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Faculty of Humanities, Social Science, and Education – Center for Peace Studies

**The Polarization of the French society: a study of the Yellow Vests movement**

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"Le plus excellent symbole du peuple, c'est le pavé. On marche dessus jusqu'à
Ce qu'il vous tombe sur la tête".
Victor Hugo
*Choses vues,* 1848


"The most excellent symbol of the people is
the pavement. We walk on it until
it falls on your head."
(traduction of James Hogarth)

For every woman who has been patronized while trying to change the world.

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# Abstract

On November 17th, 2018, French people, wearing a yellow security vest, came together in the streets of the big cities and on the roundabouts of the country towns. This movement stood out as particularly violent, on the part of the Yellow Vests, especially in Paris, and by severe repression on the part of the government. What was then called the Yellow Vests movement highlighted Social Polarization, as Structural Violence revealed social patterns. From a sociological and constructivist approach, this paper aims to understand the different actors and their role in the polarization of society in the specific conflict that was the Yellow Vests movement. The thesis questions the construction of values and norms and the perpetration of ancient cleavages in today's French society. It analyses the consequences of prolonged embedded Structural Violence on the different ways people identify, creating a polarization of identities. Furthermore, this paper researches the media's impact on the polarization of French society and how it became a tool of power. In conclusion, this study aims to investigate how different actors participated in the polarization of French society in the context of the Yellow Vests movement.

This study was conducted using critical discourse analysis on thirty-five newspaper articles from six different newspapers and on fifteen interviews with four different actors, namely, Yellow Vests, journalists, police officers, and politicians. The analysis made in this research highlights the particular impact of media on public opinion and how they are used to pursue personal and political goals. Key findings suggest that the conflict emphasized an opposition between the privileged and the underprivileged and significant Structural Violence between the different economic classes. It also emphasizes the importance of Identification and Othering in the manufacturing of Structural Violence. This research stands within the scope of research about social movements and peace and conflict studies. Conclusively, I summarize the "situation" with a discussion of possible solutions that could contribute to a more Positive Peace in the effort to end Structural Violence in France.

**Key Words:** France, Yellow Vests, Protests, Media, Critical Discourse Analysis, Repression, Polarization, Structural Violence, Othering, Identity.

# List of Abbreviations

BAC          Brigade Anti-Crime

CDA          Critical Discourse Analysis

CRS          Republican Company of Security

IGGN         General Inspection of the National *Gendarmerie*

IGPN         General Inspection of the National Police

LBD40       Defense Ball Launcher 40x42mm

RN           National Rally

YV           Yellow Vests

YVM         Yellow Vests Movement

# Key dates of the movement

| | |
|---|---|
| **November 17th 2018**<br>*Acte I* | Start of the movement, occupation of the roundabouts. |
| **November 24th, 2018**<br>*Acte II* | Violence from both sides. One of the spokespeople of the movement, Jerome, receives a LBD40 ball in the eye. |
| **December 1st 2018**<br>*Acte IV* | The Yellow Vests walk on the *Arc de Triomphe* and vandalize it.<br>Zineb Redouane is shot at the window of her apartment and dies.<br>Frank, 20 years old, loses his right eye (among other injuries).<br>The polices forces follow protesters in a Burger King in Paris and beat them down. |
| **December 6th 2018** | Raid of the high school of Mantes-La-Jolie and arrest of dozens of underage students. |
| **December 10th 2018** | First social measures from the State: 100 euros extra per month for the lowest-paid employees. |
| **January 5th 2019**<br>*Acte VIII* | The demonstrators force open the doors to the Ministry of Economy. Christophe Dettinger boxes with a police officer. |
| **January 12th, 2019**<br>*Acte XIX* | Among other wounded, Olivier Beziade is shot in the head from behind in Bordeaux. He has severe head trauma. In Paris, a 15 years old boy named Lilian, is shot in the face by a LBD40 while shopping. |
| **January 15th 2019** | Launch of the National Debate. |
| **January 19th, 2019**<br>*Acte XX* | Axel, 25 years old, is shot in the face by a LBD40 in Montpellier. |
| **March 16th 2019**<br>*Acte XVIII* | The Yellow Vests walk on the *Champs Elysées* and devastate it. The famous restaurant *Le Fouquet's* is vandalized. |
| **March 23rd 2019**<br>*Acte XIX* | A police charge is primarily criticised for disabling the 73 years old Yellow Vests protester Geneviève Legay. |
| **March, 27th, 2019** | Creation of the BRAV-M to calm the insurrections. |
| **April 8th 2019** | Grand débat: the president assist to the report of citizens contributions since January 2019 |
| **April 25th 2019** | President Emmanuel Macron states he wants to "significantly" reduce income tax, gradually reindex pensions to inflation, remove the ENA. |
| **May 1st 2019** | Labour Day, heavy protests in Paris. |
| **May 26th 2019** | European Elections, four Yellow Vests lists are submitted as candidates. |
| **July 14th 2019** | The demonstrators come back to the *Champs Elysee* for the National Day. |

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# 1. **Introduction**

Violence is omnipresent in the global geopolitical context of today's society (Galtung & Höivik, 1971). Violence is at the center of Peace and Conflict research by preventing peace. The XXth century appears as the most murderous one in terms of lives taken through direct violence (Nordstrom, 2004, p.178). It does not seem the world has learned from the six million lives taken in the extermination camps during WWII in Europe or from the nearly million deaths caused by the Rwanda Genocide (Armstrong, Davenport, & Stam, 2020). Structural Violence appears necessary to dismantle on a planet on the verge of sparking a World War III. While Vladimir Putin's attacks on Ukraine unleashes outrage in the international community, bombs keep falling on Iranian soil, Yemen, and Gaza, and insecurity rules in many countries, such as Eritrea, Somalia, and Mali, to give examples. History has shown that some violence, as murderous as it can be, could be justified by the protagonist, as was the case for the two atomic bombs of History in Hiroshima and Nagasaki or when the United States of America initiated combat in Vietnam in 1965, in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. As direct violence happens in front of our eyes through today's media, the society and the discourse in which we grew up have made us see that some forms of violence are more legitimate than others.

If direct violence is visible, a more embedded violence structures our everyday world, leading to injustices and oppression of minorities; Structural Violence. This violence creates a form of Polarization between different cultures, social classes, races, genders, and more. Polarization has become known globally in recent years, garnering attention amongst academics, journalists, and ordinary citizens alike for its possible detrimental implications. This rising concern was exemplified during the United States presidential elections of 2020 but can be equally seen in modern Europe. In France, populism has gained tremendous support from the population, breaking with the usual right-left division. As inequality in terms of living conditions increases, the Polarization within the society escalates.

On November 17th 2018, France was submerged by protests. The protesters became known as "the Yellow Vests" due to the security jackets they wore. It marked the beginning of a long wave of protests all over France for more than a year. As the demonstrations intensified, the State and police responded exponentially. In the context of research in Peace and Conflict Transformation, this thesis uses the Yellow Vests crisis as a case study to explore a profound social malaise within French society.

Thus, this study explores the manifestations of Structural Violence and its impact on creating different identities, enhancing a solid Polarization in French society. Furthermore, this study intends to understand the effect of media on those processes.

## 1.1 Introducing the case study

In 2018, the gas price exceeded 1,40 euros per liter, one of the highest prices ever recorded in France. However, France contains many rural areas, and many people commute to work by car. Facing the high prices, French citizens expressed their discontent. On May 29th, 2018, Priscillia Ludosky, a car driver, launched a petition on the internet intending to lower the gas price. Today, this petition has reached over a million signatures. On October 24th, 2018, the mechanic Ghislain Coutard released a video on Facebook, inviting everyone to wear a yellow security vest or to put it in the front of their car as a sign of protest against the rising gas taxes (see figure 10). In France, it has been mandatory to have at least one yellow vest in each car since 2008 for safety reasons. Due to the accessibility of the vests, it facilitated the spark of movement. Rapidly, the movement became associated with the security vest and formed under the french name of *Gilets Jaunes,* meaning "Yellow Vests." For fluidity reasons, the English terms Yellow Vests (YV) and Yellow Vests movement (YVM) will be used in this study.

However, Pierre Boyer et al. (2020) analyze that the protests against the gas price rapidly became a general contestation toward the government and its institutions in relation to a past State Scandal. On May 1st, 2018, Alexandre Benalla, the bodyguard of President Emmanuel Macron, was recorded assaulting two protesters. He was wearing a "police" armband (*Le Monde,* 18.07.2018). After *Le Monde* revealed the video, Benalla was charged with "violence in reunion"(*Le Monde,* 16.12.2018). As a result, he was fired from *the Elysée*, the official residence of the French President, but was not sentenced further. This case became a State Scandal when the police discovered that a safe at his residence that supposedly contained weapons was missing (*Le Monde,* 20.01.2020). On July 24th, 2018, Emmanuel Macron spoke out about the Alexandre Benalla case. He infuriated French citizens by saying, "if you are looking for a person responsible, he is in front of you. Come and get me" (Baldacchino, 2018). An analysis of the distrust of people in politicians and the influence of the rise of populism by Patrick Chamorel (2019) concluded that the election of President Emmanuel Macron in 2017 was due to a general resilience against the extreme right, but not because of his popularity. Moreover, other scholars argue that the hatred grown against the government was due to the progressive perception of president Emmanuel Macron as being in alignment with the elites while disconnected from ordinary French people and growing economic inequalities (Jetten, Mols, & Selvanathan, 2020).

The Yellow Vests were people with modest living conditions or from the lower class of society. In their study, Boyer et al. (2020) show that they did not represent racial injustices as they were in the majority-white people. They were mostly coming from the countryside and needed their car every day to commute to work (see figure 8).

The protests started with the occupations of the roundabouts. The notion of the roundabout is essential as it illustrates the typical traffic of France. The blockages happened in various size towns all around France. On the first Saturday of the movement, on November 17th 2018, about 788 gatherings blocked the road. The mobilization happened in the context of worldwide questions of liberalism and social democracy (Boyer et al., 2020, p.110). It stood out because, as Frédéric Royall (2020) emphasized it, the movement did not need a push from political parties or syndicates, such as the Confédération Nationale du Travail (CGT) (see Appendix B). Indeed, social media played a significant role in the development of the movement. For example, in December 2018, less than two months after the beginning of the riot, Facebook counted 1548 groups of more than a hundred members dedicated to the cause (Boyer et al., 2020, p.110). The movement did not claim any political affiliations; however, studies have shown that the protesters belonged in the majority to both outer parts of the political spectrum (see figure 11) (Plenel, 2019, p.37). From November 2018 to the apparition of the international Covid-19 crisis hitting France in March 2020, the demonstrators have protested every Saturday, calling each protest an *Acte*. On November 17th 2018, Statista counted 3000 different protests all around France and about 300 000 protesters (see figure 9). The tension with the government grew, and violence rose from both sides of the conflict. Some important dates are explained above in Key Dates of the movement, but I enumerate here the most important events that will be referred to often in this study.

To start with, December 1st 2018, knew a series of events. For example, the YV invaded l'Arc de Triomphe. On the same day, some protesters, fleeing tear gas, were followed by the police inside a Burger King and knocked on the ground. In the South of France, on the same day, Zined Redouane was shot at in her apartment and died (Vandepitte, 2019, pp.10-12). On December 10[th,] 2018, Emmanuel Macron proposed some concessions such as canceling the rise of the gas price for 2019, injecting 17 billion euros into the budget, raising the salary, and lowering the taxes on salary (*Elysée,* 10.12.18). However, the movement did not stop and even increased in violence, with protests against the entire economic discriminatory system (Jetten et al., 2020, p.8). On January 5th, in Paris, Christophe Dettinger triggered a polemic when he fought against police officers. A week later, in Bordeaux, Olivier Béziade was shot by a Defense Ball Launcher (LBD40) gun. Pauline Trouillard (2021) studied the repression that subsequently escalated, and according to her, a political discourse accompanied the repressive police violence to disguise its scale. One

of the main activists of the YVM, Jerome Rodrigues, was blinded in one eye on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019 by an LBD40 shot (Vandepitte, 2019, p.30). In the end, police brutality wounded more than two thousand demonstrators, including 286 head injuries, 24 eyes lost, and five hands dismembered (*Médiapart*, 12.06.20). March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019, is an important date for the Yellow Vests as well as December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018. Indeed, the YV invaded *Les Champs Elysées,* and ransacked the famous restaurant *Le Fouquet's* (Fouquet's barricadé, 2019).

The repression was important and efficient. After a year of revolt, *Le Monde* counted 10 000 custody, 3100 convictions, and 400 prison sentences (Vincent, 2019). On the contrary, if more than 2000 protesters were declared injured by the police, their accountability for their actions was minimum (see figure 13). Indeed, in a year, the General Inspection of the National Police received 399 cases, 130 of which concerned serious injuries (Les violences policières, 2020). Only 12 officers suffered consequences, but no jail time (Dufresne, 2019).

The movement dropped in number in 2019 but has remained active all around the territory. In January, the protests counted 84 000 protesters, versus 9 500 on June 1<sup>st</sup> (see figure 9). The numbers kept decreasing during 2019 before gradually dissipating and ending a year later due to the Corona Virus crisis (Beytout, 2020). But the YV came back to fight on July 14<sup>th,</sup> 2021, blending with the anti-sanitary pass protests after the summer holidays (Devilliers & Ruelle, 2021, p.6). Only a few hundred people protested, primarily due to CoronaVirus restrictions. On October 15<sup>th,</sup> 2021, *Liberation* evoked the idea of a "Yellow Vests season 2", showing the impact of the movement and the possibility of its restart (Plotu & Macé, 2021).

## 1.2  **Problem Statement**

On January 12<sup>th,</sup> 2019, the life of Olivier Beziade, a 47 years old father of three, was forever changed. On his first Yellow Vest protest, he was hit by an LBD40 bullet in the head (see Appendix B) as he was running away from the police. As a result, he suffered severe head trauma. Plunged into an artificial coma by the paramedics, then immobilized for 90 days, he still suffers from hemiplegia (Ballufier & Schirer, 2021). At the time of the tragedy, the media discredited the YVM by exposing them as violent and without real projects. Others were nourishing hate against the police by publishing violent images about police actions in the protests.

The story of Olivier Beziade is part of a bigger picture of oppression committed by governments upon their citizens. The world has a long history of popular uprisings and the myriad ways to remediate them. Those uprisings and repressions continue today, with movements such as the Arab Spring from 2010 to 2013 (Volpi & Gerschewski, 2020), and more recently, the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill movement of Hong Kong in 2019 and 2020, and the Estallido

Social in Chile from 2019 to 2021 (Waissbluth, 2020). The violence that repressed those movements and the YVM was condemned and prohibited by international norms and standards by the United Nations (United Nations, 13.08.19). Each movement for social change highlights a malaise inside the society that the demonstrators and supporters of the movement want to end. The YVM is one movement among many others. Movements such as Black Lives Matter and events such as the death of George Floyd reveal first structural and racial violence, as well as a systemic problem within the police system. This research does not address race issues, as the YVM was primarily white and opposed to the government and elite rather than toward other discriminated groups in society. However, it enhances and participates in the research about police brutality and systemic violence within the police system, which stands as an example of societal discomfort in Western society, in a "country of human rights." However, the research wants to go further than police brutality per se and seeks to analyze how both the manifestation of the Yellow Vests movement and the police brutality that followed are part of a narrative of a growing Polarization within the French society.

Thus, society faces several problems that this research wants to detangle. First, the outrageously violent reaction of the police is proof of embedded Structural Violence within the French community. Furthermore, the YVM became a crisis between the people and the government, polarising them between two camps. As a result, the physical violence significantly increased, leading some authors such as the philosopher Jacob Rogozinski (2019) to call it a "civil war." Moreover, this conflict has emphasized more significant gaps between social classes and political orientations (Mahfud & Adam-Troian, 2019, p.3), seeing more radical claims emerge with populist affiliations (Rogozinski, 2019, p.24).

The media's reactions subsequently aroused reactions and participated in creating different identities that polarised the conflict and the society. The YV developed a strong hate for the police and were in turn, hated by the police and government. By demonizing "the others," society creates a significant gap between identities, enhancing Polarization. It is what the concept of *Othering* understands (Erwin, 2019). Therefore, this research aspires to understand the role of the three different sets of actors explained above: the Yellow Vests, as the protesters, the police, as an institution but primarily as human beings behind the shields, and the media. All three groups of actors have had an important impact on the definition and the creation of diverging identities, which enhanced an intense societal Polarization through the Structural Violence issued from those identities.

## 1.3  **Objectives and Research Questions**

The Yellow Vests movement stood out by its length and unusual violent outburst. It highlighted a Social Polarization within French society divided between pro-Yellow Vests and pro-State camps. Because of the study's limits, discussions about police violence per se should not be expected. Instead, this thesis aims to understand the conditions and phenomena leading to physical acts of violence and their acceptance in society. Thus, the research focuses on the creation of polarised identities and how identities and actors impacted the Polarization of French society.

This research aims at several objectives through the case study of the YVM. First, with the analysis of newspapers, the study looks at the role of media and how they became tools of power and contributors to the Polarization of society. Secondly, the study reaches different objectives through the critical discourse analysis of interviews. Thus, it aims to understand how embedded Structural Violence led different actors to identify themselves and others. The way people identify themselves is the key to understanding how they perceive others. Finally, it seeks to comprehend how these divisions in identities perpetuated the existing Structural Violence and strengthened Social Polarization through their expression and existence. The research is subsequently oriented first from above and then from below. In this research, it is understood that every citizen played a role, consciously or unconsciously.

To achieve the thesis' objectives, the following research questions were used to guide the project:

- What has been the media's impact on the Polarization of the French society during the Yellow Vests movement?
- How has Structural Violence shaped the different identities of French society during the Yellow Vests movement?
- How did the different actors accentuate and perpetuate the Polarization of French society during the Yellow Vests movement?

To answer the different research questions, I focus on the most violent period, from November 17th 2018, the date of the first Act, *Acte I,* until March 30th 2019, marking the *Acte XX.* Therefore, the study extends across twenty weeks. This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze thirty-five newspaper articles from six mainstream newspapers. Critical Discourse Analysis is also applied to the fifteen interviews I attained, divided into four categories: Yellow Vests, journalists, police officers, and politicians or highly ranked people. Therefore, the answers to these research questions will be limited in the scope of this research.

## 1.4   **Situating the study**

This research is relevant to peace and conflict studies as France's Yellow Vests movement is part of a long-lasting conflict tradition. Social movements are active worldwide and constantly reshape societies. It is, therefore, necessary to detangle how social uprisings highlight a need for change and the impact they have on the constant construction of our norms and values. Thus, the YVM is an example of the continuous Polarization of French society. Researching the causes and the embedded Structural Violence that shapes today's conflicts allows a better understanding and contributes to the search for Positive Peace. However, the YVM was developed just recently, its foundation dating back to November 2018, and came to a (temporary) halt with the health crisis brought on by COVID-19 in March 2020. Therefore, research on the movement is still limited, as the long-term impact is unknown. Thus, the thesis may be situated within the broader frame of Peace and Conflict Research as a contribution to the research on Structural Violence, Othering, and Polarization (see chapter 3).

Research has led to a better understanding of the geopolitical context in which the Yellow Vests arose and the police brutality that followed. Moreover, researchers have analyzed the importance of media in the protest crisis. For example, Sebbah et al. (2020) compare newspaper articles with Facebook and Twitter comments about the Yellow Vests. They conclude that the newspapers underestimate the YV. On the other hand, the article acknowledges an intense eruption of a new political life on social media (Sebbah et al., 2020, p.12). Likewise, André Gunthert (2020) analyzed the power of images in the context of the YV. He concluded that the mainstream media tried to protect the population from violent events, not to create chaos. That is why the theme of police violence only appeared later on the national scene. Furthermore, he observed that new forms of information were born, as anyone can share it at anytime via the Internet (pp.200-201). Other scholars such as Christian Gerini (2019), analysed the broadcast of information and the use of social media as art. His research also looks at the messages and engaged art visible on the walls during the protests.

Other scholars have been focusing on the social behavior of the Yellow Vests, using social identity theory and significance quest theory (Adam-Troian, Çelebi, & Mahfud, 2020). In this study, the authors analyze the psychological impact of police violence on the protesters and try to understand their violent response, driving on three general motors: need, narrative, and network. They conclude that people will engage in collective actions to advance the group's interests to which they are committed. Therefore, they asserted a need for personal significance and a desire to matter and give meaning to existence, leading to violent extremism (p.1176). In another research, the researchers present additional observations when analyzing the reasons leading

people to violent YV actions. They conclude that loss of significance and feeling meaningless and marginalized can lead people to violent acts (Mahfud & Adam-Troian, 2019, p.7). Finally, Sophie Wahnich participated in the Yellow Vests' behavior research by highlighting the meaning they have created on the national scene, using new gestures and objects as weapons of public aggression (Wahnich, 2021).

The upper class and the media denounced the YV as ignorant about ecology and global warming. In a study based on interviews, Daniel Driscoll (2021) refutes the mainstream media arguments which view the YV as against climate reforms. He argues that this movement which came from below, would like to act on the environment but on their terms and that taxing poor people is a hypocritical way to change things, an argument already highlighted by Mathilde Bouyé and Yamide Dagnet at the beginning of the protests (Bouyé & Dagnet, 2018). Martine Martin and Mine Islar (2020) highlight economic inequalities and their role in understanding the climate crisis. Indeed, they compare the distress of the upper classes about the climate crisis, "the end of the world," and the despair of the lower classes, that worry more about being able to survive "the end of the month" (p.607).

This thesis is, thus, a part of the recent reflections about the YVM and social movements in France. It capitalizes on the context and Structural Violence surrounding the French society that led to the movement. Structural Violence theory provides the instruments to understand the different underlying causes of Polarization. The study draws on previous research using social identity theory in a new context. However, in this study, social identity theory serves a different purpose. The ways people define themselves and others are influenced by Structural Violence and play a role in Social Polarization. Subsequently, social identity theory appears as a tool for understanding Social Polarization. Through the critical discourse analysis of semi-structured interviews and newspaper articles, this research introduces a different conceptual framework of Social Polarization to analyze the conflict. The following pages pursue the augmentation of a more concerted discussion about embedded Polarization in France and its consequences.

## 1.5   **Motivations and Positionality**

My position as a French citizen and researcher has had a meaningful impact on this research. It is necessary to acknowledge it from the onset to understand the entire thesis through my biased lens. I was born to a middle-class family, in a small village on the West coast of France, in the countryside of a larger city.

When the Yellow Vests protests started, I did not participate but could see the activists in the streets on the weekends and in the roundabouts during the week. Motivations toward this project grew alongside increasing self-awareness. In 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement and the deadly brutality of the police against racialized people such as George Floyd in the United States or Michel Zecler in France. In the face of such cruelty, I wanted to analyze the violence of the police. However, being white, I have never experienced discrimination due to my skin color and therefore did not feel that it was my place to lead a study on racism.

Further, as a French citizen, I thought studying a French-related issue was relevant. First, it is important to consider racial biases, although not discussed in this thesis. Indeed, being a European woman, I did not feel it appropriate to apply my western views to an entirely different culture. I believe the deconstruction of one's own culture is a long process and can never be fully achieved, as we are all victims of embedded biases. Second, I thought it more relevant to study a country I have insights into, where I can speak the language and lived twenty years of my life – France. Moreover, the context of the health crisis of COVID-19 was another reason to choose to focus on a closer and more familiar country.

In between the states of emergency, the "War on Terror," the anti-immigration policies, the various social movements, the repressions, and the laws restricting individual freedoms little by little, France is a fascinating country to study when it comes to Peace and Conflict Transformation. My past has shaped and constructed my worldview. I am motivated by embitterment toward the ruling class and its contempt toward the working classes. Consequently, the YVM is compelling because it highlights police brutality, state repression, and political, economic, and *Social* Polarization in French society.

Finally, this thesis has been written in the context of the 2022 presidential election that will impact the five years to come. It tries to analyze the state of France today and can be extended by future research to find solutions to the French social crisis.

I position myself as having a constructivist perspective in an academic context. However, my worldview and position as a researcher in Peace and Conflict, besides being from France myself, impact this research, the way I conducted it, and the conclusions I made. Thus, although I deconstruct discourses, I still participate in constructing the discourse I am trying to detangle. These are positionalities that I will discuss further in the methodology chapter.

## 1.6 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis contains eight chapters. This section gives a brief overview of the thesis' continuity:

**Chapter One** orients this project with its original aim and motivation, the problem statement, the objectives of the study, and the research questions.

**Chapter two** gives a contextual background of the police system in France and its different police units. It also provides a historical background of the French government and the various states of emergency it put in place. Finally, it gives an overview of the Yellow Vests movement.

**Chapter three** introduces the different theories and concepts needed to analyze the data. It presents Structural Violence, Social Identity Theory,  and the concepts of Othering and Polarization.

**Chapter four** is the methodological chapter. It presents the methods used to collect and assess the data that form the basis of the analysis. It reflects on the selection of informants and newspaper articles, conducting interviews, and using Critical Discourse Analysis analysis method*s*. My reflections on positionality, as well as ethical considerations and methodological limitations, are also shared.

**Chapter Five** seeks to understand Polarization mechanisms from above, meaning from a higher status position and authorities, using mainstream newspapers to legitimize their opinion.  Notably, politicians from opposing sides use the conflict to gain public support. Finally, this chapter analyses the discourses as found in selected newspaper articles.

**Chapter Six** analyses the interviews with informants from the selected active groups of actors to offer an understanding of Polarization from below, meaning through individual actions and participation in grassroots/everyday life dynamics.

**Chapter Seven** discusses the findings more comprehensively to showcase the patterns leading to the Polarization of society. Finally, it discusses possible ways to recreate unity in the French society through the lens of Peace and Conflict Studies.

Finally, **Chapter Eight** gives a concluding overview of the entire thesis, tying the overall findings explicitly to the research questions. It also reflects on possible future research and its applicability in other situations.

# 2. Contextualizing the Yellow West Movement

This chapter presents a brief overview of French society in order to contextualize and understand the different processes that led to the Yellow Vests crisis. It sets the tone of the thesis by introducing the history of the government methods used during the protests of 2018-2019. Furthermore, it seeks to present the stakes in France and the people's growing opposition to the police and the State. Therefore, the chapter first introduces the history of law enforcement in France, with the development of the police institution. Then, the chapter presents the different measures taken by the government to strengthen its power. The purpose is to understand that France has strong executive power, given to one man, diminishing democracy. Furthermore, the chapter provides an overview of the history of social movements in France, showing the importance of social voices in a country where the citizens are used to fighting for their rights. It also introduces the growing gap between identities in French society. Finally, the chapter discusses the social-economic structure of France today, explaining growing injustices.

## 2.1 Law enforcement in France

### 2.1.1 The Brigades Anti-Crimes: a colonial heritage

The police, like any institution, is the product of national history. In France, police control is part of a history of supervision of populations described as "undesirable," such as prostitutes, beggars, and migrants. In his book *La domination policière, une violence industrielle*, the sociologist Mathieu Rigouste (2012) reflects on the history of police in France and their actions. The Industrial Revolution made cities more attractive, and many citizens moved from the countryside to the urban centers (p.10). Following the frames of colonization - segregation between black and white and between French and foreigners - the capital city asserted domination through social and police banishment (p.19). At the beginning of the 20th century, this segregation system was redeployed to contain labor from the colonies that industrial capitalism gathered on the French cities' outskirts. The unprivileged within the metropolis were banished due to imported management modes from the colonies. This development is what Michel Foucault called the "return effect" of "colonial models" reported in the West, meaning that the West could also practice something similar to colonization; internal colonialism (p.20). Rigouste uses the term "endocolonial segregation" to explain the form of power that develops techniques from colonial domination and applies them within the national territory to contain lower strata of the working classes (pp.19-54). In the 1930s, the police unit North African Brigade (BNA) consisted of agents recruited from the corps of Arabic-speaking colonial administrators stationed in Algeria (Blanchard, 2004, 2006; Rigouste,

2012). The BNA crisscrossed the "Muslim neighborhoods" of Paris, carried out raids, and fed political and social surveillance files. The police developed coercive measures to manage the colonized in the colonies.

Subsequently, the police units increasingly brought methods used in the colonies to metropolitan France to reinforce existing coercive practices against the unwanted and fight and control the immigrants from North Africa (Rigouste, 2012, p.19). This is what Mathieu Rigouste calls an "endocolonial police" (p.19). The BNA was dissolved in 1944 after the French Liberation during World War II, then reinstated in 1953 under the Brigade of Aggression and Violence (BAV). The police units extensively utilized methods of oppression, such as identity checks and raids against Algerian immigrants in metropolitan France (Blanchard, 2006 p.63). From 1953 to 1960, France created different institutions to repress the Algerian nationalists in France while leading a bloody Algerian war, which lasted from 1954 to 1962. The BAV was responsible for paralyzing the resistance of the colonized. It intervened mainly at night to penetrate the North African circles, subdue, banish, and catch red-handed the underprivileged immigrants in metropolitan France (Rigouste, 2012, p.149). It quickly turned into a real "Anti-terrorist brigade," abandoning "street delinquency" to assume its function as the political police of the colonized.

After World War II, the colonies slowly became independent, such as Morocco in 1956 and Algeria in 1962. However, their independence triggered massive migrations to France, increasing the sizes of the suburbs (Cohen, 2017). As a response, in order to control immigration, the French government passed an "anti-crime" policy, leading to the formation of the Brigades Anti-Crimes (BAC) in 1971 (Rigouste, 2012, p.25). The official purpose of the BAC was internal pacification, meaning that they had to ensure peace within the suburbs. However, Mathieu Rigouste observes that the goal was to arrest, give fines or bring to the police as many North Africans as possible to maintain powerful domination over them (p.152). From 1972 to 1974, the BAC made more than 2,800 arrests, which police chiefs recognized as an extraordinary success because they allowed in a short period of time to arrest and bring to justice a maximum of formerly colonized people (p.25).

Still in force today, the brigade Anti-Crimes (BAC) represents a technique of coercion and repression. Generally working in civilian clothes, they patrol in neighborhoods considered dangerous to capture "suspects." Mostly poor people and racial minorities live in those neighborhoods, and racial profiling is widespread. Despite their name, the anti-crime brigades are primarily responsible for "small and medium delinquency" (Bosch, 2017, p.3). They are armed with a *Lanceur de Balles de Défense*, or Defense Ball Laucher 40 (LBD). Reserved since 1995 for elite units (RAID and GIGN, see Appendix B), the LBD was designed to capture "armed terrorists"

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while avoiding the shooting of hostages. It was then supplied to the BAC and the local police in the "sensitive areas" from 1998 (Rigouste, 2012, p.45).

However, this has had disastrous consequences for civilians. For example, on December 17, 1997, Abdelkader Bouziane, 16 years old, was chased while driving his mother's car and was shot by the police. In May 2002, Xavier Dem, wrongly accused of murder, was shot in the head by a member of the BAC (p.50). The "efficiency" of the BAC lies in its capacity to produce disorders it can manage. From 1995 to 2003, the total number of BAC agents increased by 23.3% (p.99). In addition, new areas of intervention for the BAC were delimited: "small delinquency" and "urban violence" (p.99). Subsequently, these new provisions made it possible to use the BAC against social and political movements outside the endocolonial enclaves. On July 19th 2016, a BAC unit arrested Adama Traoré, a 24 years old black French citizen. As he refused to comply, three police officers applied the folding technique, flattening the captive's torso with the knees while exerting pressure. He died of asphyxia two hours after being arrested, a situation unfortunately mirrored by George Floyd in 2020 in the United States of America (Niang, 2020). Banned since the Air and Border Police (PAF) killed an Ethiopian in 2003, the folding technique has persisted in the methods of the BAC and continues to be applied primarily for endocolonial dominance, that is to say, on what Mathieu Rigouste (2012) calls the "sacrificial body of the damned," in reference to the forever sacrificed colonized people, and the lack of hope that the racist society gives them (p.151).

Today, the police in France have many components. First, France still uses the army as civilian control police. Indeed, France maintains the difference between the police, which acts mainly in the cities (hence its name: polis, meaning city in Latin), and the *gendarmerie*, composed of military personnel, which operates outside the metropolis, in the countryside. However, André Michel Ventre (2002) explains that the work of the gendarmerie consists primarily of general police missions. In law enforcement itself, there are different units. For example, *Companies Republicaines de Securité* (CRS) (see [Appendix B](#)), in English Republican Security Companies, created in 1944, report to the General Direction of the National Police (DGPN) and work most often in urban areas. They are part of the mobile security forces, which intervene throughout the national territory to support local units: preserving order, fighting against crime, terrorism, or irregular immigration. The *Gendarmes mobiles* can intervene rapidly in any given situation of law enforcement.

The police units of Brigade Rapide d'Intervention, or Fast Brigade of Intervention (BRI), and the Recherche Assistance Intervention Dissuasion, or Research Assistance Intervention Deterrence (RAID) are organized against big banditry (see [Appendix B](#)). They were, for example, mobilized against the terrorists in the 2015 Bataclan Attack. Both the *gendarmerie* and the *police*

are directed by the Ministry of the Interior and its chief. Christophe Castaner was the minister of the Interior from October 2018 to July 2020, when Gérald Darmanin took over the role. Both the national gendarmerie and the national police have a dedicated direction with a director in the ministry. Today, the DGPN is the head of the police, and the DGGN is the head of the gendarmerie, with Richard Lizurey until 2019 as the general director (see Appendix C). The Direction de l'Ordre Public et de la Circulation (DOPC) is one of the headquarters of the police, specializes in order restoration, and, therefore very proactive during the YV crisis.

To conclude, the police system in France is still today heritage of the xenophobic colonial policies of the country.

### 2.1.2 Democracy, the Fifth Republic, and the states of emergency

In France, the power is distributed vertically, and most decisions and authority reside in the hands of only one man. The Vth Republic was established in France on October 4th, 1958, enforced by the 1958 Constitution. The revision of the Constitution in 1962 established the election of the President of the Republic by direct universal suffrage, conferring to him a more considerable legitimacy. The president is endowed with significant capabilities (see Appendix I). For example, he can appoint the Prime Minister and terminate his functions (art. 8). He can submit a bill to a referendum on a proposal from the government or the National Assembly and the Senate (art. 11). He can also dissolve the National Assembly (art. 12), and he appoints three members of the Constitutional Council, including the president of the Council (art. 56). The President also has "extraordinary powers," meaning powers that he can use only in certain defined cases, called "states of emergency." Article 16 allows him to exercise full powers in the event of a "serious and immediate threat" to "the institutions of the Republic, the independence of the nation or the integrity of its territory" (art.16). Nourished by the memory of the defeat and occupation of June 1940, these powers must be a transient response intended to safeguard democracy and restore the functioning of public authorities as soon as possible (see Appendix I).

France has a long history of states of emergency. The first one was declared in 1961, when the military took control of Algiers and lasted until May 31st 1963 (Thénault, 2007, pp.63-78). The state of emergency makes it possible to strengthen the powers of the civil authorities and restrict certain public or individual freedoms for people suspected of being a threat to general security. Further, in 2005, the death of Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré by the police caused weeks of uprisings on the outskirts of Paris (Lapeyronnie, 2006). On November 8th, 2005, the State declared a state of emergency, which was enforced until January 5th, 2006, to contain the uprisings (Agamben, 2015). A decade later, multiple terrorist attacks were committed in France. On January

7th, 2015, the headquarter of the satiric newspaper Charlie Hebdo was attacked, leaving twelve people dead. On November 13th, 2015, the well-known theatre in Paris, the Bataclan, was attacked by Islamist extremists who killed 131 people and wounded 413 (Parmentier, 2020). Following those attacks, the legal framework for the state of emergency was amended on several occasions to facilitate the implementation of emergency measures in the fight against terrorism. The law of 20 November 2015 relating to the state of emergency modifies several provisions of the law of 1955, allowing, for example, the Minister of the Interior and the prefects to order searches in any place, including a home, day or night, when they have serious reasons to believe that this place is frequented by a person whose behavior constitutes a threat to security and public order (loi n°2015-1501, 2015). The state of emergency was prolonged in different instances before finally ending on November 1st, 2017. However, on October 30th, 2017, the law strengthening internal security and the fight against terrorism (SILT law) instituted preventive measures against terrorism, such as protection perimeters, individual assignments to a geographic area, and searches (Etat d'urgence et autres régimes d'exception, 2021). With these amendments, the government gained power over the years and reduced individual freedom progressively, in what Giorgio Agamben (2015) calls "a Security State."

On March 23[rd,] 2020, the state of emergency was introduced in the penal code of public health to strengthen the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of a health state of emergency, the Prime Minister can decree measures such as ordering home confinement, requisitions, or prohibiting gatherings. He can also take temporary control over the prices of certain products and decide on any regulatory limits on the freedom to conduct business. The state of emergency ended on June 1st, 2021, in Metropolitan France (Etat d'urgence sanitaire, 2022). Moreover, the law for Global Security was promulgated on May 25th, 2021. This law authorizes drones to fly in any public space to observe violations, for example, during demonstrations (art 22). The bill also aims to generalize the use of pedestrian cameras and on-board cameras (in law enforcement cars) and opens up access to facial recognition. Article 24 has been written several times as an "offense of provocation to the identification" of the police officers, aiming not to harm their "physical or mental integrity," which remains vague (Loi du 25 mai, 2021).

## 2.2 Brief History of social movements in France

The Yellow Vests movement is part of a prolonged protest tradition in France. This tradition dates back to the 1789 French Revolution, overthrowing the monarchy and establishing the Estates-General. It led to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. In addition, this Revolution

marked the start of a new identification of a unified French people all around France with the development of a standard French language in the countryside (Flaherty, 1987).

Several protests and revolutions have happened in France during the past two centuries and brought changes to the geopolitical organizations. First, in 1830, the July Revolution, or "the Three Glorious," brought to the throne a new king, Louis-Philippe I$^{er}$. It ended the Second Restoration of King Charles X and established the July Monarchy (Pigenet & Tartakowsky, 2014, p.188). Soon after, the third French Revolution took place in Paris in 1848. It led to the abdication of King Louis-Philippe I and the birth of the Second Republic. Only a few decades later, in 1871, Paris rose against the government led by Adolphe Thiers, tired by the Franco-Prussian conflict and humiliated by four months of siege. The municipal elections organized by the central committee quickly led to the proclamation of a free and independent *Commune* meaning "municipality." The uprising was rapidly and violently repressed by Adolphe Tiers' government, leading to the end of the *Commune* after the "bloody week" of May 1871 (p.244).

Moreover, the country has seen several workers' strikes throughout the years, particularly from the railway workers and miners searching for better work conditions in 1892, 1910, 1920, 1941, and 1963 (p.550). In 1936, a spontaneous social explosion resulted from the enthusiasm aroused by the electoral victory of the united socialist party Le Front Populaire, translated as "the Popular Front", and the revolutionary aspirations that animated part of the working class (p.559). These strikes mobilized two million workers and took on a new character. The workers voluntarily adopted pacifist behavior, avoiding any violent incidents and any destruction of material (Wolikow, 2016, p.21). Unlike the social conflicts of the 1920s, these "joy strikes" were not followed by brutal repression (Pigenet & Tartakowsky, 2014, p.535). On the other hand, the movement led to paid holidays and wage increases of 20% on average, later offset by higher prices (Wolikow, 2016, p.93). Then, in May 1968, a vast spontaneous anti-authoritarian revolt of a social, political, and cultural nature arose. It was directed against the government in power, General De Gaulle, and the Fifth Republic established for ten years, against capitalism, consumerism, and American imperialism (Bugnon, 2019). It led to the dissolution of the National Assembly and the Grenelle agreements, signed on May 27th 1968, increasing by 35% of the guaranteed minimum inter-professional wage and 7% of other salaries (Billet, 2010).

At the end of the XXth century, France had one of the most privileged working conditions in Europe (Roussellier, 2014). In 2000, the Aubry II law set the maximum working hours to 35 hours a week, and in 2002, the Collective Convention set the paid vacations to 24 working days for a full-time worker (Richevaux, 2001, p.166). However, French citizens kept rising against new measures passed by the government. For example, in September 2010, about two million people

struck against President Nicolas Sarkozy's retirement reforms (Légé, 2011, p.13) followed by solid repression by the police (p.5). More recently, during the spring of 2016, strikes and demonstrations arose in opposition to the second Valls' government and the Labor law led by Minister Myriam El Khomri called "the working law." Those strikes led to violence between the demonstrators and the police, who repressed them (Neumann, 2017). The YVM was born only two years later, following a growing culture of political disagreement and increasing misalignment between the people and its government (Légé, 2011, p.10). Most of the revolts were repressed and did not lead to much change in the government. As a result, the citizens felt unheard. This context highlights the place of the YV in a society of discontent.

## 2.3 French society today

The French society is built on class domination by the elite of the lower classes. French capitalism began to restructure itself, allowing the upper white layers of the workers to occupy the inferior positions of an expanding petty bourgeoisie to conquer new markets. At the same time, the overexploitation of foreign workers was maintained and reinforced throughout the XX century. For the construction industry, the automobile, and the most despised and tiring jobs, this restructuring needed to intensify the recruitment of a colonized underclass. Some of them had to concentrate on vacant lots on the outskirts of large towns where they had made camps to become "slums." This segregation created a division between the racialized working-class, immigrants' ancestry, and the white French working class, still more prosperous than them.

Some scholars and journalists have concluded that poverty caused the YVM (see figure 12). However the sociological composition of the YV and their supporters is not limited to the poorest fringes of French society, particularly in the city demonstrations (Blavier, 2020, p.223). Indeed, the YV is a heteroclite group, including students and the retired. The Montaigne institute identifies 26% of workers, 21% of employees, 57% of the people with a permanent contract, and 17% of retired people among the YV (see figure 8). However, the racialized people from the slums and suburbs were not present at the strikes, and the movement was mainly white (Blavier, 2020). However, the increase in the price of certain goods has created widespread scarcity amongst people. For example, the accommodation has seen its price multiplied by 2.5 from 1995 to 2011. On the other hand, the salaries have only been multiplied by 1.6 (Guilluy, 2011, p.43). In addition, goods such as gas, electricity, and tobacco - a good that the working class has become the primary consumer of - have seen their prices increase drastically in the past years (see figure 10) (Blavier, 2020, p.223). In 2017, President Emmanuel Macron removed the tax on wealth, giving him the

nickname "President of the wealthy." The unemployment rate also grew, reaching 8,5% in 2018 (p.224). French citizens feel abandoned by the politicians, who keep promising positive changes.

The industrial revolution led the working class to move to the cities due to job opportunities, but the affordability of accommodations has decreased over the years (Guilluy, 2005, pp.1-3). Therefore, the rural areas attract way more in Real State prices as car use became common, with 87% of French households owning one (Blavier, 2020, p.225). However, this new working class on the periphery and rural areas is the one that suffers the consequences of globalization the most (Guilluy, 2005, p.4). Most jobs are in the centers of the cities and enforce a daily migration and intensive use of the car by the lack of public transport in the rural areas. In the past ten years, the car has become a subject of worry concerning ecology and global warming. The gas tax increased drastically to reach 60% of the gas price in 2018 (Martin & Islar, 2020). The cities host the *bourgeoisie*, the wealthy, who can get on a train or a plane to leave to another place, and do not need a car. Therefore, the more nomadic higher classes' carbon footprint is less taxed than the carbon footprint of the sedentarised working class (Guilluy, 2018, p.65). The elites blamed global warming on the car, however much needed by the working class living in rural areas. Meanwhile, the elites enjoy taking the planes to travel, showing a form of oblivion to the real difficulties and denial of carbon footprint. The geographer Christophe Guilly (2018) denounces a *mépris de classe*, meaning "class contempt" (p.65).

## 2.4 Conclusion of Context Chapter

To conclude, the colonial history of the country and its consequential racism embedded in French culture led to the creation and the upkeep of violent and repressive police. This system works for the sake of the upper classes and at the expense of the lower classes. Further, the French government has revealed strong use of executive power in the past and the exaggerated application of the states of emergency, which has reduced individual freedom (Agamben, 2015). On the other hand, France has a long history of social movements, reshaping governments, laws, and human rights while keeping a similar power structure. Moreover, the last decades have witnessed many revolts from the lower classes, resulting in general disappointment and anger against the ruling class. In addition, media, owned by the country's wealthiest men, do not aim at the working class; instead of focusing on the higher spheres of society. Finally, French society has become increasingly divided over the years, creating more significant gaps between economic classes. A former thriving class that settled in the countryside faces debts and poverty. Thus, the Yellow Vests movement arose from this growing inequality, heated by the revolutionary dynamic of the French society and exacerbated by police repression.

# 3. Conceptual framework

This chapter will present the main concepts I use to answer the research questions. The main theoretical underpinnings of this analysis are Structural Violence, Social Identity Theory, and the concepts of Othering and Polarization. This chapter presents and explains how they are relevant within the frames of this thesis.

The chapter is divided into two large sub-chapters. The first part introduces the Structural Violence theory by the Norwegian scholar Johan Galtung. It seeks to understand the division of society from a macro-level understanding. It focuses on creating violence from a constructivist approach, as explained in the methodology chapter. I will present the different definitions of violence and society's role in maintaining violence. This part will also introduce the concept of policing subculture, explaining police brutality through psychological assessment. The second part focuses on the central concept of this thesis, Polarization, and presents different mechanisms of the social aspects of this phenomenon. It then shifts from macro-level to micro-level, giving more insight into Polarization from below. This chapter explains Social Identity Theory and then links it to class identity, as identity is often linked to the economy. Then, I discuss the limits of identity theory. Furthermore, I look at how people identify themselves impacts how they see others with the theory of Othering. Finally, through Othering, Demonization divides society.

## 3.1 Structural violence

### 3.1.1 The notion of Structural Violence

Scholars did not settle on only one definition of violence. Violence has always been among us, in everyday life, either in our private or public life, nationally or internationally (Walker, 2001, p.573). Violence is defined variously, perceived multifariously, and studied in diverse ways (H.Krauss, 2005). The definition of violence I choose to emphasize is the one Johan Galtung and his school of thought put forward (Galtung, 1969, 1990; Galtung & Höivik, 1971).

The Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung is one of the principal founders of the Peace Research Institute of Oslo in 1959 and the Journal of Peace Research creator in 1964. According to him (1969), violence "is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations" (p.168). In other words, he explains that violence is never the result of one individual but of more significant interactions that are not in the control of one individual. He created what is called Galtung's triangle, the violence triangle. This triangle explains how the three forms of violence defined by Galtung (1996), *Direct,*

*Structural*, and *Cultural Violence,* are interrelated. First, Direct Violence is the violence that can be seen and felt. It can be Security force attacks, terror attacks, mob violence, honor-based violence, torture, sexual violence, land grabbing, vandalism, or assault. Second, *Structural Violence* is defined as social injustice (Galtung, 1969, p.171). Finally, according to Johan Galtung, behavior, attitudes, and contradictions lead to conflict and enhance Structural Violence within a society (Galtung, 1996, p.72). It represents the systematic ways in which some groups are hindered from equal access to opportunities to goods and services that enable the fulfillment of basic human needs, like citizenship, justice, work, education, travel, clothes, and investments. These can be formal as a legal structure in law enforcement and policies that enforce marginalization, such as apartheid in South Africa. It can also be informal, like unwritten rules, such as limited access to education or health care for marginalized groups, as in the outskirts of Paris (Galtung, 1996).

Figure 1 is directly taken from Galtung's book (Galtung, 1969, p.173) and gives an understanding of the different existing violence in society, in all their forms. Both personal and Structural Violence can be either physical or psychological. The violence can also be intended or not. However, if the violence is not intended, the surroundings create it without purpose.
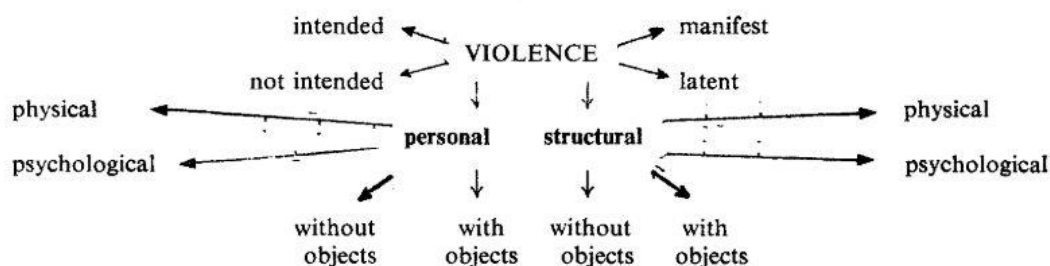


*Figure 1 A typology of violence, in "Violence, Peace and Peace Research" Johan Galtung, 1969, p.173.*

This Structural Violence takes a new turn with Paul Farmer. He insists that Structural Violence is created by political, economic, and social conditions that prevent people from fulfilling their full potential (Farmer, Nizeye, Stulac, & Keshavjee, 2006). He links the idea of Structural Violence with social injustice and the social machinery of oppression (Farmer et al., 2006). Indeed, Structural Violence creates barriers that prevent individuals or groups from enjoying rights and privileges enjoyed by other members of society. By working in Haiti, Paul Farmer (2009) concluded that the suffering people are often unaware of their deprivation, and this lack of awareness attests to the pervasive power of Structural Violence (p.23).

Discriminatory belief systems such as racism, patriarchy, and religious supremacy are based on Structural Violence. The power of habits and norms and the uncritical acceptance of these belief systems let Structural Violence exist and thrive. From a constructivist perspective, this is made possible by a long normalization system through institutions such as the education system,

the religious system, the media, and the family. Structural Violence can only exist if all groups take the norm for granted. For example, patriarchy also relies on women's consent as the dominated. For example, the idea that the man is strong and does physical jobs such as lifting weights, but the woman is caring and knows how to cook, clean, and take care of the children comes from patriarchy. Ronni Alexander (2018), a scholar in Peace Research, explains that patriarchy relies on accepting both genders to assume those roles and accepting the social hierarchy that subjugates women, making patriarchy the norm (p.16). Paul Farmer (2009) adds that capitalism and the domination of the upper class on the lower class rely on the same system of acceptance. Indeed, expressions such as "just a worker" or "mister nobody" are common in our vocabulary, without questioning them. All classes agree to their fate and thus participate in the Structural Violence that oppresses them.

Several thinkers developed how such Structural Violence could be embedded. Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist and communist of the XXth century, developed the concept of Hegemony. Hegemony, to Gramsci, is the "cultural, moral and ideological" leadership of a group over allied and subaltern groups (Gramsci, 1971, pp.44-51). Linking Gramsci's theory of Hegemony with Farmer's idea of Structural Violence and oppression leads to understanding Capitalism. Indeed, through time and people's consent, the elite class has established Structural Violence in Western societies and, therefore, in France, leading to oppression of the underprivileged. Johan Galtung (1969), a pioneer in Peace Studies, introduces the notion of the Conflict triangle in Social Science by defining three critical elements of violence to form the triangle. By this notion, Galtung explains the link between three different but interconnected spheres of violence. With my interpretation of the Violence Triangle, I reproduced a simplistic figure to understand the place of the three spheres of violence: Cultural Violence, explained below, Structural Violence, and Direct Violence.
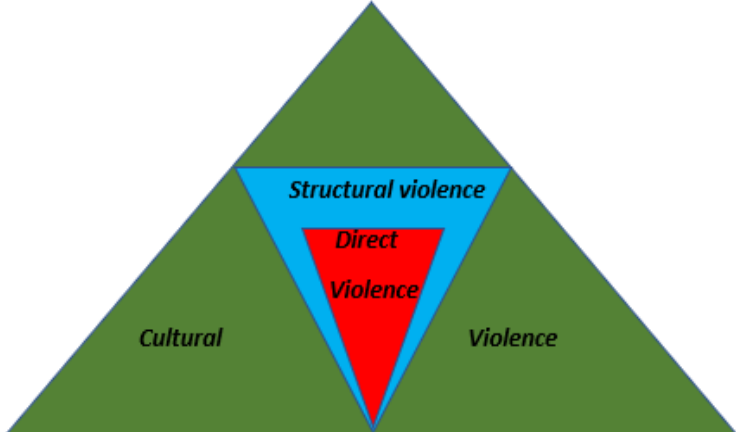


*Figure 2 Violence Triangle, a simplistic representation,* by Justine Valentin

This figure shows how violence creates instability in a society. As the triangle's base, the cultural narratives help hold the triangle of violence and allow the direct and Structural Violence to keep happening (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). Cultural narratives of violence are the attitudes, values, beliefs, and norms that make direct and Structural Violence seem natural, right, and acceptable. Johan Galtung (1990) calls it Cultural Violence. A strong example of Cultural Violence that comes from the African slave trade is the belief that Africans are inferior and primitive compared to the European Caucasians. Galtung's understanding of Cultural Violence helps explain how beliefs can become so embedded in a culture that they function as absolute, inevitable, and are passed down through generations. Cultural Violence makes Direct and Structural Violence legitimate by the psychological mechanism of internalization. Thus, violence evolves around "two problems: the use of violence and the legitimation of that use" (Galtung, 1996, p.196).

The triangle of violence can be assimilated into an iceberg, with Direct Violence at it tip, being the only violence overtly visible. As a result, underlying factors such as coercion, fear, and repression are invisible, factors through which violence unfairly, invisibly, and cruelly reproduces itself over time and history.
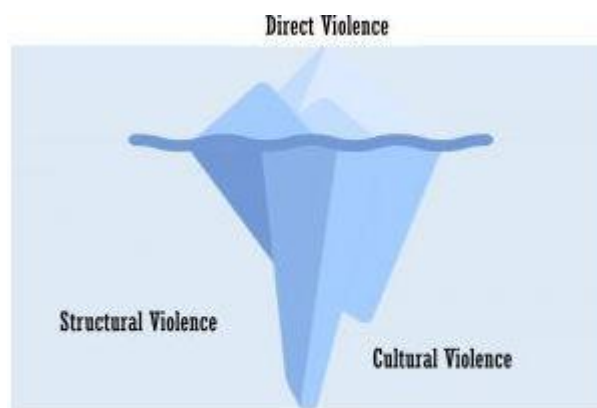


*Figure 3 Violence Triangle of Johan Galtung as an iceberg in
Context of Conflict Theory by Kalpalata Dutta*

### 3.1.2 Criticism around Structural Violence

Although this research is written from a constructivist perspective, it is essential to acknowledge and consider other schools of thought. According to Winter, a positivist associate professor (Winter, 2012), Structural Violence has failed to appeal to most social science theorists because it tends to neglect the specific differences and historical variations within forms of injustice, their intersections, and how they are associated. For example, it puts slavery, racism, sexism,

colonialism, class domination, and others into the same category. Therefore, positivist scholars link violence with visibility and actions attributed to a person (p.196). This positivist definition of violence ignores the invisible forms of violence and suits the scientific approach to social research, which argues for clear causal relations that can be proved empirically. Positivist scholars tend to restrict violence to the intentional, direct and visible, ignoring invisible harm such as psychological violence and the life-lasting consequences it can have (p.196). Winter acknowledges that this is a purely methodologically driven understanding of violence.

Nevertheless, when discussing genocides and crimes against humanity, as the results of Structural Violence, Winter and the positivist school explain that it is immoral to say that this violence is invisible. Instead, they explain that violence committed within societies is allowed by general indifference (p.198), bad faith, and misrecognition (Scheper-Hughes, 2004). This aspect of the positivist approach is interesting to associate with the constructivist approach. Indeed, both seek to understand the reasons for existing (in)human behaviors.

Because this research is based on a constructivist approach, I will defend the idea that Structural Violence is created and constructed by societies over a long period of time. It is deeply embedded in the structure and culture of one society and becomes invisible to members of this society. However, Structural Violence is always revealed by the visible piece of the iceberg. This visible tip of the iceberg represents the violence we can see - Physical Violence. Moreover, some members of society may become aware of some specific aspects of Structural Violence and denounce it, making it visible. They can be termed as whistleblowers, such as the independent journalists in the YV crisis. As this violence becomes visible, some will take the stance of denial, others of indifference, and others yet of indignity.

### 3.1.3 Policing subculture

Structural Violence creates unconsciously different subcultures. In sociology, Zheng Chen describes culture as everything socially learned and shared by a group of people in a society (Chen, 2016, p.12). The term subculture describes the variation between groups in a given society. All subcultures belong to a broader culture that embraces a similar wider social culture and shares several distinctive values, norms, and lifestyles. They not only identify with their unique subculture group but also interact with the other subcultures that compose the dominant culture. For example, police officers are part of the police subculture but belong to the broader French culture; therefore, they share French norms and values first and police norms and values as a subcategory. Subcultures are fascinating to study as they differ between nationalities, occupations, and the small distinct group we feel we belong to (p.43).

In this research, when writing about Structural Violence in France, I endeavor to explain how police brutality came into place and its reasons by looking into police subculture. The criminal justice researcher Courtney Franklin suggests that subcultures are characterized not only by suspiciousness, cynicism, and clannishness but also by hyper-masculinity (Franklin, 2005, p.13). The role of the police officer is built on images, such as movies, where the police officer is strong, fast, and violent. This violence is seen as a legitimate method of stopping crime, and he is praised as a hero. For a long time, being a police officer was considered a man's job (Rigouste, 2012, p.37). The patriarchal structure had decided that this job was too dangerous and physical for a woman, showing the underlying premise that this job requires violence. In France, only in 1979 were women allowed to work as police officers, then called "peacekeepers" (Body-Gendrot, 2010, p.664).

Furthermore, the police subculture is characterized by a strong respect for authority, valued experience, and hierarchy (Franklin, 2005, p.26). The respect for hierarchy in the police is solid, especially in the *gendarmes'* units, making the given order unquestionable. The articulations of policing subculture express an essential focus on machismo, honor, and the attendant desire to reassert status and power when questioned. The police officers' community enhances behaviors of superiority, but not only. They are also encouraged to view themselves as soldiers in an unwinnable war against inner-city crime, heroïcally doing everything they can to fight crime (Rigouste, 2012).

This research often mentions "police violence" or "police brutality." Within the scope of Social sciences, both terms characterize the violent acts carried out by police officers towards other people while carrying out their duties. It defines illegitimate violence, meaning, in this research, the use of force made outside the framework defined by law. According to Robert Paul Wolff (1969), legitimate violence does not exist. Violence is voluntary and has the purpose of physically or psychologically hurting the other. He writes that "the myth of legitimacy is the only efficient means available to the state for achieving that coordination" (p.604). In other words, he explains that making violence legitimate allows the state to justify its actions through the Hegemony of its discourse.

### 3.1.4 Positive Peace

After observing so much violence, direct, structural, or cultural, in the world, Johan Galtung set out to research peace and how it could be achieved. According to him, peace research should deal with a narrow vision of ending or reducing violence and seek to understand the necessary conditions for preventing violence (Galtung, 1996). He thus created the terms Negative and Positive Peace, which were introduced in the Editorial of the founding edition of the *Journal for*

*Peace Research* in 1964. Furthermore, he claims that the nature of peace is directly linked to the nature of violence. Therefore, by introducing Structural Violence, Galtung introduced the notions of Negative and Positive Peace (Galtung, 1969, p.183). *Negative Peace* is the end of direct or personal violence. As a result, visible peace is there, but the structure that led to the armed conflict has not changed. On the other hand, *Positive Peace* is the end of indirect violence, leading to the end of Structural Violence in society. The end of embedded violence thus creates a long-lasting peace, with agreements and tolerance, as people do not have prejudices and discriminations against each other.

Positive Peace is essential in this thesis because it emphasizes that using armed force and repression to achieve peace in a country is not a long-term solution. I will also explain how the Government has no interest in addressing the Structural Violence that exists and, therefore, no interest in creating Positive Peace. Further, I draw on the model of Positive Peace to try to solve issues from below while being aware that this process requires a lot of time.

## 3.2 Social Polarization

### 3.2.1 Polarization and Conflict

*Polarization* is a social phenomenon in which a population divides into belligerent groups with inherently differing beliefs and identities inherently different. The anthropologist Alexander Stewart described Polarization as an inhibitor of cooperation that undermines the pursuit of a common good (Stewart, McCarty, & Bryson, 2020, p.1). Joan-Maria Esteban and Debraj Ray define Polarization as a separate concept from inequality (Esteban & Ray, 1994, p.819). They understand the concept as the opposition of other "clusters" with very "dissimilar" attributes (p.819). Social and political Polarization also appears to go hand in hand with economic Polarization (Esteban & Schneider, 2008).

Polarization is often used in Conflict Theory, and both Polarization and fractionalization of society tend to affect the occurrence and intensity of conflicts (p.132). It is shown that the level and intensity of conflict increase with the magnitude of Polarization. However, due to the seemingly obvious concept of Polarization, there has been carelessness in applying the concept in the scientific community (p.133). Subsequently, Social Polarization is discussed in many issues, for example, by the economists Philip Keefer and Stephen Knack to explain income inequality (Keefer & Knack, 2002). The research emphasizes the significant impact of Polarization on political and economic development. Keefer and Knack argue that Social Polarization reduces growth by reducing the security of property and contract rights (pp.127-148). Social Polarization

is not only economical but can be defined politically. For example, in the United States of America, the range of political positions between party supporters has grown increasingly polarized along a single ideological dimension (Esteban & Schneider, 2008; Layman & Carsey, 2002).

Other Scholars studied the effect of Group Polarization. In 1969, two social psychologists, the Romanian-born French Serge Moscovici and the Italian-born Canadian Marisa Zavalloni investigated the power of the group as a polarizer of attitudes (Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969, p125-135). They suggest that individuals become more confident when joining a group if they feel supported by others and share the same opinions. Therefore, it often causes the most prevailing attitudes and opinions of the group members to become more extreme, leading to a stronger Polarization (p.132). The group dynamic strengthens the norms whereby a norm is understood as a generally accepted standard of behavior within a society, community, or group (Blackburn, 2005, p.255). Through their participation and involvement, the group members amplify individual normative attitudes and create a shift in the group norms.

Esteban and Schneider (2008) point out that social Polarization can happen through two different attitudes: "identification with other subjects within their own group of reference and distancing oneself from one or several other competing groups" (p.133). In other words, Polarization happens both by strengthening an inner identity and by a growing gap between this identity and the different identities. As Polarization mainly considers groups as the crucial actors, Esteban and Schneider (2008) understand that isolated individuals should have little weight in calculating Social Polarization. However, group behavior is enhanced by individual actions so that every individual can impact Social Polarization. Furthermore, a growing Social Polarization within a society arises as a result of identity problems (Çelik, Bilali, & Iqbal, 2017, p.217). Indeed, the Polarization of identities and the phenomenon of Othering discussed further are driving forces of Social Polarization.

### 3.2.2 Social Identity theory

*Social Identity Theory* as an approach to identity was developed in social psychology. Hogg and Abrams define identity as "people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others" (Hogg & Abrams, 1998, p.2). Following this definition, identity exists around similarities, differences, and feelings of belonging. In 1979, psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner brought up Social Identity Theory. Their central concept was that our social identity shapes our norms, attitudes, and behavior. Each identity and feeling of belonging can vary depending on multiple aspects, such as ethnicity, religion, skin color, hair color, gender, age, and generation.

Florian Coulmas, a German linguist, defines the different social identity theories developed by researchers (Coulmas, 2019). From a primordial understanding, one's identity is given from birth and is thus more fixed. Therefore, the identity of a person and a group is determined as one, fixed, and unchangeable feature, leading to certain social boundaries. On the contrary, a constructivist approach to identity, which is the approach of this study, sees identity as socially created through interactions between people (Wendt, 1994, p.385). For example, in the French podcast, *Kiffe ta race* ("Enjoy your race"), the animators, Rokhaya Diallo et Grace Ly, always ask the guest the following question: "What is your racial identity, and when did you start defining yourself that way?". Multiple black guests born in the French Overseas Departments and Territories (ODT or DOM-TOM in French) answer similarly, "I became black when I arrived in Metropolitan France. There I understood I was different" (Diallo and Ly, 2020). Therefore, being in a different place changed their identity, constructed by surroundings, interactions, culture, context, and society.

According to the German Linguist Florian Coulmas, Identity is a western product and part of the evolution of western culture (Coulmas, 2019, p.3). Indeed, the word does not have the same meaning in other languages. For example, in Chinese, "*identity*" refers to social and legal status. For the British sociologist Richard Jenkins, identification is a social process on three levels: individually, interactionally, and institutionally (Jenkins, 2014). The Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth is another researcher who, after studying ethnic identities, argued that identity is flexible over time rather than fixed (Jenkins, 2014, p. 121).

According to Barth, people always act in their interests (Coulmas, 2019, p.40). By contrast, the specialist in social psychology Henri Tajfel argued that group membership – even if it was only arbitrary assignation to a group under laboratory conditions – is sufficient to generate identification with that group. Therefore, this identification channels behavior in favor of the in-group and against out-group members (Jenkins, 2014, p.8). People follow the interests dictated by their in-group. For example, feminists will act in favor of feminism as they identify as part of this ingroup. Furthermore, the way society determines people has a strong bearing on how these people will define themselves. For example, overweight people are shamed by the tyranny of thinness and therefore are often not confident. In other words, society labeled them, and they feel that they belong to this label.

Social Identity Theory divides people into In-groups and Out-groups. The In-group of an individual is the unique group they identify with, and the much broader Out-group includes everything they do not identify themselves with. For example, a person identifying as French will be in the same In-group as all French citizens. As such, every foreigner will belong to the Out-

group of this individual. According to Henri Tajfel, people tend to emphasize the positive aspects within the In-groups and qualify them with positive adjectives (Turner & Reynolds, 2010, p.15). This social identity is thus constructed by the individual's self-image, the social category he belongs to, and the emotions attached to that membership (Hewstone & Cairns, 1996). In a polarized society, group members show identification with each other but feel socially or ideologically separated from the members of other groups (Esteban & Schneider, 2008, p.132).

Consequently, people also tend to enhance the negative aspects of the Out-group, potentially leading to inter-group discrimination and ethnocentrism. People attempt to make their in-group distinct from other groups through social comparison, which often highlights competitive In-group behaviors and creates in-group bias. This social behavior is called positive distinctiveness (Turner & Reynolds, 2010, pp.15-18). According to the psychological approach of Henri Tajfel, belonging to a group of similar identities can improve self-esteem, especially when adding positive characteristics to that group but negative attributes to the Outgroup. However, this approach has some limitations, as it sees the psychological mind of the individual, and its societal context as one, together and undifferentiated. Therefore, it has been criticized by anthropologists and sociologists, such as the psychologist John Turner, who calls it "positive distinctiveness theory" instead of Social Identity Theory (p.16). However, when considering the psychological weight of individuals and their identity definition, Social Identity Theory does not neglect society, context, and interactions.

Moreover, identities and group belonging are volatile and constantly changing. For example, a police officer interviewed for this research talked about the law enforcement actions with "we" but recalled the publicly criticized and unlawful acts of violence committed by police officers with "they." Thus, Nicholas Hirshon (2020) explains that the assimilation of the ingroup (we) and the outgroup (they) depends a lot if their characteristics and are viewed as being positive or negative. Furthermore, identity can shift depending on the political context, surroundings, and understanding. It can then serve as a factor for social movements when politicized. Historically, examples of social movements related to identity politics, such as the cleavage of left and right, gender, sexual orientation, or race, developed in the 1960s and 1970s, challenged the universal conceptions of citizenship in liberal democracies (Massoumi, 2016, p.11). For example, the Yellow Vests built a solid and new identity, bringing different people together to create a social movement. The British Sociologist Narzanin Massoumi describes various meanings of identity politics, but they are all connected to the feeling of oppression as a political mobilization factor. In other words, people unite under a similar identity when they feel their identities are threatened and oppressed and connect on the need to create change (p.22).

### 3.2.3 Class Identity

Since Roman public law, "class" distinguished citizens into several economic categories. Moreover, long before Marx, classical political economy, historiography, political science, and utopian socialists used "class" to describe property, work, income, rights, and political interests. According to Lenine, a person's social class defines their place occupied in production, which establishes a system of division of tasks and roles (Mondoux, 1983, p.835). Despite today's society not obeying all the same rules as during the feudal age, nor during Karl Marx's existence, the unwritten rules that exist are still known and respected by the members of the society. As Karl Marx wrote, "The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones" (Marx & Engels, 1848, p.1). These new oppressions are now perpetrated by the new bourgeoisie, the middle class. Less privileged than the upper-class but more prosperous than the workers, the middle class pulls the rope to stay on the side of the elite in a polarized society. This division is done at the expense of the lower-middle class, working-class, and lower class. In our modern class-based world, society is organized to meet the needs of the most powerful. For example, in contemporary capitalist society, employers hire workers to do work that produces profits for corporations rather than the inherent satisfaction of accomplishing and meeting their needs (Bhattacharya & Vogel, 2018, p.182).

The notion of privilege changes depending on the context and the surroundings. For example, a white worker living in the countryside is less privileged than a white executive but more privileged than a destitute black immigrant living on the outskirt of Paris. In this research, I use the terms privileged and underprivileged to refer to a person's social and economic opportunities. A disadvantaged person would be deprived of the opportunities privileged people have. The analysis of this research includes the lower class, the working class, and the lower-middle class. Here, the lower-middle-class (wealthy enough to buy a house and car in the countryside), are victims of the gas price rise and are the most deadlocked in the escalation of the taxes. They do not have enough income to afford luxuries and have fewer opportunities to climb the social ladder.

On the other hand, the privileged do not lack basic needs and have other privileges. The elite includes the upper-middle class who moved to the cities or the countryside with a high income. They represent political, economic, scientific, and technical knowledge. They do not have to worry about eating at the end of the month and can go on holiday often.

Individuals identify with different aspects, such as skin color, gender, and sports activities, but strongly with their social class. Indeed, the study of class identity has a strong tradition in

research on politics and inequality and pointed out by Geoffrey Evans, that most people in western countries believe in the legitimacy of social classes (Evans, 1997,p.219). These class labels are further enhanced by a country's economic situation, creating more inequality. However, studies show that most people in the western world identify as part of the middle class, especially when the political-economic situation is stable, leading to a dominant "middle class" consensus (Curtis, 2013; G. Evans, 1997; M. D. R. Evans & Kelley, 2004). This identification can be explained by the fact that many people cannot distinguish between classes. When explaining why they feel they belong to the "middle class," people tend to argue about their consumption capacities (such as having a car or a house) rather than production relations, wealth, or income (Clement & Myles, 1994; Curtis, 2013). This process has been called *embourgeoisement* and the sociologist Josh Curtis uses it as a common explanation for declining class consciousness, influenced by post-industrial economic change (Curtis, 2013, p.205). Indeed, class identity becomes less relevant when society is prosperous. As the society grows economically, the working class can consume more, leading to a positive economic growth cycle and shifting the working class to consider part of the "middle class." In short, the wealthier a society is, the more people would identify with the "middle class"(Clement & Myles, 1994; Curtis, 2013).

However, the less stable a society becomes, the more people identify with, the lower classes. Alexander J. Stewart, Nolan Mc Carty, and Joanna Bryson (2020) understand that economic declines can create changes in social behavior that trigger intra-group conflict along cleavages, such as classes. In this context, I identify five social classes in France: The Upper class, the Upper Middle Class, the Lower Middle Class, the Working Class, and the Lower Class. However, unlike McCosley (2016), who sees the middle class as class-neutral, I acknowledge the importance of capitalism on individual class. Since social and economic opportunities are inherent in the concept of class, the idea of the middle class as class-neutral appears to be a denial of what "class" stands for (Weiss, 2019, p.2).

In this research, class identity is a tool to understand how people identify as part of the same economic struggle. Europe knows a financial crisis with growing inflation and the gas price and taxes rise, but the salaries do not follow. In France, the people identifying with the "middle class" experienced more debt and saw a decrease in their privileges. As a result, they started questioning their class identity and blamed the government.

### 3.2.4 Limits of identity theory

Scholars may be worried about some weaknesses of Social Identity Theory. The theory has been criticized for viewing social identity only as of the primary motivator of intergroup discrimination

with only sporadic evidence. Jim Sidanus and Felicia Pratto defend the idea that Social Identity Theory does not address social power differences and goes against research that demonstrates outgroup favoritism. It also does not consider the historical context of outgroup oppression, such as slavery, torture, and mass murder. Rather than going against those critics, this thesis will use the theory where it has been proven to be constructive; in a political context. In the discussion, I will use Social Identity Theory to understand the rise of the movement and the determination of the Yellow Vests to fight against its government. Structural Violence Theory is used to fill up the deficiencies of Social Identity Theory. I will also add a concept used with Social Identity Theory: the concept of Othering**.**

### 3.2.5 Identity and the process of out-groups Othering

If identities can be created and re-created through social interaction, identification regards how one identifies and categorizes oneself and others (Jenkins, 2014; Turner & Reynolds, 2010). As discussed above, "Self-concept" or "self-categorization" is described as one's conception of who one is and who one is not. Social identity is generated by these social categorizations that divide into the in-group, "us," and the outgroup, "they" (in French, respectively, "*nous"* and "*eux"*). According to Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, an individual goes through three components when thinking about their identity: Social categorization, social comparison, and social identification. Richard Jenkins (2014) adds that behavior toward someone might be connected to label and, therefore, "enough to decide how to treat" the other (p.7). As discussed above, categorization of the out-group often contains negative aspects and thus leads to justification for oppression. Some critical dimensions of these classifications can become stereotypes, meaning the acceptance of the belief that someone belonging to a category of the out-group would hold certain traits (Jenkins, 2014). Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto (2001) observed how group identity could lead to the social dominance of one group over the other.

The out-group's stereotypes and categorization create the "other" and engender behaviors toward this "other." The notion of "other" as a construction opposing the "self" was introduced by Simone de Beauvoir (1949). However, the idea was influenced by the interpretive reflexivity of Hegel's dialectic of identification and distancing the self from others (Brons, 2015, p.69; Cole, 2004). Therefore, the idea of the "other" can be defined as "the one against which one defines oneself" (Cole, 2004, p.578). Hegel makes the distinction between "self-consciousness," where one sees themselves in the other, and "self-identification," when one excludes everything out of themselves as other (Brons, 2015, p.69). *Othering* is a process whereby individuals and groups are treated as negatively different and inferior from the dominant social group. Therefore, the other is

seen as "radically alien" (p.72). The theory of Othering was brought up in 1948 by French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (Erwin, 2019, p.7; Levinas, 1991). This theory is coined within post-colonial theory when analyzing the Othering of ethnic minorities (Jensen, 2011). Ayla Göl (2005) argues that national identities are socially constructed and inherently rational and that otherness becomes part of social imagination. The outgroups suffer discrimination, stereotypes, and prejudices, as is the case in our modern society for minorities such as women, divergent ethnic backgrounds, working-class people, LGBTQ+ community, or migrants (Çelik et al., 2017, p.218). The theory of Othering has been very relevant in Social Studies as a theoretical framework for explaining oppression (Erwin, 2019). The Theory of Othering is often applied in Social Science research, especially concerning race and how white people have justified the status difference between a white and a black person for so long. Drawing from various societies in human history that treated human beings as property, Orlando Patterson explains in his books *Slavery and Social Death* (1982) that humans and social relationships have a power dynamic. However, it is essential to understand slavery in the context of "post-slavery", studying black identity due to Otherness during colonization (Hartman, 1997). For the first time, Frantz Fanon highlights and embodies an understanding of how the dominant society's narrative of the Other can negatively impact the Othered (Erwin, 2019; Fanon, 1967).

Being part of a group helps the development of Othering and, as a group effect, has more significant consequences. As long as someone feels, either socially or psychologically, supported, one will put labels on other people and categories. Following Hewstone and Cairns, this research argues that the process of Othering might contribute to inter-group conflicts and be influenced by conflicts (Hewstone & Cairns, 1996). In Conflict Theory, challenging the idea of "us" versus "them" and addressing "us" as one and non-divided is pointed out as a way to reduce conflicts. Indeed, using "us" would help create shared goals and create a new group identity. Therefore, Social Identity is an essential aspect of Conflict Theory and highlights the political aspects of identity (Schlee, 2014).

### 3.2.6 Demonization of the Other: manufacturing monsters

The theory of Othering explains how this phenomenon of Othering can create fear. Kira Erwin argues that it can, for example, be used as a tool to prevent groups or individuals from gaining equality (Erwin, 2019, p.7). The most significant example in history is slavery and the justifications for its existence. Most research on Othering has focused on slavery, racism, and its consequences. The idea that equality between white and black would be a disaster, especially when framed in the context of the vulnerability of white womanhood, violence, and politics (with the idea of the

ineptitude of black elected officials), is the consequence of the phenomena of Othering during colonization and beyond. Indeed, to reach Black and White equality, subsequent generations received the message that black people were naturally violent and rapists who needed to stay in their place (Erwin, 2019, p.12).

Therefore, the theory of Othering can help us understand several mechanisms that conduct our society and behavior nowadays. This thesis uses this theory to understand how the government and the people in power used media to create national Othering of the Yellow Vests, creating fear by presenting them as monsters. Furthermore, the State delegitimized their actions and ideas by creating a negative image of them as troublemakers.

Beyer, Bockwoldt, Hammar, and Pötzsch find sociological explanations for monsterizing and demonizing others. According to them, it is due to "otherness, alterity, identity, marginalization and violence" (Beyer et al. 2019, p.11). In other words, people tend to demonize others by not connecting with others and feeling marginalized and completely different from others. Monsters are an extreme form of the other and the most despiteful. The monster always comes destructively but is consistently productive as a generator of violence (Beyer et al., 2019). This negative portrait leads to the *Demonization* of the other, meaning seeing the other as evil. The danger with or Demonization, is the dehumanization of the other. Demonization is a term used by several researchers, and is the term used in this research (Beyer et al., 2019; Coulmas, 2019; Erwin, 2019). However, other terms design the same sociological behavior, such as (Beyer et al., 2019) or vilification (Erwin, 2019). Not considered part of society, the person vilified might feel the weight of discrimination and stereotypes, leading to loneliness and anger. This situation can only worsen, and this person can stay in the given role of evil. For example, Hollida Wakefiel analysed the social reintegration of sex-offenders once they leave prison. Due to their past, they are isolated and ostracised, which is not conducive to a positive change of their behavior (Wakefield, 2006, p.2). In this study, it was also the case for the YV, who were vilified by the media, creating a feeling of marginalization, and a nonunderstanding of their place in the society called a loss of significance. A loss of significance appears when a person feels diminished and not listened to, as was the YV case. As a result, they reached a level of despair that encouraged them to act more violently.

The United States of America has shown in the past its ability to vilify others, for example, by making accusations against Iran's chemical weapons use in Syria and calling them "the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism" and "a thuggish police state, and a despotic theocracy" (Kovalik, 2018, p.155). After the United States of America invaded Afghanistan and Iraq and dropped two atomic bombs on Japan, to name a few atrocities, it is interesting to study the double standard

between how one sees the "crimes of others" compared to one's crimes. UN ambassador Nikki Haley declared in 2017 that "the fight against Iranian aggression is the world's fight." (p.148). Subsequently, this demonization of Iran gained international recognition and became part of the transnational imaginary. Here, the purpose of Demonization is that the idea of the *other* as *evil* becomes a new truth, accepted without question by society.

In this thesis, the concept of *Demonization* can apply to both sides. First, the views of the State and some members of the police see the YV as trouble makers and monsters who want to ruin the Republic. Secondly, many YV dehumanized the police, seeing them as government pawns much like Stormtroopers in Star Wars (George Lucas, 1997), not capable of emotions nor questioning.

## 3.3 Conclusion of the conceptual chapter

This thesis analyses the Yellow Vests movement through different concepts. From a constructivist approach, Structural Violence seeks to understand the context of this violence and how it is an integrated part of society. Social Polarization highlights the growing division between different groups or social classes in French society. Furthermore, the Social Identity Theory explains the understanding of people's group belonging. The Theory of Othering helps understand people's behavior against one another, as belonging to different groups and negatively characterizing the outgroups. Further still, Demonization puts a concept on the practice of the government toward a social movement to destabilize it and make it lose legitimacy in the eyes of the rest of the population. Finally, the Yellow Vests go further than Othering and completely dehumanize the police officers.

# 4. Methodology Chapter

This research aims to investigate Structural Violence and Polarization in France during the Yellow Vests crisis using these research questions:

- What has been the media's impact on the Polarization of the French society during the Yellow Vests movement?

- How has Structural Violence shaped the different identities of French society during the Yellow Vests movement?

- How did the different actors perpetuate and emphasize the Polarization of French society during the Yellow Vests movement?

This chapter seeks to explain the approach, the design, the methodology, the methods and the doubts in answering these research questions.

## 4.1 Research design

### 4.1.1 A qualitative and constructivist approach

In Social Sciences, scholars distinguish two different approaches to research: Quantitative and Qualitative research. This paper will only use a qualitative approach. This approach tends to be concerned with words rather than numbers, in opposition to the quantitative approach. The Qualitative method has a long history in its definition (Bryman, 2012), as every researcher works differently and uses different methods within the qualitative approach to lead a study. Researchers such as Silverman (p.381) would not give a precise definition; however, three features are particularly noteworthy.

First, this research method has an inductive view of the relationship between theory and research. The analysis starts with the observations, leading to conclusions and theories at the end of the study. Second, the epistemological position of qualitative research is described as interpretivism. It means that, in qualitative research, the scientist interprets the data by trying to understand its meanings. Third, in opposition to natural science, qualitative research fosters an understanding of the social world by examining the interpretation of that world by the study participants (p.381).

This study takes an ontological and an epistemological perspective (p.528). In analyzing data, a researcher's position is situated within an ontological perspective concerning what is true or accurate and the nature of reality. In this study, the ontological perspective is constructivism, which claims that the knower makes the world in which he lives and believes. Epistemology is the

philosophical study of the nature, origins, and limits of human knowledge (p.399). Therefore, social constructivism is the epistemic perspective taken in this research. Social constructivism advocates that what we experience is not predetermined but is fluid and affected by the surroundings (Morales-l, 2019, p.14). Therefore, social phenomena are under constant revision because of the pluralism of perceptions and interpretations. In other words, the discursive process involves constructing a meaningful relationship with each actor's subjectivity, emotions, actions, and surroundings. From an epistemological perspective, social constructivism is concerned with how we know and develop meaning. It asserts that knowledge is specific to cultural and historical contexts, and the focus of research should thus be on interactions, processes, and social practices. Thus, social constructivism points out phenomena and explains how they are socially constructed, their origin, the historical and cultural location, and the situation of that construction (Young & Collin, 2004). Furthermore, it describes how social processes and relational practices construct the social world. This thesis is built on a constructivist approach holding that people in society actively create their knowledge and that reality is therefore determined by the experiences of each individual, meaning that concepts such as social class, policing, and privacy are socially constructed.

### 4.1.2 Triangulation

One of the central goals of any research is to maintain strong internal and external validity and reliability across the study. The more data and methods a researcher uses, the more thorough, legitimate, and reliable the research and its results can be. This is what Denzin calls triangulation (Denzin, 2010, 2012; Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). Denzin (2012) noted that triangulation involves employing multiple data collection methods concerning the same object of study. Triangulation helps increase the reliability of the study in comparison to studies that only utilize a single method. There are various forms of triangulation depending on how the specific research is conducted and the results the researcher attempts to uncover. In this academic research, I will use a Triangulation technique within the qualitative method, in opposition to the triangulation technique that uses both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Qualitative research is based on human beings and human behaviors, and researchers are aware that their personal history cannot be separated from their interpretive analysis. That is why, to gain reliability, triangulation and mixed methods are essential. Denzin calls the aware scientists *Bricoleurs*: "The interpretive bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by the personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity of the people in the setting" (p.85). Qualitative research scholars should change the world by engaging in ethical work that makes a positive difference (p.21).

In this research, I used two different sets of data, which will serve as a more precise analysis of the situation by triangulation. First, I analyzed the Macro-level through Critical Discourse analysis of newspaper articles. Then I focused on the micro-level by analyzing semi-structured interviews of different analyzed actors: Yellow Vests, Police officers, Independent Journalists, and politicians. To define a time frame for the study, I decided to analyze the movement at its most reactive. Therefore, the research was limited from November 17[th,] 2018, *Acte I,* to March 30th 2019, *Acte XX.* I decided to use both methods for the legitimacy of the research and because I consider them inseparable due to their influence on each other.

## 4.2 The Macro-level: the newspapers' articles

People's opinion about a movement is never based only on direct, on-site experience but also on outside information, in this case, the media. The following part explains how was led the macro-level data collection.

From a macro-level perspective, the purpose was to get an insight into the Polarization of society on a national level. To do so, I selected six newspapers from different political standpoints. *L'humanité* (extreme-left), *Libération* (left), *Le Monde* (center-left), *Le Figaro* (center-right), *Le Point* (right) and *Present* (extreme right). *L'Humanité, Libération, Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* are daily papers, meaning that they publish everyday, *Le Point* and *Présent* are weekly newspapers. First, I differentiate mainstream media from polarizing media, whereby mainstream media refers collectively to the various large mass of conventional news media. These are concentrated under similar ownership, meaning that homogenizing viewpoints are presented to the readers (Médias francais, 2021). They influence many people as most people regard them as reliable and reflect and shape prevailing currents of thought. In this study, the mainstream media are *Libération, Le Monde, Le Figaro* and *Le Point.* On the contrary, polarizing media do not follow a general guideline but express strong political opinions. In this study, *L'Humanité* is a polarizing media from the extreme left wing, and *Présent* is a polarizing media representing the extreme right wing. All six newspapers are national newspapers. Moreover, the newspapers studied were more likely to have an impact on French citizens as I chose some of the most read newspapers in the country (Classement diffusion, 2021).

After going through many articles, I chose the ones that discussed the major riots I focus on: *Actes I, II, III*, for a strong start of the movement, but also the *Acte IV*, on December 1st, as it is the invasion of the *Arc de Triomphe* by the Yellow Vests. The *Acte V,* on December 8th, is a landmark for the police violence, as a record of wounded is registered in the Yellow Vests' camp. On January 5th 2019, demonstrators fought against police forces and created different reactions in

the media sphere, as is the case for Christophe Dettinger, a boxer that fought an officer. Further, the *Acte XVIII* on March 16th, 2019, is crucial for both camps, as the YV vandalized the *Champs* Elysée (see Appendix D) and many fancy stores and restaurants, such as the *Fouquet's.* Finally, several newspapers mentioned the controversial case of the brutal charge of the police in Nice, and the consequences on Geneviève Legay, who was seriously hurt, on March 23rd, *Acte XIX*. The choice of articles was oriented towards the themes approached. I selected the ones mentioning events, violence (from both sides), and consequences. I analyzed thirty-five articles: seven articles from *L'Humanité*, five from *Libération*, five from *Le Monde,* seven from *Le Figaro*, four from *Le Point*, and seven from *Présent* (see Appendix E)*.*

After collecting the data, the articles were stored on software and analyzed. The software I used was Nvivo 12. It is a program that helps researchers organize, analyze and visualize the informations and data. It can upload different audio, photos, Word Documents, and PDF documents. I read the articles several times on this software. Then, I organized different codes in which I classified sentences to lead a Critical Discourse Analysis (which I explain in the following section). It is important to note that this research is not concerned with other media genres, such as the television, the radio, the cinema, which reduces the study to understand a small part of the picture.

## 4.3 The micro-level: the semi-structured interviews

After focusing on the macro-level, the research also conducts an analysis at the micro-level, meaning a study at the individual scale. The semi-structured interview is one interview method used in qualitative research. Unlike unstructured interviews, Semi-Structured Interviews use an interview guide with prepared questions. It is, however, much less specific than a structured interview scheduled. The interview guide can have some main questions, but it can also only use keywords about essential themes that must be addressed in the interview (see Appendix G).

### 4.3.1 Recruitment

I conducted fifteen Semi-Structured Interviews from January to June 2021, all over the phone. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The informants had to fulfill several criteria. First, all of the informants of the study were adult French citizens. Second, I divided the informants into four categories to answer the research questions: Yellow Vests, Journalists, Police, and Politicians. For informants to fit into the category of the Yellow Vests, the informants were required to have participated in at least two demonstrations of the YVM in one city and identified themselves as being part of the movement. For the category of journalists, I could only interview

informants that were independent journalists. However, they had to be the titular of an official press card and have covered several YV protests with a camera. For the police forces, the same applied. Only police officers and *gendarmes* who witnessed and dealt with the demonstrations were interviewed. Finally, the politician informants should have occupied a political position during the YVM, but not necessarily have participated in the protests. However, I was limited to only interviewing city counselors or city mayors, who did not have much decision-making power during the studied crisis. I still decided to name those informants "politicians" because they are part of a decision-making process at the scale of a town. However, they represent both the ruling and upper classes in the research. Indeed, they are all part of the upper middle class and do not identify with the needs of the YV.

For the research, I wanted to perform physical semi-structured interviews. However, leading discussions in the Coronavirus crisis context was impossible. Therefore I had to approach people online. To find Yellow Vests members who would agree to talk to me, I posted an announcement on several Yellow Vests Facebook pages, explaining who I was, what I was studying, and why I wanted to talk to some of them. Unfortunately, several of the reactions were hostile, with comments such as "leave us alone" and "why do you, journalist, always have to put your nose where you do not belong," showing a misunderstanding of my aims and fear of polemic.

The task of finding different police officers to interview was even more complicated. For weeks I called various police stations in vain. I presented myself, who I was and what I was doing, but as soon as I explained the thesis research, the answer was always, "we cannot express our opinion about it." Indeed, police officers in France have a *devoir de réserve* translated as "duty of confidentiality." It means that police officers can have an opinion but cannot express it. However, some calls ended with another phone number recommended to call. After months of struggle, I ended up interviewing four police officials. With mutual trust created after a few days or weeks of emails, I was ultimately able to have almost two hours with every one of them.

Lastly, interviewing politicians also created several complications. I first called many desks at the national level and was declined every time. Finally, I contacted the regional level and was able to speak with three local politicians. To solicit interviews during the Covid-19 was a big challenge for this thesis to be realized, but the insights gained after finally talking to the participants were well worth the struggle.

### 4.3.2 Participants

I interviewed five Yellow Vests members, three Journalists, four within the Police forces (three *gendarmes* and one police officer), and three politicians. The participants were diverse, varying in

age and gender. However, the average age was 40 years old, with an average for the Yellow Vests of 35 years old and for the politicians of 52 years old. Though gender is not explicitly addressed in the study; it is interesting to note that I interviewed nine men and six women.

The interviews were recorded with the explicit consent of the informant. Afterward, I transcribed the interviews, which fit into between eight and twelve pages, and sent them back to the informants for a review. Informants were allowed to withdraw, clarify their answers or add new statements until the submission date of the thesis. Only one informant came back to me with minor changes.

To respect anonymity, I created new code names for each participant. Because this research is carried out with human beings, I felt assigning them a number would dehumanize them. That is why I decided to give them a code name. Every participant has been given a French name, starting with a "V" for the Yellow **V**ests (Virgil, Virginie, Vincent, Valérie), beginning with a "J" for the **J**ournalists (Jean, Judith, Julia), with a "P" for the **P**olice forces (Philippe, Pierre, Patrice, Pauline), and a "R" for the Politicians (Robert, Romane, Rémi). The choice of the letter R is due to the fact that it is the following letter of P in the alphabet. It can also stand for **R**ich, for simplistic and differentiation purposes. For more information, a table presenting the different participants is available in the Appendix E (see table 7).

After receiving and assembling all interviews, I uploaded them to Nvivo 12 in Word format to perform the Critical Discourse Analysis.

### 4.3.3 The relevance of semi-structured interviews

I used semi-structured interviews for several reasons. First, I did not feel comfortable preparing everything at the risk of appearing robotic. Moreover, it is important to understand the distress a participant may feel and cope with their needs and interests (as was the case with most Yellow Vests and Police Officer participants). Second, this format allows the interviewee to stray from the main topic and address issues the researcher would not have thought about, potentially giving new insights (Bryman, 2012). Subsequently, I could get information about topics I had not asked about, such as police violence in poor neighborhoods. Although this research does not treat racism and sexism directly, the participants often mention it. Moreover, the semi-structured interview also allowed for a follow-up of the discussion and asking random questions.

But beyond giving greater flexibility for both researchers and informants, semi-structured interviews also allow going beyond surface appearances and permit greater sensitivity to the contexts surrounding informant assertion (Bryman, 2012, p.212). It is interesting to be aware that, when dealing with sensitive topics, such as police violence, for both parties, participants tend to be

ambiguous due to their overwhelming emotions. There is no rush to ask the following question in a semi-structured interview or change the subject. Therefore, I could pause the conversation and allow the study participants to express their doubts and fear. I also reassured them that at any moment, they could withdraw or tell me not to include one part of the conversation in the transcript and the analysis, though none of them did. Lastly, such sensitive research needs to make the place of study (in this case, the semi-structured interviews over the phone) a safe place where the participant does not feel judged so that they can talk openly (R. M. Lee & Renzetti, 1990).

## 4.4 Critical Discourse Analysis

After being collected, the data needed to be analyzed. If the six layers of intertextuality helped analyze the data, a form of discourse analysis is required to interpret it. To do so, I used the Critical Discourse Analysis method to analyze both the articles and the interviews. This method has been developed and extended by several scholars. In this study, I focus on Gramsci's theory of Hegemony, reappropriated by Laclau and Mouffe's political theory, with the study of the interaction of hegemony and discourse. Finally, I use the application of Critical Discourse Analysis developed essentially by Norman Fairclough.

### 4.4.1 Theory of hegemony: Antonio Gramsci

Antonio Gramsci was an Italian Marxist and Communist who lived from 1891 to 1937 and was imprisoned by Mussolini from 1926 to 1935. During this incarceration time, the Marxist philosopher wrote the *Prison Notebooks,* first published in 1948, where he contributed to the theory of ideology and developed the ideas of "hegemony" and of "manufacture of consent" (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci stemmed from the Marxist notion of society and, like Marx, explained that the ruling classes who control society also control its political and primary ideological institution. He explains that political leadership is based on the consent of the population. This consent is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world-view of the ruling class (pp.44-52). In other words, the underprivileged, or the proletariat of Marxist theory, consent to being ruled by the ruling class.

"Hegemony" is, therefore, the process by which the ruling classes disseminate their ideas and gain the consent of the lower classes. By living their daily lives, the working class consents to be ruled by the ruling class by "hegemony" (p.12). The hegemonic power is understood to be more of an implicit "common sense" rather than an official and coherent body of thoughts, "which is inherently unfinished and historically contingent" (Stoddart, 2007, p.203). It is to be applied in people's everyday life "through the mundane activities connected with work, school, the family and the church, that secures the consent of capital's subaltern classes" (p.203). Hegemony is thus

an ongoing and never-ending process. It is crucial to understand that the theory of Hegemony is not based on coercion - the fact of imposing the power by force - but on consent (Fairclough, 1995, p.67). It can be understood as a battle between ideologies won by the ones that become widely accepted in society. For example, Capitalism is an ideology taken for granted in the Western World, which establishes a ruling class *bourgeoisie* at the expense of the working class, the lower class, which Gramsci refers to as "subaltern classes" (Gramsci, 1971, p.44), classes that consent to this ruling ideology.

### 4.4.2 Laclau and Mouffe's contributions to discourse analysis

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe draw on Gramsci's theory of Hegemony to analyze critical discourses. For Laclau and Mouffe, a discourse is an articulation without fixed meaning. An ongoing contingent movement is an element in a given moment with the given circumstances (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2012; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, pp.7-42). They understand the power of the discourse, its consequences on social movements, and its impact on people's lives and their understanding of the world. Laclau and Mouffe's political theory is already a discourse analysis in a Foucaultian sense.

Laclau and Mouffe drew on Gramsci's conclusion and observed that the elite, everywhere in the world, maintain power through ideology. After Gramsci, the sociologist Mark Stoddart explains that hegemonic power convinces individuals and social classes to subscribe to a system or structure's social values and norms. Those hegemonic discourses are taken for granted by most of the population. They are so powerful that they are no longer recognized as construction and are even described as "common sense" (Stoddart, 2014, p.201). Hegemony gives only one lens to see reality and makes people believe that they have freedom of opinion. Hegemony works as a soft power and slowly dictates people what to believe. When the values and the norms propagated by elites become accepted by citizens as "common sense," doctrine provides legitimacy for those in power, allowing them to maintain their privileges. Hegemony can serve the interest of those who understand how to use it. If it is used today by the ruling class, social movements can also manipulate it to reach social changes (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, pp.7-42). According to Laclau and Mouffe, Social Change requires a discourse to frame power inequality as oppression.

But hegemonic discourses are fragile and always in movement and are likely to change if they enter in contact with antagonist discourses, then becoming a discursive struggle. The discursive struggle can be seen when hegemony breaks down the actors within society and tries to promote a new way of organizing society, developing a new social practice, responding to a problem differently, or changing how a topic is viewed.

### 4.4.3 Critical Discourse Analysis as a method: Fairclough's theory

The linguist and socialist political activist Noam Chomsky designated the media as the main actors in manufacturing consent in the population as a form of propaganda (Chomsky, 2002). In 1992, Chomsky presented his thoughts in a movie, *Manufacturing consent.* He explained how the mass media works against democracy's best interests, as they do not spread the reality but instead a biased reality favoring the most powerful. Furthermore, he argued that the leading media corporation selectively chooses what to cover to benefit personal agendas and retain the ruling class's power (Chomsky 1992).

In 1971, in *Orders of Discourse*, Michel Foucault introduced the method of discourse analysis from a poststructuralist perspective, emphasizing power relationships in society as developed through language and practices (Foucault, 1971). Additionally, he brought the idea forward that each critical analysis will depend on each individual leading the research (Graham, 2005). Norman Fairclough took Foucault's theory forward by analyzing that discourses express control strategies by identifiable actors within a given historical and institutional context (Fairclough, 2013). He argues that the ideology of mainstream media parallels the doctrine of the powerful, resorting to Gramsci's concept of hegemony, intertwined with Chomsky's designation of the media's power to manufacture consent in the population (Fairclough, 2013, pp.56-69). Fairclough insists that the media participate in a domination "from above" (Fairclough, 1995, p.67). Hegemony emphasizes the importance of ideology in achieving and maintaining relations of power (Fairclough, 1995). CDA understands that actors are commonly embedded in the discourse against one another or draw on multiple discourses (Fairclough, 2013). It is particularly relevant in this thesis because the analyst examines how specific forms of text and speech produce their own versions of a social issue, problem, event, or context (Tonkiss, 2012, p.407). According to Fairclough, text analysis is central to media analysis but must be coupled with analyzing their production and consumption. Consumption is divided between interpretation, the analyst's understanding of a text, its impact on readers, and reception, that is, the readers' thoughts about their interpretation (Fairclough, 1995, p.11).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) builds on social constructionist assumptions through the interaction of the producer, the text, and the consumer, providing a critical framework (Mullet, 2018, p.124). CDA uses discourse analytic techniques combined with a critical perspective to interrogate social phenomena. Through CDA, Fairclough explains that language always has a purpose and produces and moderates social phenomena. It reveals the reproduction of power relationships and structures of inequality. CDA does not have a single set of theories or methods and can thus solve issues with different methods or theories. CDA primarily deals with the

discourse of power abuse, injustices, and inequality, attempting to uncover implicit or concealed power relations and explain how these are in practice or how they are reproduced in daily life through political and media discourses controlled by elite groups (Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1986). It thus understands strategies such as legitimation, manipulation, and other discursive methods, to influence the people in the interest of the elite. Moreover, CDA draws its analysis with intertextuality, meaning that texts, while reading alone, are part of a chain of texts reacting to, reshaping, reproducing, and transforming other texts and discourses (Fairclough, 2013, p.59). Thus, texts and spoken discourses can take us to appreciate a broader political context and its implications.

### 4.4.4 Critical Discourse Analysis as a Method: intertextuality

As discussed above, discourse is a way of exercising power; it can be speech, text, and media, and can use power to influence the ways of knowing, experiencing, and valuing the world; it reflects and creates ideologies, power differentials, gender models, or social relationships (Chomsky, 2002; Fairclough, 2013; Fairclough, Wodak, & Mulderrig, 1997; Foucault, 1971; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Mullet, 2018). Many theorists in CDA present their general principles in their terms. This thesis, among other research, explores the discursive construction of identity and power relations through discourse.

The most widely cited view is Fairclough and Wodak's (1997) eight principles of CDA. These principles emphasize the role of CDA in addressing social problems, the fact that power relations are discursive, and that discourse constitutes society and culture. Furthermore, discourse is historical, a form of social action, and does ideological work. Finally, discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory, and the link between text and society is mediated (Fairclough et al., 1997).

Bazerman distinguishes different levels of textuality, how the text is linked together and how it is linked to other texts. It is called intertextuality (Bazerman, 2003). He identifies six levels of intertextuality that emerge in a text: prior text as a source of meaning to be used at face value, explicit social dramas of previous texts engaged in discussion, background, support, and contrast, beliefs, issues, ideas, statements generally circulated, recognizable kinds of language, phrasing, and genre, and resources of language (Bazerman, 2003, p.87). He pointed out that such levels of intertextuality can be recognized through specific techniques that represent the words and utterances of others. Starting with the most explicit, these include: direct quotation, indirect quotation, mentioning of a person, document or statement, comment or evaluation on a statement, text, or otherwise invoked voice, using recognizable phrasing, the terminology associated with

specific people or groups of people or particular documents, using language and forms that seem to echo particular ways of communicating, discussions among other people, types of documents (p.88).

To detangle the texts' meaning, Bazerman advises separating the lectures into six layers of intertextuality. First, the text can draw on prior texts to induce value (1), then, it can draw explicit social drama (2), it can use background, support, and contrast (3), but also rely on beliefs, issues, ideas, statements generally circulated (4). Further, the text uses recognizable language, phrasing, and genre (5) and relies on the available language of the period (6) (pp.86-88). Each lecture corresponded to a level of intertextuality. I separated the different levels and organized them in codes in the software, which allowed me to link articles according to the themes, emphasis, goals, and implicit and explicit messages. The six layers of textuality formed a web of information about each article that could isolate the most crucial aspects of the research.

## 4.5 Research considerations
### 4.5.1 Reflexivity
In Social Sciences, it is essential to reflect on one's work, as it is not a precise science but always comes with subjectivity. There are several points of reflexivity to consider in this project, which I develop in this section.

First, engaging with human beings is not an exact science and has several limitations that can potentially result in unreliable or unusable data (R. M. Lee & Renzetti, 1990; Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1986). One of the significant concerns about interviews is that, as human beings, our reactions vary depending on many factors. The tone and expressions used by the researcher can therefore play a role in the participants' answers (Y. O. Lee & Lee, 2012). As Raymond Lee explains it, this has given rise to persistent objections on the reliability of interviewing. If interviewers do not consider the human factors, different interviewers get different results. Raymond Lee explains how it is critical to create a climate in the interview that will encourage the interviewee to be frank. It should not ask questions with underlying judgment, as this could create confusions between the interviewee's identity and the questions. Such techniques are called "randomized responses"(p.42). When talking about sensitive topics, the participants might shape their answers depending on their expectations about the future texts and audiences, trying to foresee their role in the study, therefore, censuring their responses. This phenomenon is called self-censorship (Briggs, 2011, p.6). Moreover, participants can start identifying with the researcher and giving solutions that would satisfy the study. Many participants, unfamiliar with the concept of a master's thesis, confused me with a journalist and kept asking which newspaper I was going to

publish the interview. That is why I needed to clarify at the beginning of each interview the purpose of this research and its context: a master's thesis in Norway written in English.

Second, as a French white woman studying in Norway, I have many privileges. In this thesis, those privileges were notable regarding the interviews conducted. The participants were keener on sharing their stories with me than if I was a foreigner working for the press. Briggs emphasizes the social dynamics of interviews and the social context in which they occur. Both the roles and power dynamics of the researcher and the participant saturate the interview (Briggs, 2011). Therefore, it is clear that the fact that I was a 24 years old French student from Norway impacted this research. This study also gave a tonality of formality for some participants, who thus took a very serious position. Moreover, my status as a student and their status as activists, journalists, police officers, or politicians played a role in the interviews, reflecting the power dynamics of society as a whole. This affected the questions I asked and how the participants responded to them.

Third, as a woman, my position when talking to a male participant, who used violence as a police officer or a YV, was not neutral. One participant told me, "those stories are not for a young woman like you," showing the widespread sexist assumption that women cannot handle violence, but men can. In addition, some participants talked to me as if I was innocent and fragile, which likely would not have been the case if I had been a man.

Thus, the role I played in the participant's reactions is crucial to recognize. The interview process itself is a discursive act or an act that articulates and constructs a particular discourse. But more than their answers, it is critical to reflect on my role as a researcher and analyst. My questions, and the way I asked them, cannot be objective because there is never one way to present something (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2012, p.21). I am participating in constructing the discourses I am trying to describe. If I accept that reality is socially constructed, that there is no one truth, but that truth is discursively produced, I ask myself: what do I do about the "truth" that I as researcher-subject produce?

### 4.5.2 Ethical consideration

When conducting Social Research, it is essential to consider ethics. This section provides my reflections and ethical considerations in this research process.

In *Social Research Methods,* Charles Bryman explains that writers often differ pretty widely over ethical issues and questions (Bryman, 2012). Debates about ethics are illustrated by well-known non-ethical cases, as is the case for the Milgram experiment in 1961 or the Holdaway research in the 1970s (p.143) (see Appendix A). Those examples are considered unethical and

bring knowledge to the present-day study of ethics. Within the different stances on ethics, in this study, I take the stance of the *Universalism*, meaning that no ethical precepts should ever be broken (p.133). Hoglund & Oberg (2011) warns that in Peace research, we must consider the "possible consequences the research may bring" and reminds us that the researcher's "golden rule is to do no harm" (p. 141). According to Bryman, the main ethical principles that should not be broken in research, and which I endeavored not to break, were the following: harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception (Bryman, 2012, p.135).

First, to do no harm, I made it clear from the very beginning of each interview that my intention was not to harm any participants and that it was possible at any moment to interrupt the study and delete the information this person had shared. Before every interview, I sent an information letter to each participant, explaining who I was, the purpose of the study, their role in it, and that I would ensure the anonymity of each interviewee (see Appendix G). I intended to avoid deception so that the informants knew what to expect after signing the information letter and felt respected. Additionally, I never mentioned "police brutality" or "police violence" but instead used the terms "legitimate" or "illegitimate" violence.

Second, the letter asked for written consent from each informant, without which I would not proceed with any interview (see Appendix F). At the start of each interview, I spent five minutes explaining the information in the letter verbally, again expressing specifically that they did not need to answer questions if they did not want to and that they could stop the study or remain silent at any time without having to give a reason.

Third, privacy is primordial to the comfort of the informants. At the beginning of each interview, I made it explicit that the participants were not expected to speak on behalf of their entire organization or whom they felt like representing, which relieved some stress and pressure to speak a certain way. Additionally, I let them choose the time of the interview. That way, they could take time to isolate if necessary, to be in a safe and private place. This enabled two police officers' informants to move away from "official" positions in confidence.

Finally, it is important to create trustworthiness. The setting of the interviews was also essential. For example, as most of the interviews were over the phone, I asked if they wanted to use the camera so we would see each other. Among them, only four participants accepted one Yellow Vest and three politicians. Indeed, not showing one's face can make one feel more comfortable talking, as they feel unidentified. This may have been why the police officers felt more confident in talking and did not feel like they had to stay in line with the official discourse. Perhaps, if I had met them at the police station, they may have felt that they should represent the discourse in line with their uniform. Being at the police station could have raised suspicion, with other

colleagues wanting to have listened. Talking of police brutality with police officers is a very sensitive issue because it does not follow the official discourse, and not respecting it could get them fired. That is why I did not mention the expression "police violence" in the interviews and was very careful with my words.

### 4.5.3 Challenges and Limitations

This section gives precision to the challenges that limited the study.

The most significant limitation was due to the Corona Virus health care crisis. As a result, many countries went through lockdown for different lengths and times of the year, many places were closed, and meeting people outside our social circle (family, close friends) was forbidden. For example, France went through a national lockdown from March to May 2020, then from October to December 2020, and finally from March to May 2021. During those times, people could not leave their houses except for special requests when granted authorization.

Secondly, though phone interviews helped the feeling of privacy and anonymity for the participants, not seeing the participant's facial expressions did impact the data collection. Indeed, not being able to see the interlocutors' facial expressions can be a limitation to the understanding of the message they are trying to share.

Third, the interviews I conducted were not based on a random search for people to answer, as I interviewed the only few people who matched my criterias for research purposes and agreed to talk to me. Therefore, I was allowed to speak to people with strong opinions and will to discuss the subject, which is less likely to represent French society as a whole. I tried to attract informants from all over France; however, a third of the informants come from the local council community of Poitiers, where I am from, as it was easier to talk to "a girl from here."

Finally, although I am fluent in English and French is my mother tongue, some expressions and terms were still complicated to translate. I analyzed the articles and interviews in French but had to transcribe my thoughts and analysis in English. Every language has its specificity, and every word has a different history. Expressions used in a language can not always be translated into another language as they would not make sense. To overcome those limitations, I refer to French words and expressions that are important and not precisely translatable in Italic and explain their meanings and origins. All translations of French documents and data are mine.

## 4.6 Conclusion of the Methodology chapter

In the above section, I explained the different methods I used to collect and analyze the data needed for the research. Newspapers articles were collected for macro-level analysis purposes. Moreover, Semi-Structured interviews were led for a micro-level analysis. Finally, both data sets were analyzed through Critical Discourse analysis, considering several theories. First, the theory of Hegemony of Antonio Gramsci creates a filter on the dissemination of ideas by the ruling class, both in the newspapers owned by the richest of the country and in the upper-class mentality. Second, Laclau and Mouffe's contribution to Discourse Analysis provides the tools to understand the impact of the surroundings and context on hegemonic and antagonistic discourses. Third, Fairclough adds the importance of the effect of the producer and the receiver of information and creates a complete theoretical framework to analyze the data critically. Finally, Bazerman gives a concrete method to detangle meaning in the data collected.

# 5. Polarization from above

As part of the data analysis, this chapter analyses a Polarization driven from above. A Polarization from above means a Polarization triggered by the State, the different powers that control the country, in opposition to the Polarization from below, enhanced by every individual at their scale. It, therefore, focuses on the Critical Discourse Analysis of the newspapers' articles. Indeed, as studied below, the newspapers are written according to specific guidelines given by the owners and influential people behind the newspapers and the different political parties the newspapers support. This chapter is divided into three parts. First, I analyze the mainstream media's role in this Polarization, as they give labels to the different actors of the conflict. They represent the voices of the government, the establishment, and the upper classes. In the two other parts, I analyze two polarizing newspapers. First, I analyze the extreme-right Polarization with *Présent,* and finally, I present the extreme-left Polarization with *L'Humanité*. There, I discuss how they capitalized on the situation.

## 5.1 Mainstream media; *Libération, Le Monde, Le Point, Le Figaro*

This section seeks to understand the view and impact of the four mainstream medias studied: *Libération, Le monde, Le Point* and *Le Figaro.* In the following part, I explain the research analysis. It is necessary to note that they are owned by some of the most powerful men in the country, such as Matthieu Pigasse*,* Serge Dassault, Marcel Dassault, Francois Pinault, and Bruno Ledoux (Qui possède quoi, 2021).

### 5.1.1 Identifying the Yellow Vests

In *Liberation, Le Monde, Le Figaro,* and *Le Point*, the Yellow Vests were rarely portrayed positively in the articles analyzed. They were assimilated to the Extreme Right, the "fachosphere" (meaning that they belong to the fascists' group). For example, *Liberation* wrote, "the state attributes the violence to the rebellious extreme right" (*Liberation,* 25.11.2018). They were also assimilated to the anarchists, or the communists, linking them to Melanchon (the President of "disobedient France," see [Appendix C]); for example, *Le Point* cited "Melanchon and his henchmen" (*Le Point,* 05.01.2019). The YV were also humiliated; for example, Le Monde gave the example of a homeless YV, qualified as "dangerous" (*Le Monde,* 27.11.2018). The article confused the demands of the YV with an apparent lack of understanding, making it hard to know "who wants what" (*Le Monde,* 02.12.2018). Moreover, *Liberation* assimilated the protesters as "homophobic, islamophobics and racists" (*Liberation,* 18.11.2018), reflecting Castaner, Minister

of the Interior in 2018, accusations (*Liberation*, 18.11.2018). In line with the government discourses, these discourses were meant to incite hatred toward the YV.

Strikingly, the name of the movement was not recognized as a proper name to delegitimize them. The term "yellow vests" was notably used in lowercase letters, inside inverted commas. This quotation shows that the expression was borrowed but not settled, making them lose legitimacy. Moreover, in some articles, "gilets jaunes" was only used to pinpoint the violent ones, as the peaceful protesters were addressed by "the supporters of the movement" *(L'humanité,* 01.12.2018). Through the newspapers, the government delegitimized the movement to make it seem less important than it was.

Thirdly, the newspapers over-represented the YV violence. This violence appeared especially during two critical events: On December 1st 2018, when the YV vandalized the Arc de Triomphe (see Appendix D), and on March 16th 2019, for the sack of Fouquet's restaurant. If those events are key events in the movement's history, the media only expressed extreme violence realized by the YV. The term *casseur*, translated as "destroyer," was used to qualify the YV (see Appendix D). This nickname refers to the YV's violence by "destroying" things. The term created a new label for the protesters, with a negative connotation. The word was normalized and used in every article to qualify the YV, for example, "Destroyer under stamina" (*Liberation*, 01.12.2018), "The destroyers lash out at banks"(*Le Monde*, 02.12.2018), and "a destroyer damaging a shop front" (*Le Figaro*, 18.03.2019). The violence perpetrated in Paris by the YV made the headlines in all reputable newspapers, using phrases such as "unacceptable violence" (*Le Point*, 16.03.2019), and "resurgence of violence" (*Le Figaro*, 18.03.2019). December 1st 2018 marked a significant moment for the YV violence (*Le Figaro,* 01.12.2018, Libération, 01.12.2018, Le *Point,* 04.12.2018).

However, it was also on December 1st that Mehdi, Benoit, Maxime, Guy, Christopher, Franck, Anthony, Elie, David, Romain, Hugo Clément, Benjamin, Maxyme, Alain, Jean Pierre, Frédéric, and Ayhan entered the emergency rooms of Paris, Toulouse, Avignon, Bordeaux, Tours, Calais, losing their hands, eyes, and noses, as the result violence including being shot at from an LBD40, a dispersal grenade, a baton, and a water canon (*Médiapart,* 12.06.20). But those events were not once mentioned in the articles studied, and the journalists only described material damages such as "charred cars, dilapidated buildings and smashed windows." (*Le Figaro,* 02.12.2018).

Furthermore, the newspapers want to show the public discontent with the movement. According to some articles, violence escalated to the point that even the peaceful protesters stopped believing in the movement. It is the case of an article of *Le Point* on December 8th, which left space

for some YV's testimonies and anger with the turn of events caused by the activists' violence (*Le Point,* 08.12.2018). For example, a peaceful protester witnessed, "I was ok with the banks' vandalism, but now they destroy the small businesses. They go too far. It became nonsense!" (*Le Point,* 08.12.2018). It allowed the reader to identify with the interviewed "moderate" protesters, shifting their position and supporting the State against the violent YV. Showing only a part of the protest allowed the newspapers to emphasize the weaknesses and discredit the whole movement. Through these articles, the government found a way to justify the use of violent repression.

Additionally, the newspapers foster class hatred. Although some messages were tailored to an audience sympathetic to the Yellow Vests' demands, many were also tailored to the middle class, watching the revolt from afar. Indeed the mainstream media deplored considerable material damages after the protests as having enormous consequences on businesses. For example, the cost of the damages of an "explosion" on March 16$^{th}$ is estimated to be "around several hundreds of millions euros" (*Le Figaro,* 18.03.2019). The newspapers portrayed the YV as the "Anti-rich," mocking and provoking the upper classes, saying, "You are a *Bobo* you! How much do you pay for rent?" (*Liberation,* 01.12.2018) (see Appendix D). *Le Point* points out 70 gas stations impacted (*Le Point,* 17.11.2018), and *Le Figaro* identified fifteen kiosks destroyed (*Le Figaro,* 18.03.2019). These consequences of the YV fury are qualified early as a "trauma for everyone, but a disaster for Paris" (*Le Figaro* 29.11.2018). *Le Figaro* gave the floor to the traders and the shopkeepers impacted by the attacks "no way can we experience those war scenes again," "we are not going to close every Saturday, are we?" "They have to stop this madness" (*Le Figaro,* 29.11.2018).

Finally, the entire atmosphere of the demonstration turned to revolt. *Liberation* mentioned an "insurrectional atmosphere" (*Liberation,* 01.12.2018), *Le Point* talked about a "tensed atmosphere" (*Le Point,* 08.12.2018), and *Le Monde* observed a "Civil war and insurrection" (*Le Monde,* 02.12.2018). According to the journalists, everything was calculated by the protesters as "they come together and wave a flag marked with three dates: 1789, 1968, 2018." (*Le Point*, 08.12.2018). Thus, this revolt followed the 1789 French revolution lead, threatening the power in place and the wealthy. For the journalists, the YV seriously represented a threat.

### 5.1.2 Creating deterrence and hiding police brutality

In one event of the Yellow Vests crisis, a well-known boxer, Christophe Dettinger, was politicized in the media because of an altercation he had with police officers. Because the YV community praised this event, it was less appreciated by the mainstream media (*Le Figaro,* 07.01.2019, *Le Point,* 05.01.2019, *Liberation,* 07.01.2019, *Le Monde,* 06.01.2019). Arrested, he was judged and sentenced to one-year imprisonment on very short notice. All four newspapers, *Le Point, Le*

*Figaro, Le Monde, Liberation,* have at least one article about the issue, calling out the "boxer who hit the police officer"(*Liberation,* 07.01.2019). The daily newspaper *Le Monde* wrote, "chocking images of two police officers hit violently by Christophe Dettinger," (*Le Monde*, 06.01.2019).

Many YV appeared before a judge on very short notice. Since the first weeks of protests, many people were convicted and sentenced to community service or jail time. They were arrested because they "were wearing gloves, a hood and a hammer"(*Le Monde,* 27.11.2018) or because they had stones in their hands or swimming goggles and shin pad, meaning they wanted to fight with the police. Plus, *Le Monde* emphasized the reaction of the convicted, who desperately cried, "I should have never come to Paris" (27.11.2018). Here, the purpose of the government and the upper class through the mainstream media seemed to be to deter the citizens from participating in the protests.

Overrepresenting the violence, victimizing the businesses, and discouraging the YV helped the newspapers, and those directing them, hide or undermine another aspect of the conflict: police brutality. The police, in the newspapers studied, were represented as the victims of the conflict as the YV attacked them. Several articles emphasized that "luckily," the police officers were only lightly injured (*Le Monde*, 06.01.2019). *Le Monde* insisted on the YV violence towards the police; for example, "two police officers were hurt by a YV car, who hurt them voluntarily" (*Le Monde,* 17.11.2018). In the counts of the wounded, the number of police forces is often cited first, 5 in November (*Liberation,* 24.11.2018), 14 in December (*L'Humanité* 01.12.2018), and 17 in March (*Le Figaro,* 17.03.2019). The police also suffered material damage; for example, "a patrol car was set on fire, and the officers had to run away"(*Le Monde* 02.12.2018).

On March 23rd 2019, at Nice, Genevieve Legay became an elderly victim of police brutality (see table 6). This "incident" was recalled in an article by *Le Monde*, blaming the victim, describing her as collateral damage of a charge, and noting that she should not have been present in a forbidden place (*Le Monde,* 24.03.2019). President Emmanuel Macron wished her to find "wisdom" (*Le Monde*, 24.03.2019). The idea behind the message is to say that this accident should make the YV think better about their actions and consequences, not being in the way of the police. The newspapers also justified the use of force; after five months of the strike, *Le Point* (16.03.2019) stated that the State had been "too nice up till now" and that it was time for a change.

In summary, mainstream media, owned by the country's richest people, shared the same opinions despite their different official political standpoints. Their purpose was to make illegitimate the YV actions and claims. Therefore, they portray the activists as baseless, ignorant, violent, and against

the rich, driven by pure jealousy. They gained the support of the non-activists by describing huge material losses and significant damages done to small businesses. Finally, they hid police brutality by never mentioning it or justifying it and making it an example.

## 5.2 Polarized media: the extreme right with *Présent*

Nevertheless, some media do not align with the government's statements or the upper classes. In this research, I focus on the opposing examples of *Présent* and *L'Humanité. Présent* is a weekly newspaper oriented at the extreme right-wing. The readers of this newspaper often vote for the "Rassemblement National", translated to *National Rally* of Marine LePen, who reached the second tour of the presidential election on April 24th 2022 by receiving more than 13 million voices (Elections Présidentielles, 2022). Workers and employees are charmed by her party, including many catholic traditionalists.  In the presidential elections of 2022, over 60% of the police forces voted for Marine Le Pen, According to the Cevipof (Political Research Center of Sciences Po) (Trippenbach, 2021). Moreover, many readers and workers were also in the Yellow Vests, as 25% of the YV voted for the RN party, according to Statista (see figure 11). Therefore, the Newspaper task is quite complex if they want to keep, and even increase, the number of lectors, balancing between YV workers and police officers.

The extreme right-wing saw an opportunity to win over voters in the movement. To do so, the newspaper *Présent* undermined President Emmanuel Macron. In *Présent*, the journalist portrayed the French citizens as victims of the government and upper-classes contempt, saying, "people that we laugh at, that we pressure, that we humiliate, that we despise" (*Présent,* 19.11.2018).

First, the articles studied enhanced open hatred toward the government, saying that "the government reveals its autism slowly" (*Présent,* 19.11.2018). *Présent* even insulted members of the government. For example, in one article, the journalist called the Minister of the Interior a "king of fake news" and even titled a part of the article as "The fakes of kéké" (26.11.2018), "Kéké" being a pejorative nickname given to Christophe Castaner, the Minister of the Interior. They also compared the way the Minister called out one of the spokespersons of the YV as the same way "we use to talk to a servant" (*Présent*, 19.11.18). Feeling unheard, or misunderstood, can favor a shift toward a movement or a party representing people's ideas. *Present,* together with the *National Rally* was trying to become the new voice of the YVM.

Secondly, the extreme right has always had the same enemies: the communists and the anarchists. When the government and the mainstream media blamed the "fascists," the extreme right newspapers such as *Présent* defended the material damage critics. First, they ensured that no

YV were violent. They wrote, "Yellow Vests have not sacked stores nor burnt car" (*Présent*, 26.11.2018). *Present* justified that graffiti could not be the work of fascists. They published a picture of a wall where it was written "Down with the State, the cops, and the fascists!" (*Présent*, 26.11.2018). They blamed the damages on the "red plague," characterizing the communists and the color representing their red flag (*Présent*, 03.12.2018). The "Black Blocs" are a group of activists from extreme left movements that demonstrate through violent actions (see Appendix D). *Présent* labeled all communists under "Black Blocs" and denounced them for trying to use the occasion to steal and sack, and to "terrorize the bourgeois" (26.11.2018) as they were "ultraviolent and incompetent" (18.03.2019). Thus, the party differentiated the "good Yellow Vests," to the "bad Yellow Vest," the "Black Blocs," the anarchists, the communists, who attacked the rich. The hatred that carried the extreme right was summed up in the title of an article part: "Two responsible: the masked anarchist, and Castaner"(*Présent,* 03.12.2018).

Thirdly, though successfully creating two polarizing enemies, the extreme right had yet another enemy to direct the community's anger, what they called the "ethnic gangs" (*Présent,* 10.12.2018). The unstable environment created an opportune time to marginalize this group. The newspaper wrote that the ethnic minorities "found an excuse to unleash their violence extremely troublesome, who damage the image of our country"(10.12.2018). One article referred to the Adama Traoré's case using the French term *voyou* meaning "gangster"(*Présent,* 03.12.2018). The newspaper explained that the case had been reappropriated by the left-wing as a symbol to accuse the police and that the left and the non-white people developed hatred toward the police (Brakni, 2019).

Thus, as noted above, the newspaper defends the police, an important reader. The writer explained that the death of Adama had been proven as due to health issues rather than police intervention. According to the newspaper, the police officers had just done their job in arresting a "gangster" (*Présent,* 03.12.2018). The newspaper spread the message that the police officers were never at fault and that the black people and people issued from immigration should be acknowledged as criminals instead of victims. One article explained that "all of that violence is the consequences of a *libanisation* of peripheral France, by a huge immigration and thanks to the total impunity that benefit from tens of years the extreme left breakers"(*Présent,* 03.12.2018). Their opinion is that the immigrants were not taken accountable for their actions by police forces and that the government should put more money and weapons in the police department. This discourse was again expressed during the national debate by Marine Le Pen on April 20th, 2022 (Le débat, 2022). A quote can sum up the Polarization the newspaper puts forward: "Barely some weeks ago,

Macron trashed nationalist leprosy, and Darmanin saw a brown plague behind the YV. But French people, on their screen, see a red plague and an immigration leprosy" (*Présent*, 10.12.2018).

To sum up, the extreme-right searched for support in the population. The newspaper, therefore, used the anger of the YV as a tool to collect votes. Therefore, it strongly opposed the ongoing government of Emmanuel Macron, defining its flaws and taking the protesters' side. On the other hand, they also defined other enemies than the State, namely the communists and anarchists and the immigrants and different ethnic minorities. Their discourse was thus oriented toward hatred and relied on it to form an hegemony.

## 5.3 Polarized media: the extreme-left with *L'Humanité*

On the one hand, I have explained that *Présent* identifies as a strong Marine LePen supporter. On the other hand, *L'Humanité* identifies as an extreme-left supporter but is less clear about supporting one personality or political party. The following section presents an analysis of the discourse of *L'Humanité* during the Yellow Vests movement as an extreme-left polarized newspaper. In France, the extreme right-wing is more united than the extreme left-wing, consisting of various political parties from communist and socialist to environment-friendly, all boasting different charisms and demands (see Appendix B).

Firstly, the newspaper's statements favored the Yellow Vests movement. For example, after *Acte IV,* the newspaper cited politicians from leftist parties present in the parade. Indeed, the newspaper emphasized that members of the Anti-Capitalist party, Disobedient France, the Environment party, and the Communist party were supporting the movement (*L'Humanité,* 08.12.2018).

Secondly, *L'Humanité* emphasized empathy toward the YV by creating portraits. For example, it described the women of the YVM. The journalist highlighted Amina, Amanda, Aurélie, all single mothers, in part-time or on a temporary contract, earning no more than 700 euros a month. This being an insufficient amount of money to provide for their family, the women described skipping meals, causing them to faint during work (*L'Humanité,* 21.12.2018). By telling their lives and giving them a voice, the journal empathized with the Yellow Vests' poverty. Furthermore, it solicited the reader to advocate for more equality, giving the movement more credibility. The choice to use women, especially single mothers, emphasized the diversity of the movement. Due to gender biases, a woman will often be perceived with feminized characteristics such as calm and sweet, going against the stereotypes given to the YV spread by the government, perceiving them

as irrational, violent fascists or anarchists. Rather, in this newspaper, the YV were legitimized by painting the women as heroines, stating, "I would rather die in a protest than die of hunger in front of an empty plate" (*L'Humanité,* 04.02.2019). The newspaper sought to humanize the YV to fight the dehumanization of them by the government and other media.

However, the newspaper still begot hatred. In *L'Humanité*, the police were portrayed as repressive. On December 8th, for example, the journal counted 481 arrests and 211 interrogations at only 11 am (*L'Humanité,* 08.12.2018). *L'Humanité* is the only newspaper among those studied that used the term "police violence" (01.03.2019) and criticized the weapons used as very dangerous (*L'Humanité*, 01.03.2019). Indeed, Statista counted 315 head injuries caused by police weapons during the first year of the protest (see figure 13). Some injuries dismantled the lives of many YV, as was the case of Olivier Béziade (see table 7). Though Emmanuel Macron stated that the head injuries sustained by members of the YV were accidents, health professionals interviewed by the journalists (*L'Humanité*, 01.03.2019) explained the impossibility of such an impact if the target was far and not aimed at. Subsequently, leaving such an impressive impact on someone means that the weapon was close by, and the head was targeted (*L'Humanité*, 01.03.2019). Therefore, this information portrayed in the journal points toward the police officers acting in unprofessional and dangerous ways.

Finally, the journal triggered intense hatred against the government and fed the revolt with increasing motivations to overturn the government. On November 24th, Emmanuel Macron tweeted: "A big thank you to our forces of order for their courage and professionalism. Shame on those who assaulted them." (*L'Humanité,* 29.11.2018). Those words, only present in this newspaper, provoked strong feelings in the readers regarding the hypocrisy of the police brutality (*L'Humanité,* 29.11.2018) and gave the floor to professionals that emphasized the exact opposite (L'Humanité, 01.03.2019). Commenting on his tweet, a journalist wrote about the president as a new dictator, a monarch, and an autocrat, behaving like César August, who was elected for five years before proclaiming himself emperor (*L'Humanité,* 29.11.2018). The president of the Republic was portrayed as solely responsible for the chaotic situation that the country experienced. The first man of the State was qualified as being a "liar" and a "king of fake news"(*L'Humanité,* 01.04.2019), which were similar to the accusations made by the right-wing newspaper *Présent.* These accusations followed the fall of Genevieve Legay on March 23rd, 2019, and the president's response, seen above (*L'Humanité,* 01.04.2019). The head of the State, and his ministers, were therefore portrayed as liars and manipulators.

To conclude, *L'Humanité* used empathy to support the YVM, seen as a movement from below that is necessary to achieve social change. However, the newspaper still portrayed hatred toward the government, which was depicted as indifferent and scornful. It participated in the division between the workers and the State, not listening to them. It thus strengthened the loss of significance felt by the YV.

## 5.4 Conclusion of the macro-level chapter

This chapter has shown how every newspaper studied analyzed the events and how they presented them to their readers. During the studied period, the mainstream media, *Le Monde, Le Figaro, Le Point,* and *Liberation,* participated in the Polarization of the society by voicing only one part of the situation, the Yellow Vests' violence. The establishment justified its violent reactions through the mainstream media by delegitimizing the movement and labeling the demonstrators. As a result, the information shared through mainstream media triggered Polarization within the French population and created hatred toward the Yellow Vests. Conversely, the polarizing newspapers *Présent* and *L'Humanité*, represented their interest groups which were the political parties they represented. Through their discourse, they participated in the society's Polarization by labeling and creating a biased representation of the events. As a result, the newspapers triggered more hatred in the Yellow Vests towards the government and its institutions, hence serving their political interests.

# 6. Polarization from below

As seen above, the media can actively create division within society. Polarization is also enhanced by actors on the grassroots level in society, which all participated in the Structural Violence led by Polarization. Through Critical Discourse Analysis, this chapter focuses on semi-structured interviews. I interviewed five Yellow Vests, renamed Virgil, Virginie, Vincent, Valérie, and Victor. I also interviewed three independent journalists renamed Jean, Judith, and Julia. Moreover, I interviewed four police officers, renamed Philippe, Pierre, Patrice, and Pauline. Finally, I could consult with three politicians, renamed Robert, Romane, and Rémi (see table 7).

This chapter is divided into four parts, each analyzing the role and contributions of the different groups involved in the Polarization processes of each actor studied in this research. The first part analyses the Yellow Vests' experience as participators, the second the journalists as mediators, the third the police as actors, and the fourth the role of the observers, the politicians.

## 6.1 Participators: the Yellow Vests

From January to March 2021, I interviewed five Yellow Vests, which I renamed Virgil, Virginie, Vincent, Valérie, and Victor (see table 7). Through the interviews, they presented a unified picture of peripheral France, helping to understand the legitimacy of their demands and the violence they suffered.

### 6.1.1 Poor living conditions

On November 17th,2018, demonstrations took place all over France. Many people from the rural areas came to the cities to share their despair at the situation. As explained in the context chapter, a large population depends on gas to commute to work, but their livelihoods worsened with climbing taxes and gas prices. One of the YV participants, Victor, explained his struggles as he worked as a carpenter and his fiancée was unemployed, creating an underprivileged environment "there is always something else we have to pay if it is not the car to fix, it is the electric bill" (Victor, 01.2021). The YVM represented his ideas. This cohesion between people "from everywhere" gave him hope and faith again. Virginie also felt supported by the movement's claims. Her fight started because of the increase in toll prices on the motorways. She explained that the State was "capitalizing on a common good" (Virginie, 01.2021). She liked the fact that the YV were against the capitalist system and so that the protests were often taking place in front of big chains, such as Mac Donald's or Supermarché. Those businesses represent overconsumption, thus inequalities Virginie wanted to fight (Virginie, 01.2021). Considering herself lucky, Virginie still

struggled to eat at the end of every month. She invested all of her assets into the protests, as "the struggle was worth the pain" (Virginie, 01.2021), spending about 80 euros every weekend to protest in Paris. YV were people who believed their demands would be heard, requests they thought were legitimate, such as needing acceptable living conditions and equality. Victor also went to Paris every weekend, and the reason seemed to him evident. "Macron said "Come and get me," he will see, we will come and get him, and we will see who is a smartass after that" he said about what Emmanuel Macron had told about the Alexandre Benalla case (Victor, 01.2021). This showed how Emmanuel Macron had triggered the protesters looking to get revenge.

Valérie, as a french teacher, did not struggle with money but was devastated by the number of injustices she witnessed daily. She decided to undertake the responsibility of helping plan the protests with other YV. She explained that the protesters used to file many authorizations for demonstrations, but many were refused (Valérie, 02.2021). Finally, when she managed to have one authorized, the YV were very peaceful, and the relationship with the *gendarmerie* was cordial. However, she concluded that "it is impossible to stay calm if you feel ignored" (Valérie, 02.2021). The YV decided to protest nevertheless, as many protests demands were refused, making their protest "illegal." Those protests, seen as a threat, were very rapidly repressed by the government.

### 6.1.2 Witness to police brutality

In the record of events and actions kept by the YV and starting from November 17th 2018, the events of December 1st were some of the most influential. On this date, Virgil was at the Arc de Triomphe and remembered witnessing "a strong police violence" that day; "they were using tear gas canisters and defense bullet launchers (LBD40) on us" (Virgil, 01.2021). He, therefore, decided to flee the place. Virginie stayed at the Arc de Triomphe despite the violence because she wanted to "win this war" (Virginie, 01.2021). On December 1st, she was firmly pushed away by a police officer and broke one of her ribs. She also received a dispersal grenade between her legs and got massive and painful bruises. Despite that, she considered herself lucky, as she had seen, both in front of her eyes and on videos on social media, people losing eyes or hands (Virginie, 01.2021). For example, Victor received a shot of LBD40 on the right temple. His opinion is that the police officer "shot at 13 meters, it had to be on purpose, no other way"(Victor, 01.2021). As a result, he suffered a quadruple orbital cranial fracture, a jaw broken, six teeth torn off, and a hip displacement. Today, he has epilepsy, and after a cranioplasty, he is still disabled for life and will never be able to work again. Many stories such as his were shared during the movement, and many lives were destroyed as a result of police brutality and their use of weapons.

Valérie, explained that the police officers "were looking for close contact" (Valérie, 02.2021). She was shocked by a video shared on social media about a young girl being shot. Indeed, on December 1st, in Grenoble, Eastern France, Doriana, 16 years old, lost several theet when she was shot by a LBD40 (Dossier Gilets Jaunes, 2019). In western France, in Biarritz, three weeks later, Lola, 19 years old, was also shot by the police weapon LBD40 and suffered a triple jaw fracture (Valérie, 02.2021). Young people were victims of the violence, but older people were too. On December 1st, in Marseille, in the south of France, an 80 years old woman, Zined Redouane, was killed by a tear gas canister she received in her face when she was closing the windows inside her apartment (Brakni, 2019). Valérie explained outrageously, "Whom was she threatening? What has she done? It is either cruelty or incompetence; in both cases, it is wrong" (Valérie, 02.2021). The YV participants were revolted by the police violence they witnessed.

The violence is well known by the Yellow Vests, who also created names for different "strategic attacks." For example, the word "Nasse" is a word validated by the YV (see Appendix D) and used by all those I interviewed. It refers to the police tactic to surround and close in on demonstrators from every corner, forming an impenetrable circle. According to the YV, it was a tactic of repression to gas everyone and hurt as many as possible to "give a lesson" (Valérie, 02.2021).

More than physical violence, YV were also victims of psychological violence. Virginie explained how depressed she became (Virginie, 01.2021). In January 2020, she was diagnosed with respiratory allergies for life, about a year after the main protests. The doctors blamed the fact that she had been exposed to tear gas. Other participants explained traumas that can be analyzed as post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), as was the case of one of the participants, Vincent, a young student in sociology. On March 16th, 2019 he witnessed the vandalizing of the Champs Elysees and one of its wealthiest restaurants, Le Fouquet's. On this day, he received pieces of a dispersal grenade in his calf and was hospitalized. However, this physical wound was not the worst damage he felt he had suffered. In the interview, he confessed that he was still "afraid of every sound. If a bird flies over me, I tremble or jump, thinking it is a grenade (Vincent, 01.21).

This constant violence led the demonstrators to prepare for the worse. Some people, such as Victor, decided never to come back to Paris, considering it too dangerous. Other people, such as Vincent, decided to go to Paris protected: "I was wearing a bike helmet, diving goggles, shin guard, and a heavy jacket" (Vincent, 01.2021). This equipment saved his eye when an LBD40 bullet hit his diving goggles. Vincent was not the only one to protect himself. Valérie remembered that many older people were wearing goggles and helmets as if they were expecting violence from the police. As the violence intensified through time, and many YV were hurt or lost an eye or a

hand, people were afraid. Both Victor and Virgil never went back to Paris. Virgil explained that he felt that the State did not listen to him and that the risks taken were therefore not worth it (Virgil, 01.2021).

Virginie believed that people are not violent by nature, but she felt that violence was the ultimate solution, explaining the behaviors of some Yellow Vests, and denying the use of violence from her side. At many roundabouts protests, YV were peaceful. According to Valérie, the idea was to talk, discuss, and share ideas (Virginie, 01.2021). However, time showed that they were not listened to. The most determined YV resorted to violence to get their messages across because they did not want to be ignored, so they desired to bother the unbothered, drawing attention to their movement. However, Virgil and Valérie assured me they had never seen any YV use violence. According to Vincent, the most violence he witnessed was people drawing graffiti on the wall. Virginie talked about the vandalization of Fouquet's, and explained that "the violence they used was only against institutions, against materials, never against humans" (Virginie, 01.2021). Therefore, the violence was a symbolic message to those with the most power and authority. According to the research participants, the violence committed by the YV was in self-defense and in the eyes of Virginie, legitimately used.

### 6.1.3 A trust lost in the Police

Despite the violence, some people, such as Vincent and Virginie, never gave up and continued to go to Paris with protection. However, the police interpreted those protections as danger and a characteristic of the *casseurs*. Subsequently, the police forces started executing preventive arrests, arresting people before they could even get to the place of the protest (Virginie, 01.2021). They were searching for people just as they got out of their car. Those arrested spent the day at the police station and were released in the evening as the protest ceased or the day after. Others were led to trials "for the example" (Vincent, 01.2021). Vincent was once arrested in Paris before getting to the rally because he was wearing his "life-saving" protection. He explained, "I spent the day in a cell, they took my phone and everything I had. I could not pee nor drink water. They took a picture of me, and classified me as a terrorist" (Vincent, 01.21). He claimed never to have been violent against anyone. He considered himself a freedom fighter, but the State saw him as a terrorist. He understood the quote he associated with Che Guevara "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" (Vincent, 01.2021). He talked about the example of the Boxer Dettinger and explained his vision. His opinion differed drastically from the mainstream media analysis, as he explained that Dettinger was saving a woman beaten down by a police officer (Vincent, 01.2021).

This was never mentioned in any of the articles studied and his sources come from videos published on social media.

Even though police kept harming people, no officer was sent to prison, therefore, they were not held accountable for their actions (Virgil, 01.2021). The participants felt a substantial injustice, as they felt that the voice of one police officer is equal to the voices of many citizens (Vincent, 01.2021). The YV did not trust the law either, as it was inflexible with them but very indulgent with the police (Virgil, 01.2021). The violence combined with injustice bred hatred toward the police officers among the YV. Victor said, "I was taking a video with my phone, and a police officer came and threw it on the floor, all broken". Then the police officer told him "now you get the fuck out" (Victor, 0120.21). Telling this story, Victor started insulting the police forces and explained that, for him, they are just sheep following the government (Victor, 01.2021). Virginie also hated the police officers, whom she compared to "robocops" with their "weapons of war" (Virginie, 01.2021). She explained that "they are like happy kids with their toys, promoting their weird virility, trying to impress the people. But they are just unbalanced losers, racists, sexists, and so much more" (Virginie, 01.2021). None of the participants had empathy for the police officers that were wounded; on the contrary, they dehumanized the injured police officers as robots with weapons or denied their existence altogether (Virginie, Vincent, Victor, 01.2021).

The YV participants did not refer to police officers by the French word *policier* (police officer) but by the negative mainstream word *flic*, meaning "cop" (Vincent and Virginie, 01.2021). Other slang expressions exist to degrade the police officer as a commoner among the YVM, for example, *Poulet*, used by Victor. Another slang used by some participants is *keuf* (Virginie, Victor, 01.2021). This expression is a pejorative way to qualify a police officer (see Appendix D). These "heartless" (Vincent, 01.2021), "emotionless" (Virgil, 01.2021) "bastards" (Victor, 01.21) and "brainwashed" (Valérie, 02.2021) "robocops" (Virginie, 01.21) were everything they were fighting.

### 6.1.4 A trust lost in the media

Virgil, Virginie, and Victor abstained from reading mainstream media because they "wash your brain" (Virgil, 01.2021). Victor added that the media represent the State, thus the enemy (Victor, 01.2021). According to Vincent, the media are just another capitalist cog in the system. He thought that the media wanted to sell and make money, so they needed chock information "to create buzz" (Vincent, 01.2021). He shared that the media always exaggerated the YV, only talking about *Black Blocs* or *casseurs*. Vincent did not feel understood and explained that the media refer to the YV "as anarchists or fascists, nothing else" (Vincent, 01.2021). For Valérie, the media showed the

Yellow Vests' violence to justify police brutality. For Virginie, it was clear that the media wanted to rise up the citizens against the YV. Valérie liked reading the press but with "a critical point of view" (Valérie, 02.2021). She trusted the newspaper *Médiapart* but wanted to read different newspapers for comparison. However, she claimed that all newspapers give a wrong interpretation of the movement, "as if they were stuck on one event of the day" (Valérie, 02.2021).

As they do not read mainstream media or watch the news on TV (Victor, 01.2021), the study participants use social media. Facebook for Virgil and Victor, Instagram for Virginie, and Twitter for Vincent and Valérie. They trust social, for example, Victor claims that "this is where we can see the real shit happening" (Victor, 01.2021). Social media provided the platform where hidden violence from mainstream media could be found. The screams, blood, gas, and people shouting and coughing were the reality they had seen on-site and kept viewing on social media. Virginie explained that it reminded her that she was not dreaming, that what she experienced was real. To their understanding, they live in a digital world, where social media is the people's weapon, and mainstream media is the weapon of the State (Virginie, 01.2021, Valérie, 02.2021).

To conclude on the Yellow Vests as participants, the poor living conditions decreased purchasing power, and tax increases pushed the YV into the streets. Facing ignorance from the State, some felt that violence was their last resort. However, none of the informants acknowledged having either perpetrated or witnessed violence. Second, they were mistreated by their government as they suffered police repression, leading to fear of the government and its power. Third, they witnessed an increasing injustice between how police violence was treated versus how the YV violence was condemned. Thus, they lost trust in the police and dehumanized police officers, whom they considered only tools of power. Finally, they created a separation from the official information means.

## 6.2 The mediators: independent journalists

Within the battlefield, several actors could be found. Other people did not identify with the Yellow Vests but still wished to carry their voices and stand by them. Some were independent journalists who became whistleblowers by screaming scandal before everyone else. In February 2021, I interviewed three of them, whom I renamed Jean, Judith, and Julia (see table 7).

### 6.2.1 The whistleblowers

The five Yellow Vests and the three independent journalists have heard of David Dufresne, a whistleblower, and independent journalist, who published on his Twitter account @davduf

(Dufresne, 2021), 992 alerts after for two years during the uprising (see Appendix D). Those alerts were addressing to the ministry of the Interior the concerning cases of police brutality witnessed during the YV protests and created a classification of 992 cases of violence perpetrated by the police forces toward the population. After 992 alerts, the repression could not be only isolated cases of police violence, as the government claimed (Julia, 02.2021). Jean, Judith, and Julia aimed to be a whistleblower, and to raise awareness about the solemnity of the situation.

Julia and Jean's lack of trust in traditional media led them to become independent journalists. Julia explained, "the other journalists come, put the camera on the ground, and leave." (Julia, 02.2021). They all claimed the mainstream media did not show the truth but rather manipulated it to display what they wanted to show (Jean, Judith, Julia, 02.2021). Therefore, the truth had become their mission (Judith, 02.2021). However, those who held power, including the police, started to dislike such journalists and photographs (Julia, 02.2021). Julia explained that her camera and her phone were often thrown away, but she sometimes managed to send what she witnessed on the internet beforehand. The participants could justify their right to upload what they witnessed on social media with their press cards. Sometimes their photos and videos contained shocking images, which were met with infinite shares by viewers, such as Julia's image of a young man lying in a puddle of blood (see figure 6).

The journalists were not only observers of police brutality but also victims. Judith, a young journalism student, trusted that the police would use violence only against troublemakers. However, when she was only taking pictures, two police officers jumped behind her, confiscated her camera, and handcuffed her (Judith, 02.2021). At her arrest, she was not given any answers nor explanation. She defended herself, saying she was not violent, but the police officers did not listen (Judith, 02.2021). She explained that the police officers were laughing and throwing biscuits and water bottles at the detainees "like we were animals in cages" (Judith, 02.2021), mirroring the experience of Vincent. The purpose was to keep as many protesters as possible far from the demonstration so that the movement seemed minor and easier to control. The objective was thus to discourage protesters. Indeed, Jean explained that if a YV paid much money to go to Paris and was arrested just as he arrived, he would not want to make the effort to protest again (Jean, 02.2021). As discussed in the Introduction, the arrests were very efficient in the first year of protests, deterring many people to return to the following events.

### 6.2.2 A voice against police brutality and State violence

Like the Yellow Vests, Journalists learned how to prepare for a possible confrontation. For example, Julia was wearing many protections. The contrast between the equipment of the protesters

and the equipment of the police was, however significant, as Julia pinpointed in pictures she took (see figure 7). She was also arrested on various occasions by the police, but each time managed to get out thanks to her press card (Julia, 02.2021). By arresting journalists, police officers hindered the right to information, which has existed in France since 1881. Nevertheless, the independent journalists fought for this right to be respected (Julia, 02.2021).

Julia explained that she witnessed police violence more than once, which she called "police incapability" (Julia, 02.2021). On December 29th 2018, during Acte VII in Nantes, a big city on the West Coast, she noticed a young man on the floor and a massive puddle of blood around his head. As she reached out to him, a member of the BAC pushed her away (Julia, 02.2021). Instead of being careful, the BAC member moved him to wake him up. The incompetence of the police in dealing with a wounded person outraged her (Julia, 02.2021). Indeed, the BAC members are not trained to rescue people but are formed to stop crime. After spending five days in intensive care, the victim, called Adrien, 22 years old, went home forever disabled, suffering from a severe head injury (Julia, 02.2021). For Julia, showing the images, she took of the scene was very important to stop this violence (see her photos in Appendix H). However, repression affected independent journalists as well (Julia, 02.2021). She explained that her pictures aroused fears and doubts, as some of her colleagues considered too choking and too bloody. Journalists were afraid to lose their job if they did not conform to certain norms. On the contrary, Julia was not scared and wanted to show the "real face of the police" (Julia, 02.2021).

She also remembered being surprised by the police officers charging at the protesters and that they were hitting their shields "just like at war." Julia was outraged, saying, "they are just machos and sexists who want to impress with their stupid masculinity." According to Jean, the police were there to induce violence by this impressive demonstration of force. He explained that "violence is fed from violence" (Jean, 02.2021) and that the situation was now a vicious circle where the violence did not stop nourishing violence. Additionally, the journalists participants also analyzed that police officers had become judges and executioners (Jean, 02.2021).

All three informants have decided to go for this profession because they "can say a lot with a photo" (Jean, 02.2021). According to Jean, images are powerful, more powerful than text. In half of a second, the significance of the image is understood—no need to scroll down to read. Bloody images after bloody images, the message was clear: the country was at war, and the police was the enemy (Jean, 02.2021). Together, they strengthened another Polarization, the one of democracy at risk, where pictures triumph, showing, in an interconnected world, the fight of the people for freedom (Jean, 02.2021).

Independent journalists shared information in a different way than the mainstream media. Present on the battlefield, they captured important events and broadcast on different platforms. By doing so, they raised the curtains on the hidden violence. The images of police brutality they shared had two different consequences. For one part, some of the YV, outraged by the photos, sought revenge for the wounded and were motivated to commit violence against police forces. But, on the other hand, the images scared and discouraged many people, as was the case for Virgil, who decided to stay home on Saturdays.

## 6.3  Actors: the police forces

On the other side of the battlefield, other people served the oppression. From March to July 2021, I interviewed four police officers, whom I renamed, for anonymity purposes, Philippe, Pierre, Patrice, Pauline (see table 7). Philippe used to serve in the *gendarmerie* during the Yellow Vests but is now a paramedic in the army. Pierre is part of the *gendarmerie* in the surroundings of a city he preferred not to share. Patrice commands a *Gendarmerie* unit in a city that will not be mentioned. Finally, Pauline is part of a police unit in Poitiers.

### 6.3.1 A different formation

The Yellow Vests movement was a particular period for the police forces. Indeed, as explained in the introduction, France has different police units. However, during this movement, all units were brought together in the same place "with no communication" (Philippe, 03.2021). The *gendarmerie* had an internal communication, as did the national police, the CRS, the BAC, and even the BRAV, all trained for different purposes (Patrice, 05.2021) (see Appendix B). The BAC members and some police units had never maintained order in a protest before (Patrice, 05.2021, Pauline, 07.2021). The members of the BAC have the purpose of addressing small to medium delinquency in sensitive urban areas. The population they are mainly used to fighting are young people from immigrant backgrounds, putting them on the ground before bringing them to the police station (Patrice, 05.2021). Philippe explains that working on the outskirts of Paris for years, he witnessed many injustices (Philippe, 03.2021). With the YV, the face of the BAC was not only familiar to the people living in the suburbs but to every white person coming to Paris or other big cities to protest. Moving by smaller troops, the decisions of the BAC members were made independently. Therefore, they were free to use their weapons without anyone's authorization. They were accustomed to violence and did not hesitate to use their weapons (Patrice, 05.2021).

On the other hand, in the *Gendarmerie*, where Pierre and Patrice work and Philippe used to work, much more time was needed to process decisions, as everything had to be approved by their superiors (Patrice, 05.2021). Pierre justified some police actions by explaining: " It is very

frustrating to wait for orders when Yellow Vests throw stones at you. I can understand why some colleagues drifted from orders." (Pierre, 04.2021). Pauline explained that most of the time, the orders came from the Prefet, both in the case of the police and the *gendarmerie*. The procedure then reached a high-ranked police officer. The higher-ranked officer in charge would then give a more specific order to his troop chiefs. Finally, the Troop Chief on the battlefield would scream orders to his officers, organized into shield and weapon users. Therefore, the chain of command was long in the *gendarmerie,* and the officers using the weapons were not the ones who decided when to use them. However, Patrice explained that sometimes, the orders were only objectives to reach, such as "prevent the demonstrators from reaching this place" (Patrice, 05.2021). In these cases, the police troops could, with the material provided, have *carte blanche,* meaning full permission to reach the goal in the way they wanted to.

Furthermore, if the officers did not comply with the orders, they could risk their reputation or job (Patrice, 05.2021). Philippe explained that his reputation at work was at stake if he did not shoot. This strong respect and fear of the hierarchy are present in the military and the police (Philippe, 03.2021). The former *gendarme* explained that the atmosphere of the unit was about who would be "more manly" and "less fearful." Furthermore, he accused the institution of brainwashing the troops and making them believe that they were the elite and were superior to the rest of the population (Philippe, 03.2021). This way of thinking created a considerable lack of empathy for people outside their circle of police officers, making the violence more acceptable to perform.

Finally, in their discourse, Pierre, Patrice, and Pauline used "us" automatically to describe an event concerning police forces. They also used the terms "comrade" and "colleague," terms often used in the military. Unlike strangers united in the YVM, this special bond of brotherhood in the police force created strong complicity within the police forces that was much easier to foster and harder to penetrate for outsiders (Philippe, 03.2021, Pierre, 04.2021). They created a unified social identity, an unbreakable "us," which inevitably shaped a unified conceptualized "them," the *Other.* The machismo and feeling of superiority were transmitted by the influence of the surroundings and how people interacted (Philippe, 03.2021). This is how the police subculture persists and becomes a systemic problem.

### 6.3.2 Hero or Zero? Hard-working conditions

Across several media, especially social media, police violence is described as unacceptable, and police officers are therefore shown as monsters. Police officers are fathers and mothers, daughters and sons, sisters and brothers. For example, Philippe's cousin is a Yellow Vest (Philippe, 03.2021).

Some police officers understand the claims the YV. Pierre explained that he agreed with the YV but that his duty of confidentiality forbade him from expressing his opinion (Pierre, 04.2021). Pauline also explained that she thought the movement was beautiful during the three first weeks and carried out her values (Pauline, 07.2021).

Police officers were expected to maintain their position and do their job at all costs, even when they were hungry and needed a break (Patrice, 05.21). Pauline usually served on the coordination team, where she rarely had a break from her desk. However, 2019 was memorable for her, especially after *Acte IV,* as she could barely see her family (Pauline, 07.2021). Indeed, she worked from 6.30 am until 9 pm from Monday to Saturday to ensure that the YV did not create illegal protests, did not stop the traffic, and did not commit arson. During these days of work, she was unable to take any breaks. She explained that one colleague would go and buy fast food for everybody and that they would all eat in the patrol car (Pauline, 07.2021). She had no weekend off for the entire year of the protests, as the movement was at its most active every Saturday.

As part of the gendarmerie, Philippe explained that he was on duty for 72 hours, with almost no time to sleep.(Philippe, 03.2021). Depression is frequent in the police forces. On August 2nd, 2019, *LaDepeche* reported that forty-five police officers and ten *gendarmes* had committed suicide since the beginning of the year (Chomienne, 2019). The violence was experienced against the police, as examples include the YV throwing pieces of wood, stones, or glass bottles at the police officers (Pierre, 04.2021). Pauline remembered at least two of her colleagues going to the hospital. One had a big open wound in the calf, and the other had his foot broken by a big stone. Although they were wearing protection, helmets, shields, and more, the Yellow Vests' violence was so intense that it passed through it (Pauline, 07.2021).

However, the physical violence was not the hardest to cope with for the informants. Pauline explained nearly reaching a point of burnout before summer 2019, as people not only insulted the police as an institution but were also insulting her personally. The YV told her, "are you not ashamed of who you are? What do your kids think? You should kill yourself" (Pauline, 07.2021). She explained that she was trained not to react to insults towards the State, the police force, and the government. But she was never prepared for such personal hate. She called them "crual", "heartless" and "selfish" (Pauline, 07.2021). She wondered how it was possible that the YV felt so much hatred toward people they did not know, not being aware that she and her colleagues perpetrated the same hatred against the YV. This psychological violence can have a more significant effect on the individual than physical violence.

### 6.3.3 A justified violence

This movement was the theatre for numerous acts of force from the police. The four police participants underlined that the police reaction was mainly due to the illegality of the movement. Indeed, the demonstrators were required to file an authorization of protest informing them of the places they were planning to go. But according to the police officers of this study, most protests did not have approval, which matches the Yellow Vests informants stories (Patrice, 05.2021). Pauline explained that the protests were allowed from 2 pm to 5 pm. She insisted that "people have a life, the demonstrators are not the center of the world," discrediting and trivializing the movement (Pauline, 07.2021). However, she explained that the problems started arriving after 5 pm, when the "nice Yellow Vests" went home, and the "bad ones" stayed (Pauline, 07.2021). She associated the "bad Yellow Vests" with the *Black Blocs,* a group of violent people who wanted to create material damage. The *Black Blocs* dragged the Yellow Vests to generate more violence (Pauline, 07.2021). Pierre explained that the worst part of Saturdays was in the evening when the most violent demonstrators stayed (Pierre, 04.2021). According to him, the ones that stayed only wanted to "*casser du flic,"* meaning to "destroy the cops" (see [Appendix D](#)) (Pierre, 04.2021). However, as seen above, *L'Humanité,* the YV informants, and the journalists informants expressed the contrary, as, in their stories, most arrests were made in the morning (*L'Humanité,* 08.12.2018).

Pierre differentiated two tasks of the police officer: law enforcement and reinstating order. Law enforcement is what the gendarmes of a small town like him are used to doing, mainly keeping the existing order. Reinstating order happens when the order does not exist anymore when it "spins out of control" (Pierre, 04.2021). Then the job consists of a series of warnings, which he knew extremely well. He explained that the officers had to scream in a microphone: "First warning; we will use force, second warning we will use force" (Pierre, 04.2021). He explained that after the third warning, they used the dispersal grenades, and if it did not have any effect, the police officers received the order to use their weapon, the LBD40. Patrice explained that they would lose their credibility if they would not act on their warning (Patrice, 05.2021).

The police informants did not deny the violence they used against the protesters but defined them as legitimate (Pierre, 04.2021). Patrice explained "people heard they cannot be in this place anymore if they are still there, it means they are looking for a fight" (Patrice, 05.2021). Launching dispersal grenades was also legitimized, as the purpose was to disperse people that had agglutinated in a place which had to be preserved. Patrice explained that the grenades that tore off hands were by accident; "Like this guy who went to take the grenade, probably to throw it to us, and got his hand torn off, is not very smart" (Patrice, 05.2021). Pauline came to the same conclusions. It was for example, the case of Sebastien Maillet, a 26 years old plumber, who lost his hand after reaching

out for what turned out to be a bomb (Notre dossier: gilets jaunes, 2019). Pauline talked about him, saying, "he was in the wrong place at the wrong time" (Pauline, 07.2021). Rather than seeing the tragedy of his case, Patrice viewed him as "collateral damage" because, according to him, the overall purpose, which is to protect the Republic, is more significant than a few individuals (Patrice, 05.2021). Pauline and Pierre both agreed that there were no such things as police violence because it would mean illegitimate violence. According to *Amnesty International,* police violence can be defined as the unlawful use of force by the police (Violences policières, 2020).  All the violence they had witnessed were techniques taught in police schools and thus lawful (Pierre, 04.2021, Pauline, 07.2021).

However, Philippe witnessed gratuitous violence toward people under arrest (Philippe, 03.2021). All four participants acknowledged the death of Zineb Redouane on December 1st, 2018, as a mistake from an incompetent or a rookie. "The grenade launcher is very precise," explained Patrice, "either the police officer aimed, which makes him cruel, or he shot without looking, which makes him stupid" (Patrice, 07.2021). The blame is thus put on incompetence. However, some other examples, such as the massacre of [Burger King](#) on December 1st, show more cruelty than incompetency, according to Patrice (Patrice, 07.2021). Philippe did not doubt that some police officers were aware of their impunity, allowing them to act violently without consequences, possibly out of personal revenge against the protesters, projecting their frustrations on them (Philippe, 03.2021).

Discussing the example of Olivier Béziade, as explained in the Introduction, Patrice did not trust the media to give a complete picture of the situation (Patrice, 07.2021). Pierre was against all sorts of media. He claimed not to read it because he thinks that the media go with the wind and change positions whenever it benefits the media in question, for example, portraying police officers as heroes during the terrorist attacks but as monsters during the protests. Therefore, Pierre qualified them of being "biased" (Pierre, 04.2021). Pauline did not read media either as she wanted to shield herself from work when at home (Pauline, 07.2021). Pauline expressed that she did not want to know what the media said about the YV protests. According to her, it would not represent reality (Pauline, 07.2021). As a result, all police informants have lost trust in the media.

To conclude, the police informants highlighted a high gap between the police training and the reality of the protests. They also emphasized their experience as human beings and showed the other side of the battlefield. If they understood the complaints of the Yellow Vests, they still thought the violence and length of the strikes were not justified. First, not all of them were trained to restore order within the protests occurring every Saturday. Second, they felt attacked by the YV,

though they tried not to lose face in such chaotic situations. The psychological impact of this conflict had important consequences on the mental health of the police officers, leading to depression and, in some cases, suicides. Third, they have reinforced an identity, justifying the use of force against the *others* who deserved it. Like the YV informants, none of the police informants took responsibility for any violence nor for participating in worsening the situation. They did not trust the media either, creating a gap between the macro and the micro levels.

## 6.4 The observers: the politician of the privileged middle class

In August 2021, I realized three interviews with small-scale politicians, mayors, and town councilors (see table 7). They represent both decision-makers and the upper-class, as they all have comfortable living conditions. For anonymous purposes, I renamed them Robert, Romane, and Rémi. Robert is a town councilor and a teacher, Romane is a mayor and English Teacher, and Rémi is a town councilor and an engineer.

### 6.4.1 Classism and on-site experience

When the Yellow Vests crisis arose, many politicians felt sympathy toward them (Robert, Rémi, 08.2021). Remi believed that "they are honest people who needed help and wanted to make things move" (Remi, 08.2021). None of the informants participated in a protest; however, Robert went several times on roundabouts to talk to them. As a city councilor, he felt it was his duty to understand the needs of all citizens. He felt sorry for them and admired their courage to stay all day long outside in such cold weather (Robert, 08.2021). However, he did not walk in Paris with them because he felt it was not his place to be, nor his fight (Robert, 08.2021). Both Remi and Robert underlined that the YV movement was needed to make things move in the country. If the rise of the salary profited the lower class, the higher middle class benefited from the decrease of the taxes on salary. For example, Remi is glad the YV moved that far, as he does "not have the time to worry about it," implying a difference in priorities with the YV (Rémi, 08.2021).

Politicians informants did not identify with the YV, as they always referred to the protesters as "them." They defined, explicitly or implicitly, the protesters as inferior to them, just like the working class, that "have nothing else to do either way" (Rémi, 08.2021). When Remi explained his encounter with the demonstrators, he imitated them with a stereotyping accent of the countryside, a pejorative way to mimic poor or homeless people, this time applied to the YV (Rémi, 08.2021). By doing so, he made fun of the underprivileged and continued the prejudices and discrimination against them. Romane also had encounters with the YV (Romane, 08.2021). They were blocking the roundabouts of her city for many weeks in a row. In the beginning, Romane was

indifferent to the protests and thought that "they would calm down" very fast, implying that the movement was only an excess of anger not justified. However, the anger did not stop increasing. This was very "annoying" for her as she needed to drive from her house in the countryside to go to the city center where she worked. Her father was sick, and had to travel longer in the traffic caused by the YV, so she blames the "cassos" for his subsequent death (Romane, 08.2021). *Cassos* used to designate people with poor living conditions, and today is more broadly used as an insult (see Appendix D).  This appellation shows a lack of understanding of the fight of the YV and hatred toward them.

Moreover, Romane remembered a day when she was stopped by the YV, who believed that she "was one of them" because her car was old. She laughed with contempt, "if only they knew how much I earn" (Romane, 08.2021). She degraded the Yellow Vests and consequently invalidated the movement. The on-site encounters with the YV, except for the case of Robert, gave a negative image of the YV to the politicians.

### 6.4.2 Trust in the media and the police, no trust in social media

Another aspect of the anti-Yellow Vests feeling came from another source: the media. Remi sometimes read *Le Monde*, Robert *Libération,* Romane *Le Figaro*. According to what they read, the YV were reckless and violent. Romane did not set foot in Paris in 2019, because she judged that "those people are very dangerous and uneducated" (Romane, 08.2021), information she read in *Le Figaro*. Robert and Remi are more balanced with their arguments, blaming the presence of violent people among the Yellow Vests, who discredited the movement (Robert, Rémi, 08.2021). Romane confided that she disliked the Yellow Vests because she read in the newspapers that they were "racists and homophobic in any case" (Romane, 08.2021).

The police were seen positively among the politicians. According to Romane, their role is to protect the country against criminals. First, the terms the participants used to qualify the police officers were drastically different from the terms used by the Yellow Vests. When discussing their role in society, the politicians used the term *Gardien de la Paix* (Romane, 08.2021), meaning "Peacekeeper," leaving the interlocutor to understand the genuinely good intentions of a police officer. Romane and Robert also referred to the police officers as *forces de sécurité,* in English "security forces," to emphasize their role: ensure the security of the citizens (Robert, Romane, 08.2021). The expression shows the assertive behavior of the police forces. Second, Romane justified the violence from some "security forces" as a legitimate defense form.  She believed that if a police officer used force, he had a valid reason (Romane 08.2021). She added, "people should not believe everything they see on social media," showing a considerable distrust of the widely

used social media. According to her, social media are used by everybody, and the information depicted is manipulated. According to Romane, police brutality was exaggerated to create hate against the government and help the movement, bringing a certain understanding of the Polarization of the French society.

However, Robert was more careful. He acknowledged the police violence (Robert, 08.2021). On the other hand, the informants also recognized a form of violence from the Yellow Vests, which gave no other choice to the authorities but to repress and try and reach calm instead of chaos (Robert, Remi, Romane, 08.2021).

Thus, two out of three politicians had a contemptuous view of the situation and did not empathize with the economic situation of the lower classes. One participant, Romane, mainly showed that she did not want others' problems entering her privileged world. Therefore, the study participants delegitimized the Yellow Vests claims by considering them insignificant. The upper class also justified the police actions and the violence they used as legitimate in most cases, although Robert understood that mistakes were made by both parties. Yet, they did not participate in the protests; they got their information from reading the mainstream media and only saw one part of the picture.

## 6.5 Conclusion on the micro-level data analysis

This chapter underlined the specific roles of each actor during this conflict. It showed their particular attitude toward one another and emphasized how reading different media could impact everyone's opinion. The Yellow Vests did not trust the mainstream media and only used social media, which the independent journalists interviewed also trusted. The police officers did not trust any media types, and the politicians, on the contrary, read some mainstream media. The pictures of the YV and the police painted by the media shaped the reader's opinions. If the media influenced the participants, their on-site experience also impacted their views. The Yellow Vests *othered* the police officers, and so did the journalists to a certain extent, due to their violent encounter with the police forces. On the contrary, the police informants tended to *other* the Yellow Vests and diminished the importance of their demands, as they had witnessed violence. Finally, the politicians informants were more moderate. However, they did not identify with the YV. Romane and Remi, via class contempt, were unconsciously participating in the marginalization felt by the YV.

# 7. A polarised Society

This chapter will discuss the findings and the data analysis realized above. I first put forward the different spheres of information defined by each identity and how this creates spheres of disinformations leading to Structural Violence. Second, I discuss how identity, and the various ways people identify, play a role in the Structural Violence of society and how it enhances an intense Social Polarization. Third, I question the results of this Polarization and its beneficiaries. Finally, in the scope of Peace and Conflict research, I discuss possible solutions that could contribute to a more Positive Peace in the effort to end, or inhibit, Structural Violence in France.

## 7.1 A Sphere of Disinformation

The digitalization of the media has made news consumption a class attribute. The newspaper costs money, but it also requires time to be read, which some people do not have in a world where "time is money" (Payne, Bettman, & Luce, 1996). Therefore, the underprivileged citizens, as well as the low-middle class, do not read newspapers. This creates an unfair division of access to information between the higher classes and the lower classes, creating a sphere of Disinformation. A sphere of Disinformation can also be supplied by on-site experiences, reinforcing biases.

First, the different news platforms create different narratives. By labeling the Yellow Vests as fascists, anarchists, homophobes, extremists, or terrorists, the newspapers broke the link between the media, the YV, and the people supporting them. The mainstream media studied used any trigger to paint a portrait of the YV as evil, as in Christophe Dettinger's case. On the other hand, they voluntarily omit any mention of police violence. The media have thus created distrust amongst the population.

Therefore, some people turn to a new platform of information: social media. Social media allow everyone to share information, and the YV recognizes it as a more democratic way to share information. They see it as a more direct way to spread a message, as "pictures speak louder than words" (E. Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015, p.552). On the other hand, the upper class trusts the mainstream media produced by professionals but is wary of social media, as they feel that fake news are widespread and can be used by anybody. Social media has additionally suffered from scams, and people using technology to change reality, such as retouched pictures or videos, creating even more distrust amongst a specific sphere of the population, for example, more recently during the COVID-19 crisis (Buil-Gil, Miró-Llinares, Moneva, Kemp, & Díaz-Castaño, 2021).

Those different bubbles of information create misinformation, leading to a Polarization between the different spheres of society. The different bubbles are not connected and do not narrate

the same reality. They create a vicious circle that can only lead to a more profound division. In their book, *The Routledge Companion to Media Disinformation and Populism,* Howard Tumber and Silvio Waisbord (2021) describe how disinformation can impact society by enhancing Structural Violence, including misogyny, racism, and class contempt. If people do not have the same information, they cannot contextualize and understand all the parameters of their surrounding world, creating a form of ignorance. For example, the police officers lack knowledge about the YV background and the YV lack information about the French police history. Ignorance and unawareness thus emphasize Structural Violence and do not give the population the tools to resolve the conflict. Therefore, a sphere of disinformation is a form of Structural Violence.

Second, our preferences are monitored by the numeric era. On different social medias, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok, computers calculate the interest of every single individual and create an algorithm presenting the same kind of information to the user (*The Social Dilemma*, 2020). For example, the YV could scroll through their phone and watch police violence and police hate content. On the other hand, the politicians and wealthier people were scrolling down information about the Yellow Vests violence, intensifying the group's Polarization. These preference algorithms contribute to the creation knowledge bubble and, therefore, the intensification of disinformation.

Third, people's opinion is shaped by their on-site experience. For example, Romane had bad experiences with the YV, blocking roads, preventing people from going to work, setting things on fire to be seen, and screaming to be heard. This generated Polarization between two different life conditions that do not try to understand each other. The middle-class person lacks empathy and understanding toward the protesters. She did not grasp the dimensions of their demands nor the despair leading the YV to protest every Saturday. On the other hand, the YV extend their knowledge bubble with their onsite experience of police brutality, as they either have been hurt, have known someone who ended up in the hospital or have seen someone beaten up in front of one's eyes. It, therefore, shaped their vision of the police forces, labeling them monsters. It encouraged them to act more violently, either in revenge or in defense, because hate begets hate, and violence begets violence (Galtung, 1969). Therefore, a vicious circle of direct violence is created, leaving only the most violent to win.

To sum up, what people read, listen to, or watch creates a unique sphere of information from which the individuals define themselves from others. The gap of knowledge created by Disinformation contributes to the ignorance of the other. Howard Tumber and Silvio Waisbord (2021) observed that this ignorance leads to fear of the other, generating Structural Violence (p.21). This violence

based on fear and ignorance of the other is embedded in our society and shapes the way people identify themselves and others.

## 7.2 TheoryStructural Violence from above: violence with purposes

Structural Violence can be strengthened from below, as seen above, but can also be triggered from above. The government is interested in maintaining division in the country to maintain its hegemony. I discuss here how the violence from above is done on purpose.

First, the government has a strong decisional power and is in charge of the police. Since 1958 under General De Gaulle, the French government has set up a hefty executive power, allowing it to make decisions and implement them without much trouble (Rigouste, 2012). Furthermore, it means the government can take rapid decisions to answer the demands of the Yellow Vests: people earning only 5000 euros per year would not have to pay taxes, the working bonus for the lowest-paid people was revalued, the retirement tax reduced, and the price of the gas frozen for six months (Cantié, 2018). But, on the other hand, it allowed the executive to put in place severe repression. The oppression of the "nobody," of the violent poor, who suffers injustices and cannot express them freely, is both physical, by the mobilization of a very high number of officers, the unprecedented use of weapons, and the unprecedented prison sentences, but also structural through a lack of understanding of the demands (Vincent E., 2019). The government is also responsible for police formation, which is done with the objective of making numbers and arrests, not improving the social-economic situation of the marginalized people. The techniques of arrest they learn are also based on violence but are considered lawful and legitimate.

Second, oppression is a tool to maintain Structural Violence in the country. Iris Marion Young (1990) explains that oppression is also a significant category of political discourse. Indeed, the YV suffered from physical oppression from the police forces and oppression realized by the government discourse. The interdiction of protest and the lynching of the movement in the media participated in the loss of significance felt by the protesters. Moreover, the government protected the police at all costs, and denied apparent police violence. The impunity of the police also contributes to oppression.

Third, dividing the country can seem essential for a government to have more control over its population. Divide and conquer, from the latin *divide et impera,* is a concept that refers to intended actions to strengthen the power in place by causing disagreements among people who might otherwise unite against it. The concept was developed by Niccolo Machiavelli in his essay *Le Prince* (1515). In this book, he develops tactics that have as main objective of maintaining

power, no matter the human costs. Machiavelli thus gave justifications for State violence as considered needed and legitimate. Five centuries later, his concept is still relevant today and can be applied to the case of the YVM. Indeed, the government, helped by the wealthiest people, developed a strategy of delegitimation against the YVM, portraying the protesters as violent, ignorant, and with no apparent valid reason to rebel. This Othering was realized through mainstream media, such as *Le Monde, Le Point, Liberation,* and *le Figaro,* demonizing the movement and creating hatred. Thus, the readers would disapprove the YVM, and support the government's efforts to stop it. According to Thomas Hobbes' political philosophy, two components could give the absolute sovereign power. Those components are a shared fear and the war against everyone (Agamben, 2015, p.1). Joining Machiavelli's theory, Thomas Hobbes analyzed that creating a division, in other terms, making the citizens hate each other, would strengthen the government's sovereignty.

Finally, the polarising parties also profited from this division. Finding arguments against the government and claiming people's anger could raise the number of voters very fast. At the beginning of the conflict, several political parties from the opposition joined the movement in support. However, in front of the violence of the protesters, only two political orientations kept supporting the movement: the extreme left with the main party *La France Insoumise,* and the extreme right with the main party *Le Rassemblement National.* Both populist parties stand by the underprivileged, the working class, a fringe of the society for long ignored by the mainstream parties. Through newspapers representing their ideas, *Présent* and *L'Humanité*, the polarizing parties, created hatred against the rich and the police, the government, and the immigrants in this study. This hatred did not come from the truth but was fostered by exaggerated outgroup narratives. The large impact of these stories comes from repetition, not reality. Hate-creating stories are supplied by politicians when such actions help to discredit opponents whose policies benefit an out-group (Glaeser, 2005, p.45).

The *National Rally* is the one that benefited the most from the YVM. In the European elections of May 2019, Marine Le Pen's party obtained 23% of the votes (Résultats des élections, 2019), and gained five million voters in the national elections between 2017 to 2022 (Elections présidentielles, 2022). However, this rise of populism is not singular to the case of France. Recently, the populists' movement polarized against the mainstream political forces in many different countries such as the United States of America, Brazil, Hungary, Poland, India, and the Philippines (Stewart et al., 2020, p.1), making scholars worry about the origins of this popularity. This study highlights that this Polarization toward populism is emphasized both by the role of

social identity and of economic anxiety. Thus, politicians are the winners of the conflicts, as they benefit from the Polarization of the French citizens into more distinct categories.

This discussion has shown that Structural Violence can come from below as a result of different identities, however it has also pointed out that Structural Violence can be organized from above. Thus, the government uses repression as a power tool and relies on scarcity to obtain obedience. Further, populism rallies more and more voters, creating a more significant gap in society between those who demand more social improvements and those who require more conservative and solid grounds.

## 7.3 Structural Violence from below: Social Identity and Othering

The way we define each other impact the way we treat the others. By defining each other, people create different identities that shape their narrative, and foster Structural Violence. This subchapter discusses how the demonization of the police, the dehumanization of the YV by the media and the upperclasses, and the loss of significance contribute to power Structural Violence.

First, the demonization of the police nourishes hatred and triggers violence. Some people entered the police force because they believed in the institution and that law enforcement would lead to a better world. However, many of them were not expecting to spend every Saturday in the streets for almost a year, tired, thirsty, and hungry. The YV does not consider this dimension of humanization. For the latter, the police officer was the enemy. He came to the battlefield and shot with his weapons, hurting many Yellow Vests. The YV thus belonged to a new unified identity, an underprivileged group targeted by the State and the police forces. They created a new "us," which inevitably shaped a unified conceptualized *other*; "them." Thus the police officers were thus demonized. The YV did not consider the difficulty of the job and their life outside the combat zone. The police officers were entirely dehumanized and seen as a government's pawn. The YV viewed them literally as "robocops" (Virginie, 01.2021), who did not feel anything emotionally or physically. They kept hurting people, never apologized, ran away, and exercised absolute power with no questioning of the government (Virgil, 01.2021).

The hatred against the police already exists in underprivileged areas, where the BAC is omnipresent in many suburbs (Rigouste, 2012). During the YVM, this hatred reached the white working class and the small middle class of the rural areas. It created a Polarization within the conflict, opposing the YV to the police forces, sometimes forgetting the demands they had for the government and making the fight personal (Victor, 01.2021). The face of the person underneath

the helmet did not seem to exist in the minds of the YV. The Monsterization, or Demonization, of the police made it easier for the YV to use and justify violence. This dehumanization of the police engendered a feeling of rejection for police officers, although they could suffer from the same economic issues as many of the YV (Pauline, 07.2021). As part of the police force, the main difference was that officers were not allowed to go on strikes. Dehumanization, linked to high stress and job dissatisfaction, can lead to burnout and suicide (Testoni, Nencioni, Ronconi, Alemanno, & Zamperini, 2020).

Second, class cleavage also enhance Structural Violence. The underprivileged white people in the suburbs identify with the small middle class leaving in the countryside, who own a house and a car but still struggle to make ends meet at the end of the month. This identity becomes stronger as it identifies in opposition to other groups, called outside groups, such as the upper classes and the government. Those outside groups are recognized as the *others*. Not robotic nor intrinsically evil like the police, the "others" are rich, contemptuous, ignorant, and proud (Beyer et al., 2019).

In a capitalist world where having more money increases the value of the individual, the upper class views the underprivileged as inferior. In the YVM, the "subalterns," the YV, consent to Capitalism by accepting the class system and its role, allowing its hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). Though the YV fought for more social equalities, they sought to change their status in the capitalist world and climb the social ladder. The subalterns YV apply the same violence to other "subalterns": the homeless, the immigrant descendant, black people, and Muslims generally.

Furthermore, the class identity grew stronger during the YVM, and class labels have become more critical. The underprivileged aspire to have more money yet have resentment towards wealthy people (Klontz, 2018). For example, Yellow Vests call the upper-classes "*bobo*," while the upper-classes call the Yellow Vests "*cassos*" (see Appendix D). The YVM emphasized the economic Polarization between several groups and revealed a gap within the middle class (Gilbert, 2008). On one side appeared the urban middle class, the one of the city, in favor of the environment, in no need of a car, and being content with the government situation. On the other side stood the "small middle-class," one of the rural areas, needing a car and struggling every month to pay the gas and the food and to pay rent or pay back loans (Guilluy, 2018).

Thus, classism generates Structural Violence. The middle class does not consider individual stories as they *other* the underprivileged and label everyone as part of the same "other" group. The poor are dirty, uneducated, *cassos*, discriminated against for the look of their car or for the clothes they wear, as Romane and some mainstream newspapers express. This structural discrimination gained prominence during the YVM as the protesters directly confronted the middle class when

they blocked the roads or roundabouts. Adrien Mazières-Vaysse (2019) explains that this "poorophobia" (hatred of the poor), "social contempt," or "class racism" took another turn, leading more middle class to identify in opposition to the disturbing class. The upper-class looked disdainfully at the *cassos* running to Paris and destroying things. This Polarization between different classes' identities can be qualified as "classism" (p.1). This classism generates prejudices against the underprivileged, preventing them from crossing the class bridge and climbing the social ladder. While structural oppression involves relations among groups, these relations are not always conscious and intentional (I. M. Young, 1990, p.41). Thus, by diminishing the lower classes, the upper classes are unaware of the role they actively play in the Structural Violence of society. The argument can be balanced by the intervention of Robert, who genuinely cared for their demands. However, by not identifying as part of the same social group, Robert still participated in unconsciously in the Polarization of the French society. Moreover, the upper classes impose their way of life on the lower classes. For example, they want to impose the bycicle in the city centers, when the lower class live much further on the outskirt of the city and need to use the car. The argument of the upper class resides in environmental protection but is in contradiction with their traveling lifestyle, using the planes. Thus, the higher classes establish their hegemonic cultural imperialism through different actions and propaganda that will not be discussed here but could lead to further research.

Third, indifference generates a loss of significance and participates in Structural Violence. Indeed, the disdain and misunderstanding of the higher class is only the tip of the iceberg. Indeed, the most extensive Structural Violence lies in the indifference of these higher classes toward the situation of the lower classes. This indifference and spite are created around the value of money that capitalism emphasizes. In the capitalist world, the money adds value to an individual. The Monetary school of capitalism (distinct from the *Geist* and Marxian schools) starts with money as a social relation (Lau & Smithin, 2014, p.5). Capitalism has created the ground for solid Cultural Violence against the destitute by the wealthy, embedded in the western culture for centuries. Iris Marion Young (1990) summarizes it by explaining that capitalism creates a division between the privileged and the underprivileged. Opponents of re-distribution are interested in building hatred against poor minorities to be able to keep their privileges (Mazières-vaysse, 2019, p.3). Edward Glaeser (2005) explains that, by accepting the hatred and degrading stereotypes, the middle class is guilty of emphasizing differences and inequalities and enforcing symbolic violence between the wealthy and the underprivileged. Indifference is a form of invisible violence that participates in the feeling of loss of significance and anomie in the lower classes. It also perpetuates the loss of

credibility of the movement. All of this is part of the Structural Violence that led the YV to use direct violence.

Fourth, the group effect strengthens the stereotype and the hatred. People joined together under the YV and became a unified identity as they were fighting for the same rights and against the same people. Not confident enough to stand up alone for their conviction, they became part of a social group, a bigger in-group, making them more confident and assertive. Additionally, belonging to a group also means taking less responsibility. Indeed, when talking to the participants, no one acknowledges possible violence or behavior on their part. Not accepting responsibility in a violent structure prevents positive change and develops a Positive Peace.

Finally, the phenomenon of Othering explains all of the cited above arguments, as it makes it complicated for all distinct identities to develop an understanding of the *other*. The YV blamed the State and the police for the police violence and thus demonized the police. The State and the police blamed the YV for their violence. The middle class did not understand the complaints of the YV and identified their fight as another. One informant of the middle class despised the YV. Thus, by Othering, the different social groups did not understand each other, emphasizing a Polarization between the groups. Media participated in the Polarization of the society, on one side by supporting the government and creating animosity against the protester, and on the other side by supporting the YV and criticizing the State.

In this subchapter, I have analyzed that Polarization can occur as the result of identity issues and Othering. During the Yellow Vests crisis, this Polarization was enhanced by different factors. First, the YV's hatred towards the police officers served to justify violence towards them. Second, drastic economic differences reduced people into different financial boxes and defined their identities. Thus, the upper classes looked down on the lower classes, provoking hatred from the lower classes toward the upper classes. Additionally, indifference toward the lower classes, not considered legitimate, caused their dehumanization and triggered a feeling of anomie. This lack of understanding creates an even bigger Polarization between each identity. None of the above actors were critically thinking about their triggering role. If the blame is always thrown onto the other, how can society reach unity?

## 7.4 Peace reflections

This thesis is a Peace and Conflict Transformation study; it is thus relevant to bring some elements and reflections on possible solutions and participate in the deliberations to solve conflict and reduce the French people's Polarization. This thesis does not pretend to have all the answers but wishes to

participate in creating better conditions to lead to Positive Peace (Galtung, 1969, 1996). As discussed above, Polarization can be triggered both from above, at the macro level, via media, and from below, at the individual scale, through Othering. Therefore, both sides must act to reach an understanding and reduce Polarization and Structural Violence. Positive Peace, thus the end of Structural Violence, can be achieved by efforts made from above and below.

### 7.4.1 Peace from above

The government must take action to create a Peace from above, meaning a Peace that comes from the State. First, the police issued from colonial heritage has to disappear. This police has been created for the wrong purposes and still follows the same legacy nowadays. Their techniques involve terrorizing a population considered guilty from birth (the underprivileged minorities). This only created segregation of the people, which became more assertive with the YVM as the targeted group became larger. In his book about the Yellow Vests, *La Victoire des Vaincus* (2019)*,* Edwy Plenel insists that these police units do not have to change; they have to disappear. The police should not exist to repress but to ensure the security of the State and, most importantly, the safety of its people. One crucial role of the police is the dialogue, to be able to understand the population and to be seen as a safe asset. It is therefore important to create trust between this institution and the citizens.

Second, freedom of speech, expression, and right to strike are crucial rights that the government hindered. Those are fundamental human rights, and David Laporte (2021) insists that the State should be the safeguard of human rights. A protest is a way for the people to demonstrate their unhappiness about certain things and make it visible. The government should acknowledge the people's demands and find common ground to ensure the well-being of society. Repression should not be an option, as it triggers more hate and rage and begets violence from the other side. Following Galtung's teachings (1996), dialogue is a peaceful way of finding solutions, as in Norway (Larsson, 2006).

Third, it is essential to instore justice and to hold people equally accountable for their actions, regardless of whether they are police officers or YV. As for now, the misbehaviors of the police and the *gendarmerie* have been judged by a police instance: The IGPN and the IGGN, called the "police of the police" (see Appendix B), are composed of former police officers; the IGPN hold a higher position in the police organigram and has the power to judge and dismiss officers. These instances should be dissolved and replaced by an external jury composed of magistrates, jurists, journalists, and social advisers to lead an impartial justice.

Fourth, one of the aspects of the Polarization of the population is economical. People from different life conditions who live in different places do not have the same chances for equality. The idea of classes has been constructed over centuries. The socialist vision of helping the poorest and taxing the richest is a way to solve it by raising the minimum wage and reducing the gaps between wages.

Finally, one of the leading actors in this Polarization is the media. A large proportion of the population does not trust the mainstream media and its daily or weekly newspapers. The media should work on regaining the trust of the citizens if they want to reduce the gap between the different identities of the population. First, the redactions must portray and represent every point of view of the population. This is needed to stop Othering and demonizing certain spheres of society, as some did with the YV or others with the police officers. Narratives of personal stories could be a way of recreating empathy and regaining trust from the readers. Moreover, teaching about critical abilities from primary school is a way to ensure the diversity of information read by people, and their critical views about it, unifying them under a similar sphere of information via education. Further, social media should have verifying sources to avoid the propagation of fake news. The following figures draw the different bubbles of information. The orange triangle represents the common sphere of information that would inhibit Structural Violence.
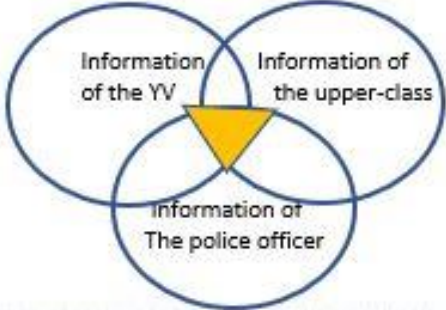


*Figure 4 Spheres of informations, by Justine Valentin*

### 7.4.2 Peace from below

Johan Galtung (1969) developed the idea of Peace from Below, making it one of the more efficient ways to reach Positive Peace and prevent the pattern from repeating. Hatred declines when there is an endeavor to learn the truth. Therefore, it is important to create a society that searches for truth and creates an environment with a strong awareness of fake news. Then, not only could media write towards a more extensive readership, but people could also learn how to distinguish information critically so as not to enter a bubble of ignorance. Here are developed few ideas of Peace from Below, following the research analysis.

First, the police officers themselves must learn that violence generates violence. Therefore, their behavior is responsible for the other person's reaction. The police formation should entail psychology and sociology to create a better understanding for police officers to apply to the cases they are dealing with. Police officers work with human beings and must be formed in sociology, psychology, and philosophy to understand and open their minds about the different lives they encounter every day.

Second, tolerance is needed from everyone to create a peaceful environment. In this case, every actor in a conflict, the YV, the upper classes, the police, and the independent journalists, should try and understand the impact of their own actions. The YV should also humanize police officers and understand that they are people just like them, and are just obeying orders and doing their job. The upper classes should aim to understand the YV struggle, and the journalists should picture all sides of the conflict. Therefore an important aspect of Peace from below is tolerance. If the different spheres of the society tolerate each other, this leads to the opposite of Othering: union and cohesion. In the search for global justice, Cristina Flesher Fominaya (2010) developed the idea of collective identity formation to create cohesion. Creating cohesion in society leads people to be aware of their situation and, therefore, identify with others. If people identify with others, the identity becomes a positive identity, as people act in the interest of a bigger in-group.

Third, it is also important that everyone take responsibility for their action. Without accountability, the situation can not improve. Thus, people can reach Peace from Below by recognizing their duty and being aware of the other to create a more respectful and tolerant society. Finally, assumed accountability also helps gaining trust, an essential factor for Positive Peace. Janine Natalya Clark (2009), studying how to achieve Positive Peace in Bosnia and Hercegovina after the war, develops the importance of responsibility and trust as crucial steps to move the peace forward.

To conclude, all actors in the conflict can take action to hinder Structural Violence and fight Polarization.

## 7.5 Conclusion of the discussion

To summarize the discussion chapter, many actors are at stake in the Structural Violence that creates Polarization within the French society. Media create spheres of disinformation by reaching different readerships and broadcasting different pieces of information. Further, Structural Violence can be initiated both from above and from below. From above, police brutality and state repression create a violent atmosphere where human rights and democracy are hindered. From below,

Othering leads people to dehumanize others and, therefore, not treat each other as equals. It creates Structural Violence, where people do not understand the struggles of others and thus start a fight between identities to be recognized as legitimate. Finally, the discussion takes on possible ideas for Positive Peace. From above, actions can be led by the government or the media. However, each individual can conduct their efforts to reach a more tolerant world from below.

# 8. Concluding chapter

This last chapter seeks to give a final overview of the research. First, the three research questions are answered individually. Second, this chapter mirrors a series of reflections on the investigation. Indeed, this research and its conclusions can be used to analyze different but similar geopolitical Structural Violence situations. Third, the chapter reflects on this study's subjectivity and emphasizes how further research can be pursued. Finally, it puts into perspective the current condition of the sanitary crisis and the evolution of the repression in French society.

## 8.1 Summary

First, the concluding chapter intends to synthesize the answers to the research questions to summarise the research and its findings.

- What has been the media's impact and power regarding the division of French society in the context of the Yellow Vests movement?

This study emphasizes the critical role of the media concerning the division of society. The press followed the interest of the power behind them, such as the government and different political parties and the wealthiest people owning them. They created narratives and reality by showing a one-sided world. The same readership often read the same media and was therefore influenced by the same one-sided view. Both in the case of mainstream media supporting the government and in the case of polarizing media promoting a political party, the articles comforted people in their view of the world and enhanced prejudices. They even created new prejudices and labeled a newly-born movement, sparking a demonization to generate hatred in different conflict camps. The fact that the media shared different points of view and that a separate public read them created various spheres of information and disinformation, emphasizing the lack of understanding of each identity in the conflict. By creating a sphere of disinformation, the media emphasize an already embedded Structural Violence based on misinformation and ignorance.

- How has Structural Violence shaped the different identities of French society during the Yellow Vests movement?
- How did the different actors perpetuate and emphasize the Polarization of French society during the Yellow Vests movement?

Structural Violence has shaped identities, and identities have emphasized Structural Violence. The circle of violence seems endless, like a vicious circle. In this research, the two research questions can be answered simultaneously because they are linked in the process of causality.

The different actors of the conflict have played significant roles in the Polarization of society.  First, the government has refused constructive dialogue and used force to repress the movement. Second, with the help of the media, it has disguised it by enhancing the Yellow Vests' violence and minimizing the government's violence. Third, the policing subculture created machismo and led police officers to contemptuous behaviors. As violence engenders violence, it maintains and nourishes the flames far from calming the conflict. Tired of the movement, they also othered the YV, seeing them as troublemakers.  Fourth, the upper classes enhanced Structural Violence by being indifferent to the YV situation and lacking understanding. They othered the Yellow Vests through the Demonization they read in the media, their on-site experience, and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes. Thus, they nourished a division between poor and rich brought up by capitalism, which strengthened the gap between classes.

Finally, the Yellow Vests, feeling othered and ignored and being oppressed, developed a feeling of anomie and loss of significance, which led them to choose violence as a last resort to make their voice matter. Thus, they chose the government as the enemy and dehumanized the police, seeing them as monsters. This demonization created conditions for easier violence perpetration and its justification.

Consequently, each group dug a more significant structural gap by expressing their identity. By viewing the others as evil and inhuman, the different identities have enhanced the definitions of others and have created enemies. This hatred towards others constitutes Structural Violence. However, the phenomenon that leads to this hatred is also Structural Violence. It is structural because it is brought, improved, and maintained by society. This violence begets a Polarization of the community and identities, which enhances Structural Violence. Below, I schematize the endless circle of violence and social identity that nourishes Polarization in the figure below.
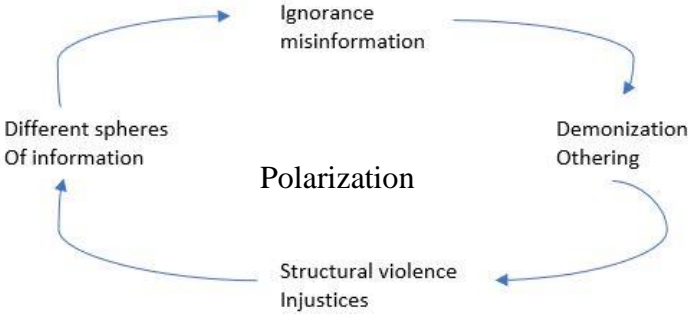


*Figure 5 Circle of Polarization, by Justine Valentin*

## 8.2 Further remarks

To conclude this research, I develop some conclusions and remarks. First, I reflect on the Structural Violence perpetrated towards the Yellow Vests and how this structure is applied every day to other groups. Second, I develop the possible ways to bring this research forward and the different possible research questions yet unanswered about the YVM. Third, the pandemic changed the dynamic of the country yet kept and strengthened similar Structural Violence interesting to investigate in the future.

Overall, the YVM was a white movement. Starting in the countryside, it concerned many people who owned cars and houses (Ruty, 2019). Vincent Geisser (2019) insists that underprivileged people with an immigration background from the outskirts of Paris or big cities were under-represented. Police brutality did not start with the YVM. However, it was before mostly perpetrated against racialized minorities, mostly of immigrant ancestry, in the suburbs of big cities. The BAC is omnipresent in the suburbs, and people growing up there have always known brutality. However, this brutality has been hidden for a long time and is even considered usual for a large part of society. It was commonly argued that the police used more force in suburbs because the population there was more dangerous and criminal, an argument often used by the National Rally (Wahnich, 2017, p.84). The government used the same argument to justify the violence perpetrated against the YV.

The YVM showed the world that massive police brutality was perpetrated against white people. The fact that the violence was towards white people can explain the enormous international echo the movement had, with a government behavior condemned by Amnesty International (Un bilan inquiétant, 2019). Worldwide, the Yellow Vests became the police brutality's victims. Eric Marlière (2020) argues that the same loss of significance as the Black Lives Matter movement happened to the YV, primarily white people, triggering a more violent response. Thus, the structure repeats itself. The underprivileged white people took the place of the racialized people, and the upper class took their place, in the Structural Violence circle of the YVM. However, the YV are unaware of this pattern, as many Marine LePen voters were represented in the YVM (see figure 11). Her party, the National Rally, is firmly against immigration.

Due to racism, the racialized people are seen mainly as troublemakers in society. During the Yellow Vests, the protesters themselves were seen as trouble makers through a process of classism. On the other hand, police officers were hated by a part of the population, making the violence perpetrated by the Yellow Vests against them seem legitimate. All three cases are examples of Structural Violence in French society. Those examples can be added to many

oppressions, especially against minorities based on genders, sexual orientations, origins, and religions. Therefore, the YVM is a victim of the same oppression structures as racism.

| Actors/oppression systems | Racism and xenophobia | Class contempt | State Hatred |
|---|---|---|---|
| Victims | People with an immigrant background | Yellow Vests | Police officers |
| Perpetrators | Police, directed by the State | Police, directed by the State | Yellow Vests |
| Facilitators | French society, especially the extreme right party | French higher sphere of the society | The extreme-left, communists and anarchists |

*Table 1 Examples of different oppression systems by Structural Violence in France, Justine Valentin*

The research itself and the Peace and Conflict reflection are the work of a 24 years old French student in Norway, coming from a middle-class family. This work is not to take for granted as bringing truth but simply as a puzzle piece. It seeks to help understand French society and the way modern democracies and their people function together. It is not written under the pretense of being a pioneer but only as an example of an analysis of French society through the lenses of the YVM.

This research only focused on the progressive and strong division of the society in France during the first five months of the YVM. This research has been done mainly from a symbolic interactionist perspective. However, for future research, it would be interesting to study the conflict after the military was mobilized on March 23rd, 2019, and its impact on the lessening of the movement. Many gaps are still to be filled in the research about the YVM. Although this research did not involve social media data, it is essential to underline the impact and importance of social media in developing the movement. It would also be interesting to understand the point of view of different people, such as comparing how the protests were received both in cities and the countryside or how foreigners living in France experienced the movement, or how the movement was received abroad, as the reactions were drastically different. The consequences of this movement are also yet to be analyzed to understand the future of our societal world.

As the Covid-19 pandemic contaminated the world, countries enforced quarantine, and people were not allowed to go out and had an obligation to wear a sanitary masks. In France, on November

21st 2020, Michel Zecler, a black French citizen, was not wearing a face mask in the street on his way home. Followed by police officers, he was beaten up in his studio (Buyle, 2021). The repression increased during the Covid crisis as the international sanitary situation legitimized more control over the population to contain the virus. In the Presidential debate of April 20th, 2022, Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron expressed an urge to strengthen and rehabilitate the police forces as victims of the citizens' fury (Débat Présidentiel, 2022). The denied police brutality and its protection by the higher instances trigger a reflection about the threats French democracy is facing. If research about a jeopardized democracy following the pandemic exists, for example *Democracy in a year of Crisis* by Sarah Repucci and Amy Slipowitz (2021), the case of France still remains to be scrutinized.

On July 21st, 2021, France created a "sanitary pass" and enforced it as mandatory in every public place such as cinemas, restaurants, bars, and theatres. The pass consisted of a QR code that proved the person was either vaccinated or tested negative in the past 72hours (Pass Sanitaire, 2021). As of Saturday, July 14th, revolts started to burst in the main French cities. The Antivax movement was joined by many former Yellow Vests, protesting against the government. Moreover, the sanitary pass raised objections concerning freedom of choice, whether to take the vaccine or not (Des gilets jaunes aux antipass, 2021). Thousands of protesters came to the big cities, and essentially Paris, every Saturday from September 2021, until the end of the Sanitary Pass on March 14th 2022 (Fin du Pass, 2022). With the economic crisis that came with the sanitary crisis, many people lost their job, and poverty increased exponentially. Minorities already marginalized suffered doubly more than the rest of the population (Blanchard, Boubli, & Lemaistre, 2021). The pandemic left a significant legacy, leading to even bigger societal gaps, which would be very relevant to research in a future study.

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# Appendices

## A. Complementary informations

*The Milgram experiment: This experiment, interested in the Nazi' system of violence, involved subjects and an actor (which they thought was another man in the experiment). The subject had to deliver (fake) Electrique chokes to the actor when he was answering the question wrong. This experiment is known as transgressing ethical barriers, and giving stress and anxiety due to being incited to administer electric shocks.

** The Holdaway research: Holdaway conducted a study within his police team, using the method of ethnography, having, therefore, access to conversations, documents and field notes without anyone suspecting he was conducting a study

## B. Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | French definition | English meaning |
|---|---|---|
| BAC | Brigade Anti Criminalité | Brigade Anti-Crime |
| BRI | Brigade Rapide d'Intervention | Fast Brigade for Intervention |
| CRS | Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité | Republican Security Companies |
| DOPC | Direction de l'Ordre Public et de la Circulation de la préfecture de police de Paris | Department of Public Order and Traffic of the Paris Police Prefecture |
| GN | Gendarmerie Nationale | National *Gendarmerie* |
| GR | Gendarmerie Républicaine | Republican *Gendarmerie* |
| IGPN | Inspection Générale de la Police Nationale | General Inspection of the National Police |
| IGGN | Inspection Générale de la Gendarmerie Nationale | General Inspection of the National *Gendarmerie* |
| LBD40 | Lanceur de balles de défenses 40x46mm | Defense ball launcher 40x46mm |
| RAID | Recherche Assistance Intervention Dissuasion | Research Assistance Intervention Deterrence |
| CGT | Confédération Nationale du travail | General Workers Conferderations |
| DGPN | Direction Generale de la Police Nationale | General Direction of the National Police |
| DGGN | Direction Generale de la Gendarmerie Nationale | General Direction of the National *Gendarmerie* |

*Table 2 The abbreviations of the police and gendarmerie in France*

| Abbreviations | French definition | English meaning |
|---|---|---|
| AntiFa | AntiFascistes | AntiFascists |
| FA | Fédération Anarchiste | Anarchist Federation |
| NPA | Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste | New Anticapitalist Party |
| PCF | Parti Communiste Francais | French Communist Party |
| LFI | La France Insoumise | The Desobedient France |
| LO | Lutte Ouvrière | Workers' Fight |
| ND | Nouvelle Done | New Deal |
| PRG | Parti Radical de Gauche | Radical Left Party |
| EELV | Europe Ecologie Les Verts | Europe Ecology Greens |
| PS | Parti Socialiste | Socialist Party |
| ModDem | Mouvement Democrate | Democrat Movement |
| LREM | La République En Marche | The Republic on the Move |
| PCD | Parti Chrétien Démocrate | Christian Democratic Party |
| LR | Les Républicains | The Republicans |
| DLF | Debout La France | France Stand Up |
| RN | Rassemblement National | National Rally |

*Table 3 Main political parties in France in 2021, from extreme left to extreme right (to be read from top to bottom)*

## C. **Key People**

| | |
|---|---|
| David Dufresnes | French independent journalist, author of *Derniere Sommation,* 2020. |
| Marine LePen | President of the National Rally, and candidate to the presidential elections in 2012, 2017 and 2022. |
| Emmanuel Macron | President of the French Republic, from the LREM party |
| Christophe Castaner | French Defense Minister from 2018 to 2020 |
| Alexandre Benalla | French Security Guard of the Government |
| Gérald Darmanin | Minister of Public Accounts from 2017 to 2020, Defense Minister since 2020 |
| Edouard Philippe | Prime Minister of the French government from 2017 to 2020 |
| Jean-Luc Mélanchon | President of the Disobedient France Party |
| Richard Lizurey | Director of the General Direction of the National *Gendarmerie* |

*Table 4 Presentation of key public figures during the Yellow Vests movement*

| Priscilla Ludosky | On May 29, 2018, she published an online petition on the increase in the fuel tax in order to denounce social inequalities. |
|---|---|
| Eric Drouet | French activist who is one of the main figures of the Yellow Vests movement. |
| Ingrid Levavasseur | Social movement activist and French politician, nursing assistant by profession, who is one of the figures of the Yellow Vests movement. Since 2020, she has been an opposition municipal councilor in Louviers. |
| Maxime Nicolle | French activist who is one of the main figures of the Yellow Vests movement. |
| Jacline Mouraud | French social movement activist who is one of the female figures of the Yellow Vests movement. She candidates for the 2022 presidential election. |
| Jérôme Rodrigues | One of the main activists of the Yellow Vests movement, blinded in one eye on January 26, 2019 by a LBD shot. |
| Ghislain Coutard | On October 24, 2018, Ghislain Coutard, a 36-year-old specialized technician, posted on social networks a video suggesting to people, like him, exasperated by the increases in the price of fuel, to place as a sign of discontent, a yellow vest on the dashboard of their car. |

*Table 5 Présentation of key Yellow Vests spokesperson*

| Zineb Redouane | This 80-year-old woman died in 2018 on the sidelines of a demonstration of Yellow Vests in Marseille by a dispersal grenade |
|---|---|
| Genevieve Legay | Demonstrator during the Yellow Vests, and member of ATTAC: Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and for Citizen Action, she was charged by the police on March 23rd 2019, and had to be brought to the emergency. |
| Olivier Béziade | A firefighter and Yellow Vests who was shot in the head by a LBD 40 in Bordeaux, and is now disabled for life. |
| Christophe Dettinger | French boxer who boxed back police officers on January 5th 2019. He was condemn to one year emprisonment. |

*Table 6 Présentation of mediatised victims of police brutality during the Yellow Vests protests*

## D. **French words and places**

***L'Arc de Triomphe****:* The Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile, often referred to simply as the Arc de Triomphe, is a monument built by Emperor Napoleon I in 1806, and finished in 1836. It is located in Paris, at a high point in the junction of the territories of the 8th, 16th and 17th arrondissements, in particular at the top of the Avenue des Champs-Élysées and the Avenue de la Grande-Armée, which constitute a major east-west Parisian axis starting from the Louvre pyramid, passing by the obelisk of La Concorde, the Arc de Triomphe itself and ending in the distance with the Arch of Defense.

***Black Blocs:*** Without an organization chart or centralized figures, the black bloc is made up of individuals and groups of individuals, organized or not, without formal affiliation or hierarchy, all dressed in black and masked for anonymity. It is formed mainly of activists from the movements of the extreme left, libertarian or autonomous.

***Bobo:*** The term "bobo", which is a contraction of the neologism "bourgeois-bohème", coined in the 2000s, conveys many social representations: the "bobo" is frequently associated with the "elite", often graduates, and with a young and trendy city lifestyle.

***Casseurs:*** The term "destroyer" designates individuals engaging in a form of activism based on degradation, or even confrontation with police forces mobilized within the framework of demonstrations. The "destroyer" is today considered a synonym of vandal.

***Cassos***: The word cassos is the abbreviation of the expression social case. Originally, a social case is a person who is a little marginalized and in financial difficulty. Its use could now be translated by "looser". With the rise of the Cancel Culture, this word is not tolerated in the French language.

***Les Champs Elysées:*** The Avenue des Champs-Élysées is a street in Paris. Nearly two kilometers long and following the historic axis of the city, it is a central traffic lane connecting Place de la Concorde to Place Charles-de-Gaulle in the 8th arrondissement. This name is a reference to Greek mythology: the Champs Elysees was the eternal resting place of deceased heroes. Also, by allusion, it was chosen to signify to walkers that they had the privilege of being able to rest in the king's gardens. The avenue is also home to the biggest ready-to-wear, cosmetics, and sports brands, such as Gap, Zara, Sephora, or Nike, and even for the Official Boutique of PSG, the famous Parisian football club.

***L'Elysee:*** The Élysée Palace, known as the Élysée, is a former Parisian mansion, located at no.55 rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré, in the 8th arrondissement of Paris. It is the seat of the Presidency of the French Republic and the official residence of the Head of State since the Second Republic. By metonymy, the term is used to designate the government.

*Flics:* First of all, some believe that cop comes from the term flick, the slang of German criminals. The latter had the meaning of "boy, young man". It would have been used first to designate young recruits, then it would have been extended to all. Other interpretations lead to think that the word imitate the noise of the whip, or the chicken.

*Gendarmerie:* Police officers and *gendarmes* share a single and the same code of ethics, they exercise the same missions but in distinct areas of competence. The police zone is essentially urban. The *gendarmerie* zone is mostly peri-urban, made up of medium-sized towns or more rural areas. The *Gendarmerie,* unlike the police, is part of the military institution. It is invested with military missions and it participates in defense policy, on national territory, as in the context of foreign operations. The officers and non-commissioned officers of the gendarmerie are career soldiers subject to the general status of soldiers.

As there is no English equivalent of *gendarmerie*, I will refer to it using the French word in this research.

*Keuf:* In french, a popular form of slang consist in playing around the syllables and to say the words in reverse. Thus, *keuf* is the "verlan", meaning the "reverse" of *flic.*

*La Nasse:* La *Nasse* is a technique developed by police forces to control the flow of crowds during protests that aim to block protesters in a police circle

**Place Beauvau :** Place Beauvau is a French square located in the Faubourg-du-Roule district of the 8th arrondissement of Paris. By metonymy, Place Beauvau also designates the Ministry of the Interior, which is located at the Hôtel de Beauvau

*Poulets:* Formerly the French police wore a hat decorated with chicken feathers. ... The origin of this appellation comes from the Paris Police Prefecture, which actually took up residence on the Île de la Cité in 1871, instead of the old chicken market in the capital. Now it is a slang to designate the police officers.

# E. Data

## E.1 Articles studied

**Extreme left:** *L'Humanité*

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**Left:** *Libération*

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**Center-left:** *Le Monde*

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- « Gilets jaunes » : à Paris, des destructions, des violences et un mot d'ordre, « Macron démission », (2018, December 2) *Le Monde,* Retrieved from https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2018/12/02/gilets-jaunes-a-paris-des-destructions-des-violences-et-un-mot-d-ordre-macron-demission_5391510_3224.html
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- « Gilets jaunes » : Macron souhaite « un prompt rétablissement, et peut-être une forme de sagesse » à la manifestante blessée à Nice, (2019, March 24) *Le Monde,* Retrieved from https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/03/24/gilets-jaunes-enquete-ouverte-apres-la-blessure-d-une-manifestante-septuagenaire-a-nice_5440544_3224.html

**Center-right:** *Le Figaro*

- «C'est un ras-le-bol général !»: le jour où les «gilets jaunes» ont dit stop, (2018, November 17) *Le Figaro,* Retrieved from https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2018/11/17/01016-20181117ARTFIG00078-c-est-un-ras-le-bol-general-le-jour-o-les-gilets-jaunes-ont-dit-stop.php
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- «Gilets jaunes»: la garde à vue du boxeur filmé en train de frapper des gendarmes prolongée, (2019, January 7) *Le Figaro,* Retrieved from
- https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2019/01/07/01016-20190107ARTFIG00139-gilets-jaunes-le-boxeur-recherche-s-est-rendu-a-la-police.php
- «Gilets jaunes»: les commerçants demandent à l'État d'agir, (2019, March 18) *Le Figaro,* Retrieved from https://www.lefigaro.fr/conjoncture/2019/03/18/20002-20190318ARTFIG00166-gilets-jaunes-les-commercants-demandent-a-l-etat-d-agir.php
- «Gilets jaunes» : une femme blessée lors d'une charge à Nice, (2019, March 23a) *Le Figaro,* Retrieved from

https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/gilets-jaunes-une-femme-blessee-lors-d-une-charge-a-nice-20190323
- L'image saisissante du Fouquet's barricadé, une semaine après son saccage, (2019, March 23b), *Le Figaro,* Retrieved from https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2019/03/23/01016-20190323ARTFIG00038-l-image-saisissante-du-fouquet-s-barricade-une-semaine-apres-son-saccage.php

### Right: *Le Point*

- "Gilets jaunes": des hypermarchés et des stations-service touchés, (2018, November 17) *Le Point,* Retrieved from https://www.lepoint.fr/economie/gilets-jaunes-des-hypermarches-et-des-stations-service-touches-17-11-2018-2272231_28.php
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- "Gilets jaunes : un manifestant filmé en train de boxer un gendarme", (2019, January 5) *Le Point,* Retrieved from https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/gilets-jaunes-un-manifestant-filme-en-train-de-boxer-un-gendarme-05-01-2019-2283574_23.php
- "Gilets jaunes": un acte 18 marqué par un fort regain de violences à Paris, (2019, March 16) *Le Point,* Retrieved from https://www.lepoint.fr/politique/acte-18-les-gilets-jaunes-misent-sur-un-regain-de-mobilisation-pour-leur-ultimatum-16-03-2019-2301520_20.php

### Extreme right: *Présent*

- La Révolte des gueux, (2018, November 17) *Présent,* Retrieved from https://present.fr/2018/11/19/la-revolte-des-gueux/
- Sous le Gilet Jaune la Peste Brune?, (2018, November 26), *Présent,* Retrieved from https://present.fr/2018/11/26/sous-le-gilet-jaune-la-peste-brune/
- La Peste Brune était rouge (2018, December 3) *Présent,* Retrieved from https://present.fr/2018/12/03/la-peste-brune-etait-rouge/
- "N'ayez pas peur!", (2018, December 10), *Présent,* Retrieved from https://present.fr/2018/12/10/nayez-pas-peur/
- L'affaire des cagnottes, (2019, January 9), *Présent*, Retrieved from https://present.fr/2019/01/09/laffaire-des-cagnottes/
- Bilan de l'Acte XVIII: ultraviolence et incompétence, (2019, March 16) *Présent*, retrieved from https://present.fr/2019/03/18/bilan-de-lacte-xviii-ultraviolence-et-incompetence/
- Gilets Jaunes, l'armée face aux manifestants, (2019, March 25) *Présent,* Retrieved from https://present.fr/2019/03/25/gilets-jaunes-larmee-face-aux-manifestants/

## E.2 Description of the study participants

| Code name | Date of the interview | Description | Role in the YV riots |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yellow Vest 1 **Virgil** | January 2021 | French Man from Morrocan origins About 40 Years Old. Guard in a high school | He attended two YV Riot in Paris. |
| Yellow Vest 2 **Virginie** | January 2021 | French woman, about 40 years old, nurse, very energetic | She was very active, went every weekend to Paris for a year although she lives 4 hours driving from there. |
| Yellow Vest 3 **Vincent** | January 2021 | French student in psychology, about 20 years old, part of the Communism Youth. | He was very commited, went on various riots in Paris. |
| Yellow Vest 4 **Valérie** | February 2021 | French litterature teacher, about 40 years old. | She went on various riots, either small ones with her daughter, or ones in the cities, without her, in the south of France. |
| Yellow Vest 5 **Victor** | January 2021 | French citizen from the West coast of France, about 30 years old. | He went on several riots in Paris but stopped after he was shot in the head and is now disabled for life. |
| Journalist 1 **Jean** | February 2021 | French man, 30 years old. Photograph reporter independent. | He was present as a reporter in several riots in Paris. |
| Journalist 2 **Judith** | February 2021 | French woman, 22 years old. Student in Journalism and Photography in Bruxelles. | She went to two riots, and the second time, in Paris, was arrested by the police for no apparent reason for an entire day, and later released at night. |
| Journalist 3 **Julia** | February 2021 | French woman,45 Years Old. Very active. Independent photograph reporter. | She was present in many riots in Paris as independent journalist. |
| Police Officer 1 **Philippe** | March 2021 | French Man, 40 years old *Gendarme,* and then paramedic in the army. | He participated in the YV riots as a *gendarme* only twice, before quitting, but was present |

| | | | for the most part as an observer. He knows the *gendarmerie* metality. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Police Officer 2 **Pierre** | April 2021 | French man, 45 years old. Worried about his anonymity, he is part of the *gendarmerie*. | He participated in towns and city riots as police officer. |
| Police Officer 3 **Patrice** | May 2021 | French man, 51 years old. Worried about his anonymity. Police officer with a high rank (anonymous) in the *gendarmerie*. | He participated to some riots as leader of the *gendarmerie*. |
| Police Officer 4 **Pauline** | July 2021 | French woman, about 50 Years old, member of the Police in Poitiers | She participated in the "control" of the YV movement in Poitiers every Saturday for an entire year. |
| Politician 1 **Robert** | August 2021 | About 50 years old, French, town councillor farmer and teacher leaving in the countryside. | He participated as observator of the YV to many riots in Poitiers (city in the West of France) |
| Politician 2 **Romane** | August 2021 | French Woman about 50 years old mayor of a town, and English teacher | She had encounters with the YV which did not give her a good impressions. |
| Politician 3 **Remi** | Auguste 2021 | French Man, about 55 years old, lives in the country side and move a lot for work town concillor and ingenior | He interacted a few times with the YV on roundabouts, and showed indifference to the existence of the YV nor to their issues |

*Table 7 Description of the Study's Participants*

## F. Information Letter

This information letter was given to the participants in French, but for the purpose of this thesis, I translated it to English. Here below are both versions of the consent letter.

**French version**:

Il s'agit d'une enquête sur la participation à un projet de recherche dont l'objectif principal est: comprendre l'étendue de la polarisation de la société française dans le cas d'étude du mouvement des Gilets Jaunes. Dans cette lettre, nous vous donnerons des informations sur le but du projet et ce que votre participation impliquera.

Je m'appelle Justine Victoria Valentin et je suis étudiante en master à l'Arctic University of Tromsø. Pour mon mémoire de master, j'examine la polarisation de la société française, en étudiant l'exemple du mouvement des Gilets Jaunes. Dans cette recherche, les objectifs sont de définir les différents modèles et acteurs qui renforcent la division de la société. Je cherche à comprendre les constructions structurelles sous-jacentes qui pourraient être encore perpétuées et utilisées dans la société française d'aujourd'hui.

Les questions de recherche sont les suivantes :

• Comment la violence structurelle a-t-elle façonné les différentes identités de la société française pendant le mouvement des gilets jaunes ?

• Quel a été l'impact et le pouvoir des médias sur la polarisation de la société française pendant le mouvement des Gilets Jaunes ?

• Comment les différents acteurs ont-ils perpétué et accentué la polarisation de la société française pendant le mouvement des Gilets Jaunes ?

UiT L'Arctic University of Norway est l'institution responsable du projet.

 Je vous invite à participer à cette recherche car vous vous identifiez en tant que Gilet Jaune/Police/Journaliste/Politicien, qui est l'un des acteurs du conflit sur lequel je me concentre. Les actions et la pensée de chacun ont des conséquences sur un conflit donné, et j'aimerais, si vous me le permettez, l'étudier à travers votre récit.

Votre participation à l'étude se fera par téléphone, en répondant à mes questions, ce qui prendra au maximum une heure. Il n'y a pas de compensation pour répondre, mais il n'y a pas de risque non plus. J'ai quelques questions préparées mais je comprends cette étude comme une conversation, car les questions viendront selon la direction de la conversation.

Pour vous assurer que toutes les informations restent confidentielles, veuillez ne pas inclure votre nom. Quant aux informations concernant votre email et téléphone, je serai le seul en leur possession, car il s'agit des moyens que j'aurai pour communiquer avec vous. Si vous choisissez de participer au projet, veuillez répondre aux questions aussi honnêtement que possible. La participation est volontaire et vous pouvez choisir de mettre fin à votre participation à tout moment, sans donner de raison. Toutes les informations vous concernant seront anonymes. Il n'y aura aucune conséquence négative pour vous si vous choisissez de ne pas participer ou décidez plus tard de vous retirer. Le retrait de la participation est possible à tout moment pendant la période d'étude (jusqu'au 1er novembre 2021). Toutes les données seront supprimées à la fin du projet.

Lors de la recherche, votre nom sera remplacé par un nom de code et les données détaillées vous concernant ne seront pas transmises.

Tant que vous pouvez être identifié dans les données collectées, vous avez le droit de :

- accéder aux données personnelles qui sont traitées à votre sujet

- demander la suppression de vos données personnelles

- demander que les données personnelles incorrectes vous concernant soient corrigées/rectifiées

- de recevoir une copie de vos données personnelles (portabilité des données)

- envoyer une plainte au délégué à la protection des données ou à l'autorité norvégienne de protection des données concernant le traitement de vos données personnelles

Justine Victoria Valentin

Numéro de téléphone : +46763259427

WhatsApp : +33786091309

Courriel : justinevictoriavalentin@gmail.com


Vos informations:

Numéro de téléphone:

Adresse e-mail:

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is: to understand the extend of the polarization of the french society in the case study of the Yellow Vests movement. In this letter, we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

My name is Justine Victoria Valentin and I am a master's student at the Arctic University of Tromsø. For my master's thesis, I am examining the polarization of the French society, studying the example of the Yellow Vests movement. In this research, the purposes are to define the different patterns and actors who enhance the division of the society. I seek to understand underlying structural constructions that could be still perpetuated and used in today's French society.

The research questions are the following:

- How has Structural Violence shaped the different identities of French society during the Yellow Vests movement?

- What has been the media's impact and power regarding the polarization of the French society during the Yellow Vests movement?

- How did the different actors perpetuate and emphasize the polarization of  French society during the Yellow Vests movement?

UiT The Arctic University of Norway is the institution responsible for the project.

 I invite you to participate in this research because you identify as a Yellow Vest/Police officer/Journalist/Politician, which is one of the actors of the conflict I focus on. Everyone's actions and thought have consequences on a given conflict, and I would like, if you'd allow me, to study it through your narrative.

Your participation of the study will happen over the phone, by answering my questions, which will take a maximum of one hour. There is no compensation for responding, but there is no risk either. I have a few questions prepared but understand this study as a conversation, as questions will come depending on the direction of the conversation.

To ensure that all information is kept confidential, please do not include your name. As for the information concerning your email and telephone, I will be the only one in their possession,

because it is about the means that I will have to communicate with you. If you choose to participate in the project, please answer the questions as honestly as possible. Participation is voluntary and you can choose to end your participation at any time, without giving a reason. All information about you will be anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw. Withdrawal from participation is possible at any time during the study period (until November 1st , 2021). All data will be deleted at the end of the project.

In the research, your name will be changed to a code name, and detailed data about you will not be transmitted.
So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:
- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- to receive a copy of your personal data (data portability)
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

Justine Victoria Valentin
Phone number: +46763259427
Whatsapp: +33786091309
Email: justinevictoriavalentin@gmail.com

Your information:
Phone number:
Email address:

## G. **Semi-Structured Interviews guide**

**French version**:

*Présentation:*

Cet entretien est anonyme, moi seul aura accès aux données. J'ai préparé quelques questions pour orienter l'entretien, mais de nouvelles questions peuvent également survenir au cours de la discussion. Vous n'êtes pas obligé de répondre aux questions si vous ne le souhaitez pas. N'hésitez pas à exprimer à tout moment de l'entretien si une question vous met mal à l'aise ou si vous souhaitez arrêter l'entretien. Je serai le seul en possession des données pendant toute la durée de ma thèse. Vous pouvez, à tout moment jusqu'au 1er novembre, me dire si vous souhaitez que je ne tienne pas compte de votre témoignage, ou si vous souhaitez modifier certains éléments. L'entretien devrait durer environ une heure. Maintenant, si vous êtes prêt, je vais commencer.

*À propos des gilets jaunes*

- En novembre 2018, le mouvement des Gilets Jaunes a commencé en France, quelle a été votre expérience personnelle ?
- Que pensez-vous du mouvement ?
- Qu'avez-vous pensé des violences des Gilets Jaunes ?

*À propos des forces de police*

- Selon vous, quel est le rôle de la police lors des manifestations ?
- Qu'avez-vous pensé des violences, légitimes ou illégitimes, perpétrées par plusieurs policiers ?

*À propos de la couverture médiatique*

- Pensiez-vous que la couverture médiatique traduisait votre expérience sur le terrain ? Pourquoi?

*À propos de l'autoréflexion*

- Si vous pouviez remonter le temps, feriez-vous les choses différemment ?

**English version**:

*Presentation*

This interview is anonymous, only I will have access to the data. I prepared some questions to guide the direction of the interview, but new questions can also come along during the discussion. You do not have to answer the questions if you do not want to. Please feel free to express at any moment In the interview if a question makes you uncomfortable, or if you want to stop the interview. I will be the only one in possession of the data during the entire time of my thesis. You can, at any moment until November 1$^{st}$, tell me if you want me not to take into account your testimony, or if you want to change some elements. The interview should last about one hour. Now, if you are ready, I will start.

*About the Yellow Vests*
- In November 2018, the Yellow Vests movement started in France, what was your personnal experience?
- What do you think about the movement?
- What did you think about the Yellow Vests violence?

*About the Police forces*
- According to you, what is the role of the police during protests?
- What did you think about the violence, legitimate or illegitimate, perpetrated by several police officers?

*About media coverage*
- Did you think the media coverage was translating your experience in the field? Why?

*About self-reflexion*
- If you could go back in time, would you do things differently?

# H. **Photos**



*Figure 6Man on the floor, hit by a LBD40. The street medic and the BAC.
Photo taken by Julia.*



*Figure 7 Demonstrator fighting back with a member of the police forces. Photo
taken by Julia.*

# I. Relevant articles of the 1958 Constitution

Art. 8:

*The President of the Republic appoints the Prime Minister. He puts an end to his functions on the presentation by this one of the resignations of the Government.*

*On the proposal of the Prime Minister, he appoints the other members of the Government and terminates their functions.*

Art. 11:

*The President of the Republic, on a proposal from the Government for the duration of the sessions or on a joint proposal of the two assemblies, published in the Official Journal, may submit to referendum any bill relating to the organization of public powers, to reforms relating to the economic, social or environmental policy of the nation and the public services which contribute to it, or tending to authorize the ratification of a treaty which, without being contrary to the Constitution, would have an impact on the functioning of the institutions.*

*When the referendum is organized on the proposal of the Government, the latter makes a declaration before each assembly, which is followed by a debate.*

*A referendum on an object mentioned in the first paragraph may be organized on the initiative of one fifth of the members of Parliament, supported by one tenth of the voters registered on the electoral lists. This initiative takes the form of a bill and cannot have as its object the repeal of a legislative provision promulgated for less than a year.*

*The conditions of its presentation and those under which the Constitutional Council controls compliance with the provisions of the preceding paragraph are determined by an organic law.*

*If the bill has not been examined by the two assemblies within a time limit set by the organic law, the President of the Republic submits it to a referendum.*

*When the bill is not adopted by the French people, no new referendum proposal on the same subject may be presented before the expiration of a period of two years following the date of the ballot.*

*When the referendum has concluded with the adoption of the bill or the proposed law, the President of the Republic promulgates the law within fifteen days following the proclamation of the results of the consultation.*

Art. 12

*The President of the Republic may, after consultation with the Prime Minister and the Presidents of the Assemblies, pronounce the dissolution of the National Assembly.*

*General elections take place twenty days at least and forty days at most after dissolution.*

*The National Assembly meets as of right on the second Thursday following its election. If this meeting takes place outside the period provided for the ordinary session, a session is automatically opened for a period of fifteen days.*

*A new dissolution cannot be carried out in the year following these elections.*

Art. 18

*The President of the Republic communicates with the two Assemblies of Parliament through messages which he has read and which do not give rise to any debate.*

*He can address the Parliament meeting for this purpose in Congress. His statement may give rise, without his presence, to a debate which is not subject to a vote.*

*Outside of session, the parliamentary assemblies meet especially for this purpose.*

Art. 54

*If the Constitutional Council, seized by the President of the Republic, by the Prime Minister, by the president of one or the other assembly or by sixty deputies or sixty senators, has declared that an international commitment includes a clause contrary to Constitution, the authorization to ratify or approve the international commitment in question can only intervene after the revision of the Constitution.*

Art. 56

*The Constitutional Council has nine members, whose mandate lasts nine years and is not renewable. The Constitutional Council is renewed by thirds every three years. Three of the members are appointed by the President of the Republic, three by the President of the National Assembly, three by the President of the Senate. The procedure provided for in the last paragraph of article 13 is applicable to these appointments. The appointments made by the chairman of each assembly are subject to the sole opinion of the competent standing committee of the assembly concerned.*

*In addition to the nine members provided for above, the former Presidents of the Republic are ex officio members for life of the Constitutional Council.*

*The President is appointed by the President of the Republic. He has the casting vote in the event of a tie.*

Art. 61

*The organic laws, before their promulgation, the proposals of law mentioned in article 11 before they are submitted to the referendum, and the regulations of the parliamentary assemblies, before their implementation, must be submitted to the Constitutional Council, which is pronounces on their conformity with the Constitution.*

*For the same purposes, laws may be referred to the Constitutional Council, before their promulgation, by the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the President of the National Assembly, the President of the Senate or sixty deputies or sixty senators.*

*In the cases provided for in the two preceding paragraphs, the Constitutional Council must rule within one month. However, at the request of the Government, if there is an emergency, this period is reduced to eight days.*

*In these same cases, referral to the Constitutional Council suspends the time limit for promulgation.*
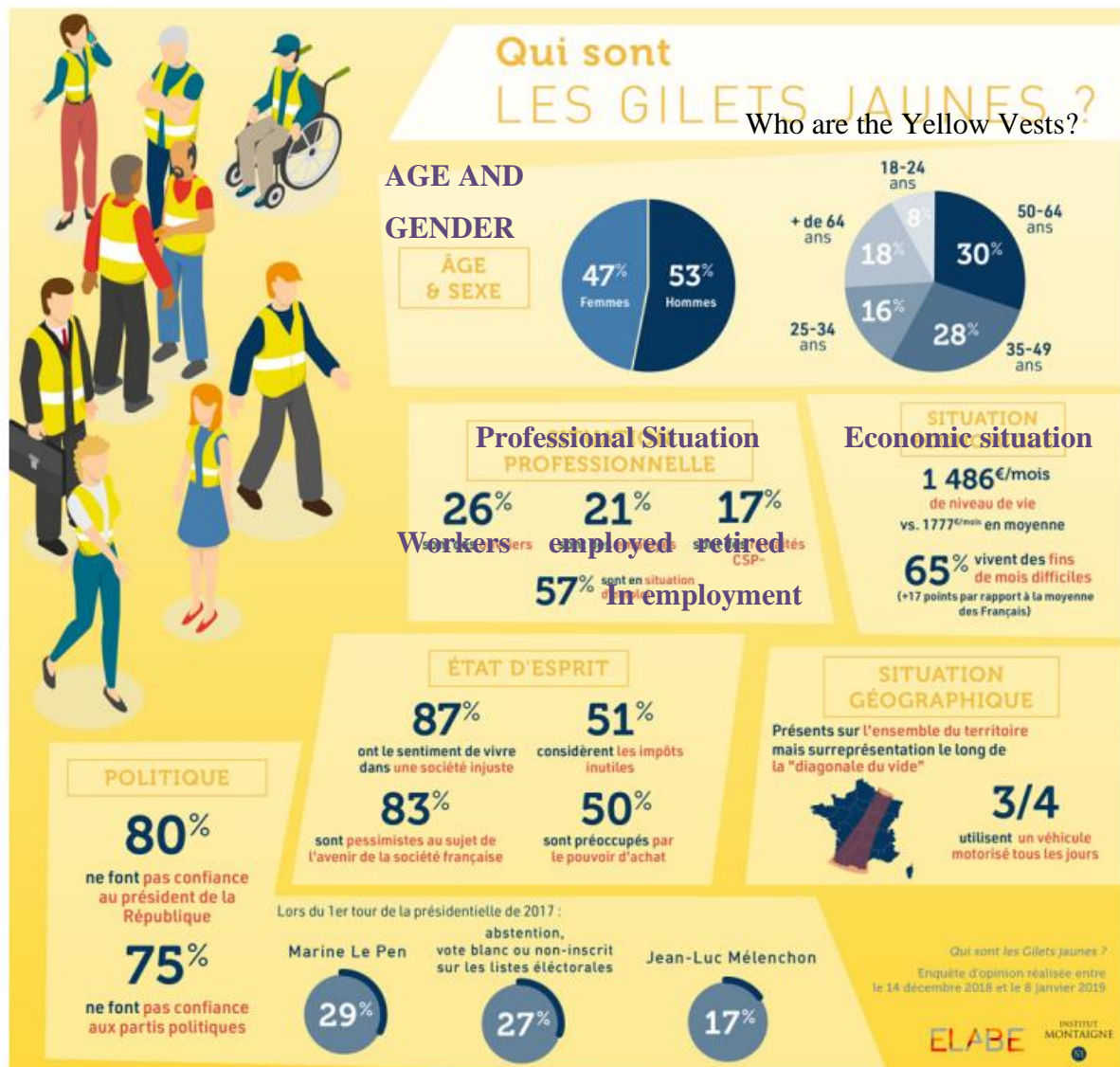
## J. Statistics about the Yellow Vests



*Figure 8 Who are the Yellow Vests? Retrived from Statist*

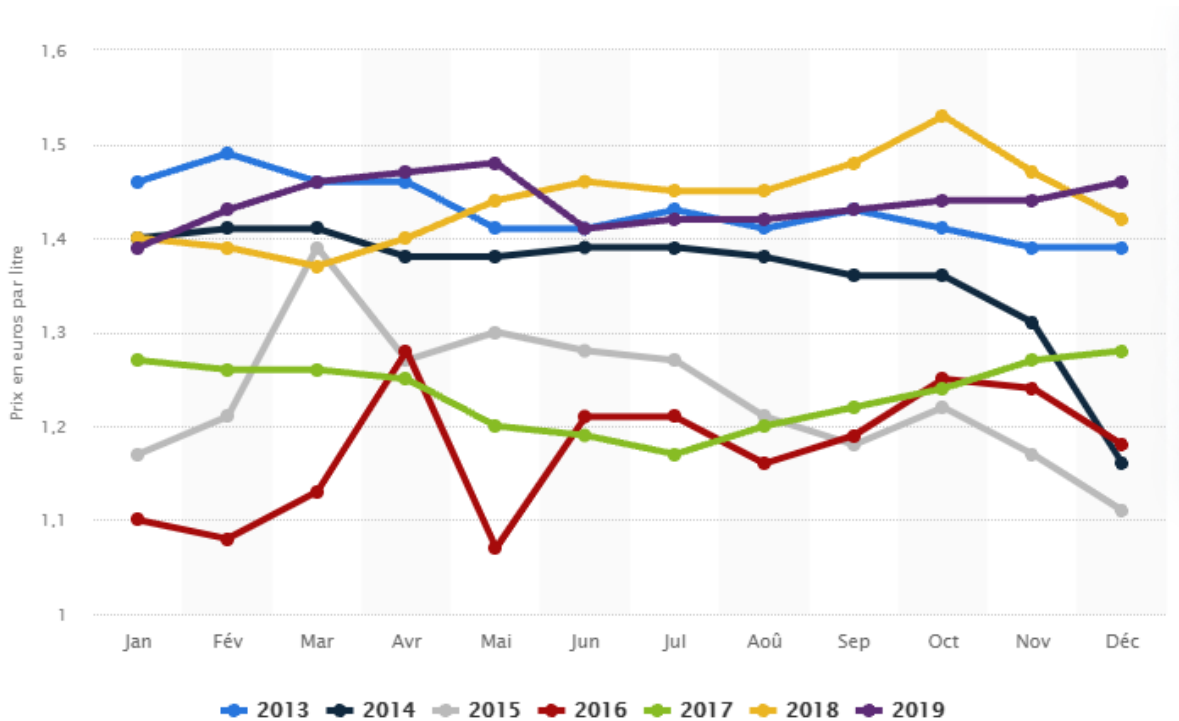*Figure 9  Evolution of the number of Yellow Vests Demonstrators, retrived from Statista*



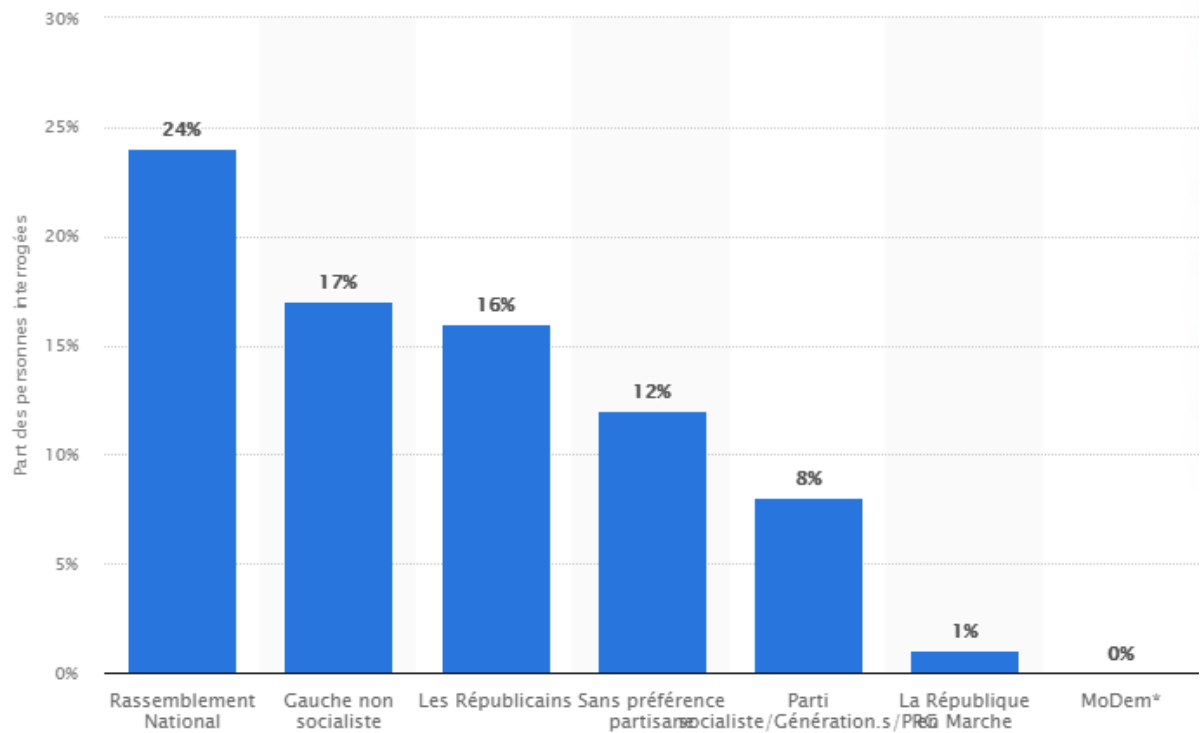*Figure 10 Evolution of the price of the Gas in France from 2013 to 2019, retrieved from Statista.*

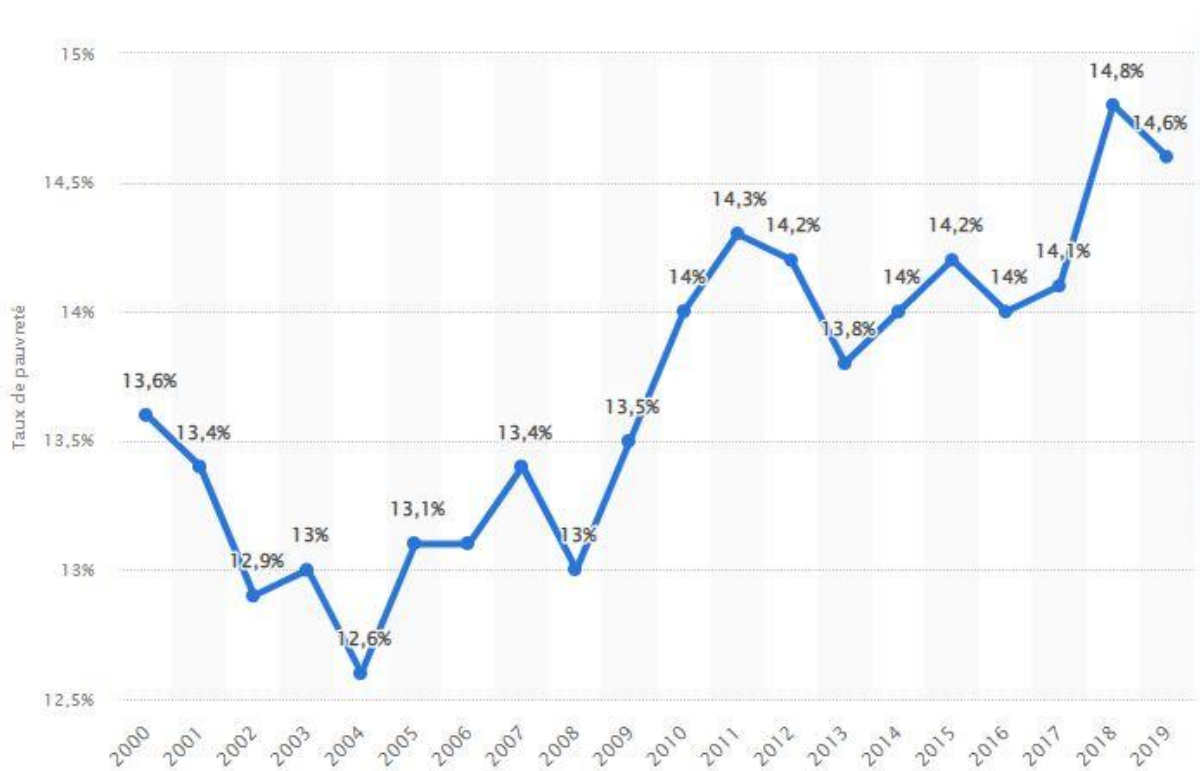*Figure 11 Yellow Vests political affiliation, retrived from Statista*



*Figure 12 Part of people earning less than 60% of the median income in France from 2000 to 2019, retrieved from Statista*

Head enjuries — Blessures à la tête — 315

Insults, indrance to press freedom — Intimidations, insultes, entraves à la liberté de la presse — 164

Lower limb injuries — Blessures aux membres inférieures — 131

Others — Autre, non renseignés — 125

Higher limb injuries — Blessures aux membres supérieurs — 75

Back injuries — Blessures au dos — 28

Hand injuries — Blessures à la main — 18

Genitals injuries — Blessures aux parties génitales — 4
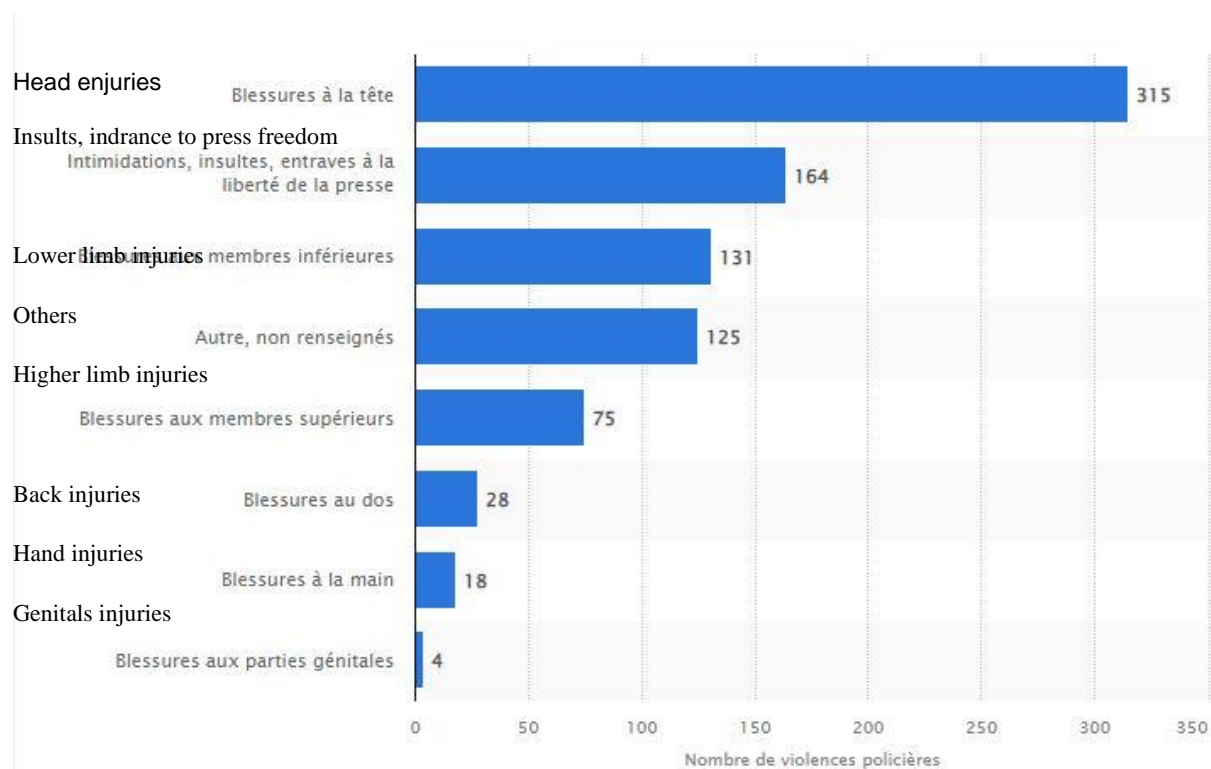
Nombre de violences policières

*Figure 13 Number of police violence recorded during the Yellow Vests movement in France between November 2018 and July 2019, by type, retrieved from Statista*