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Fabien Jobard

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**Fabien Jobard**  
CESDIP-CNRS

The 2005 French Urban Unrests. Data-Based Interpretations

**ANR-ESRC**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Seminar on French & English Riots,**  
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The intensity and duration of the urban unrest which occurred in France in the course of the autumn 2005 left their mark throughout the post-industrial world. Some television broadcasts in the USA like Fox News presented headlines on “the civil war in France”, and their counterparts in Russia defined the situation as a race war declared by the Muslims against the main French society. Social scientists were certainly less hot-headed, but the spectre of the dispensable sociological interpretation was particularly bright, though empirical work rather rare (for a presentation of the spectre: Mauger, 2006). The following contribution intends to answer questions which are central to both political and social scientific worlds, but it will mainly focus on empirical data (quantitative and qualitative) in order to fulfil this aim. We will leave the root causes and contextual aspects by one side (economic deprivation, urban segregation, conflicts with police forces, etc.) and concentrate on immediate data produced in the wake of the riots, in the little research produced afterwards (see Poupeau, 2006, for a critical assessment of the sociological work about the riots; more generally the different contextual analysis presented online by the SSRC, 2006, and Zauberman, Levy, 2003 for a larger assessment on routine conflicts between police forces and minorities). In what follows, I will make use of the term “riots”, which **implies that I have made** the assumption that collective violence is of political nature (Tilly, 2003, 18-19). Firstly, I shall briefly review the course of the events.

**I. The 2005 French riots: An exceptional series of disorders throughout the country**

First of all, **in** dealing with the unrest of October-November 2005 we absolutely need to keep in mind that these events **were** far from being the first of this kind in France. From the so-called “hot summer” of 1981 in the bleak suburbs of Lyons, to the most recent unrest in Lille, 2000 or Nîmes, in the South of France in 2003 (Duprez, BodyGendrot, 2002) , a recollection of all unrests related in the France Press Agency bulletins between 1990 and 2004 reveals around 10 to 15 local “unrests” every year in different places (Lagrange, 2006a, 44-46). But not only did the 2005 unrest expand into more than two-weeks of disorder, they also spread across almost all the national territory, including some small and peaceful cities on the far less urbanised areas.

On 27 October 2005, three young people (two of African descent and one from Turkey) on their way back from a football game, ran away from police officers

responding to a call about a break-in (see the story told by both lawyers of the **dead boys' families**: Mignard, Tordjman, Plenel, 2006). They tried to hide in an electrical substation behind a cemetery and the two African children were killed through being electrocuted. For three nights, in the town and two of its neighbouring cities, unrest developed, with 30 cars set alight on each night. Head-to-head confrontations with riot police were numerous, but were strictly bounded within the three cities. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of November in Clichy, a tear gas grenade was fired by the riot police into a hall used by the local Muslims as a mosque and where, at the time of the shot, dozens of Muslims were gathered for Ramadan prayers.

This was certainly the reason for the first wave of geographical expansion of the troubles beyond the Clichy area to other parts of the 93rd Department. Until the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, only the Northern parts of the Paris suburbs were hit by the unrest, consisting in torching cars and head-to-head confrontations with the riot police. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, the forms of unrest changed slightly (arson attacks on public goods, such as schools or sport halls, or some warehouses) and, parallel to this, the unrest extended to some middle-ranked cities of less than 50,000 inhabitants, sometimes even 20,000 inhabitants. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of November incidents occurred in 200 cities, where 1,300 torched cars are counted. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, 1,500 cars are destroyed by fire, in 275 cities. On the 7<sup>th</sup>, in 300 cities, with 1200 cars burnt out. On the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup>, the Prime Minister declared a kind of state of emergency. However, the weather turned distinctly colder, and the riots irreversibly decreased. After the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> November, one could not register more than 100 cars burnt each night.

After this 20-day period of unrest, 10 000 cars had disappeared in flames, 200 million Euros damage had been registered by insurance companies, 250 public buildings had been damaged. In contrast with the riots that ever took place for instance in the USA, the unrest in France did not give rise to physical fighting: There had been hardly any use of firearms and despite (**except for?**) a death provoked by a fight in a town in the North of Paris and the severe injury suffered by a disabled woman in a bus on fire, no important casualty **was** reported.

## II. Interpretations

In the following section, I will focus on the sociological analysis of the events, and not so much on broader political interpretations of them. I will then prioritize here the "fact-bound interpretations".

1) *Historical analysis: The timing of the growth and decrease of the unrests.*

The time-related development of the unrests needs to be put in a constant parallel **with** the moves on the national political scene, since ~~both~~ the signs sent out from the political leaders had concrete consequences not only on the forms of collective violence in use on the streets, but also on the meaning of the action held by the rioters or the perpetrators.

**Since (because) or While?** the unrests were circumscribed to Clichy and its immediate area, neither the Prime minister nor the minister of the Interior displayed

the smallest compassion for the two dead minors of Clichy. They both were constantly repeating that the young boys were felons fleeing from the police after an attempted break-in. And two days before the electrocution, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October, the then minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy declared on a trip to a rundown north-west suburb of Paris that he would clear all such cities from their scum (*racaille*). This word caused uproar and fuelled the protest in Clichy. The French media uncritically echoed the ~~the~~ stigmatization by the Interior Minister. The minister's word stood as a collective symbolic degradation of all the young men living in low-rise urban areas. The **throw** of the tear gas canister into the Clichy mosque by the riot police (which remained under the immediate command of the Minister of the Interior) enlarged the circle of the population **hit** by this symbolic degradation by Sarkozy: Not only the youth facing the riot police in Clichy, but all youth living in poor suburbs, adding to them their parents and brothers at Ramadan prayers. This tear gas canister acted as a powerful mechanism of boundary activation, organizing a firm us-them boundary within the French society (Tilly, 2003, 21).

Following the same logic of political ignition of collective violence, a parallel could be made with the night of the National Holiday in July 14<sup>th</sup> 2005, as cars were set alight in La Courneuve and two **near-by** cities, St-Denis (**administrative/political centre (?)** of the 93rd Department) and Stains. La Courneuve is a low-income estate about which the plain-speaking Sarkozy had said some weeks before in June that it should be cleaned out with Karcher (which is an industrial cleaner used **to** clean the mud off tractors). Using the traditional opportunity offered by the National Holiday night of July 14<sup>th</sup>, youths from these three cities torched cars during the night...

A second sign of the link between what happens in the national political arena and on the street-level is the spread of the disorders beyond the limits of the 93rd Department: the apparent dislocation of the government at the national level. The Prime Minister and the President seemed to **let** Minister Sarkozy dealing with the riots on his own, sending in advance a clear sign of non-solidarity between him and the rest of the government in case of accusations of police brutality or the lack of control over the situation. Some government members even expressed disapproval of Sarkozy, while the head of the government did not react.

This had a tactical consequence on the street-level interactions. Fearing the consequences of police abuse cases, the Minister of the Interior gave the priority to highly trained riot police forces during the first week of the unrests, displaying a low level of arrests and high professionalism in the use of force. This use of massive static police forces created an opportunity for small and highly mobile groups to jump from one spot to the other and to prefer hit-and-run guerrilla tactics rather than head-to-head confrontation with heavily armed police forces. Tactical opportunism (more than coordinated violence or violent rituals) is certainly or clearly? one of the main features that characterised the rioters (Tilly, 2003, 14-15).

The second consequence of the awareness of governmental duality by rioters in the suburbs was the first weakening of the president-in-waiting Sarkozy since 2002. For the first (and ~~since then~~ only) time, the widely-read newspaper *Le Parisien* published, on the 8<sup>th</sup> November, a larger picture of Sarkozy with the caption: "*Dans la nasse*" ("fallen into the trap"). Events were then set on a media spiral: Journalists interviewed people in the suburbs about their feelings, ~~being~~ only interested in ~~to~~ what they got (

as in understood? Or received? Or how they reacted to..?) from the national political scene. Everybody seemed then to agree on the need for a dismissal of Sarkozy.

The next step gave rise to a complete shift in political alignments on the government's side. On Nov 4<sup>th</sup>, the MPs of the governing conservative party at the National Assembly opposed the Prime Minister and acclaimed Sarkozy: A green light was then given to the Minister of the Interior to stand as the one and only man able to deal with the situation, and pressure was put on the Prime Minister to send a heavy handed response to the rioters. Sarkozy then turned to the use of smaller urban police squads aimed to chase after youngsters and ~~to~~ bring them before the prosecutors. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, The Prime Minister revived a law authorising curfew measures, which had originally been adopted in 1955 to quell Algerian rebels (and indeed, curfews were almost only implemented in some Southern cities of France, hardly hit by the riots, but with large populations of former "French Algerians").

From then onwards, the unrests decreased in the face of the cold weather, of the level of judicial repression and of the fact that no move would be made on the government side in order to marginalize the hated minister of Interior. Short-term gains were then not to be reached. (There would be nothing more to gain on the short term level?)

## *2) Geographical analysis: Where did the unrests take place?*

As I said, what set the 2005 unrests apart was, above their duration, their very odd geography. Let us ~~have a~~ look into the territorial specificities of these riots, based on the statistical analysis conducted by Hugues Lagrange (Lagrange, 2006b, 106-121).

First indicator: only 15% of the riot-torn places do not belong to a so-called ZUS project (so-called "Urban Sensitive Area projects", which are implemented in 751 places, among the most deprived urban areas in France, including 157 in Paris and its surroundings, and 36 in the 93d Department – for a presentation in English, see Salanié, 2006).

Meanwhile, if one takes a ratio "days of unrests/size of the population" (on a Department level), and the 93rd Department taken apart, Departments where the duration of unrest was the longest per capita were low-urbanized Departments. The simple equation "size of the agglomeration/risk of unrest" is far from offering a satisfying explanation.

In an effort to specify the "ZUS explanation", Hugues Lagrange sorted out that ZUS + proportion of young male residents (<20 yrs old) significantly enhance the risk of unrest. Furthermore (or additionally), a large part of the riots took place in the West part of France where a large population of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa has recently settled. And, indeed, Hugues Lagrange study shows that ZUS with a wide proportion of large families (i.e. more than 6 members) is the best predictor, all other variables considered, of the likelihood of unrests. Large families are here to be considered as a proxy variable for "recent African migrants".

The last indicator used by Lagrange: ZUS where the law of 2003 on housing renovation projects was implemented surprisingly appears to be a strong predictor of the likelihood of unrests. Two interpretations of this matter can be ~~here~~ offered:

- First, the sites chosen for being spots of implementation of the law could be considered to be the most depressed ones among the ZUS.
- Second, the concrete consequence of the law for the families living there is the possibility of being relocated somewhere else, combined with a high degree of anxiety as soon as administrations come into the daily lives of these poor people.

Other indicators were tested, but were not statistically significant. This means, to conclude with this geographical analysis, that the combined variable of poverty, highly stressful local situations, and the presence of new migrants from sub-Saharan Africa had by far the heaviest impact on the likelihood for a city to be hit by unrests in 2005.

Meanwhile, this combination of factors did not automatically imply a riot: 30% of the cities in which all factors were available had no such event, 20% of the cities in which none of these determinants were to be found were swept by some riots. Local qualitative factors like the local relationships with the police, ~~the~~ public authorities or the associations working in the neighbourhoods (grassroots organizations) certainly played a significant role. Small scale qualitative studies like these are of great help, as one shall see it in the following sections.

### *3) Sociological analysis: Who are the rioters?*

Following his unbeaten strategy of uninterrupted issue-setting, the head of the National Police declared that 80% of the arrested perpetrators were offenders well-known by the police ~~as such~~. Based on this assumption, the interpretation of the events was served on a golden platter: The unrests only consisted in a sudden and anomic aggregation of petty criminals, committed by well-known offenders ~~as such~~ and thus had no political aims at all.

From October 29<sup>th</sup> to November 18<sup>th</sup>, 3,100 people were arrested and brought ~~up~~ to the prosecutors, among them 950 minors. From the 2,600 adults held in police custody, 560 were sent to jail (either sentenced after an immediate trial, or serving awaiting a pre-sentence decision). 320 minors out of the 950 arrested were already known by the justice system, the majority of them not as offenders, but as so-called "endangered children" (Ministry of Justice, 2006).

Let's look at the adults. Considering the fact that the most predictive (if not the only) determinant for receiving a sentence to jail is to have been convicted once (Aubusson de Cavarlay, 2006, and for some critical insights into the arbitrariness of the judicial system in France: Hodgson, 2002), one can consider that 20 to 25% of all arrested adults only have been sentenced once before their appearance in court in November 2005, which is some distance away from the 80% assumed by N. Sarkozy.

Adding to this, we must take the modus operandi of the police into consideration. On many occasions, the arrests were made the day following the unrest and, in the

Court of 93<sup>rd</sup> Department the rate of discharge during this period was as high as 30% (for such attempts like violence against police officers, it normally lays on 3-4% - Jobard, Nevanen, 2007). Two considerations follow:

- The high rate of discharge shows a considerable loss of efficiency beyond the prosecution, which can easily be explained by a will to prosecute even beyond a reasonable doubt about offences attributed to the arrestees,
- This is largely due to the way the investigators worked, asking the riot police officers to “identify” the arrestees from the night before on the basis of books of identification (i.e. photographs of local offenders) held in the police stations, which of course lead to a substantial increase of arrestees previously known by the police as offenders...

All these considerations about the way arrests were made show that one can not exactly be sure if these data really describe the rioters, or the ones among the rioters who could not run as fast or as long as the others (and there minors are particularly concerned), or even only the usual suspects known by the police.

Anyway, a study of the 208 arrestees judged in immediate hearings in the 93<sup>rd</sup> Department has recently been published (Mazars, 2007). 40% of the 270 alleged crimes consisted in crimes against a police officer, 30% in the destruction and damage of public or private goods, and only 6% in riotous assembly. Interestingly, ~~is that~~ the average age is largely comparable to the age of offenders against police officers routinely judged in another Court of Paris suburbs in which I gathered such data over the last 15 years: There is no major difference between the youngsters involved in daily conflicts with the police and the ones who took part in the November 2005 disorders.

Michel Mazars<sup>2</sup> points to another interesting fact: 60% of the arrestees had no criminal justice record, and only a few of the 40% left had more than 2 records (i.e. 13 out of 78 had more than 2 records). For the 93 minors, the proportion of those who had once endured a criminal proceeding does not reach 40%.

But the main information from this report has to do with the personal situation of the arrestees. First of all, the vast majority of them still live with their parents (91%), and in fact only 10% of them could be considered by the author as having a secure professional activity, the other ones being either still in the school system, or being unemployed (there is hardly any difference between the adults and the minors in this matter).

Second, the families of the arrestees are less often called “traditional ones” (both parents living together with their children): half of the families are “traditional ones” (80% nation-wide), one third are single-parent (20% nation-wide), and 3% of them polygamous. But this strongly contradicts some political positions that were taken by some conservative representatives who considered polygamy as being the cause for urban disorders. Still, the number of large and very large families is quite considerable: Average number of brothers and sisters is 4.6 ; and one-fifth of the families encompass 7 or more children at home.

The social background of the parents is not really precisely recorded, since one cannot distinguish the job actually held by the father or the mother from the

profession declared to the judge. Unemployed parents do not seem to be overrepresented in the considered population (around 10% of the fathers). But the number of families with at least one dead parent (13%) or with an absence of any kind of contact between the children and at least one parent (also 13%) is strikingly high. It shows how much it is less the social situation or the situation on the labour market which is relevant here than the socio-affective situation of a non-negligible part of the arrested children (minors and adults together).

#### 4) *Political analysis: Can the riots be considered as political protests?*

This question is certainly one of the most difficult ones, for the rioters were very reluctant to express ~~themselves about~~ their motivations and aspirations (apart from the desire for the dismissal of Sarkozy) and ~~for the fact that they~~ did not have any kind of leader speaking, not even a group of different local leaders. *Post-hoc* explanations given by participants or supporters (exact boundaries between both kinds of actors being extremely vague) also mix together categorizations in terms of political protest, violent deviance, war games and nihilist desires (Galland et al., 2006, Kokoreff et al., 2006, and on over-estimates of the political dimensions testimonies Marliere, 2006). Beyond (Despite? After?) the silence on the spot and the post-event confusion, one can say that the unrests had a significant impact on policies, politics, and political identities. As such, the unrests definitely deserve to be described as political uprisings. I would here identify five aspects of this wave of protest.

First, two different local studies conducted in low-income estates of Saint-Denis town and of Aulnay (Clichy's neighbouring town, which was one of the most severely hit by violent episodes) show how strongly the rioters and their targets are bound to local matters (Galland et al., 2006, Kokoreff et al., 2006). Both studies show how frequently young (indeed very young) rioters decided to act violently in order to prove to themselves and to their local community that they refuse both the state of ~~the~~ society and the attitude of the older people of their housing estates (the ones above, say, 25 yrs old), who resigned in silence either by fear of imprisonment, or because of the need to protect their quiet illegal businesses, or even by an acceptance of their status as low-income, fragile, despairing, and hopeless youth. They also insist on the importance of parochial factors, even if they are quite difficult to analyse clearly. For instance, a large Renault car garage was spectacularly set on fire on the 2 November in the city of Aulnay (the event was then internationally broadcasted). Interviews conducted then by Galland et al. could not determine if the motivations were bound to employment practices by the local boss (he is said to have refused to employ the local youth), or to local car traffic, or simply to a collateral damage due to the fire set in the neighbouring oil station. In St Denis, the one and only school burnt in the town was lead by a principal under suspected of racism and whose car was set on fire some months ago; in Aulnay, an old people's home (retirement home?) which had been the centre of a conflict between youth organizations and the mayor the month before because the youths wanted to use the place for their own purpose was destroyed.

But all this strongly supports the point that the riots were not a kind of a political movement driven by Islamic militancy or whatever could have played the role of a political leader, but an aggregation of protests driven by larger feelings toward the



police and different local actors from the school system or the labour market (the absence of any kind of religious commitment is not only underlined in local studies like Galland et al., 2006, 13, but also in a very interesting National Police report published against the will of the Minister of Interior by the newspaper *Le Parisien* on 7 December 2005 and by a study conducted by Patrick Haenni for the International Crisis Group, 2006 – both reports, even if produced by very different institutions, show how small Islamist activists' influence was in the events, but also in the role of peace keepers they pretended to play in some localities). To sum up this aspect in Olivier Roy's terms: "There was nothing Islamic or Arab in the riots. Strangely enough, Palestinian or Algerian flags as well as Arafat-style keffiyehs (a must in leftist demonstrations in France) have been totally absent. "Allah akbar" was shouted by the would-be mediators, not the rioters. Attacks on churches and synagogues have been almost absent" (Roy, 2005).

Secondly, this consideration should not be separated from the fact that, new waves of migration seem to have played a substantial role in the uprisings (Lagrange, 2006a). In a way, considering that the youth of former migrants (the ones from the Arab countries) were the rioters of the 90s, one could say that the riots are simply part of the history of migration in France and constitute the way in which migrants step into politics in France. As such, riots or urban unrests, even if not expressed as such by the actors, are a specific form of political socialization for a specific population at a specific age.

Thirdly, riots seem to have had a substantial impact on the votes in the housing estates. The next opportunity to vote after the riots came during national presidential elections in April and May 2007. In the second ballot, Sarkozy won against his left opponent Ségolène Royal with a large majority of 53% of the votes. Not surprisingly, Ségolène Royal won in almost all very industrialized and urbanized Départements: she scored 57% of the votes in the 93rd Département (where the riots started), not so surprisingly, since it is traditionally a left-wing territory (the Communist Party still leads the local government there). But in Clichy, or in cities where the then Minister of Interior displayed some of his aggressive words towards the local youth ("scum" in Argenteuil on the 25 October 2005, "Kärcher" in La Courneuve by the end of June 2005), Ms Royal received very high levels of votes (62% in Clichy, 57% in Argenteuil, 64% in La Courneuve). More precisely, Sarkozy received dreadfully low levels of votes in polling stations located in housing estates (16% in the "Kärcher" estates of La Courneuve at first ballot, 23% in the all city, etc.).

The most striking element concerning the possible linkage between collective violence (or riots) and conventional forms of political expression (or election) is the rise in poll registrations in the housing estates from the 2005 events onwards (to put it briefly, registration on the electoral rolls is not automatic in France and people above 18 years old have to go to the City Hall to register in order to vote). Recent studies showed that until 2007, there was a large discrepancy in the deprived estates between the size of the population and the number of voters registered in the electoral roll. Céline Braconnier et Jean-Yves Dormagen (2007b), who published a very convincing qualitative and quantitative study on the long-term dynamic of electoral apathy in La Courneuve's estates known as the "Cité des Cosmonautes" (2007a), show how 2005 was marked by a rise in registration in the housing estates, where electoral participation was dramatically low in the 2002's presidential election

(Fauvelle-Aymar, François, Vornetti, 2005). Braconnier and Dormagen also show that out of a sample of 96 cities 8.83% of registered population in 2005 in the sampled ZUS are newly registered (national average: 5,75%, average in the sample's non-ZUS areas: 6.20%). Moreover, the proportion of "first registered" (in comparison to people who registered in their city after having moved from another place) is at the highest in their sample ZUS (close to 40%, vs. 20% of the newly registered in the sample's non-ZUS areas), and was higher in 2005 than in 2004 and 2003 (a bit less than 30%). "First registered ever" are in their vast majority young people who were never registered either because they have only just reached the legal age for being a voter, or because they simply had never showed any interest previously. Incentives to convert violent action into registration, frequently promoted by rap stars or football players (like Lilian Thuram), certainly remind the numerous calls to civic order sent to the rebellious Parisian workers after the insurgency of June 1848 and the introduction of the one-man-one-vote system in 1848 (Traugott, 1985, Offerlé, 1989). Our conclusion will show that this comparison with 1848 riots is far from being the only one that can be drawn with 2005's collective violence. In any case, the result of this massive registration, specifically by young people (among whom high levels of abstention were observed in the 2002 presidential poll, Muxel, 2003, Braconnier and Dormagen, 2007a) and by people in the ZUS contributed to massive electoral participation in the cities hit by riots, specifically in comparison with their low level of participation in 2002. Consequently, Sarkozy's defeat in the cities hit by riots must not only be read in percentages, but also in absolute numbers in the deprived urban areas (5800 people voted on the first ballot in Clichy in 2002, 7500 in 2007, 11000 people voted in La Courneuve in 2007, 8800 in 2002, 40000 people voted in Argenteuil in 2007, 32000 in 2002).

Fourthly, in a study I conducted over some months with young men who had taken part in riots in 1997 and protested on a more conventional basis in 2002 against police violence (two of their peers were shot down in their small suburb town in the area of Paris), I noticed how hard it was for them to gather primary political resources (money to survive, a room to share, a place to be) and to construct a positive political identity apart from their status as being known to the police (they all had been previously convicted). As such, confrontations with judges at the local court or even the appeal court in Paris allocate them both a political identity and a political space. Their status as being known by the police turns out to be their only political identity and their only political message. Court rooms are at the end the only places they can enjoy meeting a public attention (Jobard, 2007).

This matter of fact is strongly strengthened by the harsh reaction of the courts during the disorders (harsh in comparison to usual sentences given in France; considering sentences given for instance after Bradford's riots in England (Bagguley and Hussain, 2003; Carling et. al., 2004), French courts were very soft on the rioters). Around one fifth of the arrested adults nationwide were imprisoned, either in a pre-trial decision, or as a result of a judgement. Michel Mazars' report about the arrestees in the 93<sup>rd</sup> Department is more precise on this. Courts dismissed one third of the cases submitted by the prosecution. But out of the two thirds left, judges in the court of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Department sentenced two thirds of them to jail, which consists in a heavy use of imprisonment. In the study I conducted on the basis of data from a comparable court in the Paris region (Jobard, Nevanen, 2007), I found out that the proportion of such sentences for crime against police officers in the most recent

years does not reach the level of half of all sentences given. Justice reacted during the crisis against people it considered it could condemn very harshly, and in some places (according to personal statements which were made to me) sentencing was made on a collective basis with no consideration for the individual circumstances of the defendant. This strongly encourages those concerned to feel subsumed under a single political identity, the one of being an object of the police and the justice system.

Fifth and last point. In the wake of the riots, Dominique de Villepin, the then Prime Minister, seeking an alternative political response to the law-and-order stance of his Minister of Interior, promised the year 2006 to be “the year of equality of opportunity”. For this sake, he tried to pass a law creating a new kind of labour contract for young people, called CPE (*“contrat première embauche”*), against which students and youths massively demonstrated in the spring of 2006. This wave of protest was marked by a violent confrontation between the youngsters who were at school or at the university and still had some hope of finding their way on the basis of their abilities, and the youth in the suburbs. The protest marches in Paris provided the occasion for scenes of extreme violence: Protesting youngsters from the schools and universities were robbed, brutalized and beaten by those coming from the social class below them.

This strongly reminds us of the historical meaning of the word “scum”, used by Sarkozy. This word is used in usual translation of the German notion of “Lumpen” set by Marx and Engels to describe the unorganized and anarchical forces of the Lumpenproletariat, which was paid by the French government and enrolled into the “Civil Guard” to quell the second wave of uprising of the Parisian workers occurring in June 1848 (Marx, 1977, Traugott, 1985). The spectre of apolitical, ignorant, criminal forces haunted the Spring 2006 protests, and brought a new light to the events of November 2005. Together with Olivier Fillieule, I conducted qualitative interviews with almost all the high-ranking police officers of the Paris police in 1995. These interviews and an historical analysis of riot police files and documents show that the police head in Paris (“Préfecture de police”) always displayed negotiation and compromise strategies in order to hold the rebellious crowds out of the city centre and to prevent any kind of disorder (Fillieule and Jobard, 1998); all that was absolutely not implemented during the events of Spring 2006. All seemed to be in place to give the so-called scum the opportunity to engage collective violence against their peers from one social class above them. And as a consequence, the so-called scum behaved as such: the speech act in which politics consists was effectively completed.

### **III. Conclusion**

How far is violence an act of protest? How far can the authors of collective violence acting in the French deprived urban areas in November 2005 be described as “rioters” or “rebels”? Charles Tilly would refuse to see the events as riots: “because it embodies a political judgment rather than an analytical distinction. Authorities and observers label as riots the damage-going gatherings of which they disapprove but they use terms like demonstrations, protest, resistance or retaliation for essentially similar events of which they approve” (2003, 18).

Meanwhile, we think we have shown on the basis of the comparison of the course of the events on the streets and on the national government level that both timelines were inseparably bound together: Molotov cocktails and the government's display of (verbal or factual) actions seemed to answer ~~to~~ each other. In Tilly's terms, the "scattered attacks" (one of his analytical categories in order to describe types of collective violence) were the consequence of a political cycle. Closer to the scene of the violence, the strategies employed by the different actors at the government's level (in a context of pre-presidential race exacerbation of personal ambitions) played the role of a tactical opportunity structure (McAdam, 1983, Fillieule, 1997, 54-57), since police actions were a direct consequence of these conflicts at the government level.

The migrant backgrounds of the rioters (in contrast with those of the non-rioters) and generational claims of the rioters, which are brought to light through quantitative and qualitative studies, clearly show how much political motives were of importance during the events. Moreover, the fact that the riots played the role of encouraging people into the sphere of electoral registration and preferences show how much these unconventional actions did lead to the stage of conventional politics. As such, it was imperative for the government (or the then Minister of Interior) to keep a grip on the way the rioters could be discredited. Tactical battles were effectively led on the streets, resulting, in the aftermath of the riots (during the student's and pupils demonstrations in March 2006) in a new cycle of collective violence, where police and rioters were used as pawns in a game whose real players have then been (were in fact?) the French electorate and a president-in-waiting (~~one year later~~). Collective violence undoubtedly appeared to be a profitable (if hazardous) political investment.

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### Short Biography

Fabien Jobard (PhD in political science) is a permanent researcher at the Centre for the sociology of criminal law and of penal institution (CESDIP-CNRS). His research is focused on the production of law and order in contemporary European societies. After having concentrated his work on the question of police use of force, which was the topic of his doctoral research (published in two books, the first one by L'Harmattan, 1999, the second one by La Découverte, 2002), he turned to police administrations in the process of regime change. For this purpose, he specifically studied the administrative and political process of the two Berlin's police forces (1989-91), which was published in French and American contributions. His research concentrate now on empirical studies on race and sentencing (*French Journal of Sociology*, 2007), on political protest by victims of police brutality (*Berliner Journal für Soziologie*, 2004) and on ethnography of police work (published in French and Italian in edited volumes and in *Criminologie*, in Montreal). He is, together with Dave Waddington (Sheffield Hallam University), the leader of the ESRC/ANR French-British project on riots in France and England.