

Uprisings in the *Banlieues*

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If I address here the events of November 2005 in French urban periphery, it is not as an ‘expert’ on urban violence or the sociology of the French *banlieue*, but because, as a French citizen, I feel obliged to clarify as much as possible what I think about events that have an immediate impact on our present and our political future. The ‘commuting’ academic I have become believes in the importance of comparison and dialogue as instruments for understanding the world we live in. This does not replace fieldwork. But I will attempt, on the basis of the information available to me, to engage in a distanciation that is no less necessary, first of all in relation to words and concepts each of us use ‘at home.’ To remain open to correction and discussion, the reflections I offer here take the form of a series of ‘files’ attached to seven symptomatic *words* or *expressions*: names, violence, postcolony, religion, race and class, citizenship/the Republic, and politics/antipolitics. They constitute a progression, but not properly speaking an argument. I have no thesis to defend. I am looking for hypotheses, or the best way of formulating them.

1. Names

It was James Chandler, specialist on the ‘urban scene’ of the Romantic period and director of the Franke Institute at the University of Chicago, who suggested my bilingual title, which I have taken up in my own way. Each term is problematic, as we see when we expand the series to which they belong and look for equivalents in the other context. It is a matter of confronting heterogeneous perceptions of the situation, which obviously arise from divergent, if not antagonistic, ideological presuppositions.

The natural equivalent of ‘uprising’ in French would be *soulèvement*. Hardly anyone in France spoke of a ‘*soulèvement*’ with respect to the events of November 2005, at least publicly: bordering on *insurrection*, the term strongly connotes a revolutionary tradition (‘the people rise up against their oppressors’) that seems irrelevant or exaggerated here.¹ The French press oscillated between the idea of a *révolte* (rebellion) and an *émeute* (riot). Sometimes it was a question of *guérilla*, especially to describe the clashes between ‘gangs’ of youths and detachments of anti-riot police (CRS, BAC). Or, in an apparently more neutral way (but only apparently in a context of denunciations of ‘insecurity’), of *violences*. The young, car-burning demonstrators defying and being chased by police were sometimes characterized as *rebelles*, sometimes as *casseurs* [hoodlums] and ‘dealers’ (and thus assigned to the register of *delinquency*). The apparently undecided question is one of intentions and consequences, but more deeply one of logic – political or, to the contrary, criminal, supposing that the two are contradictory

in a context of radical social as well as symbolic exclusion. Some observers were tempted to see the riots or revolts in French cities and suburbs not only as an illustration of the functions of *illegalism*, but as the resurgence in the 'post-political' (and also post-democratic, postcolonial, post-national) age of the archaic figure of the 'bandit,'² regarded by historians as characteristic of the 'pre-political age,' the recurring social crisis that preceded (and in certain respects explains) the formation of the modern state and its (national) monopoly on legitimate violence.

The term *banlieue* poses completely different problems. We cannot consider it the equivalent of the American 'suburb' (from the Latin *suburbia*, which would correspond more to *faubourgs* and evokes wealth or at least prosperity), given by the dictionaries. The sociological equivalent would rather be *inner cities*, owing to inverse urban logics. The already-old debate on the problems that lead to conditions of exclusion and the double movements of social and racial exclusion in European and American society almost imposes the analogy *banlieue*-ghetto. Owing to the importance of the postcolonial dimension and the way it tends to reproduce a sort of *apartheid* in Europe on the level of citizenship that 'sets apart' populations of immigrant origin, I would propose the equivalent of *townships*, in the sense the term had (and retains) in South Africa. But perhaps at bottom it is a matter of a specifically French reality: the important thing would then be the fact that, in our current usage, *banlieue* connotes not only a conflictual, divided reality, but the *proximity of extremes*. This point is politically important. For there are *banlieues* and *banlieues*, often geographically very close to one another but separated by a social abyss and a permanent antagonism (which feeds the policies of territorial management and municipal and local power struggles): some are rich, even very rich (Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy belongs to one of these, Neuilly-sur-Seine, and has made it his 'fief' and his 'showcase'); others are symbols of poverty, the decline of public services, the relegation of ethnic minorities and poor whites, unemployment and stigmatization, and 'inter-communal' tensions. In many respects, even if the riots extended to other urban areas (especially outside Paris), it was this clash *within the banlieue*, between the two worlds it contains, that was characteristic. Not only do unacknowledged frontiers separate one kind of *banlieue* from the others; *the 'banlieue' as such is a frontier, a border-area and a frontline*. It forms a periphery at the very center of the great metropolitan areas. It materializes what I have elsewhere called the displacement of frontiers toward the center.³

And yet, revealing as it is, this semantics of the French-style *banlieue* is not wholly satisfactory. It conceals two other dimensions that brutally short-circuit the local and the global and are characteristic of the contemporary world. On the one hand, we must in effect descend to a lower level: what 'burns' concretely (cars, public buildings) and metaphorically (is ignited with rage) is never a municipality, but a *cit * or *quartier* (housing project or district), like the 'Cit  des Bosquets' at Montfermeil or the 'Cit  du Val-Fourr ' at Mantes-la-Jolie . . . It is the *cit *, with its history and its solidarities, that is the 'subject' of violence, claimed by the young rioters as a place of origin, stigmatized by politicians, police, employers, chosen as a 'target' of social policy and the terrain of police 'raids.' It is what can be usefully compared to a 'ghetto' – with

necessary specifications of degree and history.⁴ However, on the other hand, at least in the French context, precisely these ghettoized *banlieues* (and within the *banlieues* the *cités* built to contain and isolate heterogeneous populations) correspond to what, from another perspective, Saskia Sassen has called ‘global cities.’⁵ We would have to speak of global *banlieues*, whose demographic composition and movements reflect the contradictions of globalization and their local projection. This also explains what at first glance seems to be the disproportionate resonance of the events outside France: they seem to illustrate a type of revolt, perhaps of struggle, that is being generalized transnationally – a ‘revolt of the excluded,’ if not a ‘molecular civil war,’ that forms the horizon of the ‘great migration.’⁶

2. Violence

It is nevertheless necessary to return to the characterization of the ‘violence’ that was produced in November insofar as this term, now employed constantly (we live, it is said, in an age of the multiplication of violence and insecurity), is used in a highly selective and in any case never neutral way. A series of problems gravitates around the level and forms of violence, and they are decisive for understanding the political meaning of what caused the French *banlieues* to ‘rise up.’ For if there can be no doubt that it was a political *event*, it is not obvious that it was a matter of (collective) political *action*. Who were its actors? Whom or what were they aiming at? With what intentions and – possibly very different – effects? To what extent is this violence the symptom, indeed the mirror of the functioning of the French political system?

It is necessary first of all to ask whether this violence was spontaneous or, to the contrary, provoked, even deliberately planned. To be sure, as is said, the local materials were highly combustible and the preconditions for a new explosion (on the model of 1982 in Minguettes, 1990 at Vaulx-en-Velin, 1991 at Mantes-la-Jolie, etc.) had long existed. The government knew this perfectly well. So well that, observing how riots were set off (taking up and amplifying a well-known scenario of vandalism by out-of-school, out-of-work youths) by the Interior Minister’s ‘challenge’ and the tragic outcome of a manhunt typical of routine police practices, we have to ask if it did not in fact seek to touch off an episode of ‘criminal’ violence to boost its own legitimacy and law-and-order propaganda.⁷

When speaking of the ‘government,’ let us not forget that it was torn at the time by an inextinguishable rivalry between its two heads, Prime Minister Villepin and Interior Minister Sarkozy. Each had his ‘strategy,’ in part directed against the other, but converging on the ground in a single series of provocations. The ‘Villepin’ strategy was a parody of civil war; its visible (and risible) tip was the proclamation of a state of emergency based on legislation dating from the Algerian War (1955), previously used just once (in 1984 on the occasion of neocolonial clashes in New Caledonia).⁸ Here it was a matter of stirring up typically illegitimate violence, associated with the figure of the internal-foreign enemy (facilitating deportations in particular), in order to stage a simulacra of re-establishing state authority and the ‘monopoly of legitimate violence.’ Obviously

this is dangerous game, prone on the one hand to ridicule, on the other to slipping out of its instigators' control . . . The 'Sarkozy' strategy, since extended in the struggle against illegal immigration, has entered into memory above all through the Interior Minister's 'inopportune' statements: generalizing insults and repeated appeals to the racist sentiments of poor whites. This also helped amplify the violence, the better to take credit for mastering it, but with another accent – that of 'realism,' indeed 'responsibility.' The same minister with the petty macho posturing presented himself as the architect of a solution to the problem of ethnic diversity and religious intolerance, pleading for a certain recognition of the fact of multiculturalism, choosing Muslim notables as interlocutors and intercessors, and trying to enroll parents against their children in the name of defending authority and social order.

But having noted the element of provocation and calculation that played a not inconsiderable role in the unfolding of the events, it is necessary to return to a more enduring and determining reality: the endemic violence of relations between the police and '*banlieue* youth' (itself a stereotyped category that always includes racial stigmatizations: blacks and Arabs, though not only them). This violence, sometimes compared to a 'war' or 'urban guerilla warfare,' is a polymorphous phenomenon that constitutes the most visible fact of the *condition of violence* in which the populations of the ghettoized *cités* live, its roots in structural causes like the accelerated deterioration of the urban environment and public services, massive, long-term unemployment, ethnic and geographical stigmatization (to be 'from Sevran' or even 'from the 93rd' [Seine-Saint-Denis, northeast of Paris] is to see the doors closed to employment, recognition, and social mobility out of hand), delinquency (including the drug economy), at once practiced and suffered. Undisputed studies have shown the extent to which the behavior of the police in the *banlieues* toward the residents they harass and who provoke or resist them bears a mimetic dimension. At the limit, police squads act like gangs fighting other gangs in an escalation of virile exhibitionism – the difference being that they are armed, sent by the state into 'hostile territory,' and that their own disproportionate violence (insults, beatings, shootings, arrests, detentions, threats) is inscribed within a more general process of intimidation, profiling, and harassment of legal and illegal immigrants.⁹ Here the *incivility* so often invoked as a social scourge is for the most part on the side of the state and its representatives. This combination of social suffering¹⁰ and the instrumentalization of the values of order and legality, this tendential substitution of *law and order* for the *social* and the *economic*, this perversion of the notion of the 'rule of law' explains another important aspect of the situation in the *banlieues* that must never be lost from view: the resistance of families in solidarity with their children, although they are constantly called on to denounce them,¹¹ and the activity of associations, municipal representatives, and teachers – or some of them. Violence is not the whole of life in the *banlieue*, or, more precisely, the *banlieue* creates other forms of struggle against violence than police repression.

Finally, what is striking in the development of violence in the *banlieues* is a paradoxical, hard-to-define combination of contradictory predicates. This violence, it is often said, is in part *self-destructive*. People asked more or less ingenuously: why do 'they'

burn their neighbors' and parents' cars, 'their' schools or those of the little brothers and sisters, 'their' sports facilities, 'their' means of transportation? And the notions of exclusion and despair are fused with those of nihilism and depersonalization. Here it is necessary to rigorously discuss the meaning of terms. The object of destruction is in large part a 'thing' from which the young rioters are contradictorily *excluded* as 'non-citizens,' to which they only have limited, illegitimate access, but of which they are *themselves a part*, that in a way is part of themselves and their identity. This is why they can be characterized neither as absolutely outside nor as really within the social system, but only in the paradoxical terms of an *internal exclusion*, which must produce its effects at the deepest levels of subjectivity. Here we encounter the idea of the *permanent state of exception*, proposed by Giorgio Agamben on the basis of his reflections on limit-situations in which the law is said to suspend its own effectiveness.¹² This model seems more satisfactory, in the event, than that of 'nihilist violence' developed by Enzensberger or even 'violence without an addressee' proposed by Bertrand Ogilvie regarding manifestations of extreme violence in our societies that exceed the means-end schema we are accustomed to making a cornerstone of our conception of rationality.¹³ Rather than a pursuit of nothingness or the dissolution of any political objective that can be represented or expressed in a 'rational' way, it would be a matter of violence *in search of* targets and adversaries that, in part, escape it or take a shape that is itself contradictory, ambivalent. We will find this confirmed in the way institutions – whether they have to do with the state, municipalities, public administration, but also 'civil society' as a complex of public opinion and networks of belonging – react to violence directed against the urban environment: they themselves inspire feelings of revolt, hate, or fear, but all these modalities of passion are overdetermined by the feeling that it is not a matter of an isolable danger, but, to the contrary, an expression of the becoming or the manifestation of what we 'ourselves' are (and that much more worrying for this reason). I will return to this point in conclusion.

On the basis of this deep ambivalence we can then try to isolate other striking features of the violence of November 2005. First of all, its relatively narrow *limits*. Without going so far as to suggest that it was subject to internal control (which would suppose a degree of organization and premeditation that was manifestly absent¹⁴), we must note that, compared to other, often invoked 'historical' episodes (the Brixton riots in London in 1981 and above all the riots in Watts and South Central Los Angeles in 1965 and 1992), and contrary to what television coverage suggested, this *highly spectacular* violence remained relatively limited in terms of its destruction and victims: three dead (including the two youths whose indirect murder by the police lit the powder), but no or very few attacks on persons. Instead, consumer items and symbolic places were destroyed (among which we must not forget that cars and buses are subject to periodic assaults within the framework of the generalized violence I spoke of above). This spectacular character, however, was in no way secondary; it marks the advent of a new age in which the means of mass communication acquire the role of *passive organizers* of social movements. Very shortly after the first episodes a 'national competition' arose between *cités*, towns, and regions¹⁵ to appear on French and even international

television with the most spectacular scenes of ‘civil war.’ It is very hard to say ‘who is using whom’ in this process at the limits of the real and the virtual.¹⁶ But what should be taken from this ‘virtual violence’ is that it *transforms* real, endemic social violence, to which it responds, *into spectacle*, thereby at once making it *visible* in its intensity and *invisible* its everydayness. It expresses a desperate will to affirm not so much a ‘cause’ or a ‘project’ as an *existence* that is constantly forgotten or denied by the surrounding society, using means proper to the experience of reality in contemporary society (there is no recognized existence other than that which can be represented, reproduced by the media). But these means are double-edged, for they return against those who use them by imposing a certain identity on them. In this sense reference to the ‘practico-inert’ and ‘stolen praxis’ in Sartre is as useful as reference to Debord’s ‘society of the spectacle’ or Baudrillard’s ‘hyper-reality.’

3. Postcolony

It is by design that I now refer to this term that radicalizes the notion of a ‘postcolonial’ period or culture, popularized by the work of African philosopher Achille Mbembe.¹⁷ The need to combine internal perception of the events unfolding on the French scene (where necessary correcting the historical and institutional inaccuracies of distant observers) with critical distanciation, an external view and a transnational perspective, is obvious. In this case it is also a matter of finding ‘codes’ to interpret the typical short-circuit between local determinations and actors, on the one hand, and the ‘global’ significations I alluded to above, on the other.

But before coming to Mbembe’s intervention, it seems useful to refer to two others, almost contemporary, that also try to decenter our perspective, and in many respects complement Mbembe’s. The first is Immanuel Wallerstein’s in his essay “The French Riots: Rebellion of the Underclass.”¹⁸ Wallerstein regards the French riots as typical of a phenomenon ineluctably produced by the combination of racism and poverty in the ‘peripheries’ of the world economy (of which the *banlieues* are a sort of reproduction within the very ‘center’), where the contemporary politics of capitalism create growing social polarization. The reason we do not see riots everywhere all the time is nothing other than the vigilance of the dominant classes and the preventive repression they practice especially against youth, who have ‘nothing to lose’ since they have been pushed to despair and are likeliest to openly defy the established order. If there is a French specificity, it comes from the paradoxical combination of two factors. On the one hand, in a way that extends over centuries, France is an *immigration country*, whose population has grown through successive admissions, in the past from elsewhere in Europe, today from the whole world and especially the former colonies. On the other hand, France – whose political system has always drawn its legitimacy from the ‘Revolution of the Rights of Man’ – thinks of itself as *the country of universal values*, where discrimination as such is unthinkable. While this double characteristic could ideally lead to the invention of a form of multiculturalism equal to the challenges of the contemporary world, to the contrary it generates remarkable blindness about its own

history and social contradictions as well as an inability to question the founding myths of Jacobinism and state secularism (as recently shown by the famous ‘Islamic headscarf’ affair). There is, however, no symmetry in these matters, since, as Wallerstein rightly notes, religious identity claims and conflicts between politico-religious allegiances (such as those produced by the Israel-Palestine war) played practically no role in the revolt of the *banlieues*. “The French rebellion was a spontaneous class uprising” – a conclusion that clearly marks his choice of emphasis.

This choice is reversed by Rada Ivekovic in successive contributions that see the November 2005 uprisings above all as a return of a “colonial boomerang.”¹⁹ Her remarks are stamped by deep disillusionment with French universalism, the reality of which turns out in her eyes to be a thinly veiled ‘provincialism’ in which nostalgia for imperial domination and the illusion of bearing the legacy of the Enlightenment (in a sense by birthright) bars any capacity for self-criticism or analysis of the social and cultural questions posed by the end of colonialism. Unlike Germany, which at least in principle has confronted its history of nationalism and anti-Semitism in order to understand the roots of Nazism, official France has never really undertaken to return to the history of colonialism, its intellectual wellsprings and its legacy. Ivekovic thus emphasizes the stubborn resistance, ideological as well as institutional, of the French university and intellectual class to considering the postcolonial problematics now discussed elsewhere, especially at the two extremes of the Anglophone world, India and the United States, where ‘subaltern studies’ have developed. She sees this as the consequence in particular of the French illusion of speaking a language that claims intrinsic universality, but is in fact deeply imbued with historical particularisms and Eurocentric paternalism.

It is striking, however, that the main problem that (rightly) preoccupies Ivekovic in interpreting the riots in the *banlieues* – namely the internal (and in no way ‘secondary’) political contradiction they contain, combining a revolt against the stigmatization of ‘indigenous’ cultures of origin in the former metropole with a traditionalist reaction that crystallizes above all in the field of gender relations – obliges her to take into account French specificities that do not fit easily within this one-sided presentation. Ivekovic herself emphasizes that the groups of young rioters who face off against the police share a violent, ‘macho’ culture, one expression of which is rap.²⁰ And she notes that France was the setting of one of the most significant recent feminist movements, also in the *banlieues*: the protest of girls and young women (organized by the association ‘*Ni putes ni soumises*’ [neither whores nor servants]) against the sexual oppression and violence practiced by gangs of male youths who seek at once to restrict women’s sexual freedom and to benefit from it themselves; they are often the same as those who revolt against ambient racism. We must thus suppose that, despite its lingering provincialism, the scene of the French *banlieues* reflects the sharpest contradiction affecting ‘postcolonial’ culture in general, namely the conflict between affirming the identity of immigrants and their descendents against institutional racism and their own oppressive violence against women, the subaltern par excellence.²¹ As elsewhere, in France this conflict has been instrumentalized by the dominant culture, which eagerly presents itself as the

‘protector of women’ and stigmatizes the sexism of ‘people of color’ and ‘Orientals’ while throwing a hypocritical veil over the sexual inequalities of Western society. But less than elsewhere, perhaps – by reason precisely of the latent subversive capacities of a certain universalist discourse – can this be reduced to a Manichean choice between the cause of the ‘indigenous’ and that of ‘women’s liberation.’

Achille Mbembe lost no time intervening in the debate on the violence in the *banlieues* with two essays circulated on the internet: “The Republic and Its Beast: On the Riots in the *Banlieues* of France” and “Figures of the Multiple: Can France Reinvent Its Identity?”²² The dark ‘beast’ of which Mbembe speaks is *race*, which is to say not only the object of diffuse institutional racism, periodically stirred up by political demagoguery, but the *reproduction* – beyond the independences and recolonizations hidden by the ‘community’ of interests between France and its former African colonies – of a *social mechanism of discrimination and separation* of human beings into unequal ‘species’ that includes both ends of the migratory chain (France and black Africa). Mbembe insists like Wallerstein on the socially inegalitarian character of globalization, and like Ivekovic on the power of the repression of colonial history, which prevents French society from understanding what has now blown up in its face in the form of an explosion of urban violence. But he adds a supplementary thesis: there is correlation and constant exchange between state racism at home and French neocolonial policy in African countries that remain dependents of the former empire (with the complicity of corrupt bourgeoisies and military castes) – what he eloquently calls the “geography of infamy.” We thus witness a near-resurrection of the *Code de l’Indigénat* (Natives Code) that once governed the subjection of colonial peoples in the form of ‘laws of exception,’ the development of a ‘penal state,’²³ and quasi-military methods applied by police and public administration to deal with *banlieues* populated by the descendants of the formerly colonized. They reenact the ‘race war’ and inscribe it in the global context of clashes between the ‘civilizations’ of the North and the South on the basis of a very French colonial tradition whose administrative habits have never been eradicated.²⁴

Mbembe thus, like Ivekovic, takes up the critique of the blindness and deafness of the French establishment (including the larger part of its intellectuals) to the postcolonial critique of the ideological functions of universalism.²⁵ But instead of concluding that it is necessary to go beyond this universalism as such, he shows that it is rather a matter of an open contradiction within it (“universal citizenship and radical equality cannot live together with the practice of state racism”). To “imagine the beyond of race” it is therefore necessary, following the thinkers of Negritude (Senghor, Césaire, today Glissant), who made a critical return to universalism in order to open up a “passage to cosmopolitanism,” to confront *the French republican ideology* with its own democratic requirements, with no possibility of escape. This is also the responsibility of the ‘indigenous’ themselves: the violence without political objectives (aside from expressing rage) is ‘unsustainable.’ It is necessary in France to create a new, non-violent ‘civil rights movement’ inspired by the American and South African examples and at the same time to work toward the emergence of a ‘métisse’ or ‘creole’ intellectuality and a political common sense it would catalyze. “This presupposes the rise of a generation

of French intellectuals of all races who interrogate French culture from its margins: the *banlieues*, the overseas territories, the former colonies, the Francophonie . . .”

We see from these three examples that it is impossible to reflect on how class, race, and gender combine in the alchemy of the revolts in the French *banlieue* without overcoming the epistemological obstacle of a purely French perspective, locked within the conventional boundaries of the hexagon. But it is just as impossible to define its singularity (the ‘current moment’), its causes as well as its solutions or consequences, without considering its social and institutional specificity. The postcolony haunts the French situation – in many respects it is its repressed – but it cannot supply the exclusive key, especially in forms that have been defined on the basis of another historical and linguistic world.

4. Religion

The texts I have just examined (to which others could of course be added) put the emphasis on determinations like class and race as well as, in counterpoint, gender, but tend to ignore or separate the religious factor. It is to the contrary highlighted by analyses inspired (even critically) by the model of a ‘clash of civilizations.’ Is this a mistake? And if we must integrate this dimension, either when it comes to the motivations of the rebels/rioters or their representation in public opinion or by state officials, in what terms should we do so? Let us not forget that among the factors that aggravated the tension in the first days was the fact that the forces of order – intentionally according to some, mistakenly according to others – fired a teargas grenade at the entrance of a mosque;²⁶ or that in the following days the spokesmen of the National Council of the Muslim Faith, called on by the French authorities who control them as strictly as possible but also moved by a feeling of responsibility to the community they represent, which they feel is periodically threatened by the development of Islamophobic racism and the repercussions of the ‘war against terror,’ repeatedly called for calm . . .²⁷

We should therefore be on our guard both against a reductive interpretation of the ‘religious fact’ that would make it a mere *cloak* of ‘real’ social processes when it is in fact a *component* of them, and against the temptation of a ‘religious (or culturalist-theological) reading’ of current conflicts that, for its part, *conceals* real dynamics and projects them into a prefabricated ideological world. Religious readings have tended to reproduce the stereotype of a global confrontation between Christianity (Catholicism in particular), on which, despite its official secularization, the dominant French culture is still based, and Islam, to which some (but not all) of the youths burning cars belong by virtue of family origin.²⁸ This is readily associated with a reference to Jewish-Islamic antagonism by adverting to the existence of a tension between Jewish and Muslim communities in some French *banlieues* and cities, periodically triggered by events in the Middle East, and the question is posed of how to compare the French riots with the events that simultaneously shook Britain, apparently calling into question its ‘communitarian model’ for organizing interethnic relations in a postcolonial space (the participation of young Britons of Pakistani origin in the London terrorist attacks of

July 2005). Even authors who (like Mbembe) do not make the religious question an essential key have spoken of the *intifada of the banlieues* and a 'Palestinianization' of the revolts and their repression. In this way, references to the sociological reality of Islam and the often fantasmatic representation of its global role are combined in a confusion that must be untangled.

If we ask why, contrary to declarations and expectations, explicit religious discourse was so negligible in the events of November 2005 – aside precisely for among ideologues and spokespersons of the French right – we can invoke two heterogeneous but not radically contradictory kinds of reasons. The first is the weakness of what is called 'political Islam' in the French context, despite periodic cries of alarm or intimidation.²⁹ This weakness in particular means that for youths of North African origin (whose parents or grandparents were 'immigrants' from Algeria and Morocco) the reference to Islam functions essentially as the assertion of a collective identity experienced as discriminated against and stigmatized (whence the continual reference to the 'lack of respect' for their religion and the provocative role of episodes like that of the grenade in the mosque). It has no political function and no necessary connection to religious practice (everything seems to indicate that most youths of Muslim origin practice as little as other French youths, and more generally that the codes of mass communication and scenarios of urban violence spread by television have more influence on their discourse and imaginary than religion, as is the case for many other French people).³⁰ The second type of reason is that the main function of religion and religious culture – from a point of view that conforms entirely to the juridical schemas of French secularism and is subject to the same difficulties – is organization in the *private sphere*. This is why it focuses (like Catholicism not long ago) on control of the family and in particular on the relations of the sexes. In a situation of pauperization, discrimination, and the crisis of identities connected to work, education, and traditional culture, the reference to religion functions as a refuge and a substitute for social recognition. It comes to the fore when the conflict between incompatible values is acute within the revolt or the demand for recognition, as shown by the 'veil' affair, and, on a completely different level of seriousness, sexual or clan violence against girls. The fact that it remained in the background in November 2005 is a crucial indicator of the *limits of the politicization* of the movement and also of its *orientation*: it did not renew intercommunal clashes, especially Judeo-Arab (thankfully), but also did not put sexist stereotypes in question (regrettably).

This point of view amounts to regarding religious discrimination, in the French context, as essentially a component of more general *racial* (or neo-racial) discrimination – which is not to minimize its seriousness. To say that religion functions essentially as an index of racial identity, marking its minoritarian, illegitimate character from the perspective of the dominant culture, that it allows people to be subjected to the mechanism of *internal exclusion*, is not to contest that it can play an essential role in how all actors in the conflict identify themselves and present their (and others') 'identities.' But it is to insist that the conflict as such is religious neither in its origins nor in its stakes. It is also to point out the extent to which the political treatment of religion, especially the

effective recognition of Islam as it in fact is today, the second religion in France and perhaps the most vibrant, constitutes a fundamental democratic and civic objective, even from the point of view of a secular state. Here it is a matter of at once fighting a crucial aspect of institutional racism and guarding against an ideologization of social conflict that is for the moment negligible, though not unimaginable. We cannot help but note that, deliberately or not, part of the discourse of the intelligentsia is going in exactly the opposite direction.

5. Race and Class

We thus return to the idea that the fundamental complex is the intersection of class and race, each being taken in its most extended, developing sense, at once subjective (the mode of identification of oneself and the other) and objective (the effects of social relations and historical conditions). The revolt of the *banlieues* and the way it has been suppressed, and later, in the best administrative tradition, ‘buried’ beneath a torrent of announcements and promises without guarantees, bears witness both to the depth of the carefully repressed racial conflict at the heart of French society, and to the development of massive class inequalities in employment, education, security, housing, and the ‘right to the city’ (according to Henri Lefebvre’s expression, which is more current than ever). While many commentators and especially state spokespersons want to separate these two determinations,³¹ we must to the contrary carefully hold them together. But is it enough to observe that the addition of these two factors of discrimination, whose effect is at once to bear the stigma of foreign origin, as ‘immigrant,’ and to live in zones of deindustrialization and ‘preferential unemployment’ (10 percent in France as a whole, 20 percent the *banlieues* affected by the revolts, up to 40 percent for the youth of these districts) generates a reinforced exclusion, which in turn is transformed into a stigma and a social handicap in an apparently endless spiral? Perhaps it is necessary to take one more step and try to characterize the singular ‘place’ that results from the double exclusion of class and race: an essentially *negative* place, the effect of which is to constitute those who occupy it as eternally *displaced* (*out of place*) persons, the *internally excluded* – ‘pariahs,’ not in the sense the term had in its original context (a ‘caste’ outside the system of legitimate castes) but that it acquired in modern Western society (via theorists like Max Weber, Hannah Arendt, and Pierre Bourdieu): groups that find themselves denied, in principle or in fact, the right to have rights (that of *having* them or having the use of them, and above all that of *claiming* them).³²

The combined effects of race and class are covered by the administrative term ‘discrimination’ (now official at the national and transnational level: the EU has set up programs to ‘fight discrimination,’ the President of the Republic has recognized the role of ‘discrimination’ in setting off the riots, etc.),³³ or else they are indirectly signaled by euphemisms (‘identity crisis,’ ‘social divide’) that always refer to two rival hermeneutics. The experience of the youths of the *banlieues*, however, what provokes their revolt and drives them to despair, is precisely one of overdetermination, in which *each stigma prevents them from freeing themselves from the other*, crushing their

individual and collective futures. The negative place thus defined then becomes equally the *public place* where the pariahs stand up to declare, in a way that is itself negative, the decomposition of the social order of which they are the result. I will return to this in conclusion.

This omnipresence of the negative, what could be called the rise of a *negative community* on the model of what Robert Castel has called *negative individualism* (and of course the two phenomena are correlative),³⁴ should not prevent us from positively identifying the contemporary characteristics of the condition of class and the ascription of race. What predominates, it seems to me, is on the one hand the scheme of *heredity*, and on the other that of *disaffiliation* (in Castel's sense) – whence a violent tension, a condition that negates or destroys itself.

Racial ascription, and beyond it all the stigmas of color, religion, culture, goes back in a privileged way to a fixation on familial relations when it comes to the 'self' as well as the 'other.' Witness the institutional phobia of family reunification, the administration's stigmatization of broken families that have given up 'authority' over their children and therefore need to be reeducated, even punished,³⁵ and the reappearance of the Orientalist fantasm of polygamy.³⁶ It culminates in the construction of a juridically and humanly monstrous social category: the *hereditary status of immigrant* – 'once an immigrant, always an immigrant,' generation after generation, whatever nationality is acquired. And hence 'foreigners in their own country,' since they do not (or no longer) have any other.³⁷

The condition of class, for its part, is no longer defined principally by one's place in the division of labor, even if the great antitheses between income from property and income from work (albeit hidden by the extension of the category of wage-earners) or manual and intellectual labor (albeit displaced by universal education and computerization) are still significant. Today it runs above all between relatively *protected* and *precarious* jobs.³⁸ Such a frontier is by definition unstable, constantly moving, the stake of a constant relation of forces, at once global and local, the object of a perpetual, apparently irreversible *fuite en avant* (as irreversible as globalization and the 'outsourcing' it brings). It gives rise to a fierce new form of competition, *competition between territories*, as much among continental or national spaces that seek to attract investment with tax incentives, lower labor standards, and the dismantling of social rights, as among urban spaces that are treated as development zones, 'reservations,' even 'dumping grounds.'³⁹ Some *banlieues* thus appear as veritable designated living areas for a *new proletariat* whose insecurity is maximal and faces a choice only between insecure work and unemployment.⁴⁰ Imprisonment in an ethnic genealogy (a *past* of domination) is thus combined with being prevented from leaving a space of relegation (to build a real *future*). It is this double knot that is truly explosive, that is 'too much.'

But it is also here that the question arises of the political meaning of a revolt that takes its energy from despair, whose destructive aspects themselves can be interpreted as a way of rising up to reach another place, that of representation, recognition, and participation. Does this revolt mark (at least symbolically) the ultimate limit of the regime that (in France) calls itself the 'Republic' and presents itself as the institution

par excellence of a *community of citizens* that has now become impossible? Or does it entail another force of democratization, and under what conditions? Let us examine these questions in two steps.

6. Unattainable Republican Citizenship

I will proceed here once again by way of critical confrontation. The discourse developed by the '*Indigènes de la République*' collective since its foundation in January 2005 has the merit of asking what allows 'race' to reconstitute and thus reproduce itself beyond the abolition or profound transformation of the material conditions and ideological reference points of its initial constitution, and of the fundamental role of the 'republican' state in this reproduction.⁴¹ Their intervention can be evaded or dismissed only at the price of considerable hypocrisy – thus the privilege I accord it here. But there is a downside to looking for the logic of internal exclusion or 'banishment,' whose structural necessity it points out, in a simple *repetition* of the colonial form in the social formation of contemporary France, and consequently to seeking to overcome it through a metaphorical rebirth of the anticolonial emancipation movement and a settling of the Republic's accounts with its past, which would allow it to achieve 'internal decolonization' after 'external decolonization' – the last, hardest, and riskiest stage, without which the previous one is in a sense nullified. This second aspect, which is insistent in *Indigènes*' discourse, albeit with nuances and debates, is in my view an obstacle to rigorous analysis. We must try to call it into question without neutralizing the virtues of the first aspect.

It is right to abandon a problematic centered exclusively around *immigration* (even while maintaining that this word has become the 'name of race,' as I did two decades ago⁴²), since immigrant origin in its turn has become a hereditary stigma, returning to the structural invariant of historical racisms. This allows us to interpret both the apparent renewal of racist discourse (passing from the biological to the cultural, the religious, etc.) and the permanence of the *genealogical schema*, which allows it to be articulated according to conjunctures of class, familial sexism, and religion, presented as so many substantial, transgenerational identity constructions.⁴³ The Republic is certainly accountable for the discrimination and violence that result from this. Not only because this contradicts its constitutional principle, the equal access of all 'citizens' to education and social promotion, jobs and professions, equal treatment by public administration, etc.,⁴⁴ but for a more specific political reason. In France, over at least two centuries, the Republic has been constituted and reconstituted – sometimes after long eclipses – by demarcating itself in a more or less 'revolutionary' way from other regimes characterized precisely by the limitations they placed on citizenship.⁴⁵ This traces a line of demarcation and sets conditions of legitimacy for institutions that can also be invoked against their internal deviations. Of course the reality has never corresponded exactly to this principle, and the list of 'French subjects' institutionally excluded from citizenship (or from *full* citizenship) by various Republics is long, precisely from women (before 1945) to the indigeneous people of the colonies.

This is why what is important is the *direction* in which the frontiers of citizenship evolve, toward expansion or restriction, and how the contradictions that emerge with changing relations of social forces, institutional facts, and the symbolic features of real citizenship are dealt with. From this point of view, the savage critique of the *Indigènes* and their insistence on the murderous effects of the French nation's long repression of its recent colonial past allows them to call attention to the *retrograde* direction in which the contradiction resulting from the combined mechanisms of *naturalization* (the French Republic is in principle attached to *jus soli*), *the legal or illegal importat of labor* (which has not ceased for at least two centuries), and *the transnationalization of the political space* (which for us takes the form especially of the construction of Europe) are handled today. This has to do not only with the fact that, as in all European countries, a two-speed citizenship is being created, with a zone of exclusion reserved for the foreign workforce (even if this phenomenon could be compared to an 'apartheid').⁴⁶ It also has to do with the fact that the same state (and, behind it, the national political 'community') *confers and takes away citizenship*, that it includes – and even imprisons – certain individuals in the political space *and* prohibits them from participating.⁴⁷ There is thus indeed a political analogy (and not just a continuity of methods on the side of the administration and the forces of repression) with the way that, in the colonial territories, *two populations* with radically unequal rights found themselves brought together and set apart. But the institutional mechanisms and political effects are not the same. The trace of colonization is one of the origins and permanent conditions of possibility for the denial of citizenship that, in the revolt of the *banlieues*, came back to hit the 'French Republic' like a boomerang, but it is only one of them. This is why we must insist on the *double* determination of class and race in phenomena of exclusion, and on the *void of belonging* it produces. The colonial (and a fortiori precolonial) past of earlier generations can constitute a symbolic reference, even a retaliatory weapon against French national good conscience, but not properly speaking a schema or model for constructing contemporary political identities. History does not repeat itself.

Without the trace of this past, however, we would not properly understand the radicality of the exclusion of youths of 'immigrant' origin, and by extension of the urban territories to which, by administrative policy as much as by reflexes of kinship and mutual assistance, they are confined. Better: we would not understand what makes this exclusion singular and leads its difference from other, partly similar ones to be translated into racial language, thus producing the effects of an antagonism *among the excluded* themselves. It is not sufficient here to suggest a symmetry between the radicalization of the youths of the *banlieues* and the drift of a growing part of the pauperized, precarious working class toward racist ideology,⁴⁸ as witnessed in the rise of the Front National vote in the *banlieues*. We must, it seems to me, go deeper into two (obviously connected) aspects of the crisis of democracy in the French social-political formation: on the one hand, the tendential substitution of a racial phantasm for faltering political representation; and, on the other, the blockage and potential derailing of the transition that leads to democratic insurrection properly speaking in the absence of adequate representation. We must try to connect these two points in order to outline a

reflection of the *becoming political* of the revolt of the *banlieues* and to shed light on its uncertainties.

In the French Republic as it is perpetuated today (through a daily ‘republican pact’ to which each of our practices contribute), citizenship is not just ‘imperfect,’ as the best theorists of democracy and the crisis of the bourgeois nation-state have maintained;⁴⁹ it is increasingly unattainable: i.e., it is *refused* to many of those who would have to benefit from it for it to deserve the name of democratic citizenship, while for many others is reduced to a formal, limited status. In the ferment exemplified by the 2005 riots, fed by ‘rage’ at suffering from the double systemic discrimination of race and of class and thus of the place they define, it is of course tempting to see an *insurrectional capacity* to refund or reactivate citizenship: at once by the irruption of the plebs into the affairs of the city, where they claim, in Jacques Rancière’s now indispensable expression, ‘the share of those who have no share,’⁵⁰ and by the performative declaration that there is no ‘community of citizens’ without minimal recognition of the rights of all, starting with the right to existence and access to basic common goods. But for this we would have to be able to see the revolt of the *banlieues*, beyond the *sign* or *political symptom* it supplies for those observing from the national space or outside, as a moment (however fragile, uncertain, reversible) of the unfolding of a *political process* (or, as one now says philosophically, a ‘political subjectivation’) that belongs to the consciousness and action of those who are its bearers.⁵¹ The problem here is not *violence* as such; for even if this form of action is not intrinsically connected to the *insurrectional* uprisings citizens repeat when their rights are denied (they can be ‘non-violent’), historical experience shows that it is very often necessary to weaken the discriminatory system, to pierce the blindness and deafness of the ‘good citizens’ who live in it. The problem is knowing what, under given conditions, can be done politically *with* violence as well as what effects and reactions it will bring.

7. Politics, Antipolitics

It has been endlessly repeated that the violence of the *cités*, briefly unleashed and as it were thrown in the face of French society and the state by youths who are of course ‘minorities’ (adolescent, male, undereducated, for the most part from immigrant families) but also ‘at the limit’ representative of the *general condition* into which their social, familial, and generational environment has been plunged, was *infrapolitical* violence.⁵² But this formula can mean two things: either that the riot *does not* (and will not) *reach* the level of collective political action, be it because that is not its aim or because, as such, it ‘has no aims’ aside from a cry of rage; or that a riot is *still far* from political action, separated from it by several steps that have yet to be taken, and that it does not in itself contain all the conditions (consciousness, ideology, organization, tactics and strategy, etc.). In both cases, the questions of *illegalism* and confronting *repression* (which are closely connected, since repression takes its pretext from illegalism, draws its legitimacy from it and thus favors it as much as possible) play a crucial role. A movement’s continuity and its becoming political depend on

its capacity to transform the sense conferred on illegality by the dominant system and to resist repression (or to turn its effects back on those who practice it). But in both cases we have an abstract, dangerously linear schema that makes the 'political' a simple surpassing or outcome of 'spontaneous' social conflict. It is important in my view to complicate this schema in order to see how politics can also occur through its opposite – what I will call *antipolitics* – and thus emerge from the very conditions of its *impossibility*, but also, of course, find itself blocked by its internal contradictions.

Should we identify antipolitics with a failure of representation? Yes and no: on the traditional bourgeois representation of politics, as exemplarily embodied by liberalism (which in France has always been 'organic' liberalism, based on the hegemony of intellectuals, experts, and the social establishment-what used to be called '*les capacités*'-in close association with the state), representation is a function of the political system itself, which *proposes representatives* to the groups that make up the nation, and in particular to the 'popular classes.' A situation in which the political class not only refuses to represent the interests of a social group but *denies* it the right to be represented as what it is, and thus to *belong* to the legitimate 'nation' (the community of citizens), is a limit situation, though one that recurs periodically and in the end would seem to be structurally necessary for the functioning of the system. The political class (of the right or of the left) could not 'monopolize' representation (in what Althusser some time ago called an 'Ideological State Apparatus') if *all* social contradictions were regarded as *representable* and effectively insisted on being. However, political representation, as a process *that has a history and 'makes' history*, does not only have this passive face, conferred 'from above' (oligarchically, technocratically, hegemonically); it also incorporates pressure 'from below' that transgresses earlier prohibitions and imposes other types of representatives (not necessarily parliamentary – to the contrary, to begin with they are generally 'militants,' 'organic intellectuals' of all professions) or forces the existing representatives to convey (but also to try to appropriate) the speech and claims of those 'outside the law' in an open dialectic . . . Under these conditions what would seem characteristic of the conjuncture in a country like France (and not for nothing, obviously, in the *loss of legitimacy* of its political system) is the exhaustion of its ability to represent and 'speak for' its popular classes and its excluded (of whom the young unemployed 'immigrants' of the *banlieue* are eminently a part). The republican form indeed increasingly *deprives* a whole part of the social realities it informs and the conflicts it subsumes of representation – another way of saying that 'citizenship' is emptied of its content. It is for this that we can reserve the name *antipolitics*.

No doubt to interpret such a situation it is necessary to refer not only to a 'Marxist' schema of class struggle, but also to a schema we can call 'Hegelian.'⁵³ Originally conceived *before* the political organization of the working class and the institution of conflict within the framework of a national-social state,⁵⁴ today it paradoxically regains its pertinence *beyond* the emergence and development of their crisis (which is already well advanced). Significantly, Hegel used two distinct terminologies to mark out social groups, their interdependence and their conflict. The inheritor of a tradition that was

still premodern, he called recognized groups, incorporated into the state by corporate or parliamentary representation, ‘estates’ (*Stände*, like the *États* of the *Ancien Régime*), and reserved the name ‘classes’ (*Klassen*) for *internal-external* or *marginal* groups, the bearers of a capacity to subvert or disrupt the system – the ‘populace’ (*Pöbel*), pauperized by the Industrial Revolution and living on assistance, and on the other side finance capitalists, whose wealth and transnational activity exceed the possibilities of state control. Today this terminology has shifted. Because the political system was refounded in the nineteenth and twentieth century by ‘integrating’ class struggles and notably by giving revolutionary movements a ‘tribunal function’ within the bourgeois state, thus putting *limits* on social conflict without suppressing it completely (obviously in a highly variable way according to period and relation of forces), the term ‘class’ has tended instead to designate a categorization *integrated* into the economic-political system. We must therefore look for other terms to designate that which escapes its representative mechanisms, even threatens to dissolve them. This is one of the functions of contested and contestable categories like the *underclass* in English and the *excluded* in French, which always oscillate between repeating the stigmatizations they are subject to (‘delinquency,’ ‘dangerousness,’ ‘risk,’ ‘incivility’) and recognizing the phenomenon they betray: the fact that *that which exceeds representation* – its remainder – has reappeared and occupies a growing place, throwing ‘politics’ off-balance, boring a ‘void’ within it or exposing it to ‘catastrophic’ mutations (of which fascism is the great historical example), for want of a restructuring of the institutions of conflict on an expanded basis.

Thus we see the function of the overdetermined ‘fusion’ of racial and class exclusions on which I insisted above: precisely to precipitate, and to sanction, *the exteriority of the new populace* in relation to ‘politics’ – all the more effectively to the extent that class discrimination is assumed not to exist (or is still to be made up for by exhausted ‘welfare-state’ mechanisms) and racial discrimination is declared absolutely illegitimate (allowing one to deny its existence, or to pretend not to see it where it is practiced in new forms). But it is even more interesting to underline the reconstitution in a new form of the double exclusion of the extremes outside ‘the political’: those who are ‘too rich’ and those who are ‘too poor,’ the owners and executives of multinational capitalism, on the one hand, and the subproletariat or underclass of the insecure, immigrants, and especially youth, on the other. Except that if the former are tendentially located *outside* representation, it is *voluntarily*, because they no longer have an interest in ‘playing the game’ of national politics and accepting its relative constraints (‘common’ taxation, education, and medical care, participation in a certain ‘social consensus’), but only in bringing the ‘logic’ of the global market to bear on the state and by means of one state or another to obtain favorable conditions of exploitation and access to workers. Whereas the latter are *pushed or left outside* representation, which prevents their existence and their rights claims from finding any, necessarily conflictual, expression, since they are deemed unmanageable by the system and the other ‘classes,’ including the popular classes – even the *poor*, who are convinced or find reasons to believe that their security comes at the price of others’ insecurity, or that their membership in the collectivity, their

'identity,' would be threatened if other memberships, other identities, were recognized and added to theirs. The former set themselves up, materially and symbolically, *beyond* the national/foreign distinction (which, in French society, continues to formally dictate citizenship), while the latter are, by force, treated as *internal foreigners*, threatening or superfluous.

Here we find again the idea of a 'void,' already evoked in different figures above (the *void* of the space of the *cit * as the setting of the revolt, the *void* of the institutional place where determinations of class and race are superimposed), but this time as a *void of representation at the heart of the political institution* (including in the provoked form of criminalization, disqualification, preventive *evacuation*). But this void is destined to be filled, or at least displaced. And it is here that *another type of political representation* enters the scene, produced essentially by the interaction of the law-and-order policies of the state and the images manufactured and circulated by the means of mass communication (above all television): a paradoxical representation, of course, itself antipolitical, since its function is to replace real actors (especially those of the revolt) with fantasmatic actors, who combine the characteristics of pathology (drugs, 'disintegrating' families, 'unruly' behavior in school), criminality (sexual violence, petty delinquency), and cultural or ethno-religious alterity, in order to embody the community's *foreign body* in the imaginary.

On this basis, we can then try to interpret the political ambivalence of the significations and effects of the revolt of the youth of the *cit s*. As I remarked at the beginning, following many others, the rioters used *spectacular* violence. One could think that here it is simply a matter of a passive, mechanical effect of the development of mass communications. But one could also think that this effect produced something like a 'passive organization' of the revolt, giving it the character of movement at a distance, even if its development is strictly dependent on the *medium* that returns to it its own image.⁵⁵ Their violence was thus in part *real*, the result of intolerable conditions and directed against material targets (their surroundings, the police, the state), but in part *mediatic*, aiming to 'embody' society's *fantasm*, to 'produce' what it, and especially the state, had already described as their essence. This is why it combined a *narcissistic* dimension (including the self-destructive form already mentioned) and, conversely, a dimension we could call *ironic* in the sense that true irony, as Baudelaire emphasized, is always addressed at once to the other and to oneself.⁵⁶ It thereby managed to 'trap' for a time the power that had provoked it by unleashing for its own purposes a representative machine whose power it believed it controlled – paradoxically recreating a political dialectic within the element that, in our societies, is meant to radically neutralize. And this 'political' power, in order to put a stop to this, could not be content with repression: in particular, it had to utter certain words ('discrimination,' even 'racism'). But it also eventually prepared counter-offensives on the same terrain. Today we see clearly how the same Interior Minister (having become in the meantime an 'official candidate' for the presidency) instrumentalizes television to stage hunts for 'illegal immigrants' or police raids on the 'hide-outs' of young delinquents.⁵⁷ Who knows, in the end, who will outrun whom in this competition?

But the scheme of a void can also, finally, help us establish the bases of the large problem of the *becoming political* of the revolt – I am tempted to say, in the sense recalled above, of its *becoming insurrectional*. This problem is the possibility or impossibility of a *collectivization*. Let us understand by this not just a repetition or a contagion (creating a series of similar revolts, as we saw in the course of November and as we could say more generally of the episodes that have followed one another over the years) but an *articulation* with other rights claims or protests against injustice, *heterogeneous* among themselves, and thus constitutive of a virtual citizenship within a democratic framework. On first glance, the practical implications of the existential, social, and political void are just the opposite; for how could association and communication emerge from exclusion and its doubling, ‘secession’ or provocation? What constitutes an insurrectional movement – be it the American civil rights movement and black power in the 1960s and 70s, the student movement in ‘68, or the movement of *piqueteros* in Argentina in the 2000s – is at once its radicalness and its ‘transversality,’ its ability to express or echo other revolts in its own code.

The radicality of the revolt of the *banlieues* is indissociable from its power of refusal. Here the absence of objectives expressed by the repetition of incivility and violence is not a failing, even if it could eventually turn out to be a weakness. It is only to see how the university, the press, and the state devote themselves to defining it, circumscribing it, making it the essential characteristic of those who revolt in order to prevent it from disseminating wildly throughout the social environment. It makes the destructive void, the ‘non-right’ of the condition produced for the pariahs of postindustrial society, ‘return to sender.’ It is not exclusive to one or more *languages* and therefore bears an interpellation (*rap*, whose identitarian function for the youth of the *cités*, beyond the phenomenon of ‘gangs,’ I recalled above, has this role among others). But this radicality is very difficult to separate from a culture of isolation and defiance *in all directions*, another form of ‘refusal’ – as if, rather than a ‘guerilla’ or ‘civil war,’ the revolt *mimed the ‘secession’* of part of the youth, of which the primacy of clashes with police (obviously sought out by the latter) is the most striking symptom. Of course this isolation is in part fictional and remains highly relative: this is why it is so important to note that at the height of the riots, familial and even institutional solidarities (relations to associations, be they secular or religious; contact with ‘social workers,’ behind whom stand some public services and certain municipalities) were not totally broken. It is not true in reality that youths are *isolated in the cité*, expressing their despair through their illegalism or violence; at least this isolation does not go without its opposite. Nor is it true that the *cité* is totally isolated from society and the city, even if barriers are erected to separate them.⁵⁸ This is why much will depend, from the perspective of individual lives but also that of politics, on how they appropriate (or not) the part of themselves that is their urban ‘territory’ (with its institutions, from which Loïc Wacquant shows they are inseparable), against which their ‘rage’ is in part directed.

The ‘opening up’ of the youth revolt within the world of the *banlieues*, and more generally in French society, whatever its highly uncertain modalities, is a major challenge

that concerns us all. It would mean nothing less than holding in check the *law-and-order project*, or the *reduction of politics to the police*, borne alternately by the forces of the opposition (Le Pen) and components of the powers that be (Sarkozy), but that more fundamentally constitutes one of the tendencies of the evolution of capitalism and contemporary public administration. This project tends to establish a *permanent* segregation of social space, especially in the most conflictual regions, of ‘dangerous’ groups, without well-defined limits, but identified by racial characteristics and a whole set of cultural, social, and urban stigmas in a way that concentrates the mistrust, hostility, and resentment of whole part of the population, especially the popular classes – the closest to them in urban space as well as in living conditions. It thus justifies and reinforces state violence in advance. In a narrowing circle, *demands for repression* from below, what Gilles Deleuze called ‘micro-fascism,’ corresponds to *speculacular or everyday operations* of control and repression, which we know change little in the state of general insecurity (when they do not reinforce it), to say nothing of its structural causes, but mask the government’s powerlessness and lack of representativeness behind a show of authority, maintaining a share of the dominated and the exploited, whose living conditions are ever harder, in the illusion that the state ‘protects’ them and ‘takes care’ of them – since it harasses and strikes others who can be identified as internal foreigners.⁵⁹

There is doubtless no other way of defeating such a political project (which is broadly shared today, to varying degrees and more or less openly, within the dominant class and has become ‘popular’ for a large share of public opinion) than by *isolating it* in turn within the City, this time in the broad, constitutional sense of the term. But for this it is necessary to transform the power of the negative and the violence of exclusion little by little into a ‘dialectic’ of convergence and mutual recognition of all kinds of resistance that the system of representation and generalized social competition subjects to a regime of ‘dismemberment’ (*écartèlement*).⁶⁰ Since last November the extreme difficulty of this conversion has been repeatedly emphasized, sometimes by forcing sociological realities,⁶¹ for example during the ‘anti-CPE movement’ of French students that followed the revolt of the *banlieues* by a few months (March 2006), whose political codes reflected completely different logics inherited from working-class trade-unionism or May ‘68 and its aftershocks in the 1980s and 90s.⁶² This difficulty is very real. It would in fact be necessary to lay bare and confront the *contradictions within the people* as such, which the riots served to reveal – between young and old, ‘insecure’ and (relatively) ‘protected,’ ‘nationals’ and ‘foreigners’ (or those regarded as such), and perhaps above all *boys and girls* among youth, who certainly do not make up two antagonistic ‘worlds,’ but who clearly have quite different cultures of relating to institutions and imaginaries of action – from ‘within’ (in the *cit *, in the *banlieue*, in France ‘*d’en bas*’).⁶³ And it would be necessary that, still ‘within,’ all the *mediations* constitutive of ‘civil society’ that bear active citizenship (of which teams of social workers, but also resident associations, be they secular or religious, form a part) be mobilized and articulated in practice.⁶⁴ Obviously I have no recipe to propose from the outside in these matters. I

limit myself to interpreting the signs that reach us and trying to transform them into questions.

(Translated by James Ingram)

NOTES

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1. One exception was the excellent special issue of *Lignes* 19 (Feb. 2006), “Le soulèvement des banlieues.”

2. In his smart little book, *La psychose française. Les banlieues: le ban de la République* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), Mehdi Belhaj Kacem, inspired by Agamben (*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998)), plays systematically with the common etymology of the derivatives of ‘ban’ (an old medieval institution of remote Indo-European ancestry that unites opposites: putting in common and placing beyond the law): ban-ishment (*ban-nissement*, *ban-ni*), but also ban-dit and *ban-lieue*. The etymological origin of ‘banlieue’ in ‘ban-lieu’ – place of the ban – is substantiated by Jean-Marc Stébé, *La crise des banlieues* (Paris: PUF, Que-sais-je, 1999).

3. Of course, this opposition marks the extreme terms of a sociological and political polarity: the *banlieues*, especially around Paris, offer a whole range of social and living conditions. We must not forget their important function in maintaining a certain cultural public service (through theaters and cultural centers) that serves the capital itself. And it will not be considered an accident that some political resistance to the state of emergency sought by the government during the ‘events’ and attempts to mediate or resolve the crisis came from representatives of these ‘popular’ *banlieues* with diverse populations (‘*cités*,’ public housing projects, stable working class, civil servants . . .), like Saint-Denis or Aubervilliers.

4. See Loïc Wacquant’s essential *Parias urbains. Ghetto, Banlieues, Etat* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), whence I borrow the ‘institutional’ criteria for defining and comparing spaces of ‘urban marginality’ below – while contesting some of his judgments. In English see also the webcast of his debate on “Roots of the Riots in the French City”: <http://webcast.berkeley.edu:8080/ramgen/events/igs/french_riots.rm>

5. Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

6. Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, *Civil Wars: From LA to Bosnia* (New York: New Press, 1994).

7. To recall the basic chronology: on June 20, 2005, the day after the murder of a little boy in the ‘Cité des 4000’ at La Courneuve, struck by two stray bullets, Interior Minister Sarkozy appeared in the *cité* (surrounded by a large police escort) and, speaking in the street to the inhabitants, announced his intention to ‘fire-hose’ (*nettoyer au Kärcher*) the areas clean of violence and delinquency. On October 25, the same minister showed up in Argenteuil to announce a rehabilitation plan for the *banlieues* and, booed by the young residents, repeated his threats to bring them into line by dealing with the ‘rogues’ (*voyous*) and ‘scum’ (*racaille* – a term sometimes used by *banlieue* youth gangs to refer to themselves derisively, along with others). On October 27, three teenagers pursued by police, who wrongly identified them as thieves, hid in an electrical transformer at Clichy-sous-Bois, where the police left them. Two of them, Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna, aged 15 and 17, were electrocuted, while the third was seriously injured. At the news, hundreds of youths set fire to cars and stores in Clichy, setting off a cycle of (mainly nocturnal) riots that would last three weeks and spread progressively from the *banlieues* and *cités* to almost all of France. The police and the government successively insisted that they had proof that it was a case of delinquents, and that they did not know that the

youths were in mortal danger. To date, an internal police inquiry has established that the information released by the government at the time was wholly falsified. All the same, the truth as has not been officially settled and the extremely serious police misdeed has not been punished in any way. See Hugues Lagrange, "Autopsie d'une vague d'émeutes," in *Émeutes urbaines et protestations. Une singularité française*, ed. Lagrange and Marco Oberti (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2006). See also the special issue of *Mouvements*, "Émeutes, et après?," 44 (March-April 2006).

8. Passed by the National Assembly on November 8, 2006 at the Prime Minister's request with the support of the Socialist deputies, the law declared a state of emergency in a group of cities and communes at the mayor's request, and was extended for three months on November 18 (without Socialist support). It allowed a large number of arrests, summary hearings, and court convictions (2787 between October 28 and November 15). A great many mayors of all parties nevertheless called the law useless and refused to invoke it. See Evelyne Sire-Marini, "L'état d'urgence, rupture de l'Etat de droit ou continuité des procédures d'exception," *Mouvements* 44.

9. See Sophie Body-Gendrot and Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, *Police et discriminations raciales. Le tabou français* (Paris: Editions de l'Atelier/Editions Ouvrières, 2003); Fabien Jobard, "Sociologie politique de la 'racaille'," in *Émeutes urbaines et protestations*.

10. See E. Renault, *L'expérience de l'injustice* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004).

11. Sometimes under threat: a suspension of family allowances is periodically brandished against 'deficient' parents.

12. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

13. See Bertrand Ogilvie, "Violence et représentation. La production de l'homme jetable," *Lignes* 26 (October 1995).

14. Many descriptions nevertheless strikingly insisted on the fact that, from the time the fires spread, the rioters' objective was always to 'make the police run' (and make fools of them) rather than confront them head-on. See A. Bertho, "Nous n'avons vu que des ombres," *Mouvements* 44.

15. With the notable exceptions of the western cities and Marseille, although it is considered to have high levels of social and ethnic tension.

16. CNN sent one of its star reporters, Christiane Amanpour, who specializes in risky reports from Iraq and other war zones, to Seine-Saint-Denis to deliver commentaries against a background of burning cars and street fights with the police, as if in Baghdad . . .

17. The paradox is that Mbembe, who first published his book, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) in French in 2000 (reissued in 2005), was largely ignored in France until the English translation became an object of heated discussion in universities across the Atlantic.

18. Commentary No. 174, Dec. 1, 2005 (<http://www.binghamton.edu/fbc/174en.htm>).

19. See esp. her chronicle, "Le retour du politique oublié par les banlieues," *Lignes* 19 (Feb. 2006). An Indologist and feminist philosopher originally from Yugoslavia who has lived and taught mainly in France since the outbreak of the Balkan wars, Ivekovic is the author notably of *Le sexe de la nation* (Paris: Leo Scheer, 2003).

20. The ambivalence of 'rap' culture, at once a language of revolt and provocation against the repressive apparatus and a sexist 'code' (which can, however, be used ironically), has been one of the interpretive stakes of the events of November 2005. It echoed as far as the columns of the *New York Times*, in the form of a violent editorial by David Brooks, "Gangsta, in French," November 10, 2005.

21. See in particulier the work of Gayatri Spivak.

22. "La République et sa Bête. A propos des émeutes dans les banlieues de France," www.icicemac.com, posted Nov. 7, 2005; "Figures du Multiple. La France peut-elle réinventer son identité," multitudes.samizdat.net, posted Nov. 24, 2005.

23. An expression borrowed from Catalan philosopher Josep Ramoneda in an article in *El Pais* ("De l'Etat social à l'Etat pénal," Nov. 8, 2005), also to be found in the work of Loïc Wacquant.

24. With this description Mbembe in my opinion does not sufficiently take into account another statist tradition that comes from the Vichy regime, as we now see in the hunt for "illegal children" even in educational institutions. However, these two traditions are certainly not sealed off from one another . . .

25. Mbembe's critique meets, without identifying with, that developed by the 'Indigènes de la République,' discussed below.

26. This is to say a place used by Muslims for preaching and prayer, since there are no real mosques in the *banlieues*, construction being tied up by a whole system of obstacles.

27. An appeal by the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman, transmitted to the National Assembly November 8, 2005 and reiterated in the regions.

28. On the development and limits of 'neo-communitarian Islam' among youth of immigrant origin, see (despite its date) F. Khosrokhavar, *L'islam des jeunes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998).

29. There are of course all kinds of 'political Islam' that are in no way interchangeable: moderate and extremist, traditionalist and modernist, assimilationist and secessionist. This quick diagnosis is meant to apply to all of them.

30. O. Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994 (1992)); Bernard Dréano, "Notes sur l'Islam politique en France," Réseaux citoyens, Feb. 15, 2005, http://www.reseauxcitoyens-st-etienne.org/article.php3?id_article=541.

31. Thus Jacques Chirac: "It is a matter of an identity crisis" (not a social crisis), or Paul Thibaud (former editor of *Esprit*): "It is a matter of a social crisis" (not an identity crisis) . . . But both are obliged to evoke in a generic way the fact of *discrimination* and the revolt it engenders. Here we have an index of two rival hermeneutics for the November 2005 that tend to divide interpretations (despite attempts to reconcile or combine them): class reductionism and racial reductionism. Neither on its own can account for the event's *excess* or *anomaly* in relation to its models or prefigurations.

32. This is obviously the meaning of Loïc Wacquant's enterprise, cited above, which is essentially the fruit of field studies and the elaboration of a comparative theoretical model of the relation between marginality and institutions in France and the United States (*banlieues* and ghettos). However, it seems to me that Wacquant, who speaks of a 'mixed logic' and 'mixed riots,' tend to regard class as *primary* and race (or ethnicity) as *secondary*.

33. See the comparative work edited by Christophe Bertossi, *European Anti-Discrimination and the Politics of Citizenship: France and Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006).

34. Robert Castel, *L'insécurité sociale. Qu'est-ce qu'être protégé?* (Paris: Seuil, 2003).

35. A theme used by politicians of the right as well as the left, notably by the two main declared presidential candidates, Nicolas Sarkozy and Ségolène Royal.

36. Statement by Mme. Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, permanent secretary of the Académie Française, on Russian television: "Everyone is astonished: why are African children in the streets and not in school? Why can't their parents buy an apartment? It's clear why: many of these Africans, I'm telling you, are polygamous. In one apartment there are three wives and 25 children. They are so crammed that they are no longer apartments but God knows what! One understands why these children are running in the streets." *Libération*, Nov. 16, 2005.

37. This construction and the psychological effects it produces are described in detail by Evelyne Ribert, *Liberté, égalité, carte d'identité. Les jeunes issus de l'immigration et l'appartenance nationale* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), ch. 5, "D'éternels enfants d'immigrés."

38. For a recent discussion of the limits of the validity of this opposition, see Olivier Schwartz, "haut, bas, fragile. Entretien avec Annie Collovald," *Vacarme* 37 (Fall 2006).

39. Jacques Donzelot, *Quand la ville se défait. Quelle politique face à la crise des banlieues* (Paris: Seuil, 2006); Cyprien Avenel, "Les émeutiers de la politique de la ville," *Mouvements* 44. The generalized transition of capitalism to competition between territories is described by Pierre-Noël Giraud, *L'inégalité du monde* (Paris: Folio-Gallimard, 1996). See also Giraud's essay in this issue.

40. I distinguish myself on this (terminological, but also political) point from Loïc Wacquant, who speaks of 'de-proletarianization' because he identifies the 'proletariat' with the *organized*, if not institutionalized, *working class*. I speak on the contrary of 're-proletarianization' because the original use of the term in Marx distinguished it from the 'working class' and connoted the *insecurity* of the condition the worker, 'pushed and pulled,' defenseless, before capital.

41. See the internet site of the Mouvement des Indigènes de la République: <<http://www.indigenes-republique.org/>>

42. See E. Balibar, "Sujets ou citoyens. Pour l'égalité," *Les Temps Modernes* (March-May 1984), reprinted in *Les frontières de la démocratie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1992); *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, with Immanuel Wallerstein (London & New York: Verso, 1992).

43. From this moment, however, there is a risk of mimicry: once we note the ideological and institutional insistence on this absurdity – 'immigrants' born in France of parents who are sometimes themselves French – it is tempting to look for the cause *upstream*, in its 'origins' – not, however, as the result of racist discourse (they always also bear with 'them' the stigma of their indelible origins: color, customs, aptitudes, religion) but, to the contrary, according to a reversal typical of the antiracist tradition (what stigmatizes them is never anything but the effect, the projected image of the 'colonial' system that subjugated their fathers and ancestors). The signifier '*Indigènes de la République*,' however, is less simple and less instrumentalizable than that: it could also be paradoxically be understood in the opposite way, as a sort of 'performative reversal' of colonial discourse (the 'indigenous' of the French Republic, born of its blood and on its soil, *is us*, which it never properly wants to recognize . . .). This paradoxical interpretation would have the advantage of bringing to the center the question of the designation and exclusion as 'foreigner' of those who are the most authentic product of our *own, national* history.

44. Article 2 of the French Constitution of 1946 (repeated by those that followed) reads: "France is an indivisible, secular, democratic, and social Republic. It guarantees the equality before the law of all its citizens without distinction based on origin, race, or religion . . ." On the forms and practical effects of this gaping contradiction, see V. De Rudder, C. Poiret, F. Vourc'h, *L'inégalité raciste. L'universalisme républicain à l'épreuve* (Paris: PUF, 2000).

45. And sometimes in ways that revoke already acquired citizen rights, as in the case of the "denationalization" of Jews decreed by the Vichy regime. On its extension in Algeria in the form of the abrogation of the Crémieux decree, see Benjamin Stora's recent book, *Les trois exils juifs d'Algérie* (Paris: Stock, 2006).

46. Étienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

47. Such a description is exposed to the objection that, at least for *nationals*, civic rights are accessible to all. And it is not without interest that after the riots a voter registration drive among *banlieue* youth was set in motion, initiated by comedian Jamel Debbouze and rap singer Joey Starr. But it met its limit, no doubt because of the obvious gap in the eyes of those affected between formal rights and effective political representation, which holds just as much for 'nationals' and helps make them 'internal foreigners.'

48. Often themselves of 'immigrant' origin, but in another historical context, an integral part of which was a high level of working-class political and union organization. See the apposite remarks of Stéphane Beaud and Michel Pialoux in the conclusion of their premonitory book, *Violences urbaines, violence sociale. Genèse des nouvelles classes dangereuses* (Paris: Fayard, 2003). On the FN vote, see the figures and commentary by Nonna Mayer from the 2002 presidential elections: http://www.tns-sofres.com/etudes/dossiers/presi2002/itv_mayer.htm.

49. This theme is common, albeit on the basis of different premises, to Herman van Gunsteren, *A Theory of Citizenship: Organizing Plurality in Contemporary Democracies* (Boulder: Westview, 1998), for whom the essence of citizenship is its 'acquisition' (*citizenship in the making*), and Jacques Rancière, for whom democracy is not a 'political regime' but a movement of claim-making and the critique of oligarchies, *Hatred of Democracy* (London & New York: Verso, 2007).

50. J. Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

51. Not only is this question not foreign to the reflection of the '*Indigènes de la République*,' whose angle of approach I have criticized as, to my mind, one-sided; it is probably part of what drives them. The leaders of the oldest generation (like Saïd Bouamama) are in fact veterans of the '*Marche des beurs*' and '*Convergence 84*,' which tried to find the 'alchemical' formula for converting violence suffered and practiced into a dynamic for winning rights and citizenship, in the name of 'equality,' on the ground and ahead of public opinion, more than 20 years ago.

52. This characterization occurs even among authors who place the greatest *political importance* on the revolt of the *banlieues* (and, all else being equal, the ghettos), who see it as the privileged indicator of the dilemma of capitalist society undergoing neoliberal 'restructuring': a restructuring of the welfare state or the triumph of the penal state. See Wacquant, *Parias urbains*, 36.

53. As presented in the 1820 *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §§243–244. I am obliged to Bertrand Ogilvie ("Violence et representation") for having drawn my attention to the necessity of this 'return' to a *certain* (moment in) Hegel after Marx.

54. On this category, see E. Balibar, *Droit de cité. Culture et politique en démocratie* (Paris: l'Aube, 1998) and Castel, *L'insécurité sociale*.

55. At a certain point television journalists asked themselves whether broadcasting images of nightly fires was not contributing to the dynamic and decided on at least partial self-censorship.

56. I owe this antithesis to the remarkable PhD dissertation by Jennifer Bajorek on Marx and Baudelaire, soon to be published I hope.

57. The hypermediatized arrest of the alleged attackers of a CRS night patrol in the 'Cité des Tarterêts' at Corbeil-Essonnes, Sept. 25, 2006.

58. When it comes to metropolitan Paris, it has often been noted that the '*périphérique*' [the ring-road around the central city] constitutes a true frontier. See Serge Michel, "Au-delà du périph', c'est l'Amérique," *Le Monde*, April 28, 2006.

59. I have analyzed this process in *Droit de cité*, "L'impuissance du Tout-puissant," 109ff.

60. I take this term from Olivier Schwartz, "haut, bas, fragile," who borrows it from Louis Chauvel, *Le destin des générations* (Paris: PUF, 1998).

61. See again Schwartz, "haut, bas, fragile": "There has been a tendency to oppose the autumn 2005 movement of the *banlieues*, born of relegation and exclusion, on the one hand, and the anti-CPE movement, presented as a pure middle-class movement, on the other. But it was quite obvious in the anti-CPE demonstrations that many of the students did not come from the middle classes! They came from '9-3,' as one now says, or from 'deep' 91 . . .; they come from the '*banlieues*' . . ." (51).

62. We must first of all insist on this difference of logics, of political processes, and not on the heterogeneity of the 'social bases,' even the 'populations' involved, as the international press and the political class have done. Not only ill-educated adolescents took part in the revolt of the *banlieues*, but also unemployed youth driven to despair by the uselessness of diplomas that had been nullified by discrimination in hiring. See Hugues Lagrange, "Autopsie d'une vague d'émeutes," in *Émeutes urbaines et protestations*.

63. We can agree entirely with Nacira Guénif-Souilamas ("Le balcon fleuri des banlieues embrasées," *Mouvements* 44: 31-35) that the antagonism between girls and boys in the *cités* has been obscured and concealed by the racist (basically anti-Arab) stereotypes of official discourse and many intellectuals, especially (as Rada Ivekovic has emphasized) by hiding the *generality* of sexist prejudices in French society by systematically projecting them onto 'the other.' It does not follow from this, except by a pious wish, that the violence of the riots was not strongly gendered, which raises an incontrovertible political problem.

64. I insist on this particularly delicate point. If it is true that the revolt of the *banlieues* did not mobilize religious discourse, it is nonetheless the case that religiously-based cultural associations, in the first place Muslim ones, play and can play a leading role in reconstituting representation and laying bare the contradictions of collective experience, at the risk of transforming it themselves. Before raising a hew and cry here about the risk of 'communitarianism,' we should ask if it is not before anything else ostracism that reinforces communitarianism, and under what conditions politics could transform communitarianism into 'civic' universalism. The same interrogation holds for the other side, for example when it comes to the 'Indigènes' movement, which is eminently secular.

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