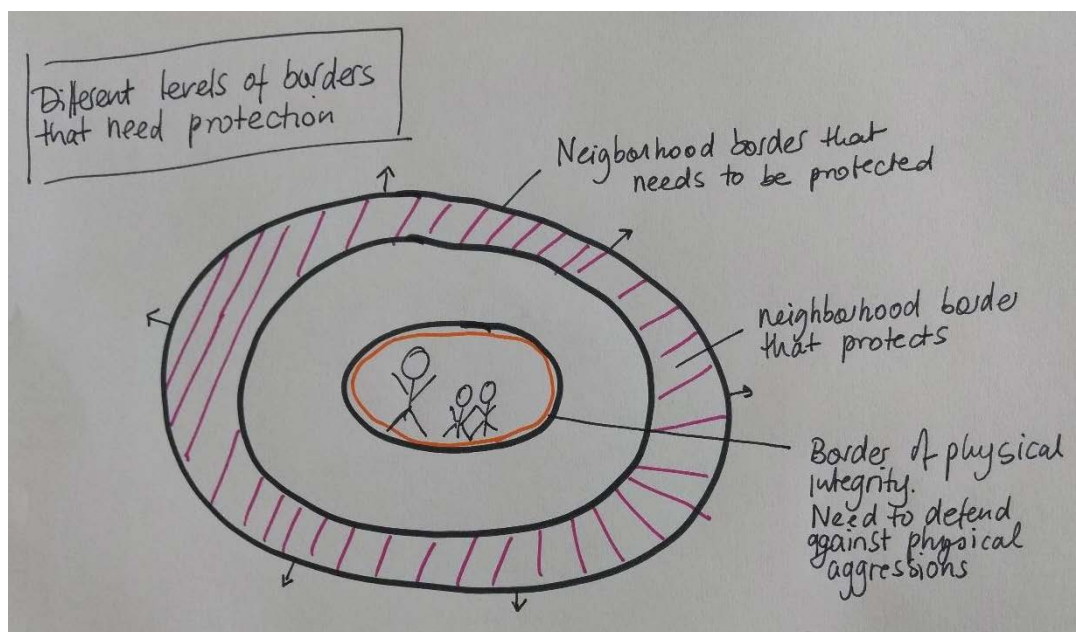


Figure 3.84. Different circles of protection and defense

This image is inspired by Dugan’s model of “nested paradigms” (1996) used in conflict transformation, that represents the ways in which forms of violence are nested into each other, connecting violence at an individual and a structural level.<sup>130</sup> In the next section I explain that I have come to consider Villeneuve as a place that is fragile.

<sup>130</sup> Examples of researchers making these connections are Bourgois on the connection between the violence involved in the inner-city crack trade and racism and economic exclusion (Bourgois 1995); Farmer (2004) on the



#### 4) My perception of Villeneuve as a place that is fragile

Dans nos quartiers, c'est comme dans *la Guerre des étoiles*: il y a le bon et le mauvais côté de la force. Le Dark Vador de la relégation, de la ségrégation et de la radicalisation, mais en face, pour l'instant, aucun Obi-Wan Kenobi ne se lève dans le gouvernement pour accompagner les énergies positives.

(Marc-Antoine Jamet, councilor Socialist Party in Val-de-Reuil, Libération, 31/03/2018)

After the descriptions by participants of what a *quartier* is and what it is like to live in Villeneuve, I now turn to my perception of the neighborhood in terms of a space that is fragile and that is under stress from significant tensions. I perceived that what some call peace is in fact a fragile equilibrium between different forces in Villeneuve. Many different actors involved in the everyday weaving of constructive relationships play a large role in maintaining this equilibrium. Sometimes, however, this “web of relationships” (Lederach 2010) breaks and paroxysmal violence erupts. In this subsection I further explain why I have come to view the neighborhood as a fragile space in which the equilibrium can break apart when tensions can no longer be contained by its self-regulating forces. I focus in particular on the impact of the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks on tensions in the neighborhood.

##### 4.1) *The fragility of Villeneuve a story of tensions and a tinderbox*

The neighborhood of Villeneuve is commonly described as "sensitive" (*sensible*) and "hot" (*chaud*). The term “sensitive”, in vogue since the 1970s according to Blanc (2007), became an administrative term in 1996 with the State’s designation of Zones urbaines sensibles. The “hot summer” of 1981 in Minguettes was a clear reference to the tensions between police and youth groups that resulted in violent confrontations. The term “*c’est chaud*” can refer to something that is complicated, that is intense, or that is a source of tension or fear, depending on the context. In general, a *quartier* is “*chaud*” or “sensitive” when one fears possible outbreaks of violence. For example, Rachid (cited earlier) said that Les Granges, the neighborhood where Kevin and Sofiane died, is not a neighborhood that has the reputation of being “*chaud*” and it was therefore surprising that such violence broke out there. See overview map for the location of Les Granges.

In Villeneuve people speak about levels of tension in the neighborhood, a typical expression I often heard is: “*c’est tendu en ce moment*”. In a discussion about the motivation of his organization, Villeneuve Debout, not to participate in a demonstration against police violence, Alain preferred the term fragility (Spring 2017). When I asked him whether he felt the situation was too “*chaud*”, he answered: “*ce n’est pas chaud, c’est extrêmement fragile*

connection between deaths from illness in Haïti and the violence of structural adjustment; (Brahim 2018) Groth (1996) about rape within armed liberation movements and the violence of waging an independence war in Namibia; and Scheper-Hughes about “the violence of everyday life in Brazil” (2009).

*et ça peut partir pour n'importe quelle [raison]"* (informal discussion, 13/04/2017).<sup>131</sup> *"Ça peut partir"* is a reference to *"partir en vrille"* (*se déliter, se désagréger*) or *"partir en live"* indicating that events can rapidly take a regrettable turn and spiral out of control. The threat that something might spark the anger and frustration in the neighborhood leading to an explosion of violence is very real, leading to the representation of a *quartier* as a tinderbox. One has to keep in mind that collective violence is never spontaneous, but depends on existing tensions and a certain level of organization. There is thus a fragile equilibrium in the neighborhood that is at a constant risk of exploding in reaction to events both inside and outside the neighborhood.

Research participants feel tensions at specific times and in specific places, differentiating between day and night, summer and winter, and holidays or working days. Weather conditions modify the occupations of public space for example. Tedy, the youth worker at CODASE, explained that tensions can reach different levels of intensity and take effect at different spatial scales.

Des tensions peuvent être locales, micro-locales par rapport à tel ou tel endroit, ça peut être une tension plus générale suite à un évènement avec un autre quartier et du coup la tension va prendre tout le quartier avec des jeunes qui vont être susceptibles d'être pris là-dedans et d'un coup tout le monde est un peu sur ses gardes et une tensions qui va prendre de façon un peu générale tout le quartier. Les tensions sont de différentes natures. (Tedy, interview, 29/9/2017).

Public space in Villeneuve, as in other marginalized social housing neighborhoods in France, has become the object of everyday tensions and competition: tensions in relation to the drug trade (see for example Marlière 2007), tensions due to boundary-marking and the imaginary borders that draw lines between geographic areas and identities (see for example Sauvadet, 2006), and finally tensions due to feelings of not belonging and the visibility of 'otherness'. Halal butchers and the *hijab* are the subject of heated debate around what is 'normal' in public space, and who has the right to impose their norms (Del Grosso 2015).

There are however forces that incessantly mitigate the permanent condition of precarity, frustration, anger and despair that inhabitants of Villeneuve are confronted with and that make life a struggle, a condition that Dubet pointedly called *"galère"* (Dubet 2008). A variety of actors help people to deal with difficult life conditions such as public actors, peer groups, solidarity networks and civil society organizations. These actors contain the potential for violence and establish some kind of social cohesion and apparent peace. However at certain times outside events, such as police interventions targeting the drug trade, the death of young people in a confrontations with the police, elections, terrorist attacks, important

<sup>131</sup> The context of this informal discussion was the organization of a demonstration against police violence (Théo Luhaka Affair) in which Villeneuve Debut did not participate because it considered that the situation in the neighborhood at that moment was very tense.

soccer matches, etc. interfere with the fragile equilibrium in the neighborhood. In some case conflict and frustration cannot be contained or managed because people have not been heard, signals have not been picked up or have not been acted upon and paroxysmal violence breaks out. This was the case in 2010 and 2012. A third moment of paroxysmal violence of great importance in the neighborhood were the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks [see Box 3.27 for context information].

#### *4.2) The 2015 Paris terrorist attacks responsible for rising tensions in Villeneuve*

##### **Box 3.27 [context]: 2015 Terrorist attacks in Paris**

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 2015 a terrorist attack took place against the editorial team of Charlie Hebdo, based in the heart of Paris, and a total of 12 people were killed with assault rifles. The attack was claimed by Al-Qaida in Yemen. The next day a person close to the brothers responsible for the Charlie Hebdo attack killed a police officer and badly wounded a municipal employee in the *banlieue* of Paris. The 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2015, this same person kidnapped clients of a Kasher supermarket in the city of Paris and killed four of them. He claimed to act in name of ISIS, although the latter never officially claimed responsibility for the act.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of November that same year a new series of terrorist attacks took place in the French capital, killing 130 people in total. The first was a suicide-attack that took place near a soccer stadium in Saint Denis, during a soccer match attended by the French president. Later that same evening terrorists carried out shootings with machine guns in an area of the city with many bars. The deadliest of the attacks took place during a concert in the Bataclan concert hall and were claimed by ISIS.

With the Paris terrorist attacks of 2015 I became aware that violence occurring outside of the neighborhood can have an important impact on tensions within the neighborhood. Following the terrorist attacks the director of the Maison des Habitants des Baladins stated that he felt a strange ambience in Villeneuve and feared a rise in tensions.

On va voir que les choses vont s'empirer les prochains mois, les choses semblent calmes mais ça va s'empirer. Il y a une ambience qui est bizarre, c'est comme ça que je le sens. (Aied, interview, 16/02/2015).

Jouda called the tensions reinforced by the attacks “the tensions between us and them” (UP meeting, 12/06/2017). This paroxysmal violence reinforced group identities of “Muslims” or “foreigners” and “French”. I consider these tensions the manifestations of racism, as the term “French” is a synonym of “Whites” as I will demonstrate in chapter 5. The terrorist attacks increased the tensions in the neighborhood around symbols of Islam and in particular around the *hijab*, a headscarf or veil worn by Muslim women. One of the people who voiced her repulsion of headscarves most clearly was Elisabeth, an active member of Villeneuve Debout [see empirical excursion in Box 3.28].

**Box 3.28 [empirical excursion]: Hostility in the neighborhood against Muslim women wearing a headscarf**

Elisabeth is a retired teacher, who was confronted with the veil in the neighborhood when mothers of her pupils started wearing the hijab in the 1980s.

L'arrivée du voile à Villeneuve était pour moi une horreur. Ça c'était quelque chose d'irréversible et la continuation, la perpétuation de cet affichage d'une opposition politique et d'une opposition à moi et à nous et à la France pour moi est une chose rédhibitoire. [...] Soyons clairs, ce voile où aucun cheveu dépasse est agressif. (Elisabeth, interview, 08/07/2017)

Elisabeth's point of view is quite typical of an idea widespread in France, that the headscarf stands for a rejection of the French Republic and its values, in particular secularism (*laïcité*). Her point of view is not however representative of all older white/French people in the neighborhood, and is also a source of tension within Villeneuve Debut. Her opinion is intimately linked to her personal experience as a *pied-noir* who had to flee Algeria after it obtained its independence. She linked the headscarf to the Algerian War of Independence, when the Algerian *haïk*, a long white cloth used to cover the head and large parts of the body, was used to hide and transport weapons (Meynier 2003). Elisabeth explained that:

Le voile pour moi, pour nous les pieds-noirs, était aussi ce qui permettait aux terroristes, parce que les terroristes et le terrorisme ç'a commencé là aussi et c'était assez fort les Algériens quand même, même s'ils sont exemptés de tout quand même. Les femmes algériennes cachaient les bombes sous leurs voiles. (Elisabeth, interview, 08/07/2017)

It is questionable whether Elisabeth was aware of all these things as a child or whether she constructed this meaning *a posteriori*. Either way, this history played a role in her current interpretation of the veil in Villeneuve and influenced her strained relationships with Muslim women in the present. A place where tensions around the veil become particularly evident is the Thursday afternoon market in Villeneuve as explained [Box 1.7]. The tensions around the veil and "between us and them" that followed the Paris terrorist 2015 attacks are relevant at several moments throughout my thesis. I only introduce the theme here in order to demonstrate the extent to which the terrorist attacks created new, or reinforced existing tensions in the neighborhood.

The 2015 terrorist attacks and the paroxysmal violence of 2010 and 2012 all had as a consequence that people withdrew from public space and turned inwards. With regard to the 2015 attacks Fadoua explained her need to protect herself against Islamophobic media coverage.

Fadoua : Au niveau familial, j'ai banni tout ce qui était info, télévision et tout ça parce que personnellement ça m'a affectée. Moralement j'étais moins joyeuse, moins fofolle. Je n'étais pas comme d'habitude. Ça m'a miné la morale. Et j'ai dit c'est hors de question : ce n'est pas ce genre de chose qui va jouer sur mon attitude et du coup, depuis, je ne regarde plus les infos.

Claske : Si je t'entends bien, tu avais besoin de te protéger, de fermer ta maison contre les influences de l'extérieur. C'est comme ça que tu le sentais ?

Fadoua : En fait, j'avais besoin que mon regard à moi ne change pas. Et mon regard avait commencé à changer car quand on est matraqué comme ça par, pas matraqué, on est... il y avait trop d'infos, tout le temps des infos. [...] (Fadoua, interview, 19/05/2017)

Mainstream news had a very negative impact on tensions in the neighborhood, it created on the one hand fear among Muslims about the hostility against Islam and on the other hand, fear among non-Muslims about the threat Islam presents to French society. Despite the fact that these tensions were less significant within the neighborhood than the tensions inhabitants encountered when they left the neighborhood, which are discussed in more detail in other parts of the thesis, these tensions were tangible. Like with the 2012 violence, they were notably felt through the silence that reigned in normally cordial relationships as the story of Fadoua demonstrates below [Box 3.29]. Through this story she explained how social life in her housing block was impacted by the attacks and how she tried to break the tensions she perceived.

**Box 3.29 [empirical excursion]: Breaking the taboo with a “Thé d’Amitié”**

Après l’attentat de Charlie, j’avais tapé un papier et je l’avais mis dans la montée en proposant un thé de l’amitié et j’avais dit “avec tout ce qu’on entend ici-et-là, si ça vous dit on se retrouve en bas de l’allée et moi j’amènerai le thé et quelques petits gâteaux et on discute pour échanger afin que ça ne reste pas tabou”, quelque chose que “ohlalala”, que chacun il se fasse des idées et qu’il n’y a pas d’échange, et du coup, c’est ce qu’on avait fait. [...] C’était un moyen de crever l’abcès et de mettre des mots sur des choses et de dire tout simplement ce qu’on pensait de la situation.

Claske : Tu disais creuser l’abcès pour le thé d’amitié, parce que tu sentais qu’il y avait des tabous ?

Bah disons que plusieurs jours après, on n’en parlait pas entre nous dans le voisinage. C’est-à-dire qu’on se croisait, on se disait “bonjour”, “ça va ? La journée ç’a été ? Comment vous allez madame ?” On disait ça va ? Ça va, comme d’habitude et c’était comme d’habitude. Mais on n’est pas comme d’habitude là. Ce n’est pas normal que personne n’échange là-dessus. Moi je trouvais ça déplacé que c’est moi qui amène le sujet donc je ne l’amenais pas mais les autres ne l’amenait pas non plus. J’aime bien quand tout est clair et tout est dit. On est d’accord, on n’est pas d’accord, ça c’est autre chose, mais je préfère qu’on verbalise les choses que chacun est dans son...

Claske : Et quand tu as ouvert ce petit lieu et ce débat autour du thé ? Qu’est-ce que les gens disaient ?

Ils étaient ravis. Vraiment. Ils étaient étonnés de l’initiative et ravis de pouvoir... Je ne dis pas que c’est le thé en lui-même qui a provoqué quelque chose mais les gens étaient moins crispés je trouve. Alors, est-ce que c’est les gens après ils avaient parlé, ils étaient moins crispés ?

Est-ce que c'est moi qui, avant le thé, je n'étais pas sûr ce que pensait un tel ou un tel et du coup j'ai peut-être interprété les visages ou les attitudes. Ça, je ne sais pas. Donc après, c'est devenu comme avant. En tout cas les relations étaient... Après je trouvais que c'était plus sain. L'atmosphère était plus saine. (Fadoua, interview, 19/05/2017)

Moments of crisis in the neighborhood are responsible for two opposing dynamics: first the tendency to turn inwards and to withdraw from public life, and second the search for a sense of community and a desire to 'do something'. These moments of crisis typically led to the reconfigurations of existing groups and tensions with regard to political positions. One of the (many) actions that followed the Charlie Hebdo attacks was the creation of the Université populaire, which I discuss in detail in the next chapter.

I have come to consider Villeneuve as a place that is fragile and where people feel vulnerable but also as a place that touches people and that inhabitants care for. In the first chapter I argue that the border has epistemological potential because it is the site of tensions and friction and this is the reason why I decided to focus on what happens in the interaction between the in and outside of the neighborhood. I am particularly interested in the dynamics at play at this junction because the problems of the neighborhood cannot be properly understood within the neighborhood, as they are embedded in wider dynamics, and forms of violence such as racism. In the next section I turn my attention to the initiatives of public authorities to address the challenges described so far, looking in particular at urban policy as a governance tool of special intervention in MSHN.

## 5) Urban policy, a superposition of special interventions in MSHN

A quel moment on a perdu le sens ? A quel moment on a lâché prise ? Quand ? Quand la société a décidé la politique de la ville, ce putain de millefeuille où il y a tout et il y a rien et on a vu que ça ne fonctionnait pas mais on a rajouté des subventions, on a créé les associations. On va mettre le paquet là-dessus et on en a oublié l'essentiel. (Mounira, interview, 05/06/2017)

Villeneuve shares many of the problems identified in the previous sections with other MSHN in France. National urban policy is created with the intention to address these problems. In this section I demonstrate that while these measures may prevent more frequent outbreaks of paroxysmal violence, they are largely insufficient to address the root causes of feelings of anger and despair in relation to precarity, humiliation, racism, and lack of future prospects. I argue that they may have the effect of pacification but that they do not bring peace.

This section is written as a dialogue between the comments of research participants on urban policy and academic literature: it discusses the interaction between outbreaks of paroxysmal violence and trends in urban policy (5.1) and presents the urban policy schemes for Villeneuve and how they are experienced by inhabitants (5.2).

### 5.1) *The interaction between outbreaks of paroxysmal violence and urban policy trends*

The creation of urban policy at the end of the 1970s was motivated by a double concern: concern over the concentration of foreign families in large social housing projects (Palomares 2008, 24),<sup>132</sup> and the fear that MSHN would “ignite” (*s’embraser*) following the patterns of “black ghettos” in the United States (Blanc 2007, 72). In the economic context of the post- 1973 oil crisis, tensions heightened around the presence of non-European labor immigrants when it became clear that they would, for the most part, not return to their countries of origin. Major concerns were voiced about their lack of ‘integration’ into French society (Dikeç, 2007). The ‘problem of immigration’ would increasingly become articulated as a spatial problem (Saint-Julien, Brunet, and Auriac 2001), speaking about the “*malaise des grands ensembles*” and the “*banlieue* problem” (Epstein 2016, 1). Jouda recalled that “something was happening” in the 1980s, that tensions were rising and that “neighborhoods started to smoke” (UP meeting, 12/06/2017).<sup>133</sup>

Moments of violence have been key for the development of national urban policy:

- The tensions between police and youth in Courneuve in 1976, an indirect result of a racist crime in Courneuve (Epstein 2016) partly motivated the Habitat et Vie sociale scheme (1977), which is a forerunner of urban policy.
- The revolts that broke out in 1981 in Minguettes, a MSHN of Vénissieux (*banlieue* of Lyon) led to the announcement of a specific policy geared towards cities (*politique de la ville*).
- The revolts in Vaulx-en-Velin (*banlieue* of Lyon) in 1990 led to the appointment of a Minister for Urban Affairs.<sup>134</sup>

In Grenoble, the two moments of paroxysmal violence also led to public statements that (partially) concern the domain of urban policy (see Table 3.9 below).

The fact that urban policy is motivated by violence is important according to Tchetché Apea, because as he points out, urban policy is not driven by the State becoming aware of a social problem but rather by the people who, through revolts, draw attention to the unacceptable conditions in which they live (see also Rigouste et al. 2016).

C'est important de faire ce lien car on a parfois l'impression qu'il y a une espèce de linéarité dans l'action publique, que l'État prend conscience d'un problème et met en place des initiatives, alors que c'est la confrontation entre la société et l'État qui, à un moment

<sup>132</sup> It is paradoxical that the concern about the concentration of immigrants occurred at a moment, 1970s, when immigrants have left ultra-segregated spaces (shantytowns, slums, transit camps), having accessed social housing that middle class had deserted (Palomares 2008, 24)

<sup>133</sup> She refers in particular to racist violence in the 1970s and 1980s which I have heard about from research participants (also Toumi Djaidja, discussion, 02/10/2015) but of which I have found little mention in literature, an exception being Abdallah (2002, 2012) and Brahim (2018).

<sup>134</sup> The Ministry for Urban Affairs stopped to exist as such in 2017. Under President Macron urban policy was placed under the Ministry for Territorial Cohesion.

donné, fait émerger des politiques publiques. (...) Ce sont toujours les principaux concernés qui, par leurs moyens d'expression, essaient de faire bouger les lignes. (Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

**Table 3.9 Policy announcements in response to paroxysmal violence in Villeneuve**

Year	Place and form paroxysmal violence	Urban policy interventions
2010	Riots in Villeneuve, Grenoble	Sarkozy declared war on insecurity and immigration in MSHN; announced specific security measures <sup>135</sup> and the intention to strip French nationality from anyone who harmed the life of a public officer.
2012	Killing of Kevin and Sofiane in Echirolles	Extension of the Zone de sécurité prioritaire scheme to Villeneuve (Grenoble and Echirolles).

Over the years, one can observe a shift in the ways of interpreting outbreaks of violence in MSHN. Between 1985 and 1995 a struggle took place over the naming and framing the problem of MSHN, the appropriate social policy to deal with the impacts of the oil crisis that heavily affected France's economy, and the austerity measures that followed in 1983 (Tissot 2006, 43). The socialist President Mitterrand took a turn to the right around 1990 with an increased focus on surveillance and repression (Dikeç, 2007). Instead of looking at how to approach the problems in MSHN, the MSHN became a problem in themselves. The 1990 revolts in Vaulx-en-Velin came to be interpreted in the context of fervent discussion around immigration and Islam in France, marked nationally by the Islamic headscarf affair in 1989, and internationally by the first Intifada, the Rushdie Affair and the Gulf War (Dikeç 2007). These concerns about the threat Islam posed in France were reinforced by the 1995 terrorist attack on the Paris railway (RER), ordered by the Groupe islamique armé (GIA) in the context of the Algerian Civil War. The person responsible for the attack, Khaled Kelkal, grew up in the MSHN where the 1990 revolts broke out and is considered the first jihadist "made in France" (*Le Monde*, 16/09/2015).<sup>136</sup> The 1996 Pacte de Relance pour la ville made security one of its four pillars and pointed to ethnic problems, concerns about public order, parental authority, and the image of the father (Dikeç 2007). In Grenoble, one can see a clear shift in the presentation of security concerns between 1989 and 1993. While the 1989 study hardly

<sup>135</sup> The security measures Sarkozy announced: the creation of a new provincial police investigation unit for the Département Isère, the Groupe Interministériel de Recherches (GIR), the installation of 60.000 security cameras, and increased punishments (30/07/2010).

<sup>136</sup> "Khaled Kelkal, premier djihadiste made in France," *Le Monde le Magazine*, [https://www.lemonde.fr/m-le-mag/article/2015/09/18/khaled-kelkal-premier-djihadiste-made-in-france\\_4762322\\_4500055.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/m-le-mag/article/2015/09/18/khaled-kelkal-premier-djihadiste-made-in-france_4762322_4500055.html), accessed 20/10/2020



mentioned security concerns, crime prevention became one of the six priorities of its first city contract in 1993 [see Table 3.11].<sup>137</sup>

It is around the Villepinte colloquium in 1997, dedicated to “Safe cities for free citizens” (Des villes sûres pour citoyens libres) that the insecurity discourse won over the left under Prime Minister Jospin. As a result, the revolts of 2005 were understood in the context of the increasing preoccupation with terrorism, security and Islam post 9/11, and of the wars waged in Afghanistan and Iraq (Dikeç, 2007) resulting in the further development of hostile arguments against non-European immigrants and Muslims. This became evident in Grenoble with Sarkozy’s speech in 2010, in which he attributed crime and the riots in Villeneuve to the failed integration of immigrants. This speech is a typical illustration that the social angle of analysis was gone in 2010 and that the cultural prism, introduced in the 1990s, triumphed: “La délinquance actuelle ne provient pas d’un mal être comme je l’entends dire trop souvent: elle résulte d’un mépris pour les valeurs fondamentales de notre société” (Speech Grenoble, 30/07/2010. This trend has continued with the wave of terrorist attacks in European cities, when the representations of MSHN became entwined with that of Muslims [see Figure 3.85].



Figure 3.85 Changing articulation of MSHN following the Paris attacks in 2015. (Courtesy Miss Lilou, “les territoires ‘perdus’ de la république”, 31/03/2016)

With an increasing focus on security, a part of the funds that were originally meant to deal with social problems and housing issues in MSHN now are used to reduce the risk these neighborhoods presented for the Republic. A telling example is that since 2015 part of the funds for social cohesion are being redirected to anti-radicalization projects, which target the prevention of terrorist violence but have no repercussions on structural problems that inhabitants of MSHN face (field notes, 15/11/2018; Torres 2019).

<sup>137</sup> Note d’intention, contrat de Ville d’agglomération for the period 1993, appendix of the Délibération du Conseil Municipal de Grenoble, séance 12/02/1993

The frame of reference through which MSHN in general and the outbreaks of violence in particular are analyzed has changed throughout the years with important consequences for urban policy.

*Favoring social cohesion rather than transforming society*

Despite the security turn urban policy has taken over the past two decades, the initial aims of urban policy were the social development of MSHN (1983) and social cohesion during the Jospin government (1997-2002). The latter implied an organic conception of society with no structural conflicts in line with a transformation that was underway since the mid-1980s (see Tissot 2006). Over the 1990s the problems that MSHN faced were no longer explained as a consequence of the destructive power of structural violence, but rather understood as the outcome of national, cultural, and ethnic differences. An urban policy focus on social cohesion and social ties (*lien social*) in the context of declining industrial activity and increasing precarity is therefore a logical result of this changing analytical framework. The change meant an abandonment by the State of the goal of reducing unemployment and other interventions that target the structural transformations in society, of which the consequences are most visible in MSHN. One of the key intervention areas of the State over the period 1985 – 1995 becomes its support to community organizations that are supposed to weave connections between inhabitants and thereby guarantee social cohesion and to prevent sporadic outbreaks of collective violence. Most of the community organizations in Villeneuve have profited from this policy, and continue to benefit from the funds made available by urban policy through city contracts (*contrats de ville*). They are very much aware though that they cannot address the more structural problems, as the quote below demonstrates [see Box 3.30]. It is an excerpt from the *White Paper* that Villeneuve Debout published following the 2010 riots, based on a large neighborhood consultation inquiring into the problems that were at the root of this violence, and in which it formulated recommendations in terms of action.

**Box 3.30 Diagnosis of root causes of riots in Villeneuve according to inhabitants**

En septembre, les associations se sont réunies sous l'impulsion des Unions de Quartier. C'était une grande réunion extrêmement intense, où chacun a pu, avec ses propres mots, entamer un chemin vers la compréhension de ces événements. Tout le monde en convient, **la détérioration du quartier, est liée à "la question sociale," au manque d'emplois et donc de perspectives.** Trouver des solutions dans ce domaine n'est pas simple, cela échappe aux habitants, en tout cas dans leur vie quotidienne. La détérioration économique dépend des grands choix politiques de société et des grands choix de développement économique, nous le savons.  
(Villeneuve Debout, Livre blanc, 2011)

The white paper (*Livre blanc*) draws an explicit link between the violence and the deterioration of the neighborhood and explains the latter as a "social" problem, meaning in the French context, a problem of the distribution of wealth and economic opportunities between rich and poor, a class question. It further states that this problem cannot

satisfactorily be dealt with at the level of the neighborhood, but depends on much larger political choices with regard to the economy. In the same vein, the mayor of Vaulx-en-Velin stated that the “problems of the ghetto cannot be managed within the ghetto, by the ghetto” (*ne pas gérer les problèmes du ghetto dans le ghetto, par le ghetto*).<sup>138</sup> Wacquant has equally warned against (mis)taking the problems associated with MSHN for “neighborhood effects” while they are “nothing more than the spatial retranslation of economic and social differences” (Wacquant 2007, 9). The state and fate of a neighborhood must therefore be placed “in the diachronic sequence of historical transformations of which they are the material expression” (Wacquant 2007, 5). Wacquant’s warning has not been taken to heart however: the spatialization of social problems, i.e. identifying MSHN as a problem in themselves, that became evident in the cartography of special intervention zones assumed that “solutions for these neighborhoods lay neatly in the designated area” (Dikeç 2002, 92). The urban renewal projects that take up a major part of the urban policy budget to deal with the physical degradation of MSHN are one illustration of the idea that problems can (partly) be solved in the neighborhood through an intervention on the built environment. Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea calls this assumption into question in the quote below.

C’est le principe même et la philosophie des plans de rénovation urbaine qui m’interpellent : le décalage qui existe entre un territoire où il y a des problèmes qui y sont concentrés et les leviers de transformation qui peuvent exister pour faire bouger les lignes. Ils ne sont pas sur le territoire en question ! (Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

Urban policy made additional funds available for urban renewal, for education, for community initiatives, political participation, and employment opportunities in ‘sensitive’ or ‘priority’ neighborhoods but did not solve the wider problems. Politicians often present urban policy funds as charity, as a gift from the State for which it can expect something in return. For example, Sarkozy demanded respect for state authority in return in his 2010 address: “La politique de la ville, nous lui consacrons 15 milliards d’euros depuis 2005. Ce sont des moyens considérables apportés par l’Etat, y compris en Isère, mais nous sommes en droit d’attendre en échange le respect d’un certain nombre de règles.” (Speech Grenoble, 30/07/2010). This perception of urban policy stands in stark contrast with the one presented by Pierre-Didier that these policies have been conceived in reaction to expressions of anger and despair through outbreaks of paroxysmal violence. Several times, participants qualified measures that fit in the urban policy framework as a means to buy “social peace” (*paix*

<sup>138</sup> Fauconnet, Léo, *Solidarité et renouvellement urbains, socialisme démocratique et Egalité à travers un siècle de politiques pour la ville*, Mémoire d’études, l’Institut des Etudes politiques de Lyon, 2006, [http://doc.sciencespo-lyon.fr/Ressources/Documents/Etudiants/Memoires/Cyberdocs/MFE2006/fauconnet\\_l/pdf/fauconnet\\_l.pdf](http://doc.sciencespo-lyon.fr/Ressources/Documents/Etudiants/Memoires/Cyberdocs/MFE2006/fauconnet_l/pdf/fauconnet_l.pdf), accessed 22/04/2020

*sociale*) (field notes, 16/01/2016). This is why I argue that urban policy is a tool of pacification.

Pacification is about restoring a situation to a state of tranquillity. I consider it as an obstacle to peace if it means that, in an attempt to avoid conflict, disagreements, anger, and injustice cannot be expressed openly. In a special issue on urban pacification Agier and Lamotte (2016) explain that while the term now is applied to the way the State deals with unrest in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, it was introduced by French generals in the context of colonial rule (Madagascar, Indochina, Morocco and Algeria). The term entered American political and military discourse during the Vietnam War as a euphemism for “counter insurgency” (Rigakos 2011). According to Agier and Lamotte urban pacification has become “a major modality of political construction and dealing with the urban margins” (2016, 8) that stresses binary oppositions of order versus disorder, center versus periphery, and inside versus outside. This finding corresponds to the violent events at the origins of urban policy and its increasing focus nationally on security measures.

### *5.2) Urban policy program for Villeneuve*

As mentioned in the previous subsection, urban policy is supposed to be a panacea for the multifaceted problems in MSHN. In this section I explain how urban policy functions and how it has been implemented in Villeneuve and how it is perceived by my research participants.

National urban policy has both an urban and a social aspect: the urban component deals with problems such as housing; links between the neighborhood and the city center; public transport; social, educational, health and sports facilities (*équipements*) etc. The social component deals with the creation of economic opportunities and with the consequences of social problems such as poverty, precarity and crime (Blanc 2007). Urban policy relies on the identification of special intervention zones in order to target its actions at certain areas in particular. One of the specificities of urban policy in France is the coexistence of two “priority geographies” (Saint-Julien, Brunet, and Auriac 2001; Tabarly 2013).

- The first is based on an identification and cartographic representation of “priority neighborhoods” by national bodies, such as the Commissariat général à l’Egalité des Territoires (CGET) currently. These are the areas where the general orientation of national urban policy apply, and for which specific funds are made available. The indicators used to draw the perimeters of these zones have changed over time. Its perimeters are published for example in Atlases: the *Atlas des Zones urbaines sensible* (2012) and the *Atlas des quartiers prioritaires de la politique de la ville* (2017) are two examples.
- The second is based on “contract zoning” and the elaboration of city contracts (*contrats de ville*) that are the result of a collaboration between a large number of public and private actors. They provide political guidelines and a budget based on

negotiation between different institutional partners (State, Region, Province, City), economic, and civil society actors.

While the first is the result of an effort of horizontal coordination among a large range of ministries (14 at the moment of its creation in 1990 according to Blanc 2007), the second is the result of a vertical coordination from local to national actors. In Grenoble, the responsibility for the management of urban contracts has been transferred from the level of the municipality to the level of the agglomeration, to Grenoble Alpes-Métro (2016, loi NOTRe 2015).

Figure 3.86 demonstrates the superposition of special interventions from the 1960s onwards. It shows the different national urban policy schemes of application to Villeneuve and demonstrates that Villeneuve has been a special intervention zone since the early days of urban policy. These urban policy schemes are further explained in Table 3.10.

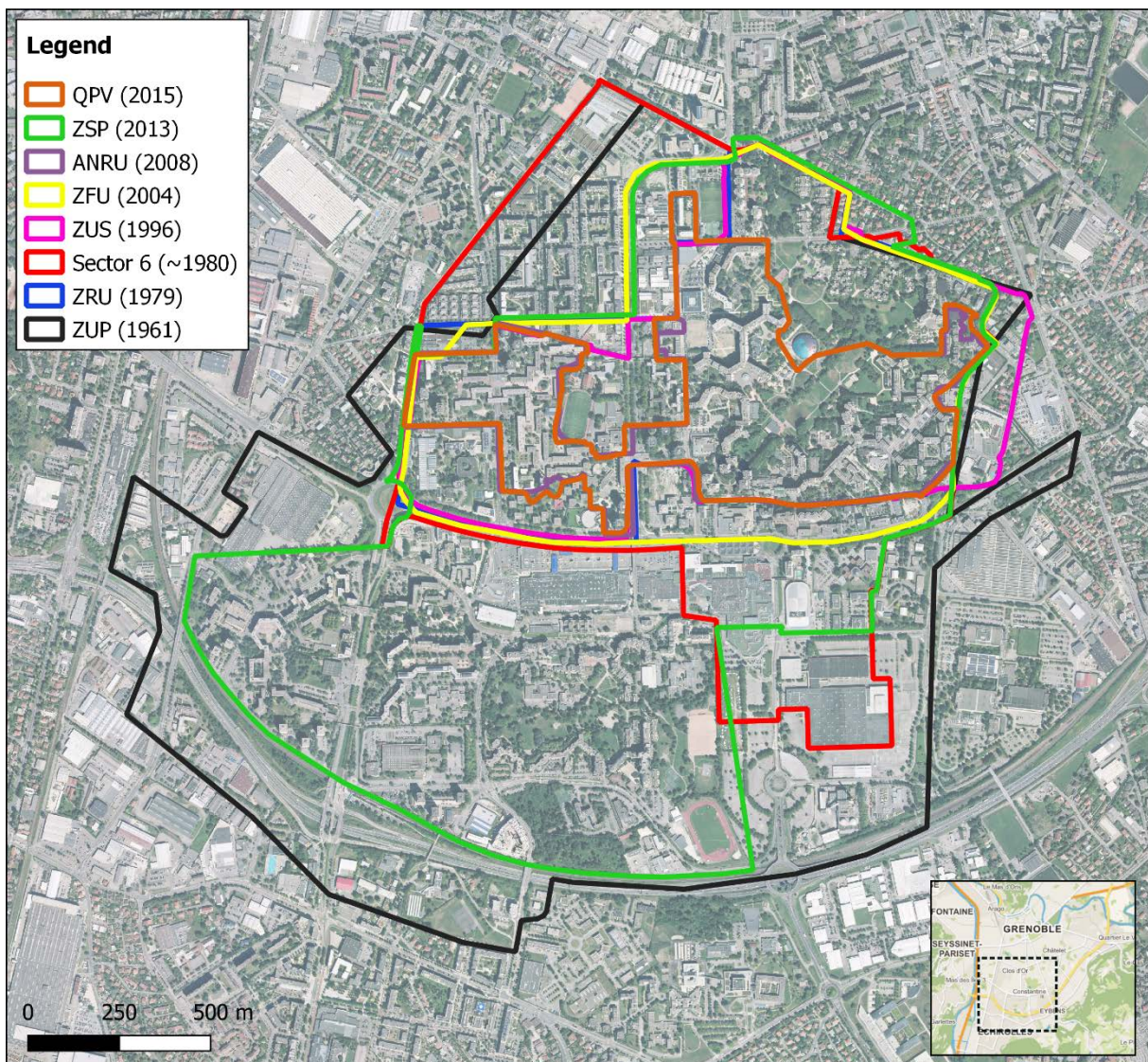


Figure 3.86 An overview of urban policy interventions in Villeneuve

Prior to the creation of national urban policy, Villeneuve was subject to an earlier form of zoning and priority policy: the ZUP procedure of 1961. Its urban policy zoning is added on to a pre-existing territorial division of political units at the level of the city, which are still in effect. As a result of the national move to decentralization in 1982 in order to encourage local democratic engagement, the city was partitioned into 6 sectors, of which the Villeneuve area is one (comprising also Village Olympique, Vigny-Musset and Malherbe). A part of the public services in the city were delocalized to each of these sectors, notably through the creation of neighborhood representations of the municipality in each sector (*antennes-mairie de quartier*) (DSQ, 1989). The organization of local democracy has since evolved but the perimeter of sector 6 is still the operational administrative unit at the municipal level [see red perimeter in Figure 3.86]. Political representation is for example organized per sector through local councilors, Conseil citoyens indépendants and a public servant in charge of the sector (*Directeur de territoire*). The priority zones are added on to this existing administrative space.

Table 3.10 sums up the schemes that have been developed nationally for MSHN according to its priority geography. The table provides a brief explanation of the aims of each program and the criteria on which the selection of neighborhoods was based. Despite the fact that schemes evolve over time, the general problems they address remain constant (unemployment, insecurity, dilapidated housing, precarity, lacking education, tensions). Four schemes target specific aspects that are addressed by urban policy, such as **educational**, **economic**, **housing** and **security** aspects [see Table 3.10]. Looking at the third column, one understands that the general trend (until the 2014 Lamy law) is towards an increasing number of neighborhoods targeted by urban policy. The funds available however have not followed this increase and urban policy does not do more than “sprinkle” funds (*saupoudrer*) across designated areas according to Blanc (2007). What was supposed to be a temporary intervention proves to be a lasting one in answer to structural problems that it cannot satisfactorily address.

**Table 3.10 National urban policy schemes of application to Villeneuve**

Scheme Year <sup>139</sup>	National Scheme, year <sup>140</sup>	N° MSHN <sup>141</sup>
HVS unknown	<b>Habitat et Vie Sociale (1977-1981)</b> This program is a forerunner of national urban policy (see e.g. David 2001). While the Baladins part of Villeneuve was still under construction. Boucheret	

<sup>139</sup> Year that it was implemented in Villeneuve (Grenoble).

<sup>140</sup> Year corresponds to the policy being implemented nationally according to its initial zoning

<sup>141</sup> Number of neighborhoods selected for each scheme. This box is empty if I did not find the data and mentions several dates if the number of selected neighborhoods evolved over the period.

	and Gotman (1973) indicate that the Arlequin part of Villeneuve benefited from this scheme. <sup>142</sup>	
DSQ <i>1989</i> <sup>143</sup>	<b>Développement social des quartiers (1983)</b> In total 148 neighborhoods were targeted by DSQ operations that sought to contribute to their social development. The stated objective of this scheme for Villeneuve was that it became “a neighborhood just like any other, recognized in its specificity and its quality” (DSQ 1989). The funds made available for these operations served predominantly for the rehabilitation of housing (Blanc 2007). In 1988 the focus shifted from specific neighborhoods to the city and the agglomeration as a whole, changing the scheme’s title to Développement social urbain (DSU) with the consequence that funds were no longer restricted to an investment in the neighborhood. In Grenoble, this led for example to a redirection of development funds foreseen in its first Urban contract in 1993 for MSHN to the development of the University. <sup>144</sup>	148
ZEP <i>1990</i>	<b>Zone d’Education prioritaire (1981)</b> I have found no data about the perimeter of the ZEP in Villeneuve, nor about the starting date of its application in Grenoble but the scheme was launched nationally in 1981. For a first-hand account of Villeneuve’s ZEP experience see the memoirs of a retired teacher from Villeneuve (2015), <i>30 ans de ZEP, même pas mal! Aux Charms de la Villeneuve.</i>	
ZUS	<b>Zones urbaines sensibles (1996)</b> <sup>145</sup> ZUS have over 10,000 inhabitants and have been defined based on an alarming level of unemployment; proportion of people that have left the education system without a diploma; proportion of young people; low revenues etc.	751
ZRU 1997	<b>Zone de Redynamisation Urbaine (1996)</b> <sup>146</sup> The ZRU are a specific category of ZUS, requiring specific intervention	416
ZFU 2004	<b>Zone Franche Urbaine (economic) (1996)</b> <sup>147</sup> ZFU are a specific category of ZUS targeted for economic development. In these zones, companies are offered a comprehensive scheme of tax waivers	44 in 1997 131 in 2007

<sup>142</sup> Boucheret J.M, Gotman Anne, “Animation globale et équipements intégrés: Le quartier de l'Arlequin à Grenoble”, Habitat et vie sociale, no. 1 (November-December 1973), available in the archives of the Ecole d'Architecture in Grenoble.

<sup>143</sup> The years are in italics if I have found contradictory information about the date of implementation in Grenoble.

<sup>144</sup> Note d’intention, contrat de Ville d’agglomération for the period 1993, appendix of the Délibération du Conseil Municipal de Grenoble, séance 12/02/1993.

<sup>145</sup> Source of information about ZUS and GIS data about their perimeters:  
<https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/zones-urbaines-sensibles-zus/>, accessed 10/01/2020.

<sup>146</sup> Source of information about ZRU and GIS data about their perimeters:  
<https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/les-zones-de-redynamisation-urbaine-zru/>, accessed 10/01/2020.

<sup>147</sup> Sources vary on which date they take as the implementation of ZUS: their designation took place end 1996 but they have become effective in 1997. I therefore take this latter date as reference.

	and exemptions of social security charges for a period of 5 years. The Zone d'Activité Les Peupliers [Figure 1.5] is concerned by this scheme.	
ANRU 2008 2019	<b>Les zones de l'Agence Nationale de Rénovation urbaine (urban renovation)</b> <sup>148</sup> Zones that have been selected by the ANRU for an exceptional investment of 30 billion euros for "urban revitalization" through demolition-reconstruction. Zones ANRU 1 (2008) and ANRU 2 (2019) correspond to respectively the first and the second Urban Renovation Plan. The demolitions that they requested in Villeneuve have encountered significant resistance in the neighborhood (Breynt et al. 2016).	
CUCS 2009- 2011	<b>Contrats urbains de cohésion sociale (2007)</b> <sup>149</sup> Refers to all the neighborhoods concerned by the city contracts of Social Cohesion ( <i>contrats urbains de cohésion sociale</i> ), contracts signed by public institutions at different levels that seek to improve the everyday life of inhabitants ("unemployment, violence, housing"). The areas covered by the CUCS are both ZUS (751) and non-ZUS areas (1750) and therefore increased considerably the number of neighborhoods concerned since 1997. They were introduced during the Sarkozy government (2007-2012)	2492
ZSP 2013	<b>Zone de sécurité prioritaire (security) (2012)</b> <sup>150</sup> Corresponds to a priority intervention zone in terms of security. They have been defined based on criteria regarding insecurity and socio-economic indicators and offer the possibility of additional funding. Actions in these zones seek to reduce drug trafficking, robberies, the storing and carrying of prohibited weapons, violence against public authorities, incivility and unsanctioned uses of public space ( <i>regroupements des jeunes</i> ). Villeneuve (Grenoble and Echirolles) were included in this scheme following the filling of Kevin and Sofiane. <sup>151</sup> According to Cyril Jacob its direct impact on the neighborhood has been minimal because coordination is its primary function.	80
QPV	<b>Quartiers prioritaires de la politique de la ville (2015)</b> <sup>152</sup> The QPV replaced the ZUS with the objective of reducing the number of special intervention areas and to simplify selection criteria to ensure that the funds are attributed to the areas with the largest difficulties. Criteria are both quantitative (median revenue of inhabitants) and qualitative (diagnosed by	1296

<sup>148</sup> GIS data about neighborhoods concerned by the ANRU scheme <https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/plan-de-relevance-2009-quartiers-anru-beneficiaires-30382806/>, accessed 10/01/2020.

<sup>149</sup> Source of information about CUCS and GIS data about their perimeters: <https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/contrat-urbain-de-cohesion-sociale-cucs-30382914/>, accessed 10/01/2020.

<sup>150</sup> Source of information about ZSP and GIS data about their perimeters: <https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/decoupage-des-zones-de-securite-prioritaires-zsp-1/>, accessed 22/01/2020

<sup>151</sup> La zone de sécurité prioritaire Grenoble – Echirolles (ZSP), 11 mars 2013, Dossier de presse

<sup>152</sup> Source of information about QPV and GIS data about their perimeters: <https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/quartiers-prioritaires-de-la-politique-de-la-ville-qpv/>



	local councilors). They were introduced as part of a new approach to urban policy under the Hollande government (2012 – 2017)	
QRR 2019	<b>Quartiers de reconquête républicaine (security)</b> (2018) This scheme replaces the ZSP and was introduced by the Macron government with the slogan “for a security policy adapted to every territory and each type of delinquency”. <sup>153</sup> Its most important proposal is the introduction of a Police de Sécurité du Quotidien (a sort neighborhood police) aimed at improving the relations between inhabitants of MSHN and the police. The perimeters of these QRR are unclear, no GIS data are available on data.gouv.fr but according to a press statement Villeneuve (Grenoble and Echirolles) were included in this scheme in 2019.	15 in 2018  36 in 2019  goal is 60 in total

A problem of this zoning, the singling out of certain areas for specific policies, is that it becomes a factor of stigmatization and that it reinforces inhabitants’ feeling of always being considered an exception to the rule (Lelévrier 2014). It makes inhabitants feel as though their problems cannot be dealt with through common law (*droit commun*) as the following quotes from invited speakers of the Université populaire demonstrate.

Tout d'abord, on est envahi par le terme “quartier populaire”, “quartier sensible”, “zones urbaines sensibles” et j'en passe. C'est un renforcement de la discrimination. C'était encore une fois : “On met à l'écart des gens qui sont déjà à l'écart”. (Participant, UP debate, 20/10/2013)

Toutes ces tentatives sont mises en place pour répondre à la question sociale et politique qui se pose dans ces territoires qui ne supportent plus d'être gérés en marge de la société française, aux confins de la République, avec des moyens de coercition inédits, avec des traitements hors du droit commun. Cela pose une série de problèmes politiques et sociaux à notre République. (Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

The superposition of myriad special intervention schemes [Figure 3.86] evoked for Mounira a *mille-feuille*, a French pastry consisting of many different layers: “*ce putain de millefeuille où il y a tout et il y a rien*”, as quoted in the opening of this section. This urban policy should be understood as a policy of statements whose local impact depends on their application by a whole range of actors, notably through city contracts, and sometimes no change is felt at all. This is the reason why Blanc also qualified this policy as “incantatory”, as a “catalogue of good intentions” (2007, 74). Each new scheme corresponds to a new conception of an old problem, and is influenced by the political orientations of the succession of different governments. This ever-new intention of solving structural problems also reveals a certain powerlessness (*Ibid.*). Since the decentralization of state power in the 1980s, the application

<sup>153</sup> Présentation des quartiers de reconquête républicaine (QRR) en Isère, 13/02/ 2019  
<http://www.isere.gouv.fr/Publications/Salle-de-presse/Invitations-presse/Presentation-des-quartiers-de-reconquete-republicaine-QRR-en-Isere>, accessed 20/04/2020.

of urban policy depends primarily on municipalities, and in Grenoble has since been transferred to the level of the agglomeration, Grenoble Alpes-Métro.

### *City Contracts*

The city contract defines the framework for investing specifically in the defined geographic perimeter classified as “priority geography” in order to improve the conditions in these neighborhoods. Decisions are based on national guidelines and locally defined priorities, notably through consultation with the *Conseils citoyens indépendants* (local instances of participation). Part of the money that is made available is to be redistributed among organizations that propose actions that fit within this framework.

From their introduction in 1993 to 2020 four city contracts have been signed in Grenoble as the outcome of negotiations between the state and local authorities (*collectivités territoriales*) [see Table 3.11]. The aim of these city contracts is to establish a global and coherent contract rather than the piling up of different schemes. Six years after their introduction though, observations about the deficiencies of urban policy remain unchanged: that there is a need for a clearer global strategy and better coordination between the different partners to avoid the “dissipation of public action” (*émiettement de l’action publique*) and to simplify bureaucratic process (Préfecture de l’Isère, 2000, 1). In 2011, local actors still demanded a simplification of the administrative procedures through which they could apply for a public grant within the CUCS framework.

The definition of objectives and the content of the thematic orientations are the result of the different thematic priorities of each of the institutional partners, but also the outcome of a power struggle between their political objectives.

Table 3.11 demonstrates that the themes of employment and education have remained stable over time, although the latter has not been mentioned specifically in the latest contract. Changes over the years are that the term mobility was not mentioned after 2006, and that higher education has not been a priority in the policies for marginalized neighborhoods such as Villeneuve since the first contract. While the first discussions about night mediation in 1994 conceive of this intervention in Villeneuve as a means to prevent crime and to increase public security, in 2007 public officials present mediation more generally as a tool to bridge the gap between inhabitants and public institutions.<sup>154</sup> The most recent contract (Green and Socialist Party) no longer mentions crime prevention, and has introduced the question of equality and citizenship to address discrimination.

<sup>154</sup> Politique de la Ville, Contrat de ville de Grenoble-Alpes Métropole, Stratégie et Objectifs, 2015-2020

Table 3.11 summarizes the objectives of city contracts (1994-present). I use color codes for the different domains of intervention [education] [economy] [housing] [security] to facilitate the comparison between different periods.

**Table 3.11 Thematic priorities defined in Grenoble’s city contracts (1994 – present)**

Period	Objectives
1994-1998	Improve housing [housing] Crime prevention [security] Encourage mobility through developing public transport in order “to break the isolation of neighborhoods in difficulty” Reinforce the higher education options in the city, support professional training for young people and their entry to the job market [education] Develop a diversified cultural policy ( <i>politique culturelle</i> ). Promote places for sports and leisure in the city Fix degraded economic and industrial zones that have a negative impact on the image of neighborhoods [economy]
2000-2006	Crime prevention and security [security] Habitat, housing, urban integration and mobility [housing] Access to jobs [economy] Education and training [education] Public health The development of cultural and artistic practices
2007-2014 <sup>155</sup>	Youth Promotion of equality and fight against discrimination Housing and living environment [housing] Access to employment and local economic development [economy] Education and training [education] Prevention and security [security] Access to health and to public health facilities Encourage access to and development of cultural activities
2015-2020	Equality and citizenship Social Cohesion Urban renewal and living environment [housing] Economic development and employment [economy]

Within the city contract scheme, subsidies are given to a variety of actors in Villeneuve that propose sports activities, social outings, neighborhood festivities, homework support, youth work etc. Competition between community organization over funds leads at times to strained relations amongst them. Villeneuve Debut is very successful in writing applications and obtaining funding, e.g. for the Université populaire, which has been a source of tension with other actors in the neighborhood who lack these skills and who therefore do not have

<sup>155</sup> During this period the Urban contracts were called “*Contrat urbain de cohésion social*”.

access to these funds. To counter this problem, it is the role of public servants, the *Agents de développement territorial* to assist inhabitants in developing and executing their projects. Their institutional affiliation however can sometimes have a depoliticizing effect.

The most important part of the funding that urban policy makes available is destined for interventions on the built environment in the targeted neighborhoods, motivated by a belief that architecture has an important influence on well-being and that the problems that MSHN face are induced by their built environment. The next section looks at the urban renewal program in Villeneuve, and how its focus on social diversity is experienced as a new civilizing mission.

## 6) Urban renewal as a means to attract a new, middle-class population

Throughout the 1990s Villeneuve is increasingly represented as being isolated and enclaved and the proposed solution is to open the neighborhood up. According to *Le Monde* “nothing was left of the initial project in Villeneuve but a ghetto” (16/11/1990).<sup>156</sup> The ghetto discourse of the 1990s resonates with a representation of a built environment “closed in on itself” or “turned inwards” (*replié sur lui-même*). Urban renewal was presented as a tool to open MSHN up to wider society, to integrate them into the city through the joint effort of demolition-reconstruction. The neighborhood needed to be opened up to a new population; to facilitate the access for security forces and to orient or even “reconquer” its population to the Republic (“*quartiers de reconquête républicaine*”). The demolition of part of the Galerie d’Arlequin, the number 50 block, “*pour réaliser une percée visuelle vers le parc*” was the most symbolic operation of opening up the neighborhood and giving a view into the park [Figure 3.87].<sup>157</sup> The need to pierce through was not new however, already in 1992 voices spoke of the need to “*faire une trouée*” dans “*la masse de muraille de l’Arlequin*”, this idea being vividly supported by Carignon.<sup>158</sup>

In 2003 the Borloo law, named after the Minister in charge of urban policy (*Ministre délégué à la ville*), was the foundation for an ambitious National Urban Renewal Program (NURP) targeting 500 neighborhoods built in the 1960s, including Villeneuve. In general, the level of degradation of the buildings was only a secondary consideration in the neighborhoods targeted nationally for urban renewal which depended firstly on the composition of its increasingly racialized population (Epstein 2014, 344). This is also true for Villeneuve. ‘Social mixing’ is an explicit objective of this program, the objective in Villeneuve being: “to regain a real social mixing” (*retrouver de réelles mixités de peuplement*) and “to reduce the overall

<sup>156</sup> “Villeneuve n’est plus qu’un grand ensemble ghetto”

<sup>157</sup> [http://www.forum-holzbau.com/pdf/28\\_FBC\\_15\\_Berne.pdf](http://www.forum-holzbau.com/pdf/28_FBC_15_Berne.pdf), accessed 20/10/2017

<sup>158</sup> Grenoble, Mensuel, n° 6, 1992, p. 35

percentage of social housing (in the Arlequin from 74% to 50% over a period of 10 years)” (Convention ANRU 2008, 8-9).<sup>159</sup>

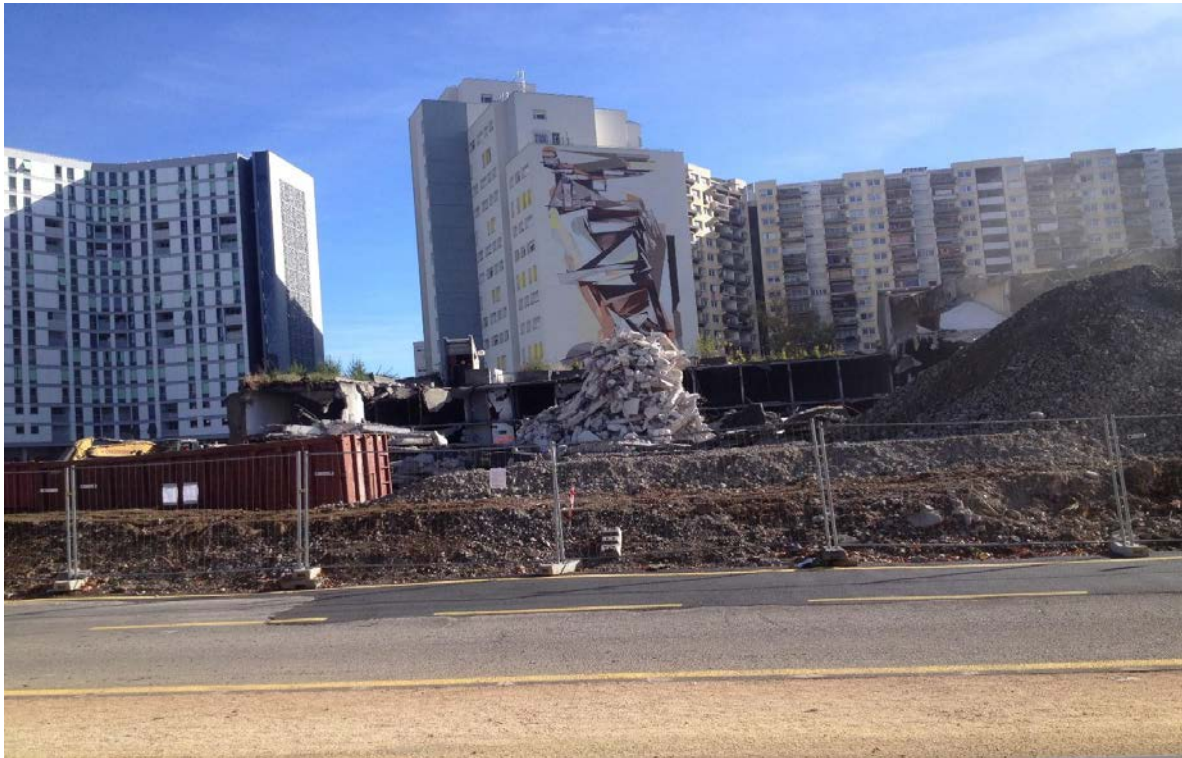


Figure 3.87 “A hole in the wall”, demolition and renovation of the Galerie d’Arlequin. (Photo author 25/10/2017)

#### *The urban renewal discourse about opening up closed spaces*

According to the urban renewal discourse, Villeneuve is a closed space. The Agence nationale pour la Rénovation urbaine (ANRU) speaks of a “*quartier replié sur lui-même*”, “*des espaces public confinés*”, of the Arlequin ensemble as “*une véritable muraille*” and in order “to reintegrate Villeneuve in the urban context of Southern Grenoble”, there is need to “open and extend the park”.<sup>160</sup> To grant access to the park, ANRU decided to “break through” (*percement*) the Galerie d’Arlequin, leading to the demolition of social housing units (ANRU, 2008). Not only the MSHN but also inhabitants were believed to be turned inwards and in need of an intervention that would orient them to French society. MSHN are believed to suffer from the flaw of “*communautarisme*” [see Box 3.31] and “secessionism with regard to the Republic”, accusations which are similar to the idea that they are “grounds lost to the Republic” (Palomares 2008, 23).

<sup>159</sup> Some 74% here and 78% mentioned elsewhere in the same document.

<sup>160</sup> Sources: Agence Nationale de Renovation urbaine, Grenoble Operation de Renovation urbaine du Quartier Villeneuve-Village olympique, *Convention*, June 2008; Actis, Le Quartier Villeneuve Convention Villeneuve, 2009.

**Box 3.31 [terminology]: *Communautarisme***

The French term “*communautarisme*” cannot be translated into “communitarianism” because the latter does not quite catch the negative connotation of the French term. Communitarianism in French is synonym for not being integrated, or rather of refusing to be part of France. Just as in English, the term in France also refers to the social networks that people develop predominantly according to their cultural or ethnic affinities, but this is interpreted as a threat to the Republic. A political group can be made up of people with 30 different national origins and still be considered *communautariste* if the majority are not white French.<sup>161</sup>

According to this representation, generalized among public actors, the distance its inhabitants feel to the city center and to the rest of society in general is not the result of their social marginalization and racialization but the result of their rejection of French society, as if they do not want to be part of it. Urban renovation was supposed to set this right and came to be considered as a panacea for dealing with social problems (Blanc 2007), like offering nice *façades*. One Université populaire participant called the urban renovation focus into question, saying that it was dignity that the inhabitants were looking for and not nice *façades* [Figure 3.88].

La rénovation urbaine c’est très bien, mais si on ne modifie pas la manière d’appréhender les problèmes des gens qui vivent dans ce quartier, je ne suis pas sûre que ce soit très, très utile de nous faire de belles façades et de belles allées. Il faut redonner de la dignité à chacun et là, peut-être, que notre société va pouvoir avancer. Je pense que c’est plus un problème sociétal qu’un problème de bâti. (Participant, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

<sup>161</sup> A selection of press articles that confirm the use of the term “*communautariste*” as disqualification of political organizing: “Municipales: la menace des listes communautaires”, Lefigaro.fr, 27/09/2019 <https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/municipales-la-menace-des-listes-communautaires-20191024>; “Le Club du XXIe siècle s’inquiète de la montée des communautarismes”, Le Point.fr, 11/04/2018, [https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/le-club-du-xxie-siecle-s-inquiete-de-la-montee-des-communautarismes-11-04-2018-2209754\\_23.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/le-club-du-xxie-siecle-s-inquiete-de-la-montee-des-communautarismes-11-04-2018-2209754_23.php); “Repli communautaire: des maires appellent à relancer la politique de la Ville”, Le Point.fr, 06/04/2018, [https://www.lepoint.fr/politique/repli-communautaire-des-maires-appellent-a-relancer-la-politique-de-la-ville-06-04-2018-2208670\\_20.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/politique/repli-communautaire-des-maires-appellent-a-relancer-la-politique-de-la-ville-06-04-2018-2208670_20.php); “Mwasi et le festival non-mixte: un féminisme communautaire, simpliste et dangereux”, Marianne, 03/06/2017, <https://www.marianne.net/debattons/editos/mwasi-et-le-festival-non-mixte-un-feminisme-communautaire-simpliste-et-dangereux>; Listes communautaires: Lecornu appelle à “empêcher cette menace de prospérer,” *Le Parisien*, 16/10/2019, <http://www.leparisien.fr/elections/municipales/listes-communautaires-lecornu-appelle-a-empêcher-cette-menace-de-prospérer-16-10-2019-8174544.php>; all articles were consulted 11/03/2020.



Figure 3.88 New façade of the Galerie d'Arlequin after demolition of the "50" block and after renovation. (Photo author, 25/10/2017)

A further development of the idea that urban renovation serves as image management can be found in Box 3.32.

### Box 3.32 Urban renovation as image management

Going by the recommendations of the DSQ report, image management became an integral part of the social development policy regarding Villeneuve since the 1990s (1989). The neighborhood's urban renovation program developed attractive graphics and seeks to make the neighborhood attractive to the middle-classes. According to Sarkozy the people are the problem in Villeneuve and not the buildings: *"on refait des quartiers, on refait les immeubles mais si on y met les mêmes personnes dans les mêmes conditions, qu'est-ce que ça va changer?"* (Speech Grenoble, 30/07/2010). The people in this context are passive and it is some unidentified force ("on" or we), the social housing corporations in fact, that are responsible for their regrouping and are therefore equally targeted. According to Bonnet and Houssay-Holzschuch it is "the normed, idealized and instrumentalized 'middle-class' that appear as the alpha and omega of the 'harmonious' development of the city" (2014, 132).<sup>162</sup> The demolition of 50 Galerie d'Arlequin therefore served the purpose of letting middle-class people into the neighborhood. One such initiative that served this purpose was the annual running event, Urban Cross, funded by urban policy funds [Figure 3.89 and Figure3.90]. It is a way of promoting the park, the neighborhood's main selling point.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>162</sup> In French: "Les classes moyennes normées, idéalisées et instrumentalisées apparaissent comme l'alpha et l'oméga du développement 'harmonieux' de la ville".

<sup>163</sup> Its first edition took place in 2017.



Figure 3.89 Flyer for the first edition of the Urban Cross run in Villeneuve.<sup>164</sup>



Figure 3.90 Attracting people to Villeneuve through the Urban Cross. (Photo author 08/04/2017)

### *The injunction of social mixing, civilizing mission 2.0?*

The ambiguous objective of the return of the middle classes in MSHN targets both the dispersion of the poor and immigrants. Social mixing replaced earlier terminology from the 1980s, the notion of a “fair spreading of the burden” (*répartition équitable du fardeau*), meaning that immigrants, represented as a burden, should be equitably distributed across cities where they live (Palomares 2008, 23; see also Masclat 2001). This term is closely linked to that of a “tolerance threshold”, beyond which ‘ethnic’ tensions will arise (*Ibid.*).

Urban renovation in Villeneuve reinforced the feeling that its current, racialized, and poor inhabitants are undesired and that the objective of the urban renovation effort is to attract a new and desired public. Living with Arabs and Blacks is experienced as a source of “*déclassement*”, according to Jouda, leading to falling real estate prizes. She wonders how to make it possible to increase the value of private property and to say to people “Come as you are! It’s nice here, we have a 14 hectares park” (Jouda, UP debate, 26/04/2018).<sup>165</sup>

<sup>164</sup> <https://www.alpesolidaires.org/agenda/urban-cross-grenoble>, accessed 20/03/2020.

<sup>165</sup> Entire quote in French: “Venez comme vous êtes!, Ici c’est bien, en plus on a un parc de 14 hectares”. (Jouda, UP, 26/04/2018). The context of this quote is the urban renovation discourse and its emphasis on social mixing in order to improve the image of the neighborhood and thereby to increase housing prices. To her, it is painful and violent that “middle-class”, i.e. white population, is needed to improve the image of the neighborhood.



Could the injunction to ‘social mixing’ be considered as a new form of a civilizing mission? That is the argument that Saïd Bouamama made as invited speaker of the Université populaire in 2015.

Il y a un modèle qui ressemble au modèle colonial, en vérité, mais pour les classes sociales. Il consiste à dire “Si on arrive à mettre dans les quartiers des couches moyennes, elles vont montrer aux ouvriers et aux chômeurs comment il faut se comporter”. Comme s’ils étaient des sauvages qui ne sauraient pas comment se comporter. (Saïd Bouamama, UP debate, 20/11/2015)

The colonial model to which Bouamama refers is the civilizing mission, which he sees being applied to the working classes, that one seeks to moralize in order that they learn to live like the middle class, through for example education. Another invited speaker confirmed this point when she stated that “On a un discours qui se rapproche du discours colonial, mais dans le registre du social” (Marie-Hélène Bacqué, UP debate, 26/04/2018). The relationship between France’s colonial past and the present in Villeneuve is the topic of the next two chapters.

## Conclusion

I described Villeneuve as a space of making in the sense of conceiving, materially shaping, policy- and image-making and lived experience and focused on the tensions between these different ways of perceiving the neighbourhood. My own perception of Villeneuve is that of a space that is fragile, where the equilibrium between different forces can always slip towards increasing tensions and even violence, for example when the mitigating function of local actors is undermined by changes in external conditions.

In conclusion, I ask the question in what way this polyvocal account of Villeneuve challenges mainstream ways of looking at MSHN and contributes to a decolonial approach to MSHN. This account challenges the representations of MSHN as closed spaces that need to be opened up and civilized. It is stigmatizing discourse and reductive categories that confine MSHN inhabitants in geographic spaces rather than their supposed traditions and foreign cultures. I consider that the question of opening the neighborhood should be turned around, and should not be focused on how to attract the middle class and let them in but how to let out a population that is trapped in Villeneuve as a result of capitalist and racist dynamics. The question should also be how to grant this trapped population a “right to the city” (Dikeç 2002; Goonewardena et al. 2008; Harvey 2008; Mitchell 2003; Purcell 2014).

A decolonial approach opens up to a much larger and less hierarchical view of spatial connections beyond the nation-state. Instead of seeing a neighborhood that is turned inwards, I see a population that is open to many different spaces, but that is not necessarily oriented towards the center, be it the city center of Grenoble or Paris. A signpost made by children during one of Mme Ruetabaga’s street workshops on the Place des Géants is a nice illustration of this outward orientation. It points to all the directions that people have spatial

connections with (e.g. Lebanon, Macedonia, Istanbul) [Figure 3.91].



Figure 3.91 Signpost Madame Ruetabaga. (Photo author, 23/12/2019)

Villeneuve is in many ways advanced in regard to what it means to live in a global village, because that is what post-colonial cities are about: a plurality of presences and cultural circulations, a phenomenon that Tarrus has called “bottom-up globalization” (*mondialisation par le bas*) (in Bancel et al. 2010). According to the perspective of public authorities one sees social and ethnic divides (*fractures*) but if one adopts a decolonial approach, one sees groups that “escape the destinies that public authorities have reserved for them” (*Ibid.*). My research has tried to make space for this perspective by organizing agonistic public debate as I explained in the previous chapter. In the next chapter I demonstrate how the Université populaire has created spaces where it has been possible to discuss topics that were taboo in mainstream debate circles such as the embodied experience of difference, racism, islamophobia, territorial discrimination, and police violence in France and their links with the colonial past.

## Chapter 4. The colonial at present in Villeneuve

The Paris terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015 reinforced lines between “us” and “them” in France, “us” being the White/French and “them” being Muslims. These tensions were also felt within Villeneuve and brought the colonial question with renewed urgency to the discussion table. 2005 already was a turning point in that regard, when a number of political, activist and academic events put the French colonial past on the agenda. Examples of political events are the debate about the commemoration of the legacy of slavery in France, around the Taubira law and the proposal of a bill that required school programs to recognize in particular the positive role of the French presence in its overseas territories during colonial times. Among examples of activist events one can think of the publication of the *Appel des Indigènes de la République* to draw attention to the ‘colonial continuum’ in France (Robine 2006); of pressure groups demanding the commemoration of slavery; and of the revolts in 2005. Examples of academic events are the publication of *La fracture coloniale* (Blanchard, Bancel, and Lemaire (eds.) 2005); the publication of *De la question sociale à la question raciale?*, which sought to articulate racial and social question in France (Fassin and Fassin 2006); and the publication of numerous special issues in French academic journals (different disciplines) about the relevance of postcolonial studies in France.<sup>166</sup> These different events drew attention to continued processes of segregation, racialization and subalternization in French society (see also Aymes 2006; Smouts 2007). The same kind of debate also lived in Villeneuve and it is the role of this chapter to explain to what extent research participants felt that the colonial past was relevant for understanding the present.

The data used in this chapter to answer this question are the results of my collaboration with the Université populaire (2015-2018) in addition to a selection of interviews and informal discussions. What do people mean with the term “colonial” in debates, meetings and interviews and what sources of information do they draw upon? This chapter seeks to answer these questions. Participants used both explicit (use of the term “colonial”) and implicit references to the colonial period or colonial practices. By implicit references, I mean that they evoked stories in the context of a debate about what remains of the colonial past, but without specifically using the term “colonial”.

The chapter is structured in three sections, starting with an account of the explorations of the Université populaire working group into the colonial past (1); followed by a section that seeks to clarify the types of relationships participants establish between the past and present (2); and by a section that explains what sources of information participants use when they evoke the colonial period (3). In the last section I focus primarily on the question of in what way information about the past is transferred in families who have an experience

<sup>166</sup> Titles of special issues and journals that deal with the postcolonial question in France: “La question postcoloniale” (Herodote 2006), “Pour comprendre la pensée postcoloniale” (Esprit 2006), “Postcolonialisme et immigration” (*Contretemps* 2006), “Faut-il être postcolonial” (*Labyrinth* 2006), “Qui a peur du postcolonial?” (*Mouvements* 2007) and “Vers une pensée politique postcoloniale. À partir de Frantz Fanon” (*Tumultes* 2008).

with colonial rule or war. The Algerian war plays an important role in memories of the past as a result of its paroxysmal dimension and the specific position Algeria had in the French colonial empire.<sup>167</sup>

## 1) The explorations of the *Université populaire* into the colonial past

This first section about the explorations of the *Université populaire* into the colonial past deals with the way the colonial question came up in fieldwork (1.1), and how the *Université populaire* cycle on the colonial past was a means to engage more systematically with the colonial question (1.2).

### 1.1) *Colonial question comes up*

References to the colonial past first came up in a debate about the root causes of violence in the neighborhood (1.1.a), in private discussions with North African immigrants in Villeneuve, and in the *Université populaire* debates about discrimination, racism, neighborhood stigmatization, and islamophobia in the period following the 2015 terrorist attacks (1.1.b and 1.1.c). After these furtive references in public debates, private discussions, and meetings the *Université populaire* working group decided to investigate the link between colonial past and present in a more structured way, in a cycle dedicated to the question “what remains of the colonial past?” (1.1.d). To understand how the *Université populaire* could play the role of making space for this debate in the neighborhood, it is important to understand who its actors were (1.1.d).

#### 1.1.a) *Colonial references come up in root causes of violence*

The colonial question first came up during the thematic exploration of the question of violence in the neighborhood and in particular during the *repas citoyen* (2013). Michelle\*, a participant with Algerian origins, mentioned that one of the causes of violence was the fact that “we don’t know our history”. I met her a week later over coffee in order to better understand what she meant when she briefly mentioned the colonial question in reference to the difficulties young people (in her case referring to her sons) face in Villeneuve. She explained that young people struggle with a feeling of being lost between the silence of parents, grand-parents’ trauma of colonialism and war, and their own current situation of unemployment, precarity, and the feeling of being treated differently than white French. She observed that young people use history to make sense of their current situation or to justify delinquent acts. While in 2013, and in the context of a debate about violence and tensions in the neighborhood, these references seemed secondary or quite irrelevant (*hors sujet*),<sup>168</sup> in

<sup>167</sup> Algeria had a specific position among the French colonial possessions as it was administered as a French Province (*département*) and not a colony, protectorate, or territory under French mandate.

<sup>168</sup> In a meeting about the final report of the conclusions of the *repas citoyen*, I had to insist that this reference to historical roots was included. As a result, “Racism and history” was one of the six categories of answers in

2017 there was a larger platform to deal with these questions. The series of terrorist attacks in France (2015-2016) played an important role in bringing up this issue, as did the negative attitudes to Muslims and racialized immigrants, leading to activists claiming space for the discussion of racism and discrimination in France. The Université populaire played a role in opening up a space for debate about these issues, first with its cycle “Pour comprendre” (Cycle I 2015-2016) and second with the cycle “What remains of the colonial past?” (Cycle II 2017-2018).

*1.1.b) The first Université populaire cycle, in search of understanding discrimination, neighborhood stigmatization and islamophobia*

In this cycle “Pour comprendre” (2015-2016), we sought to create a space in which people could speak out about experiences of discrimination, racism and territorial stigmatization. The working group identified and invited speakers for each of the debates in order to provide the participants with analytical tools through which to understand their daily life experiences. The working group’s discussions about whom to invite were important moments in order to understand which voices are legitimate for whom, for example academics versus activists; and which analytical viewpoints are considered pertinent, for example framing issues in terms of class, race or religion and *laïcité*. In particular the first speaker, Abdelaziz Chaambi, provoked considerable resistance and concern, to the extent that the civil servant in charge of Villeneuve (*Directeur de territoire*) turned up at one of our preparatory meetings (field notes 15/03/2015). Additional information about why Chaambi caused concern will be developed later in this chapter and in chapter 6.

Table 4.12 provides an overview of the themes covered by the first Université populaire cycle “Pour comprendre” and the speakers who were invited to share their analyses. The debates were filmed and transcribed, and for each of them proceedings have been published with a verbatim transcript of both the contributions of the invited speaker, and the questions and answers with the participants. These proceedings were a way of restituting the debate to the audience that was present, and to bring the debates into the public sphere.

response to the question on the root causes of violence in the neighborhood (“Repas citoyen, Réagir aux violences dans le quartier, parlons-en”, *Villeneuve Debout*, 16/02/2013).

**Table 4.12 Schedule of debates in the first Université populaire cycle “Pour comprendre”**

Date	Theme	Speaker(s)
2015		
20 March	Pour comprendre les discriminations, l'islamophobie etc	Abdelaziz Chaambi, Michel Kokoreff
20 November	Université populaire Pour comprendre ZEP, ZUP, ZUS, ZSP - Saïd Bouamama	Saïd Bouamama
2016		
11 March	Université populaire Pour comprendre la liberté d'expression	Hervé Ott

### *Université populaire working group “Pour comprendre”*

Here I briefly introduce the people who constituted the working group at the moment of the creation of the Université populaire in 2015. Aïed, Sherazade, Jouda, Alain, Cindy and I formed a diverse group of people from different social, cultural, religious, and national backgrounds. Only Alain and Sherazade were residents of the neighborhood, the rest of us were there for a mixture of professional and personal reasons.

Aïed participated in the group in his professional capacity as director of the Maison des Habitants des Baladins, one of the two community centers in Villeneuve. Aïed is personally engaged in activism for the Palestinian cause and around immigration issues, and is politically active in favor of the *quartiers populaires* in movements close to the Forum Social des Quartiers Populaires (FSQP). He was a driving force of the Université populaire working group until he was obliged to leave his professional position in October 2015.

Sherazade shares Aïed’s political causes, is a focal point in the neighborhood and has a large network. She grew up in the Village Olympique until her parents moved to Voreppe, on the outskirts of Grenoble. She is an active volunteer in many organizations and, with her husband, she ran a fastfood restaurant at the market square which became a central meeting point for the Fringale working group which both she and I were part of in 2015. While Jouda decided not to join this group (Fringale) because she felt uncomfortable with some of their political positions, both she and Scherazade were actively engaged as volunteers in the Alliance Citoyenne and the Muslim women’s collective Nous Citoyennes.

Jouda did not join the Université populaire working group as a volunteer or activist but in her professional capacity, as “*médiatrice associative*”, mediator between inhabitants, community organizations and institutions, at the Régie de Quartier. She regularly felt frustrated in our meetings, having to find a balance between expressing her personal views and those of the organization she represents. She is also a local organizer in the neighborhood where she lives, another MSHN in Grenoble (Léon Jouhaux), but in this case as a volunteer.

Alain, on the other hand, is retired and a volunteer but brings years of professional

experience to the group: as the coordinator of a large network of organizations responsible for “*éducation populaire*”; and from an early career as actor and street theater artist. He has remained a vocal advocate of working-class culture (*culture populaire*) [see Box 4.33] and is an important asset for finding funding for the activities of the Université populaire that take place within the framework of Villeneuve Debout.

**Box 4.33 [terminology]: Populaire**

In the term *éducation populaire* or Université populaire, populaire means “of, or belong[ing] to” ordinary people as opposed to the elite, the privileged people, or the bourgeoisie in a Marxist vocabulary.

Cindy, a young professional, joined the group a bit later in the capacity of coordinator once funding for the position was secured (until 2017). Our meetings usually started with an exchange of views on the latest news, in particular our indignation, as well as personal and family issues.

A more detailed description of all group members will follow (section 1.2.b), in this section I will only expand on the contributions of Aïed and Sherazade because they left the working group during the first cycle, for professional and personal reasons respectively. They were both determining factors for the form this cycle took. After their departures, the group reconfigured and changed, and other members of Villeneuve Debout (all white and retired) occasionally joined the Université populaire working group, such as Elisabeth, Anne-Françoise and Patrick.

Elisabeth, a retired school teacher, mostly expressed her dissatisfaction with our choices of themes and speakers and provided us with alternative ideas for intellectual sources and invited speakers, who were vocal about republican values and their concern about Islamism in France.<sup>169</sup> Her presence always brought some tension to the group as the voices she suggested were exactly those the initial working group wanted to contest.

Anne-Françoise tried to make the connection between the Université populaire initiative and her community organization Arc-en-ciel, but she did not receive the support of the other members of Arc-en-ciel who were wary of opening a space to discuss islamophobia.

Lastly, there was Patrick, a retired psychiatrist and progressive Christian whose theoretical references and psychological approach did not really speak of racism, discrimination, and class issues.

The organization of the first debate provoked fear and criticism from the Université populaire’s institutional partners, such as the City of Grenoble who was responsible for the

<sup>169</sup> For example, Alain Finkielkraut

the Maison des Habitants de Baladins where we held our meetings. This experience allowed me to become aware of the limits of free speech about certain topics. The first speaker was Abdelaziz Chaambi, president of the Coordination contre le Racisme et l'Islamophobie (CRI),<sup>170</sup> invited to speak about discrimination and islamophobia in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attack and proposed by Sherazade, Jouda, and Aïed. His profile created significant concerns, notably from Aïed's direct superior, the *Directeur du territoire*,<sup>171</sup> who was apparently alerted about a debate on islamophobia in the post-Charlie Hebdo context and surveilled the preparations of the Université populaire working group. He turned up one morning at our meeting asking to be informed of our plans in more detail so that he could report back to the municipal City Councilor on Social Affairs.<sup>172</sup> The Maison des Habitants had become administratively dependent on the Community Centre for Social Action in Grenoble (CCAS) in 2011/2012 when it stopped being an independent community organization.

During the preparation for this first debate a specific moment of tension arose when just before the debate (20/03/2015) a terrorist attack - claimed by ISIS - killed 21 tourists and injured another 45 people in Tunisia. An invited speaker who is Muslim and originally from Tunisia speaking about islamophobia in this context was interpreted as an insult to the victims (informal discussion with neighborhood inhabitant, 20/03/2015). Rumors went around that Chaambi, one of the two speakers invited, is close to the Muslim Brotherhood and allegedly defended Islamist statements at the World Social Forum in 2013. This was the reason given by David, of the organization Planning, to interrupt another of our preparatory meetings to warn us about Chaambi's "islamo-fascist approach" (field notes, 20/03/2015). I was worried that I had naively gotten myself involved in dangerous discourse, and that my trust in the working group members was misplaced. I watched numerous YouTube videos to check the content of Chaambi's discourse but could not find any evidence of Islamist statements.

During the evening of the debate itself, and despite the fact that the Maison des Habitants was co-organizer of the event, Aïed preferred to stay in the background. Jouda found herself in a similar situation as she encountered resistance from the board of the Régie de Quartier, and also avoided taking the microphone. Sherazade and I therefore took on these tasks, with in my case a different kind of challenge: as a white person that did not live in the neighborhood in the eyes of some of the participants of the debate (i.e. some of the members of the Fringale group) I had little legitimacy to take the floor on these issues, as I was not personally affected by their consequences. The objections that different members in the Fringale group had evoked to working together with Villeneuve Debut and the Maison

<sup>170</sup> In English: Collective against racism and islamophobia.

<sup>171</sup> The *Directeur du territoire* is the civil servant in charge of an administrative sector of the city, in this case sector 6, which covers the area that comprises both Villeneuve and Village-Olympique.

<sup>172</sup> Alain Denoyelle was City Councilor on Social Affairs in 2015



des Habitants (managed by the City of Grenoble), and thus with the Université populaire, proved justified. These objections were that these organizations were too “institutionalized” or too close to state institutions and that they, as a result, would be restricted in terms of their independence to frame the debate.

In the end, the debate went remarkably well and over 100 people attended, both from within and outside the neighborhood. Initial fears that an older, white, and educated audience would dominate and override the voices of a racialized and working-class audience withered away about 30 minutes after we started with a relatively heterogeneous audience (UP debriefing meeting, 30/03/2015). In our debriefing meeting we analyzed why there were not more racialized participants as they are the ones that are primarily concerned by racism, discrimination, and islamophobia. Jouda and Sherazade suggested possible explanations, such as the fear that one’s point of view would provoke hostile reactions; the fear of confrontation and disagreement; and finally, that people have more urgent priorities and concerns than taking the time to go to debates, and that they have different cultural and political references. If one comes from a country with a dictatorial regime or where one has experienced a context of political violence, Jouda explained, expressing one’s political ideas in the public sphere may provoke fear (UP debriefing meeting, 30/03/2015). Patrick had a hard time relating to these statements about people’s experience of not being able to express themselves and not being heard: *“on est quand même dans une démocratie, les gens peuvent prendre la parole,”* (*Ibid.*). He defended an uncritical view of the bourgeois public sphere in the sense described by Habermas (Fraser 1992), which is widely shared among the white educated population of Villeneuve. The idea that people are not equal in their capacity to express themselves, and that there is therefore the need make space so that racialized people can express themselves on issues around discrimination and racism continued to provoke resistance. It was however a conscious choice to continue to work with institutions and to seek public funding for these initiatives rather than to follow the decision of the Fringale/FUIQP collective to organize autonomously. This decision was made as part of an attempt to bring these issues from the margins to the center, and to make marginalized voices heard in mainstream circles.

### *The role of Aïed*

As director of the MDH des Baladins, Aïed provided Villeneuve Debout with an office space and the Université populaire with a meeting space in the community center, and he was key in suggesting speakers for the first sessions. He had just moved from Paris to take up the position of director of this center. The MDH is located in the middle of Place des Géants (see overview map), which I described in the previous chapter as a space of tensions, and Aïed’s energetic leadership style and his aversion to rigid bureaucracy soon brought him into conflict with his hierarchy; which in turn led to the non-renewal of his temporary contract. The nervous reactions that our initiative provoked - in particular prior to the first debate - may also have played a role in this decision, although there is no proof that supports this suspicion. The dismissal letter Aïed received alluded to internal management issues, but

Aïed's dynamism had brought new life to la Maison des Habitants, which I mockingly called "*la Maison sans Habitants*" after Aïed's departure, mostly populated by public servants in search of a public. Those who had appreciated Aïed's presence in the center organized a protest against his forced departure, but in vain as Aïed was deeply discouraged and did not have the mental energy to challenge the decision judicially. On the edge of depression, he no longer responded to our mails or telephone calls after losing his job. The only time I saw him after his departure from the community center was on the bus to Paris to join the Marche pour la dignité et contre le racisme on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2015. After Aïed's departure, Alain was the only man left in the group.

### *Sherazade and the increasing politicization of community engagement*

Sherazade is one of the people in Villeneuve who forges links and relationships in the neighborhood, caring for those she knows and mobilizing against different forms of injustice. I met her for the first time during a Saturday morning meeting "*Café parental*" (2013), the initiative of two retired school teachers and neighborhood activists, which I attended in my quest to map the different political groups and spaces in Villeneuve where people come together and express themselves. The common ground we share of being mothers of boys of the same age created a bond. From then on, I frequently stopped by for a coffee at the Fringale, the fast-food restaurant she ran with her husband, also the place that the Fringale collective was named after because its first meetings were held there. She and her husband closed the restaurant in 2016 because it was no longer economically viable. Sherazade's activism started with a struggle over her choice to wear the veil to high school at a time when tensions were starting to rise over the issue, but before it was officially forbidden. She was supported both by her father who had told her "I will never oblige my wife to wear a veil but I will never oblige my daughter to take it off" (field notes, 15/11/2015) and by the CRI. The struggle she led as a teenager to be able to go to school with her veil took away her appetite for learning in the national education system, but she continued to inform herself through activist and spiritual networks. At that time, she was a member of the board of Alliance Citoyenne as a result of her active role in a community organizing campaign in the neighborhood, and also an active member of Nous Citoyennes (see chapter 2), a network that remobilized in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. She mobilized these networks for a meeting at the Fringale a week after the attack against Charlie Hebdo, a meeting that turned out to be a prefiguration of a regional antenna of FUIQP. She was constantly navigating between the Université populaire and the Fringale/FUIQP working groups, which differed considerably in their members. In comparison to the Université populaire the latter brings together people who are younger, includes a larger number of racialized people, is more to the left of the political spectrum, and all share volunteer status. They are free from institutional constraints and are therefore autonomous in setting their own agendas. When Sherazade had to slow down her activism for personal reasons she preferred to invest her energy in the Fringale/FUIQP than in the Université populaire, but we stayed in contact. She was one of the first to open the door of her home to me, to introduce me to her family and

vice versa. She guaranteed me a place in the FUIQP for a while, until I decided to focus my energy on the Université populaire.

### *1.1.c) References throughout the Université populaire cycle "Pour comprendre"*

Throughout this first cycle "Pour comprendre" (Cycle I 2015-2016), furtive references to "colonial", sometimes in relation to "past" and sometimes not, came up at different moments. The link between discrimination/racism and colonialism was made from the working group's first meeting onwards, when Aïed mentioned the "continuity of colonial thinking" (*continuité de la pensée coloniale*) (02/02/2015).<sup>173</sup> Other references were made in small group discussions during the public debate evenings, but the only record we have of these debates is what the moderators shared in the plenary. Furthermore, invited speakers contributed to putting the colonial question on the table by picking up what had been said by participants in the debates and by using the term "colonial" in their analyses or interpretations of these contributions. For example, when a young man shared his difficulties in obtaining a job promotion, Chaambi responded:

[C'est] parce que t'es un "bougnoule", parce que tu es un indigène, parce que l'on continue à te traiter et à te regarder de la même façon qu'on regardait tes ancêtres indigènes, avec un code spécifique où il fallait d'abord dire "tu". Comme on voit aujourd'hui les policiers quand ils s'arrêtent dans un quartier... "Allez! Tu me donnes tes papiers toi! Allez, ferme ta gueule!". Il se met à le tutoyer. Dans le code de l'indigénat, une des conditions pour parler à l'indigène c'est qu'il fallait le tutoyer. On ne disait pas "Ah monsieur". Aujourd'hui on est en 2015... On entend effectivement des policiers avoir la même attitude. (UP debate, 20/03/2015).

Chaambi spoke of a colonial continuum and being in the same situation as in colonial times. A second example comes from the same debate evening. A woman who was wearing a fairly long black veil shared her experience of an appointment with a doctor at the social security service following a period of sick leave. The questions the practitioner asked revolved around her religion, her origins, (which he probably assumed to be foreign despite her typical French first name, Virginie, and the fact that she holds French nationality) as well as her husband's origin and finally he informed her that on her medical file it would be indicated that she converted to Islam at the age of 16 (UP debate, 20/03/2015). Virginie felt these questions were very inappropriate and was angry that at no point was interest shown in the medical reasons for her sick leave, but she did not herself make the link with colonial classifications in administrative files. It was Michel Kokoreff, a sociologist and invited speaker from Paris, who established this link.

[Virginie's story recalls] les pires heures de l'histoire française, en particulier colonial, où on identifiait dans les fiches

<sup>173</sup>During the meeting the person did not develop further what he meant by it and the exact context in which he evoked it is missing from my notes.

administratives les individus avec ce terme N.A. : d'origine nord-africaine. C'est une mention raciale claire qui tient de l'administration coloniale et qui a perduré jusqu'à il n'y a pas très longtemps. Et donc inscrire sur un dossier médical la conversion à l'islam, c'est une folie ! (Kokoreff, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

Kokoreff did not speak of a colonial continuum but of a current situation that echoes the colonial past, whilst at the same time admitting that racial references created in the colonial period existed well beyond decolonization.

A final example comes from the public debate about neighborhood stigmatization. One discussion group brought up that for the causes of this stigmatization we have to look into the history of immigration, and ethnicization. Another group contributed, as part of the solution to this issue, that "France should finally accept its historical past of slavery and colonization" and should review its history books. Neither statement was developed further in the plenary (UP debate, 20/11/2015). The speaker invited for this debate, the sociologist and activist Saïd Bouamama answered that reviewing France's history is crucial.

On a complètement sous-estimé les effets de la colonisation sur les peuples des pays colonisateurs. Pendant 130 ans on a expliqué dans ce pays, que l'on était supérieur aux autres cultures, qu'on allait les civiliser, que c'étaient des sauvages. Pendant 130 ans, ces idées ont été diffusées dans des journaux, des photos, des films et des livres scolaires. On a diffusé des images du 'Noir', de 'l'Arabe' et du "musulman" qui empêchaient de le considérer comme notre égal. Le travail de déconstruction de ce que j'appelle "l'espace mental colonial" n'a jamais été entamé. Car on a considéré qu'avec les indépendances, on pouvait passer à autre chose, de but en blanc. Mais on a oublié que ces images restent dans les imaginaires. Et donc ce n'est pas la faute du peuple français ! C'est un héritage ! (...) Autrement dit, il y a une transmission transgénérationnelle du stigmatisme xénophobe. (Saïd Bouamama, UP debate, 20/11/2015).

The words Bouamama chose to use when speaking about negative representations and the link between the colonial past and present were "transmission" and "heritage" and he spoke about the need to deconstruct these images, a task that according to him has never been initiated. What is of interest here is the link people make, both the audience and invited speakers, between a colonial past and a current situation in France. It is this link that we continued to explore in the Université populaire cycle that followed (Cycle II 2017-2018).

#### *1.1.d) Towards a cycle posing the colonial question*

At the end of this first Université populaire cycle, participants were invited to contribute to the choice of a new theme. In their proposals, the colonial question came up again: "Colonization/ Post-colonization" (field notes, 21/03/2016) and "the history and geopolitics of colonization and decolonization" (field notes, 27/07/2016) were among the suggestions. A recent graduate in geography, Coline Cellier, proposed dedicating her "voluntary community

service” (*service civique*) to a new cycle of the Université populaire<sup>174</sup> (March 2017). Moving away from furtive references to “colonial” with regard to practices, past, representations etc., this new cycle offered an opportunity to engage more systematically with the link between France’s colonial past and discrimination and racism in the present. An extract of one of the first meetings of the working group for this new cycle demonstrates that exactly what this link looks like was not clear in the beginning, and that there was a strong resistance from some members to establishing this connection between the past and present. The following quote is from the third meeting of the Université populaire working group on the colonial past-present.

Jouda : (...) La France a mis un blanc sur ce passé colonial et il y a eu quelque chose, que j’ai envie d’aller voir. On ne peut pas passer à côté de la question qu’est-ce que sont les répercussions aujourd’hui : la ghettoisation...

Henri : C’est là où je ne comprends pas comment tu peux faire le lien.

Jouda : Bah justement, j’ai envie d’aller sonder ce lien.

Henri : Mais comment toi tu fais le lien ?

Jouda : Je suis en train de lire, je vois, je regarde, je lis, je constate aussi par rapport aux discriminations, par rapport à tout ça et je veux comprendre.

Henri : Moi aussi, je passe mon temps à ça aussi et la question de la discrimination je me bats contre, mais je ne vois pas de lien entre tout ce que tu viens de dire sur la colonisation et la discrimination 60 ans après. Comment on fait le lien ?

Jouda : Je cherche. Je n’ai pas de réponses. (...)

Henri : ... Je ne vais pas pouvoir continuer à venir pendant longtemps parce que je suis en désaccord profond avec ce lien que vous n’arrivez pas à expliquer entre colonisation et discrimination. Je crois que je vais arrêter parce que je pense que c’est une erreur idéologique... C’est de l’idéologie et ce n’est pas de la réalité. C’est une construction...

Alain : qui existe.

Henri : Bien sûr que c’est une construction de la pensée mais les constructions de la pensée, ce n’est pas pour ça qu’elles sont justes.

Jouda : On n’a pas dit que c’était juste, on a dit qu’il y a une question qui se pose dans la société et nous on veut...

Henri : Non, la question ne se pose pas dans la société, elle se pose à partir des idéologues.

Alain : Elle se pose ici, on le vit tous les jours. (...)

<sup>174</sup> The voluntary community service was officially with Modus Operandi and I was her tutor.

Alain : Comment se fait-il que ces pensées que tu qualifies comme idéologiques ou idéologues ou je ne sais pas, soient autant répandues dans le quartier ? (..)

Cindy : Je ne pense pas qu'on peut nier que dans le quartier c'est un fait qui est hyper présent donc je ne comprends pas pourquoi il ne faudrait pas en parler.

Henri : De quel fait ? Il faut le dire à chaque fois.

Alain : Cet amalgame colonisation-discrimination. Si c'est un amalgame il faut qu'on arrive à dénoncer que c'est un amalgame. Mais il faut pour ça aborder la question de front, il ne faut pas l'aborder par des détours.

(UP meeting, 19/05/2017)

This illustration of the resistance that this link between past and present encountered is indicative both of the objectives of the working group, to investigate this link as an open question; and of the animosity the project encountered.

### *1.2) Université populaire cycle on the colonial past as a means to engage more systematically with the colonial question*

In this section I provide information about the debates the working group organized during the second cycle of the Université populaire (1.2.a) and about the people who participated in the debates, referred to as the participants. They can be represented as five concentric circles or tiers [Figure 4.92]. The first tier is the initial Université populaire working group and the second tier is the enlarged working group, including those who joined the group at the start of the second cycle (1.2.b). I differentiate between the two because the first tier shared the experience of the first cycle and the high level of trust and informality that this created in meetings, which was not the case with the second tier of the enlarged working group. The third tier are the resource persons whom we approached for their contribution to the cycle at specific moments in time, including the invited speakers (1.2.c). The difference between the two is that the former participated in the discussion circles and not the latter. The fourth tier exists of the participants in the plenary debates (1.2.d); and the fifth tier exists of those participating in the street debates and more generally those who were informed about the debates but did not come (1.2.e). The last subsection deals with criticism addressed to the Université populaire that it did not represent "ordinary inhabitants" (1.2.f).

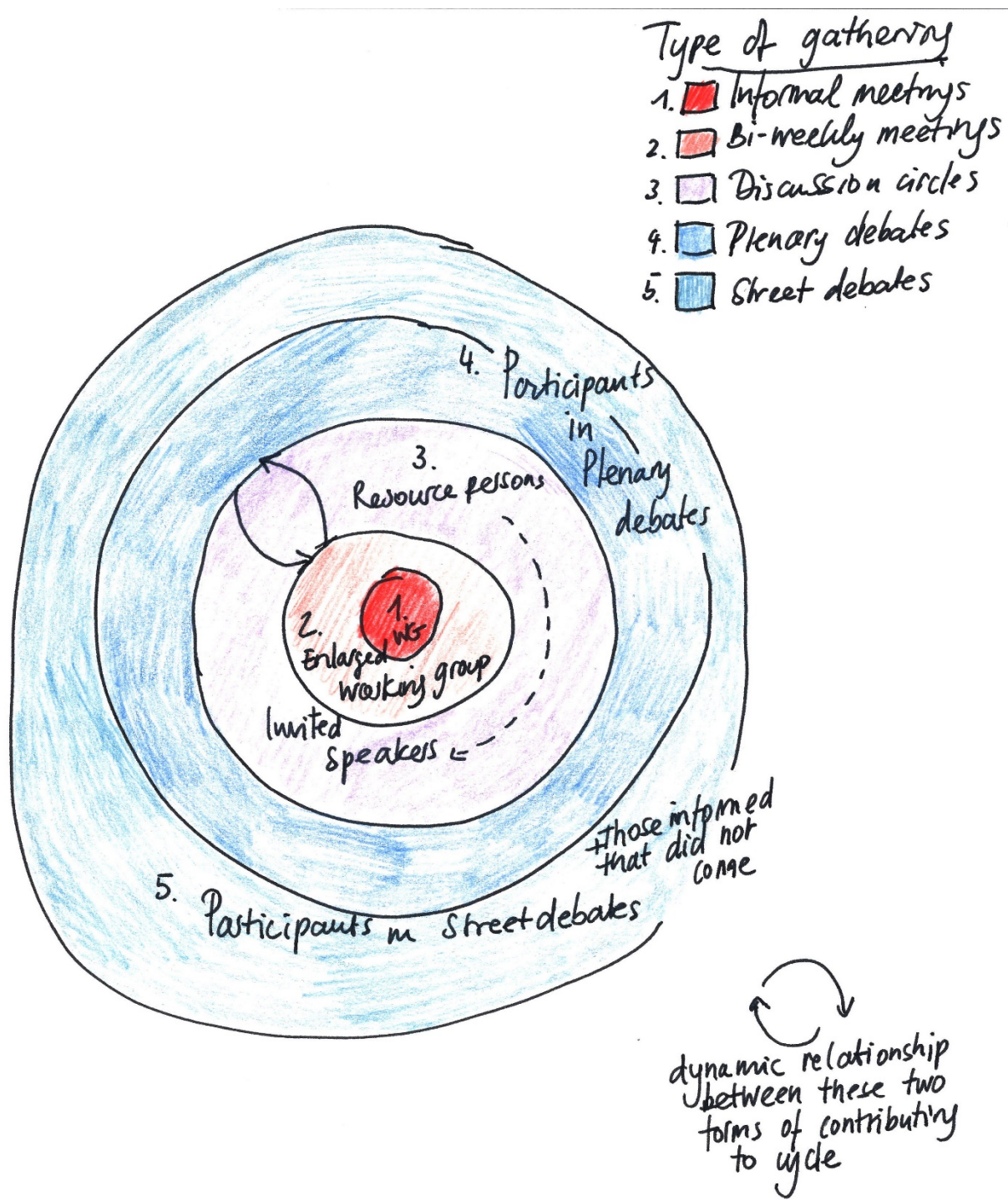


Figure 4.92 The five tiers of participation in the Université populaire

1.2.a) *The Université populaire cycle inquiring into the legacy of the colonial past*

In May 2017, meetings started with the renewed working group, and in July 2017 the cycle started with a first discussion circle followed by 9 plenary debates which took place over the period of a year. The working group's bi-weekly meetings continued throughout the cycle. Figure 4.93 summarizes the phases of the cycle and the themes explored.

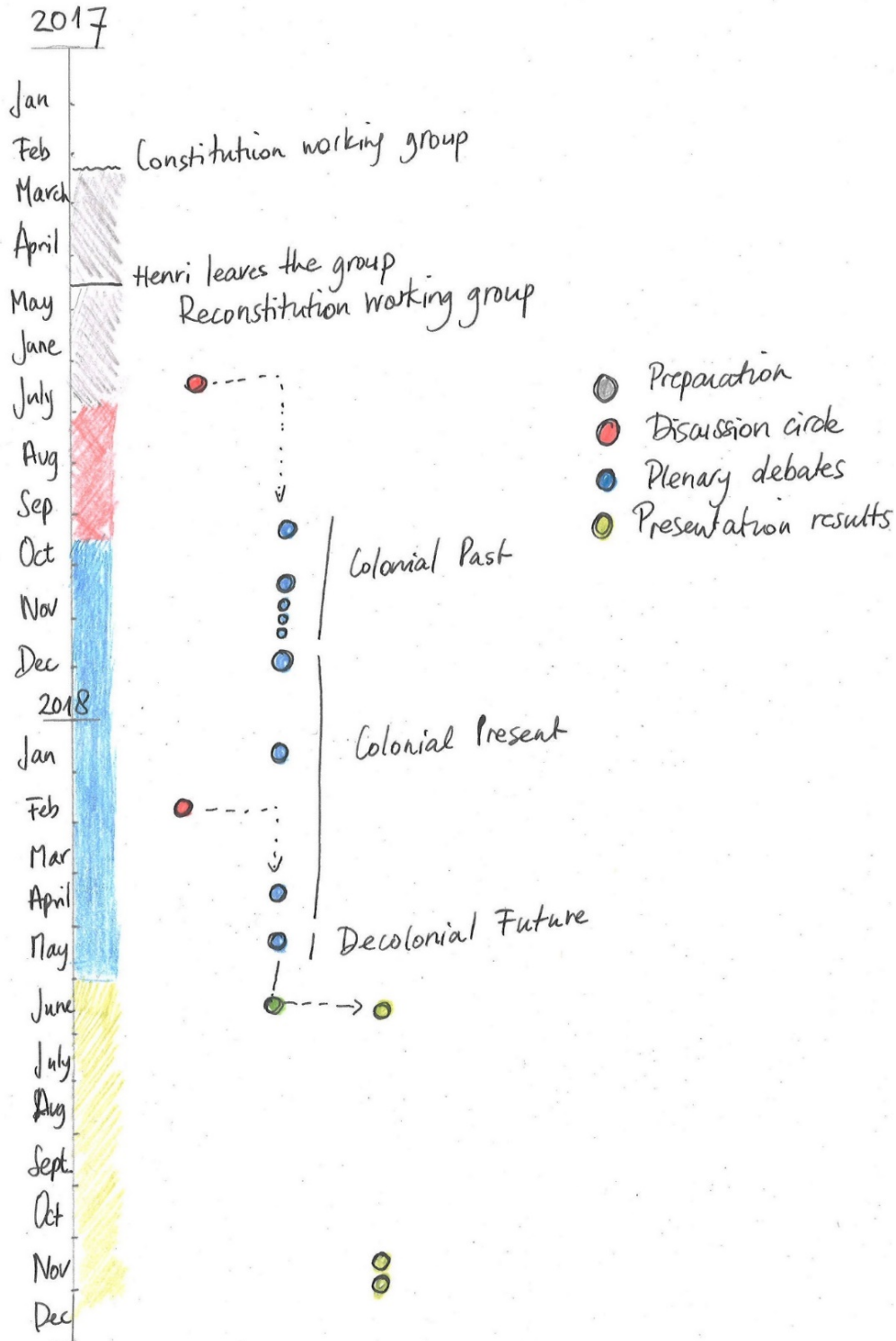


Figure 4.93 Timeline of the UP cycle inquiring the legacy of the colonial past



The cycle can roughly be categorized in three phases:

- Phase I: the colonial past (July – December 2017)
- Phase II: the colonial present (December 2017 – June 2018)
- Phase III: presentation of results (June- December 2018)

Table 4.13 provides an overview of the dates and the titles of the plenary debates organized during the cycle “What remains of the colonial past?”. It also includes information about the invited speakers, and a schedule of meetings and discussion circles that were organized prior to the debates.

**Table 4.13 Schedule of meetings, discussion circles and public debates in the Université populaire cycle “What remains of the colonial past?”**

Date	Theme	Speaker(s)
<i>2017</i>		
April - July	7 preliminary meetings	Working group
7 July	Discussion circle in preparation for the first public debate about the question “Que rest-t-il selon vous du passé colonial?”	No invited speakers, only invited participants from both in and outside of the neighborhood with relevant personal experience for the cycle, whose role was that of resource persons
13 October	“Mémoires de la colonisation entre récits et tabous.” Soirée construite autour des témoignages de multiples intervenants, pour la plupart habitants du quartier de la Villeneuve	Ali Djilali (moderator), AlterEgo
10 November	“La France et ses colonies”	Claire Marynower, Assistant Professor, Institut d’Etudes Politiques, Grenoble
20 November	“La guerre d’Algérie, connaître les faits. Le processus de colonisation jusqu’au début de la guerre d’indépendance”	Antonin Plarier, PhD student, Institut d’Etudes Politiques, Grenoble
22 November	“La guerre d’Algérie, connaître les faits. La guerre d’Algérie en cinq dates importantes: 1945, 1955, 1956, 1958, 1961”	Abdelhamid Benhamida, retired history teacher from the Lycée Argouges
24 Novembre	“La guerre d’Algérie, connaître les faits. Qu’est-ce qu’être ‘colon’ ou ‘colonisé’ en Algérie?”	Claire Marynower
8 December	“Quelles continuités de l’imaginaire colonial après 1960?”	Nasima Moujoud, Assistant Professor University of Grenoble
<i>2018</i>		

22 January	“Repenser le monde avec Césaire, Fanon et Glissant”	Kenjah Ali Babar, independent researcher, activist, and inhabitant of Villeneuve
28 February	Discussion circle in preparation of the question “Can we speak of a colonial management of MSHN?”	No invited speakers but those invited with relevant experience for the 26 April session
26 April	“Mixité sociale, injonction à vivre ensemble, quelle gestion pour les quartiers?”	Guillaume Roux, CNRS researcher, Pacte Marie-Hélène Bacqué, Université Paris-Ouest Nanterre Omer Mas Capitolin, Plateforme stop contrôle au faciès (Paris) Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea, FSQP
25 May	“Contre les discriminations, quels mots utiliser?”	Herrick Mouafo, Modus Operandi Nadia Kirat, Rassemblement citoyen Nedjib Sidi Moussa, independent researcher (Paris)
<b>Presentation of results</b>		
<b>Dates 2018</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Location</b>
18 June	Final evening. Theatre play and video screening “Sur les traces d’un passé colonial au présent”	Theatre Espace 600, Villeneuve
22 November	Theatre play and video screening “Sur les traces d’un passé colonial au présent”	Public library, Grenoble city center
30 November	Theatre play and video screening “Sur les traces d’un passé colonial au présent”	Café le TRUC in Saint Bernard du Touvet

The goal of the first debates was to create a common ground and vocabulary.

- 13 October 2017: The first public debate enquired into one’s personal relationship with the past and to what extent it was still relevant for understanding the present, inviting eight people to tell their stories about what they felt remained of the colonial past. The working group chose for life stories as a starting point for a collective exploration of personal histories and geographies.
- 10 November 2017: The goal of this plenary debate was to seek some agreement on the definition of the terms colonization, decolonization, colonialism and “colonial”.
- 20-24 November 2017. Three debates were dedicated specifically to the French colonial presence in Algeria because many people in Villeneuve are of Algerian origin. This history also personally affects many white inhabitants, as political activists, coming from *pièdes-noirs* families (French colonials born in Algeria), or enrolled in the French army and sent to Algeria.

The objective of the debates that followed was to examine the link between the past and present.

- The debate on 8 December 2017 dealt with the colonial imagination in current political discourse and in particular with regard to women.
- 22 January 2018 participants debated about the relevance of the work of three Caribbean anti-colonial thinkers, Césaire, Fanon and Glissant, to understanding the world today and working towards a decolonial future.
- 26 April 2018 the working group put the question of whether one can speak of a colonial management of MSHN up for debate. In preparation for this debate, the working group convened a second discussion circle (28/02/2018) because of the resistance to this theme, which was particularly high in the initial working group.
- The last debate, on 25 May 2018 posed the question of which words or concepts would be helpful for working towards a decolonial future. What are the possibilities and risks of mobilizing and organizing around racialized identities (Muslim, Black, Arab, etc.) or, instead, around inclusive non-racialized identities?

The last *rendez-vous* in the cycle were the presentations of the debates as a video - and theater format in order to answer the question we initially set out with.

### *1.2.b) First and second tier: initial and enlarged working group*

For the second cycle, the working group started out with those already involved in the first cycle: Alain, Jouda, Cindy and I, joined by Coline, François, Henri, Elisabeth and Anne-Françoise who, apart from Coline, are all part of the Villeneuve Debout collective. Tensions rapidly appeared and rose over the objective of the cycle and the framing of the debates. Throughout the meetings it became clear that our personal trajectories and political opinions positioned each of us very differently on these issues. The subject of the Algerian war in particular diametrically opposed members of the working group, with some families having actively supported the armed resistance on the Algerian side, the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), and others supporting the paramilitary Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS) that fought for Algeria to remain French.

During the first months of the cycle we took the time to put our differences on the table, explore them and find a way to progress, taking into account these different positions. It was interesting to see how each of us evoked other places to understand the present in Villeneuve, France, and the links established with the past. Here follows a short presentation of each of the members of the working group based on the stories they shared throughout the meetings and the first discussion circle (07/07/2017). In these stories they often explain where they grew up, their links with other places and how their political opinions were formed but also what appealed to them in the cycle and why they were there. The links they make between past and present will be discussed further on in the chapter (section 2).

### *Personal histories and geographies*

Alain was born in 1943 and grew up in a working-class family in Paris. The political *milieu* in which he evolved was progressive Christian, that of the Parti Socialiste unifié (PSU) and Témoignage Chrétien.<sup>175</sup> His family was in favor of decolonization, and some of his uncles were “*porteurs de valises*”. This literally means “suitcase carrier” and was used to refer to those who carried bags of money from Algerian workers in France into Algeria to support the armed liberation movements. The remark of a resource person that the idea of universalism was used to legitimize colonization [rather colonialism] and had been responsible for the minorization of local languages and cultures (discussion circle, 07/07/2017) struck Alain. It helped him to reinterpret his father’s frustration and anger about the French role in the Algerian war and helped him to understand that his father, from a working-class family in Brittany (Bretagne), experienced a situation of “internal colonialism” (see Casanova 1964; Mignolo et Escobar 2009). Alain’s grandmother did not speak a word of French, only *breton* and his father always remembered the humiliation of being forbidden to speak his mother tongue at school: “*la langue de ta mère, tu la rentres maintenant et tu parles le français*” (UP meeting, 05/05/2017). Alain thinks that his father kept the frustration that his language and culture was not fully recognized all his life and that this turned him into a profound anti-colonialist, even if he was not directly involved in anti-colonial struggles.

Jouda’s family on the paternal side is originally from the Algerian Sahara and they fled “when France arrived”, heading for Tunisia by camel. Even though her father was born in Tunisia, he chose to be buried back in Southern Algeria when he died in 2017. In 1956 he arrived in France as a young man and got involved with the FLN (in France). When Algeria became independent six years later he chose the Algerian nationality and tried to live for a while in Algeria, but did not stay for long (discussion circle, 07/07/2017). Sherazade once said that if you met Jouda’s father, it became easier to situate Jouda (field notes, May 2016). Jouda says of him that despite racism at his work in the painting industry, her father knew how to make himself be respected (informal discussion, 03/07/2017). Beyond his personal characteristics, this is probably also due to the fact that her father came from an educated family who occupied positions within the French colonial administration. He was very fond of his enterprising and outspoken daughter. Jouda is indeed a very social and confident person and despite the fact that she is mother of four children she is present at every major activist meeting. She wears a *hijab* and jeans to stress both her submission to her faith and her rebellion. She was the only racialized person in the working group (Arab, veil, Muslim) and the object of suspicions due to her visible religious affiliation: the same positions voiced by me or by Jouda were not interpreted in the same way.

<sup>175</sup> *Témoignage Chrétien* is a progressive Christian weekly which was first published by the French Resistance during German occupation.

François, a neighborhood resident, also has a connection to Algeria as he worked there in development projects as a young architect after the country obtained its independence.<sup>176</sup> He was based in Colomb-Béchar close to the Moroccan border where he worked on a hospital project. When François arrived in Grenoble he became involved with the Association Dauphinoise de Coopération Franco-Algérienne (ADCFA) doing literacy training (07/07/2017). His position in the group is rather discreet and his involvement seems to be motivated by curiosity. He does not have a strong emotional stake in these issues, neither does he defend affirmed political positions, which clearly distinguishes him from Henri.

Henri never explicitly shared his personal story but it becomes rapidly clear that the topic of the debate has an emotional resonance for him, as it does for Elisabeth and Jouda. I picked up from what he said that he comes from a Jewish family in Algeria and moved to France after independence. In his professional life he held the position of a director in the cultural domain, he is an affirmed atheist and neighborhood resident. He decided to leave the group after the third meeting as a result of a disagreement over the framing of the debate, but he nevertheless played an important role in the first meetings. He was the most well-read out of the six of us. We could hardly counter the references he made during our meetings because even though we had heard of them, we had not read them or could not cite or summarize them in the same way. His affirmation that there was no link between 'colonization' and 'discrimination' pushed other members of the working group to read more in order to be better able to defend their intuitions and ideas. With hindsight I think Henri had the impression that he could mold the working group to his ideas, and when he realized this was not the case he preferred to quit rather than find a way to integrate our different positions and ideas.

Elisabeth has in common with Henri that she was born in Algeria, but in her case in a poor settler (*piets-noirs*) family, originally from Spain. Her family strongly defended the position that Algeria should remain French. During the war years she was part of a militarized youth movement close to the OAS. From this period she has retained the anger and fear of being chased away from what she considered her homeland. She once confided in one of the resource persons that she still feels nauseous when she hears the Algerian hymn ("*Quand j'entends l'hymne algérien, j'ai envie de gerber*" (Ali, UP meeting, 06/06/2017). She still imagines another outcome of the conflict, one with less bloodshed and through negotiations, which might have allowed her to stay. With regard to Franco-Algerian relations, she spoke of "two centuries of suffering and misunderstanding" (UP debate, 13/10/2017). Her choice of the term "misunderstanding" does not speak to the domination that Jouda evoked in the working group's first meetings, nor to the issues of racism and

<sup>176</sup> The French term for this kind of volunteer work in development cooperation was "*coopérant technique des volontaires du service national*", which young men could apply for in the 1960s (after 1962) as an alternative to military cooperation. Its overseas missions depended on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and were part of the nascent French development policy.

discrimination that have been the starting point for the first cycle. Every time someone brought up discrimination or racism in the discussions, Elisabeth sighed. She systematically denied that racism and discrimination are pertinent view points for understanding the everyday life experience of racialized people in France. For her, France “*est accueillant quand on fait quelques efforts*” (UP debate, 13/10/2017). Those that feel unwelcome have not put enough effort in their integration, or rather assimilation, into French society. These are sensitive issues for Elisabeth because of the hostile way she was received as *pied-noir* in “the metropole”, in 1962. She remembers that in the harbour of Marseille there was a banner “*pieds-noirs capitalistes et racistes, à la mer*” (UP debate, 13/10/2017).<sup>177</sup> The Mayor apparently said about the latter: “*qu'ils aillent se réadapter ailleurs*” (see also Le Gendre 2012). She followed this advice and “re-adapted, assimilated and integrated elsewhere in France” (UP debate, 13/10/2017). She became a primary school teacher in Grenoble, and for many years in Villeneuve, where she still lives. After being uprooted by the Algerian independence war one of the satisfactions in her life is her second home in the Ardèche, where she “bought her roots” (interview, 08/06/2017). Despite her strong disagreement with the working group’s inquiry into the link between the present in France (discrimination) and its colonial past, she continued to join meetings and come to the public debates.

Anne-Françoise is the only white woman in the neighborhood who always wears a *pagne*, an African dress through which she demonstrates her connection to the Congolese community that she married into. She continued to wear it after her husband’s death several years ago. She is originally from a small village in Savoie and did not receive a long formal education. She never really told us how she came to marry a Congolese student and settle in Villeneuve, but she did tell us about his silences, his difficulty in speaking about his past in the Congo and his depression in France where he never found a job that corresponded to his qualifications (informal discussion, January 2014). Anne-Françoise is an active member of several community organizations such as Arc-en-ciel, which organizes social encounters between neighborhood inhabitants of different cultures; Villeneuve Debout; and is part of the Conseils citoyens indépendants, the public scheme that seeks to stimulate the political participation of MSHN inhabitants.

Cindy was a young project coordinator at Villeneuve Debout who joined the working group for as long as funding was available. She had to leave the group in the summer of 2017 for health reasons. She said in an informal discussion that she was confronted in Villeneuve with the same neo-colonial tensions that she encountered during her work as coordinator for a humanitarian organization after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Her decision to invest her energy locally in France did not resolve her ethical questions about development work,

<sup>177</sup> Elisabeth recounted that the banner was displayed by the CGT dockers’ labour union. It is difficult to verify whether she remembers having seen the banner and knowing who was behind it or whether she learned this information later, as part of her interest in the history of the *pieds-noirs* in Algeria and France.

finding similar dynamics of patriarchy in Villeneuve Debut (UP discussion circle, 07/07/2017).

Coline linked her observations in Villeneuve to her experiences as an exchange student in Brazil where she was struck that French acquaintances attributed differences observed between France and Brazil to the latter's "lack of development" (discussion circle, 07/07/2017). She drew a parallel between classifications based on levels of development and colonialism. Her geographic position at the Geography Institute, in the close vicinity of Villeneuve, and some pedagogical projects she was involved in helped her to connect with the neighborhood.

As a member of the working group I also shared my position during the discussion circle (07/07/2017). I recounted the fact that my encounter with the neighborhood brought back many memories of my observations in South Africa, where I lived and worked (2000) as a Dutch person interested in my country's colonial past and its role in the apartheid years. What struck me in particular was the question of who occupies which place in society and in employment. *"J'ai l'impression que quand t'es derrière un ordinateur, il faut être blanc. Les postes à responsabilité dans le quartier sont occupés par les blancs et les postes de nettoyage de gardiennage, d'exécution sont occupés par des racisés."* (discussion circle, 07/07/2017). Being obliged to think about race dynamics and which privilege goes with the category of white reminded me of South Africa, as did more subtle gestures, like hands during meetings. Who took notes? With which tools? And which jewels embellish which hands? The ritualized and gentle opening of a fountain pen at the start of a meeting is a sign of social distinction. In the relationships I observed in Villeneuve and in the meetings I attended I noticed these moments of social distinction. These moments in themselves are not colonial, but the color of privilege is.

Through these stories I became aware that geography shapes our experiences as much as history does. It is experiences in different geographical places that working group members referred to in order to explain why the colonial past was relevant. They use these experiences in other places to give meaning to their observations in Villeneuve. Figure 4.94 is a map of the places participants of the discussion circle (07/07/2017) evoked in answer to the question of what remains of the colonial past.

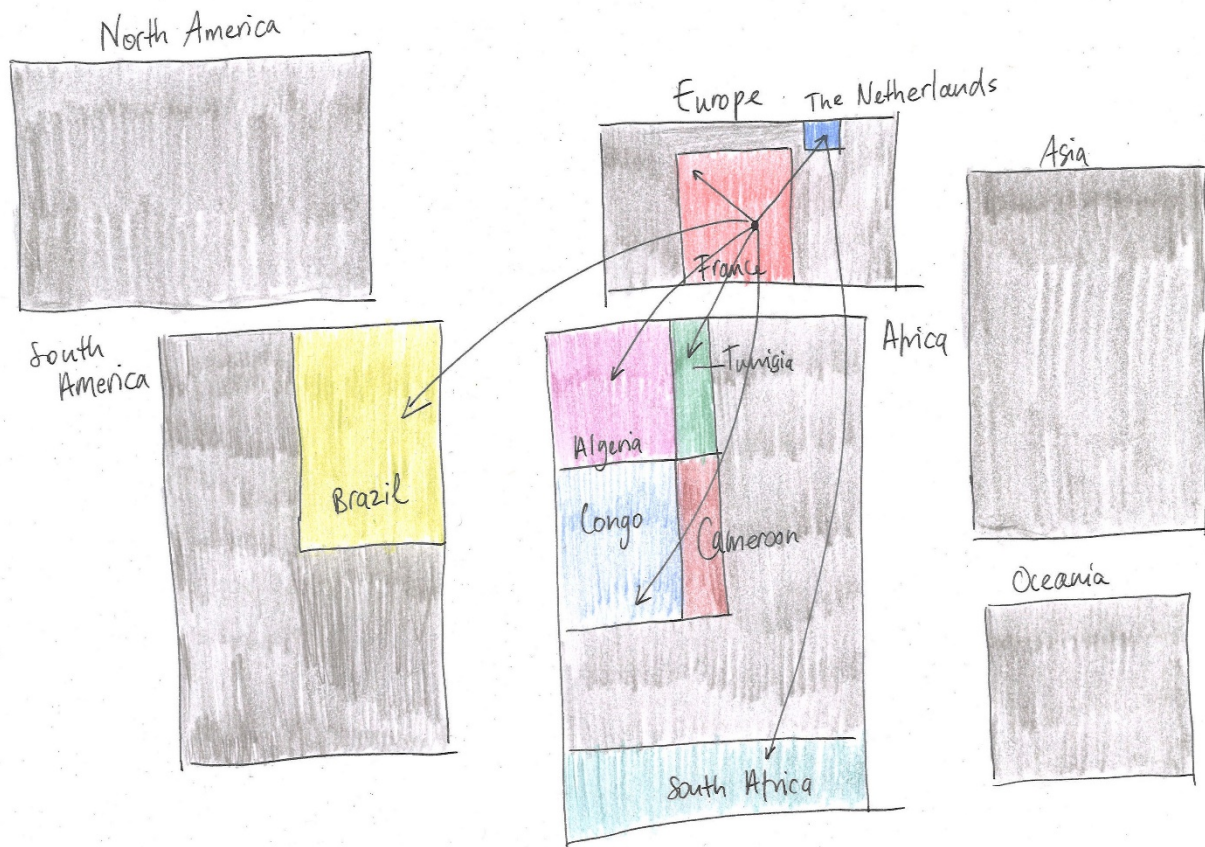


Figure 4.94 Sketch of places evoked in personal geographies in response to the question “what remains of the colonial past?”

### *Thematic framing of the cycle*

The renewed working group reached an agreement about what the cycle set out to do: to create a space of expression for inhabitants of MSHN (*expression populaire*) and to propose a variety of analytical tools with which to analyze their lived experience.<sup>178</sup> The theoretical framing of the cycle, which was initially called “*Mémoire et colonisation*” was the topic of extensive debate during meetings from April to July 2017, which brought to the fore significant tensions in the working group between those who sought to enquire into a link between the colonial past and discrimination and racism in the present, and those that strongly objected to making this link, calling it as an “analytical error” (UP meeting, 19/05/2017). In order to work through these tensions, I invited each of the working group members, including myself, to state their objectives for the cycle (UP meeting, 24/04/2017). What motivations drove their participation in the cycle? Which personal trajectories, political views and fears about the current developments in French society informed their

<sup>178</sup> There is one voice in the working group, that of Elisabeth, who does not share this objective. She is very reluctant to open the Université populaire space for the simple expression of inhabitants. The mission of the Université populaire, according to her, should be to elevate the discussion to a higher level.



positions? This section sets out to describe the personal motivations that drove the members of the working group to enquire into the colonial past and its links to the present.

### *Personal motivations and fears of UP working group members*

The direct interest Alain had in the cycle is that some of the actions he initiated in the neighborhood with the Villeneuve Debut collective were called “neo-colonial” while the cause he is firmly dedicated to, “*éducation populaire*”, aims at emancipation:

L'éducation populaire, c'est la désaliénation, l'auto-responsabilité, la fabrication de citoyenneté et l'auto-éducation entre les gens - et donc traduire l'éducation populaire comme un truc de néo-colons, ça me fait du mal. (Discussion circle, 07/07/2017)

This accusation was very painful for him and he sought to better understand where it came from and what it meant. He saw two possible answers "either a falsification of history or a falsification of *éducation populaire*" (UP meeting, 05/05/2017), so he was interested in acquiring knowledge about colonial history and the way it is mobilized in the neighborhood.

Jouda shared this interest in learning more about colonial history, which she compared to a dotted line (*trait en pointillé*), the dots being her knowledge acquired through a mixture of family narratives, reading and activism. She sought to fill in the blanks between the dots but she said she felt somewhat lost in the midst of “information that arrives in a discontinuous and disarticulated way” (*des informations qui arrivent de façon très discontinue, sans lien*) and is in search of some kind of compass to guide her through individual (his)stories and “political discourse and activist discourse that take these questions on, but always in a particular light” (discussion circle, 07/07/2017).

The difficulty Henri saw in the proposal to provide a platform for stories and statements around colonization was that we would be confronted with individual memories and feelings that, according to Henri, were often “pure fantasy” (UP meeting, 24/04/2017). To support his argument about imaginary pasts he told the story of his own father who had his personal version of the Algerian independence war but which, according to Henry, was disconnected from larger historical facts. Henri’s concerns about “fantasized history” were not shared in the working group, except by Elisabeth. The other members agreed in principle that there was a risk of fantasizing the past but attributed more importance to the risk of doing the opposite: not considering personal memories is also a means to delegitimize people’s attempts to understand their experiences of discrimination and humiliation in France. Henri was not opposed to working with personal stories as such, but feared that opening a space to people’s “fantasized” narratives of colonization would work in the interests of the Parti des Indigènes de la République (PIR), a political movement that has politicized the colonial question in France since 2005. The PIR is the spectre that haunted our debates, as I explain below. Part of Henri’s motivation to be in the working group was to prevent these ideas being given a platform in the neighborhood, with the aim of suffocating the debate that others wanted to have (UP meeting, 24/04/2017). A focus on academic history was a

guarantee for Henri that the Université populaire cycle would contribute to building on what we have in common as a society (*rentrer dans une construction commune*) rather than to reinforcing our differences. Both he and Elisabeth are in search of some kind of national and personal reconciliation.

For Elisabeth there is some urgency for better mutual understanding: “let’s not lose time after two centuries of suffering and misunderstanding, (..) let us once and for all understand each other because we have so much to do together” (letter read publicly, 13/10/2017). However, I did not get the impression that she was really open to learning from others. For example when Mohamed B. told his story, that of an Algerian immigrant having fled rural poverty in 1963, she could only sigh because she felt that he took on a victim position (*s’enferme dans une posture de victime*). Identifying himself as a victim of colonization, according to Elisabeth, he tends to forget that “even colonized and without shoes in winter as a child, he came to get medical treatment in France and we have treated him” (*même que bien que colonisé sans chaussures en hiver il est venu se faire soigner en France et on l’a soigné*) (interview, 08/06/2017).<sup>179</sup>

For me the goal of the Université populaire was about making space for these different narratives, and the cycle should give space to the multiplicity of historical narratives about colonization (*mémoires*) and the links people draw with this past to explain the present (UP meeting, 24/04/2017). Personal histories are an important starting point in the *éducation populaire* approach for analyzing larger societal phenomena, and as a site for resistance against domination (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006; Panos 1999). Part of my goal was to create a space that was safe enough for people to speak about the stories and silences that were transmitted in their families. This desire is motivated by my observation that many of these stories are supposed to stay within the family circle because of the risk associated with sharing them. Throughout different debates I observed the difference between what can be said in public and what can be said in private. For example, the case of Aïed who told his daughter not to discuss the Palestinian issue nor religion at school but only to do so in family circles because it could get her into trouble. I also saw this discomfort, at least this is how I interpret the facial expressions I saw, when I brought up the question in informal discussions with young people involved in the MJC des Roseaux. Abdallah timidly smiled at me when I asked him whether at home they talked about the colonial past, and answered “yes, but....” (field notes, March 2017). Tassadit, one of the resource persons, warned me that people would not tell me because they would not trust me (field notes, 10/02/2019). Could we contribute to making a space for these stories in French historiography? Creating this space would also contribute to providing an answer to what Stora identified as an “enormous problem” in France: the lack of the integration of the colonial history into the republican

<sup>179</sup> Mohamed had indeed been hospitalized in France and was treated for tuberculosis. This is however not the reason why he came to France. According to him, he came to work and earn an income for his poverty-stricken family, replacing his older brother who died of tuberculosis in Algeria.

national history, and thereby, the integration of the history of its minorities (Stora 2007, 297). The space the initial working group aimed to create in the Université populaire “could do a lot of good to people in the neighborhood”, according to Jouda, “either to reconcile themselves with their history or to find out more about it” (discussion circle, 07/07/2017). I further develop the question of oral transmission versus silence about the past in section 3.

*Tensions in the working group around racism and discrimination as a starting point for examining colonial history*

Jouda is interested in the history of colonialism because of her experience of racism and discrimination in France as an Arabic speaking woman wearing a *hijab*. She seeks an answer to the question whether “racism is a residue of colonialism?” (*Est-ce que le racisme serait un relent du colonialisme?*) (UP meeting, 05/05/2017), a question she later reformulated as a hypothesis “*la question de la colonisation elle se pose, à travers les rapports de domination, la question des discriminations*” (UP meeting, 19/05/2017). Establishing this link between current discrimination and racism and the colonial past is an analytical error, according to Henri, and very unproductive for what he saw as the goal of the Université populaire cycle. He denies the relevance of this issue for people in France, the only thing that the working group should be interested in, according to Henri, is how people can take control of their lives (*se prendre en charge*) and assume their place in society here and now (*assumer leur place dans la société ici aujourd’hui*) (UP meeting, 24/04/2017). For understanding the present, he made it very clear, it is of no use to enquire into the colonial past. Jouda later retorted that she does not want to be manipulated by those who attribute everything to colonization but neither “by those who are in a complete denial of a history that is not told” (discussion circle, 07/07/2017). Directly addressing the question of “colonization” [colonialism] induced fear on the part of Elisabeth and Henri that we would get trapped in binary discourse that opposed two points of view, that of the colonizers and the colonized,<sup>180</sup> and that it would act as an obstacle to projecting oneself in a shared society. This fear seemed to be linked both to the topic and the place where we wanted to address it:

Je crois qu’il faut être très attentif si on veut parler du quartier, si on aborde la question simplement en termes de colonisation, on va être confronté à des points de vue, à des gens qui vont venir défendre un truc contre un truc, contre un autre (Henri, UP meeting, 05/05/2017).

In a binary debate Elisabeth feared that she would find herself on the colonizer side, those responsible for the suffering of others, while she herself still suffers from this history that has never found a comfortable place in her conscience.

<sup>180</sup> Henri: “De toute manière si tu es un colonisé, tu es un colonisé (Albert Menni) et des gens comme ça”.

Henri saw two ways out of this analytical trap, either by focusing on a shared history or by changing the theme. François proposed to change the debate to migration, Elisabeth suggested focusing on success stories of immigrants that did find a place in French society, and Henri again proposed reorienting the debate to narratives of exile. Rather than the colonial question, “it is the question of exile which is pertinent for neighborhood inhabitants with different origins, of having left their country” (Henri, UP meeting, 05/05/2017). To support his argument he explained that he had worked for 27 years with immigrant families in a MSHN in Saint Martin d’Hères for whom the link between the present and the colonial past does not exist. Jouda and I object that exile may be a key issue for the generation of immigrants that arrived in France, but that this is not the case for a younger generation, born and raised in France. It is rather the next generation(s) that we had in mind when designing the cycle. For Henri exile remains an issue for this younger generation, more so than the colonial issue, through transmission and by having observed their parents, “even if they have succeeded socially” (*Ils ont la transmission de l’exil. Ça les regarde. Ils ont vu leurs pères et leurs mères, même s’ils ont réussi socialement*) (*Ibid.*). To reinforce his argument he evoked “certain young people that are 30 years old, that have studied and that do not recognize themselves in this notion of colonization” (*Ibid.*). Jouda and I countered that the principal frustration for those born in France is not having obtained a place in their country of birth, rather than to have “lost one’s country”. The latter statement reveals a state-centric and nationalist approach to identity, which holds the view that one necessarily has one country to which one is supposed to belong. The idea of exclusive national identities is a topic that was questioned throughout the cycle. Elisabeth wanted the cycle to aim in particular at the young people who feel they lack a place in French society. She added though that this may very well be the result of them not having provided the necessary effort to obtain this place (UP meeting, 05/05/2017). Her statement revealed her opinion that the majority of discrimination is self-inflicted. She wanted the cycle to be aimed at these young people because it is these people who “**are** a problem” according to her, rather than that “they **have** a problem” (UP meeting, 05/05/2017). According to Elisabeth, they lack education, good manners and show uncivil behavior (discussion circle, 07/07/2017). This debate brought out that there were important tensions in the group about our approaches to discrimination.

### *Discord unveiled*

At two moments during our meetings Henri and Elisabeth alluded to self-inflicted discrimination in response to Jouda’s remarks about discrimination. As mentioned, Jouda had chosen at a point in her life to wear a *hijab* in accordance with her Muslim faith. For Elisabeth this means that she cannot complain that she is discriminated against with the veil, because it is only normal to adapt to a country to which one immigrates. Jouda retorted that she was born in France and that therefore she can claim the country as hers as well; she is not some sort of visitor (field notes, 13/09/2017). Henri made a similar allusion as Elisabeth did when he stated that “*la discrimination est aussi nourrie de l’incapacité de prendre en*

*compte la laïcité pour un certain nombre de cultures*” which he identifies as a big challenge at present (*une grande difficulté dans laquelle on est*) (UP meeting, 19/05/2017). Without addressing Jouda directly, his statement inferred the idea that Muslims are a problem in France today because they do not respect the principle of *laïcité*, and he therefore could not be empathetic with Jouda’s accounts of discrimination in relation to wearing a veil. His conception of *laïcité*: “*est que l’espace public ne laisse pas de place à la religion*” (*ibid.*) which he understands in a very material sense: that the wearing of religious symbols should be limited to the private space. His approach to *laïcité* also brought him in conflict with his family, his brothers and cousins, who wear their *kippah* on the street. What many Muslim women experience as a form of discrimination, e.g. that they cannot work with their veil or cannot accompany their kids on school outings, for Henri is only natural: the State is only fulfilling its role in limiting religion to private spaces. His analysis of current day France and current threats in French society is informed by an analogy with France of 1905 and the ferocious competition between the State and religion at that time. The quote below is a transcript of the moment in our meetings in which Henri took up this position, which was also the moment he decided to leave the working group. His remarks about *laïcité* came up suddenly in the discussion, he apparently had kept these opinions to himself for quite a while because, as he explained, he “knew what would happen if he spoke out loud about his point of view” (*Je sais que ça allait se passer comme ça si je disais un peu plus fortement mon point de vue*). In the transcript it also becomes clear that it is not so much the law of 1905 and the principle of *laïcité* that was a central point of tension in the group but its current interpretation in France.<sup>181</sup> Below is the transcript of the moment during the meeting that Henri announced that he was leaving the working group.

Je veux aussi dire autre chose. Je suis juif d’origine. Je n’en ai rien à foutre, je ne suis pas religieux. J’ai passé du temps à m’engueuler avec des frères, avec des cousins qui se baladent dans la rue avec la *kippah* sur la tête. Je leur dis que la religion est un espace privé qui appartient à chacun, j’ai le même regard sur le voile, aussi des femmes. Je trouve ça difficile que l’expression religieuse soit présente dans l’espace public parce que je suis un laïc convaincu et c’est quelque chose de privé. Et quand les cousins se baladent avec la *kippah*, je les engueule.

Jouda : Ça s’appelle la dictature. C’est une catégorie de la population qui aurait un pouvoir sur une autre partie.

Claske : Mais quel lien fais-tu avec le thème ?

Henri : Non c’est la force positive de la France.

Jouda : La force positive de la France est d’accepter.

<sup>181</sup> Since the 2015 attacks the lack of respect for the principle of *laïcité* is presented as a main security concern and wearing a *hijab* in public spaces is demonstration par excellence of this lack of respect. As a result, the veil is increasingly interpreted as a threat to security. This is not new however in 2015, this already started in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution, in 1989 with the “*affaire de Creil*”.

Henri : la force positive de la France est la laïcité.

Jouda : Et la laïcité est d'accepter tout le monde.

Henri : Non, la laïcité est que l'espace public ne laisse pas de place à la religion.

Claske : Mais Henri quel est le lien avec ce débat ?

Henri : Parce que la discrimination elle est aussi nourrie de ça. Elle est nourrie de l'incapacité de prendre en compte la laïcité pour un certain nombre de cultures. Et ça c'est une grande difficulté dans laquelle on est. (..)

Henri : Il y a des questions de logiques et de couloir dans lequel on est et je crois qu'on est difficilement dans le même couloir et c'est là la difficulté. Je vais vous laisser continuer et je viendrai écouter les débats mais je ne me sens pas porteur là de quelque chose qui est à partir de la colonisation alors qu'il faut partir de la discrimination. Ce qui n'est pas du tout la même chose et je pense que c'est un point de vue qui nous ferme, la colonisation. Je vais vous laisser continuer car de toute façon j'avais prévu de partir tôt aujourd'hui. Allez, bonne continuation.

(UP meeting, 19/05/17)

In the context of a discussion about the PIR and Jouda's reaffirmation that she does not belong to that current, Henri suddenly said that he wanted to say something else. This "something else" is the profound disagreement he has with women wearing a veil in public space. He holds those wearing religious symbols in public space responsible for current tensions in society and are themselves to blame for "so-called" discrimination. As there was only one person in the group wearing any religious symbols it was clear that he was directly addressing Jouda without saying so. What was at stake for Henri, from my point of view, is that he was distrustful of Jouda's motivations in the working group, as if wearing a veil is a political statement in itself, interpreted as adhering to the political positions of Tariq Ramadan and of the PIR which he feared would infiltrate our debates through Jouda. Both Alain and Jouda share this interpretation:

Je ne comprends pas son objectif quand il parle du *kippah* et du voile, après voilà mais qu'il ne se met pas en tête qu'il y a de l'idéologie qui s'infiltré. (..) "Qu'est-ce qu'il veut dire par là, que je viens camouflée ? (UP meeting, 19/05/2017).

This is not the first time the combination of Jouda's veil and political activism were looked upon with suspicion, a colleague from the social justice research group of Pacte (of which I am also a member) remarked in the debriefing meeting of a discussion I organized, inviting Jouda and another woman to speak in our group about their participation in the March for dignity and against racism in Paris (17/11/2015), that she had reservations about Jouda whom she believed to have political ambitions (field notes, 07/12/2015). Jouda denied the latter in an informal discussion (11/01/2018). Even if she had political ambitions, I could not see which impact this had on her contribution to the meeting we were debriefing. Moreover, Jouda is not attracted to the movement around Tariq Ramadan because she

prefers rights-based struggles, such as those proposed by CRI and FSQP, rather than religious activism.<sup>182</sup>

### *The specter of the PIR*

Henri brought up Tariq Ramadan and the PIR time and again without these being a reference for any of the other group members. Moreover, the following transcription of our meeting demonstrates that Henri had a very approximate knowledge of the PIR, which he confused with the FUIQP. It is a transcript of part of the meeting in which we discuss the danger that the Université populaire became a platform for fascist ideas.

Claske : (...) Notre intention ce n'est pas de faire avancer une certaine thèse. Tout ce qu'on dit, on l'a déjà entendu ou lu. La question maintenant est quelle question poser ? (...)

Henri : En tout cas ce qui est évident est qui va intervenir et la façon que seront posées les questions est essentiel pour voir si c'est ouvert ou si c'est canalisé de façon consciente ou inconsciente, parce que les thèses que défendent les indigènes de la République ou le parti comment...

Alain : Le PIR ?

Claske : C'est ça ? Le Parti des indigènes de la République ?

Henri : Oui mais il y a aussi l'autre truc là...

Alain : Le Front uni.

Henri : Le Front uni, il y a toute cette these...  
(UP meeting, 19/05/2017).

The problem Henri has with the PIR is their affirmation of racialized identities: Black, Arab, Muslim, which he interpreted as a threat to the French nation and social cohesion. According to him, the PIR is fascist in nature "*à partir du moment où ils veulent séparer des choses, des blancs, les gris, les noirs*" (UP meeting, 05/05/2017). The terms used to designate racialized categories in France are another source of discord in the working group. When Jouda used the term "white" in reference to people who were part of a meeting, Elisabeth and Henri expressed their dissatisfaction. In the working group we could not find an agreement on the words to name these observations. Below a transcription of the meeting in which the working groups discussed observations about racialized groups.

Jouda : Hier, j'étais dans une réunion avec des "Blancs" entre guillemets, mais même dans ces groupes... Ça te gêne Elisabeth ?

Elisabeth : beaucoup !

<sup>182</sup> Tariq Ramadan is a Swiss theologian and charismatic speaker who is much contested in white middle-class circles, but has many followers among Muslims and speaks out against certain colonial legacies. Henri's suspicion was not completely off track when he thought Jouda might be attracted to Ramadan's ideas: one of her acquaintances did get actively involved in the campaign against the incarceration of Tariq Ramadan, denouncing that he did not receive fair treatment. In addition, Tariq Ramadan was also one of the people on Aïed's wish list of people to invite. However, Henri is wrong about Jouda's position.

Jouda : Je ne sais même plus comment le dire. Je ne peux pas dire franco-français parce qu'il y a des gens avec des origines italiennes qui ne se reconnaissent pas dans l'histoire de la colonisation française, voilà bref. (...) Dans les quartiers où il y a les ex-colonisés si on peut encore dire ex-colonisés quand on est ici, c'est compliqué de parler en fait (prend grande inspiration).

Henri : C'est pas des ex-colonisés, c'est des exilés. Ce n'est pas tout à fait la même chose.

Jouda : Ceux qui sont en face [ne te traitent pas comme français].

Henri : Mais qui ?

Jouda : Les gens qui sont en face. C'est pour éviter de dire les Blancs. [Eclate de rire]. Je ne sais plus comment parler, je ne sais plus comment dire.

Elisabeth : Mais c'est sûr que dans ce domaine, moi non plus je ne sais plus comment parler.

Henri : La généralité que tu fais, elle construit une forme de racisme.

Jouda : pas raciste !

Henri : Je suis très en colère d'entendre ça, Jouda. Je n'aime pas du tout. Quand tu dis les Blancs, je n'aime pas du tout ! (...) Quand tu dis les racistes j'entends. Quand tu dis les Blancs, je n'entends pas. (...)

Cindy : Je ne vois pas pourquoi nommer la couleur de peau est tabou et de dire qu'à l'école à Villeneuve il y a que des Arabes et des Noirs et il n'y a pas de Blancs. Et à des endroits où il y a beaucoup de Blancs, de dire qu'il y a beaucoup de Blancs. (UP meeting, 05/05/2017)

Apart from the paternalistic fashion in which Henri addressed Jouda, as if he was correcting a child, we can observe that Henri refuses to move away from his framing of racialized people in France as "exiled". What about those that were born here, from what moment on can they claim France as their home? The question of what words to put on these observations in everyday life remained a source of tension even after the departure of Henri, and was further explored through one debate in particular, "*Contre les discriminations, quels mots utiliser?*" (UP debate, 25/05/2018). The connection Henri established between anti-colonial and pro-Islamic discourse is a way of silencing neighborhood voices interested in the root causes of racism and discrimination. What Henri's statements imply is that people can contest their conditions as immigrants, as exiled, as economically exploited, possibly as Arabs - but that their Muslim identity poses a problem. We sought to assuage Henri's suspicions, but also insisted on the need for a space to speak out about these questions.

Alain : Oui mais on ne peut pas... Il faut l'aborder.

Henri : Oui mais de façon cohérente et pas en laissant la place à...

Alain : Mais on ne peut pas le renvoyer à un simple fantasme, même si des choses qui sont ressenties etc, ce sont des choses qui sont



exprimées comme des argumentaires aujourd'hui dont est victime le vivre ensemble d'une certaine manière, en tout cas moi je le ressens comme ça. (UP meeting, 24/04/2017)

Jouda, Alain and I continued to defend the position that, even if one might disagree, we have to create a space in the neighborhood where it is possible to enter into dialogue [multilogue] on these issues and to dare to be in disagreement. We felt that we had to acknowledge that these positions were present in the neighborhood and that therefore they should be made discussable in the Université populaire.

Alain : Les choses qui se disent, se disent, que ce soit fondé ou pas, c'est ça le problème.

Cindy : Je ne pense pas qu'on peut nier que dans le quartier c'est un fait qui est hyper présent donc je ne comprends pas pourquoi il ne faudrait pas en parler.

Alain : Et il faut aborder la question de front, il ne faut pas l'aborder par des détours.

Jouda : A un moment donné il faut aussi, (...) qu'on pose les questions comme elles sont posées par des gens qui ont vécu l'exil et la colonisation et tout ça. (UP meeting, 19/05/2017).

This opposition to clearly framing the debate in terms of the colonial past-present is exactly the situation that the PIR denounces: the paternalism of white middle-class progressive actors whose political orientation should make them into allies but who often form an obstacle to bring an issue in the public sphere. The movement therefore pleads for non-mixed spaces to make space for autonomous thought, just as the feminist movement did (see e.g. Fraser 1992). Even though Jouda clearly stated in a meeting that she does not share the analytical framework of the PIR, she does understand the reasons why their ideas are echoed widely, which becomes clear in the following quote:

Quand tu cites le FUIQP, le PIR, quand ils te disent le travail en non-mixité ça veut dire que les gens quand ils sont dans quelque chose ils te disent, du fait des rapports sociaux, des rapports de domination, il n'y a pas de pensée qui puisse émerger des personnes qui sont concernées, ils font le pari de rester entre personnes concernées pour faire émerger une pensée libre. (UP meeting, 24/04/2017)

Jouda later confided in me that the experience with the Université populaire cycle allowed her to better understand the position of the PIR and their call for organizing autonomously.

Among Whites, there is quite some disbelief of and resistance against the idea that not everyone can speak in public space. For Jouda there is a neo-colonial element to the fact that people cannot express themselves and in fact are not allowed to, since their statements about their experiences are always called into question, to the point that they are denied political subjectivity. To support her argument, Jouda gave the example of a recent meeting she had with women in the neighborhood and some professionals in charge of social policy, in order to organize a Université populaire debate about education. When these women

spoke about the discourse of some teachers, described by Jouda as “more than discourteous, almost racist” (*ce que les enseignants peuvent parfois avoir comme propos plus que désobligeant, limite raciste*), a white person working for a local development organization called into question these women’s experiences of discrimination. Jouda observed that this form of paternalist behavior is one of the reasons why the colonial past is still relevant:

C’est toujours comme ça, c’est-à-dire que t’as des personnes qui sont concernées par une violence quelle qu’elle soit et surtout quand elle est institutionnelle et de dire bah, c’est le propre de la discrimination de dire pour qu’elle existe il faut le prouver et c’est de toujours renvoyer cette personne qui vit ces choses là à “prouve ce que tu es en train de dire” et c’est à cause de ça que les gens se trouvent dans un rapport néo-colonial, qu’on reproduit des rapports de domination qui sont hérités de cette époque de la colonisation où le blanc était le maître et l’indigène il faisait ce qu’on lui demandait et qu’il a été dépossédé de sa terre et compagnie. Dans la tête des habitants c’est aussi ça. (Jouda, UP meeting, 24/04/2017).

Speaking from her role of community mediator (*médiatrice associative*), Jouda pointed out that professionals are supposed to rebalance asymmetric power relationships in meetings, rather than reinforce them, and “to accompany this emergence of speech”, to organize debates that make space for disagreement and better understanding (UP meeting, 24/04/2017). The situation Jouda described is quite typical for Villeneuve, and not only by people holding a professional role; there is an entire generation of retired volunteers that are on the board of almost every neighborhood organization (for example Elisabeth, François, Alain and Henri) – whom are mockingly called the dinosaurs. They have various roles, such as the role of Alain in our working group, who made these debate cycles possible, but there are others who take on a gatekeeping role (*verrouilleurs*). They hamper a process from moving forward, do not bring proposals but are there to critique or to sidetrack the process. Throughout the preparation phase we observed the different strategies put into place to deviate the intention of the initial working group from opening a space of debate about the colonial past-present by transforming the topic (into exile, migration or success stories); by pointing out that the theme is based on analytical fallacy; and by warning of the danger of creating a platform for fascist ideas.

Several power dynamics traversed the working group: gender, age, and eloquence, where the latter should be understood as a combination of knowledge and the capacity to express oneself. Jouda, in addition, was confronted with institutional constraints: there were limits to what it was possible for her to say. Her participation in the Université populaire in her professional function had to be validated for each new cycle by the board of the Régie de Quartier. The board, of which Elisabeth is a member, expressed resistance to the themes chosen by the Université populaire working group. On most of the debate evenings the board members of the Régie de Quartier were present and gave their feedback to Jouda

afterwards. In an informal discussion, she told me that there were several occasions where, had she participated in the Université populaire as an activist rather than as employee of the Régie de Quartier, she would have taken much bolder positions and certainly would not have let certain things be said without retorting (field notes, 08/09/2017). Once the preparations for the second debate of cycle II were under way, Jouda was informed by the new president of the the Régie de Quartier that from now on (September 2017) she had to directly report to the board about her activities in the Université populaire as there was the worry that the themes we set out to discuss, in particular the theme of colonial legacies, did not contribute to the goal set by the Régie de Quartier, that of contributing to “*vivre-ensemble*”, which can be defined as the harmonious cohabitation between individuals or between communities.<sup>183</sup> Setting up the 2<sup>nd</sup> Université populaire cycle therefore not only provided data about participants' references to the colonial past but equally importantly, demonstrated the resistance to discussing this question. Another illustration of the resistance the Université populaire working group encountered in preparation of the cycle on colonial legacies is that we learned that the funding we applied for at the Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles of the Regional Government was granted by the selection committee but was subsequently blocked by a regional councilor of the far-right Front National party (field notes 10/05/2018).

Despite the resistance the Université populaire working group met, there were several enabling factors in organizing the cycle. One factor was that the working group could demonstrate that the demand to address the colonial question came from neighborhood inhabitants and not only from a bunch of activists outside of the neighborhood. This demonstration was possible thanks to the time-consuming work of recording and transcribing all debates of the first cycle, and retracing the moments of colonial references. A second enabling factor was the support from the University, which provided the UP with funding,<sup>184</sup> and helped to legitimize the cycle on the basis that the UP not only followed an activist agenda, but that it grounded its learning in academic research. A third factor was the role Alain played in attenuating asymmetric power relations in the group and with regard to institutions. During the first cycle Alain gained trust through our working relationships, in particular through his positioning at moments of crisis, e.g. by mobilizing support for Aïed when his contract was not renewed, and by supporting the invitation of Chaambi despite the harsh critiques. More importantly he had learned to give space to all during meetings and was very attentive to making sure that the floor was equally distributed (*la parole circulait*). This support of the working group required certain sacrifices for Alain in the neighborhood, it led to strained relations within Villeneuve Debut as well as with old friends in the neighborhood. A fourth enabling factor is that Jouda is eloquent and trained in nonviolent

<sup>183</sup> One could critique this idea of harmoniously living together if, to obtain this objective, possible conflicts are silenced and peace is chosen at the expense of justice.

<sup>184</sup> Financed in the following framework: Idex Université de Grenoble, projets rayonnement social et culturel 2018

communication and, as a result, controlled her emotions and did not let herself be carried away by anger. Despite the disadvantages of participating in the group in her professional role, her professional commitment had the advantage that she could not just walk, out which paid off in the long-term. This made her position different to the one of Scherazade.

### *1.2.c) Third tier: Resource persons*

The Third tier are those who served as resource persons throughout the cycles. They are different from the working group in that they joined the second cycle (on the colonial past-present) at specific moments but did not attend the biweekly meetings. Most of the resource persons were invited as speakers: roughly half of them were invited to share their personal answers to what remains of the colonial past for the first plenary debate in the cycle and the second half of the group were invited for their specialized knowledge.

The Third tier joined the cycle in order to do one or more of the following:

- Participate in the 1<sup>st</sup> discussion circle (07/07/ 2017)
- Share their personal narratives at the public launch of the cycle (13/10/2017)
- Participate in the 2<sup>nd</sup> discussion circle (23/02/2018)
- Participate in preparatory meetings for the public debates

I first present the resource persons who were invited for their specialized knowledge and then I present the people whose stories launched the cycle. With the choice of resource, the working group created a discourse about the colonial past and its link to the present. After the departure of Henri the working group identified the need to bring in new people to get out of the deadlock in which it found itself, with a focus on involving more racialized people who could speak from their own experience, and had entered in a learning process through reading and reflection.

### *Presentation of resource persons*

The first resource persons who joined the group were Nasima Moujoud, Claire Marynower, Abdelhamid Benhamida, Ali Djilali, Herrick Mouafo, and Kenjah, from hence on to be called by their last names (apart from the last three).<sup>185</sup> They were all invited to the first discussion circle with the aim of preparing the launch of the cycle in search of a way to approach the issue of the colonial past-present from personal points of view and experiences in order to prevent a direct and binary confrontation of opinions that was so feared by a part of the working group (Henri and Elisabeth). The whole approach of the cycle was one of compromise and dialogue, not a radical approach designed to only promote the point of

<sup>185</sup> Despite the discomfort that my choice to use last names induces because of the disparity it creates between working group members and resources persons, I chosen this option because it is standard in academia to cite last names. As public persons, they are mostly known by their last name, with the exception of Kenjah, who is known by his first (chosen) name. Herrick Mouafo Djontu chose to be referred to as Herrick Mouafo and Ali Djilali as Ali.

view of the formerly colonized without taking into account the experiences of those that were associated with the colonizers. Despite our cautiousness it was interpreted by some, notably the FUIQP, as being overly representative of the dominant white middle-class. The section below provides a presentation of the different resource persons.

I present the resource persons in more or less chronological order, based on when they joined the cycle. For each of them I will try to answer the following questions:

- Why the working group approached them
- In which way they contributed to the group
- Their profile in terms of level of education, social and political position and where they grew up
- Their motivation to participate.

The first person we asked to join the working group was Ali. He had already worked with memories and stories of immigration as a playwright and actor and we were looking for a person who could assist us with the staging of people's stories for the debate. One of his latest plays was inspired by his father's story as a farmer in the area of Oran (Algeria) who lost his land to French colonial rule and went to France in search of work. Even though he usually works with the term immigration rather than with the term colonialism, Ali agreed to work within our framing. He exchanged ideas with Henri about our experience in the working group and said:

Il y a une tension que certains ne veulent pas voir. J'ai discuté avec notre cher ami Henri. Il ne veut pas voir. "Mais tu habites où toi ? Ce n'est pas possible ça !" Il existe une vraie tension. Tu le sens, par exemple Mourad qui vend des trucs, il dit "il y a eux et nous". C'est comme si une certaine guerre est déclenchée et ce n'est pas uniquement lié aux quartiers ces choses-là, c'est lié à la société. C'est un sujet hein, ça touche à plein de choses.  
(Ali, UP meeting 06/06/2017)

Ali therefore agreed to meet the people who the working group selected to share their stories during the first public debate and helped to present them (13/10/2017).

The second person we approached as resource person was Moujoud Moujoud. Her role was to support the link between the colonial past and discrimination and racism in the present from an academic perspective. On the occasion of the FUIQP/Fringale debate about the struggle of women against islamophobia (31/05/2015),<sup>186</sup> she evoked the colonial imagination that still informs laws and the treatment of those who have immigrated from former colonial territories. Her academic position as Assistant Professor in Anthropology has been helpful in countering the argument that this link is purely based on fantasy and radical activist discourse, and as such, far removed from ordinary people's experiences. Moujoud

<sup>186</sup> The title of the debate was "Résistances populaires, refus de l'islamophobie, les luttes des femmes, rencontre avec Ismahane Chouder and Nasima Moujoud" and took place at MJC l'Abbaye in Grenoble.

did not disclose much about her personal trajectory, for what reasons she came to France or the social and political position of her family, but she did share that she originally came from Morocco, is from a Berber family, and that she did not grow up in a social housing neighborhood. She contributed at different points to the cycle: she was present for the first discussion circle, participated in several meetings and gave a public lecture in which she tried to answer the question “*Quelles continuités de l’imaginaire colonial après 1960?*” (08/12/2018).

Claire was the second academic to join the cycle on our invitation. She is a historian specializing in the Communist Party in Algeria in the 1930s and holds the position of Assistant Professor at SciencePo Grenoble. Her family on her mother’s side are also from Morocco, from a Jewish family. She did not take part in the discussion circles, but contributed to the preparation of the public debates on Algerian colonial history, a topic that we identified as at risk of being the subject of counterproductive confrontation and debate, and gave a lecture on the general overview of France’s colonial past. She has the historic knowledge that we needed in our working group to counter some of Henri’s views, who for example denied that there ever was a *Code Noir*<sup>187</sup> (notes meeting, 24/04/2017). Also, she did not agree on certain points with Benhamida, the person who had been our principal resource on Algerian history up till now.

Benhamida is a retired high school History and French Literature teacher. I got to know him in a semi-professional setting (2014) when I was trying out a method to generate participation in public space at a market square in the old-town of Grenoble. We ended up in a discussion about the wounds of Algerian Independence that had not yet healed in France. We decided to exchange telephone numbers and a year later, once I had started my thesis, Benhamida called me to continue our conversation. His nuanced approach to French-Algerian relations and his collection of images were key inputs to the presentation we organized in the first cycle “*Histoire d’immigré, la petite histoire dans la grande histoire*” (21/09/2015), which took his personal trajectory as the starting point for a wider debate. He was born and raised in an educated family in Algeria during French rule. His father was the only “Muslim”<sup>188</sup> teacher at a primary school in Algiers, teaching Arabic. His grandfather was a landowner in rural Algeria and had to balance his collaboration with the armed liberation forces and his obedience to French colonial power. It seems to me that Benhamida still seeks to balance these forces when he expressed his profound attachment to French literature and culture, as well as his love for the Arabic language and its poetry. The fact that he always sought to narrate the story from both sides is what attracted us to his approach to the

<sup>187</sup> The *Code Noir* (Black Code) was a decree first formulated by France’s King Louis XIV in 1685 that defined the conditions of slavery in the French colonial empire. According to Stovall, it is “one of the most extensive official documents on race, slavery, and freedom ever drawn up in Europe” (2006, 205).

<sup>188</sup> ‘Muslim’ is a term used for the indigenous population of Algeria that was not Jews or Christian, irrespective of their religious practice. The term ethnicized an entire population, both Arab - and Kabyle - speaking, and was linked to the administrative status of these groups.

historic connection between France and Algeria. However, his family's privileged position within the French colonial system resulted in a presentation of the history of immigration from an elitist point of view which was strongly contested in the UP debate during the first cycle, along with his pro-De Gaulle position. In addition, Claire considered his historical knowledge outdated and leaning too much towards the French perspective. That is probably the reason why Elisabeth was very supportive of his contributions in the cycle. In the preparation of the narratives of colonization during the second cycle, we therefore sought to counterbalance elite narratives, which proved to be much easier to find in our networks, with narratives from much less privileged backgrounds (Mohamed B, Béchir and Tassadit).

Throughout the process of identifying resource persons from Grenoble's marginalized neighborhoods, who hold non-elite social positions in French society, we discovered that many of them in fact come from privileged backgrounds in their countries of origin. Herrick Mouafo and Kenjah for example have both lived through phases of serious precarity in France and are both sons of local dignitaries who chose their own, rebellious, paths. Herrick Mouafo was a colleague at Modus Operandi from 2012, he was born in Cameroon and moved to Grenoble to pursue a PhD in Public Affairs. As a student leader and human rights activist he had a strained relationship with the power structures in place in Yaoundé, and developed a critical perspective on the ethnicization of identities. He has an issue with speaking in name of racialized identities, which is gaining ground in France and in Villeneuve, at the initiative of political groups such as the PIR and FIUQP. In Grenoble he became actively involved in the White March Movement and was one of the key persons behind the creation of the Agir pour la Paix collective. From these spaces he has been an astute observer of the racialization of French society, and an advocate of a non-racial society. For him a anti-racism starts with the choices we make in our everyday lives, and the vocabulary we mobilize to analyze these everyday situations. His reflections are influenced by authors such as Fanon, Mbembe, M'bokolo, Glissant, Miano and Olivier de Sardan among others. His principal contributions to the working group were to question the use of racialized categories and to question universalism. The objective he set for the cycle was to move beyond a binary reading of the world (Herrick Mouafo, discussion circle, 07/07/2017) and his input inspired us for the last public debate "*Contre les discriminations, quels mots utiliser?*" (UP debate, 25/05/2018). While Herrick Mouafo and Kenjah share the same references, most importantly Glissant, they do not draw the same conclusions.

Kenjah was an active member of the FUIQP before his departure to Martinique (March 2018) and closer to the positions of the PIR. He was very much involved in the politicization of racialized identities, and in sowing the seeds of what could become a decolonial movement in Grenoble. He politicizes the identities Herrick Mouafo wants to deconstruct and insists that the working group should not focus on studying the colonial past, but instead study the French State's governmentality, which was forged during its colonial history and then pursued in mainland France. Kenjah grew up between Paris and the Antilles and lived in Villeneuve over the past years. Depending on the context he introduces himself either as an

independent researcher, an anthropologist, Caribbean, Rastafari, or pan-Africanist. He pursues his intellectual and activist engagements independently and lived from a monthly welfare allowance when we met. He probably represents the most radical voice in the working group and his involvement was most likely only possible after the opening of the discussion space that followed Henri's departure. His participation in the working group reconciled me with my frustration over the impossibility for me to have a place in the FUIQP. His participation was a means to guarantee that this group's voice was represented during the cycle. Other members of the FUIQP participated from time to time in the debates but each time expressed their frustration with the positions defended by the white middle-class part of the audience. Kenjah and Herrick Mouafo also helped to widen the cycle's geographical scope beyond Algeria.

Jouda and Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea are both involved in a local group of the Forum Social de Quartiers Populaires (FSQP) and she asked him to join the cycle when we were preparing the debate on the colonial management of MSHN. Tchetché-Apea has actively contributed to the politicization of the *banlieue* question as a member of the Mouvement de l'Immigration et des Banlieues (MIB) at the end of the 1990s, which denounced their colonial management. Even then he already defended the idea that "the banlieues are a heritage of colonialism" (in Abdallah 2012, 129). As he explained, his trajectory as an activist started with the death of Thomas Claudio in a police-provoked scooter accident in the banlieue of Lyon (Vaulx-en-Velin, 1990), resulting in riots and the creation of the Thomas Claudio collective, which evolved into a movement called Agora. When he told this story, I suddenly realized that I was already familiar with it. In fact, interviews with Agora members, among which Tchetché-Apea, provided important data for Dikeç's field study in the *Badlands of the Republic* (2007). Tchetché-Apea strongly denounces the second-class citizenship status of France's racialized population and has an extensive experience and refined understanding of how these voices are excluded from political participation but nevertheless decided to pursue his struggle through political engagement (in the FSQP which joined forces with the green party, EELV). He uses his anger and frustration constructively by continuing to struggle for the common good (*intérêt général*) and therefore could not be part of the local FUIQP whose standpoint was that of autonomous organization, but at the same time he is quite tired of seeing so little progress. He contributed to the cycle by participating in the second discussion circle and by presenting his analysis of a colonial management of MSHN focusing on security- and urban policy (Up debate, 26/04/2018).

Where Kenjah and Tchetché-Apea disagree is that for Kenjah there is nothing to expect from the State, which, according to him, will always develop its policies based on reaction while Tchetché-Apea still hopes, without being naive, that one day the State will be "*à la hauteur des enjeux*" (discussion circle, 23/02/2018) and thinks this is possible under the condition that those primarily concerned will seize the political cause.



On my initiative, Abdallah joined the second discussion circle at the same moment as Tchetché-Apea. Of Algerian origin, he is a local councillor in Echirolles and a long-time activist involved in struggles that defend the interests of *quartiers populaires* and immigrants. From one member of the Fringale/FUIQP working group I learned that he had founded a local FUIQP earlier, and I found out that he had organized an important national meeting in Grenoble in 2012. Abdallah kept his distance however from the FUIQP because he did not agree with its proximity with the PIR and the latter's use of racialized categories in political discourse. For this same reason, he did not join the new local FUIQP group. I met Abdallah during a film screening at the MJC Desnos, organized by a young political candidate close to APLP and running for the opposition. During the debate that followed the film, Abdallah alluded to Fanon when he remarked that our inheritance of colonialism is "the interiorization of white superiority" (UP debate, 26/10/2017). He participated in several of the Université populaire debates and took the floor on different occasions. At one of them he drew a link between immigration struggles for recognition and current Islamism (since immigrants' demands have been ignored for decades, young people turn to more radical positions that legitimize violence as a means of change). The latter is an important source of concern for him, he shies away from Muslim activism and is therefore also critical of Chaambi.

Béchir is another older activist (born in 1947), but of a different kind. He was never interested in joining a political party in France, but had been very politically active in his younger years in preparation for a return to Tunisia that never took place. He was an active member of trade unions during his working life. After his retirement he joined the board of the Union de Quartier. He does not have the same level of formal education as the other resource persons: as the son of a landless farmer he migrated to France to find factory work. He counterbalanced the limits of his formal education through political engagement and self-education, a heritage from his family which was engaged in the pan-Arabic movement and unionism. I met Béchir in Villeneuve Debout meetings where he was often frustrated. When I invited him for an interview, he first wanted to establish my intentions in the neighborhood as he was puzzled by my curiosity, and wanted to check whether he could trust me. Béchir maintained an ambiguous relationship with the working group because while he appreciated Jouda and I, he resented Alain and could not stand Elisabeth. He was one of the people who accused Alain and Villeneuve Debout in general of neo-colonial behavior. Their relationship goes back years, as do the tensions between them around competition over funding resources and the management of community projects. Despite his disagreements and a structural feeling of misrecognition, he never really ended the relationship with Villeneuve Debout. He played an important role at the margins of the working group and participated actively in the debates, however most of my data is from the numerous recorded discussions we had. Together with Michelle, he was one of the first inhabitants outside the FUIQP circle to bring up the colonial continuity in France.

Mohamed D. joined us for the first speech cycle, but decided not to pursue his involvement with the working group because he preferred to remain discreet on the issue of the colonial past-present (informal discussion with Jouda, 02/10/2017). Among those born in Algeria, Mohamed D. is of a slightly younger generation than e.g. Elisabeth and Pierre, growing up in the 1970s and 1980s in an independent Algeria. He had worked on the theme of the colonial past for a while and made a film about inhabitants' childhood memories of the Algerian war, interviewing acquaintances in Villeneuve and Grenoble who had found themselves on different sides of the conflict. This is the reason why Jouda initially contacted him, with the intention to view his film together, and invited him to join the working group. In addition to his desire to remain quiet on the subject, he also does not think that the topic is a priority for young people now, and is more interested in working towards the future. Despite the fact that Mohamed D. did not continue the group he provides an interesting counterpoint to those who insist on the existence of the colonial present: he argues that in Algeria people have moved on, and that a lot has changed in France as well. While the first generation of immigrants had to remain discreet, current generations are visible and able to take up their place in French society. He is wary of turning the colonial into a political battle and prefers a reconciliatory, rather than confrontational, attitude.

Table 4.14 and Table 4.15 provide additional information about the social class and level of education of all resource persons, as far as I have the information. The term parent may refer to father or grandfather.

**Table 4.14 Situating resource persons socially**

Parent local dignitary	Kenjah, Herrick Mouafo, Benhamida
Parent factory worker	Alain, Ali, Pierre
Parent farmer with own land	Ali (later move to France, factory worker)
Parent landless farmer	Mohamed B., Béchir
No information	Moujoud, Tchetché-Apea, Tassadit and Anne-Françoise (grandmother had restaurant in Haute Savoie)

**Table 4.15 Level of education of resource persons**

Level of education	Resource Person
PhD. Degree	Herrick Mouafo, Marynower, Moujoud, Pierre
Master's degree	Tchetché-Apea, Kenjah, Benhamida, Alain
Bachelor's degree	Jouda, Elisabeth
Socio-cultural diploma	Ali, Mohamed D.
Professional training	Tassadit, Mohamed B., Anne-Françoise, Béchir

### *The first debate, forging a story about the link between past and present*

In preparation of the first debate of the cycle the Université populaire working group had to acknowledge that it contributed to forging a narrative about the link between the colonial past and present in the neighborhood. The working group needed to take responsibility for its choice of whom to invite and not invite. The equilibrium it sought to establish is to:

- Recognize the importance of the Algerian case without making it our exclusive focus
- Present a diversity of points of views about the colonial experience
- Represent diversity in social positions (currently and in the positions their families occupied during colonial times)
- To assure some kind of gender balance
- Include different generations
- Avoid the overrepresentation of elite points of view and make space for marginalized voices.

The number of possible narratives that fit these criteria was limited by the fact that the speaker needed to feel comfortable to tell the story for a public audience. Eloquence and confidence unsurprisingly proved to be related to people's level of formal education. This was an obstacle to the objective of avoiding the overrepresentation of elite points of view.

The number of people to choose from was further limited by the fact that the speaker needed to have full confidence in the working group before speaking on such a sensitive issue to an audience they did not know. The members of the working group therefore recruited mostly within their existing networks. Some indicators of the social position of the speakers of this first debate are summarized in Table 4.16. For those of whom information is lacking about the profession of the father, I indicated their social class.

**Table 4.16 Profiles of the resource persons during the first debate**

Name and age		Country of birth/childhood	Profession	Father's profession
Ali (~50) moderator	Male	Algeria/France	Actor	Factory worker
Claude (=61)	Male	Cameroon	Doctor	Teacher
Kenjah (~50)	Male	France/Martinique	Independent researcher	Local dignitary
Mayare (~20)	Female	Algeria/France	Student	Middle-class, high social capital
Mohamed B. (=76)	Male	Algeria	From worker to animateur socio-culturel, retired	Landless farmer
Mamedou (~70)	Male	Mauritania/Senegal	Businessman, retired	Chief of a post office in Mauritania

Elisabeth (~70s)	Female	Algeria	Primary school teacher	Working class <i>pièdes-noirs</i> family (from Spain)
Pierre (=77)	Male	Tunisia	Historian, researcher CNRS, <sup>189</sup> retired	Factory worker
Tassadit (48)	Female	Algeria	Domestic worker (cleaning)	Poor working class

### *Weaving stories about the colonial past and present*

That first evening there were eight stories, which lasted ten minutes each, and a moderator (Ali) wove these stories together. He told two of the stories of people who did not feel comfortable to present them publicly (Mayare and Elisabeth). Without this choice it would have been even harder to assure an equilibrium of stories by men and women. Among these stories five were about Algeria and three from people who came from other places (Martinique, Senegal/Mauritania and Cameroon). The narrative about Algeria, including the Algerian war, was the most challenging part of organizing the evening. A ‘war is still waged over its memory’ (*la guerre de mémoires*), an expression Stora used to indicate that this history is still highly sensitive and contested (Stora and Leclère 2007). How to manage the emotions that may arise, how to represent as best as possible different viewpoints? Which threads should be selected to weave the tapestry of this story? Each thread represents only one voice, and when this voice speaks, the others are silenced. The five stories chosen for this narrative were those of Elisabeth, Tassadit, Pierre, Mayare and Mohamed B.

One of the reasons why we invited Mohamed B. to share his story was to counter the criticism aimed at the working group that it misrepresented the history of immigration by not focusing enough on working class history. Mohamed B. grew up in a family of poor landless farmers in rural Algeria, who had to struggle to survive and who were heavily dependent on their landlord. When he migrated to France in 1963 in order to lift his family out of poverty he started out with a job as a construction worker, and climbed the social ladder to become a socio-cultural facilitator and youth worker, and he married his French teacher.

The goal of giving the floor to marginalized voices in the neighborhood was not really attained with Mohamed B.'s story as he already had a platform to share it. With the help of a professional writer, a present of from his daughters, he had already self-published his biography (Boukhatem 2014). In addition, the story of his arrival in France is part of a graphic novel about immigrants in Grenoble (Picaud 2015), and he participated in the movie *Notre santé n'est pas à vendre* (1976). Why the working group members decided to invite Mohamed B. was that he was one of the few older migrant laborers we knew who was eloquent in French and comfortable to speak in public. His story was supposed to represent

<sup>189</sup> Centre national de la recherche scientifique

those who still lived in the immigrant hostels (*foyers de travailleurs immigrés*) in and around Villeneuve, some of whom participated in the street debates. Mohamed B. has this capacity to cross between several worlds [see Box 4.34].

When Mohamed told his story of rural misery on the 13th of October, Elisabeth could not suppress her frustration, she felt that Mohamed took on a victim role (field notes, 13/10/2017), while she also knew poverty as a daughter from a working class *pieds-noirs* family in Algeria.

The second person telling her story on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October better met our objective to include marginalized voices as a working-class illiterate immigrant woman with little education. I got to know Tassadit because she worked for me as a cleaning lady. Following our conversations, she became involved in the Université populaire. She did not experience the same upward mobility as Mohamed B. after her arrival in France as an undocumented immigrant in the 1990s. She was born in Algeria after it gained independence and was still in Algeria during the civil war (1991-2002) *la décennie noire*. The story she told on the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> October is that of her arrival in France full of good intentions and good faith, and of not being able to understand the hatred she was confronted with: both in her work with *pieds-noirs* families and with people's hostility due to her veil. What she did not tell was the way she is looked at as Muslim woman who wears the veil; and that she was spat at. This is possibly because she does not make a link with her colonial past, but it is also possible that she avoided polemics, presenting a very pacified story.

#### **Box 4.34 Empirical excursion: Mohamed B. in Saint Hilaire du Touvet**

Mohamed often strolls through the neighborhood, is very social and is an active participant in public debates. The first time I met him was during one of the informal breakfast social times at the Maison des Habitants des Baladins, organized by the CCAS. We had a connection when he found out that I lived in Saint Hilaire du Touvet. He spent two years of his life there, in the hospital where he was treated for tuberculosis. During our first encounter he requested that I take him to visit my village. I fulfilled this request at the end of 2018 when we presented the end result of the cycle “What remains of the colonial past” in my village [Figure 4.95].



*Figure 4.95 Mohamed B. tells his experience as a patient at the hospital of Saint Hilaire du Touvet to an audience of inhabitants from the village and a delegation of Université populaire participants in Saint Bernard du Touvet. (Photo author, 31/11/2018)*

Mohamed told how he arrived in France in 1963 without a penny and worked on construction sites in Grenoble, where he also spent the night in the absence of housing; how he grew up in a *douar* (an administrative term used in colonial times for a small rural settlement) in Algeria in conditions of extreme poverty. One of these stories is also about a restaurant in the village where I now live, where waiters refused to serve an Algerian in the mid-1960s.

Motivated by our intention to include voices from the younger generation and to address the criticism Mohamed D. expressed, that the question of a colonial past is not pertinent to the younger generation; I invited Mayare. She is a young woman from Agir pour la Paix, who had proposed to work during one of the APLP workshops on the book by Yasmina Kadra “*Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*” (2008), a story that is set in colonial Algeria. It was obligatory reading for her French class in high school, and whilst reading this book she found out that this part of history was more complex than a simple confrontation between the French and the Algerian Front de libération nationale (FLN). In our preliminary conversations she told me that one day she discovered that one of her best friends’ grandfathers was a *harki*, a native Muslim Algerian who served as an auxiliary in the French Army during the Algerian War. As a granddaughter of a *moudjahid*, a fighter for Algerian independence, and having grown up with the nationalist narrative of freedom struggle, she was deeply shocked to learn this. Her story shows that the colonial past and the liberation from it continue to be transferred down the generations, but she admits that it is relatively irrelevant in her everyday life. What is important for her is being able to envision her professional future in France while wearing a veil. The connection she makes with the past is that of exile: that of *pieds-noirs* who had to leave Algeria, her parents’ choice to leave Algeria and settle in France, and now her question of whether she has to leave again in search of a place where she can wear a veil and work as an economics teacher. Ali presented her story in public after a long discussion and based on my transcribed interviews, he silenced her comment that the colonial past is as relevant to her daily life because of the discrimination she experiences wearing a *hijab*.

The voice of Elisabeth stood in stark contrast with that of Mayare, and making a space for her to tell her story on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October meant putting aside our goal of looking for people beyond the usual suspects from the neighborhood who already have a platform from which to tell their stories through their voluntary engagements. Despite this, Alain, Jouda, Ali and I deemed it important that she told her story because, while being full of judgments in our meetings, she rarely spoke about herself and did not feel comfortable speaking about the past. Her story is one of hurt, of having lost a home and no longer being wanted, of rejection, of nostalgic childhood memories, but also one of self-censorship. She did not dare to tell her story publicly for fear that it would not be well received by the audience, so she carefully wrote her text, which required an enormous effort with much re-reading and correcting and Ali read it out loud on the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> while she was present in the audience.

It was Elisabeth herself who suggested telling the story of Pierre as a counterpoint to hers because he is part of a progressive *pieds-noirs* movement, and she happily admitted that she does not share their ideas. Pierre indeed was a very valuable resource to help us grasp the complexity of colonial history and to avoid the lazy over-simplification of binary categories. Pierre was born in 1940 to a working class *pieds-noirs* family in Tunisia and he arrived in Grenoble in 1956, in the Léon Jouhaux neighborhood where “*pieds-noirs* were parked”

(discussion circle, 07/07/2017). In 1958 he was mobilized to fight in the Algerian War and described the atrocities he was ordered to commit. Desertion was the only option to get out, so he handed his gun over to the FLN and became an active supporter of the armed struggle in Algeria, one of the "*porteurs de valises*". Pierre, a former active member of the Tunisian communist party, remained on the political left, though his activism later in life was in the form of *éducation populaire* at the MJC Jouhaux.

The stories about what remains of the colonial past beyond the Algerian experience were told by Kenjah (Martinique); Claude (Cameroon) and Mamedou (Mauritania/Senegal). Kenjah diversified the stories of the colonial past by speaking about Martinique, which was part of France's slave and sugar colonies. He clearly presents the problems around citizenship in France, of racism and continuing economic injustice taking the chlordecone scandal in the Antilles as an example (see also Ferdinand 2015; Ferdinand 2016).

Claude was invited by François and spoke from a particularly elitist point of view which provoked resistance from the audience but also among working group members. Claude was born in 1956, the son of teacher, and came to France 22 years later to pursue his higher education. He provided the audience with a very polished and pacified story about the colonial period, insisting with a hint of nostalgia on the anti-malaria treatment under colonial rule and the deteriorated health conditions nowadays.

The working group invited Mamedou because his story widened our geographic perspective to West Africa. He is a neighborhood resident, president of a local initiative for elderly immigrants, and was born in Mauritania. In his story Mamedou claims his descent from the Tall family, and his descent from the great marabout El Hadj Oumar Tall who was an emblematic figure in the spread of Islam in Western Africa, and the resistance against French penetration by the governor Faidherbe. He was born in Mauritania just before its independence, where his father was Chief of a postal office and thus an indigenous relay for the colonial administration which allowed him to grow up with relative privilege, being dressed "*à la française*". In his story he combined personal memories with written sources.

Given the resistance against the cycle and the criticism addressed to the working group, the members, including myself were quite stressed about the first debate. The strict moderation and the carefully orchestrated stories prevented tensions from getting out into the open. Resource persons reserved very personal stories about humiliation, domination, and spoliation to informal discussions and discussion circles. The debates that were most tense were those dealing with Algeria [see Box 4.35].



**Box 4.35 Empirical excursion: Tensions in the plenary debate**

During the third debate about the Algerian colonial history, tensions came to a head about the framing chosen by the working group in collaboration with Marynower as the invited speaker. An older white French man, particularly angry about the turn the Université populaire was taking during the sessions on Algeria, turned in a very aggressive way to Mohamed B. and says: “it is because of people like you (..)”. I do not remember what he actually accused Mohamed of but through his statement he indirectly accused the UP working group of taking Mohamed B.’s perspective as a starting point. As moderator, Jouda had to intervene because he got up and approached Mohamed as if he wanted to aggress him. Afterwards I went over to him to understand what made him so angry. He told me that he was part of those French that supported the FLN and that he was responsible for protecting Ben Bella as well as others whose names I did not know. He feels the good things that the French did are missing in the story such as the collaboration between French and Algerian in resistance.” (Field notes, 24/11/2017)

*Role of invited speakers*

The choice of invited speakers was a political one as it influenced the type of debate that would follow their presentation, and therefore my data. They had a special role in the plenary: speakers prepared a presentation in answer to the frame set out by the working group and were given more time than the participants to expose their ideas. Their role as invitees that came from “elsewhere” as well as their titles gave a certain weight to their words. As discussed in chapter 2, their position gave them the possibility to make space for speech, i.e. to open a space where it becomes possible to say things that are silenced in other discussion settings. The positions of the invited speakers in the two Université populaire cycles on issues of racism and discrimination and their links to the colonial past had the function of rebalancing some of the power relations in the plenary debate. This rebalancing of power led to tensions from majority voices who felt silenced, such as Elisabeth (field notes, 10/03/2015) and another member of Villeneuve Debout (field notes, 26/04/2018). The invited speakers were chosen by the working group through a process of extensive debate. Table 4.16 provides an overview of who suggested which speaker throughout the two UP cycles, and based on which motivations.

**Table 4.17 List of Invited speakers of the two UP cycles**

Speaker	Choice	Motivation
Abdelaziz Chaambi	Scherazade and Jouda	Involved in shared struggles; activist credibility
Michel Kokoreff	Alain	Academic credibility to complement activist speakers
Said Bouamama	Aïed	Vocal and recognized spokesperson on MSHN and racism/discrimination in France; both academic and activist credibility
Hervé Ott	Claske	Could speak to several constituencies, not recognized in either academic or activist circles
Claire Marynower	Claske	Academic credibility and resource person, institutionally linked through project funding
Antonin Plarier	Claire	Academic credibility and research on topic
Abdelhamid Benhamida	Working group	Resource person
Nasima Moujoud	Jouda	Resource person; both academic and activist credibility
Kenjah Ali Babar	Claske	Resource person
Marie-Hélène Bacqué	Jouda	Academic credibility and involved together in the Pas Sans Nous movement
Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea	Jouda	Activist credibility and involved in shared actions
Omer Mas Capitolin	Jouda	Activist credibility and affinity
Guillaume Roux	Claske	Academic credibility and affinity
Herrick Mouafo	Claske	Resource person
Nedjib Sidi Moussa	Claire	Author of book, complementary position to others
Nadia Kirat	Jouda	Activist credibility, complementary position as provincial councilor

Jouda and Scherazade proposed Chaambi because they were involved in the same struggles. First Chaambi (CRI) supported Scherazade when she chose to wear the veil in high school, and secondly the CRI got involved in the mobilization in Grenoble to contest the *circulaire Chatel* (2012). This is a ministerial circular that, among other points, prohibited mothers from wearing religious symbols (in occurrence the veil) when accompanying their children on school activities. It was not so much in the working group that this choice was contested, as outside of it. Alain proposed Michel Kokoreff, a sociologist at the University of Paris 8, whom he had met at a study day organized by the municipality of Grenoble after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in 2015. It is no coincidence that Chaambi was the choice of the racialized members of the working group while Kokoreff was the choice of a white retired man. Alain's choice of Kokoreff was also a means to ease concerns voiced in Villeneuve Debout and

beyond. It was interesting to observe however that the positions Chaambi and Kokoreff defended during the first Université populaire debate were not fundamentally different. What was different between them were the words they chose, their rhetorical style and the emotional resonance issues of islamophobia and discrimination had for them personally.

Aïed, director of the MDH during the first cycle, wanted to invite people of renown such as Tariq Ramadan and Saïd Bouamama. The working group decided on the latter. Bouamama is a sociologist-activist who is an important reference for those involved in struggles around racism, discrimination and *quartiers populaires*. He is one of the founders of the FUIQP at a national level and is locally involved in Lille. I noticed that Bouamama was one of the major references of the Fringale working group.

I proposed Hervé Ott, whom I knew previously, a trainer in nonviolence and conflict transformation and director of the small organisation, the Institut Européen Conflits Cultures Coopérations (IECCC), based in the center of France. I suggested him because I thought he might please different Université populaire constituencies: first the audience of Villeneuve Debout because he corresponded to their profile as a white retired progressive and Christian male and his calm demeanour - in opposition to Chaambi who was described as “angry” by Elisabeth (field notes, 15/04/2015) and second a Muslim audience because he had in common with them that he did not approve of the Charlie Hebdo cartoons that were experienced as insulting by Muslims.

The invited speakers in the cycle on the colonial past-present were less contested than those in the first cycle, probably because the Université populaire’s *modus operandi* had been established. Those who disagreed or felt uncomfortable with its functioning no longer came, as was the case for example of a participant who publicly contested the academic presence next to “the activist” voices during the first Université populaire debate as a form of white paternalism.

Ce soir il y a Michel [Kokoreff] qui est invité en tant que sociologue, et Abdelaziz [Chaambi] qui est invité en tant que militant. En fait, on [racialized people in France] est toujours les témoins de nos propres vies. On n'est jamais les personnes qui venons faire de l'analyse et produire du discours sur nos vies (Participant, UP debate, 20/03/2015).

Abdelaziz Chaambi himself denied that his role was reduced to that of a storyteller, but that is not the point. It is also with this critique in mind that for the next debates we only invited one speaker, to avoid possible competition between them and leave more room for a dialogue with the audience. The fact that there were no other academics included in the first cycle might very well be an unconscious consequence of this critique. This changed in the second cycle, where the need for specialized knowledge was clearly identified by the working group. Nevertheless, a similar critique was voiced with regard to the prominent place Marynower was given in the video we produced at the end of the cycle in order to

answer the question we posed at the start (informal discussion, 21/11/2018). When I debriefed about this critique with Jouda she responded with surprise: “but we needed this knowledge, we went looking for it because we didn’t have it” (field notes, 29/11/2018). Aware of this risk, it had been a conscious choice on my part to let Jouda select and cut the sequences of the interview with Marynower that served as material for the video. It was a means to see which information she deemed important. So, while I principally agree that prioritizing academic knowledge is a factor of subalternization, and that reducing the voices of people who are primarily concerned by oppression to testimony rather than analysis is very problematic, our choice of associating academics to the Université populaire was part of a different strategy. Academic speakers in the Université populaire gave weight to marginalized voices since their role was not to contradict them, but to contextualize them in a larger historical and social process. In a way the working group instrumentalized the view still shared among a large part of the audience that academics “know”. The invited academics were carefully selected, based on affinity with their analyses and their interest in interacting with a non-academic audience.

On another occasion the legitimacy of the speakers, both academic and activist, was challenged by a university colleague of mine as not representative of “ordinary people”, and in occurrence neighborhood inhabitants. "*Qui parle quand on parle de politique de la ville ou quand on parle des populations? Où est la parole des populations elles-mêmes?*" (26/04/2018). Tchetché-Apea, who was one of the persons targeted by this critique, answered in the following terms.

D'où parle-t-on ? De notre place de citoyen, de personne ordinaire qui vit des choses en raison, malheureusement, de son origine, de sa confession, de sa citoyenneté, qui se voit traiter différemment de n'importe quel citoyen. C'est de ça dont il s'agit. Je crois que personne ne prétend porter la parole des quartiers ou être dans une posture de monopole. (UP debate, 26/04/2018)

The voice of activists was thus contested as non-representative of neighborhood residents, a point I develop in more detail in the next section. But the role of the invited speakers in assemblies was also to represent more marginalized people and points of view in the neighborhood, to say things that the latter agreed with but that they could not formulate themselves. Throughout the Université populaire I observed how statements were received by the participants in a debate, which statements evoked reactions and which did not, which public chose to come to which theme, and who came for which speakers.

#### *1.2.d) Fourth tier: participants in the plenary debates*

The fourth tier corresponds to the participants in the plenary debates that were not involved in their preparation. I quote fourth tier participants, as “participant” and not by their names as they did not give specific permission to use their name. The type of participants that came to the debates depended on the topic, the invited speaker, and the effort put in publicizing the event and in mobilizing our networks. The public debate with Said Bouamama brought

together the largest group of people, from both inside and outside of the neighborhood [Figure 4.96]. This success was probably both due to his reputation and to the timing, exactly one week after the terrorist attack on the Bataclan in Paris.

The timing and topic certainly helped to attract people to the first debate on discrimination and islamophobia, which brought together 120 people. In moments of crisis, people feel a certain sense of urgency to come together. During the second cycle that dealt with the colonial past-present, this urgency was absent. We no longer organized the debates in reaction to events but instead, we set our own agendas. Most of the debate during the second cycle evenings brought together between 50 and 70 people.



Figure 4.96 Plenary debate with Said Bouamama. (Photo author, 20/11/2017)

The invited speakers frequently commented that it was relatively rare to see such a diverse audience in MSHN. Said Bouamama for example observed that he usually addresses either a retired white or a young and racialized audience, but rarely such a mix (20/11/2017). Such a mixture was probably due to the history of Villeneuve and to the diversity of the working group. The people who participated in the plenary debates were mostly already part of the networks of the working group. We could clearly identify Alain's network from Villeneuve Debout whose general profile is white, retired, on the political left, educated, and residing in the neighborhood; Jouda's network is typically racialized women both from the neighborhood and from her activist networks elsewhere in the city, with varying levels of education. My network extended from the Agir pour la Paix group in Echirrolles, to a few researchers from Pacte, some personal contacts in the neighborhood and activists (*militants*) from other places in the city.

The list of people who joined the debates at one moment or another is long. Some examples of people who frequently participated in the plenary debates that reflect this diversity are Leo, Fadoua, and M. Leo is a retired factory worker and union activist who regrets the disappearance of working-class solidarity that accompanies the increasing unemployment in the neighborhood. For him the Université populaire evenings were a means to get out of his

isolation, and he enjoyed the availability of snacks and drinks. Fadoua is Muslim and mother of two children who go to a Catholic private school. She is a daughter of Moroccan immigrants and grew up in a rural village in the Savoie. M. is a refugee from Central Africa and whose privileged family background did not protect him from a precarity upon arrival in France. He had several friends in the neighborhood, and also did an internship with a neighborhood organization as part of his university training. The data that the Université populaire generated reflect this extraordinary collection of voices, each with their own stories and trajectories.

Despite the fact that the debates principally targeted those living in Villeneuve or its proximity, they were not limited to people from the neighborhood. The level of formal education among the participants of the plenary debates was highly variable. Those that received little formal education often compensated for this with *éducation populaire* and being autodidacts. What they did share though was the curiosity to learn from each other and from speakers, an openness to dialogue, some hope, and to be looking for solutions to the political left rather than the right, even though many had come to the conclusion that little could be expected from elected political actors.

Outside of a relatively constant core, each speaker and topic attracted its own audience. Said Bouamama attracted the radical left and those mobilized around issues of immigration and MSHN (*quartiers populaires*); Moujoud brought with her feminist and racialized circles, and the cycle about Algeria drew elderly inhabitants from different places in the city and neighborhood residents with a personal link to Algeria. We were astonished by the audience that showed up for the evening with Kenjah which aimed to “rethink the world with Césaire, Fanon et Glissant” and brought together an audience we had never seen before; a younger audience, with more people than usual from sub-Saharan descent and from all over the city. For the debate about the colonial management of MSHN at least one person travelled especially from Paris, while critics of the Université populaire observed that there were very few “inhabitants”, a reproach I will get back to.

The working group observed a progressive change from the first to the second cycle. When the topic became more controversial and less directly concerned with the everyday life experience of neighborhood residents the constituency of the plenary debate changed, attracting more highly educated participants from beyond the neighborhood. For example, when we organized a street debate about the question “*Que reste-t-il de la guerre d’Algérie ?*,” we received concerned reactions “do you want to have war in the neighborhood?” (street debate, 16/11/2017) or answers from people guaranteeing to Jouda and I that they did not pose any problem to French society. They were clearly not comfortable with the topic, in particular first-generation immigrants who were keen to show their willingness to adapt.

1.2.e) *Fifth tier: those participating in street debates*

The fifth tier is all those who participated in street debates conducted by the UP working group prior to the plenary debates (see appendix 1). The street debates and their role in the Université populaire are extensively discussed in chapter 2 so I do not expand on them here.

1.2.f) *Critique that the Université populaire only represents “activist” voices*

There was a generalized critique among the white retired middle-class and active neighborhood inhabitants that the Université populaire provided training for activists (field notes, 12/02/2019) but did not address the concerns of “ordinary inhabitants”, who supposedly did not come to the Université populaire. This criticism was based on their observations throughout the cycle on the colonial past-present, but probably does not concern other moments during the Université populaire such as the cycle on education, whose main audience was made up of parents in the neighborhood worried about their children's education. While this criticism is not unfounded, the question is who are the “ordinary citizens” and how to interpret their absence from the debates? The Université populaire detractors use this as an argument to prove that the topic only concerned a tiny part of the population and was therefore not relevant, thus meaning that it did not need to be funded. In this section I engage with this critique.

This critique was publicly formulated by an associated researcher of Pacte,<sup>190</sup> who by the way is not white but is himself of Algerian origin, on the occasion of the Université populaire debate on the colonial management of MHSN (26/04/2018). To add context, I have to point out that the latter debate was considered the most controversial in the white middle-class circles, such as the board of Villeneuve Debut and the Régie de Quartier. Indeed, this debate is also the one which attracted a politically conscious audience from beyond the neighborhood, but also a racialized high school teacher from the neighborhood whom we had not seen before, and younger white residents who were not part of the Université populaire's usual suspects. When this associated researcher of Pacte took the floor, he wondered “*Où est la parole des populations elles-mêmes?*,” in opposition to the discourse of the invited speakers as if there was such a thing as a whole and single discourse; and also questioned the pertinence of approaching the discursive articulation of MSHN through a colonial angle:

Moi, ce qui m'intéresse, ce sont les récits de vie des personnes, quand on les rencontre, que ce soit à Montpellier, que ce soit à Créteil, à Bordeaux, à Grenoble, quand on fait des rencontres collectives, quand des gens ordinaires parlent de leur ordinaire, ils n'évoquent pas des questions coloniales. Ils invoquent des questions d'habitat, de quotidien, des questions liées à l'insalubrité, ils invoquent des questions sociales, sans théoriser. (UP debate, 26/04/2018)

<sup>190</sup> Pacte, which I am also part of, is the social science research centre of the Université Grenoble-Alpes.

He infers a cleavage between “ordinary people speaking about their ordinary (everyday) lives”, who do not theorize and do not evoke the colonial question and UP participants. Among neighborhood observers (a term I use to refer to all those interested in the neighborhood and observing it from the outside for professional reasons, such as researchers and public officials) I noticed a search for the opinion of the ordinary and supposedly “real” inhabitant, believed to be representative of the neighborhood. I have the impression that, according to neighborhood observers, the figure of the “ordinary inhabitants” has a low level of education, is racialized, and poor. This figure is not necessarily uniform but is a sort of compilation of different neighborhood constituencies, such as the immigrant worker, the veiled woman, etc. I deduce from the associated researcher’s remark that he associates the legitimacy to speak for the neighborhood to being an “ordinary” inhabitant. I wonder whether the voices of the uneducated are more representative of the neighborhood than the voices of those who have theorized their situation based on a border experience of growing up or living in a MSHN and have acquired the theoretical tools to analyze this experience? It seems that in the representation of the associated researcher the theorization of these invited speakers, transforms and invalidates an otherwise authentic expression of daily lives by “ordinary people”. Notwithstanding that the eloquent and educated have access to hegemonic language that others do not, I question the idea of a shared voice of “ordinary people”, which I consider a product of romanticization. I have not observed anything that could be an “authentic” form of speech in MSHN. Information and discourse are everywhere and they structure the ways people interpret their daily lives both in and outside of the neighborhood. I observed that ideas travel and enter the neighborhood, just as they enter other spaces through the vehicles of mainstream media such as talk-shows, social media, local newspapers, public gatherings, school, work, unions etc. All these influences undermine the idea that there is some kind of authentic voice of ordinary people. In conclusion, the question whether people theorize their experience or not is not linked to their social position, but is a consequence of their political consciousness and their education, either formal or informal. I argue that the associated researcher used the representativity question in order to devalorize a postcolonial framing of questions around racism and discrimination in France. For the reasons I have evoked before (the gap between the experience of marginalization and dominant discourse) the discourse of ordinary people about their daily lives should be questioned as much as that of neighborhood activists and academics, and at the same time it should be taken equally seriously.

While I have dealt with the figure of the “ordinary inhabitant”, there remains an issue for whom the colonial question is relevant and for whom not. The topic is most relevant for the educated racialized inhabitants of MSHN who feel stagnated in their social mobility and is less appealing for those struggling to make a living, even if this does not mean that all those concerned with the colonial past are free from this struggle. Mohamed D. feels that “young people in MSHN today are not preoccupied by the war in Algeria or the past. Their preoccupations are in the present, with work, professional training *etc.*” (discussion circle,



07/07/2017). Moujoud shares the impression that the colonial question is not a priority for immigrants who struggle to make a livelihood in France. Other reasons for not joining in the public debate are the fears that one's points of view will provoke hostile reactions, and the fear of confrontation and disagreement when expressing political views in public space. The latter point particularly concerned those coming from countries with a different political culture, such as dictatorial regimes and those having experienced a context of political violence. From the debates I understood that the colonial question for many was not relevant in their country of origin, but became relevant upon their arrival in France as the place where they were confronted with racism. A general profile emerged of those who were interested in investigating the colonial question as a key to understanding racism and discrimination in France. This profile is of people who had gained political consciousness through formal or informal education, secured a somewhat stable financial situation, belonged to a generation that grew up in France, who grew up with the promise of equality, and felt entitled to make claims. It was their confrontation with a glass ceiling that brought them to the colonial question.

### *1.3 Conclusion: From process to results*

In this section I explained how the Université populaire has made it possible to have a debate about the links between the present and the colonial past in Villeneuve from the point of view of its participants. In making space for this debate, the working group encountered important resistance. The working group had to deal with the fear of some older white working group members (but not only) who felt that looking into colonial history would hurt the already tense relations in the neighborhood and that it would revive hatred.

In his critique, Henri was right about one point, that the Université populaire contributed to the emergence of a discourse on the colonial past-present and thereby reinforced those actors that sought to politicize the colonial past. It made space for voices to speak out about colonial past-present in the neighborhood. Where I disagree with Henri, is whether this is a source of danger for the harmonious co-habitation between Whites and those of immigrant origin.

I explained who the resource persons and invited speakers were, and who was responsible for the framing of the question, and who participated in these debates. The participation of academics served to take away some of the fears above, as they were supposed to guarantee academic neutrality. We used this representation strategically to reassure those fearing for a fascist ideological point of view: their presence helped to pacify the debate. It turned out that, at times, speaking about the past played the role of healing or therapy.

I turn in the next section to the results the debates produced in answer to the question of what is the link research participants establish between past and present, and which channels of information inform their knowledge about the colonial period and permit them to make these connections.

## 2) The nature of the relationship between past and present

In this section I seek to clarify the types of relationships participants establish between the past and present. There are a few participants that denied the relevance of drawing a link between the colonial past and present. The large majority, however, are of the opinion that the past is very relevant to understanding the present in France, in particular in its MSHN. The way they see this relationship ranges from continuity, to analogy, legacy or strategy (using the past strategically, to denounce phenomena at present). I illustrate the different registers participants used with examples that came up in the debates. While I focus on participant voices (2.2), I start with a brief overview of the academic debate in France about this link between past and present, in order to be able to situate participants' voices within this larger debate (2.1).

### *2.1) Academic debate about the relevance of a postcolonial approach to MSHN*

Both in reaction to English postcolonial academic literature and political events in France, a fierce debate has been going on among academics in France about the relevance of the postcolonial approach to understanding present day France. Roughly three different positions can be discerned in this debate: first, postcolonial literature is not very relevant for understanding today's challenges in France (Giblin 2006; Bayart and Bertrand 2006; Bayart 2011); second, the legacies of the colonial past are important for understanding representations of the 'other' in France but they are quite irrelevant for understanding the "banlieue crisis" and tensions around immigration (Robine 2008; see Stébé 2010 on *banlieue* crisis); third, currently we face a process of recomposition, reinvention and reproduction of colonial power relations which is very relevant for understanding processes of racialization, particularly important in MSHN (Héricord, Lévy, and Khiari 2005;<sup>191</sup> Khiari 2006; Kipfer 2011).

I do not further develop the first position as it does not resonate with the positions of participants in Villeneuve. Those defending the second position, of which Robine is an example, observe a continuum in colonial representations but a rupture in the economic and geopolitical system. Robine states for example that although nowadays France is clearly post-colonial, the key problems it faces today cannot be qualified as post-colonial problems (2008).<sup>192</sup> He argues that the "inequalities experienced by immigrants and their French descendants, its [France's] political tensions, ghettos and violence, as well as the idea of the nation and national identities that it produces," [an be best explained by other explanations

<sup>191</sup> <http://indigenes-republique.fr/indigenes-de-la-republique-reponses-a-quelques-objections/>, accessed 21/10/2015.

<sup>192</sup> Robine uses post-colonial as a historical notion in the sense of after or beyond the colonial period and thus has a linear approach to time. The interest of the term for him lies in evoking the rupture between two periods, and the founding moment of the passage of the one moment to the other. He acknowledges however the contribution of American postcolonial studies that have evoked the postcolonial (without hyphen) to weaken the idea of rupture and inquire into the ways the former period still significantly marks the current one (Robine 2008, 141).

such as globalization, the analysis of socio-economic relations, xenophobia and racism or even islamophobia than by the postcolonial prism (2008, 143).<sup>193</sup> He thereby disconnects processes of globalization and phenomena of racism and xenophobia from a post-colonial analytical framework and disconnects phenomena around “ghetto formation, territorial control by local drug dealers, the war against terrorism, the Arab Spring, and the outrage provoked by the cartoons depicting Mohamed” (*Ibid.*) from the French colonial past. Robine’s position is typical of a current that recognizes the relevance of the colonial past for understanding depreciative representations of the racialized ‘other’ in France and Europe as a whole, but that denies its pertinence to understanding situations of economic inequality and current geopolitical tensions. Robine traces the term colonial back to the narrow concept of colonization as the domination of an autochthonous majority by a foreign minority on the territory of this majority group through violent means. Looking at colonialism instead of colonization however allows the establishment of a certain continuum in terms of unequal economic, political, and race relations between colonial and present times.

In contrast to the position defended by Robine, others defend the position that understanding racialized representations as a purely cultural phenomenon is an analytical misconception, and argue that racism cannot be understood without embedding it in the economic systems in which it emerged and has been perpetuated. As explained in the first chapter, Latin-American thinkers of the Modernity/Coloniality Working Group introduced the idea of a continuum in the capitalist/colonial world system. They put forward that the introduction of racial categories was inextricably linked to the shifting economic system in the early modern period, a moment when racism became the legitimation for a system of economic exchange that was very profitable for some and very unfavorable for others (Quijano 2007). Quijano’s work, among others, has made it evident that relations of socio-economic dependence of so-called ‘peripheral’ countries with regard to countries of the ‘center’ in the capitalist world-system have racialized bodies and have taken the form of racism (Ali and Dayan-Herzbrun 2017). In this way he connects world system theory to racism: material relations of exploitation to intersubjective relations (Quijano and Cohen 2007b). The question of whether the current inequality in France should be explained either by racism or economic developments is therefore a false one. Racial inequality not only serves as legitimation for early capitalist exploitation, it is co-constitutive of modernity and I agree with Quijano that it is a system that continues to reproduce itself despite political and economic evolution. However, obviously, the present is not a simple reproduction of the colonial situation (Blanchard, Bancel, and Lemaire (eds.) 2005).

<sup>193</sup> In French: "On peut formuler la question ainsi: est-il adéquat d'affirmer que la période actuelle serait avant tout caractérisée par les rapports post-coloniaux, c'est-à-dire par des traces et prolongations des rapports coloniaux dans le présent?".

In the next sections I turn to the voices of Université populaire participants who have actively contributed to this debate locally.

## *2.2) Participants' views of the relevance of the colonial past for understanding the present in France.*

As with academics, participants in the Université populaire debates also widely varied their positions about the relevance of the colonialist past for understanding the challenges France faces in its MSHN and beyond. My objective is to give insight into the links participants of Villeneuve established between the past and present. When I mention Université populaire participants, I refer to all five tiers (working group members, resource persons, invited speakers, participants of the plenary debates and participants of street debates). I also include, where relevant, statements and stories from other research participants that did not participate in the Université populaire.

Drawing on the Université populaire data, I have identified three ways in which participants evoke the “colonial”: 1) by specifically using the term “colonial”; 2) through telling a story about an experience or commenting on a situation, which they do not literally qualify as “colonial” but which was triggered in the context of the debate about the colonial past; 3) when invited speakers comment on the stories of other participants. This was for example the case when Kokoreff said of an administrative practice that it “recalled” colonial practices.<sup>194</sup>

In the following subsections I provide an analysis of the ways participants interpreted the legacy of the colonial past in French society in general and in Villeneuve in particular.

### *2.2.a) Organizing participants' answers*

Participants' answers on how they see the relationship between the present and the colonialist past can be organized in four registers: as a continuum, as a heritage, as an analogy, and as a strategy. A fifth category regroups suggestions of participants on how to deal with this colonial legacy. I present their answers in three ways: a sketch I made early on in my data analysis that shows the categories I came up with while organizing my data in an excel sheet [Figure 4.97]; a mind map that reorganizes the categories I first came up and to which I added another register [Figure 4.98]; and a description of these different registers based on the examples that participants provided in their arguments of a link between the colonial past and present.

<sup>194</sup> This was during the first UP debate (20/03/2015) that dealt with discrimination and islamophobia when the issue of links with the colonial past was not yet on the agenda.

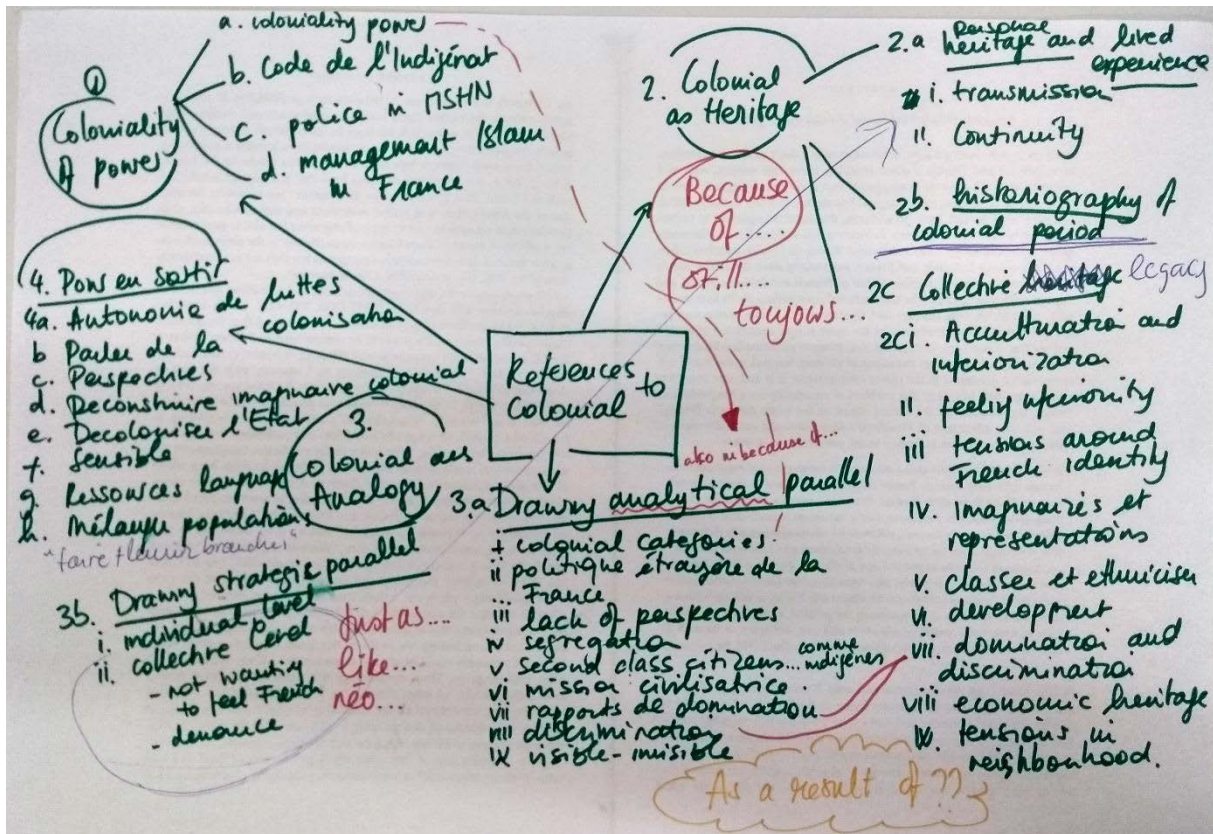


Figure 4.97 Sketch that organizes participants' answers to the question of what remains of the colonial past, March 2019

Here follows a summary of the answers that participants provided in each of the five registers.

1) Colonial continuum – “We continue to be in a colonial power situation”

Participants referred to the “coloniality of power,” to “governmentality,” to the continuity of public policy between the former colonies and mainland France as well as the categories used by state actors. Participants also mentioned the continued hierarchization of humanity; the “ethnicization of social relations,” the ethnic management of people in MSHN; the management of Muslim worship in France (*gestion du culte musulman*); and a special security regime in MSHN as well as police violence (further developed in section 2.2.c).

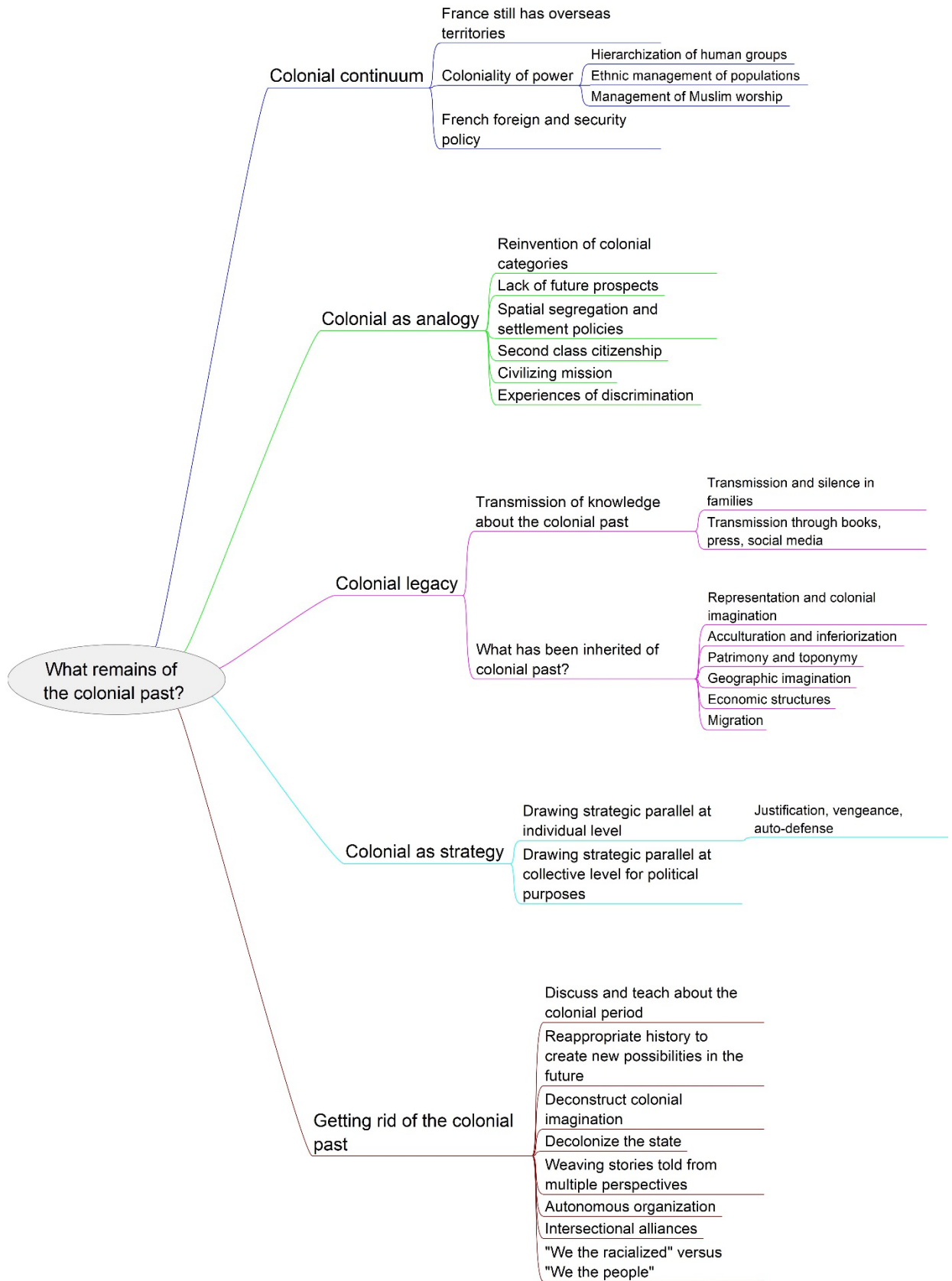


Figure 4.98 Mind map of participants' references to the term "colonial"

2) *Colonial as analogy – “The present is just as the past”*

Participants evoke the colonial as an analogy if they draw an analytical parallel between the past and present, for example when they compare the actual situation to the colonial past. This is the case for example when an invited speaker said that a particular administrative practice “**recalled**” colonial practices. Other examples of parallels that participants drew between the colonial past and present are references to the lack of economic perspectives for racialized inhabitants of MSHN in France, spatial and professional segregation, second class citizen status, patronizing behavior, civilizing attitudes, and experiences of discrimination (further developed in section 2.2.d).

3) *Colonial as heritage – “What we have inherited from the past”*

Two strands of comments fit this category:

The first deals with participants’ stories of what they know about the colonial past and through which channels they obtained this information. The role of the family in the transmission of knowledge and experience, but also the silences that many families opted for in relation to their colonial past, was an important topic. Other channels through which participants received information about the colonial past are historiography of the colonial period in France and in its former colonies: school curricula are an important vehicle of transmission, with important gaps and tensions between what participants learned at home and at school. Critical press and more recently social media are alternative channels of information (see section 3 of this chapter).

The second strand deals with what is ‘inherited’ of the colonial past in both a tangible and less tangible way. With regard to the first, participants made references to patrimony (buildings and architectural style), toponymy (street names) and other forms of cultural heritage such as language, economic heritage and migration. With regard to what was transmitted in a less tangible way, participants spoke for example about acculturation; of feelings of inferiority; of tensions around French identity and citizenship; and experiences of domination and discrimination. Most participants agreed that current generations deal with a cultural heritage of representations and geographic imaginations, of the classification of people in continents, in ethnic, national, religious or racial groups and have inherited ideas about the civilizing mission of the French (and Europeans or the white man more generally). Some also mentioned the current tensions in the neighborhood as a heritage of the colonial past (further developed in section 2.2.e).

4) *Colonial as strategy – Denouncing a phenomenon at present by describing it as colonial*

A last way of evoking the colonial is to draw a strategic parallel, either to justify individual behavior (e.g. along the lines of “if I steal in France, I only do the same thing as the French did to my forefathers in colonial times”) or to denounce, for political purposes, current practices as “colonial” or “neo-colonial”. This is for example the case when civil society groups denounce French foreign policy in former colonies and in the Middle East, Iraq and

Afghanistan as colonial or neo-colonial behavior; describe the Israeli occupation of Palestine as colonial in nature; denounce the “colonial management” of MSHN; or present the struggles in name of MSHN as the pursuit of anti-colonial struggles (further developed in section 2.2.f).

5) *Getting rid of the colonial past*

A fifth category of participants’ comments in relation to the question “what remains of the colonial past” deals with suggestions of how to get out of the current deadlock (*impasse*), how to go towards a decolonial future? Participants insisted for example that we have to break the taboo about the colonial past, to make it discussable; another mentioned that people have to take possession of their history in a reading that offers perspectives; that there is a need to deconstruct the colonial imagination; that the State needs to be colonized; that people have to listen to each other’s (his)stories beyond the colonial divide and that there is a need to “weave” their stories. Other comments specifically dealt with political organization: some were in favor of autonomous organization, while others insisted on the need for intersectional struggles and both wondered in which name to organize, which framing of the problem would be most effective from a political point of view. Which new terms to invent? Suggestions of how to get rid of the colonial past and how to envision the future will be further discussed in chapter 7.

Table 4.18 summarizes each register, the type of relationship it represents, and the vocabulary used to explain this relationship. In addition, a “zero” register deals with the denial of the relevance of the colonial past for understanding racism and the challenges in MSHN at present.

**Table 4.18 Participants mobilize five registers when they evoke the term “colonial”**

Register	Explanation relationship	Vocabulary used
0) rejection	there is no link, establishing a relationship between present and colonial past is not pertinent	
1) continuity	Permanency	is the same, is still ( <i>toujours</i> )
2) legacy	Consequence	is a heritage of, is because of, is what remains of
3) analogy	Analytical parallel	just like, similar to, as if, recall ( <i>faire penser à</i> ), remind ( <i>rappeler</i> )
4) strategy	Strategic parallel, justification	is colonial, is neo-colonial is because of

Each of these is illustrated through examples that I chose on the basis of the vocabulary used by participants, and which clearly pointed to one particular register. Few references



exclusively fit one register though: a person can mobilize different registers in the same sentence or story. People do not necessarily identify one particular relationship between past and present, the registers they used are context-specific. In quotes, I highlight the word that establishes the relationship between past and present in bold. I do not comment on whether the relationships they established are correct from an analytical point of view, as this is not relevant for understanding participants' point of view.

### *2.2.b) Rejection of relationship colonial past and present*

One way of apprehending the relationship between the colonial past and the present is by rejecting its pertinence for understanding racism and discrimination in MSHN today. In accordance with academics defending this position, participants in this register find that the present is rather influenced by other developments such as for example capitalism, immigration, and globalization, which they do not consider relevant to the colonial past. Those that defend this position are indicated with the term 'the detractors'. One of them for example, loudly voiced his disagreement when a participant drew a parallel between the images that were shown of identity checks during the Algerian war and the identity checks by police of racialized men in MSHN (UP debate, 22/11/2017). I identified four arguments that sought to dissuade from drawing parallels between the two periods.

The first argument is that it is not possible to compare the past and present because the key characteristic of the colonial period, the inequality before the law, has been undone: citizenship rights and equality before the law are guaranteed at present for all those holding French nationality.

Si on parle de question coloniale, il ne faut jamais oublier qu'au moment colonial, dans les colonies, l'indigène n'a aucun pouvoir. Il n'a même pas de droits. (...) Nous ne sommes plus dans ce contexte-là. (Participant, 26/04/2018).

The second criticism of interrogating the past to understand the present is that the variety of objects to which the term "colonial" are applied have nothing in common apart from the name. The term "colonial" in this context was accused of being a floating signifier.

Participants indeed referred to a large range of situations, but this does not mean that these references are without meaning, they merely call for a more refined analysis of the different situations that are signified.

A third argument is that drawing a link between racism today and France's colonial past is the fruit of an "analytical construction" or an "intellectual approach" that is disconnected from neighborhood inhabitants' lived experiences. As I have demonstrated earlier, this is the position of Henri whose arguments have already been dealt with abundantly. Another person in this register argued that the colonial issue is far removed from the everyday concerns of MSHN inhabitants and that they do not evoke it to speak of their lives. This criticism clearly challenged the working group's hypothesis, indirectly suggesting that it is only an issue for activists and academics. I therefore ask whether the literal use of the term

colonial is a prerequisite for making the link between colonial past and present relevant? Another participant dealt with this question of nominalism, arguing that beyond the term it is the experience behind the term that counts and that participants evoke.

Ce n'est pas parce que les gens ne prononcent pas les mots-clés, comme colonisation, qu'ils ne les abordent pas. Je vais vous donner un exemple personnel : comme journaliste, j'ai interrogé des vieux Algériens. Faites-les parler du Code de l'Indigénat : personne ne le connaît. J'en ai fait l'expérience. Mais ce n'est pas parce qu'ils ne le connaissent pas qu'ils ne peuvent pas vous raconter l'expérience qu'ils ont subie sous le Code de l'Indigénat. Ce n'est pas parce qu'ils n'ont pas les concepts historiques, sociologiques ou politiques, que ces concepts ne sont pas pertinents pour comprendre ce que ces gens vivent. (Participant, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

The fourth and last argument is that the real question in MSHN, including discrimination and racism, is not colonial but related to migration. This point of view is for example defended by a participant who challenged Moujoud when she spoke, as an invited speaker, about a colonial imagination.

Après tout, ça fait quand même 55 ans, en ce qui concerne la France, qu'il n'y a plus de pratiques coloniales, qui ont été une honte ! Comme vous ne pouvez plus parler de la colonisation, comme vous le dites si bien, qu'est-ce que vous appelez "imaginaire colonial" ? (...) Qu'est-ce que c'est aujourd'hui, lorsque nous assistions à ces problèmes horribles qui sont liés aux migrations et que l'Occident, pas plus que l'Afrique, ne parvient à résoudre ? (Participant, UP debate, 08/12/2017)

In answer to the detractor-participant quoted above, Kenjah turned the question of what remains of the colonial past around by asking when can one say it stopped.

J'aimerais que chacun se pose la question : à quel moment historique, à quel événement de ces 55 dernières années, on peut marquer la fin de l'imaginaire colonial ? À quel moment y a-t-il eu un événement qui a pu effacer cet imaginaire colonial? À quel moment a-t-on pu dire: "Nous ne relevons plus de cet imaginaire" ? On parle d'imaginaire, on parle de représentations, on parle de symboles, de discours, de langage, de formes. (Kenjah, UP debate, 08/12/17)

Kenjah's comment serves as the transition from the "zero" register to the register of continuity.

### *2.2.c) Continuity*

Participants that describe the relationship between the past and present as continuous represent this relationship as an uninterrupted line between then and now. They employ terms like "the same" and "still" and have in common that they do not recognize decolonization in the 1960s as a point of definitive rupture. None of the participants cited in this register really think however that the present is exactly the same as the past. When they

refer to a continuum, they often do so strategically or because they are familiar with the work of decolonial thinkers, which becomes clear if they use for example the term “coloniality of power” or because they point out that France still has overseas territories. I first present participants’ arguments that the colonial period is not over yet, then arguments in favor of considering the coloniality of power in France, and finally arguments that there is a certain form of continuity between current French foreign and security policy and the colonial past.

#### *France still has overseas territories*

One Kanak participant from French New Caledonia pointed out the colonial continuity in French overseas territories, which Bonin called the “confetti of the empire” (Bonin 2012, 5). This participant pointed out that the colonial does not belong to the past and was critical of the question that served as a red thread throughout the UP cycle.

La question [du cycle de l’Université populaire] c’est : “Que reste-t-il du passé colonial ?”, mais **je ne sais pas si c’est vraiment du passé**. Je suis originaire de Nouvelle-Calédonie et cette année, en novembre, on vote pour l’indépendance, à la suite d’un processus de décolonisation entamé il y a 30 ans. C’est-à-dire que l’État français reconnaît qu’il possède encore des colonies. Pour certains, la colonisation c’est encore du présent. (Participant, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

A similar argument was put forward by activists for the Palestinian cause who pointed to the Israeli colonization of the Palestinian territories, and that we therefore cannot speak of the colonial past in an international context, an argument I do not further develop here. It is the links between former French colonies, its overseas territories, and the French mainland and the economic networks in which they are embedded that motivated two participants to speak of the coloniality of power.

#### *Coloniality of power*

We have seen in the first chapter that Latin-American thinkers of the Modernity/Coloniality Working Group introduced the term “coloniality of power” which did not end with the withdrawal of former colonial powers. Both Kenjah and another participant who is part of the FUIQP are familiar with this work and situate themselves most clearly in the register of continuity. This participant discarded for example the terms “post-colonialism or neocolonialism,” words that indicate some form of rupture, to which she preferred the “coloniality of power” insisting on the continuity of a colonial configuration of power relationship (UP debate, 20/03/2015). She brings “the situation we experience in France”, i.e. racism and islamophobia, in relationship with imperialism as a long and ongoing economic and cultural process (*Ibid.*). Both she and Kenjah apply the “coloniality of power” for analyzing France as a former colonial power. According to Kenjah, the means of governing forged in the slave colonies and France’s former colonies were extended to mainland France and continued in policy today. He finds that “the hierarchization of humanity, introduced in the slave colonies, continues until today.” “It’s the same (his)story

(*c'est la même histoire!*)" (Kenjah, UP debate, 20/11/2015). In the following quote he explains how he views this continuity.

Ce qui se joue est que la colonialité a toujours été présentée comme liée aux colonies, c'est-à-dire à des espaces lointains et liée à une période qui n'existe plus. Le plus récent est Algérie en 62 et après 62 on passe à autre chose. Ce mode de gouverner, certes qui s'est forgé dans l'esclavage et ensuite dans le colonialisme, certes, mais le plus important ce n'est pas son histoire mais c'est sa réalité, son mode de fonctionnement. La colonialité donc ce n'est pas simplement des territoires lointains et du passé, c'est donc aussi ce que peut sentir une société métropolitaine toute composante confondue par rapport à cette mode de gouverner. Ça c'est social, **c'est structurel** aujourd'hui, et je pense que de plus en plus le regard va sortir un peu des zones lointaines et du passé pour se focaliser sur un appareil d'Etat. Ce n'est pas juste le passé colonial quoi. (Kenjah, discussion circle, 23/02/2018).

Kenjah argues that one should not focus on the colonial past but on present forms of coloniality, both in France and in its relations with former colonies. Several participants denounced the continuity of colonial relations in French foreign policy.

#### *French foreign and security policy*

An example of the continuities that participants identified in French foreign policy is the French monetary policy in its former African colonies.

Vous dites que la colonisation, c'est fini depuis 50 ans. Mais non, **c'est pas fini !** Il y a des pratiques qui relèvent du post-colonialisme et c'est ce qui produit de l'exclusion. Par exemple, le franc CFA, c'est l'expression d'une pratique coloniale. Le franc CFA, c'est Paris qui dévalue la monnaie en Afrique de l'Ouest. C'est une réalité. Il y a un vrai combat politique à mener pour une émancipation et une souveraineté réelle et totale des pays de l'Afrique de l'Ouest. (Participant, UP debate, 08/12/2017)

Participants accused France of behaving like an imperial power, with military interventions to defend its own economic interests in countries such as Mali, Libya, Ivory Coast and Tunisia. Tchetché-Apea gave the example of the French foreign policy minister, who proposed that the French police services intervene in Tunisia, in support of its autocrat, Ben Ali, whose rule was challenged through mass demonstrations.

Je ne sais pas si vous vous souvenez de l'intervention de Mme Alliot-Marie [garde des sceaux dans le gouvernement Fillon], pour prodiguer, en pleine Assemblée nationale, les services de la police française à l'État de Ben Ali pour mater la contestation du peuple tunisien. (Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea, UP debate, 26/04/2018).

France has a long history of providing police and military support to keep dictatorial leaders that serve their interests in place. The colonial continuity for Tchetché-Apea lies in the fact that: "there are particular ways of dealing with a population, of whom one does not

recognize that it exercises its rights under common law" (*Ibid.*).<sup>195</sup> His observation of the role that security policy plays in the denial of rights of certain marginalized people who are limited in the political role they play applies both to former colonies and to MSHN, as I demonstrate later. Another argument a participant used with regard to the pursuit of colonial military methods is that, according to him, the American army in Iraq turned towards the counter-insurgency methods France deployed during the Algerian independence war: "these methods are thought out, structural and relayed by state administrations."<sup>196</sup> (Participant, UP debate, 20/11/2015).<sup>197</sup> Similarly, the participant from New Caledonia mentioned that to deal with the Kanak revolts of the 1980s, the French government sent an army division, trained for the Algerian war, as if it was dealing with colonial subjects and not with citizens that ask for rights over their own land.

Quand il y a eu les révoltes dans les années 80, on aurait pu penser que l'État français avait appris des anciennes guerres coloniales. Mais non, pour mater les indépendantistes, il a envoyé l'armée, notamment des anciens du 11e Choc, qui avaient été formés pendant la guerre d'Algérie. Pour l'État français, il était face à une guerre coloniale et ne réalisait pas qu'il était complètement normal qu'un peuple demande le droit de disposer de ses terres. L'État réagit toujours de la même façon face aux revendications de certaines parties de la population. (Participant, UP debate, 26/04/2018)<sup>198</sup>

In addition to French military and police aid to former colonies and conduct in overseas territories, several participants described the police conduct in MSHN in France today as a continuity of colonial ways of governing. Chaambi, for example, explained that "today we are [still] in a colonial continuum" (*aujourd'hui on est dans un continuum colonial*), referring to policemen using the same techniques of humiliation that were practiced and even prescribed in the colonial period (Chaambi, UP debate, 20/03/2015). Tchetché-Apea pointed to the adoption of exceptional security measures in 2005 that drew on a law adopted during

<sup>195</sup> In French: "Il y a des façons particulières de procéder avec une population dont on ne reconnaît pas qu'elle exerce ses capacités de droit commun".

<sup>196</sup> In French: "Ce sont des méthodes pensées, des méthodes structurelles, des méthodes relayées par les administrations."

<sup>197</sup> An Indian digital newspaper confirmed this information: Prakash, Amit. "The Battle of Algiers in America: How French Colonial Warfare Influenced US Police Practices." Scroll.in. <https://scroll.in>, July 26, 2020. <https://scroll.in/article/965578/the-battle-of-algiers-in-america-how-french-colonial-warfare-influenced-us-police-practices>, accessed 28/09/2020.

<sup>198</sup> I have not found any specific information confirming that soldiers of the 11th Choc battalion of the French Army were trained in Algeria, but I found information confirming that this battalion was deployed in the military operation "Victor" in New Caledonia to liberate the 16 police officers that were taken hostage by Kanak independence activists (*Humanité*, 4/5/2018). <https://www.humanite.fr/ouvea-une-tragedie-coloniale-654875>, accessed 28/09/2020. See Valette (2002) about the role of the 11th Choc battalion in the Algerian independence war.

the Algerian war (see Thénault 2007). Police units dedicated to MSHN are instruments of governance based on exception, which is incompatible with the principle of equality.

Cet état d'exception est incompatible avec l'égalité de traitement dans un état de droit. L'instrument de cet état d'exception, c'est la police. Son rôle est clairement identifié d'un point de vue territorial et d'un point de vue de la population à qui est adressée cette politique spécifique et particulière. (Tchetche-Apea, UP deabte, 26/04/2018)

I continue to explore inhabitants' experiences with the police in chapter 6. Tchetche-Apea also argued that the building of the French State is indissociable from colonial history and that French "colonial history is a State affair" (*Ibid.*). For others, this focus on the State disregards the economic dynamics of colonialism. Béchir for example affirmed that he still feels colonized but that the [real] colonization nowadays is of a different nature, "that of capital" (field notes, 20/11/2017). He wanted the working group to pay more attention to the colonialism – capitalism nexus. Neocolonial forms of foreign policy and military and police interventions in the name of "security" form the bulk of participants' references in the continuity register. Below I demonstrate that participants evoke these same themes in another register, that of analogy.

#### 2.2.d) Analogy

For research participants who established an analogical relationship between the colonial past and present, the present is "just like" the past or is "similar to" it. Tchetche-Apea used this register, for example, when he said that "one sees that there are important similarities with the colonial period" (*on voit qu'il y a des grandes similitudes avec cette période-là*) (discussion circle, 23/02/2018). As mentioned, participants also refer to security and foreign policy in the analogy register: one person drew a parallel between military, counter-insurgency methods in Algeria (identity controls) and MSHN in France; a second person made a parallel between reasons for the Algerian conquest in 1830 and military intervention in Libya in 2011.

Quand on regarde la façon dont les choses se passent et qu'on regarde l'histoire de notre pays, ça nous renvoie à ce qui se passait dans les années 50 avec les populations algériennes. (Omer Mas Capitolin, UP debate, 26/4/2018)

Tassadit also makes a parallel between military conquest in Algeria and Libya, which she both considered as forms of colonization, motivated by the unwillingness of France to pay its debts.<sup>199</sup>

<sup>199</sup> This example requires some context information. Tassadit learned from the generation of her grandparents that the French colonized Algeria in order to avoid repaying their debt. The historian Stora indeed confirms it is in the context of a conflict about the French repayment of an important quantity of wheat it had borrowed from the dey of Algiers that the latter hit the French consul with his fan (Stora 2004). This incident was used as a justification of the conquest of Algiers and generations of school children in France were taught this version

Même si nos grand-pères et nos grand-mères nous racontent cette histoire, ça nous choque, la raison de la colonisation de l'Algérie, ça nous choque. **Comme** avec la Libye maintenant. Qu'est-ce qu'il a fait Sarkozy quand il savait qu'il avait des dettes, qu'il allait payer? Il a bombardé et l'histoire s'arrête là, c'est fini. De la colonisation à la 2<sup>e</sup> colonisation de la Libye. (Tassadit, discussion, 06/10/2017)

During the debates it struck me that inhabitants, who are often believed to be far removed from politics, followed the news closely, including international news and that references to French international policy made up a very large part of comments in the continuity and analogy registers.

Additional examples of participants using the register of analogy dealt with experiences of humiliation and the spatial segregation of racialized people in France. One participant responded to the detractor who felt that an analogy between the two periods is out of place because the juridical context has evolved and that “there are a number of things that permit us to make **analogies** or to think of a certain **continuum**”. He mentioned for example the experiences of humiliation of North African labour immigrants and was interested in the link invited speakers made between *banlieue* issues and colonial history (participant, UP debate, 26/04/2018). In response, one of the invited speakers pointed to the *de facto* spatial segregation in France.

Si, dans certains quartiers, on ne retrouve effectivement que des Noirs et des Arabes, est-ce que ce sont eux qui ont choisi d'habiter là ? (...) Comment contient-on une population ? Vous les mettez au même endroit ! Comme pour un troupeau, avec un enclos autour. (Omer Mas Capitolin, UP debate, 26/04/2018).

He made a link between this segregation, segregatory practices and settlement policies (*politique de peuplement*) during colonial times, which sought to distribute certain people into certain spaces. (Omer Mas Capitolin, UP debate, 26/04/2018). Field data about experiences of humiliation and being made to feel different form the empirical base of the arguments developed in the next chapter and are therefore not dealt with in detail here.

### 2.2.e) Legacy

Those speaking in terms of colonial legacy establish an analytical link between past and present, and explain the present through the past without establishing a direct link and not going as far as saying that the present is the same as the past. They find that, at present, we are dealing with the consequences of colonialism. Anne-Françoise, for example, stated that “l'histoire ne se passe plus de la même façon mais il y a **encore** des choses qui titillent et qui font mal” (discussion circle, 07/07/2017). Terms like “because of”, “sequelles”, “relents” or “what remains of” (*ce qui reste*), “being an effect of”, “être héritiers de”, “having roots in” (*être enraciné dans ou être ancré dans*), “still” (*encore*) and “being a consequence of” (*être*

and were never given information about the French debt. Many press articles have covered the financial connections between Sarkozy and Gadaffi (see for example *Le Monde*, 17/01/2020).

*une consequence de*), all point to the present as legacy of the past. In opposition to references to continuity, references that mention legacy acknowledge that there is a before and an after independence of French colonies in the 1960s. Participants quoted in this subsection have a representation of a colonial **past** that is qualitatively different from the present, with the present being a consequence of the past but not identical to and not a perfect reproduction either. The fact that a large part of the participants' comments correspond to the register of legacy is, in all likelihood, due to the working group's framing of the question. Through the formulation "What remains of the colonial past," the core of the working group situated itself in this register.

Within this analytical register of legacy, participants referred to:

- What is left over in terms of representations
- Toponymy, monuments and personal names as legacy of colonial past
- Migration and exile as colonial legacy
- The continuity of social networks and geographic spaces between (former) colonies and the French mainland

### *Representations*

Through socialization people inherit cultural representations, which should be understood as mental infrastructures that format the way people receive and perceive new information. Tchetché-Apea for example observed that we are **still** stuck (*figé*) in our imaginations and representations (..) and spoke of "elements that **link** us to colonial history". When confronted with a new situation, one analyzes new information through existing categories that are a legacy of colonial epistemology. Ali provided a good example of how these representations continue to work.

Il y a toujours une façon de regarder l'autre: "Elle est voilée," "c'est une Arabe," on ne peut pas l'aborder en tant qu'être humain quoi. C'est ça le truc ! On l'aborde avec tout un imaginaire. On aborde l'autre avec un imaginaire qu'on peut avoir sur l'Arabe, les craintes, les peurs, sur les bribes de l'histoire qu'on connaît etc et ça biaise le rapport d'entrée je pense. C'est vrai, c'est un classique. Jamais, ils ne vont te dire "Salut Ali, tu vas bien ? D'où tu viens, t'es de quelle origine ?". (Ali, informal discussion, 06/10/2018)

Anne-Françoise tells a similar story of the assumptions that skin color evokes, giving the example of how her black brother-in-law and white sister-in-law are received differently by tax officers, while they present exactly the same case.

Ma belle-sœur blanche râlait pour ses impôts et on lui a dit "mais madame ce n'est pas possible, on ne s'est pas trompé". Mon beau-frère il y a va, il est africain, il montre la feuille d'impôt en disant qu'il y a une erreur et la dame lui dit "Monsieur, vous ne pouvez pas payer autant d'impôts, ce n'est pas possible". C'est ridicule mais ça montre bien la façon qu'on a casé les gens simplement en les regardant. Pour évaluer sa feuille d'impôt, on n'a



pas regardé quel était son métier et ce qu'il faisait. (Anne-Françoise, discussion circle, 23/02/2018).

Challenging these representations is a hard task and requires some form of re-formatting of the mental frameworks through which we process new information. Representations and imagination are forms of invisible ties that connect past and present, but their consequences become very real as we have seen in the example of the tax officer above. Representations “**translate into**” political and administrative decision-making (participant, UP debate 26/04/2018).

References to legacy often mention a new element in comparison to the past, something that belonged to the past, was kept alive, and that returned in a different form. Characteristics that belong to the colonial past can temporarily disappear but nevertheless remain or are kept intact under the surface and can thus re-appear. Therefore, representations can also be understood as re-inventions or re-appearances of the colonial past. Pierre for example said that one of the aspects “where colonialism **re-appears**, is the press” (discussion circle, 07/07/2017). This “re-appearance” is synonymous with becoming visible again. In addition to the press, Moujoud lists a “set of discourses”, such as “literature, cinema, journalism and music” which transmit “a heritage and an imagination that continue to influence us in one way or another” (UP debate, 08/12/2017).<sup>200</sup> “It is something that **still** exists,” says Moujoud, but not in the sense of continuity. Sometimes, re-appearance can take the form of reproduction or re-invention. Jouda for example evokes “*un rapport néo-colonial*” and the “reproduction of power relations, which are inherited from the period when the White was the master and the *indigène* did what he was asked” (UP meeting, 24/04/2017). Representations are but one form of legacy though and in the remaining part of this section I focus on more tangible forms.

#### *The past is physically present and contested in toponymy and patrimony*

Personal names and the names of places and monuments are more tangible examples of colonial legacy. One invited speaker said, for example, that without the French colonial administration she would not be called Nasima nor Moujoud (discussion circle, 07/07/2017): “*Je suis devenue arabe et musulmane en France car la désignation de mon nom a été arabisé par l'administration coloniale française*” (UP debate, 08/12/2017). This transformation of people’s names can be explained by the fact that the French colonial administration introduced numerous errors in the transcription of names when they were added to the population register (*registres de l'état civil*). Civil servants’ lack of knowledge of local languages led to the creation of entirely fictional surnames.<sup>201</sup> This is why Moujoud argues

<sup>200</sup> In French: “Un ensemble de registres a transmis un héritage et un imaginaire qui continuent de nous influencer d’une manière ou d’une autre”.

<sup>201</sup> Université de Laval, [http://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/afrique/algerie-3Politique\\_ling.htm](http://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/afrique/algerie-3Politique_ling.htm), accessed 6/05/2019.

that colonial legacies affect people at a very personal level, because they impact the names one is known by.

A frequent answer to the working group's question about legacies of the colonial past mentions street names and statues. Ali gives the example of French inculcation (*impregnation*) in Algeria through naming: "*Sur les noms c'est intéressant car cette impregnation de la France même dans les panneaux ou trucs, elle est encore présente quoi*" (Ali, informal discussion, 06/10/2017). This form of legacy is not necessarily negative in his opinion. Ali did not attach a strong emotional meaning to the French colonial legacy of language and name plates, in opposition to other colonial legacies that affected his family more personally. Participants are concerned in different ways by the political stakes around toponymy, as we will see in the remaining part of this subsection, some even lean to nostalgia when they mentioned these traces of French presence in former colonial landscapes.

Mamedou, who grew up in Mauritania, as son of a father who was employed by the French administration, chose to tell the story of a statue, erected in Saint-Louis (Senegal), in honor of Faïdherbe, the general governor (*gouverneur général*) of French Western Africa (*l'Afrique occidentale française*, AOF), who was responsible for "Senegal's colonization and pacification" (13/10/2017). The statue accidentally fell in September 2017 (also see *Le Point*, 24/05/2018) and, according to Mamedou, the Senegalese asked that it wouldn't be reinstated: "it no longer had any purpose and did not deserve its place here" (*elle n'a plus raison d'être*) (UP debate, 13/10/2017).

Tassadit, on the other hand, does not understand the fuss about renaming and replacing colonial legacy, saying that "we cannot undo what was done during colonization" (informal discussion, 6/10/2017). She explained that, as a result of Arabization, many places have been renamed and new schools now carry Arabic names.

When you want to explain to someone who grew up before the 90s, you cannot simply say "I studied in this school" using the Arabic name, because they would not understand" (*Ibid.*).

With all these new names her mother lost her sense of orientation (*repères*). These name changes from French to Arabic are not really necessary, nor positive, for Tassadit: "why should these [French] names be no longer? It is part of us, it is part of the life of people and we won't erase a part of people's lives just like that" (interview, 24/05/2017).<sup>202</sup> A possible reason why Tassadit is not be favorable to changing French street names to Arabic is that her

<sup>202</sup> In French: "Pourquoi il faudrait que ça le soit plus? C'est une partie de nous, une partie de la vie des gens. Et on ne va pas effacer une partie de la vie des gens comme ça, facilement".

paternal family is Berber and imposing Arabic in public life can be felt as a form of domination.

A person who is rather nostalgic about the past is Claude, the doctor from Cameroon. He talked about the statue of doctor Jamot, sitting on a throne, in front of the Ministry of Health in Yaoundé. Eugène Jamot was a military doctor (1879-1937) specialized in tropical medicine who spent part of his career combating sleeping sickness in Cameroon. This was an occasion for Claude to laude the medical facilities introduced by the colonial regime and to lament the country's health standards nowadays. The fact that the statue has not been dismantled in the country's capital is an indicator for Claude that "the Cameroonians do not hold a grudge" against the French or the colonial period (UP debate, 13/10/2017). His interpretation does not take into account that president Biya's authoritarian rule and the tight relationships between the political and economic elites in both countries make protesting a highly dangerous activity.

The relatively frequent stories about names and statues can probably be explained by the fact that they were a relatively safe choice for participants, combining both personal memories and an impersonal relationship. This is probably the reason why they were evoked in particular during the first public plenary debate dealing with the colonial past (UP debate, 13/10/2017). Stories of humiliation, domination, and spoliation were more difficult to share and have, apart from certain exceptions, been reserved for informal discussions, discussion circles, and plenary debates later on in the cycle.

For Kenjah street names and statues as symbols of the coloniality of power are a very important domain of struggle, in which he got involved on different occasions in Grenoble. The first time was with Contrevent that organized its first decolonial walk in the city, and the second time was in collaboration with students from the Geography Faculty and myself, at the occasion of the Third Rencontres de Géopolitique critique (February 2018). The aim of these walks is to question the legacy of the colonial past and to draw attention to the fact that these legacies will not simply go away, but that they have to be actively undone (Dijkema, Ali Babar, and Eickemeier 2019). Street names and statues that honor generals, politicians, and writers who have actively participated in the colonial enterprise have been identified as a strategic place to challenge this legacy. In this struggle, one shifts from the register of legacy to the register of strategy.

The references to colonial legacy that follow in the next subsection touch on more personal aspects of how the colonial past has affected participants' lives, and the reasons that brought them to France. They deal with economic infrastructures as a legacy of the French colonial presence.

#### *Migration as colonial legacy - "we're here because you were there"*

Participants cite the political and economic situation in former colonies, "there," as reason why those of former colonies are now "here" in France. In *Cosmopolitan Strasbourg* Western

presents similar results, dedicating one entire chapter to this relationship between here and there, entitled “‘Because you were there’: Shards of the Colonial Past” (Western 2012; Houssay-Holzschuch et al. 2013). References in my research about “here” (France) and “there” concern in particular Algeria and Tunisia through the experiences of François, the working group member that carried out his civic service as volunteer worker (*coopérant*) in Algeria, as well as Tassadit and Ali.<sup>203</sup>

Tassadit is one of those who came to France following a family member who was in search of economic opportunities. She explained this relationship between colonial past and the present in the following terms: “we are here because you were there”. This is also the answer she would like to give each time “French” ask about her motivation for having migrated to France, but she does not. She said that Algerians in France “are made to feel guilty [about their presence in France], but it’s not their fault, they were at home [when the French came to Algeria]!” (interview, 27/05/17). She meant that the French were responsible for establishing this relationship. As they entered Algeria through conquest, they should not be surprised now to find Algerians in France. Hassan\* also explained that the reason why Tunisians are here is because of the situation “there” (street debate, 22/10/2015), referring to the lack of economic opportunities in his country of origin. When analyzing the after-effects of French colonization, “*les séquelles de la colonisation*,” François comments on its economic consequences (discussion circle, 07/07/2017). He holds the colonial economy accountable for the current structural economic problems and trade deficit in Algeria.

Pendant la colonisation, sur le plan économique, le rôle d'un pays comme la France a été de pomper les ressources des pays dans lesquels ils étaient implantés. C'était aussi le cas de l'Algérie, avec notamment son pétrole et cela avait pour conséquence l'exploitation de ces ressources et leur exportation en France par exemple, avec comme conséquence le fait que les gens sur place n'en profitaient pas. (Discussion circle, 07/07/2017).

François blames this unviable economic situation for the fact that many people emigrated from North Africa to France.

Ils vivaient une certaine misère économique qui les poussaient à l'exil. Et pour moi l'exil est encore aujourd'hui une conséquence de cette exploitation des ressources dans les pays dits sous-développés. Donc, c'est une conséquence aujourd'hui de la colonisation. (François, discussion circle, 07/07/2017)

The immigrants who moved to France for economic reasons initially came with a mission and did not intend to stay. They “came with a dream,” according to Béchir, and that dream generally was to earn money: “One does not leave one country when one is at the bottom of the social ladder without any reason, it’s not for tourism, but to find work and to feed one’s

<sup>203</sup> Civic service was an alternative to military cooperation. Its overseas form, that depended on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was part of the nascent development policy, a remnant from the colonial civilizing mission.

family” (interview, 09/05/2016). The story of Hamid\* is typical of many North African immigrants (post WWII). Driven by the lack of opportunities in post-independence Algeria, where “everything was destroyed, all had to be rebuilt” (*ils ont tout rasé, tout était à reconstruire*) he took the boat to France to make a living. Ali’s parents were also driven to France by economic reasons, arriving before Algeria’s independence. The war had disrupted the subsistence economy in rural areas, which suffered from incursions of both the French and the liberation army.

Mes parents sont venus parce qu’ils ne pouvaient plus travailler. On leur a enlevé les terres, les animaux. La journée c’était les militaires, la nuit c’était les fellaghas et après ils n’avaient plus rien du tout. Pour nourrir sa famille, il était obligé de partir.  
(UP meeting, 06/06/2017)

The theme of economically-driven migration is not new though, as Ali points out (informal discussion, 06/10/2017). He stressed that *pieds-noirs* were also driven by economic hardship, in Southern Europe (Malta, Andalucia, Sicily) when they went to North Africa. Despite the fact that the migration of North African immigrants to France was originally temporary, it gradually became permanent as the situation “there” did not get any better. Over time, when immigrants built families in France, return became a “myth” (Sayad 1999; Schaeffer 2001). Ali remembers this dilemma of return which he experienced as a child through his parents’ discussions.

On retourne, on ne retourne pas ? On attend que ça s’arrête, que ça se calme ? Ça ne s’est jamais calmé en Algérie. Avec les gouvernements successifs, on voit bien le résultat. (Ali, informal discussion, 06/10/2017)

Ali points here to the political regime in Algeria under Bouteflika. The political and economic context in Algeria has never become favorable to return: “it was not because the country was independent that it was viable” (informal discussion, 06/10/2017).<sup>204</sup> Béchir stresses that the decision to stay in France was not a positive choice, it felt like “a trap.”

Progressivement, ils se rendent compte que c'est comme un piège qui se ferme sur eux. De l'autre côté de la Méditerranée, la situation ne s'arrange pas et ceux qui partent en France sont considérés comme des privilégiés. Leur situation matérielle s'est améliorée mais le prix à payer est élevé. Il est élevé affectivement au niveau de l'épanouissement personnel [because the environment in France is hostile]. (Béchir, interview, 09/05/2016)

Béchir further explained that immigrants still feel that there is no place for them in France, because the French do not grant them a place. They are still regarded as second-class citizens. This fate is only reserved to certain kinds of immigrants though, those coming from former colonies or those associated with them (e.g. Turkey). Ali and Hassan do not share Béchir’s feelings of entrapment. France has provided them with opportunities they did not,

<sup>204</sup> In French: “Donc, ce n’était pas parce que le pays était indépendant qu’il était viable quoi.”

or would not have had, if they or their parents would have stayed in or returned to Algeria and Tunisia respectively. Hassan explained that France gave him the political freedom he did not have in his own country (street debate, 22/10/2015). Ali's path is quite exceptional, he obtained a place in France as a recognized actor, receives public funds for his productions, has a very large network, and feels at ease in many different social settings.

Je suis content que mon père soit resté ici moi, parce qu'il nous a donné une autre vie et ça ne nous empêchait pas de faire des aller-retours entre l'Algérie et la France quoi. Et on a grâce à ça réussi à faire des études, à travailler, à avoir une autre vie.  
(Ali, informal discussion 06/10/2017)

This recognition is frequent among first generation immigrants that were able to provide their children with a better education than they would have had in their countries of origin. Béchir is equally proud of the excellent degrees his three daughters obtained.<sup>205</sup> Ali is especially recognizing that his father moved to France when he compares his situation with that of his cousins who stayed in Algeria and who have difficulty making a living in a mountainous area: "*ils galèrent*".

C'est difficile la vie là-bas. Malgré tout, ils ont réussi à faire leur petit truc etc, mais la plupart prennent le bateau et ils préfèrent mourir. (Ali, informal discussion, 06/10/2017)

The economic hardship they encounter continues to push young people into exile and the next paragraph demonstrates that, for François, the working group member who carried out his civic service in Algeria, this "exile is in a certain way the **consequence** of (*le fruit de*) colonization" (discussion circle, 07/07/2017). As mentioned before, the colonial economy is for François the missing link between immigration, exile and colonial rule.

L'exil est, d'une certaine manière, le fruit de la colonisation. Parce que dans certains pays la colonisation n'a pas amené un développement économique notamment ou [il y a eu] un pillage de ressources donc les populations locales ont été amenées à partir.  
[François, discussion circle, 07/07/2017]

Tassadit agrees with François that France still has a responsibility for the economic and political conditions in Algeria, which drive people to exile. Both she and Ali point to patronage networks that continue to connect political and economic elites on both sides of the Mediterranean.

Tassadit : La liberté avait un secret qu'on ne connaissait pas.

<sup>205</sup> His daughters received the education he did not have access to in Tunisia, despite his father's efforts. Béchir's father was denied his stripes for his services to the French army during the second world war because he could not read or write. This injustice was determinant in his decision to provide Béchir with elementary schooling so he would not be illiterate like his father. For Béchir however, not having had access to higher education remains a source of frustration. Access to higher education would have allowed him, he thinks, to express himself better publicly and therefore could have allowed him to be taken more seriously in debates and public life.

Ali : Et qui l'a fait faillite [l'Algérie] ? C'est les dirigeants, ce sont des voleurs, c'est les mafias.

Tassadit : C'était dès le début la mafia. Et cette mafia était choisie par la France, par l'Etat français.

Ali : La fameuse Françafrique.

Tassadit : Il ne faut pas dire qu'on soit libre. Nous ne sommes pas libres. (...) La France colonise encore l'Algérie.  
(Informal discussion, 06/10/2017)

The term "Françafrique", employed by Ali, refers to French actors' neocolonial practices and the continued imbrication of political and economic interests of elite players in France and its former colonies, which have been extensively described and denounced by Verschave (1998) and the organization Survie. They are not simply a heritage of the past, but they also give a new form to the past economic relationships, that is why these links are also called neo-colonial. References to "neocolonial" do not only fit the register of legacy. The function of the examples cited here is to explain the present through evoking the past (= because of). In a different context the term "neocolonial" can also fit the register of continuity, in particular in reference to public policy: foreign, security and economic or development policy. With Tassadit's statement that "France still colonizes Algeria" (*La France colonise encore l'Algérie*) we have clearly glided into the register of continuity.

Both Tassadit and Ali comment on the apparent paradox of post-independence migration to the former colonial power. The "colonial trauma" (Kinouani 2020; Lazali 2018; Lloyd 2000) clearly did not keep former colonial subjects from moving to France to improve their situation, on the contrary. Tassadit explained that immigrants "were searching for their wealth, they were searching for what you [the French] took" (informal discussion, 06/10/2017). She does not necessarily share this point of view but reports what she frequently hears in discussion with other Algerian immigrants. In the coming paragraph I focus on the more positive forms of continued relationships between former colonies and France.

*Between here and there through continuity in social networks and geographic spaces*  
The observation "we are here because you were there" is not necessarily used only in reference to negative stories. In discussions, positive stories also come up about links that were established and that continued after independence, notably through charity networks that were part of the colonial missionary project. The example Tassadit provided is that of the Saint Paul mission in Oran (interview, 27/05/2017). It was here that her family got medical treatment and that she learnt sewing skills. When her mother found herself in Grenoble as an undocumented immigrant and without any housing she went to Father Fréchet of the Saint Paul parish in Grenoble, who provided her with housing in a village close to Grenoble, in the village in which I happened to live. Tassadit pursued this link by volunteering in the parish's initiative to organize sewing classes and drew in some of her friends. It is interesting that a colonial missionary project is the reason why a group of

Muslim women volunteer at Saint Paul's. References to the colonial period, therefore, do not necessarily always have a negative connotation, sometimes continuities just are. They are part of life, just like time, and time moves on: it did not stand still after 1960. Just as time is continuous, so are geographic spaces.

Geographic spaces are made of connections. Tchetché-Apea spoke about a geographic continuity between here and there: "Quand tu fais la part entre le territoire ici et le territoire lointain, il y a quand même une continuité." (discussion circle, 23/02/2018). Observations about geographic continuity came up in several participants' stories, such as the one Mohamed B. told about how customs of one place and time travel to another as a result of the continuous nature of space. When disembarking from the boat that took him from Algeria to Marseille he was shocked that the segregation he was used to under colonial rule was maintained on French soil. There were separate queues for the identity checks on *pièds-noirs* and Algerians. The arrival in France was "in the image" of the colonial situation in Algeria.

Je me retrouvais face à deux couloirs dédiés au contrôle de police : l'un destiné aux pieds-noirs, poussés à l'exode et l'autre aux Algériens. (...) La cohabitation avec les pieds-noirs ne se faisait pas en Algérie, l'arrivée était donc à l'image de la manière dont nous avons vécu les uns avec les autres c'est-à-dire séparés. (Boukhatem 2014, 24)

There is a geographic continuity of people, boats, goods and ideas that travel between different spaces. The distinct treatment of Algerians and French, which was part of the colonial society became part of the French landscape. These displacements show the fallacy of clear distinctions between "here" and "there," and "then" and "now." From different stories I understood that Africa is only another continent in the European mind. For those who immigrated to France, the latter is an extension of the territory they came from. I understand that participants continue to live between here and there, and that they stay attached to several places that are all important to them and make up who they are. Place related identities add up but do not erase one another. The question, often posed to immigrants, "do you feel more Moroccan or French?" should be understood as a legacy of the binary thinking about national identity, which does not conceive of people's multiple identities. I observed that national borders are quite irrelevant for participant's experience of living on both sides of the Mediterranean, here AND there, as a continuous geographic space.

From these stories evoking different legacies of the colonial past in the form of representations, economic infrastructure, migration, and lasting relationships which were not necessarily negative, I now shift into a new register, that of the strategic use of the adjective "colonial" in order to denounce an unacceptable situation at present.



## 2.2.f) Strategy

A strategic use of drawing a parallel between the present and the colonial past has the function of denouncing a situation in the present. In this register people do not speak about continuity, analogy, or legacies but either legitimize their acts in the name of the colonial past or denounce the present current practices as “colonial” or “neo-colonial” for political purposes. In the first case, people justify individual behavior by a reference to the colonial past that can be summarized as “fuck France” (*emmerder la France*). In the second case, the use of “colonial” is a synonym for “bad” to talk about an injustice that urgently needs to be redressed, using the argument that a certain practice is out-dated.

### *Drawing a strategic parallel at an individual level - Fuck France for its colonial past in Algeria*

I quote Tassadit in the previous subsection, who said that Algerian immigrants in France came to get what the French took from them. In addition to being an illustration of the link participants make between “here” and “there,” this is a typical example of a strategic use of the colonial past on an individual level. Tassadit made this statement in a discussion with Ali, who commented that this type of discourse is rather frequent.

Tassadit : Moi je l’ai demandé à beaucoup de gens, qui disent : “Moi je prends la part de mon grand-père”. “Oui, Ils ont tué mon grand-père et ils ont pris sa richesse et moi je suis venu la chercher.”

Ali : Qu’est-ce qui dit ça ?

Tassadit : Une fille à l’université, une Algérienne.

Ali : Oui, oui c’est ça.

Tassadit : Il y a une dame qui avait dit : “Nous [les Français.es] sommes partis, vous [les Algérien.ne.s] nous avez suivis, pourquoi vous nous avez suivis ?” Elle [l’étudiante algérienne] a dit : “Vous [les Français.es] avez vécu 130 ans chez nous [les Algérien.ne.s] alors, moi aussi, je vais rester 130 ans chez vous. Quand je finirai les 130 ans, je pars.”

Ali : Oui c’est ce qu’on entend souvent hein ?

(Informal discussion, 06/10/2017)

The argument that France plundered Algeria can also be used as justification for delinquent activity nowadays in France, as Michelle explained. She said that “for those who are delinquent, it is a legitimate right”.

La France leur a emmerdés, a colonisé l'Algérie pendant 132 ans, maintenant c'est leur tour d'emmerder. L'histoire, qu'ils ne connaissent pas, leur sert. C'est une sélection de vérités. Vue l'injustice qu'a été administrée à leurs parents, ils ne trouvent pas anormal qu'ils font ça. La société leur a créé, ils le veulent à la société. (Michelle, interview, 15/03/2013)

There are several other people who gave accounts of a similar discourse, such as Moustapha, a private security guard at the Carrefour supermarket in Echirrolles. He told me during an informal conversation that some of the young people that steal, use the same

justification, that they steal to fuck (*emmerder*) France and that they feel legitimate to do so after “all France has done to us” (field notes, 10/10/2013). According to Moustapha they “take on a victim role” (*construisent une image de victime*) and “use the history for this purpose (*ils se servent de l’histoire*) but actually know quite little of it, e.g. they have little knowledge of the dates” (*Ibid.*). His white French Muslim wife commented a couple of days later that Moustapha’s statement may as well reflect his own view rather than that of the young people he deals with (field notes, 16/10/2013). When I ask Mayare whether this story or justification is common, she answers affirmatively, saying that she hears it all the time and that when she was younger, she could have said such things herself.

Mayare : C’est des choses que j’aurais pu dire quand j’étais plus jeune, quand j’étais... quand je ne savais pas vraiment d’où je venais et qui j’étais. Et voilà c’est ceux qui n’ont pas trouvé leur place, ceux qui n’ont peut-être pas essayé de le trouver parce qu’on a une part de responsabilité aussi, et oui, quand ils ne savaient pas trop quoi dire, surtout en cours, surtout au collège. Ça c’est plus des phrases qu’on entend au collège, quand le prof il nous fait chier on sort des phrases comme ça. [...] Le prof, au lieu de prendre le jeune comme un jeune, essaie de... et d’avoir une approche pédagogique avec lui bah il se met à son niveau et voilà c’est la guerre, c’est la colonisation épisode 2 quoi.

Claske : C’est pour provoquer ?

Mayare : Je ne sais pas ce qu’il pense mais c’est un mécanisme de défense en tout cas. (Interview, 07/07/2017)

Mayare explains this type of discourse as one of self-defense, to protect oneself against a society in which it is hard to find a place as a racialized immigrant. I come back to the issue of self-defense in chapter 5.

#### *Drawing a strategic parallel for a political purpose*

Drawing a parallel with the colonial past can have a strategic function if statements that fit this register take the form of public statements that are part of a form of political organizing. The issue therefore is not whether a statement is analytically correct, whether the present situation denounced by activists is indeed similar to the colonial period, but is the effect it produces. A typical example is the Appel des indigènes de la République, calling attention to the fact that inhabitants with links to the former colonies are still not fully considered as citizens, but as *indigènes* (see chapter 5). Two examples from my field research are the statement of Chaambi denouncing French foreign security policy, and a participant denouncing European migration policy.

Ça fait 30 ans qu'on parle de politique coloniale, ça fait 30 ans qu'on fait le lien entre la politique néo-coloniale ou coloniale tout court actuellement avec ce qui se passe au Mali, au Niger, en Afghanistan, en Syrie, en Irak etc. (Abdelaziz Chaambi, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

Abdelaziz Chaambi is an activist and is not really interested in the analytical exactitude of his statement, his goal is to call attention to a form of injustice. A participant refers to colonial history to denounce the fact that European Union pays countries such as Libya to hold back migrants:

M. Macron, raconte *Le Monde*, a dit qu'on n'avait pas "assez renvoyé de migrants dans leur pays" et en ce moment on fait pression sur les préfets pour les renvoyer. C'est de l'histoire coloniale. (UP debate, 08/12/2017)

Using references to the colonial period in a strategic way thus has the function of politicizing a situation, by framing a situation into a political problem. "Framing" is the term social movement scholars use for giving signification to a certain situation that activists seek to denounce. Calling a current situation "colonial" is an example of "generating an interpretative frame that does not only differ from existing ones but that may also challenge them" (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). Framing is a topic that has received extensive attention in sociology (Goffman 1986), in the American sociology of social movements (Gamson 1995; Benford and Snow 2000; Snow, Vliegenthart, and Ketelaars 2018) as well as its French equivalent (Hajjat and Mohammed 2013; Neveu 2011).

### *2.3 Conclusion: from connection between past and present to sources of information*

In the situations people evoked when using the adjective "colonial" or stories told in this context, roughly five themes emerged: references to a colonial mode of governance and public policies; feelings of inferiority and tensions around nationality, citizenship and French identity; reasons for migration; imbrication of race and class dynamics as an explanation for the question of marginalization; the hostility against Muslims and Islam in France.

It is not always easy to make a clear distinction between the four registers of continuity, analogy, legacy, and strategy that establish a link between the past and present because one person may refer to each of them at different moments in time and in reference to different situations. Even more so because people can use, in one train of thought, terms that point to different registers. In general though, participants use the continuity register with regard to a certain continuity in public policy; they use the analogy register to indicate that over time, the direct link between past and present is extended and harder to establish; they use the legacy register mostly with regard to a colonial representations that the current generation has inherited, but also in reference to the physical presence of the colonial past in statues and street names, to migration patterns and continued relationships; and finally they use the strategy register both to justify individual behavior and to denounce current practices for political purposes.

At the end of this section one can pose the question, what is the relevance of the colonial past for participants? From their stories and comments, I understand that it is not so much the past that counts but that through colonial references participants seek to make a statement about the present. In opposition to the mainstream approach that frames the

colonial issue as a historical one, *une question de mémoire*, I consider the interest in the colonial past in the neighborhood as a search for answers to pressing questions, that lead research participants back to the past. Participants wonder why they are being treated differently as racialized persons in France, why they generate fear in public space, how to explain their inferior social position, their concentration in certain neighborhoods, and the stigmatization of these spaces. From participants' stories, I understood that it was not so much in their families that they learned information about the colonial period. A question that came up therefore was where participants drew their information from, because in order to make a comparison between past and present one has to have some idea about the past.

### 3) Participants' sources of information about the colonial period

I started the UP cycle about what remains of the colonial past with the assumption that participants in commenting on the link between the past and present would evoke the memories transmitted in their families of what it was like to live under colonial rule. What most people recalled though, was the silence of their parents rather than stories recounting their direct experiences. Early on in my research my questions to Béchir oriented him towards family transmission, informed by this false assumption that this was an important source of information. Béchir informed me that few families openly speak about the colonial period and their migration to France: "*c'est une minorité qui discute 'd'où je viens, d'où je suis et pourquoi tu es là'*" (interview, 09/05/2016). In this section I explain that many participants spoke about the silence that reigned in their families (3.1). Older participants with direct experiences spoke about the dilemma of transmission, and the circumstances that drove them to break this silence (3.2); in other families stories about the colonial past were transmitted and were a source of information for participants (3.3); the question how to narrate the past and what to do with trauma, feelings of rancor and resentment remains relevant (3.4); in many cases it is not the stories about the past but children's observations of how their parents are treated in France that serves as a source of information (3.5).

This section draws on my analysis of the sources of information participants turn to in their discourse about the colonial period. In total I identified six sources of information: direct experience with colonial rule; indirect non-verbal transmission; oral transmission in families; indirect national education; media and social networks; activist networks and *éducation populaire*. They can be organized in three categories: the first is direct experience, the second is family transmission and the third are channels of information beyond the family [Figure 4.99]. Clearly, they are complementary, and participants drew on more than one source. In the context of this thesis I only deal with the first two categories because they deal with participants' direct and indirect experiences. Findings about other sources of information participants draw on in their references to the colonial past will be the topic of a separate article.

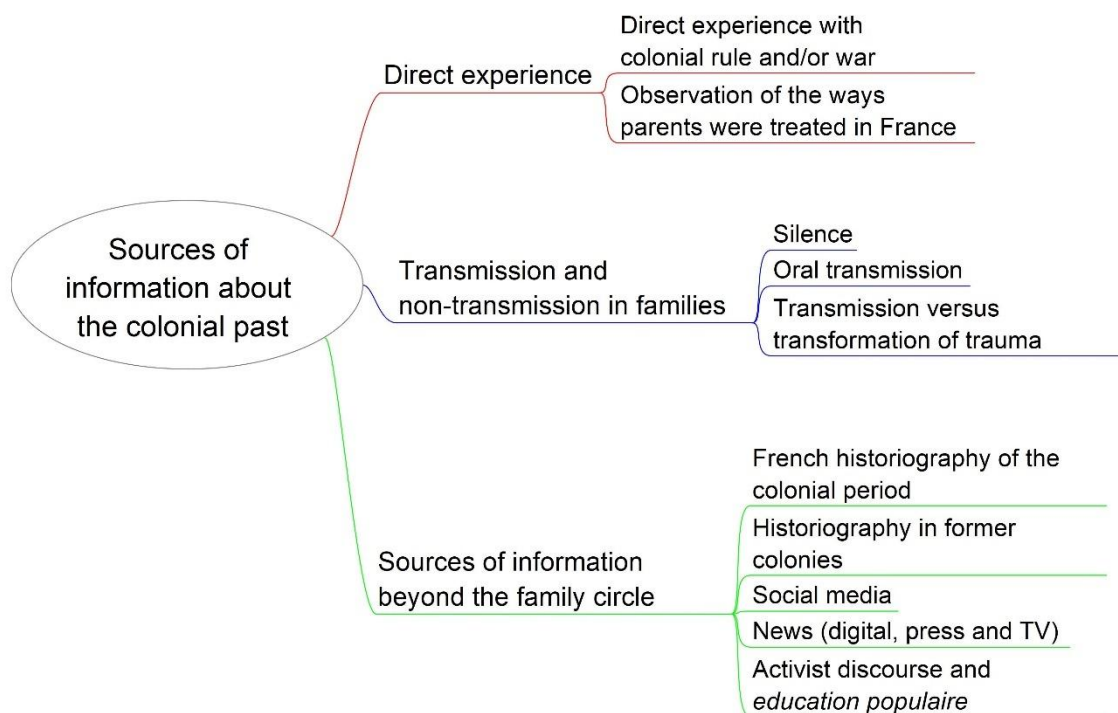


Figure 4.99 Mind map of research results about the sources of information about the colonial past.

### 3.1) Indirect non-verbal transmission through silence

Many participants insisted on the silence of parents with first-hand experience of the colonial period and in particular the Algerian war, either as civilians undergoing the effects of colonial rule and war, or as combatants in the French or liberation armies. Despite the fact that the silence about experiences during the colonial period might not directly provide concrete information, it is a form of transmission and a form of information. Children of these parents, such as Jean-Pierre, a youth worker in Villeneuve whose father never talked about his experience in the French Army in Algeria, spoke about how the past can be present through its silence.

During the first debate about the colonial past (UP debate, 13/10/2017), both Pierre, Mohamed B., Tassadit, and Claude mentioned the silences they imposed upon themselves. Claude, the doctor from Cameroon who was nostalgic about colonial health facilities, said for example: “I still have memories of the period of colonization, macabre details, but I’m not going to linger about them (*s’attarder là-dessus*)”. In an attempt to understand the reasons for this silence, Ali conjectured that parents did not want to “invade” their children with their painful experience because they wanted to give them the possibility to move on: “*ils ne nous ont pas envahis avec ça dans notre enfance parce qu’ils voulaient qu’on avance*” (UP meeting, 24/04/2017). Not burdening the next generation was part of his father’s desire to make a fresh start in France in the hope of a better, more prosperous future, by leaving economic hardship and dispossession behind in Algeria. Because while France was

responsible for past suffering during colonial rule, it simultaneously presented opportunities for immigrants' aspirations. Mohamed B. tells for example that when he arrived in Marseille it felt like a "myth, the start of the dream, the promise of ending misery, so much longed for by our fathers (*tant voulu par nos pères*)" (Boukhatem 2014, 23). There thus were important reasons for not transmitting traumatic experiences of the past.

### *3.2) Dilemmas around breaking the silence*

Some participants with direct experience of colonial rule or the Algerian war (Pierre, Mohamed B., Béchir) confirmed that, initially, they wanted to carry on with life and tried not to give too much space to memories of traumatic events. At some point though it seems that they did not have a choice but to face the memories that one cannot wipe out.

#### *Breaking the silence*

The first example of a participant who chose one day to break this silence is Pierre, the older  *pied-noir* from Tunisia, who joined the FLN after having deserted from the French army. It was only a couple of years ago that he finally accepted to look into his own past when he was invited to speak about his experience as a conscientious objector.

Quelque part, pendant extrêmement longtemps, j'avais largué mon passé, la guerre d'Algérie etc. Non pas que je n'y pensais plus... mais mes enfants me disaient "raconte nous, t'as fait la guerre, qu'est-ce que t'as fait etcetera, etcetera, mais je n'avais pas envie d'en parler. (Pierre, discussion circle, 07/07/2017).

He experienced "the shock of his life" when all these memories suddenly came back (*Ibid.*) and since then he has continued to share them because he considers it important that this history is known and transmitted.

The second example is of Mohamed B. who was confronted during a theater workshop with his traumatic experiences during the Algerian war. His memories of being a prisoner at the age of 16 came back suddenly: "*l'Algérie était revenue en moi de manière soudaine et violente*" (Boukhatem 2014, 43). What Mohamed B. has in common with Pierre is that memories resurfaced suddenly, making them aware of the fact they never left. They both stated in different ways that traumatic memories of violence mark one deeply. For Pierre it was the worker's strikes in Sfax that were crushed in a bloody way that marked him as a child.

Mon père était ouvrier à Sfax, dans la grosse entreprise de la ville. J'ai vécu mon enfance avec les grèves. J'avais sept ans, j'étais à mon balcon et j'ai vu ça, des chars qui passaient, les tirs de fusil, les gens par terre, le sang... Ça c'est des souvenirs qui marquent. (Pierre, UP debate, 13/10/2017)

Mohamed B. evoked that memories accompany one over time and across geographic space, tying one forever to a certain place: "*Car en chacun de nous, on n'oublie pas, on n'oublie rien. On ne quitte jamais l'Algérie*" (UP debate, 13/10/2017).

Despite the profound marks these traumatic experiences leave, it is not clear as to a child what to do with them. It is often later in life that one develops the analytical frameworks to interpret and give meaning to these events. Pierre dedicated his working life to carrying out research on worker's movements. For Mohamed B., it was at the moment of independence that he learnt "a lot of things" about the Algerian war and the French occupation because "tongues were being untied" (*les langues se sont déliées*). Nevertheless, he said that "many things with regard to the Algerian war still remain unspoken and silenced" (*Ibid.*). He grew up in a remote rural area and was not aware of what was going on in Algeria because his family did not speak about it and "didn't have any consciousness about the political events" (*Ibid.*). He linked this to the colonial situation, of being occupied, both physically and mentally "*plongé dans l'obscurantisme*" and considered to be "stupid and uncultured" (*Ibid.*). He admits to having internalized for example the discourse of the French army that the regrouping of people from villages in camps encircled with barbed wire was for their benefit, protecting them against terrorist attacks. Despite the fact that Mohamed B. is very vocal about his past, he admits that he also chooses to remain silent about some of the atrocities, not letting "these things get to the surface", leaving the Algerian war "in the silence we inherited" (*Ibid.*). Several people who took the floor during the cycle, and in particular during the three debate sessions about the colonial history of Algeria, expressed this ambiguity both regretting the silence and being actors of silence, continuing the silence they themselves had suffered from.

#### *The past as a burden and the dilemma of speaking about it*

Those denouncing silence about the past are, at times, active participants of this non-transmission, telling half-truths for the sake of reconciliation and to allow the next generation to project themselves in France, and in a positive future. Hamid, a friend of Mohamed B., is one of those participants who verbalized this dilemma between remembering the past and imagining the future. He asked the plenary what he should do as a witness of atrocities during the Algerian war (UP debate, 22/11/2017), should he talk about them?

Bonsoir tout le monde, je m'appelle Hamid. Ça fait 50 ans que je vis en France, j'ai des enfants, j'ai des petits-enfants et durant les événements... Peut-être j'ai fait partie de la famille qui a été la plus touchée durant la guerre d'Algérie. Puisque c'est quelque chose de négatif, qu'est-ce que je dois faire avec mes enfants ? Est-ce que je peux ou est-ce que je ne peux pas [leur en parler], puisque c'est quelque chose de négatif, même dans la société dans laquelle ils vivent. Je m'interroge. Je n'arrive pas à discuter avec mes enfants de ces faits. (Participant, UP debate, 22/11/2017)

One of the participants in the audience, Béchir, responded: "*Parle, parle, la parole libère*". In a private discussion later on Hamid explained that the atrocity he referred to concerned a rape scene: "*on ne peut pas raconter ça*". He wondered what can be, or should be, transmitted to the next generations and what cannot: "if it was something positive, it would

be good [to share]" but, what if it is not (*Ibid.*)? Hamid's question confirms Ali's guess that parents kept silent in order not to burden the next generation.

The term burden or weight (*poids*) comes back frequently when describing how the past is still present. In discussion with Béchir I asked whether the older generation, with direct colonial experience, still carries a form of anger. He answers negatively:

Claske : Est-ce que la génération qui l'a vécue porte une colère ?

Béchir : Je ne dirais pas une colère, c'est un poids.

(Interview, 09/05/2016)

The burden (*poids*) of the past was also evoked by Michelle, quoted earlier about young people's feeling entitled to "*emmerder la France*". She said "the colonization and the war were heavy (*lourdes*)", and her parents didn't talk about it either (interview, 15/03/2013). Stories about the burden of the past concerned both sides of the Algerian war.

Michel, an older neighborhood inhabitant (82 years) asked the microphone one evening during a debate about the Algerian war, to tell that he was part of the French army in Algeria and that many of his colleagues' lives are still impacted by the war. Traumatized, they had not been able to share their painful experiences with their families.

Je connais quantité de collègues qui ont été en Algérie qui n'ont jamais parlé à leurs familles ce qu'ils ont fait, qui ont vécu une vie d'enfer jusqu'aujourd'hui. Ils ont vécu pendant plus de 18 mois en Algérie, ont vécu tous les massacres dont on a parlé ce soir. (...) Ils commencent à parler 60 ans après ce qu'ils ont vécu et à dire à leurs enfants la honte qu'ils ressentent encore aujourd'hui. Quantité de collègues d'autrefois vivent aujourd'hui très très mal, assument très très mal ce passé de combattant. (UP debate, 22/11/2017)

Leo, an older retired factory worker told a similar story about a friend who got married after his military service in Algeria. The evening before the ceremony he confided in Leo:

Bon voilà, j'ai emmené des types à la torture. Je ne suis pas croyant, je ne veux pas me confesser à un curé, je ne vais pas le dire à ma future femme, jamais à mes parents, donc je le dis à toi. (Participant, UP debate, 22/11/2017).

Leo commented that "this silence has crushed at least two generations". He regrets that neither civil society, political organizations, nor labour unions have been capable of listening to these stories. The only option for those carrying this painful memory has been "to bloody deal with it" (*Ibid.*).

It is interesting to observe that Michel, while starting to speak about himself, quickly shifted to the experiences of his colleagues when calling attention to their suffering as a veteran of the French army. Participants in the Université populaire regularly used the register of telling a story through evoking the lives of others. I wonder whether these stories were not just as much about themselves, and whether this serves as a means to create some distance and to reduce self exposure on sensitive issues.



### 3.3) Direct oral transmission

Among participants, there were also stories on how information about the colonial period was shared in their family. Jouda was such an example.

J'ai des souvenirs de ce qu'on me racontait, qui sont de l'ordre de la ségrégation. Euh, les Tunisiens et les autres... Le fait de ne pas avoir le droit d'aller nager sur les plages ou de fréquenter certains quartiers... Ça c'est une histoire qu'on m'a racontée. (Discussion circle, 07/07/2017).

At the same time, she admits that she belongs to a generation that spoke little of these questions (*une génération où on en parlait peu*) (*Ibid.*). This is probably why she spoke of “history as a dotted line”, as a history that is both present and absent at the same time.

The clearest example of direct oral transmission is that of a participant in the debate on the Algerian colonial history. After the presentation of Antonin Plarier, a PhD student in History dealing with the period from 1830 to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this participant took the floor to state that this historian may (re)present history but that she “really” knows this history as her parents and forefathers passed it on to her. She was quite unsettled that the version Antonin presents differs from her version; “the truth” (field notes, 20/11/2017). Mayare, a 20-year old woman who was born in Algeria and who moved early in her childhood with her parents to France, is a third and final example of people who specifically give an account of history via family transmission. Her grand-father was a combatant for the FLN, which to her family is still an important source of pride.

C'est une fierté. Mon grand-père maternel est mort pas longtemps après [l'indépendance], mais mon grand-père paternel est encore en vie, donc chaque fois qu'on le voit, il raconte. Il raconte toujours la même histoire et on l'écoute toujours. C'est toujours des moments magiques et dont on est fier. Ça fait partie de mon identité. (Mayare, interview, 07/07/2017)

What these stories have in common is that transmission took place in families with a heroic or positive story, of having fought for Algerian independence. In Colonna's (2007) work on family trees of *pieds-noirs* families in Algeria he found that the stories of the more affluent and socially distinguished family lines are more often transmitted and thus better known than those who were socially less well-off. I formulate the hypothesis that this is not only true for social status but also for other forms of distinction, such as war heroism. Through research participants I understand that having a family member that fought for the FLN, continues to be a factor of distinction among Algerian families. Mayare confirmed this when she told a story about a friend of hers who comes from a *harki* family.

On n'en parle pas. Elle sait que nous savons [que son grand-père était *harki*] mais nous n'en parlons pas. (...) Au final tout le monde s'est rendu compte quel côté il aurait fallu prendre et moi je pense qu'il ne sont pas... les familles que je connais [qui étaient du 'mauvais' côté], n'en parlent pas du tout. C'est quelque chose qu'on a oublié, on le met dans un tiroir et on n'est pas responsable et on

ne veut pas en parler, on ne veut pas s'expliquer là-dessus. Du coup par rapport à l'Algérie, pour eux ça doit être super compliqué et par rapport à ici, les gens ne font pas forcément la différence entre Algériens. (...) Moi je l'amène parce que j'en suis fière mais si je n'en étais pas fière je pourrais tout à fait le mettre de côté parce que je n'ai pas un lien direct avec ça on va dire.

(Mayare, interview, 07/07/2017)

It is thus very likely that family transmission particularly took place in those Algerian families who were politically active, and who were on the victor's side. They recognize themselves in the Algerian national narrative, but for those with an alternative story, either coming from families with little political consciousness or who found themselves on the losing side (e.g. *harki*), this transmission is more complicated.

Another possible reason for the transmission or non-transmission of stories about the colonial past is the moment people left Algeria. Tassadit and Ali agree that there is a large difference between immigrants who came to France in the 1960s and those who came in the 1990s after staying in Algeria during the dark decade. The atrocities and terrorist violence in the 1990s civil war chased away the memories of colonial atrocities. According to her, this terrorist violence showed that "violence could come from anywhere or anyone".

On a vécu des années noires. Les peurs... Dans les villes comme dans les villages. Il y a des gens qui ont quitté leurs terres pour s'évader des terroristes. C'était terrible d'accord ? Et peut-être ça, ça a raisonné les gens, les gens qui avaient la haine contre la colonisation. Ça a fait oublier ça, parce que cette génération, on l'a vécu. C'est pour ça que cette génération, on ne peut pas dire qu'elle a la haine contre la colonisation ou quoi... Parce qu'elle a surtout la haine contre les terroristes. Et eux c'était des Arabes, pas que des Européens. C'était nos propres enfants. (Tassadit, interview, 24/05/2017).

Tassadit is the first person in my research to mention this analysis. When she shared it with Ali he confirmed that he heard this before, in Algeria (informal discussion, 06/10/2017). New traumatic experiences seem to push older painful experiences to the background if no direct relationship is established between them. Tassadit opposed two forms of enemies, the terrorists ("our sons") and the French (as others, foreigners). Algerian immigrants who already lived in France, or younger generations born in France, did not have the same experience of the Algerian armed conflict in the 1990s, and might therefore be more likely to refer to the colonial past. However, Tassadit's example does not mean that colonial memory is not kept alive by some parts of the population in Algeria, and especially by those in power. Several references mentioned the continuation of colonial memory through official information channels, notably in Algeria.

### 3.4) *Transmission versus transformation of trauma*

This section deals with how families filter and transform past traumatic experiences related to the French colonial presence in its former colonies. It first looks at transmission of hatred in *pieds-noirs* families, second at attempts of non-transmission, third at resentment among Algerians and stories about revenge about past wrongdoings.

#### *Transmission of hatred among pieds-noirs*

Here I deal with the accounts of hostility, resentment, and even hatred, which participants of Algerian origin (Ali and Tassadit) attributed to “*pieds-noirs*”, and which two *pieds-noirs* themselves (Pierre and Elisabeth) or children of *pieds-noirs* parents confirmed. Ali gave the example of Elisabeth and compares her resentment with his fathers’, who also had to give up his land.

Quand je rencontre des pieds-noirs qui ont une telle haine dans la bouche, mais bon sang pourquoi autant de haine ? Je n’ai même pas entendu autant de haine de la part de mon père, alors qu’on lui a enlevé sa terre qui était l’héritage de ses ancêtres. (Ali, UP meeting, 24/04/2017)

Pierre, himself from a *pieds-noirs* family, felt that the ideology *pieds-noirs* exported to France is a real problem today.

Si vous saviez toute l'idéologie que les pieds-noirs ont ramené avec eux d'Algérie... D'ailleurs c'est un problème aujourd'hui ! Dans des régions de France, c'est un sacré problème. (Pierre, discussion circle, 07/07/2017).

When Pierre mentioned “certain regions”, he referred notably to the South of France, the region where most repatriated *pieds-noirs* settled after Algerian independence (Savarese 2006). The South is also an important stronghold of the extreme right party the Front National (*L'Express*, 22/02/2017).<sup>206</sup> For Tassadit Marine le Pen and her father are good examples of the consequences of perpetuating hatred: “what he [father] experienced, he transmitted to his children” (interview, 27/4/2017).<sup>207</sup> An acquaintance of Ali explained her support for the Front National by evoking her mother’s history as *piéd-noir* and how she had been obliged to leave Algeria. Ali expressed despair over this transmitted hatred, which he compared to the injustice his parents had experienced and which they did not transmit to their children; “*quand j’entends mon père, ma mère, frappés, maltraités par les français, paysans etc. ils n’ont pas autant de haine dans leur bouche quoi*” (UP meeting, 24/04/2017). The pain of the past remains a problem when anger about it continues to be transmitted and individuals are held accountable for things that are not their responsibility, which is the case

206 “Les cartes de France du vote FN sous le signe du social”, *L'Express*, [https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/elections/les-cartes-de-france-du-vote-fn-sous-le-signe-du-social\\_1881726.html](https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/elections/les-cartes-de-france-du-vote-fn-sous-le-signe-du-social_1881726.html), accessed 28/09/2020.

207 They are key figures of the extreme right in France. The president of the Front National (in the period 1972-2011) Jean-Marie Le Pen participated in two colonial wars, one in Indochina and the second in Algeria, during the Battle of Algiers.

of the “Arab” youth here in France. This hatred not only belongs to the past, but “continues to be fed”, according to Ali.

Cette haine est entretenue. Par qui, par quoi ? Du coup la situation est hyper compliquée parce qu'elle est véhiculée. (Ali, informal discussion, 06/10/2017)

Ali wondered what happened, or rather what did not happen to make that this feeling is so strong. Having Elisabeth in mind, he asked “what path has not been walked” (*quel chemin vous n'avez pas parcouru*) in the sense of a mourning process that has not been accomplished or a history that has not been digested, if one is still physically affected to such an extent by the sounds of the Algerian national anthem that it makes one feel like vomiting. This rancor expressed itself for example through questioning the legitimacy of North African immigrants or Arab presence in France (*ibid.*), as the following example from Tassadit confirms. She personally experienced the wrath of a *pied-noir* woman for whom she worked as a cleaning lady. What remains of the colonial past, for her, is this hatred.

Il reste [de la période coloniale] que les Français se souviennent bien des gens qui les ont chassés de l'Algérie. Il est resté beaucoup de haine qu'ils ont transmise à leurs enfants. C'est ce que j'ai vécu avec une dame chez qui j'ai travaillé pendant trois ou quatre mois. Elle m'a dit : “Je sais ce qu'ils [les Algériens] ont fait à mes enfants. Je vous déteste tous. Pourquoi vous êtes venus ici ? La France ne peut pas accueillir tout le monde. (...) Vous allez nous coloniser comme ça si vous venez tous là”. (Tassadit, informal discussion, 06/10/2017)

I already discussed Tassadit's answer that she is here in France because the French were in Algeria, but she would not say such as thing to this lady. She admitted that she does not speak her mind in discussions: “we [Algerians] know” but we “don't tell the truth [about colonial history] because we don't want to hurt them [the French]” (interview, 27/05/2017). Both Tassadit and Ali are concerned with not transmitting and not becoming part of this hatred.

#### *Transcending painful experiences to avoid transmission of hatred*

Ali was not educated in “this hatred of the other” and his father told him “if you respect others, you will be respected” (Ali, UP meeting, 24/04/2017) and Tassadit cites the role of her grandmother in not transmitting hatred, she instead tried to transcend her feelings of loss and anger, saying, “*si vous allez toujours être dans le chagrin et le passé, vous n'allez pas vivre*” (UP debate, 13/10/2017). So, as a family involved with the FLN, there was direct verbal transmission about colonial rule and the Algerian war, but this transmission came in a filtered form. Tassadit's grandmother served as a sort of buffer between the past and the present, protecting the younger generation and wanting to free them from the burden of the past, by teaching them love instead, a decision beyond all doubt inspired by a religious or spiritual practice. Her example is one of active transformation of a painful past into a liveable future. Tassadit feels that each generation “should live its life” (*chacun vit sa vie*) and now it is up to her generation, who did not experience these atrocities, “to live” theirs

(*Ibid.*). Tassadit and Ali's stories of non-transmission are obviously not representative of all Algerian families.

### *Resentment in Algerian families*

Transmission of hatred or distrust is also present in Algerian families. For example, Jouda's father once told her that: "the French don't like us, [and will never like us], we will always remain Arabs" (UP meeting, 03/07/2017). The impossibility of making peace with the present is what will bring people to draw on the past. Tassadit associates the transmission of hatred among Algerians with the generation of migrants who came directly to France [just after colonization and that did not experience the civil war]. I cannot verify Tassadit's statement, but there are more factors to take into account with feelings of hatred and distrust such as one's social position in French society, one's political consciousness, and the opportunities one was given in France. The expressions of hatred or hostility she observed among Algerian immigrants in articulation with the colonial past is stronger in France than in Algeria, according to her, in particular among the young people cited earlier. Their discourse about "*emmerder la France*" clearly makes a reference to colonial injustice. When I asked her to explain what she meant when she stated that some people who move to France want to "take revenge", she answers by saying that "they want to get rich while the euro is strong and the dinar is weak".

C'est comme s'ils sont en train de récupérer ce qui leur appartient, à leurs pères et leurs grand-pères. Les gens parlent ici que leurs grands-pères ont créé la France et que la France n'était pas comme ça. (Tassadit, interview, 15/03/2013)

Such a story of revenge was also mentioned by Mamedou, who set his story at the moment of independence in Mauritania, where they justified stealing in the name of vengeance for what France had taken from their country (UP debate, 13/10/2017).

Quand j'avais 15 ans, on était dans la rue avec des amis après avoir joué au football. On a commencé à parler de la France, à dire que la France nous avait colonisés : "La France nous a tout pris, nos pères, nos grands-pères..." et, à ce moment-là, il y avait un petit Français qui passait. Il était parti acheter du pain et on l'a attaqué. C'était peut-être de la délinquance mais c'était aussi une question de vengeance. C'était quelque chose de spontané, mais pas méchant. On lui a pris son pain, on l'a mangé, c'est tout. (Mamedou, UP debate, 13/10/2017).

The story of Mamedou is also an example of how a group of peers is a source of information about colonial issues. An additional channel of information needs further discussion, which is the knowledge that a generation obtained through indirect transmission, through observation by youth that did not live during the colonial period, but who were witness to the way their parents were and are treated.

### 3.5) Direct experience with inferiorization in France

In this section I focus on the link that participants make between the past and present, through observation of the treatment in France of immigrants from former colonies in the period that followed decolonization. Emotions play an important role in this source of information. A generation who was born in France or who arrived during childhood observed how their parents were treated, leaving them with a feeling of injustice and powerlessness.

Some participants were of the opinion that, as direct experience is declining, the colonial question equally loses its relevance. Henri for example said that “we are now 60 years further with people who, for the most part, have not experienced this period” (UP meeting, 05/05/2017).

Academic research about the intergenerational transmission of trauma, also amongst those without a direct experience with colonial rule or war contradict this position (Kinouani 2020; 2021). Stories from participants confirm this, as the following five examples demonstrate.

The first example is that of Michelle. Despite the fact that her generation did not “know the history”, she and her peers did observe and experience the different way in which their parents and they themselves were treated. She explained:

Je voulais dire que chacun a son histoire, ce qu'il vit chez lui. Ça joue sur chaque enfant. (...) La colonisation et la guerre étaient lourdes. Les parents n'en parlaient pas. Certains enfants ont vu leur pères ou grand-parents ne pas être reconnus et eux non-plus ne se sentent pas reconnus. On est français mais on ne nous traite pas comme des français. (Michelle, interview, 15/03/2013).

The second is of Béchir who spoke of the legacy of colonialism, in particular in contact with institutions and through the gaze (*regard*) French people have on immigrants as well as the feeling for some people of being “still in a situation ‘in-between’, not really belonging in France but not in the country of their parents’ origin either” (interview, 09/05/2016). The third example is from Tassadit, who mentioned that the wounds of the (Algerian) war do not heal, but “remain open”, because of “a lack of well-being (*mal-vivre*) in France”: “there are people for whom nothing changed, maybe they feel that they are still strangers” (interview, 27/05/2017). The fourth is Henri. Although he did not think that colonialism was a pertinent angle from which to understand the present, he did insist on “the transmission of exile” by which he understood that children “have observed the way their parents were treated, even if they [children] succeeded in society” (UP meeting, 05/05/2017). Finally, Tchetché-Apea stressed that it is in particular his parents’ relationship to the State that marked him and that brought him to the issue of colonialism. When he was challenged by one of the (academic) participants of the audience asking him in whose name he spoke and to what extent he represented racialized inhabitants, as activist and highly educated, he countered that he drew on real life experiences, on his observations of the way the French State treated his parents’ generation. He qualifies the latter as colonial, and insists on the lack of recognition,

the inferiorization, and the subaltern place they were attributed in society. He finds this was implicitly transmitted to his generation, not through words but through his parents' defeat: the dreams and aspirations they had to give up.

Par exemple, je vois dans ma famille, mais aussi dans celle des autres, ce qui nous a été transmis. C'est le rapport à l'État français, comment les anciens étaient considérés, quel statut ils avaient, quelle place ils avaient. (...) Ce à quoi ils ont dû renoncer, ce qu'ils ont vu transformer, ce qu'ils ont vécu aussi en termes de spoliation, en termes de domination et ça... (Tchetche-Apea, discussion circle, 23/02/2018)

Parents might never have said a negative word about the French or colonization but young people reaching adulthood observed them, and constructed their own interpretative framework in combination with other means of socialization.

I focused in this section on experience and observation in the period that followed decolonization as a source of information about the colonial period. For the participants cited in this subsection, it is immigrants' and racialized inhabitants' inferior social position that brought them to the issue of colonialism.

## Conclusion

This chapter dealt with two questions: what do people mean with the term "colonial" in debates, meetings and interviews; and which sources of information do they draw on. The cycle of debates about the legacies of the colonial past organized by the University populaire helped to answer these questions. From these debates it became clear that participants characterized situations or practices as "colonial" in reference to a wide variety of discussion topics, this range including stories about discrimination or racism to spatial segregation and the concentration of racialized people in certain neighborhoods of the city; the Algerian war; French military intervention in former colonies; patronizing attitudes; the difficulty to make oneself heard in civil society organizations and public meetings; the discourse about "integration" and the narrow and racialized conception of who is considered as French and who is not. French foreign and security policy in its overseas territories, former colonies and beyond in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria also played an important role in making the colonial past particularly relevant for participants.

The sources of information about the colonial past that participants drew on in their statements and stories evoking the adverb "colonial" are multiple. I had to reject my initial hypothesis that their principal source of information would be oral transmission in families. Issues around colonialism and independence wars have been silenced for many years in families from former colonies, in French families who participated in these wars, and in French society at large. Participants' knowledge about the colonial past is rather a *bricolage* (Garlitz 2015; Lévi-Strauss 2009) and draws on a mix of sources at hand: oral transmission in families (despite the fact that silence was prevalent) and direct observation of humiliation

are complemented by secondary sources of information. Research participants obtained information from national education, TV, press, digital and social media, and interpreted this information in their own manner, depending on their social position, their political awareness and orientation, and on the context (e.g. the examples people gave of the neo-colonial characteristics of French foreign policy were informed by recent news events).

In the next chapter, I focus on one of the aspects participants brought up in their references to the colonial past: the (im)possibility of being considered as a French citizen, as this is the link I make between the colonial past and present.



## Chapter 5. The impossibility of citizenship for racialized MSHN inhabitants

La gestion coloniale en termes de gestion c'est aussi la question du statut des Français qui se reconnaissent en tant que tel mais qui ne sont pas toujours reconnus par cet Etat et cette société.

(Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea, discussion circle, 23/02/2018)

Aujourd'hui, on ne dit pas que les enfants qui sont nés ici sont Français, ils sont "d'origine de". [...]. La France les appelle "les étrangers" et pourtant ce sont des enfants qui sont nés ici et qui sont exclus dans leur pays d'origine, mais on ne parle pas de cela. La France a un passé...

(Participant, UP debate, 11/03/2015)

In this chapter I argue that the experience of second-class citizenship status, evoked in the quotes above, is one of the keys to understanding why the colonial past is still relevant for Université populaire participants. One of the specificities of colonial rule was that it adopted a variety of citizenship regimes. The authors of the *Appel des Indigènes de la République* (Manifesto of the "Indigenous" of the Republic, 2005) placed the citizenship status of post-colonial immigrants in France at the center of current public debate. By choosing to refer to themselves as "*les Indigènes de la République*", as colonial subjects in the Republic, they clearly invoke colonial rule in order to denounce their second-class citizenship status in present day France. Racialized participants in my research expressed that they are regularly made to feel different and out of place in France; that they have to assimilate, to adapt, that they have to be grateful to be in France, and that they are denied the right to difference. Even if they have formal rights there are still obstacles that prevent them from being considered French citizens. I sought to situate these stories within existing research on citizenship. The definition of citizenship I use in this chapter is not limited to formal membership of a political community, but should be understood in a broader sense with regard to an array of civil, political, and social rights available to people, therefore also referred to as "substantive citizenship" (Holston 1999, 52).

Research participants rarely evoked the issue of "citizenship" literally in their stories, nor did they make direct links between citizenship status in the French colonies and in the here and now in France (apart from invited speakers and participants cited in the next section). It is the stories about their embodied experiences of inequality; of not having a place in France, of having the feeling that they don't count as much; and their observations that they cannot speak that led me to establish the connection between past and present citizenship issues.

Based on existent literature and research participants' stories, I define citizenship as follows:

- A citizen is equal to his/her fellow citizens
- A citizen of France is recognized and considered French, and referred to as "French"
- A citizen has the right to be defended by the State and is considered worth defending
- A citizen has the right to claim rights

In this chapter I discuss in what ways racialized inhabitants of Villeneuve feel that they are not treated as equals, not considered French, not considered worth defending, and finally, are not granted the right to claim rights. In comparison to other chapters, this chapter draws on a wide range of field material: data from the Université populaire, field notes from my involvement in Agir pour la Paix (APLP), as well as field notes from a number of public events organized by the collectives with which I collaborated (see appendix 3).

The first section of this chapter briefly presents a disagreement between participants of the Université populaire on whether citizenship issues at present can be understood as a legacy of the past. It then places this disagreement within a theoretical discussion of citizenship, and provides background information about differential degrees of citizenship throughout the colonial period. Sections 2-5 present my field data: the second section discusses the embodied, everyday experiences of inequality that make full-right citizenship impossible for racialized inhabitants of MSHN; the third section points to the internalization of inferiority as a factor of impossible citizenship; the fourth section deals with the terms that discursively place racialized inhabitants outside of the nation; the fifth section describes how participants feel they are not considered worth defending. I conclude with the observation that not being recognized as a citizen means that one is denied the right to claim rights.

### 1) Citizenship - a question of the colonial past and present

Differential citizenship where not all nationals have access to the same social, political, and economic rights, or “fragmented citizenship” (Urban 2017) is both a feature of France’s colonial past and its present, albeit in different ways.

#### *1.1) The Manifesto of the “Indigenous” of the Republic, establishing a link between past and present*

The Manifesto of the “Indigenous” of the Republic problematized the colonial question in present-day France through insisting on the second-class status of post-colonial immigrants in France.<sup>208</sup> Its authors, who consist of academics, activists, and members of CSOs, stated that in 2005, in France, the people with links to former French colonies are still not fully considered as citizens. The French term *indigène* can be literally translated as indigenous in English, but it does not have the same connotations. It is a direct reference to the *Code de l’Indigénat*,<sup>209</sup> a specific regime for colonial subjects with their own set of rights, customs,

<sup>208</sup> The Manifesto was the founding moment of the *Mouvement des Indigènes de la République*, which formed into a political party in 2008 (P.I.R. *Parti des Indigènes de la République*). Despite the fact that the Manifesto has been the most audible argument of a “colonial continuum” in recent years, it is not the first to politically make this analysis. The *Mouvement de l’Immigration et des Banlieues* (MIB) already did so in 1997, but it did not get the same amount of media attention.

<sup>209</sup> In the colonies and the provinces (*départements*) of French Algeria a specific set of laws was applied in the period from 1887-1946 (1881 in Algeria), called the *Code de l’indigénat* (Urban 2017). It defined a series of restrictions and special sanctions that were only applicable to the colonized (*indigènes*). This specific penal

and institutions, which instituted a legal hierarchy of citizenship (for a detailed discussion, see Le Cour Grandmaison 2010; Thénault 2014). In French the term carries the emotional and political weight of former colonial institutions. When the authors established this link between past and present, they warned that they were not implying that one can directly transpose the colonial past pre-1960 to the present, nor that one can literally speak of colonial subjects. Its use in post-colonial France in 2005 has the clear political objective of opening societal debate about the present situation of post-colonial immigrants in France. It highlighted the apparent contradiction, already present in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, between specific regimes for “*indigènes*” and the Republican ideal of equality, liberty, and fraternity. The objective of the text was to draw attention to processes of segregation, racialization and subalternization in French society. The authors of the manifesto point to a disconnection between French nationality and citizenship by asserting that French nationals with links to former colonies are granted only second-class citizen status. A difference with the past is that their current subaltern status is not legal and codified, but rather implicit and informal. The authors of the manifesto draw a direct connection between MSHN and France’s colonial past: “Independently of their real origins (*origins effectives*), those that live in ‘*quartiers*’ [MSHN] are ‘indigenized’ and relegated to the margins of society” (Manifesto, 2005).<sup>210</sup> To be indigenized means, in this context, to be associated with a former French colony where one would be ‘indigenous’, a place where one supposedly really belongs and that one supposedly should call home despite French nationality. While the *Code de l’Indigénat* provided specific rights for specific people, the authors claim that those indigenized in France nowadays are also denied their full rights: “equality before the law is not respected and laws in themselves are not always equal” (Manifesto, 2005).

### *1.2) The claims of the manifesto subject to debate in the Université populaire*

The question whether the term *indigènes* is still relevant in France in 2005, in reference to the experience of its post-colonial immigrants and racialized nationals, was a subject of debate at the Université populaire.<sup>211</sup> One participant disagreed on the basis that citizenship rights and equality before the law are guaranteed in modern day France.

Si on parle de question coloniale, il ne faut jamais oublier qu'au moment colonial, dans les colonies, l'indigène n'a aucun pouvoir. Il n'a même pas de droits. La question de l'indigène en Algérie, telle qu'elle se pose, est vraiment juridique sur des questions de légitimité. Nous ne sommes plus dans ce contexte-là.  
(Participant 1, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

regime was not applied in France’s protectorates, mandates, nor in its “old colonies” (Saint-Louis, the Isle of Gorée in Senegal; Pondicherry and former slave colonies in the Antilles).

<sup>210</sup> “Nous sommes des indigènes de la République”, <http://indigenes-republique.fr/le-p-i-r/appel-des-indigenes-de-la-republique/>, accessed 10/03/2015.

<sup>211</sup> Debate evening “Mixité sociale, injonction à vivre ensemble, quelle gestion pour les quartiers?” which took place on 26/04/2018 at the *Cordée*.

Another participant agreed that a direct analogy between the legal situation in the past and present is unjustified, and is even “an insult to the memory of victims of colonization,” but nevertheless, he feels that there is a form of continuity.

Chaque fois qu'on aborde la question [du continuum colonial], on se fait traiter de paranoïaque, on nous dit que c'est faire insulte aux victimes. Et c'est vrai, car faire une analogie directe entre la situation des banlieues et la situation qui était celle des indigènes dans les pays colonisés, est une véritable insulte à la mémoire des victimes de la colonisation. Néanmoins, il y a quand même un certain nombre de choses qui nous permettent de faire des analogies ou de penser à un certain continuum. (Participant 2, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

This participant was very much interested in finding these links between the colonial past and present and was unsatisfied with the answers provided by the speakers, which lacked clarity in establishing this link:

Je reste sur ma faim car on ne parle pas de la clé qui est l'articulation entre la question des quartiers populaires et des banlieues et la question de l'histoire coloniale. [...] Je trouve que vous n'avez donné aucune articulation entre présent et passé. (*Ibid.*)

For Tchetché-Apea this articulation between past and present lies in the ongoing lack of recognition of post-colonial immigrants as full French citizens, and in the unequal access to employment and education.

On est dans cette problématique qui fait penser aux situations d'antan qui sont transmises par nos parents et par l'histoire. Évidemment, on n'est pas dans la même situation que dans les années 40, 50, 60, c'est un lieu commun. En même temps, les problèmes existent toujours, pour avoir accès à tel emploi, pour faire de telles études, pour être reconnu. On parle beaucoup de l'Islam, on sait que quand on est une femme voilée dans la société française, on a énormément de difficultés. Toutes ces questions mènent au refus d'accepter la situation et à une volonté d'être considéré autrement, donc conduisent à s'exprimer et à s'organiser, ce qui pose problème à la société française. (Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

These quotes clearly demonstrate that there is no consensus among research participants (including the invited speakers) on the link between past and present. My point here is not to insist that the same conditions apply today as during the colonial past, nor that they are a direct consequence of this past; my point is that one of the reasons why this past remains relevant is that people in France still feel treated as second-class citizens. This is particularly the case if they live in MSHN. The rest of this section therefore discusses fragmented French citizenship during colonial times, and how I connect it to the present.

### *1.3) Nationality without citizenship, a colonial condition*

Rather than apprehending citizenship in the strict sense of “the capacity to participate in the exercise of national sovereignty through the right to vote” as is the case of most work on

citizenship, Spire interprets citizenship in a larger sense, as “the capacity to exercise an ensemble of economic, political and social rights” (Spire 2003, 48). Citizenship therefore refers to “all the rights that derive from belonging to a political community” (*Ibid.*). It needs to be distinct from nationality, the latter being defined as “the juridical and political affiliation of a person to the constituent people of the State” (*Ibid.*). These notions only partially overlap when for example white women in France were recognized as French nationals but were denied political rights until 1944. The Republic’s ambiguous position with regard to women who were constitutive of the State but not of the political community is what Scott has called “paradoxical citizenship” (1998). This paradoxical situation also applied to colonial subjects as French nationals that were denied French citizenship. Urban demonstrates this ambiguity most clearly with regard to the 1930 Constitutional law: “Citizenship belongs in principle to each French citizen over 21 years [apart from women], but each subject of France is not a French subject and each French subject is not a citizen” (2017, 152). A citizen can only be a “French subject of masculine sex” (*Ibid.*). Urban adds that:

Those excluded from the right to vote are foreigners, who aren’t subjects of France; *indigènes* of French colonies and Algeria who had not been naturalized [the large majority] and who are therefore subjects of France but not French subjects; and French women who are French subjects but are not full-right French citizens as they are denied the right to vote.  
<sup>212</sup> (Urban 2017, 152).

This confusing situation is what Urban calls the “fragmentation of French citizenship” (2017, 10). This idea of fragmentation, that all nationals cannot claim the same citizenship rights, is helpful for understanding the stories of research participants about their experiences of differential treatment. In the coming subsections (1.3 – 1.7), I provide further background information about the construction and institutionalization of difference during colonial rule.

France’s colonial history was quite exceptional in that its “colonial enterprise perfectly joined the emergent ideological system of republicanism” (Bancel and Blanchard 2005, 38). The act of conquest was epistemologically turned into a movement of natural extension of the Republic, that would gradually assimilate or integrate the ‘other’ subjects that lacked civilization. Mainstream racial discourse in 19<sup>th</sup> century post-revolutionary France made a distinction between “Whites” and non-European populations to whom republican principles could only be applied in time (Bancel and Blanchard 2005, 39). The French revolution paved the way for the first Republic by changing the status of subjects into citizens. But while France had become a nation with citizens, it remained at the same time an empire with

<sup>212</sup> In French: “[La citoyenneté] appartient en principe à tout citoyen français majeur de 21 ans, mais elle n’appartient qu’au citoyen français; or tout sujet de la France n’est pas sujet français et tout sujet français n’est pas citoyen. Le citoyen est le sujet français du sexe masculin [...]. Le droit de vote n’appartient, par conséquent, ni à l’étranger qui n’est pas sujet de la France, ni à l’indigène des colonies et de l’Algérie non naturalisé, qui est sujet de la France, mais qui n’est pas sujet français; ni à la femme française, qui a bien la qualité de sujet français, mais qui, jusqu’à présent, n’a pas à tous égards celle de citoyen français.”

subjects, an empire that would embark on a new wave of imperialism starting with the conquest of Algiers in 1830. This tension between universal values and exclusionary citizenship is what Stovall calls the “paradox of imperial republicanism” (2005, 220). The French Republic denied citizenship to people defined as non-White and non-civilized and *de facto* limited their status to that of subjects. Stovall’s paradox, which applied throughout the Third Republic (1870-1940), cannot be understood without considering the rise of nationalism at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as it is then that the concept of the nation was invented. During this period a distinction was operationalized between the State and the Nation, which corresponded to different geographical spaces. The space of the State included its overseas territories, but the French nation only applied to the French mainland. The inhabitants of French colonies were therefore ruled by the State but were excluded from the nation. The difference between those subject to the State and those belonging to the nation was their “*droit de cité*” (Urban 2017, 151).<sup>213</sup> With the invention of the concept of the nation, a specific French national culture was created. Its definition is ethnicized and territorialized, excluding the colonies, some of which had been integrated into French territory long before departments such as the Savoie (1860). So, at the historic moment of the closer articulation between nationality and citizenship and the progressive move towards male suffrage in 19<sup>th</sup> century mainland France, the “colonial pact” in the French colonies was based on the dissociation between nationality and the right to vote (Saada 2006, 65). The French nation came to be represented as White<sup>214</sup> and was “marked by the increasing racialization of social relations (*rappports sociaux*) between Europeans and *indigènes* in the second half of the 19th century” (Bayart and Bertrand 2006, 151). In the following two paragraphs I seek to call into question two general ideas: first, that there was a clear geographical distinction between different colonial legal regimes (*Code de l’Indigénat*, *Code Noir*, etc) in the overseas territories and Republican laws in the French mainland; second, that there was a clear-cut temporal distinction between the colonial and post-colonial period, and that the specific regimes therefore ended at the moment of de-colonization in the 1960s.

<sup>213</sup> This difference is notably theorized by leading law scholars working on the Third Republic like Maurice Hauriou et Pierre Lampué, who developed a theory of citizenship in the Empire of the Third Republic (Urban 2017). According to Urban, “Hauriou défend la thèse d’une différence de nature entre le territoire métropolitain, territoire de la nation, et le territoire colonial, territoire de l’État. Le droit de cité les distingue” (2017, 161)

<sup>214</sup> An example of the racialized concept of the nation during the Second Republic (1848-1852) is that the Republic extended suffrage to all men over 21 years old, which made them eligible for a seat in Parliament. All (male) inhabitants hence had the rights of French citizens, but the deputies from French overseas territories could only participate in the elaboration of laws that did not apply to their territories because the latter stayed under a derogatory regime of common law until 1946, the moment of the creation of départements d’outre-mer. The motivations behind this regime of juridical exception drew on anthropological and ethno-racial arguments and on “an essentialized conception of its slavery past that supposedly had abated this population” (Larcher 2015, 138). For example, there was a crime of “manquement au travail”, which does not exist in mainland France, and which is based on the prejudice that black people are indolent and lazy (Cottias 2007).

### *Transfers from the colonies to the mainland*

Research into citizenship questions in colonial and mainland France has demonstrated that the idea that colonial categories and colonial forms of governance remained strictly limited to the colonies is mistaken. In her work on the racial categories that were employed by public servants in Lyon's metropolitan area (1950–1970), Belmessous points out that “aspects of the colonial rights system were adopted into the French Republican ideology” and that this very specific relationship between nationality and citizenship was not only applied in the administrative management of colonial natives in the colonies, but also “on French mainland soil” (2019, 503). She comes to the same conclusion as Shepard (2006) that, while “notions of race and ethnicity were not recognized by law, neither in Algeria, nor in the rest of French territory, they were consistently mobilized in practice (in the education and legal system, in political debates or in medical controversies)” (Belmessous 2019, 503).<sup>215</sup> When colonial subjects migrated to the French mainland their treatment was rife with ambiguities between the application of colonial categories and the respect for the principle of equality between French people (Spire 2003, 48). These ambiguities “built upon the roots of institutionalized racism which accompanied the settlement of Algerian populations in France, even after Algeria's independence (1962)” (*Ibid.*). Even after 1946, when the constitution formally extended citizenship to all French nationals, intermediate categories continued to exist between the foreigner and the national (*Ibid.*). Systems of governance that were initially implemented at “the margins of the Republic” (Algerian provinces), were subsequently imported to the French mainland and notably “a certain definition of the nation, its borders and the people that could have access to citizenship and those that were excluded from it” (Shepard 2006, 45).<sup>216</sup>

### *From colonial rule to the period that followed*

It is generally believed that differentiated citizenship regimes for French nationals ended with the end of colonization, and this is indeed true as far as voting is concerned. However, the work of Belmessous, Spire, and Shepard call this idea into question. As mentioned above, voting rights were actually already granted to all nationals from French Overseas Territories (*ressortissants des territoires d'outre-mer*) in the 1946 constitution. However, in the post-WWII period intermediary categories between the foreigner and the national continued to exist *de facto*, leading to a graduation of citizenship. Shepard demonstrates for

<sup>215</sup> In French: “Les notions de race et ethnologie étaient constamment mobilisées dans la pratique (systèmes éducatifs et judiciaires, débats politiques ou controverses médicales) mais n'étaient pas reconnues par la loi, ni en Algérie, ni en dans le reste du territoire français.”

<sup>216</sup> In French: “Les institutions républicaines, mises en place pour gouverner la France et l'Algérie en tant qu'entités politiques, ont été redéfinies en occultant une réalité essentielle et aveuglante, en l'occurrence que la République française s'était bel et bien construite avec l'Algérie et que des structures et dispositifs, initialement mises en place en marge de la République (c'est-à-dire dans les départements Algériens), avaient été importés en “metropole” et notamment une certaine définition de la nation, de ses frontières, des populations ayant accès à la citoyenneté et de celles qui en sont exclues.”

example that “with Algerian independence, France adopted new restrictions concerning who belonged to the nation, restrictions that introduced a racialized appreciation of individual’s origins in mainland laws and administrative practices” (2008, 60).<sup>217</sup> In addition, Kipfer came to the conclusion, by means of an extensive literature review, that after 1962 colonial practices were adapted to control and to ‘civilize’ migrants through specific policies for this racialized population, designed and implemented by a variety of state branches such as “social security, immigration, citizenship, regional planning, civil engineering, local policing, internal security and the military as well as housing officials (Belmessous 2014; Blanchard 2011; David 2014; De Barros 2006; Fredenucci 2003; Hajjat 2012; Laurens 2009; Math 2000; Rigouste 2012; Spire 2005)” (Kipfer 2016, 614). While Shepard, Belmessous, Spire, and Kipfer focus their research on a continuity in governance, drawing on archives, I am less interested in texts than in the *de facto* experience of being depicted and treated as ‘other’ in public space and political discourse. This does not mean that a public administration approach is no longer relevant, it would for example make sense to study laws, circulars, and internal regulations that target Muslim women wearing a headscarf and how it impedes them in their citizenship rights, according to the larger definition that Spire gives, such as the capacity to exercise an ensemble of economic and social rights. It would further make sense to carry out research into the categories that social housing corporations use when attributing housing, into the categories the police mobilize to justify interventions etc., but this is not the object of my research which focuses instead on the lived experience of racialized inhabitants of MSHN in Grenoble.

#### *1.4) Inequality*

Racialized research participants expressed in debates, informal discussions, and interviews that they feel treated as ‘other’, as unequals. This means that in practice they do not have the same rights as white French, despite the fact that they DO have French nationality and ARE French citizens by right. They feel that these rights only exist on paper. Participants’ everyday experiences therefore contradict the general idea that, from the moment of decolonization onwards, French nationals have all been treated as equals. The feeling that participants described, of not having a place in France and of being made to feel ‘out of place’ in public space outside of MSHN, is one reason why citizenship is impossible, as Painter and Philo claim (1995):

If people cannot be present in public spaces (streets, squares, parks, cinemas, churches, town halls) without feeling uncomfortable, victimized and basically 'out of place', then it must be questionable whether or not these people can be regarded as citizens at all; or, at least, whether they will regard themselves as full citizens of their host community able to exist on

<sup>217</sup> In French: "Et qu’avec l’indépendance algérienne, la France a adopté de nouvelles restrictions concernant l’appartenance à la nation, restrictions qui ont introduit dans les lois métropolitaines et les pratiques administratives une appréciation racialisée de l’origine des individus".



an equal footing with other people who seem perfectly 'at home' when moving about in public spaces (Painter and Philo 1995, 195; quoted in Yarwood 2014, 152).<sup>218</sup>

Equality is therefore a condition for citizenship, and this equality must be rooted in both material- (access to employment, housing, access to public space etc) and in symbolic conditions (recognition, culture, etc). The current configuration of power relations in French society results in structural inequality.

### *1.5) Not French*

Post-colonial immigrants are not recognized as 'French', they remain eternal outsiders, 'other'. They are addressed or referred to as "immigrant", "of immigrant origin", "Muslim", "Arab", "Black", or "*jeune de quartier*" despite their French nationality and in this way they are discursively placed outside of the nation. Each of these terms geographically locates their 'otherness' in a space outside of France: the immigrant comes from elsewhere; the Muslim and Arab are associated with Arab-speaking countries just as Black is associated with sub-Saharan Africa. A '*jeune de quartier*' is associated with a racialized space in France and therefore also 'othered' (Agier and Lamotte 2016). It is in these faraway spaces that they are supposed to have roots in, and where they are supposed to 'really' belong.

### *1.6) Not worth defending and not being allowed to defend themselves*

In stories about being targets of police interventions and about Muslims being treated differently to Jews in France, participants express the feeling that some lives in France are worth more than others.<sup>219</sup> Their observations resonate with Dorlin's innovative way of distinguishing between a citizen and a non-citizen (2017). The distinction she makes between the two is that citizens are considered by the State as worth defending and have the possibility to legitimately defend themselves, while non-citizens are left without protection and without any means to defend themselves. Self-defense tactics are the only means left to them. Dorlin's work is for a large part based on the non-citizen condition of slaves in plantation colonies, and clearly cannot be transposed to France today. I therefore do not speak of non-citizens, but of second-class citizens: those not quite French, who remain in a process of striving. For these people French citizenship works like a promise that is never fulfilled (see section 4.4). Dorlin focuses on non-citizens' self-defense tactics as a means of becoming political subjects, and I focus on participants' observations that they are deemed less worthy of being defended than first-class citizens (section 5 this chapter) and cannot (verbally or physically) defend themselves without being considered violent (Chapter 6). Despite these differences in context and in the extent of subalternity, I see a parallel between Dorlin's framework and the situations research participants described, as the latter

<sup>218</sup> In Painter and Philo's original article I have not been able to identify the quote. In addition, the page Yarwood referred to, page 195, does not correspond to the article's page numbers (107-120).

<sup>219</sup> For a philosophical discussion of which lives are "grievable", see Butler (2009)

also feel that the State considers them as less worth defending and does not recognize them as full-right citizens.

Based on Dorlin's perspective, one's position in the citizenship hierarchy between a non-citizen and a citizen can therefore partially be determined by the extent the State prioritizes defending/protecting a person or a group. Spire's work on the differential treatment of colonial immigrants in mainland France in the 20<sup>th</sup> century demonstrates that migrant workers from the French colonies, for a long period, did not benefit from the same social protection (*protection sociale*) as French workers.<sup>220</sup> Colonial immigrants were "allocated to the most trying tasks and the hardest working conditions", and they were therefore "most exposed to work accidents and professional illnesses but were in practice the least protected against these risks" (Spire, 2003, 62).<sup>221</sup> Paradoxically, immigrant workers of Polish, Italian or Belgian nationality did have certain rights to this social protection (2003, 62). There are therefore grey areas between "French citizens protected by the State and non-citizens excluded from social protection" (Spire 2003, 62).

### *1.7) Cannot claim rights*

Research participants have said that whenever they manifest discontent in the public sphere they are reminded of (*renvoyer vers*) their immigrant, non-French origins and concern is expressed about their compatibility with the principles and values of the Republic (see also Dikeç 2007, 177). As a result of not being considered French they cannot claim the right to have rights in Isin and Nielsen's definition of citizenship (2008, 8). They are basically denied political subjectivity. Paradoxically, MSHN are simultaneously depicted in dominant discourse as political deserts because of inhabitants' low participation in elections. Habermas' ideal of a bourgeois public sphere in which all are free to carry out their citizen-political participation (1989) has been called into question for exactly this reason (denial of political subjectivity), because people do not have equal access to this public sphere, which in reality is exclusionary in nature: it privileges male, bourgeois, and white citizens (Howell 1993; Fraser 1992; Mitchell 2003). There are important obstacles to political participation and to political subjectivity for those that do not belong to these latter categories. Isin has come up with an approach to citizenship "after orientalism" and beyond the State, that looks at practices in which new forms of citizenship are enacted (2012). I am interested in the tension between these "acts of citizenship" (Isin and Nielsen 2008) on the one hand, and the denial of political subjectivity by dominant citizens on the other. Isin's conception of citizenship as "the process by which political subjectivity is recognized and enacted" (2012,

<sup>220</sup> Examples: protection against workplace accidents (*accidents de travail*); unemployment benefits (*allocation de chômage*); family benefits (*allocations familiales*) if their children did not reside in France, despite the fact that they contributed financially (*cotiser*) to this social fund.

<sup>221</sup> In French: "Assignés aux tâches les plus éprouvantes et aux conditions de travail les plus rudes, les migrants coloniaux sont les plus exposés aux accidents du travail et aux maladies professionnelles, mais sont en pratiques les moins protégés contre ces risques"

3) therefore speaks to me, despite its exclusive focus on political aspects of citizenship and overlooking of its social and economic aspects. Denying some people citizenship and political subjectivity serves a purpose according to Barbero (2012),<sup>222</sup> as “citizenship and border regimes are created in order to construct and control certain migrant groups, especially Muslims” (quoted in Isin 2012, 3). Defining the contours of a political community based on the characteristics of citizenship also defines who is excluded from this community, who is 'other' or the 'anti-citizen' (the illegal, the antisocial, the criminal, the terrorist immigrant) with the aim of legitimizing the domination and redefinition of European and nation-state identities” (*Ibid.*). As a result of these forms of ‘othering’ racialized inhabitants of MSHN cannot claim full-right citizenship.

Throughout this chapter I engage with a theme already developed by Dikeç (2002; 2007), of impossible citizenship for racialized inhabitants in MSHN, in the sense of not being recognized as political subjects. Dikeç explored the ways in which the political voices of MSHN inhabitants are turned into noise, claiming that “inhabitants of certain areas are deprived of their right to the city in the political sense of the term through a particular configuration of space”, as a result of urban and security policy (Dikeç 2002, 95). Building on this earlier work of Dikeç, I shifted the focus from being deprived of the right to the city to that of differential citizenship as an analogy with colonial citizenship regimes, paying specific attention to the workings of racism in public space, institutions, and geographic imagination.

## 2) Embodied experiences of inequality

Le corps noir, juif, ou arabe que l'on voit pré-existe, en quelque sorte et idéalement, dans l'imagination. Avant d'être vu, il est déjà subordonné à la volonté de celui qui est appelé à le voir. Il y a une loi du regard qui lui donne forme avant même qu'il n'ait été vu.  
(Mbembe interviewed by Dorlin 2007, 154)

The experience of inequality was an important theme in the Université populaire, in particular among racialized inhabitants. They shared their experiences for example of not having equal access to transportation, to education, to employment, to consumption, and basically, to citizenship. They also evoked on several occasions the reactions their bodies provoke in public space, recalling the moment they first realized that their bodies were designated as different and undesired, something they were confronted with sooner or later in life. Nadia for example recalled the moment how her life changed when she started wearing a veil: people she had befriended no longer wished to have a relationship:

Je me souviens d'un voisin que j'aimais beaucoup mais vraiment beaucoup. La première fois que j'ai porté mon voile, il m'a dit :  
"Mais qu'est-ce que c'est ce déguisement? Vous ne me dites plus bonjour, je ne veux plus vous voir, vous et votre mère, vous ne

<sup>222</sup> Online publication, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/legitimizing-immigration-regimes-in-european-union/>, accessed 30/01/2020/

m'adressez plus la parole". (...) Malheureusement, j'en ai rencontré beaucoup comme ça. (Nadia, interview, 21/02/2019)

The experience of wearing a *hijab* obliged Nadia to position herself differently in public space, and within society as a whole. Several stories evoke moments research participants learnt that they were considered 'other'. It is in public spaces that bodies meet the gaze of others.

In this section I first discuss the gendered experiences of inequality in public space, focusing on women's experiences with the veil and on the experiences of racialized men during police checks (2.1); second, experiences of humiliation in institutional spaces and in encounters with institutional actors (2.2); and third, participants' experiences with unequal access to unemployment benefits (2.3).

### *2.1) Gendered experiences of inequality in public space*

There are recurring patterns in both women and men's stories of the reactions their bodies produce in public space. Both mention experiencing fear and rejection from others: racialized men because they are associated with crime and drugs, and Muslim women because of negative associations provoked by wearing the veil.

#### *2.1.a) Being made to feel out of place in public space – the experience of Muslim women*

In the context of a discussion about the idea that racialized inhabitants are made to feel unwelcome in certain spaces Catherine recalled a story about a friend of hers, who was born of Algerian parents, and who had a very traumatic experience as a child growing up in the decade following the Algerian independence war. In the central park (*jardin de ville*) of Grenoble she was hit in the face as an expression of hostility against Algerians generally, and against their presence in such a central area of the city particularly. It left her with the feeling that she was unwanted in this place where, typically, French families take a stroll on Sundays and bring their children to the playground. She was made to feel that she did not belong there (field notes, 29/09/2017). I have no means of verifying the veracity of Catherine's story, and it lacks several details that could help explain the exact motivations behind this violence. What I take from it however, is the message Catherine wanted to get across by recalling the story: she drew a parallel with current stories of women who feel uncomfortable in the city center with their *hijab*. Catherine alluded to the fact that this was not entirely a new phenomenon, and that the animosity against women wearing a veil is an extension of an older animosity against Algerians. For example Fahida told that when she went with her husband and children to the center of Grenoble, a woman stared at her.<sup>223</sup> In this look she read rejection and disapproval, which made her feel very uncomfortable. For a long time she wondered why this woman looked at her in this way, might it be her veil? (field

<sup>223</sup> The context in which Fahida shared this story was a screening of the documentary "*Un racisme à peine voilé*", organized by Madame Ruetabaga. She took many precautions to make sure her account would not hurt me, nor the other non-Muslim white women (field notes, 06/01/2017).

notes, 06/01/2017). Fahida identified the city center as a space of confrontation with disapproving gazes, and where she was made to feel out of place.

*2.1.b) Being made to feel out of place in public space – the experience of racialized men*

Racialized young men share the experience of being made to feel out of place in central public space. They less frequently cite the way they are stared at or insults addressed to them by those passing by, but rather bring up the police checks that systematically oblige them to justify their legitimate presence in public space. Based on their stories I make a distinction between police checks in the city center, carried out by the municipal police, and police checks inside the neighborhood in the context of the fight against drugs, carried out by special police units. Younger men's encounters with night mediators, who seek to disperse groups of youth at night to prevent nuisance for other neighborhood inhabitants, are once again of a different nature. Laurent, a friend of mine in his thirties who does not live in a social housing neighborhood and originally comes from La Réunion -one of France's Overseas Territories- is not used to police checks. He was therefore very much surprised by the way he was treated by the police when he went shopping in Lyon with his brother-in-law (of North-African origin). For his brother-in-law the unfolding of the procedure was quite common: a policeman ordered Laurent to place his hands against the wall, questioning his legitimate presence in this central and bourgeois space ("*que faites-vous ici?*"), followed by the question of whether he could read ("*tu sais lire?*"), using an informal form of address reserved for children and close acquaintances (Informal discussion, 12/05/2017). Arif\*, a young man from Villeneuve, in his thirties and either in temporary work or unemployed, is often found in one of the central squares in Villeneuve, Place des Géants. For him the identity checks during which police officers employ derogatory vocabulary are a reason to stop going to the city center. They make him feel rejected by "the French" and, as a result, he prefers to stay in the neighborhood in order not to be harassed or to be confronted with remarks from the police.

Les Français nous rejettent à travers des contrôles policiers, avec des mots qui blessent. On reste entre nous, discret. Je ne vais même plus en centre-ville. On peut respecter la loi mais ils ne veulent pas de nous. Ils le font savoir par le regard, par des petits mots à la caisse. (Arif, micro-trottoir, 20/10/2015)

Arif's remark that he observes an a priori rejection on the side of the French, irrespective of his behavior, can be interpreted as the presumption of guilt. In addition to being stared at he evoked quick, short, microaggressions in publicly accessible spaces such as remarks in shops, public transportation, cafés, the street, etc. The feeling of rejection expressed by Arif frequently appeared in other interviews and discussions. I argue that frequent identity checks in spaces of consumption, such as city center shopping areas, are a means to discourage racialized young people from MSHN from going to these central spaces. César, a 16-year-old white high school student from Villeneuve, confirmed this theory. When he goes with racialized friends from Villeneuve to the city center they are subjected to police checks,

while this is not the case when he goes out with white friends (interview, 17/03/2017). He gives the example of the national celebration, the Fête de la Musique, where he and his racialized friends from the neighborhood were stopped twice by the same police unit. According to César this is because neighborhood youth went to the city center:

Quand je vais en centre-ville avec mes potes à la Fête de la Musique on se fait contrôler cinq fois la même soirée et deux fois par la même équipe de la BAC. Je pense que c'est parce que les jeunes de quartiers vont en centre-ville. (César, interview, 17/03/2017).

Joachim helped me understand the permanent suspicion that reigns in public space towards racialized young people. Youth take into account the fact that they may be confronted with a police control and that it might ruin their evening (*"la police est capable de gâcher ta soirée"*). As an example of such an evening that ended badly, he cited the example of going out with a group of friends to the city center – *"on se faisait un apéro en plein air"* – and they sat together on the steps of a church toward the Place Felix Poulat in the city center where they were smoking cannabis until the police came (See Map A3) (field notes, 18/06/2015). The police took their cannabis, and took one of the friends to the police station. One might say that it is to be expected that the police intervene when youth contravene laws, and that they should arrest a person in possession of drugs. However, what young people denounce is the criminalization of an activity that is widely practiced by both white and racialized youth. Typically, white students smoking cannabis are left unbothered, while racialized youth are treated as criminals. Frequent police checks in the city center area are one of the reasons why Joachim and his friends do not go out of the neighborhood anymore for leisure. Their social life is mostly restricted to the neighborhood, which according to Joachim is quite typical for MSHN youth (*jeunes de quartier*). He explained this difference in the following words.

Tu vois pour eux [jeunes qui n'habitent pas le quartier] le vendredi soir c'est: "on va sortir, on va boire un coup, faire la fête" ou quoi. Et nous ce n'est pas du tout ce style-là, nous c'est: on reste posé dans le quartier, entre amis." (Joachim, interview, 18/06/2015)

Likely, police checks are not the only explanation for what Joachim calls their "style", financial motivations may also play a role here, although Joachim denied this aspect and explained the difference in terms of life-style choices.

Omer Mas Capitolin, invited speaker of the Université populaire and activist of the Paris-based civil-society platform *"En finir avec les contrôles au faciès"*, places these stories in a wider context. Research the platform carried out confirmed that practices targeting MSHN youth are part of a wider strategy of special police units that operate specifically in "priority security zones" (*zones de sécurité prioritaires*). The latter are found to employ the term *"indésirables"* as justification for a police intervention (UP debate, 26/04/2018). While the

situation in Paris cannot be directly transposed to the context in Grenoble<sup>224</sup> the outcome of this research corresponds to the feeling that young people have when they occupy public space, particularly but not exclusively in the city center, that they are undesired. In the quote below, Omer Mas Capitolin explained this finding and the context of the court case that the platform has prepared with 18 youths in Paris.

On a accompagné 18 jeunes mineurs du 12<sup>e</sup> arrondissement qui ont déposé plainte contre une brigade BST (*Brigade spécialisée de terrain*) pour laquelle est clairement mentionné, dans le rapport de police de mise en place de cette brigade, l'objectif de harceler les jeunes dans l'espace public par tous les moyens. (Omer Mas Capitolin, UP debate, 26/04/2018).

The presence of young racialized men in public space is often considered problematic, in particular when they are loitering in groups.<sup>225</sup> In 2003 a law was introduced that forbade these group gatherings, with the pretext that they are an obstacle to the free circulation of other residents. In Villeneuve it is the task of night mediators (*médiateurs de nuit*) to convince loitering youth groups either to go to spaces of consumption or to go home. I do not deny that these gatherings in public space do pose important problems for neighbors, as discussed in chapter 3, and may also be associated with drug trade (see also Dijkema 2019). Night mediators however explain that, in other cases, not much is really going on when young people gather and that the requests from older white inhabitants for their intervention are sometimes also unfounded (informal discussion, 03/03/2017). According to the latter the mere presence of groups of racialized male youth in public space is a source of fear and feeling of danger. I argue that this feeling has a racist element to it, that perceiving the body of a racialized man as potential danger is the result of the projection of “white paranoia” (Butler 1993).

Young men’s stories suggest that these police checks largely surpass the strict context of the fight against drugs. Racialized young people have integrated the fact that they constantly have to carry their ID card, since not being able to present one’s ID is a possible reason to be taken to the police station for a check. This itself is an experience of inequality because white youth do not share the concern of always carrying an ID. These frequent interventions by the police or night mediators give younger racialized men the feeling that they constantly have to justify their presence in public space to a state authority figure. The experience of being targeted by these checks contributes to the embodied experience of inequality for

<sup>224</sup> Paris policemen, who are part of the Agora initiative (*Agora des Citoyens, de la Police et de la Justice*), confirmed that relations in MSHN in Paris and its *banlieue* are considerably more tense than outside of the capital (field notes, 15/03/2019).

<sup>225</sup> The unsanctioned use of public space (*l’occupation abusive de l’espace*) is considered as a first indicator of urban violence, according to Lucienne Bui-Trong, a police officer that developed a scale of urban violence for the French Central Intelligence Agency (*Direction Générale des Renseignements Généraux*), from the first degree of group violence without an anti-institutional character to riots having an anti-institutional character (Lucienne Bui-Trong cited by Bonelli 2001). In 2003 a law was introduced that provided the police the juridical tools to fine youth for gathering in apartment halls (loi n° 2003-239).

racialized young people. Bodily characteristics are not the only factor in being targeted, one's style of dress is also an important factor: hoodies, baseball caps, tracksuits, sling bags, and certain hairdos all draw police attention, also when they are worn by white youth.

### *2.1.c) From staring to micro-aggressions in public space*

A lot of interactions in public space do not involve verbal exchanges. Through staring (*regards*) one can be made to feel undesired. Staring is charged with invisible and unspoken tensions that are clearly understood by those who are stared at. Here are four examples of research participants who raised this issue. The first is from a participant of the Université populaire:

J'aimerais bien aller dans un restaurant avec ma femme sans qu'on me regarde, [mais] quand on rentre on sent un regard qui... ça pique, ça gêne, ça c'est épiqué ça ! (Participant, UP debate, 20/11/2015)

A second story is from Mounira, who grew up in Villeneuve and whom I met in the Marche Blanche movement. Her example concerns the way visibly Muslim women are stared at in public space. She has been able to observe the difference between the way people look at her, a neatly dressed woman of North-African origin with make-up and straightened hair, and the way they stare at her daughter-in-law, wearing a *hijab*:

Mounira : Moi, je le vois bien quand je me promène avec ma belle-fille, le regard des gens qu'ils portent sur nous.

Claske : Pourquoi, qu'est-ce qu'ils voient ?

Mounira : Ils voient une femme comme moi, maquillée, [bien] habillée et ils voient ma belle-fille qui est foulardée, qui n'est pas... Je vois bien le regard qui se pose sur elle." (Mounira, interview, 05/06/2017)

From the context of the interview it was very clear that this staring is not positive. A third example is from Béchir, a retired inhabitant of Villeneuve, born in Tunisia. His story places this way of staring as part of a longer timeline. For him staring has been an integral part of making North-African immigrants feel uncomfortable and not feel at home in France.

Les enfants des familles maghrébines sentent le regard qu'on pose sur eux et à l'école. Ils ont été élevés avec ce regard-là, qui n'est pas bienveillant, on sait faire la différence. (Béchir, interview, 09/05/2016)

Marion\*, a French-born woman who converted to Islam, shares the experiences of Muslim women from immigrant families of being stared at in the streets in the city center and in parks, which also gives her the feeling that she is unwelcome and out of place in certain spaces in France:

Moi Française, née en France je ne me sens plus dans mon pays car on ne m'accepte pas comme je suis. Je me sens en quelque sorte marginalisée car on ne nous accepte nulle part avec notre voile. (Debate Madame Ruetabaga, 06/01/2017)



The practice of staring and its negative charge is rather systemic. Who is being stared at and the emotion it is charged with, however, is subject to the influence of a changing socio-political context. Obviously, the impact of the Charlie Hebdo massacre and the terrorist attacks that followed were pointed out by participants as events that had an important impact on their everyday lives, reinforcing their embodied experiences of inequality.<sup>226</sup>

It obviously did not start with Charlie Hebdo, other moments that participants cited and which problematized the way they were perceived were: the terrorist attack by Mohamed Merah (2012); the law restricting the wearing of religious symbols in public schools (Article L.141-5-1, 2004); and the First Gulf War (1990). What was pointed out in particular was the role of the media and the anti-Islamic way in which they framed these events in talk shows, TV reports, news broadcast, and articles etc. From participants' stories, I deduce that the emotions that Islam provoke range from fascination to fear, contempt, and disgust. For example Tassadit specified, with regard to her experience of being spat at while walking on the side of the road, the political context of the terrorist murders by Mohamed Merah (2012). This was the moment for her when the rejection she at times felt was clearly verbalized and took the form of an aggression. This incident occurred when she was walking from one house to the other in the village where she worked as a cleaning lady. A person yelled at her from a car passing by: "go home terrorist, why are you here?" and spat her in her face. In her own words:

Depuis le moment de l'histoire de l'attentat qu'a fait Mohamed Merah, les gens du village ils me voient différemment, m'insultent, ils me crachent dessus me disent "rentrez chez vous terroriste, pourquoi vous êtes là?" Alors, cela m'a angoissée. (Tassadit, audio recording for UP debate, 20/03/2015)

This experience scared her and had an impact on her mobility within the village. She no longer dares to hitchhike as she used to do, reducing the time she can work and the amount of houses she can clean because of the long distances between them. The theme that frequently came back in these stories is the expression "go home" (*rentrez chez vous*).

People's view has changed, according to Nadia, as a result of "the events" in reference to the series of terrorist attacks, the introduction of laws restricting the possibility of wearing a veil in certain institutional spaces, and media coverage:

Il y a beaucoup de gens qui suite aux événements qui se sont produits, au projet de loi qui a été élu, par rapport aux médias, ce qu'ils véhiculent, il y a des gens qui ont énormément changés. (Nadia, interview, 21/02/2017)

The next example demonstrates the power that media images have in society. They not only provoke fear of the unknown among people who do not have any Muslim acquaintances to

<sup>226</sup> The changing perceptions of Muslims post 9/11 has been extensively dealt with in American literature, see for example Butler 2009 [2016], Gregory 2004, Semati 2010).

rectify stereotypes about Muslims as terrorists and oppressors of women, but they also modify perceptions on a very intimate level, even in mother – daughter relations as the following example from Catherine demonstrates. Catherine was born and raised in a French, Catholic family and became interested in Islam at university, befriending Arab students. She has since converted to Islam and has been wearing a veil for over a decade. Her mother’s perception of her has become more and more negative as a result of a changing perception in wider society, affecting their relationship:

Déjà, ma mère c’est de pire en pire. Je me suis rendue compte de ça, il n’y a pas longtemps. De l’instant que la société est devenue, parce que c’est la société qui change, elle a changé en même temps que la société et je me suis dit que les gens ont quand même vachement... ils suivent sans trop réfléchir. Ça je trouve que c’est un peu inquiétant quand même parce que ne pas faire la différence entre un terroriste et enfin une femme voilée ou sa fille, ça c’est quand même grave quoi. (Catherine, interview, 21/02/2017)

I comment on the power of media images in chapter 6, how they produce otherness, affect people’s lives and people’s capacity to speak out as citizens. Here I continue with other stories about the period that followed the Charlie Hebdo massacre, stressing the fear Muslims provoked in public space. Fadoua felt strongly that the way she was perceived in public space changed after Charlie Hebdo, and that her way of dress, *hijab* and wide black clothes covering arms and legs, provoked fear. Greeting became a struggle for her: when she passed people on the street who would not greet her and avoided eye contact, or who would look but then quickly move on, she started to wonder whether people thought she might be part of, or agree with, a terrorist group because of the way she was dressed. She felt the risk of becoming paranoid (*devenir paranoïaque*) and had to force herself to “remain spontaneous” and continue to greet people, as she used to do, overcoming the feeling that she would “aggress people” by what she represented through her clothes:

Au bout d’un moment on sort dans la rue. On croise des gens qui ne vont pas dire bonjour, qui ne vont pas nous regarder même si on les connaît ou qui vont regarder mais qui vont passer comme ça, tout de suite. Enfin moi, au bout d’un moment, ça a été crescendo sur une semaine, au bout d’un moment on pense, mince, peut-être la personne en face croit que moi, parce que je suis habillée comme ça, que je fais partie peut-être d’un groupe terroriste, que je suis d’accord avec ce qui a été fait, que voilà. Je commençais à rentrer dans un... J’aurais laissé, je pense que je serai devenue paranoïaque. Donc j’ai dit non, non, non, non, je n’ai jamais pensé comme ça donc il n’y a pas de raison que je pense comme ça aujourd’hui et du coup j’ai dit non, je n’ai pas envie d’être influencée, que mon ressenti soit influencé par des choses de l’extérieur. (...) Je voulais rester spontanée parce que je me bloquais. En général, quand je croise quelqu’un et que nos regards se croisent, je dis bonjour, alors là je ne le disais plus. Je regardais la personne et je veux dire “ah”, peut-être elle n’a pas envie que je lui dise bonjour. Je ne voulais pas lui imposer, j’avais l’impression que j’allais imposer quelque

chose ou que j'allais entre guillemets l'agresser par ce que je représente. (Fadoua, interview, 19/03/2017)

She experienced an inner struggle in order not to let others' changed perceptions influence her attitude in public space. Several days after Charlie Hebdo, she was yelled at in the street:

J'étais en voiture. Je laissais gentiment passer un monsieur. Je me suis décalée. J'ai même fait marche-arrière pour laisser passer et quand il est passé à mon niveau, il m'a dit : "allez dégages, sale bougnoule, allez dégages, sale bougnoule." (Fadoua, interview 19/03/2017)

"*Bougnole*" is a racist insult used for Arabs. Fadoua responded by saying that a simple thank you would have been fine (*un simple merci aurait suffit monsieur*). Another participant recounted her experience in a supermarket when an older person passed her, making a puffing sound:

Je faisais mes courses dans cet hypermarché et une personne âgée souffle en passant 'pff, pff'. Je répondais qu'il n'est pas un anniversaire ici et que ce n'est donc pas la peine de souffler les bougies. La personne âgée répondait : 'Que faites-vous ici, on en a marre de vous ici'. (Field notes, 31/05/2015)

This "puffing" is noteworthy because there was a second person who told a very similar story, that in the street it was often older people that made remarks when passing by:

"When you pass someone, and you hear 'pff', you wonder"

(..) aussi dans les rues... c'était souvent des personnes âgées hein ? Ce n'était pas trop les jeunes, Ce n'était pas... Tu passes à côté de quelqu'un et tu entends... "pff"... et tu te poses la question... (Nadia, interview, 21/02/2017)

This is but one of many stories that women wearing a *hijab* shared about minor aggressions in public space in the period following terrorist attacks. These small aggressions induce doubt whether one has interpreted a gesture correctly. Was it on purpose that the waiter spilled water on one's clothes? Is this person indeed hostile and is his/her hostility addressed to me? Why did the person change places in the train after I sat down? They wonder whether their judgement is correct, but at the same time the systematic nature of these embodied experiences of difference and rejection leave little doubt of the tension and hostility in public space.

## *2.2) Experiences of humiliation in institutional spaces/encounters with institutional actors*

A second form of being made to feel 'other' is in participants' encounters with institutions, where participants have the feeling that they receive specific treatment, and at times feel humiliated. Again, these experiences are gendered: visibly Muslim women recalled the reactions they encountered when accessing institutional spaces (2.2.a) and the stories of male participants focused on their encounters with the police (2.2.b).

### 2.2.a) Muslim women – what did my veil do wrong?

I present in this subsection a series of examples of the institutional spaces where women were singled out or denied access as a result of wearing a veil: a polling station, a town hall, a hospital, a school outing, and the university.

#### *Polling station*

When Naima\*, a Muslim woman living in the Villeneuve area, presented herself to volunteer at the polling station, the person in charge of the polling station flung at her, pointing a finger in her direction: “you think you can run a polling station dressed like that?” (*tu comptes tenir un bureau de vote avec cette tenue-là?*). When Naima responded positively, that she indeed intended to do so, the person in charge told her that it was out of the question. Naima returned home and felt so humiliated she could only cry because this interaction took place in front of all the voters and volunteers already present. In the days that followed she was still so affected by it that she could no longer eat or sleep. In the end she filed a complaint (*elle a porté plainte*) with the help of Planning (field notes, Fringale debate, 31/05/2015).

#### *Town hall*

Chaambi, as an invited speaker of the Université populaire, denounced (along with his organization, the Coordination against racism and islamophobia (CRI)) the fact that a woman was asked to unveil on the day of her marriage (09/06/2011) by the Deputy Mayor in charge of officiating the wedding in Lyon. The Deputy Mayor threatened that if she did not comply the wedding would be cancelled. Despite the fact that this request is illegal -there is no law that forbids the wearing of a *hijab* in a town hall, nor during weddings- the Prefect of the Rhône (province) publicly defended the decision of the Deputy Mayor. The only legal text on which the deputy’s decision can be based is the circular (*circulaire du 22/06/2010*) that the identity of the partners should be verified. Chaambi reported that the young woman stood there in front of the state official, crying on her wedding day, and felt obliged to take off her veil (Chaambi, UP debate, 11/03/2015).<sup>227</sup>

#### *Hospital*

Another participant works in a hospital in Grenoble (geriatric service) and shared her strong disagreement with the hospital’s policy that female patients have to take their veil off when they are hospitalized. She works with older, immigrant women who have worn their veil all their lives and feel very uncomfortable without it, almost naked (participant, Solexine debate, 24/01/2018).

<sup>227</sup> An article in the local press confirmed the story: “La mariée devait-elle se dévoiler?”, *Lyon Capitale*, 22/06/2011; <https://www.lyoncapitale.fr/Actualite/La-mariee-devait-elle-se-devoiler/>, accessed 20/09/2019.

### *School outings (as a parent)*

Naima, the same woman who was rejected as a volunteer at the polling station, was also denied the possibility of participating in a school outing with her children. She used to be a school teacher in Algeria, and she often volunteered at her children's primary school without any problems, until one day she was dismissed by the school teacher. This incident happened just after the Chatel directive (*circulaire Chatel*) named after the Minister of Education, Luc Chatel, stating that volunteering parents (*parents accompagnateurs*) during school outings should be considered as being an extension of a public service (education) and therefore also renounce the wearing of any religious symbols. It was not only the fact that she was no longer allowed to volunteer at school which was humiliating, but in particular the way the teacher communicated this information. She felt treated as if she was guilty of some wrong-doing (field notes, Fringale debate, 31/05/2015).

### *University*

Alicia, a member of Agir pour la Paix and university student, recounts the specific treatment she experienced during an exam:

Ala fac surtout on me prenait pour quelqu'un, par exemple aux examens, qui allait tricher. Quand je rentrais dans l'amphithéâtre on venait me voir moi directement en me disant "dégagez vos oreilles parce qu'il se peut que vous portiez des écouteurs" par exemple. J'avais envie de leur dire mais en fait derrière j'ai vu des filles qui avaient des écouteurs sous leurs cheveux lâchés et elles trichaient donc pourquoi moi en fait? Moi la seule devant tout le monde devant un amphithéâtre de 300 personnes on vient me dire devant tout le monde: 'enlève' et tout le monde me regarde. Ça veut dire que tu n'as pas confiance en moi, pourquoi, qu'est-ce que je dégage en fait? (Alicia, interview, 01/05/2018)

Alicia speaks here of the humiliation of being singled out, and of the presumption of guilt already evoked. The humiliation that we hear in these stories echoes the humiliation that men experience during police checks.

### *2.2.b) Young men and the police – everything under control?*

Young men also speak about their experiences of humiliation in encounters with institutions, and police checks are an important example in this regard. It is difficult to say how representative the stories that I cite in this section are, as it was only towards the end of my field research that I started to examine police practices in the neighborhood, as a future theme of investigation for the Université populaire.<sup>228</sup> The reason for starting to explore this new orientation of the Université populaire was precisely because of the prevalence of these

<sup>228</sup> When the Université populaire started to prepare a new thematic cycle on the topic of "relations between the police and the population" as a euphemism for speaking about police violence, it met important resistance: the *Direction Départementale de la Sécurité Publique* refused to collaborate; the Régie de Quartier did not want to participate; and racialized inhabitants were suspicious about the fact that white members of the Université populaire would want to tackle this issue.

stories in the neighborhood, the taboos around them, and the resistance they provoked among older white inhabitants. Identity checks are experienced as a means to remind them of their subjugated position in France, and as an attempt to put them in their place. César explained that being controlled is “a fairly violent” experience (*assez violent*) and a form of public humiliation. What is humiliating for example for Farid\* is that “always the same people are being controlled” and that police address neighborhood youth in a “mean” and “condescending” way (*Ils parlent méchamment aux gens jeunes. Ils sont méprisants dans leur façon de parler*) (street debate, 20/10/2015). For Farid and for many other young people who participated in the debates, police checks are encounters that serves as a demonstration of power, with a lack of respect and in some cases with contempt. Human Right Watch confirms this observation in a report titled “*La base de l’humiliation*” (2010, 2020). In this subsection I go back and forth between the everyday humiliation that racialized young people in Grenoble say they experience in the presence of the police, and the more dramatic examples that invited activist speakers cited based on their experience in other larger cities, such as Lyon and Paris. I include references to paroxysmal cases that happened throughout this period because they were closely followed by young people in Grenoble, who were interested in discussing these cases with two police officers (Maison de Quartier Aragon, 30/04/2017). Both the young people that participated in the debate and Omer Mas Capitolin pointed out different *modus operandi* of humiliation during police checks: giving orders without greeting a person; using a very informal mode of address (*tutoiement*); making degrading remarks; physical humiliation; and public humiliation. For an academic reference that confirms that racialized inhabitants are dealt with as internal enemies of the State and dealt with through a security policy that is reminiscent of colonial times, see Deltombe et Rigouste (2005), Rigouste (2008), Rigouste et al. (2016)

#### *Giving orders without greeting*

There are countless stories about the way police address in particular younger people (under 30) in the neighborhood, and how they interact with them during identity checks. The following extract from a debate I co-organized at the Maison du Quartier Aragon (see overview map) is such an example. This debate was organized on the occasion of an exchange between youth from Saint Martin d’Hères (wider Grenoble area) and from Molenbeek (Belgium). At the time of the debate the case of Theo Luhaka was at the center of public attention. During an identity check this young man was seriously injured in the anus by a police officer with an ASP (expandable baton or *matraque télescopique*). The debate provided those participating (including from Villeneuve and Echirolles) the opportunity to discuss, among other topics, the tense relations between youth and the police with two police representatives working in the area, and to compare their experiences. It turned out that not all participants had experienced police checks: boys and men had such experiences much more often than girls and women, but the latter were not entirely spared these checks either. The transcript below is from this debate and includes a moderator (female), a female participant and a police representative (male).

Moderator : Qu'est-ce que t'appelles un contrôle brutal ?

Participant : Par exemple, un contrôle où on ne vous dit même pas bonjour et on vous arrête comme ça : "mettez les clefs sur votre siège", comme si on avait commis un délit alors qu'en fait, on n'a rien fait. Comme s'ils étaient au-dessus. Entourer la voiture comme ça, alors qu'on a des enfants dans la voiture. Moi, je ne trouve pas ça normal, ça fait peur aux enfants derrière. Moi, personnellement, j'ai ce recul mais pas les enfants derrière... et je trouve que c'est une façon de se sentir au-dessus.

Police representative : Comment les policiers doivent se positionner quand il y a un véhicule qui circule ? Comment ils doivent faire pour ne pas faire peur ? Comment ils font ? Ils demandent au véhicule de s'arrêter...

Participant : Par exemple, dire au véhicule de s'arrêter, dire bonjour...

Police representative : Ah ben oui ça effectivement c'est la politesse.

Participant : Quand ils effectuent un contrôle de routine, expliquer juste : "on fait un contrôle de routine, vous pourriez nous passer vos papiers ?". Là, c'est : "vos papiers, mettez vos clefs sur le siège".

Police representative : La politesse c'est la règle absolue. Un policier doit s'exprimer poliment. (Debate MJC Roseaux, 13/04/2017)

Unsurprisingly the police representatives considered this demeaning behavior as an exception, contradicting the systemic nature of this form of impolite address that participants described as a demonstration of contempt.

### *Using an informal form of address*

In addition to not using polite greetings the police use a very informal form of address, which would be considered a provocation if it was used the other way around. In French, there are two options if one wants to say "you": "*tu*" or "*vous*". The latter is a courtesy and recommended in relations with adult strangers while the former, *le tutoiement*, is reserved for children and informal or close relationships. The use of *tutoiement* by police is a form of humiliation in public space. Joachim, who is part of Agir pour la Paix, was one of the young men that evoked this kind of humiliation when he described his first police check (interview, 18/06/2015). He (14 years old) and his friend (13 years old) were waiting one evening at a tram stop when they saw a police car pulling over on the other side of the road. Four policemen got out and approached them, they started snapping their fingers: "You, stand over there and you over there" (**Toi, tu te mets là, toi, tu te mets là**) followed by a body search, hands and face against the tram stop. Joachim explained the use of this informal address as a provocation, adding that it requires a lot of self-control not to respond and stay calm (field notes, 18/06/2015). *Tutoiement* is also a means of infantilization, treating adults as eternal children, and a means of reaffirming unequal power relations. Abdelaziz Chaambi raised the fact that police use this very informal form of address during frequent identity

checks and made a parallel with the *Code de l'Indigénat*, which, according to Chaambi, prescribed the informal “*tu*” when one addressed an “*indigène*”.

Dans le Code de l'Indigénat, une des conditions pour parler à l'indigène c'est qu'il fallait le tutoyer. (Abdelaziz Chaambi, UP debate, 11/03/2015)

I did not find any proof that this was part of the *Code de l'Indigénat* which dealt rather with different legal regimes, but it is certain that *tutoiement* was very much integrated in social interactions during colonial times, and was the standard form of address for those designated as indigenous (*indigènes*). Le Cour Grandmaison (2010) demonstrates that, in addition to being a social practice, *tutoiement* is also a social injunction (*injonction sociale*), it is the type of advice experienced officers transmitted to newcomers in the French colonies (see Montherlant 1995 [1964] for an example in fiction) and of which the origins apparently are to be found in France's involvement in slavery. He states that this informal address in social interaction “was a means to state publicly, and in a way perceivable by all, the inferiority of the “*indigène*” and to “affirm (*conforter*) his/her subjected status in an inegalitarian society characterized by a total dissymmetry of rights and duties” (Le Cour Grandmaison 2009, 185). An official document that confirmed this practice is a circular issued after WWII by the governor general (*gouverneur général*) of Dakar and that forbids the use of *tutoiement* by state officials (Le Cour Grandmaison 2009; Périé 1994). This informal way of addressing racialized persons has remained very common though, which Le Cour Grandmaison interprets as a legacy of the colonial past (2009, 186). It still works as a way to remind racialized people of their subjugated status in France. Beyond *tutoiement*, these checks are accompanied by other forms of physical and racial humiliation.

### *Degrading remarks*

Humiliation is further carried out through degrading remarks. Youth participants in the debate with the police did not bring up any experiences of racist remarks, but the case of Theo was brought up continuously, more with regard to the violation of his physical integrity than with regard to racist remarks. Theo accused the police of using the racist term “*bamboula*”, and a police union activist defended the use of the term on national television saying that while not entirely politically correct it remained appropriate (*convenable*) in an exchange between youth and the police.<sup>229</sup> This in itself is quite indicative of tolerance in the police force of racist remarks that seek to degrade a person. Omer Mas Capitolin raised other examples, drawing on the information that the platform “*En finir avec les contrôles au faciès*” gathered in preparation for the court case that youth, with the help of this organization, filed against a police brigade in the 12<sup>th</sup> district (*arrondissement*) in Paris citing degrading terms like “*face de pneu*”, “*parasite*”, “*nuisible*” et “*rat*” (UP debate, 26/04/2018).

<sup>229</sup> Source: “ ‘Bamboula, ça reste convenable’: un syndicaliste de la police dérape, Le Roux le recadre”, Le Monde, 10/02/2017, [https://www.lemonde.fr/police-justice/article/2017/02/10/bamboula-bruno-le-roux-condamne-les-propos-racistes-d-un-responsable-policier\\_5077430\\_1653578.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/police-justice/article/2017/02/10/bamboula-bruno-le-roux-condamne-les-propos-racistes-d-un-responsable-policier_5077430_1653578.html), accessed 13/01/2020.



### *Physical humiliation*

Omer Mas Capitolin also raised an aspect of physical or sexual humiliation that was not mentioned during the debate in Grenoble, either because it was not relevant or because it was too awkward to talk about it in the group. During police checks a police officer may perform body searches looking for concealed objects such as weapons or drugs. The Theo Luhaka case exposed that these body searches sometimes result in forms of sexual violation, and reactions to this case demonstrated that this is not an isolated incident. Being touched in such intimate places is a very effective form of humiliation, and the shame associated with it prohibits victims from speaking out. In the court case that Omer Mas Capitolin prepared, he also gathered proof that police used forms of sexual humiliation in Paris, which is an important form of domination (see e.g. Fanon 2010 [1961]; Shepard 2017).<sup>230</sup>

On a aidé 18 mineurs à porter plainte contre la police, non seulement pour des insultes racistes (...) mais surtout pour des palpations, qui doivent être exceptionnelles selon le code de procédure: "Allez vas-y que je te mets la main entre les jambes", "je te palpe les coquilles", "je te touche les parties génitales", "je demande à un gamin de 14 ans de se déshabiller complètement." (Omer Mas Capitolin, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

Omer Mas Capitolin explained that being physically touched by the police on the street, for everyone to see, is a form of public humiliation.

### *Public humiliation*

Identity checks are a public show of subjugation to state authority and display a presumption of guilt for the eyes of the neighborhood. In the short time of the police check the person is displayed to the neighborhood as being guilty of something:

Le discours consiste à dire : "Si tu n'as rien à te reprocher, ça dure 30 secondes". Oui mais pendant ces 30 secondes, tu es affiché dans ton quartier, devant tout le monde, tu peux avoir ton employeur, ta belle-mère, qui passent, qui te voient les jambes écartées en train de te faire palper par un flic, et qui, tout de suite, va se dire "Ah, il a fait quelque chose". (Omer Mas Capitolin, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

Omer Mas Capitolin insisted that it is also through these checks that racialized young people become aware that the police treat them differently based on their skin color.

On a des policiers qui viennent arrêter des gamins à la sortie du collège. Et ce qui est difficile pour ces gamins, c'est que leurs petits copains blancs avec qui ils étaient en train de discuter ne subissent pas ça. En termes de résilience ou de sentiment

<sup>230</sup> The court ruled in favor of the group of young people in Paris that filed a complaint about police identity checks, see Deléan, Michel. "Violences policières sur des mineurs: l'Etat est condamné pour faute lourde", *Mediapart*, <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/291020/violences-policieres-sur-des-mineurs-l-etat-est-condamne-pour-faute-lourde>, accessed 6/11/2020.

d'appartenance, on est en train de bouffer nos mêmes et on nourrit quelque chose qui est extrêmement néfaste pour la société entière. (Omer Mas Capitolin, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

César is well placed to observe that people are not equal with regard to police checks. He is white and brought up in a highly educated family. He recounted his experience of hanging out with friends in the park at the foot of his apartment building when the police passed, inquiring whether he was alright, i.e. not being bothered by “darker” youngsters.

Moi ça m'est déjà arrivé de rigoler avec des potes en bas de chez moi et les flics ils passent et ils disent: "Monsieur il n'y a pas de problème?" Bah non, je suis avec mes potes, non il n'y a pas de problème. C'est une putain de violence et on ne s'en rend pas compte. C'est une violence qui est silencieuse. (César, interview, 17/03/2017)

He is very aware that he is not treated in the same way as his friends that are racialized as Arabs and Muslims or Blacks. The violence is thus not only in the experience of the police control itself and in the public humiliation that goes with it, but also in the injustice that some are presumed guilty a priori and others are presumed innocent.

The experience of being made to feel guilty and confined to certain areas, being made to feel out of place in the more bourgeois areas of the city, in the areas of consumption, and in those areas that are frequented by tourists is shared by women wearing a *hijab*. Both men and women speak from different contexts about being given the feeling that they are guilty of something. Naima, at the polling station, felt that others treated her as if she had done something wrong, as if she was guilty of a crime. Fadoua felt that those that stared at her on the street perceived her to be an aggressor, simply due to the way she was dressed. Police surveillance and control is a display of presumed guilt. Both men and women experienced that their bodies are seen as aggressors, as presenting a danger, as bodies that need to be put in their place. Their bodies are criminalized: the only agency that they are attributed is that of a “phantasmagorical” aggression (Fanon 2010; [1961] in Dorlin 2017, 29).

### *2.3) Unequal access to employment*

L'accès au travail est le principal enjeu au sein de la société et beaucoup de personnes racisées et ethnicisées issues d'ex-pays colonisés sont orientées vers certains corps de métiers spécifiques ou vers le chômage.

(Nasima Moujoud, UP debate, 08/12/2017)

Pointing out difference legitimizes differential treatment and marginalization; it therefore has material as well as political consequences as it has impact on one's capacity to participate politically. Following Tillion (1957), Shepard speaks of “economic racism,” pointing out that the most significant effect of racism in Algeria was the pauperization of its population (Shepard 2008a, 35), and in a parallel fashion, poverty in France is racialized. For

Moujoud the objective behind the designation of racial or cultural differences is both political and material, and serves to legitimize marginalization, even today.

Elles ou ils sont trop différent(e)s pour être pleinement associé(e)s à la conduite de la société. Donc si elles ou ils sont différent(e)s, elles ou ils ne peuvent pas assumer les rôles politiques qu'assument les autres, donc elles ou ils doivent **rester à leur place**. La désignation de la différence a pour objectif de maintenir les uns et les autres à leur place. (Nasima Moujoud, UP debate, 08/12/2017)

The idea that capitalist and racist dynamics cannot be dissociated is one of the central themes of the Modernity/Coloniality Working Group, as discussed in the first chapter. Analyzing the attribution of difference at the intersection of race and class dynamics is also very relevant for modern day France. This is also the proposal of Moujoud, and the direction she proposed to give to the Université populaire's cycle on what remains of the colonial past.

Je me demande dans quelle mesure le travail, donc l'accès aux ressources et à l'égalité - y compris dans les espaces d'éducation populaire et tous les autres - n'est pas au centre des relectures de l'histoire coloniale. (Nasima Moujoud, discussion circle, 07/07/2017)

Despite the relevance of this question it was not the specific topic of any of the debates. However, the question of access to employment is absolutely crucial to debates in the neighborhood about the challenges its inhabitants face.<sup>231</sup> Employment is a condition associated with adulthood, unemployment on the other hand keeps those concerned in a child-like condition. Women can partly escape this status through marriage and motherhood, but men cannot, and have to deal with the humiliation. Demands for equality in terms of access to the job market have not been answered with structural political responses (Tissot, 2006). Instead, politicians invest in soccer fields to keep "social peace" according to a youth worker at Codase in Villeneuve, so men in their thirties still kill their time playing soccer.

C'est ça, et tu leur construis un stade de foot. Et à 30 ans ils jouent encore au foot parce qu'ils n'ont pas de boulot, mais on construit encore un stade de foot. Et tu te dis, mais il y a des gens, ils sont élus, ils sont payés pour ça ! (Jean-Pierre, interview, 29/07/2017)

In this subsection I discuss some of the stories female participants shared about the obstacles they faced in access to employment, in particular Muslim women who chose to wear a veil. From these stories I understand that particularly women aiming for higher level jobs are confronted with obstacles (Delphy 2008, 135). It seems that a veil is tolerated for

<sup>231</sup> The fact that there is a consensus on the issue made it less interesting for debate IN the neighborhood but the question should be posed to actors in charge of urban policy in interaction with the Ministries of Education and Economic Affairs.

cleaning, but forbidden by law when working in public administration, and obstructed by many private companies through specific internal regulations (field notes, 20/03/2015).

The first story about economic exclusion as a result of wearing the veil was told by a participant from a community-based organization in Marseille. Like Jouda, she is part of the national movement Pas Sans Nous that seeks to defend the interests of MSHN inhabitants. She was vocal about the class dynamics and about spaces of professional exclusion:

Il faut qu'on arrête de se fermer les yeux. Dire qu'une femme voilée dérange quand elle travaille à l'hôpital, mais une femme voilée qui nettoie les cabinets, cela ne dérange personne, elle a le droit de travailler. Pour moi, il y a cette hypocrisie qu'il faut arrêter. (Participant, UP debate, 20/11/2015)

A second story confirmed the above conclusion. Nadia pursued higher education and encountered numerous difficulties in finding a job. She was an active participant of the Université populaire and member of Nous Citoyennes (see chapter 2). She regrets that people do not look at her skills but are fixated on her appearance:

Dans le travail aussi. J'ai rencontré beaucoup de problèmes dans les formations quand tu veux accéder à des formations où tu as la possibilité d'avoir accès à un financement mais que ton apparence ne convient pas par rapport à l'éthique ou la réglementation de l'entreprise. C'est quelque chose qui est blessant parce que tu te dis que tu as les compétences, t'as les formations parfois et quand ton profil ne convient pas parce que tu portes un voile... Ils ne voient pas tes compétences en fait. Ils se focalisent sur l'apparence. **Tu dois être à leur image**, de ce qu'ils souhaitent. Dans les entretiens je ne me laisse pas faire. Quand on me dit : "Oui il faut enlever votre voile pour l'entretien", [je réponds] "Non madame, je n'enlève pas mon voile pour l'entretien". (Nadia, interview, 21/02/2017)

Nadia pointed out that employers focus on appearances and seek to hire people "*à leur image*" which can both mean who are like them or who correspond to their image. This remark fits well with a topic I further develop in section 4.4 about the sacrifices demanded from immigrants and their children in order to become French (give up their cultural specificities and their right to difference).

A third story from an Algerian woman who arrived in France about ten years ago demonstrates that, even in lower-skilled jobs, it is hard to work with a veil. She lives in Villeneuve and is part of Madame Ruetabaga.

Une fois embauchée pour des ménages, son patron voulait qu'elle enlève le voile. Même volontaire pour mettre un bandeau, elle sentait encore du gêne et a été sous pression pour quitter son travail. (Debate Madame Ruetabaga, 06/01/2017)<sup>232</sup>

<sup>232</sup> I quote from the minutes of the debate that were published in *Le Crieur de la Villeneuve*.

In order to obtain or defend their rights women could not count on labour unions, according to a (white female) trade unionist who came to support Chaambi during his trial. She explained the subjugated position of immigrants in labour unions and added: “*et les femmes voilées, n'en parlons même pas parce que pour eux [union members], c'est vraiment un dégoût hein?... un dégoût!*” (Solexine debate, 24/01/2018). Béchir, a labour immigrant and political activist, confirmed that the working-class immigrants in MSHN were abandoned by “traditionally leftist” actors that had played a role in political organizing and unionism up until the 1980s. He argued that the immigrant working class was kept in a subaltern position and denied citizenship.

Maintenant, ce qui se passe dans ces quartiers populaires dits 'sensibles', est que la gauche traditionnelle a cessé depuis les années 80, de jouer le rôle qui était le sien : l'encadrement. Cette gauche-là considérait et considère encore la population de ces quartiers comme une population jetable, c'est-à-dire qu'il ne faut pas qu'elle soit exigeante, revendicative. Elle n'a pas la prétention qu'elle fasse partie d'une citoyenneté pleine et entière. (Béchir, interview, 01/06/2016)

These stories are arguments in favor of the claim that racism has the function of maintaining white privilege. It is therefore not surprising that in particular those women aiming at higher positions are targeted by these measures. According to Spire, in colonial Algeria, excluding *indigènes* from public service positions was one of the ways in which they were denied citizenship (2003). Only those who were naturalized (*naturalisés*) and who had “evolved” to assimilate French culture and life-style, could apply for these positions. Hajjat and Mohamed interpret the requirement to unveil (*injonction au dévoilement*) as a common form of islamophobia and frame the latter in Elias and Scotson’s theory about the “Established and the Outsiders” (Elias and Scotson 1994 [1956]).

Resentment arises when a marginalized, socially inferior, group that is despised and stigmatized, is about to claim, not only legal equality but also social equality, when its members begin to occupy positions in society that were formerly not accessible to them, which means that they start to enter directly in competition with the members of the majority (Hajjat and Mohammed 2013, 20; after Elias et al. 1991, 152).

In other words, “we tolerate a marginal, stigmatized and relatively powerless group as long as their members settle for an inferior status, which, according to the conception of the established group, is their due, and as long as they behave according to their inferior status” (*Ibid.*). In the case of immigrants in France, behaving according to their inferior status means behaving like a visitor or a newcomer that has to adapt to the social norms of the ‘host’ country, but cannot claim the right to difference. The following sections in this chapter illustrate this point. Several stories from participants confirmed that the current generation of post-colonial immigrants has become, or made itself, visible to an extent that previous generations had not. This can procure a feeling of competition and fear among the “established” population.

One participant who brought visibility into relation with competition is Mohamed D., a social worker, artist, and inhabitant of Villeneuve. He contradicted the feeling, which is shared among a part of the Université populaire participants, that the situation in France for MSHN habitants, and Muslims in particular, is deteriorating in comparison to the 1980s. Mohamed D. observed that those with an immigrant background have become more visible in France and that they have started to occupy central positions.

Aujourd'hui, je connais des gars qui sont mariés, avec des enfants tout ça. A l'époque en 80, la population issue de l'immigration n'existait pas ! [dans le sens qu'elle n'était pas pris en compte et restait invisible]. Aujourd'hui, les populations "issues de", enfin les jeunes de 3ème génération comme on les appelle, ils sont partout. [Par exemple] quand je suis arrivé [à Grenoble début 1970], il y avait une mosquée dans la rue Très Cloître, en-dessous. Maintenant il y a des lieux de culte partout. Donc **ce qui n'était peut-être pas visible avant est devenu très visible aujourd'hui**, ce qui fait que les rapports sociaux ne sont plus les mêmes. Aujourd'hui il y a eu une population issue de l'immigration pauvre, qui vient du Sud, les ex-colonisés et on voit que dans les quartiers, ceux qui étaient minorité sont devenus majorité. Et dans le centre-ville, tous ces bars, cafés, commerces, comme le boucher Boudoudou ou les Kebabs, avant il n'y en avait qu'un seul. Aujourd'hui, les rapports entre populations sont des rapports concurrentiels. On se bat pour les mêmes postes, les mêmes logements etc. Je me dis qu'il **faut bien qu'à un moment des populations doivent s'affirmer, rendre visible** etc. (Mohamed D., UP discussion circle, 07/07/2017)

For Mohamed D., sons and daughters of post-colonial (mostly labour) immigrants have come into competition with the "established" population over social positions. This observation thus goes in the direction of the thesis of Hajjat and Mohammed, who add that it is precisely because of this competition that differences are being re-articulated and (new) forms of exclusion operationalized. This is what makes the colonial past relevant in the present.

Observations about inequality; the strained access to central city spaces and to institutional spaces; and difficulty of access to work in general, and higher positions in particular, all bring us to the issue of what place racialized people can occupy. In this section I have demonstrated that racialized citizens from MSHN "cannot be present in public spaces without feeling uncomfortable, victimized and basically 'out of place'" and therefore, it must be questioned, as Philo and Painter have argued, whether they can be regarded as citizens at all (1995, 195). The embodied experience of inequality indeed is a question of citizenship. Throughout the debates participants stated on many different occasions that they are not considered in the same way as most French, but as second-class citizens. The result of othering is that they are denied the right to claim their rights as French citizens: instead they are treated as eternal foreigners.

### 3) The consequences of the internalization of inferiority for political organizing

In the previous section I discussed the experience of inequality and the feeling of not having a place in France, in its public and institutional spaces. The embodied experience of inequality means being made to feel inferior. This section deals with the internalization of inferiority as an obstacle to citizenship and political organizing: what impact has the feeling of inferiority on one's capacity to act as a political subject? I look at the ways ideas about superiority and inferiority can impact one's capacity to speak out and challenge unequal relations (3.1); as well as at the ways feelings of racial and ethnic superiority or inferiority get under one's skin (3.2).

#### 3.1) Inequality as an obstacle to citizenship

The widely shared feeling among participants that despite the fact that all those with French nationality are French citizens, and on paper have the same rights, in practice this is not the case. Participants made a distinction between written laws and lived experience. Tassadit for example observed that "there are rights, there are laws, but there is no justice" (*il y a des droits, il y a des lois, mais il n'y a pas de justice*) (informal discussion, 06/10/2017).

Participants rarely expressed themselves directly in terms of rights in the way Tassadit did, instead they said that there is no place for them in France, "*On n'a pas de place*" or "*il n'y a pas de place pour nous en France*". What people mean when they make these statements is that the place they are attributed in society does not correspond to the place that they aspire to. These statements speak of a discrepancy between the image people have of themselves and the image society projects on them.

The following two quotes demonstrate the way the feeling of inferiority is an impediment to acting as citizens. M. a male participant of the Université populaire, who came to France to seek asylum from a central African country and was student at Science Po, stated that:

Le problème des dominations est que ça joue psychologiquement sur les Africains, sur la couleur de peau. C'est que l'homme blanc est supérieur à l'homme noir, l'homme blanc réfléchit mieux que l'homme noir.... (Participant, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

M. thus evoked the psychological consequences of the inferiority that is associated to his skin color. According to Tchetché-Apea, the fact that people have internalized the superiority/inferiority discourse that was central to colonialism is today one of the main obstacles to addressing one's inferior status in society through collective political action. That is what he means when he says that those primarily concerned by this problem "have integrated the fact of history". They do not grant themselves the right to, and do not feel concerned by "the political cause", feeling themselves powerless.

Le problème est que les premiers concernés ont du mal à s'organiser du fait qu'ils ont intégré le fait de l'histoire et de s'autocensurer entre guillemets, ne pas se sentir concernés par la cause politique parce qu'ils pensent qu'on ne pense pas qu'on a la force, on ne pense

pas qu'on va y arriver. On pense que ça ne sert à rien. (Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea, UP discussion circle, 23/02/2018)

### *3.2) Inferiorization gets under the skin and is responsible for self-silencing*

This idea of the internalization of inferiority was theorized by Frantz Fanon in his emblematic work "Black skins, white masks". He started out with the following quote from Césaire (2000 [1972]): "I am talking of millions of men who have been skillfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement" (Fanon 2008 [1967], 1). According to Fanon the internalization of inferiority is the outcome of a double process: first it is material, and second it is symbolic. Fanon therefore explained inferiorization as a combination of a race and a class condition: one's inferior position is constantly reaffirmed in cultural representations and consequently becomes internalized, gets under the skin. Fanon called this process "epidermalization" (Makward 2007, 2). Makward states that the process of epidermalization "indicates that the individual victim has accepted the dominant society's declaration of superiority and translated it into racial terms" (*Ibid.*). Rather than "accepted", the term "apparently accepted" would be more appropriate, in the sense that those who are inferiorized do not contest their position openly and publicly, but this does not mean that they accept it either.

It has been striking to hear in participants' accounts of the experiences of inequality how this feeling gets under one's skin, and how difficult it is to defy this inferiorization and not to internalize it (see for example Biko 1987, 21). The internalization of the inferiority of certain cultures, languages, geographic origin, skin color and religions *etc.* clearly is a legacy of the colonial past.

Three resource persons and invited speakers of the Université populaire commented on the internalization of inferiority, establishing a link between past and present. Abdallah (resource person and FSQP activist) evoked Fanon, the internalization of inferiority, and white supremacy in answer to my question of whether the colonial legacy (*le fait colonial*) is still present, and whether it continues to play a role in people's capacity to act as political beings. This was said in a debate at the MJC Desnos held after a film screening in which the main (racialized) character, Salma, says at a certain moment to his (racialized) friends "You're still colonized in your heads" (*Vous êtes encore colonisés dans vos têtes*) when they looked desperately for a white candidate to complement their electoral list (field notes, MJC Desnos, 26/10/2017). Abdallah confirmed the continued relevance of Fanon's analysis fifty years after its publication, in the sense that racial inferiorization still gets under one's skin. Despite the fact that racism in France is less articulated in terms of skin color than elsewhere, who will be considered as truly "French" (*Français de souche*) and who is not, results from a racialization processes that people integrate. Colonialism altered both the discourse of the colonized and the colonizers about themselves, as Moujoud pointed out as invited speaker, building on Fanon:



Il y a aussi un processus qui a profondément transformé les conditions du discours des colonisés, comme le dit Frantz Fanon. Les discours des colonisés sur elles-mêmes et eux-mêmes, comme le discours des colonisateurs, sont ou ont été construits, reconstruits, redéfinis, dans ce contexte colonial (...). (Nasima Moujoud, UP debate, 08/12/17)

When the colonized integrated the discourse of colonizers, they integrated the cultural representations that devalued them and overvalued the colonizer. This belief in European superiority is still widespread according to Herrick Mouafo (resource person). He provided an example of persistent Eurocentrism and representations of France as the center of the world, which still produces forms of the colonization of knowledge:

Je crois que la colonisation a beaucoup contribué à ce que j'aime appeler une "dictature de la pensée". Elle a fait croire au monde qu'il y a un centre où se pense l'universel, et ce centre-là, soit c'est le vieux continent, ou alors c'est la France, mais que ceux qui n'y sont pas, ne peuvent pas prétendre penser de manière sérieuse. (Herrick Mouafo, discussion circle, 07/07/2018)

These representations travel over space and time and are still effective in Villeneuve.

Four Université populaire participants commented on the ways the internalization of inferiority leads to different forms of self-silencing: Mohamed B., Tassadit, Béchir and Mayare. Being considered as uncivilized and having internalized it to a certain extent provokes a notable feeling of being out of place, and prevents a person from calling into question his/her inferior position, as Mohamed B. explained in his memoirs. He arrived in France in the early 1960s, the illiterate son of a landless farmer, and he explained that he came from an "occupied people" (*peuple occupé*) who had "the tendency to see the colonizer as a force", comparing the latter to red ants and colonized Algerians to the much slower black ants (Boukhatem 2014, 23). He was used to naturalistic explanations of differences in social positions:

Le colonialisme a cela de puissant qu'il entraîne des complexes inévitablement. Pour exemple, au temps de notre dépendance, nous pensions que les Algériens, représentaient des fourmis noires, les plus lentes, quand les Français, eux, étaient associés aux fourmis rouges, davantage rapides. Les complexes sont longs à défaire et tout ce qui nous arrivait de malheur relevait de la normalité. (Boukhatem 2014, 23)

Béchir, a son of a landless farmer like Mohamed, but born to a politically active family in Tunisia, explained that the experience of colonization "handicapped" (*handicaper*) the first generation of immigrants arriving in France. He described how the fact of having occupied an inferior position in a colonial society seriously affected immigrants' confidence "in the sense that it delayed the rebuilding of one's conscience" and therefore their capacity to critique the French and to defend themselves in public space or in discussions (interview, 09/05/2016). The feeling of lacking legitimacy led to a practice of self-silencing, or what Dotson (2011) has called "testimonial smothering", which is one of the effects of epistemic

violence. Its obvious consequence is that it discourages any form of challenging one's inferior position. Another example of self-silencing is that, in the case of inequality, one is associated with an inferior group and apprehended from this angle. When one takes the floor, one therefore does not speak as an individual but as a representative of this marginalized group. This leads to a form of silencing because as one speaks, one speaks for an entire community, and is held accountable for this community. Internalizing the idea that there are civilized and uncivilized people has led in Tassadit's case to enormous pressure not to fall into the category of uncivilized. She seeks to distance herself from the 'uncivilized' so that the positive image others form about her may be extended to the representation of the inferiorized group. She feels a pressure to always prove what she is worthy, never to lose control and leave a negative image of the group one belongs to, as transpires in the following quote:

Moi je suis venu pour coloniser les cœurs [et non pas les terres], pour prouver aux Français que nous ne sommes pas les barbares qu'ils nous disent que nous sommes, [des gens] de rien, et que nous sommes des gens civilisés.... (Tassadit, informal discussion, 06/10/2017)

This pressure is part of the dynamic of the inferiority/superiority complex and is associated with her classification of un/civilized people. She represented white French people as civilized and was puzzled when she was confronted with the opposite: "*Comment une femme civilisée peut penser comme ça?*" (UP debate, 13/10/2017). She felt she couldn't judge the person and had the duty to remain polite and respectful, which echoes with Tassadit's earlier story about her complicity with the silence in discussions with "French" about France's colonial past in Algeria. Gaining the feeling that it is legitimate to openly question one's inferior position in society is a long and complex process.

A last example of the feeling of inferiority and reactions of people comes from Mayare, a young woman of Algerian origin who is part of the Agir pour la Paix collective. Her story demonstrates that the induced feeling of inferiority is not necessarily internalized and does not necessarily result in submission, but may also lead to anger. The sense of inferiority induces complex psychological processes of desire and rejection, notably described by Fanon (2015 [1952]). Inferiorized men do not just want to be recognized by their superiors, they also want to own the house of the master and to sleep with his wife (Fanon 2010 [1961]). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Mayare evoked the feeling of inferiority to explain why some people, mostly younger, say that it is now their turn to "fuck with France" (*emmerder la France*) after 130 years of French occupation. She said that she mostly heard this discourse at high school, and in the specific context of feelings of inferiority.

Ça va toujours être par rapport au conflit et ça va toujours être quand **on se sent inférieur** donc soit quelqu'un qui a un statut d'autorité, soit un blanc comme tu dis, soit un Algérien qui s'intègre entre guillemets et qui n'a pas de problème avec ça. (Mayare, interview, 07/07/2017)

Mayare mentioned that racialized young people in Echirolles can feel inferior in relation to their teachers, ‘Whites’ and (surprisingly) with “integrated Algerians”. Mayare admits that she herself has felt inferior (“weak”) in the past and that in this context it is a “natural mechanism” to withdraw and protect oneself through this kind of combative discourse, recalling the past and justifying revenge in the present. Mayare described its working as a defense mechanism:

Du coup on se sent faible par rapport à lui [quelqu’un qui a un statut d’autorité], on se sent... Lui il a... il assume quoi tout ça et moi je n’arrive pas alors je me... Voilà c’est un mécanisme naturel. Je me mets dans ma coquille et je parle dans les phrases qui... [ne finit pas sa phrase]. (Mayare, interview, 07/07/2017)

In Mayare’s account feelings of inferiority lead both to withdrawal and verbal aggression, which both function as defense mechanisms. I further comment on the aggression as defense mechanism in section 5, and on the status of “integrated Algerians”, as mentioned by Mayare, in subsection 4.3.b.

What systematically comes back in these different accounts of dealing with inferiorization is how it impedes people from speaking out as equal citizens and making political claims to their rights. In these accounts participants often positioned themselves in opposition to the “French”. I argue in the next section that there is a specific form of racism in France which frames the question of color in terms of nationality and citizenship.

#### 4) Nationality without citizenship

Les gens n’ont pas dans leur conscience qu’on peut être Noir et Français, Arabe et Français, qu’on peut être basané et Français.  
(Jouda, UP meeting, 02/05/2017)

This section is dedicated to the identities that research participants were assigned, other than ‘French’, and the impact these assigned identities have on them. A discussion of the terms research participants employed to describe themselves is included in chapter 7. The assignation of identities was a transversal topic that came up in the discussions of all the working groups. While identities by nature are multiple and situational (Brubaker and Junqua 2001), some assigned identities work as labels that are hard to get rid of, they stick. When Spivak says that subalterns occupy a position without identity (Weselby 2014),<sup>233</sup> I understand this as being assigned an identity that deforms lived experience, and that leaves little room for auto-definition. According to Weselby, “oppressed minorities are defined and understood solely by their differences to the rest of the social strata”, they are systematically regarded as inferior and “they are not able to think or communicate as a

<sup>233</sup> Weselby, “Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, on the Subaltern and Epistemic Violence”, 2014, <https://magpiecws.wordpress.com/2014/09/13/gayatri-chakravorty-spivak-on-the-subaltern-and-epistemic-violence-study-notes-2/>, accessed 06/01/2019.

unified collective subject because they have been objectified” (*Ibid.*).<sup>234</sup> Assigned identities such as being Black, Arab, Muslim, and/or MSHN inhabitant have the effect that they symbolically exclude a person from the category “French” which is associated with White, Christian, and European. Skin color obviously is an important factor in making a difference between ‘French’ and the rest, but it intersects with other attributed characteristics or identities.

This othering would not have such a power if it was not embedded in material relations: racial and cultural domination are embedded in economic power structures. I therefore argue for an intersectional approach to understand the stakes involved in being considered a French citizen.

This section is structured as follows: it starts with a brief historic overview of the racialization of French national identity (4.1); followed by a series of quotes from participants about not feeling recognized as French citizens, including an empirical excursion that explains that APLP members felt that they only could be French abroad (4.2); a discussion of the attributed identities that placed participants symbolically outside of the nation (4.3); an explanation of the interests and the costs involved in becoming French, as well as the reasons to renounce this objective (4.4); and, finally, I draw a parallel between the perpetual postponement of French citizenship during colonial rule with the current situation, in which one eternally strives but never really gets to be considered as French, despite having French nationality.

#### *4.1) The racialization of French national identity*

In the historical context of post-revolutionary France, we can observe “the progressive racialization of French identity” as a result of which whiteness became a constitutive part of French national identity (N’Diaye 2006, 53). While there clearly was a color line in the designation of difference and privileges during the second colonial empire (mid 1850s – 1960s) it became less articulated or justified in terms of color and on the distinction between ‘Blacks’ and ‘Whites’ than it had been in the period before, notably in the plantation colonies (*Ibid.*). This difference was due to a change in the discourse used to justify the colonial enterprise in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This discourse came to be more articulated around civilization and reason as the distinction between those considered as French and who could appeal to the rights of a French citizen, and those who could not. Racism is the operating force behind this distinction, but skin color is only one form of racialization and of marking bodies as superior and inferior: ethnicity, language, culture, or religion are others (Grosfoguel and Cohen 2012). These differences depend on differences in colonial histories across time and space (*Ibid.*). In the French colonial project in addition to color other differences came to be articulated in legal regimes (*Code Noir*, 1685), e.g. through the category “French Muslims” in the case of Algeria. To understand the continuing inferiorization of certain people in France

<sup>234</sup> This source is an online publication that does not provide page numbers.

it is not enough to establish a simple continuity between the forms of racism deployed in the colonies and the forms of disqualification and subjugation in the present (Saada 2006, 57). The modes of the production of difference have evolved over time and space, and one can observe the racialization of the Muslim figure. Muslim religious identity, according to Grosfoguel, currently constitutes “a major marker on the inferiority/superiority line in Europe and the United States” (Grosfoguel and Cohen 2012, 45). I observed in Villeneuve that references to skin color occur more frequently among ‘African’ or ‘black’ research participants, while the terms “Arab” or “Muslim” were employed for those having a link with North-African immigration, referring to ethnic and confessional categories. For the latter, it is however still their physical appearance that leads to an assigned religious identity.

#### *4.2) Not being recognized as French*

Participants expressed themselves in the following terms in order to indicate that they were not considered as French, despite holding French nationality:

- On est français mais on ne nous traite pas comme des Français. Pourquoi “issu de” ? (Michelle, interview, 15/03/2013)
- Aujourd'hui je vis ici et la question qu'on se pose, nous Antillais : sommes-nous Français à part entière, ou entièrement à part ? (Kenjah, UP debate, 13/10/2017)
- Une personne m'a demandé “est-ce que tu te sens français?”. Mais [ce n'est pas la question. La question est] est-ce que toi tu me vois comme un Français ? Moi, j'aimerais bien me sentir français, j'aimerais bien voter comme tout le monde, [mais ce n'est pas le cas]. Pourtant je suis né en France j'ai fait des études en France, et je travaille en France. (Participant, UP debate, 20/03/2015)
- J'entends encore des propos racistes à mon rencontre et malgré mon intégration réussie à la culture française, certaines personnes me remettent sans cesse à ma place d'immigré. (Boukhatem 2014, 81)
- On nous met dans des cadres d'opposition, l'identité culturelle [Arabe et Musulmane] contre l'identité française, alors qu'en réalité, ils ne sont pas opposés, c'est l'un et l'autre. (Nadia Kirat, UP debate, 26/05/2018)
- Pourquoi faut-il élaborer une approche particulière alors que les gens sont nés en France, parlent français, ont été éduqués à l'école de la République, se sentent citoyens de ce pays, aiment ce pays ? (Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea, UP discussion circle, 23/02/2017)

Participants stressed that their belonging to France, their ‘Frenchness’, was continually questioned by white French through stressing a person’s immigrant roots (*être “issu de”*); by asking whether one felt French despite the fact that the person was born, educated, and working in France; by giving one the impression that one’s immigrant origins are an obstacle to being considered as French; and finally by discursively articulating MSHN as ‘other’ spaces.

During the journey to Copenhagen with APLP these identity questions were quite central to many of our conversations, brought about by their surprise that Danish young people of immigrant origin welcomed us waving the Danish flag [Box 5.36]. It led to observations in the group about their feeling -or not feeling- French, and under which circumstances.

**Box 5.36 [empirical excursion]: One has to be abroad to affirm oneself as French.**

When APLP travelled to Denmark, it was hosted by a youth center (*Ungdomsskole*) based in Ishoj, a suburban area of Copenhagen with a high concentration of inhabitants of immigrant origin. The group that welcomed us waving little Danish flags had parents who came from Iran, Palestine, Syria, etc. This appropriation of the national flag was met by surprise by APLP and interpreted as an indication that the Danish (immigrant) youth felt entirely Danish. When the group from Echirolles would host international visitors, it would never occur to do the same, and thereby affirm their adhesion to the French nation. It induced them to question why Danish youth apparently felt so comfortable in mobilizing this national symbol and why they were not.



Figure 5.100 Danish flags as a way to welcome the Agir pour la Paix group in Ishoj. (Photo APLP, 18/05/2015)

For Steven, one of the APLP members, these Danish flags meant that these youths were no longer considered as immigrants but (almost) as Danish: *“ils ne sont même plus immigrés. Ils sont intégrés...c’est des Danois, ce sont pratiquement des Danois”* (interview by Mayare, 01/05/2017). The flag experience led to a debate within the APLP youth about whether they felt French, and under what conditions. For example, that same day on the soccer field, they started to sing the national anthem with hands on their hearts after a friendly match against the Danish youth, which they admitted they would not be inclined to do in France.

If racialized inhabitants of MSHN are not considered as French, then how are they considered, which identities are they assigned? In the next subsection I seek to understand the alternative terms and attributed identities through which they are discursively placed outside of the nation.

#### *4.3) Being reduced to other symbolic spaces and categories*

This subsection seeks to understand the role of skin color (4.3.a); ethnicity and religion (4.3.b); spatial identities (4.3.c); and of being associated with other spaces, both within and outside of France, and its role in designating a racialized inhabitant of Villeneuve as ‘not French’ (4.3.d). I use participants own comments as input for answering this question because they themselves often tried to understand the causes of their differential treatment.

For participants, it was not always clear which of these factors (skin color, ethnicity, religion etc.) dominated in their designation as ‘other’. Alicia wondered for example whether it is her Arab name, her immigrant background, or the fact she wears a veil that can explain why she is being treated unequally at University.

Il y'a vraiment une inégalité des choses. [Remarque par rapport à son traitement inégalitaire à l'université] Est ce que c'est parce que je suis d'une **famille d'immigrés** ; parce que je porte un **nom arabe** ; est-ce que c'est parce que je montre **l'Islam** dans ma **tenue vestimentaire** ? J'ai tout mêlé en fait et j'essaye de comprendre pourquoi, pourquoi tout est inégal comme ça ? (Alicia, interview, 01/05/2018)

On voit bien que quand on est né dans un **certain territoire**, quand on a une certaine **origine**, une certaine **confession**, on n'est pas traité de la même façon. [On est] assigné à une certaine identité, réduit à un statut qu'on ne peut plus supporter car on a vocation à être traité autrement. (Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

J'aimerais bien être juste un individu qui marche dans la rue. Ce n'est pas le cas. En fait l'État me réassigne parce que je ne suis **pas française** et tous les ans je dois aller réclamer un titre de séjour. Dans la rue on me réassigne, parce que je suis **musulmane**, en fait je suis une **femme** il y a toujours des réassignations. (Participant, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

Participants felt that their immigrant origins, their Arab names, their religion (Islam), and the fact of being dressed like a Muslim all pose a problem, in addition to being associated to a “certain place” (*territoire*), which refers to MSHN. In the upcoming part of this subsection, I describe in more detail how each of these characteristics played a role, drawing again on participants’ stories. The section will conclude with an analysis of their intersections.

##### *4.3.a) Being identified by a skin color*

Despite its claims to be a color-blind society, being attributed a color (“*noir*”, “*basané*”) plays an important role in France and determines whether one will be considered French or not. A

more politically correct way of evoking skin color is to use the term “African” or “European” but these clearly refer to respectively “Black” and “White”, e.g. “*des agents de sécurité africains*”. The question of skin color was introduced in the earlier section about police identity checks when M. from Central Africa explained that as a result of his skin color he is (made to feel) inferior, and when Fadoua was called “*bougnoule*”, a racist term used principally for North Africans but that is also an insulting term for “*nègre*”, “*noir*”.<sup>235</sup>

Skin color obviously does not exist as such, but only exists in the eyes of the beholder, and is a reflection of power relations (Hall 1980). In the French context N’Diaye says that “being black is not an essence, nor a culture, but the product of social relations” (2006, 34). During one meeting of the Université populaire it struck me that I was also influenced by the imaginary construct of skin color. On my return from summer holidays, I was surprised to notice that my skin (of a blond and blue-eyed person) was darker than that of Jouda who is considered “*basané*”, which literally means as “a person with a naturally brown skin color” (Larousse).<sup>236</sup> I apparently had integrated the fact that I was white and Jouda not. Henri, a member of the UP working group who grew up in a Jewish family in Algeria, also insisted that: “Algerians don’t have another skin color. They have the same skin color as I do, they are not black (*noirs*), and Berbers (*Kabyles*) in Algeria are blond with blue eyes” (UP meeting, 02/05/2017). While for Henri this is an argument to prove that race does not matter in relations between Algerians and French, I interpret these examples differently as the phenomenon of racialization, of attributing a race or subjecting a person to racial ideas, going beyond skin color. Historically racialization has not been limited to (post-)colonial immigrants but has been applied to Europeans, notably the Irish who were considered “not quite White” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States, and as belonging to an inferior race (Garner 2003; Heinz 2013). The attribution of color positions one in relationship to those without color, or those imagined as ‘White’ whom enjoy certain privileges (see McIntosh 1988). The following four examples demonstrate how people are made aware of their skin color and how this is an impediment of being considered as French.

Several participants evoked one specific moment in their lives, often in their childhood, when they were confronted with the fact that others singled them out as ‘other’ due to their skin color. For example, as a child in Paris, Kenjah enjoyed watching the TV series *Bonanza*, a story about a father and three sons in the American Far West. In his school’s playground, kids used to play out this story, but when he wanted to participate the other boys told him he could not because “there are no black people in *Bonanza*”. He learned that while he identified with the story as a human, as a boy growing up and looking at the lives of other boys, the other children saw him in terms of his skin color. Kenjah could still physically recall

235 Source: <https://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/bougnoule>, accessed 31/01/2020.

236 Source: [https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/%C3%AAtre\\_basan%C3%A9/8171](https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/%C3%AAtre_basan%C3%A9/8171), accessed 31/01/2020.



this refusal (*dans son corps*) (field notes, 23/11/2017), which is a good example of what Makward called “epidermization”, of inferiorization getting under one’s skin.

Omer Mas Capitolin, the invited speaker and Paris activist involved in a struggle against racial profiling by the police, argues that it is his skin color that means that his place in the French nation is never guaranteed, but always has to be gained:

Tous les jours, on oblige des citoyens à s'interroger sur leur propre couleur de peau quand ils se lèvent. Je viens des Iles, de la Guadeloupe. On a intégré la République bien avant la Bretagne<sup>237</sup>, qui est sur le continent [Savoie]. Mais je suis obligé de justifier en permanence mon appartenance à la République. (Omer Mas Capitolin, UP debate, 26/04/2018).

He said that he permanently has to justify that he is part of the French Republic.

When a participant told me that he feels there always remains an invisible border between him (as Arab) and the ‘French’, I shared my experience as an immigrant in France and how my children are considered as French he exclaimed: “Yes but you are white!” (participant, informal discussion UP, 22/11/2017),<sup>238</sup> which stresses the racialized nature of the category “French”, as does the following example.<sup>239</sup> A participant from a community organization in Marseille stated that she has not the right color to be considered as French, despite the fact that she “is French, thinks like a French (wo)man, eats French, sleeps French, wakes up French and is married to a French [here meaning White]” (UP debate, 11/03/2016).

Being racialized in terms of color (non-White) is therefore an important obstacle to being considered as French. In Villeneuve, white people were frequently called “*Français de souche*”, a term re-introduced by the extreme right in the 1980s, associating nationality with a blood line. Its literal translation, “French at the stem”, evokes a racialized image of “French” and is widely used by racialized inhabitants of MSHN. It is another illustration that French has come to be synonymous with White (see also Geisser 2015).

Another recurring theme in the debates was the question of why Italians and Portuguese can blend into the category “French” while the offspring of post-colonial immigrants are called “first, second or third generation immigrants”. This comparison between post-colonial and European immigrants can be extended to *pieds-noirs*, who were also discriminated against upon their arrival in France but able to blend in, in opposition to the post-colonial

<sup>237</sup> This information is factually incorrect. Omer Mas Capitolin probably confused the department of Bretagne with the department of Savoie, a frequently used example to remind of the long history of the Antilles being French. While nowadays the Savoie is completely integrated in the geographic representation of France, the Antilles are not.

<sup>238</sup> In French: “Mais toi, tu es blanche!”

<sup>239</sup> In answer to my question on how he understands this difference, why some are easily integrated, by which I mean considered as (equal to) French and others are not, he responded that “one has to go far back in history” (*ah pour ça, il faut monter loin*) (field notes, 22/11/2017).

immigrant, who is still ‘other’. Three different arguments were put forward in the discussion of the UP working group about why post-colonial immigrants were not to the same extent “assimilable”:

- Because they are racialized (“colored”, “Muslim”)
- As a result of the shrinking (low-skilled) labor market from the 1970s onwards, they could not be integrated in the workforce
- Because they are culturally more distant, they do not share the same cultural roots as European immigrants.

This debate is summarized in the following quote:

Claske : Pourquoi les Italiens sont des Français maintenant et les Arabes sont encore des immigrés ?

Henri : Parce qu’il y a eu d’autres immigrés. Il y a une logique de l’impérialisme et du système capitaliste. A un moment on intègre une communauté parce qu’on l’intègre par une autre.

Jouda : Ils ne sont pas assimilables, les **Arabes** [ironique]. Parce que **colorés, musulmans**, ils ne peuvent pas se fondre comme des Italiens. Aujourd’hui, on ne peut pas savoir si t’as à faire à une origine italienne. (UP meeting, 05/05/2017)

Jouda guessed that North African immigrants could not blend in in the same way because they were “colored” and “Muslim”,<sup>240</sup> stressing that skin color is but one part of racialization. She pointed at racialization and glided in her explanation from the category Arabs to “colored” and to “Muslims”, stressing that racialization is a multifactorial process. For Henri however, this had nothing to do with racial discrimination but is a question of class (*question sociale*) and the fate of the latest arrival of immigrants in a capitalist society.<sup>241</sup>

Ce n’est pas une question raciale, c’est une question sociale. Il y a une logique de l’impérialisme et du système capitaliste. A un moment on intègre une communauté parce qu’on l’intègre par une autre. (Henri, UP meeting, 05/05/1017).

Anne-Françoise wondered whether Italians, Spanish, and Portuguese labor immigrants integrated more easily in French society as a result of their “roots”, their common history and a “shared Latin, Roman and Christian culture”, suggesting that post-colonial immigrants are culturally more different (UP discussion circle, 07/07/2017).

The different integration of post-colonial and European immigrants is due to a combination of factors: first, colonial relationships, and second, the different economic context in which these waves of immigration took place. Explaining this different integration through cultural differences is a remnant of colonialist discourse, according to Moujoud (UP discussion circle, 07/07/2015; see also Streiff-Fénart and Gardes 2009). This colonial discourse is based on a

<sup>240</sup> “Muslim” in this context is an ethnic rather than a religious category.

<sup>241</sup> The argument that with Roma immigrants from Eastern Europe and migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, the *Maghrébins* are no longer the last arrived in France but still discriminated against is not true in Henri’s view.

confusion between French as a political or as a cultural union/community: in order to form a political union its constituent parts do not need to be the same culturally speaking (Kenjah, UP debate, 13/10/2017; see also Manceron 2005). Rather than compare the trajectory of post-colonial labor immigrants with European labor immigrants, Bouamama argued that they can better be compared with the sons and daughters of African-Americans in the United States, with whom they have more in common through the “transgenerational transmission of the xenophobic stigma” (UP debate, 20/11/2015). Where Bouamama used the term “xenophobic”, I would prefer to use the term “racist”. Most participants agreed that skin color was not the only factor of distinction that was considered to be an obstacle to integration. In the following subsection I look at participants’ accounts of the role of ethnicity and faith.

#### *4.3.b) Being assigned ethnic and religious identities*

##### *Being called Arab*

Being “Arab” was another possible reason that participants, i.e. Alicia, pointed out for their inequality in French society. The figure of the Arab may have evoked orientalist fantasies in the past, but currently in France refers mostly to North-African labor immigrants and their descendants. One invited speaker of the UP recalled a moment when she was given this label, which singled her out and placed her outside of the community of French:

Dans mon expérience, depuis que je suis petite, c'est ce à quoi je suis confrontée. (...) Quand j'étais en terminale, je me mobilisais dans un club qui s'appelait *Droits de l'Homme, droit de vivre*, donc j'étais assez dynamique sur les questions sociales et politiques. La CPE, pour me désigner, disait “la petite Arabe qui fait de la politique”. Tout ça pour dire que ce sont des mots qui nous assignent à des identités que, nous-mêmes, nous n'avons pas choisies. (Nadia Kirat, UP debate, 25/05/2018)

Again, Kirat saw herself as a French citizen mobilizing for the ideal of human rights and she was confronted with the fact that others refuse to see her as part of this community, but identify her through supposed ethnic characteristics.

##### *Being referred to as Muslim*

Just after the Charlie Hebdo massacre Mohamed B. was told by a neighbor: “What just has happened creates a gap/divide between us” (informal discussion, 23/01/2015).<sup>242</sup> Mohamed B. was confronted with the fact that this neighbor identified him as Muslim, while in fact he is not religious. This experience reinforced his feeling that once more, despite all his efforts to carve out a place for himself in France, he still remains an outsider be it “immigrant” “Arab” or now, “Muslim”.

<sup>242</sup> In French: “Ce qui vient de passer creuse le fossé entre nous”

### Box 5.37 [terminology]: Muslim, both a religious and an ethnic category

The adjective “Muslim” refers both to a religious and an ethnic category. During colonial Algeria, non-European populations had the civil status of “French Muslims” independently of whether they practiced religion (De Barros 2005; Belmessous 2019; Shepard 2008a).

In 1947, President De Gaulle granted all inhabitants of French Algeria French citizenship and thus they became equals, on paper. However, in the 1954 census in mainland France a distinction was made between “Muslims that come from Algeria” (*musulmans originaires d’Algérie*) and “French by birth and coming from Algeria” (*Français de naissance originaires d’Algérie*). The first category was used to refer to people born in Algeria with an Arab or Berber name and the second category was used for those that had a Judeo-Christian first name (Simon 1998; Belmessous 2014, 133). This confusion between a religious and an ethnic category continues in the present with the term, common in public discourse, “of Muslim origin” (*d’origine musulmane*). It comes from the earlier expression “of immigrant origin” (*d’origine immigrée*). Even France’s Minister of Education employed the term during a televised debate in preparation for a presidential election (RTL, 20/01/2017),<sup>243</sup> leading to a series of reactions on twitter from people wondering where the country “Musulmania” or “Islamistan” might be found on a map (Twitter, 13/01/17).<sup>244</sup>

The adjective Muslim is generally understood in opposition to French, and Muslim women wearing the veil experience this in particular. For example, Fadoua told how the way she saw herself changed in the moment she decided to wear a veil, due to others giving the impression that this was incompatible with being French:

Personnellement, j’ai grandi dans une petite campagne de Haute-Savoie, dans la vision que j’avais de moi-même, j’étais la bonne Française, Haut-Savoyarde, etc. Vraiment. S’il y a un psychiatre ici je veux bien prendre ses coordonnées. J’ai vraiment grandi en pensant que j’étais une Haut-Savoyarde. On avait une éducation à la maison avec une culture d’origine que nos parents nous inculquaient, mais ma vision de moi-même, j’étais la petite Française, l’amie de Laeticia, Cécile, etc. Je m’identifiais vraiment à mes amis et à mon entourage. En grandissant, à mes 18 ans, j’ai porté cet accoutrement, ce petit bout de tissu sur ma tête qui m’a fait désenchanter. Je me suis rendue compte que j’étais dans une illusion, que je n’étais pas regardée de la même façon. À ce moment j’ai compris que non, je n’étais pas la petite Française Haut-Savoyarde. Dans mon cas, ça a été ma pratique religieuse qui a remis en question mon statut de Française. (Fadoua, UP debate, 25/05/2018)

By asking for a psychiatrist in the Université populaire plenary, Fadoua brought up the identity issues that she had to deal with and in a later, informal, discussion remarked that it

<sup>243</sup> <https://www.rtl.fr/actu/politique/primaire-de-la-gauche-peillon-evoque-l-origine-musulmane-et-agace-les-internautes-7786710586>, accessed 31/01/2020.

<sup>244</sup> <https://twitter.com/search?q=musulmanie%20peillon&src=typd>, accessed 15/05/2018

is a wonder she has not turned “schizophrenic” yet, torn between opposing and contradictory injunctions from society and one’s internal feelings (field notes, 01/07/2019). She is regularly confronted with the message –verbalized or not- that she is not entitled to the place that she projects herself in, as she already formulated in an interview two years earlier:

J’ai envie de ne pas être distinguée mais d’être reconnue comme je suis, d’être acceptée comme je suis. Être reconnue comme une personne qui prend des décisions, qui fait des choix de vie et qu’on reconnaisse mon droit de... pouvoir faire ces choix-là. (Fadoua, interview, 19/03/2017).

Jouda also spoke about the impact of her decision to wear a veil on her position as French citizen:

J’ai toujours cru que j’étais citoyenne jusqu’à ce que j’ai l’impression qu’on m’avait chapardé ma citoyenneté juste parce que je portais un foulard. (UP discussion circle, 07/07/2017).

From being used as an ethnic identity to indicate a North-African origin, the term “Muslim” increasingly operates as a form of racialization. See Garner and Selod (2015) about the racialization of Muslims in the United States, and Hajjat and Mohammed (2013) for the situation in France. In their study of Islamophobia Hajjat and Mohammed do not use the exact term of racialization but speak of “*une lecture raciale-religieuse de l’agir musulman*” and warn that “the essentialization of Muslim identity is fundamental to islamophobia” (2013, 263). In the period that followed the terrorist attack against Charlie Hebdo “Muslims” were more and more defined in opposition to “French”.

#### 4.3.c) *Being assigned spatial identities*

In addition to skin color, ethnicity, and faith, participants also wonder to what extent living in a MSHN is responsible for their inferior position in society. Tchetché-Apea said for example that “when one is born in a certain area, one is not treated in the same way [as other citizens]” (UP debate, 26/04/2018)<sup>245</sup> and Moujoud put forward that a particular concern for people in the neighborhood is that “the immigrant never becomes entirely French” (UP meeting, 29/05/2017).<sup>246</sup> One’s address is a further way of being othered. Below follow three examples of the experience of being stigmatized as a MSHN inhabitant:

Si tu arrives en ville, je ne sais pas pourquoi, on sait qu’on vient du quartier. On nous regarde direct. Quand on va dans un magasin, direct, j’ai envie de dire, j’ai de quoi payer dans mon sac, ne me suis pas. (Tina, interview, 20/05/2017)

<sup>245</sup> In French: “Quand on est né dans un certain territoire, on n’est pas traité de la même façon”.

<sup>246</sup> In French: “Ce qui concerne particulièrement le quartier c’est que l’immigré ne devient pas français à part entière”.

Il y a des enfants qui ont fait des études et qui sont au chômage. Ils n'obtiennent pas d'entretien d'embauche. Leur nom, leur **adresse** jouent à leur désavantage. (Michelle, interview, 15/03/2013)

Jouda also explained that, in addition to being seen as “Arab”, “*basané*”, and “Muslim” she is also reduced to coming from a marginalized neighborhood, an identity that is imposed on her:

Des gens qui me renvoyaient au quartier et certes, pendant un moment j'ai vécu dans un quartier mais c'était un endroit où je dormais et ma vie se passait ailleurs et j'avais d'autres activités ailleurs et on me remettait dans un truc. (Jouda, UP meeting, 02/05/2017)

Coming from, or being associated with, a marginalized neighborhood is an additional stigma and may serve as a form of racialization. Academic references that support this claim are for example Wacquant, Slater and Pereira, who confirm that certain stigmatized places are “racialized” (2014, 1274); Delica and Larsen (2017) on the “blemish of place”; and Loyd and Bonds (2018) about the racialization of a poor neighborhood in Milwaukee. Already in 1995 Calmore described the “racialization of space” as “a process by which residential location and community are carried and placed on racial identity” (1995, 1235). One of the few references that speak of “racial representations of space” in France are Roux (2019) and Garcia and Rétis (2011). Steven provides a telling example of how neighborhood identity serves as a racialized identity disregarding one’s skin color or one’s ethnicity.

le Blanc du quartier n'est pas différent du Noir et de l'Arabe du quartier. C'est la même chose [...] Si tu prends un Chinois d'un quartier, ce sera pareil. Si tu as grandi dans un quartier, tu as un profil du quartier, peu importe ta couleur de peau. (Steven, interview, 01/06/2017)

While the term “*jeunes de quartier*” evokes an image of racialized young people as a group or category. White young people can also be included in it as a result of a certain style of dress and behavior. The marginalized neighborhood has the effect of homogenizing identities disregarding one’s skin color. The marginalized neighborhood in this sense is part of an imaginary geography of “other spaces” that contribute to discursively placing a person outside of the nation. However, while white young people in MSHN are also concerned by processes of spatial racialization this alone is not enough to deny them ‘Frenchness’, the latter being the result of a combination of factors.

#### *4.3.d) Being associated with ‘other’ spaces*

One reason why racialized MSHN inhabitants are not considered as French is that they are associated with ‘other’ spaces. The characteristics of skin color, ethnicity and confession/religion, as well as marginalized neighborhoods, are part of a geographic imagination that associates racialized MSHN inhabitants with places outside of France: “Black” is associated with Africa; “ethnic groups” are associated with spaces outside of

Western Europe;<sup>247</sup> “Muslims” are associated with the Middle East and North-Africa; and finally, MSHN are discursively articulated as placed outside of the Republic or French nation (Robine 2011). In short, all these characteristics are associated with spaces ‘other’ than France and hence being “Black” (Muslim, Arab *etc.*) is incompatible with being French.

Participants provided ample examples of being eternally associated with an elsewhere. Jouda for example said that: “On voit toujours les Arabes [as coming from a place outside of France]: t’es né où? Tu viens d’où? Je viens de Lyon” (UP meeting, 05/05/2017). Even though the person that posed the question might not have this intention, the effect is that it gives the person to whom the question is posed the impression that they do not really belong in France. When Jouda answers that she comes from Lyon it is clear from their reaction that this is not what people want to know, they want to find out where she is ‘really’ from, where she is ‘originally’ from, what is her parents’ country; but she was born in Lyon, France. At times she gets really fed up with this question.

On te renvoie toujours à là d’où je suis supposée venir. Tu vois c’est toujours comme ça. Et des fois tu n’as pas envie qu’on te renvoie ça. (UP meeting, 05/05/2017)

So, while possibly motivated by a genuine interest in the life trajectory of a person and his/her family, the aforementioned question about one’s origins has the effect of reminding a person over and over again that their roots are elsewhere and that they do not entirely belong in France.

Another, more hostile, form of the same reminder of one’s otherness is when racialized research participants are told to go “home”, something which especially happened to Muslim women. For example, as we have already seen (section 2.1.c), Tassadit was told to “go home” (*rentrez chez vous*), spat on, accused of being a terrorist, and asked why she was here in France while walking down the road. This person was clearly questioning her legitimacy to be in France. This means that especially women wearing the *hijab* are associated with other places where they supposedly ‘really’ belong. The participant who was told to go home while in a supermarket, exclaimed: “but we are at home here,<sup>248</sup> we know French people and we don’t cause any problems for anyone” (field notes, 31/05/2015). Stating that one knows people is a way of demonstrating that one is connected in France.

The geographic imagination that associates racialized immigrants with ‘other’ spaces is also translated into certain policies. Three examples follow below, one deals with the policy of the return of immigrants; the second deals with the “repatriation” of *pieds-noirs*; and the last with the withdrawal of nationality.

<sup>247</sup> The term ethnicity is hardly ever used for “white” minority groups such the Wallon in Belgium or the French speaking swiss in Switzerland.

<sup>248</sup> In French: “On est chez nous ici”.

A good example that one never really becomes French as racialized inhabitant is the policy of return of migrants, a political measure that sent “back” youth “of immigrant origin” but born in France to the countries of their parents’ origin.<sup>249</sup> This policy was adopted just before the election of President Mitterrand in 1981. For Abdallah being sent “back” to a country one did not necessarily come from is a remnant of colonial policy. He considers that the term “expulsion” is more appropriate than “return”, the motive of this policy being to remove illegitimate bodies from French soil (UP debate, 26/04/2017).

I see a parallel with the situation of *pieds-noirs* who were “*rapatriés*”, meaning re-installed or brought back to their fatherland (*patrie*), in this case the French mainland, at the independence of French colonies in North Africa. Pierre said that he did not feel any attachment to France, a country that he did not know as his family had migrated to Tunisia from Sicily and Malta, and yet his family was granted the right to “return” (discussion circle, 07/07/2017). Their legal status in North Africa gave them this right, while “French Muslims” were considered refugees (Shepard, 2008).<sup>250</sup> The category “*rapatrié*” was not a purely racial category however: it also covered Algerians of non-European origin, the indigenous that were naturalized French by decree (*Ibid.*).

Both of these examples demonstrate that there is a geographic imagination of a place where racialized people ‘really’ belong and that place is outside France, on another continent. This imagination is a remnant of Bernier’s tentative in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to classify races in certain spaces, creating stereotypical images of ‘the African’, ‘the European’, *etc.*

Another example of this geographic imagination is the recurring debate around the deprivation of nationality (*déchéance de nationalité*), which comes up time and again in political discourse, as it did in Villeneuve in 2010. Sarkozy threatened to deprive of their French nationality every person who put in danger the life of a police officer or any other person representing public authority (speech, 30/07/2010). He made this statement despite the fact that a 1998 law prohibited the removal of nationality if it would make a person stateless (*apatride*). The bill the Sarkozy government proposed was therefore discriminatory in nature because it would only apply to those persons holding double nationality. President Hollande proposed a similar bill following the terrorist attacks in 2015. Roux, invited speaker of the Université populaire, qualified this policy as “a form of ethnicization or racialization of nationality, while the latter could be a purely juridical matter” (UP debate, 26/04/2018).<sup>251</sup> For Tchetche-Apea this bill is part of a series of “projects that refer to a postcolonial

<sup>249</sup> The context in which this example was mentioned, was the UP debate about whether we can speak about a colonial management of MSHN (26/04/2018). Abdallah situated this expulsion policy in the context of the oil crisis in the 1970s, as a result of which immigration came to be seen as a societal problem.

<sup>250</sup> A specific juridical regime, introduced by the 1961 Boulin law, distinguished between “*réfugiés*” and “*répatriés*”.

<sup>251</sup> In French: “Une forme d’ethnicisation ou de racialisation de la nationalité, qui pourrait être une notion purement juridique”.



situation” because they clearly treat French denizens differently and affirm that some are more French than others.

C'est choquant dans une communauté française où on veut essayer de fédérer les gens, de renforcer la cohésion et tout ça, on vient de diviser des gens, de dire qu'il y a qui sont plus français que d'autres. (Pierre-Didier Techtche-Apea, UP discussion circle, 23/02/2017)

The ideas of sending back and revoking French nationality evoke the idea that French nationality is not a legal notion that one is entitled to if one fulfils the legal conditions, but a privilege that one needs to deserve and that can be revoked if one is deemed unworthy. It also conjures the image of a condition of continued striving but never completely attaining, as we will see in the next subsection.

#### *4.4) Becoming French?*

This subsection looks at what ‘being French’ represents (4.4.a); which costs are involved in becoming French; and what one has to give up to be considered French, such as having to give up one’s right to be different (4.4.b). It also provides examples of those who renounce the search for recognition and attach importance to other aspects of identity instead, or who reject French identity (4.4.c).

##### *4.4.a) Being ‘French’ represents strength, civilization and the right to a voice*

The term ‘French’ stands for civilization or civilized behavior, but is also associated with social ascension, being successful and having access to certain privileges, being worthy of being defended and having a voice, and that is probably why being considered French is attractive and being excluded from it represents a disadvantage.

Mohamed B. associated French with force (red versus black ants), and three additional examples demonstrate that French is also associated with civilized behavior, Enlightenment, reason and refinement, as well as with being ‘White’ and having the right to a voice. The first two examples are from Tassadit and Béchir who both are working class research participants of over 50 years old, who immigrated to France from North-Africa. The third example is from a Université populaire participant who is active in a community-based organization in Marseille, and who understood being French as being taken into account.

For Tassadit, who grew up outside of Oran in the period just after Algerian independence, ‘French’ is not so much associated with force as it was with civilized behavior. French to her meant per definition that one is (supposed to be) civilized in opposition to the uncivilized behavior of ‘Arabs’. Being ‘French’ and being civilized has the function of being a standard, a benchmark to live up to. In our discussions she regularly added the adjective “civilized” to describe people, as in “civilized students” (*étudiants civilisés*) or in “a civilized lady” (*une dame civilisée*)” (informal discussion, 06/10/2017) and it was important for her to be considered in those terms, as the following quote demonstrates. During an interview she

answered the question of how she felt when she arrived in France: “*en tout cas nous, on s’est senti comme dans notre pays, parce que nous sommes des gens civilisés*” (interview, 27/05/2017). In addition to associating the adjective ‘French’ with civilization, Tassadit associated ‘French’ with Enlightenment, refinement, and Paris as the city of “love”, “life”, “liberty”.

Quand ils parlent de Paris, ils parlent de l’amour, de la vie, des Lumières, ils parlent du soleil, de la liberté, de l’humanité et tout. Après, quand tu viens et tu trouves des gens comme ça [des gens civilisés qui t’insultent], ça te choque. Tu trouves le racisme. Mais où sont les trucs beaux que vous racontiez ? (Tassadit, informal discussion, 06/10/2017)

The reality Tassadit encountered in France felt like a broken promise. For her, and many others, the moment of displacement from former colonies to the French mainland was a reality check and shattered the myth of the representation of France and the French.

Béchir shared this experience of disenchantment upon his arrival in France, in “the North”, which for him represented “culture, Enlightenment, the dominant force and knowledge”.

Comme tous les Maghrébins de l’époque, pour nous le Nord c’était la culture, des Lumières, c’était la force dominante, le savoir. Et cette manière de voir les choses était portée par l’élite arabe. Le fait de parler arabe et français c’était une promotion sociale assurée dans les années 50. (Béchir, interview, 09/05/2016)

This representation of France as a symbol of civilization had been spread by the Arab elite but, along the way, immigrants discovered that this ideal-type did not exist, and that even if it did, that they (still) would not have access to it because of new forms of exclusion that they encountered.

Another Université populaire participant from Marseille, of a younger generation, daughter of North-African immigrants with French nationality, associated being French with being ‘White’ and with the privilege of being able to speak out: that one’s voice counts and that one is spared from being treated in a condescending way.

Il n’y a personne qui me donne la leçon ou que personne ne me dit ce que je dois faire parce que je suis française et que je réfléchis comme une française. (...) Donc je n’ai pas besoin de me justifier à chaque fois, et de dire mais je suis française ! (Participant, UP debate, 11/03/2016).

French, for this participant is also associated with not having to justify oneself.

#### 4.4.b) *What does one have to do or give up to become French?*

Becoming French comes at a cost, and this subsection discusses how research participants understand this cost. The cost of “becoming French” (*devenir Français*) that participants evoked are: to pursue higher education; to give up one’s proper culture and one’s cultural

identity; to give up the right to difference; to be denied the right to criticize France; and the obligation to be grateful for living in France.

### *Education*

Education plays an important role in the effort to become French. Pursuing training and education is part of what immigrants understand is required from them in order to become French. Research participants affirm that what they have done in order to become French is to learn how to speak and write in French, to pursue higher education, to participate in cultural activities, in school activities, voting etc., all without any recognition.

On a appris le français, en tant qu'analphabète, si ce n'est pas être intégré, bah merde alors ! (Mohamed B., informal discussion, 23/01/2015)

Pursuing higher education, which some consider as a privilege, is perceived by others as a sacrifice, in particular if it does not fulfil its promise of social ascension. Michelle for example stressed the sacrifice of having to leave one's family and neighborhood, all that is well-known and familiar, to pursue one's studies.

Les enfants qui ont fait des études et qui sont au chômage... Ils font tout pour en sortir, ils se sacrifient pour faire des études, même parfois en quittant Grenoble, mais après, on leur ferme les portes. (Michelle, interview, 15/03/2013)

In my understanding, part of the sacrifice of studying lies in entering an unexplored domain when one is the first of one's family to do so: an endeavor associated with difficulty, unattainability, and the risk of failure, as well as social alienation. Entering this domain therefore was considered as a big step into the unknown that could lead to humiliation and distance from one's origins. These actions (learning to write, educating oneself, opening up to culture etc.) were efforts to achieve social mobility and to integrate. Participants have the feeling they did their part for integration but that the promise of equality has not been fulfilled. Tina comes to the conclusion that despite her efforts at becoming French through cultivating herself and her children, she still is seen as an immigrant, a stranger.

Moi, c'est vrai, j'ai tout fait pour m'intégrer, mais quand on nous dit : "Il faut vous intégrer," il y a aussi de la part des autres qu'ils nous intègrent. Moi il n'y a pas de problème, je suis prête à m'intégrer, pourquoi vous ne voulez pas m'intégrer ? C'est VOUS qui ne voulez pas m'intégrer. Donc c'est facile de dire : "Il faut qu'ils s'intègrent". Moi je suis bien intégrée, je parle français, j'ai fait des études, j'ai des diplômes, j'ouvre mes enfants à la culture, pourquoi vous ne m'intégrez pas alors ? (Tina, interview, 19/05/2017)

For the reasons evoked in the quote, she considers integration to be a two-way process. Despite her efforts, she feels "the French" do not accept her.

### *Give up one's cultural identity*

When Mayare evoked earlier that racialized young people in Echirolles might feel inferior in relation to their teachers and 'Whites', she also mentioned in this list "integrated Algerians".

The latter should be understood in the historical context of the status “*indigènes évolués*” who could be naturalized as French. Mayare suggests that there is a kind of compromise Algerian people make when they seek to be recognized by and integrated in France. The latter has a cost and requires sacrifices, as it asks a person to renounce part of their customs, traditions, and values. Mayare explained that people that do so are looked upon with a mixture of envy, because of their social success, and disapproval, because they betray their origins both in terms of class and culture.

Tchetche-Apea also mentioned the culture postcolonial immigrants had to give up in order to be considered French and attain “the French dream”. Wondered: “*Qu’est-ce qu’on leur a demandé pour atteindre le ‘rêve français’ entre guillemets?*” (discussion circle, 23/02/2018). The cost of becoming or wanting to become (considered as) French is that of assimilation according to Kenjah, who speaks from his experience as a person moving back and forth between France and Martinique. The Caribbean island legally became a French department in 1946, politically “assimilating” it to the French mainland. For Kenjah this meant the denial of the island’s own culture: being assimilated held the risk of being digested and disappearing.

La loi qui fait de nous [les Antillais] des citoyens est appelée loi d’assimilation. Mais il est hors de question que nous nous assimilions. Être assimilé c’est être digéré et disparaître en tant que tel. (Kenjah, UP debate, 13/10/2017)

He associated this political assimilation to cultural assimilation, and the limits this represented to its inhabitants’ possibilities of auto-definition and carving out a space for difference. His experience in Martinique is very comparable to that of Anne-Françoise in Villeneuve. She is a retired white inhabitant of Villeneuve who was married to a Congolese man from Congo-Brazzaville, and she confirmed Kenjah’s observations as witness to the way her husband and his compatriots were treated. She feels that foreigners who arrived in France were asked to forget their own culture in order to be considered as French and obtain a place in society.

Quand les étrangers sont arrivés en France, on leur a d’abord demandé d’oublier leur propre langue. Les enfants devaient parler uniquement le français. On leur a demandé de se fondre dans la masse. (...) On a l’impression qu’on les a effacés. (Anne-Françoise, UP discussion circle, 23/02/2018)

In order to integrate, to find a place in France, they had to forget about their past and their origins, they had to be unnoticed, they had to be stripped of their original identity. They had to wipe out their history and their pride (Anne-Françoise, UP discussion circle, 07/07/2018). Another example of being stripped of one’s identity in order to be accepted and integrated in France, in the sense of being able to occupy a professional place, is that of Tina. She is not really called Tina, but this is the pseudonym she chose for herself when I asked her what she wanted to be called in my thesis. It is the name she was once given by an employer in a restaurant who preferred French-sounding names for his employees, rejecting her original

Arab one, with eye on his clients' preferences. The practice of requiring changes to non-European names is a standard procedure in the call center industry, Mrs Asiani\* for example had to call herself Mrs. Fouquet (field notes, 16/02/2013). These examples demonstrate that immigrants and their children have to give up the right to difference in order to become/be considered as French.

### *The right to difference*

Sons and daughters of immigrants still find that there is an impetus for assimilation, which means that they are denied the right to difference. For example, Farid states that "the French want us to think as them" (street debate, 20/10/2015). What was asked from immigrants in the 1960s was total loyalty, in the sense of Hirschmann (Hirschman 2004 [1970]): to be silent and invisible and certainly not to disturb or disrupt (*déranger*) as the next example from Mohamed B. demonstrates.

A notre arrivée en France, il ne nous avait pas été demandé, à nous autres Algériens, de nous intégrer mais seulement de ne pas déranger. (Boukhatem 2014, 36)

The denial of the right to difference is still very relevant today as numerous discussions demonstrated. This became in particular evident in debates around the veil and the space Muslims can dispose of to practice their religion. Two examples serve as demonstrations: first, two women who wondered why their difference in terms of wearing a veil is considered as a problem in France; and second, women of *Nous Citoyennes* who were asked why they do not take off their veil in order to be like everyone else.

A participant who originally came from Algeria expressed that "we" are always perceived through the angle of difference, and that difference in itself is not a problem but that, to be able to integrate, France has to accept this difference.

Aujourd'hui on nous voit à travers le foulard, à travers des barbes. Ce qui nous représente fait partie de notre culture. On l'accepte. Il faudrait aussi que la France l'accepte pour pouvoir nous intégrer. (Participant, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

The "we" this participant speaks of is that of "we Muslims" which is an important symbolic shift from "we immigrants", "we Algerians", "we Moroccans" etc. of the generations before. A second participant, Zéliha, a daughter of Kurdish Turkish immigrants, felt that after the Paris terrorist attacks this right to difference for Muslims was even further reduced.

[Après les attentats contre Charlie], on doit aller dans le même sens, sinon on est suspect. (..) On porte une image et les gens ont tout de suite des préjugés. On a une appartenance. Nous appartenons à une religion bouc émissaire. Je m'adapte aujourd'hui. Je ne comprends pas pourquoi le respect n'est pas réciproque. (Zéliha, UP debate, 11/03/2016)

She does not understand why there is no space in France in which Muslims can be free, not as Muslims, but simply as those practicing a religion.

The second example is from a debate that took place in Villeneuve between a delegation from La Vie nouvelle, a French movement dedicated to *éducation populaire*, and three women of Nous Citoyennes, the Grenoble-based initiative mentioned earlier that encourages Muslim women to take position on political issues as French citizens.<sup>252</sup> La Vie nouvelle delegation was mainly made up of retired white participants who were strongly influenced by the 1968 political movement, and the Nous Citoyennes delegation was mainly Muslim women in their forties. The debate between them is a good indication of the way Muslim women's right to difference (through wearing a veil in public space) is questioned or denied, and how French-born politicized Muslim women respond to the suggestion to take off their veil in order to be "like everyone else".

Participant 1 La Vie nouvelle : En quoi le voile relève d'une pratique spirituelle ? J'ai aussi une pratique spirituelle mais je n'ai pas besoin de le montrer. Pourquoi le montrer ? En quoi le voile est une expression de foi ?

Participant 2 La Vie nouvelle : Nous femmes occidentales, nous avons lutté pour enlever le voile, qui était obligé à l'époque pour entrer à l'église, afin de pouvoir s'habiller comme on voulait, pour pouvoir mettre un pantalon etc. Il est difficile pour nous de ne pas voir le voile autrement que comme une imposition. [Un peu plus tard une autre participante parle du voile en termes de "enfermement"]. Pourquoi le voile n'est pas une affaire privée ? Pourquoi vous ne pouvez pas l'enlever en public ? Pourquoi vous n'enlevez pas le voile pour être comme tout le monde ?

Participant 1 Nous Citoyennes [Femme française convertie à l'Islam] : Pourquoi on serait comme tout le monde ? On revendique notre égalité.

Participant 3 La Vie nouvelle : C'est quoi la laïcité pour vous ?

Participant 2 Nous Citoyennes : Ce n'est pas d'être uniforme. C'est la possibilité que chacun puisse vivre sa religion.

Participant 3 Nous Citoyennes : [réagit à l'expression "nous femmes occidentales"] Et moi je ne suis pas occidentale ? Et que fais-je avec mon bagage culturel, Brassens, Victor Hugo, ça ne m'appartient pas ? [Elle explique qu'elle est tout le temps renvoyée à sa différence et qu'elle en a marre]. On est un patchwork. Je ne parle pas de mon identité mais de mes identités. Je suis fière de ma partie algérienne, tunisienne, ça me construit.

(Field notes, 27/05/2016)

The women of Nous Citoyennes claimed their right to equality, while also claiming their right to difference by insisting on their right to wear a veil. They stated during the discussion that

<sup>252</sup> Alain, a working group member of the Université populaire (Villeneuve Debout) arranged for the meeting and I participated in it. The text draws on the notes I took during the debate at the Régie de Quartier (27/05/2016). The women of Nous Citoyennes that participated in the meeting (Catherine, Jouda and Scherazade) are also active members of the Université populaire and for this reason I integrate this debate as another occasion to share their points of view and the opposition they encounter. Because I have not asked specific authorization to use this field data, I do not cite them personally.

they do not claim this right as Muslims, but as French citizens and that they no longer want to make themselves invisible as the previous generation had done. They insisted that they saw no contradiction in being both French and Muslim. This is what one of the *Nous Citoyennes* participants called a “patchwork identity,” in reaction to the statement of a *La Vie nouvelle* participant whose concept of “Western women” excluded Muslim women. In this person's concept it is as if only “Western women” could be feminists, yet the Muslim *Nous Citoyennes* women also position themselves as feminists and claimed the joint heritage of feminist struggles of previous decades. The *Nous Citoyennes* women refuse to pay the price of taking off their veil in order to be considered French. It is important to keep in mind that unveiling Muslim women in Algeria was part of the civilizing mission that France had given itself. Woodhul gives a detailed account of this colonial practice in “Unveiling Algeria” (1991). Asserting one’s difference should not be interpreted as a refusal of similarity, but rather as a claim to make space for the possibility of difference. An invited speaker raises this point in the following words:

La définition de ce qu’on est, de notre histoire, de notre parcours, me paraît quelque chose de très important. Parce qu’en réalité, le fait d’assumer notre identité culturelle, c’est revendiquer **un droit à la différence**. Ce n’est pas contre la citoyenneté, au contraire. Ce que l’on défend, c’est qu’on est des citoyens à part entière, avec une spécificité. Ce n’est pas une contradiction. (Nadia Kirat, UP debate, 25/05/2018)

These quotes support my argument that the claim to the right to be different is a claim to citizenship. Racialized inhabitants no longer seek to become invisible through assimilation, as did previous generations, but demand the space to be different and be recognized as equal at the same time.

#### *Being denied the right to criticize France.*

A fourth and last example of what is required from post-colonial immigrants is that they express gratitude for living in France, and that they do not complain. For example, Mohamed B. has become quite allergic to “the discourse that consists of conveying (*véhiculer*) the idea that we should be grateful to France for having received (*accueillir*) us” (Boukhatem 2014, 81).

H., an outspoken black woman born in Mali and grown up in France, added that it is difficult to publicly express a critique of France because then she is told “not to spit in the soup”, meaning not to be ungrateful.

Quand tu émetts une critique contre la France, tes collègues de boulot, n’importe qui te regarde et [ils] disent “ne crache pas dans la soupe”. (H., informal discussion, 17/11/2015)

This expression of “not spitting in the soup” came back in other discussions. Joachim for example has internalized this obligation, and when he formulated a critique of his situation in France, he immediately qualified it with the fact that he did not want to “to spit in the

soup" (interview, 18/06/2015). H. voiced her resistance to always having to be grateful most clearly. Her position is particular because she suffered from polio, and was adopted by a childless aunt in France so that she could receive treatment. This obviously reinforced her marginalized position in France as a black disabled woman and, in addition, she was inculcated with a sense of debt for the treatment she received, which was not presented as a right that she had, but as an act of charity. A typical thing she heard was:

C'est grâce à la France qu'on a pu te soigner, tu te rends compte les handicapés africains ce qu'ils vivent..." Tu te construis dans ça et je dois toujours dire "merci, merci, merci". (H., informal discussion, 17/11/2015)

She chose to follow her own path, getting rid of the obligation of eternally having to demonstrate gratitude and recognition for being allowed to live in France and enjoy its health service. Openly expressing a critique requires confronting and reconsidering parts of one's socialization. As an immigrant who has to be eternally grateful one does not have a right to a voice and a place in France; rather, living there is represented as a favor which one needs to deserve, and if one does not it can be withdrawn. This conditional citizenship recalls the political debates about the withdrawal of French nationality/citizenship discussed before. One form of rebellion against this, as a response to feeling rejected, can be to reject French identity.

#### *4.4.c) From the search for recognition to the rejection of French identity*

The sacrifices one is willing to make to be considered as French citizen change over time, and vary from one generation to the next. For the current generation, born in France as grandchildren of labor immigrants, rejection is common, especially among MSHN youth.

The first generation of labor immigrants in the 1950s, the 1960s, and the beginning of the 1970s were still attached to the national identities of their newly independent countries of origin, and were hesitant about putting down roots in France because of the dream of return to their country of origin. The generation that was born in France in the 1970s and 1980s wanted to build a future in France, they projected themselves in French society and sought to affirm themselves as French citizens. For the first generations, as well as those who stayed in the country of origin, immigrants were visitors in France that had to adapt to French customs, and they did not always understand the choice of the 'second generation'<sup>253</sup> to affirm themselves in France.

Quand tu es au bled, eux ne conçoivent pas que tu es français. Construire des mosquées et tout. Va leur expliquer que non, ça fait maintenant tant d'années qu'on est là: 60 ans, c'est logique qu'on a des endroits où [on peut prier]. (Jouda, UP meeting, 12/06/2017)

<sup>253</sup> A term that deserves criticism because it contributes to attributing an immigrant status to those born in France, but I will use it here because research participants used it to point out differences between their parents', their own, and their children's' positions in France.



Jouda's generation is one of non-return, that put down their roots in France, claimed the right to be French and the right to be different, notably through their way of dress (veil). Their concept of integration is no longer that of assimilation and making oneself invisible, but of educating themselves and participating, in her case through political participation and civil society activism. Making claims is an affirmation of one's French citizenship, and is a way of building a home, living together, *construire ensemble*, putting down roots, and should be understood as an expression of attachment to France. This generation made itself more visible through self-affirmation, but this visibility is also the work of media and politicians who make Muslims visible, irrespective of their intentions. One participant stressed that: "today, they see us through the veil, through beards" but "France should accept these in order to be able to integrate us" (UP debate, 11/03/2016). This demand for recognition was typical of the 'second generation' (a term this participant employed in reference to herself) and still is true to a certain extent for the younger generation, but there is also a tendency to reject French identity and put forward other forms of identity as counter-stigma. Chaambi for example spoke of his feeling of helplessness (*désemparé*) that current young people reject French identity and identify with the country of origin of their parents or grandparents, while his generation fought to claim French identity. The following story serves as an illustration.

J'ai remplacé un imam à Décime avec 70 enfants (...) de 5 à 13 ans. On discute de tout, de la religion, des quartiers, de la police, de tout ce que vous voulez. À un moment je dis aux enfants: "Vous êtes quoi?". Les mains se lèvent et ils disent: "je suis marocain, je suis sénégalais, je suis malien, je suis algérien". Il n'y en a aucun qui a dit: "Je suis français". Et nous on s'est bagarré dans les années 80 pour arriver au bout de 15 ans à faire dire à quelqu'un (...) à dire mais tu es Français, dis que tu es français Norredine. (Abdelaziz Chaambi, UP debate, 11/03/2015)

Jouda told a similar story about her adolescent son who identifies as Tunisian despite her and her husband's efforts to carve out a space for their children in France, and to make them feel full-right citizens (field notes, 15/03/2015). She explained her son's choice by the fact that it was easier for him to accept being treated as 'other' when he indeed was a foreign national, because in that case it would be 'normal'. It allowed him moreover to project himself in a community where he supposedly 'really' belonged, where he was legitimate.<sup>254</sup>

Another person who identified himself in opposition to French and who does not seek any recognition as French, but has instead found alternative forms of identification, is Steven. His critique of discrimination in France and its neo-colonial policies are two reasons he mentioned for claiming Muslim and Cameroonian identity [see Box 5.38].

<sup>254</sup> However, youth also find out when they are in the country of origin of the (grand)parents, they are considered as French. This led another adolescent to comment that the only place where he could be at home was in the airplane between France and Algeria (field notes, 10/06/2016).

Racialized research participants experienced the pressure to assimilate and to integrate as highly paradoxical. On the one hand, they felt that what is demanded from them is that they become similar to, *s'assimiler*, French; on the other hand, they come to realize that these efforts are undermined by a parallel movement that seeks to articulate them as 'other'. While racialized research participants want to be recognized for their singularity, the focus on superficial characteristics such as skin color, frizzy hair, and the headscarf come to define a person as part of a category. These superficial characteristics work as fixational objects.

**Box 5.38 [empirical excursion]: How can I be French if tomorrow France could attack the country of my parents?**

Steven said that one out of three "immigrants" do not identify as French, and among neighborhood youth this feeling is even more significant. He explained this through France's colonial past and its neo-colonial policies in Africa and the Middle-East that pacification efforts cannot erase.

Le sentiment des jeunes de quartier est qu'ils ne se sentent pas français. Ce qui est le sentiment des jeunes de quartier aujourd'hui hein? C'est mon sentiment aussi à moi. Je ne me sens pas français. (Steven, interview with Mayare, 01/05/2017)

Steven identified first as Muslim and second as Cameroonian despite the fact that he was born in France, has French nationality and is from a Christian family. He does not feel French because this would mean "to accept that one is still a colonizer in 2018". He asked: "*Comment tu veux que je me sente français? Demain, s'ils s'attaquent au Cameroun, tu vas faire quoi?*" (*Ibid.*). In addition to the French colonial past and neo-colonial present, the ambient islamophobia in France is another obstacle that prevents Steven from affirming a French identity.

*4.5) French as a condition of striving but never quite attaining*

On se demande toujours pourquoi on veut intégrer les gens dans une société dans laquelle ils sont nés, quel est son objectif?  
(Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea, UP discussion circle, 23/02/2018)

This last part of my argument, why I consider that post-colonial immigrants have been granted nationality without citizenship, brings up the condition of eternal striving to Frenchness in relation to the idea of a civilizing mission and of a line that shifts between first- and second-class citizenship.

Beyond simple legal equality, the offspring of post-colonial immigrants aspire to *de facto* equality, obtaining the same rights and chances as 'established' French. Immigrants are confronted with pressure to integrate, but are never sufficiently integrated to be granted the right to make claims and the right to difference. For them, French is a condition of striving but that can never be attained; something that was already the promise of the civilizing mission in colonial times that legitimated the colonial project. Becoming French is something

that remains postponed, is only granted to a tiny minority, while the majority (should) keep(s) trying or give up. An expression I frequently heard in informal discussions in Villeneuve, was “what else do we have to do [to become French], drink wine, eat pork?” (field notes, 10/02/2013). This expression was also reiterated by Chaambi during the first UP debate.

Il faut quoi ? Il faut avoir le saucisson sur la table et la bouteille de vin pour avoir la bonne culture ? Et bien, qu'ils nous le disent ! Qu'ils nous disent : "on veut vous blanchir, on veut vous assimiler, on veut vous obliger à rogner votre identité religieuse au détriment du principe de base des droits et des libertés".  
(Abdelaziz Chaambi, UP debate, 11/03/2015)

From Chaambi's statement I understand that he does not want to be considered integrated or French at any cost, rather he wants to be recognized as a French citizen who has the right to religious difference.

Tchetche-Apea has the feeling that, as children of post-colonial immigrants, they are never quite good enough and compares them to “illegitimate children” that seek the recognition of their parents, which they will never be considered worthy to obtain. He described this idea of having to acquire one's Frenchness as a civilizing process, as a condition of always striving where the closer one gets, the higher the bar is set.

On se demande dans le rêve français entre guillemets si au fur et mesure qu'on avance, les exigences ne sont pas de plus en plus lourdes, de plus en plus fortes. De plus qu'on s'en approche de plus on s'en éloigne. Comme l'objectif est toujours repoussé de plus en plus loin, on a vraiment le sentiment qu'il y a, quelque part, une chose qui fait en sorte qu'on n'atteigne jamais l'objectif. (...) Il y a quand même quelque part un mouvement permanent qui fait qu'on a l'impression de ne jamais pouvoir y arriver ou seuls quelques-uns peuvent y arriver mais ils sont vraiment triés. (...) Ça me fait penser à des enfants illégitimes, ou en tout cas, dont les parents posent de telles conditions de reconnaissance qu'elles sont insurmontables. (UP discussion circle, 23/02/2018)

Tchetche-Apea's remark that “few that attain this goal” reminds me of the status of *évolués* in the colonial period. The promotion of an elite as a prefiguration of the future was part of the colonial project. Shepard's work confirms that “qualified individuals that gained French citizenship served as prefiguration for all Algerians to become, over time, French (Shepard 2008b, 53).<sup>255</sup> Shepard argues that it was in the French mainland that “the model of assimilation, elaborated on the other side of the Mediterranean, was the most widely applied” (*Ibid.*). Obtaining the status of *évolués* was also a question of class and education. Through education and clothing, among other signs of distinction, one could get closer to the category French and distinguish oneself from the other *indigènes*. From older

<sup>255</sup> In French: “Les individus qualifiés, qui accédaient à la citoyenneté française, préfiguraient ce que tous les Algériens deviendraient à terme, à savoir des Français.”

participants' stories, I understand that shoes played a large role in situating oneself socially.<sup>256</sup> Up until today class is an important factor for attenuating skin color: one can distinguish oneself for example through elocution (using certain vocabulary versus slang), through clothing style and through where one lives (field notes, 10/12/2018).

This condition of striving evokes the civilizing mission that served as legitimation of the colonial project during the period of the second colonial empire. The colonialist imaginary of the 18<sup>th</sup> century approached the 'West' as coterminous with 'civilization' and superiority, in opposition to the subalterns that were often described as 'barbarians' or 'savages' (Gregory et al. 2009, 87). According to Gregory, "the aim of the 'civilizing mission' was to 'enlighten' or 'develop'" the colonized (*Ibid.*). One participant made a literal reference to the civilizing mission and its continuing validity in present day France. As a highly educated political activist and member of the FUIQP, she mentioned the civilizing mission in her critique of the Islamophobic and paternalist treatment of Muslim women in France, and in particular of the injunction to unveil Muslim women.

On reste encore dans cette espèce d'illusion de la mission civilisatrice blanche : on va civiliser les barbares et les indigènes parce que ce sont des gens qui n'ont rien compris. Et on va leur faire comprendre, de gré ou de force et, au fait, c'est toujours pour leur bien. (Participant, UP debate, 11/03/2015)

Another research participant, Tina, who does not share this level of education and political awareness, indirectly evoked the civilizing mission when she was talking about how she felt she was treated by institutional actors: at times as a child and at times as a savage (Tina, interview, 20/05/2017). She is a racialized inhabitant of Villeneuve and the context of her observation was a social outing organized by a publicly-run community center (run by public servants and financed by the City) to give inhabitants the opportunity to get out of the neighborhood (*sortir du quartier*). Tina is Muslim and wears a veil, but stressed in the quote below that it was rather her MSHN identity that was an obstacle to being considered as civilized and as an adult. As I have demonstrated previously that neighborhood identity is a form of racialization.

Même quand on propose de faire des sorties on dirait que c'est comme, c'est le ressenti que j'ai eu, c'est comme si "oh, on va les sortir un petit peu, une journée, alors attention, ils sont un peu **sauvages**, ils ne savent pas se tenir donc je vous prépare psychologiquement". Dans le bus: "**calmez-vous**". Des fois on avait envie de dire: "mais j'ai vécu, **j'ai un âge**, voilà, je peux payer moi-même mon truc, voilà je ne suis pas un **sauvage**". (Tina, interview, 20/05/2017)

"*Calme-toi*", is a typical phrase in France to address children that make noise or "*calmez-vous*" when there are more. I guess that Tina meant, when she said "*j'ai un âge*", that she

<sup>256</sup> To stress that she came from a poor family, Elisabeth explained that her mother had to share one pair of shoes with her brother and sisters; Benhamida situated himself socially by saying that, as French Muslim, he did have shoes; in his memoirs Mohamed B.'s illustrates the poverty of his family by their lack of shoes.

felt she was treated as a child. In addition, being treated as a “savage” is a clear reference to the civilizing mission.

The promise of the civilizing mission, that people would become French in time, has turned out to be false promise. Research participants argue that despite their efforts they will never be recognized as French citizens. Gradually they have come to realize that there is an invisible border due to skin color, religious symbols, or space; and mostly through a combination of these different, intersecting factors.

### *Color line*

The observation of graduations in citizenship in France resonates with Fanon’s work on the difference between the zones of being and non-being (Fanon 2015 [1952]) and Sousa Santos’ work on the “abyssal line” separating those who live above and those that live below (2006).<sup>257</sup> Grosfoguel and Cohen combine these approaches and speak of a line that separates the human from the non-human (2012). It is racialization that marks bodies as superior and inferior, and places them above or below this line. Fanon’s analysis is situated in colonial Algeria and Sousa Santos’ writing has emerged from the contemporary Brazilian context and therefore they cannot be transposed uncritically to the French situation. Grosfoguel and Cohen demonstrate their relevance with regard to the ambient Islamophobia in Europe (2012). I mentioned before that, in France, one cannot speak of a categorical division between White and Black, but that this line divides in graduations of citizenship on the basis of processes of racialization. This line is moreover mitigated by the intersection with other power dynamics such as class and gender. I argue that the abyssal line in France is between those who are considered as political subjects and those who are treated as second-class citizens, who are denied the possibility to consider themselves as French, and who are denied the possibility to make political claims as French citizens (appealing to equality and freedom).

The function of invisible borders is to separate the racialized and non-racialized, to determine who can be assimilated and integrated into the category of French, and who cannot. The perceived color of one’s skin, one’s ethnicity, one’s religion, class or the spaces one is associated with are all factors that position one in this graduated hierarchy of citizenship. However, even in colonial times the border between citizens and non-citizens was not hermetic. Those who were referred to as *évolués* were recognized to be closer to French than other *indigènes*, and were eligible for naturalization (Spire 2003). They had climbed up the hierarchy, as have the people that Mayare referred to as “integrated Algerians”.<sup>258</sup> According to Grosfoguel and Cohen, the markers that refer to Islam (either

<sup>257</sup> De Sousa Santos, *Renovar la teoría crítica y reinventar la emancipación social* (Encuentros en Buenos Aires), CLACSO, Buenos Aires, 2006, p. 16.

<sup>258</sup> Whether they really are recognized as such will depend on the circumstances though, as has been pointed out at several occasions in discussions. As long as they are successful, they will be classified as French, but when their behavior shows a negative image of France, they will be considered otherwise. For example, when

through skin color or dress) situate a person on the superiority/inferiority scale and thus place one with regard to the line of the human (2013, 45). During this thesis several research participants have spoken about their humanity being taken away as a result of dehumanizing representations of Muslims. The following section builds on this idea of factors that distinguish citizens from 'others', and argues that whether one is deemed worthy of defending or not is another such distinction.

## 5) Not French, not worth defending

Dorlin (2017) provides an additional contribution to the idea of a line that categorizes bodies and social groups into first class, second-class, and non-citizens. Inspired by Fanon, she makes a distinction between those who have agency and can be actors of their own defense and those who only dispose of a negative form of agency, whose capacity to act will always be explained negatively (Dorlin 2017). When subalterns protect their physical integrity against violations of the dominant, their actions will always be interpreted as violence. State discipline consequently is interpreted as reacting to their violence, as a defense against the violence of the subaltern. Dorlin introduces an innovative theoretical framework that deals with the question of who has the right to defend him/herself and is considered worth defending, and who is not. She points to a (form of) demarcation that traces a line between these two positions. A decisive aspect of citizenship is that one's body is considered worth defending. In this section, I develop two illustrations that have come up during my field research where young people in particular point out the fact that their bodies do not enjoy the same protection. The first example deals with the question of police violence, and the second deals with the question of why the lives of Jews seem to be worth more than the lives of Arabs.

### 5.1) Police violence

In this subsection I further draw on the debate between youth and two police representatives at the Maison de Quartier Aragon, which I introduced earlier. One of the topics of discussion was the difference between good and bad policemen, and what to do when confronted with a bad one. The advice of the police officer, in answer to a young man who asked the police what they recommended in case of unfair treatment, was to do nothing and remain polite. The debate is between two male police officers and two younger racialized male participants.

Participant 1 : Moi j'ai une question. C'est quoi la réaction qu'on pourrait avoir face à de mauvais policiers ?

Intervenant de la police : La meilleure réaction c'est de ne pas sur-renchérir à la bêtise. Si un policier fait une erreur, si un policier n'est pas professionnel, je dirais que le mieux c'est de faire profil bas parce que de toute façon ce n'est pas gagnant comme réaction. Si

the soccer player Zinedine Zidane scores, he is French, but when he headbutts someone (World Cup 2006) he no longer is, instead his Algerian origins are evoked.

la réaction est mauvaise de votre part, il y a de fortes chances que la réaction en face soit aussi mauvaise.

Participant 1 : On doit subir la police ?

Intervenant de la police 1 : Ben subir... disons que ça dépend mais en tout cas il faut faire très attention parce qu'un mot de travers c'est un outrage. Voilà donc.

Participant 1 : Lui-même nous insulte et on n'a rien le droit de dire ?

Participant 1 : Tout à l'heure vous avez dit : si on répond ça fait outrage pour nous, mais en gros c'est juste que lui il est là il a le pouvoir et il peut nous mettre un outrage alors que nous on ne peut rien dire (...).

Participant 2 : C'est comme, j'étais en cellule, un policier m'a dit "si tu continues à parler je t'emmène dans la cave et je vais te matraquer" et donc je ne pouvais pas parler.

Intervenant de la police 2 : Ne pas répondre c'est la meilleure des façons. (Debate MJC des Roseaux, 13/04/2017)

The insistence on the part of the police to never respond to police provocation, but without offering their interlocutors any avenue through which to claim their right to be treated correctly, is a clear example of Dorlin's analysis that some citizens are denied the protection that others are deemed deserving. It is this difference that distinguishes a citizen from a non-citizen, or in this case from a second-class citizen. The police representative himself warned against the risk that their behavior be judged as "*outrage*", which can be translated as a minor form of rebellion and which generally justifies an "*intervention musclée*" (literally an intervention that uses muscles, a euphemism for using force). For a critical analysis of police use of the category of "*outrage*" to characterize youth behavior see e.g. Jobard (2002) as an academic source and Human Rights Watch 2012 as a civil society source. A topic that also deserves additional attention is the extent to which the police incite youth through humiliation and the demonstration of might in order to provoke their anger and aggression, and therefore to legitimize interventions that subjugate youth and remind them of their place in the hierarchy (for an analysis of the power to excite/incite (exciter) as governance measure, see Dorlin 2017). In the next chapter I explore the topic of "inverted projections", how acts of self-defense (the defense of one's dignity in this case) are to be interpreted as a danger to the public order and a threat to the Republic.

It is not only young people that report violent encounters with police. Mothers have also been witnesses to this violence through the accounts of their children (sons in particular) and through the stories that are shared in the neighborhood. They fear for the physical security of their children when they come into contact with police. It is for this reason that mothers of Villeneuve expressed concern about young people's participation in a demonstration to denounce police violence (César, interview, 17/03/2017). Their fear of the police influences their decision to participate in political activity or not, as past cases of

police violence have taught them that they cannot appeal to the right to be defended. One of the organizers of this demonstration against police violence is César, a white high school student and neighborhood resident. He is part of the youth movement of the French Socialist Party and member of a student union that mobilized after two incidents of police violence that caught national attention (death in custody of Adama Traoré in 2016 and extreme violence against Theo Luhaka, early 2017).<sup>259</sup> The demonstration departed from Villeneuve in the direction of the center of Grenoble. During one of the preparatory meetings prior to the demonstration mothers in Villeneuve that intended to participate expressed their fear of what would happen to their children when they would return to the neighborhood from the city center. They feared that the police would be waiting for them and carry out raids (*razzias*) as a sort of revenge for demonstrating and as an expression of their hostility (César, interview, 17/03/2017). My data do not allow to give an indication of the extent to which this fear is shared among inhabitants. In the following chapter I look at the consequences of this specific security treatment on the possibility to voice political claims.



Figure 5.101 Demonstration in Villeneuve to express outrage about the police violence against Theo Luhaka. (Photo Dauphiné Libéré, 18/02/2017)

### *5.2) Do the lives of Jews count more than the lives of Arabs?*

The second example demonstrating that research participants feel they are less worth defending than others draws on one of the Agir pour la Paix workshops in which youth said that their bodies and lives, which linked back to North-African immigration, did not count as much as those of those of Jews. They felt that Muslims are not deemed to deserve the same protection as other minorities, in particular Jews. They interpret this different treatment as an indicator of their reduced citizenship status. This comparison, again, has historic resonance and should be considered in relation with the specific legal regimes that governed

<sup>259</sup> The next chapter gives more detailed information about these cases of police violence.



both groups in colonial Algeria. Its dual system of citizenship became “more clearly exclusionary for Muslims with the Cremieux Decree in 1870, which granted French citizenship to Algerian Jews but not to Algerian Muslims”, who remained under the rule of the *Code de l'Indigénat* (Belmessous 2019, 504).

The comparison between Jews and Arab/Muslims in France came up during the APLP workshop in March 2015, two months after the Charlie Hebdo massacre. The workshop discussed the issue of Muslim radicalization in France, a hot topic in the French media at the time. The topic of the discussion about double standards with regard to Muslims/Arabs and Jews in France was raised in the debate through the following line of reasoning: why would French youth leave for Syria; their treatment as criminals on their return; and a comparison between the treatment of Jews that join Tzahal (Israeli Defence Force) and Muslims that join ISIS, while both groups are responsible for atrocities. The participants in the debate did not mention that Tzahal is recognized as a national army and ISIS is not. One (male) participant said that he was not going to “radicalize” (*je ne vais pas me radicaliser*) but felt strongly that there were more and more obstacles to Islam: “*Plus ça avance et plus, ça met des barrières à l'Islam,*” inducing the idea that he could understand some of the grievances that motivated people to leave for Syria (APLP Workshop, 07/03/2015). He further felt that the rules regarding secularism (*laïcité*) were not applied in the same way to Jews and Muslims. He provided the example of the events organized by the CRIF (Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France) to which were invited politicians and other influential persons and, on these occasions, wearing the *kippah* did not pose any problems. In support of his argument he referred to Article 2 of the constitution that, according to him, stipulates that “the State does not tolerate any religion” (APLP, 07/03/2015). His quoting of the Constitution is incorrect and he does not distinguish between private and public spaces with regard to respect for the principle of *laïcité*. Nevertheless, I understand what he refers to: it would be unthinkable, for example, to see the same public officials appear at a dinner organized by the Muslim version of the CRIF, the Conseil français du culte musulman (CFCM). The discussion between two young men (1,2) and one young woman (3) further develops the idea that Jews are defended and can defend themselves while Muslims are left undefended:

Participant 1 : Ce n'est pas normal. En France quand quelqu'un a des propos islamophobes, personne ne... C'est tout à fait normal de parler de ça à la télévision. Et quand quelqu'un a des propos antisémites, directement on commence à l'incriminer dans tous les médias. Comme par exemple avec Dieudonné et je trouve que ce n'est pas normal. En France on est dans un pays démocratique et **on on n'est pas sur le même pied d'égalité.**

Participant 2 : Je suis d'accord avec toi mais ça revient à ce qu'a dit A., c'est en partie notre faute. On manque d'organisation. La communauté juive quand on leur tape dessus, le CRIF répond direct. Nous on n'a personne.

Participant 3 : C'est très compliqué et je suis d'accord avec [participant 1], je comprends aussi. Je suis écœurée quand j'entends des discours haineux envers les Juifs mais je les comprends en fait. C'est grave hein, mais je les comprends. Les gens se sentent mal parce qu'ils voient que ces gens [Juifs] on les traite bien et eux [Arabes/musulmans] on les traite mal. Un jeune avec un *kippa* qui rentre en fac, on ne l'embête pas. Et pourquoi aujourd'hui on parle d'enlever le voile à la fac ?  
(APLP workshop, 07/03/2015)

The first participant denounced that Islamophobic statements are legally accepted as part of the respect for freedom of expression, as has been the case with the publications of *Charlie Hebdo*, while anti-Semitic statements have been treated as a crime. The French comedian Dieudonné who has been condemned several times for his anti-Semitic jokes has become a symbol of these double standards.<sup>260</sup> For this participant, the difference in their treatment shows that Muslims are not as deserving of being defended as Jews are. The second participant stresses this point by pointing out that “we” [Muslims] lack organizations to defend Muslim’s interests, like Jews have with the CRIF. While the French state has looked for an interlocutor and representative of Muslim voices, it has simultaneously sought to control this voice. The CFCM for example is placed under the responsibility of the Ministry of Home Affairs, responsible for internal security, while the CRIF is an independent organization. Attempts at autonomous Muslim organization have systematically encountered reactions ranging from suspicion to criminalization as the next chapter will demonstrate.

A similar argument was voiced during another debate in Villeneuve, saying that Muslims and North-African immigrants are not considered worth defending, neither by France, nor by their countries of origin whose elites are entangled in neocolonial relations.<sup>261</sup> Houria Bouteldja, as invited speaker, pointed out that this lack of defense stood in stark contrast to the situations of the Chinese in France: when a Chinese man died at the hands of the French police, the Chinese government spoke out.<sup>262</sup>

<sup>260</sup> For a critical voice, explaining “why Dieudonné is not Charlie”, see Hajdenberg, Michaël “Pourquoi Dieudonné n’est pas Charlie”, Mediapart, 15/01/2015. <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/150115/pourquoi-dieudonne-n-est-pas-charlie?onglet=full>, accessed 20/01/2015.

<sup>261</sup> Panel discussion that took place in Villeneuve “Regards croisés sur les violences policières, islamophobie, racisme d'Etat et sionisme dans la politique française: Khlass la hogra”, organized by several associations in Grenoble, with the support of FUIQP (Salle 150, 01/04/2017). Houria Bouteldja (PIR) was one of the invited speakers.

<sup>262</sup> The event to which Bouteldja referred to was the death of Liu Shaoyao on March 26th 2017 in Paris during a police intervention. See for example the article in Le Point “Mort de Shaoyao Liu: Paris et Pékin jouent l'apaisement” for the role the Chinese government played (02/04/2017), [https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/mort-de-shaoyao-liu-paris-et-pek-in-jouent-l-apaisement-02-04-2017-2116655\\_24.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/mort-de-shaoyao-liu-paris-et-pek-in-jouent-l-apaisement-02-04-2017-2116655_24.php), accessed 12/10/2020.

The resentment towards Jews that participants mentioned should therefore not so much be understood as an expression of hostility against Jews, but as the expression of a feeling of injustice that they do not enjoy the same treatment. This lack of consideration for the suffering of Muslims/Arabs also becomes evident for one of the APLP participants in the double standards during history lessons at high school: while there was a “duty to remember” (*devoir de mémoire*) the Holocaust, this duty did not seem to apply to atrocities committed during the colonial period and against Palestinians (APLP workshop, 07/03/2015). When the Israeli- Palestinian conflict was on the agenda of her history lessons in high school she was told by her teacher that the matter was too difficult and too recent to be included in the final exam and that she would skip it for this reason.

Nous Français, on a un devoir de mémoire, c'est ce qu'on nous apprend à l'école dans le programme scolaire. Je me rappelle à la fin de ma terminale on devait parler de Israël et Palestine mais la prof elle a sauté ce chapitre et elle a dit : "Ah bah c'est pas grave parce qu'ils ne le demanderont jamais au bac parce que c'est trop compliqué et c'est trop d'actualité". C'est pas normal. J'ai appris que j'ai un devoir de mémoire mais on ne m'a pas expliqué ce qu'il se passait là-bas. (Participant, APLP workshop, 07/03/2015)

It gave her the impression that the suffering of Arabs is not important, too complicated to understand, and that “the duty to remember” only concerns some parts of the population, that the lives of Jews count more than those of Arabs. While history lessons are focused on creating empathy for Jewish victims, they fail to create the same emotional proximity with the victims that APLP members identified with, those of colonization and Israeli occupations, and more recently with the civilian victims of the Global War on Terrorism.

Together with Dorlin, Sousa Santos provides a helpful analytical framework to understand which lives are grievable and which bodies are worth defending by explaining the different means of managing conflict provoked by those above the “abyssal line” and those below (Grosfoguel and Cohen 2012). For Sousa Santos, racialization is the determining factor of who is above and below this line. Both racialized and non-racialized people may suffer from oppression but the way the State deals with those challenging oppression will depend on their position above or below the line. Those above the line are identified as legitimate citizens. When the non-racialized oppressed engage in conflict to address asymmetric power relations they can appeal to concepts of freedom, autonomy, and equality, and spaces of negotiation are opened to them (Grosfoguel and Cohen 2012, 46). State actors generally employ non-violent means, violence being an exception (*Ibid.*). However, when the racialized oppressed, those that are denied political subjectivity, challenge their subaltern position state actors are more likely to resort to repression and violence to manage the

conflict. In general these conflicts are managed with methods that would be unacceptable in the zone of citizenship (*Ibid.*).<sup>263</sup>

Based on their extensive experience with grass-roots organizing in different MSHN in France, invited speakers confirmed Sousa Santos' argument that they receive a specific treatment in terms of security. The following quote illustrates this feeling that the measures to maintain order are different for racialized denizens that express discontent in comparison with, for example, white French farmers.<sup>264</sup>

Avec les violences des agriculteurs qui, très régulièrement brûlent et saccagent des choses, on n'a jamais vu la police ou la gendarmerie venir et prendre en otage tout un village parce que, parmi eux, il y aurait eu des personnes qui seraient venues troubler l'ordre public. Ici, à la Villeneuve, les habitants ont été pris en otage ! (Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

Tchetché-Apea refers in this statement to the security measures that were taken in response to the 2010 riots [Figure 5.102]. Khaled Satour, an inhabitant, explains the riots out of anger that Boudouda's body had been abandoned by the police after they shot him, as if it was not worth caring for.<sup>265</sup> While the riots obviously compromise public order there is a general feeling in Villeneuve that the drastic measures taken, its complete closure of the neighborhood and the presence of helicopters, would not have been adopted in the better-off neighborhoods of the city. Beyond reinstating public order, the police intervention also had the function of demonstrating might. Tchetché-Apea cited a similar example in Vaulx-en-Velin (UP debate, 26/04/2018).

Un exemple qui montre que le quartier n'est pas traité comme n'importe quelle ville ou village : c'est la façon dont il est exclu du droit qui régit les autres citoyens dès qu'il y a un problème. (Tchetché-Apea 2000, 87-88)

Tchetché-Apea insisted that these police interventions are intended to transmit a dramatic message, that inhabitants of MSHN are reserved a specific security treatment, a theme I come back to in the next chapter.

<sup>263</sup> In French: "En revanche, comme l'affirme Sousa Santos, en-dessous de la ligne abyssale, les méthodes utilisées par le "soi" impérial/capitaliste/masculin/hétérosexuel et son système institutionnel pour gérer les conflits, passent par l'usage de la violence et par la dépossession ouverte et éhontée. En règle générale, ces conflits sont gérés avec des méthodes qui seraient inacceptables dans la zone de l'être, car c'est seulement à des moments exceptionnels qu'on emploie des méthodes relevant de la régulation ou de l'émancipation."

<sup>264</sup> Since the police violence used against the Nuit Debout movement (2016) and the Gilets Jaunes movement (2018-2019) this affirmation that police violence is not used against white activists expressing discontent in public space is less true. Strategies of oppression previously reserved for MSHN have been deployed against activists of Nuit Debout and against the Gilets Jaunes. These experiences with police violence have led to discussions about converging interests and under what conditions a convergence of struggles could be opportune (See for example Basta!, 01/06/2016; Kokoreff 2016).

<sup>265</sup> This view is for example expressed by Khaled Satour in an open letter La Villeneuve de Grenoble: une cité sous état d'exception, published through e-mail (28/07/2010).



Figure 5.102 Police checks of cars entering the neighborhood during the nights that followed the death of Karim Boudouda. (Dauphiné Libéré article, 19/07/2010, Archives Départementales)

### **Conclusion: not being citizen, being denied the right to claim rights**

Racism in France is less articulated in terms of black and white identities than it is in the United States, rather it is articulated in terms of who can be French or not. In this chapter I deal with racist mechanisms in France that deny racialized inhabitants of MSHN citizenship. I give ample attention to participants' experiences of othering and how this complicates their citizenship in France, by which I mean that they are not considered as French. In order to be considered as French they have to give up their cultural difference, to be silent, invisible, and not disturb anyone (*ne pas déranger*), or disrupt (see Rancièrè in the next chapter). These requirements are incompatible with my definition of citizenship. When racialized inhabitants vocalize their claims to rights, they are reminded of their visitor status in France and their statements are interpreted as ungrateful, aggressive, or illegitimate. When they get involved in activism and make their discontent visible in public space, through either violent or non-violent means, this is interpreted as "disrespect for the Republic" (Kipfer 2007, 702). My argument is not that France's racialized population is locked in a position of subalternity, there are important differences in MSHN inhabitants' capacity for representation: there are those that can and do speak, that have access for example to political platforms, that are organized, and even to some extent listened to. My argument is that there are processes in place, driven by power configurations, that make their voices go unheard. If citizenship is impossible in France, it is because it is impossible to be heard and therefore to address grievances and claims to those in power. Not being recognized as full French citizens means that racialized inhabitants cannot make the same claims as first-class citizens. Being denied the right to claim rights means being denied the possibility to address the issue of social and racial inequality in MSHN through political conflict.

## Chapter 6. Subaltern in France: without room for conflict, politics is impossible

Dans ce continuum colonial, tout est fait pour désintéresser et pour éloigner ces populations [habitants de quartier, racisés] de la chose publique, de la question politique, de l'intérêt général et du bien commun, par des moyens très fins. [...] Ce sentiment général emprunte à des façons d'intervenir passées dont l'objectif est d'empêcher la participation et le partage du pouvoir à certaines populations.  
(Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea, UP debate, 26/4/2018)

Quand on a le malheur de vouloir mener une lutte de manière autonome on est suspecté, on est diabolisé, on est criminalisé.  
(Abdelaziz Chaambi, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

One of my first encounters in the neighborhood was with Arif, a man in his early thirties who often hangs out in the Place des Géants. When, not long after the deaths of Kevin and Sofiane, we discussed violence in the neighborhood, he explained that he understands insults as a way of crying out, "*l'injure est un cri*", pointing at the graffiti on the walls, and told me to look around and tell what I see (field notes, December 2012). What I see are tags that state "*Nique la police*" (fuck the police) and "NTM" (*Nique ta mère*). What Arif sees is anger, often kept inside, but also expressed on the walls of public spaces; people who cry out but are not heard.

This chapter argues that it is impossible for racialized inhabitants to make their political claims heard and to challenge their unequal position in society through political means. As a result, it is impossible for them to challenge the status quo openly. In addition to the existing literature on obstacles to political mobilization in MSHN, which relies overwhelmingly on the views of state and institutional actors,<sup>266</sup> this chapter is particularly interested in the views of MSHN inhabitants. In debates participants provided information about the methods that different actors, such as the State, institutional, and other elite players (e.g. the media, opinion makers, or established civil society organizations close to government) use in political demobilization. I analyze research participants' statements using sociological theory about the history of immigrant and MSHN struggles; subaltern studies; postcolonial feminist studies; and political philosophy, and I give particular attention to the role of space in political organizing. This chapter looks in particular at the period following the 2015 terrorist attacks. The court case against Chaambi, as a result of his political activism with the Coordination contre le Racisme et l'islamophobie (CRI) backs up my argument that the possibilities of political conflict for MSHN activists have narrowed over the last years, in particular if they are Muslim. Next to this case I draw on many examples provided by Université populaire participants. Both the case-study and the examples deal with the shrinking political space in the aftermath of the 2015 terrorist attacks.

<sup>266</sup> State and institutional actors speak through interviews and archives and underrepresent the views of those directly concerned by these policies. Talpin points to the difficulties involved in obtaining access to the field (*au terrain*) as an explanation for this underrepresentation (Diamond and Talpin 2019, 2).

The theme of impossible conflict was inspired in particular by three invited speakers of the Université populaire with years of experience in MSHN activism rooted in anti-colonial- and immigration struggles, against police violence, and in favor of the liberation of Palestine. They are Abdelaziz Chaambi, Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea and Saïd Bouamama. I have analyzed the data available on Chaambi as a case-study because his activist trajectory, the non-receivability of his claims, and the reactions his activism provoked are all emblematic for my argument of impossible conflict. They are emblematic first because the scope of his activism is the broadest; second because it spans a period of almost fifty years; third because he was targeted by state efforts to criminalize his activism during the period of my field work; and fourth because his profile is less known than for example the one of Bouamama, who suffered comparable attempts at silencing his voice. An extensive discussion of Chaambi's activist trajectory shows, and is typical of, the evolution of immigrant struggles in France.

The chapter is structured as follows: first it sets out with a theoretical framework for understanding the (im)possibility of challenging asymmetric power relations for racialized MSHN inhabitants in France (1); it looks at the experience of immigrant and MSHN activists to challenge these unequal power structures, looking in particular at the activist trajectory of Chaambi (2); it analyzes the obstacles that activists are confronted with in their political organizing, such as the criminalization of activists (3); the shrinking political space to organize and to publicly address a wider audience (4); and the depoliticization of political acts through disqualifications and naming, reducing racialized inhabitants of MSHN to silence or making their voices inaudible (5).

### **1) A theoretical framework for understanding the (im)possibility of conflict**

*Il y a tout un tas de choses qu'on dit, que dit Abdelaziz [Chaambi] depuis longtemps, que disent d'autres gens, qui ne sont pas audibles ou qui restent invisibles.*  
(Michel Kokoreff, UP debate, 20/3/2015)

Of course, the phenomenon in question would not ordinarily be thought of as violence: it is too respectable, too academic, too genteel for that. It is violence all the same, and deserves to be seen for what it is (Norman 1999, 354).

This section provides a theoretical framework for the affirmation that conflict is not possible for racialized inhabitants in MSHN. I understand conflict in this context as the openly challenging structurally asymmetric power relations in society through nonviolent political action. As I will demonstrate, it is close to Rancière's concept of politics and Mouffe's concept of agonism, and is distinct from violence. When racialized inhabitants vocally claim the right to have rights they are not heard, they are not recognized as political subjects, and they are denied a voice, i.e. they are denied the political tools to challenge their embodied experiences of inequality. I therefore consider that the concepts of conflict, politics and voice are closely connected (1.1). I combine the analyses of (Curle 1971) that have emerged in peace theory with political philosophy about challenging the current order (Mouffe 1999; 2000, 2002, 2013; Rancière 1999) (1.2) and its spatial applications (1.3). I answer the

question why conflict is inevitable when addressing unequal power relations and why challenging the current unjust order should not be considered as a threat to the Republic but as a step towards more peaceful relations. An entire subsection is dedicated to the obstacles to political organizing and that impede overt conflict (1.4).

### *1.1) Conflict is not possible for racialized inhabitants in MSHN*

Arif's observation that graffiti in the neighborhood is a way of crying out reminds me of Mbembe and his inquiry into the Postcolony (2001). Mbembe looked into the question of whether the situation described by Fanon, of colonial subjects in Algeria, could be extended to the cries of Africans in the postcolony (interview with Dorlin 2007, 143). The postcolony as a concept corresponds to a diffuse geographic area that includes France. Mbembe's interpretation of Fanon is that colonial power produced suffering subjects and each time they opened their mouths only screams and shouts would come out (*Ibid.*). This obviously recalls Spivak's question of whether the subaltern can speak (1988). Arif's statement demonstrates that it is legitimate to question whether racialized inhabitants of MSHN linked to former colonies can speak, in the sense of being heard. The moments of collective violence in Villeneuve, in 2010 and 2012, have only reinforced representations of racialized MSHN youth as savages engaged in barbarian acts. The "state-led articulation of *banlieues*" typically obscures the political significance of riots and they are only understood as noises that disturb the established order (Dikeç 2007, 153). As discussed before, this is increasingly the case from the (end of the) 1990s onwards as a result of the government's increasing obsession with security, and adoption of associated discourse. According to Dikeç:

The problem is that the republican imaginary is so white and so Christian that any manifestation of discontent –either on the streets or in the spaces of institutional politics- by the Republic's darker and non-Christian citizens, quickly evokes concerns about the values and principles of the Republic (Dikeç 2007, 177).

This discursive articulation obstructs their ability to be "heard as equals, making a claim on the Republic as part of the Republic -and not as barbarians at its gates" (*Ibid.*). The possibilities for political activism and for challenging the *status quo* continued to narrow after the 2015 terrorist attack, when MSHN became increasingly associated with the threat of Muslim terrorism.

The embodied experiences of inequality and subalternity discussed in the previous chapter show that the political tools available in France fail to address this structural injustice, something that is also true for other European democracies. The premise on which the current model of deliberative democracy is based and the idea that "political decisions should be reached through a process of deliberation among free and equal citizens" is false (Mouffe 2000, 1). Habermas' democratic ideal of a public sphere in which all can participate and challenge each other has the serious flaw that, in reality, citizens are not equally able to participate in the democratic process due to the power relations that span through society. Second-class citizens are excluded from the space of formal politics because they are not



represented by political parties, they are negated as interlocutors and are instead seen as a danger to the unity and order of the Republic, and even dealt with as such. This idea on which deliberative democracy is based, that through deliberation a consensus can be found, denies the conflictual nature of politics as competition between people pursuing different and, at times, conflicting interests. Rather than opening political space for those at the margins (Dryzek 2002), deliberative democracy contributes to an anti-political view of society (Springer 2011a).

The situation Tchetché-Apea described in the quote at the beginning of this chapter is but one illustration of the ways that conflict is made impossible, through “warding people off” and “disaffecting” them from politics through “very subtle means”. The indirect ways of discouraging political participation pointed out by Tchetché-Apea correspond to what Talpin called “quiet repression” (*répression à bas bruit*), in reference to “the discrete but efficient means with which institutions and, in particular, elected officials try to obstruct the collective organization of MSHN inhabitants” (Talpin 2016a, 1; see also Dikeç 2007; Tchétché-Apéa 2000) and generate voter abstention.<sup>267</sup> These strategies seek “to obstruct the structuring of counter-powers” (*Ibid.*). They are responsible for the representation of MSHN as “political deserts” (*deserts politiques*) (see for example Arslan 2016; for a critique see Tissot 2008) which further reinforces the idea that MSHN inhabitants are not fully worthy citizens, because they do not participate in the democratic game.

Depoliticization, disqualification, and epistemic violence are closely related. The fact that statements and claims of MSHN activists have remained inaudible and invisible, as I demonstrate in section 5, is an outcome of “practices of silencing” (Dotson 2011). Silencing requires the deployment of power, because it is only through the exercise of power that one “determines what is audible and visible, which utterances are of concern for the community and which are to be dismissed as unworthy noise” (Rancière 1999 in Selmeczi 2012, 499). This silencing is an outcome of epistemic violence which, according to Spivak, is the systematic disqualification of marginalized people’s experiences and their incapacity to reflect on the latter through the imposition of a conceptual framework that disqualifies their experience.<sup>268</sup> In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the post-colonial second-class citizens remain ‘other’, just like the colonial subjects who were denied political subjectivity, albeit not to the same extent. Epistemic violence still denies racialized citizens in France political subjectivity. Its function is to “damage a given group’s ability to speak and be heard” (Dotson, 2011, 236). In her work on the subaltern’s possibility of discourse Spivak has described the difficulties of

<sup>267</sup> In French: “La façon discrète mais efficace avec laquelle les institutions, et en particulier les élus municipaux, tentent de contrecarrer l’organisation collective d’habitants mobilisés autour d’un projet de rénovation urbaine. Alors que les quartiers populaires sont souvent qualifiés de déserts politiques, cette expérience montre qu’il n’en est rien, mais que tout est fait pour empêcher la structuration de contre-pouvoirs à l’échelle locale”.

<sup>268</sup> Weselby, “Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, on the Subaltern and Epistemic Violence.”, <https://magpiecws.wordpress.com/2014/09/13/gayatri-chakravorty-spivak-on-the-subaltern-and-epistemic-violence-study-notes-2/>, accessed 06/01/2019

addressing epistemic violence, as the latter attempts to eliminate the knowledge possessed by marginal groups (Dotson, 2011, 236). The embodied experiences of inequality are one form of such knowledge, and epistemic violence is responsible for the difficulty in making this knowledge visible and audible. Spivak's work clearly speaks to Rancière and his analysis of the epistemic framework proposed by the "police," a framework that ultimately leads to the disqualification of racialized inhabitants' own experiences and analyses. It is only through autonomous collective action that self-confidence can be rebuilt, and this is exactly what state strategies impede through both overt and silent repression.

### *1.2) A peace theory model to grasp the transformation of asymmetric power relations*

The subaltern position of racialized inhabitants can be analyzed as a form of asymmetric conflict between an established and a marginalized group. The marginalized group I refer to consists of all those that share the condition of racialized inhabitants of MSHN, or those that identify with this social position. Their condition of marginalization is described in the previous chapter. When I refer to people as belonging to a "marginalized group" this does not mean that they themselves identify as a group. They may each deal with their own problems. The marginalized are a group made up of individuals who may come to the awareness that they share similar interests. The formation of a group, identifying with it, and making oneself visible as part of a group, as well as the publicization of collective claims is what political organizing is about. Members of a marginalized group therefore do not evolve through the stages of Curle's model of challenging asymmetric power relations (see below) all together, but small groups emerge that have their own we-identities and specific claims. They may join their forces in overarching groups.

Curle, a peace studies scholar, proposed a model that deals with challenging power asymmetry and the transformation of unpeaceful relationships into peaceful ones (1971). Unpeaceful is defined here as relations characterized by political exclusion, lack of recognition, and economic exploitation. Peaceful relations are those in which people are equals and live up to their potential (Galtung 1969). Challenging the status quo openly is crucial as a means to make the structural violence at the basis of these unequal relationships visible. The movement towards more peaceful and more just relationships may thus involve a temporary increase in overt conflict (Modus Operandi and The Network University 2012).<sup>269</sup> The space opened up by this conflict is not without the risk of violence but "this potential is actually mitigated by allowing conflict to play an integrative role" according to Springer (2011a, 531).

Curle's model of challenging power asymmetry [Figure 6.103] demonstrates that moving towards peaceful relationships depends both on raising awareness among the marginalized group about its conditions (x-axis) and an increase in the power they dispose of (y-axis). The model shows that the first stage is to raise awareness about power imbalances and to

<sup>269</sup> "Transforming Civil Conflicts", Manual online training course, Modus Operandi and The Network University, 2012

translate them into claims (stage 1: conscientisation); the second stage is to organize, to politicize grievances and to publicize them, to bring them out in public space (stage 2: confrontation). It is only then that a marginalized group can begin to negotiate on a more equal footing with those who hold power over it (stage 3: negotiation) and that it may be successful in creating relationships built on a more equal footing (stage 4: resolution, which Curle called “peaceful development”), (Modus Operandi and The Network University 2012).

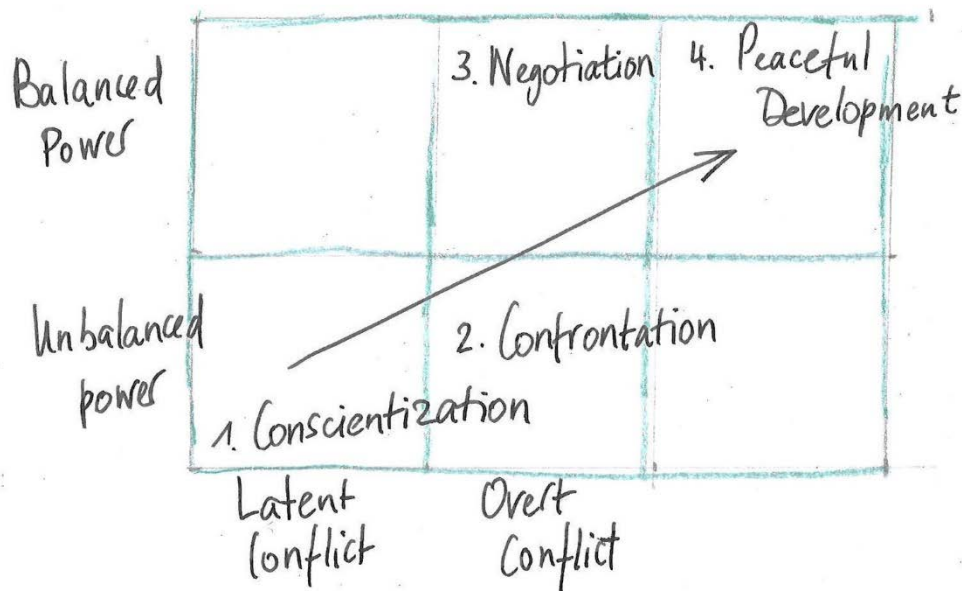


Figure 6.103 Curle's model of challenging asymmetric power relations. Based on Curle (1971), credit: The Network University and Modus Operandi, Manual online training course in Transforming Civil Conflicts (2012).

The habitual reservations about models of conflict transformation are also applicable here: that no process is linear and that any process may suffer setbacks and may be stalled. Curle's model helps to identify the obstacles research participants meet both in raising awareness and in challenging the positions of the established. Only the first two stages of the model are of interest to this chapter. In the first phase of Curle's model (conscientization) conflict is latent and it is not visible: it is the phase in which inequality is epidermal, people feel it on their skin and are confronted with it in a very physical way (as demonstrated in chapter 5). However, they might lack the words and the analytical tools to translate their experience into political discourse.

The condition of subalternity is the result of practices of silencing. For Spivak if one truly wants “to understand the consciousness of the subaltern”, one “must appreciate the significance of their silence” (Weselby 2014). Their silence is due to the fact that representations of subalterns are “embedded within the dominant discourse” (Green 2002, 16). Speaking, in the sense of Spivak, depends on both the capacity to produce discourse (speech) and on the capacity to make oneself heard (voice) and to be listened to. This distinction between speech and voice, between what is speakable and what is audible, corresponds to the stages of conscientization and confrontation. One's capacity to make oneself heard is, again, related to one's power position in society. For the subaltern to speak,

there is a clear need for a shift in power relations (De Kock 1992). Therefore, in the model conscientization is concomitant to an increase in power of the marginalized group. Inevitably, this challenge to existing power relations will encounter significant forms of resistance. The work of Rancière on the relationship between the police and politics, (Rancière 1995) and on the “partition of the sensible” (2000) is particularly helpful to understand the resistance of the established and why conflict is inevitable. Rancière’s work on the stakes involved in visibilization (2000) serves as a complement to Spivak’s work. While Spivak is interested in the pre-conditions for making claims audible Rancière is, additionally, interested in the visibility of making claims. This focus on visibility explains the particular interest geographers have shown for his work (Davidson and Iveson 2014a; 2014b; Dikeç 2002; 2007; 2012; 2015; Springer 2011a). Additionally, sociologists working on immigrants’ social movements have also used his work, as visibility clearly is an issue in immigrants’ struggles (Uitermark and Nicholls 2014).

For my argument, that conflict is impossible, I will use some key elements of Rancière’s work on the distinction between the police and politics as interpreted by Dikeç. Dikeç has mobilized Rancière’s work in order to explain why and how MSHN inhabitants “are deprived of their right to the city in the political sense of the term”, called in French “*droits de cité*” (Dikeç 2002, 94). Both the spaces of MSHN and its (racialized) “inhabitants have been assigned to their ‘proper’ places in the police order - in the symbolically constituted social imaginary- as places of noise”. As a result, MSHN inhabitants claims cannot be heard, even when they are at all able to formulate them in political terms (*Ibid.*). So, even if the material and symbolic conditions are met for the production of collective discourse for voicing claims, state actors and other elite players turn their “voices into noises” (Dikeç 2007, 152). Uitermark and Nicholls add that “the police order defines what is visible and sayable, what is noise and what is voice” (2014, 972). Rancière describes a system of distribution of places in society that “*makes forms of domination appear as if they are founded on a sensible and obvious system*” (Dikeç 2002, 93), which he called the “partition of the sensible”. Dikeç explains the latter “as a system of sensible evidence, [that] arranges the perceptive givens of a situation – what is in or out, central or peripheral, audible or inaudible, visible or invisible” (2007, 18). Its function is to distribute and to define who is part of the IN-siders: who is included in the center, audible and visible; and who is part of the OUT-siders: those in the periphery, inaudible and invisible. The term I use for the insiders, after Elias and Scotson (1994), is “the established”, who monopolize sources of power and use them to exclude and stigmatize “outsiders”. The term I use for the outsiders is the marginalized. To explain the continued power asymmetry between the established and the marginalized Rancière makes an important distinction between the police and politics. His conception of the police is very different from the term commonly used for the national security forces, it refers to “the established social order”, in other words, to “a natural order of things where a society is represented as being divided into functions, into places where these functions are exercised, into groups which are, by virtue of their places, bound to exercise this or that function”

(Dikeç 2002, 95). The “State’s statements define the ‘proper place’ of things and people” (*Ibid.*). Politics, according to Rancière, is not the exercise of power nor the struggle for power (Dikeç 2007), but is about power equilibrium and happens when one challenges the supposedly natural order and the place that one has been attributed in it. Politics occurs, according to Rancière, “when a wrong (denial of equality) has been identified by a subaltern group” and “when they [marginalized] make a statement of dissensus” (Uitermark and Nicholls 2014, 972). Hence, politics “is the arena where the principle of equality is tested in the face of a wrong experienced by those who have no part” (Swyngedouw 2009, 605; Uitermark and Nicholls 2014, 972). Rancière’s conception of politics is therefore very close to my conception of conflict.

### *1.3) The role of space in challenging one’s position*

Space plays an important role in challenging one’s subaltern position because it is here that people can come together to form a group, and that collective claims can be publicized. According to Springer, “politics as such is materialized via the public display of dissensus, a dissensus that disrupts the depoliticizing order built by government” (Springer 2011a, 533). This is exactly the reason why subalterns see their access to public space denied or thwarted. Uitermark and Nicholls (2014) however argue that this challenging of power relations does not take place in one political moment but is the result of a long process, such as the one described by Curle. A subordinate group does not suddenly realize that it is equal and that it has the right to be considered accordingly, this is a long and complex process. Based on my field research, I identified five actions that are part of the process of challenging structurally asymmetric power relations by a subaltern group:

- Translate the experiences of the marginalized group into words, and produce speech in order to break with self-silencing practices
- Question the interiorization of inferiority and acquire the feeling that, as marginalized, they can legitimately contradict or reject dominant discourse
- Constitute a group, define and agree on a we-group identity
- Produce (collective) discourse, formulate claims
- Communicate claims in public (politicization)

I called these actions and not steps because steps should be taken one after the other, usually in a specific order, while the actions listed above can take place simultaneously. There is however some chronology involved in the sense that one cannot publicize collective claims as long as a group has not been formed, and without some level of conscientization. I discuss these actions throughout the chapter, mostly through the voices of participants’ that tried to realize any of the above actions, and that give an account of the difficulties encountered. Obviously, politicization goes together with policing (Uitermark and Nicholls 2014) and those responsible for the police order undertake, in response, actions that target depoliticization, demobilization, and disorganization. By politicization I mean the translation of anger into political claims, and by depoliticization I mean keeping away from political

influence or control, or the concealment of the political aspect of discourse. If a marginalized group is not part of the “whole”, those considered as the established will not interpret the claims of the marginalized as mobilization in favor of peaceful relationships, but instead will interpret them as a threat to the order that the established call peace. Rather than peace, the term “pacification” (Agier and Lamotte 2016) is more appropriate to describe this form of establishing order. As a result of presenting the marginalized as a threat, state actors can ‘legitimately’ repress their claims and respond to them with security measures instead of listening. Hence my argument that conflict is not possible when political claims are interpreted as aggressions and violence, and dealt with accordingly.

*1.4) Obstacles to political organizing, impeding overt conflict*

The obstacles the marginalized meet in their efforts to make themselves heard differ according to the stages of political organizing in Curle’s model. I only focus on the obstacles in the first two stages: during the conscientization stage they are confronted with the negation of their experiences, with being presented as dangerous and culturally inferior, and during the confrontation stage they meet obstacles to organization that impede group formation, and therefore impede the formation of a political voice. The capacity to make oneself heard depends not only on voice and making oneself audible, it also depends on the capacity to make oneself visible, and to publicize one’s positions in public space. Once the marginalized have been able to publicize their claims, the next obstacle is that these claims are turned into noise through disqualification, repression, and criminalization. Table 6.19 gives an overview of the types of obstacles participants can meet in the five actions involved in moving from latent to overt conflict.

**Table 6.19: Actions and counter-reactions in political organizing**

Actions	Obstacles
Translate the experiences of the marginalized group into words, produce speech in order to break with self-silencing practices	Interiorization of inferiority and self-silencing
Call into question the interiorization of inferiority and acquire the feeling that, as marginalized, they can legitimately contradict or reject the dominant discourse	Epistemic violence
Constitute a group, define and agree on a we-group identity	Denied access to meeting spaces in which individuals can form a group
Produce (collective) discourse, formulate claims	Disqualification and de-politicization through forms of discursive articulation
Make claims public in spaces of confrontation (politicization)	Access to public space impeded

The research participants encountered many of the above-mentioned obstacles in their attempts to make their voices audible. The next sections draw on observations that they

shared during the debates. Most of the difficulties mentioned by the research participants fit the four wide categories, identified by Diamond and Talpin (2019), that led to political demobilization in MSHN (*quartiers populaires*).

- Security response to political claims and organizing - repression of mobilizations and activists
- Strategies of disqualification and categorization in the discursive domain
- Cooptation and clientelism
- Constraints on the material conditions of mobilization (resources and space)

My approach is however broader than Diamond and Talpin's, who focus on the demobilization of political action and on what happens once groups have been able to mobilize. My analysis also includes impediments to mobilization prior to groups being constituted, including the difficulties encountered in Curle's conscientization phase.

Additional obstacles came up in public debates and informal discussions:

- The impossibility of speech and criminalization of political activism as impediments to group formation and political action
- A focus on the role of space in group formation, and in both politicization and policing
- A focus on the difficulty of forming collective claims, speaking out as a 'we-group'
- Epistemic violence, inverted projections and the hypervisibilization of violence

Each of these will be explained in further detail in this chapter.

## **2) Fifty years of experience with challenging asymmetric power relations**

The trajectories of the invited speakers, discussed in this section, demonstrate that over the last 50 years the racialized inhabitants of MSHN have been demonstrating their capacity to organize moments of conflict. They have been publicizing their anger about their experiences of inequality and translating them into claims through workers'-, hunger-, and rent strikes, marches and demonstrations (Abdallah 2012; Boubeker and Hajjat 2008; Chekkat and Delgado Hoch 2011; Taharount 2017). Despite these moments of visible organization, collective action has been repressed and fragmented to such an extent that Hajjat speaks about a "crisis of activism" in MSHN in France (2008). The forms of political action used by racialized inhabitants seeking to address embodied experiences of inequality have been systematically thwarted. One factor is the internal dynamics such as competition within immigrants' and MSHN organizations (Diamond and Talpin 2019), and a second factor is the strategies of state actors in favor of maintaining order and the status quo. For a comprehensive discussion of internal obstacles to collective organization, see authors such as Boubeker and Hajjat (2008) and Taharount (2017).

Most invited speakers and resource persons have these past fifty years been part of political organizations as immigrant workers, MSHN inhabitants, Muslims, racialized *etc.*, addressing asymmetric power relations. In this section I discuss in particular the activist trajectory of Abdelaziz Chaambi (2.1) and how he became a target of demobilization strategies (2.2). I

then mention, in comparison, the trajectory of Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea (2.3), emphasizing similarity of the obstacles they encountered, despite divergences in their trajectories. These struggles have often been met with security responses (2.4).

### *2.1) Chaambi's activist trajectory and the history of immigrant's struggles*

The activist *curriculum vitae* of Chaambi [Box 6.39] reads like a summary of immigrants' struggles in France. It shows how immigrants have tried to have a voice in France; demonstrates the obstacles to organization for immigrant workers, the rupture with the political left and the turn towards autonomous organization; and finally his trajectory reveals how the fear of Islam is an obstacle to making claims audible, and to creating alliances with broad-based movements.

Chaambi was born in Tunisia and grew up in a working-class family which was strongly committed to the struggle against the French colonial presence (Seniguer 2018, 165). His father, who was illiterate, sent him to a private French Catholic School where he came into contact with the colonial elite, and became very much aware of class differences. Looking for work, Chaambi's father moved to France in the 1970s and took Chaambi with him (Seniguer 2018, 165). In 1974 and 1975 he frequented Villeneuve (UP debate, 20/03/2015). In his activism four thematic strands can be identified: the first is around class and worker's issues, closely tied to immigration struggles and those of MSHN; around Islam and issues that particularly concern Muslims denizens in France; support of the Palestinian struggle; the last is his activism in relation to the political transition in Tunisia after the fall of Ben Ali. Below I develop each of these strands in more detail.



### **Box 6.39 The activist trajectory of Abdelaziz Chaambi**

1957 – 1970 Early life in Tunis - family actively involved in the struggle for independence  
1976 – 1979 Activist in Lutte Ouvrière  
1979 Renewed engagement with Islam  
1979 Opening of a place of worship in Aubenas  
1979 Creation of a local branche of the Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l’amitié des peuples (MRAP) in Basse-Ardèche  
1981 Creation of a (local) Association de Solidarité avec les Travailleurs Immigrés (ASTI)  
1983 Participation in the Marche pour l’égalité et contre le racism (with ASTI)  
1987 Co-founder of the Union des Jeunes Musulmans (UJM), later leading to the the Collectif des Musulmans en France (1993) and Présence Musulmane  
1991-1993 Organization of three large UJM congresses in a MSHN of Vénissieux (Minguettes)  
Participation in the creation of the collective DiverCité  
2003 Participation in the European Social Forum in Saint-Denis (with UJM)  
2005 Member of the Mouvement des Indigènes de la République (MIR)  
2007 Participation in the creation of the Forum social des quartiers populaires (FSQP)  
2009 Creation of the organization Résistance Palestine  
2009 Co-founder of the Coordination contre le Racisme et l’islamophobie (CRI)  
2011 Co-founder of the organization les Amis de Bouazizi  
~2011 Appointed General Secretary of the Instance régionale indépendante pour les élections in Tunisia  
2011 Organized elections of the Tunisian constituent Assembly in the South of France  
2012 Co-founder of the political party Force Citoyenne Populaire  
2015 Defense of the Msakni case with CRI  
Please note that the terms “opening of”, “creation of” or “participation in” never refer to an individual action by Chaambi but always refer to his involvement in these different events as part of larger collectives and organizations.

#### *Social, worker’s, immigration, and MSHN issues*

Just after receiving his high school diploma Chaambi became involved with the French communist (Trotskyite) movement, Lutte ouvrière, with whom he shared common ground on issues of worker’s rights, colonialism, imperialism and the political imagination of revolution. He also rapidly became engaged in combatting racism with the Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l’amitié entre les peuples (MRAP),<sup>270</sup> setting up a local branch in the Basse-Ardèche, as well as a local Association de Solidarité avec les Travailleurs Immigrés<sup>271</sup> (ASTI) in 1981. It is through the latter group that he participated in the organization of the 1983 March for equality and against racism (*Marche pour l’égalité et contre le racisme*), a watershed moment

<sup>270</sup> Movement against racism and for friendship amongst peoples

<sup>271</sup> Association of Solidarity with Immigrant Workers

in the history of immigration struggles in France. It was the first time that post-colonial immigrants in France gained such political visibility. The 100,000 marchers who arrived in Paris gained national and international media coverage, and were received by the French President to state their demands. Ever since this event Chaambi has been a key figure on these issues, that came to be articulated in terms of *quartiers populaires*. Another major event was the organization of the Forum social des quartiers populaires (FSQP) organized for the first time in 2007, and inspired by the World Social Fora.<sup>272</sup> Based on the observation that “the political class overall has never considered the problems of the *banlieue* and the inheritors of immigration as a priority in policy-making”, Chaambi, and many activists who share his trajectory, resolved that the only solution was to found a political party (Saphirnews.com 06/06/2012).<sup>273</sup> In 2012 he co-founded the political party Force Citoyenne Populaire in order to directly represent the interests of MSHN inhabitants in politics.

### *Islam*

His activist life took a turn in 1979 after the violent death of his brother, who was the victim of a racist crime in Chambéry. In that period he rediscovered Islam (with which he grew up, but did not practice) in which he found answers to some of his existential questions (*Seniguer, 165*). From this point onwards Islam has been an important source of inspiration for his struggles against oppression and domination, a fact which has provoked tensions with his comrades, as the next quote illustrates:

Moi je suis issu de la gauche, je suis issu de l'extrême gauche. Je suis un renégat, pour certains, de l'extrême gauche. Parce qu'en '79 (..) je quitte l'extrême gauche parce que je découvre l'Islam. (..) Ils ne pouvaient pas concevoir, les copains d'extrême gauche, (..) qu'on puisse être quelqu'un qui défende les opprimés, qui lutte contre les oppresseurs, les dominants mais qui a une spiritualité.

Et j'ai eu l'impression que, quand je leur ai dit que je ne peux pas continuer avec vous, parce que j'ai une transcendance que vous ne pouvez pas m'apporter, j'ai trouvé une relation autre que vous ne pouvez pas m'apporter, mais ceci dit, on se retrouvera peut-être le jour où il y aura la révolution. Ce jour on se retrouvera parce que vous allez vous rendre compte que l'être humain a besoin de quelque chose d'autre. Il a besoin de rêves, il a besoin d'idéal, il a besoin de transcendance, il a besoin de sortir de sa dimension matérialiste. En tout cas c'est ma conception de la vie et de l'existence. Et je les ai quittés depuis [les camarades de Lutte Ouvrière], et c'est là que j'ai compris qu'il y avait un problème en Occident, en France en particulier, avec la religion. (UP debate, 20/03/2015)

For Chaambi the fact that there was no place for his spiritual life and religious convictions in radical anti-capitalist movements is an indicator that France has a problem with religion. As a

<sup>272</sup> Chaambi actively participated in both the European Social Forum and the Maghreb Social Forum.

<sup>273</sup> “Force citoyenne populaire, un nouveau parti à destination des banlieues”, Saphirnews.com, 06/06/2012 [https://www.saphirnews.com/Force-citoyenne-populaire-un-nouveau-parti-a-destination-des-banlieues\\_a14586.html](https://www.saphirnews.com/Force-citoyenne-populaire-un-nouveau-parti-a-destination-des-banlieues_a14586.html), accessed 9/10/2019

result he distanced himself from *Lutte ouvrière*, and in the 1980s became an important actor in the development of Islam in Lyon (Seniguer 2018, 165) but without ever really abandoning his struggle for social justice. In 1979 he opened a place of worship (*lieu de culte*) in the marginalized social housing neighborhood les Oliviers in Aubenas (Ardèche) which also offered courses in Arab and Muslim culture for the neighborhood youth. In Aubenas, he also created the Association des Musulmans d'Aubenas. When he moved in 1986 to Lyon he participated in the creation of the Union of French Muslims (*Union des Jeunes Musulmans*, UJM), which opened the first Muslim library in France and created the publishing house Tawhid. In this period the UJM introduced a new form of activism combining Islam and political issues, getting rid of the nationalism and tribalism that had previously marked Muslim organizations, and created partnerships with non-Muslim organizations (Seniguer 2018). At the end of the 1980s the UJM organized three large congresses in Minguettes (a MSHN of Vénissieux, a suburb of Lyon). Although these congresses primarily targeted Muslim youth of the Lyon area, they attracted thousands of young people from all over France. This Muslim activism in Lyon was an innovative approach to political activism but built on earlier struggles, such as the 1983 March for equality and against racism (Seniguer 2018). From this new dynamic grew the Collectif des Musulmans de France<sup>274</sup> (CMF) in 1993 and Présence Musulmane at the end of the 1990s, both of which served as a springboard for the rising career of Tariq Ramadan (*Ibid.*). It was in 1994 that Chaambi met Tariq Ramadan during the demonstration in support of Scherazade in Grenoble.<sup>275</sup> Ramadan's intellectual background and eloquence were an important asset for UJM's visibility, and the UJM provided Tariq Ramadan with the legitimacy of a grass-roots movement.<sup>276</sup> The target group of the UJM were young people of immigrant origin in France, it adopted French as the language for all communication, and picked social struggles related to their condition in France. Since, Chaambi has distanced himself from Tariq Ramadan's positions (2009) because he felt that it worked to counter the cause of Muslims in France, especially in a climate where the political space for Muslims was rapidly shrinking and halal, hijab, mosques, and minarets were increasingly turned into political problems (UP debate, 20/03/2015).

In 2009, Chaambi co-founded the CRI, which he considers both a necessity and a terrible step backwards in comparison to the converging struggles in which he participated in the 1980s.

<sup>274</sup> Collective of Muslims of France

<sup>275</sup> Tariq Ramadan is a very influential Swiss Muslim theologian, public speaker, and writer and is the grandson of one of the founders of the Muslim Brotherhood. Up until 2017 he was a professor of contemporary Islamic studies at the University of Oxford. Ramadan is also very contested: in France for example by Fourest who dedicated a book to her criticism (2004).

<sup>276</sup> The UJM initiated Ramadan to the social problems in the banlieues around Lyon: "mass unemployment, racism, police violence, deaths in detention, run-down neighborhoods, the rise of violence and hatred, self-destruction, the rise of the Front National", some of which he was not at all aware of before, according to Chaambi (Seniguer 2018, 174). However, the relationship between Tariq Ramadan and Abdelaziz Chaambi started to deteriorate around 2003 as a result of a profound disagreement about Tariq Ramadan's political statements just before the start of the European Social Forum and led to a complete rupture in 2009.

He exclaimed on several occasions that he would rather not have had to create the CRI, and that he would have preferred to fight for social issues, workers' rights, citizenship, the equal distribution of wealth, the environment, and pacifism. However, he feels that the political context does not leave him a choice because no one else is defending the rights of Muslims, and no broad-based human rights organization is taking up the cause of the violation of their rights (UP debate, 20/03/2015).

J'ai créé la coordination contre le racisme et contre islamophobie avec des acteurs et à contrecœur. J'aurais préféré moi, continuer à développer le parti politique qu'on a créé Force Citoyenne Populaire pour dire il faut que les gens s'engagent au-delà de leurs appartenances, de leur couleur de peau, de leur religion. Pour moi les choses sont claires par rapport à ça. Nous on parle, on veut la liberté. Quand la république qui dit liberté égalité fraternité, on l'attend dans les faits. (UP debate, 20/03/2015)

In the above quote Chaambi confirmed once more that it is not Muslims as such that he seeks to defend, but rather a type of society in which he believes and which he seeks to defend by political means. As I demonstrate later, Chaambi's positions provoke strong resistance. This is likely due to the fact that he practices a form of Islam that is political, not in the sense that he believes that the State should be ruled by religious morals and principles, but in the sense that in Islam he finds a source of spiritual inspiration and the vocabulary for his political actions. In public addresses he regularly refers to the Quran, for example with regard to the importance of education or about the obligation of Muslims to speak truth to power:

Excusez-moi de revenir sur mon référentiel musulman, le prophète de l'Islam dit que le plus grand Jihad, cela on ne nous l'apprend pas dans les mosquées je vous le dis, c'est une parole de vérité devant quelqu'un qui abuse du pouvoir. C'est-à-dire le contre-pouvoir. C'est-à-dire dire à son président, à son maire, à son élu, à son directeur : "Tu n'as pas le droit", c'est de dire "ce n'est pas juste ce que tu as fait". Si tu ne le fais pas, tu n'as pas rempli ta mission [de musulman]. (UP debate, 20/03/2015)

One could interpret his spiritual references in political discourse as a form of political Islam, with all the inherent fears that this provokes about mixing the spaces of religion and the State. His political imagination is however very close to that of progressive Christian movements who play a very important role in French civil society, and who do not seem to pose any problems. This Christian social tradition is also an inspiration for the activist commitment of the large majority of older white activists involved in almost every single organization in Villeneuve.

### *Palestine*

The third strand of activism that Chaambi is involved in is that of the Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation. He was co-founder of the organization Résistance Palestine, created in the context of the three-week Gaza war in 2009 (Seneguié 2018, 176). When interviewed at the time by the weekly *Marianne* he clearly expressed his support for Hamas

and Hezbollah, including their armed wings, explaining that “there is an occupation, so there is resistance” and that “ Hamas represents this resistance in the same way that Lucie Aubrac, Jean Moulin, and Nelson Mandela did in their time” (Marianne, 17/01/2009).<sup>277</sup> Despite the Republican packaging of his message by appealing to symbols that speak to the majority of French people, his support for armed resistance has remained problematic in public opinion and in the eyes of *Marianne*, especially the sympathy expressed for Hezbollah.<sup>278</sup> Israel has been very successful over the past few years at defining any armed resistance against its occupation of Palestinian land as Muslim terrorism, and this is creating a backlash against activists for the Palestinian cause in France. A person close to Chaambi and to the CRI has said that they believe that the labelling of him as an Islamist and the criminalization that he is the target of cannot be dissociated from these developments. This explanation is not surprising if one takes into account that the Palestinian question has for a long time been an important motor behind mobilizations in MSHN (Abdallah 2012) as well as for islamophobia (CRI website).<sup>279</sup> Originally, support for the Palestinian struggle was led by North African immigrants with ideological roots in pan-Arabism, but later generations of Muslim, Arab, and MSHN activists continued to mobilize for the Palestinian cause despite the decline of pan-Arabian ideology. This same person close to Chaambi explained that one of the reasons for the criminalization of Islam in France is that Muslims are potential bearers of a radical anti-Zionist discourse, and the establishment does not want this discourse to be audible (informal discussion, 15/01/2018).

#### *Tunisian political transition*

Despite Chaambi’s deep involvement with struggles in France, he has always stayed connected to the political situation in his country of birth. This fourth and last strand of Chaambi’s political activity is therefore related to the political transition that followed the overthrow of President Ben Ali in Tunisia (2010-2011). He is one of the founders of the organization les Amis de Bouazizi, named after the young man that set himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid, and he organized a demonstration in Lyon in support of the Jasmine revolution. In addition, Chaambi was also appointed Secretary General of the government agency in charge of organizing and supervising elections in Tunisia. I cannot find any relevant information about his political positions with regard to Tunisian politics, nor about his links with the Muslim Brotherhood there, but it is very possible that there are connections. As far as I know

<sup>277</sup> *Marianne*, “La grande colère des musulmans de France”, 17/01/2009,

<https://www.marianne.net/societe/la-grande-colere-des-musulmans-de-france>, accessed 15/10/2019

<sup>278</sup> The weekly asked the political scientist Vincent Geisser to comment on the new popularity of Hezbollah in France since the 2006 Lebanese war. In his comment Geisser equated this support with “Muslims in their 40s and 50s” that still believe in “the third-world myth” and that “equate Nasrallah with Chavez”. He thereby dismissed their support as belonging to a different time, and by suggesting that these Muslim activists have not understood that it is erroneous to associate these two political leaders, because as a Muslim and a socialist they have nothing in common.

<sup>279</sup> CRI website, <https://www.crifrance.com/Islamophobie/article/lutter-contre-l-islamophobie-et-pour-la-palestine-un-meme-combat-politique>, 27/10/2009, accessed 14/10/2019.

Chaambi never sought to further the influence of Tunisian politicians or political movements on French politics.

Under the influence of both outside and personal factors Chaambi's activist trajectory has taken different directions, these changes can partially be explained as means to deal with the obstacles the collectives of which he was part met to making their voices heard. The names under which he speaks and organizes have shifted over time; his we-group has changed from "we workers", "we immigrants" to "we MSHN inhabitants" and "we Muslims".

## *2.2) Chaambi, a target of demobilization strategies*

Chaambi has three higher education diplomas in social work and 30 years of work experience. He attributes losing his job five times, despite his qualifications, to the fact that he is a Muslim political activist. For example, supporting Scherazade's struggle to be admitted to school with a veil in the mid-1990s, cost him dearly. Just prior to this he had been recruited by a local community development organization (Association de Développement Local) and at the end of the contractual trial period the organization's board confronted him with a press clipping about the mobilization in Grenoble and said: "Abdelaziz, you didn't tell us you were part of the Union des Jeunes musulmans (UJM), are you Muslim?" (UP debate, 20/03/2015). In the context of the Algerian Civil War, the board, made up of progressive councilors in Vénissieux (*banlieue* of Lyon), associated "Muslim" with "islamism and fundamentalism" and he lost his job. The Civil War in Algeria (1990s) and the terrorist attack of Khaled Kelkal in the Paris underground (1995) strongly reinforced concerns about Islam in France and suspicion towards Muslim activism.<sup>280</sup>

Musulman, c'est synonyme d'islamisme, d'intégrisme et aujourd'hui de terrorisme. Donc oui je l'ai vécu dans ma chair et aujourd'hui je suis grillé professionnellement. (UP debate, 20/03/2015)

The words Chaambi chose in order to speak about the fear of Islam address the physical effects of islamophobia: he has "felt it in his flesh" (*vécu dans ma chair*) and today he is scorched professionally. However, he recognizes that being blacklisted professionally has provided him with a kind of freedom of expression that others do not have. "In my misfortune, there is one good thing, that I can say certain truths" (UP debate, 20/03/2015).<sup>281</sup> This stifling context that prevents people from speaking is not only limited to the professional environment, but is also present in religious or political organizations who do not allow any space to speak out about racism or islamophobia.

[Le fait que j'ai perdu mon emploi] m'a donné une force que je ne retrouve pas chez d'autres militants, où d'autres acteurs qui ont une épée de Damoclès sur leur tête. C'est-à-dire **ils ne peuvent pas parler**, par ce que : soit ils sont dans une organisation musulmane par exemple, et ils ont peur de ce que va dire le supérieur, la

<sup>280</sup> One could argue that the 1995 bombing of the Paris underground had a similar effect in France as the 9/11 attack in the United States.

<sup>281</sup> In French: "Dans mon malheur, il y a une chose bonne, c'est que je peux dire certaines vérités.

confrérie, le groupe, le pays d'origine. Soit, ils sont dans une fonction, dans une administration et ils ont peur que le chef dit : "Attention droit de réserve, devoir de réserve, soit par ce qu'il a simplement peur d'exprimer sa position politique dans son parti, soit... Parce qu'il faut être politiquement correct, il faut l'être aujourd'hui en tout cas. (UP debate, 20/03/2015)

The price Chaambi has had to pay, and is still paying, for his activism deters other activists and is an important obstacle for grass-roots mobilization. This account of Chaambi's activism complexifies the history of immigrant and MSHN struggles in France and stresses the obstacles Muslims, immigrants, and MSHN inhabitants meet in challenging the status quo. Resistance comes not only from the established in charge of order but also comes from the marginalized that fear challenging the order.

### *2.3) Tchetché-Apea and the Mouvement de l'Immigration et des Banlieues*

Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea's trajectory of political activism has some intersections with that of Chaambi. Some of these points of intersection are that an important part of Tchetché-Apea's activism also took place in the Lyon suburbs (Vaulx-en-Velin); he also became involved in the creation of an autonomous political party; and he is also an active member of the Forum social des quartiers populaires and organizes in the name of MSHN inhabitants. The differences between them are that Tchetché-Apea does not organize in the name of Muslims; he is not North-African; he is from the generation that grew up here as the children of immigrants, was too young to participate in the 1983 March, and is more highly educated. He obtained a degree from the prestigious SciencePo. Tchetché-Apea started organizing against police violence in his early twenties when a young man (Thomas Claudio) from his neighborhood died in a traffic accident semi-provoked by the police, which led to riots in the neighborhood.<sup>282</sup> His activist involvement started with the Comité Thomas Claudio, and later took the form of Agora, a local organization in Vaulx-en-Velin that sought to make the voices of young people heard and be taken seriously by public institutions. After his experience with Agora he decided that he no longer wanted to represent the inhabitants' interests through a civil society organization, but aimed at influencing politics more directly through the creation of a political party, le Choix vaudais. He later joined a more mainstream political movement (les Verts) and FSQP. His activist involvement in the 1990s in the name of MSHN inhabitants led him to become an active member of the Mouvement de l'Immigration et des Banlieues

<sup>282</sup> I use the term semi-provoked by the police because the police car intentionally touched the motorbike on which Thomas Claudio was a passenger (without helmet), but without the intention of causing an accident. According to Tchetché-Apea this police technique of destabilizing a vehicle that is in motion, "pare-chocage," is quite common in MSHN (UP debate, 26/04/2018). Different versions about how the accident happened circulated in the press: Libération speaks about "a police car blocks the road to a stolen scooter" (27/10/2006, [https://www.liberation.fr/evenement/2006/10/27/trente-ans-de-violences-urbaines\\_55599](https://www.liberation.fr/evenement/2006/10/27/trente-ans-de-violences-urbaines_55599), accessed 23/02/2020) and a more activist source of information (Rebellyon.info) mentions that a motorcycle was hit by a police car (6/10/2019, <https://rebellyon.info/Le-6-octobre-1990-a-Vaulx-en-Velin-Thomas-15461>, accessed 23/02/2020). I adopt the latter version because it is in accordance with the version given by Tchetché-Apea who in the early 1990s was the spokesperson for the Comité Thomas Claudio.

(MIB). This movement's aim was to federate numerous local initiatives, notably with an inter-neighborhood coordination for the different committees organized after incidents of police violence, to reinforce their political clout. From the politicization around police issues the MIB came to address other issues such as political representation and repressive urban policy. The movement was the first to bring up the colonial question in relation to the *banlieue*, denouncing the colonial management of MSHN, and related this colonial management directly to urban policy. Based on his experience with police violence and the obstacles to autonomous organization, at the end of the 1990s, Tchetché-Apea already defended the idea that "the banlieues are a heritage of colonialism" (in Abdallah 2012, 129) and that one can speak of "a sort of colonial management of these neighborhoods" (in Dikeç 2007, 144). By means of his activism he wanted to challenge his reduced citizenship status as an *indigène*: "we are the future of this city, no longer an indigenous minority" (in Abdallah 2012, 129). He strongly denounced the special security treatment applied to MSHN, leading to the targeting of inhabitants making a claim to equality, as if they are dangerous minorities, not French citizens.

#### *2.4) Special security treatment of MSHN*

During one debate in particular participants and invited speakers insisted on the ways their claims to equality and justice have been articulated by others as dangerous, and have been met by security treatment that especially targets MSHN.<sup>283</sup> The Université populaire working group's discussions with Tchetché-Apea had an important influence on the organization of a debate to pose this question. The three following quotes from the debate serve as an illustration of the feeling that the claims of MSHN inhabitants are not received and are only answered by a security response.

Comme dans tous les pays, quand un groupe commence à s'organiser pour revendiquer, il **devient dangereux**. Plutôt que d'envoyer des signaux politiques, on a oublié que ces gens avaient des revendications, des spécificités qu'il fallait reconnaître et qu'on n'a pas pris en compte. (Participant, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

N'y voyez pas un procès anti-policiers, mais on est dans un contexte socio-politique qui montre de telles tensions que ce qui a prévalu jusqu'ici, c'est la notion de **répression, de coercition**, de refus de reconnaître des questions qui sont exposées depuis pas mal d'années. (Tchetché-Apea, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

Les moyens de **coercition**, assez inédits, de la police sont mis en œuvre pour à la fois contenir la colère de cette population et pour empêcher qu'elle déborde. Il y a des rapports du **Ministère de l'Intérieur** qui font clairement état de la façon dont les **forces de l'ordre**, qui ne sont effectivement plus des gardiens de la paix,

<sup>283</sup> This was the debate that dealt with the question of whether we can speak of colonial management in MSHN (26/04/2018). Because this title would in all likelihood not have got past the board of the Régie de Quartier, the publicized title was "Mixité sociale, injonction à vivre ensemble, quelle gestion pour les quartiers?".



s'entraînent pour contenir cette population, avec des moyens et des technologies modernes : drones, guérilla urbaine dans des villes fictives, etc. Cela interroge la volonté de l'État de résoudre les questions régulièrement posées dans ces quartiers. (Omer Mas Capitolin, UP debate, 26/4/2018)

Invited speakers and participants argued that public servants in the police force and justice system are the primary actors in the repression of collective action. Sociologists and political scientists confirm the above analyses by research participants, that they are subject to a security regime that is aimed at certain populations seen as danger, and for certain neighborhoods.<sup>284</sup> The State reserves a special treatment for MSHN and for the claims that emanate from it, see Abdallah (2012); Collectif Angles morts (2011); Dikeç (2007). It is not only racialized bodies that are subjected to a special security treatment. César, a high school student and organizer of a demonstration against police violence, was able to experience how political organizing in Villeneuve is closely surveilled by security forces. While César is generally spared from police controls because he is white and wears the right clothes, he became a target in the run up to the demonstration. A special police anti-crime squad waited for him every evening at the entrance of his apartment building to carry out checks on him (César, interview, 17/3/2017). Police controls can thus have the role of deterring political activity in MSHN. Over the course of my research, I observed that the criminalization of MSHN inhabitants is in the process of being extended to anti-capitalist activists.<sup>285</sup>

### **3) From the impossibility of speech to the criminalization of activists post-Charlie**

I take the criminalization of political activism that has been mentioned in the previous section as proof that there is limited democratic space for racialized persons in France. In the following section I argue, based on participants' accounts, that this already limited space closed even further for Muslims in the period that followed the Charlie Hebdo massacre. I first discuss how Muslims felt that they could not speak after the massacre, and second how political activists were criminalized in this period using the example of the court case against Chaambi.

<sup>284</sup> For general observations about the state as the guarantor of public order and its use of repression when this order is challenged, see Della Porta and Fillieule (2006); Combes and Fillieule (2011); and Moreau de Bellaing 2012 in Diamond and Talpin 2019.

<sup>285</sup> Over the last five years, this has become particularly noticeable in the violent repression of-, and in the associated discourse used to talk about, those involved in the ZAD (*Zone à défendre*) to block the airport project in Notre Dame des Landes; in the police violence during the demonstrations of the gilets jaunes movement (2018-2019) as well as the criminalization of the pro-Palestinian BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement.

### 3.1) Charlie is hegemonic

Un an après, je ne suis toujours pas Charlie. Charlie se permet de dire ce qu'il veut car il est dans une position dominante. Nous ne sommes pas égaux face à ça. On entend toujours les mêmes et il y en a qu'on n'entendra jamais alors qu'ils ont des choses importantes à dire. (Participant, street debate, 10/01/2016)

#### *Charlie and the freedom of speech*

When Muslim organizations sued the weekly magazine Charlie Hebdo because they felt hurt by the controversial cartoons and interpreted them as an insult to their religion, the judge ruled that, in the name of freedom of expression and the communication of one's thoughts and opinions, Charlie could publish these drawings. This was in 2007, and ten years later this same freedom of expression was not guaranteed when Chaambi was condemned for speaking out about his negative opinion of the Provincial Government. Many research participants commented that, in France, there are double standards as to who is free to speak and provoke, and who is not (street debate, 10/10/2016).



Figure 6.104 Marianne: “Rire, se moquer, provoquer, c’est ça la France”. (Marianne n° 976-977, 24 December 2015 – 7 January 2016)

The magazine *Marianne* associated being French with “laughing, making fun of and provoking” [Figure 6.104]. The magazine seems to place conflict and disagreement at the center of French democracy and what it means to be French, while as I demonstrate in this subsection, Chaambi was denied this right.

The way the Charlie Hebdo killings were framed was responsible for widening the fault line between Muslims and non-Muslims. To be or not to be Charlie, that was the question! I argue that the omnipresence of the “*Je suis Charlie*” signs on social media, press, public spaces, and places of power put Charlie in a hegemonic position. For example, a university colleague placed the black on white “*Je suis Charlie*” logo on her personal page on the

university website,<sup>286</sup> the local newspaper *Dauphiné Libéré* hung a large “*Je suis Charlie*” banner in front of its head office (Houllier-Guibert 2016), as did the City of Grenoble above its town hall (field notes, 15/01/2015). The logo could also be found on the webpage of the *Conseils citoyens indépendants*, an initiative to encourage the political participation of, notably, MHSN inhabitants [Figure 6.105].



Figure 6.105 *The Independent Citizens Councils are also Charlie.*<sup>287</sup>

The support of academics, state- and media actors for Charlie Hebdo is not new. When Muslim organizations initiated the case against the satirical weekly because they experienced the publication of the drawings of their prophet as hurtful (7-8May 2007), leading intellectual and political figures were given the floor during the trial, in the defense of the newspaper. The support of the French political elite (Sarkozy, Hollande, Bayrou) for Charlie Hebdo further reinforced the feeling among Muslims that Charlie Hebdo was hegemonic. The participant quoted at the opening of this subsection said that Charlie was in a “dominant position” and that Muslims were not heard and could not speak.

### *Being Charlie is being French*

Being Charlie became synonymous for being French (Todd 2015, 12) and, as a result, Muslims came to be discursively articulated as dangerous others and denied participation in public debate (*droit de cité*). Those that did not recognize themselves in Charlie were alienated from the political community. Hayeth\*, for example, felt dispossessed of her identity as French citizen: “*La France nous attaque dans notre chair, je n'ai pas de pays maintenant*” (field notes, Fringale meeting, 13/01/2015). She felt as if she is not recognized as French citizen as a result of media images of Muslims and of the statements of politicians (see chapter 5). Zéliha, the young woman I quoted earlier, daughter of Turkish Kurds, formulated her feelings after the Charlie Hebdo attack as follows:

<sup>286</sup> [https://www-fourier.ujf-grenoble.fr/~lescop/charlie\\_files/Carte-france-Charlie-logo-dessin.jpg](https://www-fourier.ujf-grenoble.fr/~lescop/charlie_files/Carte-france-Charlie-logo-dessin.jpg), accessed 17/06/2019

<sup>287</sup> Image from the website of the *Conseils citoyens indépendants*, an initiative of the City of Grenoble, <https://www.grenoble.fr/461-conseils-citoyens-independants.htm>, accessed 21/01/2015. The image has disappeared since.

Je suis née et j'ai grandi ici mais si on est contre Charlie, [c'est comme si] on est contre la République. Après les attentats, je me sentais surveillée. Je n'ai pas de tranquillité intérieure, qu'est-ce que cette personne va penser de moi ? Dans les infos [on entend que les] personnes [sont] surveillées pour ce qu'ils disent. (Zéliha, UP debate, 11/03/2016)

Because Charlie was present everywhere and could not be contradicted, I argue that Charlie was hegemonic. Hegemony involves not only coercive power and the exercise of force (feeling under surveillance), it also “designates a type of domination based primarily on dominated people’s and groups’ consent” (Houssay-Holzschuch 2020, 357). One can ask what consent means in this context, but I consider that if it is not possible to express dissent one can speak of hegemony. The French national education system was one such actor involved in creating the hegemonic position of Charlie Hebdo.

In the aftermath of the massacre high school students (12 – 15) were invited in (some) schools to make “*Je suis Charlie*” signs. When Ahmed’s\* son refused to make such a sign because he did not feel included in the slogan (he was not Charlie) he found himself in a very difficult position at school (field notes, Fringale meeting, 13/01/2015). Muslim children spoke at home about their impression that freedom of expression did not exist for them and several parents attested to the fact that they briefed their children not to express themselves during these debates, but instead to remain silent, and most of all not to respond to any provocations.

Après les attentats je ne pouvais pas dire que je n'étais pas Charlie. A mon fils (18 ans) je disais : “Tu ne donnes pas ton avis”. Toutes les mamans ont dit : “Vous ne dites pas que vous n'êtes pas Charlie”. Il y a eu des dérapages. Si tu étais contre Charlie, c'était comme si tu étais pour [cette violence]. J'ai peur d'être jugée. (Participant, UP debate, 11/03/2016)

At school students’ oppositional points of view, if they could express them at all, were simply dismissed. Moreover, the imposition of the minute of silence in all educational institutions was perceived as very problematic by participants. There were several cases of students who refused to participate in it and who were summoned with their parents to the police station (see chapter 1). This is a clear example of the criminalization of dissent. A young man in high school gave an example of a classmate who did not want to participate in the minute of silence.

Un jour dans ma classe, un élève ne voulait tout simplement pas faire une minute de silence. A cause de ça il s'est fait exclure du cours et c'est parti loin tout ça. Mais moi je trouve que si cette personne ne veut pas faire une minute de silence, et ben qu'il ne la fasse pas. C'est une liberté ça. Si cette personne refuse de faire la minute de silence, ça ne veut pas dire qu'elle est pour le terrorisme, c'est juste qu'elle ne veut pas s'en mêler. Elle n'est ni pour Charlie, ni pour le terrorisme, elle est neutre. (Participant, UP debate, 11/03/2016)

### *Raser les murs*

It is paradoxical that as a result of the particular framing of the issue, in the name of freedom of speech, an entire segment of the population felt silenced. A different framing would have prevented the rift that was reinforced by society as a whole, for example as being in favor or against the use of violence for political purposes. The following quote is another piece of evidence that Muslims could not speak in the period that followed the Charlie Hebdo massacre.

On ne pouvait pas donner son opinion. On ne pouvait pas le donner. On ne nous entendait pas (...). On ne nous comprenait pas donc il valait mieux **raser les murs** et faire le plus discret que possible, c'était ça. (Tina, interview, 09/05/2017)

In French the literal translation of "*raser les murs*" is to walk very close to the wall, and means to keep a low profile. This spatial metaphor is an accidental reference to Rancière's illustration of the distribution of the sensible, with those at the center who can walk in the middle of the pavement, and those at the margins who have to move to the side. The expression is frequently used in references to the position of the first generation of migrant laborers who were expected to remain invisible.

It is quite telling that this expression was used in the period after the Charlie Hebdo massacre as it indicates that the position of Muslims went towards the situation of their (grand)parents, and not in the sense of emancipation and peaceful relations. The expression "*raser les murs*" also came up when Chaambi tried to mobilize all kinds of different French Human Rights organizations in the Post-Charlie period in order to defend the rights of a Muslim family whose children were placed under state protection out of fear the family would leave for Syria. I deal extensively with this case in the next subsection but I include the quote here as demonstration that the injunction to "*raser les murs*" also affected the possibility to defend Muslim's rights. Chaambi explained that he had written to a large range of human rights organizations for support in the case of this family, but that none were willing to help, not even Muslim organizations.

On a affaire à une musulmane [mère d'enfants qui étaient placés] et tout le monde a fermé sa gueule. J'ai la preuve, j'ai envoyé à tout le monde : Amnesty, Ligue des Droits de l'homme, MRAP, SOS [racisme], tout le monde. Même les musulmans ont **rasé le mur**. Pourquoi ? Parce que c'était après Charlie et il fallait **raser les murs**. Aujourd'hui on continue à **raser les murs** sauf qu'à force de **raser les murs** on va [?] sous terre. (Chaambi, Coup de gueule "Pas sans Nous", 16/01/2016)

During this period, continuing to speak out became a struggle in itself, as Catherine argued in a radio interview that followed the Université populaire debate about freedom of expression.

Il faut qu'on continue à parler, il ne faut plus qu'on se taise quoi. Je trouve que c'est vital maintenant en fait, mais c'est très dur. (Catherine, News FM, 25/04/2016)

The forms of surveillance that some participants brought up and the impossibility of dissent

are indicators of the hegemonic position of Charlie: those that did express their dissent were guaranteed repression and the criminalization of their struggles, as I argue in the next subsection that deals with the Msakni affair. They are relevant examples to support the argument that the impossibility of speaking out and the criminalization of political activism are impediments to group formation and political action (section 1.4).

### *3.2) The Msakni Affair as an example of criminalization as a deterrence strategy*

Chaambi had to stand trial in both 2017 and 2018, charged with “*menaces, puis d’outrage à fonctionnaire du Conseil général*”. His trial was a direct result of his involvement in the Msakni Affair [Box 6.40].

#### **Box 6.40 [empirical excursion]: The Msakni Affair**

The Msakni parents, who live in Bourgoin-Jallieu, lost custody of their children because the state prosecutor judged that the father had an “extreme practice of his religion” (Islam) (*pratique extrême de la religion*) (France3, 07/03/2018) and as a result the children were placed under the protection of the State<sup>288</sup>. This was in the period that immediately followed the attacks on Charlie Hebdo in 2015, and the Provincial Government in charge of child protection feared that the family was likely to leave for Syria to join ISIS. In fact they intended to leave for Tunisia, the family’s country of origin. The mother of the children called upon the Coordination against Islamophobia and Racism (CRI), based in Lyon, to assist her in contesting this “placement” and to have her children returned to her. The CRI organized demonstrations in front of the Town Hall in Bourgoin-Jallieu and in front of the House of the Provincial Government in Lyon, demanding to see a representative in order to call for the return of the five children of the Msakni family to their mother (field notes, 15/02/2017).

The trial against Chaambi cannot be dissociated from the political context of the Charlie Hebdo attack and the criminalization of Islam in the period that followed. Criminalization is defined here as the process by which individuals and behaviors are transformed into criminals and crime (Michalowski 1985). My argument here does not directly deal with the Msakni Affair, and does not evaluate whether the Provincial Government was right or wrong to remove the children from their parents,<sup>289</sup> but is about the possibility to contest this placement and denounce the treatment of this Muslim family. Repercussions for defending the Msakni family were severe, and they provide a strong argument in favor of thesis of the impossibility of conflict in the current political context.

When contacted by the Msakni family the CRI, the anti-racist organization Chaambi is president of, took the case to heart and decided to contest the decision of the prosecutor to

<sup>288</sup> “Abdelaziz Chaambi condamné à 2 000 euros d’amende pour outrage par la Cour d’Appel de Grenoble,” <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/auvergne-rhone-alpes/isere/grenoble/abdelaziz-chaambi-condamne-2-000-euros-amende-outrage-cour-appel-grenoble-1436387.html>, 17/03/2018, accessed 07/10/2019

<sup>289</sup> Additional information about the reason these children were placed is that apparently there were issues with the father’s violent behavior against the mother’s children from a previous marriage (France3, 17/03/2018).

place these children under state protection. CRI organized demonstrations in front of the Town Hall (*mairie*) in Bourgoin-Jallieu and occupied the House of the Provincial Government (*Conseil Général*) in Lyon. Chaambi was personally affected by the case, as became evident when he spoke at the Université populaire, in particular by the way the mother and her children were treated by the police. The youngest of the children, aged three months old, was still breast fed at the time he was removed from his mother. When the mother went to the police with a bottle of her breast milk, she was harshly told off.

C'est quelque chose de violent. On arrache un bébé de trois mois au sein de sa mère, et on refuse le lait de la mère au commissariat de police. Elle dit : "voilà mon lait j'aimerais que mon bébé boive mon lait". "Non non non" on lui dit "dégagez, on lui donnera de la poudre". Il a trois mois. Mais attendez... C'est quoi ça ? Je ne sais pas si les nazis ont osé faire ça. C'est quoi ça ? On est en République, on est dans la République des droits de l'homme ? On enlève un bébé de trois mois à sa mère et personne n'en parle. (Chaambi, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

The other four children, the younger two aged four and five years old, also received harsh treatment according to Chaambi, with the police showing up in uniform at their schools and using force when they refused to enter the police car.<sup>290</sup>

The very violent way the children were taken and the way the mother was treated at the police station (as a criminal) with no room for discussion, confirms the theory of Sousa Santos mentioned in chapter 5, that conflicts in the zones of second-class citizenship are dealt with violently. When Chaambi contested the removal of the children through political action, he was confronted with repression and a justice system that did not grant him the right to contest, as I demonstrate below. The pressure CRI put on the state institutions led to a rapid reunification between the mother and the children. In the following quote, Chaambi explains the means CRI used to put pressure and construct a *rapport de force*, to rebalance power relations.

Le procureur a parlé, mais nous on s'est manifesté. On a fait des manifestations devant la mairie et on est allé occuper le Conseil Général de façon pacifique, intelligemment bien sûr, pour ne pas donner le bâton pour se faire battre. Le lendemain matin Madame Msakni a eu son bébé de trois mois et a pu l'allaiter. (...) Et si on n'avait pas fait ça, elle ne l'aurait jamais eu. (Chaambi, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

At that moment in time, March 2015, Chaambi could still tell this story in a victorious way: the CRI was faced with a form of injustice and had been able to address this by putting pressure on public institutions through the physical presence of large numbers of people in public space and by organizing the non-violent occupation of an institutional space. The tools chosen for this political action were classic, and have proven their efficacy. In this version of

<sup>290</sup> Reference: Procès en appel Grenoble 24 janvier 2018, <http://www.criFrance.com/Video/procès-en-appel-d-abdelaziz>, accessed 29/9/2019

the story he demonstrated that it was still possible to challenge power relations through traditional activism:

Comme on s'est mobilisés, on a fait du tapage, on a fait du bruit, on a manifesté. (...) Donc il y a ce rapport de force. (UP debate, 20/03/2015)

Nine months later, Chaambi was obliged to revise this victorious account of CRI's action and of the possibility of rebalancing power relations in the current political context in France. This action had as secondary consequence the double criminalization of his activism and the reduction of the political space in which he could speak.

Qu'est-ce que [cette bataille] m'a valu ? La maman a retrouvé ses enfants, j'en ai pleuré pendant les retrouvailles au Conseil Général mais qu'est-ce qu'on me fait ? On me colle une fiche S et on me colle une plainte du Conseil général de l'Isère. (Chaambi, Bourgoin-Jallieu, 16/01/2016)<sup>291</sup>

The first form of criminalization that he was faced with was that he had to appear in court charged with having insulted civil servants (*dépositaires de la fonction publique*), despite the fact that he never directly addressed any civil servant during the demonstration [Figure 6.106]. These charges are a concrete illustration of what I mean by the criminalization of activism. His lawyer used this argument in his defense: that it is not because one says things that may challenge (*remettre en cause*), offend (*vexer*) and upset (*fâcher*), that this is punishable by law.<sup>292</sup> However the court ruling demonstrated this really was punishable by law: it found Chaambi guilty of charges and fined him 2000 euros according to France3 (17/03/2018) or 600 euros according to the CRI website.<sup>293</sup> The Provincial Government obtained what Muslim organizations were never able to obtain from a court in the case of Charlie Hebdo, which was a source of frustration. This court ruling further reinforced the feeling that there is a two-tier justice system.

<sup>291</sup> Speech by Chaambi during the General Assembly of the "Pas Sans Nous" collective, 16/01/2016, video "COUP DE GUEULE Abdelaziz Chaambi à l'Assemblée Générale de PAS SANS NOUS", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18skrsoTIHY>, accessed 10/12/2018.

<sup>292</sup> Source: youtube, <http://www.criFrance.com/Video/proces-de-abdelaziz-chaambi-le-15>, accessed 29/09/2019.

<sup>293</sup> The fine was 600 euros according to <https://www.cotizup.com/solidarite-abdelaziz-chaambi>, accessed 08/10/2019.





Figure 6.106 Abdelaziz Chaambi holds a placard "Stop la criminalisation des militant.e.s". (Photo author, 24/01/18)

The second form of criminalization in Chaambi's case is that he was labeled "S," an administrative category of the French National Security Directorate (*Direction générale de sécurité intérieure*) for people who are suspected of being a danger to state security (*atteinte à la sûreté de l'État*). The far right in France regularly call for the preventive detention of all those fitting this category.<sup>294</sup> Given his activist trajectory, I wonder for which reason Chaambi has been classified "S": as a result of his radical political positions; his successes in building a *rapport de force* through grass-roots mobilization; his previous connections with Tariq Ramadan; or as a result of his position on the situation in Palestine and his expression of sympathy for Hamas and Hezbollah; or, finally, as a result of his involvement in Tunisian politics and a possible proximity to the Muslim Brotherhood there? Looking at the profiles of French young people that radicalized (Khosrokhavar 2015) it is quite unlikely that a person who has always been committed to political- and grass-roots struggles for freedom, equality, and justice will become a terrorist overnight. His frame of reference is that of the French Republic and the French Revolution. The fact that he defends the decisions of Hamas or Hezbollah to engage in armed struggle in occupied Palestinian territory does not mean that

<sup>294</sup> See for example, "Sécurité. Fichage des djihadistes: les mensonges de la droite", *l'Humanité*, 27/03/2018, <https://www.humanite.fr/securite-fichage-des-djihadistes-les-mensonges-de-la-droite-652666>, accessed 31/10/2019

he is supportive of similar tools to balance asymmetric power relations in France. Chaambi himself is convinced that this classification is a direct consequence of taking up a public position in the Msakni affair. The court case against Chaambi is an example of the criminalization of a Muslim activist involved in collective action in the name of human rights.

The fear of Islam is not new: already in colonial times French colonial powers in Algeria feared that Islam might serve as a federating factor for marginalized or oppressed groups and they saw Islam as “a major obstacle for French domination” (Saaidia 2016, 115). Current political leaders also fear that Islam could be a unifying force for the marginalized in France who share anger about present and past injustices. Their political objective is therefore to demobilize and break Muslim activism. This case is by no means an exception for racialized MSHN activists, as the condemnation of Bouamama for his political statements in the same period demonstrates, an example I develop in chapter 7.<sup>295</sup> Criminalization and repression of dissent are a direct form of impeding political organization (Hayem 2018; Pregolato 2017; Garcia and Rétis 2011; Hajjat 2008) as Chaambi’s treatment acts as a deterrent to the mobilization of other activists. In a discussion that followed Chaambi’s second trial Kenjah observed that those in charge of order have wider aims than just the personal punishment of Chaambi, and they are to “strike the imagination” of activists and to dissuade solidarity and activism as the following quote demonstrates.

Ton cas est un cas symbolique qui vise à frapper les imaginaires dont le but est de dissuader la solidarité, de casser le militant. [Ceci] dans un contexte que J. a décrit. Il y a trois ans de défaites syndicales et politiques qui se sont succédées jusqu'à Macron et ça continue. Ils savent bien qu'on [les militants] est dans un état lamentable et on [l'Etat] marque des points en dissuadant de se solidariser, en frappant les personnalités un peu emblématiques etc. et en disant aux autres, restez dans votre coin. (Kenjah, Solexine debate, 24/01/2018)

The treatment of Chaambi has reinforced the feeling among those activists that are familiar with his case that overt political conflict is not possible at the moment in France. This may radicalize some activists’ positions, but for most others it carries the message that activism is dangerous, repressed, and requires huge sacrifices. One should, in the interests of oneself and one’s family, stay away from the political domain.

The case of Chaambi demonstrates that overtly challenging power relations in the post-Charlie period is not possible, that political action does not lead to societal change, or if it does the sacrifices involved are so high that most people are unwilling to pay the price. This case is a good example of the security responses to political claims and organizing that Diamond and Talpin hold responsible for political demobilization in MSHN.

<sup>295</sup> “Procès de Saïd Bouamama et Saïdou,” Alterinfo.net, 23/01/2015, [https://www.alterinfo.net/Proces-de-Said-Bouamama-et-Saidou\\_a110066.html](https://www.alterinfo.net/Proces-de-Said-Bouamama-et-Saidou_a110066.html), accessed 10/02/2020; LesInrockuptibles, 28/11/2012, <https://www.lesinrocks.com/2012/11/28/actualite/actualite/nique-la-france-un-rappeur-et-un-sociologue-poursuivis-par-une-association-dextreme-droite/>, accessed 10/02/2017

#### 4) The role of symbolic and physical space in political organizing

Space has several functions in challenging structural power asymmetry:

- It is in space that people can speak to each other, that they can become a group
- It is in space that they publicize their claims, that they become political

The question of mobilizing and organizing and of becoming a public, is partly a question of having access to a space in which one can make claims audible. Action and speech require visibility and it is in public space that people can make themselves visible (Iveson 2007). Belonging to any public requires that individuals must “physically come together and occupy a common space” (Howell 1993 in Springer 2011a, 537). Springer also adds that “all groups, whether subaltern or dominant, cannot constitute themselves unless they produce a material space” (Springer 2011a, 539). Public space provides a platform for embodied self-representation. In the previous chapter I demonstrate that in public space racialized inhabitants are made to feel out of place, and it is therefore difficult for them to claim a space for representation, a place in which groups and individuals can make themselves visible as a crucial element of political organizing (Mitchell 2003). I therefore look both at material or physical, and symbolic space.

In this section I discuss five ways in which space plays a role in either enabling or impeding group formation, politicization and publicizing political claims. I deal first with the case of *Nous Citoyennes* and the role space played in creating a collective and making claims public (4.1); second with the different community centers with which I worked and how power increasingly shifted from MSHN inhabitants to the municipality (4.2); third with the way emotion and political discourse are evinced from institutional spaces, which require from citizens that they remain rational under all circumstances, even in the heat of a political confrontation (4.3); fourth I provide further theoretical input based on Mouffe and Rancière to argue that, if confrontation either through words or the occupation of public space is not possible, conflict – and inherently politics- is not possible (4.4); lastly I demonstrate that the political activism of Chaambi is silenced through being denied access to public platforms (4.5).

##### *4.1) It is in space that *Nous Citoyennes* becomes a collective and publicizes its claims*

The story of the Muslim women’s collective, *Nous Citoyennes*, provides an illustration of all the aspects of Curle’s model of challenging asymmetric power relations and confirms the role that space plays in the move from speech to political discourse and voice. I use this example to explain the relationship between physical space, speech, and forming a we-group with collective claims. Uitermark and Nicholls phrase this relationship beautifully:

We maintain that the probability that politicization occurs depends on the precise socio-spatial processes in which people develop their sensibilities and perceptions. It may be difficult to pinpoint exactly under what conditions claims for equality are made but we can identify how certain mechanisms interact to favor politicization in one place and time and not another. We therefore suggest politics is a gradual, incremental, and partial process of

building alternative networks and imaginaries, resulting in the recognition of one's inherent equality and the alienation of this equality by the existing order of things. The urge to politicize (identify a wrong, disagree with the consensus, give voice) results from the incremental formation of relations within interstitial spaces that are outside of effectively policed spaces (cf. Fraser 1990) (Uitermark and Nicholls 2014, 973).

The Nous Citoyennes collective was formed at the moment of the *circulaire Chatel* in 2012, an initiative to enforce the principle of *laïcité* in the entire education system, extending its application from civil servants all the way to parents accompanying school outings (see also chapter 5).<sup>296</sup> Some of the women of Nous Citoyennes became active participants of the first cycle of the Université populaire and it is in this context that I got acquainted with them. The main narrator of the story of Nous Citoyennes, Nadia, insists that at the beginning the collective responded to a need to talk about their experiences, to meet other women, and to share information. It was in (semi-)private spaces that they met and that they spoke about what they could do. It is in a relatively safe space that they became a “counterpublic” (Fraser 1992): identified as Muslim citizens, and formulated claims. She described the move from conscientization to confrontation, literally insisting on the latter term. From the (semi-)private spaces of their first meetings, Nous Citoyennes decided to go into (*investir*) other (semi-)public spaces, such as spaces of debate and the street in order to confront their perspectives with those of the established and to publicize their claims.<sup>297</sup> I put in bold the words that indicate the forms of organization that help a person to break out of their isolation and form a group.

Nadia : On l'a ressenti [*circulaire Chatel*] comme un élan de révolte, d'injustice, d'incompréhension, le fait qu'on puisse voter des lois comme ça, pour nous exclure tout simplement car le but de ces projets de loi c'est vraiment d'exclure les femmes voilées, donc on s'est dit, qu'est-ce qu'on peut faire ? Je crois que c'était le déclic où déjà nous on ressentait de l'injustice et plein d'émotions négatives et le **besoin d'en parler** dans un premier temps. On s'est **regroupé** au début et c'était pour en **discuter**, de discuter de ça et qu'est-ce qu'on peut **faire** ? Quelle **voix** peut-on porter, nous, pour nous **faire entendre** et de **dire** : "voilà, les lois sont injustes et en tant que femmes on se sent avant tout citoyennes et non pas musulmanes". Notre priorité est de **dire** : "nous on est des citoyennes musulmanes" parce qu'on ne peut pas renier le fait qu'on est musulmane mais qu'on est là et qu'on veut **participer** à la société et **pas de nous exclure** quoi. Donc d'un coup on a fait des **débats**, on est allé dans les **débats publics**. On **rencontrait** des gens, on rencontrait des femmes, des gens qui avaient de l'incompréhension vis-à-vis de ça parce qu'on s'est rendu compte qu'il y avait beaucoup de gens qui n'étaient **pas au courant** de ces projets de loi qui se votaient à l'Assemblée Nationale

<sup>296</sup> For a critical reading of this legal text, see Ismahane Chouder, Saphirnews.com, 05/05/2012, [https://www.saphirnews.com/ismahane-Chouder-avec-la-circulaire-de-rentree-scolaire-2012-la-discrimination-est-institutionnalisee\\_a14364.html](https://www.saphirnews.com/ismahane-Chouder-avec-la-circulaire-de-rentree-scolaire-2012-la-discrimination-est-institutionnalisee_a14364.html), accessed 10/02/2020

<sup>297</sup> CRI had supported the Nous Citoyennes initiative in 2012. Chaambi was present at the moment of their action and public address at the Place de Verdun close to the *Préfecture*.

à notre insu. Donc du coup on s'est dit que c'est important d'en **parler de réagir**, de **sensibiliser** les femmes, les hommes...

On avait besoin de se **parler** et besoin de se **regrouper**.

Je trouve qu'on a besoin des **espaces de dialogue** comme ça surtout dans des choses qui nous touchent le plus profondément quand on parle des droits des femmes, même moi, qui ne suis pas maman, je me sentais concernée quoi. [...] Je me sens concernée, en tant que femme. [...] Je me pose la question comment ils ont pu faire ce genre de loi.

Catherine : Bah tout **seule** quoi. Parce que les principales concernées ne sont jamais là aussi hein ? Quand on voit qu'ils disent, "oui les femmes voilées sont des femmes soumises". C'est des gens non-voilés qui disent ça.

Nadia : Mais le pire est, et c'est en plus le but de Nous Citoyennes à la base, qu'il y a vraiment beaucoup de gens qui n'étaient pas au courant de ça. Car si tu ne t'intéresses pas à la politique, t'es pas censé savoir ce qu'ils sont en train de faire, des projets de loi derrière ton dos tandis que, toi, tu n'es pas au courant quoi et que du jour au lendemain tu peux te retrouver à être interdit d'aller je ne sais pas où.

Claske : Sensibiliser les personnes concernées, donc plutôt les femmes voilées ou...?

Nadia : Non à la base c'était tout le monde. On va dans les **débats publics** pas spécialement pour parler qu'avec des femmes voilées. On sait très bien ce qu'elles pensent... pas vraiment mais on a plus ou moins les mêmes façons de penser. Alors que le but...

Claske : est de se confronter ?

Nadia : est de se **confronter** à d'autres idées, passer des messages, informer, parce que tout le monde n'était pas forcément au courant et je ne sais pas si tu étais présente. On avait fait... Tu te souviens la première fois, qu'on avait un bureau de vote dans la ville ?

(Nadia and Catherine, interview, 21/02/2017)

This public space that Nous Citoyennes entered (*investir*) in 2012 in protest against the *circulaire Chatel* rapidly closed in the period following the Charlie Hebdo massacre. Several reasons were behind this closure: the political and media discourse that discursively articulated Muslims as dangerous, the comments that undermined and discredited their political statements, and the state of emergency. The closing of this symbolic space strongly affected their self-confidence and impeded their mobilization to defend their rights. The following example demonstrates the effect it had on their capacity to defend their rights when a new labor law was introduced that confirmed private companies' right to forbid the wearing of the veil in their internal regulations.

The labor law, known as the "El-Khomri law" after the minister who drafted it (09/08/2016), stipulates that even though an employer cannot forbid "in a general or absolute manner" an employee from showing their religion, they can adopt internal rules and regulations that require from employees the "obligation of neutrality that limits the expression of personal

and religious convictions”.<sup>298</sup> In other words, the law gives private companies the possibility to deny their employees the right to wear a veil by including this clause in their internal rules. This provision of the labor law clearly goes beyond the 1905 law that provides the legal framework to *laïcité* in France and that requires religious neutrality of the State, but not of private actors. The argument on which this obligation to unveil is based is that clients can be offended by having to deal with ostensibly Muslim women.<sup>299</sup> Jouda, one of the motors behind the Nous Citoyennes initiative in 2012, explains in the quote below why they were not able to mobilize in 2016 when the law was under debate, and what prevented them from participating in political activism in public space at that moment in time. In this quote some important obstacles to organizing become evident. Again, I have highlighted the relevant words:

On [musulman.es] nous a tellement cassé.es ces dernières années, je trouve que **militer était très dur**, il y avait beaucoup de gens qui, moi la première, avaient besoin de faire le point. Personnellement je reviens un peu. [Cette loi] c'était tombé à un moment où ils nous avaient tellement **massacré.es, mis la pression, matraqué.es**... Tu ouvres la télé, tu vois des voiles partout, des musulmans partout. Charlie Hebdo, ç'a été un cataclysme chez nous ! C'était trop dur et cette loi est passée à ce moment-là. Et personne ne l'a vu. Nous en tout cas, **on n'était pas dehors**. Pourtant on était dehors pour la loi sur les nounous et tout. Mais là tu dis, allez les musulmans, mobilisez-vous, bah **personne ne pouvait se mobiliser**. Tout le monde a des **jambes coupées, des bras coupés**. Il faut recommencer, il faut **ressortir**. (...)

En fait la confiance en nous, déjà pour sortir de chez nous, on ne l'a même plus, ils nous ont **laminé.es**. Et même dans nos associations, aussi petites qu'elles soient, il faut qu'on retravaille la confiance en nous. Il faut qu'on retravaille sur notre posture, il faut qu'on retravaille sur toutes ces choses parce que voilà... On a de la **force** hein, parce qu'on a beaucoup de **colère**, juste qu'il faut un certain moment donné, il faut qu'on la remette à sa place et qu'elle ressorte et qu'il faut qu'on la canalise et qu'il faut qu'on y aille parce que franchement c'est trop dur. (Jouda, Solexine debate, 24/01/2018)

Jouda used a very physical metaphor to express the obstacles Muslims encountered in the post-Charlie period, having their arms and legs “cut off” (*coupés*) which in French is a expression used for “being paralyzed by a violent emotion”.<sup>300</sup> In case of paralysis one’s body cannot come into action, one is not mobile and therefore cannot be part of a mobilization.

298 Source: “Religion dans l'entreprise: quelles sont les règles?”, Servicepublic.fr, <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F20367>, accessed 17/02/2020.

299 For an example of a specific case, see “Affaire Asma Bougnaoui: la justice confirme le droit de porter le voile en entreprise”, Le Figaro, 19/04/2019, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/affaire-asma-bougnaoui-la-justice-confirme-le-droit-de-porter-le-voile-en-entreprise-20190419>, accessed 17/02/2020. The engineer Asma Bougnaoui had been told by her employer to take her veil off after one of their clients had refused to deal with a “veiled woman”. When she refused she was fired, a decision she challenged in court.

<sup>300</sup> Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales, <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/academie9/jambe>, accessed 14/02/2020.

This physical constraint to action recalls Fanon's focus on muscular inhibition as part of the colonial condition (Fanon 2011 [1959]; Fanon et al. 2010 [1961]) – colonial violence is experienced at the level of the muscles (Mbembe 2007b). Jouda holds the negative image of Muslims in a context of terrorist violence, shown everywhere on media screens, responsible for this paralysis. The discursive articulation of Muslims as threat to the republican order very much affected Muslim's self-confidence and inhibited their ability to enter public space. "*Recommencer, ressortir, retravailler*" are all references to having to re-start the work that Nous Citoyennes undertook in 2012 all over again. They had to work again on building confidence as a prerequisite for meeting, expressing their anger in discourse, forming a group and articulating collective claims before they could even think about confronting the established in public space. Their anger makes them a potential force, says Jouda, but in 2016 this potential force was scattered and split, staying behind the doors of individual and private spaces. The work of convincing women to leave the space of their homes to come together, to share their anger and to channel their scattered forces into a common voice had to be restarted if they hoped to mobilize for street protests against the El-Khomri law, or others yet to come. Disqualifying media images clearly have the effect of silencing the voices of marginalized groups, and of preventing the translation of their experience into political claims.

I have demonstrated above that marginalized groups need space in order to form a group, to exist and to publicize their claims. Over the period of my field research I was able to observe that this space has been closing, not just the public space as Jouda mentioned in the previous quote, but also the physical space of meeting places that either closed or have restricted access.

#### *4.2) Restricting the political function of community centers*

This subsection provides examples of the political role of community centers and how this function has been reduced through the transfer of power from independently-run associations to the municipality. This phenomenon is also referred to as *municipalisation* in French. During the period of my field research I witnessed the closure of several community centers that played an important role in neighborhood organization, spaces where it was possible to become a collective and obtain a political voice. I provide four examples: the Maison des Habitants in Villeneuve (Place des Géants); the Maison de la Jeunesse et de la Culture Desnos in Echirolles; MJC des Roseaux in Saint Martin, an area that is not directly part of my field research but that was included as a result of the death of Luc Pouvin and the mobilization that followed, and that was part of the 2 October collective (see chapter 7 for more detail); the final example is that of Osmose in Villeneuve.

When I started with my preliminary field research in Villeneuve, at the beginning of 2013, the Maison des Habitants (MDH) of the Place des Géants, one of the two community centers in Villeneuve, had just stopped being a publicly funded independent organization run by a board of neighborhood inhabitants. In the aftermath of the 2010 riots, and due to a financial

deficit, the City of Grenoble had taken over the management of the center and had put public servants in charge. The new director, Aïed Chemli, was a motor for launching the Université populaire just after the Charlie Hebdo massacre, but he lacked the support of his superiors.<sup>301</sup> A few months later, his short-term contract was not renewed. When confronted with the mobilization of inhabitants and neighborhood organizations that worked with Aïed to protest against his dismissal, the civil servant in charge of Villeneuve said that this decision was due to Chemli's lack of rigor in administrative procedure and authoritarian management style. Those involved in the mobilization believed however that political reasons were involved, notably the invitation of Chaambi for the first debate of the Université populaire (field notes, 04/05/2015). After Aïed's departure from the Maison des Habitants it was not possible to continue the same kind of collaboration.

The Maison de la Jeunesse et de la Culture (MJC) Desnos in Echirolles also risks being taken over by the municipality of Echirolles. It is still one of the few independently run MJC in the wider Grenoble area (at the time of writing) but it is continually under financial pressure. Due to this the MJC's director was laid off at the beginning of 2019, removing from the organization the only person with real skills in applying for project funding. The MJC had been key in providing young people a space to organize in the aftermath of the deaths of Kevin and Sofiane, and its director, Annick Bousba, had played a crucial role in the creation and running of Agir pour la Paix. In addition she welcomed a screening of video footage of the Marche de la dignité et contre le racism, a march that took place in Paris to denounce police violence on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2015 (see chapter 7). This turned out to be a founding moment for the FUIQP. She was asked to do this because it was known that she was open to providing space for the political voices of inhabitants, which certainly is not the case of the Maison des Habitants in the vicinity who wanted to be able to examine the content of any proposed event, and are particularly sensitive about ways of approaching racial discrimination.

The MJC des Roseaux was one of the other remaining independently run MJCs, but it was closed in the course of 2017. It played a similar role to MJC Desnos after the violent death of Luc Pouvin: it provided a space for community organizing. It was there that family and neighborhood inhabitants met to talk about what had happened, and it was there that they organized the White March and a public debate about the insecurity in the neighborhood and its relation to more structural problems. For over a month after Luc's death, the MJC acted as a base for the organization of shared meals every single evening on the square (Place Etienne Grappe, see overview map) where Luc was killed. From the MJC the family set up their own CSO that became one of the pillars of the 2 October collective, and had strong links with Agir pour la Paix. When the MJC was closed the director Faouzi Ben Salem was laid off – thus removing one of the great drivers behind youth initiatives in the neighbourhood.

<sup>301</sup> The MDH director falls under the *Directeur de territoire du secteur* and the *Centre Communal d'Action Sociale* which both fall under the City of Grenoble



He had set up a two-year project on nonviolence in the neighborhood and was also the main organizer, next to the young people, of the dialogue with the police (see chapter 5). The MJC was not replaced and the municipality took over the projects Faouzi Ben Salem had initiated, depoliticizing part of their content.

A last example is from the independently run community organization Osmose which has as its main function to provide homework assistance to young people in Villeneuve, and also opened its doors to several Université populaire events in an attempt by the working group to invite participants into less institutional spaces [Figure 6.107]. One of its coordinators in particular played a very important mediation role between families and schools, and the local organization was an important meeting space for mothers, catering to a very different population than the Maison des Habitants. Again, it was for financial reasons that its coordinator (Ishrak) could not be kept on. Recognizing the importance of homework assistance in the neighborhood, the City of Grenoble proposed to finance the coordinator's position – which meant that Ishrak became an employee of the municipality and had to work closely with the Maison des Habitants. She was no longer allowed to wear a veil at work and had to take it off every time she entered the Maison des Habitants. Additionally, she did not feel comfortable having to collaborate with the female director of the Maison des Associations who had replaced Aïed (field notes, 11/07/2017). Later that year, Ishrak received a letter informing her that she was being laid off for “incompetence” (field notes 24/11/2017). With her departure, this space provided for group formation was closed.



*Figure 6.107 Informal gathering in front of Osmose after a UP debate. (Photo author, 26/05/2018)*

In this subsection I have demonstrated the importance of community spaces for political organizing, and how this space is under constant stress. With these community spaces being closed or taken over by public servants, inhabitants' independence in terms of deciding on content, and the place reserved for them to set their own goals and priorities was reduced or

was completely lost. With the closing of these spaces, possibilities for conflict are also reduced. In the next subsection I deal with how both the symbolic and physical space to speak shrank for Chaambi during his court case and the period that followed being labelled as “S”.

#### *4.3) Chaambi silenced through being denied the right to anger and emotions*

In this subsection I argue that the deliberative model of democracy does not leave room for the expression of dissensus. The speeches of the prosecutor and of Chaambi’s lawyer, Gilles Devers, during the first trial provide information about the court’s interpretation and framing of CRI’s political actions, and they support my claim that the space for conflict is closing in society. I make this argument by demonstrating that the prosecutor in Chaambi’s court case required unconditional respect for institutions and communication devoid of emotion, thereby leaving no space for conflict. When there is no space for agonistic conflict, there is no space for politics.

The 15th of February 2017, Chaambi was summoned to appear in court, charged with “threats and offense (*outrage*) of a civil servant(s) of the Provincial Government” (*LeMuslimPost*, 23/10/2017).<sup>302</sup> Despite the judge’s decision to acquit him, a year later he had to stand trial again. Another public prosecutor re-opened the court case on appeal and Chaambi had to appear before the Court of Appeal in Grenoble. The first prosecutor accused Chaambi of shouting through a megaphone in front of the House of the Provincial Government in Lyon: “You are all incompetent [people] and islamophobic” (*vous êtes tous des incompetents...et islamophobes*) and that he used the term “*enlèvement*” instead of “*placement*” (placement) of the children [under the State’s protection], which would be the proper professional term (field notes, 15/02/2017). The word “*enlèvement*” has a triple meaning in French, that of “removal”, “abduction”, and “kidnapping”. While it became clear from Chaambi’s defense that he used the term to mean removal, it is the meaning of “kidnapping” that the prosecutor referred to in her accusation. I do not go into the technical details of the court case and the way Chaambi’s lawyer disproved the accusation of “*outrage*”.<sup>303</sup> Instead I develop on the prosecutor’s insistence on the respect that state institutions deserve, which makes it impossible to contest them. The prosecutor argued that “the institution [Provincial Government] deserved respect” and stressed the “need for **reason**, for **moderation** and not to let one be guided by one’s **emotions**” (*besoin de raison, de modération, pas d’émotion*), Chaambi explained that this mother was in tears and that he was “**angry**” (*en colère*). Nevertheless, the prosecutor felt that “his behavior has gone too far that day” (*son comportement ce jour-là est allé trop loin*) and that “all needed to return to

<sup>302</sup> *LeMuslimPost*, “Qui veut faire taire Abdelaziz Chaambi?”, 23/10/2017, <https://lemuslimpost.com/proces-relaxe-appel-abdelaziz-chaambi.html>, accessed 14/10/2019

<sup>303</sup> Chaambi’s lawyer, Gilles Devers, contested in court the accusation of “*outrage*” (offense, insults) because Chaambi’s words did not target any person directly at the moment they were spoken, the latter being a condition for a statement to be considered as an offence (*outrage*).

**calm**” (*Il faut que tout le monde retrouve le calme*) (field notes, 15/02/2017). The judge insisted that there are ways of finding solutions other than proffering threats, and that if one does not agree with a court decision [in the case of the children’s placement] then one needs to seek dialogue (*Ibid.*)

The prosecutor’s request for calm and reason is based on a representation of society in which all citizens are equal and where dialogue will lead to finding a solution, which is close to the model of deliberative democracy, a form of democracy in which deliberation is central to making decisions. Mouffe contradicts this representation, which according to her is flawed for thinking about politics and democracy. For her politics is necessarily conflictual, and conflict should be accepted as part of democracy (Mouffe 1999; 2000; Mouffe, Wagner, and Mouffe 2013). Chaambi’s long years of activism indeed have taught him that dialogue and legal tools alone are not enough. Calm and reason are counter to the role of emotion in embodied experiences of inequality and injustice. Appealing to the emotions of a group plays an important role in mobilization. Chaambi stressed the necessity of building a balance of power (*rapport de force*) and creating conflict, in the sense of putting pressure through non-violent means on those holding power, with as a goal the renegotiation of the power relations between the parties in an asymmetric conflict.

(..) non il n'y a pas que le recours au droit, il y a le recours au politique au sens noble du terme. C'est le rapport de force.  
(Abdelaziz Chaambi, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

The prosecutor presented Chaambi as a dangerous person who was able to scare the entire personnel of the Provincial Government. His lawyer contradicted this representation of this powerful state institution as a victim of an activist who only has his voice, publicly asking: “Will the CRI make the Provincial Government tremble? No, I don’t think so”.<sup>304</sup>

This inversion of victim and aggressor role is an example of what Butler (1993) has called “inverted projections”, a term I come back to (section 5.3). For Chaambi's defense his lawyer drew on the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights, saying that it is precisely Chaambi’s role to create conflict, and that the confrontation of different positions is essential for a healthy democracy. He asked the prosecutor to take into account that Chaambi is a “grass-roots activist” (*militant, proche du terrain*), a “spokesperson for those who can’t speak” (*un porte-voix de ceux qui ne parlent pas*). Furthermore, he criticized the request made by the Court to deal with conflict in a civilized manner (keeping emotions under control, only reverting to calm dialogue) and disagreed with its conclusion that “the interests of the actors are the same”. He insisted that, sometimes one has to “cross the line”, and it is this action that allows debate to become possible (field notes, 15/02/2017).

Pour vivre-ensemble, on a besoin de l'affrontement, mais pas dans la violence. (...) Il faut pouvoir faire un pied au-delà de la ligne.

<sup>304</sup> In French: “C’est le CRI qui va faire trembler le Conseil Général? Non.”

Peut-être ç'a pu choquer, ç'a pu blesser. C'est la base du militantisme. (Gilles Devors, field notes, 15/02/2017)

Finally, Chaambi's lawyer said that rather than "condemning" the court should "encourage" Chaambi's activism because he is one of the few that still speaks out. His social activism over the last decades prepared him for this task.

Où est-ce qu'on trouve les minorités qui s'expriment ? Qui parlent ? Il faut être quelqu'un qui a la tête sur les épaules. (*Ibid.*)

Disregarding the defense of his lawyer, Chaambi was condemned a year later. In a political context where, since the Charlie Hebdo attacks, freedom of expression has been celebrated as one of the main characteristics of Western societies, the fact that the lawyer could not convince the judge that "democracy grows with words that hurt" (*la démocratie grandit avec les mots qui blessent*) is further proof that not all have the right to the same freedoms. It is on the same principle of freedom of expression that Gilles Devors built his defense, speaking this time no longer in court but outside of court, addressing a small audience that had come to support Chaambi.

J'ai fait un petit rappel que l'action militante existe et que dans une société la liberté d'expression n'est pas sans limite mais qu'on a le droit de choquer, de heurter, de blesser quand c'est pour défendre une cause d'intérêt général et surtout que l'autre partie a la possibilité de répliquer donc la grande chance qu'il y a avec le militantisme et l'action de Chaambi sur cette affaire est que les gens pensent des choses et ne disent rien et lui l'exprime. Donc on veut le sanctionner parce que lui il parle mais [le condamner] c'est le contraire ce qu'il faut faire. (Gilles Devors, field notes, 15/02/2017)

The lawyer's defense gives us information about addressing publics, and the different rules and spaces where it becomes (im)possible to say certain things. He was critical of the prosecutor's interpretation and qualification of the CRI's slogans as insults and asked the judge to take into account that "here [in the court room] we are analyzing statement in a cooled down manner (*à froid*)" but asked to keep into mind that they were formulated in the "heat of the moment". In the context of the court these statements would have been very much out of place, but the statements for which Chaambi stood trial were formulated in an entirely different context, during a demonstration (field notes court hearing, 24/01/2019). This hot versus cold context of speaking was not taken into account by the judge. The prosecutor clearly denied the importance of political confrontation in a democracy and rather adhered to a consensual model devoid of conflict.

#### *4.4) In the deliberative democratic model there is no place for conflict*

In this subsection I bring my empirical data about the court case against Chaambi together with Mouffe's political theory on radical democracy and her critique of current democratic disfunction.

The positions defended by Gilles Devers are very close to Mouffe's political philosophy, for

example when Mouffe states that “far from jeopardizing democracy, agonistic confrontation is in fact its very condition of existence” (2000, 16). The juridical treatment of the Msakni case and the demands of the prosecutor to remain calm and seek dialogue under all circumstances is close to the apolitical role that Mouffe denounced in deliberative democracy, and typical of neo-liberal societies. The latter is responsible for the “ideological foreclosure of overt conflict”<sup>305</sup> according to Garnier, a French (Marxist) sociologist (2007, 63). This ideological foreclosure closes the material and symbolic space of politics. Politics, defined by Mouffe as “the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence,” what Rancière called part of the police, create conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they deal with “the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations” (2000, 15). Accepting this dimension of antagonism and entering the arena of agonistic confrontations is what being political is about. In democracy we need to acknowledge this conflict and make space for it.

In a purely deliberative model of democracy, as we have seen in the example of Chaambi, there is not space for conflict because of the fear that conflict will disrupt social order. “Agonistic confrontations” are those where opponents are not enemies, but adversaries (Mouffe 2004, 126). Enemies are those one seeks to eradicate and to evince from the political domain, whilst adversaries are those whom one considers legitimate to defend oppositional statements and to whom one attributes this right (*Ibid.*). Political parties that lean to the extreme right foreclose agonistic conflict when they constantly present the figure of the racialized immigrant as a threat to the State, and not as part of a same political community. In the case of Chaambi it is clear that the Provincial Government and the judge approached him as an enemy and as a threat to their authority, rather than as an adversary who legitimately called into question the decisions of the Provincial Government. Between adversaries there exists a “conflictual consensus”, they share “a common allegiance to the democratic principles of liberty and equality for all while disagreeing about [their] interpretation” (2004, 126). I argue that Chaambi has accepted this conflictual consensus and deals with the Provincial Government as an adversary instead of an enemy. The fact that he addressed his claims to the Provincial Government vocally is an indicator that he recognized them as legitimate interlocutor with whom CRI was in disagreement.

Difference and dissensus are at the basis of Laclau and Mouffe’s proposal of radical democracy. “Radical democracy occurs when those who the sovereign deems to not count insist on being counted” according to Springer, based on Rancière (2011, 532) and this is exactly when subalterns become political subjects (see also Isin and Nielsen 2008). With regard to the risk of violence, Springer remarks (after Mouffe) that “the aim of radical democracy is not to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere, but to defuse the potential of human hostilities by providing the possibility for antagonism to be transformed into “agonism” (Mouffe 2004 in Springer 2011a, 530). With the elimination of agonism “the

<sup>305</sup> In French: “*verrouillage idéologique de la conflictualité ouverte*”.

activity of governance continually risks pacification (...), what Rancière refers to as the dark side of the idyll of consensus” (Rancière 1999, 135; Springer 2011a, 533). When there is no space for conflict, violence may become an option. Chaambi’s choice for political tools of action is a clear choice in favor of pacifism and against violence, hence the paradox of him being labeled as a potential danger to state security. The consequence of this label and of Chaambi’s condemnation in court are that he is denied access to political fora.

#### 4.5) *Chaambi silenced as a result of shrinking political space*

Both Chaambi’s condemnation and his “S” label are responsible for limiting the public sphere in which he can speak, and thereby the possibility to publicize his statements to a wider audience. After the Msakni Affair two public events cancelled Chaambi's invitation as speaker: first a symposium on islamophobia at the University of Lyon that was planned in October 2017 and second, the *Moussem festival* in Gennevilliers that took place in January 2018.

The decision to cancel the symposium *Lutter contre l’islamophobie, un enjeu d’égalité* [Figure 6.108] was taken by the President of the University of Lyon after a polemic that was started by Laurent Bouvet. Bouvet is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Versailles and founder of the Printemps républicain, a movement on the left of the political spectrum that seeks to defend “Republican values,” mostly against Islam. His tweets alleged that it was “a symposium with Islamist speakers under the cover of academia” (Le Figaro, 04/10/2017).<sup>306</sup> FdeSouche, a far-right website, as well as the Ligue Internationale Contre le Racisme et l’Antisémitisme (Licra),<sup>307</sup> rapidly adopted Bouvet’s stance and respectively denounced the “Islamist and *laicophobe*” character of the symposium (Le Figaro, 04/10/2017).



Figure 6.108 Poster of the cancelled symposium.<sup>308</sup>

<sup>306</sup> Heidsieck, Louis, "Après une vive polémique, un colloque ‘contre l’islamophobie’ annulé", *LeFigaro étudiant*, 04/10/2017, [https://etudiant.lefigaro.fr/article/apres-une-vive-polemique-un-colloque-contre-l-islamophobie-annule\\_e8428954-a8e2-11e7-aab4-2721e4baf56d/](https://etudiant.lefigaro.fr/article/apres-une-vive-polemique-un-colloque-contre-l-islamophobie-annule_e8428954-a8e2-11e7-aab4-2721e4baf56d/), accessed 20/10/2019.

<sup>307</sup> International League Against Racism and Antisemitism

<sup>308</sup> <https://www.psm-enligne.org/societe/actualites/6051-colloque-lutter-contre-lislamophobie-un-enjeu-degalite-universite-lyon-2-le-14-octobre-2017>, accessed 8/10/2019

This cancellation closed the possibility of a public debate on islamophobia at the University and reinforced the idea that those involved in the struggle against islamophobia are inevitably Islamists.

The second example of a public arena to which Chaambi was denied access as speaker was the 2018 edition of the *Moussem festival*. It is an annual event that seeks to transmit knowledge about immigrants' past struggles in favor of equal rights and dignity, and about the Tricontinentale, an international solidarity movement encouraging solidarity among "third-world" countries [Figure 6.109].<sup>309</sup>



Figure 6.109 Flyer Moussem festival de l'immigration et de la tricontinentale 2018.<sup>310</sup>

In this case, it was the organization behind the festival, the Association des Travailleurs Maghrébins de France (ATMF)<sup>311</sup> that ceded to pressure from those close to the Printemps republicain that, again, qualified the invited speakers as Islamist.<sup>312</sup> Chaambi explained this refusal as follows:

Ils devaient fêter à Paris [le Moussem festival], les militants qui ont 50 ans de lutte, qui ont lutté avec nos parents sur les chaînes OS [ouvrier spécialisé] dans l'automobile etc. et les mecs ont dit

<sup>309</sup> The origins of the Tricontinentale lie in the 1955 Bandung conference and in the 1966 Havana Conference. Source of information about the Moussem festival: [http://www.bboykonsian.com/Moussem-Festival-de-l-immigration-et-de-la-tricontinentale-les-06-et-07-janvier-2018-a-Gennevilliers\\_a3855.html](http://www.bboykonsian.com/Moussem-Festival-de-l-immigration-et-de-la-tricontinentale-les-06-et-07-janvier-2018-a-Gennevilliers_a3855.html), accessed 21/10/2019.

<sup>310</sup> Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration, <https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/opac/45304/show>, accessed 13/10/2020.

<sup>311</sup> English translation: Organisation of Workers of the Maghreb in France.

<sup>312</sup> Source: Message facebook 59/62, 5 janvier 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/fuiqpsud/>, accessed 02/10/2019 and (*Le Parisien*, 07/01/2018).

non à Abdelaziz Chaambi (..) [et à Sonia Nour, militante communiste]. On a été exclu, soi-disant que le bureau du Ministère de l'intérieur, le cabinet, a appelé. Ils ont été appelés par le Printemps Républicain, par la fachosphère en disant vous avez un fichier "S" [...]. (Abdelaziz Chaambi, Solexine debate, 24/10/2018)

These two examples illustrate how the space to speak has been closing up for Chaambi. This closing of space is facilitated by consensus between the political left and right that the Republic needs to be defended against Muslim influence, and that a strict definition of *laïcité* is a rampart against this threat. Divisions between organizations that have their roots in immigrant's struggles weaken their capacity to resist this pressure.

## 5) Depoliticization through disqualification and naming

This section presents four ways through which the voices of MSHN inhabitants are depoliticized, looking for example at the instrumentalization of religious leaders by state actors (5.1). The three subsections that follow look at different ways of disqualifying political claims such as territorial stigmatization and highlighting cultural differences (5.2); inverted projections, which invert victim-aggressor roles and present those responsible for state violence as victims of (nonviolent) racialized inhabitants (5.3); as well as the hypervisibilization of violence in the neighborhood (5.4).

### *5.1) The role of religious leaders in depoliticization*

Just as religion was a factor of politicization for Chaambi, it can also be a factor for depoliticization, for example when state actors use religious representatives as a political deterrence strategy to impede collective action. In 2015 imams were called upon by the state authorities to publicly denounce the acts of terrorism in the press, and express their solidarity with Charlie. To the irritation of one of the participants of the Fringale collective, they are urged to publicly denounce violence at moments of crisis, but they are not invited by the media afterwards to provide their analyses of the phenomena and to denounce islamophobia (field notes, 13/01/2015). Their voices are therefore used as instruments to keep order but are not audible in their own right. During my research I came across different stories about the contradiction between the fact that the State deters organized religious practice (Islam) and relies at the same time on Muslim religious actors to help public actors to exercise control (recuperation, political instrumentalization). Invited speakers in the Université populaire provided several examples of depoliticization through the state mobilization of religious actors. I did not directly investigate these examples, but I analyze them as arguments that speakers mobilize to make their point about the continuing colonial condition of being unable to have a voice. This subsection gives first an illustration of state interference in religious and political practice, followed by several examples of the reliance of the State on religious leaders to deal with conflicts and violence in France.

#### *State interference in people's freedom of association and of religion*

The first illustration is brought up by Chaambi, and deals with the state interference in



people's freedom of association and of religion. He evoked the example of a Muslim man, going through the naturalization procedure to obtain French citizenship, who is married to a French citizen. When the man was summoned to the Town Hall for an interview as part of the naturalization procedure the civil servant carrying out the interview interrogated him on his religious practices and political activities, such as whether he went to the mosque and whether he was a member of an organization (*association*). The interviewee understood very well that affirmative responses to these questions would not help his case. Chaambi is livid about this special treatment of Muslims, and points out that it is hard to imagine that the same interview protocol would apply to Jews and Christians.

Vous vous rendez compte ? "Faites-vous partie d'une association ?"  
Alors ça veut dire : les associations dégagent ! Il ne faut pas que tu fasses de la politique, il faut que tu suives les *béni-oui-oui enturbannés* qui te disent : "Ah ça ce n'est pas bien de faire de la politique mon frère, Ah ma sœur tu n'as pas le droit de créer une association. Reste à la mosquée..." Ils réduisent l'Islamité à une religiosité vide de sens. (Abdelaziz Chaambi, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

Chaambi's critique targets the State and the control it exercises over Muslims, as well as the complicity of Muslim organizations. The term "turbaned yes-men" (*les béni-oui-oui enturbannés*) is an allusion to the imams from consular Muslim organizations (*associations consulaires*) funded by the immigrants' countries of origin. The proximity of these imams to elite players on both sides of the Mediterranean is responsible for a conservative position that discourages their followers from getting involved with socio-political issues. During the Msakni affair the CRI was again confronted with this kind of position, when friends of the Msakni family were reluctant to participate in the demonstration fearing that it would be contrary to religious guidelines.

On a manifesté au détriment de ceux qui étaient les amis de la famille Msakni et qui disaient [mot arabe] que c'est un interdit religieux de manifester. (Abdelaziz Chaambi, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

In the above case, religion acts as a factor of de-politicization, and it is on this effect that state actors count when they call on imams in cases of violence.

#### *When the Prefect sends the imam to deal with political claims*

The second example of the reliance of the State on religious leaders to deal with conflict is that, when CRI voiced political claims to the Prefect in the Msakni case, the state representative sent the imam to the CRI as interlocutor. This example demonstrates that state actors themselves reframe these claims in religious, rather than political terms.

On intervient, les familles nous sollicitent. On se bagarre, on alerte le préfet. "Monsieur le Préfet on aimerait vous rencontrer parce qu'il s'agit d'une discrimination manifeste, on souhaite vous rencontrer parce qu'il y a une question de droit et une mauvaise interprétation de la laïcité." Vous savez ce qu'il fait ? Il ne nous répond pas et il nous envoie le responsable du culte musulman. Mais elle est où cette république-là ? On se moque de qui ? Oh, c'est fini

les colonies, le bureau des Arabes etc. le marabout du coin là ! Il nous prend pour qui ce préfet ? (Abdelaziz Chaambi, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

Chaambi insists that the issue he seeks to address is not religious, it has nothing to do with halal, mosques, or Muslim graves as suggested by the media, but is a question of rights (UP debate, 20/03/2015). This religious framing of a political claim is a way to disqualify and depoliticize the claims of the Coordination contre le Racisme et l'islamophobie. Chaambi draws a parallel with the colonial means of governance in French Algeria, where the French authorities sought to control the local population through coopting religious figures such as the marabout. The 1905 law on *laïcité* was not implemented in Algeria for the same reason, "to perpetuate a strict control on religious worship, in particular on the religion of the colonized" (Achi 2006, 237).

Tchetche-Apea was also very critical of sending imams as a state response to political claims during the Université populaire debate about the remnants of the colonial past in MSHN.

Le fait de solliciter des responsables religieux face à des jeunes qui posent des questions sociales et politiques [est critiquable], alors qu'à tout bout de champ on prône un État laïc. (UP debate, 26/4/2018)

He analyzed politicians' appeals to imams to intervene in the case of the disruption of order by revolting youth as a means through which the state aims to obstruct the political participation of certain parts of the population, and shield current power structures.

These examples resonate with my own experience when in March 2019 two young men, Adam Soli et Fatih Karakuss, died in a scooter accident while being pursued by the police (BAC) and riots broke out in different areas of Grenoble. It was mostly young people who participated in these riots to express their anger about yet another death of racialized young men in an accident provoked by a police pursuit.<sup>313 314</sup> The families organized a White March

313 The communication service of the police (service de communication) officially denies that it was a pursuit, but employs the following terms for following the two young men on a scooter: "marquage à distance" (*Libération*, 6/03/2019). Despite these semantic differences, I use the term pursuit for linguistic clarity. Part of the anger about their deaths was motivated by the argument that the pursuit did not respect an internal police note, formulated after deaths under similar circumstances, that stipulates that "aucune situation ne peut justifier la blessure ou le décès d'un tiers ou d'un fonctionnaire de police, du fait d'actions trop risquée des intervenants". Source: "Les forces de l'ordre ont-elles l'interdiction de poursuivre les deux roues?", *Libération*, 6/03/2019). Source: [https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/2019/03/06/les-forces-de-l-ordre-ont-elles-l-interdiction-de-poursuivre-les-deux-roues\\_1712899](https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/2019/03/06/les-forces-de-l-ordre-ont-elles-l-interdiction-de-poursuivre-les-deux-roues_1712899), accessed 19/02/2020.

314 This incident is strongly reminiscent of the conditions in which Zyed Benna and Bouna Traouré died in 2005 (Clichy-sous-Bois); Moushin Sehouli and Laramy Samoura in 2007 (Villiers-le-Bel), and Thomas Claudio in 1990 (Vaulx-en-Velin) as well as others. The latter sparked important riots in the neighborhood. On a personal level, they motivated Tchetche-Apea's political activism around police violence. On national level, they instigated a new discourse concerning banlieues, which increasingly came to be seen as threats. These threats were considered so significant that the "Ministère de l'Équipement" was transformed into the "Ministère de ville", allowing for close collaboration with other state actors, such as the Minister of Justice and France's Central Intelligence (Renseignements Généraux), which introduced new terms such as "quartiers sensibles" (sensitive neighborhoods) and "délinquance urbaine" (urban delinquency).

publicly share their emotions and commemorate their children [Figure 6.110].

During this March, in which I participated, an acquaintance who works in the Mayor's office told me that she expected that the violence would stop from that moment on because the imam had intervened at the request of the City, as part of its strategy of working with a variety of civilian actors (confirmed in *Le Monde*, 07/05/2019). It was hoped that the imam could convince young people to stop taking to the streets at night (field notes, 06/03/2019). Relying on the imam to calm youth down is a form of pacification, especially if it is not accompanied by opening up spaces for, in particular young inhabitants, to express their legitimate anger.<sup>315</sup>



Figure 6.110 Placard to announce the White March for Adam and Fatih in Grenoble.<sup>316</sup> (Photo author, 06/03/2019)

State actors have adopted a very ambiguous stance toward religion: they aggressively insist on the respect for *laïcité* when Islam is involved, to guarantee a separation between the political and the religious spheres;<sup>317</sup> whilst simultaneously calling upon Muslim leaders in situations of crisis and relying on their influence to pacify disruptive forms of politics that challenge the police order.

<sup>315</sup> For an excellent account of the function of religious leaders in situations of conflict, between peace-building and pacification, see Williams (20015) who has worked on citizenship and Muslim lives in North India.

<sup>316</sup> The name Fatih is written in different ways, as this poster demonstrates. I use the spelling of family and relatives, which they used on the banner the White March.

<sup>317</sup> Going as far as extending the requirement of religious neutrality for public servants as stipulated in the 1905 law, to citizens

## *5.2) Disqualification – voices into noises*

Disqualification designates the means through which state actors disqualify political claims by giving them another (e.g. cultural) meaning and it can have the function of impeding collective action and organized, overt, political confrontation. Dikeç explains the relationship between disqualification and depoliticization as follows: "One of the ways in which the police avoid the disturbance of politics is to name phenomena and to assign them to their 'proper places' in the established order, and therefore de-politicize them" (Dikeç 2002, 95). One example of political messages being changed and distorted was the presentation of Chaambi as a danger to the state when he undertook political action in defense of the rights of a family whose children had been removed. One of the results of what Diamond and Talpin have called the "discursive domain of categorization and disqualification" of governing strategies (2019) is to make voices inaudible. Forms of disqualification I focus on in this subsection are territorial stigmatization and highlighting cultural differences.

### *Territorial stigmatization*

Territorial stigmatization of MSHN and their discursive articulation as spaces outside of the Republic is an important impediment to mobilization in these neighborhoods. One obstacle is that inhabitants do not want to be associated with a negatively tainted category, and a second obstacle is that the claims of those speaking in name of these stigmatized spaces are disqualified in advance due to these negative representations (Hajjat 2008). Relating political claims to criminal acts is another form of disqualifying political claims. This is one of the registers to which Sarkozy resorted in 2010 when he said that the young people involved in the riots "had wanted to show their allegiance to thugs" (Speech Grenoble, 30/07/2010),<sup>318</sup> thereby completely bypassing the anger that Karim was shot in the back and that his body was left unattended to for over six hours.

### *Highlighting cultural difference*

The type of disqualifications I discuss more extensively here are those who use references to cultural differences in order to disqualify the political claims of racialized inhabitants of MSHN, for example by explaining collective violence as the result of a supposed lack of successful integration into French society. Racialized neighborhood youth have been described in terms of "*inculture*" and "*étrangeté*", a vocabulary that is explicitly racist (Mauger 2006, 93). In the 2005 social revolts, polygamy was put forward as a factor to explain urban violence.<sup>319</sup> This insistence on cultural differences and othering "conceals the

<sup>318</sup> In French: "Les violences qui ont frappé la ville de Grenoble sont le fait d'une petite minorité, certes d'une minorité qui a voulu marquer son allégeance envers les truands".

<sup>319</sup> Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, Permanent Secretary of the Académie française, explained in an interview on Russian national television in the aftermath of the 2005 riots that "*beaucoup de ces Africains, je vous le dis, sont polygames*". "*Dans un appartement, il y a trois ou quatre femmes et vingt-cinq enfants. Ils sont tellement bondés que ce ne sont plus des appartements, mais Dieu sait quoi! On comprend pourquoi ces enfants courent dans les rues.*" (*Libération*, 16/11/2005 quoted in Gèze 2006). This message has been abundantly spread by the far right, but also in more mainstream press reports about "the supposedly cultural characteristics of

structural and notably economic mechanisms of segregation, discards the unemployment question, the issues of precarity, discrimination and even more so police violence” according to Tissot (2006, 55).<sup>320</sup> In 2010, after the riots in Grenoble, Sarkozy also pointed to the cultural differences of immigrants as the explanation for the riots that had broken out in Villeneuve after the death of Karim Boudouda; framing the latter as a problem of “insufficiently regulated immigration” and lack of integration (Grenoble speech, 30/07/2010), as discussed earlier.<sup>321</sup>

Activists’ accounts of the disqualifications through cultural differences used by politicians corresponds to the observations of academics who have identified a “neoconservative current in urban policy” (Epstein 2016, 3), also discussed in chapter 3. The focus of government officials and the experts they relied on shifted away from social conditions in MSHN, and towards the ‘threat’ posed by cultural and religious differences (Dikeç, 2007, 173). This focus on the threat that difference poses has only increased with the fear of and the imminent threat of terrorism. Activists feel the primacy of cultural interpretations and the effect it has on their political space, as the quote below demonstrates. Chaambi defends the idea that politicians have encouraged “cultural separatism” (*séparatisme culturel*).

Qui nous renvoie à une parcelle de notre identité, à notre islamité. C’est qui ? Ce sont les hommes et femmes politiques qui depuis 30 ans et surtout depuis le 11 septembre 2001 nous ramènent la question du halal, la question du voile, la question des mosquées, la question des minarets. Ce n'est pas moi... C'est la classe politique, ce sont les dirigeants qui sont en train de nous **pousser** et de nous **réduire** à cette dimension (Abdelaziz Chaambi, UP debate, 20/03/2015).

In this quote Chaambi clearly stresses the feeling of being pushed and being reduced. Other examples of terms that are used in cultural disqualification, and that specifically concern racialized inhabitants, are “*communautarisme*”, “*revendications identitaires*”, “*mobilisations victimaire*”, “*radicalization*” (Fassin and Fassin 2006). For a discussion of the term *communautarisme*, see Box 3.31. The two quotes below demonstrate how disqualifying a claim as communitarian is a way of undermining political voices:

L’argument contre nous [c’est] quand vous allez voir vos élus pour tenter de faire bouger les choses, on nous accuse de communautarisme. (Omer Mas Capitolin, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

Il y a un vrai problème de représentation politique et un vrai problème de portage de la parole politique. Les principaux concernés

immigrants that would be incompatible with the values of the Republic” and polygamy is one of them (*Le Figaro*; 17/11/2005 quoted in Garcia Retis 2011)

<sup>320</sup> In French: “occultation des mécanismes structurels et notamment économiques de la ségrégation, et refoulement de la question du chômage, de la précarité, des discriminations, et plus encore de la violence policière”.

<sup>321</sup> For Sarkozy, violence has nothing to do with addressing grievances but is the indirect outcome of supposedly unregulated immigration, an inherent problem related to immigrants, who are supposedly too different to be able to integrate into French society. These examples of using cultural differences in order to explain social problems contribute to the discursive articulation of racialized inhabitants as ‘other’.

ont un rôle à y jouer, mais dès que les gens le font, ils se font tester, taxer de communautarisme, et d'autres termes en -isme qui cherchent à les cantonner dans leurs initiatives. (Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

This framing as “*communautariste*” is an important obstacle to organizing autonomously, because people fear being labeled as such. A participant explained the resistance of racialized persons against getting involved in autonomous organizations because they fear that as a result they will be considered to be not-integrated in French society. A typical reaction she gets to her suggestion to auto-organize is:

Mais non il faut qu'on reste avec les blancs parce que sinon on va penser qu'on soutient les djihadistes et que, nous, on est des radicaux et que, nous, on n'est pas intégrés. (Participant, Fringale meeting, 20/11/2015)

Cultural explanations and islamophobia are important obstacles to collective action and we-group formation in a context where there is a pre-existing fault line in society, created by tensions around Islam that have strongly reinforced Muslim versus French identification. They are important tools of the epistemic framework that legitimizes domination.

### *5.3) Inverted projections*

In this subsection I am interested in a specific form of silencing, “inverted projections” (Butler 1993). This is complementary to the ones discussed earlier: the interiorization of inferiority (chapter 5.3) and testimonial smothering, which are both forms of self-silencing as a result of epistemic violence (this chapter, section 1). Inverted projections are also the result of epistemic violence and can be understood as a form of disqualification because they transform the meaning of voices and acts through racist representations. The specificity of the idea of inverted projections is that it focuses on the visual rather than the discursive domain of representation. Inverted projections deal with an image (projection) of an act that comes to represent the reality. In the interpretation of this image by the established, the intentions behind an act (of a marginalized or subaltern person) are not only made inaudible but the intentions of the aggressor and victim are being inverted: the victim becomes the aggressor. The idea of inverted projections helps therefore to understand the way in which racialized bodies in danger come to be seen as sources of danger (Butler 1993).

#### *The empirical case at the basis of Butler's concept*

The empirical case on which Butler drew to build this conceptual tool of inverted projections is the Rodney King case in which physical self-defense was interpreted as an act of aggression. I apply her analytical framework to two examples: the first is the Chaambi case, in which defending one's rights through demonstration was interpreted as a danger to public order and therefore indirectly to the State; the second is that of the idea of dangerous neighborhoods. Butler studied the trial of the police officers responsible for Rodney King's death. She analyzed the video footage of the police violence against this African-American man, and how it was used for police officers' defense. Butler explains that a “racially

saturated field of visibility” is responsible for the fact that video footage of a black body, being beaten by the police, in court becomes visual evidence of a black body that is threatening the police (Butler 1993, 16). This "visual evidence" is transformed by analysis through a racist frame. Through the workings of the "inverted projections of white paranoia," the image of violence against a black man is interpreted as evidence of police vulnerability (*Ibid.*). The endangered get to be viewed as dangerous (*Ibid.*)

*The only audible suffering is that of state employees*

There are important differences between the cases of Chaambi and Rodney King: King was a case of alleged physical aggression, while Chaambi was a case of supposed verbal aggression; the former was about physical self-defense against police violence, while the latter was about the defense of the rights of a family (through nonviolent action) against a state institution. With the former, the police officers stood trial, with the latter Chaambi himself stood trial. What they have in common is the constructed "vulnerability of whiteness" (Butler 1993, 19). The prosecutor insisted on the harm Chaambi did to the employees of the Provincial Government who were targets of "hurtful language" and who were "very scared" (field notes, 15/02/2017), for which Chaambi was held responsible. Drawing on Fanon, Butler argues that "attributing violence to the object of violence is part of the very mechanism that recapitulates violence, and that makes the jury's 'seeing' into a complicity with that police violence". During Chaambi's court trial, it never became audible for the judge and the prosecutor that what they presented as a verbal aggression was in fact the defense of a family that suffered brutal police treatment and the loss of their children.

Other examples of inverted projections are that endangered neighborhoods become represented as dangerous neighborhoods (see chapter 3) and that victims of islamophobia are framed as potential terrorists. A participant of the Université populaire provided the following example:

On voit comment la perception des sœurs et des camarades musulmanes qui portent le hijab [a changé]. On est passé des femmes musulmanes qui étaient des victimes de leurs pères, de leurs frères et de leurs maris aux femmes musulmanes qui sont diabolisées comme potentiellement aussi des terroristes en puissance. (Participant, UP debate, 20/03/2015).

*Dorlin: the more the marginalized defend themselves, the more they are in danger*

Dorlin takes Butler's work further, developing the idea that the form of governmentality we are facing now "creates beings who, the more they try to defend themselves, the more they cause damage to themselves" (2017, 9).<sup>322</sup> It is not a new phenomenon that people who defend themselves against the violence of the police order will, as a consequence, be presented as a danger to society. What is new however is that it will seem as if they are responsible for their own hurt, because it seems that they expose themselves voluntarily

<sup>322</sup> In French: "produire des êtres qui, plus ils se défendent, plus ils s'abîment".

either to psychological or physical violence. For example, when a woman refuses to take off her veil and she becomes the target of verbal and physical aggressions in public space it seems that she could simply have avoided it. This example is borne out by the reaction of a member of the organization La Vie nouvelle in discussion with *Nous Citoyennes*, who wondered why the women present did not simply take their veils off, suggesting that it would solve the problems of exclusion they talked about. The way she presented it was as if veiled women themselves are responsible for the problems they meet, an idea that is widely shared in mainstream public opinion.

From these examples I deduce that Muslims in France are denied the right to defend themselves and if they do so, they are not simply punished but also depicted as if this punishment was self-inflicted.

#### *5.4) Hypervisibilization of violence*

In the last subsection of this chapter I continue to build on the contributions of Butler and Dorlin, focusing on the images of urban/youth violence during social revolts and their performative power. I observe a paradox between the hypervisibility of violence in the neighborhood (made visible) and the inaudibility of voice (made inaudible). I argue that the hypervisibilization of violence is an important factor of depoliticizing the political claims of inhabitants, to make them inaudible. I analyze the image that has become symbolic of the 2010 riots in Villeneuve as an example of the hypervibilization of violence, and I use the theoretical input of Butler's analysis of inverted projections, Haraway's space of constructed visibility, and Dorlin's input on violent subjects acting out of self-defense.

##### *The constructed space of visibility of the image of the riots in Villeneuve*

The problem for the racialized is that they are seen all the time because they are made visible as 'others' (e.g. skin color), but they are not heard. According to Haraway, "vision is always partial and provisional, culturally produced and performed, and it depends on **spaces of constructed visibility** that - even as they claim to render the opacities of 'other spaces' transparent - are always also **spaces of constructed invisibility**" (1988; 2004, 12). It is specific of racism that "those that are 'imaged' or 'pictured' (*mises en image*) are in reality the objects of a 'design' (*dessin*) that has little to do with them in first instance" (Mbembe in Dorlin 2007, 153). The image below [Figure 6.111] of the riots in Villeneuve is such an example for me. While it has come to represent Villeneuve to a certain extent, the neighborhood's inhabitants feel it had little to do with them.



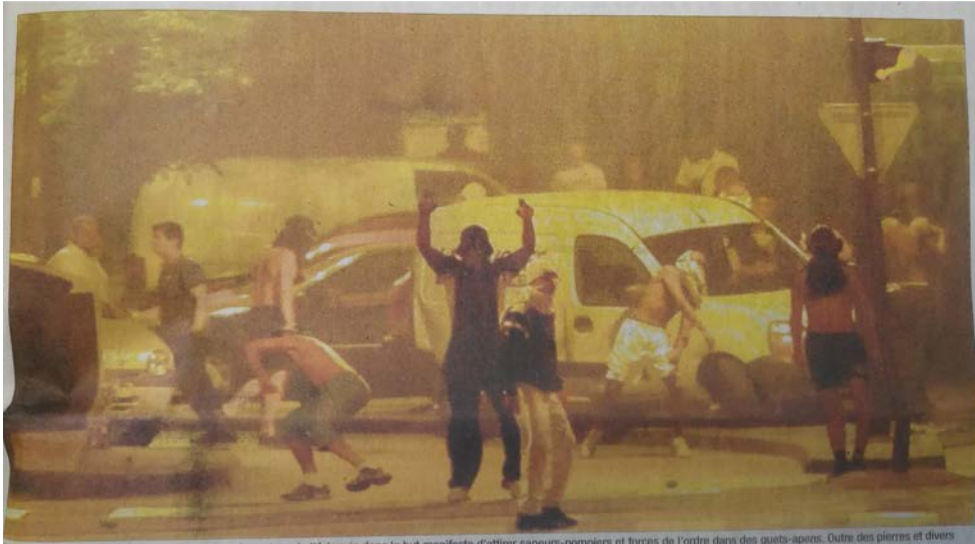


Figure 6.111 Local press photo of riots. (Photo Dauphiné Libéré, 18/07/2010, Archives départementales)

This image is not object of an inverted projection as such because the young man's hands in the center of the picture are not raised in self-defense as in the case of Rodney King. The two other men next to him are throwing objects in the direction of the police. Seeing them as aggressors is therefore not only a projection of white paranoia. However, what this image has in common with the footage of the raised hands of Rodney King is that it suffers from the effect of the "frozen frame", of using an image taken at one moment in time to portray a whole situation. Butler's observation that "the raised hand, is torn from its temporal place in the visual narrative" (1993, 20) is applicable here. In this case the image comes to speak for the 2010 riots and Villeneuve as a whole, but does not say anything about what happened prior to this moment. In other words, what this image brings into visibility leaves out of visibility other aspects of what happened that evening: Karim Boudouda being shot by the police, his body being left unattended, and the much more structural tensions around police conduct in MSHN. This frozen frame reinforces the representation of urban violence as "senseless" or "barbaric" and has the function of a "bestialization of the [racialized] crowds", as did the frozen frame in the Rodney King case (Butler 1993, 21).

The decontextualization of this image by the mainstream media was subsequently to be recontextualized by the French President, explaining the riots in 2010 as a problem of immigration and integration. This political treatment of the riots in 2010 meant that 20 people, the estimated number of young people that participated in the riots, came to speak for an entire neighborhood, while other voices were made inaudible. While visibilizing violence, media did not capture the alternative and everyday prefigurative politics that inhabitants were engaged in to work towards a better future, two of which I discuss in the next chapter, the FUIQP and APLP.

Urban riots are an expression of anger about police violence and oppression, about police that represent a physical danger to them, and the wish to defend themselves. However, what in the neighborhood is seen as a defense is interpreted by the established as an attack on the

Republic. Dorlin explains why: the State does not defend the subalterns (see chapter 6) and albeit the subalterns do not have the right to defend themselves, physical violence is one of the few tools they have left to defend their dignity (2017). Sartre and Fanon (1961) obviously serve as sources of inspiration for this statement. The aggression of a violent subject should therefore be reinterpreted as an act of self-defense. In the case of 2010, rioting and entering into violent confrontation with the police should not be seen as an act of individual physical self-defense, but as the defense of their neighborhood and the defense of their dignity (see chapter 3).

The hypervisibilization of violence during the 2005 riots stands in stark contrast with the silence of the rioters. Rioters chose to speak in terms of acts rather than words: a journalist qualified these riots as a “deafening silence” (*Le Figaro*, 28/11/2005), Cortéséro and Marlière commented their “mutism” (Cortéséro and Marlière 2015, 70); for additional comments on this silence see Bertho (2006) and Garnier (2007).<sup>323</sup> The hypervisibilization of images of violence, their power, and the extent to which they are broadcast serves to cloak whatever political speech may emerge from the neighborhood. Similar phenomena occur with the hypervisibilization of images of Muslim terrorism that make Muslim voices inaudible because all attempts to analyze the violence in political terms are dismissed with the argument that “to explain these acts is an attempt to excuse them”.<sup>324</sup>

## Conclusion

Those who are inaudible are not necessarily invisible, quite on the contrary. The former subsection has demonstrated that, at the same time as subalterns are brought into the field of visual representation, they are maneuvered beyond the range of hearing.

One of the problems of the condition of being racialized is that, while they are being made visible as other, they cannot make themselves invisible and unnoticed. Characteristics in their physical appearance such as skin color or a veil draw visual attention. Simultaneously to being within sight, their voices are beyond hearing, but they are not mere victims, they adopt tactics to deal with this situation. The subaltern actors use this visibility to publicize their anger.

I argue that rioters have developed a means of public address adapted to this condition of the subaltern, and to this age of the image and social networks. Media do the work of widely distributing the images produced by angry young people. They use this visibility that media provide to make public statements, to publicize their frustration and anger.

<sup>323</sup> Bertho stresses in his book that rioters are present through their shadows: “Nous n'avons vu que des ombres”; Cortosero and Marlière refer to this violence as mute: “*le sens de l'émeute est bien livré par l'émeutier, non pas dans son discours, mais dans son mutisme*” (2015, 17) and Garnier speaks about “*une violence inédite parce que non dite*” (2007, 61).

<sup>324</sup> Le Monde, “La sociologie, ce n’est pas la culture de l’excuse!,” 14 December 2015, [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/12/14/la-sociologie-ce-n-est-pas-la-culture-de-l-excuse\\_4831649\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/12/14/la-sociologie-ce-n-est-pas-la-culture-de-l-excuse_4831649_3232.html), accessed 8/11/2019.

This is not the only option available in the neighborhood. Despite all the obstacles to political organization mentioned in this chapter, which make it very hard to enter in agonistic conflict to address structurally asymmetric power relations, actors do not give up, not in France, and not in Villeneuve either. Local actors seek to transform the violence they are confronted with (physical, structural or epistemic) at school, on the street, in confrontations with the police, in interactions with institutions, and through media images into political claims. In the next chapter, I look at two examples in Villeneuve, the FUIQP and APLP, who each adopted a particular political imagination, respectively of the fist and of the dove, in answer to the question of how to be political, in the sense of challenging the status quo of an unjust order.

## Chapter 7. The political imagination of the fist and the dove

Partir de ce qui a été fait. De ce qui nous a été fait. Nous femmes, pédés, gouines, noir.e.s, jui(f)(v).e.s, racailles, colonisés.e.s... Prendre la blessure comme arme et l'arborer fièrement. Le passé se nera pas révisé ni effacé. La marque des événements est indélébile. Sillon sur nos cœurs et nos visages, la mémoire des violences subies taquine l'ordre vincible et menace de l'invertir.<sup>325</sup> (Notaris 2017, 8)

The main question of this chapter is what options are available to racialized inhabitants of MSHN in order to fight the structurally asymmetric power relations in France, given the obstacles to citizenship, overt political confrontation, and conflict discussed in the previous chapter. In other words, what options do racialized inhabitants have to be political? I answer this question by looking at the political imagination behind the actions of two collectives that I worked with: the Front Uni des Immigrations et des Quartiers Populaires (FUIQP) and Agir pour la Paix (APLP).

With the term political imagination I refer to mental images of how change can be achieved. Political is understood here in the sense of Rancière, as that which helps a person to shift from the role of victim to that of actor, and from subject to citizen by making collective claims heard. In the expression “political imagination of the fist and the dove”, the fist stands for a combative approach and for making the fault lines in society visible; the dove stands for peace discourse and the weaving of everyday relationships. I argue that the means of fighting that the FUIQP and APLP adopt are inspired respectively by the fist and the dove.

In order to describe the options open to citizens and collectives to fight what they consider as injustice, I draw on the Exit Voice Loyalty (EVL) argument of Hirschman (1970), which I adapted into the Exit Loyalty Fight (ELF) model. The option to fight can take either the form of voice, or violence (1). A prerequisite for having a voice in a context of subalternization is to have some power. Power is necessary to redress asymmetric power relations, and an obvious source of power is through numbers. As discussed in chapter 6 forming a we-group and speaking out in its name is a condition for being able to make claims and for having one's concerns taken into account. In which name to speak, and naming the we-group turned out to be a political and contested process in Villeneuve (2). One of the main points of conflict was whether to speak in name of racialized identities or not. The FUIQP and APLP found themselves on opposite ends of this debate, and that is one of the reasons why I present them in parallel fashion in this chapter. The FUIQP opted for forming a group that

<sup>325</sup> “Start from the past, taking the injuries as weapons and display (*arborer*) them proudly. The past will not be overhauled, nor will it be wiped out. The marks that past events have left are indelible, they are like scars on our hearts and faces. The memories of violence against us/ our experiences of violence tease the reasonable order and threaten to invert it” (Notaris 2017, 8, my translation).

defends the interest of the racialized, while the APLP refused to organize in name of racial or territorial categories (“we the racialized” or “we MSHN inhabitants”) despite the fact APLP members were also confronted with racism. What the APLP and FUIQP have in common is that they both look for ways to exercise political agency, both choose to fight against adversity by seeking to make their silenced voices heard. Where they differ is that each turned to a different political imagination which I present in detail in section 3 (FUIQP) and section 4 (APLP).

The FUIQP is a national organization, a “united front” of local collectives that have so far formed in five cities in France: Marseille, Montpellier, Saint Etienne, Lille, Paris-banlieue, and now Grenoble. It exists as a network of people that know each other and participate together in round-table discussions and debates, that produce and publicize a new anti-racist discourse in France of which the FUIQP 38 is the local relay. When I speak about the FUIQP from now on I refer to its formation in Grenoble (FUIQP 38). When I refer to the FUIQP as a wider movement encompassing its different local branches, of which Saïd Bouamama is the main thinker and spokesperson, I refer to it as the United Front. The United Front introduced a new antiracist vocabulary which is more combative than that of other anti-racist organization such as SOS racism. This breaks with a focus on “moral racism” concerned with racial prejudice and stereotypes, and instead is interested in “systemic racism” which Gregory et al. define as being “manifest socially, through institutions and practices that reproduce and essentialize difference and inequities” (2009, 617). The FUIQP looked for new publics to address their anti-racist and anti-colonialist program to, in particular those primarily concerned with racism, a public that was generally ignored by traditional anti-racism. The FUIQP has a special position in the political landscape of Villeneuve, where the large majority of associations receives funding from a myriad of public institutions and is managed by retired white middle-class neighborhood inhabitants. It adopted an autonomous mode of organizing, which in this context means being independent from public funding and white paternalism, and adopted a confrontational position with vocabulary that shocked the established. It opened space for agonism, both in Villeneuve and in Grenoble, forging a political identity as racialized and as immigrants in opposition to Whites. Its agonist stance against the mainstream socio-democratic left was difficult to understand and accept for among others older anti-racist organizations.<sup>326</sup> The actions of the FUIQP correspond to Springer’s ideal of what it means to be truly political, to “challenge the anti-political modes of aggregative and deliberative democracy” and to enact a “radicalization of democracy’s content and meaning” through provoking confrontation (agonism) in targeted spaces (2011, 530). The political imagination of the fist is nourished by images of mass mobilization by the marginalized and revolution to overthrow power structures, ideas dear to communism.

<sup>326</sup> An example is the *Centre d’Information Inter-Peuples* (CIIP), see interview with one of its members <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yD2SO6cFhKM>, accessed 10 novembre 2019.

APLP is driven by another imagination, that of peace and of liberating oneself from the effects of violence. The violent death of Kevin and Sofiane in 2012 is the direct reason for the creation of APLP, and its members were initially motivated to honor the memory of their friends/brother/cousin. The workshops it started to organize in 2015 became a space for discussion where a diverse group of people could express themselves and experiment with new ways to position themselves in society. The workshops were the result of an encounter between a group of friends and relatives of Kevin and Sofiane and Herrick Mouafo, a researcher and coordinator of Modus Operandi. The language of peace that APLP opted for in its workshops stands in stark contrast with the language of struggle and confrontation of the FUIQP. This choice by the APLP in favor of peace discourse can be interpreted as an initiative to keep the violence of their friends' deaths at a distance. The APLP initiative has gained considerable media and political attention, but its detractors criticize its apolitical character.

APLP is one of the few examples in Grenoble of the politicization of young racialized people that share an immigrant background and grew up in a marginalized neighborhood (some intermittently). The core members of APLP have the exact profile of people the FUIQP would like to reach out to: younger racialized inhabitants of MSHN; I noticed however that the FUIQP discourse is rather unattractive to APLP youth. Presenting these two collectives in parallel helps to better situate the FUIQP within the wider political landscape of Villeneuve. APLP serves as a counterpoint to the FUIQP and demonstrates that this political landscape, and that of MSHN more generally, is diverse and contested. A parallel presentation furthermore is helpful for illustrating the different options MSHN inhabitants have to fight neighborhood stigmatization, violence, discrimination, and racism: in other words, to claim a voice.

### 1) Options when facing racial injustice: fight, exit, or loyalty

When the claims to equality and equal rights of racialized inhabitants of MSHN are rendered inaudible and political conflict is made impossible, the most common options are **loyalty** to the status quo (one accepts the deleterious change in one's environment but makes no other change to one's behavior) and **exit** (abandoning the political sphere). Although less likely **violence** is another answer that people may opt for when confronted with deleterious change, it is part of the third option, to **fight**.

#### 1.1) *The Exit Loyalty Fight (ELF) model*

While the Exit Voice Loyalty (EVL) argument of Hirschman (1970) was originally developed for consumer choices, political scientists have adapted the model to political choices (Clark, Golder, and Golder 2013). Whereas Hirschman conceived of the deterioration in a situation as "accidental" or "random" (1970, 1,4), Clark et al. "choose to think of it as resulting from a deliberate choice by some actor" and looked in particular at the ways citizens respond in cases where "a state policy negatively affects their welfare" as a result of deleterious change

(Clark, Golder, and Golder 2013, 2). I draw on the analysis of the latter to describe the options citizens have when confronted with state policy or interventions that have a negative impact on them.

Where my application of the model differs from Clark et al. is that I do not deal with a sudden change in the conditions of citizens. The deleterious situation I am interested in, the embodied experiences of inequality, is not new if one looks at a macro-level. I nevertheless consider that this model applies to my study because this undesired situation is not stable either: the State responds to events on a local, national, and international level by introducing new rules and regulations. It is subsequently up to citizens to position themselves with regard to changing policies and to organize themselves according to the political opportunities.

In their period of formation in 2015 the political positions of the FUIQP and APLP were in interaction with an evolving political context in France with regard to Islam and police violence. A change in context that concerned both collectives was the paroxysmal violence of the Charlie Hebdo attack and of the Bataclan massacre, which resulted in a security backlash. The declaration of a state of emergency with a quasi-permanent character and exceptional security measures increased the generalized suspicion of Islam and racialized people. A national change in context in 2015 that was specifically relevant for the FUIQP was the acquittal of the two policemen who were indirectly involved in the death of Zyed and Bouna ten years earlier, whose deaths led to countrywide riots. A change in context on a local scale that was particularly relevant for APLP was the death of Kevin and Sofiane, and the media and political reactions that followed. On the international scale, the Black Lives Matter movement and the Syrian war have informed the positions of the FUIQP on police violence in France and on neo-colonial wars.

Figure 7.112 presents the model I developed, adapting the earlier ELV model. I replaced Hirschman's category of **voice by fight** because violence is an additional option of political action (see also Torre et al. 2006). I decided to include voice and violence in one overarching category because I consider that voice and violence are different modes of action that can both be mobilized to fight what is considered an undesirable situation. I understand fighting as a means to engage in collective overt confrontation, this may use either violent (violence) or nonviolent (voice) methods. I am interested in collective violence that seeks to make some kind of statement and that is not purely instrumental (used to obtain material gain); and in particular the setting on fire of public buildings and the burning of cars, tires, and garbage bins following the death of a neighborhood inhabitant in relation to a police intervention.

These four options differ in their degree of confrontation (y-axis) and how they organize this confrontation/non-confrontation, through individual or through collective action (x-axis).

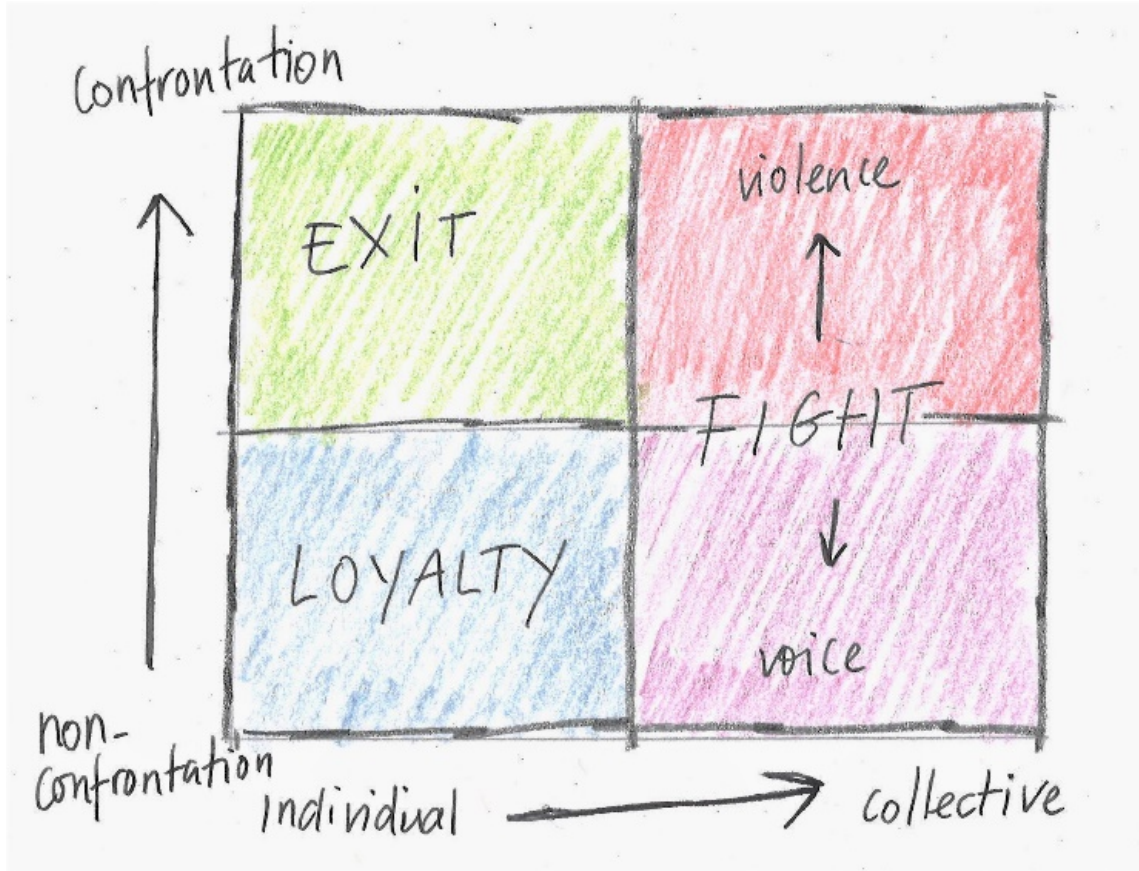


Figure 7.112 Analytical model Exit, Loyalty, Fight (voice and violence).

In the rest of this section I develop each of these options in more detail, and explain in which ways they correspond to types of agency that I observed in the field.

### 1.2) Loyalty

When a citizen accepts the situation, or rather the change in the situation, and does not change its behavior accordingly the choice is one of loyalty. Loyalty is in most cases not a positive choice, as people are nonetheless confronted with deleterious or negative change. In addition, one should remain critical of the term “accept” (as already mentioned in the previous chapter) which I use to mean visibly accept in the sense that they do not engage in visible action to contest a given situation. If they do not make their disagreement known through exposing their voices and bodies in public space, this does not mean however that they accept, in the sense that they agree with, a certain political decision. The position of people who opt for loyalty may vary from a comprehensive position, to not agreeing at all. Whether they will express this disagreement depends on whether people are willing to make it public or not and enter into opposition. If they subsequently engage in individual or collective behavior depends on factors such as one’s insertion in existing networks and the obstacles to collective organizing. When overt confrontation is not possible according to



Mouffe “apathy and disaffection with political participation” are likely responses (2000). Pierre-Didier Tchetché Apea described apathy and disaffection resulting from the conviction that change is not possible, and from refined methods (*méthodes raffinées*) to keep people away from the political domain. Isolation, keeping a low profile, and not expressing one’s disagreement has repercussion on personal well-being, resulting e.g. in low self-esteem. The loyalty option corresponds to the interiorization of inferiority framework as it is difficult to challenge one’s position if one feels inferior. As mentioned, loyalty is therefore not necessarily a choice: in the case of hegemony the option to fight may be too costly. Mohamed gave the example that protesting against French colonial rule in Algeria seemed unimaginable for landless farmers, at least among the farmers he was acquainted with.

Il n’y avait aucun esprit de protestation chez les “*fellahs*” (landless farmers) que nous étions. [...] La révolte contre les français nous semblait inimaginable. (Boukhatem 2014, 14)

Mohammed’s story confirms once more the necessity of an intersectional approach to race and class: the extreme poverty, isolation, and subjugation meant that the energy of landless farmers was focused on survival, which was an impediment for resistance.

Loyalty is also the choice of those who opt for peace rather than justice. In the following example Tassadit prefers to accept injustice if that guarantees that she be left in peace, and she also calls for respect for authority. Her position is quite typical for one type of discourse in the neighborhood, which I associate with the loyalty option. I make considerable space for Tassadit’s point of view [Box 7.41] because this type of viewpoint is underrepresented in my thesis. Tassadit comments on the revolts that broke out following the sexual violation of Theo Luhaka during a police check, discussed in the previous chapter.

#### **Box 7.41 Choosing peace over justice, the story of Tassadit**

Tassadit commented that she could in no way support the revolts, and that other means of expression would be preferable in this case: calm demonstration and reasoning with people. She mostly blamed the parents of youth involved in revolts for not having educated their children better.

Moi je ne trouve ça pas normal [que les jeunes cassent et se révoltent contre les violences policières]. Ce n’est pas à cause d’un [une personne, Théo Luhaka], que tout le pays va se détruire [doit s’enflammer]. Qu’est-ce qui s’est passé à cause de ce gars-là ? C’était dur de brûler des voitures [...] de manifester pour ça. Il y a la loi mais de tuer encore des policiers, de brûler leurs voitures, ça aussi ce n’est pas honnête. Il faut être raisonnable quand on défend quelque chose, il faut bien le défendre mais ça ? Je viens du peuple, je suis musulman[e], je suis ... comment disons ? Ça ne m’intéresse pas mais je suis d’accord. Même s’il est mon cousin, même s’il vient de ma famille, même si c’est mon frère, non : **on ne soigne pas le mal avec le mal**. On raisonne les gens, on manifeste calmement. Nous ne sommes pas d’accord avec ce qu’il s’est passé, on ne détruit pas le pays. (Tassadit, informal discussion, 23/03/2017).

Despite the fact that she is in favor of calm demonstrations, I consider that she fits the loyalty option because in the period I have known Tassadit she has not participated in demonstrations. She does not believe she can change the world, so she fixes an objective for her personal life. She speaks from the point of view of a person that has experienced civil war, who prefers peace to a violent claim to justice, who prefers to accept the unequal distribution of resources if it can prevent the violence of hatred induced by inequality. Inequality for her is first and foremost about the difference between rich and poor, and she reflects on how to deal with this difference. She felt that each of us has the freedom to decide one's goal in life and the goal she set was to love. In an interview with Tassadit my colleague Coline countered that "maybe, when one has experienced important forms of injustice, it is more difficult to love another" (*peut-être, quand on a vécu de grosses injustices, c'est difficile d'arriver à aimer*) and Tassadit agreed that indeed, this makes us very angry (*Oui d'accord. Ça nous met très en colère*) but still maintains that we have a choice of what to do with this anger. She explained in the interview that probably her position as a Muslim (woman) influenced her viewpoint. Her faith inspired her insistence on the necessity to pardon, and the language of rights is not very relevant for her: "*Si vous n'aimez pas le mal pour vous, vous ne l'aimez pas pour l'autre. Ça c'est ma justice*".

Vous savez, je vous parle comme une croyante, et peut-être c'est différent pour une croyante. Mais on ne se dit pas : "Pourquoi le pauvre il est pauvre ?". Si on sait [connait] bien sa religion, et on connaît bien son Dieu, alors on **accepte** d'être pauvre. Parce que c'est le Dieu qui m'a mis sur ce chemin (interview, 27/5/2017).

The explanation of Tassadit that her religious convictions keep her from wondering whether something is just or not fits the loyalty option because the result is that she accepts her fate and will not contest it. The position of Tassadit is similar to the position of those that Chaambi qualified as the turbaned yes-men.

Religious convictions could also fit the exit option if they lead to abandoning the political sphere entirely. For Chaambi though, religion is a source of inspiration to fight injustice, not through violence but through voice.

### *1.3) Exit*

According to Clark et al. people opt for exit when they accept the change and alter their behavior to optimize their conditions in the new situation. The same reservations to the term "accept" apply here [see Box 7.42]. The example Clark et al. provide of the exit option is that, when "a citizen does not like the fact that her state [in the context of the US] has introduced a handgun ban, she could accept the situation and simply move to another state where handguns are allowed" (2013, 3). My interpretation of the exit option is slightly different because the possibilities to escape from state power in France are rather limited. For many racialized people in Villeneuve emigration is more a thought they play with than a realistic option, a more likely option is to abandon the political sphere. In the latter case,

people express disapproval not collectively through either voice or violence but they undermine state power without a voice, through an act that remains under the political radar because these acts do not become visible. I see the exit option as a form of non-publicized personal resistance.

**Box 7.42 [theoretical excursion]: A critical note to the term "accepting"**

In his seminal work, *Weapons of the weak* (2000), the American anthropologist Scott calls into question the idea of acceptance of one's inferior position. He observed that peasants in Malaysia resist domination through everyday forms of resistance, and he demonstrated that forms other than open confrontation are widely practiced in order to subvert the power of the elite and to avoid repressive measures. Similarly, Dorlin's work on resistance during slavery in the French slave colonies challenges the idea of the internalization of inferiority (Dorlin 2018), in particular the way Bourdieu conceived it as "symbolic violence" with regard to the internalization of masculine domination in Algeria (Kabylie) (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007). Dorlin's objection is that the absence of visible contestation or resistance does not yet mean acceptance. Despite the fact that I agree with Scott and Dorlin that, as researchers we must be better attuned to perceive forms that resist domination, I demonstrated in chapter 5 that experiences of inequality get under one's skin and make it difficult to defy one's marginalized position, which may give the false impression that this situation is accepted. People thus do not simply accept their subaltern condition; they will always use the space they have to exercise some freedom and seek to negotiate this space.

Those who individually say "NTM" (*nique ta mère*), "Fuck France" (*la France, je l'emmerde*) or who justify stealing from Carrefour because of French colonial rule in Northern Africa have chosen the exit option: they do not engage in collective action to make their discontent heard but simply seek to be a nuisance. People opting for this choice feel that the only power they have left is to be a nuisance. Being a nuisance can both fit the exit or fight category: if the power of nuisance – the power to subvert - is carried out individually and does not involve collective physical presence in public space, then I consider this form of resistance part of the exit option; if it is organized collectively, e.g. in the form of collective violence (see below), or publicly, e.g. in the form of an artistic performance, then I consider this part of the fighting option. In opposition to loyalty, people opting for exit do not support the status quo, they withdraw their support. Exit is however not only about withdrawing because in withdrawing support one can simultaneously be destructive, on an individual level. One can think for example of the biblical figure Samson, to give a paroxysmal example. Samson made sure he brought down the columns of the temple when the Philistines took him captive, leading to its collapse and the death of the Philistines in it, as well as his own death. Under exit I thus include the forms of individual nuisance operated without accompanying public statements.

## 1.4) Fight

The fight option is about making visible and/or audible, it is about making public, about entering into opposition, about making a collective statement that is not necessarily vocal. This is very close to my definition of what is political, based on Rancière, as that which can challenge the current order. In short, the fight option is about being political.

Much ink has been spilled over the question of when an act can be considered political and where to draw the line between the political and the apolitical.<sup>327</sup> Many terms have been introduced to qualify the grey area of the 'not-quite political', such as pre-political (Ruby 2000), proto-political (Mauger 2006), infrapolitical (J. C. Scott 2000; 2012) and postpolitical (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014) but not all authors agree on the definition of what is political. Following Rancière's definition an act functions politically if through it 'those that have no part' obtain to be taken into account. The political is "disruptive" (Dikeç 2017) and consists of an "antagonistic moment" (Dikeç 2012, 674). Others have argued that this definition of political is too narrow (Beveridge and Koch 2017). In their critique of the post-political city thesis which draws attention to the depoliticization of cities, they insist on the contingency between politicization and depoliticization, and on political agency beyond the antagonistic moment. This is closer to Scott's concept of infrapolitics, which refers to a kind of politics that avoids direct confrontation but opens up to a "subterranean world of political conflict" (2012, 113). His analysis is limited to contexts in which direct confrontation would be too costly, and in which direct claims of those at the lower end would not be heard. For Scott, the political lies not in the individual act itself, but in the accumulation of everyday acts that together can have a massive effect. I consider this type of political action as the exit option. The *Weapons of the Weak* framework of infra-politics of the oppressed is about being a nuisance to the powerful without entering into direct confrontation. Gaining the feeling that it is legitimate to openly question supposed superiority is a long process, and as I have demonstrated in chapter 5, involves the renouncing the dream that one day if one tries hard enough one may be considered a "normal" mainstream citizen. As mentioned, the fight category covers two modes of action: violence and voice.

### 1.4.a) Violence

If one has the feeling that one is not heard, that one cannot speak, what is the point of making a vocal claim? In that case violence can become a viable option. Rather than treating violence as a general *modus operandi*, my comments focus on a specific form of violence in Villeneuve, that of setting objects on fire.

While the dominant may well require that post-colonial immigrants and MSHN inhabitants "ask for their rights politely and that if they have still not obtained them after 40 years, that

<sup>327</sup> An earlier version of this paragraph written by myself has been published in De Backer, Dijkema, and Horschelmann (2019).

they act as if nothing's the matter" (Delphy 2008, 135–36),<sup>328</sup> Springer explains that eruptions of violence are only to be expected "if those 'from below' perceive those 'from above' as unwilling to listen, evidenced through a denial of public space and a refusal to recognize them as legitimate political adversaries, then tensions will mount and may erupt into violence" (2011, 553–54). One of the APLP members formulated this option as follows:

Celui qui souffre chez lui ne peut plus accepter que derrière il se passe des choses qui ne sont pas justifiées, qui sont contraires à l'humanité tu sais ? Donc ça finit en violence. De toute façon il reste quoi ? La violence est la dernière expression. Et nous [Agir pour la Paix] on travaille sur la communication avant la violence. Eux [qui emploient la violence pour se faire entendre] ils ont déjà communiqué mais ils n'ont pas été entendus, donc dernière étape la violence ; après il ne reste plus rien. Quand ils ont voulu s'exprimer ils n'ont pas été écoutés, en tout cas c'est leur message. Leur discours n'est pas passé, donc on casse tout.  
(Steven, interview with Mayare, 01/05/2018)

Racialized inhabitants in Villeneuve differ in the extent to which they feel heard or not, depending notably on their experience with activism, and on the degree to which they have tried to make themselves heard. Two participants confirmed that the radicalization of opinions and the decision to use violence can be explained by the existence of claims that are not recognized. An invited speaker and a resource person, who both have had extensive experience with political organizing in name of MSHN, interpret the 2005 riots and Islamist violence in France in these terms. Pierre-Didier Tchetché-Apea explained the 2005 riots as the expression of "a refusal to be assigned to a certain identity, to be reduced to a status that one can no longer bear because one feels entitled to be treated differently" (UP debate, 26/04/2018).<sup>329</sup> According to Abdallah, the same issues that were formulated 50 years ago in social terms now get to be formulated in cultural terms. He places the attraction of Islamism in a long-term time frame of struggle, and a long experience of not being heard. According to him people that have felt rejected have found some recognition in Islamism.

Les grèves dans les foyers Sonacotra pour de meilleures conditions de vie illustrent le fait que les immigrés commencent à revendiquer une situation plus viable. Ou encore les grèves à Renault, les luttes syndicales. [...] Ce sont les causes de la sédimentation de la situation sociale qui ont cristallisé une certaine revendication d'une place dans la société française, née de la situation qu'on avait par rapport à l'immigration. Petit à petit, dans les quartiers, les choses ont commencé à monter, notamment la relation avec la police. Comme dans tous les pays, quand un groupe qui commence à s'organiser pour revendiquer devient un groupe dangereux. Plutôt que d'envoyer des signaux politiques, on a oublié que ces gens avaient

<sup>328</sup> In French: "ce que les dominants attendent, c'est qu'on demande ses droits poliment et que si on ne les obtient toujours pas après 40 ans, qu'on fasse comme si de rien n'était".

<sup>329</sup> In French: "Ces révoltes ont été le refus d'être assigné à une certaine identité, d'être réduit à un statut qu'on ne peut plus supporter car on a vocation à être traité autrement".

des revendications, des spécificités qu'il fallait reconnaître et qu'on n'a pas pris en compte. La montée de l'islamisme s'est appuyée là-dessus. Suite à la révolution iranienne, le wahhabisme a commencé à s'implanter dans les pays occidentaux, notamment en France, ce qui a permis à des personnes qui se sentaient rejetées de recevoir une forme de reconnaissance. Il ne faut pas oublier que la question de l'immigration a été, à mon avis, un des déclencheurs des situations sociales qui se sont aggravées. Dans l'Histoire, il y a une continuité. (Abdallah, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

Violence becomes an option in a context where the use of words does not make sense for those who lack access to the channels of verbal expression. If they cannot make themselves heard, what does lie in their power is the ability to make themselves visible and to do harm (*pouvoir de nuire*). They act out of a frustration with words that have become “semantic prisons that label, stigmatize and confine”, they choose instead to speak through acts (Boubeker 2010, 40).

This approach to violence breaks with the common interpretation that violence is a sign of anomie (Dubet 2003), of powerlessness, and/or a desperate act to exist in some way (Garnier 2007, Wacquant 2006, Zizek 2005). While I welcome that the latter three authors put forward the agency of rioters, I disagree with the interpretation that rioting youth turn themselves against capitalist and neo-liberal oppression. They turn themselves indeed against the lack of economic opportunities, but my experience with youth groups in Villeneuve (who for the most part would not participate in riots) demonstrates that anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal discourse is not the vocabulary they use to frame their grievances. Moreover, interpretations of riots should pay more attention to the proximate causes of violence, i.e. the anger with regard to a specific experience of humiliation, often (but not only) related to police violence. According to rumors in the neighborhood the high school was set on fire as a result of a perceived injustice that perpetrators wanted to redress, and the canteen of the Football Club was set on fire to contest a recent decision to restrict access in order to bring the dealing of soft drugs on its premises to a halt (field notes, 22/09/17). Setting things on fire is a form of fighting mainly for younger men in the neighborhood.

The act of setting something on fire has an important performative function, it produces spectacular images that make visible feelings of anger and revolt. Those involved in urban revolts use the hypervisibilization of violence to publicize their anger. I consider the burning of cars, tires, garbage bins, and schools as smoke signals. Hence, fire becomes a means of public address. The only space available to publicize their anger is urban public space (Garnier 2007a). According to Springer, "public space offers a spatial medium to the frustrations subalterns feel with regard to systems of archy, neoliberal or otherwise (Springer 2011a, 553). It is there that their public address can meet its audience. Lighting fires frequently serves as a provocation aimed at the police force, as the latter are supposed to accompany firefighters in Villeneuve, given the specific security regime that the area is

subject to. In the case of the 2010 riots this was certainly a part of the motivation; but fire also has the performative function of making a statement in public space [Figure 7.113]. Cars, street furniture and walls (graffiti statements) were used in July 2010 to express anger about the death of a man. The security forces are the target of this message, but they also have a larger audience. The chosen location for the exhibition of flames, a parking lot at the edge of the neighborhood, should be taken into account. Three reasons may have played a part in the choice of this location: it was here that Karim was shot; a car park is a logical place to burn cars; and the parking area functions as a transition zone between what is considered to be inside and outside of the neighborhood. A statement made on the border of the neighborhood is most likely addressed to those outside of it, but from a space that is considered theirs.



*Figure 7.113 Cars set on fire during the riots in Villeneuve in 2010. (Photo Dauphiné Libéré, 19/07/2010, Archives départementales)*

Apart from the objects set on fire during the 2010 riots in Villeneuve, and the 2019 riots mainly in Mistral but also affecting Villeneuve, four buildings were set on fire in Villeneuve during the period of my field research [Table 7.20]. In this list I have not included the frequent but isolated cases of cars being set on fire, since neighborhood inhabitants generally do not attribute a political dimension to them, but explain them as a means to obtain insurance benefits.

**Table 7.20 Buildings set on fire in Villeneuve 2015 – 2018**

18 April 2015	Club house of the Villeneuve Football Club (AJAV) <sup>330</sup>
18 April 2015	Theater Prémol located on the border between Villeneuve and Village-Olympique and next to the Geography Institute <sup>331</sup>
11 June 2017	High school in Villeneuve, Collège Lucie Aubrac, situated in the middle of the park in Villeneuve [Figure 7.115]
28 January 2018	LIDL supermarket located on the border between Villeneuve and Eybens <sup>332</sup>



Figure 7.114 Local newspaper coverage of the 2010 riots in Villeneuve. (Photo, Dauphiné Libéré, 18/07/2010).



Figure 7.115 Local newspaper coverage of the High School in Villeneuve set on fire. (Photo, Dauphiné Libéré, 12/06/2017)

Since rioters know that their voices will not be heard, most of them do not even try to speak and instead choose silence. A postcolonial reading of riots leads Piettre to the conclusion that it was not an incapacity to speak, but a refusal of interlocution that characterized the 2005 riots in France (2013). I agree with Piettre that these riots should be interpreted as a

<sup>330</sup> Grenoble: les installations du club de foot de la Villeneuve dévastées par le feu, *Dauphiné Libéré*, 18/04/2015, <https://www.ledauphine.com/isere-sud/2015/04/18/grenoble-les-installations-du-club-de-foot-de-la-villeneuve-devastees-par-le-feu>, 19/11/2020.

<sup>331</sup> “Grenoble: le théâtre Prémol détruit par un violent incendie,” *France Bleu Isère*, 19/05/2015, <https://www.francebleu.fr/infos/faits-divers-justice/grenoble-le-theatre-premol-detruit-par-un-violent-incendie-1429433989>, accessed 19/11/2020.

<sup>332</sup> “Incendie du magasin Lidl à Eybens en 2018: deux mineurs interpellés,” *Dauphiné Libéré*, 19/12/2019 <https://www.ledauphine.com/edition-grenoble-vercors/2019/12/19/incendie-du-magasin-lidl-deux-mineurs-interpelles>, accessed 19/11/2020.



refusal to speak. It is because rioters understand that they cannot speak that they choose alternative means of communication, and in this sense they are in competition with other neighborhood inhabitants who are involved in other forms of political action. Riots allow for a direct confrontation with the State without the mediation of politics, according to Piettre, who described them as a form of “body politics” (2013, 125).

Si le corps est ici le vecteur et l’analyseur du mouvement social, c’est parce qu’il est irréductible à un discours toujours prompt à le trahir, à le traduire dans un langage qui n’est pas le sien, celui du dominant. On est ici confronté à la limite intrinsèque à tout mouvement social de subalternes (*Ibid.*).

If rioters chose to communicate through the body by setting things on fire in the neighborhood, could we interpret igniting fires as a form of auto-mutilation, as did Mohamed Mehmache for example? Mehmache, director of AClefeu [Enough fire], interprets the burning of public buildings that provide social services like schools or day care centers as a form of auto-mutilation.<sup>333</sup>

Il faut bien expliquer que ce n’est pas des émeutes, que c’est des révoltes sociales et que derrière ça il y a un vrai message, que c’est une sorte d’auto-mutilation, c’est un suicide collectif quand on commence à brûler sa propre école, ses voitures ainsi de suite; qu’on est simplement en train de dire que nous n’en pouvons plus, qu’on vit des situations très aggravantes et qu’il va falloir agir (Mohamed Mehmache, France Culture, 29/03/2018)

He qualified the revolts as a collective suicide that is a political statement. I link this observation to Spivak’s reading of suicide through immolation as a political act. In 1926 a young Indian woman, who happened to be Spivak’s great-aunt on her mother’s side, committed suicide and left a message to accompany this violence against herself that clearly framed her act as anti-colonial resistance. However her sister, to whom the letter was addressed, explained her self-destruction as a desperate act of love (De Kock [interview with] 1992, 45). The message was not identified as a radical gesture of revolt and political protest, and this is also the case of the riots and revolts in 2005, which are not recognized as political acts. Both could be interpreted as examples of violence turned against the self out of despair due to the incapacity to create change in the world beyond oneself. While tempting, I disagree with this interpretation of auto-mutilation, and I instead interpret setting fires as a means to provoke a direct, physical, confrontation with public authority (police, fire-fighters). Flames make dramatic pictures that are widely spread by news channels, and have a much larger reach than demonstrations in the neighborhood. Their political impact is however limited because since rioters do not speak they have no influence on the interpretations of these events, and mostly they lead to strengthening of the security discourse and to measures that negatively affect racialized inhabitants of MSHN.

<sup>333</sup> “La marche des banlieues et après: La troisième génération ou le rêve américain,” France Culture, 29/03/2018, <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/lcd-la-serie-documentaire/la-marche-des-banlieues-et-apres-44-la-troisieme-generation-ou-le-reve-americain>, accessed 30/03/2018.

#### *1.4.b) Voice*

The fourth and last option is **voice**, which corresponds to a situation when citizens engage in forms of direct action to change their environment, for example through complaining, protesting, demonstrating *etc.* There are obviously also individual forms of voice that may have a political impact if they are incarnated by powerful figures. Voices of marginalized only have a chance to be heard if they are able to gain power through their number. I am therefore mainly interested in collective vocal statements that seek to challenge the status quo. The rest of the chapter is dedicated to this form of fighting, looking at the FUIQP and APLP collectives.

#### *1.5) FUIQP and APLP choose different ways to fight*

In this subsection I explain why I study the FUIQP and APLP together, despite their divergences. First I discuss the points on which they diverge and then the points they have in common.

The context of APLP's politicization resists a direct comparison with the FUIQP. In the case of APLP it was physical violence (the death of their friends) that was the reason for people to come together and to take political action; in the case of FUIQP it was the direct violence of the police force and their impunity, as well as the epistemic violence of racism (in particular islamophobia) and the security responses that followed the terrorist attacks that were the reason for creating a collective. While the FUIQP clearly deals with a deleterious change imposed by the State, this is not the case of APLP. One could therefore argue that it does not fit the ELF model, which deals specifically with state policy or interventions negatively impacting citizens. However, the core groups of the APLP were also strongly affected by discrimination, racism and islamophobia, as I explain in the next section, and for this reason I consider that the ELF model is applicable to APLP.

Rather than denouncing police violence, members of APLP's core group initially called for a severe police and justice system, who they considered as allies in their combat against physical insecurity. The type of justice this core group was looking for was the harsh punishment of those involved in the death of their friends and brother, motivated by a desire for revenge. Some were even sympathetic to the security discourse of the extreme right (field notes, 22/05/2015).

FUIQP and APLP also differ in the type of we-group they seek to form, and in whose name they seek to speak, which is a topic in section 2.

APLP and FUIQP take a different stance on violence and nonviolence. In their conception of violence APLP stresses its destructive power and the FUIQP sees violence also as a form of resistance against oppression, if its aim is to contest domination and state violence, to break submission and to undertake action. APLP calls for nonviolence, which it interprets as saying no to violence; the FUIQP interprets this call as advocating pacification. The FUIQP associate

nonviolence with Martin Luther King's proposal to turn the other cheek, to which they prefer Malcom X's fist.

APLP chooses to speak the language of peace, to create spaces of solidarity, and to create awareness based on a shared idea that choice is possible, whereas the FUIQP chooses a conflictual approach and seeks to confront structural sources of injustice.

A reason why a parallel presentation of these collectives is nevertheless of interest is that they both promote the fight option in case of adversity, and they aim to transform people from victims (that fled or were loyal) into actors that affirm themselves as citizens.

In addition APLP and FUIQP have in common that they carved out a space for autonomy, in which participants of their workshops and events can gain self-confidence, where they can prepare to verbally defend themselves and to address a larger audience. In both spaces individuals become part of a collective, prepare common positions, confront them with a wider audience and work on the idea that their voices count, that they are entitled to make demands.

I consider the spaces FUIQP and APLP open up as spaces for agonism in which a confrontation of ideas becomes possible. Agonistic space breaks with the consensus that deliberative democracy advocates, and makes overt conflict impossible. In agonist spaces experiences of forms of injustice are made audible and people can learn or practice self-defense (*espace d'apprentissage de l'auto-défense*). For example, the FUIQP created public debate on issues that the government would like to silence, and APLP created a political platform for its members.

#### 1.6) How physical violence revealed the experience of inequality

In this subsection I further develop my argument of why I consider that APLP fits the ELF model, despite the fact that the State is not directly responsible for the violence that is at the onset of their mobilization. While its initial encounters were about the transformation of individual pain to collective healing, APLP came to be about transforming mourning into political action. The political context in which APLP was created meant that rapidly themes similar to those of the FUIQP were on their weekly agenda. Although the violent death of their friends or relatives was the original reason for APLP participants to come together, they share similar experiences of inequality in their everyday lives as the ones evoked in the previous chapter. For example when I discussed their feelings of anger during a group interview with APLP youth (Rachid, Housseem, Steven),<sup>334</sup> one of them, Rachid, explained that dealing with anger had been part of their lives for a long time [see Box 7.43 for background information about Rachid].

<sup>334</sup> This group interview, which I did with a journalist from Radio Grésivaudan, was broadcast on 20/11/2014: Radio Grésivaudan, *Comprendre et agir sur la violence*, broadcast, available on <http://www.radio-gresivaudan.org/Comprendre-et-agir-sur-la-violence.html>, accessed 19/11/2019.

### Box 7.43 Introducing Rachid

Rachid was a very close friend of Kevin's, and Kevin's death prevented him from being able to envisage any kind of future. He did not pursue further education, nor was he working at the moment of the beginning of APLP, and he struggled with symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome. He had his mind fixed on the trial against those responsible for Kevin and Sofiane's death that took place from 2 November until 12 December 2015. He was the only plaintiff that was not a family member, and carried the burden of the emotional stress involved in the face-to-face confrontation with the perpetrators in court.

Rachid explained that even before the violent death of his best friend he was already familiar with anger, an emotion he became acquainted with during his high school years and the period that followed as a result of the lack of professional opportunities, as the quote below demonstrates.

La colère, on en a toujours eu, de toutes façons on n'a pas attendu ça [la mort de leurs amis] pour avoir de la colère. Dès qu'on ne trouve pas de travail, dès qu'on sort de l'école, dès qu'on se déscolarise, tout ça. On a de la colère, on la garde en espérant des jours meilleurs. (Rachid, radio interview, 01/07/2014)

In an informal discussion, he added that he also felt anger with regard to the lack of professional perspectives for his sisters, who wear the *hidjab* (field notes, 22/05/2012). Rachid comes from a religious family, and he is probably the one in APLP who takes religious interdictions most seriously. He dealt with his anger by hoping that things would change and by believing in justice in the afterlife (the exit option). Rachid's experiences of inequality were shared by other members of APLP, such as Alicia, the cousin of Sofiane. Alicia felt this inequality when she entered a prestigious high school in the city-center, when she had to find an internship, and at university. She tried to understand the othering and the different treatment she had noticed: was it due to her immigrant origins, her Arab name, her Muslim style of dress?

Est-ce que c'est parce que je suis enfant d'immigrés? Est-ce que c'est parce que je porte un nom arabe? Est-ce que c'est parce que je montre l'Islam dans ma tenue vestimentaire? Est-ce que...? J'ai tout mêlé en fait et j'essaie de comprendre pourquoi, pourquoi tout est inégal comme ça? (Alicia, interview, 01/05/2019)

The experience of inequality that Rachid and Alicia mentioned was reinforced following the Charlie Hebdo massacre, which coincided with the launch of APLP's first workshops. This political context probably contributed to its attraction for both Muslim and non-Muslim youth, as it represented an opportunity to meet. The anti-Muslim feelings that the massacre roused in France further reinforced APLP participants' sense of insecurity in society, translating in some cases into acute fears about their physical safety. Alicia explained for

example that she was very afraid that Muslims would be even more stigmatized, wondering what future she had in France, and playing with the idea of an exit option.

Alors en 2015, avec Charlie Hebdo, au début j'avais un peu peur quand tout ça s'est passé. J'ai eu peur parce que je me suis dit, on va mélanger ma religion à la religion des personnes qui ont fait ça, tandis que pour moi on n'a pas du tout la même religion, donc je me suis dit bon bah on va être stigmatisé encore une fois, il va peut-être y avoir des problèmes encore une fois. Quel est mon avenir en France en fait? (Alicia, interview, 1/05/2018)

Alicia already suffered from panic attacks following her cousin's death and this feeling of fear was further reinforced in the period after Charlie Hebdo. Her experience is similar to that of Mayare, another member of APLP, who became involved with APLP after the workshops it organized at her high school. Mayare recalled that receiving the information about the Charlie Hebdo massacre was a similar experience to hearing the news about Kevin and Sofiane's death, which she experienced in a very physical way as blows to her own body. Rather rapidly, this feeling transformed into an all-pervasive fear of being a target of an anti-Muslim attack in public space, impeding her mobility within the city (see Chapter 3), as the following interview extract demonstrates, a response to the question about her experience of the Charlie Hebdo event on the 7th of January 2015.

Au tout début, ce que je savais était qu'il y avait des gens tués au nom de Dieu et je me rappelle qu'on était devant la télé avec ma famille et que j'étais vide quoi, que c'était horrible et que les larmes tombaient toutes seules. Voilà c'était horrible. Ça me rappelait, ça m'a fait la même chose que quand on a appris pour Kevin et Sofiane et que je lisais les articles et chaque mot me frappait comme si c'était moi qui recevait les coups quoi, et que c'est horrible [...] Parce que j'avais peur... Ah oui parce que j'avais de la peine et tout de suite j'avais peur pour moi, pour ma mère, pour tous les gens qui sont visiblement musulmans. [...] Pourtant je ne me suis jamais sentie comme ça quoi. J'ai commencé à envisager de partir ailleurs quoi et voilà. Il commence à y avoir des attentats contre les musulmans et je me dis... voilà..., ça va exploser et on ne sait même plus où se réfugier quoi. Limite je pense à ça. Je ne pense même pas aux gens qui sont morts. Je me dis je vais me cacher où moi? Où est-ce que je vais me cacher? Et c'est horrible de penser comme ça et de ne pas pouvoir prendre le temps d'avoir de la peine pour les gens et être toujours sur ses gardes. (Mayare, interview, 07/07/2017)

Mayare shares with Alicia this experience of fear, and of being bothered by the fact that the fear for her own safety and that of other Muslims overtakes her empathy with the victims of terrorist attacks; something which she said takes away part of her humanity. Both young women also share the fact they have in consideration an exit option, and imagine their possible future outside of France, in the United Kingdom.

Feelings of inequality were also reinforced through responses of public institutions to the deaths of Kevin and Sofiane. These tragic deaths were for the family, relatives, and friends an encounter with racism that took the form of media statements and the policy responses of state representatives. Relatives and, albeit to a lesser extent, friends of the victims were confronted with the fact that public opinion (mainstream media, state representatives, and views expressed on social media) did not simply approach them as victims of an atrocity that could have happened to anyone. They came to realize that the above-mentioned opinion makers see them through the lens of geographic specificity, as inhabitants of MSHN, and that this geographic location seemed to suffice as explanation for the violence. The four examples presented below demonstrate in what way friends and relatives were confronted with experiences of inequality, ranging from prejudice to racism. The first deals with racist opinions in social media; the second with the way youth violence came to be framed as a spatial problem by a police statement; the third concerns the decision of the Prime Minister to react with a territorial policy; and the fourth deals with the racialized categories employed by the judge in the court case against those involved in the deaths of Kevin and Sofiane.

Firstly, Alicia recalled the racist comments she read on the Facebook page that was created in commemoration of Kevin and Sofiane, basically stating that the death of two [racialized] youth in a MSHN was good riddance.

J'ai pu voir sur Facebook que certains mettaient "ben ça en fera deux de moins dans les quartiers", des choses tellement blessantes quand on te dit: "Ton cousin est décédé, ben ça en fera un de moins dans le quartier donc c'est mieux", ben c'est dingue en fait. (Alicia, interview, 01/05/2018)

Second, the police interpretation of the violent confrontation between youth in Echirolles that led to Kevin and Sofiane's death was based on prejudice: it was automatically interpreted as a crime-related settling of scores (*règlement de compte*). The police presumed that the victims of the violence in Echirolles and Villeneuve were criminals. The families of the deceased also perceived this presumption of guilt in the hospital (Monkam-Noubissi 2014) and in televised media that depicted Kevin and Sofiane as criminals, all of which further added to their feelings of injustice. For example, Alicia remembered that:

J'ai entendu à un moment qu'ils disaient que c'était un règlement de compte entre des jeunes de deux quartiers différents et que ça se passait souvent comme ça à Echirolles. [...] J'en ai pleuré de nerfs parce que tout ça, je l'avais vu sur TF1, donc je me suis dit, c'est diffusé dans toute la France et on dit que mon cousin a été quelqu'un comme ça et qu'il est décédé et c'est comme ça. [...] Ça m'a révoltée et je me suis dit: "Non mais c'est n'importe quoi". Ça veut dire que, à chaque fois qu'il va y avoir un décès d'un jeune, on va dire ben en fait c'est limite pas grave, c'est des règlements de compte et puis voilà. (Alicia, interview, 01/05/2018)

One day after the initial police statement that these deaths were the result of score-settling between criminals, the State prosecutor (Procureur de la République à Grenoble) rectified this position in the press, after the families' intervention, stating that the victims of this violence indeed were not criminals, and that the violence did not take place in the context of a "struggle over territory" (*appropriation du territoire*), "gangs" or in the context of drug traffic "which we see sometimes [in these neighborhoods]".<sup>335</sup>

The third example is that despite rectification by the police, the immediate political response of the Prime Minister was nevertheless to add Echirolles and Villeneuve-Grenoble to the State's selection of special security zones, framing the problem of this violence as specific to certain kinds of neighborhoods<sup>336</sup>. This reaction contributes to the representation of violence as a spatial problem, producing "a discourse that binds violence in place" (Springer 2011b, 90). In the printed press for example Kevin and Sofiane's death was associated with the riots that had taken place in Villeneuve in 2010, while in reality the two have little in common, apart from the fact that they were both worthy of a visit from the President of the Republic.<sup>337</sup> In addition, no link was established with other deaths through youth violence that took place in Grenoble and its surroundings since 2010. Springer argues that the representation of certain spaces as by definition violent is the outcome of orientalism, functioning as a key method of distortion: "while violence sits in places in terms of the way in which we perceive its manifestation as a localized and embodied experience, this very idea is challenged when place is reconsidered as a relational assemblage", it is always co-constituted by, mediated through, and integrated within the wider experiences of space" (2011, 90). This spatial framing of violence was deemed very problematic by friends and relatives of the deceased, and was one motivation "to make their voices heard" (*prendre la parole*) (field notes, 01/05/2018).

The final example is that in addition to a spatial reading of the violence, according to Alicia, the judge of the trial against the perpetrators adopted a racialized reading of the victims and perpetrators who all supposedly belonged to the same category of racialized persons (i.e. Blacks, Arabs, Turkish).

Le président, le juge principal a dit à un moment que "de toute façon, en gros, ce sont des Turcs, des Noirs et des Arabes qui ont tué un Noir et un Arabe en fait". Ça m'a dégoûtée qu'il dise ça. Ce

<sup>335</sup> Piu, Mélody. "Morts à Grenoble: ni gang, ni règlement de compte (procureur)". France info, 29/09/2012. <http://www.franceinfo.fr/actu/faits-divers/article/morts-grenoble-ni-gang-ni-reglement-de-compte-procureur-190295>, accessed 9/12/2019

<sup>336</sup> Echirolles : Villeneuve deviendra une ZSP, *Le Figaro*, 2/10/2012, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2012/10/02/97001-20121002FILWWW00411-echirolles-la-villeneuve-deviendra-une-zsp.php>, accessed 9/12/2019.

<sup>337</sup> "Deux ans après les émeutes de la Villeneuve de Grenoble en juillet 2010, la capitale des Alpes revenait sur le devant de la scène médiatique par le truchement d'un fait divers tragique", in "Un déchaînement de violence rapidement élucidé par la police", *Dauphiné Libéré*, 27/09/2013.

n'était peut-être pas méchant qu'il dise ça mais ça m'a révoltée en fait. Donc je me suis dit "ah ouais en gros on se tue entre nous et on sera toujours à la marge de la société comme ça...". (Alicia, interview, 01/05/2018)

What troubled Alicia in the words of the judge is that he analyzed the perpetrators and victims as belonging to the same group. Instead, she insisted on the necessity of making a distinction between the families of the victims and those of the perpetrators, and wanted to make clear that: "no, we are not all the same, stop thinking that all people living in an MSHN, all Blacks, Arabs, etc. are the same". This generalization by public officials wipes out differences within the neighborhood and between inhabitants, and is considered very problematic by the latter. Youth involved in the APLP group were mostly from families that had opted for loyalty in French society, who stressed the importance of education, the values of caring for others, integration in French society, and who had told their children that they might have to work harder than French but that by doing so they would be able to find a place. The profile of these families stands in opposition to those of some of the perpetrators, who are considered to be problematic, are known for previous incidents of violence, and who are marked by a fragile family context and school failure.

In the period that followed Kevin and Sofiane's deaths and the Charlie Hebdo massacre friends and relatives that were part of APLP became aware that their claims, experiences, and misfortune were interpreted as specific to the neighborhood where they lived, and that as a result they could not appeal for sympathy as ordinary citizens, only as specific citizens, those associated with a neighborhood. They were confronted with forms of subalternization, since racialized representations and geographical imagination denied them the possibility to share their interpretations of this violence, violence which they considered as a problem of society at large and not as a neighborhood problem. In addition to not feeling heard by established state actors, they did not feel heard either by Marxist-inspired neighborhood- and anti-racist activists such as the FUIQP<sup>338</sup> who explained the physical violence of the youth as the result of structural injustice and economic conditions. The risk of becoming a victim of physical violence in MSHN is silenced by collectives such as the FUIQP in order to avoid further neighborhood stigmatization, and because the FUIQP has chosen to focus on systemic or institutional violence. How can one make one's voice heard from this subaltern position? As discussed in chapter 5, APLP youth also dealt with the feeling of inferiority that racialized MSHN inhabitants struggle with and that inhibits them from positioning themselves as citizens in society. As APLP coordinator, Mayare explained that the collective sought to address this point.

Avec Herrick on se disait qu'on aille vers des jeunes pour leur dire qu'ils ont des choses à dire aussi et qu'ils n'ont pas besoin de

<sup>338</sup> When I refer to Marxist oriented leftwing activists, this includes a large part of the activists within the neighborhood, and France in general where Marxism is still an important and shared political framework for the left, in opposition to other European countries or to the USA.



diplôme ou d'avoir d'un taf [du travail] pour avoir des choses à dire et pouvoir s'exprimer quoi. (Mayare, interview, 07/07/2017)

Just as FUIQP did, APLP addressed this feeling of inferiority that prevents youth from positioning themselves as citizens in society. In section four it will become clear that becoming part of APLP helped its members to position themselves with a different voice, one that is distinct from those of established institutional actors and other neighborhood organizations.

## 2) Forming a we-group in whose name to fight

This section describes the different approaches APLP and FUIQP adopted in order to form a we-group and speak in its name in order to have a voice. Constituting a group, defining, and agreeing on a we-identity is one of the five actions I identified in chapter 6 that contribute to challenging structurally asymmetric power relations by a subaltern group [see Table 7.21 .

**Table 7.21 Actions that contribute to challenging asymmetric power relations**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Translate the experiences of the marginalized group into words, produce speech in order to break with self-silencing practices</li><li>- Question the interiorization of inferiority and acquire the feeling that, as marginalized, one can legitimately contradict or reject dominant discourse</li><li>- <b>Constitute a group, define and agree on a we-group identity</b></li><li>- Produce (collective) discourse, formulate claims</li><li>- Get involved in collective action and communicate claims in public</li></ul>
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To become political and to fight structural injustice through political means requires the construction of a we-group that makes collective claims visible. Under which name to speak and to make these claims is an issue that the groups I worked with resolved differently: the FUIQP makes its claims as racialized people “issus de l’immigration postcoloniale” and as MSHN inhabitants, whereas the APLP avoided these racialized identities. In order to understand these different positions it is important to understand how these groups formed and around which issues. I describe the process of group formation of the FUIQP (2.1) and APLP (2.3) and my place in both of them (2.2 and 2.4). I then discuss the dilemmas involved in speaking in name of racialized identities (2.5).

### *2.1) The prefiguration of the Front Uni de l’Immigration et des Quartiers Populaire*

The United Front as national organization is rooted in anti-capitalist, pro-Palestinian, immigration-, MSHN-, anti-colonial, and anti-racist struggles. An anti-capitalist (Marxist and anarchist) position is the common denominator of its activists, but the FUIQP distinguishes itself from other anti-capitalists struggles in that it links economic and racist domination.

This is a position very close to that of Latin-American decolonial thinkers, without specifically acknowledging this intellectual affiliation. Racism, according to the FUIQP, is systemic and can only be challenged through a fundamental change in the State and the economic system.

The following issues are of particular concern to the United Front:

- 1) Racism, discrimination and islamophobia
- 2) Police violence
- 3) Anti-colonialism and neo-colonial wars
- 4) Palestine

I set the start of the FUIQP in Grenoble one year before its official creation in 2016. The prefiguration phase of the FUIQP started with the creation, throughout 2015, of several collectives in Villeneuve that together became the FUIQP. During this prefiguration period the United Front already played an important role in the political framing of the collective's struggles. At the end of 2015 a loose network of activists concerned about islamophobia, racism, and police violence came together as the FUIQP 38. My observations cover the period 2015-2017, I use therefore the past tense in reference to its actions during this period, whereas the organization still exists at the time of writing.

The FUIQP chose the term "Front" instead of "Party" to mark a distinction with political parties (Bouamama, Fringale meeting, 20/11/2015). It chose "United Front" (Front Uni) because of its aim to bring together several struggles around immigration and working-class neighborhoods. The decision to create a local FUIQP group in Villeneuve in December 2015 came out of the intention to formalize the three informal collectives that formed over the course of 2015, but in which a lot of the same people were involved [Figure 7.116]. The three collectives that later became the FUIQP 38 were: 1) the informal "Fringale" collective, named after the snackbar where its first meeting took place just after the Charlie Hebdo massacre. Its full name, chosen on the occasion of the organization of the public debate on islamophobia, was "La fringale pour la justice sociale et l'unité des classes populaires"<sup>339</sup> [Box 7.44]; 2) the "Zyed and Bouna" collective, which was created to organize of a rally (*rassemblement*) to contest the acquittal in 2015 of the two policemen that had pursued Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré, leading to their deaths in 2005 [Box 7.45]; 3) the Collectif de la Dignité et contre le racisme 38, a combination of the first two collectives that organized a delegation for the Marche de la dignité et contre le racisme<sup>340</sup> that took place in Paris on 31 October 2015 [Box 7.46].

The March provided the broader analysis of racism in France that the local collectives were interested in. The Collectif de la Dignité et contre le racisme 38 took the decision at the

<sup>339</sup> The insistence on the unity of the working classes can be explained by the shared analysis in the group that racism divides the working class even though all are victims of capitalism and neo-liberalism.

<sup>340</sup> March of Dignity and Against Racism

beginning of December 2015 to bring the group of local activists against islamophobia and police violence under the banner of the FUIQP.<sup>341</sup>

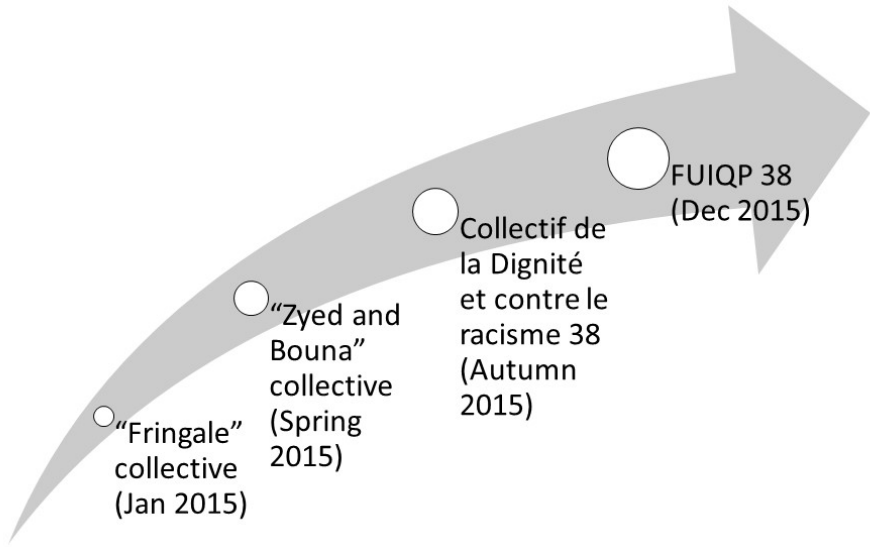


Figure 7.116 Collectives that prefigure the FUIQP

**Box 7.44 The foundational meeting of the Fringale collective**

The first meeting of what was to be informally called the “Fringale collective” was organized spontaneously by J. and S. a couple of days after the Charlie Hebdo attack. The hope behind it was to transform a general feeling of bewilderment and fear about the consequences of this violence for Muslims into action. The two women remobilized existing networks formed during past struggles, such as *Nous Citoyennes* and the *Alliance Citoyenne* in Grenoble.<sup>342</sup> The importance of the meeting was that it was one of the few semi-public spaces in which one could say that one was not Charlie, as the text from the e-mail invitation below demonstrates.

Clairement, nous ne sommes pas Charlie mais nous sommes contre le crime pour quelque raison que ce soit, contre le terrorisme. Les musulmans seront les premières victimes de ces fanatiques. (E-mail 13/01/2015)

This first meeting was followed by weekly meetings to prepare targeted actions. The configuration of the collective changed over the first few meetings, as did the level of politicization of those that participated. The involvement of M., bringing in an afro-feminist voice and imposing a more radical form of language was decisive for the language the

<sup>341</sup> A local FUIQP collective had already formed in Grenoble (Echirolles) several years before and had hosted the United Front’s 4<sup>th</sup> *Rencontres nationales des immigrations et des quartiers populaires* (2012), but since then the movement had withered away as a result of the disengagement of its initiator due to a disagreement about FUIQP’s race position and its proximity to the PIR.

<sup>342</sup> In the prefiguration phase of the *Alliance Citoyenne*, while it was still called *ECHO* (2013-2014), it had undertaken a campaign to lobby for the reconstruction of a primary school in Villeneuve that had burned down due to a failure in the electrical system. The women that got involved in this campaign formed a network that was remobilized in 2015.

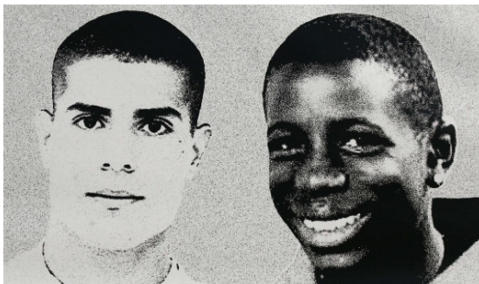
collective adopted, but it equally provoked tensions in the group and led to the departure of some who did not recognize themselves in this type of antiracist and combative vocabulary, close to that of the Parti des Indigènes de la République (PIR).

#### **Box 7.45 Zyed and Bouna” collective after the acquittal of two policemen**

In the same period that the Fringale collective was preparing for a debate on the struggle against islamophobia, a court decision revived the struggle against police violence in relation to the death of Zyed and Bouna. On the 18 May 2015, ten years after their deaths and the riots that followed, the Courthouse (*le tribunal correctionnel*) in Rennes ruled that the policemen who were tried for non-assistance to persons in danger for not having intervened while they knew the adolescent boys were in danger, were acquitted (*Le Monde*, 18/05/2015).<sup>343</sup> This provoked a strong feeling of injustice and of a two-tier justice system that the collective denounced through the organization of a rally [Figure 7.118]. The rally took place at Place Félix Poulat (see overview map), a square that serves as a soap-box space in the city center of Grenoble, destined for political statements and static demonstrations. The choice of this geographic location is a means to bring an issue that is of particular concern in MSHN into central public space. The rally was therefore a way of opening an agonistic space in Grenoble, outside of the neighborhood.

**PAS DE JUSTICE, PAS DE PAIX !**

**NON À LA JUSTICE À 2 VITESSES !**



**ZYÉD ET BOUNA 10 ANS APRÈS...**

**ON N'OUBLIE PAS !!**

**Rassemblement**  
**Vendredi 05 Juin 2015 à 18h30**  
**Place Félix POULAT**  
(Tram A&B: "Victor Hugo")



Figure 7.117 Flyer for demonstration to denounce court decision. (Digital document, 15/05/2015)

Figure 7.118 Rally "Pas de Justice, pas de paix" at Place Félix Poulat. (Photo author, 05/06/2015)

<sup>343</sup> Le Monde, "Zyed et Bouna : le jugement qui relaxe les deux policiers", Pascale Robert-Diard, 18/05/2015, [https://www.lemonde.fr/justice/article/2015/05/18/zyed-et-bouna-le-jugement-qui-relaxe-les-deux-policiers\\_6002384\\_1653604.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/justice/article/2015/05/18/zyed-et-bouna-le-jugement-qui-relaxe-les-deux-policiers_6002384_1653604.html), accessed 25/11/2012

### Box 7.46 [empirical excursion]: Collectif de la Dignité et contre le racisme 38

The organizers of the March in Paris, the MAFED<sup>344</sup> sought to place police violence high on the political agenda again, commemorating both the 2005 revolts and the 1983 Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racism,<sup>345</sup> as it was police violence that sparked the anger of racialized MSHN youth both in 1983 and in 2005. Having learned from the political and masculine co-opting (*récupération*) after the 1983 March, the MAFED armed themselves against these traps, limiting the organizing committee to racialized women and excluding representatives of political parties (MAFED 2015; for an academic reference see Hancock 2016). As a result, it was women that spoke out about the impunity of racist and police violence, and used this platform also to declare solidarity with Muslim women. During the March, the Grenoble delegation marched just in front of the United Front delegation which exuded energy with its chanting, slogans and flags.



Figure 7.119 FUIQP delegation in the Marche de la dignité et contre le racisme. Said Bouamama holds the microphone. (Photo Politis, 31/12/2015)<sup>346</sup>

The invitation of Bouamama as invited speaker of the Université Populaire, and even more so his presentation of the FUIQP afterwards in the Fringale snackbar on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2015, were important impulses for the decision to become part of the United Front. His presence in Villeneuve one week after the Bataclan massacre created a moment

<sup>344</sup> Collectif de la Marche des Femmes pour la Dignité.

<sup>345</sup> March for Equality and Against Racism

<sup>346</sup> <https://static.politis.fr/medias/articles/2015/10/revivez-la-marche-de-la-dignite-32868/image-6.jpg>, accessed 03/03/2020.

of hope at a time when a general feeling approaching desperation was widespread in the neighborhood. An earlier moment of becoming acquainted with the FUIQP and its discourse was the participation of several members of the Fringale collective in FUIQP's Fifth national encounters (*Rencontres nationales des immigrations et des quartiers populaires*) in Saint Etienne (2015), which provided the collective with some analytical direction. These annual encounters seek to forge a common identity and a political vocabulary. It is here that the collective's members became familiar with the more confrontational anti-racist discourse of the FUIQP and with Saïd Bouamama.

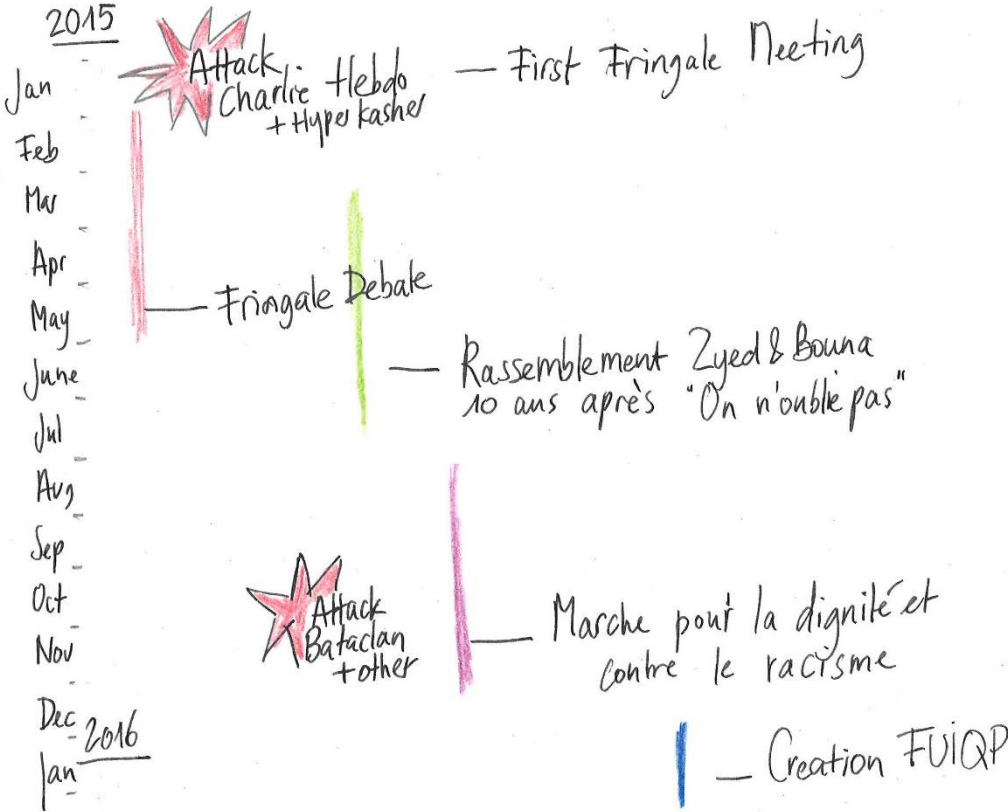


Figure 7.120 Timeline of the events organized by collectives that prefigured the FUIQP

The road towards creating a local FUIQP collective [Figure 7.120] introduced a new activist energy in the neighborhood, imposing a new vocabulary and opening up a discursive space.

2.2) My involvement and position in FUIQP

I became involved in the prefiguration of the FUIQP as a result of my presence at the foundational Fringale meeting. Over the 12 months that followed a group formed made up of roughly 10 people, a mix of racialized and non-racialized people that ranged widely in age. My position in the group was peripheral, limited to my presence during meetings, events, and participation in organized debates. I did not take much initiative as I felt uncomfortable doing so, due to the clear position that the FUIQP should provide a space for racialized and working-class people in MSHN.

Several vocal members in the group aspired to a collective in which racialized inhabitants of MSHN were in the majority, which obviously raises the question of the role of Whites within the United Front. Bouamama explained in the Fringale snackbar (20/11/2015) that all can join the United Front, specifying “Whites as well”, as long as they share the analysis that “the organization of society at present is pyramidal, just as in colonial times” and that “immigration”, or rather making a distinction between immigrants and “French”, “is a mode of governing, a means to divide”.<sup>347</sup> Another person from the Fringale collective formulated their role slightly differently, saying that “*les personnes blanches peuvent être avec nous, nous soutenir, peuvent parler avec nous mais c'est nous qui parlons*” (participant, Fringale, 20/11/2015). The type of autonomy advocated here recalls Spivak’s idea of clearing the space of power relations for the subaltern to be able to speak. It is in this space that they can find a new voice.

The distrust that some members have of academics and their tendency to speak for those directly concerned by oppression certainly did not help me find a place in this group. A FUIQP participant expressed this criticism during a UP debate.

Dès qu'il faut analyser les choses, là on va faire appel à un universitaire blanc qui va faire du beurre là-dessus, pour qui c'est son boulot, son business. C'est comme ça qu'il gagne sa vie et du coup il vient t'expliquer la vie et lui on l'écoute alors que toi t'es pas écouté. (Participant, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

Given the critical positions of FUIQP members against the hegemony of white academics, leading to the dispossession of racialized voices, I did not expect to obtain permission to use my activist involvement in the group for academic writing. Nevertheless, I decided to include a section on the FUIQP in my thesis as a result of the particular role the FUIQP played in the neighborhood. Their radical position influenced the framing and discourse of both civil society organizations and academics. This is for example the case of the Université populaire: its positions came to be seen as more mainstream in comparison to the radical positions of the FUIQP. For ethical considerations I only use public statements (Facebook, public, and semi-public meetings) and do not draw on weekly meetings, as explained in chapter 2. For a while I struggled with the question of whether I still respected my principle of the right to opacity when including this section. I consider I do because FUIQP statements during public debates and on social media aim to publicize the organization’s positions. Some members of the FUIQP feel that it is the role of Whites to teach Whites about racism, so I consider that it can be my role to share some of the things I learned in the presence of FUIQP members about racism and how to address it.

The decision to quote only from public statements and only those who gave specific permission has the unintended outcome that I give prominence to the voices of older men,

<sup>347</sup> In French: “*La société est organisée comme à l'époque coloniale de façon pyramidale et l'immigration est un mode de gestion des rapports de classe et de sexe, c'est une manière de diviser.*”

while silencing younger female voices. This might give the erroneous impression that men represent the majority of the FUIQP's support base, which is not the case. I regret that issues around permission unintentionally have led to the invisibilization of the women that were the main mobilizers in the prefiguration of the FUIQP (2015-2016).

### *2.3) The road towards Agir pour la Paix*

In this subsection I present the process of the creation of APLP. It was a tragedy that was at the origin of APLP's approach to peace: the violence on Kevin and Sofiane's bodies, which directly resonated with the physical pain felt by their parents. Sofiane succumbed to 36 different wounds: a punctured spleen, wounds inflicted by a hammer, and those as a result of being run over, back and forth, by a scooter. Kevin had wounds from 12 weapons and by eight different hands, yet it was a punctured lung that killed him. Two years later, Kevin's mother described the feeling of losing her son to this violence as if her "womb was ripped out" (Monkam-Noubissi 2014). Its destructive power extended to the lives of relatives and friends: it led to depression, feelings of guilt, panic attacks, sleeping problems, and other symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Furthermore, it broke up family structures and destroyed future prospects.

#### *Informal discussions prior to the creation of APLP*

Kevin and Sofiane's immediate circle of friends became the core group of APLP, accompanied in their grief by Herrick Mouafo. Herrick Mouafo drew his legitimacy among the friends of Kevin and Sofiane during the process of creating APLP from the close relationship he was able to establish with Steven, Kevin's brother, and Mohamed, Sofiane's father. The motivation behind the time and energy that Herrick Mouafo invested in the group (2012 – 2017) is fact that he himself experienced an important loss and is concerned that youth, who are at the beginning of their adult lives, should not withdraw from society but position themselves fully within it. Herrick Mouafo asked Steven whether he could meet his brother's friends to understand what they felt, and to listen to their stories in order to formulate actions that represented their interests. Steven agreed and Herrick Mouafo regularly met them at in the evening, outside in their neighborhood, where they hung out. The first night (07/10/2012) the group took Herrick Mouafo to the stele that was erected in commemoration of Kevin and Sofiane in the place where they died, and around which they gathered to smoke. Initially they merely tolerated his presence, but later they started to enjoy the conversations. After about a year, they did not want their discussions to focus on their friends anymore: recalling their deaths made them sad and angry. Herrick Mouafo proposed to talk instead about the values of their friends, because it struck him that the core group frequently praised the latter, and he convinced them that they could honor their memory by embodying these values (*porter ces valeurs*).





Figure 7.121 Memorial stone for Kevin and Sofiane in the park Maurice Thorez. (Photo APLP, 01/04/2015)

An important moment in group formation was the participation of this group of friends in the creation of a video clip with a singer-songwriter of national renown who grew up in Echirolles, Calogéro. Calogéro had written a song about these brutal deaths in which he used the White March slogan “*plus jamais ça*”. After receiving the approval of the families involved, he wanted to film a music clip in the neighborhood with Kevin and Sofiane's core group of friends. The proposal to participate in the clip, which the core group of friends initially declined, was an occasion for Herrick Mouafo to work with them on translating values into action. After having participated in the video this group of friends agreed to speak at the *Soirée d'hommage à Kevin et Sofiane* in the Auditorium of the Musée de Grenoble (17/06/2014) (see overview map) and declared there their decision to participate in the Marche Blanche collective.

Given the relatively advanced ages of the members of the Marche Blanche collective, and given the absence of youth in almost all neighborhood associations that are not specifically created for them, it was rather unexpected that a group of neighborhood youth in their early twenties decided to join the collective. The adherence of the youth to the Marche Blanche collective in 2014 was facilitated by Herrick Mouafo, who was concerned about the fact that the initiatives to deal with youth violence only spoke to an older mainly white population, but not to the young people directly confronted with this violence. Initially close friends and young relatives of Kevin and Sofiane were very far from getting involved in collective action and investing in society. For example, Rachid answered my question whether there was any exchange between the White March collective and the group of friends, with a clear “no”.

Non. Si je parle aux jeunes du quartier où les faits se sont déroulés, non. Ils sont invités mais ils ne participent pas. (Rachid, radio interview, 01/07/2014)

Herrick Mouafo worked hard to facilitate a rapprochement between the core group of friends and the Marche Blanche collective, with success. In the quote below Housseem explains how his position towards the Marche Blanche collective evolved over time. This change of position was largely influenced by the group's discussions with Herrick Mouafo.

La première impression qu'on a, pardonnez-moi l'expression que "ce sont des vieux qui viennent nous embêter, nous saouler" mais au final on s'aperçoit que ces vieux se préoccupent des jeunes dans un sens plus large. Quand je les vois par exemple organiser des journées pour la non-violence, contacter un tel ou un tel, c'est quand même une sacrée démarche et je me dis qu'au final ils ont raison qu'ils se battent contre la violence dans notre ville avant de parler du monde. C'est une valeur qui me va très bien, je n'aime pas la violence et je suis tout à fait d'accord avec eux. Je ne dis pas que je suis d'accord avec tout ce qu'ils font. (Housseem, interview, 01/07/2014)

### *The Creation of APLP*

To be able to speak specifically to other youth and to be autonomous, APLP chose to become an independent initiative. This makes it one of the three collectives created in the aftermath of the death of Kevin and Sofiane, each formed at different times and with a different constituency [Figure 7.122], but occasionally working together. Kevin and Sofiane's parents are at the core of these collectives, and they are what binds them together.

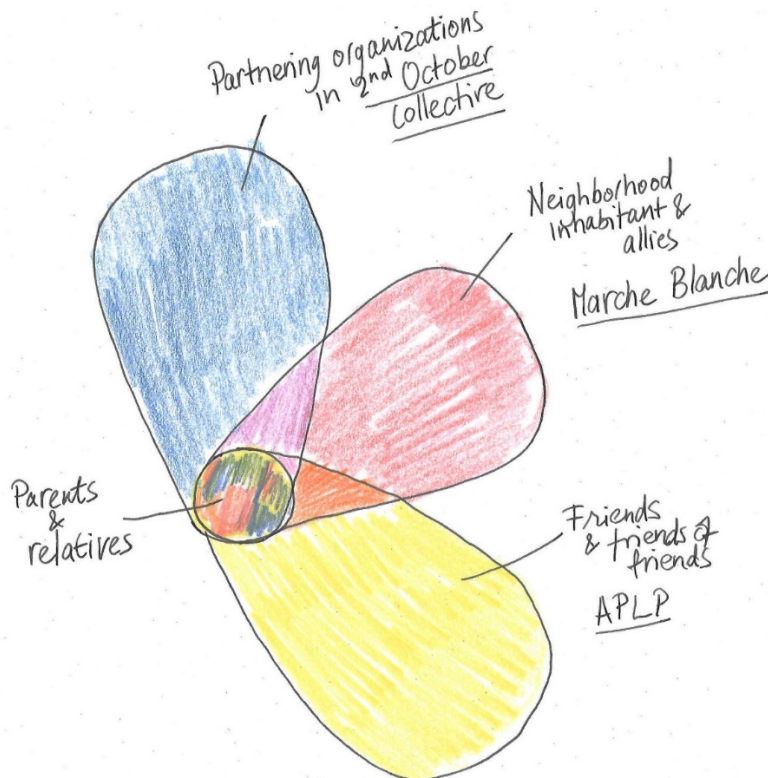


Figure 7.122 APLP in relation to the Marche Blanche and 2 October collectives.

What sets APLP apart from the Marche blanche collective is that the core group of APLP is motivated by grief and anger about the loss of loved ones, as at first mourning was an important motivation for coming together. Members of the Marche Blanche collective, apart from the parents of Kevin and Sofiane, do not have the same emotional connection to this loss and to violence. Few, apart from Herrick, understood this difference and took it in account in their approach to this group of friends. Instead of considering them as victims of stigmatization and racialization as other actors did (including myself), Herrick Mouafo addressed them as the victims of a crime, dealing with a terrible loss. Over time these other victimizing factors also came into play, notably at the moment of the Charlie Hebdo massacre which “reminded them that they belonged to a dominated group in society” (feedback discussion, 24/01/2020).

#### *APLP Workshops (2015-2016)*

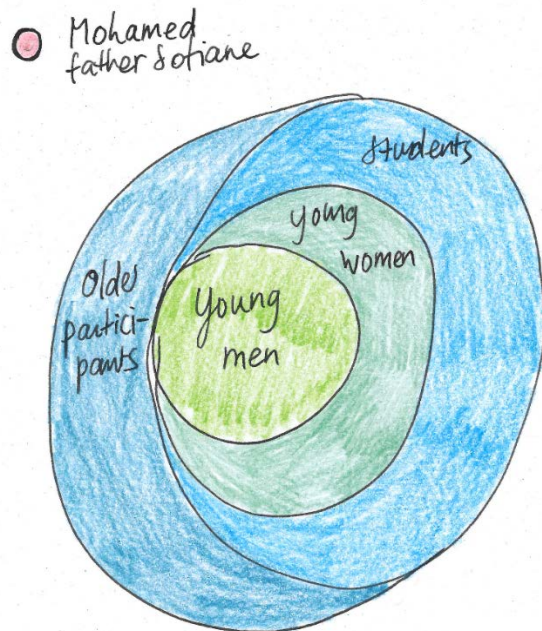
In early 2015 APLP organized its first workshop, these workshops simultaneously formalized the encounters between Herrick and the group of friends, opened them up to a wider public, and moved them into a specific space, that of MJC Desnos in Villeneuve (Echirolles) [Figure 7.123].



*Figure 7.123 MJC Desnos in Villeneuve (Echirolles). (Photo APLP, 13/04/2015)*

The director of MJC Desnos, Annick Bousba, not only provide a space for the group, but she also found the necessary funding for the remuneration of an APLP coordinator and for their

activities. Housseem, one of Sofiane's close friends, was chosen as coordinator and it was his task to mobilize peers to participate in the workshops. Together with Herrick Mouafo, Housseem was able to bring together a heterogeneous group of people, enlarging the immediate group from a core group of friends to include wider networks. This group can be represented in the form of four concentric circles.



● Aurélie mother Kevin

Figure 7.124 Constituent groups of APLP

- The core group at its heart was Kevin's brother, Steven, and direct and indirect friends of Kevin and Sofiane (seven young men including Rachid, Housseem and Joachim who are quoted in my text).
- Female school friends of this first group form a second group that is close to the core. At times they operated as one group but at other times this distinction became clearer. The young women from this group quoted in my text are Maissane and Amelle, school friends; Alicia; and Mayare, who went to the same high school as Kevin and Sofiane but is two years younger.
- The two groups in the inner circles are from the neighborhood (green), people in the two outer circles are from outside the neighborhood (blue).
- The third circle consists of students that are friends of friends, mostly brought into the group by the young women from the neighborhood who pursued higher education themselves, which is not the case of the core group of young men.
- The fourth circle is other, older, interested people such as Sofiane's aunt, members of the Marche Blanche collective, and friends of Herrick as well as myself.

- Sofiane's father had a special role in this group, which I have represented as a red circle on the outside. He cannot be considered as really being part of the group but rather as its patron, for whom all APLP members had a great esteem. Kevin's mother, Aurélie, had more distance to the group and was less accessible for young people but also had the role of moral guidance.

It is hard to situate Herrick in any of these circles because he was central to APLP and close to all groups, yet he refuses a place in the center because he feels that the core group has never accepted him into their inner circle (feedback discussion, 24/01/2020).

The workshops addressed a diverse range of issues of concern to youth such as neighborhood stigmatization, islamophobia, politics, media representation, and violence; but these were all framed in the language of peace. Herrick prepared the workshops (e.g. topic, agenda, ice-breaker) in advance with the youth coordinator and did not intervene during the workshop in order to leave the leadership with the youth coordinator.

In addition to the weekly workshops at MJC Desnos, APLP also organized a workshop in Kevin and Sofiane's former high school in Echirolles (Lycée Marie Curie) and participated in the organization of two annual events: the 2 October celebrations and Deal de Paix, an initiative that one of Sofiane's cousins set up within the framework of his training as social worker.

After Housseem's decision to stop as coordinator in order to pursue another career opportunity (luxury car rentals in Geneva), two other coordinators replaced him: first Hédi a cousin of Sofiane; and then Mayare, who was neither family nor a direct friend, but a young woman from Echirolles who was particularly interested in the space APLP provided to become politically involved (not in the sense of party politics but as a citizen).

She gave APLP another direction in 2017, under the continued guidance of Herrick Mouafo. After having tested a different type of workshop at the MJC Desnos—*Les Ateliers de la Pensée*—and another type of action, fund-raising for humanitarian aid in Myanmar and Palestine, she decided to widen APLP's horizon to other areas of the greater Grenoble area and carried out a large, community-run research project about the driving forces behind violence in the neighborhood. APLP has ceased to exist as such but it continues to exist as a network whose members continue to meet informally. Some of its activities have been taken over by MJC Desnos (2 October celebration), others are being continued by Modus Operandi (research and debates), but the workshops in the MJC that drew in a variety of neighborhood youth to debate issues of their concern stopped in 2016. Figure 7.125 presents a timeline of APLP from the period 2012 – 2017.

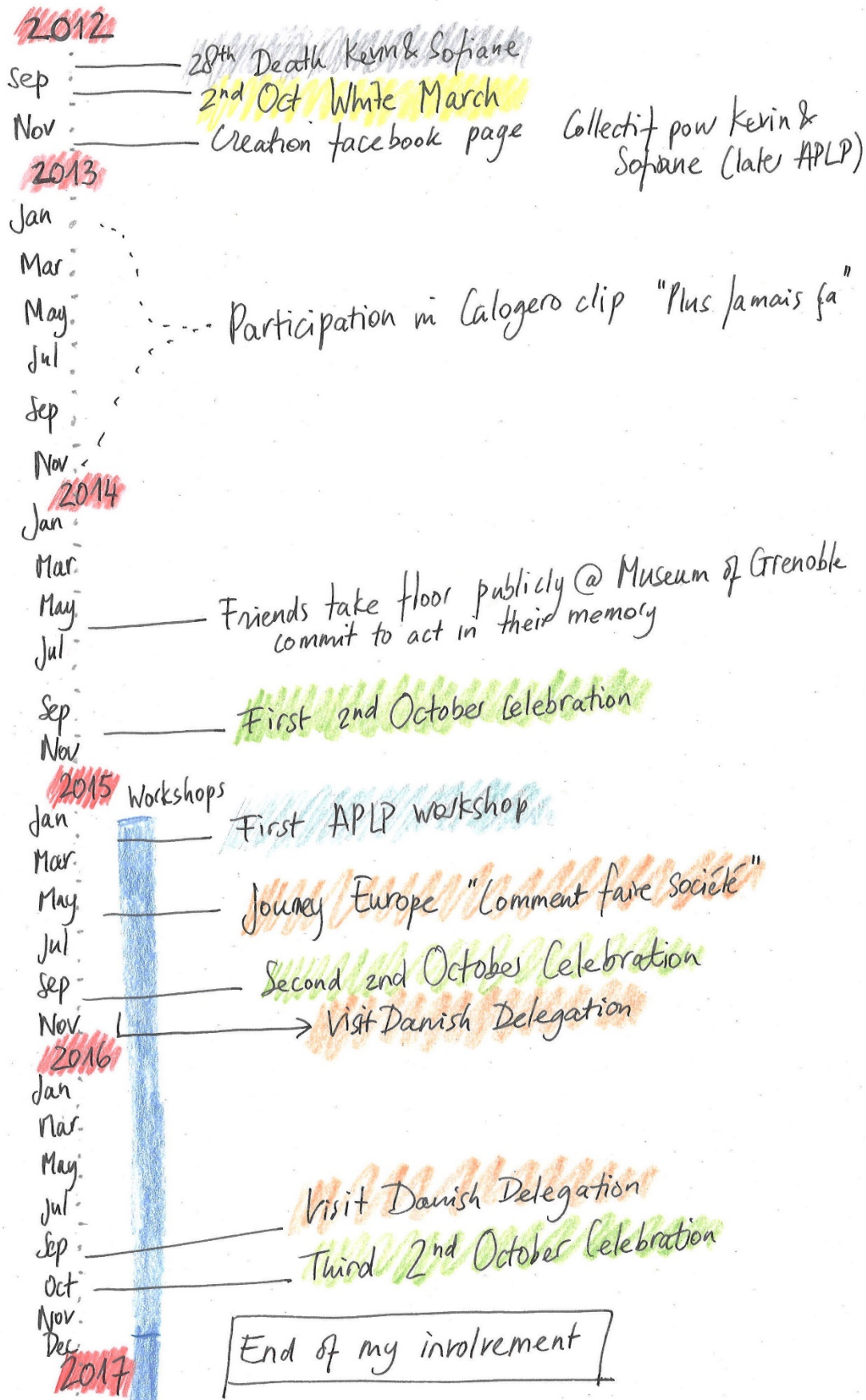


Figure 7.125 Timeline APLP

#### *2.4) My involvement and position in APLP*

My direct involvement with APLP started with its first workshop on the 7th of February 2015. Before its official launch, I had observed from some distance the evolution of the initiatives that followed the White March, and I participated occasionally in their actions. At the beginning of 2015 I became an active member of APLP and of the wider 2 October collective (until November 2017). I took part in APLP's weekly workshops and in their social events. My most important contribution to the collective was to initiate the journey APLP undertook to Denmark and the Netherlands in May 2015 and to hosting youth groups from Denmark in return (2015, 2016 and 2017).

In the APLP group I stood out as the "organic-eating, sporty, anthropologist with casual clothes". This was the description of me provided by one of the participants during the icebreaker the first workshop. My identity as colleague of Herrick Mouafo gave me quite a lot of credit in the group, profiting from the trust he had built. Later it became better known that I was working at the University on a PhD that had something to do with the neighborhood, but nobody ever really asked what this something was. Later, during interviews with some key APLP members, I gave more information about my research.

The journey to the Netherlands and Denmark was an opportunity to go beyond appearances and was the occasion for engaging in long informal discussions, learning to stand next to each other rather than looking at each other (see Ch. 1). This was also the moment when some tensions arose with regards to finding a position in the group that suited me, in particular in relation to the young, male coordinator. I had the feeling he manoeuvred me into the position of teacher, with all the resistance that this position of authority provoked. Tensions arose around who was in charge, who should take and give responsibility. While I had prepared the trip the idea was that the APLP (youth) coordinator would take over during the journey, but I felt he refused to take on this responsibility leaving it to me, while at the same time not accepting my authority, refusing to carry out instructions and adopting a simultaneously lax and defiant attitude. When I shared this feeling later with Mayare, she interpreted this teacher/defiance dynamic as following:

Dehors, ils te devaient peut-être du respect parce qu'ils sont plus jeunes que toi ou alors à cause de ton statut social, eux sont des jeunes et toi t'es chercheuse, tu vois, c'est quelque chose qu'ils reconnaissent quoi. On ne change pas les rapports qu'on a dehors, on les garde dedans. (Mayare, interview, 07/07/2017)

My role in the group evolved from my failed attempt to position myself as an equal to that of a kind of aunt (*tata*), which was facilitated by the fact that I started to bring my children to events organized on weekends. In particular the male youth engaged in longer lasting connections with them [Figure 7.126 and Figure 7.127]. The relationships I established in the group were based on affection and the shared experience of the journey, rather than on shared political goals as had been the case with other working groups.



Figure 7.126 Marike and Youp with APLP in Brest. (Photo author, 16/01/2016)



Figure 7.127 Cas with APLP in Brest. (Photo author, 16/01/2016)

### 2.5) Dilemmas involved in creating a we-group

In this subsection I am interested in the different positions the FUIQP and APLP take with regard to the political potential and even necessity of speaking in name of a marginalized identity, such as MSHN inhabitants, Muslims, Blacks, or undocumented migrants *etc.*

**The FUIQP and APLP take opposite positions in the debate about ‘in whose name to speak and to make claims’,** in other words, ‘in whose name to fight’. Essentially, they have opposing ideas about the conditions that make claims politically effective, in the sense of making them visible, making them heard, and producing the demanded change. The FUIQP chooses to speak in the name of racialized or spatial identities, ‘we the racialized’ or ‘we MSHN inhabitants’ (*habitants des quartiers populaires*). The APLP refused this choice: Herrick Mouafo, who was very influential for the political positions of the APLP, preferred to speak instead of ‘we, all humans in relation’, an idea he tried to pass on to APLP members. In accordance with the exit strategy, APLP youth initially did not identify with a collective “we” as racialized citizens of France, neither did they identify with the working poor. Instead they projected themselves into middle-class futures outside of the neighborhood. After these tragic deaths they constructed an “us” versus “them” discourse that was based on a distinction between “we” the integrated, the civilized, those that have succeeded in France and “they”, the barbarians, the loitering, lacking moral education and schooling, the delinquents, the crazy (*fous*). Sometimes this “we” versus “them” also took the form of territorial aspects, “we” the civilized of Echirrolles, versus “they”, the uncivilized in Villeneuve (Grenoble). The other political identity that the majority of the APLP group identified with



was that of “we Muslims” (becoming involved with solidarity actions with Palestinian and Royinghas refugees).<sup>348</sup>

To describe the positions of each of these collectives I draw on the statement of influential spokespersons in both groups who expressed themselves during the debates of the Université populaire. For the APLP this is Herrick Mouafo, and for the FUIQP this is “a participant” and Kenjah. This obviously does not mean that the stated ideas of these spokespersons were the consensus in the collectives.

In France, framing problems in racial terms and **speaking in name of** racialized identities in anti-racist struggle is a relatively recent phenomenon and one that is met with suspicion, often interpreted as a threat to the unity of the Republic. The mainstream opinion is that speaking in terms of racial identities is incompatible with the idea of cosmopolitanism as the future of humanity. Two examples of organizations nationally that have politicized racial terms are the PIR and the Brigade Anti Négrophobie (BAN). During the 2015 March in Paris, the Collectif pour la dignité et contre le racisme 38 walked side by side with these organizations and became associated with its discourse (see 3.1). The question of the political potential of employing racialized categories versus larger, universal identities in the struggle against racism are not new. Fanon already wrote in the 1950s about the dilemma to fight as a “Negro” or as a “man” (2008 [1952], 180). The FUIQP opts for fighting as a “Negro,” it is in favor of politicizing racialized identities and turning them into a force. A person that would later be a driving force behind the creation of the FUIQP stated:

Il y a toujours des réassignations et du coup on peut en faire deux choses. On peut faire un truc de : “Non, non, non, je ne veux pas de réassignation identitaire, je ne suis qu'un individu, je suis une personne française”, ça c'est une chose et on peut aussi se reconnaître dans une communauté en faire une force! Ne pas pour faire un truc essentialiste de la communauté arabe ou de la communauté musulmane qui serait super, plus que les autres, mais pour se dire : “de fait on est des immigrés, on est les descendants des immigrés et des immigrations postcoloniales, on est au moins la communauté musulmane, auto-organisons-nous et faisons-en sorte qu'être d'une communauté est une force d'agir. (Participant FUIQP, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

This position can be summarized as claiming to be different and equal at the same time, or as “similar” (*semblable*) to speak in Mbembe's terms, and appeals to an ethics of similarity (*éthique du semblable*) (Mbembe interviewed by Dorlin 2007, 150). This position resonates with that of the FUIQP participant, who asserted that she recognizes herself in ‘a [racialized] community, not in an essentialist way, in pretending it is better than others but as a source of empowerment and auto-organization’. At the same time Mbembe is opposed to the

<sup>348</sup> APLP undertook humanitarian projects for both causes.

“fetishism of identity” (interview with De Calan 2017),<sup>349</sup> and it is this reading of Fanon that appeals to Herrick Mouafo, who is very critical of forming political identities based on skin color or religion.

Aujourd’hui, ce qui nous bloque dans nos luttes, c’est la tendance à ne voir dans nos faisceaux identitaires, que celui lié à la couleur ou à la religion. Ce que refuse Fanon. Il parle d’un système de domination, il ne parle pas d’une couleur. Le défi aujourd’hui, c’est de sortir de cet enfermement identitaire et de refuser de n’être considéré que par une fameuse couleur. (Herrick Mouafo, UP debate, 25/05/2018)

His position is also inspired by Fanon, who considers his fight against racism and colonialism as a man or human (*homme*) aspiring to universality, rather than as a black man, a “Negro”. Fanon wrote that both Negro and white man 'must turn their backs on the inhuman voices which were those of their respective ancestors in order that authentic communication be possible' (2008 [1952], 180). Following Fanon, Herrick Mouafo recognizes the problem of racism in France, but would never identify as black.

Kenjah, who is close to the FUIQP, in discussion with Herrick Mouafo points out the tension in Fanon’s position who refuses, according to Kenjah, to identify as black but for whom the categories of White and Black at the same time have meaning as the title *Black skins, white masks* testifies. Kenjah explains this apparent contradiction as follows.

[Fanon] n’abandonne pas le discours en termes de races, tout en disant que c’est un discours qui nous enferme et qu’il faut casser. Dans un autre texte [que *Peaux noirs, masques blancs*] il dit : “Ok, ça c’est l’idéal, mais il y a un effort de désaliénation à mener”. Je le lis comme ça : il condamne la réalité des faits causés par le racisme systémique, la société n’est pas déracinée, nous n’avons pas fait ce travail de désaliénation sur nous-mêmes. Ça ne veut pas dire que je m’en revendique, ça ne veut pas dire que je défends des camps contre d’autres. Mais encore aujourd’hui, il y a des Noirs et des Blancs. (Kenjah, UP debate, 24/01/2018)

Herrick Mouafo personally resolves this tension by identifying himself in relation to others.

Si on veut être dans le champ politique, on doit se dire que nous sommes des êtres en relation. Je dois pouvoir lire mon histoire mais en la mettant en perspective. Je pense qu’il sera intéressant, peut-être même urgent, de rompre avec des catégories Noir, Blanc, Arabe qui de mon point de vue ne veulent pas forcément dire grande chose. Je me range dans la pensée de Frantz Fanon, il faut se réinventer mais ne pas se réinventer par rapport à l’autre. Il faut se réinventer par rapport à soi. Se réinventer par rapport à soi voudrait dire que lorsque je produis ma pensée, j’entre en dialogue avec l’autre sans prétention d’avoir une forme de hiérarchie dans cette posture, donc quand je pense, je ne pense pas comme un Noir ni comme un Africain,

<sup>349</sup> <https://www.lafriquedesidees.org/achille-mbembe-a-cure-to-the-fetishism-of-identity/>, accessed 26/11/2020.

je pense comme cet être qui se situe dans ce monde et qui par son savoir produit, arrive à rentrer en dialogue avec les autres.  
(Herrick Mouafo, UP debate, 25/05/2018)

A typical critique addressed to Herrick Mouafo is that his approach is highly individualistic, and that the image he projects of a fuzzy constellation of identities changing according to context lacks political potential. However, he is not politically naïve and believes in forming “strategic groups” (Olivier de Sardan 1995) that are not based on essentializing identities. He appeals to people’s imagination to invent solidarities and coalitions that are not in reaction to racist categories, as he did with the collective APLP.

Based on these debates I identified three dilemmas associated with the use of racialized identities to have a voice in anti-racist struggles: 1) using the binaries that one seeks to overcome; 2) ambiguity on when essentialism is strategic or merely essentialist 3) appropriating language without power.

*First dilemma: using racialized identities in anti-racist struggle*

The first dilemma is to articulate a political struggle on the basis of racialized identities which one seeks to overcome. Why lock (*enfermer*) people in categories, which one knows are constructions, if the final goal is to overcome them? Postcolonial critique has demonstrated that the binary oppositions on which the modern/colonial metanarrative was based – the oppositions between European/non-European; White/non-White, modernity/tradition, civilized/savages- were based on a myth. So why use similar binary oppositions -the racialized versus White- in anti-racist struggles? One can consider the latter in response to the binaries mainstream political discourse produces (for example through the opposition between spaces in- and outside of the republic, between France and its *banlieues*, between French and ‘others’).

The FUIQP adopts a common strategy in political organizing, which is to speak in name of opposing and dichotomous identities in order to make fault lines in society visible (see e.g. Houssay-Holzschuch 2020 for binary oppositions used by Gramsci). In the process of making a claim and putting it on the political agenda (to turn it into a political problem) it is often necessary to simplify a complex reality in order to make it visible and audible. This involves stressing oppositions and fault lines in society for example through “insurgent identities” (Gould 1995). Racialized identities follow earlier forms of binary identities used in class struggles, that opposed the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, or MSHN struggles that politicized spatial identities. While the separation between marginalized neighborhoods and the rest of France is obviously a fiction, making this epistemological distinction has a political potential when it is mobilized as part of a political agenda. This is what Mignolo understood by “thinking from dichotomous concepts,” instead of “ordering the world in dichotomies” (Mignolo 2012, 85). The American civil rights movement played an important role in politicizing racial identities. In the French context class struggle has been a major form of politicizing power inequality in society at the expense of making racial inequality visible.

While I am convinced of the political relevance of binary oppositions in order to redress invisibilization, I became aware through working with these collectives that it is difficult to keep these oppositions purely at a political level and not let them affect everyday relationships between racialized and non-racialized persons. In other words, it is a fine line that distinguishes between essentialism, the view that “categories of people [...] have intrinsically different and characteristic natures or disposition” (Oxford dictionary) and strategic essentialism when these categories are used in political struggle to denounce the power structures that are built on these categories.

*Second dilemma: when is essentialism strategic?*

Mbembe does not deny the dangers of the affirmation of difference, in case “difference poses itself politically as the site of a specificity that is unfathomable by nature” (2007, 150); is essentialist in other words.<sup>350</sup> It is Spivak who introduced the term “strategic essentialism,” in reference to the political possibilities of mobilizing national identities in anti-colonial struggle (with Guha 1988). Kilburn understands this idea in the following terms:

Essentialism is like dynamite, or a powerful drug: judiciously applied, it can be effective in dismantling unwanted structures or alleviating suffering; uncritically employed, however, it is destructive and addictive (1996).<sup>351</sup>

I consider that politicizing racialized identities is not necessarily incompatible with pluralist democracy, if its goal is using these essentializing terms strategically in order to overcome them through political action. It is questionable however whether it is possible to use essentializing terms strategically in a context where the dominant have the power to name, a power that the dominated lack.

*Third dilemma: appropriating language without power*

Can one liberate oneself with the same terms or names that have served to lock people in categories of difference? A participant of the Université Populaire expressed this dilemma in the following terms.

Voilà toute cette philosophie, toute cette construction intellectuelle qui sature l'espace public. Nous-mêmes, en tant que dominés, avons du mal à nous en départir. Pour preuve, on utilise les mêmes mots pour déconstruire le discours des dominants. (Participant, UP debate, 26/04/2018)

Can the marginalized reappropriate the categories and invented by the established to divide and rule? In the face of processes of subalternization, can counter stigmatization be politically effective? The French sociologist Sayad, who worked extensively on immigration

<sup>350</sup> In French: "Je ne cherche pas à me voiler la face quant aux dangers de ce désir de différence, notamment lorsque la différence se pose politiquement comme le lieu d'une spécificité insondable par nature."

<sup>351</sup> <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2014/06/19/spivak-gayatri-chakravorty/>, accessed 06/01/2019

and counter-stigmatization in France (1999) is not very optimistic. He wrote that “when combatting stigmatization and when fighting for imposing an autonomous definition of oneself, one that is in accordance with one's (material and symbolic) interests, its outcome is often nothing more than a reproduction of the stigma in an inverted form and tied to the representation one wants to challenge” (1999, 365). Building on Sayad's work, Hajjat is equally doubtful about the possibilities for self-definition outside of dominant representations as long as power relations remain asymmetric and as they tend to “reproduce alienation and the dominant patterns of perception” (2008, 263).

It is these dilemmas that the FUIQP and APLP dealt with differently? and that inform the political imagination of the fist and the dove that they respectively adopted. The next two sections deal simultaneously with three other actions that contribute to challenging asymmetric power relations, in addition to forming a we-group. They are: to question the interiorization of inferiority and acquire the feeling that, as marginalized, one can legitimately contradict or reject dominant discourse; to produce (collective) discourse, formulate claims; and to get involved in collective action and communicate claims in public [Table 7.21].

### **3) Fighting with a fist, the FUIQP adopts a combative political stance**

This section presents the political imagination of the fist adopted by the FUIQP. Through its combative approach, the FUIQP contributes to the process of challenging structurally asymmetric power relations. The strategy of confrontation that the FUIQP opted for, is their riposte to the obstacles to politicization discussed in chapter 6.

The answer of the FUIQP to issues of islamophobia, racism and police violence is a combative one: “We are not whining, we are fighting” (*on n'est pas en train de pleurnicher, on est en train de se battre*) (Fringale, 20/11/2015) and targets the State. An important part of the struggle that the United Front wages deals with providing its constituency of racialized people and MSHN inhabitants with self-confidence, that they are entitled to a better place in society, that this is within their reach, and that they should speak and stand up for themselves. The United Front provides analytical tools that explain second-class citizenship status as part of structures of injustice induced by racism and capitalism: structures that need to be combated. The United Front furthermore fights the powerful discourse that convinces people that they are inferior, and that they cannot alter their position in society. Instead it seeks to create hope through the promotion of positive racialized role models, and it seeks to inspire resistance through advocating a “duty of insolence” (*devoir d'insolence*) as a way to undermine hegemonic discourse in France; and to create the space where marginalized voices feel safe to express themselves. In addition, it insists on financial and political autonomy, provides tools for self-defense, and creates space for agonism both inside and outside the neighborhood.

The combative stance of the FUIQP becomes clear in its iconography, in which the fist - an instrument of combat - is a prominent symbol. Different fists used in the visual communication of the FUIQP, and the collectives that prefigured it, highlight different aspects of this combative approach: the fist of mass mobilization (3.1); the fist of Black power (3.2); the fist of women's agency and solidarity (3.3); and the fist that punches to defend the voices and dignity of those that are oppressed (3.4).

### 3.1) Making a fist together: the racialized underclass come together in a mass uprising

The political imagination that speaks to the FUIQP involves images of popular mass uprising overthrowing the system. These images are reminiscent of the communist imagination of the proletariat that overthrows the bourgeoisie, and capitalism with it. The racialized underclass in France today replaces the proletariat of the days of Marx. This imagination becomes apparent in the iconography of the Marche pour la dignité in Paris (2015) in which the Collectif de la Dignité et contre le racisme 38 participated. A mass of people, among whom the racialized are prominently represented (veil, baseball cap, beard, dark frizzy hair), form a fist and constitute a force that counts. They are an asset in creating a form of counter-power (*créer des contre-pouvoirs*) against the established [Figure 7.128].



Figure 7.128 Iconography of the Marche pour la dignité. (Flyer published prior to the March 31/10/2015)<sup>352</sup>

The organizers of the March took example from the Black Power movement's politicization of black identity. In parallel fashion, as discussed in the previous section, the FUIQP advocates a political identity of "we", the racialized versus White, which is often interpreted as "anti-white racism" (*racisme anti-blanc*).

The March in Paris was a moment *par excellence* of opening a new agonistic space. While police violence was the main reason for organizing the March, participation in the March

<sup>352</sup> <http://pcfvlr.unblog.fr/2015/10/22/de-ferguson-a-paris-marchons-pour-la-dignite/>, accessed 13/10/2020

achieved a larger goal, that of making a racialized minority visible not as victims, but as citizens that affirmed their existence publicly and at a highly symbolic space, the *Place de la République*.<sup>353</sup> A person from Grenoble who participated in the March insisted on the importance of the feeling of standing together.

Le but était atteint pour moi qu'on se retrouve tous à cette Marche, tous ceux qui y étaient se sentaient ensemble et ce sentiment, il fallait le vivre pour passer à autre chose. (Participant, Fringale, 20/11/2015)

Bouamama confirmed the importance of physically getting together and forming a group. He commented the messages posted on the United Front's Facebook page following the March, which expressed gratitude and stressed the importance of becoming visible.

Vous ne pouvez pas savoir le nombre de messages qu'on a reçus au story du Front Uni, c'était des messages vraiment très émouvants. On a appelé à que les gens s'organisent et leur message a été: "Je suis venu de telle ou telle ville, merci, merci d'exister". Ça montre quand même l'isolement de beaucoup de monde aujourd'hui. Le simple fait d'être dans la Marche a donné de la visibilité au sens propre du terme. C'était vécu comme notre propre marche, c'est **nos mots d'ordre**, c'est **nos revendications** et pour une fois **c'est nous qui parlons**. (Said Bouamama, Fringale, 20/11/2015)

The interest of FUIQP 38 opening an agonistic space in Grenoble is that one perceives that one is not alone, but part of a larger collective. The March was the occasion to collectively assert a new anti-racist vocabulary, as racialized and their white allies, and to create a feeling of a minority that is many and visible in public space. Beyond making racialized inhabitants in France visible, the March gave them a political voice. This political moment however rapidly dissipated with the second wave of terrorist attacks in Paris that happened two weeks later.

The organization of the March provoked fierce opposition not only among the political right, but also among left-leaning and radical leftwing activists in Grenoble, concentrating on certain figures such as Houria Bouteldjia of the PIR. In left-leaning circles, this critique has focused on the issue of politicizing a racialized identity and on religious positions, as can be deduced from the exchange on the (radical left) social media platform Indymedia Grenoble.<sup>354</sup> While this critique does not comment directly on the positions of the FUIQP, the latter became associated with it. When I invited two persons that participated in the Grenoble delegation of the March for a discussion with the Social Justice research group at

<sup>353</sup> FUIQP 38 published a video document (36') about the participation of the Grenoble delegation in the March, "Un bus pour la Marche de la Dignité 31-10-15", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqhR0gLrgik>, published 08/02/2016, accessed 20/08/2019

<sup>354</sup> See for example "Lettre ouverte à ceux qui pensent que participer à la Marche-de-la-dignité-contre-le-racisme-avec-le-soutien-d'Angela-Davis n'est pas un problème" published on Indymedia in October 2015 by a collective that named itself "Crossroads" (A la croisée des chemins) [https://grenoble.indymedia.org/IMG/pdf/contre\\_marche\\_dignite.pdf](https://grenoble.indymedia.org/IMG/pdf/contre_marche_dignite.pdf), accessed 22/10/2019

the social science laboratory, Pacte the resistance against politicizing racialized identities, and the difficulty of the left to deal with a combative political stance that speaks in name of racialized identities became once more evident. During this workshop dialogue was impossible, among other reasons because my white colleagues found it difficult to accept this combative approach and felt personally affected by it (field notes, 17/11/2015). The tensions that these positions provoke in majority “white” groups stands in stark contrast with the possibilities it opened for racialized people in MSHN to speak out, as is clear in the above quote from Bouamama and during a presentation of the March organized by the FUIQP, “*Retours et perspectives locales suite à la Marche de la Dignité et Contre le Racisme*”, in MJC Desnos (19/12/2015).

### *3.2) The raised fist of Black Power and of self-defense*

The United Front chose a fist as their logo and present it prominently on their 10-point political program, or rather its 10-fist program “*un programme en 10 poings*” [Figure 7.129]. The expression is a pun as a “*poing*” (fist) is pronounced the same way in French as point (*point*). Both the iconography of the fist and the idea of a ten-point program are references to the Black Panther Party (BPP).<sup>355</sup> The objective of its program, which each year chooses three transversal themes that are jointly decided upon by the national coordination of the different local organizations, is to strike at the same time “*taper au même moment*” in different locations in France (Bouamama, Fringale, 20/11/2020).



Figure 7.129 Flyer *Les dix poings du FUIQP*. (Scan of flyer distributed by Saïd Bouamama, 20/11/2015).

<sup>355</sup> Bouamama mentioned in his presentation of the FUIQP that its fist is a reference to the Black Panthers (Fringale, 20/11/2015). The logo of the Black Panther Party (BPP) is a black panther, and the fist is the symbol of the Black Power movement but the Black Panther Party equally used the fist and was responsible for popularizing it. The Black Panther Party adopted in 1966 its “Ten-Point Platform and Program”, which was written by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale (Wahad 2017).



FUIQP activists look to Angela Davis for inspiration, and the closed fist she raised on so many occasions. The political imagination of the FUIQP does not draw on religious sources of inspiration and its activists reject the sanitized and whitewashed figure of Mandela, as well as the ideas of reconciliation and the rainbow nation that he stood for, but they count on self-defense.<sup>356</sup> In this sub-section I further explain in what way the Black Power movement and especially the BPP were sources of inspiration for the FUIQP and what the fist means in the context of the FUIQP.

The Black Panther Party's insistence on self-defense, as their full name in the early years demonstrated, was a response to the violence used against Blacks by fascist militia and by police forces. The latter discredited the principle of active nonviolence as a form of resistance advocated by Martin Luther King, and a new doctrine gained in importance: that of self-defense. Through self-defense and the celebration of militant black masculine agency the BPP intended to deter police brutality and other racist oppression.

What BPP and FUIQP have in common is their combative stance and their belief in the importance of self-defense by attacking the opponent (aggressor and aggressed), what they do not share is the means they employ to defend themselves, nor the virility of the movement. The use of armed violence that the BPP advocated was an answer to the violence against black people in the US in the 1960s: a context that cannot be transposed to 21<sup>st</sup> century France. However the idea of the BPP that it is necessary to appropriate the right to defend oneself in a context in which that right is denied is relevant in France, where racialized people feel that they are not considered worth defending. Partly inspired by Sartre and Fanon (1961) the idea is that in taking this right one changes one's object position into that of a subject (Dorlin 2017, 130). Acts that are generally considered as an aggression should therefore rather be understood as embodying the right to defend oneself.

#### *Why FUIQP chooses the fist*

The FUIQP chooses the fist because it thinks that only through confrontation and conflict things might change. Bouamama formulated clearly that entering into conflict is the only option for racialized inhabitants of MSHN. According to him, what society needs at this moment is "the provocation of conflict", understood here as unsettling the status quo and the current distribution of power (*Le meilleur service qu'on peut rendre à la société est d'être dur - il faut provoquer le conflit*) (Bouamama, Fringale meetings, 20/11/2015). The type of confrontation he aims at cannot be organized in the political arena of representative democracy. That is why he co-created the United Front, rather than a political party, to represent the voice of MSHN inhabitants. He does not think that it is possible to rebalance power relations (*rapports de pouvoir*) and to destabilize the status quo through political parties. The confrontational approach the FUIQP deems necessary is informed by their systemic approach to racism and the conviction that "a non-offensive attitude, in the sense

<sup>356</sup> I guess they are less familiar with his advocacy in favor of armed resistance.

of showing one's goodwill and efforts to integrate, is not enough to obtain a place in France," as stated by a participant.

On n'est pas juste dans du débat en fait. On n'est pas dans un débat où mon voisin français... Ce n'est pas juste une divergence du point de vue, c'est un système de domination qui fait que cette divergence de point de vue nous écrase la gueule. Ce n'est pas en étant de bonne volonté et en étant très souriant, super sympa, qui veulent s'intégrer et qui adorent la choucroute qu'on va y arriver en fait. C'est au bout d'un moment, on installe un rapport de force et... (Participant FUIQP, Fringale, 20/11/2015)

### *Verbal self-defense*

In the symbolic and physical spaces that the FUIQP opened respectively through its discourse and the meeting spaces, marginalized people could gain self-confidence. In these spaces they came to interpret certain experiences as forms of aggression that should not be tolerated and against which they needed to learn to defend themselves with words. The analytical tools the FUIQP provided prepared its members for verbal self-defense (*espace d'apprentissage de l'auto-défense*). The following quote demonstrates that the FUIQP indeed has this role

Avant je n'osais pas trop [renvoyer à la personne ce qu'elle donne], mais le fait de fréquenter ces discussions, de fréquenter certaines personnes, ça m'a permis... Je pense qu'il faut qu'on fasse du travail sur nous-mêmes... (Participant, Fringale, 20/11/2015)

The agonistic stance of racialized persons that are able to affirm their opposition to mainstream opinions and norms is often interpreted as aggressive. What is considered as aggressive by the established is interpreted as a means of self-defense by the FUIQP. For example, H. told me that when she speaks, disagrees, and expresses her anger, it is always understood as an aggression (informal discussion, 17/11/2015). Another participant said that

On m'a toujours dit que j'étais quelqu'un **d'agressive** et que j'étais **méchante**. Ce n'est pas vrai, je suis un bisounours, très gentille, j'aime les gens et chaque fois que **je défends** une personne on me disait "on ne discute pas avec Mme X., parce qu'elle est **agressive**". Ce que j'ai réussi avec mon **agressivité**, à un moment, il faut **renvoyer** à la personne ce qu'elle nous donne. Et moi, quand on me méprise, je renvoie l'image de mépris. (Participant, Fringale, 20/11/2015)

This participant is accused of aggressive and mean behavior, behavior that she describes herself as defending a person or giving back what she receives. In discussion with Bouamama she suddenly understood why people accuse her of being aggressive when she perceives her action as defense of herself or others. The analytical framework of the FUIQP helps to turn dominant ideas around about who is aggressor and who is victim, calling into question the mainstream image that the police protects society against savage/wild/uneducated MSHN

youth and Muslim activists such as Chaambi. According to this mainstream image institutions are represented as the latter's victims, while the FUIQP perceives them as aggressors.

### *Promotion of positive role models (and self-defense)*

A means to build self-confidence is to promote knowledge about leaders of African anti-colonial struggles through a book publication, *Figures de la révolution africaine* (Bouamama 2014), and YouTube tutorials. The idea is that racialized populations in France can identify with these important figures of African resistance, and that their emancipatory paths serve as inspiration for getting rid of systems of domination in France. An example in Grenoble was the organization of an evening dedicated to the commemoration of Muhammad Ali, and his contribution to the struggle for black liberation. The image chosen for the poster about this event, Muhammad Ali gives the fist that punches [Figure 7.130].



Figure 7.130 Poster of Muhammad Ali on a wall in Villeneuve. (Photo author, 29/09/2017)

### *Duty of insolence*

Insolence or impertinence is an important tool of the FUIQP to allow agonism, as it is a way of undermining the symbolic power of the dominant over the dominated. It works like the *Riddikulus* charm in Harry Potter used as defense against a fearsome creature: by making it look ridiculous it loses its terrorizing power. While insolence is not equivalent to ridicule it has the same function. Bouamama turned insolence into a duty (*le devoir d'insolence*) and explained it as a counterreaction to the double instigation of parents and institutions to assimilate, and as a means to withdraw from the latter their normative power. Its role is to undo the interiorization of inferiority in the sense of Fanon.

Quand il y a domination, Frantz Fanon dit il y a toujours deux conditions: Il faut que le dominé intériorise qu'il est inférieur et que le dominant intériorise qu'il est supérieur. Quand on a compris ça, ça veut dire qu'il y a un travail à faire sur nous-mêmes pour sortir de l'infériorité et à imposer le débat que le dominant soit contraint de [revoir?] de cette relation. Je parle de contraint hein

parce qu'il ne le fera pas par plaisir. (Saïd Bouamama, UP debate, 20/11/2015)

Bouamama's call for insolence is motivated by a desire to see solidarity and forms of organization emerge among the subordinate in order to find a common voice and to see new perspectives and horizons open up. An indication that the verbal self-defense that Saïd Bouamama promoted with Z.E.P.<sup>357</sup> in *Nique la France, devoir d'insolence*, in order to tackle institutional racism in France worked to some extent was the reactions it provoked. Provocation is for Bouamama "the only means [left] to make the suffering of youth audible, whom are not heard and have no right to speech" (*Regards*, 2019).<sup>358</sup> This provocation had a price though, Bouamama and Z.E.P.'s singer-songwriter have been pursued in court and found guilty of "anti-white racism" (*Les Inrockuptibles*, 28/11/2012).<sup>359</sup>

Participants of the FUIQP commented on the limited possibilities for dialogue and discussion with those enjoying white privilege. They no longer want to gently ask for change, but to be recognized and be included in dominant society. They want doors to be opened and if others will not do it for them, they will do it for themselves.

La dernière fois on m'a dit il ne faut pas promouvoir la violence. J'ai dit : "Je ne promeus pas la violence pour la violence mais à un certain moment donné, je n'ai plus envie de dire que mes compatriotes blancs sont dominants. Je veux que ma fille aille à Polytechnique, ils ouvrent la porte, point barre." (...) Je n'ai plus envie d'être dans la négociation. (Participant, Fringale, 20/11/2015)

The only option to gain a place and to make themselves heard, is to be loud: "if we do not put the issue of racism and discrimination on the table, if we don't shout (*gueuler*), then nobody will" (participant, UP debate, 20/11/2015). According to this perspective, it is urgent to build a *rapport the force* to challenge the current status quo and its unequal distribution of power.

### *The need for autonomy*

FUIQP members stressed the necessity of autonomy in political organizing, and of getting rid of white paternalism. According to a participant from Marseille the paternalistic attitude of political parties and civil society organizations is an obstacle for making the voices of racialized inhabitants of MSHN heard, giving the example of the attitudes of white activists who get involved in her marginalized neighborhood and come to tell them "how we should think and how we should organize" (participant, UP debate, 20/11/2015). Another participant commented that:

<sup>357</sup> Music group *Zone d'expression Populaire*. They also published an album with the same title in 2009.

<sup>358</sup> <http://www.regards.fr/acces-payant/archives-web/racisme-anti-blanc-une-campagne-de,5818>, accessed 1/10/2019

<sup>359</sup> Lemaire, Basile, " 'Nique la France': un rappeur et un sociologue poursuivis par une association d'extrême droite", *LesInrockuptibles*, 28/11/2012 <https://www.lesinrocks.com/2012/11/28/actualite/actualite/nique-la-france-un-rappeur-et-un-sociologue-poursuivis-par-une-association-dextreme-droite/>, accessed 10/02/2017

Du coup, pour moi [organisation autonome], c'est aussi d'éviter le paternalisme blanc en fait, qui est plein de camarades qui sont très gentils, qui vont nous aider, qui veulent venir, mais... (Participant, UP debate, 20/03/2015)

She stressed the importance of organizing among the marginalized in order claim a place and make their own voices heard.

Pour moi l'auto organisation ce n'est pas pour vivre dans le séparatisme... Je ne dis pas qu'il ne faut jamais faire des choses ensemble et avoir les politiques d'alliance. C'est juste qu'il faut qu'on reprenne des places, qu'on produise un discours sur nos vies : produire un discours sur ma vie, produire de l'analyse pour ne plus être cantonné aux témoins de ce que nous vivons nous-mêmes en fait. Moi, je n'ai pas besoin qu'un sociologue blanc -et c'est avec tous mes respects- vienne m'expliquer ce que c'est que la domination et vienne expliquer en fait ce que c'est que de vivre dans un quartier populaire et du coup le jour où on sera aussi, en tant que personnes issues des immigrations postcoloniales qui vont produire ce discours là et qui vont en fait s'auto organiser là-dedans, je pense qu'il y aura des choses avancées. (Participant, UP debate, 20/11/2015)

An important condition for being autonomous in one's political positions is to be independent financially. In this regard the Black Panther movement is again an important source of inspiration, as it provided "one of the rare moments of thinking about autonomy in political terms" (Bouamama, Fringale meeting, 20/11/2015). To assure financial independence in Grenoble members of the Collectif de la Dignité et contre le racisme 38 collected second-hand objects for weeks and sold these on flea markets in order to raise the money for the bus that would take them to the March in Paris. Financial independence gave the United Front the freedom to formulate political positions that no political party was willing to defend. To make his point Bouamama mentioned two examples of demands that no political party, left nor right, would be willing to carry politically: the abolition of the 2004 law against religious symbols in schools, and the question of reparations for colonization and slavery (Fringale meeting, 20/11/2015).

### *3.3) The raised fist of solidarity with and the agency of Muslim women*

The fist raised in this third example is a fist of again a different kind, it is one of agency, organization, and of female solidarity and lacks the masculinist glorification of violence. It is closer to a lesser-known form of black power concerned with community service. Albeit less prominently, the symbol of the fist is present on the flyer of the debate the "Fringale collective" organized on Islamophobia [Figure 7.131]. This image in which women raise their fists stresses their agency and their capacity to defend themselves, and stands in contrast with the mainstream representation of Muslim women as submissive to Muslim men. Showing Muslim women's agency aims to break with the image, perpetuated through white paternalism, that immigrants, MSHN inhabitants, and Muslim women can only be saved by white activists. The idea of self-defense is close to the type of feminism Dorlin defends in *Se Défendre*, which according to her should focus more on developing women's capacity to

defend themselves, and allowing them to be aggressive, than on protecting them as humans that are particularly vulnerable to aggressions (*France Culture*, 2017).



Figure 7.131 Poster for the debate on islamophobia. (“Fringale” collective, 31/05/2015)

In the specific security context that followed the terrorist attacks, the necessity of creating a space where racialized minorities were in the majority, became evident. The space the Fringale collective provided served to build the self-confidence needed for daring to defend a (racialized) minority position and to confront the disagreement and animosity that was common in public debates in this period. The FUIQP publicly denounced (state) racism and islamophobia, which were highly contested terms in France in 2015, and still are five years later. The radicality of the Fringale collective becomes clear in comparison with the positions of the Université Populaire that addressed similar issues during the same time period, and with some of the same people involved. Compare for example the title that the “Fringale” collective chose for a debate on Islamophobia with that of the Université Populaire. The Fringale/FUIQP stressed **resistance** and **struggle**, “*Résistances populaires, refus de l’islamophobie, les luttes des femmes*,”<sup>360</sup> while the Université populaire aimed at **understanding**, “*Pour comprendre les discriminations, islamophobie, etc.*”.<sup>361</sup> The Fringale collective provided the space for women to speak out about their experiences and they did not first have to prove that they experienced discrimination and islamophobia through personal narratives, which was the case if their voices were the minority. The fact that the debate was programmed on a Saturday afternoon, with an on-site free childcare, and that the announcement of the debate was not published on local activist mailing lists nor on the

<sup>360</sup> English translation: “People’s resistance and the refusal of islamophobia, women’s struggles”

<sup>361</sup> English translation: “To understand discrimination, islamophobia etc.”

Villeneuve Debout mailing list, but instead was communicated by telephone by Muslim women that were part of the organization helped to avoid an overrepresentation of white activists. As a result Muslim women were the majority in the Fringale debate, which was not the case during the Université Populaire debate. Another factor that made space for a different kind of speech was that the invited speakers of the Fringale debate were both female (Ismahane Chouder and Nasima Moujoud) while the Université populaire invited two male speakers (Abdelaziz Chaambi and Michel Kokoreff) to speak about a form of discrimination that concerned women in particular.

The FUIQP alternated between debate spaces in the neighborhood giving an opportunity to racialized inhabitants to be in the majority (Fringale and Muhammad Ali debates) and spaces in the city center in which they wanted to make the voices of racialized inhabitants heard (Place Felix Poulat on the occasion of the rally for Zyed and Bouna). Another example of choosing a space in the city-center is the concert that was organized to support the family of Adama Traoré. Organizing this concert in Engrenage, in the Saint-Bruno neighborhood (see overview map), they opened a space for counter-hegemonic discourse where subaltern discourse could find a public, an example I develop in the next section.

#### 3.4) The fist that punches: no justice no peace

The last example of the type of fist with which the FUIQP fights is the fist that punches. This fist can be found on the poster for the rap concert FUIQP organized in support of the family of Adama Traoré (21/07/2017), who was another victim of police violence [Figure 7.132] (3.4.a). I present in this subsection two actions the FUIQP organized, the first following the death of Adama Traoré in police custody (July 2016) and the second in response to the sexual violation inflicted upon Theo Luhaka (February 2017) during an identity check.

Defending black bodies against police violence is a central theme for the FUIQP, just as it was for the Black Panther Party. In reaction to the two cases of police violence the FUIQP did not seek to physically defend black bodies against police violence in the neighborhood as the BPP did, through demonstrating their capacity to use arms, but opened spaces of agonism both in- and outside the neighborhood to speak against police violence (3.4.b). The threat to use armed violence is not entirely absent however in FUIQP discourse, as I demonstrate at the end of this subsection (3.4.c) that deals with responses to the riots that followed the death of Adam and Fetih in Grenoble (February 2019, see chapter 6).



Figure 7.132 Poster Concert en soutien à la famille de Adama Traoré. (FUIQP, published by ICI-Grenoble, 21/01/2017)<sup>362</sup>

### 3.4.a) A counter-hegemonic concert, creating the space to speak about police violence

The case of Adama Traoré resembles that of George Floyd, which received international media attention in Spring 2020, because Adama Traoré had also told the police that he had difficulty breathing while he lay handcuffed on his belly with the police on his back and died on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 2016. Eight months after his death the FUIQP organized a concert in a central area of the city, Engrenage (see overview map), to express support to the family of Adama Traoré and provided them with a platform to present their version of the circumstances in which Adama Traoré died. The Traoré family contests the version presented by the State and affirms that Adama Traoré died as a result of police violence (Engrenage, Grenoble, 21/01/2017). The fist the FUIQP used in the visual communication to announce the concert is not a symbol of aggression, but is a symbol of self-defense against a police force that is experienced as a source of danger by racialized families. The type of fist used for the poster of the concert is the one that can give a punch, and that strikes back when it is hit. It fights with words but does not shun the support of violence carried out by others in response to state violence.

I continue to draw on Dorlin to interpret the meaning of this fist that punches and that, through punching, defends the bodies of racialized men in MSHN. It is through attacking that one defends oneself. Dorlin describes the agonistic approach of self-defense pruned by thinkers relevant to the Black Panther Party as a specific way of engaging the activist body. It

<sup>362</sup> [http://www.ici-grenoble.org/user/mes-fichiers-a-moi/agenda/3028/Affiche\\_concert\\_21janvier.jpg](http://www.ici-grenoble.org/user/mes-fichiers-a-moi/agenda/3028/Affiche_concert_21janvier.jpg), accessed 19/12/2019



is not part of a long-term strategy of struggle, as is the case of the mechanism of active nonviolence according to Dorlin (2017, 29), but counts on the power of the immediacy of a strike or a punch. The power of active nonviolence versus self-defense as two different strategies of struggle correspond to different temporalities, respectively long-term and immediate.

Self-defense through violence is concomitant with a certain idea of history, that it is impossible to make history without irruption and shock. According to Dorlin, the metaphor of the strike is needed to show that the oppressed can respond, blow for blow (2017). In opposition to active nonviolence, this strategy does not play on the “exemplary nature of one’s martyrdom but on the inexorable and inescapable nature of one’s defense” (2017, 130). Dorlin puts forward that, according to this “martial philosophy”, the terms and the positions of domination are no longer thought in ontological terms, between dominant and dominated; or in hierarchical terms, armed versus unarmed; but in diachronical terms, between aggressors and aggressed (*Ibid.*). The speeches on the occasion of the rap concert provide an illustration of framing an issue in terms of an opposition between aggressors and aggressed.

The evening of the concert in support of Adama Traoré and his family, several members of the Traoré family came to Grenoble to speak about their struggle following the death of Adama to obtain an independent investigation into the conditions that led to Adama Traoré’s death and the responsibility of the police. Adama’s twin sister (Hawa), his mother (Ouma) and Adama’s elder brother (whose name was not mentioned) spoke about the ways state actors forced them into silence. They spoke of the asymmetry in power relations between their family and the State, “a poor black family in France” versus figures of authority like “the doctor”, “the prosecutor”, “prison”, posing the rhetorical question “who will they believe?”.

Le médecin qui ment, le procureur qui ment et entre eux et moi, le frère, avec mon objectivité de frère, qui va-t-on croire ? (Brother Adama, Engrenage, 21/01/2017)<sup>363</sup>

The family presented themselves as victims of state aggression. They stressed that the only tools they have at their disposition are their “mouths” and that their struggle therefore is a non-violent one.

On n’est pas dans la violence. (...) ils ont tué Adama, ils prennent mes deux enfants et ils les mettent en prison, [parce que] ils font trop de **bruit**, il faut qu’ils **s’éteignent**. Comment tu veux qu’ils s’éteignent ? C’est impossible ! On n’a pas de couteaux pour tuer, on a que nos **bouches** et on va **parler**. Comment se **taire** ? (Ouma Traoré,

<sup>363</sup> “Soirée Justice pour Adama à l’Engrenage Grenoble 21-01-17”  
<https://www.facebook.com/FUIQPGrenoble/videos/179141310114815/>, published 04/03/2017, accessed 17/09/2019

Engrenage, 21/01/2017)

Voice is the only weapon they have, and it is through words that they count defending themselves. It is exactly this weapon that was taken away from them when four family members were pursued in court as a result of their activism to demand justice for Adama, accused of aggression against police forces (*Le Monde*, 02/07/2019).<sup>364</sup>

Pour nous, une famille qui n'a rien demandé, on a tué notre frère et en plus, en réponse, on nous a fermés en prison, voilà ce qu'il faut que les gens entendent. Voilà ce qu'il se passe réellement en France pour une famille comme nous. (...) On va faire le tour de la France, on va aller partout pour que les gens **entendent**. Voilà comment on est mangé en France ici parce qu'on est une **pauvre famille de Noirs**. Malheureusement ils sont tombés sur... **On ne va pas lâcher**. (Brother Adama, Engrenage, 21/01/2016)

The only power at the disposal of the Traoré family is the mobilization of public opinion in order to put pressure on the State; obtain an investigation into the very dubious conditions of Adama Traoré's death; to expose the lies of state actors; and to make police violence visible. This power is constantly thwarted though through a criminalization of the family members and their incarceration, discrediting their voices and impeding them from speaking out.<sup>365</sup>

Through the organization of the concert the FUIQP provided the Adama family a platform to make their voices, which are objects of silencing practices of the State, heard. I consider that this space that the FUIQP offers provides the possibility to organize a sort of verbal self-defense against what is considered as an aggression of the State.

#### 3.4.b) Retorting to state violence through creative expression in the park

Another action the FUIQP initiated in response to an incident of police violence was to retort to police violence through exposing messages in the park like "our neighborhoods are not shooting ranges" (*stands de tir*) [Figure 7.133], "Theo and Adama remind you why Zyed and Bouna ran" [Figure 7.134], "resistance to oppression is a right" [Figure 7.135], "who protects us against the police?" [Figure 7.134] and "police partout, justice nulle part" [Figure 7.136]. These messages replied to the violence that was inflicted on Theo Luhaka in February 2017. This time the FUIQP targeted a neighborhood audience and chose to open a space for agonism in the park in Villeneuve. The FUIQP invited inhabitants to participate in making creative statements against police violence "Créations contre les violences policières" and

<sup>364</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/07/02/bagui-traore-frere-d-adama-renvoye-devant-les-assises-pour-tentative-d-assassinat\\_5484471\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/07/02/bagui-traore-frere-d-adama-renvoye-devant-les-assises-pour-tentative-d-assassinat_5484471_3224.html), accessed 17/11/2020.

<sup>365</sup> See for example *Médiapart Club*, "La guerre contre Assa Traoré est déclarée, Geoffroy De Lagasnerie, 14/10/2019, source <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/geoffroy-de-lagasnerie/blog/141019/la-guerre-contre-assa-traore-est-declaree>, accessed 17/12/2019 ou *Le Monde*, "Bagui Traoré, frère d'Adama, renvoyé devant les assises pour "tentative d'assassinat", 02/07/2019, [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/07/02/bagui-traore-frere-d-adama-renvoye-devant-les-assises-pour-tentative-d-assassinat\\_5484471\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/07/02/bagui-traore-frere-d-adama-renvoye-devant-les-assises-pour-tentative-d-assassinat_5484471_3224.html), accessed 17/12/2019.

made paper and green paint available to all passersbys in the park. Through creative expression, they provided inhabitants with an opportunity to speak back to the police, using the power of ridicule, for example by representing police as pigs [Figure 7.136], and through the message “anti-flics” [Figure 7.137] as well as “Beware, police” signs [Figure 7.138]. I interpret this action also as a form of creative self-defense in the neighborhood against police violence.



Figure 7.133 “Nos quartiers ne sont pas des stands de tir”. (Photo Facebook FUIQP, 01/03/2017)<sup>366</sup>



Figure 7.134 Placard “Who protects us against the police?”. (Photo Facebook FUIQP, 01/03/2017)<sup>367</sup>

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<https://www.facebook.com/FUIQPGrenoble/photos/a.1831916110397847/1796545093934949/?type=3&theater>, accessed 17/12/2019.

<sup>367</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/FUIQPGrenoble/photos/a.1831916110397847/1796544990601626>, accessed 17/12/2019.



Figure 7.135 placard "Resistance against oppression is a right". (Photo Facebook FUIQP, 01/03/2017)<sup>368</sup>



Figure 7.136 Placard "Police partout justice nulle part". (Photo Facebook FUIQP, 01/03/2017)<sup>369</sup>



Figure 7.137 Drawing "Anti flics injustice" (Photo Facebook FUIQP, 01/03/2017)<sup>370</sup>



Figure 7.138 Placard "Attention Flics" (Photo Facebook FUIQP, 01/03/2017)<sup>371</sup>

<sup>368</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/FUIQPGrenoble/photos/a.1831916110397847/1796545713934887>, accessed 17/12/2019.

<sup>369</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/FUIQPGrenoble/photos/a.1831916110397847/1796544737268318>, accessed 17/12/2019.

<sup>370</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/FUIQPGrenoble/photos/a.1831916110397847/1796544913934967>, accessed 17/12/2019.

<sup>371</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/FUIQPGrenoble/photos/a.1831916110397847/1796544877268304>, accessed 17/12/2019.

The struggle against police violence and in favor of physical security is essentially a struggle for rights, it is saying: we have a right to safety, our bodies deserve as much protection as white bodies, we deserve to respect ourselves and be respected – but we will not ask for this respect from you, we will enact it.

### *3.4.c) FUIQP position on the use of violence (violence as self-defense)*

While the *modus operandi* of the FUIQP is nonviolent in practice, its position that violence can be a political tool distinguishes it from the other collectives that I worked with, because despite the fact that they do not advocate violence as a political means, they do not condemn it either. The FUIQP spoke out in support of revolts as a means to resist oppression, as the example below demonstrates. This attitude to violence is in accordance with more and more critical voices in antifascist and anti-capitalist circles that call into question the efficacy of the principle of nonviolence in political action, just like Robert Williams, and the Black Panthers after him, did in the segregationist US (Dorlin 2017). “Principled nonviolence” (Nagler 2004) is understood by activists of the FUIQP as an unjust appeal by the dominant to the dominated to refrain from physical violence while they continue to be victims of state violence (see for example Gelderloos 2013). The FUIQP position on violence and the rejection of principled nonviolence as promoted by Martin Luther King is similar to the position of Malcom X and the BPP: if one is hit on the cheek, one does not offer the other cheek, but one raises the fist. In the context of anti-police riots that followed the sexual violation of Theo Luhaka, a statement on the FUIQP facebook page declared that the FUIQP supported all means of resistance against state violence.

La police assassine et viole.  
La Justice requalifie les faits et acquitte la police mais condamne les jeunes qui **résistent**.  
La révolte populaire est **légitime**.  
Le FUIQP Grenoble soutient les personnes mobilisées, quels que soient leurs modes d'action.  
La **seule violence** que nous condamnons, c'est la violence d'Etat.  
Organisons-nous pour **combattre** les violences policières, par tous les moyens nécessaires! (Facebook FUIQP 38, 25/02/2017)<sup>372</sup>

When riots broke out in several MSHN in Grenoble after the death of Adam and Fatih in 2019, who died in a traffic accident while being pursued by the police, the Vérité pour Adama collective expressed support to the families for the loss of their loved ones, calling for “Truth and Justice for all” [whose death stands in relation to a police intervention]. Assa Traoré, the sister of Adama Traoré continued her message by the statement “*Sans Justice vous n’aurez jamais la paix*”, which is an adaptation of the slogan used internationally to

<sup>372</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/events/223749771423769/>, accessed 10/02/2019

English translation: “The police assassinate and rape. The justice system reframes these facts and acquits the police but condemns the youth that resist. The people’s revolt is legitimate. FUIQP Grenoble supports those that are mobilized, whatever their mode of action. The only violence that we condemn is the State violence. Let’s organize to combat police violence, by all means necessary.”

protest against police violence “No justice no peace” (*Sans Justice, pas de paix*) [Figure 7.139].



Figure 7.139 “Without justice you will never have peace”. (Screenshot FUIQP, 05/03/2019)<sup>373</sup>

Taking it further takes away the ambiguity of the initial slogan, which can be interpreted in two ways: 1) as long as police officers are not condemned in court for their crimes, one cannot speak of peace in our societies and 2) you will not have peace as long as justice is not be done. The slogan “Without justice, you will never have peace” that Assa Traoré posted and that she wears on her t-shirt leaves no ambiguity and is formulated as a threat. Again, I argue that this threat is not one of aggression but one that shows that one is intent on defending oneself, preferably vocally but if needs be with violence, for as long as the State does not consider racialized bodies worth defending.

The combative discourse of the FUIQP stands in stark contrast with the peaceful discourse of the APLP members, who were directly confronted with the physical vulnerability of the bodies of their loved ones, but this time it was not the State that was directly responsible but other racialized younger men from MSHN. This made the politicization of these deaths more difficult, an issue that applies more generally to black-on-black violence. The images of the FUIQP do not speak to the audience of the APLP. The Marxist/socialist imagination of proletarians that rise up, wage a revolution and overthrow capitalist power is not part of the APLP collective vocabulary. The figures of Zyed and Bouna did not hold important symbolic importance for APLP as persons with whom they identified, nor was political organizing in

<sup>373</sup> Facebook post FUIQP: “Le Comité Adama apporte son soutien aux familles et aux proches de Fatih et Adam à Grenoble. Vérité et Justice pour tous! Sans Justice vous n'aurez jamais la paix!”, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Community/FUIQP-Grenoble-1595>, accessed 17/10/2019.

name of MSHN particularly appealing to them (field notes, 2015). This group feels more attracted to the perspective projected by Herrick Mouafo of humans standing in relation.

#### 4) The peace discourse of the APLP, between exit, fight and loyalty

In this section I seek to understand the political imagination behind the APLP initiative: why has it been attractive for youth, what did they find in the space created by APLP, and what compelled them to invest considerable time and energy in it over a longer period of time? I further explain what I mean by the political imagination of the dove, as a means of fighting that does not draw on the imagination of a confrontation between two antagonistic forces that combat each other, but as a means of fighting that seeks to repair the present injustice and suffering. It does so through opening up a new horizon, through seeking a third way in the encounter and embrace of the other and unknown and through accepting to stand together in a relationship. The political imagination of the dove draws on the discourse of peace and helps a person to shift from the role of victim to that of actor, from subject to citizen. I make the distinction between three different forms of peace discourse: a discourse that celebrates life, as has been the case of the parents following the deaths of their children (4.1); a discourse that supports the loyalty and exit options, as a means of coping with injustice and grief, as has been the case of some younger family and friends of Kevin and Sofiane (4.2); and as a means of political imagination that seeks to transform victims in actors and subjects in citizens, as has been the proposal of Herrick Mouafo for APLP (4.3).

##### *4.1) Parents' peace discourse, a celebration of life*

Even faced with these particularly atrocious forms of violence, the parents of the victims chose to avoid speaking in terms of anger and revenge and instead chose to use a language of peace. These parents found a vocabulary of nonviolence and life-affirming values in their respective religious traditions (Muslim and Protestant). Sofiane's mother for example delivered the following message during the White March "*Nous appelons au calme et à la paix, [notre fils] en aurait voulu ainsi*" (02/01/2012). The parents were exceptional in their capacity to communicate strength, to find the means to affirm time and again their commitment to peace, love, and the value of life. Peace, in this context has come to stand for many different things: inner peace, for example being able to sleep; pastoral peace, peace in the afterlife; the celebration of life, of life-affirming values rather than life destructing ones; to break the cycle of violence and revenge and to transform the violence of their death into something positive.

In the context of being confronted with the taking of life through violent means, the public affirmation of the celebration of life has to be understood as a political statement. "Facing the destructive power of violence, how is it possible to continue living?" was the question that Sofiane's father, Mohamed, shared with a large audience (Soirée d'hommage à Kevin et Sofiane, 17/06/2014). He wondered how one could survive such a tragedy and remain human (*survivre humainement*)? How to keep "a taste for life" (*le goût de la vie*) after such a

brutal murder? How to go on? (*Ibid.*). In response to his own question, he stressed life-affirming values such as to “stay alive”, “avoid bitterness”, “stay open” (*ne pas s’enfermer*), “avoid suffering in silence”, “create collectives” (*faire du collectif*), “sincerity”, “love”, “healing”, “believe in the beauty of life”, “transform negative into positive” and “peace is stronger than violence”. His conception of peace is that of a positive force that celebrates the value of life and that should help to combat negative forces such as anger, violence, depression, or in other words violence to ourselves or others. Others could feel this energy and took it over. Nabil, a member of the Marche Blanche and APLP collectives, for example said that the goal of the White March was “to embrace life” (*Soirée d’hommage, 17/06/2014*). The insistence that life goes on and that one has the obligation to live it, provided a normative framework that prevented APLP youth from remaining stuck in the past. At one moment, Herrick Mouafo reprimanded close friends of Kevin and Sofiane that they adopted a position of victimhood while the parents and close relatives did not allow themselves this immobility (*field notes, 23/05/2015*). For Herrick Mouafo, their victim status impeded them from positioning themselves as citizens.

#### *4.2) Peace discourse as exit and loyalty*

Despite the above argument that publicly affirming the celebration of life in face of violent death is political, it is undeniable that peace discourse can also serve the exit and loyalty options. Parents’ accounts of transcendental images of life after death are to me an example of a narrative that offers a way out of suffering, or at least soothes it at an individual level. It does not address the wider challenges of the here and now. I am not of the opinion that religion necessarily inspires the exit or loyalty option, but it may have this function, as the following examples of religious imagination of Kevin and Sofiane as angels residing in paradise, demonstrate. This image “appeased” Mohamed.

La fille d’un ami a partagé avec moi le rêve qu’elle fait: elle a vu Kevin et Sofiane assis sur une étendue d’herbe, en paix, et ils nous demandaient de prier. Ce témoignage est un signe, parmi tant d’autres, qui fait qu’aujourd’hui, je suis apaisé. (Mohamed, *Soirée d’hommage à Kevin et Sofiane, 17/06/2014*)

Alicia, Sofiane’s cousin and member of APLP told a similar story.

Certains textes [dans le Coran] expliquent que quand tu n’as entre guillemets “rien fait” et tu te fais tuer lâchement comme ça avec souffrance tu es considéré comme martyr et donc pour eux forcément le paradis leur est ouvert donc moi vraiment c’est ça qui m’a soulagée en me disant: “bon nous on est sur terre mais eux pour moi ils vivent éternellement dans un endroit magique”. Donc, déjà ça, ouf, ça m’a fait relâcher. (Alicia, *interview, 01/05/2018*)

While this peaceful imagination, projecting the victims in an ideal world, has brought appeasement to the families of the victims on an individual level, it is not helpful for investing in collective action here on earth, for addressing anger and feelings of injustice. Moreover, religion is not only an inspiration for peace discourse. It originally provided youth



that later got involved in APLP a discourse about punishment and revenge. In some Quran verses, Alicia and Steven found reassuring confirmation that perpetrators would be heavily punished in hell. Holding on to this image at least helped them in some way to channel their anger.

[..] un verset qui m'a vraiment touchée, c'est quand on tue une seule personne injustement, donc hors état de guerre etc., c'est comme si on avait tué l'humanité entière, forcément tu seras puni par Dieu. C'est ça qui m'a soulagée et avec Steven, vraiment, notre haine on l'a passée dans ça quoi. C'est bon, justice sera faite.  
(Alicia, interview, 01/05/2018)

The fact that religion can be a refuge for earthly suffering becomes clear in Alicia's story.

Pour ne pas tomber on va dire en dépression, je me suis réfugiée dans quelque chose qui me tenait à cœur parce que c'est Sofiane qui essayait de me l'inculquer, la religion. Alors que je n'étais pas forcément dedans, le bon comportement, être bon envers les autres, croire en Dieu etc... Et c'est dans ça que je me suis réfugiée, c'est ça qui a fait qu'après j'ai porté le voile... pour m'apaiser.  
(Alicia, interview, 01/05/2018)

Again, this imagination can provide individual soothing, which in itself is worthwhile. Any emotional help and source of feelings of happiness and completion are obviously welcome when one suffers. This imagination contains a trap though, when it is (only) at the service of loyalty and leaves no space for emotions of anger, hatred, and injustice and becomes an impediment to expressing these through political and collective action. For example, the parents' calls to remain calm have had the positive effect of suppressing further violence, as in dissuading revenge, but they do not address the question of what to do with one's anger other than swallowing it. Sofiane's mother clearly called upon youth to be "respectful" and "prudent".

Soyez respectueux et prudents, écoutez vos parents, évitez les problèmes, rien ne vaut la vie et la famille. L'amour et la paix triomphent toujours dans cette vie ou dans l'au-delà...  
(Messaouda, speech White March, 2/10/2012)

The deep respect I have for parents that have been able to formulate phrases of peace and love after their son's brutal murder, does not keep me from associating above statement with Abdelaziz Chaambi's critique of the pacifying role of some Muslim discourse. During the interview, Alicia explained that she sees her investment (*engagement*) in society as follows:

Pour moi déjà, par exemple en ayant ma fille c'est bien l'élever pour qu'elle respecte les autres, les aide, et soit toujours là pour être bonne, et pas néfaste pour la société, donc ça, déjà c'est mon premier combat, on va dire, que ma progéniture reproduise ce que moi j'ai voulu faire, que mes parents, grands-parents ont fait voilà. Après, s'investir à mon échelle, dans sa ville, aider les autres, enfin, c'est toujours la même chose, mon analyse c'est toujours aider

son prochain, faire en sorte que tout le monde réussisse et qu'on réussisse professionnellement, scolairement, personnellement, voila... (Alicia, interview, 01/05/2018)

Alicia's projection in life is a clear example of Hirschmann's category of loyalty, of adapting oneself to find a place in society. The story of her family's trajectory is that her grand-parents arrived in Grenoble with their ten children, where they had to learn the French language and to find their way in society. Her mother and aunts walked every day to school from Echirolles to Grenoble because they had no money for public transport, but they pursued, for some later in life, (adult) education to obtain professional diplomas and find work. In this context, it is very understandable that Alicia is proud of this history, of the way her family integrated in French society, considering the hard work and sacrifices it involved. There is a risk though that this narrative of integration will stand in the way of her capacity to defend her rights, notably her rights as a Muslim citizen. I understood that she was concerned about the latter when she came to participate, to my surprise, in the first Université populaire debate with friends, to discuss islamophobia and discrimination. Together, they shared stories about the problems they encountered in their daily lives as a result of their decision to wear a *hijab*.

The concept of peace contains the risk of pacification and appeasement, if it calls for suppressing anger and demands for justice. Pacification insists on peace and love without providing the space for demanding justice, a necessary component of peace. In response to my question of what Steven and Rachid did with their anger, Steven answered:

La colère, qu'est-ce qu'on en fait? On essaie de la canaliser tout simplement. Elle existe, elle est là, elle est présente tous les jours. La colère, la vengeance, donc toutes ces choses-là, on les garde intérieurement et c'est ce qui fait la différence entre nous et les autres, ceux qui passent aux actes [...]. Nous on canalise tout ça, et puis on le garde à l'intérieur de nous et petit à petit ça se dissipe. (Steven, radio interview, 01/07/2014)

The imperative to remain calm potentially has the negative side effect of turning the anger inwards, suppressing it with soft drugs and/or leading to a withdrawal from public life. This has proved true for some young people close to the victims. The risk of pacification was certainly present in the public statements of the Marche Blanche, and this has also been an important source of critique of the movement around the 2 October celebrations. A member of the Université populaire working group in Villeneuve, for example, said that: "*le message de la non-violence, de ne pas être violent, d'être gentil, ne passe pas parce qu'il n'est pas politique*", and wondered whether those who accompany APLP had sufficiently politicized the question (*suffisamment politisé les choses*) (informal discussion, 21/02/2017). What place did APLP provide for youth to speak their anger which was, as demonstrated earlier, multi-layered: anger about the death of their friends, cousin or brother, but also anger about their experiences of inequality. In the next section, I develop how APLP was an attempt to politicize the positions of youth that were involved.

#### *4.3) APLP peace discourse and the transformation of subject into citizen*

APLP offered youth an alternative to the discourse of the parents and the Marche Blanche collective, as an invitation to transform anger from different sources and to build a future. Herrick Mouafo provided the group with intellectual and moral guidance. He did not choose a confrontational approach but adopted the political imagination of the dove and was less interested in understanding and describing the present than in making a future possible. In his accompaniment of youth, he started to work with their initial positions which were, at times, far from his peaceful ideal and close to the positions of the right or extreme right side of the political spectrum. For example Housseem, who was to become the first APLP coordinator in 2015, stated that this “barbarian act” was the result of a lack of (moral) education. His discourse is close to that of Sarkozy who blamed failing parents for the so-called banlieue crisis.

Pour rappel ces jeunes qui ont commis cet acte inhumain et barbare étaient dépourvus d'éducation ni éducation civique ni éducation morale ni éducation religieuse. (Housseem, Soirée d'hommage Kevin et Sofiane, 17/06/2014)

In addition to a lack of moral education, the friends of the deceased also blamed the neighborhood of Villeneuve, paradoxically following the interpretation of state actors. The opposition between victims and perpetrators quickly came to be framed as an incompatibility between territories, two neighborhoods separated by a road with a shopping mall in the middle of the two as a space of encounter. Those living in Echirolles, especially youth, insisted on the distinction between both neighborhoods, theirs (*les Granges* in Echirolles) inhabited by “law-abiding, respectful citizens” that had fallen victim to “uneducated, uncivilized and violent youth” in Villeneuve. However, sociologically, it is difficult to identify any clear differences between the two groups.

Herrick Mouafo accepted their positions as such, despite his disagreement, and used them as a starting point for collective reflection. Step by step he sought to take youth from their positions as victims to that of citizens. He explained his approach of transforming legitimate anger into constructive action as “a pedagogy of life turned towards society” (*de pédagogie de vie tournée vers la société*), (internal document Modus Operandi, 2016). Herrick Mouafo included in his conception of citizenship the values that APLP members attributed to Kevin and Sofiane, as well as their conceptions of what it signifies to act in favor of peace [Box.7.47]. The box provides an overview of the values that APLP members listed during one of the workshops.

### **Box 7.47 Values associated with “Agir pour la Paix”**

A la question que signifie Agir Pour La Paix, il ressort des cinq mini-ateliers les éléments ci-après:

- Le respect de l'autre
- Le respect mutuel
- Accepter la différence, accepter l'autre comme il est
- Eviter la violence
- Etre gentil
- Savoir dire ce qui ne va pas, car ne pas le faire peut dégénérer en violence
- Ne pas être observateur, mais acteur de la paix
- Savoir dire bonjour et parler à tout le monde même à celui ou celle qu'on ne connaît pas et qui est seul(e)
- Savoir partager ce que l'on a
- Savoir partager un sourire
- La différence ne doit pas être une barrière à la gentillesse
- Apprendre à pardonner, montre que l'on est au dessus de la haine et de la colère
- Acteur de paix et non spectateur de la violence
- Aller au-delà des préjugés, aller à la rencontre de l'autre
- Etre acteur: juste dire bonjour, avoir un visage qui exprime le sourire (Minutes meeting, workshop, 19/03/2016)

Being a citizen therefore meant, in the context of APLP, to speak out about violence and its corollary; to position oneself in society as part of a larger whole; to reach out to people different from oneself; and to other spaces beyond the neighborhood. Citizenship started for Herrick Mouafo by opening the circle of the group of friends and relatives to other people, for example those from other spaces in the city, holding other social positions, political opinions, or who enjoyed white privilege, in order to carry out a common cause. During one APLP workshop, the participants formulated APLP therefore as follows:

APLP est l'ensemble de personnes toutes différentes qui travaillent pour un même objectif à savoir, la paix comme respect de la différence. Et pour que cet objectif se réalise, le membre d'APLP doit pouvoir aller vers l'autre. L'autre ici, c'est la personne qui se présente devant toi à tout instant. C'est un espace de parole libre avec un principe de concorde et non de discorde, un espace d'inclusion et non d'exclusion, un espace qui va au-delà des différences sans préjugés. (Minutes meeting workshop, 19/03/2015)

Applying these values to APLP proved to be a big challenge for the initial core group. This challenge of inclusion was most strongly felt during the journey through Europe when the young women were at times excluded from activities and at other times those from outside of the neighborhood, who also happened to be white, were excluded. To Herrick's disappointment, the young men in the core group let their personal interests dominate those of the larger group and group cohesion. In the end, the core group did not extend

their initial circle from Echirolles and excluded all that were not touched by the same grief about Kevin and Sofiane (Herrick Mouafo, feedback discussion, 24/01/2020). Herrick is opposed to a racialized reading of the group dynamics though since both he and Nabil -of the same age and older than APLP youth members- were never integrated into the core group, while they are both racialized. Herrick Mouafo feels that proximity/distance to Kevin and Sofiane and neighborhood identity were more important for the fault lines in the group. Despite not being entirely able to live up to their own standards, APLP did open up possibilities for members on an individual level, in the sense that the experience of APLP transformed their views and led its members to certain actions, notably educational and professional trajectories, as a means for them to build a future. On a collective level, APLP was an extraordinary experiment with community activism driven by racialized MSHN youth involving a diverse group of people with other profiles.

In the next subsection I explain this approach that I have called the political imagination of the dove. It sets out with a theoretical discussion of the political dimension of peace discourse as one that helps to transform victims into actors with the help of peaceful concepts, it then provides examples of the ways this applies to APLP.

#### *4.4) Peace discourse as a healing narrative that opens up future paths*

Peace discourse is defined here as speaking with peaceful concepts such as tolerance, friendship, hope, reconciliation, justice, solidarity, and empathy. Evoking these terms publicly and with regard to the present is a means to bring them alive, to have them materialize. The objective of peace discourse is to break the cycle of violence and revenge,<sup>374</sup> to create a space of possibility, help victims project themselves in the future. I build on the definition of peace provided in the first chapter as a “fragile and contingent process that is constituted through everyday relations and embodiments that are inextricably linked to geopolitical processes” (McConnell, Megoran, and Williams 2014, 11) as multiple, positive, and always in the making. Based on my fieldwork with APLP, I complement this understanding of peace with the observations that:

- Speech can serve as a symbolic space to shape peace
- Peace discourse always has a utopian element to it, it holds a promise that works figuratively
- Peace discourse opens up and widens horizons that have narrowed as a result of violence

<sup>374</sup> Les sept marches vers la réconciliation, Irenees, [http://www.irenees.net/article560\\_fr.html](http://www.irenees.net/article560_fr.html), accessed 6/12/2019, inspired by Olga Botcharova: “Implementation of Track Two Diplomacy.” In: Tutu, D.: “Forgiveness and Reconciliation.” Region, Public Policy and Conflict Transformation, Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2002.

The peace discourse I am interested in is far from empty words but fulfils a political function.

- It makes the banality of peace visible
- It serves as healing fiction (*fiction réparatrice*) and as repair action (*action réparatrice*)
- It provides a symbolic space to make the imagining of new relationships and new futures possible

In the end, it allows those concerned to fully project themselves in the here and now, as citizens and full members of society, in order to engage in collective action and work towards a common goal.

#### *4.4.a) The banality of peace*

I argued above that peace discourse is not merely made of words, nor is it only about a future in the making, mobilizing peaceful concepts is also a means to make the banality of peace visible: the fact that peace is around us, despite co-existence with (past) violence. This banality can, for example, be made visible through integrating peaceful concepts in our analytical frameworks to help to create solidarity, friendship, or other positive connections visible. Peace discourse “constantly seeks ways to re-articulate a person's relationship to others so as to keep them connected to social networks and to improve their quality of life” (Laliberté 2014). The actions incited by peace discourse facilitate relations and connect individuals to a wider web of relationships. It is this invisible “web of relationships” that holds society together (Lederach, 2010). In her work with social movements in the Philippines Wright demonstrates that a concept like hope draws on connection and on the work of creating and recreating solidarities through the very act of living (2008). Working with such a concept thereby draws on connections and on the work of creating and recreating solidarities through the very act of living, as the parents of Kevin and Sofiane did in their peace discourse.

Herrick Mouafo's political approach to peace is close to the one described by Laliberté of “constantly seeking ways to re-articulate a person's relationship to others so as to keep them connected to social networks and to improve their quality of life” (Laliberté 2014, 56). His position evolved throughout his involvement with APLP [see Box 7.48]. The chain of connections of the youth involved in APLP has extended considerably since the White March in 2012 as they have become part of an international, intergenerational, and inter-class network breaking with the widely shared representation of the neighborhood as ghetto. As Wright pointed out, connection and the creation and recreation of solidarities through the very act of living is a source of hope, it opens up a horizon.

Initially, youth affected by the deaths of Kevin and Sofiane and dealing with other forms of injustice in society were not motivated to get involved in collective action and to invest in society.

#### **Box 7.48 Limited validity data over time**

The remark I made (chapter 2, section 6.2) about the possible limited validity of data over time applies in particular to the statements of Herrick Mouafo whose political thinking evolved considerably over the last five years, notably as a result of our collective inquiry at Modus Operandi into the colonial past/present. I think there are some formulations he would probably not repeat today in the same words. It is through his discussions, reading new literature, and his experience with APLP as well as new experiences in France and in Central Africa that his political imagination has evolved. He has enriched his thought by reading the following authors that are important sources of intellectual inspiration: Felwine Starr, Achille Mbembe, participants of the *Ateliers de la Pensée* in Dakar, Fanon, Glissant, and probably others I am less familiar with. The quoted statements in the context of APLP should therefore be read as political positions at one point in time that do not necessarily reflect positions at later moments, as they always evolve through our encounters, reading, and learning-by-doing.

Step by step Herrick Mouafo, through APLP, helped them to reconnect to other people, to other places, and to get involved in collective action as we can read in the following quote from Alicia.

Jusqu'à APLP, je pense que j'étais dans un état de haine et de colère qui n'est pas redescendu... après en ayant discuté, fait le voyage, côtoyé tous les jours les amis de Sofiane et Kevin c'est là que j'ai commencé à m'ouvrir, enlever ce sentiment de haine et me dire bon bah y'a quand même quelque chose de positif derrière ça.  
(Alicia, interview, 1/5/2018)

The journeys to Brest, Copenhagen, and Amsterdam were occasions to widen their geographic horizons, to connect with people facing comparable challenges, and share the answers they found.

When they first got involved in Marche Blanche they did so to honor the memory of Kevin and Sofiane and to keep it alive, along the way they discovered that they shared values with members of the Marche Blanche collective. They established connections and became key players of the annual 2 October celebrations. The first APLP coordinator, Housseem, explained why, in the end, he decided to invest in the collective.

Bah le deuil je le porterai toute ma vie, ça ne changera pas donc autant y aller. Quand j'y vais, il y a des gens qui portent le même deuil comme le père de Sofiane ou Steven. La famille des victimes, on voit qu'il y a la même souffrance - si ce n'est pire. Du coup, vaut mieux rester avec eux que de rester dans son coin, à cogiter. Après même des fois, je ne suis pas tout à fait d'accord avec ce qu'ils font, on s'éloigne du sujet mais ce qui me rassemble en premier, c'est Kevin et Sofiane. J'y vais pour leur mémoire. Les actions de non-violence c'est très, très bien mais j'y vais pour Kévin et Sofiane. (Housseem, group interview, 01/07/2014)

At first, Houssein went to the meetings of the Marche Blanche collective to break out of his isolation and to be with other people who shared his pain. The creation of APLP was a step towards moving beyond this pain and to building something constructive, motivated by the positive memory of his friends and what they stood for. The banality of peace for him lay in connecting with others who may be different but who stand for the same, or similar, goals. Being part of a collective proved also important during the challenging time of the court trial against the perpetrators (November 2015). One participant explained for example that APLP helped her to remain constructive in that period of face-to-face confrontation with those responsible for the death of her friends.

L'importance de APLP est que ça aide de rester constructif pendant le procès. Ils [les amis] vont vers le futur. La fonction de APLP est de réunir, être dans le constructif. (Maissane, informal meeting, 06/11/2015)

Being part of the APLP helped the group to be able to envisage the future beyond the trial.

#### *4.4.b) Healing fiction and repair action*

Peace has a utopian side to it, it is about projecting hope and what I call, after Notaris (2017), a “healing fiction” (*fiction réparatrice*) or healing narrative, that nevertheless has the effect of changing the here and now. Fiction, as that which is in the process of becoming real, is like clay, “this formless material that gets transformed in Golem”, in life (2017, 8). It is not only the support material for virtuous symbols, it is also that “fault line in which monsters (of the past) can slip, whom we try so hard to suppress but who live by our sides and are part of us” (*Ibid.*). The healing potential of any narrative lies in its capacity to project life-affirming values. Narratives create “spaces of possibility” (*espaces des possibles*): they allow people to project themselves in the future through appropriating the space and openings that peace discourse creates. The peace discourse I am interested in may start with a narrative, but is always related to action in the here and now which I call, following Gouarier (in Notaris 2017, 8), “repair actions” (“*RéparACTIONS*”). These heal negative experiences from the past, sticking points, and can unblock these situations to allow living beings to move forward again (*Ibid.*). They open up new horizons that had become foggy as the result of the propensity of violence to kill the future, to kill life.

The metaphors evoked by the parents and Herrick Mouafo motivated this group of grieving youth to go beyond images of rage, hatreds, loathing and harsh punishment in hell and find new words in their own imagination, in the form of the values of Kevin and Sofiane. Herrick Mouafo had come to understand quite rapidly that Kevin and Sofiane were not only friends for the core group, but also role models because they were both exemplary in following religious precepts. In addition, Kevin was the only one in the group to pursue higher education and had taken on a role of mediator in the past, in the context of conflicts around the use of public space in the neighborhood. Herrick Mouafo therefore invited the core group in the prefiguration phase of APLP to live by and to carry out the values that they so much appreciated in their friends, as a way to keep their memory alive. Another part of the



healing narrative was the image of an imaginary channel of communication between those that continued to live and those that were in paradise, evoking the idea that those in heaven can see the actions of those on earth and can also be affected by these actions, providing a reason for taking action in the present. This moral imagination thus called for action and for looking to the future rather than staying in the past. It should be interpreted as an ongoing invitation to break a negative cycle through the everyday choices of how to behave with those around us.

Through speech Herrick Mouafo created a vision for the future, a future which had been destroyed by the death of their friends and ambient islamophobia. Herrick Mouafo believes in the liberating power of words, "*la parole est libératrice*" (17/06/2014) and that is why he engages in speech as a space for peace, insisting on the need to practice debating as a tool for self-defense and as a tool to make oneself heard "*outils pour la construction argumentative pour se faire entendre*" (internal document Modus Operandi, 19/04/2018). One of the APLP participants explained how it helped her to have the words to express herself and deal with problems (related to finding a place in France).

Après Agir pour la Paix franchement, même si je ne me rends pas compte comme ça mais si je regarde en arrière vraiment ça m'a beaucoup aidé à mettre des mots. Une fois qu'on met des mots c'est plus facile de gérer nos problèmes quoi. (Mayare, interview, 07/07/2017)

#### *4.4.c) Peace discourse as symbolic space to think peace*

I associate the idea of speech as a symbolic space for peace with Jean-Paul Lederach's concept of "moral imagination" as "the capacity to imagine and generate constructive processes that are rooted in the day-to-day challenges of violence and yet transcend these destructive patterns" (Lederach 2010, 182). I understand this idea as an invitation to actors of conflict to reframe their imaging of the other as enemy into a representation of the world that insists on their interdependence, rather than aspire to the domination or annihilation of one's enemies. Lederach insists on the importance of providing space for the creative act as a means to allow for the emergence of a vision, the conviction that the future is not a slave of the past, and that the birth of something new is possible. "The goal of transcending violence is advanced by the capacity to generate, mobilize, and build the moral imagination" (Maiese 2016) and project both victims and perpetrators into the future.<sup>375</sup>

I call APLP a healing narrative because while the core group of friends in the beginning did not really believe that engaging in collective action could bring them something, they publicly committed to involvement in the Marche Blanche collective, and committed to the ideal that they projected in their discourse. One of such moments was the Soirée

<sup>375</sup> Online publication: <https://www.beyondintractability.org/bksum/lederach-imagination>, accessed 11/11/2019

d'hommage à Kevin and Sofiane when Housseem and Rachid took the floor in the name of this core group of friends, in the prefiguration phase of APLP.

On a convenu d'éviter de nous enfermer sur cet acte cruel et inhumain, mais de faire une immersion dans les valeurs que portaient nos amis. Cette immersion nous a donné à comprendre que nous surfions sur des vagues de non-violence, d'amour et de paix où se trouvaient déjà les parents de Kevin et Sofiane. Cela nous a permis, en outre, de ne pas laisser la violence abjecte prendre le dessus sur la paix et le vivre-ensemble dans nos quartiers et cités. Car redonner confiance et surtout, révéler le talent de l'autre, tel pourrait être le résumé de ce qui a particularisé et distingué de façon significative nos deux amis. (Rachid, Soirée d'hommage à Kevin et Sofiane, 17/06/2014)

Nous, amis de Kevin et Sofiane, avons décidé de partager les valeurs qu'ils nous ont transmises. (Housseem, Soirée d'hommage à Kevin et Sofiane, 17/06/2014)

From the formulation of their intentions and the vocabulary they used, it is clear that Housseem and Rachid did not write the text they read aloud. However, this does not mean that the narrative they projected should be considered as untrue. Herrick Mouafo used the discussions with the friends of Kevin and Sofiane as a basis for writing speeches for public occasions in which he projected another truth, one to open new roads into the future. The question remained, however, of whether youth were going to take these paths which did not describe the present but projected those that formulated them into a desired future. Enouncing these words in public before a large audience ensured that those who spoke them made a form of public commitment, and Herrick Mouafo counted on the fact that they wanted it to become true. I argue that youth tried to live up to the discourse they expressed publicly. He wanted to open the "we" of "immigrants", "Muslims", "MSHN", "the victims", "of Echirolles" to a wider "we" that fully affirmed their place in society, as citizens. APLP was relatively successful in this objective as the following quote of a participant demonstrates.

Bah franchement, Agir pour la Paix m'a donné vraiment une identité autre que ce que j'avais à la maison parce que j'étais moi-même. C'était vraiment un des endroits où j'ai pu être moi-même et m'exprimer, avoir une parole en tant que... bah française parce qu'on avait beaucoup de conversations comme ça au tout début d'Agir pour la Paix quand ils venaient au lycée et qu'on faisait les ateliers. Une fois il y avait un atelier sur les catégories et on devait se mettre dans l'espace selon la catégorie choisie et je me rappelle qu'on avait un grand débat sur "si on va à l'étranger et on nous demande, on est quoi, on est français ou algérien?". Pour moi c'était logique, j'étais française pas algérienne si j'étais aux Etats-Unis ou juste en Angleterre. Quand je vais en Angleterre et je rencontre des gens, je dis que je suis française et du coup de là, je me suis dit que si dans ces situations je me sens française pourquoi je ne serai pas française si je suis en France? C'est quand même le bon endroit de me sentir française? On se disait que "je suis qui je veux quand je veux". (Mayare, interview, 07/07/2017)

So while the core group never really opened up and did not become a large, lasting movement beyond the Echirrolles, the political imagination of the dove transformed individual lives through opening up horizons to constructive life trajectories.

## Conclusion

The FUIQP has opened a space in the political landscape of Villeneuve that is dominated by an older generation of white neighborhood activists. It has provided a new voice that breaks with the discourse of white paternalistic activists, those involved in cultural activities, or of those stuck in a single-focus anti-capitalist and working-class discourse. The FUIQP changed the designation of the we-group and the definition of problems that racialized inhabitants of MSHN face. According to this new discourse people in the neighborhood are no longer poor victims of society that need to be assisted, but inheritors of long-lasting anti-colonial struggle who need to organize and learn to defend themselves in a structurally unjust system. The most important contribution of the FUIQP is that they provide a vocabulary and an analytical framework that creates the symbolic space in which 'others' become visible, are granted the right to difference and equality.

Paradoxically, while the FUIQP targets racialized populations in and from MSHN it has nevertheless been very attractive to people with a different profile. Initially, radical left white young and highly educated people from Saint Bruno ("*boboistan*") showed great interest in the prefiguration of the FUIQP. FUIQP's primary target group, younger racialized and working-class people in MSHN did not automatically feel attracted to the FUIQP. Of the racialized inhabitants present during the initial Fringale meeting or who came to the debate about islamophobia, quite a few were uncomfortable with the radicality of some of the political statements and the confrontational approach; not all shared the vision that a structurally unjust State and capitalism needed to be overthrown.

I observed a distance or tension between the FUIQP discourse and the discourse of success (*réussite*) through integration, which is used not only by right-leaning politicians but also by certain racialized inhabitants from MSHN (also in APLP) who seek to be recognized and find a place in French society, or have settled for their current place. In other words, the group that opted for loyalty. This latter group felt more attracted to the discourse of APLP.

My hypothesis that one of the limits of the FUIQP, and a reason why it cannot count on more grass-roots support, is that by making people aware that they are oppressed by a system of domination they may potentially make people feel disempowered: trapped, depressed, paralyzed, rather than experiencing this awareness as an incitement to action. It is this oppressing feeling that the APLP collective sought to avoid, preferring the more optimistic discourse of personal transformation.

Another reason why the FUIQP is not necessarily attractive to less politicized neighborhood inhabitants is because it does not address inhabitants' concerns about youth and physical

violence in the neighborhood. As a result of FUIQP's tendency to verticalize problems and to dismiss more peaceful discourse as double consciousness ("they have not (yet) understood the dynamics of oppression!") they disregard more horizontal forms of violence that are an important source of concern for parents and young people. It is exactly the silence on the different forms of physical violence in the neighborhood that is problematic for those who mobilized after Kevin and Sofiane's deaths. The following example illustrates how among those close to FUIQP silence is imposed on the subject of violence in Villeneuve. When I presented a video which I had made with a young man from APLP for use in one of our debate evenings<sup>376</sup> (in which he commented on his neighborhood) to a person from the UP working group, who is also member of FUIQP, she asked me to take out one part. This was the part in which the APLP member explained that the commercial center was a place where violent confrontations take place between youth groups. Her objection was that it is not very representative of the neighborhood and she chose the parts that fit her analytical framework and avoided the stigmatization youth, but did thereby not do justice to the experience and fears of other, less-politicized, neighborhood residents (fieldnotes, 19/11/2015). The FUIQP portrayed the perpetrators of the violence against Kevin and Sofiane as victims of structural violence. This framing, which in the end is very similar to state actors' framing in pre-existent categories, placed the families of Kevin and Sofiane and the families of the perpetrators in the same category of victims of structural violence. The families of Kevin and Sofiane felt that they were denied agency by this framing. When APLP called attention to the physical insecurity in the neighborhood the FUIQP feared that this message would be instrumentalized by state actors, and would be used in support of repressive measures and would lead to further stigmatization of MSHN and racialized youth. Hence, the FUIQP dismissed APLP's discourse—on youth violence and peace— as apolitical. I argue however that the APLP initiative was also a means for its participants to reclaim a voice and that it was a starting point for politicization. APLP's effort was to transform the language of the initial core group who claimed a neighborhood identity and religious affiliation to claims based on humanitarian principles, inscribing themselves as being part of a larger community. The role of APLP was to provide the space that its members did not find within the Marche Blanche collective, a space in which they could speak about their emotions and (start) to transform negative emotions; start to understand and analyze violence; project themselves in society; break the cycle of violence and revenge through writing a new script; and to form a collective and work towards a common goal.

What APLP and FUIQP finally have in common is that they carved out some space for autonomy in which racialized inhabitants of MSHN could gain self-confidence, where they prepare to verbally defend themselves and address a larger audience. In both spaces, individuals become part of a collective and prepare shared positions, confront them and work on the idea that they are entitled to make claims as French citizens.

<sup>376</sup> UP debate 20/11/2015 on "pour comprendre les ghettos, ZUP, ZUS etc".

## General conclusion

Villeneuve is a place of observation that shares with other marginalized social housing neighborhoods (MSHN), despite its specificities, their stigmatization as 'other' spaces, lost to the republic, riddled with violence, and populated by immigrants. In which ways can this place of observation and action be instructive for understanding the stigmatization of MSHN in a new light?

I took marginalized points of view as a starting point for my inquiry. Research participants from Villeneuve did not limit their observations to neighborhood concerns but used the opportunity of the public debates I co-organized (and were central to my research methods) to discuss mainstream French society beyond the neighborhood. Villeneuve was therefore not an object of study but a locus of enunciation from which to interrogate wider society and the power it exercises on people in marginalized spaces.

Through research collaborations I understood that MSHN inhabitants had other priorities than speaking about violence in their neighborhood, the topic I set out with, but -aided by the post-Charlie context- rapidly brought to the table issues of discrimination, racism and neighborhood stigmatization. Their neighborhood was a topic of debate, but less so the violence that occurred there than the tensions they felt between neighborhood stigmatization from the outside and their lived experience in the neighborhood. I realized that it requires quite an effort from inhabitants to formulate their own definition of a '*quartier*', to place dominant representations at a distance and to authorize themselves to come up with alternative definitions. This is a significant effort because it demands of people to shift from an object to a subject position. It is exactly this shift that I wanted my research methods to contribute to.

The analytical framework which I developed to understand the stigmatization of MSHN in a new light draws on postcolonial theories (including subaltern and decolonial). Its novelty lies in the application of these theories first to the present instead of the colonial past, and second to geographical areas of a former colonial power instead of to its former colonies. What justifies this shift in time and space is the links that exist between the colonial past and present, between "here" and "there", France and its former colonies. These links are made through the physical displacement of people; of the recycling of colonial civil servants in French police and policy in charge of immigrants; of economic entanglements between former colonial powers and colonies; and finally of a modern/colonial worldview that still informs representations of the former colonial 'other' in France. The epistemic violence behind this modern/colonial worldview is responsible for racialization, actively produces subalterns, and writes out of view a certain number of realities which I try to bring into view through this thesis.

In this conclusion I explain which theoretical contribution this thesis makes, what a decolonial approach to MSHN brings into view (1); which epistemological and methodological contributions it makes (2); how the context in which I carried out my research has evolved, impacting its reproducibility (3), and finally with which questions I am left at the completion of this work (4).

*1) Theoretical contribution: what a decolonial approach to MSHN brings into view*

A decolonial approach to MSHN exposes what those in power would like to keep invisible. It does so through adopting a relational approach to space and time; an intersectional approach to race, class and space; through working with feminist concepts of agency and the everyday; with combative concepts such as justice and self-defense; as well as with peaceful concepts such as hope and aspiration. In the rest of this section I develop what that approach brings into view.

What a decolonial approach to MSHN brings into view is that the '*banlieue* crisis' is not so much about the *banlieue* but about wider French society, about racism and about not being able to obtain a place in France. Symbolically there is no place for racialized 'others' because French is synonym with White in mainstream representations, and physically they are concentrated in social housing neighborhoods. They are always associated with distant places, as if they cannot really belong in France. The spatial articulation of social problems, as if the *banlieue* is the problem, is a means to euphemize racism. One can say very demeaning things of MSHN, which evoke images of its racialized inhabitants, without it being considered as racism. For racialized people in Villeneuve, racism is very tangible though, notably in public space where their bodies encounter reactions ranging from curiosity to fear and rejection. These embodied experiences of inequality make them aware that they are seen as 'other' and make them feel out of place.

A decolonial approach calls into question the narrative of French decolonization. Through the point of view of research participants, I came to understand the history of France as one of international connections and learned that post WWI colonial France was a huge multi-territorial and multinational entity. At that time, the Republic was made up of a multitude of races, religions and publics. This diversity has continued in mainland France, yet the narrative of decolonization, as a rupture between the colonies and mainland France, reinforced the representation of French as White and continued to exclude racialized French from the nation. According to a decolonial approach, undoing colonialism is not about undoing relationships but about acknowledging these relationships and renewing the terms on which they are based. It is about the de-racialization of national identities and society at large.

A decolonial approach reveals therefore that Villeneuve, despite being experienced by some inhabitants as a mental and physical prison, is not the isolated ghetto that right-leaning politicians pretend it to be. Its inhabitants are inserted in a bottom-up kind of globalization

and are linked in many ways to other spaces and times. In a country that is strongly centralized and where all roads or trainlines lead to Paris, I discovered other paths beyond centers of power, for example across the Mediterranean, connecting Villeneuve to cities and villages in (North) Africa, but also migrant-migrant connections across Europe.

A decolonial approach to MSHN helps to question the narrative of violence that characterizes MSHN. Violence is not only part of the representations of MSHN but is also an important part of lived experience of the neighborhood. A bottom-up perspective of violence, as carried out in this thesis, provides a more complex understanding of what violence actually is and how it manifests itself in Villeneuve. It gives rise to stories about personal tragedies and suffering, direct and inter-personal forms of violence and to more structural and epistemological forms of violence, as well as the ways in which all these forms are imbricated. It is these connections that are generally written out of view. A decolonial approach to violence in MSHN furthermore introduces the perspective of violence-as-self-defense rather than violence-as-aggression.

And finally, a decolonial approach shows the agency of MSHN inhabitants that is invisibilized through the hypervisibilization of violence. Images of violence silence political voices and feed into the representation of MSHN as apolitical, (low) voting rates being the measure of political participation. These images hide the rich history of activism in the name of neighborhood struggles (*luttres des quartiers populaires*), which are a reconfiguration and a transformation of a dwindling workers movement from the 1980s. Many racialized persons have been very actively involved in these struggles, which continue to be a factor of political activism now even though a younger generation is looking for alternative ways to make themselves heard. I have identified different options available to MSHN inhabitants dealing with deleterious change and fighting is one them, which can be done through the use of violence or voice. Politicizing racialized identities, such as Blacks, Arabs and Muslims, is one such means of fighting and political organizing through voice. My thesis demonstrates that the claim to difference should not be understood as a rejection of France and French cultural values, but as an expression of the need for space to auto-define oneself. In my point of view those concerned about the affirmation of 'other' identities should trust in the compatibility of multiple and-and identities, while letting go of the idea of either/or identities ("do you feel French or Moroccan"?) and the idea that people have to give up their cultural identities to become French. The future lies in here-and-there identities.

Through this decolonial approach I understood that the colonialist past continues to be relevant today because racial injustice continues to be reproduced: it is the present that makes the colonial past still relevant. Politicizing the colonial past is therefore not about redressing past injustices but about challenging racism today. The colonial question has been the object of politicization by MSHN- and anti-racist movements, articulating an old question in new ways, in terms that break with the more mainstream approach of organizations like SOS racism. The Mouvement des Indigènes de la République is the most obvious example

with its claim to a collective identity as “*nous les indigènes*”. This reference to the colonial past thus has a political function. As there is general agreement that colonialism was bad and that this page of history needs to be turned, articulating a phenomenon as colonial is synonym for a moral condemnation, and a call for change. The term colonial stands for Western/French superiority and the inherent inferiority of the ‘colonial’ other; the minorization of non-European languages, knowledge and religion; the racialization of ‘non-Whites’, in particular those from Africa and Arabic-speaking countries including those that were not French colonies (i.e. Turkey, Nigeria and the RDC); non-White being associated with an elsewhere, outside of France; spatial segregation; *Françafrique*, continued political and economic entanglement at the expense of ‘the people’.

What is the role of referring to the colonial past in search of a better future? To what extent can this reference to the past be a tool for creating a future in which one recognizes the ‘other’, not as the same and not as different but as equal, leaving space for difference and room for auto-definition? One participant said that the future of France cannot be disconnected from the future of its MSHN. It is here that its future is partly played out, in these cosmopolitan spaces that stand in relation to wider networks: it is here that the future of France is made. The present is no more than the future-in-the-making and the future is both made of the rigidity of structures inherited from the past and of the hope the current generation has for the next. While it is difficult to make peace with the past, one can make peace with the future. I have the feeling that the white fear of the violence of the racialized is a projection of guilt, and it is time to understand that the claims, both violent and non-violent, of the racialized are in fact demands for equality and peace. This peace does not exist without justice but justice alone is not enough. I have been impressed by the sacrifices that people are willing to make for the future of their children and their willingness to forgive if this is in the interest of their offspring. These sacrifices also include lowering demands for justice in favor of reconciliation if that would avoid violence or violent conflict. This is true under one condition though, that their children are granted a better future. If this is not the case, the colonial past will haunt the future. A decolonial approach to MSHN thus also helps to understand why interrogating the colonial past is relevant for building a (common) future in France

The decolonial approach I developed not only consists of another way of viewing but also of another way of doing research as I explain below.

## *2) Epistemological and methodological contributions: decolonial explorations*

In addition to a theoretical contribution to neighborhood stigmatization and racism in France, including ways to fight it, my decolonial explorations are an epistemological and methodological contribution to social science. Decolonial explorations are an epistemological inquiry into more horizontal ways of being in research relationships; they are a methodological inquiry into developing research methods that create the conditions for researchers to speak with marginalized persons on a basis of equality and motivated by



mutual interests. Decolonial explorations involve the collaborative production of knowledge that is of academic and political relevance: academic relevance because the research methods developed give access to knowledge that might remain inaccessible otherwise; political relevance because the methods developed make space for marginalized people to speak out.

I could help to make heard what was supposed to remain silent by making space for the voices of inhabitants who participated in a variety of civil society initiatives operating from Villeneuve. The choice with whom to collaborate was a highly political one: to what extent did civil society actors contribute to social transformation, did they question and effectively challenge power relations? These collaborations took the form of creating spaces for debate on topics chosen together with the collectives I worked with.

A space of speech refers to a space in which speech becomes possible because it is configured in such a way that power dynamics are mitigated. In this space a public comes together and exchanges with each other about a specific theme. It belongs to the public sphere and is publicly accessible; it may form in public space, but more often in a space that is closed by walls and a door as the latter offers a form of protection and separates the space from the street. This closure helps to constitute a group for a particular moment in time and in a particular space. The creation of spaces of speech helped to meet the conditions necessary to make my invitation to speak ethical, to make speech possible, and political.

My research method corresponds to the following **ethical concerns**: public debates propose a way of engaging with marginalized people without being intrusive; they open the one-to-one relationship that is typical of interviews to a much wider circle; and they are moments of collective learning in which participants voluntarily share their knowledge. Moreover, this research method is a means to avoid resource extraction because speech is brought into the public sphere and can be owned by all those participating. Speech is afterwards brought into the public sphere beyond the spaces in which it is produced through the circulation of paper publications, video, and other productions.

The **academic interest** of data collection through public debates is that debates propose a new research configuration that influences the ability of those invited to verbalize their experiences and ideas. The principal benefits of public debates as a means of data collection in comparison to interviews is that they create a setting in which the knowledge of the research participant expresses itself in a more spontaneous way than when prompted by the researcher in an interview setting. Configuring spaces of speech corresponds to some extent to the advantages of focus groups. Their difference is that in focus groups the researcher is in charge of moderating the debate and formulating the research question, and does not check whether his/her research priorities reflect the priorities of the participants. Spaces of speech are also spaces of contradiction between people: contradiction and disagreement in debate highlight the fault lines in the neighborhood and in society at large, and they are an

important starting point for understanding power dynamics. In order to make sure that public debates produce research data they need to be audio-recorded or preferably filmed.

Despite its merits there are important limits to the scientific relevance of organizing public debates: information shared publicly in debates is necessarily concise, as the speaker's time is limited, which does not allow the development of a longer argument; the researcher cannot probe the research participant for more detailed information and cannot paraphrase to verify whether he/she understood the statement correctly; statements in plenary debates are made in front of an audience so there is also an element of performance that is absent in interviews. Additionally, speaking in public is a factor of stress and only the most confident will take the floor, so power dynamics do continue to silence certain voices. Moreover participation has a cost for observation: being involved in the organization of debates is an important impediment to the quality of one's observations during meetings and debates.

Finally, group debate is not the proper format for discussing topics that touch on the intimate and taboos; in that case, the privacy of interview settings might work better.

Organizing public debates has a **political function** in a context where people say that they are not heard. Public debates are potentially a form of vocal and prefigurative politics if they question and challenge the status quo, and if they provide the marginalized the opportunity to speak and act as citizens. The conditions that determine whether public debates have a political function are that: topics of debate need to reflect the interests of marginalized people; power relations need to be mitigated through moderation techniques therefore specific attention should be given to the configuration of space; space needs to be available that is relatively neutral (that is not connotated as belonging to one group in particular). I argue that the spaces of research have an effect on their outcome: research that involves the participation of many people in semi-public spaces has a different effect to research carried out in a one-to-one setting behind closed doors because the outcomes are owned collectively. According to which people are brought together in these spaces of speech different political aims are met: when marginalized people are in the majority spaces of speech have the role of building confidence and speaking out; when groups are mixed, representing both marginalized and established people, there is also a dimension of speaking truth to power, and possibly a prefigurative element to coming together and engaging in a dialogue beyond power differences. The creation of spaces of speech that bring different people together is politically promising (beyond their scientific interest) because they open up spaces of controlled confrontation which are very necessary in increasingly polarized societies. The contribution of academics to opening these spaces can have a reassuring function, as was the case in the Université populaire, if those representing the established (here white retired persons) have respect for this institution.

### *3) Possible obstacles for the reproduction of these decolonial explorations*

There are a certain number of limitations that need to be taken into account when considering this type of collaborative research and that question its reproducibility. These limitations relate to factors of time, funding, and available networks.

Time is an important obstacle to replicating this type of research as this method is necessarily time consuming: it requires time to become part of existing networks, to explore common thematic interests and to develop new collaborations. I was able to take this time due to my hybrid institutional position: over the six years of my research, only three years were covered by research funding; two years were covered by Modus Operandi; and one year has not been covered by any funding. The reason why Modus Operandi could fund this kind of participatory research is because it is one of the rare civil society organizations that does not depend on project funding but receives institutional funding from a private foundation (Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation). This type of funding guarantees a large degree of autonomy. I realize that without the financial support of my family and partner I could not have made the same choices.

Finding appropriate funding for collaborative research might thus be an obstacle to the replication of this research method, because funding applications in general have to present a detailed research plan that leaves little room for the serendipity that is specific to this method. The success of this method depends on the presence of mediators and of existing networks, collectives, groups, and civil society organizations that the researcher can collaborate with. I understood from the reactions of both participants and invited speakers that the context of Villeneuve is special in comparison to other MSHN as a result of its socially diverse population, the high density of its social fabric, the availability of meeting spaces and the capacity of civil society actors to raise funds for their activities (e.g. the Université populaire).

To a certain extent the factors that enabled me to carry out this research have evolved negatively, it is even questionable whether I would be able to carry out the same research if I had to restart six years later. This is due to an evolving political context at the local, regional and national level; to spaces closing down; and to a revision of ethical guidelines.

The type of funding I obtained from the Regional Government in 2014 specifically aimed to support partnership research. The fact that civil society organizations were considered eligible as partners within the ARC funding framework was the result of a successful political lobby of elected councilors of the Green Party. After the regional elections in December 2017 the Regional Government turned to the right, and the willingness to support research collaborations between the University and civil society actors disappeared, privileging economic partnerships instead.

In addition, after the cycle of debates on the colonial past, the Université populaire lost the financial support it received. Despite the political support of Grenoble-Alpes-Métropole,

older white inhabitants, who are overrepresented in instances of local political participation (Conseil citoyens indépendants) and who have a consultative function with regard to the attribution of urban policy funds to neighborhood organizations, judged that the Université populaire debates were counter to the funding framework's objective of increasing social cohesion.

Throughout my thesis I provided ample examples of spaces that closed due to political decisions of actors who were no longer willing to provide the necessary funds to keep them open (MJC des Roseaux), or spaces whose function changed because the people that served as bridge builders were dismissed (MDH des Baladins, MJC Desnos, Osmose). Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, active at the time of writing, it would have been impossible to create physical spaces of speech because all the spaces I cite are closed.

Another evolution of the political context that could affect carrying out similar research with Muslim participants is the growing distrust of the national government with regard to social science. After the 2015 Paris attacks the Prime Minister warned sociologists that "*expliquer, c'est déjà vouloir un peu excuser*".<sup>377</sup> At the time of writing (November 2020), and following a new series of attacks, several politicians portrayed certain currents in social science as internal enemies (*l'ennemi intérieur*) that need to be combated. Two councilors of the center-right political party, Les Républicains, have asked for a parliamentary inquiry into "ideological aberrations in university circles" (*les dérives idéologiques dans les milieux universitaires*) aimed those who work with the terms "decolonialism, race or gender", whom they accused of "jeopardizing (*porter atteinte à*) the values of the Republic".<sup>378</sup> A month earlier the Minister of (primary and secondary) Education denounced the threat of the infiltration of "*l'islamo-gauchisme*" in universities, which is a derogatory term for those defending ideas on the political left that are critical of islamophobic tendencies in France: they are (falsely) accused of supporting Islamism.<sup>379</sup> In order to deal with these concerns the Minister of tertiary education and research proposed to modify the article of the law that serves as framework for academic research, adding that academic independence and freedom can only be guaranteed as long as this "freedom is carried out in respect of the values of the Republic" (*les libertés académiques s'exercent dans le respect des valeurs de la*

<sup>377</sup> Lebaron, Frédéric, Fanny Jedlicki, and Laurent Willemez. "La sociologie, ce n'est pas la culture de l'excuse!" Le Monde.fr, December 14, 2015, sec. Idées. [http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/12/14/la-sociologie-ce-n-est-pas-la-culture-de-l-excuse\\_4831649\\_3232.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/12/14/la-sociologie-ce-n-est-pas-la-culture-de-l-excuse_4831649_3232.html), accessed 14/12/2015.

<sup>378</sup> "Demander une sorte d'enquête parlementaire sur ce qu'écrivent les universitaires est inédit: les sciences sociales dans le viseur du politique." Le Monde.fr, December 2, 2020. [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/12/02/demander-une-sorte-d-enquete-parlementaire-sur-ce-qu-e-crivent-les-universitaires-est-inedit-les-sciences-sociales-dans-le-viseur-du-politique\\_6061944\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/12/02/demander-une-sorte-d-enquete-parlementaire-sur-ce-qu-e-crivent-les-universitaires-est-inedit-les-sciences-sociales-dans-le-viseur-du-politique_6061944_3224.html), accessed 02/12/20.

<sup>379</sup> "Polémique après les propos de Jean-Michel Blanquer sur 'l'islamo-gauchisme' à l'université." Le Monde, October 23, 2020. [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/10/23/polemique-apres-les-propos-de-jean-michel-blanquer-sur-l-islamo-gauchisme-a-l-universite\\_6057164\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/10/23/polemique-apres-les-propos-de-jean-michel-blanquer-sur-l-islamo-gauchisme-a-l-universite_6057164_3224.html), accessed 02/12/20.

*République*).<sup>380</sup> The main Republican value that the Minister has in mind is *laïcité* and this is particularly problematic for the obvious reason I developed in this thesis, that the French notion of secularism and the separation of State and Church has been object of political instrumentalization over the past decades.

Finally, a revision of ethical guidelines for academic research following the European rules for the protection of data could be an impediment to reproduce similar research in the future. From May 2018 onwards, Pacte is obliged to abide these rules for data collection that make it obligatory to define the objectives of data collection beforehand, and to work with written consent forms. While deontology is very important, the relative rigidity of these rules leaves little space for the serendipity that is characteristic of decolonial explorations (Costey 2009, Landrin, forthcoming 2021).

#### 4) *Questions that remain*

At the moment of writing this conclusion, I have the feeling of *déjà-vu*. Five years have passed since the terrorist attacks in Paris, and at the completion of this thesis the trial is taking place against those who helped the terrorists responsible for the attacks on Charlie Heddo and the Hyper Kasher. On this occasion the magazine Charlie Hebdo has republished the highly sensitive cartoons that were the motivation for the attacks in the first place;<sup>381</sup> their publication was followed by a new series of attacks, one against the former Charlie Hebdo headquarters that moved after 2015;<sup>382</sup> these attacks were the occasion for new affirmations about the importance of freedom of expression and *laïcité* without any regard for the fact that these specific cartoons are experienced as continued forms of humiliation and domination by Muslims worldwide.<sup>383</sup> The atrocious assassination (by beheading) of a History and Geography teacher with the motive that he had showed the Charlie Hebdo cartoons in class again revolted the entire country;<sup>384</sup> another obligatory minute of silence in schools, the renewed criminalization of minors that refused to participate in it, and in taking

<sup>380</sup> Berkaoui, Helena. "Un amendement du Sénat suscite la colère du monde universitaire." *Public Senat*, October 30, 2020. <https://www.publicsenat.fr/article/parlementaire/recherche-un-amendement-du-senat-suscite-la-colere-du-monde-universitaire>, accessed 02/12/20.

<sup>381</sup> " 'Charlie Hebdo' republie les caricatures du prophète Mahomet qui avaient fait du journal la cible des djihadistes." *Le Monde*, September 1, 2020. [https://www.lemonde.fr/actualite-medias/article/2020/09/01/charlie-hebdo-republie-les-caricatures-du-prophete-mahomet-qui-avaient-fait-du-journal-la-cible-des-djihadistes\\_6050580\\_3236.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/actualite-medias/article/2020/09/01/charlie-hebdo-republie-les-caricatures-du-prophete-mahomet-qui-avaient-fait-du-journal-la-cible-des-djihadistes_6050580_3236.html), accessed 04/12/2020.

<sup>382</sup> "L'auteur présumé de l'attaque à Paris pensait s'attaquer au siège de 'Charlie Hebdo'." *Le Monde*, September 26, 2020. [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/09/26/attaque-a-paris-l-auteur-presume-pensait-s-attaquer-au-siege-de-charlie-hebdo\\_6053745\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/09/26/attaque-a-paris-l-auteur-presume-pensait-s-attaquer-au-siege-de-charlie-hebdo_6053745_3224.html), accessed 04/12/2020.

<sup>383</sup> "Ce qu'il faut retenir du discours d'Emmanuel Macron sur la laïcité et les 'séparatismes'." *Le Monde*, October 2, 2020. [https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2020/10/02/ce-qu-il-faut-retenir-du-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-sur-la-laicite-et-les-separatismes\\_6054523\\_823448.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2020/10/02/ce-qu-il-faut-retenir-du-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-sur-la-laicite-et-les-separatismes_6054523_823448.html), accessed 04/12/2012.

<sup>384</sup> "L'effroi des habitants de Conflans-Sainte-Honorine après le meurtre d'un enseignant, décapité « par un monstre »." *Le Monde.fr*, October 17, 2020. [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/10/17/a-conflans-sainte-honorine-l-effroi-des-habitants-apres-la-mort-d-un-enseignant-decapite-par-un-monstre\\_6056385\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/10/17/a-conflans-sainte-honorine-l-effroi-des-habitants-apres-la-mort-d-un-enseignant-decapite-par-un-monstre_6056385_3224.html), accessed 04/12/2012.

children as young as nine years old in police custody.<sup>385</sup> This *déjà-vu* proves on the one hand the relevance of the topic of my thesis but leaves me with many interrogations about the relevance of academic publication as a means of action.

I would therefore like to conclude my thesis not with a reflection on where social science stands now and with the suggestion of new research perspectives, as is common, but with a reflection on the position of the university in these societal debates and in, what I consider as, a conflict that is waged in France and Europe more generally. If my thesis makes a contribution to academic science, it is a good thing, but the goal I set out with in the first place was to contribute to social transformation. I feel it is urgent to reflect on how to make sure that the voices I cited are more than a document available on a thesis database. How to translate this knowledge into practice?

I wrote that when embarking on decolonial explorations one takes responsibility for making voices travel beyond the context in which they are produced. Through this thesis I bring these voices into the academic sphere, where they resonate with earlier findings. Their influence is limited however because I am told time and again that very few people will actually read my thesis. Moreover, the academic relevance of the voices I cited is less important than their political relevance: they contradict politicians that continue to ignore or contest the reality of racism in France (as ideological positions) whereas they confirm academic findings and theories that have produced similar outcomes. What is the sense of carrying out more research if the findings in the field continue to be denied by State actors? A telling example is police violence: a term that was so evident for research participants continues to be denied by the President of the Republic who argued that as long as France continues to be ruled by the law (*est un Etat de droit*), police violence is out of the question.<sup>386</sup>

As long as my research findings remain in the academic sphere they can easily be ignored by politicians. For my research findings to contribute to challenging the asymmetric distribution of power, its outcomes must enter the arena of political struggle. At the moment I wonder about the role of academia in this political arena, which is a theme I am committed to exploring further. While tertiary education reproduces social and racial inequality, universities are also important terrains of experimentation, terrains of struggle and politicization. How can it stand side-by-side with those that it structurally excludes at the same time? I have not resolved my initial question about the responsibility of the university to those that feel misrepresented by politicians and for whom university education remains out of reach.

<sup>385</sup> Conge, Paul. "Des mineurs en garde à vue pour apologie de terrorisme: pourquoi la mesure divise le monde judiciaire," *Marianne*, November 6, 2020. <https://www.marianne.net/societe/police-et-justice/des-mineurs-en-garde-a-vue-pour-apologie-de-terrorisme-une-mesure-qui-divise-le-monde-judiciaire>, accessed 04/12/2020.

<sup>386</sup> [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/economie/transports/gilets-jaunes/video-gilets-jaunes-macron-juge-inacceptable-dans-un-etat-de-droit-de-parler-de-violences-policieres\\_3222835.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/economie/transports/gilets-jaunes/video-gilets-jaunes-macron-juge-inacceptable-dans-un-etat-de-droit-de-parler-de-violences-policieres_3222835.html), accessed 01/12/2020.

## Epilogue

A Dutch tradition requires that doctoral dissertations conclude with 10 affirmations.

In respect of this tradition, I formulated the following:

1. The answer to the “the *banlieue* crisis” does not lie in the *banlieue*
2. A relational approach to both space and time challenges the representation of MSHN as ghettos and brings into view the connections people have with many different places
3. Racialized French immigrants are ‘here’ because France was ‘there’: with immigration, France harvests what it has sown with its African foreign policy<sup>387</sup>
4. The problem of integration in France is not that racialized inhabitants do not want to integrate but that the established do not want to integrate them
5. In urban policy one should replace the objective of ‘social mixing’ by the right to the city
6. Agonistic conflict should be embraced as an invitation to review the terms of a relationship
7. Security fears and policy responses addressed to MSHN are a self-fulfilling prophesy: while disenfranchised youth is not an intrinsic threat to the Republic, it may become one if security responses are the only answers they get
8. Let our thinking about identities be inspired by the *rhizome* rather than by roots or stems (*souche*), by relations rather than by borders
9. The ethical guiding principle of doing research with subalternized people should not be to have as little impact as possible, but should be to contribute as much as possible to altering their condition
10. The term research objects should be changed into research subjects in order to prevent objectification and advocate subjectivation instead.

<sup>387</sup> After Mbembe, *Le Monde*, 17/10/2011, [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/10/17/achille-mbembe-professeur-d-histoire-la-france-n-est-plus-notre-soleil\\_1589022\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/10/17/achille-mbembe-professeur-d-histoire-la-france-n-est-plus-notre-soleil_1589022_3232.html), accessed 06/09/2020.

## APPENDIX 1: STREET DEBATES (UNIVERSITE POPULAIRE)

**Table A.22 List of street debates (Université populaire)**

2015	TITLE	PLACE	PART.
20- Oct	UP Cycle 1 - Pour comprendre les quartiers populaires	Place des Géants, Villeneuve	14
21- Oct	UP Cycle 1 - Pour comprendre les quartiers populaires	Avenue Marie Reynoard	10
22- Oct	UP Cycle 1 - Pour comprendre les quartiers populaires	Place du marché, Villeneuve	8
02- Nov	UP Cycle 1 - Pour comprendre les quartiers populaires	Village Olympique	3
<b>2016</b>			
08- Jan	UP Cycle 1 - pour comprendre la liberté d'expression	Pêle-mêle	5-15
10- Jan	UP Cycle 1 - Pour comprendre la liberté d'expression	MDH le Patio	5-15

In chapter 3 I draw on the first series of street debates (Cycle I of the UP). The question put up for discussion in public space was: *“certains disent que ce quartier est un ghetto, qu’en pensez-vous?”*. These debates took place in preparation of the Université populaire plenary debate *“Pour comprendre les ZEP, ZUP, ZUS, ZSP: mon quartier, qu’est-ce qu’on en dit, qu’est-ce que j’y vis?”* (22/11/2015). In total, 35 people participated in these discussions at four different dates and locations:

- The **Place des Géants**, one of the two central squares in Villeneuve. We strolled there during school time so we didn’t meet a lot of passersby and we mainly spoke with the men that hang out on the square, the youth workers of the Place des Géants and a group of men sitting towards the entry of the Grand’Place shopping mall.
- The **Avenue Marie Reynoard**, on the border of Villeneuve and Village-Olympique. It is a place of mobility, and it is not an easy place to initiate discussion as people are in motion to go somewhere, in opposition to other neighborhood spaces where people are stationed. People encountered there did not only come from Villeneuve but also from the surrounding neighborhoods.
- The **Place de Marché of Villeneuve** is a busy and lively place on a Thursday afternoon. The community-café Pêle Mêle, run by the Régie de Quartier, is a meeting place for older inhabitants.
- The neighborhood **Village-Olympique**, where we met less people on the street, even after primary school hours.

The table below presents the number of people spoken to at each of the four locations and their estimated age and gender.



**Table A.23 Overview of people engaged in debate (end 2015)**

Location	Men	Women
Place des Géants 20/10/2015 14 discussions 10M, 4F	2 teenagers 1 in 20s 5 in 30s 1 in 50s 1 in 65+	2 teenagers 1 in 20s 1 in 40s
Avenue Marie Reynoard 21/10/2015 9 discussions 1M, 9F	1 in 40s (Teisseire)	3 in 30s (1 Vigny-Musset, 2 Village-Olympique) 2 in 40s (Vigny-Musset, unknown) 3 in 60s (2 Arlequin, 1 Village-Olympique)
Place du Marché 22/10/2015 5 discussions 4M, 4F	<i>2 Market salesmen</i> 30s, market salesman from Chambéry le Haut, originary from former Yugoslavia 40s (Maghreb)  <i>2 Inhabitants</i> 40s 65+, VN, (Chili)	Discussion with one group of women ranging from 30s to 60s)
Village Olympique 2/11/2015 3 discussions 3F		65+ (origine marocaine) 30 ans (origine marocaine) 65+ blanche

## APPENDIX 2: DISCUSSION CIRCLES AND WORKSHOPS

**Table A.24 Discussion circles - Université populaire**

2017	TITLE	PLACE	PART.
07-Jul	"Que reste-t-il du passé colonial?"	MDH des Baladins	10
2018			
23-Feb	"Peut-on parler d'une gestion coloniale des quartiers?"	MDH des Baladins	8

**Table A.25 Workshops Agir pour la Paix**

2015	TOPIC	PLACE	PART.
07-Feb	Launch of workshops "Comment faire République?"	MDH Desnos	10-20
07-March	"Radicalisation islamique"	<i>idem</i>	~15
11-April	"Les tabous dans la démocratie"	<i>Idem</i>	~15
20-Sep	Participation in the TV report <i>enquête exclusive</i> dealing with violence in Grenoble	<i>Idem</i>	~15
2016	TOPIC	PLACE	PART.
19-March	Qu'est-ce qu'Agir pour la paix? Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire? Réfléchir ensemble à une définition commune.	<i>Idem</i>	17
24-sept	Discussion circle with the Danish resource center in Norrebro about gender relations	<i>idem</i>	~25

Included in this list are only the workshops in which I participated and are therefore not representative of all the workshops organized by APLP.

**Table A.26 Fringale/FUIQP workshops**

2015	TOPIC	PLACE	PART.
10-nov	Médias et quartiers populaires, entre mépris, manipulation et mensonges n°1	Snack la Fringale (Place du marché)	6
16-nov	Médias et quartiers populaires, entre mépris, manipulation et mensonges n°2	Snack la Fringale (Place du marché)	~10

**Table A.27 Marchons pour dire non à la violence Workshops**

<b>2015</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>PLACE</b>	<b>PART.</b>
09-March	"Nonviolence"	MDH des Baladins	5-20
23-March	"Violence according to health professionals"	MDH des Baladins	5-20
17-June	Training in nonviolent communication 1	MDH des Baladins	5-20
03-July	Training in nonviolent communication 2	MDH des Baladins	5-20

These workshops were those organized by the Marchons working group in view of publishing the magazine.

## APPENDIX 3: PLENARY DEBATES

The table below provides a list of all the plenary debates I have participated in (grey) and in which I have been involved as co-organizer (black). The list provides information about the title of the debate, where they took place and how many people participated (PART.). Five categories indicate the number of people present at each debate: 1) 5-25; 2) 25 – 50; 3) 50 - 75; 4) 75 – 100; 5) + 100.

**Table A.28 Overview of plenary debates**

2013	PLENARY DEBATES	PLACE	PART.
16- févr	Villeneuve Debout - Repas Citoyen "Violence dans le quartier, parlons-en!"	La Cordée, Villeneuve	3
14- nov	Villeneuve - Décryptage public de Envoyé spécial	Salle 150, Villeneuve	3
2014	PLENARY DEBATES	PLACE	
17- juin	Marche Blanche and Villeneuve Debout- "Comprendre et agir sur la violence, soirée d'hommage à Kevin et Sofiane"	Musée de Grenoble	5
02- oct	Marche Blanche – International Day of Nonviolence	Lycée Marie Curie Echirrolles	5
2015	PLENARY DEBATES	PLACE	
20- mars	UP Cycle I "Pour comprendre les discriminations, l'islamophobie etc"	Salle Polyvalente des Baladins	4
11- mai	MJC Roseaux - Latifa Ibn Ziaten - Jessy Cormont	Maison de Quartier Aragon	3
31- mai	Fringale/FUIQP – "Quartiers populaires et luttes contre l'islamophobie, la lutte des femmes – Rencontre avec Ismahane Chouder"	MJC l'Abbaye	3
02- juil	MJC Roseaux - Réunion public après la mort de Luc Pouvin	Maison de Quartier Aragon	4
21- sept	UP Cycle I "Pour comprendre - histoire d'immigré"	Salle Polyvalente des Baladins	2
02- oct	2 October collective – Debate at high school with activists involved in MSHN struggles using non-violent methods	College Henri Vallon	5
02- oct	2 October collective – Debate with APLP "Comment faire société au-delà de nos différences?"	Alpexpo	2
02- oct	2 October collective – Debate "Quelle mobilisation collective pouvons-nous mettre en place pour répondre de façon nonviolente aux violences?"	Alpexpo	3
02- oct	2 October collective – International Day of Nonviolence	Summum	5+
24- oct	MJC les Roseaux – "Journée tous ensemble contre les violences"	L'Heure Bleue, Saint Martin d'Hères	5

28- oct	Fringale/FUIQP Projection débat "Qui a tué Ali Ziri"	Cinéma le Club, centre-ville	5
20- nov	UP Cycle I "Pour Comprendre les ZEP, ZUP, ZUS, ZSP - Said Bouamama"	Salle Polyvalente des Baladins	5
19 dec	Fringale/FUIQP - Restitution Marche pour la Dignité à Paris	MJC Desnos	1
<b>2016</b>	<b>PLENARY DEBATES</b>	<b>PLACE</b>	
11- mars	UP Cycle I "Pour comprendre la liberté d'expression"	Salle Polyvalente des Baladins	3
02- juin	2 October collective – "Nos mères nos daronnes"	Cinéma le Club, centre-ville	4
03- juin	UP Cycle I "Pour comprendre la géopolitique"	Salle Polyvalente des Baladins	3
10- juin	UP Cycle I "Pour comprendre le djihadisme"	Salle Polyvalente des Baladins	3
25- sept	APLP – Debate with the Danish resource center in Norrebro theme "Face aux représentations politiques, peut-on être religieux et citoyen en Europe aujourd'hui?"	MJC Desnos	2
<b>2017</b>	<b>PLENARY DEBATES</b>	<b>PLACE</b>	
01- avr	FUIQP (co-organizer) - Table-ronde regards croisés "Violences policières, islamophobie, racisme d'Etat et sionisme dans la politique française: <i>Khlass la hogra</i> "	Salle 150, Villeneuve	3
10- avr	MJC des Roseaux - Public Meeting liquidation MJC	Maison de Quartier Aragon	3
13- avr	MJC des Roseaux - Debate with young people from several neighborhoods in Grenoble (métropole) and Molenbeek organized by Jeunes Debout. Participation from Villeneuve organized by youth workers	Maison de Quartier Aragon	4
01- juil	Ad hoc public debate incendie collège -dialogue des savoirs avec parents d'élèves	Parc de la Villeneuve	2
13- oct	UP Cycle II - "Mémoires de la colonisation, entre récits et tabous"	MDH des Baladins	3
20- oct	UP Cycle II - soirée film	MDH des Baladins	2
10- nov	UP Cycle II - "La France et ses colonies"	Salle Polyvalente des Baladins	2
20- nov	UP Cycle II - "La guerre d'Algérie, connaître les faits" 1	La Cordée	2
22- nov	UP Cycle II - "La guerre d'Algérie, connaître les faits" 2	La Cordée	2
24- nov	UP Cycle II - "La guerre d'Algérie, connaître les faits" 3	La Cordée	2
08- déc	UP Cycle II - "Quelles continuités de l'imaginaire colonial après 1960?"	Salle Polyvalente des Baladins	3

2018	PLENARY DEBATES	PLACE	
21- janv	UP Cycle II - "Repenser le monde avec Césaire, Fanon et Glissant"	La Cordée	4
24- janv	Court trial Chaambi Grenoble - soirée débat "Quelles libertés pour nos luttes?"	Solexine, centre-ville	2
06- févr	Rencontres de géopolitique critique - "Conférence Edouard Glissant ou l'éloge du Tout Monde, les propositions de Glissant pour (re)penser le monde"	Kafet, IUGA	2
07- févr	Rencontres de géopolitique critique - "Déambuler à l'envers de la ville, une ballade décoloniale"	Kafet, IUGA	2
26- avr	UP Cycle II - "Mixité sociale, injonction à vivre ensemble, quelle gestion des quartiers?"	La Cordée	2
25- mai	UP Cycle II - "Discrimination, quels mots utiliser?"	La Cordée	3

## APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEWS

**Table A.29 List interviews with research participants**

Name	Encounter	Estimated age	Where they live	Date
Alain	Villeneuve Debout	60+	Villeneuve (Géants)	30/05/2016
Alicia	Agir pour la Paix	20-30	Echirolles/Mistral <sup>388</sup>	01/05/2018
Amelle	Agir pour la Paix	20-30	Grenoble city center	09/09/2017
Ariane	Villeneuve Debout	60+	Villeneuve (Arlequin)	19/04/2013
Béchir	Union de Quartier	60+	Villeneuve (Bruyère)	04/07/2016 (à transcrire (notes 2010))
Catherine	Université populaire	40-50	Pont de Claix	21/02/2017
César	Other	15-20	Villeneuve (Bruyère)	17/03/2017
Elisabeth*	Villeneuve Debout	60+	Villeneuve (Géants)	08/07/2017
Fadoua	Université populaire	30-50	Vigny-Musset	19/05/2017
Françoise	Marche Blanche	60+	Echirolles (Granges)	06/06/2016
Houssem (group interview)	Agir pour la Paix	20-30	Echirolles (Essarts)	01/07/2014
Hosny	Union de Quartier	40-50	Unknown	15/11/2013
Joachim	Agir pour la Paix	20-30	Echirolles (Village 2)	17/11/2015
Mahrez	Union de Quartier	60+	Villeneuve (unknown)	20/10/2013
Martine	Madame Ruetabaga	30-50	Villeneuve (Bruyère)	09/07/2017
Mamedou	Université populaire	60+	Villeneuve (Géants)	01/12/2017
Mayare	Agir pour la Paix	20-30	Echirolles (center)	07/07/2017
Michelle*	Villeneuve Debout	60+	Villeneuve (unknown)	15/03/13
Mounira	Marche Blanche	30-50	Grenoble city center	05/06/2017
Nadia	Université populaire	20-30	unknown	21/02/2017
Nawaz	Association 30-40	50-60	Villeneuve (Arlequin)	19/02/2013
Rachid (group interview)	Agir pour la Paix	20-30	Echirolles (Essarts)	01/07/2014
Steven	Agir pour la Paix	20-30	Echirolles (Granges)	01/07/2014 (group)

<sup>388</sup> In 2018, Alicia got married and moved out of her mother's apartment in Echirolles to an apartment with her husband on the border of the Mistral neighborhood.

				01/05/2018
Tassadit	Université populaire	50-60	Mistral	07/05/2016
Tina*	Université populaire	30-50	Villeneuve (Géants)	29/05/2017
Zeliha	Université populaire	20-30	Villeneuve (Constantine)	29/05/2017

Interviews and informal discussions (in blue) took place in the period from 2013-2014. The rest of the interviews (in black) took place in the period 2016-2017. The table below provides an overview of their names, their organizations/collectives, their estimated age, where they lived and when the interview took place.

#### Radio interviews

- Radio interview with Steven, Rachid and Housseem, Comprendre et agir sur la violence, 20/11/2014, Radio grésivaudan  
<http://www.radio-gresivaudan.org/Comprendre-et-agir-sur-la-violence.html>, accessed 19/11/2019
- News FM with 2 participants of the Université populaire, 1 person of UP working group and 1 invited speaker, 25/04/2016

**Table A.30 Interviews with professionals working in Villeneuve**

Name	Function	Organization	Date
Cyrille Jacob	<i>Directeur à la Direction des tranquillités</i>	City of Grenoble	25/05/2017
Jean-Pierre and Tedy <sup>389</sup>	Youth workers	CODASE	29/09/2017
Christian Liégois	<i>Délégué de cohésion police population</i>	Police nationale	12/06/2017
Denis Setboune and Pierre-Yves Orloff	Head of the Night mediation unit	Régie de quartier	20/09/2013

<sup>389</sup> Both persons I interviewed at CODASE have indicated that I can quote them with their first names, as Jean-Pierre and Tedy, youth workers at Codase.



## APPENDIX 5: PRODUCTIONS RESULTING FROM COLLABORATIONS

### *Methodological explorations*

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## APPENDIX 6: RESUME (LONG) EN FRANÇAIS

Depuis que les images de voitures en feu lors des révoltes dans les *banlieues* en 2005 ont été diffusées, les quartiers d'habitat social marginalisés (QHSM) français sont devenus tristement célèbres dans le monde entier. Ces QHSM sont considérés comme des lieux de danger et d'altérité, des lieux "à peine connus mais vivement imaginés" (Gregory 2011, 239).

Cette thèse cherche à questionner cette construction discursive de ces quartiers du point de vue de ses habitants. Pour ce faire, elle se penche sur cette question à partir d'un quartier en particulier appelé Villeneuve, qui se trouve entre les communes de Grenoble et d'Echirolles.

En 2010, Villeneuve est devenue le théâtre d'un nouveau discours public sur les QHSM qui a émergé pendant la présidence de Sarkozy. Epstein décrit ce discours comme s'inscrivant dans un courant néoconservateur en matière de politique urbaine (2016, 3) et Dikeç l'a appelé "nationalisme républicain" (2007). A travers ce discours, les QHSM sont présentés comme des espaces qui, d'une certaine manière, ne conviennent pas, pointés comme dangereux et déviants, ils sont considérés comme une forme d'extériorité qui menace "l'intégrité de la République" (Dikeç 2009, 6) et sont "différenciés de la société majoritaire" (Germes et al. 2010, 528). En outre, l'idée de « *banlieue* » évoque couramment des représentations raciales (Garcia et Rétis 2011). Les hommes politiques parlent à plusieurs reprises de "zones de non-droit"<sup>390</sup>, de "territoires perdus de la République"<sup>391</sup> (*Le Figaro*, 14/08/2015)<sup>392</sup> et d'espaces à "reconquérir" (*quartiers de reconquête républicaine*)<sup>393</sup>. Les frontières raciales et spatiales sont imbriquées dans la représentation des QHSM français.

La peur des QHSM n'est pas nouvelle, mais les images qui lui sont associées ont changé au fil des ans. La stigmatisation de ces espaces s'articule de plus en plus à travers des termes ethniques, raciaux et religieux (Bonam, Taylor, and Yantis 2017; Calmore 1995; Neal et al. 2013). "À partir des années 1990 en particulier, on a assisté à une forte stigmatisation des

<sup>390</sup> In a press conference in January 2004, Sarkozy affirmed that he wanted to reconquer Dans une conférence de press en janvier 2004, Sarkozy affirmait qu'il voulait reconquérir les "zones de non-droit" et mener une « lutte sans merci contre les violences urbaines et l'économie parallèle » : and to wage a "struggle without mercy against urban violence and the parallel economy": "Nous allons répertorier les vingt villes et les vingt quartiers les plus criminogènes, ceux dans lesquels les violences urbaines sont le plus fréquentes et où la gendarmerie et la police ont le plus de mal à pénétrer. ". Durand, Jacky, "Pas de quartier pour 20 quartiers. Le ministre s'est fixé comme objectif la reconquête des 'zones de non-droit' ". *Libération*, 15/01/2004. [http://www.liberation.fr/france/2004/01/15/pas-de-quartier-pour-20-quartiers\\_465293](http://www.liberation.fr/france/2004/01/15/pas-de-quartier-pour-20-quartiers_465293), accessed 18/04/2016

<sup>391</sup> Je traduis le terme "territoires perdus" par "lost ground" pour deux raisons : il rend justice au vocabulaire martial que le terme a mobilisé en français, et parce qu'il évite la confusion autour de la traduction du terme français *territoire* (voir encadré 0.3).

<sup>392</sup> <http://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/societe/2015/08/14/31003-20150814ARTFIG00245-des-territoires-perdus-de-la-republique-aux-territoires-perdus-de-la-nation-12.php>, accessed 18/04/2016

<sup>393</sup> "Grenoble : 70 Policiers Supplémentaires d'ici Fin 2019 Pour Trois 'Quartiers de Reconquête Républicaine.'" Place Gre'net, 15/02/2019. <https://www.placegrenet.fr/2019/02/15/grenoble-reconquete-republicaine/229575>, accessed 08/04/2019.

banlieues avec des références à la formation de ghettos, au séparatisme ethnique, au 'communitarisme' et au fondamentalisme islamique" (Dikeç, 2007, 175)<sup>394</sup>. Sa population est toujours "peinte dans des teintes plus sombres et plus exotiques que ne le justifie sa démographie" et ses "différences culturelles - dont religieuses - sont exagérées, tandis que sa position de classe vulnérable est minimisée ou totalement ignorée" (Wacquant, Slater et Pereira, 2014, 1274). Les connotations négatives des QHSM ont évolué dans les années 1990 avec des références aux QHSM comme étant des "ghettos ethniques" et "religieux"<sup>395</sup>, alors que ces termes étaient absents du discours politique des années 1970 et 1980 (Dikeç 2007). L'ouvrage de Kepel, *Banlieues de L'Islam* (1987), est un exemple de la crainte plus récente des QHSM en tant que foyers de l'intégrisme islamique.

Les QHSM sont de plus en plus associés à un ailleurs, en dehors de la France, et définis par opposition à ce qui est considéré comme "français". Il y a donc une dimension spatiale dans la construction discursive des QHSM comme "*territoires perdus de la République*", étant présentés comme des espaces qui ne font pas entièrement partie de la France : ils seraient éloignés de la République, voire en dehors de celle-ci. Ce discours situe géographiquement les menaces à la sécurité nationale au sein des QHSM et les présente comme des espaces ennemis qu'il faut contrôler, reliant la violence à des endroits en particulier. Ingram et Dodds considèrent qu'il est du devoir des géographes de "clarifier les manières distinctement géographiques dont les espaces "exceptionnels" sont produits" et les "manières dont les idées sur la sécurité sont utilisées pour invoquer un type spécial de politique, impliquant des prérogatives exceptionnelles, des mesures d'urgence, le recours à la violence et la réaffirmation de la souveraineté pour contrer les menaces au corps politique" (2009, 22-23).

Ma recherche doctorale vise à contribuer de quatre manières à la littérature existante sur la stigmatisation des quartiers. Premièrement, elle s'intéresse à la dimension postcoloniale de la société française en interrogeant les sources épistémologiques des représentations de ces quartiers comme "autres". Deuxièmement, elle prend en compte la relation dialectique entre la stigmatisation spatiale d'une part et la violence paroxystique d'autre part. Troisièmement, elle s'intéresse à la puissance d'agir des habitants des quartiers stigmatisés, qui reste peu étudiée (Wacquant 2007). Wacquant a identifié une lacune dans la littérature concernant l'effet performatif de la stigmatisation territoriale sur les personnes vivant dans les QHSM et leurs réponses à cette stigmatisation. Mon analyse va plus loin. Elle examine la manière dont les habitants de Villeneuve luttent contre les relations de pouvoir asymétriques qui sont induites par le colonialisme et qui se traduisent par une forme

<sup>394</sup> Les actes de violence paroxystique qui renforcent cette imagerie ennemie sont l'attentat de 1995 dans le métro de Paris dans le contexte de la guerre civile algérienne, les attentats du 11 septembre contre les tours jumelles de New-York, l'attentat de 2012 de Mohamed Merah, les attentats de Paris en 2015 et l'attentat terroriste de Nice en 2016.

<sup>395</sup> "Des 'centaines de Molenbeek en France?' Eric Ciotti veut 'reconquérir les territoires perdus de la République'", *Nice Matin*, 28/03/2016. [nicematin.com/faits-de-societe/des-centaines-de-molenbeek-en-france-eric-ciotti-veut-reconquerir-les-territoires-perdus-de-la-republique-36062](http://nicematin.com/faits-de-societe/des-centaines-de-molenbeek-en-france-eric-ciotti-veut-reconquerir-les-territoires-perdus-de-la-republique-36062), accessed 10/01/2020.

particulière de racisme en France. Le racisme en France s'articule autour des identités spatiales. Enfin, ma thèse apporte une contribution méthodologique à la réalisation de recherches aux QHSM.

Les arguments que je développe tout au long de cette thèse sont organisés en sept chapitres.

Le premier chapitre fournit un cadre théorique inspiré de des théories postcoloniales et décoloniales. Dans ce chapitre, je passe rapidement en revue la littérature postcoloniale, décoloniale et celle des *subaltern studies* comme outils pour remettre en question les métanarrations modernes/coloniales qui informent encore la construction discursive des QHSM. Cette littérature, combinée aux apports de la géographie critique (féministe et anarchiste), est prometteuse pour développer une nouvelle façon d'aborder les QHSM. Elle fournit les outils analytiques permettant d'aborder Villeneuve non pas comme un objet de recherche, mais comme un lieu d'énonciation qui se situe par rapport à des espaces plus larges.

Le deuxième chapitre traduit les outils analytiques et épistémologiques de cette approche décoloniale en une méthodologie de recherche. Plusieurs années d'explorations méthodologiques et thématiques à Villeneuve ont mené à ce que j'appelle des explorations décoloniales. Lors des explorations décoloniales, les chercheurs sont attentifs aux asymétries de pouvoir dans les relations sociales et aux processus historiques et géographiques qui les ont façonnées. J'ai cherché des moyens par lesquels la recherche peut contribuer à défaire ces structures de pouvoir inégales, dans mon cas en travaillant avec des groupes ou des collectifs dans des quartiers marginalisés qui sont impliqués dans une forme d'action. Mes recherches ont tenté de faire place à la perspective des voix marginalisées et, en particulier, des habitants racialisés de Villeneuve, qui sont les plus durement touchés par l'oppression de classe et de race. C'est en réfléchissant à la spatialité des cadres et des configurations de recherche que j'ai développé une méthodologie de recherche orientée vers l'organisation de débats publics agonistiques dans le quartier. Dans ce cadre de recherche, je fais partie d'une conversation plus large entre des personnes qui sont directement concernées par différentes formes de domination. Les sujets de débat sont le résultat de longues périodes de discussions et de consultations dans le quartier. Les débats étaient destinés aux habitants du quartier mais ont attiré un public plus large. De toutes les explorations, les débats que j'ai organisés en tant que membre du groupe de travail de l'Université populaire correspondent le plus à ma définition des explorations décoloniales et ont généré le plus de données. Ils ont donc obtenu une place particulière dans ma thèse.

Le troisième chapitre est le premier d'une série de cinq chapitres qui sont centrés sur mon matériel de terrain. Comme j'aborde Villeneuve comme lieu d'énonciation, il est important de commencer par comprendre ce lieu. Ce chapitre situe Villeneuve dans le contexte socio-historique dans lequel ce quartier a été construit, les politiques urbaines qui l'ont façonnée

et qui l'ont conçu comme une zone d'intervention particulière. Dans ma description de Villeneuve, j'accorde une attention particulière aux expériences vécues par les habitants du quartier. C'est une façon de faire place aux voix marginalisées et de répondre aux représentations stigmatisantes du quartier qui fonctionnent comme des prisons sémantiques. Ma propre perception de Villeneuve est celle d'un espace fragile, où l'équilibre entre les différentes forces peut toujours glisser vers des tensions croissantes, voire vers la violence, par exemple lorsque la fonction d'atténuation des acteurs locaux est minée par des changements de conditions extérieures. Enfin, je fais une critique du programme de rénovation urbaine en cours et en particulier du discours stigmatisant qu'il produit sur le quartier comme un espace ghetto qui doit être ouvert physiquement pour laisser entrer une nouvelle population de classe moyenne. Certains ont qualifié ce discours de colonial et comme un prolongement du discours sur la mission civilisatrice utilisée pour légitimer le régime colonial.

Le chapitre quatre explore davantage la question de la pertinence du passé colonial pour comprendre l'asymétrie du pouvoir en France, par rapport au QHSM, au niveau national et international. L'Université populaire a exploré cette question pendant un an et demie à travers neuf débats publics et plusieurs réunions plus informelles. Sur la base du matériel recueilli, je réponds à la question de l'héritage colonial du point de vue des habitants qui ont engagé une discussion avec les intervenants qui avaient des connaissances pertinentes sur le sujet, notamment des universitaires et des militants. Une partie importante du chapitre est donc consacrée au lien que les participants aux débats de l'Université populaire ont établi entre le passé colonial et le présent. J'accorde également une grande attention aux tensions liées à la création d'un espace pour les voix marginalisées, qui est l'objectif de l'Université populaire. Poser les sujets tabous, tels que l'expérience incarnée de la différence, le racisme, l'islamophobie, la discrimination spatiale, le passé colonial français et la violence policière dans les débats publics peut être, d'une certaine manière, compris comme créant du conflit. C'est néanmoins un moyen trouvé pour faire entendre ce qui devait rester inaudible. Mon expérience de l'organisation de ces débats est donc aussi une expérience de première main des tentatives de faire taire les voix marginalisées. Je développe les moyens utilisés pour faire taire les voix des personnes marginalisées dans le chapitre six.

Dans le cinquième chapitre, j'explique ce que je considère comme l'héritage du colonialisme en France, en me concentrant sur les spécificités du racisme. À travers une discussion approfondie des résultats obtenus sur le terrain, je soutiens que la condition de nationalité sans citoyenneté, qui était la clé du régime colonial, s'applique toujours à la France d'une certaine manière, car les habitants racialisés ne sont jamais considérés comme "vraiment" français. Ils restent toujours des citoyens de seconde zone. De nombreuses personnes racialisées des QHSM ont le sentiment qu'il n'y a pas de place pour elles en France. Grâce à ce que j'appelle des expériences de différence incarnées, elles sont amenées à se sentir "autres" dans l'espace public. Le racisme en France se manifeste à travers des catégories nationales racialisées qui font que dans l'imaginaire commun les "vrais" Français sont

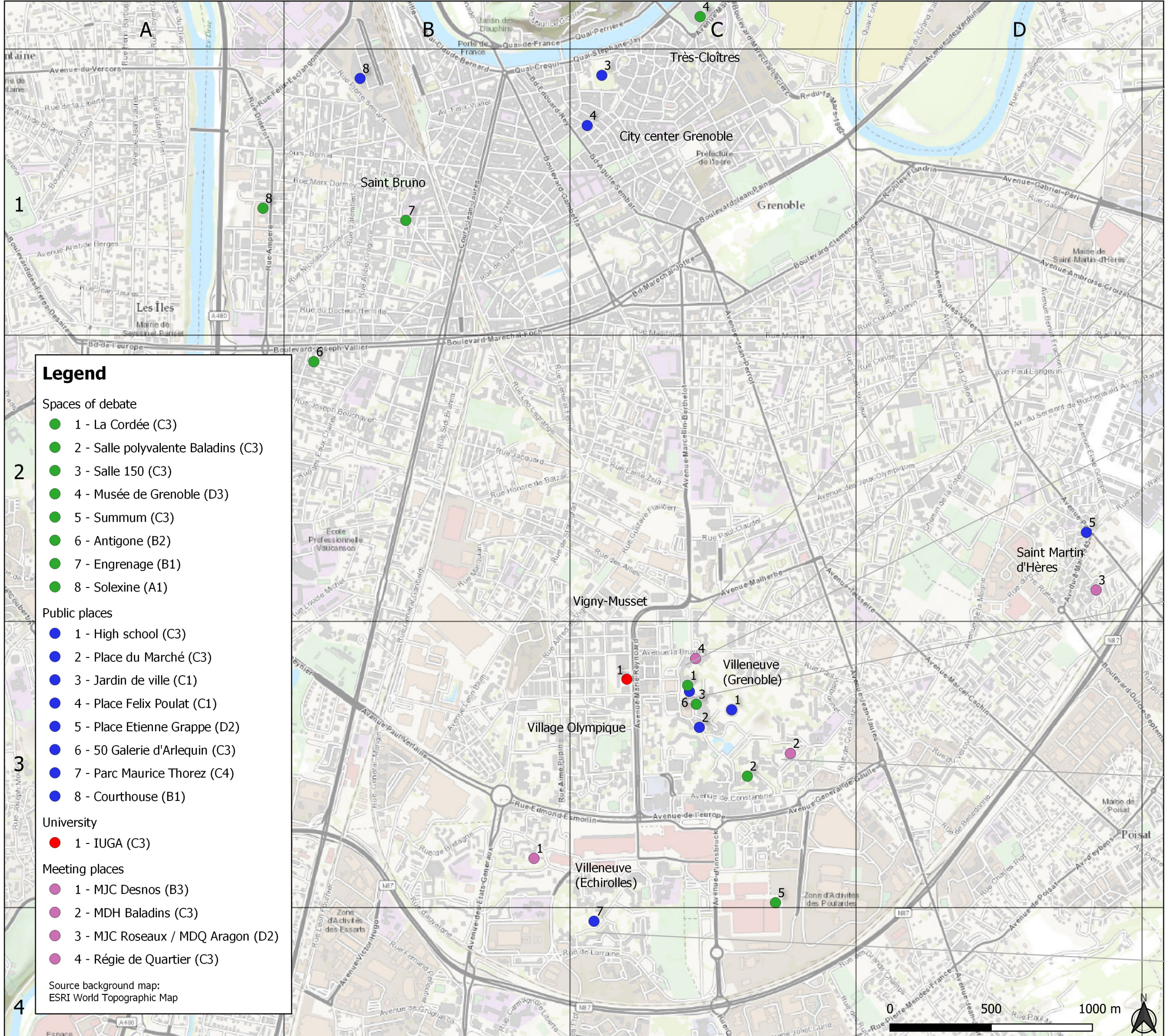
forcément blancs, ce qui fait que les Français racialisés restent d'éternels étrangers. Les citoyens de seconde classe, bien qu'ayant les mêmes droits formels, n'ont dans la pratique pas les mêmes droits que les citoyens français blancs de première zone : ils ne peuvent pas revendiquer le droit d'avoir des droits. Par conséquent, les citoyens de seconde zone ne peuvent pas contester leur situation marginalisée par une action politique ouverte. Une des conséquences de l'(im)possibilité de citoyenneté est l'(im)possibilité de conflit, qui est l'essence même de la politique, selon Rancière.

Dans le chapitre six, je soutiens, en m'appuyant sur Curle et sur les travaux du Modus Operandi, que, dans des circonstances spécifiques, la création de conflits est un moyen de remettre en cause les relations de pouvoir asymétriques et un facteur de prévention des flambées de violence paroxystique. J'examine les conséquences politiques de ne pas être reconnu comme un citoyen à part entière et je m'interroge sur la relation entre la voix, la politique et la violence, car si les voix politiques sont rendues inaudibles, la violence peut être l'un des rares moyens de rendre la dissidence visible.

Le septième et dernier chapitre présente une adaptation de l'argument Exit, Loyalty and Voice développé par Hirschman (1970), que j'ai rebaptisé en modèle Exit, Loyalty, Fight. Dans ce contexte, la lutte concerne les moyens par lesquels il est possible d'être politique malgré les efforts de dépolitisation qui cherchent à entraver l'organisation politique au sein du QHSM. Je décris les réponses créatives que les collectifs Front Uni des Immigrations et des Quartiers Populaires et Agir pour la Paix ont trouvées pour être politiques, en adoptant l'imagination politique du poing et de la colombe respectivement. Je décris également les dilemmes liés à la mise en avant des identités racialisées dans la lutte pour surmonter la racialisation et la stigmatisation, ainsi que les différents choix de ces deux collectifs pour traiter ces questions.

## APPENDIX 7: OVERVIEW MAP





**Legend**

**Spaces of debate**

- 1 - La Cordée (C3)
- 2 - Salle polyvalente Baladins (C3)
- 3 - Salle 150 (C3)
- 4 - Musée de Grenoble (D3)
- 5 - Summum (C3)
- 6 - Antigone (B2)
- 7 - Engrenage (B1)
- 8 - Solexine (A1)

**Public places**

- 1 - High school (C3)
- 2 - Place du Marché (C3)
- 3 - Jardin de ville (C1)
- 4 - Place Felix Poulat (C1)
- 5 - Place Etienne Grappe (D2)
- 6 - 50 Galerie d'Arlequin (C3)
- 7 - Parc Maurice Thorez (C4)
- 8 - Courthouse (B1)

**University**

- 1 - IUGA (C3)

**Meeting places**

- 1 - MJC Desnos (B3)
- 2 - MDH Baladins (C3)
- 3 - MJC Roseaux / MDQ Aragon (D2)
- 4 - Régie de Quartier (C3)

Source background map:  
ESRI World Topographic Map



La Bruyère (Google Earth)



Résidence 2000 (Google Earth)



Galerie d'Arlequin 10 - 40 (Google Earth)



50 Galerie d'Arlequin (Photo: C. Dijkema)



Place des Géants (Google Earth)



Les Granges (Google Earth)

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADCFA	Association dauphinoise de coopération franco-algérienne
ADRECA	Association pour le développement d'une recherche citoyenne et active
ANRU	Agence nationale pour la Rénovation urbaine
APLP	Agir pour la paix
APU	Ateliers populaires d'urbanisme
AUA	Atelier d'urbanisme et d'architecture
AURG	Agence de l'urbanisme de la région grenobloise
BAC	Brigade anti-criminalité
BST	Brigade spécialisée de terrain
CCAS	Centre Communal d'Action Sociale
CIIP	Centre d'information inter-peuples
CLSPD	Conseil Local de Sécurité et de Prévention Local
CNRS	Centre national de recherche scientifique
CODASE	Comité dauphinois d'action socio-éducative
CRI	Coordination contre le racisme et l'Islamophobie
CSO	Civil society organization
CUCS	Contrats urbains de cohésion sociale
DDSP	Direction départementale de la sécurité publique
DSQ	Développement social des quartiers
FLN	Front de libération nationale
FSQP	Forum Social des Quartiers Populaires
FUIQP	Front Uni des Immigrations et des Quartiers Populaires
HLM	Habitations à loyer modéré (Dwellings at Moderated Rents)
HVS	Habitat et Vie Sociale

MIB	Mouvement de l'Immigration et des Banlieues
IUGA	Institut d'Urbanisme et de Géographie Alpine
MJC	Maison de la Jeunesse et de la Culture
MHSH	Marginalized social housing neighborhoods
NPA	Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste
OAS	Organisation Armée Secrète
ODTI	Office Dauphinois des Travailleurs Immigrés (1970-2004) Observatoire sur les discriminations et les territoires interculturels (2004 – present)
PAR	Participatory action research
PIR	Parti des Indigènes de la République
QPV	Quartiers prioritaires de la Politique de la Ville
QRR	Quartiers de reconquête urbaine
UITC	Université international Terre citoyenne
UP	Université populaire
VET	Vivre ensemble tranquillement
ZAC	Zone d'activités
ZEP	Zone d'éducation prioritaire
ZUP	Zone à urbaniser par priorité
ZUS	Zones urbaines sensibles
ZRU	Zone de redynamisation urbaine
ZFU	Zone franche urbaine
ZSP	Zone de sécurité prioritaire

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## Résumé (court) en français

Cette thèse cherche à repenser la stigmatisation des quartiers d'habitat social marginalisés en France à travers un cadre d'analyse à la fois postcolonial et décolonial. Son originalité réside dans l'application des théories postcoloniales en France: au présent et non pas au passé, aux espaces de la métropole et non aux anciennes colonies. Cette approche décoloniale permet d'analyser les formes de reproduction de l'injustice raciale. Dans le contexte des attaques terroristes au nom de l'Islam, je me concentre sur l'islamophobie en particulier.

Cette thèse se situe dans le projet critique qui vise premièrement à rendre visibles des réalités alternatives, restées jusqu'à présent sous le radar de la recherche en sciences sociales; deuxièmement il vise à faire de la place dans la recherche et l'écriture scientifique pour les voix des personnes rendues inaudibles dans la société plus généralement: en particulier celles des "jeunes du quartier" et des femmes musulmanes.

Cette approche décoloniale consiste à adopter une autre façon de voir, mais également une autre façon de faire de la recherche. Les explorations décoloniales entreprises sont le résultat d'une quête à la fois épistémologique et méthodologique pour élaborer de modes plus horizontaux pour « être en relation » dans la recherche. L'objectif étant de développer des méthodes qui créent les conditions pour que les chercheurs parlent avec des personnes marginalisées sur une base d'égalité et motivés par des intérêts mutuels. Ces collaborations ont pris la forme de la création d'espaces de parole avec des collectifs citoyens qui se sont organisés à Villeneuve (Grenoble et Echirolles) au lendemain de violences paroxystiques. Dans le quartier, la violence a un triple effet de provoquer des discours stigmatisants, de réduire les voix déjà marginalisées au silence et de susciter l'urgence d'agir et de produire un contre-discours.

Les habitants racisés de Villeneuve estiment qu'ils ne sont pas traités comme égaux, qu'ils ne sont pas considérés comme Français, qu'ils ne sont pas défendus et, enfin, qu'on leur refuse le droit de revendiquer des droits. Leur condition d'avoir la nationalité française sans être reconnus comme Français, i.e. leur statut de citoyen de deuxième rang, évoque la citoyenneté fragmentée qui était typique de la période coloniale. Lorsque les habitants cherchent à contester leur position marginalisée dans la société par des moyens politiques, ils sont confrontés aux stratégies de démobilisation de l'État, des institutions et d'autres acteurs établis. Ces derniers nient leurs expériences, les présentent comme culturellement inférieurs, criminalisent leurs actions et entravent la formation de groupes et l'organisation politique. C'est dans ce contexte que la violence peut devenir une option.

Mots clés: Stigmatisation territoriale, quartiers populaires, racisme, islamophobie, citoyenneté, politisation, subalterne, approche décoloniale

## Abstract

This thesis seeks to rethink the stigmatization of marginalized social housing neighborhoods (MSHN) in France through a post and decolonial analytical framework. Its novelty lies in the application of postcolonial theories; first to the French present instead of the colonial past, and second to geographical areas of a former colonial power, instead of to its former colonies. This decolonial approach helps to analyze the ways in which racial injustice continues to be reproduced. In the context of terrorist attacks carried out in the name of Islam, I focus in particular on islamophobia.

This thesis is situated in the critical project of making alternative realities visible that have so far remained under the radar of social science research and of making space for subalternized voices in academic research and in academic writing. Its focus is in particular on neighborhood youth and Muslim women.

This approach not only consists of another way of viewing but also of another way of doing research. The decolonial explorations I embarked on are an epistemological inquiry into more horizontal ways of being in research relationships; they are a methodological inquiry into developing research methods that create the conditions for researchers to speak with marginalized persons on a basis of equality and motivated by mutual interests. These collaborations took the form of creating spaces for debate with citizen collectives that formed in Villeneuve (Grenoble and Echirolles), in the aftermath of paroxysmal violence. Within the neighborhood, violence has the triple effect of stigmatizing discourse, of silencing already marginalized voices and creating the urgency to act and to produce counter-discourse.

Racialized inhabitants of Villeneuve feel that they are not treated as equals, that they are not considered worth defending and that they are denied the right to claim rights. They have the French nationality but are not considered citizens. Their second-class citizenship status evokes the fragmented citizenship that was typical for the colonial period. When inhabitants seek to challenge their marginalized position in society through political means, they are confronted with political demobilization strategies of the State, institutional, and other elite players. The latter negate their experiences, present them as culturally inferior, criminalize their actions and impede group formation and political organization. It is in this context that violence may become an option.

Keywords: Territorial stigmatization, , islamophobia, citizenship, politicization, subaltern, decolonial approach