

French cities burst back into flames after President Sarkozy's election on a 'clean the scum off the streets with a high-pressure hose' ticket. It won't be the last time, as long as the factors necessitating the mass revolt of November 2005 remain in place, in France and elsewhere. This text, based on Emilio Quadrelli's interviews in the Paris banlieues during and after the 2005 events, overthrows the whole spectrum of slurs against the racialised, pathologised *racaille*. The myth of an all-boy riot is trashed by female combatant leaders, and left-ist commonplaces incur special scorn, above all those about the inarticulate cry for help of the 'socially excluded'



Go home, white boy, we don't need you

– Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voice of Freedom*

GRASSROOTS POLITICAL MILITANTS



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INCIPIIT. THINGS AND WORDS*

25 October 2005, Argenteuil, Department Seine-Saint-Denis, early evening. Interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy, visiting the *banlieue*, speaks frankly: 'You can't stand this scum any longer? Don't worry, we'll get rid of it soon'. The promise is directed towards the 'French' minority in the 'working-class neighbourhoods' who are forced against their will to live with the *racaille*.^[1]

27 October, Clichy-Sous-Bois, the sun has just gone down. Ten or so youths – *black/blanc/keur* [translator's note: these three terms are used in this linguistic combination, and without gender variation, in the original Italian text] – have just finished playing football and are getting ready to go home. Perhaps to shorten the journey, they cut across the ground away from the streets. On the way they find a building site and they cross it. Someone, probably one of the many spies in the pay of the police, notices them and doesn't waste any time rushing to the telephone and sounding the alarm. A generic alarm: 'a group of kids inside a building site', nothing more, but enough to alert a police patrol of two officers. Before leaving the car, the pair call for reinforcements. A few minutes later another three patrol cars have joined the first one. The number of police increases to 11. Now the hunt can begin. When they see the police the youths know immediately what they're up against. They have done nothing, it's true, but the police don't need any reason for a typical *ratissage*.^[2] If they're stopped, the best they can hope for is to be held face down on the ground, searched, identified and then perhaps released, but it could also turn out worse. In that case a trip to the station is almost certain, and once inside anything can happen. An everyday scenario in the banlieues, and the only solution, as ever, is *run man run*.

For six of them the flight is short. They are caught and surrounded and taken into custody by some of the police. The other officers resume

the hunt. Three of the prey have escaped. Muttin Altun, 17, of Turkish background, Zyed Benna, 17, the son of Tunisians, and Bouna Traoré, 15, from Mali, have slipped through their fingers and are still running. The three cross a small wood at the end of which they find quite a high wall, three metres. They don't lose heart, they climb it. They find themselves inside one of the French electricity company's small sub-stations. It seems like almost enough. It's darker now; if they can just find a good hiding place for a while, then with the help of the night it should be easy enough to stay out of the police's clutches. Anyway they haven't done anything. There's no reason not to expect that in a short time the hunt will be abandoned. The only problem is finding a space that can keep them out of sight of the officers, who still haven't given up yet. Perhaps the three fugitives feel lucky because the space is right there, just within reach. Without thinking too much about it, in a moment they reach it. It's the end of them. The three don't know that the space that could hide them from the policemen's eyes conceals a big electric transformer. The shock hits them. Bouna and Zyed die instantly, while Muttin, severely injured, survives and manages to call for help. Sarkozy has kept his word.

Clichy, 29 October. Thousands of youths attend the funeral of Bouna and Zyed. Most wear a t-shirt saying 'dead for nothing'. The revolt begins shortly afterwards. The first signs come at Clichy-sous-Bois near the funeral of the two boys. For the people of the banlieues there is nothing accidental about the deaths, it is a double murder deliberately carried out by the police force. Furthermore, the episode is neither casual nor exceptional. The names of Bouna and Zyed do no more than lengthen the list of bodies which for many people goes back to October 17 1961, when the corpses of over 200 Algerians tortured and massacred by the security forces were thrown into the Seine. They had taken part in a demonstration against the curfew imposed on all Arabs by the Paris police department[3], and the response of the *République* had not been slow in coming.[4]

Clearly Sarkozy has invented nothing new, and in the maintenance of

all Europa Editions, New York, 2006-7.

[53] This condition should not be ascribed to French society alone: rather, it seems to be the dominant tendency across the world governed by global capitalism. For an 'empirical' description of this reality in Italy see A. Dal Lago, E. Quadrelli, *La città e le ombre. Crimini, criminali, cittadini*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 2006.

[54] See in particular Zygmunt Bauman, *La società dell'incertezza*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1999.

[55] See Lagrange, Oberti, *op. cit.*

[56] The reference is to the lucid intuition of Michel Foucault at the end of the 1970s, particularly in the Collège de France courses of 1978 and 1979: *Naissance de la Biopolitique: cours au Collège de France (1978-9)*, Gallimard/Seuil, Paris, 2004.

[57] See in particular Z. Bauman, *The Individualised Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2001.

[58] On a global scale this reality is shown most clearly by the exponential growth of slums, inhabited not by excess humanity but by so-called low-status workers. See Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, Verso, London, 2006.

many football terraces, the 'radical right' can boast a certain hegemony, perhaps more 'cultural' than 'political', in some sections of the 'white underclass'. For a discussion of these aspects, see E. Quadrelli, *Left Snobbery and the Radical Right* <http://www.metamute.org/en/Terraces-and-Peripheries>

For a general overview of the 'radical right' see G. Caldiron, *La destra plurale. Dalla preferenza nazionale alla tolleranza zero*, Manifestolibri, Rome, 2001.

[48] As seems evident, the theoretical/analytical framework of the interview is strongly influenced by the rhetoric of one of the best-known lines of research on contemporary political, social, economic and cultural transformations. See in particular Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard, Cambridge, MA., 2000 and *Multitude*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 2005.

[49] On this aspect, see in particular Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2004.

[50] On the rhetoric of 'zero tolerance' see in particular Alessandro De Giorgi, *Zero tolleranza. Strategie e pratiche della società di controllo*, Derive Approdi, Rome, 2000; and *Il governo dell'eccedenza. Postfordismo e controllo della moltitudine*, Ombre Corte, Verona, 2002; L. Wacquant, *Prisons of Poverty*, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, 1999, and *Deadly Symbiosis*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2004.

[51] In France this is mainly centred around the journal *Multitude*, whose theoretical presuppositions can be found at the site <http://www.multitudes.samizdat.net>

Among the many texts representing this tendency may be recalled Maurizio Lazzarato, *Lavoro immateriale. Frome di vita e produzione di soggettività*, Ombre Corte, Verona, 1997; Christian Marazzi, *Il posto dei calzini. La avolta linguistica dell'economia e i suoi effetti sulla politica*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin, 1999; Paulo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles/New York, 2004.

[52] Not insignificant in this respect is this relative climate of social peace experienced during the revolt in Marseille, the French city where organised crime seems to have considerable power. This reality is convincingly presented, even more so than in 'scholarly' research, in 'literature', particularly the trilogy of J-C. Izzo, *Total Chaos*, *Chourmo* and *Solea*,

public order he can boast some illustrious precedents, starting with Maurice Papon, Paris police chief at the time of the massacre. Papon's zeal for obedience to the law and the maintenance of order was not lacking a few years earlier either. During the Nazi occupation, he was responsible for the mass arrest of thousands of Jews and their deportation to the death camps. Governments change but in the end police forces stay the same.[5]

The inhabitants of the banlieues seem well aware of this. Within a few hours, in a single body, the *black areas* of the Northern belt of the Paris periphery join together with the insurgents of Clichy-sous-Bois. In quick succession, Le Courneuve, Le Blanc Mesnil, Argenteuil, Aulnay-sous-Bois and Montfermeil begin to burn. It is only the beginning. Rouen, Dijon, Lille, Lyon, Toulouse, Strasbourg and to a lesser degree Marseille soon also join in. A sound of another age seems to be echoed in another form: *Ce n'est qu'un debut, continuons le combat*, although, in comparison, May '68 will look like so much mischief dreamed up by over-exuberant students. For more than 20 days, no French periphery sleeps tranquilly. [translator's note: *periferia* is sometimes translated into English as 'suburbs'. 'Periphery' is preferred here because 'suburbs' in the English-speaking world carries an economic-social-cultural connotation at the utmost remove from the life of the banlieue, to the extent that stereotypically 'banlieue'-type phenomena are sometimes designated 'inner city' or 'urban' (as in 'blight'). Using 'periphery' also emphasizes the social as well as geographical nature of the banlieue's distance from the world of the 'citizens' or 'entrepreneurial individuals'.] Thousands of fires are started, hundreds are injured, one person dies, and the number of stop-and-searches and arrests is unknown.

November 9, 2005. A curfew is applied in 25 French *Départements*, with everything that entails: searches of any building at any time without a warrant; a ban on meetings, demonstrations and assemblies, no freedom of movement for all those who might impede the action of public officials. The scenario recalls 1955 and the Algerian war.[6]

It does not seem excessive to make the connection, because if the *French hot autumn* was not a war it was certainly no mere skirmish. Yet no-one had seen the slightest sign of what lay beneath the surface in the peripheries of French cities and to a lesser extent those peripheries in certain other parts of Europe.

What happened last autumn in the French peripheries was quickly dismissed as an apolitical event of which the dynamics should be sought variously in resurgent community sectarianism, in ethnic-religious-cultural identification, in criminality, or in the senseless and desperate gestures of victims of the social exclusion, urban decay and socio-cultural privation typical of metropolitan peripheries. These versions deprived the events of all political significance. My work in the field during a series of stays in the French capital, one in the midst of the *émeutes*, would seem to reveal something different.[7]

objectively incomprehensible. Nor did R. Gagliardi escape the temptation to reduce the inhabitants of the banlieues to pure animality (zoe) in the article 'Tra banlieues in fiamme e delirio comunista', in *Liberazione*, November 13, 2005. Put bluntly, the revolt is reduced to a problem of shopping, or its impossibility. As the author seemed to say between the lines, 'bare life' is always governed by the satisfaction of 'primary needs'. Basically if a few truckloads of Nikes were sent to the banlieues the problems would solve themselves. The time when explorers used beads and mirrors to win over the 'natives' doesn't seem so far away. Basically all that has changed in the last 500 years is that the 'blacks' also want designer labels.

[44] The central role of women in the economic and social life of the banlieue is very well rendered, while remaining in the background, in the film *La Haine* by Mathieu Kassovitz (France, 1995).

[45] One of the most representative 'feminist or postfeminist' theorists on the present French cultural scene. Many of her works have been translated. She is also well-known in Italy, particularly for having edited *Archivio Foucault. 1961-1970 Follia, scrittura, discorso*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1996. In Italy she is associated with the political-cultural area of the journal *Posse*.

[46] A militant in the Black Panther Party and subsequently in the Black Liberation Army. In 1979, after spending six years in a maximum security US prison, she escaped with the help of a commando of four men and one woman, and obtained political asylum in Cuba, where she articulated her political and existential experience as a woman and a political militant in the USA. The result was an autobiography, Asatta Shakur, *Assata, an Autobiography*, Lawrence Hill Books, Chicago, 1998, which has taken its place in the cultural and political history of the black movement alongside that of Malcolm X.

[47] The Front National of J.-M. Le Pen enjoys a certain amount of support among white banlieuesards, whose socio-economic situation has plummeted in recent years. In contrast to Southern France, where Le Pen's social base resembles in many ways that of Italy's Northern League, in the banlieues support comes primarily from the 'downwardly mobile', many of whom would not long ago have voted for the French Communist Party. In particular, rhetoric against globalisation and against immigrants has a certain backing among elements of the white population afflicted by 'neoliberalism'. This phenomenon resembles in many ways the situation in Italian urban peripheries where, apart from the hegemony won across

multinational companies wishing to restore a government inclined to maintain the favourable conditions which they had enjoyed until Lumumba's government took power.

[41] The question of the 'veil' has attracted particular attention in the French political and cultural world, especially since religious symbols were prohibited inside public institutions, in the name of the secular nature of the state (see C. Nordman (ed.), *Le foulard islamique en questions*, Éditions Amsterdam, Paris 2004); repercussions centred less on the religious question than on the 'female question'. Much of legitimate society in France regarded the battle against the veil as a non-negotiable aspect of women's emancipation, counterposing in some way the civilised and emancipated Western world to the oppressive archaism of the Islamic world. In other words, the 'clash of civilizations' was replayed on a microscopic scale over the veil. Clearly, little is original in all this. Much of the rhetoric that emerged around the 'veil question' seemed to differ little from that underlying the 'female question' continuously used by the 'French boss' to subjugate the 'Algerian worker' during colonial domination. This aspect was recognised and analysed well by F. Fanon in *Sociologie d'une révolution*, op.cit.

[42] Significant in this respect is the name used by a movement of women in the banlieues: Ni putes, ni soumises (literally, 'neither whores, nor submissive').

[43] The limits to which the 'white gaze' will go seem to spare almost no-one. This can perhaps be shown best through two examples. The first comes from A. Rivera, in his article "Brucio tutto quindi esisto." La voce delle banlieues', in *Liberazione*, November 12 2005. [translator's note: the title of the article translates literally as: I burn everything therefore I am. The voice of the banlieues. The publication is the party newspaper of Rifondazione Comunista, a party currently claiming to represent 'the movement of movements' inside the Italian government.] In the article 'fire' is considered as the only possible form of communication for the 'voice' of the inhabitants of the 'working-class areas'. This 'lapsus' is common across a wide range of contemporary political and intellectual areas, where the existence of two qualitatively incommensurable 'forms of life', zoe and bios (see *Giorgio Agamben Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA., 1998) is generally agreed on. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the Italian researcher's article the 'flesh and blood' presence of the social actors in the émeutes was not remotely apparent: rather, the sole points of reference were Furio Colombo [Italian journalist and ruling party Senator] and Romano Prodi [Italian prime minister], although what they have to do with the reality of the peripheries of the global metropoli is

GRASSROOTS POLITICAL MILITANTS/ INHABITANTS OF THE PERIPHERIES

The phrase 'grassroots political militants' became well-known through the work of Italian sociologist Danilo Montaldi.[8] In order to avoid any misunderstanding, therefore, some clarification is needed. Montaldi essentially described the tension and sometimes the significant conflict between centre and periphery, but our case is far from his world. For Montaldi the terms 'centre' and 'periphery' indicate the conflictual relation *within* parties and political movements, between the leaders and insiders on one hand, and on the other the countless ground-level activists who act without hope of career or prestige. The periphery, for Montaldi, is the ideal space to re/discover the *dispersed party* which is present in all his works, and which exercises on the centre a constant critical function and sometimes more. However, despite their perpetual tension, relations between the centre and the periphery always exist within a single world in Montaldi. Through their almost always dramatic stories, his 'grassroots political militants' represent the true, 'raw' soul of the 'class', to the point that his discourse often seems to abandon the spaces proper to politics to enter areas closer to the world of morality.[9] In our case the scenario is completely different, and if a 'spiritual father' must be sought we should probably look to Fanon, whose analytical grid can be applied both to the contradiction between the grassroots political militants and the various political specialists, and to the radical break between the *citizens* of the urban centres and the *faceless masses* of the peripheries.[10] This scenario is far from Montaldi, whose historical-political framework is entirely internal to the inclusive model of the nation-state.[11]

Between the inhabitants of the centre (the little Paris for example) and the periphery (the big Paris), there exists a gap that has little or nothing to do with the traditional conflict and/or opposition that has served as our social backdrop, or at least did so for a long time. Es-

essentially this centre/periphery conflict did no more than lend to the vocabulary of 'urbanism' the opposition between working class areas on one side and bourgeois residential zones on the other. This opposition accompanies the entire history of the last century.[12] The two hostile worlds shared a fundamental political language; they battled each other through and by virtue of a reciprocal recognition. There is no trace of any of this in the 'French events'. Hence the return to a Fanonian discourse, which notwithstanding all its complications and caveats, seems the most appropriate way to try to describe not only the asymmetrical power relation[13] between centre and periphery, but also the appearance and characteristics of a political discourse which seems closer to the world of the Algerian war[14] than to conventional social models, even those in which *emnity* assumed its most tragic forms.[15] This text seeks to address the return of a discourse which seems close in many ways to the 'colonial world'.[16]

The text includes extracts from interviews[17] with social actors who have played some kind of 'leading' role in the movement of the banlieuesards, and who, beyond metaphor, embody the three colours '*black, blanc, beur*', the combination which participated in the French events. There is also an interview with a young 'white' intellectual, whose viewpoint seems best to embody the distance separating the inhabitants of the 'little Paris' from that of the 'working class areas', plus the 'viewpoint' of a *blanc* banlieue resident and street social worker, who sharply analyses the contradictions which emerged between the banlieuesards and many of the students involved in the anti-CPE movement in spring 2006.

The texts which follow are far from representative of the 'average point of view' of the inhabitants of the banlieues; to pretend otherwise would not only be scientifically dishonest but also ingenuous. In fact the social actors who play a large part in the text are *black political militants*. [18] However this choice turns out to be less eccentric than it might appear at first. If the 'narrating voices' are 'militant voices' this does not mean their position and their point of view are external or extrane-

these tendencies are not restricted to the special corps, they have a solid presence in other much larger sections of the security forces. At Sens, for example, where the CRS (Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité) are based, the anthem adopted for recruits was that of the SS Charlemagne Division, the French volunteers who fought alongside the Nazi army. To all this should be added the hegemony within the security forces of the extreme-right PPIP union, which the magistracy was obliged to order be dissolved for its open incitement to racial hatred.

[32] *Ratissage*, a raid or search. The term was applied to specific actions carried out by the French army against the population in Algeria during the Algerian war of independence.

[33] See Ignacio Ramonet, 'La pensée unique', in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January 1995.

[34] For a critical discussion of these themes see for example G. Ritzer, *Il mondo alla McDonald, Il Mulino*, Bologna, 1997 and id. *La religione dei consumi. Cattedrali, pellegrinaggi e riti dell'iperconsumismo*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2000.

[35] On the particular continuing weight of the 'colonial question' in the present, see P.Blanchard, N. Bancel, S. Lemaire (eds.), *Fracture coloniale*, La Découverte, Paris, 2005.

[36] See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, Routledge, London, 2001.

[37] See Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, Telos Press, New York, 2003.

[38] In 1992 Lebanese militias logistically supported by the Israeli army entered two Palestinian refugee camps, massacring and torturing an unknown number of people, without distinction between combatants and civilians, women and men, the elderly and children. For a reconstruction of these events see X. Baron, *I Palestinesi, Genesi di una nazione*, Baldini & Castoldi, Milan, 2002.

[39] An insurrectionary political movement which, from 1952 onwards, organised systematic resistance to British colonialism in many parts of Kenya.

[40] Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961), president of the Republic of Congo, who, after successfully leading the war of liberation against colonialism had to deal with a long and bloody struggle against the secessionists of Katanga. Led by Moïse Ciombe, whose followers included large numbers of white mercenaries, the secessionists acted on behalf of

1960.

[26] For a synthetic but effective account of this debate, see H. Legrange and M. Oberti, *Integrazione, segregazione e giustizia sociale. La Francia a confronto con Gran Bretagna e Italia, in La rivolta delle periferie. Precarietà urbana e protesta giovanile: il caso francese*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano, 2006.

[27] Much of the material here was gathered thanks to the mediation of militants of *Mouvement de l'immigration et des banlieues*, which amounted to more than the traditional role played by 'gatekeepers' (on this role in 'field research' see in particular M. Hammerlay and P. Atkinson, *Ethnography. Principles in Practice*, Routledge, London & New York, 1995). Objectively speaking, without their help none of this testimony would have had a realistic chance of appearing.

[28] The term, *caïd*, which is almost always used in a derogatory sense, indicates a little neighbourhood boss who imposes power on inhabitants through violence and intimidation.

[29] On October 15, 1983, the *Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme* began in Marseille. After being broadly disdained by everyone, it arrived in Paris on December 3 the same year. 100,000 people were waiting for it. A success of no little importance given the completely self-organised and self-run nature of the March. It was at that point that the political powers decided it was no longer possible to ignore the 'racial question' in France, and decided to receive at the *Élysée* a large group of the organisers and to put together a project like *SOS Racisme*. However, not all the participants in the March agreed with this institutional decision, and in an act of not insignificant symbolic value, while the majority went to the *Élysée*, they headed for a factory occupied by 'dark skinned' workers. After the continued failures of *SOS Racisme*, this 'minoritarian' action seems to have been widely revalued not only among 'militant groups' but among large parts of the population of the banlieue.

[30] For a more in-depth look at the 'military question' in the course of the events of the French autumn, allow me to cite E. Quadrelli, 'Burn baby burn. Guerra e politica dei banlieuesards', in *Wobbly* no.10, Genova, 2006.

[31] This is a 'special corps', usually operating in plain clothes, specialising in maintaining order in the banlieue, in which xenophobic and racist behaviour are the norm. However

ous to feeling which is widespread in *black neighbourhoods*. Rather they amount to a telling synthesis, and can justly be regarded as the range of views most commonly present within the social worlds considered. It is easy to see that their version of the *émeutes* is not only far removed from that accepted in 'legitimate society', which would be of limited interest in itself: it also provides an explanation which seems difficult not to classify as '*political*'. [19] Ultimately, if the 'banlieue case' were nothing more than the latest periodical and endemic explosion of the 'ghetto', it would not demand sustained attention. The history of cities and metropolitan centres is full of riots of various intensity and varying degrees of radicalism: certainly not events to be underestimated, but once the noise of the barricades is extinguished, interest in them can tranquilly be confined to sectors of the human and social sciences such as the sociology of deviance, urban sociology, criminology and cultural anthropology. [20] The 'banlieue case', by contrast, seems to represent something different. If, as appears obvious even from superficial attention to the French presidential contest, the election will to a large extent be fought around the banlieue, something significantly different from the usual metropolitan riot of the 'French autumn' must have been set in motion, to the point that the censorship initially applied to it eventually had to be withdrawn. [21]

For various ultimately converging reasons, much of the truth of the origin of the French conflagrations was conveniently hidden at the moment they appeared. It was hidden by the government, which in reality, thanks to the information obtained through the security forces, soon had a substantially realistic picture of the context in which the events were determined, but for obvious reasons preferred not to reveal it. [22] The media were largely unaware of the truth at the time, reduced to reliance on government bulletins. [23] Many intellectuals ignored the truth or interpreted it badly, simply because it was not known to them. [24] In some way they *all* eventually backed up power's version of *truth*.

The *émeutes* have been read as a phenomenon substantially lacking

in political and social content, in terms starting from the triad *fundamentalism / community sectarianism / identity* and soon arriving at the pairing *criminality / desperation*. This was supposed to be most apparent in the very way the revolt manifested itself: indistinct and indiscriminate, a destructive luddite force that sometimes recalled the disturbing, incoherent and irrational action of the *open crowd*.^[25] Indiscriminate fires served as evidence of this. In the end, when some sort of reasoning about the events was attempted, debate in legitimate society centered on whether or not there existed a crisis of the 'French model' of inclusion, and a comparison with the 'anglo-saxon model'.^[26] This debate seemed to leave the inhabitants of the 'working class areas' wholly indifferent: their testimony emphasized quite different things, confirming more than ever Gramsci's statement that *the real country does not correspond to the legal country*.

Bearing in mind all the limitations of empirical research, the data gathered on the ground tells quite a different story. It seems worthwhile to start listening to the words of those who, in various roles, were able to observe the events close-up.

other hand, everything seemed to be calmly dealt with through the 'negotiation of disorder' (see P. Marsh, E. Rosser and R. Harré, *The rules of disorder*, Routledge, London, 1994) which always govern the microconflictual elements of urban life. Malcolm X first then the BPP posed unequivocally the question of power, positioning their struggle within the international opposition to imperialism; not by chance, Vietnam was among their constant points of reference, and, as a possible terrain of mediation, they proposed an overall redefinition of relations of force and power within the United States. In negotiations in 1992, on the other hand, the authorities were able to count on the willingness of the Crips and Bloods gangs to become legitimate actors in business in some way (see Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: excavating the future in Los Angeles*, Verso, London, 1990).

[21] Both the candidates most widely seen as serious contenders for the French presidency in 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy for the right and Ségolène Royal for the left, regard the 'banlieue question' as the central node of their government projects, as can be seen from even a brief look at the media coverage of their pre-election programmes.

[22] In particular, the 'classified report' issued on 20 November, 2005 by the Direction Central des Renseignements Généraux, in which the social character of the revolt and the absence of religious, cultural or ethnic motivations within it was shown unambiguously.

[23] For a synthetic and unprejudiced reconstruction of the behaviour of the media during the revolt, see A. Figorilli, *Banlieues i giorni di Parigi*, Edizioni Interculturali, Rome, 2006.

[24] Probably the text which best shows the distance currently separating the 'intellectuals' and the 'people' is Y.M. Boutang, 'The Old New Clothes of the French Republic: In Defense of the Supposedly "insignificant" Rioters' <http://info.interactivist.net/article.pl?sid=05/11/29/038222>

A good overview of the difficulty encountered by the left intelligentsia in trying to make sense of these events emerges from the articles appearing in the journal *La Question Sociale* no.2 & 3, Paris, 2006, in which, with various intentions and accents, the simplistic equation 'banlieuesards=lumpenproletariat' seems to be the only conceptual framework through which the 'banlieue case' can be approached. In Italy part of this debate can be found in *Wobbly* no.9, Genova, 2006.

[25] In the sense expressed by Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, Continuum, New York,

York, Bedminster Press, 1968.

[14] The strength of the presence of the Algerian war on an imaginary level in the 'French autumn' is well articulated by Guido Caldiron, *Banlieue. Vita e rivolta nelle periferie della metropoli*, Manifestolibri, Rome, 2005.

[15] The reference is to the conceptual distance separating the 'civil war' (see R. Schnur, *Revolution e guerra civile*, Giuffrè, Milan, 1986), from the 'colonial war' (see Fanon, op. Cit.).

[16] For a good overall account of colonialism, see W. Reinhard, *Storia del colonialismo*, Einaudi, Turin, 2002.

[17] From a methodological point of view the 'research techniques' used in this work come from the world of social ethnography. For a discussion of this approach or 'working style', see in particular A. Dal Lago, R. De Biasi, *Un certo guardo. Introduzione all'etnografia sociale*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2002.

[18] 'Black' is not used with reference to 'objective' skin colour; it refers to those who become 'black' by virtue of the social and political category they are placed in. Fundamental on this question is A. Portelli, *La linea del colore. Saggi sulla cultura afroamericana*, Manifestolibri, Rome, 1994.

[19] In the sense use by Carl Schmitt, *Le categorie del politico*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1972.

[20] The intensity, the 'violence', the rage etc with which an event manifests are not in themselves useful indicators of the presence or otherwise of a 'political' framework. Paradigmatic in this respect may be two episodes, apparently not dissimilar, but with quite different political repercussions. The Watts revolt which broke out on August 11 1965 in the ghetto area of Los Angeles (see Robert E. Conot, *Rivers of blood, years of darkness*, Morrow, New York, 1968.) and that of South Central Los Angeles in 1992 (see for example B. Cartosio, *Senza illusioni. I neri negli Stati Uniti dagli anni Settanta alla rivolta di Los Angeles*, ShaKe edizioni, Milan, 1995. In the first case the insurgency occurred in the context of a process which, while not linear, posed a general problem to white American society. The arguments of Malcolm X and the precepts of the Black Panther Party were objectively present in the first of these revolts, and it was not for nothing that response of America's legitimate society was of a political-military nature. In the second case, on the

THE DISCURSIVE ORDER

The journey in the banlieue begins with M.B., a no longer young black woman, politically active in the banlieues for some time.[27]

The first things that need to be mentioned are the objectives central to the revolt. There was not a trace of these in the various media. What was shown, I would emphasise, was the irrational aspect of the revolt. But in fact it wasn't that way. There has been much talk of cars burned as if this had been the only target, but in reality the main targets were other things, the police and the police stations obviously, and a little bit was said about this, in part because when they started talking about criminal command [of the riots], which didn't exist, talk of an attack on police stations could have supported that thesis. But it was not only the police who came under attack. Temporary work agencies and 'state community centres' were attacked and destroyed no less than the police stations. There was no trace of this in the press or on television, or, when it was mentioned, it was shown simply as a secondary effect. When there's an explosion, everything around gets blown up too, that's what I mean by a secondary effect. But the temp agencies and the community centres were not burned by chance, they were deliberately attacked no more and no less than the police stations.

Everybody knows what temp agencies are. They regulate access to the labour market on a temporary basis and on conditions that favour companies. They are also organisations of blackmail and social control by police and unions, because if you're someone who organises the struggle and the conflict in the workplace or in any case someone who steps out of line, you're thrown out, and you can be sure it will be very hard for you to get another contract. You end up among the undesirables and you don't work again. The agencies are the main weapons used by capitalism to

make workers harmless. Apart from the agencies there were also quite a few businesses, ones that use illegal or semi-forced labour exclusively, that went up in flames. There are quite a few of these which mostly exploit female labour, through piece-work done on domestic premises. Or, in other not infrequent cases, adapting for work warehouses and basements where women work almost under concentration camp conditions, with no safety, no ventilation, with shifts of never less than 10 hours, under the control of physically violent and arrogant bosses.

Some groups of women, and I can guarantee this because I organised some of them, settled our accounts with our bosses and guardians while the battle was going on in the streets. When it was impossible to attack the warehouses, we went for their cars and homes. Some caïds met with accidents.[28] This should give at least a bit of a different picture of the revolt and of the role women played in it, which was in no way subordinate or even invisible. But this is not what seems to me to need emphasising most. It seems more important to speak of the silence which there has been on this, starting from the left parties and movements.

At the centre of the revolt, or among its most important targets, was the critique of the capitalist organisation of labour, and this passed completely unobserved, which is very telling [...] It shows, for example, that work is a completely different thing for one part of society than it is for the other. It's a question of two worlds that speak different languages, where for one there are opportunities and possibilities while for the other there is a rigid subordination, domination and blackmail. [...] But it's not something new that happened yesterday. To understand this it's enough to see what has happened [in the past] during marches and demonstrations. The left-wing movements – and this is quite striking when you think that it's even more true in the youth movements – don't want to be contaminated by the young banlieuesards, they do everything to keep them out, and in some cases have worked together with the police

valuta la moralità delle persone basandosi sul aspetto, in P.P. Giglioli, A Dal Lago (eds.), *Etnometodologia*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1983.

[4] On these events see in particular J. L. Einaudi, *La bataille de Paris*, 17 Octobre 1961, Seuil, Paris, 1991.

[5] On the activities of Maurice Papon in the course of the Nazi occupation in France, see the site: www.trial-ch.org/trialwatch/profiles/fr/facts/piss.html-35K

[6] On April 3, 1955, under the government of Edgar Faure, a series of 'exceptional' laws were passed providing, among other things, for control of entry into and exit from the areas with the greatest density of Arab population, and 'administrative' detention without trial or charge. To these laws were added the establishment of 'administrative internment camps', to which anyone, whether Algerian or not, who showed the least sympathy for the Algerian National Liberation Front could be deported based on suspicion. Four camps were opened between 1955 and 1957. In the Larzac camp alone 10,000 Algerians were held in 'administrative custody'.

[7] A first account of this material is available in E. Quadrelli, *Black, blanc, beuer. Lotta e resistenza nelle periferie globali*, in 'Infoxa' n, 020, Rome, 2006.

[8] D. Montaldi, *Militanti politici di base*, Einaudi, Turin, 1971.

[9] This essentially 'moral' tendency appears particularly strong in his best-known work, D. Montaldi, *Autobiografia della leggera*, Bompiani, Milan, 1998.

[10] The reference is in particular to the works written in the course of the anticolonial struggle: Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, New York, 2004; *Sociologie d'un révolution*, Paris, Maspero, 1960.

[11] See in particular Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, Allen Lane, London, 2003.

[12] The classic work on this question is L. Cavalli, *La città divisa. Sociologia del consenso e del conflitto in ambiente urbano*, Giuffrè, Milan, 1978.

[13] On 'power' as an asymmetrical relation, see Max Weber, *Economy and society*, New

FOOTNOTES

*Translator's note: *Le cose e le parole*, i.e. the Italian title of Foucault's *Les mots et les choses*, published in English as *The Order of Things*

[1] This is the largely derogatory term used to indicate a social condition very close to that of the Lumpenproletariat immortalized by K. Marx in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1984, whose behaviour Walter Benjamin also discussed in 'Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire' (in *Selected Writings*, volume 4, 1938-1940, Harvard, Cambridge MA., 2003.) Unlike the classical 'subproletariat', which was designated as a residue of a pre-modern world, the racaille is presented as the excess product of contemporary existence. As well as by a certain predisposition towards illegal activities, the two categories appear united by extraneousness to the world of production. However the objective social parasitism of the racaille seems not to be in question. Even the 'political' areas most sympathetic to the banlieusards do not seem interested in questioning such rhetoric: rather, they reinforce it and emphasize it by inflecting it positively instead of negatively. (See F. Argenti, *Le notti della collera. Sulle recenti somosse di Francia*, Tempo do ora, Clichy-Sous-Bois, 2006.) The text that follows, by contrast, takes a clearly opposed position, seeking to show how the world of the banlieue is anything but extraneous to contemporary models of production: on the contrary, it prefigures and anticipates the condition for a far-from-insignificant part of population.

[2] Although in novel form, an excellent description of the political and cultural nexus in which the ratissage takes shape is given in J.G. Ballard, *Super Cannes*, St Martins, New York, 2001. Making use of literary texts in sociological research is less bizarre than it might seem at first. In any case, outside scientism, the degree to which the link between 'sociological discipline' and literature is tenuous is evident from the dense interweaving of Max Weber's 'scientific work' on the origins of capitalism with Thomas Mann's literary production of the same time (as clearly recognized by W. Lepenies, *Le tre culture*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1987). For a discussion of these themes see A Dal Lago, *Oltre il metodo*. Interpretazione e scienze sociali, Unicopli, Milan, 1989.

[3] In practice the decree ended up applying to anyone who looked like an Arab. Very little about his procedural model is exceptional: it is part of the routine behaviour of security forces to base their line of action on appearance. See H. Sacks, *Come la polizia*

to keep them from acting in the centre of Paris. Without seeking overly complicated explanations, I believe the origin of the problem should be sought in the social background of the two groups. The youth of the left movements are mostly students, whereas the others are workers, thieves, robbers, and, as there's no reason to hide it, also small-scale drug dealers. This, you'll say, is nothing new, and that's true. Those who, like me, have a long history of political militancy know very well that things have always been this way, but this is not the point.

[...] The real issue today is that the world has changed radically in its material and structural basis, with important repercussions. It's as if there existed two worlds, inhabited by different species. And these two worlds, as far as I can see, are no longer simply separated by different positions in the social hierarchy within a single social model; now they belong to two different realities, coloured black and white. Perhaps it's for this reason that the critique of the capitalist organisation of work is extraneous to much of the left, because, in the end, it's a white organisation, therefore it's also theirs. [...] Explaining the attacks on the 'state community centres' seems very important to me because it clarifies – yet again, it might be said – our point of view on these events. A story that wasn't born yesterday but goes back in time. This is also a way of responding to all those, regardless of ideology and politics, who live in Paris and think, when everything's fine, that here in the peripheries the one thing we want is to be integrated by them. We are not included in the Republic and we don't even want to be, this is not our problem. A lack of interest, or to be clearer, a refusal which, among other things, was not born last autumn but has origins long ago, going back to the Mitterand era and the birth of SOS Racisme.[29] [...] Yes, because precisely then many things were understood and marked out which have continued over time, leading to an irreconcilable break. On one hand there's the path that leads to the institutions, on the other, the way to the streets. These two paths cannot coexist.

What did those associated with SOS Racisme want to do? To pile up mountains of francs, because Mitterand wasn't worried about the expense. For many, especially for the blacks who joined the project, it was a good opportunity for individual emancipation. [...] They were included, even if not at a very high level, in some organisation, project or similar bullshit, and they went around like the flower of the Republic. The noble savage offered a chance by white civilisation, all that, because those were the stakes, giving up political and organisational autonomy, to put it simply giving up being class-for-itself. On the other side there were the others, us.

For us the problem is not to be integrated into the Republic, becoming the good servants of the white boss. We are the Arabs, the blacks and, as has been seen recently, the bad whites – because a lot of whites in the banlieues have been active in no small way in the riots – dangerous because we want to cut the throat of the white boss and his domination, just like we did when we were under colonial domination, from which in some ways we have never emerged. The rupture between us and our leaders, who rushed frantically to sell themselves out to the whites, is something that should be properly noted. [...] We don't want them to tell us what we should be, we want to be us, not what they would like. On this point you can see clearly that there can be no mediation. [...] From our point of view, then, the 'state community centres' are no more than another face of domination, not a vehicle for emancipation. As anyone with the least experience will immediately see, they are the other face of the police, with whom, although in Paris everyone avoids saying so, they co-operate and collaborate. Attacking the police stations and sparing the 'centres' would have been a pure contradiction. [M.B.]

The temp agencies and 'state community centres' were strategic targets on which the practical critique of the banlieue inhabitants was concentrated. As the 'militant' quoted above explained, this was no improvisation, it was the product of a discourse with a significant hold

tion to the world of the *entrepreneurial individuals*.^[57] All this is far from appearing as an aporia: on the contrary, it seems to be one of the objective and carefully managed effects of *global capitalism*, and it is this that the *tool box* of social research and critical theory is obliged to address.^[58]

Translated from Italian by Matthew Hyland

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extend the rights and privileges of the well-off middle class. For them the university and high-school students are even worse than the flics, because they don't even have to get their hands dirty to maintain their privileges. It's natural that, all things considered, there's more sympathy for those who do the dirty work. At least there's no hypocrisy in what they do. [...] Yes, although this is not something new, it goes back a long way now, I think it's difficult to speak of a student movement in the classical sense. '68 has been dead and buried for a long time and there's no longer any common connection within the student world.

There's no culture, political philosophy or ideology that brings students together: in practice they do no more than reproduce the social differentiations they are immersed in. If at a certain time being a student meant placing individuals within a suspended social zone where the fact of being students was a unifying factor, today and for a long time this is no longer true. Students reason very pragmatically on the basis of their social condition and the life-expectations deriving from it. Therefore nothing can be understood about what happened and is happening without underlining that there is no calling into question of inequalities, only the struggle to maintain them. [...] The banlieuesards pose a problem exactly opposed to that of the middle class youth, that of the condition of those who in our society are not individuals, are not a class, have no past and no future and who represent the great repressed of contemporary societies. (M.T.)

What the revolt of the banlieues revealed is no more than the truth of a world in which is emerging a rigid opposition between those destined to embody the *entrepreneurial individual* on one hand and on the other those who in many ways seem to recall the *faceless masses* of the colonial world.[56] As Bauman has shown clearly, the contemporary age is completely dominated by the *individual* dimension, from which, however, significant elements of the population must remain excluded, so that they fall into a condition of complete extraneousness/opposi-

and legitimacy in the black areas, and in a certain way it entailed a model of 'urban guerilla' activity capable of attacking these targets. It is important here to observe the type of 'military model' used in the course of the revolt and the way the relation to the security forces was handled.[30] All this leads to one point: how are the police perceived by the people of the banlieues? This aspect allows something significant to be said about the banlieue and its relation to legitimate and respectable society. We discuss this in the following interview with J.B., a 29 year-old *beur*, a precarious worker and an active participant, neither more nor less than others, in the émeutes.

The police are the enemy, full stop. And this is not just because, obviously, you find them against you when you act but they're against you always. It's not a political question but one of everyday life. The deaths of Bouna and Zyed, which, as you know, were not an exception but the latest in a long series of murders, normal one might say, committed by the police in the banlieues, didn't happen as the next consequence of some rebellion. They were the consequence of what, for us, is normal routine. The police are in the habit of stopping you with no reason, searching you, insulting you, beating you, simply because you are you and they are them. For us it's normal to find your doorway covered in cops like in an American TV show; they go inside, hold you face down on the ground and throw everything around. You are an enemy for the simple fact of existing. You don't have to do anything to be guilty, you are the guilt. So for us the problem of the police is not to do with some particular events, it's always a problem. If it can even be a problem when you're at home, imagine what it means to go out in the street. Every time you go out and walk around, a problem can start.

[...] Perhaps some people need to be reminded or don't even know that the BAC, the Brigades Anticriminalité, operate in the banlieue. [31] These special units were created just for us. They act like an expeditionary force in enemy territory. The Brigades are the exact nexus between army and police, and they represent on a local

level the instruments used by the West in its foreign policy. In relation to the banlieues they apply, in full continuity, the same logic now amply tested on the external periphery. Within the metropolis, we are the equivalent of rogue states. In any case that's what Sarkozy said quite frankly. It's a wide-ranging discourse that can't be resolved right here. But it has to be kept in mind, otherwise it becomes difficult to answer your questions.

[...] To understand the dimensions of the conflict within our areas you have to make an imaginative effort and enter into the colonial reality. This is necessary in order to understand the guerrilla model used, which is very different from the one commonly known and practised by the various left movements, especially in the past. These movements fight by putting into the field an opposing army which clashes frontally with the police. Of course, within this schema there were variants, adjustments, but the essence was the same. In particular there was the idea of the military corps, the combat force which carried out the strictly military tasks, and then the rest of the militants who were something like the equivalent of the civilian population. The division between combatants and non-combatants was quite clear. Within the various organisations the combat force formed a structure autonomous from the political section. A miniature version of the traditional division between the military and the political. There were the politicians, the military and then all the others who represented the population.

[...] In the banlieues the guerrilla warfare took completely different forms. Partisan action, rather than the army – regular or otherwise – was the operational model. Small groups moved, struck, dispersed and regrouped to reappear soon afterwards somewhere else. The effective number of guerrillas is limited, although not to be underestimated, and at first that might seem to suggest isolation from the population. But in fact if the number of guerrillas is limited it's for exactly the opposite reason. In the guerrilla war that developed in the banlieues, the entire population, apart from spies

from the meetings. Also, when the vocational students and some of the banlieue youth began to take part, their understanding of the struggle against the CPE was very different from that of the other high school and university students. Different in form, different in content. The way the vocational students interpreted the conflict with the security forces was very significant. From the start the confrontation was conceived on a symbolic plane, ritual and virtual. The university and high school students never posed the problem of the military confrontation with the police, which on the other hand was central to a certain degree for the vocational students and their elder siblings, for the simple reason that their life in the banlieue is perennially marked by this type of conflict which – and this is the point – has nothing symbolic about it. This is not a marginal aspect, it defines very realistically two conditions of life which go in completely opposing directions.

[...] For the vocational students and their older siblings even the objectives of the struggle meant little, because for them what threatens the middle class students today is not just an established reality, conditions have been even more severe for some time. Paradoxically, for this part of the population, the non-guarantees of the CPE would actually be a desirable social gain. That says it all. So when these people arrived they brought with them a point of view difficult to assimilate to that of the university students.

[...] As everyone knows, not only was there not much sympathy between the two groups, there were open clashes. The banlieuesards attacked the university students, beat them up and robbed them. In the end, there was not much difference for them between the children of the middle class and the police, in fact if there's a kind of respect for the flic, because the continuous physical confrontation generates a reciprocal recognition, the hatred for the middle class kids is even greater. The idea the banlieuesards have, which is basically not much mistaken, is that the police are just those who materially carry out a practice intended to maintain and

economy).[53] In the best of cases, these people can aspire to a 'dignified' existence at the service of some private or public, single or collective 'white' boss, and, if they are earnest and faithful servants they will probably not run into too many misadventures, and, as in Victorian London, will always be able to count on the benevolence of the master who will not refuse them his clothes, cast off but still in good condition.

Lives and opportunities are different for those on the vertical axis, the world of the 'whites'. This is not a homogenous grouping: within it various positions of income, prestige and power are objects of an obsessive social stratification, and the struggle for individual success is ferocious, unscrupulous and incessant. Most important here, however, is what they have in common: the opportunities within reach are, if not infinite, numerous and all part of a 'lifestyle' that is inclusive and respectable. Certainly, flexibility, precarity, and 'lack of certainties' are in some way the background of the lives of the 'whites', but whereas for the 'blacks' the *society of uncertainty*[54] is only a nightmare, for the whites it seems more like an *adventure* where the balance between risks and benefits seems all on the side of the latter. For the 'whites', in the worst of cases, everything is resolved in mortal leaps which are virtual and symbolic, and most often with strong safety nets underneath. For the 'blacks' the leaps are equally mortal but drastically real, material and without any safety net. All this became extremely obvious watching what happened in spring 2006 in the struggle against the CPE.[55] A good description of this is given by M.T., a *blanc* street social worker whose work has been one factor in her considerable knowledge of what is going on inside the banlieue.

There was unity only at a few moments, and this was perhaps due to the government's behaviour towards the students. To tell the truth this unity was very precarious: sometimes it held, at other times it didn't. On the other hand, the rich or well-off student marked out their distance from the others from the start. At the very beginning, for example, students from vocational schools were excluded

and pimps, had a combatant role. [...] In any case, this is a new phenomenon only up to a certain point because if you look closely it does no more than bring the model of the colonial wars into the present. In these wars the population never played the role of civilians, it was never a hypothetical neutral party; it was always in the front line. [...] There is no room for neutrality round here. Anyway the police make this logic standard practice, with no need for an emergency situation. They never acted differently. They never arrested the people materially responsible for the actions, they just took whoever they could get their hands on. They followed the logic of the *ratissage*, but that was nothing new for us.[32] This is something we've grown used to, and it didn't make any particular impression on anyone.

In reality, rather than arresting the guilty they got thousands of people deported: they did what they do every day, but on a larger scale. [...] Answering this question gives me another opportunity to refute some myths about the banlieues that have spread like weeds. The most obvious and common is the one that presents the banlieues as places without a social life. We're [presented as] pure nullity: when we do express ourselves in some way the most we can do is create chaos. But in a reality like that the existence of a network of spies and informers becomes incomprehensible. How and why spy on nullity? Why organise a network of informers inside places that don't exist? In reality things are very different, and in the banlieues the network of spies and informers is something the police take great care of. This in itself should already make the theorists of nullity – or perhaps even worse, of the presocial dimension we live in – think again.

Obviously, if they spy on us it's for a reason. If nothing else, this acknowledges one thing: that we exist. And this first acknowledgement inevitably leads to another. If the spies are identified it means that within our territories there must exist a more or less organised social model in which thousands of threads can be followed in an

investigation leading to the identification and the unmasking of the network sold to the enemy.

[...] When I talk about spies I don't mean the small-time informers known to everybody, who sometimes give the police something in order to protect their own little operations. What they're up to is well-known already and anyway they're not in a position to do much harm. They can grass someone up, like they've been grassed up themselves other times, but only for matters of petty crime which in the end are marginal aspects of our lives. No, I'm not talking about them. I'm referring to those who act as informers in the most complete anonymity and without attracting the least suspicion. These people don't reveal themselves, they have to be driven out into the open. Exposing them means setting up an organised network, there are no alternatives. [...] And it's clear that in the course of the events these people were targeted, and it doesn't strike me as an exaggeration to say that the majority of the internal victims attacked by the demonstrators were part of the network of spies working for the police. [...] You can see then, that what you have to take seriously is that we always live like we're at war. (J.B.)

It is in the context of this scenario that, particularly for groups coming from a background of colonialism and decolonization, the return to these histories takes a central role in their reflections on the present. Almost paradoxically, at the moment when the rhetoric of global capitalism and the *pensée unique*[33] seem to have homogenized and made uniform the 'cultural cages' through which individuals perceive their existence in the world[34], among the wretched of the metropoli there appears a discursive order which, starting by revisiting their own historical/political experiences, not only criticizes the present but also attacks key passages in world history and Western culture.[35] This critique is directed towards all the viewpoints from which the same (i.e. 'we') has looked at, classified and ordered the other (them).[36] This is explained with considerable insight by O.S., a 'black thug' who is, however, a cultivated Saint-Denis University graduate in social scienc-

EPILOGUE: 'PEOPLE' AND 'INDIVIDUAL'

The points of view expressed by the various social actors heard here gives a version of the French 'working class areas' which is objectively different from the one usually heard. What emerges is an entire social world, formed of millions of invisible individuals of whom the legitimate world of the 'whites' knows little or nothing, even though it is talked about constantly. Without too much difficulty, we have found something quite different from the various [clichés of] *fundamentalism*, *community sectarianism*, *ethnic identification*, *criminal hegemony* or *metropolitan nullity*. The *banlieuesards* did not fight for someone or something but against clearly defined organisations, structures and institutions: the precarious labour agencies, the state community centres and the police. If there was any interaction with the criminal underworld, it was only to shake it off.[52] The *organisation of work*, *model of social government* and *army* were the targets of the revolt. Almost no echo of any of this was heard outside, and even less was picked up on in the worlds of the 'white left'.

The discourse seems to become interesting only once the rhetoric of politicians, media and various kinds of intellectuals has been cleared away. The last interview addresses precisely the kind of 'material' aspects of the life of the *banlieuesards* which have largely been ignored. Essentially, the position occupied by individuals in the contemporary social situation can be exemplified by imagining them between two lines, one horizontal and the other vertical. On the horizontal axis are placed those sections of the population whose future oscillates between low status casual, precarious and flexible jobs or continued incursions into the informal and/or illegal economies. These moves are determined by simple contingencies, whether 'structural' (increased or decreased demand for low-status labour) or 'individual' (opportunities occasionally offered by one of the many sectors of the informal

tive work is most concentrated? What is the banlieue if not the place where exploitation is most intensive? Millions of people live in the banlieue and the fable is that the banlieues are unproductive, parasitic, completely reliant, unable to stand on their own feet. This means that in France there are millions of people who do not produce wealth and profit: where, then, are those who produce these things? What neighborhoods do they live in? Where are they? It's true, statistics indicate that unemployment is concentrated in the banlieue, but this is a partial truth. In reality the banlieue is the place of the greatest concentration of unregulated work, so that the real paradox is that no-one works as hard as those who are officially unemployed. This is particularly true if we look at the female population, by whom the whole family economy is often supported. But this is the point. The banlieue is the place where the kind of work which in present society no longer has any legitimacy or social recognition is concentrated. The myth, on terms of which not so long ago the people of the banlieue was widely seen, led back to the recognition of working class and proletarian labour in society. Today there is not recognition of this; rather, it is the object of prejudice and stigmatisation. If you come to Paris and say you're a removal worker, a bricklayer, a welder, a barperson, a waiter, a textile worker or whatever, you're immediately catalogued as failed, cursed, marginal and so on. It's as if a whole field of activity, although it continues to be the destiny of millions of people, had lost all dignity. Isolation in the banlieue is in reality the exact image of the conditions into which non-respectable labour has fallen. (G.Z.)

es. After dissecting certain aporias usually ignored by humanism[37] his interview concentrates on the memories and the practices of decolonisation, showing how even within the same hypothetical field – the historical/political world of the left – ‘whites’ and ‘blacks’ end up producing two narrative orders which are different or even opposed. At the core of the question, for the ‘whites’, history, including that of struggles and revolutions, is a ‘history of the whites’, because it does no more than trace, by virtue of its objective superiority, the path which the other must necessarily follow. A difference of ‘power’ at the limit of ‘naturalism’, which today, with all due qualification, we find applied precisely to the wretched of the metropoli.

The existence of a history and a memory of blacks and whites can be seen clearly looking at the historical consciousness of left militants. It's quite easy to find experts on the Russian revolution, the failed revolution in Germany, the Spanish civil war, but as far as Vietnam or Algeria are concerned, you'll find almost nothing, as these struggles are always considered interesting only for the repercussions they might have had on Western countries, not in themselves. This is an old vice in the West that goes back to humanism. While Man appears inside the West, Non-man takes shape outside its borders. Examined closely, the whole history of colonialism first then imperialism afterwards is founded on this gap between the human and the inhuman worlds, at least according to Western thought and above all practice. [...] Over the course of the centuries this logic may have softened a bit, but it has never really been abandoned. In some way we are always the non-human that appears before you. To understand this it's enough to look at how whites generally react to massacres, torture and violations of various kinds. [...] This was even seen recently with the torture in Iraq and the use of chemical weapons in Fallujah, to cite episodes well-known to everyone. What really shocked Western consciences? The fate of the tortured or of those burned alive? Absolutely not. What caused concern and was criticised was something else: the negative repercussions these events as forms of barbarism could

have on Western civilisation. The problem, then, is not what happens to others, who must be others for a reason, but the losses and costs that Western society ends up paying when practising methods which, it's easy to see reading between the lines, don't belong to it officially, and bring it to resemble non-Western barbarians.

[...] If whites kill blacks the real problem is not the skin of the black but the repercussions, on various levels, of the killings for the whites. You find this mental colonialism, with various intonations, in all white environments, regardless of ideological and political allegiance. [...] If you ask a politically committed white person about Sabra and Chatila[38] it's very unlikely that he or she will be able to respond, and examples of this could go on endlessly. If you move on to the history of African peoples the lack of response turns into panic. It's more likely that someone remembers the day a few rocks were thrown at the police and a few windows smashed than the Mau Mau insurrection[39], more likely that they know the name of a local leader than a figure like Patrice Lumumba.[40] But to return to our point, this does not happen out of ignorance, but because all of that happened outside the first world, the world of the whites, and so has always been regarded as being of secondary importance. Revolutionary struggles haven't fared any better. Even in revolution there's a hierarchy to respect, and white comes before black and everything depended on one fact: first world productive forces were more advanced than the others, they'd progressed further therefore their struggles were of a higher quality. No-one has dreamed of questioning this certainty even if a revolution has never been seen in the white world.

[...] Today the scene has changed, given that the cycle of commodity production has leaped over every kind of barrier and it's the third world that produces for the first, but this certainty, this conviction has remained, even if it has taken on different forms. The right and the white left use it, perhaps with different intonations,

this is useful in order to show you that what is happening today is the exact opposite of what I experienced concretely first-hand.

[...] If at a certain point some people, like me, decided to break from this kind of experiment, returning to act within the banlieue, others stayed on to work in certain environments. On however small a scale, these people made a bit of a career. But they did so by adopting behaviour and attitudes exactly opposed to those that preceded them. To put it simply, if previously there existed a positive myth of the banlieuesard as incarnation of the people, today this myth has been inverted into pure negativity: the banlieuesard is no longer the personification of the people, today the myth is of the thug, the accursed, the invisible, the premodern, the presocial, the marginalised, the preglobal or I don't know what else. In any case it is something that cannot be represented, but only made invisible. At this point, in order to be accepted you have to show to the point of exaggeration that you have completely left behind any connection with your past, with your origins. You have to die as a banlieuesard and be reborn as an individual. This is the game that some have dedicated themselves to playing. Now their whole life is a continuous cancellation of what they have been. They're ashamed of their origins, they hardly set foot in the banlieue, and when they talk about us they say: 'those people there'. Their behaviour is typical of all renegades [translator's note: rinnegati, those who renounce or disown]. Perhaps more than anyone else does, they consider us pure excrescence, social nullity.

All this tells you a lot about how times have changed. The periphery no longer represents a world, a reality which the centre has to take account of, but the unknown. What Sarkozy said – that we are simply a matter for the Kärcher [the industrial cleaning machine referred to in Sarkozy's notorious pronouncement] – just squeeze, squeeze a bit – that's what they all think, even if they don't all arrive at his practical conclusions. But what is the banlieue in the end if not the place where the lowest-status, worst-paid and least attrac-

desired and caressed. [...] Yes, it's true what you say. In some way this is and was a form of racism. The banlieuesard, with somewhat rough, non-respectable behaviour, was imagined by intellectuals and middle class leftists as the noble savage, the pure degree zero of the class. The banlieuesard satisfied their need to meet the people, and the representative of the people had much more chance to assert him or herself by remaining, at least in part, 'people', and behaving as the progressive bourgeois imagined a man or woman of the people should. One might object with good reason, pointing to the lack of personal dignity of someone who adopts to the limit of buffoonery the mask of 'the people' imagined by the progressive bourgeoisie, but that's another matter.

Obviously I was never willing to play this role, and I was always very critical of this behaviour, but also I certainly wasn't telling you about these things in order to advocate this behaviour. I raised it in order to show how, for a certain period, and with all the contradictions that existed, being an inhabitant of the banlieue was not something socially contemptible. It's important to be clear that I am not defending this model, I'm simply saying that the banlieue was not invisible; on the contrary, it suffered from an excess of social visibility. For everyone [in the bourgeois left], presenting a banlieuesard who was urbanised but not too much so – and this, as you'll see, was the whole point – was the proverbial flower in the buttonhole. Not only that. The banlieuesard who could exemplify the whole banlieue became a kind of cult object. A banlieuesard as individual made no sense, and as such couldn't hope for any sort of success or affirmation; he or she always had to be the expression, the representative of the banlieue. This entailed a certain way of being and acting at all times, publicly but also privately. In this respect everything revolved around representation, around what someone personified. So that for society, in some distorted way there was a recognition of an entire social body or bloc. The people, in these terms, had the full right to exist and to appear. Those who built some kind of career did so by playing on this. All

but with the same sense: the objective inferiority of the blacks. [...] In the age of globalisation the myth/dogma of the productive forces has become the discursive order used by the whites, by all the whites, to dominate the people of the 'blacks' and delegitimise their struggles and resistance: here the 'blacks' refers to all those excluded from the exercise of domination, regardless of the gradations of skin colour. The silence or the lies about the banlieues seems to me to be the best evidence of all this. [...] There has been general silence about the banlieues, even though in terms of number of participants, duration and extension the revolt was greater than May '68. (O.S.)

GENDER AND BANLIEUE

While much of the banlieues went up in flames, many sections of so-called 'civil society' suddenly 'discovered' the deplorable condition in which the sexism present in the banlieue forced the women there to live. Women subjected to every form of brutality and frustration by male banlieuesards in prey to a perpetual testosterone excess, who looked at them the same way they looked at their cars. What emerged again and again was a totally subordinate role held by the women of the banlieue. This rhetoric seemed to convince most people, making it useless even to attempt any empirical approach to the question. An everyday 'police incident' witnessed by the present writer seemed at least to crack open a conceptual framework generally regarded as unassailable. Blanc Mesnilin, late November 2005, 4pm. Suddenly a metallic grey BMW of the latest model comes at top speed around what's not an easy corner. The bend is demanding and the speed of the car doesn't help, and the driver seems to lose control. The back of the car starts to go into the most classic kind of spin. An accident appears inevitable. Then, with considerable skill and calm, the driver regains control of the car and takes it into a side street. While the noise of the brakes is still in the air, the passenger quickly leaps out and points at the street a large-calibre pistol that looks like a Browning bifilar 9mm parabellum, holding it in both hands. Immediately afterwards the driver gets out and the pair disappear down one of the adjacent streets. A few seconds later three police cars appear, and at the sight of BMW they slam the brakes on. The fastest of the cops jump out while the cars are still moving, pull out their guns and surround the BMW. But it's no use, there's no longer anyone inside. Cursing, they run into the surrounding streets in search of the fugitives. But they soon return; the hunt was not successful. All this might seem of little interest, an ordinary *storia sbagliata*, as [Italian anarchist songwriter Fabrizio] De Andre would have said, but for the quite surprising fact

the lack of openings which our autonomous work now evidently encountered led us to reconsider in a different way our relation to several phenomena which were appearing. Many of us, therefore, decided to create a base outside the banlieue. For me this experience was particularly disappointing, but it also helped me to understand many things about the present world, the type of contradictions that have opened and their nature. Because this is something very different from the past.

The old opposition between those who adhered to the projects of the institutional left and those who took a different path was no more than an opposition between those who took a so-called realistic and reformist line and those working on a more critical and radical project. The endless discussions – which I'm banalising a bit for you so they can be understood – were about means, methods, timing, but, although once again this is very much a simplification, this all seemed like a discussion between people who wanted to go in the same direction, who had the same objectives but disagreed about how to pursue them. Well today this common horizon no longer exists even on paper. If the difference between us and them used to be political, today I think it's possible to speak of a difference on an entirely different basis. The problem is not one of how to intervene or how we live in the banlieue, but of being or not being banlieuesards.

I'll explain with an example which immediately makes this clear. In the past, living in the banlieue meant a kind of added value. Within the reformist political world being a banlieuesard could boost your career. Of course you had to remain within a certain framework, but once you'd entered the game your banlieuesard status was almost an advantage. For a certain part of the left there was something like a myth of the inhabitant of the periphery. Quite a few people used their origins to get access to a career, albeit a small-time one. They accentuated almost as paroxysms some of the traits of the banlieuesard. The banlieuesard was a cult object,

prelude to a revolution but rather the concrete manifestation of the desperate condition in which exclusion and social marginality is confined. The fires of the banlieues should be taken for what they are, a cry for help of the excluded and the marginalised, but the heart of the political question is certainly not there. The heart, if we want to use this extremely dated language, is where the general intellect is in action, that is where the game is played out. Because it is there where the only really revolutionary force able to effect transformation is in action; there the multitudes of knowledge, understanding and desire can impede imperial domination, continuously bringing about transformation and liberation. (F.C.)

The rhetoric underlying the young researcher's discourse is no more than a sort of vulgarization of theories which, dressed up more elegantly, enjoy considerable influence in many intellectual circles.[51] The interest in these theories could be tranquilly ignored or attributed to the *freemasonry of useless erudition*, if they were not a mirror – albeit a somewhat particular one – of the prevailing social model. This division does not seem to leave room for possible mediation, as is made quite evident by the account of G.Z., a young *black/blanc* who for a certain amount of time was part of movements and groups of the 'respectable white left'.

In the course of the 1990s political and social work around the banlieue underwent a notable fragmentation. This was primarily the consequence of general transformations which had important effects on our territories, which were only understood later. [...] At this point, a debate about the need for a closer relation to political forces arose within the [social rather than geographical] area involved in action in our territories. To put it simply, the problem posed was whether to remain in the banlieue, taking forward autonomously a discourse completely centered on the specificity of our territories, or to take the banlieue into a wider political discourse. Many of us chose the second option. Although we continued to regard as valid much of the criticism of institutional politics,

that the fugitives were two veiled women.[41] Two girls who appeared very young, dressed in army boots, sweatshirts and bomber jackets, but with the veil. The veiled fugitives did not seem objectively to have much 'fundamentalism' or even much religion about them, and it would be difficult to imagine them as subordinate or submissive to anyone. [42] It is quite evident that, just like other aspects, the 'female question' in the banlieue is difficult to approach through the lenses of white power/knowledge; another 'tool-box' is needed.[43]

In reality, women played a role in the events of the 'French autumn' which was anything but secondary. In any case, anyone with the least knowledge of social and economic life in the banlieue is aware that women's influence in the concrete organisation of everyday life is strategic.[44] Certainly it is a role that has little or nothing to do with the debates that enthral legitimate society and women's studies departments. 'Female representation quotas and equal opportunities' do not mean much to the women of the banlieues, and their 'elective affinities' share very little with the theoretical reflections of Judith Revel[45]; rather, they have many things in common with the practices of Assata Shakur[46], and it is for this reason that an investigation 'on the road' [in English in the original] is of interest here. The observations and reflections of the women of the banlieues give a view of the 'black areas' in France which is far from that which the media, the political establishment and much of the intelligensia have accustomed us to. Not only has the entire movement of the banlieuesards shown itself to be much less non-political than legitimate society portrays it as being, but the women, or a substantial number of them, seem far from embodying and accepting the role of grim subordination to male power. Rather, in certain ways, it seems to be they who have grasped lucidly the heart of the contradiction, identifying the central elements of the problem in the transformations of the capitalist organisation of labour and the return of a colonial-style power relation. But the women, or at least some of them, seem also to have had an important role in the 'military aspect', a fact which in terms of the widely-accepted rhetoric regarding women in the banlieue seems incredible to say the least.

An exhaustive account of all this is given by Z., a young black French woman living in the Argenteuil banlieue, who has worked in depth in this area. It is in this context that the 'female question' imposes itself. As a woman, Z. often had to confront leaders and bosses who opposed her precisely because of her sex. This fact should not be underestimated, and should certainly not be relegated to a secondary level as a minor problem. In reality the relation to the 'female question' is decisive for any movement that seeks to abolish the present state of things, because all the essential problems of the conception of power revolve around it. Failure to acknowledge the authority of a revolutionary leader because she is a woman amounts to internalization of the same fascist mentality of the cop who comes into the banlieue expecting to be in charge because he is white and French, as if this made him 'naturally' destined to dominate. This logic is no different at all from that in which the male 'naturally' dominates the female.

It is of some significance that in this particular case Z. imposed her authority not so much by emphasising being a woman, but through her 'overall political and military leadership', thereby not only imposing formal gender equality (although this should not be underestimated), but posing the 'female question' as wholly internal to that of the emancipation of the subaltern social classes. She did not claim the abstract right of a woman, but the concrete right of a woman 'military leader' to exercise the most serious and delicate functions of political direction. Thus, as Z. describes in detail, she was able to undermine in front of their own groups some of the little leaders and bosses who opposed her, so that they had to accept the situation or remain at the margins of events. This aspect shows how the 'question of power' can never be regarded as resolved once and for all: it requires continuous attention, as no-one is immune from the logic of domination. Remaining faithful to the role she took on and is likely to go on holding, Z. confronted the problems she had to deal with, starting from the political-military framework in which she operated, taking care never to lose sight of the complexity of the situation in which she found herself acting.

20th century, projecting themselves towards the future with a new way of conceiving political action. [...] However, because otherwise one would end up blaming the victims rather than targeting their tormentors, [it must be said that] what happened is nothing other than the perverse effect imposed by neoliberal policies. These populations are left alone, without anyone helping them. The neoliberal governments have completely cut off social work, and this has condemned the peripheries to implosion. [...] No, ascribing some kind of political meaning to what happened is completely without sense, and thinking this like this is just a way of bringing back the same old ideas in different terms. These are not the new sites of conflict, but sites of excess. In some way they make up part of the humanitarian emergency which the West does not seem to want to deal with today. From the metropolitan peripheries there are no echoes of revolution, just the desperate voices of marginality and social, or perhaps it would be better to say human excess. [...] What happened seemed to me to be of great interest, because in a dramatic way and in its entirety it brought out the question of the peripheries, a question which is obviously not only French, but which, like every reality, presents local aspects which cannot be generalised. [...] In any case it is not with the police, and with the massive and indiscriminate use of policing, that it is possible to think of dealing with this situation. It is no longer possible to know whether the devastation, the looting and the fires will be limited to French territory, with sporadic similar episodes in other countries, or whether there will be worse consequences. However it is worth paying attention to the simple fact that there was some spreading into Belgium, Germany and Greece is worthy of attention. It means that an emergency of excess is appearing on a European scale.

While the responsibility of national governments cannot be forgotten, this calls into question the social model which has taken shape in Europe. What has happened in France is the direct consequence of economic neoliberalism and 'zero tolerance'[50] in social policy, but what has reached its peak in France is not the

To put it bluntly, there is no sense in talking about, thinking, proposing a break with the present world through the appearance on the historical scene of a class able to organise the world starting from its own viewpoint, because this particular class, which according to 20th century logics was the working and proletarian class, is now historically non-existent or purely residual. In reality, if we want to go on improperly using the term 'class' today we must do so in terms of a universal class. And this class exists and acts. These are the multitudes who, with their knowledge and their desires, can liberate humanity from the restrictions which Empire tends continually to impose on them [sic]. Revolution, if we want to call it that, is possible, but this is not thanks to the external intervention of a non-existent phantom class, but through a process of liberation and erosion from within by subjects who, through networking, socialisation and co-operation of knowledges, continuously erode parts of capital's power, forcing it continually to modify and transform itself in order to keep from imploding. But this transformation, which is before everyone's eyes, has entailed and entails a radical transformation of political practices. In the first place it makes central the relation between struggles and communication and therefore the primarily symbolic aspect that political action must assume. Secondly, this means leaving behind every logic based on direct confrontation and everything that follows from it. If there is no outside because everything is inside, then action for transformation must work patiently from within, in order to develop new norms of participatory democracy from below, based on new rights of citizenship.

[...] In the peripheries social excess is confined and left to itself, and it is not hard to see how senseless explosions of this kind can occur in these non-places, true concentrations of desperation.[49] What is incubated in the peripheries is social nullity and cultural nullity. The recourse to violence bears witness to this in some way. All the radical political movements have for some time distanced themselves from models and practices typical of the

[...] At the same time things need explaining a bit, otherwise you end up with a very falsified idea of this reality. We had to organise the guerrilla action on two fronts, one external, the other internal. I think this is something that always happens. In some ways the internal front was almost more important than the other. The cops have to get information of a certain precision in order to hit us, but that's not all. In quite a few cases they also needed the way cleared for them. For example, having access to people who would spread disinformation could be fundamental for them, because it makes you move in exactly the direction they want. At the same time, receiving information on where you intend to strike, or how you intend to reach a target, attack it and set it off, this is essential information for them. Another important thing is getting information on our levels of internal organisation. Finally, having to move across practically endless territory like ours, it becomes decisive to discover and identify our refuges and logistical structures. This work can only be done through a good network of spies and informers within our territory. Then, although this came later, we had to deal with some attempts by the fascists to build their own guerrilla groups for counter-insurgency within the banlieue.[47] As far as we were able to discern, this was an unofficial initiative. [translator's note: un'iniziativa più ufficiosa che ufficiale: without formal sanction, but with tacit institutional support] It started spontaneously among some extreme right elements within the police, which the official powers pretended to be unaware of. If it worked, good; otherwise it had nothing to do with the institutions. Either the classic dirty operations were successful, or no-one knew anything about them. But as I said, this happened at a second stage, and perhaps was also the lesser problem. The real problem was how to neutralise the network of spies and informers which, as is perhaps easy to guess, was absolutely not, shall we say, a technical matter [...]. Yes, I think the way you put the question was right: to deal with this kind of a network it was necessary to set up a structure capable of making a series of moves. But perhaps it's better to give some examples than to approach the question so

abstractly.

The first thing to do was to make available to everyone the endless series of fragments of information we had received. This was the first stage, and was not simply a technical process. In order to arrive at this point we had to break with the sectarian logic that the gangs and some groups had brought with them. Among many people there was the tendency continually to assert their own identity, separate from the others, with whom at most alliances could be formed, but not at the cost of one's own identity. This was obviously bullshit, because that way you do no more than play the game of the enemy, who has every interest in keeping you divided. Of course uniting isn't something you can do simply by putting together the various realities as if there was nothing to it: we needed to establish a collective model in which the various experiences could recognise one another. Alongside this problem of a general container was another one, no less important. In reality the resistance to uniting ourselves and combining our forces depended not just on presumed differences but on the resistance of little leaders and bosses who in some way saw their micropower diminishing, and then in many cases there was also the openly stated aversion to submitting to the leadership of women. This aspect hit me particularly hard, and I'll need to say a few words about it [...].

Being a woman in the banlieue is not always easy. And being a militant woman involved in the struggle is even less so, although perhaps this is always the case to some extent. It may be that in the banlieue everything is accentuated, because the difficulty first of determining and then of putting into practice a way of acting that's able to overturn exploitation and oppression favours the reproduction of fascist and authoritarian mechanisms. So until the struggle breaks through the crust of oppression and people are unified by fighting, this situation generally tends to reproduce within itself the mechanisms typical of power. Men against women, young against old, whites against blacks, French against immigrants and so on.

'BLACK' AND 'WHITE'

The picture given by the interviews seems far removed from the rhetoric widely accepted by politicians, media and intellectuals and literary figures of various kinds and political and cultural stripes, and which, somewhat surprisingly, was also heard from much of the left. The interview that follows is a good example of the latter. The speaker is F.C., a young Parisian researcher attached to a cartel of radical intellectuals which enjoys enviable fame in 'white' Paris and is particularly sought out in the salons of the French and international intelligentsia. Her statements do not require much comment.

The first thing that must be done in order to understand what has just happened is to throw away a whole series of 20th century legacies. Realistically speaking, this means not going in search of class conflicts, or, even more absurdly, neocolonial ones, for the simple reason that these no longer exist and looking for them is only a nostalgic operation that looks at the world and thinks about it with categories belonging to the past century. The idea of a class society leads back to a world centered on manual labour, but in our societies, as everyone can see, that labour has disappeared or is on the way to extinction, and it can be added that labour itself is simply a residue. Our societies are founded on immaterial, or to be more precise, cognitive labours, which it is very difficult to make lead back to a division of society into classes, or at least into the idea of classes that prevailed in the 20th century. It's worth adding that only within this world, that of the general intellect, is it possible to think and enact any transformation.[48] [...] This does not mean our societies do not have conflict and contradictions with them, but that these cannot be addressed using conceptual and organisational apparatus and models of struggle which are old and completely superceded.

the paramilitaries were preparing within the banlieues, which among other things yielded a considerable bounty. Many things, many instruments which were to have been used for the counter-revolution passed into the logistics of the guerrilla insurgency. The BAC were probably well pissed off! The second aspect, clearly more important in every way, was the absolutely unequivocal aversion of most of the inhabitants towards these initiatives. If the guerrilla groups and cells hit their logistical and military structures hard, it can be said without any triumphalism that the masses crippled them politically, because when they tried to set up any sort of public initiative it turned out that they were so few, under the threatening eyes of so many, that they had to give it up. What's more, and this quite important, some of those who got themselves interviewed and denounced the revolt in interviews were spontaneously punished by groups from the people who had organised themselves precisely so as to stop these so-called responsible citizens spouting their vomit over the struggle. (Z.)

But this here is what we are, and only through the struggle can we overturn this condition. Only by demonstrating that resisting and winning is possible can we think of subverting our habitual conditions of life at their root. In the struggle, in the war against domination, while we destroy all that oppresses us we also have to construct in a positive sense new social, political and cultural models able to prefigure a new way of being and existing. Revolution is a continuous process of destruction and construction, and this is even more true in a situation where the struggle promises to be long, difficult and painful. [...] It doesn't make much sense, it doesn't take you anywhere, to enter into a battle for equality in an abstract sense, even though the principle must be reiterated continuously: it has to be not only propaganda but something imposed in practice. There are those who hold their noses, who don't want to be led by a woman, or, in our situation, by several women. In these cases you can't wait to discuss things, you have to throw the puppet facing you down from the pedestal, with no half measures. You can only do this by demonstrating in front of everyone that you're capable of doing things that many people's fate depends on, while all your opponent can do is talk. Political leadership is only imposed through the real authority, the effectiveness and efficiency that someone can demonstrate. I, we, smashed all stupid sexism as soon as it appeared by imposing ourselves as political and military leaders. So that many of those who saw it as not only senseless but even dishonourable to be led by a group of women eventually became the most disciplined.

[...] All this should not be seen as a particular aspect, separated from the rest of the context we found ourselves acting in. The process of building a revolutionary structure, if that's what it's going to be, cannot avoid calling into question what goes on within it, revealing how the logics of domination and power have taken hold even among those who are ready to fight against the dominators. Therefore, starting from an apparently technical problem, we had to deal with much more complex issues, which forced many people

to confront their contradictions and to make choices. This process was useful because it allowed us to attain clarity within the movement, forcing these people to make a leap forward. To return to our problem though, a lot of the spies, who in reality can't be called that because everyone knows they are on the side of the cops, are the racists in the banlieue. But these are the lesser problem. We burned their cars, and we went into some of their homes, and others we caught in the street, and these ones couldn't do much.

The real problem were the ones who were unknown and above suspicion. These ones were in our midst, and they certainly weren't sporting the French cockade. As you'll know, part of the economy of the banlieue is based on small-scale trafficking, and it's around this that the BAC recruit most of those they infiltrate among us. Because it's these people who are most vulnerable to blackmail. This meant we had to carry out a series of investigations among ourselves, which were never easy, among other reasons because in situations like this there were some people who tried to discredit someone by calling them a spy in order to settle personal matters, old quarrels or even stupider things. This work was never easy, and in some cases it led us to make mistakes, accusing people who then turned out to have been completely straightforward. But this gives you an idea of how, at the moment when you enter into the real battle, into praxis, when you no longer stick to chatter like the Paris left loves in its salons, the situations you have to deal with are anything but simple: you can only learn how to fight a war by fighting it. [...] Finally, we had to deal with the attempt to attack the movement from within through paramilitary groups. This operation wasn't very successful, because the attempts that were made were crushed before they could get started. However it must be said that within the banlieue there is heavy racist propaganda, mostly anti-Arab; as everyone knows, arabophobia is a very widespread phenomenon in France, promoted by right-wing groups linked to Le Pen, which have a certain strength in the banlieue and can rely on support and a considerable amount of protection from the

BAC. The link between the BAC and the nazi groups is very close, and in some ways they're the same thing. The only difference is that one is legalised and the other is not.

These paramilitary groups were used in two ways. The first was the legal one which everyone saw thanks to the television and the newspapers. These were the so-called citizens whom everyone rushed to interview and film thanks to very precise agreements between the police and the media. There, Le Pen supporters were presented as upstanding citizens, implying that they represented the majority of the population of the banlieue who demanded the restoration of legality, order and the repression of the revolt. As we learned by interrogating one of the organisers of this mise-en-scene at length, the tones used in the clips and the interviews were deliberately oriented towards moderation, towards what is commonly regarded as the common sense of the average citizen. All the speeches were against violence, and they tended to emphasise the population distancing itself from the incendiaries, with the clear intention of making the guerrilla warfare seem like the work of tiny minority groups with no legitimacy whatsoever within the areas. Once this version was widely disseminated, it became very easy to proceed with heavy repression. An idea of the substantial unity reached by the various powers in opposing us is given by the fact that the media waged a real propaganda war against us. Newspapers and television did nothing but run interviews with banlieue inhabitants who said they were sick of what was going on. They intended that this should be the start of a more far-reaching operation, which, at a second stage, would have seen paramilitary groups disguised as citizens mobilised to restore order.

First the propaganda which should have prepared the ground for consent was spread, then these groups would have come into action. This project didn't work for at least two reasons. The first was the timely intervention of militant forces which destroyed through a series of targeted actions all, or at least many, of the bases which