7

Voices into Noises: Revolts as Unarticulated Justice Movements

Why did they happen? This question was remarkably absent in the aftermath of the autumn 2005 revolts in the French *banlieues*. For many activists, social workers and researchers, the relevant question was why such revolts have not occurred more often given the state of many social housing neighbourhoods. Having done practically nothing to alleviate inequalities, prevent discriminatory practices and police violence – disproportionately felt by *banlieue* inhabitants, youth in particular – the repressive government set up by Chirac was more surprised by the magnitude and persistence of revolts than by the fact that they happened at all.

Like previous revolts, those of autumn 2005 were triggered by the deaths of young inhabitants, in which the police, once again, were implicated. Like previous revolts, they were spontaneous – not organized – uprisings.[1] Also like previous revolts, they took place in the social housing neighbourhoods of *banlieues*, practically all of which were among the priority neighbourhoods of urban policy. Unlike previous revolts, however, they were suppressed by exceptionally repressive measures by the French state. They revealed not only once again the geographical dimension of inequalities, discrimination and police violence, but also the contemporary transformations of the French state along increasingly authoritarian and exclusionary lines. In this chapter, I expand these similarities and differences by putting the 2005 revolts in context, and comparing them with the previous revolts of the last two decades with a focus on their geographies, triggering incidents and (obscured) political significance in the consolidated police order.

Before moving on, however, the subtitle has to be accounted for, since this chapter is not about 'justice movements' – organized or in the making – as such. It is about the nature of revolts in the *banlieues* of French cities since the 1990s and the responses of the French state to them. Such

incidents are not covered in the literature on new social movements in France (see, for example, Appleton, 1999; Waters, 1998). They are not social movements in the more conventional sense either, if we follow Buechler's definition of social movements as 'intentional, collective efforts to transform social order' (2000: 213). They are neither pre-conceived nor organized, and they are not articulated as collective efforts aimed at transforming the established order. However, as I will try to show, they are not intrinsic acts of violence either. They all mobilize with a demand for justice and as reactions against perceived injustices. 'Let justice be done' or '*J'ai la haine*',[2] as was heard – again – during the revolts of autumn 2005. Unarticulated as they are, such incidents are nevertheless episodic mobilizations that manifest contention and raise certain claims. Yet, their political significance has been obscured by state-led articulations of *banlieues*, and the French state has increasingly interpreted and responded to them merely as acts of violence. Hence the title of this chapter – *voices into noises*.

Revolting Geographies

On 27 October 2005 three young men in Clichy-sous-Bois, a *banlieue* to the north-east of Paris, took refuge in an electricity substation in order to escape identity checks by the police – a form of daily harassment not uncommon in the *banlieues* towards youths, especially if they have a dark complexion. Two of them were electrocuted and one was seriously wounded. That the police actually chased them was officially denied, although the surviving young man stated the contrary. This was the triggering incident for the revolts, which started on 28 October in Clichy-sous-Bois, and quickly spread to other social housing neighbourhoods of 274 communes, lasting for two weeks. More than 10,000 vehicles were set alight, and more than 3,000 people were placed under police custody, of which one third were indicted.

Similar incidents had occurred in the *banlieues* as early as the 1970s, though, compared to them, the revolts of 2005 were unprecedented in terms of their magnitude and geographical extent. As we have seen, two major series of revolts had been most influential in shaping political debate around *banlieues*: the so-called 'hot summer' of 1981 and the revolts in Vaulx-en-Velin in 1990. The 1980s witnessed five large-scale revolts in the *banlieues*. The 1990s, on the other hand, saw 48 large-scale revolts, in addition to some 300 on a smaller scale, referred to as 'mini-riots'. On Bui-Trong's (1993) 'scale of indicators of violence in sensitive neighbourhoods', the large-scale revolts of the 1990s were of 'degree 8' – the highest on the scale. This meant that they were characterized by the presence of up to

200 young people of the neighbourhood in question, motivated by a sense of solidarity against institutions of authority (police, municipality, and so on), lasting four to five consecutive days, and with confrontations with the police. The 'mini-riots' of the 1990s, on the other hand, were of 'degree 7', which meant that they were marked by 'massive vandalism' and Molotov cocktails with the participation of three to 30 young people, and with no confrontation with the police (Bui-Trong, 2000, 2003: 15–17).

With a few exceptions, all the large-scale revolts of the 1990s shared two common features in terms of their geographies.[3] First, all but two of the areas where revolts occurred were priority neighbourhoods of urban policy. Out of the social housing neighbourhoods of 38 communes where such incidents occurred,[4] four had been included since the policy's inception in 1982, three had been included since 1983, 13 since 1984, and another 13 since 1989. All of these priority neighbourhoods experienced revolts following the so-called 'return of the state' in the early 1990s. Three of them were included in 1996, after having experienced revolts, and two of them have never been priority neighbourhoods.[5]

Second, all the large-scale revolts of the 1990s took place in social housing neighbourhoods, nearly all of them in *banlieues*. These neighbourhoods and the communes where they are located followed a similar pattern in terms of constantly increasing levels of unemployment following the economic crisis of the 1970s and the ensuing processes of economic restructuring. In 1975, unemployment rates in the communes where these neighbourhoods are located were about the same as the national unemployment rate (except in Toulon and La Seyne-sur-Mer, where it was close to 8%, twice the national rate). After that, all of these communes were severely hit by diminishing industrial and manufacturing activities. To give an example, in Mantes-la-Jolie in the Paris region (included in urban policy since its inception, experienced revolts in 1991), the unemployment rate went from 3.9% in 1975 to 10.3% in 1982, then to 12.1% in 1990, and 20.2% in 1999. In its social housing neighbourhoods where the revolts occurred (Le Val-Fourré), it went from 15.7% in 1990 to 25.7% in 1999 (INSEE, 1990, 1999a; INSEE-DIV, no date).

What these figures suggest is that there is an embedded unemployment problem, constantly aggravating and hitting, more severely than any other place, the priority neighbourhoods of urban policy in the *banlieues*, which were once working-class neighbourhoods with low levels of unemployment. Furthermore, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the spatial designation of such areas does not facilitate things. In *banlieues*, spatial stigmatization is part of the daily lives of the inhabitants, youth in particular. Where they live becomes, in a negative way, a defining feature of their place in the society. As Wacquant argues, '[T]he powerful stigma attached to residence in the bounded and segregated spaces, the "neighbourhoods

of exile", [. . .] is arguably the single most protrusive feature of the lived experience of those assigned to, or entrapped in, such areas' (1993: 369; emphasis removed). There is, therefore, a strong spatial dimension to the injustices experienced by the inhabitants of 'framed' *banlieues*. As many scholars working on these areas have observed, while socio-economic conditions constitute an important factor, there is also a deep feeling of injustice that leads to the explosion of revolts (Begag, 1990; Dubet and Lapeyronnie, 1992; Esterle-Hedibel, 2002; Jazouli, 1992; Lapeyronnie, 1995; Wieviorka et al., 1999). Revolts are, in this sense, unarticulated justice movements against spatial injustices (Dikeç, 2001), addressing at once material, categorical and political conditions that are spatially produced. The element of spatial injustice follows not only from economic difficulties that keep inhabitants 'trapped in space' (Harvey, 1989) or 'chained to a place' (Bourdieu, 1999), but also from the discursive articulations of *banlieues*. The remarks of Abdel from Vaulx-en-Velin are telling in this respect:

> As inhabitant, I didn't particularly choose to come and live here . . . If I could go and live elsewhere, I would. We didn't do it on purpose, all the Arabs didn't decide to come and live in Vaulx-en-Velin at Mas-du-Taureau! No more did the Africans, it's not our own doing, it's not a choice! What's so great about living here? We're not in Cannes, not in Monaco, we're not . . . we're in a *banlieue*!
>
> *But maybe it's the networks, you see, you know someone . . .*
>
> No, no, no!
>
> *That's not it?*
>
> No, that was in our parents' time. In our parents' time, when my father came, he came because he knew someone here, who'd started working, and told him, come and work, so he came, got a job, then, yes [. . .] But we didn't choose to live here . . . we chose because financial constraints make you come here, it's . . . it's other choices that make you come here.
>
> *Would you leave if you had the means?*
>
> I'd leave, if I had the means, I'd leave!
>
> *Do you think that's the case for most inhabitants of the neighbourhood?*
>
> Yeah, for lots of people, yeah . . . except for the oldest.
>
> *But the youngest?*
>
> The youngest would leave.
>
> *They can't leave?*
>
> Well, they don't have the financial means to leave, going elsewhere, when you come from Vaulx-en-Velin and when you're an immigrant, it's not possible. (Interview, Abdel Della)

As we have seen in the previous chapter, this strong spatial stigmatization negatively affects relations with employers and police, as well as with those from 'better areas' (see Wacquant, 1993). Both Abdel and Pierre-Didier,

for example, relate that putting a 'better address' when applying for a job is a common – because necessary – practice. Bernard Brun, the project director in Vaulx-en-Velin, provides another example:

> We had a DSQ neighbourhood [. . .], it was called the Etats-Unis, boulevard des Etats-Unis, just that name . . . The address was boulevard des Etats-Unis, and when people wrote a cheque with that address, they were refused. So, we tried symbolic change, we changed the addresses, we created new street names, so that people, for a while at least, would not realize the person came from the boulevard des Etats-Unis, they'd live avenue, I don't know, we had made up names. (Interview, Bernard Brun)[6]

That the revolts of the 1990s occurred in the designated social housing neighbourhoods in *banlieues* does not come as a surprise in the light of these observations. What about the revolts of 2005, then? They basically shared the same geographical features, but dramatically expanded the geographies of revolts, touching 274 communes. One geographical difference was that some of the *banlieues* that were the principal sites of revolts in the 1980s and 1990s either experienced revolts belatedly in autumn 2005 (such as the *banlieues* of eastern Lyon) or stayed relatively 'calm' during the incidents (notably the notorious northern neighbourhoods of Marseille) (Lagrange, 2006a). Other than this, however, they followed a very similar geographical pattern: they occurred again in the social housing neighbourhoods of *banlieues*, most of which were the designated spaces of intervention under urban policy – the so-called ZUSs, according to the current label. Only 15% of the neighbourhoods where revolts occurred were not classified as ZUSs. The remaining 85% were urban policy neighbourhoods, and among them, the ZFUs (tax concession areas, designated among the ZUSs) were in the majority (Lagrange, 2006b). We should remember that the ZFUs are prioritized among the priority areas, seen to be having more problems, and thus have enjoyed more measures since 1996, of which tax concessions for attracting business is one. In other words, they are the sites of urban policy where public action is most concentrated.

The revolts of autumn 2005 touched two-thirds of the communes with designated urban policy areas (ZUSs). This ratio was even higher in the case of communes which had signed conventions with ANRU: 85% of the communes with designated demolition–reconstruction sites experienced revolts (Lagrange and Oberti, 2006).[7] As we have seen in Chapter 5, this programme was initiated in 2003 by Borloo with a very specific target: social housing neighbourhoods in *banlieues*, where the autumn 2005 revolts took place.

So what does this overlapping of geographies of urban policy neighbourhoods and revolts imply? Obviously, the neatly delimited areas – some of

them included in urban policy for more than two decades now – do not 'contain' both the problem and the solution. Lagrange (2006b) argues, with relation to demolition–reconstruction sites, that these programmes might be creating further tensions in social housing neighbourhoods. Demolition–reconstruction means first the expulsion of inhabitants, and there is anecdotal evidence that this process is not always taking place with the involvement of inhabitants concerned, thus aggravating tensions (see Lagrange, 2006b: 112–13; and *Libération*, 24 February 2005: 7). Concerning the ZFUs, Lagrange argues that such designations may be creating expectations without fulfilling them. The utility of this measure for the inhabitants of the designated areas in terms of creating jobs is highly contested, as we have seen in Chapter 5. Thus for Lagrange, the revolts of 2005 raised 'claims aimed primarily at the state' (2006b: 122), given that they mainly occurred in the neighbourhoods of urban policy, which have been objects of public policies for more than two decades now.

While I certainly agree with these remarks, I believe there is more to it than that. First, of course, there is the spatial stigmatization that follows from such designations. When it started, urban policy did not intervene in already given spaces, but constituted its spaces of intervention as part of the policy process, consolidating, over the years, a geography of priority neighbourhoods – what I have referred to as 'the police'. This police order, as I have tried to show in Part II, has been subject to increasingly negative discursive articulations, moving from working-class neighbourhoods to 'ghettos' allegedly threatening the integrity of 'the republic', becoming almost literally a police order with constantly increasing repression.

Second, although urban policy started with the best of intentions, the heavy bureaucratic and technocratic structure it put in place, instead of encouraging local political dynamics and the right to the city – which were its initial objectives – contributed to the exclusion of inhabitants from processes that directly concerned their lives. As the *Agora* story in the previous chapter suggests, this has created further tensions by frustrating the democratic aspirations of *banlieue* youth eager to be part of the political life of their *cités*. In this sense, urban policy has, perhaps, been too present:[8]

Whereas, in the policies of which we are talking, the inhabitants are absent. What exists is rather policies of assistantship. So, it's a policy of assistantship, with respect to animation, to local policies, to projects in the neighbourhoods, that is, we have . . . from my point of view, it's a tendency to de-responsibilize people. Rather than make people act by themselves, and so on, it tends to kill initiative. Besides, when you read Dubedout, [. . .] he wrote this book, *Making the City Together*, something like that. [. . .] Well, he says clearly: you must be careful! This is what he said in the early eighties. He said you had

to be careful because a neighbourhood with a policy too present, at best will result in revolts, permanent ones, and in the worst case in indifference. And that's the case. (Interview, Pierre-Didier Tchétché-Apéa, Vaulx-en-Velin)

Finally, we should bear in mind that such designations also came with increased repression – more police forces, constant surveillance, Local Security Contracts, *Maisons de Justice et de Droit*,[9] flash-ball guns, and so on. Police repression is somewhat 'targeted' on certain areas classified as 'sensitive neighbourhoods' (see *Le Monde*, 20 April 2002: 11).[10] There is, then, another layer to the overlapping geographies of unemployment, stigmatization, urban policy and revolts: geographies of repression.

Geographies of Repression: 'Police Everywhere, Justice Nowhere'[11]

We have seen that the revolts of autumn 2005 had two common features with those that occurred in the 1990s: they took place in social housing neighbourhoods, practically all of them in *banlieues*, and almost all of these neighbourhoods were among the priority neighbourhoods of urban policy. Let us go back again to the revolts of the 1990s to highlight another common feature they share with the revolts of autumn 2005, starting with the observations of Lucienne Bui-Trong, the creator of the 'Cities and *Banlieues*' section at the French Intelligence Service (RG):

And what do you think are the major reasons for the riots, why do they occur?
Riots, according to my observation, riots occur in neighbourhoods with a large population of immigrant origin, so they primarily reflect a difficulty of integration, and resentment, so, a resentment very strongly felt by young people of the second generation, and even the third generation too. [. . .] These problems are experienced as a rejection from society, and, let's say, they have the feeling they're relegated. But I think the riots, the context, the general background in which they appear, is this background, this feeling, this impression the people have of being relegated from society. [. . .] That's why in the neighbourhoods, which are also targeted by urban policy, in neighbourhoods that are very poor, but in which foreign population is not important, we don't have these phenomena of riots, because you don't have the same resentment against society in general, so that factor of riots is connected to, is connected to the fact that, one is in touch with other cultures, while also integrated in French culture, but with the feeling of being rejected by French society, you see? That's it. Now, incidents that trigger riots, that's another issue completely, you see, there's the triggering incident, and there's the background that's going to make it, because incidents triggering riots are like the spark that sets fire to

a stock of gunpowder, but that's what the gunpowder is. It's that resentment. (Interview, Lucienne Bui-Trong; see also Bui-Trong, 2003).

The triggering incidents – spark to the gunpowder – constitute the third common feature of the revolts of the 1990s and 2005. The majority of the large-scale revolts of the 1990s (34 out of 48) were provoked by the killing, accidentally or not, of a young person (second- or third-generation immigrant) of the neighbourhood in question. In more than half of the triggering incidents of revolts (29 out of 48), the police were implicated (questioning, wounding or killing). This number, however, could be higher than is suggested by the list provided by Bui-Trong. For example, the triggering incidents for the 1991 revolts in the Val-Fourré neighbourhood of Mantes-la-Jolie (a *banlieue* to the north-west of Paris) is given as a dispute over entrance to a reception given at the municipality's ice rink. There is, however, more to the story.[12]

Following the dispute, some young people, frustrated by being rejected entry, started attacking cars parked in the parking lot of the ice rink. The municipality called the riot police. Confrontations with the riot police started, store windows were smashed down, and the commercial centre was ransacked. The riot police arrested six young people, and put them under police custody. It was a Saturday night. One of these young people, an 18- year-old inhabitant of the neighbourhood from a North African family, was asthmatic. He needed to regularly take medicines to prevent an attack, and the cell where he was kept was far from ideal. Furthermore, he had been beaten by three police officers during his arrest. Since the following day was a Sunday, police custody was automatically prolonged as the courts would be closed. On Monday morning, the family of the young person brought in the necessary medicines to the police station, but they were not allowed to give them to him since the medicines were not accompanied by the appropriate medical certificates and necessary official authorizations. Shortly after, the young person had an asthma attack. He was transferred to the hospital, but too late. Spark to the gunpowder: revolts started, and continued for two days.

This account suggests that the police might be implicated more than the list suggests. In addition to this, there are some curious incidents that call into question the practices of the police. Two of the revolts, for example, started following the killing of two people in the police station – one of them handcuffed (which was the starting point for Kassovitz to write and direct *La Haine*; see Favier and Kassovitz, 1995). Another started after a police officer shot and killed a young person of African origin 'while trying to prevent him from committing suicide'. To give yet another example: on one occasion, the spark to the gunpowder was discharged when a 'mother of a drug dealer [threw] herself out of the window' while the police were

searching the premises. This is not to imply that Bui-Trong's list provides false or distorted accounts. However, they evoke curiosity as to the practices of the police, and there is ample evidence of police discrimination and violence, notably towards *banlieue* youth.

The most recent example is Clichy-sous-Bois, where, as noted above, the 2005 revolts started following the killing of two young inhabitants of the neighbourhood (one of North African, the other of Malian origin), and the wounding of a third one (of Turkish origin) after they took refuge in an electricity substation to escape the police. According to the official version maintained by Sarkozy, they were not being pursued by the police, although the surviving young man, once out of the hospital, gave an account to the contrary. According to his version of events, they started running because one of the killed young men said the police was chasing them, although they were just coming back from a game of football and had done nothing wrong. They heard the sirens of the police approaching, panicked and hid in the electricity substation, where they stayed for about 30 minutes. 'I wanted to come out, go home, after all, we hadn't done anything!' But they were intimidated by the voices and barkings of dogs outside, and then it happened (see Muhittin's account in *Libération*, 16 December 2005). Let us assume that Muhittin is wrong and Sarkozy is right: even though they were not *actually* chased by the police but thought they were, what is it about the police that made these men, who had not done anything wrong according to Muhittin's account, panic and hide in an electricity substation whereas they were in their neighbourhood already? With a matter-of-fact attitude, Sarkozy never pondered the question, and stated that 'the police was not physically pursuing them' (*Libération*, 16 December 2005). Muhittin, on the other hand, was put in police custody for throwing stones at a police car during a new series of incidents in Clichy-sous-Bois at the end of May the following year (*Le Monde*, 31 May 2006).

A year before Clichy-sous-Bois, it was the *banlieues* of Strasbourg that revolted, following the 'accidental' killing of a person of North African origin by the police with a bullet in the head during a routine police road check (see, for example, *Libération*, 22 March 2004) – a form of casualty not uncommon as the triggering incident of unrest in the *banlieues*. In a book entitled *La police et la peine de mort* (The police and capital punishment) Rajsfus (2002) documents 196 deaths between 1977 and 2001, the majority of which involve youth of African or North African origin in the *banlieues*. Furthermore, the authors of such killings are usually acquitted or given very light sentences, which aggravates hostility among the *banlieue* youth towards the police, who are seen to be immune. Police violence and impunity has long been observed (see, for example, Cyran, 2003; Rajsfus, 2002), and was recently criticised openly by Amnesty International in a report on France, entitled 'The search for justice: the effective impunity of

law enforcement officers in cases of shootings, deaths in custody or torture and ill-treatment'. The report, among other issues, highlighted racist police attitudes and the same geographies of repression:

> The lack of public confidence in even-handed policing is seen particularly in the 'sensitive areas' ('*quartiers sensibles*') from which many of the victims of police ill-treatment and excessive use of force originate. Such tensions between the police and these communities have also been exacerbated when cases brought by alleged victims of police violence, or their families, eventually came to court, and resulted in highly controversial acquittals of, or token sentences, for police officers. The courtrooms, on these occasions, have been packed with friends and relatives on one side, and with police officers on the other, and scenes of violence within the court precinct have not been unknown, reinforcing the sense of 'us against them' on both sides. (Amnesty International, 2005: 1–2)[13]

A similar point was made by Patrick Bruneteaux, a researcher at the Centre for Political Research at the Sorbonne, who was interviewed by *Le Monde* on the rise of police violence in recent years: 'Dirty laundry is best washed at home. Policemen lose points or get demoted, but citizens barely ever see them being really condemned by the judicial system. It has an immediate impact in the *cités*, where violence flares up. You can hardly imagine you are in a lawful state when wrongdoers are not condemned' (*Le Monde*, 27 January 2004a).

Another issue that came to attention with the 2005 revolts was police provocation. An account provided by an eyewitness – a teacher from Clichy-sous-Bois – accused the riot police of provoking the youth by 'calling out racist insults, challenging them to fight, posturing' (Germa, 2005). The tensions arising from such provocations were aggravated when a tear-gas grenade, of the type used by the riot police, ended up in a mosque a few days after the start of revolts, and the incident was seen as a deliberate provocation by the police.[14] Another incident that took place a few days later suggested deliberate provocation by the police even more clearly. This time the place was Lyon, in the social housing neighbourhood of La Duchère,[15] and the scene was recorded by a journalist using a hidden camera. The police were conducting identity checks on a group of young men, one of whom protested. The following dialogue ensued:

> *Policeman*: Shut up!
> *Young man*: You tell us to shut up but we haven't done anything wrong, Sir.
> *Policeman*: Do you want me to take you to a power transformer?
> *Young man*: Sorry, Sir, you're not talking nice to me, I didn't talk to you, Sir.

Policeman: So don't talk to us! . . . We're telling you to move back, move back!

Young man: Listen, Sir, we're addressing you respectfully [*on vous vouvoie*] and your colleague's not answering the same way [*il nous tutoie*]! We're being respectful!

Another young man to one of the officers: Well done! You have cancer! You've lost all your hair!

The officer responds: Hey, you wanna fry with your pals? You wanna go into a power transformer? You just keep going, and we'll take you.

The first young man: If you behave like this, do you really think the neighbourhood is going to calm down?

Policeman: We don't give a shit whether the neighbourhood calms down or not. In a way, the worse the shit, the happier we are![16]

These examples show once again the tensions between the police and the *banlieue* youth, and suggest the possibility of a deliberate police provocation (see also Le Goaziou and Mucchielli, 2006). Indeed, this is more than just a possibility according to a recent report by the French Intelligence Service (RG), which points to the responsibility of the CRS (riot police) in the aggravation of tensions and ensuing revolts in Clichy and Montfermeil. As an officer from the RG explains:

> We don't say explicitly that our colleagues created the problems. We avoid criticizing each other. But we have reported to our superiors that there are useless provocations. Unless what is intended is to set fire, again, to the *cités*. In this respect, mobile police squadrons are clever. They intervene more subtly. The CRS, on the other hand, are obedient. They hit first and think afterwards. In the field, I meet more and more parents, families who report violence from the police. Recently, a father and his teenaged daughter told me their house was shot at with flash-balls. With no reason. (*Le Canard enchaîné*, 7 June 2006: 4)

These are worrying developments. In 2003, police violence was on the rise for the sixth consecutive year (*Le Monde*, 27 January 2004b) – since, in other words, the turn of the left to the 'right to security' in 1997. The coming to power of a right-wing government in 2002 with a deliberate repressive policy only exacerbated the situation.

Policies of Urgency: '20 Years for Unemployment, 20 Minutes for Insecurity'

It's difficult to have a logical, general, systematic discourse about rethinking the city, while people are saying: 'Well, that's discourse and that's long term,

it's to be left to academics with leisure.' We have to answer the population's claims: 'we want security, we want police, we want cameras. It works well elsewhere, so we're following suit'. And that can be done in fifteen seconds.
            Luc Gwiazdzinski, urbanist (interview in *Marchands de sécurité*, 2002)

Increasing police violence and repression, targeted more openly towards the *banlieue* youth, has to be seen in a context of an ever-increasing obsession with security in recent years. As we have seen in Chapter 5, the Socialist government's prioritization of the issue of security in 1997 and the presidential elections of 2002 were important turning points. The elections of 2002 were so marked by the issue of insecurity that an extreme right militant made the following comment: 'Now everybody talks about nothing but insecurity, immigration, and the authoritarian functions of the state. When we used to talk about these issues, we were being treated as fascists' (*Libération*, 28 December 2001: 11).[17]

It then comes as no surprise that in 2000, the fastest growing sector of the French economy, hiring and advancing more than any other, was the private security sector – the 'security merchants' ('*marchands de sécurité*'), as a documentary called them (*Marchands de sécurité*, 2002).[18] The prioritization of security in 1997 was followed by its privatization, partly at least, with the introduction of Local Security Contracts (CLSs). Since then, 'the *banlieue* is the new El Dorado' for private companies offering security services, such as the preparation of 'local security diagnostics' (a prerequisite for having a CLS), creation of municipal police and installation of surveillance cameras (*Marchands de sécurité*, 2002). As the 'urbanist' whose remarks open this section argued, such measures would have been 'unthinkable' five or ten years ago:

> I was lucky enough, a few years ago, to go to the US and the UK to work on these issues of security policy, and I came back with a few experiences in mind. I came back with the experience of curfews: 280 cities in the US had set up curfews for teenagers. I came back with the experiences around cameras, camera systems to control inner cities in particular. I also came back with those ideas and policies set up around the private cities, the gated communities. I also came back with these expanding ideas about private police, the privatization of private [*sic*] police, the development of private security, with the development of Giuliani's zero tolerance policy in New York, too. All these things, ten, five years ago, would have been unthinkable in France. Now they exist. (Luc Gwiazdzinski, interview *in Marchands de sécurité*, 2002)

Zero tolerance has been an explicitly stated policy of the government since 2002, the effects of which were particularly felt in the social housing neighbourhoods of banlieues. As Lahlou of the MIB puts it:

> The only response to people's misery, nowadays, is repression and imprison-
> ment. They think the prison is the answer. [. . .] There's no zero tolerance
> policy against people being hit by trouble, say. I mean, there's this social inse-
> curity, no one talks about it: unemployment, lousy housing, people deep in
> shit, excluded from the social arena, with just a minimal income, or even
> less . . . No one talks about that, because, since they have no solutions, they
> prefer to reassure public opinion about zero tolerance [for crime] so once again,
> who gets hit? The *banlieue* gets hit, necessarily. (Interview, Lahlou, MIB)

We have already seen in Chapter 5 how the government rapidly introduced
many repressive measures immediately after taking office in May 2002 – so
rapidly that a young inhabitant of Vaulx-en-Velin commented as follows:
'They couldn't find the solution to unemployment for 20 years now, but
they have found the solution to insecurity in 20 minutes.' This hard-line
policy only intensified in the following years, again with a spatial focus on
the social housing neighbourhoods of *banlieues*. In January 2004, Sarkozy
held a press conference to define his priorities for the year, and announced
'a merciless fight against urban violence and parallel economies' (which
means drugs in the *banlieues*). One priority involved a reform of the French
Intelligence Service in order to increase its efficiency in fighting against
terrorism and 'urban violence'. Another was even more explicitly spatial.
Sarkozy stated that the 'rule of law' ('*état de droit*') would be restored in 20
spatially targeted 'outlaw areas' ('*zones de non-droit*') before the end of the
year (*Le Monde*, 14 January 2004; *Libération*, 15 January 2004; see also *Le
Monde*, 16 January 2004 for the reactions of the inhabitants of Val-Fourré,
which was on Sarkozy's list). The definitive list of communes was announced
a few days later, and included 23 communes with 'sensitive neighbour-
hoods' (*L'Humanité*, 27 January 2004). All of these were included in urban
policy (four since 1982, nine since 1984, eight since 1989 and two since
1996), and more than half experienced revolts in autumn 2005.

Sarkozy's zero tolerance policies were premised on what he called a
'culture of results' ('*culture du résultat*'), which meant 'better' numbers (i.e.
more police actions and less delinquency). This 'culture' imposed on the
police by Sarkozy was seen as partly responsible for the increase in police
violence by the organizations defending human rights (which were, by the
way, ridiculed by Sarkozy with the expression 'human rightists' ('*droit de
l'hommistes*') (*Libération*, 6 May 2004)). Sarkozy wanted immediate results
so much that when a group of proximity police officers in Toulouse told
him they had organized a football game with the youth of the 'sensitive
neighbourhood' of Bellefontaine (which was on Sarkozy's 'black-list'), he
scolded them before TV cameras: 'You are not social workers. The best of
preventions is sanctioning' (*Le Canard enchaîné*, 5 March 2003: 4).

VOICES INTO NOISES

This emphasis on 'results' also produced curious practices among the police. In April 2003, for example, a police chief sent a letter to his 140 police officers asking them to 'boost the figures', for the statistics in his district were not good enough. He wrote: 'The technical control of the district currently in progress shows an obvious *deficit* in terms of elucidation rates on which the effort has to be increased in order to allow the presentation of statistics in conformity with the departmental average.'[19] The stress grew as the end of the year approached, since the Minister of the Interior publicized the figures at the beginning of each year, and those bringing in 'bad' figures risked their jobs. Thus, in October 2003, an even more curious letter was circulated by the public security director of the department of Hérault (in the Languedoc-Roussillon region). Reckoning that the numbers in his department were not satisfactory, the director sent the following instructions to his officers: the anti-criminal brigade '*must* [emphasis in original] achieve the minimum objective of six police custodies per day'; the daily shift a 'minimum four police custodies per day' of which a 'minimum two at night'; only two for the dog brigade, and seven for the proximity police, not forgetting at least one by the road team. Funny though it may seem, the letter, in fact, constituted a violation of the penal procedure, which the secretary of the national police officers' union interpreted as resulting from the emphasis placed on results by the Minister of the Interior (*Libération*, 31 October 2003).[20]

These developments and such practices are important in order to make sense of the revolts of 2005 in the *banlieues*. Another important point to keep in mind is the Minister of the Interior's use of inflammatory language towards the *banlieue* youth, which definitely did not help to calm things down. Three months before the revolts, on a visit to an emblematic *banlieue*, the *cité des* 4000 in La Courneuve, Sarkozy had talked about 'cleaning the *cité* with Kärcher' – a well-known brand of power hoses for cleaning surfaces through sand- or water-blasting.[21] During the revolts, he referred to the revolting youth as '*racaille*' – a rather pejorative term usually translated as 'scum' or 'rubble' – and proposed the expulsion of foreigners (including those with residency permits) implicated in the incidents.[22] The insults did not end there. On 10 November, while the revolts still continued, Sarkozy was invited on a TV programme on France 2 about the *banlieues*: 'They are thugs [*voyous*] and scum [*racaille*], I'll stick to my guns.' Once the revolts were over, he would regret using the term '*racaille*', but not because it was overly pejorative – to the contrary, it was too 'weak' a term to qualify the revolting youth:

> And honestly, if I regret one thing, it's to have used the term *racaille*, which is way too lenient if you look at the judicial pedigree of some of the

individuals arrested during the riots. It's the law of the republic and not the law of the gangs that prevailed. (*Libération*, 21 November 2005: 13)

The use of this kind of inflammatory language is not new – Chevènement, for example, used to talk about 'little savages' ('*sauvageons*') – but Sarkozy definitely raised the bar, adding to the stigmatization of the *banlieue* youth. I have tried to show some of the problems that the inhabitants of *banlieues*, youth in particular, have to face on a daily basis – unemployment, discrimination, stigmatization, police violence and an increasingly hard-line, even insulting, official discourse against them. But this is not the image of the *banlieues* constituted by the state's statements of the recent years, not to mention the media. Sarkozy's assertion is exemplary here:

The primary cause of unemployment, of despair, of violence in the *banlieues*, it isn't discrimination, it isn't failure of the educational system. The primary cause of despair in the neighbourhoods, it's drug trafficking, the rule of gangs, the dictatorship of fear and the abandonment by the republic. (*Le Monde*, 22 November 2005: 12)

This brings to mind the remarks of an activist:

They say, 'but these are not social issues, this is about public order'. So what happened was that from the phrase of the 1980s, 'neighbourhoods in danger', to be taken care of, they shifted to 'dangerous neighbourhoods', and there you go. (Interview, Guy, MIB)

Conclusions: From 'a Just Revolt of the Youth' to 'Urban Violence'

Despite similarities with the previous large-scale revolts in the social housing neighbourhoods of *banlieues*, the revolts of 2005 were nevertheless unprecedented in terms of their magnitude and persistence. The measures used to repress them were unprecedented as well, including the declaration of a state of emergency, allowing curfews to be imposed, on 8 November 2005 – just when calm was returning to the *banlieues*.

The government's response to the revolts was marked by a characteristic concern with rapid and increased repression, and in this sense, it differed remarkably from the responses of previous governments. When faced with the 1981 revolts in the *banlieues*, the Socialist government of the time took the incidents seriously and initiated an urban policy programme with strong political ideals. Following the 1990 revolts, a City Ministry was created as a sign of the commitment of the state to the 'urban question'. But the 1990s also saw the consolidation of a particular spatial order constituted

mainly by the social housing neighbourhoods of *banlieues*, and gave the first signs of the coming of the penal state with the involvement of the Ministry of Justice and the French Intelligence Service (RG). The involvement of the RG, in particular, was a very strong statement. The secrecy of the activities of the RG, and its more traditional focus on terrorism strengthened the impression that the *banlieues* were 'threats' to the French society. Thus, not only was the constant surveillance of the *banlieues* justified, even rendered necessary, but new ways of talking about them were generated with the appearance of new notions such as 'urban violence', 'sensitive neighbourhoods' and 'urban guerrillas'.

The RG's involvement was also effective in the production of new statistics on the first of these terms, 'urban violence', which entered the agenda in the early 1990s.[23] Since no statistical information was gathered before to measure 'urban violence' – the category simply did not exist – the impression was that there was a sheer explosion of urban violence in France. Thereafter, these statistics were regularly used by the media and politicians asking for more security measures.[24] However, Lucienne Bui-Trong of the RG was very clear on the production of these statistics. Starting from 1991, the RG had asked the departments to provide them with 'information on difficult neighbourhoods', which would then form the database of the section on 'urban violence' (the early name of the section 'Cities and *Banlieues*'). As the statistical category did not exist before, there was indeed a sheer explosion of 'urban violence' in France in the early 1990s. And 'urban violence' kept increasing not necessarily because there were more acts of 'urban violence' (however defined) every year, but because more departments were concerned, more neighbourhoods were included, and more incidents were *reported*. The number of surveyed neighbourhoods increased threefold in five years, thus increasing the quantity of reported incidents as well. Furthermore, some departments were more eager and capable (that is, with more agents working on the issue) than others to provide information on 'urban violence' for the RG's database, as the following remarks make clear:

> In 1991, we placed an order with the departmental directions to spot the difficult neighbourhoods [*quartiers difficiles*]. And the civil servants managed to get us the information. Originally, those agents were not specialized, obviously; they worked traditionally on political or social issues, as generalists on a geographical area, or they were specialized on a single issue. At the RG, missions are very diverse depending on departments, because we are a small service: according to local situations, each departmental director manages with the means at his disposal. The first studies were done by generalists who had never worked on this issue in particular but who had been given a guideline for their research. Little by little, people in the services took on this new mission. Sometimes specialists were designated. In some departments, there

are four or five people working exclusively on the difficult neighbourhoods; in others, a single civil servant spends a few hours a month on them. (Bui-Trong, 1998b: 227–8)

The status of delinquency statistics, which is also highly popular in the media and among politicians, is no less problematic. There is, indeed, a major flaw in the production of the statistics both of delinquency and of 'urban violence': they are the results of the activities of the police. Furthermore, unlike other institutions, say, the INSEE or INED, charged with collecting statistical information on issues that have nothing to do with their own activities, statistics of delinquency are collected by institutions that are directly charged with the issue – the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice. Thus, activities of the police become a mirror-image of delinquency. And here lies the flaw: 'If the repressive priorities of the police change, its forces increase, if the minister issues strict orders, the statistics at the end of the year will show evolutions that bear no relation with the evolution of criminality. [. . .] However, every year the figures and the interpretations of the ministry of the Interior are directly quoted by the media' (Mucchielli, 2001: 24–5).

This production of new terms and the putting in place of sensible evidences such as statistics – however flawed – re-configured a perceptive field around the *banlieues*, which increasingly associated them with violence and delinquency. This re-configuration, which started in the early 1990s, has largely contributed to the debilitation of the political significance of revolts. In the 1980s, revolts were seen as having a political significance, an interpretation shared by Lucienne Bui-Trong as well:

The really critical events were the violences which took place in Vénissieux, at the Minguettes, during the summer, the summer 1981 I think, but it was, they were, those violences, phenomena of degree 5 or 6, on my scale. But still, it had already considerably impressed the ministry, well, the government, *as it was a left-wing government*, so that government was looking for very comprehensive solutions, and from there they launched the, the Primer Minister Pierre Mauroy had asked Bonnemaison, the commission of mayors, to prepare a whole doctrine on that, so, it was the starting point for the police, for urban policy, let's say, a social and comprehensive work on the neighbourhoods. (Interview, Lucienne Bui-Trong)

This vision, however, started to change starting from the 1990s, as we have seen in Chapter 4, and the line that separated the left from the right in terms of repression eventually disappeared towards the end of the decade, as we have seen in Chapter 5:

In 1991, when the government wanted to talk only of a 'prevention police', and interpreted violence [i.e. incidents of 1990 and 1991 in *banlieues*] as '*a just revolt of the youth*', I emphasized the unease of the police faced with this discourse; I tried to show that violence in itself was a problem. [. . .] The first task of my section, therefore, had been to make known in higher places the policemen's point of view on the question of *banlieues*, their discontent with the way the phenomenon was being treated ideologically and in the media. (Bui-Trong, 1998b: 230 and 227; emphasis added)

This change from one decade to the other has also been observed by sociologist Eric Macé:

But the difference between the 1990s and the 1980s is that, in the 1980s [. . .] there was a political awareness, saying: 'Deep down, these violences have a political significance. They challenge French society on its ability to integrate generally.' In the 1990s, under the term 'urban violence', what constitutes a threat is designated – what threatens, and what has to be intervened in, in fact, to protect us against this threat. (Interview in *Marchands de sécurité*, 2002)

Such a change in the perception of the *banlieue* revolts has largely shadowed the political significance of such incidents. With the re-configuration of a perceptive field around *banlieues* with such terms as 'urban violence' and 'outlaw areas', it is not surprising that repression has become a focus – and 'legitimately' so. This re-configuration highlighted less the difficult material conditions in the *banlieues* than the 'threat' posed by 'the *banlieue*' to security, social order and the integrity of 'the republic', rendering episodic manifestations of discontent acts of violence rather than claims for justice – turning, in other words, voices into noises. By confining the 'other' within a geographical elsewhere, by closing the *banlieue* in on itself, this consolidation of the police order not only removed from perspective the structural dynamics of persistent inequalities and injustices, but also re-configured the 'givens' of the situation by constituting 'the *banlieue*' as a problem in itself, treating the claims rising from the *banlieues* not as voices that question the order of things, but as noises that disturb the established order. However, overlapping geographies of inequalities, discrimination, police violence, repression *and* revolts suggest another interpretation. The geographical pattern and expansion of revolts imply that there are structural dynamics aggravating inequalities, which particularly hit the social housing neighbourhoods in *banlieues*. Revolts, therefore, are not just looting and burning; even though they are marked by elements of violence, they connect and speak to larger dynamics and severe material conditions. They are, in this sense, unarticulated justice movements.