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A clean and civil city: Local associations and the moral bordering of Parisian public space

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Abstract

For years, city officials in Paris have tried to reduce ‘incivility’ to maintain public order and security. While civility is being used by the city to enforce a respect for others through a respect for public space, it is also being used to claim moral authority and legitimacy by groups who already enjoy a privileged access to these spaces. Although some of these groups may seek to bring their neighbours into an imagined moral community through ‘awareness raising’, others attempt a revanchist approach to push the ‘uncivil’ and ‘undeserving’ further outside the borders of this community. This article argues that in combatting incivility and bad behaviour, local associations attempt to establish a spatial and moral community that legitimises their vision of appropriate consumption and use of public space and excludes already-marginalised publics from its borders.

Keywords

Incivility, waste, security, bordering practices, Paris

In September 2019, The Guardian published an article calling Paris ‘the dirty man of Europe’ (Willsher, 2019), prompting a vocal reaction among many Parisian politicians and residents. While the dirt of Parisian streets — the proliferation of allegedly ever-larger and numerous rats, overflowing rubbish bins, the urine in alleyways and the dog waste on pavements — is a recurring theme in the French media, something about this article in the British press struck a chord with residents. When Mayor Anne Hidalgo responded, saying that even with more money put into street cleaning, she ‘could not put a street sweeper behind every

Parisian’, she echoed the broader sentiment among city planners and elected officials that the continued dirt on the streets was the fault of uncivil individuals rather than inadequate cleaning. Although this response generated frustration among some groups who felt that the mayor was absolving her government of responsibility, the ‘incivilities’ that dirty Paris’s streets have become a point of contention in some areas of the city.

Much of the recent work on incivility and anti-social behaviour has approached it from a legal and criminological standpoint, highlighting how middle-class tastes are imposed on public spaces to the detriment of vulnerable groups (Lundsteen and Fernández González, 2021; Peršak, 2016; Peršak and Di Ronco, 2018). Building upon recent calls to investigate how borders are inscribed in the everyday spaces of the city (Iossifova, 2020; Scott and Sohn, 2019), this article looks at how incivility has been defined by what people leave behind and the role that this waste plays in bordering practices (Sundberg, 2008). What kind of neighbour, whether witnessed in the act or imagined to be responsible, is constituted through these remnants? How do these traces, tied to a real or imagined stranger, come to define community borders?

Drawing on ethnographic and archival research conducted in 2019 and 2021, I examine how ‘incivility’ is implicated in the formation and policing of everyday borders. The first sections discuss the role of civility, morality and consumption in defining community borders. The article then introduces the Parisian case study, surveying how the City Hall has tried to repress incivility as an issue of both respect and security. While civility is being used by the city council to legally enforce respect for others through respect for public space, it is also being used to claim moral authority and legitimacy by groups who already enjoy privileged access to these spaces. Focusing on two associations selected from wealthy and gentrifying neighbourhoods, I analyse how objects such as dog waste and litter come to define the borders of the moral community and its relationship to ‘uncivil’ outsiders and neighbours alike. The article concludes that in combatting incivility and bad behaviour, local associations attempt to establish a spatial and moral community that legitimises their vision of appropriate consumption and excludes already-marginalised publics from its borders.

Civility and bordering-as-practice

A moral obligation

Cities have long been sites where the definition of ‘civil’ and ‘uncivil’ behaviour have been negotiated and contested, and these ‘codes of civility’ have in turn formed part of the social production of urban space (Smith and Davidson, 2008). Urban studies scholars have noted two meanings behind ‘civility’: the first concerning politeness in encounters with others and the second referring to largely non-verbal, often visual behaviour that impacts others. This latter definition, also known as ‘diffuse civility’ (Fyfe et al., 2006), overlaps with the former, entailing a responsibility of care for shared spaces by considering the impact of our actions both in and after we leave these spaces—a difficult task when one cannot predict what impact one's actions might have on others. Actions such as littering or playing loud music in public can be viewed as crossing the boundary between rudeness and disrespect for shared spaces, and may act as ‘signal disorders’ (Innes, 2004), communicating messages of undesirable risk in an area. Thus, some may perceive diffuse incivility as both impoliteness and contributing to a broader sense of threat and insecurity.

As ‘a moral obligation that we owe to others’ (Boyd, 2006: 875) through civil and respectful comportment, civility has been depicted as a way to ease social conflicts and aid the functioning of diverse urban spaces (Bailey, 1996; Boyd, 2006). However, while civility is often presented as a core component of the functioning of civil society, the formation of community bonds and neighbourly relations, and the production of social capital (Putnam, 2000), it is also a powerful disciplinary force (Walters, 2002). The meaning, practice and boundaries of ‘civility’ are often bound up in the tastes, interests and opinions of the dominant group (Millie, 2014), meaning that the enforcement of civility is often at the expense of already stigmatised inhabitants (Fyfe et al., 2006; Gayet-Viaud, 2017). For instance, failing to observe ‘civil inattention’, defined by Erving Goffman (1966) as a way of relating to others in public spaces without interaction, may be perceived as rude, disruptive or indicative of delinquency and subject marginalised and racialised people to increased policing and surveillance (Kleinman, 2019: 62). Therefore, as a ‘moral obligation’, civility is used to define the boundaries between subjects worthy of mutual respect and moral outsiders who fail to honour this tacit social contract. Indeed, the hostility to incivility through exclusion

and removal of the uncivil subject has been equated to a hostility to difference (Fyfe et al., 2006), meaning that the quest to secure civility may undermine the very functioning of diverse, multicultural and cosmopolitan city life that it is thought to protect (Bannister et al., 2006).

Beyond its social and moral implications, incivility has become a ‘law and order’ issue in many cities, one to be addressed through increased policing and securitisation. Over the last two decades, neoliberal urban policies have shifted from addressing the structural causes of incivility to its signifiers in an attempt to maintain public order (Coleman et al., 2005). This securitisation of urban governance has resulted in groups and individuals associated with incivility to be expunged from public spaces in order to reduce feelings of insecurity and protect commercial activity (Helms et al., 2007; Palmer and Warren, 2013; Walby and Lippert, 2012). Moreover, it has provided a language through which residents can complain about undesirable groups and seek municipal intervention. ‘Incivility’ thus becomes a framework through which racist, classist and xenophobic beliefs can be expressed and acted upon to police the ‘Other who [does] not know how to behave correctly’ and hence does not belong (Lundsteen and Fernández González, 2021: 847).

Recent calls from critical border studies have aimed to bring the everyday into our understanding of border formation, with particular attention to how borders are enacted in the city through policing, immigration control and the containment or exclusion of undesirable Others (Fauser, 2019; Sassen, 2013; Thrift, 2000). At the neighbourhood level, the tension between borders as markers of community and identity, on the one hand, and as fundamental to processes of exclusion and marginalisation, on the other, requires greater attention to the ways in which borders are ‘intrinsic to the social production of space’ (Scott and Sohn, 2019: 310). This is particularly visible through the rise in municipal ordinances targeting incivility and anti-social behaviour, which act as ‘bordering practices’ that sort, order and demarcate those who belong from those who are out-of-place (Lundsteen, 2021; Lundsteen and Fernández González, 2021). The norms, expectations, and policing of ‘civil’ comportment thus constitute a ‘moral economy’ (Fassin, 2009) implicated in the production of the Other and the ordering of urban spaces and populations (Iossifova, 2020; Van Houtum and Van Naerssen, 2002).

Pollution and consumption

As a moral issue, civility is bound up in ideas about purity, cleanliness and order, with incivility connected to the presence of dirt and disorder (Peršak, 2016). Incivility is perceived as a polluting act, contaminating public spaces by generating social and physical disorder, with the perpetrators of incivility viewed as pollutants. The uncivil polluting Other is thus ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas, 2002) that needs to be purged or ‘expelled’ (Sassen, 2014) to re-establish the purity of the moral, civil community. In a re-reading of Mary Douglas’s work, Richard Fardon (2016) notes that it is not dirt that is dangerous, but rather this quest for purity, which can isolate groups, entrench boundaries and borders, strengthen sectarianism and undermine solidarity. The quest to create a moral community based on the exclusion of incivility thus risks constructing rigid borders between ‘us’ and ‘them’ to the detriment of social cohesion.

While the borders between ‘civil and ‘uncivil’ subjects are ‘imagined’ (Anderson, 2006), they are also sensed (Howes and Classen, 2013), with immoral and uncivil(ised) outsiders defined through aesthetics, odour, sound, noise, touch or by the dirt they do or do not leave behind (Classen, 1992; Millie, 2014). As civil inattention entails a muted or unobtrusive sensory presence, any visual, acoustic or olfactory disruption in public is perceived as a social and moral transgression that needs to be regulated or prevented (Langegger and Koester, 2016; Low, 2008, 2013). Such sensory ‘assaults’ are used by the dominant classes to assign moral identities to individuals or groups and justify their distance from or domination over amoral transgressors (Gramsci, 1971; Largey and Watson, 2006; Simmel, 1997). Among these sensory transgressions in public spaces, the presence of physical waste can disrupt multiple sensory orders and attract moralising panics around uncivil or ‘anti-social’ behaviour. The aesthetics and odour of physical waste ‘shocks and exposes us to the uncivil element’ (Peršak, 2016: 167), and is seen to indicate the presence of polluting moral outsiders by those who seek to assert dominance through their ‘moral leadership’ (Gramsci, 1971: 57). Waste found in public spaces is, therefore, more than an object; it is thought, at least by those who wish for its absence, to indicate a particular type of person who has left it behind: poor, ignorant, homeless, foreign or disrespectful (Ablitt and James Smith, 2019; Argyrou, 1997; Doron and Raja,

2015; Sundberg, 2008). Hence waste constitutes part of what Nigel Thrift has called the ‘small details’ (2000: 384–385) that come to define ‘us’ versus ‘them’.

Much of this sensorily intrusive waste is attributed ‘flawed consumers’ (Bauman, 2004) — those groups of people who, because of their exclusion from or lower status within consumer society, do not fit the idealised image of the ‘civil’ user of public space. Indeed, consumption has become inextricably connected to issues of cleanliness and civility as municipal governments try to police and sanitise public spaces to make their cities attractive for businesses and investments (Pospěch 2021). Within this paradigm, moral communities based on civility have become communities of civilised consumers, bounded in opposition to the disorder, waste and incivility of those ‘bad’ consumers who pollute public space (Ranasinghe, 2011). It is thus through the recognition of these ‘flawed consumers’ that the boundaries of the community, as a purified and moral space, are enacted. The homeless person, deprived of privacy, who urinates in public, the teenager who leaves behind nitrous oxide canisters, and, as shall be discussed below, the fast-food diner who drops their kebab on the pavement become sensory polluters against whom the community of the ‘civil’ citizen-consumer is defined. The ‘civil’ and ‘community-minded’ resident picks up their waste while the anti-social and undeserving consumer demonstrates their outsider status by polluting the physical and sensory environment (Flint and Nixon, 2006; Ghertner, 2012; Instone and Sweeney, 2014). Waste disposal thus becomes a class performance, with the practice of ‘proper’ or ‘improper’ disposal defining belonging or justifying exclusion (Machado-Borges, 2017; Soma, 2017).

In Paris, where urban policies have treated social ills as a spatial problem (Tissot, 2018), incivility has been viewed a pollutant originating in the ‘menacing exteriority’ (Dikeç, 2007: 176) of the working-class *banlieues* (suburbs). Since the 1990s, the French media has played a crucial role in demonising the *banlieues* and equating its racialised working-class population with deviance and crime (Hargreaves, 1996), a stigma that travels with banlieue residents as they move between Paris and the periphery (Garbin and Millington, 2011; Wacquant, 2009). This media demonisation has been coupled with a shift in French urban policy towards containment and repression of the *banlieues* and their racialised residents, who have been seen as a ‘threat’ to state authority and republican unity (Dikeç, 2006; Lagrange and Oberti, 2006). The result is an equation of the Parisian *banlieues* with racialised ‘disorder and incivility’ (Rivière and Tissot,

2012) that risks spilling into the bourgeois core and polluting the ‘good’ citizens and city spaces. Incivility is thus associated with foreignness, Otherness and an outsider status that places (presumed) perpetrators exterior to the moral community of ‘good’ citizens. However, as will be discussed below, these moral outsiders may be neighbours rather than non-residents, but it is their racial and class positioning which defines who is worthy of re-education and reincorporation into the imagined borders of the moral community and who needs to be removed to restore civility.

Methods

To understand the role of civility in defining moral communities, I focus on two civic associations in Paris dedicated to ‘defending’ residents’ ‘quality of life’. Paris has countless such civic groups, most of which are chartered under the law of 1901, requiring them to have a stated mission, by-laws and democratically elected board. The two groups I focus on in this article, Seine-16 in the 16th arrondissement and Vivre Clichy in the 17th and 18th arrondissements, were selected from six different associations across Paris with whom I conducted interviews and ethnographic research¹. The associations I worked with were predominantly comprised of white middle- and upper-middle-class professionals, many of them over the age of 50. While the membership of these associations represents a minority of residents in all their respective neighbourhoods, they are a vocal minority, often monitoring local council meetings and public consultations to mobilise support for or resistance to municipal projects. While all these associations had different localised complaints relating to incivility, Seine-16 and Vivre Clichy are highlighted in this article as they were both well-established groups at the time of research with significant, up-to-date online presences and were engaged in ongoing campaigns against waste-related incivility. They were also not ‘single-issue’ associations—tackling incivility was only part of their core objectives, which included a combination of historical preservation, community cohesion and improving public space. This meant that the groups had a larger membership base with diverse motivations for engagement that reached beyond waste, and which sometimes led to dissenting opinions on local grievances or official viewpoints of the association. Nevertheless, while two associations are the focus of this article, my interviews and ethnographic research with other groups has informed the conclusions drawn in this paper.

The first association, Seine-16, was founded in 2017 and had around 100 members representing an area with a population of 4,000. The area is among the wealthiest in the city, where 38.9% of household income comes from real estate, financial or other capital investments (compared to a city-wide average of 19.9%) (INSEE 2019). Seine-16's membership was representative of the local area, and many active members were retired partners, executives or senior managers in the financial, cultural and legal services industries. As a relatively new association, Seine-16 sought to assert its role as a credible intermediary between residents and the local council through collective actions, including street clean-ups, flyer campaigns and tagging uncollected dog waste with sarcastic notes, all to draw attention to the prevalence of dirt on their streets.

Vivre Clichy, on the other hand, was founded in the mid-1990s and had 300 members representing an area of 158,000 residents located along Paris's gentrification frontier (see Clerval, 2013). The association largely focused on architectural conservation and local history, although it had also developed a reputation as local stakeholder within the political sphere by monitoring, reporting and critiquing municipal projects. It maintained communication with its membership through regular blog posts, email communication and a biannual newsletter. Many of the more active members reportedly worked in education, consulting, journalism or publishing and were owner-occupiers of their accommodation. Unlike Seine-16, Vivre Clichy focused on lobbying the City Hall and local councillors around proposed improvements rather than taking direct action.

The groups were initially contacted via email, and I was put in touch with board members who were seen to be particularly informed about the history, actions and grievances of their association. Between June-November 2019 and August 2021, I conducted semi-structured interviews and go-alongs with three members from Seine-16 (two board members and one lay member) and two members from Vivre Clichy (one board member and one lay member), all of whom had lived in their respective neighbourhoods for over 30 years. Informal conversations during association actions and public consultations brought me into contact with a dozen additional members from Seine-16. I also conducted participant observation of public spaces in the 16th arrondissement and the Clichy neighbourhood, including key sites identified as incivility 'hot spots' by the associations, to capture the localised, everyday aspects of dirt and incivility. Although the

ethnographic fieldwork, particularly with non-board members, was cut short by the coronavirus pandemic, this was supplemented with an analysis of both associations' newsletters, blog posts and coverage in the local press, particularly the member bulletins of Vivre Clichy from 2002-2020. The research also involved review and analysis of municipal archival material, including policy documents, reports, campaigns and press packs relating to waste and incivility from 1990 to the present.

Incivility as insecurity

As an official, legal category, 'incivility' has become a significant focus for Paris's City Hall since it first emerged in public debate in the late 1990s. 'Incivility' encompasses some crimes against persons (petty theft, verbal aggression, assault and street harassment), as well as 'abusive' uses of public space (littering, fly-tipping, public urination, disruptive noisemaking, privatising the pavement, graffiti, flyposting and failing to pick up dog waste). From the city council's perspective, these two types of incivilities are interconnected, with a lack of respect for public space thought to engender criminality. This assumption, influenced by New York City's 'Broken Windows Policing', has led municipal authorities to perceive and respond to waste, graffiti and other incivilities as security issues (Denis and Pontille, 2021). Official *communiqués* and public awareness campaigns over the last 25 years indicate that the dirt attributed to litter, dog waste, abandoned appliances and graffiti has been seen by public authorities as 'signals' (Innes, 2004) of disorder that create feelings of insecurity among residents. Incivilities have thus been blamed for 'damag[ing] Parisians' quality of life' (Jean Tiberi, Mayor of Paris, press release 15 December 2000) and contributing to urban disorder.

To tackle dirt and restore a sense of order and security, the Paris City Hall has run several public awareness campaigns to get residents to sort their recycling, make use of public waste bins and pick up after their dogs. Many of these campaigns have tried to instil a sense of shared responsibility among the population to get them to participate in keeping the city tidy (Prost, 2014). In 1997, residents were implored, 'If you love Paris, keep it clean' while a subsequent 1999 campaign featured pictures of a woman in a wheelchair rolling through a pile of dog waste, stating, 'You are right to not pick it up, she does it very well for you'. By 2009, the city tried to appeal to environmentally conscious residents with a campaign featuring

photoshopped piles of dog waste and litter in pristine natural settings, inciting Parisians to treat the city as a shared environment worthy of respect. Today, the city also has 34,000 rubbish bins, free public toilets, portable urinals and a mobile phone application that lets residents request a free collection of bulky objects — all of which have sought to make being clean *easier*.

Although educational campaigns have appealed to Parisian's moral sensibilities, the city council remains focused on securitised measures to combat incivility. Since 2016, the responsibility for controlling incivility has fallen to the Prevention, Security and Protection Directorate (DPSP), which employs agents to patrol the city streets and issue fines for infractions relating primarily to cleanliness, public order, safety and driving. The cost of fines has fluctuated over the years, ranging from 35 to 183€, and they have been treated as both a dissuasive and a pedagogical tool to instil civic mindedness. Mathieu Clouzeau, then-Director of the DPSP, explained the strategy in 2017: 'When an employee explains at the water-cooler that he was fined for throwing his cigarette a few minutes earlier, it makes people talk ... and it can change behaviour' (Le Parisien, 2017). Through this combined effort of education, sanitation and policing, the city has tried to suppress incivility by making 'correct' waste disposal more socially and financially desirable.

While these years of citations, public awareness campaigns and word of mouth have reportedly improved conditions in some neighbourhoods, litter, dumping, graffiti and dog waste remain a concern, albeit in different concentrations, throughout the capital (Mairie de Paris, 2017). To focus efforts on improving public spaces, the city created a specific team within the DPSP to monitor and issue citations for 'incivility': the Anti-Incivility Brigades. Like other DPSP agents, the Anti-Incivility Brigades patrol public spaces and gardens in attire that resembles police uniforms while also deploying plain-clothes officers to catch unsuspecting litterers and negligent dog walkers. The DPSP employs 3,200 Anti-Incivility Brigade agents who have issued an increasing number of citations for littering, dog waste and cigarette butts since 2016. Although the City Hall might not be able to 'put a street sweeper behind every Parisian', they can, it appears, try to increase a sense of surveillance to deter incivility. The city has thus pursued increasingly securitised measures in the fight against incivility, which, as will be discussed, often contrast with associations' perceptions of and responses to incivility as an issue of morality and consumption.

Dirt and discomfort

In October 2019, Hendrika invited me to join six other Seine-16 activists for an afternoon street cleaning in the northern part of the 16th arrondissement. I was placed on a team with Hendrika, one of the only social housing tenants in the association, and Marie, a pensioner, and we were tasked with cleaning a triangle of primarily residential streets. Members had brought their own gloves and hi-vis vests, so Hendrika loaned me a pair of yellow rubber gloves that were too large for my hands. My fingers fumbled at flattened cigarette butts, plastic wrappers and bits of torn paper as pedestrians passed by without taking notice. A city vehicle from the waste and sanitation department drove past, and a couple of workers in their green uniforms shouted ‘thank you’ out of their window. While searching for litter on a shady street with Marie, she asked if I had ever been to Strasbourg. When I replied that I had not, she laughed and said, ‘You would never see this [litter] there. They still have some of that German mentality’. She claimed that Germans never litter and that it was ‘a problem with the French mentality ... it will take centuries to correct it’. Moments later, I looked down the road and saw an imposing middle-aged man come out from a building to smoke a cigarette. He was dressed in what appeared to be an expensive, double-breasted suit and scrolled through his phone without looking around. I bent over to pick up a piece of plastic wrapper that had blown against the curb and mixed with dust, hair and dried leaves, and when I looked up, the man had turned to go back inside, a still-smoking butt lying in the gutter.

When we regrouped after an hour, everyone shared some of the amusing or pedagogical encounters they had while cleaning. Cathy, a retired senior manager in the banking industry, laughed while recounting an ‘absurd’ interaction. An older, ‘well-dressed’ woman had approached her and, in a paternalistic tone, said, ‘Do not worry, madame, you will be paid at the end of the month for this little job’. Cathy found it ‘funny’ that the woman had ‘thought [she] was poor’. Ingrid, the president of Seine-16, reported that a few children thanked her while she was picking up trash but that adults ignored her. As we took the full black rubbish bags to deposit them next to the bins, two children approached and asked, ‘Are you cleaning the neighbourhood?’ Marie responded, jumping at the chance to educate others, ‘Yes, and we are doing it to raise awareness so that people throw their trash in the bins and do not throw it on the ground. You put things

in the bins, right?’. The event was judged a success, given some positive interactions with residents, although Ingrid and Hendrika lamented that some members were opposed to these public clean-ups as they ‘paid their taxes’ and therefore should not have to clean the streets. Nevertheless, Ingrid explained, the purpose was not clean the streets but rather to demonstrate to their neighbours that the streets were dirty and to educate them about the impact of litter.

However, activists acknowledged that there was only so much ‘awareness raising’ that they could do, particularly around the problem of dog waste. Seine-16 had tried humorous posters, courted local media coverage, and even stuck toothpicks with paper labels featuring attention-grabbing statements like ‘Thank you!’ and ‘Yuck!’ into abandoned piles of dog waste, yet everyone I interviewed had stories to share about uncivil dog owners. The association was adamant that the city needed to employ more DPSP and Anti-Incivility Brigade agents in their neighbourhood to curtail such incivility, and many lamented having never seen a single agent in the area.

Nonetheless, even if citations increased, the current 68€ fine would not be a robust financial deterrent for many of the area’s wealthy residents. For the members I interviewed, this level of wealth was part of the problem. Ingrid explained,

Journalists, for example, always think that in wealthy neighbourhoods it must be clean. No! ... Here, people are disgusting ... I experienced it live the other day! A very respectable-looking woman with her dog waiting at the red light. The dog did it right in the middle of the street. The woman had nothing [to pick it up with]. A young woman and I were yelling, saying, ‘Madame, Madame, pick it up!’ She pretended to search in her bag. In the meantime, cars went through all the turds, so it was everywhere, crushed. Beautiful. So, afterwards, people walk in it, it will get in their shoes.

Indeed, the wealth of their neighbours was tied to all manner of incivilities beyond abandoned dog waste. For instance, when looking at the broader issue of litter and fly-tipping in the neighbourhood, all interviewees blamed the youth who, they claimed, were not taught in school or by their wealthy parents to respect public space. Cathy viewed this lack of respect for neighbours and public spaces as rooted in the sense of entitlement brought about by a wealthy upbringing. ‘Here there are a lot of wealthy, spoiled young

people’, she explained, ‘and on the weekends and at night they drink themselves into oblivion, and they throw bottles all over, and they are loud, and they walk down the street as if they own it’.

Despite their extreme wealth, neighbours were not exempted from the moral obligation of care for others from the perspective of Seine-16 activists. As a result of their wealthy neighbours ‘entitled’ and uncivil behaviour, members experienced what they described as a ‘degradation’ of their living conditions. However, this incivility contributed to a sense of discomfort rather than insecurity. The waste of others created sensory distress, whether through the sight of litter or the smell and tactile unpleasantness of stepping in a pile of dog waste. While this seemingly pan-generational incivility contrasted with the city’s Broken Windows view of dirt and disorder, it is also notable for two reasons: The perpetrators were primarily assumed to be both *wealthy* and *local*. Activists attributed incivility to their neighbours, people with whom they shared a similar upper-class position and residential address. Moreover, perhaps because of this shared postcode and positionality, the association focused on raising awareness about respect for public spaces. They could not expel their neighbours, after all, their neighbours ‘belonged’ in the area, but they could try to educate them about the need to respect others by respecting public spaces and bring them back into the moral community of civility.

Flawed banlieue consumers

Walking up Avenue de Clichy one Saturday morning, the remnants of last night’s parties mixed with the typical bits of torn paper that always, with the slightest breeze, seemed to evade the street sweepers’ brooms. Before the city cleaners had made their rounds, the streets had more litter than those I had seen in the northern 16th arrondissement, although the dirt was minor when compared to the crushed cardboard boxes and food waste that is more frequently seen in the eastern parts of the 18th arrondissement (Milliot, 2015). A box of empty beer bottles sat next to an overflowing rubbish bin, while further up the road, pigeons pecked at a spilt container of chips. Beside some green planter boxes, installed by the city following a proposal by Vivre Clichy, scattered cigarette butts hinted at an earlier social gathering, perhaps a group of friends smoking and talking into the night.

These traces of activity and consumption formed part of the ‘recurring dirt’ that Vivre Clichy had been fighting against in recent years, which the association attributed to the proliferation of ‘cheap’ local commerce and fast food in their neighbourhood. According to the association, one cause of degradation was ‘mono-commercial activity’ — a term used to refer to an overabundance of a particular type of business in one neighbourhood. The term, which could as easily be used to describe the concentration of luxury boutiques around the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, nonetheless appears in municipal reports and activist bulletins almost exclusively to describe the prevalence of shops that are not considered to be ‘traditionally Parisian’ — that is, shops that cater to a clientele that fall outside the white, secular, middle- or upper-class ‘norm’. In Clichy, kebab shops and takeaways are said to dominate, followed closely by stores selling low-quality, inexpensive products ‘all [labelled] “Made in China”’. These ‘cheap’ shops were blamed for lowering residents’ quality of life, not just because they did not cater to the tastes of Vivre Clichy activists but also because they attracted undesirable clientele from outside the neighbourhood.

Incivilities and the visual and olfactory pollution they introduced into Clichy were attributed to a combination of café terraces, take-aways, inexpensive shops and the customers who frequented them. The area has easy transport connections to the northern working-class *banlieues* — the ‘difficult suburbs’ in the words of one activist — and it was this racialised population that came to Paris to work and shop but did not live *in* the neighbourhood or the city that was blamed for both degrading local commerce and for creating the litter and waste associated with these inexpensive takeaways and shops. Jean, one of Vivre Clichy’s board members and resident since 1972, drew connections between changing consumption and the extension of public transport into the *banlieues*:

Very good that people from Gennevilliers, Saint-Denis, further away ... come to Paris. Perfect, to enjoy *Paris*. But, in fact, it also attracted businesses that targeted a specific clientele and the only clientele that came from far away. Well, the cafes, restaurants, the Parisian bistro, they have all been bought and have been transformed into kebabs, and only kebabs — written very big [on their signs] "halal". They target a specific customer.

Vincent, a lay member and resident since 1984, added to this by saying:

For me [the problem is] the recurring dirt, that is, people eat, take something from the kebab, go eating in the street — because it is cheaper, and they are in a hurry — and they leave it all in the street. Chicken bones, unfinished hamburger pieces, it is my daily life ... and that is very difficult because they are not necessarily people who live here.

The recurring dirt cited by these activists on their blog and in interviews — i.e., plastic wrappers, prepaid phone cards, lottery scratchers, chicken bones, hamburgers, soda cans, used napkins and plastic bags — were used as a form of ‘moral accounting’ (Ablitt and James Smith, 2019: 879) to make assumptions about the type of people who left them behind. These uncivil consumers, deemed poor, undesirable and non-local, were ‘flawed’ (Bauman, 2004) because they did not share the same shopping habits as members of the association and consumed goods that would be thrown away quickly and incorrectly. Deviance, dirt and cheap consumption habits were thus signs that the incivility and disorder of the *banlieues* had infiltrated the ‘civilised’ core of the city.

To address this, the association tried to work with local politicians and the city of Paris to diversify commerce in their area, albeit with reportedly limited results despite the introduction of a voluntary Business Quality Charter in 2016. Activists wanted more organic shops, ‘traditional bistros’, small bakeries — places that sold ‘quality’ products rather than cheap ‘mass-produced food’. By removing the undesirable shops, they hoped to reduce or eliminate the litter left by uncivil clientele. Such a change would, from their perspective, represent the needs and desires of residents over visitors. Vincent summarised this vision, stating, ‘Life of the neighbourhood belongs to the people of the neighbourhood, and not to people who come from outside, who pass here, who party, who leave their trash’. While the city could purchase some vacant commercial spaces and limit terrace extensions, there was little that could be done about ‘undesirable’ yet law-abiding businesses already open in the neighbourhood. Instead, what the association saw as the primary magnet for litter was not part of the municipal approach to tackling incivility.

Although the municipal framework for pursuing and prosecuting uncivil behaviour shaped what action and outcome Vivre Clichy could obtain — namely aesthetic improvements to some willing business shopfronts — it established ‘civility’ as the language through which they could express concerns about local connections to the *banlieues*. By trying to remove supposedly ‘low quality’ shops and eliminate the

incivilities that they were thought to engender, activists hoped to restore a sense of pre-existing order that declined when the undesirable consumers began to arrive. However, in claiming to work in the interest of their neighbours, Vivre Clichy implied that anyone eating ‘cheap’ takeaways shared more in common with outsiders than with ‘real’ residents. The incivilities linked to these undesirable businesses positioned their patrons outside the imagined moral community of ‘respectable’ residents. Thus, it was not just visitors or workers from the *banlieue* who were outsiders; the neighbour who enjoyed lottery scratchers, bought inexpensive goods ‘Made in China’ or let their kebab fall on the pavement was rendered illegitimate. In seeking out a cleaner space devoid of uncivil consumers, the association’s vision proposed a city and neighbourhood that was inward-looking — a neighbourhood that catered to the tastes and interests of a predominantly white, middle- and upper-middle-class demographic and that severed its ties with the polluting working-class *banlieues*.

Conclusion

Debates about incivility are inextricably bound up in power relationships, with different groups and institutions vying to define civility on their terms. For the city, incivility is a legal category and security issue which requires a police response. Dog waste, litter, fly-tipping, and graffiti are monitored and regulated for their potentially destabilising effects, as dirt is thought to provoke feelings of insecurity among residents. However, municipal policies shape the actions and campaigns of local associations, but they do not define them. The city’s emphasis on incivility as insecurity is not shared by associations like Vivre Clichy or Seine-16, who instead see it as a moral issue and an indicator of a breakdown in social cohesion or a decline in standards of living. Yet, because the city defines the legal parameters of intervention against incivility, permitting fines and educational campaigns for litter but not an overhaul of local commerce, associations may appeal to or adopt the language of municipal policies aimed at securitisation in an effort to socially and morally transform their neighbourhoods. When incivility is treated as a moral issue, those who dictate what constitutes ‘civil’ and ‘uncivil’ behaviour also position themselves to define ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ residents, visitors and consumption practices.

In the 16th arrondissement, activists have tried to address incivility through awareness-raising activities, aiming to educate their wealthy neighbours about the disrespect and discomfort of dirt. This tactic is aimed at shaming uncivil residents back into the moral community. However, in Clichy, where activists come from higher socioeconomic positions than those thought to perpetuate incivility, expulsion rather than education is pursued. Vivre Clichy is not concerned with lobbying for more DPSP agents in the neighbourhood or increasing the number of fines. Instead, they envision a larger-scale commercial and moral transformation to remove incivilities and protect their neighbourhood for the ‘traditional’ and authentic residents. Thus, respect for established codes and laws of civil comportment is used to stake claims over legitimacy — legitimacy to speak for others, define belonging and exclude uncivil others.

Looking at the shift towards a governance of public space through civility that has been occurring in the last 20 years, Fyfe et al. concluded, ‘Increasingly, it seems, civility is to be achieved through the exclusion of incivilities; the public realm is to be secured for the respectable through the exclusion of the unrespectable; and the city becomes increasingly hostile to difference’ (2006: 854). Thus, while civility is being used to enforce respect for others through respect for public space, it is also being used to claim moral authority and legitimacy by groups who already enjoy privileged access to these spaces. While some groups may seek to bring their neighbours into an imagined moral community through ‘awareness raising’ activities, others want to push the ‘uncivil’ and ‘undeserving’ further outside these borders.

Notes

1. Names of individuals and associations have been changed.

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