Young people’s “ethnicity trajectories” in disadvantaged neighborhoods:

articulation between peer groups, family and school

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A constructivist approach to ethnicity

A focus on ethnic boundaries making by young people in deprived immigrant neighbourhoods of Paris and London

Two roots:

• Weber (1922): subjective belief in a common
• Barth (1969): Attention to boundaries
A spatial unit of observation

- Exploring boundaries *making*: no presupposition of location, salience, meaning, nor existence of ethnic boundaries.
- Interplay between ethnic boundaries and other types of boundaries (Baumann 1996)
- Grasping both *symbolic* (representations, categorizations) and *social* (relationship network, structures of inequalities) aspects of boundaries (Lamont and Molnar 2002)
- A “full circle” explanation (Wimmers 2008): from macro structuring processes to micro resistances and negotiations.

→ **Minimal local consensus** (“of who belongs and who doesn’t” Wimmers 2004; “community discourse” (Back 1996)) about ethnic boundaries, their location, their meaning, their salience.
Complexity of the local place

The end of traditional closed working-class neighborhoods (Schwartz 1998)

• Dominant, middle-class influences: the media, institutions (school), expansion of service occupation
• Foreign influences: international media and cultural industries, Diaspora-related family links
• Autonomous local references

Diversity and local change:

• High internal differentiations: gender, generations, socio-economical and cultural resources, family histories, housing conditions.
• Economical, demographical, urban transformations

→ co-presence of divergent and conflicting systems of symbolic and social closure
→ Competing socialization spheres: peer groups, family, school.
Field work

- **Two outlying working-class immigrant neighborhoods:** Bondy (Seine-Saint-Denis, Paris Suburb), London Borough of Newham (East London)
- **Qualitative methods:** individual interviews, focus groups, participant and non-participant observations carried out with young people aged 15 to 25, with different family backgrounds and school trajectories.
Outline

I. Mapping symbolic and social closure systems:
Local consensus, Peer group, Family, School.
A specific attention to territoriality (Poche 1996)

II. Individual articulations:
conditions, resources and strategies.
Local Consensus

PARIS
Rich
French (White)
Old people

SUBURBS
Poor
Immigrants (Black and Arabs)
Young people

« BONDY NORD »
Poor, Young people
Immigrants (Blacks and Arabs)
Social Housing Projects

« BONDY SUD »
Middle class
Old people
French (White)
Detached houses

NEWHAM
BLACK
Poverty
History of local violent racism

WHITE
West Ham United,
Pubs, White Flight

ASIAN
Poverty

Middle Class

→ dual opposition between “immigrants” (Blacks and Arabs) and “French”

→ three-cornered competition between “Black”, “Asian” and “White”

/ Newcomers (Asian immigrants in Bondy, Somalian refugees and East-Europeans immigrants in Newham) and traditional outsiders: Gypsies
Peer groups boundaries system

"Renois", "Rebeux", "Céfrans"

LOCALITY, turf, local culture and everyday-life

Black, White, Asian

Leisure places in the city center
Leisure places in nearby districts

Racist Narrow-minded
Countryside
Undeveloped exotic
Countries of origin

Public space: multidimensional stigmatization from adults (passer-by, shopkeepers, the police)

MEDIA
Films, music

DIASPORA culture

Imagined UNITED-STATES
“Nigerian Ipod”: poking fun at countries of origin
Family boundaries system

- Country of emigration
- Diaspora relationships
- Family members in the same country
- Nationality, Region, city, village of emigration, Castes...
- Relationships between men and women, generations
- Religious practices
- Local community, cultural and religious organizations

Culture and Decency
Difficult articulation: Low resources, harsh discrimination: **finding a shelter** (Boys, law socio-economic status, school drop-outs, social housing projects, stigmatized groups)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Topologies</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Identity strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer groups, Street and gang culture</strong></td>
<td>Strong identity and belonging</td>
<td>Local turf; Symbolic places of wealth and success</td>
<td>Youth culture “bouffonisation” overplaying stereotypes</td>
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<td><strong>Youth work</strong></td>
<td>Cultural resources, Role models</td>
<td>From involvement in the local community to integration in larger society</td>
<td>Youth work ethic and Anti-racism (contesting salience of ethnic categories in the local consensus)</td>
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<td><strong>New socialization groups Ex: Salafist groups</strong></td>
<td>Religious and cultural resources</td>
<td>Local and international Ummah, Islamic countries (Hijra)</td>
<td>Muslim/non Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
<td>Back to tradition</td>
<td>Family and country of origin</td>
<td>Family boundaries</td>
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Difficult articulation:
cultural resources / segregated and stigmatized environment:

**Escaping the neighborhood**
(successful school students/Deprived Neighborhoods)

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<td>Escaping through school or professional success</td>
<td>Rejection of the local place: (segregation and stigmatization) Entering mainstream society, Moving to foreign western countries</td>
<td>Rejection of categorization; longing for invisibility; affirmation of personal individuality</td>
<td>Crossing boundaries</td>
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**Happy articulation:**

*Better resources, lower discrimination: Blurring boundaries*  
(Girls, upper working-class/lower middle-class, successful school students)

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<td><strong>Newham</strong></td>
<td>No contradiction</td>
<td>Involvement in local community — involvement in society — changing the world</td>
<td>Criticism of (individual) racism and (institutional) ethnic categorization: out-of-date and meaningless</td>
<td>Neither ‘member of a cultural community’ (too restrictive), neither ‘English’ (too odd!), neither ‘British’ (no meaning)</td>
<td>Boundaries Blurring</td>
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<td><strong>Bondy</strong></td>
<td>Contradiction: support to republican values/ lack of recognition of family heritage</td>
<td>Contesting Republican discourse in the name of Republican values</td>
<td>‘Bricolage’ of new Black, African, Muslim... French identities</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thank you for your attention!

- **Barth (dir.) 1969**, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The social organization of culture difference*, Bergen/Oslo.
- **Weber 1922**, *Economy and Society*.