



**HAL**  
open science

## Conclusions

Fabien Jobard, M. King, Dave Waddington

► **To cite this version:**

Fabien Jobard, M. King, Dave Waddington. Conclusions. Dave Waddington; Fabien Jobard; Mike King. Rioting in the UK and France. A Comparative Analysis, Willan Publishing, pp.229-244, 2009, 978-1-84392-504-0. hal-00550791

**HAL Id: hal-00550791**

**<https://hal.science/hal-00550791>**

Submitted on 1 Jun 2015

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

**Rioting in the UK and France. A comparative analysis.**

**Willan, 2009**

## **18. Conclusion**

**Fabien Jobard, Mike King and David Waddington**

### **Preamble**

The foregoing chapters have largely focused on the various recent cases of public disorder in England and Wales and France as separate countries and, to some extent, cultural entities. In contrast, the purpose of this concluding chapter is to examine the main common themes. To this end, we initially dwell on those contributions which focus on the 2001 and 2005 riotous events in England and Wales, plus our two other-national case-studies, namely the US and Germany. We then move on to discuss the primary themes emerging from the French studies, before exploring in more detail a central issue concerning multiculturalism and race relations. We conclude by focusing on the French situation and discussing some important policy implications arising from our findings.

### **Overview of Chapters on England and Wales, the USA and Germany**

One of the main themes identified throughout the majority of the chapters concerns *multiculturalism*. The multiculturalism ideal and the appreciation of difference has been a decided policy adopted in the UK, certainly from the 1960s. Kalra and Rhodes, however, suggest that post-2001 riots, this has been increasingly questioned on the basis that such notions have perhaps allowed, or even *created*, the development of communities being segregated by ethnicity. In this respect Thomas refers to the Cattle report's depiction of 'parallel lives'. Indeed, both contributions mention arguments opposed to multiculturalism on the grounds that that minority ethnic populations have chosen to self-segregate from mainstream society. Such negative connotations concerning multiculturalism have been directed especially at segregated Muslim communities. Thomas and Bujra and Pearce observe

though that rather than an underlying concern of the 2001 riots being to preserve such segregated communities, they were an expression for recognition on the part of South Asian communities of equal inclusiveness *within* a multicultural society. Further, Kalra and Rhodes and Thomas put forward the argument that segregation in inner-city areas has largely been determined, or at least enhanced by institutionally racist local government housing policies.

The segregation issue is explored further by a number of the contributions in respect of the apparently divisive post-1981 policy of local authority allocation of resources according to 'ward level indices of multiple deprivation'. It has been argued here that not only has this had the effect of enhancing racialised geographical communities (even if, to take Kalra and Rhodes' point, they are in reality more 'symbolic landscapes' rather than firm geographical boundaries) *between* minority ethnic populations and white communities, as came to the fore in the 2001 riots, but also *within* respective minority communities, as instanced by King's examination of the 2005 riots in the Lozells area of Birmingham. Here, grievances surfaced between the South Asian community who were seen as being more effectively organised in obtaining local authority resources than the longer-term resident Africa-Caribbean community.

Crucially, Thomas focuses on the post-2001 'watershed' policy of community cohesion and on assertions that such a policy is not only contrary to the principles of multiculturalism, but integrationalist to the extent of (to mis-use a quote from one of Bujra and Pearce's interview respondents) a 'melting pot'. His contention though, evidenced in his study of youth work in Oldham, is that community cohesion and multiculturalism are not necessarily mutually exclusive; indeed, community cohesion can be utilised to recognise rather than subsume multiculturalism/diversity. In other words, community cohesion can serve to enhance 'core

values' whilst recognising diversity. Despite this though, Thomas suggests that the negative impact of community cohesion policies is the withdrawal or non-renewal of local authority funds for mono-ethnic/religious community projects.

In contrast to the above contributions, but still within this primary theme, Lukas refers to the relatively exclusionary situation that exists in Germany for minority ethnic communities. He suggests that neither notions of multiculturalism nor integrationalism/citizenship are applicable here, but that the term 'marginalisation' is more accurate. Indeed, he points to an increasingly social and geographical segregation for such communities.

A second major theme is that of police-community relations. This is especially relevant within Lukas' account as to why there have been no major riotous eruptions in Germany in comparison to the UK, France and elsewhere, despite the general lack of incorporation of its minorities. In this respect he focuses on a developed system of police-community 'round table' communication and mediation practices. Police-community relations is also an issue that runs throughout Bujra and Pearce's examination of the 2001 Bradford disturbances, which points to an apparent dichotomy between diversity-sensitive policing and the policing operational logic directed at the universal. They argue that it was a combination of the latter, which necessitates equality of treatment rather than being sensitive to the individual culture, and police 'ethnic framing' that led to an escalation of the conflict. Waddington's focus on the Cincinnati riots of 2001 also highlights the issue of police-community relations as being subject to ongoing tension for at least the previous 30-years. A way forward was not only the recognition of this fact, but an attempt at conciliation by the formulation and enactment of a 'collaborative agreement' between the police and the various community stakeholders. However, his findings show that whilst a written agreement was reached, the police would

seem to have been somewhat recalcitrant in putting their part of the equation into practice. King's contribution also highlights a police attempt at mediation between conflicting groups, to which they would have no lines of communication due to the criminal and underground nature of the latter, through the utilisation of an independent mediation service.

A third (related) theme is that of racialised territories, 'turf' or territorial boundaries. We referred earlier to Kalra and Rhodes' suggestion of racialised *symbolic* rather than *actual* geographies, and many of the contributions stress the importance of spatiality in relation to the disorders. Bagguley and Hussain, as well as Bujra and Pearce, raise this as a dominant issue in respect of the Bradford 2001 riots, as do Kalra and Rhodes in relation to Oldham and Burnley. Associated with this, and something that must be a concern for future policy, is that despite there being no recent re-escalation of conflict to the extent as seen in these instances, the underlying situations continue. In this respect, King as well as Kalra and Rhodes' point to the present realities of 'slow rioting' and ongoing tensions.

### **Chapters on the French Riots**

Placing the English and the French contributions side by side, it is remarkable to note how the topics addressed in the two countries regarding contemporary riots are both similar and yet contrasting. They are similar in the sense that the core issues are embodied by police-public relationships, by race-relations and/or multiculturalism, and by territory in combination with identity. But those concepts relate to different realities on either side of the Channel, and their importance for an understanding of the causes of the riots must be differently ordered.

The undisputed *immediate* cause for the riots in France was the police. Triggering events have been of different kinds in the UK (racial conflicts, BNP's involvement, etc.), but Hamidi shows that major French riots from the beginning of the 1990s onwards have systematically stemmed from (rumours of) deadly police encounters. Not only have the deaths of two young boys in Clichy during a police chase been the starting point of the riots in 2005, the mismanagement of the riot police sent to the trouble-spots over the week-end after the fatal incident (the shooting of a tear gas canister into the local mosque) appeared to be the triggering event that led to the spread of rioting nationwide. The police, then, can be seen as the key player in riot processes in France. However, there are a number of associated amplificatory factors: the central organization of the French police and, more conjecturally, its over-politicization by the then Minister of Interior and President in waiting, Nicolas Sarkozy\*, have made the police a metonymic figure in the eyes of the *banlieues*\* youths. In this respect, the police are, on the one hand, seen as embodying the policies that Sarkozy represents, and on the other hand as embodying the whole French polity.

Mouhanna highlights in his conclusion two major consequences of this growing importance of the police in the *banlieues*. The first one is the over-investment of policy-makers in an attempt to 'secure' the *cités*\* from ongoing disorder – but in a typical 'means over ends syndrome' (Goldstein 1979), it is argued that the police are mainly deployed in the *cités*\* on a self-preservation basis, i.e. a spiraling militarization producing a lasting reinforcement of riot police forces and the multiplication of local paramilitary police units. In this respect, Mouhanna shows how much the elected local and central authorities relied on the police during the *banlieues* riots in 2005, reinforcing both the myth of the 'thin blue line' protecting the Republic from chaos and conversely increasing the growing dependence of the elected bodies on the police. The on-going presence of the police in the *banlieues* has an immediate

impact on the way that politics is organized at the local level. On the basis of long-term in-depth observation in one *banlieue* town\*, Mohammed shows the extent to which violence has become a routinised political tool over the last decades in some *cités*. The local mayor (being also an MP), although infamous in France for his explanation of the riots as being rooted in polygamy, devotes a part of the town's resources to the local gang leaders in order to avoid major disturbances that could jeopardize the local balance of powers. Mohammed demonstrates, then, the extent to which small-scale riots or disorders actually belong to routine politics in French *cités*, as a means to force local authorities to divert subsidies from the city-centre to the *cité* or to specific (ethnic) groups residing in the *cité*. Unlike the UK, in France these resource allocation processes rely more on bargaining processes and trials of strength, rather than being based on routine multiculturalist policies.

The above example indicates that law-and-order issues are not solely used as a one-sided form of political domination. Mohammed's focus on the local impacts of law and order shows the integration of extraordinary and daily collective violence into routine politics. In this respect it not only illustrates the dissolution of normative boundaries in the local polity but, as in some English towns, the 'slow rioting' that occurs on a routine basis in the *banlieues*. On the basis of interviews conducted after the 2005 riots in Saint-Denis (the main town of the first riot-torn *département*\*), Kokoreff argues that core rioters were actually tied into different networks of local actors, such as social workers, school teachers, communist or Left activists and local politicians. His contribution indicates that riot-prone territories are actually places in which the use of collective violence is subject to a deliberative engagement with those mediators, and thereby eventually play a role in local politics.

Local area studies like those conducted by Mohammed and Kokoreff also shed a new light on the nature of the national wave of rioting in 2005. An overly dominant focus on the respective roles played by the central police and by Nicolas Sarkozy as symbols of the youths' hatred by the media and wider academic literature has tended to mask the fact that this universal episode contains hundreds of different local and, indeed, parochial events, with each location unveiling its specific set of causes and forms of collective violence. One salient aspect of this localized nature is the fact that local politics, local identities and territories now deter national political activists from the local scenes. Both Kokoreff and Mohammed show how these apparently politicised territories refused to open to national migrants' or race-related political movements like MIR\* or CRAN\*, thus contributing to (despite their apparent national character) the scattering of the different local revolts. Historical insights offered by Hamidi, who depicts the growing distance in France throughout the 1980s and 1990s between rioters, political movements and institutionalized parties, helps to understand the salience of a long-term disenchantment of the mundane world experienced by the *banlieues* youths - a disillusion long sustained by the instrumental use of local political forces by the hegemonic *Parti socialiste*\*. In an attempt to give a broader insight on the links between collective violence and politics in France, Fauvelle-Aymar, François and Vornetti focus on votes cast in a sample of ZUS\* areas (considered to be among the most deprived urban areas in France), where the overall votes achieved by Sarkozy have been the lowest recorded in France. Their logistic regressions indicate that, all else being equal, turnout in the 2007 French presidential election was greater in those ZUSs hit by rioting, and that the left candidates, notably the main opponent Ségolène Royal\*, scored better in those ZUSs marked by the intensity levels of the daily recorded violence.

Unlike the UK riots, the 2005 French episode and its 300 affected areas offers a basis for the use of explanatory tools used to understand the causes of the US riots. As expected, Lagrange discovers that riots are more likely to occur in poor urban areas (ZUSs), specifically the ones most affected by youth unemployment and by renewal programmes launched by ANRU\*. Further, the 2005 riots were apparently massively driven by major social factors in which 'race' (as this term is used in the US) does not play a role in itself, but migration waves do. More accurately, it appears that the riots were strongly linked with the intensity of racial segregation (measured on the basis of proxy variables). Such a finding highlights the dialectical roles of territories and race in the causation of the French riots. Due to the legal restrictions on administrative data in France, Lagrange's findings shed an ambivalent light on the race-related aspects of the 2005 riots. On the one hand, one can consider that segregation towards sub-Saharan families have played a central role; while on the other hand, one can point to the position that recent waves of immigration are the key factor here, since newcomers (today mainly from sub-Saharan Africa) are settled in the most deprived areas of the *banlieues*. In addition to the central role played by the law and order policies, one further policy has recently gained a major place among the significant contextual variables of collective violence in urban France. As Epstein explains, the urban renewal policy has, since the beginning of the 2000s, not only become the main instrumental policy aimed at dealing with urban misery and urban disorders, but could indeed be one of the most salient determinants of future riots in France.

### **Policy and Political implications**

It is often asked whether riots are ultimately worthwhile for those who engage in them. Piven and Cloward (1991: 456) answer this question resoundingly in the affirmative:

Lower-stratum protestors have some possibility of influence .... if their action violates rules and disrupt the workings of an institution on which important groups depend. When lower-stratum groups form organizations and employ conventional political strategies, they can easily be ignored. But institutional disruptions cannot so easily be ignored. Institutional disruption provokes conflict; they arouse an array of ‘third parties’, including important economic interests, and may even contribute to electoral dealignment and realignment. To restore institutional stability and to avoid worsening polarization, political leaders are forced to respond, whether with concessions or repression

As far as riots in the UK are concerned, the early 1980s disorders had a positive effect on, for instance, policing (PACE 1984) and on race-relations (Thomas, this volume). But the impact of the ever-recurring French riots on politics and policies gives rise to a more pessimistic view than the one defended until now by the two US American authors<sup>1</sup>: in France, repetitive riots since the beginning of the 1990s seem to have produced nothing but a strong contribution to political shifts within the French public sphere (impacting on fear of crime, fear of immigration, hate crime, extreme-right voting patterns, etc.) which finally nurtured and legitimated law-and-order policies as the main strategic option. Nevertheless, some empirical evidence could suggest a more ambivalent view on the policies instituted – without referring again to the introduction of *politique de la ville*\*, which represented a real if not very successful policy shift in France, one can add that major police abuses of force that ignited large-scale rioting during the 1990s and 2000s led to the introduction of human rights provisions in the Police Acts (in 1986, 1993 and 2000) and also the creation of a national civilian review board (2000).

It is important therefore to take a closer look at the effects of the 2005 riots on French polity (in terms of both politics and policy) in order to assess the extent to which it is worth rioting in France, or the degree to which it simply results in self-destructive nihilism (Marx 1970). Even if it is too soon to give a definitive assessment on the impact of the nationwide 2005 riots in France, we can observe most assuredly that: (a) race-relations policies follow from the riots, and simultaneously; (b) such policies instituted still seem to follow the path taken from the 1990s onwards, and (c) a policy process unable to deter further riots in France.

*a) Race relations and multiculturalism*

In such an ideological context, it appears to be quite difficult to assess both the state of race relations in contemporary France and the possible impact that the riots has had on them. In an enlightening French-English comparative study, Garbaye (2005, 10) recently pointed to the main difference as far as political inclusion of minorities in each country is concerned: 1) Due to earlier immigration flows, the fact that Commonwealth migrants gained citizenship from the first generation onwards, and the impact of earlier riots, the formation of an immigrants' political elite 'took place much earlier' in Britain than in France; 2) British minority politicians frequently have a career as (Labour) party activists behind them, while their French counterparts 'are more frequently picked by party-lists makers among local personalities with little political clout'; and 3) The formation of a political elite in Britain 'was accompanied by the formulation and implementation of anti-discrimination policy agendas in Britain, which has not been the case in France'.

Things are changing on both sides of the channel, and violence in general and riots in particular have been playing a significant role in both cases, threatening to shatter the rigid boundaries separating the two 'models'. In England, 'signs of a return to a more

assimilationist perspective appeared in the early 2000s' (Garbaye 2005: 17), exemplified by the oath of allegiance to 'British values' defended by Home Minister David Blunkett in 2004, and the promotion of 'community cohesion' programmes by the Commission for Racial Equality from 2004 onwards (as discussed by Thomas in this volume). In France, for the first time ever, the 2005 riots have undoubtedly introduced an agenda shift marked by the prioritization of racial issues in the policy process. Meanwhile, Sarkozy's presidency results from his long (and successful) strategy to gain Front National supporters\* 'back' to the Conservative party and from his relentless ideological manipulation of social fears resulting from 2005 riots and disorders. Therefore if the riots had an impact on the political agenda in France, its meaning is far from univocal.

The 2005 riots undoubtedly took place in a critical juncture marked by a rise of racial and culturally-related issues. Already in 2001, a law recognized that the slave trade in which France took part constitutes a crime against humanity. In February 2003, *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*\* (NPNS) was founded in order to promote a hard-line assimilatory discourse as a way to protect Muslim women in the *banlieue* from (Muslim) male violence. The intense media coverage of NPNS increased when, in 2003, they pronounced that the Muslim headscarf was a 'symbol of the submission of women in places where the State should guarantee a strict gender equality' (as quoted in the women's magazine *Elle* in November 2003), thereby launching a national controversy which ended with a law being passed in 2004 banning the wearing of headscarves in schools (Jelen 2005). For their part, the Parliament passed a law on 23 February 2005 mentioning the 'positive role' played by the French in their former colonies.

The headscarf controversy and the debate launched on the law on the former colonies encouraged the foundation by immigrant activists in January 2005 of the *Mouvement des Indigènes de la République* (MIR\*) with the objective of fighting against the contemporary ‘postcolonial State’ of France that allegedly treats immigrants as mere ‘natives’. Two weeks after the 2005 riots had subsided, a Representative Council of Black Associations (CRAN\*) was founded to promote blackness in French politics and culture, and to insist on the introduction of racial administrative statistics and more urgent positive action. Controversies between the right-wing majority, anti-racist assimilationist movements such as NPNS and radical movements like MIR or CRAN or grassroots activists like MIB\* intensified to such a degree as to force ‘race relations’ (to use an English term) to the forefront of public debate (Ancelovici 2008: 87-89; Dufoix 2005) and resulted in ‘ambivalent policy-making in the domain of multiculturalist policies’ (Lépinard 2008: 100).

The 2005 riots took place within the context of the above heightened controversies and had immediate consequences. President Jacques Chirac, who had already inaugurated a national day celebrating the abolition of the slave trade and, in December 2004, set up the ‘Equal Opportunities and Anti-Discrimination Commission’ (HALDE) as an independent statutory authority aimed at identifying and deterring racial discrimination. Chirac also lent his support to a ‘law on equal opportunities’, introduced in January 2006, in order to fight ‘discrimination’ and help youths ‘from immigration or overseas territories’, a phrase which broke with decades of euphemistic references like ‘youths from *deprived* territories’. Following his election in June 2007, Chirac’s successor Nicolas Sarkozy appointed three minority members to his government, among them the founder of NPNS, Fadela Amara, and displayed some sympathy towards grievances raised by CRAN. But Sarkozy also showed resolute tendencies towards Conservative nationalism by creating a Ministry dedicated to

‘immigration and national identity’, - the only one of its kind in Europe - which promotes fierce anti-immigration policies and advocates uncompromising measures in response to rebellious youths.

At present it is too soon to assess the long-term consequences of the 2005 French riots on policy innovation. Meanwhile though, the shock provoked by the riots, the controversies launched by CRAN, MIR or NPNS and Sarkozy’s opportunistic ‘strategies of minority management’ (Esman 1973: 52) both supports agendas aimed at reinforcing the electoral support displayed by former FN\* voters and visibly addresses race issues in a way that even France’s sacrosanct ‘non-ethnic administrative data’ (Simon, 2008) is subject to public scrutiny. In this respect, the 2005 riots have, more so than their predecessors, resulted in increased controversy around multiculturalism and race relations, and in ambivalent, if not contradictory, policies.

*b) On the (non-)impact of policies aimed at deterring riots*

During the 2005 riotous period and its aftermath, possible explanations were put forward for the violence and destruction. Sociologists, media, opinion makers and politicians seemed to agree on the causes of the riots: the deepening social deprivation affecting the *banlieues*, its disastrous effects on male youths also reeling from negative relations with an increasingly militarized police force, and the inefficiency of policies designed to alleviate such problems, were all regularly featured in relevant discussion.

As usual in such tumultuous situations, some political and media pundits argued that the disorders had been deliberately provoked by ‘Islamic fundamentalist extremists’, were the consequence of provocative hip-hop lyrics, or were a by-product of polygamous Muslim

families. These arguments were mainly delivered by the closest supporters of the law-and-order strategy deployed by Sarkozy (see Mohammed, this volume), who obviously needed to remain committed to the police - the 'thin blue line' protecting the French Republic from internal chaos. This blaming strategy (against deviant migrants or 'scum') also echoed the lasting strategy of the then president-in-waiting Sarkozy, aimed at 'siphoning off' (Mayer 2007) Far Right voters one year and a half years prior to the presidential election (Cautrès and Cole 2008: 30).

However, such verbal escalation should not hide the fact that most French opinion makers sustained the view that riots were rooted in the social despair of male *banlieue* youths, reactivated by violent encounters with the police. The opinion expressed below exemplifies the most common accounts concerning French riots and does not differ significantly from what many journalists and some academics have repeated since then. What is most surprising here is that this depiction of the riots is volunteered from within the intelligence service of the *Police nationale*\* itself:

[The riots consisted of] an unorganized urban insurrection, lacking any obvious leadership or political agenda. The youths were spurred on by a strong sense of their identity which does not rest solely on their ethnic or geographic origins, but also on their social condition, as people rejected by French society' (2005, in Dufresne 2006: 137 ).

Of course, this sociologically oriented explanation of the riots was not shared by hard-liners like Sarkozy, who reacted strongly to this assertion (Dufresne 2006: 131; Mucchielli 2009). But to focus unduly on Sarkozy's authoritative gesture would cause us to miss a crucially

central point regarding the *locus* of the riots in the French ‘polity’ (Tilly, 1984: 306). As soon as Sarkozy was elected, he followed in the shoes of all his predecessors from 1981 onwards by announcing a substantial programme called *Plan Espoir Banlieue* (‘Banlieue Hope Programme’), aimed at alleviating the underlying causes of riots by providing funding for, among other things, social programmes, urban planning, and better education in the most deprived areas.

Looking back at the last three decades of riots in France one can easily notice a kind of political cycle marked by a reiterating occurrence of riot/ineffectual policy/ new riot, etc. Policy content has varied over the years, but the accompanying rationales seldom have. Here, for example, is what President François Mitterrand said in Lyon’s *banlieue* two months after the eruption of the Vaulx-en-Velin riot in 1990:

Tomorrow there could be horrible tragedies of the type which occurred in this very region .... It will be necessary to take from those who have much to give something to those who have nothing, lest the poorest localities flounder .... I have learned all my life that whoever owns something hates giving it back. [We should not] fear the hostility of those who own (Body-Gendrot 2000: 71).

The Vaulx-en-Velin riot immediately induced the strong reinforcement of *politique de la ville*\* (Body-Gendrot 2000: 75). However, the effect of this innovation was merely to cushion the deep and lasting consequences of de-industrialization on male youths from the *cités*.

Fifteen years later, Prime Minister de Villepin\* reacted to the recently-occurring riots by introducing a law aimed at encouraging and supporting those individuals struggling to cope in an inhospitable labour market. Somewhat in contrast to the tone adopted by Mitterrand, de Villepin stated how:

Our country has just gone through a hard time [i.e. the 2005 riots] and we need to act: We must refuse powerlessness and solve the problems experienced by the French people .... The crisis we have just endured unveils weaknesses and shortage. Discrimination, either of direct or indirect nature, is of particular concern for the people living in deprived neighbourhoods, for immigrants and their dependants and those who have arrived from our overseas territories .... Unequal opportunity specifically hits youths from the ZUSs\* .... But this crisis has helped us appreciate the numerous achievements we need to accomplish. We face a great opportunity, we must seize it. (Introduction to the Law on Equal Opportunities, presented to the Parliament 16 January 2006).

Central to this law was a new work contract aimed at young employment seekers. The contract gave employers the means to dismiss employees more easily, thus encouraging them to take on young job seekers with less risk. Following waves of protest, Jacques Chirac abrogated the law in what was widely perceived as a ‘humiliating reversal’ (Howell 2008: 221). One side-effect of this defeat was to remove from contention Sarkozy’s only real Conservative rival in his bid for candidacy in the Presidential race.

Following his election, Sarkozy introduced his ‘Hope in *Banlieue* Programme’ by arguing:

Over the last 20 years we have learned one thing: it is not sufficient to create a *ministère de la ville*, and likewise nor does the inflow of money, nor housing refurbishment make the inhabitants not feel neglected, abandoned, put aside from the Republic, aside from its laws and the support it displays .... [Nevertheless] I do pay homage to all *ministres de la ville* ... since 1988 and who have ardently tried to convince the public about the intensity of the *banlieues* crisis (Nicolas Sarkozy, speech introducing the *Plan Espoir Banlieue*, 8 February 2008).

This broad rhetoric has remained basically unchanged while the *politique de la ville* has followed its now ancient three-decades-long path. Such policy has proven to be indispensable in the daily life of people living in the *cités*, but it remains incapable of solving what it was aimed achieve: the disappearance of the riots. It all constitutes a never-ending cycle that continues to reproduce itself amidst a growing authoritarian powerlessness, characterized by an overwhelming police militarization and urban renewal measures based on a hollow political rhetoric.

The very essence of riots in France actually lies in their ritualized nature. Despite their spontaneity, riots are characterized by a high level of self-discipline: cars are set alight, street confrontations with the police happen in the strict confines of the *cités*, with no contagion to city-centres like Paris and with no recourse to gunfire, and with no electoral mobilization by the rioters and their peers in the local elections. Riots do not overly impact on the political balance of power in France. They are therefore dealt with as the one of the unavoidable costs of a social crisis in which the police are repeatedly brought in to play a key containing role.

c) *The show still goes on*

Neither the intensification of the criminal justice system's efforts to manage criminality, nor the police militarization process - nor, indeed, the successive programmes aimed at dealing with underlying causes of the riots - have deterred ongoing collective violence in the French *cités*. To conclude our discussions, three main post-2005 developments in France deserve special mention.

To begin with, there are now clear signs of a radicalization of collective violence. First, there is a form of increased nihilistic violence illustrated in recent inter-youth fights during conventional protest, characterized by the observers as '*casseurs* versus protesters violence', or as *banlieues* youths versus secondary school and university students. During the protest movements in January-March 2005 (against the education reform) and in March 2006 (against the government's CPE\* initiative), hundreds of young protestors were harassed, assaulted, robbed and beaten up by gangs of youths<sup>ii</sup> (Bronner 2006; Dufresne 2007; Kokoreff 2008). These events induced a resurfacing of *banlieue*-related fear and concern, since they provided evidence that, by attacking other young people who were partly demonstrating for *their* interests, the *banlieues* youth were intent on political self-destruction.

Secondly, signs of a radicalization of police-youth confrontations in the French *banlieues* may be detected in localised breaks with such ritualized forms of riotous behaviour as hit-and-run fights with the police, setting cars and public buildings alight, and using of non-lethal weapons against the police. On 25 November 2007, two helmet-less Black and Arab pupils riding a small motorbike collided with a police patrol car in the Paris *banlieue* Villiers-le-Bel and died instantly. Three nights of riots then occurred in the town during which the youths,

quite predictably, threw stones, cobblestones and Molotov cocktails, but also made novel use of firearms (Lagrange, 2007). The Villiers-le-Bel riot was been significant in that, unlike in 2005, the police used their firearms in self-defence (Bronner 2008). Again, during a smaller-scale riot in Grigny in May 2007, police officers used their firearms several times; youths also fired at the police during a further confrontation in Grigny, in March 2008. For the time being, such events are not very frequent and seem to occur only in *cités* like *La Grande Borne* which are characterized by both a persistently high level of deprivation and severely endemic conflict with the police.

Finally, some post-2005 riots have occurred that seem to confirm some of the main findings of quantitative analysis of the 2005 riots wave specifically regarding the geography of the riots (Lagrange, 2006). To date, five high-intensity riots (entailing more than one night of unrest) have occurred since that period: in Saint-Dizier (October 2007), Vitry-le-François (June 2008), Romans-sur-Isère (October 2008), Villiers-le-Bel (November 2007) and Grigny (March 2008). The most striking aspect of these is that, whilst the Grigny and Villiers riots occurred in classical large-scale *cités*, the first three occurred in very small estates, located in small cities within isolated in rural areas characterized by a negative demographic growth. Also, looking at the geography and demography of the riots, one should note that Grigny and Villiers-le-Bel are both located in the furthest outskirts of the capital (respectively 25 and 18 km away from Paris), and marked by a large community of sub-Saharan African immigrants. It would certainly be too soon to draw generalisations from these latest events, as we still lack accurate information. Nevertheless, they do appear to represent an extension of the riot-like protests into the cities that could never have been contemplated several years ago.

What seems undisputed today is that France's turbulent *banlieues* have regressed into the same type of violence-prone condition that affected them at the outset of the 1990s. The apparent re-establishment of order in urban France must not obscure a possible radicalization of collective violence, the like of which has been observed both during and after the 2005 episode. For the time being, one key institution remains constant to the riots. Indeed, we can safely predict that the political economy of the riots will stay unchanged so long as the police remain ready and able to contain the rioters within their territorial boundaries and without inflicting fatal casualties. The moving balance of 'ritualization' and 'escalation' (Edelman 1969) observed during 2005 and after depicts today's riot prone localities as 'murky areas' (Aureyo and Moran 2007: 245) where the balance of power between the political authorities, the rioters and the police is decidedly unstable. .

In a recent major work, the American historian, Charles Tilly, pertinently remarked:

I have omitted the widely used term 'riot' from the typology for a different reason: because it embodies a political judgment rather than an analytical distinction .... In cataloguing thousands of violent events - many of them called riots (or the local-language equivalent) by authorities and observers - from multiple countries over several centuries, I have not once found an instance in which the participants called the event a riot or identified themselves as rioters (Tilly 2003: 18-19).

What our cross-national insight into contemporary 'riots' in France and in the UK. has shown is that, contrary to Tilly's assumption, collective violence, 'non-normative' or 'deviant' protest, and non-institutionalized action all constitute the protest repertoires of male youth struggling to survive within deprived urban areas. The forms and brutality of these actions may differ

widely in both countries from night-brawls to inter-racial fights, deviant games such as car-burning or car-rodeos to scattered attacks against other youths that turn into organized confrontations with the police. However, no matter what their actual form may take, in both countries rioting appears to have become a major form of contentious politics; and in France at least, it appears to have produced both positive and negative dividends.

---

<sup>i</sup> In her 2007 Presidential address to the American Political Science Society, Frances F. Piven clearly supports the positive impact of collective violence ‘from below’: ‘Without the support of the rabble, the war with England could not have been won ... [in the US] chattel slavery was not restored, the Southern apartheid system is dismantled, and while labor is taking a beating, there are still unions, and they may matter again in American politics’ (Piven 2008: 1-2).

<sup>ii</sup> On how ‘youth gang’ must be defined, see Mohammed in this volume.