

## Rioting the Residences and Reclaiming the Republic

Graham Murray called them “France’s Hurricane Katrina” (2006: 26). French philosopher Alain Badiou wrote in the French newspaper *Le Monde* (November 15, 2005) that “we have the riots we deserve.” Social scientists and politicians in France and elsewhere have agreed: France’s October–November 2005 riots that started in the suburbs of Paris, the *banlieues*, shook the three pillars of the French republican principles that defined the 1789 French Revolution – “liberty, equality, fraternity.”

Ethnic riots have taken place in France for over 20 years, since the riots between police and ethnic minorities in the suburbs of Lyon, France, in 1981 and 1983, and then in 1990, 1991, 1993, and later (Roché, 2006). However, what made the 2005 riots new and unique was their prolonged duration, as well as their persistence for almost three weeks, despite a strong police presence.

What also appears to be new was the strategy used by the government to seemingly maintain tension by using confrontational language on the one hand and a rhetoric of fear and security on the other.

The riots have been defined and categorized by scholars as “ethnic riots” because they involved “episodes of sustained collective violence with an ethnic, racial, religious, or xenophobic character” (Bleich et al, 2010: 271). Previous research on the 2005 French riots has focused primarily on the social and racial inequality, and the resulting social and racial fracture, that exists in the *banlieues* of France for disenfranchised minority groups; this racial inequality has been analyzed as the main explanation for these explosive riots that burned the suburbs of France, and Paris in particular (Hargreaves, 2005; Weil, 2005; Castel, 2007; Fassin and Fassin, 2009). However, despite a considerable amount of scholarship written on the place of the riots in French integration politics, very little attention has been paid to the role of the French government’s response in how the riots developed and were represented and dealt with, although a few scholars have acknowledged its

significance (Macé, 2005; Murray, 2006; Roché, 2006; Waddington and King, 2012).

Through a review of public speeches, media declarations, and interviews by French government officials and influential intellectuals, this chapter examines the language used and the measures taken by the French government over the course of the events. Using the White racial frame perspective (as articulated by Feagin, 2010b, 2012) and the colorblind framework (as formulated by Bonilla-Silva, 2006), the chapter argues that the government's response to the riots shows that (1) by applying a White racial frame to the riots against the rioters, the state was able to denigrate the rioters and deny any legitimacy to the riots themselves; and that (2) by applying colorblind racist labels to the rioters, the state was able to discredit the revolt in order to rationalize and justify a set of repressive tactics and racist measures without "sounding racist." The chapter reveals that the French government ultimately normalized a racial frame about the riots through colorblind racist rhetoric and practices, indicating the rise of a legitimized racism that is becoming a dominant and widely accepted view in the political arena in France.

This chapter will first describe the 2005 French riots that took place in the French *banlieues*. It will then review the current literature that has examined the riots and provide an analysis of the riots as they pertain to the larger question of racial identity. Finally, it will demonstrate the 2005 riots' significance in the larger context of the discursive and institutional structure that is the French model with regard to race and racism.

### **Political rhetoric**

Language and rhetoric are at the center of this chapter. Political rhetoric is not treated as epiphenomenal to the riots but rather analyzed as a central phenomenon. Peter Berger (1969: 20) claims that individuals use language to impose order on reality, and that therefore the use of language orders the physical reality. Rhetoric in this regard can be defined as symbolic action in which people engage, and when they do, they participate in the construction of social reality and ascribe meanings to that reality. More specifically, this chapter focuses on the rhetoric employed by representatives of the French government and other elected officials over the course of the 2005 riots and how that rhetoric supports the rise of legitimized racism in France. For the purpose of this chapter, rhetoric isn't limited to Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as the "available means of persuasion." Rather, this chapter uses Kevin Michael DeLuca's perspective on rhetoric as "the mobilization of signs for the articulation of identities, ideologies, consciousness, communities, publics, and cultures" (1999: 17). As such, the discourse employed by the French government can be analyzed as a form of domination that "creates and sustains social practices which control the dominated" (DeLuca, 1999: 17).

Through rhetoric, then, a social framing is at work, where ideological frames are imposed on social events and cultural texts. Additionally, in Michel Foucault's perspective (1984), rhetorical procedures can be analyzed as ways of producing events and decisions that imply action. Indeed, as argued by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, rhetoric is action, and people possess rhetorical agency: "[R]hetorical agency is the capacity to act, that is, to have the competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one's community" (2005: 3). The French government has rhetorical agency, while the rioters lack any such agency. The rioters don't get to participate in the construction of the social reality; in fact, they have no control over what is said about them and about the riots. That is because, according to Roland Barthes (1970), rhetoric can be viewed as social practice and language as power owned by the elite to act in the world, therefore having rhetorical agency. And for Foucault (1984: 110), discourse is "the thing for which and by which there is struggle"; it is "the power which is to be seized." In this sense, rhetoric is an instrument of power as well as "the means by which people engage in a struggle for power" (Palczewski et al, 2012: 23). Finally, the rhetoric used by the French government serves to mobilize symbols to act and justify its actions (policies), therefore asserting its power and hegemony. Indeed, in a Gramscian perspective (Palczewski et al, 2012: 25), hegemony is constructed and maintained by rhetorical actions. Using a Gramscian approach (Zompetti, 1997), hegemonic ideology means that social control is accomplished through the control of ideas. Such hegemony reduces one's agency because it limits the choices that make sense, that give meaning and interpretation.

### **Chronology of events: how the house burned down**

The French ethnic riots of October–November 2005 started in the Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois (zip code 93, in the department of Seine-St-Denis, northeast of Paris), where a high percentage of immigrants and racial minorities reside, particularly North African or sub-Saharan African minorities. Specifically, on the evening of October 27, 2005 in Clichy-sous-Bois, three minors, Bouna Traoré (15 years old), Zyed Benna (17 years old), both from African-Maghrebi families, and Muhittin, or Muttin, Altun (17 years old), from a Turkish family, were chased by the police as they were returning home from a football game. They ran and jumped over the fence of an electric transformer (owned by France's national electric company, Electricité de France or EDF). Two of them, Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna, were electrocuted and killed; Muttin Altun, seriously burned, ran back toward his projects, where Bouna Traoré's brother found him.<sup>2</sup> The word spread fast in the  *cité* , and shortly afterward confrontations started between a dozen young men and the police in the area. Overnight, some

cars were burned, and then a kindergarten as well as some local stores and bus shelters were damaged. The next day, October 28, Muttin Altun was brought in for police interrogation.

The riots had begun. During the night of October 28, more violent altercations occurred between young men and the police, and the violence reached other nearby *cités*. On October 29, 400 people marched silently in Clichy-sous-Bois wearing white T-shirts that read *Morts pour Rien* (Dead for Nothing), provided by the association Au-delà Des Mots (ADM, or Beyond Words), which was founded in memory of Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna. Graffiti saying “Bouna, may you rest in peace” could be seen on the buildings along the street.

In a matter of days, the riots expanded to other towns of the 93 zip code. Cars were the primary targets of the attacks, but public property was also damaged. By November 7, about 1,400 cars had burned, and schools and public transportation properties had been destroyed. Rioters and the police clashed on the streets, so much so that on November 9 the government decided to put France under a state of emergency and apply the 1955 state of emergency law to the entire French continental territory. The riots continued, and on November 11, while the government commemorated the First World War Armistice of 1918, about 300 people united in a collection of associations called Banlieues Respect (Suburbs Respect) and began to march for peace in the center of Paris, asking for the violence to stop. Security was reinforced in the area of the march with an additional 2,200 police. At night, the riots still raged. By November 12, riots had spread to other suburbs of Paris and to all the major cities of France (except Marseille). Over the nights of November 12 and 13, the violence continued, although it had decreased and become less prevalent in the Parisian suburbs than in the rest of the country. On November 16, the front page of the French daily newspaper *Libération* stated, “France is burning less and less.” By November 17, the riots seemed to be over. Over the course of the riots, 4,770 individuals were arrested for questioning by the police, 763 of whom received prison sentences, of which 118 were minors.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, besides these arrests and jail sentences, anywhere between ten and 120 people among the individuals arrested were foreign nationals and were immediately deported back to their country of origin. However, the cabinet of the Minister of Interior never gave an official count of the number of deportations or of the countries of deportation. Five policemen were also indicted under the charge of assaulting a young man beaten up by the police in front of television cameras.

The geography of the riots is a significant and relevant element. As previously mentioned, the city of Clichy-sous-Bois, where the riots started, is a suburb northeast of Paris with a population of almost 30,000 inhabitants located in the department of Seine-St-Denis. According to the 2009 census, the department of Seine-St-Denis has a population of about 1,500,000

divided into 40 communes, one of which is the city of Clichy-sous-Bois. The zip code for the Seine-St-Denis department is 93 and is identified in local slang as “the 9-3” (“the ninety-three” or “the nine-three”), which often implies a reference to *cités* like in Clichy-sous-Bois. From 1930 to 1950, the Seine-St-Denis department was known as the “Red Belt,” a residential area for a working-class population, with dominant Communist local governments. Since the 1960s, when the development of housing projects or *cités* increased, the department of Seine-St-Denis has become the French department with the highest proportion of immigrants – 21.7 percent. Furthermore, according to French demographers [Bernard Aubry and Michèle Tribalat \(2009\)](#), the 2005 demographic records show that 57 percent of all minors born in France residing in the department of Seine-St-Denis have at least one parent of foreign origin (77 percent for minors residing in the city of Clichy-sous-Bois). Additionally, [Aubry and Tribalat \(2009\)](#) show that in the Seine-St-Denis department, out of the 57 percent of minors born in France with at least one parent of foreign origin, 22 percent of them have at least one parent from North Africa and 16 percent have at least one parent from sub-Saharan Africa. However, because France does not allow the collection of ethnic (including religious) or racial data for census purposes, these percentages do not include a specific ratio of racial and ethnic minorities. Some scholars, like [Aubry and Tribalat \(2009\)](#), use the national origin of the parents as a substitute for ethnicity. In fact, as duly noted by a bystander during the riots, “in Clichy-sous-Bois, there are three main communities, the Arabs, the Turks and the Black people. The three victims represent each one of them” (*Le Monde*, November 7, 2005).

French sociologists have described the suburbs in the Seine-St-Denis department as pauperized territories, symbols of a social and racial fracture in French society, a fragmentation at the periphery of Paris, where exclusion is a common experience to the residents. French scholars ([Lagrange and Oberti, 2006](#); [Castel, 2007](#); [Mucchielli, 2009](#)) argue that the 2005 riots made it abundantly clear that racism, ethnic, and racial discrimination of stigmatized populations were the issues at the heart of the events. [Castel \(2007\)](#) more specifically explains that the populations in the suburbs like Clichy-sous-Bois have been systematically excluded from French society through mechanisms of institutional discrimination and segregation. In particular, scholars ([Weil, 2005](#); [Castel, 2007](#); [Schneider, 2008](#); [Simiti, 2012](#)) show that racial minorities in suburbs like the Seine-St-Denis department experience high unemployment rates, discrimination in the labor market, police brutality and abuse, racial profiling, lack of access to adequate healthcare, political exclusion, and spatial isolation. In fact, one of the ways in which geographic exclusion takes place is demonstrated in the fact that Clichy-sous-Bois has no direct connection to Paris by subway or the train Réseau Express Régional (RER, or Regional Express Network), as do other

wealthier suburbs of Paris. For the residents of Clichy-sous-Bois, the bus is the only form of public transport granting them access to the next town, where an RER train then takes them to Paris. For Murray (2006), it is no accident that the riots occurred and mostly stayed in the suburbs: “[T]o target more significant symbols of the state would have meant taking a couple of buses and a commuter train to first reach them,” Murray (2006: 29) explains.

Media reports and studies by French sociologists produced during and after the riots have identified the populations that participated in the riots. Hugo Lagrange (Lagrange and Oberti, 2006) explains that the rioters were young men (15–20 years old), residents of the suburbs where the riots took place, and that some of them were foreign nationals but the majority were French (only around 7 percent of the arrested rioters were foreign nationals; Roy, 2005). Lagrange (Lagrange and Oberti, 2006) also reports that 26 percent were not enrolled in school, 44 percent had a general studies or technical studies high school degree, and that most were unemployed. Finally, contrary to Sarkozy’s initial declarations, most of the rioters (60 percent) did not have any prior criminal record (Lagrange and Oberti, 2006).

## **The grammar of the White racial frame**

### *Kärcher and racaille*

This chapter contends that the physical violence that took place on the streets between rioters and police forces was matched only by the violence of the language used by French government officials and others. According to French sociologist Bourdieu (1979), language can be seen as symbolic capital exerting symbolic violence: for example, he argues that social classes are dominated even and especially in the production of their social image and their social identity. Subjugated classes don’t get to speak but are spoken about and against. Applying Bourdieu to the present case, only those with political power and capital are authorized to say what the riots are and how we should think about them and the rioters. As Demiaty (2007: 58) explains, the use and radicalization of “unrestrained words” against the rioters and the riots constructed a social reality in the mind of the public that equates to symbolic violence in political discourse.

Even prior to the riots, from the moment Sarkozy was nominated as minister of interior in June 2005, he made many impatient, angry statements about urban security, about the youth of the suburbs (in cities like Perpignan in southern France or La Courneuve, a suburb of Paris) in order to disavow any legitimacy to grievances or complaints by the youths who live in those suburbs (Demiaty, 2007: 58–76). For example, in June 2005, while visiting projects in La Courneuve, Sarkozy had claimed that the suburbs should be “cleaned up with a *kärcher*” (pressure washer). Although the comment did not directly initiate the riots that took place later in October that same year,

this kind of expression not only stigmatizes the youth of the suburbs into deviant outsiders and the suburbs as unclean spaces but it also constructs a meta-narrative and a social reality, or a T-discourse, in the words of Dorothy Smith (1993), in the mind of the public about the suburbs and their inhabitants. Smith (1993: 51) argues that T-discourses can be thought of as ideological codes “hooked into policy and political practices.” T-discourses organize the activities and practices of individuals. According to Smith (1993), the ideological code found in T-discourses orders the ways that syntax, categories, and vocabulary are chosen and produced. The following examines the racial framing constructed by the French government about the riots and the rioters.

*The riots and the rioters as criminal*

As soon as the riots began on October 27, 2005, using the same kind of unrestrained words he had used in prior months, then-Minister of Interior Sarkozy commented on the events by denouncing the actions of the rioters, whom he labeled “scum” and “thugs” (the now-infamous French word *racaille*). Sarkozy’s derogatory comments almost immediately received a furious reply from then-colleague Delegate Minister for the Promotion of the Equality of Chances/Opportunity Azouz Begag, who stated that “you don’t say to young people that they are thugs, you don’t say to young people that you’re going to attack them and then send them the police” (*Le Monde*, November 1, 2005). Addressing more specifically Sarkozy’s comment on cleaning the suburbs with a *kärcher*, Begag added, “I would use the expression ‘to clean’ or ‘clean up’ to clean my shoes, my car. I don’t ‘clean’ the *quartiers*” (*Le Monde*, November 1, 2005). Begag also declared that: “When one nominates a Muslim *préfet*, when one claims wanting to grant the right to vote to foreigners, and when one is sending the CRS against the youths in the suburbs, there is a disconnect ... It’s by fighting against discriminations” (*Le Monde*, November 1, 2005). Generally, Begag denounced the war semantics Sarkozy used during the riots. However, Begag was struck silent by his own government for being too critical of the government’s response to the riots (Wihtol de Wenden, 2005). Despite the numerous criticisms Sarkozy received in response to his comments, not only did he not retract his words but he doubled down on his position by adding more derogatory words and repeating them. On November 6, while visiting with police forces in a northern suburb of Paris, he warned that if the republican order was not soon reestablished, “it will either be the order of the gangs, or the order of the mafias, or another kind of order” (*Le Monde*, November 6, 2005). Sarkozy also denounced the supposed status quo that had prevailed under prior governments by saying that “it has been thirty or forty years that ‘things’ have been tolerated that should have never

been accepted” (*Le Monde*, November 6, 2005). On November 10, Sarkozy made an appearance on French television (during a special news program on France 2) saying that he “insists and persists” in using the words “racaille” and “scum,” for, according to him, “one must call a cat a cat” (*Le Monde*, November 11, 2005). He further declared on national television:

I would like anyone to tell to my face, someone who hits a firefighter, who throws stones to a firefighter, how do we call him? “Young man?” “Sir?” We call him a thug because it’s a thug. When I say they are scum [*racaille*], they call themselves that! Stop calling them “young people”! (*Le Monde*, November 11, 2005)

On November 21, in front of about 2,000 new members of his party, the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP, or Union for Popular Movement), Sarkozy used those terms again, adding, in an ironic tone, that “this vocabulary was perhaps a bit too weak” (*Le Monde*, November 21, 2005). As if to bring evidence to his claim, Sarkozy declared that “the first cause of despair in the *banlieues* is not discrimination. The first cause of despair in the *banlieues* is drug trafficking, the law of the gangs, and the dictatorship of fear” (*Le Monde*, November 21, 2005, emphasis added). Later, in December 2005, Sarkozy affirmed that “75% to 80%” of the rioters were notorious delinquents.

As argued by Feagin (2010b), frame elements are often clustered in key sub-frames within a broad, overarching frame. In this case, one of the central sub-frames here is the criminalization of the rioters, as well as the association and correlation between rioters, urban violence, immigrants, and racial minorities. This criminalization of the rioters is constructed in opposition to the “good” French citizens who are viewed as the victims of the riots. Indeed, using Feagin’s (2010b) concept of White racial frame, this chapter argues that Sarkozy’s discourse about the rioters rested on racial stereotypes and narratives, as well as emotions, particularly a negative orientation with a feeling of inferiority toward the outgroup (the rioters), and a positive orientation with a feeling of superiority of the dominant in-group (constructed as “White French citizens”).

On the one hand, Sarkozy showed empathy to the “good” citizens of the suburbs while, on the other, stigmatizing ethnic minorities, using the double label of “ethnic” and “deviant” in the same sentence so that it became their joined identity. The way that Sarkozy ranked people into categories of “good” (“White” being the sub-text) people who inhabit the suburbs and are the “victims” of the riots on the one hand, and “bad” ethnic/immigrant youths (with the additional label of Islamism and Islamic terrorism) who committed urban violence on the other, allowed him to build a dichotomy, an opposition constructing the rioters as a threat to the republican order and to national identity. In fact, Castel (2007: 61) claims



that over the course of the riots, the main question addressed by Sarkozy and the government in their public declarations was the return to order, and that the question of insecurity was framed as the major problem of the suburbs, linking immigration and issues of insecurity. Though to be fair, this isn't all new in Sarkozy's discourse: he has used correlations between ethnicity/nationality and urban violence and criminality before. Additionally, the rhetoric of insecurity and fear associated with the ethnic youths of the suburbs that dominated Sarkozy's language is a well-known form of populist discourse used by the National Front. For example, [Noiriel \(2007b\)](#) explains that a term like *racaille* has been used before, but only by the "hard" right wing during the 1930s. However, over the course of the riots, Sarkozy used derogatory adjectives and nouns, sending a double signal to the White people and to the racial minorities of the suburbs that he was the number one cop of France and that, as such, he was not afraid of being "tough" to preserve and secure the republican order, which is then assumed to be White. As shown by [Feagin \(2010b\)](#), in the United States, "Americans" is routinely used to mean "White Americans," and an expression like "American Dream" is often used to refer to the values and ideals of White people. Similarly, the "big picture narrative" ([Feagin, 2010b: 13](#)) of the republican order refers to a society of hardworking White French citizens threatened by racial minorities portrayed by Sarkozy as criminal outsiders from within. More specifically, during the riots Sarkozy used the police doctrine and denounced a youth culture in the suburbs that is, according to Sarkozy, prone to be violent and anti-establishment, or a network of drug dealers, gang leaders, and Islamists. At the same time, Sarkozy and the government in general remained cautious and evasive about the tear gas grenade that was thrown in the direction of a local mosque (which had many worshippers, especially because it was almost the end of Ramadan), and instead focused on the inhabitants of the area who told him "we can't stand it anymore, we're afraid." Olivier [Ferrand \(2012\)](#) argues that Sarkozy's communication strategy was to focus on finding scapegoats to feed to the masses.

This chapter claims that part of this strategy was to establish a racial frame separating an "us" – the good White citizens, victims of the riots – from "them" – immigrants, Muslims, "scum" of the suburbs, delinquents, all grouped in the same collective stigmatized entity. [Moran \(2011\)](#) argues that terms such as "scum," "thug," "youths of the suburbs," all packed together in expressions employed by Sarkozy, create a direct correlation between those labeled and stereotyped individuals who are in the suburbs (that is, racial minorities) and the idea of threat from within to French society. The focus on correlating immigrants/ethnicity/delinquency/urban violence is in that regard part of a larger racial framing that is both racist and nationalist. Here again, using [Feagin's \(2010b\)](#) notion of racial framing, I argue that the criminalization sub-frame used by the French government, which contains all

negative elements targeting ethnic and racial minorities in the suburbs, serves as the central reference point. This point of reference then becomes everyone's "frame of mind," the lens through which French citizens make sense of the riots. More specifically, we can see two ways in which the rioters and their actions were delegitimized: one, Sarkozy (and the police who were under his authority) constructed an image of the riots as the actions of organized thugs and gangs of the suburbs, which puts them outside of the institutionally approved means of protests. As shown by Jennifer Eberhardt et al (2004: 876–93), the verbal and visual dehumanization of racial minorities supports the targeting of some groups through societal "cruelty, social degradation, and state-sanctioned violence." Indeed, Sarkozy's rhetoric helped justify a warlike discourse that was calling for the eradication and the cleansing of the scum, and of the suburbs themselves as the perceived menacing social space.

Using Smith's concept of T-discourse (1993), I contend that Sarkozy produced an ideological code through the racial framing of the riots that helped justify in the public eye the use of police violence and state repression against the rioters. As Feagin (2010b) underlines, powerful frames and sub-frames like these include emotions, visual images, and language: as demonstrated here, these verbal elements become the dominant racial frame constructed to rationalize racist discourses and practices. And two, the rhetoric supported by the French government (including Sarkozy), but also by French intellectuals and the media during the riots, presented the suburbs (*quartiers sensibles*) as a menace to the rest of French society. The populations (and the rioters) in the suburbs were labeled as the responsible agents fragmenting the Republic "along ethnocultural lines" (Moran, 2008: 3). The fear that Sarkozy's rhetoric was feeding into has to do with an idea of communitarianism based on racial, ethnic, or religious identities, constructed in opposition to the republican order that implies being a French and White citizen. This Manichean opposition between racial minorities and White French citizens reinforces racist stereotypes describing racial minorities in the suburbs (and, by extension, the suburbs themselves) as the outsiders from within bringing violence and destruction against the "good" citizens of France, a racial frame that has been used by the conservative/right-wing National Front. However, the division constructed by Sarkozy relies on racial codes advancing a colorblind frame that allowed him to use racist discourse "without sounding racist," as Bonilla-Silva (2006) would argue. So, for example, terms such as "gang members" or "extremists" are racial code words for "North African" or "Muslim," also mixed with references to immigration and Islam presented as threats from within. The purpose of such a colorblind racist frame is to seek wide public support from citizens who would not necessarily support the National Front's openly racist rhetoric. By virtue of this framing, presenting the riots as menacing the social order of the "good citizens," the government effectively denied any legitimacy or legitimate meaning to the rioters and

their plight. However, Sebastian Roché (2006) notes that representatives of the law would often contradict Sarkozy's presumptions about the rioters and the riots. For example, the implicit association made by Sarkozy regarding the status of the rioters (for example, that 80 percent of the youths brought before the prosecution were well known to the police) has been disproven by the courts and the Direction Centrale des Renseignements Généraux (DCRG, or Central Direction of General Intelligence), which showed that most of the rioters who were arrested had no criminal history. Additionally, while Sarkozy and others claimed the involvement of radical Islam, the DCRG again denied any involvement of radical Muslim groups. In fact, the DCRG reported that Muslim fundamentalists had no role in starting the riots or in the subsequent violence. The DCRG rectified or contradicted Sarkozy's and the government's declarations on several occasions, not only about the status, the numbers, and so on but also about the interpretation of the riots. For example, the report presented by the DCRG in November 2005 called the events "riots" instead of "urban violence" (as the government had qualified them) and declared that the riots represented a "crisis more serious" than random acts of urban violence, diagnosing them as a "popular uprising." In fact, the DCRG report clearly establishes that it was the "social condition of being excluded from society" that was at the source of the rioters' actions. The report further adds that "to limit the events to simple urban violence would be an error of analysis." The DCRG report, as published in *Le Monde* (December 7, 2005), also claims that "the youths from the 'sensible' areas feel penalized by poverty, by the color of their skin and by their names" and that they are handicapped by "the absence of perspectives in French society." The report concludes that the riots were the result of a deep sense of social despair felt by the youths in the suburbs, as well as a "total loss of confidence in the Republic." Nonetheless, Sarkozy's racial framing of the rioters helped him and the government justify a particular social order where disenfranchised individuals and communities experience oppression and are held responsible for their social conditions. What Sarkozy's rhetoric accomplished through its hegemony was to enable the government to deny the individuals any legitimacy in their fight against oppression, any agency in publicly ascribing their own meanings to their fight. Sarkozy's racial framing functioned as an ideological code, a T-discourse permeating the formulation of texts and actions against the rioters. Power thus manifests itself with the creation of a dominant ideology through a rhetoric that guides and justifies actions and policies, as seen subsequently.

#### *The state of emergency and colonial legacy*

Sarkozy's racial framing of the rioters allowed him to deny any legitimacy and meaning to the riots. It also enabled him to rationalize the use of repressive

measures, like the state of emergency. As argued by Pascal-Yan Sayegh (2008: 10), policies can be analyzed as “discursive elements that provide additional support to a discourse.” On November 4, 2005, then vice president of the far-right party Front National (or National Front) Marine Le Pen, daughter of then-party leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, requested the imposition of a state of emergency. In her statement, she pointed out that the measures had been used in 1985 by then-French President François Mitterrand “to reestablish the republican order in New-Caledonia, for troubles that were infinitely less serious than today” (*Le Monde*, November 4, 2005).

On November 7, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin announced that the government would put in place the state of emergency law from 1955, especially using the curfew regulation. At this point, this was the first official speech given by the head of the government since the start of the riots. He authorized the *préfets* to start imposing a curfew by November 9. On November 8, French President Jacques Chirac confirmed that he would apply the 1955 law declaring a state of emergency for the country. On November 9, the declaration of an emergency state that the government had adopted the day before took effect with the publication of a simple decree by Minister of Interior Sarkozy in the *Journal Officiel*. It applied to the continental territory of France (or the *métropole*), where it had never been used before.

The state of emergency law of April 3, 1955 was adopted for the Algerian War (when Algeria was a French colony). According to this law, the government can declare a state of emergency by decree for a maximum length of 12 days. It was used in Algeria in 1955 to reestablish social order and then again in 1985 in New Caledonia for the same reason, in both cases as a system of repression against subjugated groups. More specifically, as explained by Sylvie Thénault (2007), the state of emergency law was used in 1955 against colonized Algerians to prevent them from starting a war of independence, and it was also used in 1985 in New Caledonia against the Kanak independence movement in the context of independence uprisings. In the case of the 2005 riots more specifically, Article 5 of the law gives power to the *préfets* (with the agreement of the mayor of each city to which it is applied) to enforce a curfew; to impose an interdiction of stay or summons home stay to people causing troubles; to order the closure of public places (including cafés, bars, restaurants, cinemas, conference centers, and so on); to ban any meetings or gatherings of people that might provoke or perpetuate disorder; to proceed with house searches night or day without any warrant; and to control the press, among other things. During the riots, 25 departments were affected by the state of emergency law of 1955; six departments applied it, and four departments still had it in place in December 2005. For the state of emergency law to remain in place beyond 12 days (that is, beyond November 20), the decision needed to be voted into law

by the National Assembly, the lower house of the bicameral Parliament of France. On November 15, prior to the vote, Sarkozy made a speech at the National Assembly to defend his proposal to extend the state of emergency law for three more months. Using a rhetoric of fear, he declared: “15 minutes away from the center of Paris ... cars are burning,” and then again, “15 minutes away from the center of Paris ... there are French people who look down walking in the street and triple lock their doors when they get home, and live in fear, and it’s been a few years like that already.” And finally, Sarkozy said: “[T]he time for truth has come! ... Because if it is not the order of the Republic that reigns in these areas, it will be the order of the gangs or the extremists.” Here again, Sarkozy used code words like “gangs” or “extremists” to mean “North African,” “Black,” or “Muslim,” referring to residents of projects in suburbs like Clichy-sous-Bois. Such code words allowed Sarkozy to construct negative connotations about racial minorities using a colorblind racist discourse. Using Smith’s (1993) concept, Sarkozy’s code words can be analyzed as ideological codes transmitting a schema into which descriptive elements can be inserted, creating a dominant racist trope with the appearance of colorblindness. Sarkozy’s codes didn’t simply justify his own repressive policies; they also normalized and validated the racist rhetoric of the extreme right. Furthermore, the discourse Sarkozy used to justify the application of the emergency law centered on security and how people live in fear, and on all the money given to the *cités*, or the *quartiers*, without tangible or positive results. For him, the “central factor” for what he called urban violence was “the will of those who made delinquent acts their main activity in order to resist the ambition of the Republic for order and law on its territory” (*Le Monde*, November 15, 2005). However, in reaction to Sarkozy’s speech, then Green Party representative Noël Mamère declared that “the state of emergency law cannot be the response to a state of social catastrophe” (*Le Monde*, November 16, 2005). Additionally, several organizations publicly showed their disagreement and disapproval of this measure. On November 15, criticizing the application of the state of emergency law, the Syndicat de la Magistrature (French professional union of members of the judiciary) claimed: “Considering the serious detrimental character of such a measure to civil liberties, the international conventions stipulate that the States who choose to apply this law must inform the United Nations’ General Secretary as well as the European Council’s General Secretary” (*Le Monde*, November 15, 2005). Several human rights associations and civil liberties organizations reacted in a joint statement, saying that “you cannot respond to a social crisis with a regime of exception” and that “there is here a real national emergency, and we must replace this police state of emergency by a state of social emergency, so that the actions of the government stop contradicting the principle of the Republic” (*Le Monde*, November 14, 2005). Nonetheless, the law to extend the state of emergency

passed with 346 votes in favor and 148 opposed. The UMP and the Union pour la Démocratie Française party (UDF, or Union for French Democracy) voted in favor, while the Parti Socialiste (or Socialist Party), except for one person, the Parti Communiste (or French Communist Party), and the Greens voted against. On November 16, the French Senate adopted the text extending the emergency law (especially the curfew), even though things were returning to normal and the violence (or reports of violence) had decreased significantly. On November 18, Prime Minister de Villepin declared that he had no intention of lifting the state of emergency law before the beginning of 2006. The vote on the emergency law was made possible by the White racial framing of the riots, which gave Sarkozy and the government a rationalization, if not impunity, for dealing with the riots. Indeed, using the 1955 state of emergency law, which was the first measure brought by the head of the government in dealing with the riots, the French government sent a clear message to the rioters: they would be treated the very same way that their ancestors in Algeria (and in other former colonies) were, that is, through oppression, subjugation, and repression. The rioters had already been construed and treated as outlaws, so, by applying the state of emergency law, they also become de facto “children of the traitors” of yesterday’s colonies, claims [Rigouste \(2011\)](#). In that regard, [Rigouste \(2011: 278\)](#) argues, the emergency law carried a “symbolic and memorial” dimension by placing it in the framework of a “pacification of the enemy of the interior.” Indeed, the emergency law allowed Sarkozy to use what amounts to warlike operations in some parts of the French territory and against some populations, without having to subject the whole economic and political structure to the same regimen. In that regard, [Thénault \(2007: 76\)](#) argues, the state of emergency law is as much “a law of political repression as it is a colonial law.” For [Thénault \(2007\)](#), the idea behind the state of emergency law is to repress anyone who is an outlaw, that is, anyone who is acting outside of and against the republican system of law and order, anyone, in fact, who contests the republican order. Thus anyone who does not recognize the republican order and its laws by acting outside and against it should not expect to receive the guarantees and protection of the common law. On the contrary, anyone acting outside of the law should expect to be treated with a regime of exception, such as the emergency law. Furthermore, [Thénault \(2007\)](#) explains, the emergency law in France is deeply rooted in the larger history of repression in France, primarily directed at populations and movements that are perceived to threaten republican order, like the independence movements in the former colonies. The passage of the emergency law can thus be seen as a racist policy targeting populations that were accused of being outside of the republican contract and its institutions, even though it is precisely the institutions, through institutional racism, that had placed them outside the republican social contract. [Rigouste \(2011\)](#)

even goes so far as to suggest that, in some ways, this period of “exception” (since the emergency law is a law of exception) was a good time to experiment for Sarkozy: it had the function of a full-scale social laboratory experiment – a kind of lab to test a new counter-insurgency program that had just been circulated on October 18, 2005. According to [Thénault \(2007\)](#), 73 percent of French people polled by the polling institute CSA approved the proclamation of the state of emergency law. Additionally, on November 9, Sarkozy announced that he had asked the *préfets* to deport all non-French citizens who had committed violent acts or simply participated in the riots, even if they were “legal” foreigners and/or residents by status. Sarkozy specified that 120 foreigners (not necessarily undocumented) had been convicted. On November 14, Sarkozy reiterated that there would soon be some deportations. However, Sarkozy faced difficulties in applying the law, as per Sarkozy’s own November 2003 law, because deportations do not apply to minors, or to adults who arrived in France before the age of 13 or who have strong family links in the country. The question of deportations actually undermined a simple fact: the rioters were predominantly French citizens, most of them second generation from immigrant parents; hence, the government could not send them “back” anywhere. But the media hype around the idea of deportations contributed to the construction of a racist narrative about non-French foreign criminals being the main instigators of the riots. Using Gilles [Finchelstein’s \(2011\)](#) analysis of the banalization of the ideas of the National Front, by using words like *racaille* or proposing to send the supposed delinquents “back” to their country, Sarkozy was indeed paraphrasing ideas of the National Front, which are based on a populist, nationalist, and racist ideology. Ideas previously used by the extreme right have become “banal” in the political landscape because Sarkozy’s rhetoric justified and legitimized the ideology behind them. In the end, then, in line with Feagin’s (2010b) concept of White racial framing, the racial framing of the rioters as thugs and criminals by the French government created a negative narrative about their actions, which denied them any legitimacy while normalizing a racist discourse and rationalizing racist policy measures against them.

#### *Cultural racism as colorblind racism*

On November 10, on national public television France 2, Sarkozy expressed his views on why some people experience integration problems. Making a covert link between the riots and the rioters, he explained: “There are more problems for a kid of an immigrant from Black Africa or North Africa than for a son of a Swedish, Danish or Hungarian.<sup>15</sup> Because of culture, because of polygamy, because social origins make it more difficult” (*Le Monde*, November 10, 2005). The “polygamy case,” as presented by Sarkozy, was

also used by then–Minister of Employment Gérard Larcher, who declared that polygamy was one of the explanations for racial discrimination in the workforce and one of the main causes for the violent urban uprisings; according to him, polygamy represented a “disintegration of family values” (*Le Monde*, November 15, 2005). On November 7, Prime Minister de Villepin declared that some “criminal networks are supporting the chaos” in the suburbs and called for “responsibility from the parents.” Following this statement, on November 14, the Mayor of Draveil (a city southeast of Paris), Georges Tron, announced that he would immediately suspend social aid to families of rioters in his commune. These family allocations include aid for food, utilities, rent, school dinners, vacations for children, medical prescriptions, and phone bills. On the same day, the Minister of State for Family Affairs, Philippe Bas, indicated that there was a discussion taking place about a law that would suspend any family allocations/aid to parents who did not “carry out correctly their parental function/duty” (*Le Monde*, November 14, 2005). The problem with such an argument about parental responsibility was that it completely ignored the fact that families in these suburbs had been facing a social and economic strain – structural violence – for over 20 years, which had broken any “normal” way of functioning, if there even existed such a thing. Finally, in an interview with French magazine *l’Express* on November 17, Sarkozy said: “[Those rioters] are totally French legally speaking. But let’s say things as they really are: polygamy, the acculturation of a number of families makes it more difficult to integrate a young individual of African origin than another young French person of another origin.”

In addition to declarations by political officials, some French intellectuals commented on the riots using a similar White racial frame regarding the rioters and the idea of threat against the “Republic.” Specifically, François Gèze (2006: 89) talks about the “fundamentalists of the Republic,” an intellectual nebula of thinkers who have been vocal about the riots. Murray (2006: 32) also refers to this group or movement of French scholars called the *néoréacs*, or neo-reactionaries, for which the equivalent in the United States would be the “neocons,” who have professed their own perspective on the events using arguments similar to those employed by the far right, although they have defended themselves against being described as racists. Their declarations usually share two points: the defense of republican principles they deem essential, and the supposed resistance to the invasion of “barbarians” that are usually portrayed as immigrants and/or Muslims. For example, renowned French scholar Hélène Carrère d’Encausse, an expert on Russia, declared in the Russian media that “if so many African children are loitering around in the street,” then it was because “many of these Africans are polygamists” (Carrère d’Encausse, 2005). However, Carrère d’Encausse offered no evidence to support her argument. Literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov declared at a conference at Columbia University



that the riots “were caused by the dysfunctional sexuality of Muslim youth obsessed with behaving in a macho way” (Hargreaves, 2005). Additionally, in an interview with the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* (November 18, 2005), French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut explained that the “problem” was that “most of these young people are black or Arabs and have a Muslim identity.” Finkielkraut frames the riots in terms of hate stemming from the culture and the religion (Islam) of the rioters against a Judeo-Christian tradition in France. In addition to public intellectuals like Finkielkraut correlating the presence of Islam in France with danger, Castel (2007: 54) claims that over the past several years the French government has increased its public declarations on Islam, framing Islam as a potential threat to the Republic and its universal values. In the 2005 *Haaretz* interview, Finkielkraut further states that there were in France “other immigrants in difficult situations – Chinese, Vietnamese, Portuguese – and they don’t participate in the riots. Therefore, it is clear that this revolt is ethnic and religious in character.”

The word “immigrant” used in many of these declarations is a euphemism for race, blurring any distinctive identity between Black, North African or Arab people. Maxim Silverman (1992: 37) explains that although racial minorities in France “do not appear statistically as foreigners, they are frequently classified popularly as immigrants because of the racialized association between immigration, those of North African origin, and blacks.” Additionally, contrary to the prejudiced commentaries by the intellectuals cited above, and per the findings of the French intelligence service, Islam or radical Islam did not play any role at all in the riots. In fact, as noted by Cathy Schneider (2008), imams from the major mosques actually implored the youths to stay calm. In many ways, a part of the Parisian intellectual class basically supported Sarkozy’s use of derogatory language, arguing that the riots were simply a fire of hatred fanned by delinquents, and that Sarkozy was the victim of misplaced and wrongful criticisms from the left.

As explained by Bonilla-Silva (2006), colorblind racism is a set of frameworks that help explain and justify the racial status quo without having to specifically refer to race. It is a racial ideology that allows for rationalizations and justifications of a racial order based on explanations other than race and in that regard minimizes the relevance and significance of race. During and after the riots, the focus of the discourse on foreigners (who have become scapegoats), the accusation against the parents (guilty of being poor and excluded), and an intensified accusatory language focused on the threat of Islam against law and order is a perfect illustration of Bonilla-Silva’s concept of cultural racism. One of the central frames of colorblind racism is cultural racism, which uses cultural arguments to explain racial-ethnic minorities’ positions in society. It “blames the victim” by attempting to identify cultural aspects of minorities and by explaining that they are inferior to the White normative culture. Therefore, their deficient culture is identified as the

source of their inability to succeed. As [Bonilla-Silva \(2006: 29\)](#) claims, this is “racism without racists.” The rhetoric of Sarkozy, the French government, and others in the media and part of the French intellectual class, through stereotypes and stigmas, showed complete contempt and disregard of the riots as a political act, and of the rioters and their plight. Moreover, the use of such derogatory language allowed Sarkozy to define and construct an image of the rioters as delinquents and put the blame directly on the rioters and their families for their own plight, which is one of the arguments of cultural racism. Indeed, based on Bonilla-Silva’s analysis of colorblind racism, we can see here how the use of cultural claims to explain the status of racial minorities in French society allowed the government to essentially “blame the victims” by identifying cultural aspects constructed as inferior to the White normative culture, without using an explicit racial discourse. As [Bonilla-Silva \(2006\)](#) and [Wieviorka \(1998\)](#) show, the biological views that previously supported explicit racial ideologies are replaced by cultural ones in contemporary racism. Using cultural racism, Minister of Interior Sarkozy and members of the government delegitimized the rioters’ plight by framing them as a dangerous, culturally deviant class, which gave Sarkozy the authority to employ an alarming rhetoric of fear and chaos in order to justify confrontation and repression. As [Castel \(2007: 61\)](#) notes, no mediation was ever offered during the riots. Sarkozy’s criminalization narrative against the rioters based on their presumed cultural deficiencies gave him full legitimacy to apply security measures in much the same way as a police state. The rhetoric used by Sarkozy and other representatives of the French government also shows an ideological alignment with the thesis of the ideas of the far-right party National Front, including anti-immigrant rhetoric and xenophobia. Indeed, Michel [Tubiana \(2006\)](#) suggests that the government has used the rhetoric of the National Front in a more open and uninhibited way that stigmatizes foreigners and puts the guilt and responsibility exclusively on the parents of the rioters, linking a parental deficit to their culture. Using Bonilla-Silva’s concept of cultural racism ([2006: 40](#)), this chapter argues that focusing on questions about Islam or the family structure, and connecting them directly to the riots and urban violence, is an ideological banalization of the racist and populist ideas of the National Front, making them appear a normal and banal expression of political analysis of French society.

## Conclusion

Most French social scientists have admitted that the 2005 riots were not a new phenomenon in the contentious politics of the French suburbs. In fact, [Laurent Bonelli \(2005\)](#) qualifies the riots as “an ordinary mode of protest.” Indeed, [Bonelli \(2005\)](#) points out that the particular “practice” of burning cars had already occurred, in 2003, when about 21,500 vehicles

were burned in the course of the year (representing an average of 60 cars per night). However, if the methods of contention were not original, the length of this particular type of protest and the demographics of the participants were a somewhat new phenomenon. Laurent Mucchielli (2009: 732) thus claims that the 2005 French riots were France's "most consequential riots in its contemporary history." Many scholars, like Eric Marlière (2011), have pointed out that the riots were definitely not a form of "unmotivated violence." Similarly, Marilena Simiti (2012: 145) argues that despite being "volatile," the riots were not "irrational, random and unorganized events." Rather, they can be analyzed as contentious events challenging existing norms and policies. As Denis Merklen (2006: 131) suggests, the mobilization of November 2005 consisted of political acts: "[S]ometimes, burning cars is a matter of politics, as much as calling the ones who have done it 'delinquents' is an act of political dismissal."

Yet, the ethnic riots of 2005 have not been treated as political acts by the French government, the media, or by some French intellectuals but rather as a deviation from the norm in terms of political behavior. In fact, the 2005 riots have been framed by the government, the media, and certain public intellectuals as an attack, or a threat, against French republican democratic order. However, some scholars (Weil, 2005; Hargreaves, 2005; Castel, 2007; Fassin and Fassin, 2009; Simiti, 2012) have instead focused on the issues of racism, equal rights, justice, and opportunities. Such scholars view the riots not as a menace to the French Republic but rather as confronting the behavior of political leaders who continuously delegitimized their voice (and who may well be the ones "acting in an 'unrepublican' manner"), as well as questioning the treatment to which they are subjected in their daily lives, including being denied access to republican citizenship.

Through this chapter, I have examined the pattern of the state response to the riots that took place in the French suburbs in 2005. Using Bonilla-Silva's (2006) colorblind racism framework, and Feagin's (2010b, 2012) White racial framing perspective, this chapter has shown that (1) by discrediting the rioters themselves through a White racial rhetorical framework, the French government denied any legitimacy to the riots; and that (2) through a colorblind racist framing of the rioters, the state rationalized and justified its own repressive acts and measures, calling for an even more oppressive rhetoric, all of which further neutralized the voice of the rioters. Indeed, the stigmatization of the rioters as criminals and the "enemy from within" allowed the government to deny all political meaning and legitimacy to their motives. The government – particularly the Minister of Interior Nicolas Sarkozy – used "a particular language and rhetoric to make 'colorblind' arguments and denigrate oppressed groups" (Byrd, 2011: 1007). In essence, Sarkozy's stigmatizing rhetoric denied the very existence of the social conditions in which the participants found themselves every day, which

were at the root and core of the riots. By giving a hegemonic reading on the riots, Sarkozy and the French government in particular were supporting a dominant racist ideology that could not be challenged by the rioters, who had no rhetorical agency. As residents of the *banlieues*, the rioters already experienced domination in their everyday practices (discrimination, police brutality, segregation, unemployment, poverty), but also in the production of their social image. In the case of the riots, because of their lack of rhetorical agency, the rioters did not get to participate in the construction of the social reality – they didn't get to present a counterhegemonic discourse about the riots because there is no negotiated or oppositional reading at work (Hall, 1993). As Lagrange (2006: 55) explains, the rioters, who were already marginalized and oppressed in their everyday social experiences, were also isolated politically. The rioters then have the least control over the production of a discourse about their social reality. Sarkozy and the French government, on the other hand, emitted a T-discourse (Smith, 1993), an ideological code asserting dominant claims about the reality of the riots that in turn governed the political decisions and policies toward the rioters.

Furthermore, not only did Sarkozy and the French government exert symbolic violence upon dominated social agents (Bourdieu, 1979) through the imposition of categories of thought but they also imposed the specter of legitimacy of a racist social order. Sarkozy's hegemonic discourse reduced the rioters' and the public's agency because it limited the choices of analysis that give meaning and interpretation. Racialized framing of riots isn't exclusive to France, and scholars (Hunt, 1997; Messer and Bell, 2010) have shown that media and government in the United States have used a White racial frame to stigmatize nonWhite rioters as criminals. Other studies (Cavanagh and Dennis, 2012) have looked at the framing of the 1981 riots in the UK and how the riots were also coded in terms of race and race relations. However, Harlan Koff and Dominique Duprez (2009: 723) claim that, unlike the United States and Great Britain, "France has not attempted to find solutions to the problems that caused the 2005 riots." Instead, Koff and Duprez (2009: 723) argue, Sarkozy and the French government actually benefited from the riots in that by racializing the riots and criminalizing the rioters, they were able to justify more anti-immigrant campaigns and restrictive citizenship policies, attracting the conservative electorate from the far-right party, National Front. Additionally, as observed by French sociologist Macé (2005), blaming the rioters without relating the riots to their larger socioeconomic conditions amounts to "accusing the rioters of the Commune of Paris in 1870 who revolted against the bourgeoisie which had made alliance with the German troops occupying France," or denouncing the violence "perpetrated by the natives during the decolonization wars." By comparison, when French farmer José Bové dismantled a McDonald's in 1999, and was sentenced to prison for it, or when Green activists regularly

destroyed transgenic crops in the fields, they received the support of the French public and the media. In some cases, people even protested to show their support of the activists. Furthermore, in March 2006, and hence shortly after the October 2005 ethnic riots, students (mostly White and middle class) protested in the streets in the heart of Paris, close to the university La Sorbonne, against a government employment reform called *Contrat Première Embauche* (CPE or First Hire Contract) affecting students entering the job market. Although they too burned cars in the center of Paris, the student protesters were presented in a positive light by the media as a “political generation,” in contrast to the coverage of the 2005 riots on the outskirts of Paris. In the end, not only did they receive public support but they eventually succeeded in their demand, as the French government backed down and dropped the reform altogether. Generally, [Macé \(2005\)](#) stresses, when union workers (mostly composed of White people) oppose the French government through strikes and sometimes violent confrontations – as was the case during the major protests of 1995 and the massive transport strikes of 2007 – the damage caused to public or private property (such as cars) do not reduce or negate the significance of the struggle itself. In fact, such contentious acts have been explained and even justified in terms of structural arrangements in French society. Such was not the case in the November 2005 riots. [Koff and Duprez \(2009\)](#) argue that French leaders and citizens have “distanced themselves from the discontent that led to the riots.” [Bleich et al \(2010\)](#), who focus on the state response to riots in Western Europe, explain that different response patterns can be identified according to the levels of repression and accommodation used by the states in question. In comparing ethnic riots in the UK (Brixton in 1981 and Bradford in 2001) and in France (Lyon in 1990 and Paris in 2005), they find that states employ repression and/or accommodation depending on two factors – social control and electoral incentives. For the 2005 ethnic riots in Paris, they claim that high repression and medium accommodation was employed by the French government, whereas the 1990 ethnic riots in Lyon provoked low repression and high accommodation. They argue that the electoral incentives model accounts for the differences: in particular, the political landscape explains the differences in state response, where a left government in the 1990 riots showed low repression and high accommodation, and a right-wing government in the 2005 riots responded with high repression. Further comparative studies looking at the racial framing of riots in different national cases would be useful, particularly in the context of the strong progression of the far right in Europe, but such an analysis goes beyond the immediate scope of the current chapter and demands further research.

The rhetoric used during the riots by the French government – Sarkozy, as well as some of the French intellectual class – largely corresponded to an ideological meta-narrative that is both racist and nationalist and has served

as the validation and banalization of far-right views. Using Feagin's approach (2010b), this chapter has demonstrated that the White racial framing used by the French government has become hegemonic, as it normalizes the language and interpretations that make sense of social arrangements. In line with Sayegh's work (2008) showing Sarkozy's contribution to a dominant culturalist discourse on identity in Europe, Sarkozy's rhetoric and policies during the 2005 riots can be analyzed as a White racial framing of the identity of the rioters, who were constructed as "non-French," immigrants, or foreigners. By applying a colorblind frame onto the riots and the rioters, Sarkozy legitimized and banalized a racist and populist narrative that has been used by the National Front, albeit without sounding racist, because his seemingly nonracial framing focused on a concern over the threat and menace that the rioters supposedly brought to the entire French Republic. Noiriel (2008) argues that this kind of rhetoric is part of a larger "populist shift in contemporary political communication." This should raise some serious concerns, because, as Wieviorka (1998) explains, populist and extreme right parties in France, Italy, Austria, and Belgium have become important political forces to be reckoned with as they have gained in electoral support by using racist and anti-Semitic ideologies. Europe witnessed the entrance into the Swedish Parliament of the extreme right party (the Sverigedemokraterna) as a result of Sweden's 2010 general elections and the strong reemergence of the extreme right party in Austria (the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs) in the October 2010 regional elections. Additionally, the right-wing populist Norwegian party Framstegspartiet made its first entrance into the Norwegian government in October 2013 and is now in a position of strength and power, 40 years after its creation. In light of these political changes, the radicalization of Sarkozy's discourse against racial minorities doesn't seem like an isolated outlier. It may even indicate a trend among other European parties and nations to integrate the "extreme" into their "right" and further normalize and legitimize state racism at home.