Conflict and territory narratives: Sensitive neighbourhoods in police discourses

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Abstract[1]

While policing practices in sensitive neighbourhoods are widely researched, little of this research has studied how these spaces are thought of by the police. Discourses on space are interpretation grids that guide individual action and legitimize institutional action. This article intends to study the police discourse on sensitive neighbourhoods based on interviews conducted with national police local authorities and municipal police authorities. The formal analysis of descriptive and spatial structures demonstrates how the narrative of conflict constructs a representation of sensitive neighbourhoods in territorial terms, distinguishing the space belonging to some from that belonging to the others and delineating infringed boundaries. Second, the analysis of the discourse on the UTEQs (Unités TErritoriales de Quartier[2]) shows how these spatialized antagonistic representations are used to legitimize a device, the purpose of which is control of the territory and which has an ambiguous relationship with the violence it gives rise to. The territorialization of the police discourse is inseparable from the violence of conflict, deemed as more legitimate in some spaces than in others.

Key words

Police; sensitive neighbourhoods; territory; UTEQ; discourse

Introduction

Police and Territories

Whether in uniform or civilian clothes, on patrol or specific assignments, police practices are a contributing factor to the production of space – and more specifically, the production of urban space (Fyfe, 1995). Policing[3] activity consists in part of monitoring and controlling space as well as establishing spatial strategies: the space is an instrument in the service of the specific mission it has been assigned. The strategic and organizational issues of the distribution of security forces, the delineation of districts and the location of police stations delineate a geography that is specific to the police, whose work is very territorialized (Fyfe, 1991). The spatial differentiations thus introduced by the police tend to identify threatening spaces and threatened spaces – just as there is differentiation in the population of individuals who are threatening and those who are threatened based solely on their apparent belonging to a social

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[1] Translator's note: While the word "banlieue" is generally translated as "suburb", I have left the word in French because "suburb" gives rise to thoughts of the middle class developments with their lawns and single family homes that in North America in particular, are more of a refuge from the city; the French banlieue referred to in this article is much closer to the "inner city" in the North American (particularly U.S.) setting. SWM

[2] Translation: Neighbourhood territorial units. SWM

[3] Police work is extremely varied: traffic monitoring, court investigations, information, border police, etc. (cf. Monjardet, 2002; Brodeur, 2003: 350-353). Monjardet explains how a different relationship is established with the territory (jurisdiction) based on the duties and assignments of each type of police: he states that mobile response forces (like the CRS [Compagnie républicaine de sécurité; tr.: Republican Security Company]) have a circumstantial relationship with the territory; that the crime police are distinguished by the play between geographic jurisdiction (areas of jurisdiction) and the geography proper of hubs and networks of criminal activity. Urban police, however, require greater adaptation to the field as well as a better understanding of the local specificities like an ability to fit into local society (Monjardet, 1996: 135). The research proposed here is concerned solely with urban police (state and municipal).

group. In the name of public space, individuals identified as deviant are banned from certain places (Belina, 2007). Moreover, discriminatory behaviours on the part of the police are observed particularly in disadvantaged neighbourhoods of major cities: in North America (cf. Herbert, 2003) but also in Europe (cf. Loader, 2002) and in France (cf. Goris et al., 2009).

Knowledge of and control of social space are the working conditions for the police, while at the same time, police work contributes to the production of urban space. In France, the term territoire [territory] is recurrent in the police organization and likewise in the discourse on the police – and two different meanings of the word can be distinguished. The first meaning, the territory of jurisdiction, refers to the district belonging to the police as part of the national territory network. Even if the use of the term territory is current in the general domain of local public action in France, in the case of the police, it expresses more than simply the spatialization of institutional action or the attribution of responsibilities and assignments over a given space – it also implies control, surveillance and mastery of the space. The district, the local territory "entrusted" to police authority by the State, is something of a synecdoche of the national territory. A second meaning of the term territory emphasizes police work itself, the territory being (or supposed to be) appropriated by policing practices; this meaning implies the experience, knowledge of the site and the inhabitants and the ability to impose itself. Such uses of the term territory with regard to the police are a reminder that the territory is not just any space, but a sovereign area: the term calls to mind appropriation (violent or otherwise), control, legitimacy, law – and potentially, protests against the same.

Police, the State and violence

The purpose of this contribution is to participate in the study of the relationships between the State and violence and to propose a geographic interpretation of the considerations in the social sciences and political philosophy on the police, based on the concept of territory. The police are in fact often thought of in relationship to the State and the idea of legitimate violence. In counterpoint to the cruel violence of nature or the arbitrary violence of a powerless, an-archical, society, the State distinguishes illegitimate violence from legitimate defence and thus institutes its own coercive power. The use of force by the police is a legitimate exercise of violence, the purpose of which is to contravene violence (cf. Bittner, 1980). According to Weber's concept that the State is characterized by the monopoly of violence, and the police represent one of the institutions making the exercise of this violence possible. The police thus are often raised as an issue as coming under a paradox in the context of constitutional states and democratic regimes (cf. Herbert, 2003). However, the definition of the object "police"[4] is compared to the epistemological problems of the construction of the police as a research topic. If the descriptions of the police apparatus that make an abstraction of its social role are nearly unanimously rejected, researchers as a whole are not however united behind a "sociology of social (legitimate) uses of force" (Monjardet, 1996). Research on the police may of course be a means for examining the close relationship between violence and the State – but this would be forgetting that resorting to violence is in fact rare in day-to-day police work and that defining

[4] A nuanced definition of the police as "[translation] an institution of social control equipped with a relative latitude for defining the situations that call for its intervention and which may then implement the means of coercion that it is equipped with. We mean that first, the activity of policing is less repressive than organizational; the police endlessly negotiate the conditions of their intervention, the police participate more than others in the collective definition of what is tolerable and what is intolerable, and the police make a major contribution to organizing a social order to which it is not external but a stakeholder." (Favre and Jobard , 1997 :207)

the police through the legitimacy of violence would not account for the diversity of policing assignments and practices (Brodeur, 1994). However, separating the research on the police from the ambiguous and complex relationships they entertain in conceptual terms with violence and the State is not a satisfactory solution, either. It is impossible to ignore the wide-spread concept that the police are invested with powers by the State, that they represent the State and that they are even the very symbol thereof. This concept is precisely the foundation of the legitimization of the police: their work (potentially coercive or intrusive – Herbert, 2003) is legitimized by the State. The concept is based on two assumptions: first, that the State would provide protection from pre-existing violence; second, that the police would stem from the State. Now, violence is not apart from the State, it is not what the State is against; violence is also the legitimization of the State's right and the instrument of its strength (Gros, 2006). Moreover, the State's precedence over the police is also questionable. The State is not an institution but an abstraction, whose function is to legitimize social and political organization, i.e. institutions and their practices. These day-to-day, institutional practices and discourses are what form the State (Painter, 2006 and 2010).

Territory: Sovereignties and appropriations

Rather than considering that the State produces one or more territories which would be the containers and structures of police action, we deem instead that the day-to-day and institutional police practices are what simultaneously produce a territory and contribute to forming the State. The State (re-)produced by the police would be produced in part by means of territory – methods and practices for the establishment of sovereign spaces. Often controversial due to the its many possible meanings, the concept of territory is, however, fundamental for Francophone social geography and Anglophone political geography, even if its meanings are different. In the Francophone context, territoire is most often conceived as an appropriated space, supporting an identity – political, historic and economic processes; individuals and groups are affected (Di Méo, 1998). Against the risk of spatial reification, the term territoriality makes it possible to refer to the processes of spatial appropriation and identity – without however running the risk of assuming the production of "territory as a thing" (Aldhuy, 2008). These concepts make it possible to think about the power relationships that are entered into in the space (Ripoll and Veschambre, 2006), as well as the concrete and symbolic aspect of the conflicts that are expressed in the space. In the Anglophone context, territory often refers to the territory (alone) of political sovereignty and the concept is very often closely tied to the State. The constitution of state territories, the history of territorial concepts and methods, and the recent evolution of States' (de-/re-) territorialization are the main areas of research where territory is conceived of as a means of power.

From the French meaning of territoire[5] as an operative concept, we recall the idea that territory is constructed by multiple social practices – and that it is an instrument of power and struggles between social groups with diverging interests. Around territory, the forming a "we" goes together with the demarcation of a "them": appropriation by is also an appropriation against. From the English language meaning of territory as a specific historic object, we recall the idea the "space of state sovereignty" as an instrument for controlling the people. From the great deal

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[5] The current use of the term "territoire" in the police discourses introduces a certain polysemy. It means indeed a unique and unambiguous object, the space of competence and work. For clarity, the terms "space" and "spatialization" and spatial terms are used to designate these territories and territorialisations.

of questioning on the validity of the term territory, we also recall that a (or even many) territory/ies is/are not produced, but instead, there are complex and ambivalent territorialization processes.

The banlieues in France: A policing discourse[6]?

The purpose of this research is to study the policing discourse of city policy in France on "sensitive neighbourhoods", spaces that are known for their "social problems"[7], on the basis of the concept of territory. The social sciences analyze the urban planning and architectural aspects of these problems (Dufaux and Fourcaut, 2004), their socio-economic history – related to industrialization and the creation of urban working classes, then later with deindustrialization (Duchêne and Morel-Journel, 2000; Beaud and Pialoux, 2003), the phenomena of identity disaffiliation (Bacqué and Sintomer, 2001). With regard to public policies, the neighbourhood "in trouble" was created as a spatial object by texts, institutions and policies to become a category of public action and to be used for the reification of multiple social issues (Tissot, 2007). France's banlieues are also subject to representations that have been shown to be very powerful in political and government institutions among the "inhabitants" themselves or alternatively, in public opinion (Fourcaut, 2000). The media play a crucial role in the production and dissemination of such representations; journalism's work in producing "banlieue" as a category (Sedel, 2009) reflects rivalries for imposing a narrative on the banlieues – the causes of their problems and outlines for their solutions. Despite these rivalries, a hegemonic discourse emerges which associates the banlieue almost invariably with insecurity (Germes et al., 2010) – and which explains in great part that for a number of years, they have been subject to repressive measures taking the form of specific and territorialized policing devices and local security policies (Dikeç, 2007: 93-204; Bonelli, 2008). Furthermore, these spaces, described as well as "no-man's land" are also subject to particular policing practices: subjects identified as belonging to disadvantaged neighbourhoods (the more so when they are identified as belonging to a visible minority or a minority with low social capital), are more easily targeted for police repression, which is in part at the discretion of the police officers (with regard to the interpretation of a situation and determining how to intervene - Herbert, 2003). Everything occurs as if a "different" law governed policing practices in sensitive neighbourhoods (the analysis proposed by Jobard, 2005).

What causes the spatial differentiations in police work and what role does space play? We formulate the hypothesis that both the devices put in place and the reaffirmed representations are separate components of the same discourse. "Discourse" is defined as a way of giving meaning to the world, to decipher it, to understand it, beyond the diversity of positions and individual opinions (Glaze and Mattissek, 2009). Space is the topic of multiple discourses; here,

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[6] Instead of considering that representations (individual or collective) are in some way impressions of the real world's perception, the concept of discourse (in relation to topics that are neither individuals or groups but institutions or, alternatively, statement positions) makes it possible to imagine how the socially negotiated conceptions of the world shape the action.

[7] Criticism is justified of the generic designations such as "banlieues" and "sensitive neighbourhood", which in fact contributes to the unified representation of extremely different situations and thus producing a reified spatial category and support of the stigmatiziation. These concepts do not allow the conception of the complexity and overlapping of issues concerning, in part, precarious employment situations, gender biais, racial discrimination on a daily basis, run-down housing, unhealthy living conditions, lack of accessibility, gentrification due to market factors or urban renewal, etc.

the focus is on the policing discourse regarding "sensitive neighbourhoods", and on the discursive construction of the banlieues as police territory. Appropriation by the police is thought of as appropriation against (adversaries), in the name of (the State). We will investigate the role of conflict and violence in the appropriation discourse as related to territory.

As a way of examining a portion of the police discourse on the French banlieues, about ten semi-directive interviews were conducted in 2008 and 2009 with local state security stakeholders, among which were some members of the national police at the precinct level, departmental headquarters, and central headquarters as well as municipal chiefs of police[8]. The communes affected by these interviews include at least one "Sensitive Urban Zone". Speakers were first requested to present and explain the mechanisms in place in their jurisdiction; then, they were questioned more specifically on the sensitive areas and the UTEQs [territorial neighbourhood units]. The texts gathered made it possible to examine the discourses of local stakeholders (members of the police) on the social space. This corpus of interviews is not considered representative; thanks to this exploratory study, possible discourses are identified without claiming to reconstruct the police discourse. The analysis of the interviews showed the implementation of narratives of conflict heavily supported on territorial identifications. How is this type of territorial discourse produced and to what ends?

1. The Formation of Territories in the Police Narrative

The principle of discourse analysis is the attention given to repetitions beyond the diversity of statements and positions in order to draw attention to a common discourse in a corpus of particular texts; i.e. the "how" things are said (and not "what" is said). The methods used make possible the identification of enunciative structures, spatial designations or spatializations and the expression of conflicts in the interviews (Glasze and Mattissek, 2009). The study of enunciative structures is based on the attention given to proper and common nouns, personal and possessive pronouns (or alternatively, elliptical or implied formulations) designating individuals, groups or institutions. This study makes it possible to analyze the subject positions formed in the discourse. Second, the study of spatial designations is built on the inventory of proper and common nouns designating the places or spatial forms, as well as spatial prepositions and adverbs, but also verbs of motion. The identification of spaces makes it possible to highlight relationships of correspondence or belonging established between spaces and subjects in the discourse. Third, the study of the expression of conflicts is built on the reading of syntactical forms of negation and lexical forms implying opposition, power, impediment and avoidance. At the end of this third analysis, which completes the first two, the formation of territorializations in discourse can be studied: the territorialization discourse is in fact, an interweaving of topics, spaces and conflicts. A selection of especially significant and typical quotes (for the corpus of interviews) will be analyzed throughout the text; the words that, based on our analysis, refer to the subjects, to the spaces or to conflicts will be emphasized respectively through the use of small capitals, bold face or underscoring. The initially formal analysis will gradually become more interpretative.

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[8] In order to protect the identity of the individuals met with, the municipalities are not indicated. The speaker's position in the institution will be the only reference made.

1;1 A place for everyone and everyone in his/her place

The not very strict enunciative structure is typical of texts resulting from the transcription of interviews: the first, second and third persons do not systematically refer back to the same subjects (now the speaker, now the police, now one group or another); the subjects are not systematically designated but are often implied (cf. quotes 4 and 5[9]). It was however possible to identify the construction of three different subjects. First, the speaker (more often than not a member of the national or municipal police) identifies himself with the "police" which he'll sometimes designate in the third person (cf. 1 and 6: "...to signal the arrival of the police ; "they saw the police "), sometimes in the first person plural (cf. 3 and 5: "We can't; "We don't go there."), indeed, even directly addressing the listener, in the second person (cf. 3: "When you go back..."). In interaction with the police, the subject emerges as the main object of the police actions and which is almost exclusively designated by the third person plural in the masculine (c.f 5 and 6: "They take off"; "it's their place"; exception cf. 3: "They put you[10]"). The vocabulary "gang", "gang leader", "delinquent leaders", "the look-out" [whose role is to give a signal]" (cf. 2,1,6 and 7), make up this second subject, first as a group organized around leaders, and second by its opposition to (or its protest against) the rules and laws presupposed by the police-subject. "They", an anonymous adversary, refers to the discursive figure of the young male of the banlieue who is potentially delinquent and potentially threatening (Hancock, 2008). Finally, a third less frequent subject is the 'peace-loving population'; this population is distinguished from the 'minority' of delinquents that threaten it. The three subjects that have been identified are thus structured by relationships of opposition.

The spatial designations construct a slightly more complex geography around a very clear structure, of which the housing projects, the neighbourhood or neighbourhoods are the first referent[11] (cf. quotes 3, 2: "there, that project there..."; "When you go into the neighbourhoods..."). These spaces are described as closed spaces (cf. 3 and 1: "you hit a dead-end"; "just one way in"), with their attached areas (cf. 5: "They take off to the woods!")" or their hideouts (cf. 5: "They go...to the cellars).￼" These spaces are constructed in opposition with an "outside", a nearby space that is not more specifically designated or described (cf. 6:, "The police, they're outside [the project]"). The verbs imply movement, also implying the existence of this space from which one "comes home" to the neighbourhood or indeed, towards which one returns when "running" or "hunted" outside the neighbourhood (cf. 3 and 6 respectively): Not only do they repeat the spatial dichotomy, but they show that this dichotomy is an effective signifying structure of the discourse. The space is meaningful. This reiterated demarcation between inside and outside plays a fundamental discursive role in that it tallies with, and thus confirms, the opposition constructed between the two main subjects.

In fact, the police subject belongs to the "outside", by the same token as the other subject, the adversary, belongs to the neighbourhood, the banlieue (cf. 6: "They have a territorial mind-set, they're at home, and the police, they're from outside [the project."]). This extremely clear

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[9] The complete quotations are reproduced and discussed in paragraph 1.2 below.

[10] Translator's note: The French construction using "on" – a 3rd person impersonal singular wihich is given the attributes of 1st person plural in the previous sentence – is indicated as an exception because this construction was associated with the police in other instances in the interviews. However, in the instance cited as an exception, "on" takes on the 3rd person impersonal sense and makes the "criminal" element the subject, and not the 1st person plural (i.e. self reference by the police) referred to above.SWM

[11] This is quite simply due to the fact that the police devices and work in the "troubled neighbourhoods", or "problem neighbourhoods" were one of the main themes of the interview.

distribution of the subjects and spaces is based on a network of discursive equivalencies and oppositions, where only two elements are clearly and distinctly evoked: the police and the banlieue. The two additional elements (the adversaries of the police on the one hand, and the area outside the banlieue on the other) are described much more vaguely – while also, however, being unsaid, implied by the discursive structures examined (see also Germes and Glasze, 2010). This clarification procedure points out how the spatial category (in this case the neighbourhood, the projects) makes it possible to refer to social groups without having to name them – or how the name of the place can replace the reference to a social group. Numerous expressions of conflict are grafted onto the base of this socio-spatial discourse; they will be studied in detail in the following paragraphs.

1.2 Spatial conflicts

The text of the interviews resorts overwhelmingly to syntactical (like negations) and lexical expressions implying conflict. The expression of conflict is based on the network of equivalencies and oppositions that have just been highlighted. Conflict is always closely tied to the territory subject to it: more often than not, this is avoidance of entering or remaining in "the others' territory" (to avoid a confrontation or a test of strength).

(1) When there is only one way into the neighbourhood, it's enough to post a single lookout at the entrance to signal the arrival of the police. – (Municipal police department).

(2) When you go into the neighbourhoods, it's fine to go on foot, but on foot you, if you question someone, what are you going to do with the guy? And if there's a hostile gang nearby, they're going to give these two police butting in a hard time. – (Municipal police department).

(3) When you go in, and end up in a dead-end, what are you going to do if they block you in with a car? You can't get out, you abandon your vehicle and you run....And that project, there, you can't set foot in there because... you can't even go in with the vehicle ...It's their turf... - (Municipal police department).

These remarks set out the (possible) conflicts related to the police entering the "'hoods". The police are subject to surveillance (which is a reversal of the power relationships with regard to its own mission to keep under surveillance and control); the police have to deal with adversity (cf. 2: "if there's a hostile gang nearby"). The narrative of avoidance constitutes drawing a line and thus, produces a border (cf. 3 : you can't set foot in there).

These remarks refer to the architectural and urban planning configuration of the large complexes which is automatically considered a problem facing police presence and surveillance (Romieux 2007; Landauer 2009). The occasionally "dead-end" pedestrian-friendly traffic flows are difficult for police cars to access, and are challenged, as are the alley ways and roofs that can be used as look-out posts, not to mention attack points. The police aren't the only ones practicing avoidance; it's said to be reciprocal. The police apparently avoid the "'hoods" just as the gangs supposedly flee them when the police penetrate the area.

(4) The took off running when they saw the police. – (Municipal police department).

(5) Every time, they take off into the woods! We're not going to look for them in the woods. Or, they go into the common areas, into the cellars, etc. We're not going in there, uh-uh! – (Municipal police department)

Interpreting the narrative of these avoidances could be surprising (cf. 5 : "We're not going in there" ; "they take off") as a narrative of conflict. This is precisely because the reason for avoidance is to prevent the conflict, that the former connotes the possibility of the latter, the possibility of a confrontation. Thus, the confrontation is avoided to the benefit of a status quo on both parts of a negotiated limit at the mercy of the events. Every law has its space and every space, its law:

(6) [It is the] gang leaders who more or less rule by their own law, and when they see police vehicles, the police who do everything they can to discredit them, the police who do everything to chase them out of the territory. they have a territorial mind-set, they're at home, and the police, they're from outside [the projects."]. – (Municipal police department).

(7) There's a neighbourhood that is no longer completely under the laws of the Republic, controlled by a gang leader. – (Municipal police department).

Both appropriations are concurrent and mutually exclusive, they directly refer to the sovereignty of one or the other. The territory is the instrument of the conflict, in that it makes it possible to formalize the appropriations and mark the boundaries and thus, to make tangible, to materialize, the existence of the other. The discursive analysis shows that the conflicts are not the result of a pre-existing territorial rivalry but that the narrative of conflict produces territorialization. It is valuable to note that the discursive make-up of the territory relies essentially on the omnipresence of conflict, without reference to non-conflict-related interactions or inter-knowledge.

2. Territorial Neighbourhood Units: A Discourse of Violence

The implementation of police devices specifically directed toward sensitive neighbourhoods appears as the consequence of this discourse. Since the 1990s, police intelligence services have created special units for the surveillance of sensitive neighbourhoods, for the purpose of foreseeing and defusing "urban violence" (Bonelli, 2001; Dikeç, 2007). During the 1990s, plain-clothes squads were also instituted. Their purpose was rapid intervention and catching criminals in the act: the anti-crime squads are very mobile over a jurisdiction, not to say a department, work a great deal at night particularly concentrating on the sensitive neighbourhoods and other "hot spots". Between 1999 and 2002, community police units were also deployed in sensitive neighbourhoods for the purpose of improving dialogue between the police and local residents and preventing crime (Mouhanna, 2008). Therefore, the sensitive neighbourhoods are subject to special police devices which are also accompanied by a certain municipalisation of security policies. Local security contracts (CLS) and local security and criminality prevention councils (CLSPD) link the municipality, State and government administrations to determine the "sensitive" areas in a commune, to have a security assessment done, to bring together all the stakeholders involved (national police, city police, the courts, but also in the broader sense, schools, hospitals, businesses, etc.) and implement concerted preventive actions. The purpose is implementation of "made to measure" communal criminality prevention systems (Bonelli, 2008). The spatializations of police devices are in great part based on city zoning policy (Dikeç, 2007), i.e. cutting the area into "sensitive neighbourhoods" constructed on the basis of socio-economic criteria (e.g.: employment, population, housing, level of education, etc.).

In 2008, two new police devices were designed to meet the objective of "securing" sensitive neighbourhoods - the daily, visible presence of the police (UTEQ) in very limited areas of sensitive neighbourhoods, completed by department wide police mobile units ready for rapid response for maintaining order (CS, security companies). These two types of units, working on

different scales and timelines, were launched in Seine-Saint-Denis in 2008. The first UTEQs were introduced in the "most sensitive" neighbourhoods before being gradually expanded to many other French agglomerations[12].

The objective of this second part is not to analyze the UTEQs as a device but to analyze the discourse conducted on the UTEQs by the police. The UTEQs are more than a positioning of police work: the territory (sovereign space, simultaneously the place and the law) is explicitly subject to the device, which takes on meaning solely in the context of the antagonistic territorial discourse expressed above. However, the study of police discourses on the UTEQs show that the UTEQs in fact infringe the territorial limits described in the former case. The most interpretative analysis of the interviews will study the police discourse on the UTEQs to show how they infringe the territories constructed and how they handle conflict.

2.1 "Criminogenic areas"

To begin with, the UTEQs are defined by the space under their jurisdiction. They come under a very specific institutional territory, below the district level (cf. 8):

(8) Let's say that the UTEQ for example, let's talk about the UTEQ in S., [this UTEQ] is confined to a particular area. So, its investigation area is the F. project. ...Why?... because it's an especially criminogenic project in the district and the department. – (National police, local command).

The "area" of urban space is abstracted from its context and limited to a few apartment blocks, a few streets. The vast majority are housing projects and neighbourhoods already qualified as being in a Sensitive Urban Zone in the context of City Policy – and yet, according to the interviews, the main reason for the demarcation pertains to crime. The device thus is based on the assumption of crime being inherent to the space. This assumption was challenged by research in critical criminology showing how the series of logical reductions works which consists of describing an individual by his or her (criminal) behaviour, then describing a social group (that to which the individual belongs) as criminal and finally, describing the space (with which the group is associated) as criminal (Belina, 2006). The result of this reasoning by analogy is the territorialization of police action. This control of a "criminal" space is exercised, conversely, over groups of individuals independently of their actual behaviour (idem.). The criminogenic areas where the UTEQs must work belong by definition to territory belonging to "the others": the police are therefore led to cross borders established in the discourse on the banlieues.

2.2 Control and representation

The description of police work emphasizes the control of this new territory.

(9) The UTEQs have even more in-depth training on knowing their neighbourhood....These are small territories so that they're able to really know them and be known by the neighbourhood's residents....the UTEQs are even trained in the sociology and topography of the neighbourhoods they operate in. – (National police, departmental headquarters).

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[12] The UTEQs are small units with jurisdiction over small areas in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Despite these points in common, they are designed in contrast to the former community police: the UTEQ is for "[translation] ensuring that State authority is respected and respect for the law wherever and whenever necessary" (M. Alliot-Marie, France's Minister of the Interior, 14.01.2008)

(10) So, in concrete terms, we're going to have ten public employees on foot, patrolling an area. – (National police, local command).

(11) They have a more repressive mission, at any rate. We occupy the ground. We pacify. And we make contact with the population, we serve the population, we make it safe, we make contact with the population. – (National police, local command).

Control of the territory consists of a number of components: prior training for the police, continuous information in contact with the population and obvious presence. The police discourse on UTEQ practices, based of course on the reaffirmation of the exceptional nature of the territory, often resorts to a third subject identified above, one that is neither the police nor the adversary but the "population", by and large peaceful (cf. 9, 10 and 14: "everyone"). The inhabitants are not only potential informers but also spectators of police re-appropriation: "foot patrol" (10), "occupying the ground" (11) is quite the opposite of the avoidance strategy referred to previously, an affirmation of the attempt to push back the limits of one's own territory. Because of this infringement, the UTEQ is a sign: wherever the State's sovereignty is threatened, the UTEQ will be seen as being its representative, its symbol. The occupation of the (disadvantaged) projects' public space by the UTEQ can be interpreted as a strategy to drive back the "undesirables" from the public space.

2.3 Ambiguous violence

The police discourse on the UTEQs moreover maintains a quite particular relationship with violence:

(12) Because, you see, there is a great deal of crime and the police had to ... the police first of all belong to..., manage to impose itself in the area so that the population could quite simply live better. – (National police, local command).

(13) At the beginning we had plenty to worry about. Because the first day the UTEQ was in place, we had two public officials injured. But the situation has since normalized. – (National police, local command).

(14) In other words, for us, if a UTEQ [officer] is hit with stones this means they're a disturbance. Because stones are being thrown on the one hand, but on the other everyone is glad the officer is there. – (National police, headquarters).

The second of the three subjects evoked at the beginning of the text, the adversary here, the individual who commits violent acts, is omnipresent (implied by the conjugated verbs, cf. 13: "injured", 14: "is hit with stones,") but is not named. The violent acts, that in a way are committed by no one in particular, are therefore more closely linked to "the area", "the territory" of the UTEQ, as if violence were inherent to the space, as if it were part of the territory. It's the police presence ("be there"; "impose itself on the area") that seems to trigger the violent acts presented as normal, indeed necessary, because they are cathartic. Violence thus is part of the territorial device. The power relationship is presented as the purpose of the device, which must make it possible to eradicate the pre-existing violence for the purpose of redefining the power relationship and symbolic order. The discourse on the UTEQs paradoxically normalizes a violence that should always be illegitimate. The ambiguous relationship between the State and violence crystallizes in the police discourse and in the territory they establish. So just as it is constructed by conflict, the role that falls to (the concept of) territory is to legitimize a confrontation that seems to be the condition for a "return to order."

Conclusion

The police discourse on sensitive neighbourhoods in France repeatedly resorts to the narrative of a highly territorialized conflict. Legitimate space, or the sovereignty over the territory by some, is contested by the others – and this goes both ways. Get-aways and avoidance strategies are significant: they are the boundaries that each places on his territory. However, and secondly, infringing these borders is part of the police device; this is a demonstration of strength, which maintains an ambiguous relationship with the violence that is considered necessary for the police to "reappropriate" sensitive neighbourhoods[13]. This investigation finding echoes the idea formulated in the introduction according to which the State is also made of violence; violence legitimizes its right and is the instrument of its power (Gros, 2006).

These police discourses present France's working class neighbourhoods as the exception, that are thought to be somehow in favour of violence. The symbolic impact of these discourses is all the greater as the "banlieues" are moreover, in dominant discourses often considered as badlands of the Republic[14] (Dikeç, 2007), as spaces that are not only dangerous in and of themselves but also for the values of the majority society and the State (and its authority). The banlieue is a space that in the hegemonic discourse acquires a symbolic dimension (Germes and Glasze, 2010): the "anti", the contrary and nearly the adversary of the Republic or the State or the Nation. In this context, the denial of belonging to the political collective, to the "us" that gathers the political community together, depicts a symbolic injustice. The use of the term "banlieue" has often been criticized for the fact that it springs from both an excessive (quasi-causal) spatialization of the social problems and an over-simplification of the issues. This term also contributes to making a combination of issues that are in great part common to other contemporary societies appear as specific to France. Even if the issue of police discourses on sensitive neighbourhoods presents appreciable specificities in France, they do not represent the core of the problem but instead one of these manifestations: the consideration of the historic depth shows how the issue of sensitive neighbourhoods in France is anchored in issues of the socio-spatial segregation of post-industrial cities (and in the continuity with industrial cities) and the discrimination of post-colonial societies (in continuity with the colonial era). By the same token, the injustices tied to the practices in neighbourhoods in difficulty and police discourses about the same are not specific to the situation in France but are closely tied to a contemporary conception of a repressive State.

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[13] Our findings present two complementary discursive motives: the avoidance discourse (first part) is in our characteristic corpus of remarks by city police, while the confrontation discourse (second part) is instead characteristic of the national police.

[14] Translator's note: In English in the French text. SWM

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