

ENFORCING ORDER

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF URBAN POLICING

DIDIER FASSIN



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Didier Fassin

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For Thomas, Baptiste and Camille

For their friends in the neighborhood of M. and their parents

Parrhesia is the courage of the truth in the person who speaks and who, regardless of everything, takes the risk of telling the whole truth that he thinks, but it is also the interlocutor's courage in agreeing to accept the hurtful truth that he hears.

Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983–1984*

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Preface to the English Edition

Everyday Urban Policing in Times of Civil Unrest

From Watts in Los Angeles in 1965 to Tottenham and London in 2011, almost all major urban disturbances during the past half-century resulted from a violent interaction between law enforcement officers and inhabitants of disadvantaged neighborhoods, usually leading to the death of youth belonging to a racial or ethnic minority group. Although broader structural issues, such as segregation, poverty, high unemployment, experience of discrimination and injustice were involved, the immediate cause was nearly always related to abuses by the police. Each of these episodes of civil disorder was abundantly discussed in the public sphere, by journalists, politicians, sociologists, and many others. Official commissions were appointed to investigate the circumstances of the triggering incident, inscribe them in their wider social context and propose policy recommendations. Scientific programs were developed to deepen the understanding of the relationship of the police with their public. The riots were thus political events in the fullest sense of the word, that is, they created a temporal rupture delimiting a before and an after in the social consciousness.

France is no exception to these logics of civil unrest, and the dozens of incidents in the housing projects since the early 1980s followed such tragic encounters. However, France is relatively exceptional in that none of its numerous local uprisings has given birth to public inquiry or political reform, and that most of the research initiatives have been deterred by the authorities, especially when they included direct observation of the police. In other words, they remained political events from which no lessons were drawn. Not only do we know

little about the disturbances themselves but we do not seem to have much more understanding of what goes on between these episodes. And yet, it is generally assumed that the comprehension of the everyday practice of law enforcement in these neighborhoods is key to the analysis of the dramatic outbursts of violence that unexpectedly and occasionally flare, leaving most commentators stunned by their intensity. The present ethnography of urban policing is an attempt to fill this cognitive gap. Conducted in the banlieues of Paris, it started, indeed, a little before the 2005 riots, prompted by the electrocution of two adolescents attempting to escape an anticrime squad in Clichy-sous-Bois, and ended just before the 2007 rebellion of Villiers-le-Bel, succeeding the death of two youths whose motorcycle was hit by the car from a similar special unit. What happened in-between these events, and more generally what happens when no youth is killed, no car burnt, no building destroyed, no store looted – and it is reasonable to imagine that this corresponds to the habitual situation in these neighborhoods – is the subject of this book.

So, an ethnography it is. For most people, the term evokes far-away societies and probably traditional cultures – and I have learned to avoid it in the presentation of my work before non-specialist audiences, especially the police themselves, because of its exotic connotations. Some explanation must therefore be provided here. Ethnography is about entering and communicating the experience of men and women in a given context: their way of apprehending the world, of considering their place in society and their relations with others, of justifying their beliefs and actions. It is an attempt to go through the looking glass, so to speak, and explore another universe, often initially foreign but progressively becoming more familiar. In other words, it is not about producing otherness, as one would often assume from a stereotypical image of anthropology to which anthropologists themselves are not entirely alien, but, on the contrary, it is about bringing closeness, discovering that those who seemed so different, irrational or incomprehensible resemble us more than we thought, act more coherently than we conceive, and, in any case, think and behave in a manner that can be rendered intelligible to everyone. This is as true of Claude Lévi-Strauss's Nambikwara people and Clifford Geertz's Balinese villagers as it is of law enforcement officers in Baltimore or Paris.

I just defined ethnography as being about entering and communicating the experience of others: both verbs are crucial. Genealogically, ethnography is about fieldwork, as we have known since Bronislaw Malinowski. Etymologically, it is about writing, as we have learned from James Clifford and George Marcus. On the one hand, it cor-

responds to immersion within a social group allowing long-term observation of their activity: I have indeed spent 15 months with the police, mostly with an anticrime squad, patrolling in housing projects. On the other hand, it implies an account of what one has seen, heard and understood: it is in this instance a description of law enforcement as much as an interpretation of its signification. In both these dimensions, ethnography is not neutral, though: it involves choices. In terms of fieldwork, I favored the study of the everyday over that of the sensational that nourishes media chronicles, the inquiry into the ordinary life of a police station over spectacular events disrupting its course, even if I was occasionally the witness of what can be called quasi-riots, which presented all the conditions for a possible explosion of violence. In terms of writing, I privileged a narrative form rather than the usual sociological analysis, the depiction of scenes as opposed to abstract developments, preferring to insert my theoretical arguments into empirical situations, in the hope of rendering my work accessible beyond the circle of specialists. This ethnography of urban policing can thus be viewed as a tentative application of the art of storytelling to the monotony of routine.

But do we really need such ethnographies? After all, we have excellent accounts by journalists, vivid memoirs of former officers, and remarkable fictions in crime novels, detective movies and television series. Besides, in their own way, social scientists also participate, through their books, articles, and talks, in the production of public representations of police work that add to the abundant literature and filmography on the subject. So, in what sense is ethnography different? To say that ethnographers endeavor to depict reality as it is actually may be a correct self-characterization of their work, but it is not distinctive and it is deceiving. It is not distinctive because the journalist and the officer make the same claim, and so do, sometimes, the novelist and the film director. And it is deceiving because all descriptions of the social world entail the use of specific lenses that allow viewing of certain dimensions rather than others. Instead of defining the merits of ethnography in terms of realism – although I believe it is a significant part of the ethnographic endeavor – it is probably more accurate and helpful to do it in terms of the combination of presence and distance. Presence – being there – supposes a temporality that is both instantaneous (the immediate now, when a car chase or a stop and search occurs) and expanded (the long duration, which renders regularities and exceptions visible, and therefore discriminations perceptible): it is the infinite repetition of the present. With presence, comes a reciprocal acquaintance between the observer and the observed: a form of mutual trust progressively develops,

which makes possible an access to the everyday and the commonsense of those under study. Distance – stepping aside – results from simultaneous astonishment (the permanent surprise in front of a given state of affairs) and estrangement (the sentiment of not belonging to the group) as well as the search for a distinct perspective (bringing the larger picture into being): it is a distantiating from the taken-for-granted. With distance, what is happening in the field is related to the trajectory of the agents, their professional and institutional environment, the ideological and political context in which they work, and the larger historical and social configuration. The combination of presence and distance thus has the consequence that familiarity is never devoid of alienation: one comprehends the conduct of the police within the logics of the insider as well as with the perspective of the outsider.

Now, how does this combination translate into the analysis of law enforcement? Contrary to the image of relentless action generally associated with police work – including among officers themselves, always keen to emphasize the exhilarating moments they have experienced when they talk to their colleagues – boredom is what dominates most of their roaming through their precinct. Far from being this heroic activity dedicated to arresting thieves and thugs, as many imagined when they entered the job, law enforcement is generally synonymous with inaction and ennui. The rhythm of their urban expeditions resembles more that of the episodes of *The Wire*, which my interlocutors had never heard about, than that of the adventures of the Strike Team in *The Shield*, whose photographs covered the walls of their common room. As has been demonstrated in numerous studies worldwide, the time spent effectively responding to calls from the population – reactive intervention – is very limited, which obliges beat officers to practice random patrolling in search of suspects – proactive intervention. It is all the more so since in France, as in many other countries, there has been a constant decline in crime, especially in its more serious and spectacular expressions, such as homicides or burglaries, the increase observed for certain offenses corresponding mostly to misdemeanors, including cell-phone thefts, or to incivilities recently introduced in the law, such as loitering in the lobby of an apartment building. Any description of police work should therefore start with the depiction of the long eventless days or nights spent driving through the city and its housing projects, expecting calls that rarely come and often prove to be hoaxes or errors, the sole encounters being with youth of ethnic minorities hanging around in public spaces, immigrants returning home from work or Roma heading toward their camp, whom they indiscriminately submit to frequently

aggressive and humiliating stops and searches, in the hope of finding a small ball of hashish, identifying an illegal alien, discovering evidence of an improbable larceny – or simply as a way to kill time. In these mundane conditions, minor facts, such as the noise pollution caused by a motorcycle or the physical altercation between two adolescents, often become major events, generating a flurry of excitement in the crews and inducing disproportionate and inappropriate interventions, which prompt indignation among the local population and sometimes lead to sudden disturbances.

When juxtaposed with what is known of other countries, this preliminary sketch of urban policing in the French outer cities may seem relatively banal to the reader – and in many respects, it is. Studies conducted in North America and Western Europe during the past half-century have established the discrepancies between the imagined and actual contents of law enforcement, the targeting of certain groups bordering on racial harassment, and the exacerbated tensions with the inhabitants of disadvantaged neighborhoods. However, the case of France presents two crucial differences with most comparable countries: police have a national organization, and insecurity has become a national issue. The two elements are related, although their association was in no way a logical necessity.

On the one hand, law enforcement has essentially been conceived, since the Ancien Regime, as a prerogative of the state, reinforced by the Jacobin policies of the Revolution and Joseph Fouché's authoritarian centralism under the Empire. The attempts to develop municipal police during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have largely failed, even if local initiatives have revived this project in recent decades. That policing is organized on a national basis and is a state prerogative has two important implications for law enforcement. Firstly, the police are recruited in the whole national territory and therefore generally work in places they do not know. Even more crucial to the understanding of what happens on the ground is the social origin of the recruits. Four out of five come from rural areas or small towns, often from white working-class families living in deindustrialized zones. Because their career is based on seniority, the first posting they obtain corresponds to the least desirable precincts, that is, in the outer cities, where they will be working amongst a disadvantaged population of immigrant background. The way this public is introduced to them during their training at the academy contributes to the sentiments of strangeness and hostility they will feel when discovering this new urban environment. Secondly, the police are only accountable to the state, that is, concretely, to the minister of the interior. In other words, their responsibility and

commitment are not prioritized toward the population or its elected representatives, as in the United States or Britain where the authority over law enforcement is local. In France, mayors, who are liable before their constituency not only in terms of security but also in terms of relationships between the institutions and their public, are often viewed by officers and commissioners as adversaries systematically taking the side of the inhabitants against the police. This organization of law enforcement has long been presented as guaranteeing national equality of treatment and avoiding local pork-barrel politics. But in the past three decades, far from being a neutral and distant entity, the state to which the police are accountable has become increasingly embodied through successive ambitious ministers of the interior who have used them for the promotion of their political career. The ideal of impartiality progressively vanished, as law enforcement became an instrument for conquering power.

On the other hand, indeed, insecurity issues were imposed on the national political agenda, a phenomenon one can trace back to three decades ago. The historic victory of the left in the general elections of 1981, after 23 years of conservative domination, provoked the restructuring of the French political landscape, with the rapid rise of the far right and the weakening of the traditional right. The National Front built its success principally on two issues, immigration and security, often mixing the two by presenting immigrants, or their children, as the major source of insecurity. The response of the Gaullist party, at that time the Union for a Popular Movement, later renamed the Union for the Presidential Majority, thus keeping the same acronym, was to radicalize its discourse, adopting xenophobic themes translated into immigration restrictions, and producing alarmist statements about alleged insecurity. Two men, both ministers of the interior, were pivotal in this process: Charles Pasqua in the 1990s and Nicolas Sarkozy in the 2000s, the former having been the political mentor of the latter. In hindsight, the electoral success of this strategy of rejection and fear is undeniable, since the raising of immigration and insecurity issues played a decisive role in three consecutive general elections, allowing 17 years of continuous conservative presidency. It is noteworthy that the construction of immigration and insecurity as national priorities – the second taking precedence over the first in the past decade – occurred in a period when France was subject to objective threats, that of terrorism in particular, much less than other countries. But, in the absence of an external enemy, it remained possible to identify an enemy within to substantiate the call for security and relate it to the immigration issue. This discourse justified repressive policies. Increasing legal limitations were brought

to migratory flows, technologies of border control and identity-checking developed, confinement and deportation of undocumented immigrants boomed. But it is on the front of insecurity that the government devoted most of its efforts. Crime statistics and public research fell under the sole authority of the minister of the interior to allow the massaging of data and avoid independent investigations. The police benefitted from additional human and technical resources, and special units – the anticrime squads in particular – were created. The judicial system followed the trend, as the legislators voted new laws enlarging the definition of offenses and ensuring more severe sanctions, while the executive exerted a growing pressure by accusing magistrates of irresponsible leniency. These policies were not meant to be implemented everywhere toward everyone: they concerned certain territories and certain populations. Geographically, the outer cities with their housing projects, and socially, the working-class youth belonging to ethnic minorities, were their main targets. Law enforcement served as the key institution for regulating these territories and taming these populations partially abandoned by the state, the politics of which had largely contributed to the situation of segregation and stigmatization they were facing.

When one considers the two logics just analyzed – the consequences of the national organization and state accountability of the police and the instrumental use of insecurity and immigration issues – it is not difficult to comprehend that, instead of enforcing the law, as they would describe their activity, the officers patrolling in the disadvantaged neighborhoods are actually enforcing a social order characterized by swelling economic inequality and expanding racial discrimination. But it also becomes clearer that they are not doing so on their own initiative – although the ideological profile of those posted to the special units renders many of them prone to demonstrate excessive zeal in their targeted repression – but rather as part of the mission assigned to them by the government. Here, ethnography proves irreplaceable – first, to establish the shift from law enforcement to enforcing order; second, to articulate the national politics and the local practices. Only the patient and fastidious observation of what has become the norm in the governing of these territories and of these populations can account for the concrete manifestations of this shift and this articulation in the everyday life of the outer cities.

The deployment of supposedly neutral managerial tools in the assessment of police work – and, more generally, of the activity of all public institutions – can serve as an illustration: it has been famously designated as “*la politique du chiffre*,” the politics of

numbers. By establishing quantitative objectives that were most of the time unattainable, in terms of monthly arrests and clearance rates particularly, the government constrained the police to develop adaptive tactics focusing on two types of offense, which became what officers sometimes call “adjustment variables”: offenses in relation to drug use and illegal residence, the offenders being, in both cases, easy prey. Indeed, the targeted practice of stopping and searching youth in the housing projects or city centers, for the former, and immigrants in public spaces like train stations, for the latter, gives a high yield in terms of arrests. This productivity has a non-negligible social cost, though, which is the banalization of racial discrimination and racial profiling, officially encouraged although illegal. It was fascinating to watch officers stopping teenagers from ethnic minorities in disadvantaged neighborhoods to frisk them in search of hashish, while ignoring upper-class white students obviously under the influence of the drug in the surroundings of their college, just as it was perplexing to see them select individuals in the crowd getting off the metro according to their skin color and physical appearance to subject them to an identity check and a body search. Certain officers expressed discontent about what they considered to be a dirty job serving political interests rather than the public good. Others found obvious satisfaction in a policy of which they approved. In fact, even when they disagreed with this quantitative evaluation and its consequences, the police did it more for practical than for moral reasons – they denounced the pressure of the result on their activity rather than the breach of legal or deontological norms. Conspicuously, in his first statement, Manuel Valls, the new minister of the interior appointed after the election of the Socialist president, François Hollande, in May 2012, announced the end of the politics of numbers, a decision applauded by police unions. But he also stated his reservations regarding the measure proposed by non-governmental organizations, activists and lawyers to regulate the practice of stop and search, namely the presentation of a receipt to each individual checked. In other words, there was no more incentive to harass youth and immigrants but nothing was envisaged to prevent it from occurring.

So far, the story seems to be narrated as a moment in French history – its repressive turn. And there is definitely a national specificity of law enforcement: British, Canadian or US police, to mention the most widely studied, each have a distinct organization, recruitment, training, supervision, professional norms and disciplinary regulation. Yet, as a result of both the convergence worldwide of a dominant model of urban policing and the global networking of law enforcement institutions, the policies and the practices have become

increasingly similar transnationally. The contemporary French police resemble more the US police of today than the French police of yesterday. Significantly, in 2011, debates and lawsuits took place about racial profiling in the practice of stop and frisk simultaneously in Paris and in New York City. Observations made in one place may therefore prove valid in another. Analyses of the discretionary power of the police, of their justification for professional secrecy or of their representation of the public as hostile, in North American sociological and political research during the 1960s and 1970s, were just as relevant for the approach to European law enforcement. Similarly, in the developments presented in this book, I believe that my discussion of discrimination and violence, and of social scientists' frequent reservations in dealing with these questions, permits posing them in terms which have a broader pertinence, to go beyond discrimination as racism and violence as brutality; that my study of the moral economy of policing and the practical arrangements of officers with ethics is of general bearing, since agents always have to try to explain their acts, especially when these differ from what their deontology implies; and that my proposition to interpret police work in relation to the historical situation and its political implications is crucial for the understanding of what law enforcement is like in whatever context.

This is the paradox of all fieldworks: the singular reveals the general; the ethnography becomes an anthropology. It is by entering the details of a specific social world in a particular moment that one can access processes and logics that have a wider meaning. Subsequently, the question of the possible extrapolation of empirical results from a local observation to society at large, so often opposed to ethnography, is wrongly articulated, and hardly makes any sense in this formulation. The problem is not to know whether the police act identically everywhere, within a national territory or across borders, but whether the type of relation they have with a certain public, the way in which political incentives influence their practice, the effects of various systems of evaluation and sanctioning on their conducts, or the justification they provide for their deviant behaviors are generalizable. If, as I argue, they are – with certain methodological precautions, of course – then some lessons need to be drawn from my investigation in the banlieues of Paris.

The most comprehensive one goes as follows. The contemporary world is increasingly unequal, both when one compares countries among themselves and when one considers categories within each country. International disparities tend to stimulate migratory flows toward richer nations, whatever the risk incurred, while social

disparities tend to marginalize those who belong to racially and ethnically stigmatized groups: both dynamics converge, sometimes over two generations, with the tragic disillusionment of immigrant parents who have sacrificed everything for their children, who they realize are now increasing the ranks of the stigmatized urban poor. In recent decades, the concentration of impoverished and discriminated populations, either in inner cities, as in the United States, or in outer cities, as in France, has generated anxieties in the general public, often fueled by conservative parties and rarely addressed by liberal ones. As inequalities deepened, the political response has been the deployment of what is often described as a punitive state essentially dedicated to the disadvantaged segregated areas, even when they do not have higher crime rates, and the ethnic and racial minority groups, who comprise the impoverished working class: law enforcement has become tougher and more people are arrested for minor misdemeanors; legislation has been revised to impose heavier sentencing, constraining the magistrates to more severity and resulting in mass incarceration. It would probably be too simplistically functionalist to assert that repression exerted on the most vulnerable segments of society merely serves to elude the question of the growing inequalities: instead of speaking of social justice, one would talk about social order. However, it is undeniable – the French case being paradigmatic – that there are political dividends, for right-wing as well as left-wing governments, not only of repression, but also of its publicization and even spectacularization, through highly mediatized impressive police interventions to arrest a few suspects in a housing project, deport undocumented immigrants or evict Roma from an illicit camp. Thus, governments are ready to pay a huge price for these symbolic returns, delegating to the police more than the legitimate monopoly of violence held by the state, as is well known: the power to exert power in unlawful ways, to deploy illegal practices they would never consider deploying in other contexts, to carry out actions that the most elementary morality would make it inconceivable to conduct against other territories and populations – that is, in Walter Benjamin's words, the power to make the exception the rule.

Why, then, is it so crucial to have ethnographies of urban policing? The answer to this question certainly becomes clearer now. It is not simply that ethnography provides a sort of immersion in the world of law enforcement, allowing us to understand what happens when the police are in the field. It is perhaps more importantly that it produces a vision of a world that has been made either invisible or opaque to most of us. This is what I realized through the numerous reactions I received from readers – whether journalists specialized in

urban and social issues, who told me they had just become conscious of a reality of which they were unaware due to their usual reliance on official sources, or youth of the projects, who confided to me how much the book meant to them for the credibility it gave to their version of facts, which neither the media nor the magistrates ever believed. In that sense, by revealing what is generally concealed – or simply ignored – the ethnographer re-establishes citizens in their responsibility to know what is going on and take part in the public sphere, and reinstitutes the individuals and groups affected by these policies in their right to have their experience acknowledged and their voice heard.

D. F., Princeton, September 2012

Acknowledgments

In writing this book, I am repaying a double debt: firstly, to residents of housing projects, particularly the younger ones among them, whose experience of law enforcement, so little considered and so rarely heard, I seek to give an account of here; and secondly, to the police, especially the senior officers who, probably with few illusions about what might be expected from a researcher, accepted being made the object of study. I hope I have not betrayed the trust of either. I therefore wish to express my thanks to the police commissioner who welcomed me at a time when the Ministry of the Interior was closing its doors to research, and I am grateful to the officers in his district, particularly the anticrime squad, for consistently helping to make my work easier. I am also grateful to the teachers, youth workers, adolescents and youngsters who spoke to me about their experience with the police. For a long time, for reasons that I explain in the introduction, I doubted whether I would ever complete this book. If I have succeeded, I owe it in good part to my son Thomas, who convinced me of the pressing need to make public what I had seen and heard, and to my children Camille and Baptiste, who urged me to write in a way that would reach a wide audience. The French version of the book has benefitted from the unfailing trust of Hugues Jallon, head of Human Sciences at Le Seuil, and the rigorous editing of the manuscript by Bruno Auerbach. For the present English version, I am particularly indebted to John Thompson for his immediate and constant support at Polity Press, to Rachel Gomme for her elegant translation, to Linda Garat for her scrupulous work of copy-editing and to Leigh Mueller for her tactful final revision of the manuscript. I

owe the accurate wording of the English title to Joan Scott who, on several occasions, helped translate the untranslatable. Finally, I feel deeply grateful to Anne-Claire Defossez for having been my first reader – benevolent, encouraging, and constructively critical.

The Advanced Grant I was awarded by the European Research Council made a significant contribution to the writing of this study and to its publication. I might still not have been able to undertake this task had I not had the benefit of the exceptional working conditions at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, where I am now based. Paradoxically, it was in this place, so far removed in all ways from the banlieues where I conducted my investigation, that I was able not only to find the necessary concentration for thinking and composing, but also to reconstruct a mental image of the atmosphere in the neighborhoods and the presence of those who live there or police them.

Preliminary Remarks

This study was conducted in the “banlieue” of Paris. Literally, the word means “suburbs.” Yet, in France, the social structuring of urban areas is such that most banlieues are constituted of a mix of middle-class residential areas with individual houses and impoverished neighborhoods with large public housing projects. Besides, the term, when used in the plural, has generally taken a pejorative connotation as is perceptible in the generic expression “problèmes des banlieues” or, to designate its youth mostly from minority communities, “jeunes des banlieues.” I will therefore keep the French word to avoid any misunderstanding and complement it with three related topographic terms. “Cités” corresponds to public housing projects, which have come to epitomize the “urban question,” with the combination of dilapidated buildings, poor facilities, high unemployment, social segregation and racial discrimination. “Quartiers” literally signifies neighborhood, but the word, in its plural form, sometimes formulated as “quartiers en difficulté,” has increasingly been used as a euphemism for public housing projects and, more generally, disadvantaged neighborhoods. “Zones urbaines sensibles,” or “ZUS,” which can be translated as sensitive urban zones, is an administrative division of the territory identifying large housing projects confronted with the most serious social and economic situations, for which special measures are implemented as a result of the “politique de la ville,” that is, the urban social development policy.

The police have in each national context their specific organization and hierarchy. In France, patrolling is generally conducted by officers in uniform with marked vehicles, but in the banlieues special units

have been created: the dreaded “brigades anti-criminalité,” often designated by their acronym “BAC,” translated here literally as “anti-crime squads,” primarily composed of plain-clothes officers driving unmarked cars. In periods of unrest, “Compagnies républicaines de sécurité,” also known as “CRS,” translated here as “riot police companies,” which are equipped with helmets and shields and move around in vans, are deployed as reinforcements from the garrison where they are usually stationed. It should be noted that law enforcement comprises two distinct institutions with similar missions: the police, a civilian corps based in large towns and cities, and the gendarmerie, a military corps present in small towns and rural areas. In the conurbation where the study was carried out, both were operating, although in distinct territories. For the police ranks, the equivalence in the US system is roughly the following: “commissaires” are commissioners – the one who is at the head of the whole district being translated here as the chief of police; “officiers” are lieutenants, captains and majors; “gardiens de la paix,” literally peacekeepers, are rank-and-file officers. Among the latter, the “brigadier” corresponds to a sergeant and the “brigadier major” to a sergeant major.

Prologue

Interpellation

Hailings hardly ever miss their man.
Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 1971

Even if we're innocent, our parents say:
"How come they caught you if you didn't do anything?"
Friend of the boys who were electrocuted at Clichy-sous-Bois, 2005

December 31, 2006, 7 p.m. In a large conurbation in outer Paris, three smartly dressed teenagers are waiting for their bus in the rain, close to a small public housing project. They are planning to spend New Year's Eve with friends in the neighboring town. The older two are 16, and are long-time friends. The third is 13, the cousin of one of the other boys. He is visiting his uncle for the holidays. The three adolescents have been standing under the shelter for a few minutes when they see a group of five youths run past, jump into a car and speed off. At that moment a riot-police van that has been patrolling the neighborhood appears. Its occupants seem not to have noticed any of this brief flurry of activity. As they pass, they look the boys at the bus stop up and down, and continue on their leisurely patrol. A while later, a police vehicle roars up and halts with a squeal of brakes in front of the three teenagers, who are still waiting for their transportation. Three uniformed officers jump out, call out to the boys brusquely, ask for their papers, search them roughly and question them about what they are doing there. Apparently satisfied with the answers they receive, they get back into their car to radio details back to the station.

At this point, the youngsters are still under the impression that this was no more than a routine identity check. The two cousins are Mauritanian. Their friend was born in Ecuador, and, all three living in the banlieues, they know from experience that, for them, venturing outside of their home means being frequently exposed to such stops and frisks, which all follow the same humiliating routine – hands on the door of the police car, pockets emptied of their contents on the hood, body searched, legs apart – a ritual that is almost always performed in public, in front of local residents, who will later pass comment on the scene. They have already undergone many similar checks, at different times of day and in different places, while merely waiting for a friend at the train station or walking in the street. While they resent the situation, they are not particularly worried. They have nothing to feel guilty about, and, anyway, have they not shown compliance in submitting without complaint? They are unaware at this point that the police have just called for reinforcements.

Another car, this one unmarked because it belongs to the anticrime squad (BAC, “brigade anti-criminalité”), arrives almost immediately, followed by two vans of riot police (CRS, “Compagnies républicaines de sécurité”), one of them being the one that was already cruising the neighborhood. An officer audibly expresses his relief at this massive support for the squad assigned to the area, which is deemed sensitive on this New Year’s Eve, a night which has seen a number of cars set on fire over the last several years. Five officers, two in plain-clothes, now surround the teenagers. One of their riot police colleagues, armed with a Flash-Ball, an impressive non-lethal handheld weapon, stands nearby; the others have remained in the vans. The tone has hardened. The three boys are searched again, and asked the same questions about what they are doing at this late hour. The uniformed law enforcement agents who checked them the first time do not seem surprised that they have not attempted to flee, despite the markedly conspicuous arrival of reinforcements. The riot-police officers who passed by a few minutes earlier do not seem inclined to inform their colleagues that they saw the youngsters waiting quietly at the bus stop. Yet when they had recognized the officers who had scrutinized them in the dark, the boys had felt reassured, imagining that they would attest to their innocence. They are now disabused of this idea. “Bring them in,” comes the curt command from one of the officers.

Shivering in the rain, the boys offer no resistance. Nevertheless, they are handcuffed, hands behind their backs. The officer fitting the cuffs on the youngest remarks, laughing: “I’ve put them on backwards.” And indeed the adolescent, who does not dare complain, has

his arms and body twisted into a painful position which he has to endure for the duration of the trip to the precinct. Throughout this trying ordeal, the three boys have remained silent, simply stating that they have not done anything wrong and were only waiting for their bus. Local residents have gathered around them in the dark, though they keep a careful distance. They are surprised to recognize their own children's friends being manacled like criminals. Witnessing the substantial police deployment and the unexpected recourse to physical restraint, they imagine that the affair is serious.

During the journey the youngest is separated from the others. After a moment of silence, an officer in the car carrying the older two asks: "Do you know why you're here? – No sir. – There's no point pretending, we know it's you. – But we haven't done nothing, sir." Faced with what he interprets as a refusal to cooperate, the officer switches to intimidation: "Anyway we know it's you. So here's what's going to happen. We're gonna hold you for twenty-four hours." He adds sarcastically: "Do you want to know your rights? You can ask for a lawyer or a doctor. And since you're minors, we'll even call your parents." Minutes later, the cell phone of one of the older boys rings in his pocket. He recognizes the ring tone: "It's my father calling me, sir. – So pick it up and answer him," the police officer taunts the handcuffed teenager, who can hardly move. At each bend in the road, the officer sitting between the two boys in the back of the car pretends to be thrown onto one or other, crushing them with all his weight toward the door. The vehicles arrive in spectacular fashion at the station, with flashing lights and sirens in virtually deserted streets.

Once inside, the interrogation resumes, this time individually, and more roughly. The adolescents are commanded to take their hands out of their pockets and submitted to insulting comments. An officer passes close to them as their details are being taken, and makes a derogatory remark about their skin color. His young colleague casts an embarrassed glance toward the boys and laughs: "Hey, no, they're good-looking kids." He tries to reassure them, telling them that if they have not done anything they will be free to go. The older officers, however, seem convinced of their guilt. They try to trick one of the older two, whom they have taken aside: "Your cousin's just confessed. You'd do better to admit what you've done. – It isn't possible, sir. He can't have confessed. We haven't done anything." Between two interrogations, the three boys, relieved of their wallets, watches and personal items, are led into a small room walled with plexiglass panels, known as the "jar." This is where suspects are held while waiting for a decision to be made on their case, either to release them or to keep them in custody. There are no chairs in the room,

and its occupants withstand the mocking gaze of the police, amid the fetid odor of urine from their predecessors who did not get access to the toilets in time. The enclosure, the anxiety, the presence of other more or less angry suspects, the taunts of the officers passing through the adjacent room, all contribute to a psychological tension which is supposed to encourage confessions.

After a lengthy interval, the teenagers are led into a corridor where they are placed in front of a one-way mirror. A woman – the victim of the crime they are accused of – is on the other side. She is there to identify the individuals she maintains she saw from a distance, in the dark, in the rain, running away after they committed it. Without understanding what is expected of them, the three boys turn to show themselves full-face and in profile in response to each order shouted at them by an officer. Later they learn that the witness claimed to recognize the two cousins, whom she described as “blacks dressed in dark clothing.” But there is one troubling detail, which will prove decisive: the third adolescent is wearing a hooded sweatshirt with blue and white stripes, rendering it easily recognizable, whereas the woman’s statement mentioned a similar garment in plain gray. In these conditions it becomes difficult to confirm the teenagers’ guilt, at least assuming that they were all three together. The boy who does not conform to the description is therefore taken into another room and interrogated once again by four officers. One of them puts the deal in his hands: “Look, we know your mates messed up. The victim recognized them. So you’ve got two choices. Either you tell us you weren’t with them, then you can go. Or else you tell us you were with them the whole time, and we throw you in the slammer. – But I was with them the whole time, sir. – In that case you’re guilty, we’ll put you in custody with your pals.” For a quarter of an hour, the officers continue to try to persuade him to break solidarity with his friends. Although he fears the consequences of stubbornly insisting on what he knows to be the truth, the boy does not yield to pressure. He is finally taken back to join the other two in the “jar.” They still do not know what they are accused of, but remain convinced that they will be placed in custody.

However, just as the victim’s testimony is inconclusive, a search into the infamous “STIC” the Reported Crime Processing System (Système de Traitement des Infractions Constatées), the national crime database which holds information on all persons who have come into contact with the police, including suspects who have been exonerated and those who are simply victims, offers no evidence to support the suspicion about the three boys: they are unknown to the police. The captain therefore decides to call the parents of the two

older boys to inform them their children are being held at the police station and they should come and collect them. They are given no explanation as to the reasons for the police questioning. When the two anxious fathers arrive, they are greeted by the captain, who explains that a vehicle was damaged (the door was scratched) by a group of teenagers close to the spot where the three boys were waiting for their bus, and that their description seemed to match that of the culprits. Although he acknowledges that in winter and at this time of night, the majority of youths are clad in dark hooded sweatshirts, making this a minimally distinguishing feature, he concludes, in a threatening tone addressed toward the teenagers who are now being released, and pointing to the one dressed in the striped shirt: “They’re lucky he wasn’t wearing grey” – as if, rather than an error having been made on the part of his colleagues, it was just a clever trick the boys managed to play on the police. He clearly still suspects them and is only sorry not to have been able to establish their guilt. Neither he nor any of the other officers offers a word of apology for their mistake and the distress it has caused.

It is almost midnight. The adolescents have spent more than four hours with the police, under threat of being taken into custody. For them, the New Year’s party is over. But, more than the disappointment of their ruined evening, they resent the injustice they have suffered and the indignity of the situation in which they found themselves: being arrested in front of friends’ parents, the handcuffs, the threats, the taunts, the insults, the racist comments – all of them vexations that they realize they have endured because they live where they live and they are who they are. If they had not been on the outskirts of a public housing project, and if they had not been visibly of non-European origin, they would not have become the “usual suspects” for a banal misdemeanor and would not have had to experience these humiliations.

The scene I describe here resembles many others I observed during the course of the study of the police in the Parisian outer cities I conducted between the months of May 2005 and June 2007. Usually going out in the evening and at night, most often with the anticrime squad, I witnessed many stops and frisks of young men taken in for questioning in similar circumstances, which gave occasion for like practices. This particular episode brings together in both exemplary and banal form many of the ingredients of law enforcement interventions in working-class neighborhoods: ineffective repression of crime (the riot-police van passed the car carrying the young men fleeing the scene of the crime without the officers on board paying any attention to it, even after the event), made up for by the identification of

unlikely culprits (the arrest represents an “act” that can be included in administrative statistics for the crew that made it, and might even have translated into an incident that would have been credited to them as “solved,” had it not been for the non-matching clothing); disproportionate character of the resources deployed (four vehicles with approximately 15 officers, the brandishing of a Flash-Ball which in principle is reserved for riot control or situations where the police are exposed to physical danger) given the trivial situation (three frightened teenagers, the youngest only 13 years old, who showed no intention of resisting); finally, recourse to harassment (putting on handcuffs in front of the friends’ parents) and intimidation (the reiterated threat of custody).

An everyday scene of the life in the banlieues, in short, which at least ended well, with the release of the three boys without charge. It falls within the normal order of things. For the police, in fact, it was no more than an ordinary identity check and properly conducted interrogation, both justified by a reasonable suspicion of participation in a criminal act. For the adolescents it was no more than a brush with law enforcement, admittedly more traumatic than previous episodes, but which they knew was not the first and assumed would not be the last. And for me, it would have been just another observation in my field notebook, had one of the three boys not been my son.

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In a famous text on ideology, Louis Althusser proposes the distinctive concept of interpellation.¹ Taking the word in its customary sense of hailing, rather than its juridical sense of formal police questioning (since in French the same term, “interpellation,” means both), he imagines the following scene. In the street, a police officer hails an individual: “Hey, you there!” The hailed individual turns round: “By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*.” His gesture shows, indeed, that he has recognized that he himself is the individual hailed, either because he believes himself more or less guilty of something, or because he feels targeted for no reason. He has understood that “it was *really him* who was hailed”; in other words, he has accepted the terms of the hail which was addressed to him. This “little theoretical theatre” presents an allegorical model of what we might call the elementary structure of ideology which consists, paradoxically, in forcing individuals to submit freely to the law and hence to become subjects. Thus, freedom does not exclude subjection, but, rather, reinforces its legitimacy. Broadening this proposition, we may posit that the state, through the way it treats its citizens, “transforms individuals into subjects” who

recognize themselves in the condition imposed on them. In a democratic space, however, this is not a simple process. Interpellation is a complex and ambivalent phenomenon that Michel Foucault's analysis of power can help us to understand in more nuanced ways.² On the one hand, it proceeds by "subjection" (the individual submits to domination, in this case that of the police), but, on the other, it is a matter of "subjectification" (the individual constructs himself through this identification, in this example on the basis of the social position to which he is assigned). The political subject is therefore the product of this dialectical relationship of subjection and subjectification, through which the individual is assigned a place which he can either recognize as his own, or reject.

Let us return to our initial scene. Playing on the two senses of the word, the *interpellation* of the three youngsters can be grasped on two levels of reading. First, in the literal, or juridical sense, interpellation (police questioning) is the gesture in which they are stopped, frisked, arrested, taken to the police station and finally released without any further form of legal proceedings. Second, in the figurative, and therefore political, sense, interpellation (ideological hailing) is the action through which they discover that they are at the mercy of police discretion – since they understand that it is not enough to be innocent in order not to be deemed guilty – and above all through which they become aware that what is happening to them is related not to what they have done, but to what they represent. They learn who they are to the gaze of others ("project youth" who can be treated as they are treated, precisely because they have been constituted as such, in social but also in racial terms). This questioning thus represents a key moment in the experience of the three boys, different as it is from that of teenagers of their age who live in less stigmatized neighborhoods and do not bear such visible signs of their origin. On one level, of course, this experience merely confirms what they already knew – because other institutions, from primary school onwards, had already taught it to them, because their parents or elders had warned them about it, and ultimately because, in the more specific context of their relations with the police, they had already, despite their young age, been subject to identity checks and body searches on several occasions – acts they understood were not carried out at random, but related to what they represented in the eyes of the police. Nevertheless, what they went through that New Year's Eve was beyond anything they had previously experienced. The brutality of the arrest, the harshness of the language used, the lack of any justification for the use of physical restraint, the powerlessness they felt in the face of the omnipotence of law enforcement created a sort of accelerated

apprenticeship, not only in a particular social order in which they had just been assigned a place, but also in their own individual condition of subjects with no choice but to resign themselves to accepting it.

This apprenticeship is much more than a simple coming to awareness. It is “*an* experience,” in the strong, “vital” sense that Dewey gives to this expression, in opposition to the everyday “flux” of experiences³ – one of those moments that may not be important in itself, but which becomes so because of what it means to the person living through it. In short, an event that stands out from the ordinary run of life and gains meaning after the fact. And this experience is not merely an intellectual one. It is inscribed in the boys’ bodies – in two distinct and complementary ways. On the one hand, they come to understand what they embody in the eyes of society: “This is what you are,” they are told. On the other, they internalize this representation they are given of themselves: “Become what you are!” they are ordered. This engagement of the body – embodiment and internalization – is not entirely at a conscious level. It is experienced rather than analyzed. It emerges through affects, first and foremost the fear that certain individuals say they feel when they see the police – individuals who not only have already had dealings with them, but also know that, because of what they represent, they are particularly susceptible to finding themselves once again subjected to distressing procedures and insulting comments, and do not know how far all this might go. At a deeper level, this humiliating and unjust experience often induces a sense of shame and sometimes guilt which is all the harder to repress because it is not based on any objective reality: the individual is ashamed of the violence to which he has been subjected, and feels guilty of a sin that he has not committed.

In the interview he granted me shortly after the riots of 2005, the chief of police for the district in which I was then carrying out research expressed his amusement and surprise at the attitude of youngsters from the projects who, he said, would routinely run away when they saw a police car. “So they’re running, but they don’t even know why. I often have officers telling me that when they get somewhere they see kids running away. They catch them and bring them in to the station. And they find out they’ve done absolutely nothing. So they ask them: ‘But why did you run off?’ It’s amazing: it must be a Pavlovian reflex.” I refrained from replying that his description of such a scenario seemed considerably more benign than what I had already witnessed, but I could not hold back from suggesting that the fact that the police officers chased after the youngsters when they saw them run was perhaps a similar reflex. I am not sure he appreciated the irony of my remark, but his observation seems to me illuminating.

Rather than a reflex, I would see this as an embodied memory:⁴ before we even have time to think, the body remembers. What is manifested in these frantic flights is past experience of interactions with the police, and their occasionally playful aspects should not mask the real base of irrepressible fear. In short, a sort of immune reaction which, unlike that produced by vaccination, allows the danger to which one is exposed to be recognized, but does not protect one from it.

The death of two teenagers from Clichy-sous-Bois, news of which triggered the riots of that fall, offers a tragic reminder of the irrepressible power of this memory, and what it allows the individual to anticipate.⁵ What is known is that a small group of boys were returning home from a soccer game when they heard police sirens, saw youths from their neighborhood running away and caught sight of a plain-clothes police officer brandishing a Flash-Ball. Panicking, they took flight, three of them seeking refuge in an electricity substation where 15-year-old Bouna Traoré and 17-year-old Zyed Benna were electrocuted, while Muhittin Altun, also 17, suffered serious burns. Contrary to what was immediately stated by the Ministry of the Interior, the three boys had committed no crime, but, like the youngsters referred to by the chief of police in his interview with me, they had run off in fear, to escape the prospect of arrest and interrogation, which would probably have ended less happily than the case I have recounted above, since this incident took place in a town where relations between youngsters and the police were much more strained.

The phrase “Dead for no reason,” which became the central slogan in demonstrations in memory of Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna, emphasizes the extremes to which teenagers may be driven, informed as they are by previous contact with law enforcement and therefore terrified of the potential consequences of police questioning, whether these consequences consist of being held in custody at the precinct or being punished by their parents. Lawyers subsequently explained that the boys fled because they did not have their identity documents with them, but as my account above indicates, even if they did, they could not have been certain they would avoid being arrested and detained, particularly in a context in which the officers were searching for teenagers suspected of breaking into a construction site. Thus, while they were not subjected to “interpellation” in the legal sense of questioning, the three youths were certainly “interpellated” in the political meaning of being hailed: they understood that the police might be after them; hearing sirens and seeing the Flash-Ball, they “recognized” themselves, ran off and found somewhere to hide. Although innocent, they behaved as if they were guilty, realizing that

if they were caught they would be treated the same way regardless. And when the minister of the interior accused them the following day of a break-in which they were already known not to have committed, he confirmed that they were right to fear that things would not go well for them if they were taken to the precinct.

Nothing like that occurred, of course, in the episode I recounted above. Readers will, moreover, have noted that, perhaps less experienced in these dangerous liaisons with law enforcement, the three teenagers did not move when the riot-police van passed the bus shelter, or when the police car halted abruptly in front of them, or even when they saw the three other vehicles arrive. Confident of being within their rights, they thought this was nothing more than an ordinary stop and search (at 16, my son had already experienced several times what his father had never been exposed to during his entire life). The three boys would no doubt be less trusting another time. This “interpellation” had decidedly begun to bear fruit, constituting them as docile subjects in the face of law enforcement. For my part, I have to confess that I had anticipated such situations. When this event transpired, I had already been engaged in researching the police for a year and a half. Enlightened by my observations, I had begun a rather special kind of civic education with my son and his friend, explaining to them – not without deep discomfort – that in contemporary France, the color of their skin made them susceptible to frequent stops and frisks, and that, if they were faced with this kind of situation, they should not react in any way, however they were treated by the police. There was nothing very original in my approach: I later learned that parents in the neighboring housing project had the same conversations with their sons. Having to teach one’s children that discrimination is an everyday fact and that they should remain docile in the face of injustice – one should certainly not underestimate the seriousness of the question of what such an obligatory concession to the rule of law means in a democracy.

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My aim in presenting this personal take here is not simply to offer a “testimony.” Journalists and sociologists have gathered many of these. Social workers and community mediators have recounted them. Some have been published, like the moving tribute by Alain Badiou during the riots of fall 2005.⁶ Returning to the events that triggered the riots, he writes: “Of all the complaints made by the youth of this country in revolt, the omnipresence of being checked and arrested in their everyday lives, this harassment without respite, is the most constant, the most widely shared. Do we really realize

what this grievance means? The dose of humiliation and violence it implies?” In an attempt to exemplify this situation, the French philosopher chooses to recount the experience of his “sixteen-year-old, adopted son who is black.” Over the previous 18 months, he had been subjected to so many checks that he had lost count; as to arrests, there had been six, the most recent of which was reported in substantial detail, the handcuffs and the threats, the insults and the harshness. Finally, when nothing could be held against the boy, he was released, and the police offered his father, who came to pick him up, an apology. “I suppose that those from the projects don’t even have the right to apologies,” the author observes lucidly; for the officers I had dealt with, such a prospect was indeed unimaginable, whatever mistakes they had made or cruelty they had inflicted. This, then, was an edifying tale, and publishing it represented both a revelation and an accusation. On the one hand, it testifies, from the pen of an academic who made sure to list his titles and qualifications, to what cannot be articulated by those who have no access to the media, or who, even if they had, would still seem suspect to many: people wonder, do they really have nothing to reproach themselves for, these young people who are checked or arrested by the police? On the other hand, it denounces practices deemed iniquitous and dangerous in forceful terms, comparing the police to “dogs unleashed on children of working-class people and people of foreign origin”; one may nevertheless query whether this denunciation succeeds in doing more than preaching to the converted. In effect, this testimony both bears witness and moves us, but it does not enlighten.

I propose a different approach in this book, seeking less to establish the veracity of the harassment of some young people by the police than to reflect on the truth that this situation holds for our society. I am interested less in the anger that may legitimately be aroused by an account of police questioning than in how to make such an account intelligible.

To be more specific, the truth that I am trying to grasp is the very precariousness of the actual story of these three adolescents, that is, the risk that its reality may elude us. It is in fact possible to live one’s entire life in the banlieues and never encounter such situations. It is also possible to live one’s entire life in the banlieues and be exposed to them daily. French society is divided, and its territory is segregated, in such a way that one may be unaware of large parts of one’s environment, even while living alongside those who usually have little choice but to remain there. For a large proportion of the young people of France, violence and injustice are an everyday experience stemming from interactions with the police about which the majority

of citizens have no inkling; and if they were to find out about it, they would be led to believe that it is simply the price to be paid for maintaining public order. It is therefore from this point of view that I felt the necessity to conduct my investigation.

As to the intelligibility I seek, it implies something like a shift to the other side of the mirror: condemnation may be legitimate and necessary, but it is not enough. Thus, rather than putting the police on trial, it seemed essential to me to inquire into their activity in the outer cities. Although there are some excellent studies of the profession, the organization, the culture, and now also the history of the police in France, there are still few investigations of the modalities of their interventions in working-class neighborhoods that are based on observation of their practices. By sharing their daily routine at a police station and in an anticrime squad, I tried to grasp the logics and constraints of their actions, at the same time attempting to resituate these in the process of transformation of our societies. In this way I hope to shed some light on how and why the officers come to be what they are. Perhaps this truth and this intelligibility will, in their turn, stimulate readers not to anger but to indignation:⁷ in other words, to a moral sentiment capable of generating not impotence or violence, but action.

When my son and his friends were arrested, I realized – in some ways retrospectively, for I was already well into my research by that time – that it was the search for this truth and this intelligibility that led me to undertake this work. Quite simply, I was trying to comprehend what made such incidents possible. And I understood over the following days that it was no longer possible for me not to write this book.

In 1945, presenting the fruits of 16 years of “philosophical investigations,” Ludwig Wittgenstein concluded his preface with these words: “I make them public with misgivings. It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light into one brain or another – but, of course, it is not likely.”⁸ Similarly clear-sighted as to the insufficiencies in my own work, but also aware that we are once again passing through dark times, I shall nevertheless venture greater hopes for the reception of this anthropological research. If therefore, serendipitously, reading this book was to stimulate some debate among the police or the public, this would give some meaning to the long hours spent on patrol with an anticrime squad and to the labor of writing I have undertaken since then to make it accessible beyond the usual social science readership.

Introduction

Inquiry

Doing ethnography is not just observing what human beings do – that would mean treating them like mice – but understanding the meaning of what they do, in the context of a world of meanings that is radically foreign to us.

Jean Bazin, *Des clous dans la Joconde*.
L'anthropologie autrement, 2008

With very rare exceptions, any request for field study with any section of the police is either immediately refused or referred to a higher authority, up as far as the central directorate of the Ministry of the Interior.

Dominique Monjardet, “Gibier de recherche.
La police et le projet de connaître,” 2005

That research should be an activity independent of political intervention is a fact generally accepted in modern democracies, and that analysis of the way in which state institutions operate in their relations with citizens is a legitimate task of social sciences may certainly seem obvious to many. Five years after I began a study of the police, I had to acknowledge that these two assumptions, which my initial experience of studying law enforcement had led me to believe were justified, were no longer shared by the French ruling authorities. For the first time, in a research career that has taken me to sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America to explore often delicate and sometimes controversial subjects, under regimes of varying degrees of freedom, I came up against a ban on the continuation of my work. A ban couched in “civil” terms, but imposed with a persistence that left

little doubt as to the determination to prevent me from completing a study that had been initiated under the best auspices. My “discovery” of the censorship that prevails around law enforcement will not surprise experts in the field who know that, in reality, secrecy and opacity are the rule, disclosure and transparency the exception.¹ Nevertheless, after a period in which the French police opened up to research, albeit with difficulties recognized by both sides – but also with acknowledged mutual benefits – the policy introduced during the early years of the twenty-first century marks a withdrawal that sets us back more than two decades, in a domain in which France was only just beginning to catch up with other major Western nations.

Security issues are now managed at the highest level of government, and the exercise of public force is probably the most sensitive topic within that domain, so much have its excesses been linked to the eruption of urban violence over the last 25 years – the riots of the fall of 2005 constituting the most striking episode. The vise has therefore progressively tightened around the local authorities, policing apparatus, deontological control, judicial procedure, journalistic reportage and, finally, scientific research. The restrictions applied to the latter may not be the most worrying, but the state’s closure to the scrutiny of social scientists, and by the same token that of citizens, does merit attention. However, this censorship is neither total nor permanent. It relates only to certain institutions and is imposed only at certain times. It demarcates zones of exception in the strong sense of a demonstration of the sovereign gesture suspending democratic rule.² It concerns what we might – in order to avoid echoing a certain pathos not uncommon in reference to this concept – term “petty exceptions,” the multiplication of which can provide a fairly significant indicator of how democracy is working. The fact that the police can no longer be made the object of independent observation and analysis leads one to wonder what they might have to hide, or what the authorities would prefer to leave unsaid about them. The aim of this book is to put forward an answer to that question, through an ethnography of law enforcement where its absence is so manifest and significant: the banlieues. There is, of course, a paradox in asserting censorship of research in the introduction to a book that reports on a long-term study by revealing precisely that which I state has now been withdrawn from our gaze. But the fact is that times have changed.

The sort of study I conducted, which was already exceptional when I did it, became impossible a few years later. Indeed, the authorization I was given in 2005, by the chief of police in the district where I was able to freely carry out my research on the everyday

work of an anticrime squad, has been refused to me since 2007 in the various locations where I have tried to continue my investigations. After completing that study, I realized that it would be desirable to extend my “fieldwork” through similar observations in one or two other locations, in order to form a more solid basis for my findings. Although ethnographic research is focused on in-depth knowledge of a specific social configuration rather than statistical representation of a population on the basis of sampling – the qualitative rather than the quantitative – it is, however, useful to be able to compare a number of these configurations so as not to generalize from individual cases.³ Putting the units I observed in parallel with others operating in other cities seemed to me to conform to a principle of basic scientific rigor as much as to a requirement for honesty with regard to the world of the police. This is why, to avoid jeopardizing my chances of obtaining the necessary authorization, I had decided not to publish any text or make any public presentation of my analyses. However, this reticence did nothing to dispose the authorities benevolently toward my request.

A first attempt, in 2007–8, received the agreement of the head of a police district on the outskirts of Paris who had expressed interest in the presentation of my initial findings at a meeting with magistrates and commissioners. But he explained to me that I had first to apply to the director of public security of the *département* – that is, the administrative region. The fact that an official at the highest level of the local police hierarchy could no longer authorize research, which at the time was funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs, without gaining approval from his regional superiors certainly marked a change compared with my previous experience. After several exchanges with the prefect who is the representative of the state in the *département*, I finally learned that my application had been rejected, but I was advised to submit a reformulated request at a later date. At the time I interpreted the refusal and the accompanying recommendation as an expression of unwillingness to allow research on the police during a period in which presidential, parliamentary and local elections were to take place in quick succession. The individual with whom I was in communication gave me to understand that this interpretation was correct. I therefore decided to wait for a more propitious moment.

A second try, in 2009–10, was made in what seemed more favorable circumstances: there would be no elections for several years; I had just been awarded a major grant by the European Research Council, part of which was to cover research on law enforcement; my request was accompanied by a letter of support from the minister

of higher education; a Department of Public Security senior official whom I had gotten to know in an academic setting was giving me helpful advice and speaking discreetly with his colleagues on my behalf; I was no longer aiming for specific sites and stated that I was prepared to continue my observations wherever I was permitted. Despite these theoretically ideal circumstances, I had little more success: the only difference was that it took much longer for me to understand this. For six months I continued to call, write letters, meet officials from police communications offices; I was transferred from one département to another within the Paris region, with assertions that I would certainly be welcome in each one; I was asked to wait for a decision from a more senior official, with the guarantee that those submitting the application would support my request, which was by now accompanied by official letters and opinions from ethics committees. I accepted each new instruction docilely, and patiently made contact with the recommended individuals. Each time the circle returned to the start and the same interminable negotiations ended in the same result.

Finally, I asked an official in the National Directorate of Public Security, who had been sent my file and who seemed sorry to have the task of repeatedly stalling me when he knew well I had no chance of obtaining a satisfactory answer, whether the obstacles actually came from “on high,” and whether, that being the case, it would not be better for me to apply directly to the minister of the interior. He appeared relieved to be able to confirm this, and indeed invited me to take this step by sending my request to Michèle Alliot-Marie. When I decided to do so, her successor, Brice Hortefeux, had just taken office. I wrote to him, setting out all the arguments I imagined might carry some weight, reminding him in particular how well things had gone in my first field site. Shortly afterwards I received a polite letter from his principal private secretary informing me that the minister had “noted my request with attention,” and would be giving it “appropriate scrutiny.” Several exchanges of mail – and some months – later, I finally received a letter from a general inspector of police regretting that he could not “offer the conditions required for completion” of my research, and inviting me, inevitably, three years after my first attempt, to “submit a further request in the future.” Since I had “merely” applied to the minister of the interior, I drew the conclusion that I had not yet gone “high enough” in my request, but guessing that I would not improve my chances by writing to his “superior,” I decided to halt my rise up the political ranks there.

My reason for recounting these trials and tribulations of an interrupted study is that they echo the misadventures experienced by other

researchers, and I believe they have a significance that reaches beyond the frame of my own inquiry. Since 2002⁴ the Ministry of the Interior has been taking research into law enforcement back into its own hands, first by removing social science researchers from the Institute for Advanced Studies in Internal Security (IHESI, Institut des hautes études de la sécurité intérieure), and then by replacing it in 2004 with the National Institute for Advanced Studies in Security (INHES, Institut national des hautes études de sécurité), whose director closed down the research department. This institute, which in 2009 finally became the National Institute for Advanced Studies in Security and Justice (INHESJ, Institut national des hautes études de sécurité et de la justice), is located within the Military Academy in Paris and attached to the prime minister's office, and now gathers statistics relating to both crime and the justice system.⁵ In parallel, it has become increasingly difficult to carry out research on the police, particularly when it involves fieldwork – that is, observation of the activity of patrolling: the Ministry's control of all levels of the administration, including the power to sanction prefects or even remove them from office if they are judged not to have contained criticism of the authorities satisfactorily, leads to a situation where, understandably, neither the chief of police, nor the département's director of security, nor even the prefect is prepared to stake their position on potentially sensitive subjects.⁶ The procedure for approving a simple study that involves observing police work therefore becomes a matter for the central administration and the minister's office – ultimately where such requests are actually blocked.

The government's takeover of the main institution dedicated to researching security issues, and the practice of intimidating regional government officials, have resulted in an unprecedented degree of censorship on police officers, whose every public utterance is subject to a duty of secrecy, and have given rise to penalties which can go as far as dismissal, even if the individuals in question are cooperating with researchers or working within a research center.⁷ As Christian Mouhanna, a sociologist who himself suffered the consequences of this authoritarian policy, observes: "Any scrutiny or critical gaze based on in-depth knowledge of police circles represents a danger. Clearly, if the policy in force essentially aims not at modifying police practices but at improving the image of law enforcement bodies, the slightest divergence in analysis is likely to disturb the authorities."⁸ This gives some indication of the extent to which the study I carried out between 2005 and 2007 represented an improbable departure, much more so than I imagined at the time, during a period in which the grip was tightening but when, subject to the agreement of the

département's director of security, it was still possible for a dauntless chief of police to grant a researcher authorization to work independently.⁹ There was little chance of this anomaly being repeated, as I learned to my regret.

The closing of the door to research that took place a decade ago occurred after a short period of greater openness. Dominique Monjardet, generally regarded as the pioneer of the sociology of the police in France, recognized the fragility of this openness even as he emphasized its importance: "It is vulnerable, and tight-lipped silence may yet return to dominance. But knowledge cannot be made to disappear by slamming doors. Too many police officers have discovered too many resources through this encounter with the other to imagine that they will long accept this renewed closure."¹⁰ His gloomy prediction of the ever-present possibility of a return to tight-lipped silence was accurate, but, in the light of current circumstances, his forecast of resistance among the police seems over-optimistic. However, according to Jean-Marc Erbès, who, as director of training programs for the national police and later director of IHESI, initiated the exchanges, these years of collaboration between researchers and police yielded rich results, which aroused, he acknowledged, a range of reactions within law enforcement – these results were judged to bear little relation to the reality of operations and to be over-critical, and there were some fairly stormy exchanges between the two sides. But it was recognized that these results offered a different perspective and new knowledge – to the extent that some elements emerging from this research were incorporated into police training and reforms of the institution. Nevertheless, the then director of IHESI also warned against possible retreat: "Nothing is ever guaranteed and we must hope that this scrutiny can be maintained, and that the police as an institution remain open to research. Law enforcement, whether in France or any other country, is more tempted than any other institution to hide from external scrutiny. The acceptance of that scrutiny by government and police authorities represents a good marker of the health of a democracy and the quality of public debate that takes place there."¹¹ Subsequent events were to confirm his fears, particularly the takeover of research on the police by one man, Nicolas Sarkozy, first as the minister of the interior, and then as elected president.

Thus what is at stake in the ban on social science research on the police, at least on studies that aim to observe the way they operate in the field, is indeed the disappearance of an external gaze on the action of the main institution to which the state delegates the legitimate use of force. Recent high-profile cases involving the police –

either when they have committed brutality or even murder, or when they have been accused of practicing racial discrimination – not to mention several cases of corruption, have shown that the absence of any approved third party resulted in a situation where the only voice heard and listened to, both in the media and in the courts, was that of the police, while that of their public was barely audible. Researchers do not, of course, hold a monopoly on the truth of such cases, nor do they express themselves as spokespersons of the inhabitants of the banlieues, but their work makes it possible to see these often tragic incidents in a new light, by offering an external perspective on them and, more generally, on relations between the police and the public.¹² If we therefore consider the relationship between action and knowledge – here, between the world of the police and the world of research – not as a hostile confrontation but as a critical dialogue, and if we recognize that, notably in relation to public policy, this relationship is a key concern in democratic debate, it is clear that the foreclosure of any independent observation of the work of law enforcement bodies is a worrying sign.

There was a marked increase in studies on the police in the United States and Britain following riots that opened a dramatic window onto the tensions prevalent in working-class neighborhoods – often with high minority and immigrant populations – between residents, particularly young people, and law enforcement – the Watts riots in Los Angeles in 1965, the riots in Chicago in 1966 and Newark in 1967, and the riots in Brixton in 1981 and London in 2011, to cite only some of the most serious in terms of damages and decisive in terms of policy. Public inquiries were set up. Their reports – McCone and especially Katzenbach and Kerner in the United States, Scarman in Britain – highlighted the structural conditions forming the background to the riots (spatial segregation, racial discrimination, economic precariousness) and described the immediate factors that triggered them (the police were almost always implicated in these explosions of violence). Extending these observations, scientific studies were undertaken, supported by dialogue between police and academic circles, and sometimes resulting in reforms in the organization of law enforcement. Unlike in the United States and Britain, when France experienced its worst riots in at least three decades, in 2005, the government chose not to draw any lesson from them, and strove to protect the police by insulating them, while the French parliament avoided taking on the issue. No inter-ministerial working group was appointed, no parliamentary committee was created, no major program of scientific study was launched – on the contrary, the openings for research were restricted still further.¹³ Given these conditions,

I recognize my good fortune in having been able to complete my initial study, at a time when the riots might have served as a pretext for halting it.

It will, of course, be objected – legitimately – that the police have good reasons for not wishing to expose themselves to external scrutiny. As William Westley pointed out in 1950: “Secrecy among the police stands as a shield against the attacks of the outside world; against bad newspaper publicity which would make the police lose respect; against public criticism from which they feel they suffer too much; against the criminal who is eager to know the moves of the police; against the law which the police too frequently abrogate.”¹⁴ To this list we may undoubtedly add sociologists and anthropologists, who are generally seen as overly inclined toward criticism – although, to be fair, not only by the police but also by doctors, psychologists, teachers, and even researchers, who do not readily take to people coming to see how they work.¹⁵ Indeed, I have to say that in earlier studies I myself met with much more reticence among these professionals with high academic capital than I did from law enforcement officials, who generally made me welcome, and showed no particular mistrust toward me. My response to these points must therefore be that it was not the rank-and-file officers who obstructed me with secrecy, but rather the hierarchy of the police. The problems of access I encountered had less to do with a generalized pattern of resistance to inquiry than to the specific circumstances of control of knowledge. If it is true that, as Jean-Paul Brodeur writes, “the action of the police is a subject that presents conscious resistance to the project of knowledge,”¹⁶ the French experience over the last 30 years demonstrates the extent to which this resistance may be reinforced – or sometimes, on the contrary – reduced, by the vagaries of the political scene.

However, the state is not of a piece in this respect, and not all institutions submit to censorship with equal obedience. It was instructive to compare how my requests to conduct research were received by law enforcement and by prison administration, both of which are involved in implementing the repressive policies of the state. While the regional and national Directorates of Public Security proved systematically hostile to research when authorization was requested, the national Directorate of Penitentiary Administration, which has a genuine research support service as well as an associated research center, demonstrated its openness. For a social scientist, it is now almost as easy to work in a jail as it is difficult to work with the police. And yet if there is one environment that does not have a positive image among the public and in the media, it is the world of the prison; if there is one profession that feels disliked by citizens, it is

that of the prison guard; and if there is one place that might easily be imagined to be turned in on itself and closed to external scrutiny, it is almost by definition the prison. All the conditions would thus seem to militate against sociologists and anthropologists being made welcome there. But my experience, and that of most researchers who have carried out studies on the prison world, is the opposite of what I, as well as most of my colleagues, encountered with law enforcement.¹⁷ It is difficult to imagine that this contrast bears no relation to what the two institutions seek to show or, on the contrary, hide. At a time when security issues are becoming a matter for presidential jurisdiction and a major electoral issue, censorship of research leaves the monopoly on legitimate discourse to the political representatives of the state.

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What government has difficulty with, then, is research being carried out on the police, and, more specifically, this research being ethnographic in nature. Thus, when a professor at the National School for the Judiciary (ENM, *École nationale de la magistrature*), who asked me to present my research to magistrates and commissioners, learned the title I planned to give the talk, he immediately expressed concern. Without thinking too much about it, I had entitled it “Ethnography of an anticrime squad,” considering that this vague formulation would avoid giving away too much of what I would be saying. This choice was apparently not a good one: “You can’t say you’ve done an ethnographic study of them,” the professor explained; “They’ll think you’re saying they’re savages.” This was a useful reminder of the inadequacy of these vestiges of academic ethnocentrism in my language: the term “ethnography” is no more neutral than “native,” which some, in France, use with a mixture of scientific exactness and ironic detachment in speaking of their research, particularly when it relates to individuals who are socially and culturally close to them. I therefore yielded to this justified criticism and renamed my presentation in a perhaps no less ambiguous way: “Investigation of an anticrime squad.” If, notwithstanding, I persist in describing this work as an ethnography of urban policing, it is because I did indeed conceive of it as a monograph of the kind anthropologists have traditionally produced. Ethnography is, of course, by no means the private province of anthropology, and it is worth noting that, both in North America and in Western Europe, ethnographic research on law enforcement has been conducted almost exclusively by criminologists, sociologists, political scientists and legal scholars. There is certainly no strong argument for the distinction between disciplines,

but it is curious that those who describe themselves as anthropologists so rarely focus on the police: this surely represents a legacy of an old division of academic labor and an idea that most still have of their discipline.¹⁸ In defining my research as an ethnography of law enforcement, I consequently need to clear up two misunderstandings. Indeed, two things are generally expected of anthropologists.

On the one hand, it is assumed, all anthropology requires an element of exoticism. The police are, of course, part of a world that is familiar to us – certainly more familiar than the Quechua farmers of Ecuador or the residents of South African townships on whom I focused in previous research. Nevertheless, from crime novels to film noir and television series, and by way of some variously embellished autobiographies of “cops,” law enforcement has been rendered exotic. While it purports to bring the police close to us, this popular culture in fact presents a heroic and distant image. Police officers readily identify with this positive representation, even though they know how far removed it is from the relatively uneventful reality of a profession whose monotone palette they attempt to brighten by inserting some colorful moments, such as high-speed car chases, in pursuit of adventures that occur only rarely. Despite the symbolic advantage that exoticism always confers – in terms of the attraction it holds for the reader but also, in this case, the satisfaction it would give the police – I will try rather to describe the everyday routine of their profession and to report the mundane detail of their work, without seeking out the highlights of moments of bravery or glimpses of scandal. Here, it is the insignificant that carries the greatest significance.

On the other hand, it is generally held that the anthropologist’s task is to describe cultures. The police do not, of course, present the community of language, traditions, beliefs, and rituals that ethnic groups are imagined to have. But researchers who have studied them readily talk of the “culture” of the police. Having myself often criticized the culturalist bias that holds sway both in common parlance and in academic analysis, I shall not venture into this terrain. Rather than essentializing features assumed to be uniform characteristics of police officers, I shall try to show how their actions depend not only on institutional constraints and political circumstances, but also on their own life trajectories and their professional careers. There is enough variation in the way individual officers act in a given situation – for example, in their interactions with the young people of a poor neighborhood – to mean that it should not be circumscribed by a concept that often operates tautologically: with the assumption that police officers do what they do because of their culture, and that the

reasons why they do it constitute the characteristics of that culture. Culturalism as ideology is poor social theory.

The advantage of relinquishing this dual expectation is not merely one of academic accuracy: there is also a political, or even ethical, advantage. Exoticism distances. Culture constructs otherness. And if anthropology has any meaning in the contemporary world, it is precisely to assert the “end of exoticism”¹⁹ and to propose not to “promote otherness, but to reduce it.”²⁰ From this point of view, I cannot say that, for me, understanding French police officers was necessarily any less of a challenge than understanding doctors in a Soweto hospital, peasant women in the Andes, or traditional healers in Senegal. Certainly, we spoke the same language – at least in the first approximation – but I often became aware that I shared fewer of their attitudes and judgments than I had experienced with my informants in previous field sites. So, the task I set myself was to reduce otherness and therefore to try to think as much as possible like a police officer, even about subjects on which my ideas, my instincts and my personal reasoning were far removed from those of my companions on patrol. Moreover, this exercise took the form not of abstract principles over which I could muse in tranquility on my return from the field, but rather of concrete situations in which I was myself caught up: how could I have absented myself mentally from scenes that racist remarks or acts of violence rendered distressing – scenes I witnessed with an uncomfortable sense of complicity and where my outward appearance could lead others to see me as one of the plain-clothes officers whom I accompanied? Consequently, I had to accept our actual proximity, and even what those who were subjected to identity checks or formal questioning might interpret as connivance or involvement on my part. This was what made my study possible, but it was also a corollary of the effort the police were making to integrate me, at least temporarily, into their community.

I should not, anyway, exaggerate the distance – including the moral distance – separating me, in the everyday work, from the men and women among whom I was conducting my research.²¹ On the one hand, even when one does not share all of the ways of doing or seeing of the group one is studying – whether they include witchcraft or xenophobia – ethnographic practice assumes a degree of, if not sympathy, at least respect for the rules implicit in the exchange implied by any study. This was made all the easier for me by the fact that my informants were honestly agreeing to these rules by accepting me into their world. On the other hand, even when there is a certain group habitus that tends to favor reprehensible behavior or extremist

ideologies – thus giving the impression that all Zulu men are violent, or all police officers racist – the internal disagreements within these apparent moral communities should not be underestimated. During my research, although the majority of the members of the anticrime squad did not hide their views from me any more than they disguised their actions, of which they guessed I would disapprove, some of their colleagues and superiors seemed, on the contrary, to be inspired by a sense of their profession and a vision of society which I felt was close to my own. For these two reasons, I was less inclined to relegate them to a radical otherness than to understand them in their differences – from me, and from one another.

Two strategies helped me do this – one analytical, the other tactical. Firstly, I tried to resituate the occurrences I was observing back into the broader social and political context that made them possible: the police do not behave as they do purely because of their psychological traits or moral qualities; their actions depend very largely on their personal history, the training they have undergone, the supervision they receive, the conditions of work imposed on them, the tasks conferred by government policies, and the representations of the social world that society produces. In applying this strategy, I did not presume to relieve them of their individual responsibility by judging them entirely determined by realities they inherited and which were more powerful than they were; I hoped simply to give a more sociological meaning to their actions. Secondly, I knew that my apparent imperviousness to the emotions and judgments that the scenes I witnessed might arouse was itself the condition of my research, and specifically of any trust my informants might place in me: expressing disagreement or reproach in response to unpleasant episodes would have prevented me from completing my work. In any case, the study was comprised less of these difficult moments than of a routine, the issues of which I was attempting to grasp. Under these conditions, things were relatively simple. The officers carried out their work, and I did mine. They did not bother to determine what I thought, and I did not attempt to expose it to them. They brought me into their everyday activity, included me in their discussions, and probably tested me by letting me hear their racist comments and witness some actions of questionable legality. I limited myself to observing, listening, formulating a few questions, engaging sometimes in mundane conversations and, ultimately, trying to comprehend what was going on. Of course, from time to time, some of them asked me again, probably somewhat apprehensively, the purpose of my work, while I, for my part, occasionally, and sometimes clumsily, ventured a comment that prompted a reaction from them. But, essentially, both

they and I maintained the ambiguity of this situation as if there was nothing unusual about it.

The ethnographic relationship, that is, the link that forms in a research situation between the social scientist and those he is studying, always sets up a tension between complicity and duplicity: on the one hand, the anthropologist is seeking to induce an artificial proximity that eventually becomes real; on the other, he strives to maintain a degree of distance with regard to an intellectual project that itself develops as the research advances. In general, complicity prevails, if only for the practical reason that it offers a better return in terms of information (people say more to a researcher with whom a degree of complicity has been established), but also as a result of a miserabilist tendency that is fairly widespread in the social sciences (most research relates to dominated groups, whether they be the poor or unemployed, illegal immigrants or asylum seekers, threatened indigenous groups in Latin America or marginalized African urban dwellers, to cite only my own research²²). Sometimes duplicity is deemed necessary, and even if it is somewhat disapproved of by anthropologists (one is not supposed to deceive one's informants), it is recognized that under certain conditions it can be difficult to work in any other way (for example, when conducting studies of illegal activities).

My research was not exempt from this tension. Indeed, I did develop a certain degree of complicity with the police officers: I had coffee with them at the start of the shift, I took part in their conversations about sports or politics, I asked about a family event they had mentioned in my presence. More concretely, up to a point I was part of their group, wearing clothes that resembled theirs, standing alongside them during stops and frisks, not setting myself apart from their actions on the ground even when I found them disturbing. I realized more than once that the people we came into contact with in the neighborhoods took me for a police officer – a “rookie” or a “chief,” depending on the circumstances. But, conversely, I could not avoid a degree of duplicity in my relationship with the officers: I had of course introduced myself as a researcher, and they had also been informed of my study by a memo from the commissioner; I had briefly explained the aims of my work, attempting to reassure my informants that this was not an evaluation requested by their senior officers, but rather a scientific investigation. At the same time, I did not reveal my impressions or my analyses; I did not show the disapproval I sometimes felt; I asked questions that might lead them to say more than they would have wished. But this tension was in no way specific to the fact of studying law enforcement: the double game of

complicity and duplicity is ultimately the condition of all ethnography. At most, the sensitive nature of my subject made it more visible.

Moreover, I was certainly not the only one playing this game: my companions on patrol were no slouches. Even though, as the deputy chief of police said to me at the end of my first year in the field, "It looks like now they behave pretty much as if you weren't there," it is clear that, while its effects certainly diminished over time, my presence undoubtedly altered their attitude. Certain political symbols would disappear when I passed, some conversations would break off as I approached, some actions were not undertaken when there was a risk I might witness them. In general, although they were able to realize over the months I was with them that my work had nothing to do with an audit, and I was not reporting my observations to their superiors, in my presence, they no doubt avoided engaging in any activities that might have caused them problems. From this point of view, making racist or xenophobic remarks, which left no material traces, risked much less in the way of repercussions than committing illegal acts such as drinking on duty, which might have resulted in sanctions. The illegitimate practices they allowed me to see were essentially things everyone was aware of, be they dangerous car chases they were not authorized to make or the unjustified identity checks regularly condemned in the courts, which were both tolerated by their hierarchy. I was also conscious that, in order to reduce the risk of my witnessing problematic scenes, I was not taken out with certain crews, known to be made up of particularly deviant officers. All the same, despite being legitimately on their guard, the police gradually allowed me to enter into their everyday routine.²³ I should add that what I saw and heard, hence what got through their self-censorship, seemed interesting to me precisely for this reason: it allowed me to understand what police officers believed to be normally acceptable. For an observer from outside their world, that was already a considerable insight.

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Anthropological studies are often determined by contingencies. Mine was no exception. Not only was I unable to continue it, as I have explained, but it could easily never have got off the ground. In 2005 I was completing a collective research project I coordinated on racial discrimination in the Paris region – in a location which I shall not name in this book, for reasons of confidentiality.²⁴ The conurbation, composed of a city surrounded by several small towns and even villages, has a population a little under 200,000, substantially younger in age than the rest of the region. Although the socioeconomic range

is broad, the average economic situation is relatively poor, especially in the city. Compared to the rest of the *département*, the proportion of those receiving the minimum income supplement, which is a welfare benefit, is 20 percent higher, the percentage of households paying no tax is in excess of 14 percent, the rate of high school students on scholarships is 33 percent above the average, and more than 1 household in 20 receives assistance from a charitable organization. While spatial distribution in the area ranges from semi-rural zones to densely built town centers, the conurbation is dominated by housing projects, especially in the city, where urban planning is nevertheless generally harmonious: the percentage of tenants in public housing is two and a half times higher than the average for France as a whole and double the regional average; 1 resident in 5 lives in one of the so-called sensitive urban zones, which receive support from the state due to their disadvantages. Finally, the population of the city is of diverse geographic origin: 1 in 5 is an immigrant (i.e., born outside France), and 1 in 8 is a foreigner (i.e., not a French citizen), these percentages being, respectively, nearly three times the national average. Two-thirds of the non-French nationals are African, divided equally between North and sub-Saharan Africans. As may be imagined, these various sociodemographic factors combine with one another, the projects concentrating the most precarious groups and accommodating the highest proportions of immigrants. In the sensitive urban zone located in the center of the city, the unemployment rate is 33 percent higher than in the rest of it, the proportion of manual workers 33 percent above the national average, and the proportion of foreigners in excess of 50 percent. Essentially, this city differs little from most of the large conurbations of the greater Paris region, with its social inequalities – and, of course, its problems of crime and misdemeanor. Responsibility for public security in the conurbation, which I analyze below in more detail, is divided between the national police, for whom it is one of the largest districts in the country, and the *gendarmerie*, which operates in the semi-rural towns (in addition, there are municipal officers, who are mostly in charge of traffic control for local events and rarely involved in the prevention and investigation of crime).

The interviews I had conducted during my study on discrimination had revealed that, in the experience of residents of the *banlieues*, particularly young people, the institution whereby this kind of injustice was most sharply manifested was the police.²⁵ At a meeting of the main state services in charge of responding to this problem, held at the prefectural offices, I was somewhat taken aback to hear the senior officer of the law enforcement department explain that her

precinct had only dealt with four complaints of discrimination in three years, none of them directly related to the police. Puzzled by these remarkably low figures, which seemed to reveal the lack of confidence of the area's inhabitants in their police rather than the reality of their experience, I asked her for an interview. Our discussion very quickly turned to the question of transparency, which, she asserted, was increasingly being demonstrated by law enforcement. "The police have opened up," she told me; "Thirty years ago I wouldn't even have met with you." What she did not know was that a few years later, the same would be true again. I therefore took her at her word and asked if it would be possible for me to conduct a study of the anticrime squad operating out of her station. She recommended that I write to the département's director of public security, which I did. Shortly after, the district chief of police called me, set up an informal meeting and gave me his authorization, even inviting me to investigate all the activities that came within the remit of the central police station. I was thus able to talk to the heads of the various services in charge of the different missions of patrolling, crime investigation and traffic control, and to follow the work of their agents, both at the police station and in their roaming through neighborhoods, initially with uniformed officers before finally joining the anticrime squad.

I carried out my study with almost complete freedom to decide the pattern of my presence at the police station and on patrol with the squad (the only restriction imposed was that I was not allowed to use a tape recorder). A memo circulated by the chief of police stated that I was undertaking an "observation" and asked officers to "make the researcher fully welcome," concluding with this sentence, probably meant to concern his officers as much as myself: "Any problem with the implementation of this memo should be reported immediately to me." I do not believe that any such "problem" arose during the 15 months of my study. In truth, the research progressed much more easily than I could have imagined.

For a long time I wondered why and how the chief of police had opened the doors of his institution to me in this way. When we met for the first time, I began to introduce myself and the research center of which I was the director, but he interrupted me, saying: "I know, I looked you up on the web." I had thought, naively, that a commissioner would get his information from the famous "RG," Renseignements Généraux, the police intelligence service at the time, rather than using a search engine. I do not know what he found out and what he thought of it, as the papers, articles and interviews that came first in such a search left little doubt as to the critical work I was

conducting on a range of social and political issues, but it did not dissuade him from authorizing my work with his teams. I believe that, above and beyond any other consideration, his decision was related to a certain openness and sense of accountability. His deputy welcomed me equally generously, and over the months I spent working with his teams he never failed to support me. Shortly before the end of my study, I asked him what had induced them to authorize it. He looked surprised, hesitated as if suspecting a trap, and said simply: “But we have nothing to hide. There is no corruption here. We don’t have any crooked cops.” The overstatement in this sentence suggested that the essential quality people had a right to expect from the police, above all others, was integrity. As to the officers with whom I went out on patrol, their willingness to engage with me naturally derived mainly from the instructions they were given: “As long as it’s approved by the top brass, we don’t have a problem with it,” I was repeatedly told. No doubt not all of them were delighted with a presence that represented less an obstruction to their activities than a source of anxiety as to possible repercussions. But if I reflect on the number of times that police officers complained to me about their poor public image, I think they were also making a point of showing me that it was unjustified. They may have thought that, through what I saw and heard, I would become a sort of witness to their moral probity.

For 15 months, from May 2005 to February 2006, and from February 2007 to June 2007, I was thus able to carry out my research. This period included the riots of October and November 2005. In this book, however, there are only distant echoes of the disorder that occurred in the city I was studying, where the number of vehicles set on fire was among the highest in the whole of France. During the early stages of these events I was able to continue my research, but when the prime minister declared a state of emergency the chief of police told me I could no longer accompany his officers. Yet they themselves suffered very little violence or even damage to their equipment: a car burns out in two minutes, and, even if they rush to the scene, officers often find no more than a smoking carcass. In this respect, as we shall see, the excitement aroused among the police by the riots, which was echoed by the spectacular images broadcast on television and the government’s alarmist rhetoric, was based on few objective elements, according to their senior officers. Traveling around the city with the police, and later on my own, my experience was above all of deserted streets where, in the city center, I occasionally came across stationary riot police vans, while in the projects, small groupings of residents gathered from time to time as vehicles or public buildings were set on fire.

Apart from this brief interruption, I was able to visit the central precinct regularly, to chat with the officers, to accompany them on patrol, either on foot or more often in a car, and to share in their routine by day or night, from the time they came on duty to the end of their shift, although my night-time research often ended around 1 or 2 a.m., when they took a break that allowed me to get a few hours of sleep before my working day. I chose not to ask for any structured interviews with the officers I was shadowing, opting rather for informal chats over coffee, during the long hours spent going back and forth through the streets, when they dropped in at a local police station, or even while watching their interactions with their public. I was almost always allowed to accompany the officers in their operations, whether these were stops and frisks, questioning and arrest of suspects, stake-outs in a car or on the street, or chases through the alleyways of a housing complex or the stairs of an apartment block, and I was never prevented by security reasons from following them in an action that involved physical engagement or danger.

Despite the familiarity that was eventually established between us, particularly with some crews, I never departed from my role of neutral and silent observer: if I saw something when we were on stake-out, or detected a contradiction in the statements of a person being questioned, or had previously heard an officer relating an interesting piece of information, I did not point it out to the police I was working with, judging – unlike other researchers who sometimes morph temporarily into law enforcement auxiliaries²⁶ – that I owed it to myself to maintain a strict abstention. In contrast to the canonical form of ethnography, I therefore adopted what might be called a position of non-participant observation (by which I do not imply that my presence did not interfere with their work, as I explained earlier). It was the only position I felt was ethically defensible, both in relation to the public (as any intrusion on my part could have had consequences over which I had no control) and in relation to the police (for I needed not to place myself in a false relationship of complicity with them).²⁷ Staying therefore at a respectful distance from the action, even as I was in fact involved in it, was certainly not without its difficulties. However, this predicament was much less than that I experienced when I embarked on reporting on my research and hence on writing the present book. This related to two issues: how to situate myself in relation to the police officers, and what form to give to my analyses. I shall now address both of these.

“Whose side are we on?” asks Howard Becker – most of whose studies have been on deviance – in a famous article.²⁸ The question may seem incongruous to the reader: should the researcher not be

impartial, and should science not be guided by the quest for objectivity? At the same time, anyone can understand how a researcher may feel more or less sympathy for the people among whom he conducts his research, and that, especially when taking a qualitative approach, which is more susceptible to moral judgment or emotional investment, strict neutrality is an illusion. Indeed, according to Becker, the question of impartiality implies a false dilemma for, whether we recognize it or not, we always take sides, either by adopting the perspective of the dominant or by trying to understand the point of view of the subordinate. The question is therefore simply to know which side we are taking, to explain why we do so and to draw the appropriate conclusions. This position is relatively easy to maintain – and to defend – when the line is clearly drawn between dominant and subordinate, the powerful and the powerless: in this case, researchers feel justified in stating that they are choosing one camp, sometimes even arguing for a militant approach.²⁹ However, it is less comfortable when dealing with individuals or groups who are dominant in some ways and subordinate in others: police officers certainly have a power which they may use and abuse, but in terms of both their socioeconomic environment and their working conditions they are not privileged.³⁰ In this book I have tried to show what they do, while highlighting the tensions and contradictions running through their work, the discrepancies between representations of the profession and the reality of their activity, the gaps between the dream world and real life. Thus I am applying a critical method here,³¹ one which makes it possible first to reveal, and then to comprehend a little better, what is at play in the work of the police in the banlieues. This choice of position, which is not just theoretical but also practical, since I was accompanying them on their patrols, obviously gives rise to a bias in my descriptions and my analysis. I placed myself on the side of law enforcement and I saw only that part of life in the neighborhoods that is perceptible to them. I had no direct access to criminal activities and networks, and will not be able to give an account of antisocial behavior, delinquency and violence – except on occasions when the officers themselves faced them. The fact that I do not show this aspect, which is so often presented in the media, should not therefore be interpreted as a moral bias, but rather as a methodological one that consists in restricting myself to what I was able to observe – that is, what the police themselves saw.

When They Read What We Write is the title of a collection of essays edited by Caroline Brettell that brings together anthropologists' experience of the often problematic reception of their work. Publishing means, in effect, coming face-to-face with an audience.³²

Social science researchers usually have one ready-made, in the form of the colleagues to whom, legitimately, they primarily address their work. While I do not wish to renounce being read by my peers, this book is aimed at a broader readership. I am not an expert in law enforcement, and do not intend to become one. In France there is a growing body of high-quality research, to which I shall make frequent reference.³³ However, there is a dearth of direct observation studies on what seems to me today a major issue: the way in which urban territories are policed. Certainly, the police are not the only actors involved, but it is their presence that is most intensely felt by the local populations. This pressure on the inhabitants has increased, moreover, over the last ten years, for reasons unrelated to a rise in objective insecurity, which I will develop later. In such conditions, describing and analyzing this reality is not only a matter for experts. Everyone should be able to tackle these issues. That is why, in what follows, I have privileged a narrative form, reconstructing scenes I observed, and examining in detail case studies that had a more general significance. Giving an account of an ethnographic study is delicate work. The material is too rich, but also too disparate. There is a risk of producing a flat monograph, which would be all the more disappointing here, given that films and television series focusing on the police move at a breathless pace far removed from the reality of the job. The cinematographic equivalent to the written work best suited to an ethnography of the police is actually the documentary, although the author of *The Wire* invented a hybrid form between reportage and fiction which interestingly blurs the line between description of reality and art creation.³⁴ In a somewhat similar way, reporting facts that took place under the gaze of the observer, the ethnographic account proceeds like a dramatization that reveals the theoretical issues the researcher is attempting to make intelligible.

Three years were to pass between the end of my fieldwork and the point when I started the work of writing. During this time I did continue my research with teenagers, educators and social workers, seeking to engage with their perspective on law enforcement – passing to the other side of the mirror, as it were. And for a long time, I also hoped to be able to diversify my data on the basis of other field sites, and the frustrations of continually deferred authorization correspondingly set back the point when I decided I had the necessary raw material. Equally evidently, I did not want to begin publishing results which I feared would definitively seal my access to law enforcement. But there are deeper reasons for my difficulty in embarking on the writing of this book – reasons of an ethical nature. Writing always means betraying. This was particularly true here. Betraying those

who trusted me, who allowed me to enter into their everyday life, who said and let me see things they did not necessarily want people to know. Betraying, too, the reality, through a description and interpretation resulting from choices that never manage to fully reconstitute, nor even articulate, its complexities and ambiguities. The risk of failing in loyalty to my companions on patrol, and the sense that I did not sufficiently master all the dimensions involved in police work, held me back for a long time – until the point when I accepted the idea that not writing is also a betrayal. A betrayal of the intention that lay at the root of this research: trying to give an account of a little-known reality of our society, namely the way project residents, and especially adolescents and youngsters, were treated. But also a betrayal of those who had opened the doors of their police station for me to conduct my research: the now rare privilege of this favor placed me under obligation to return their democratic investment.

Ethnography, Daniel Cefaï argues, is a form of commitment.³⁵ Firstly, commitment to the research, to the field and its protagonists, with the contradictory loyalties and ethical problems it implies. Secondly, commitment to society, to the public sphere and its debates, with the moral tensions and political issues involved therein. This study may have arisen partly by chance, but giving an account of it became a necessity for me. In not allowing me to continue it, the Ministry of the Interior reminded me of this necessity and gave me the resolve to set to work.

1

Situation

It is worth noting that the concept of *situation* can offer, in substantial measure, the integration of different points of view that the current state of social sciences requires.

Georges Balandier, "La notion de 'situation coloniale'," 1955

The rhetorical shift from "crime control" to "war on crime" signifies the transition from a routine concern to a state of emergency . . . The expression "war on crime," not only implicitly extends the stamp of legitimacy to methods that would not be acceptable on moral and legal grounds, but it also encompasses the impossible.

Egon Bittner, *The Functions of the Police in Modern Society*, 1980

During the riots of 2005, a film became extremely popular among the youth of the working-class neighborhoods where I was conducting my study of the police. Released a year previously in cinemas, to no great excitement, *Banlieue 13* was now circulating in the form of pirate DVDs that they passed from one to another, with approving commentaries.¹ The pleasure they took in watching it certainly had a lot to do with the breathless pace of episodes as violent as they were improbable, and with the art of acrobatic movement from place to place ("parkour") practiced by the characters who made light work of urban obstacles. But many of them clearly saw, in this futuristic film, a fantasy echo of what they were living during that period, albeit more on their television screens than in their immediate environment. "Paris 2010. Faced with the unstoppable rise in crime in some banlieues, the government authorizes construction of an isolation wall around high-risk housing projects," read the DVD insert.

While the plot, which involves an officer from a special intervention unit that has infiltrated mafia gangs being tasked with disarming a weapon of mass destruction, might seem far-fetched, the images of projects abandoned to the rule of gangs, around which walls have been erected to contain a population that has become undesirable, offered a seductive, if caricatured, reference to the segregation at work in the banlieues.² The title also pointed to this convergence between fiction and reality, the number 13 evoking the 93 postal code of the Seine-Saint-Denis département where the riots had begun a few weeks earlier.³ The opening scenes showed burned-out cars, graffiti-tagged walls, broken-down entry phones, dilapidated building stairwells, teenagers wearing hooded sweatshirts, and threatening heavily armed helmeted police. In an implausible final confession, the minister of the interior admitted that he hatched the extermination plan to rid society of the “scum” of these neighborhoods. By remarkable coincidence or premonition, given that the film had been shot long before Nicolas Sarkozy’s notorious visits, as minister of the interior, to the “Quatre Mille” of La Courneuve and later to the “Dalle d’Argenteuil,” two large housing projects, this language was identical to that subsequently used by the character’s real-life alter ego.⁴ The ending of the movie, where the housing project destined for demolition and its residents condemned to disappear were miraculously saved by a hero who chose to remain in the walled neighborhood where he claimed to feel at home, despite offers to get him out, was far from the more humdrum and less happy experience of its young viewers. But after I had, at the start of the unrest, accompanied the anticrime squad in their night-time activities, supported by the riot police companies who were called in as reinforcement, and protected by helicopters shining powerful searchlights over the apartment blocks, for me there was something troubling about the parallel I involuntarily drew, as obviously the youngsters did, with some of the scenes in the film.

“It’s a shame you weren’t there. It was practically war out there!” one of the members of the anticrime squad exclaimed to me excitedly when he saw me again in January 2006, after several weeks of absence. He told me how, for several days, he and his colleagues wore bulletproof vests, donned riot helmets and patrolled with Flash-Balls. It is true that the prime minister’s declaration of a state of emergency on November 8, 2005 – paradoxically, at the point when the vehicle fires and arresting of rioters were beginning to die down – had thrown the work of the police into unusually sharp focus, and many of them suddenly felt themselves masters of the place. It was the first time since the Algerian War of Independence in the 1950s and early 1960s

that a government in France had recourse to such an exceptional measure, and the use of this legal instrument for the control of people, many of whom originated from North Africa or sub-Saharan Africa, gave a particular tone to the mass police operation in the projects. Riot police vans patrolled the streets or parked at strategic points. Gendarmerie helicopters equipped with infrared cameras circled low over the city. Although there was no curfew in the areas where I was carrying out my study, the neighborhoods were deserted as soon as night fell, sporadically lit up by a burning vehicle.

Yet in this district, which was deemed at risk and often mentioned in media stories and the Ministry's reports, there were few confrontations. On November 23, 2005, when the number of vehicles set on fire in France had fallen below the level used to define so-called "normal nights" (that is, about 90), I asked the chief of police how these weeks of disorder had been. He replied smiling: "What riots? What are you talking about? We need to know what it is we're counting here: cars or violence? If we're talking cars, there were a few dozen. If we're talking about violence, there was hardly any. But the media only counted the burned-out cars. It was actually very calm around here." Keen to share his experience with me, he stated how, several years earlier, following the death of a youth in a police car chase in a housing project, a "real riot" broke out in the town where he was then a young deputy commissioner: "That was really hot. I'd even say it bordered on insurrection!" By contrast, the events he had just witnessed seemed to him to have been highly exaggerated by the communications from the Ministry and the images broadcast on television. Despite what his officers were feverishly trying to tell themselves, for him, the war of the projects had never taken place.

There is a remarkable contrast between these two visions of the events of 2005 – "practically war" for some, "very calm" for others – in a city where, after one night in which a number of cars were burnt in a housing project but no arrests were made, there had ultimately been few incidents other than isolated fires in private cars and public buildings. One could, of course, as beat officers often do, attribute this difference in perspective to the gap between those involved on the ground and those commanding from their offices, between a rank-and-file facing the everyday reality of the neighborhoods and a hierarchy gathering information only from statistics, or even between the former telling the truth and the latter euphemizing it in front of a stranger. But this would be to misunderstand the image officers have of the social situation in which they are involved, and the consequences this worldview has on the way they police these neighborhoods.

Rather than the objective analysis of events offered by the commissioner, we need to grasp their subjective apprehension by the officer of the anticrime squad – not because it would be more faithful to what did happen but for what it tells us of the vision and spirit of the police operating in the banlieues. It is his excitement at what this agent sees as a state of war that it is necessary to comprehend. The episode of the riots in fact crystallizes a representation of the banlieues that portrays them as territories constantly at risk not only of falling prey to disorder but also of slipping out of the grasp of law enforcement. The trope of “no-go zones” into which the police no longer dare to venture and where they need to re-establish themselves is, with rare exceptions, much less a description of reality than a rallying slogan based on a fantasy of danger as well as reconquest, the image of danger magnifying the courage of those who face it, and that of reconquest justifying the action aimed at realizing it. In the district where I conducted my research, the police had no problem in going wherever they wanted – and much more often in projects reputed to be problematic than elsewhere – but the talk of “neighborhoods” that must not be left to the “hooligans” nevertheless continued to circulate, as if the defense of the “territories of the Republic,” to use the officials’ language, could serve as grounds for “pacifying” the projects.

An adolescent told me that, the day after a vehicle fire in his project, the sergeant major heading the anticrime squad spoke to a group of youngsters gathered in a square in the late afternoon: “If one more car is set on fire here and I catch the guy who did it, I’ll kill him and bury him.” The fear inspired by this officer, well known in the area, made his threats – if not literally, at least symbolically – plausible. There is nothing surprising about this story, and I often heard similar statements myself. A beat officer laughed as we watched a video of youths being questioned that was then circulating widely online: “Everything started OK, but for once when it was looking good for us there’s that cop that says to the motherfucker: ‘If you carry on like that you’re going to burn on the electric cables like your pals.’” The macabre allusion to the tragic event that sparked the riots, and my informant’s amused response, revealed the extent to which the violence of the words seemed normal in the police world. For him, as for a number of his colleagues, working in the banlieues meant operating in hostile terrain where the residents were seen as enemies who would miss no chance to attack them. If, exceptionally, they did happen to get “stoned” by youngsters, they knew they could return with reinforcements to exact reprisals that would affect the whole of the neighborhood. Their senior officers had great difficulty

in preventing them from doing this – despite their genuine desire to do so. A commissioner told me of the problem she had experienced in restraining her troops who, after coming under attack in a project, wanted to intervene *en masse* to “establish their presence in the territory.” She had to use all her authority to prevent them from “putting the project to fire and sword,” since it was so much simpler to come back the next morning, she added, when tempers would have cooled, to conduct the necessary questionings and arrests. Usually, however, superiors did not intervene to inhibit such operations, either because they saw them as inevitable, or because they were only told about them afterwards. They then had to offer a public justification for them and demonstrate support to their officers, while concurrently trying to conduct an internal inquiry into the most glaring infractions.

Six months before the events at the end of 2005, certain incidents in one of the reputedly problematic neighborhoods in the town seemed to me richly informative about the sequence of events that could lead to what the police unions later described as a “riot,” but which a French engineer living in the neighborhood compared to a “*ratonnade*,” that is, a form of ethnic cleansing against Arabs. I had accompanied uniformed officers on foot patrol or in marked vehicles several times in this neighborhood, made up of two- or three-story blocks, pleasingly designed, set amid green spaces. The contrast between its peaceful appearance and its bad reputation was remarkable. A resident, a member of a small Jesuit community, told me of the patient efforts of the tenants’ association to induce respect for the environment and improve relations within the community: graffiti had disappeared from the walls, the acts of petty vandalism had diminished, a block party had just been held in the park adjacent to the apartments, donations had been collected from residents to fund a weekend by the sea for a group of teenagers. But the social reality as he described it was far from idyllic: unemployment was high among the youth, and everyone knew that drugs were being dealt. As to the relationship between the local population and law enforcement, it was consistently deteriorating. There were constant stops and frisks, always targeting the same young men, which had no effect on illegal activities but raised tensions. When a resident called the police about a mundane problem such as a noisy gathering in a square, the response was so brutal and, ultimately, counterproductive that most had given up making complaints. “The atmosphere between residents and the police has become horrible,” my informant concluded. I recognized this myself as I accompanied officers in the afternoon and evening, and witnessed their interactions with young people during

checks and searches. The aggressive attitude and scorn of the law enforcement agents was met with hostile silence and mute rage.

In this tense atmosphere, a resident called the police one evening in May to complain of an all-terrain vehicle being driven in the adjacent park and causing noise pollution. Three uniformed officers turned up to stop the young driver, who attempted to flee but fell off his quad bike, without hurting himself. The accident allowed the police to catch him and bring him under control. Seeing their friend in difficulty, a dozen teenagers who were in the vicinity rushed to his rescue and formed a threatening circle around the officers, who, outnumbered by their opponents, had to retreat and call for reinforcements. Once alerted, all the uniformed and anticrime squad patrols active that night swiftly arrived, overrunning the project as they searched for suspects. The police deployment was striking and brutal. On that spring evening, many children were at the playground, the youngest under the watchful gaze of their parents. In the ensuing disorder, a number were pushed. One officer, aiming to intimidate a nine-year-old he had judged insolent, put the barrel of his Flash-Ball to the boy's head. A mother who tried to shield her children was questioned aggressively. Horrified residents looked out of their windows as the police stormed the neighborhood paths and the stairways of the buildings. The door to the apartment where the family of one of the suspects lived was broken down, the furniture overturned and several persons hurt, including the teenage sister of the young man being sought. She was doing her homework, and, as she came out of her room at the wrong moment, she was roughed up, ending the night in the hospital with a broken arm and a neck injury. Her brother – a well-known drug dealer – was finally arrested but released a few hours later, when the police realized he was blind and could not therefore have been involved in the initial altercation.

The Alliance police union, known to be close to the right-wing government, spoke of “attacks of indescribable savagery” against the police, making reference to officers “set on and seriously injured.” The Human Rights League (*Ligue des droits de l'homme*) local representatives wrote to the state prosecutor denouncing “racist and sexist insults that particularly shocked the local residents because death threats were added.” The following day, the town hall organized a meeting with residents' representatives, who condemned ‘the disproportion between the incidents and the police response, and the stigmatization of non-French residents,’ while the mayor met the commissioner to discuss with him the “vicious spiral” of violence on both sides, the “gulf between law enforcement agents and inhabitants,” and

his “anxiety as to whether the police have the will to protect local residents’ safety.”⁵ When I discussed these incidents with the mayor, he said he was shocked by the brutality of the operation, which had affected all residents indiscriminately. Later I met one of the leaders of the tenants’ association, who told me that such incidents wiped out months of patient efforts to improve life in the neighborhood, and even led residents to see criminals as victims. The commissioner, for his part, protested that once again the police were being blamed. He criticized the mayor, whom he suspected of playing politics with the affair, and accused the tenants’ association of adding fuel to the flames. He could not imagine the former, as head of the municipal police, and the latter, which in its own way was committed to maintaining order, as allies. He regarded them as adversaries with whom it was necessary to compromise, but certainly not collaborate. The officers I spoke to during the following days admitted that the serious injuries evoked by the union amounted to one of the three who had chased the driver of the all-terrain vehicle spraining his ankle. They nevertheless considered their brutal intervention justified, because it had shown the residents that the police would not be pushed around. They believed they had been victims of an “ambush,” a term increasingly used at the time to describe confrontations with youth in the projects, with the assumption of premeditation and criminal intention. In the face of what they saw as a sort of urban guerrilla war, these punitive raids seemed to them the only way to bring rebellious groups “to heel.”

Such bellicose practices are not isolated incidents. They echo the discourse that has been systematically used by the authorities in speaking of the banlieues since the early 2000s, whether in calling for “war against crime,” “war without mercy against criminality,” “war on drug dealers” or “war on violent gangs.”⁶ The use of this rhetoric legitimizes not only the police’s views of the situation facing them, but also the way they work to impose order. This is what Egon Bittner argued in relation to the routinization of the discourse of war on crime in the US in the 1960s: “The price we are prepared to pay to defeat crime and disorder does not include visiting incidental suffering on innocents. Not to observe this stricture would turn crime control into a handmaiden of crime.”⁷ The warlike rhetoric has a cost in terms of democracy, leading to excesses that affect not only the criminals targeted, but also, through collateral damage, citizens who have done nothing wrong. In France, discussion of police operations has focused recently on the weapons used by the youth in the projects, suggesting an unavoidable deadly escalation that justifies the excessive equipping of officers with so-called “sub-lethal” weapons

(Flash-Balls and Tasers), which can in fact have serious consequences.⁸ The use of martial vocabulary, to which is added the language of stigmatization (“scum”) and eradication (“cleansing”), radicalizes a way of talking not so much about problems and individuals as, by association, about areas and populations – precisely those in which economic disparities, social hardships and racial discrimination are accumulated – and it not only radicalizes it, but also normalizes it at the highest level of state. Thus, via a rhetoric that sidesteps the issues of segregation and inequality to focus purely on disorder and violence, the social question is transformed into a martial question.⁹ The politics of the projects becomes a politics of war.

Indeed, in the government’s view, it is not enough to talk the talk: actions must follow the words. This means no longer simply employing military metaphors, but also enacting images of war. The scale of police deployments in response to even minor incidents, or for arrests involving no risk, gives a measure of how keen the authorities are to make a spectacle of their action, and to do so in front of television cameras.

Thus, on February 18, 2008, at 6:00 a.m., more than 1,000 law enforcement officers, including squads from the Research, Assistance, Intervention and Dissuasion unit (the famous RAID created to operate in cases of terrorist attacks), were mobilized in Villiers-le-Bel, a town situated in the north of Paris, to arrest 37 persons suspected of having thrown stones or fired a shotgun at police, some months earlier, during confrontations following the death of two teenagers who had been knocked down by an anticrime squad patrol car.¹⁰ The mass dawn invasion of the neighborhood by heavily armored men dressed in black, helmeted and armed, was filmed by 30 journalists who had been secretly tipped off about the operation and given authorization to accompany the police into the homes of those who were to be questioned. A commissioner explained to me that, for good measure, the elite units usually mobilized in dangerous operations against organized crime broke down the doors to the apartments of the individuals under suspicion, awakening terrified children – a strategy he saw no need for, since he pointed out that the other squads, albeit less specialized but no less efficient, used the more mundane procedure of ringing or knocking and waiting for the door to be opened. The disproportionate means used, given the routine nature of the arrests to be made, and the ensuing media spectacle appeared to be aimed less at protecting the police than at producing the dual effect of terrorizing the residents of these neighborhoods by exerting a show of force as they were placed in a state of siege, if for only a few hours, on the one hand, and impressing the

mainstream population, who was given to assume that only a quasi-military expedition was capable of reestablishing the authority of the state in territories that threatened to escape it, on the other hand.¹¹ By a sort of circular reasoning, the spectacular deployment of public force signified the presumed danger and justified the exceptional measures employed.

Notwithstanding the performative power of the war metaphors used by the authorities – which produces the feeling of danger simply through the use of a bellicose vocabulary – we should not forget that this language is all the more efficient because it preaches to the converted: most young officers carry this image of the banlieues as dangerous, the residents of the projects as their enemies, and the situation in which they find themselves as a state of war, even before they are assigned to districts where they did not want to work, and which they seek to leave as soon as they can. While demographic studies show that at a national level four-fifths of beat officers spent their childhood in rural areas or in country towns,¹² the consequences of this sociological fact are even more glaringly evident in the precincts in the outskirts of Paris, which are often the first – undesired – posting after police academy. In effect, the new recruits discover a world totally alien to them, a world about which they have gleaned a little information from the media, but which they have mainly heard about during their training. All those I spoke with told me that their instructors almost systematically portrayed the disadvantaged neighborhoods as a hostile environment. When, at the end of their years of training, they chose their posting from among those that remained once the more senior officers had put in their transfer requests, they almost always ended up in a station in the banlieues of Paris. This was particularly the case in the district where I was conducting my study, which had a decidedly unflattering reputation. Their instructors then goaded them with troubling and mocking remarks, predicting the worst for them in this first experience. For these young officers, most of whom came from rural communities or small towns in the North of France, and whose parents were former miners, manual workers, office workers or sometimes farmers, such warnings had even greater impact because they were accompanied by tales of heroics served up by older officers, relating their more or less mythologized experience of the banlieues.

In addition, many of these new recruits would come to know their district only via their vehicle patrols through the projects, the commercial centers and, less frequently, the quieter middle-class residential neighborhoods, since, even if they were posted on the outskirts of Paris for several years, they would not live there, preferring to

return to their home region on their days off. Aware of this nomadic lifestyle and keen to make service in his station attractive, the chief of police had, furthermore, arranged the shift rota so as to make these journeys easier: officers worked four days on and then had two days off, which amounted to three days for the night shift teams, once the start and end times of their shifts were taken into account. During work periods, they often shared a small apartment close to the police station. As soon as they had leave they “went back home.” This exteriority contributed to the feeling of being alien to the place: the banlieues were not their world, and would never become so.

When they depicted these neighborhoods for me, exotic images vied with culturalist prejudices. The easygoing sergeant of one local station offered me his view of the zone in which he and his teams operated thus: “The problem is that there are people from all over, of all races. And often they live here like they live at home. Take the Africans: they have several wives and loads of children. And the kids aren’t used to staying indoors, so they hang out in the street and get into bad company.” Although it was true that the local neighborhoods had a high immigrant population, predominantly from sub-Saharan Africa, polygamy was extremely rare there, as a study carried out by the municipal social services department revealed, and hardly any of the children had ever been to their parents’ country, making it difficult to see how they would have picked up any habits there. And this was a well-meaning description by a good-natured officer. I often heard much more virulent accounts that unashamedly expressed xenophobic and racist sentiments. In either case, and even assuming that such representations – which are also sometimes found in academic and political circles, and even in sociological analyses¹³ – are susceptible to modification through education, the chances of seeing them change in this context were limited. A commissioner told me that a few classes in anthropology had recently been introduced into some police cadets’ training, with the aim of making them more aware of the different cultures they might encounter. When, impressed but intrigued, I asked her who taught these classes, she replied that it was officers from the “RG,” *Renseignements Généraux* – that is, intelligence agents.

“The police, they are the internal immigrants against the external immigrants”: this was one commissioner’s striking description of how young recruits from the provinces were sent to him to confront the young people from minority communities.¹⁴ The officers’ sense of exile when they took up their posts in the banlieues thus cut them off from the world around them, setting up a double barrier of difference and hostility. The residents of these neighborhoods were not

just strangers: they were enemies. The feeling of difference gave rise to expressions of intolerance. The perception of hostility led to a fantasy of war. For 20 years, those expressions of intolerance and that fantasy of war had been maintained, and even fostered, by governments that consistently returned to the themes of both national identity in danger, and the Republic under threat.

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How, then, are we to characterize this singular configuration, in which the police and the local population confront one another? More than 50 years ago, in a text which had a lasting influence because it broke with the ahistorical and depoliticized French anthropology of the period, Georges Balandier proposed an analysis of Congolese society using the concept of the “colonial situation.”¹⁵ His aim was to introduce the ideas of change, power and conflict associated with colonization into the ethnographic studies that then tended to focus on analysis of traditions and structures, and therefore appeared to fix societies in an immobile time and isolated space. Both elements of the phrase were significant: “situation” pointed to the historical and political aspects; “colonial” specified the conditions in which the situation was expressed. The idea of the “situation” still seems to me useful in relation to the banlieues, and more particularly to grasp the context of law enforcement. The work of the police cannot be understood, as it usually is, purely in the moment of their interaction with their public. It is set within a history. It articulates relations of domination that extend beyond the individual actions of officers. The police and the residents cannot be held solely responsible for the tensions between them.

When, during one of the numerous heated exchanges between law enforcement and municipal authorities, the chief of police, questioned by the mayor about the practices of his beat officers, retorted that it was not their fault if they arrested black people more often, because, in the city, there were a lot of black people, he was not simply using specious arguments to exonerate his officers of their discriminatory practices.¹⁶ He was also stating a basic truth: that the situation, which they had both inherited when taking up their respective posts, was largely beyond their grasp. They were caught up in a game whose rules they had not defined, and over whose terms they had little control. This did not mean they could do nothing to change the course of events – both were actively working to do so – but it did mean that their freedom to maneuver was limited by long-term processes and short-term policies that combined to produce inequalities and difficulties with which they both had to deal.

The phenomenon of spatial segregation, which includes social, economic and racial segregation, has led over several decades to a concentration of communities of low-income manual workers, with low levels of education and high rates of unemployment and, above all, comprised largely of families of immigrant origin, often from Africa – North Africa or, later, sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁷ From the late 1950s onwards, while these low-rent housing projects made it possible to eliminate the slums into which French and particularly immigrant workers were crammed after World War II, from the mid-1970s – when economic difficulties were hitting the least skilled workers, and labor immigration for work, then officially halted, gave way to family reunification – what had been seen as an improvement in residents' living conditions ultimately led to new problems. The ideal of ethnic mixing and social mobility, which inspired this urban planning, resulted in a much more problematic reality, and at a time when the most vulnerable households rarely reached a level of resources sufficient to allow them to move elsewhere, the most precarious groups became concentrated together, against a background of increasing tensions in the labor market and growing disparities in housing.

Particularly in relation to immigrants and minorities, this segregation was hidden or minimized in the statistics, owing to legal restrictions regarding the release of information about national origin, ethnic identification or skin color in censuses and most surveys. Data on citizenship, usually the only indicator recorded in the analyses, substantially understate the reality of the presence of these groups, because individuals who have acquired French citizenship are not counted; the use of the category of immigrant in some recent studies, while it provides a better image of this reality, still fails to recognize French people belonging to minorities, notably what are often called the “second generation,” but also those from French overseas territories. But what demographers find hard to establish, those who live in the neighborhoods know from experience. Although there remain households of European origin, the majority of residents – whether they hold French nationality or not – are of African origin, either black or Arab, and they themselves complain that their communities are increasingly concentrated in these areas.¹⁸ Moreover, the segregation of these groups is markedly higher than it would be if it was simply the consequence of their socioeconomic level, indicating it is due not only to this latter factor, as is often said, but also to racial discrimination in housing which adds to discrimination in employment and, more broadly, in access to most resources.

This development obviously did not go unnoticed by government, and from the early 1980s, in a period marked by the introduction of

increasingly restrictive immigration controls and the eruption of riots in some neighborhoods on the outskirts of the cities, local government policy has been to create urban development programs aimed specifically at the projects facing the greatest problems. The map of the so-called “sensitive urban zones” thus makes it possible to establish a national geography of the social question, and to follow its evolution over time.¹⁹ There are 4.2 million people living in these territories. To these can be added the 3.8 million residing in neighborhoods assigned “urban social cohesion contracts,” which correspond to slightly less disadvantaged areas. In total, 8 million people live in housing projects with especially worrying situations – or one person in eight in mainland France, since the population is almost 64 million people. This is a young population: there are 25 percent more people under 20 in these neighborhoods than elsewhere in France. Since the early 1990s, poverty and unemployment have increased substantially in these projects, and, above all, when compared to the surrounding urban area in which they are located and, still more, compared to the general population, socioeconomic inequalities have deepened. An aggravating factor is that most of those who find themselves able to move to other neighborhoods are those who are a little better off and have jobs, leaving the families in greatest difficulty where they are. In these territories, unemployment is twice as high, and average pre-tax income half as much, as elsewhere in the conurbations in which they are situated. The level of education and the proportion of university graduates have risen less rapidly in these projects – where the majority of residents have not gone beyond middle school – than in the surrounding urban population.

At a national level, the proportion of foreigners living in these projects is twice as high as in the rest of the urban areas in which they are located, and three times as high as in the overall population of mainland France. Considering more specifically the disadvantaged neighborhoods of the region of Île-de-France, this rate represents five times the average for the rest of the country. But again, these figures give an imperfect indication of racial segregation, because, as discussed earlier, they refer only to nationality and do not supply information on the totality of immigrants (failing to include those who have become French), still less on minorities (which include many French people born in France).²⁰ These groups suffer from an accumulation of social disadvantages. In particular, immigrants and minorities combine all of the previously mentioned unfavorable factors, with higher levels of poverty and unemployment, and lower numbers of graduates and skilled workers. The fact of living in marginalized and stigmatized neighborhoods adds a further negative

factor, particularly for women: thus, a woman born of non-French parents is four times less likely to have a job if she lives in one of these projects than if she lives elsewhere. In general, segregation is manifested in disparities that are both inter-urban (between towns) and intra-urban (between neighborhoods), and both are tending to become greater: firstly, the conurbations with the largest numbers of disadvantaged foreign households see more and more of them coming in, while those with fewer receive increasingly fewer of them; and secondly, the projects with the highest numbers of such families also tend to accommodate increasingly more of them. While the logics underlying this development are complex, policy at both local and national government levels plays a decisive role in aggravating it, especially through the distribution of social housing in France.²¹ Indeed, the present vicious circle of segregation is not inevitable: it is the product of political choices.

This, then, is the objective situation that the police encounter when they are posted to a district in which one or more of these large housing projects is situated: a heterogeneous territory facing major socioeconomic difficulties at the same time as stark sociospatial segregation. Does this situation generate specific security issues? The majority of French people probably believe that the banlieues in general, and the projects specifically, are acutely at risk of security problems. The officers I accompanied on patrol certainly shared this prejudice. Their conviction justified why, both day and night, whether as members of the anticrime squad or as uniformed beat officers, they patrolled the length and breadth of the streets and squares of the housing complexes, inspecting vehicles and individuals, stopping them to check and search them. Moreover, the whole repressive policy of the state, since the mid-1990s, had focused on and stigmatized the banlieues, making reference to the danger they represented, notably in terms of juvenile delinquency:²² police numbers had been increased, their resources for action reinforced, and their powers broadened. Measures had also been taken to allow magistrates to act more quickly and impose more severe penalties, in particular through the creation of procedures for summary court appearance, and later with the introduction of minimum prison sentences for repeat offenders.

But does this focus on disadvantaged neighborhoods have any basis in reality? Are the problems of petty and serious crime concentrated in the housing projects, as is widely asserted, and is public disorder there exacerbated by organized crime, as is often suggested? Statistics in this domain need to be treated with especial caution. On the one hand, the most frequently cited sources, the police and the gendarmerie, offer only an imperfect and partial reflection of reality.

In fact, the data gathered depend firstly on the way complaints are treated by these institutions, which itself is related both to the extent to which victims are inclined to report incidents and the extent to which officers are willing to record them; and secondly on the police or gendarmerie's initiative, which derives from the choice to prioritize action on one problem rather than another. On the other hand, the increasing manipulation of crime figures by government, according to elections and opinion polls, calls for strict vigilance in interpreting them. Depending on the guidelines provided by the Ministry of the Interior, emphasis may be placed on one type of crime or another, in such a way as to increase or decrease their number or improve the clearance rate (published figures suggest that vehicle thefts, which are rarely solved, are diminishing, contrary to assault and battery, which appears to be increasing, and which almost always results in a conviction), or to focus attention on a certain category of individuals, such as youth (drug abuse) or aliens (illegal immigration), which provides high yields in terms of arrests. For these two sets of reasons, it is important, wherever possible, to compare the police and gendarmerie's statistics, firstly with data from the courts, in other words criminal convictions, which vary less with the political climate, and secondly, with figures from victim studies, which give a picture of the perception and experience of insecurity in the general population.

Bearing in mind these caveats, it may be noted that, as a general rule, the various sources indicate that, since the 1980s, there has been a consistent and marked decline in homicides over a prolonged period, while violent crime has remained relatively stable (the increase in assault and battery reported by the police and gendarmerie resulting mainly from a widening of the definition criteria), and theft has also shown a steady and significant decrease (as population studies denote even more clearly than police statistics).²³ In other words, even if there has been an increase in reports of some forms of attacks on the person, particularly verbal (in all likelihood largely because these are less tolerated now than they used to be), we are far from experiencing the general decline in public security that political parties – right and left – strive to present in ever more dramatic fashion, attempting to destabilize their opponents at the risk of further perpetuating and aggravating the climate of insecurity. But is this also true for the population of the banlieues? Are these national trends also observed in the projects?

Limiting the field initially to the statistics published by the Ministry of the Interior, and therefore to the police and gendarmerie statistics contained in the "State 4001" report,²⁴ it may be noted that the rate

of thefts per 100,000 residents is lower in the “sensitive urban zones” (29.4) than in the surrounding urban areas (35.0), and similar to that among the general population (29.1). By contrast, damage to property is slightly more frequent than in the corresponding cities (14.0 compared to 12.1), and much more frequent than in France overall (6.6). Finally, the incidence of physical violence (10.6) is marginally higher than in the rest of the urban zone (9.5), but substantially above the figure for French society in general (6.0). Half of this latter difference, however, is accounted for by offenses of insulting and resisting public officials, the allegation of which has been encouraged by the authorities. To sum up, property crimes are much less frequent in disadvantaged neighborhoods than in the surrounding urban areas (43.4 compared to 47.1), but higher than in the general population (35.7), and violent crimes are moderately more frequent in the housing projects than in the surrounding cities (13.0 against 11.6), and much more than in the country as a whole (7.3), with this latter gap being largely related to the consequences of increasingly tense interactions with law enforcement. The parallel with the general population, moreover, is only partially valid, since it is difficult to compare the problems of crime that arise in densely populated urban zones, with a high proportion of young people, and rural zones composed of significantly older households. Furthermore, beyond the disparities observed in these diverse environments, which are delicate to interpret given that they describe the activity of law enforcement rather than provide a depiction of the reality of crime, it is important to emphasize that there is a regular decline in the level of crime throughout these various zones – whether in the housing projects, in their corresponding conurbations, or in the national population.

A second layer can be added to this picture using data from national victim surveys, which have the advantage of reflecting the objective and subjective experience of the population, regardless of whether incidents have been reported to law enforcement.²⁵ It is worth noting that, in France, eight out of ten people express neither concern nor fear about crime: 11% manifest concern about it (are preoccupied by the problem in general), and 4% say they are afraid (have a personal feeling of insecurity at home or in the street); finally, 3% express both concern and fear. Examination of the figures at the local level reveals a remarkable difference between subjective and objective accounts. In the housing projects, concern about crime in general is particularly elevated (37.5%) compared to the surrounding urban area (20.5%), the outskirts of Paris (22.3%) and Paris as such (18.4%), while the sense of fear at home is also markedly higher than elsewhere (12.9% versus 7.8%, 7.1% and 4.7%, respectively, in the

other three urban contexts). Yet this concern and this fear do not correlate with the objective reported incidence of theft in the neighborhood, which is lower than elsewhere (9.7% for vehicles and 2.2% for burglaries, contrasted with 11.1% and 4.9%, respectively, for Paris), or of assault, which is roughly similar to that in Paris (4.3% and 4.1%). However, they are in line with figures for damage to public facilities in the neighborhood (70%, versus 38% in Paris). Similarly, if we compare the projects with the urban areas in which they are located, it may be noted that burglaries, thefts, vandalism on vehicles, and physical assaults are less frequent in the former than in the latter, while concern and fear about crime are higher. Preoccupation about the bad image of the neighborhood is also four times greater in the projects than in the surrounding conurbations.

Thus, neither institutional statistics nor population surveys confirm the idea – generally accepted in France, deliberately disseminated by government, and often taken as truth by law enforcement – that crime is concentrated in the banlieues, and more specifically in the projects. Admittedly, the data come from different sources and contrast with one another, and consequently render it difficult to draw a simple conclusion. It nevertheless appears that, in terms of most indicators, housing projects are less affected by crime than the surrounding urban areas, and even, in the case of certain crimes, than the Paris region overall. In addition, it is clear that concern about and fear of crime which, by contrast, are expressed more strongly in these neighborhoods, stem not from an objectively observable higher rate of property or violent crimes, but mainly from damage to public facilities and from the perception that such neighborhoods have a poor image. This picture therefore belies the sensationalist images of the media and the alarmist declarations of the politicians, both of which not only contribute to stigmatizing the banlieues and their residents, but also serve to justify the concentration of police activity in these zones and on these already discriminated groups.

Without wishing to minimize the objective and subjective experience of people living in projects, most of whom have little prospect of getting out of there, but, on the contrary, in order to grasp this experience in its entirety, we therefore need to resituate it within the frame of a collective responsibility and a public commitment. The political response to the problems in these disregarded zones cannot simply be limited to tightening the grip of law enforcement and increasing the number of police operations. As the link between concern about and fear of crime, on the one hand, and the deterioration of facilities and perception of stigmatization, as opposed to the actual frequency of crime, on the other, shows, the problem relates

to what has been theorized in the United States in terms of the “broken window”:²⁶ when the authorities allow certain elements of the environment to deteriorate, other damage and depredation quickly occurs, and rather than the reality of danger, it is this disengagement that generates social anxiety. The insecurity felt by the inhabitants of these neighborhoods results from their abandonment by the welfare state. The remedy that consists in replacing it with a repressive state has little effect on most of the more troubling crime, particularly damage to property (which has a very low clearance rate), but does reinforce the feeling of stigmatization and the reality of the discrimination that residents already endure.

We can now proceed to a characterization of the situation – in the strong sense I noted above – that prevails in the banlieues in France, and conspicuously in the projects. The population of these territories on the fringes of the urban area to which they are attached is characterized by socioeconomic parameters markedly below the national average, with the proportion of immigrant families (most originating from Africa) much higher than in the general population of France. The neighborhoods where these minorities live have for decades suffered from a disengagement on the part of the public authorities, which has been accentuated over recent years. Only rare attempts have been made to open them up, and in fact segregation has been reinforced. In this context, the shift of attention from social issues, especially those of unemployment and inequality, toward issues of insecurity, notably youth crime, has portrayed these increasingly less laboring classes as being more and more dangerous.²⁷ Even at a time when virtually identical data from the Ministry of the Interior and general population surveys show a decline both in most kinds of violent crimes and in the majority of categories of property crime, throughout French society but also within the projects, insecurity has been cast as the most pressing problem, and these abandoned neighborhoods as the site where it is most strongly manifested.²⁸ In response to these concerns and fears, which find little corroboration in the objective crime statistics but are stoked by politicians in search of popular legitimacy and given credit by a media hungry for newsworthy stories, an authoritarian strategy has been put in place. This strategy is based on a redeployment of the police, through both an increase in their numbers in the banlieues and particularly the refocusing of their work on a repressive, rather than preventative, version of public security. Policing of the projects is grounded in a constant, visible presence, which residents often experience as oppressive, in the name of preventing crime which often occurs no more frequently than in neighboring areas.

The police tasked with implementing this policy on the ground come mostly, as seen before, from small towns and rural areas, are often young and inexperienced, and are psychologically prepared for this experience through a caricature of the places where they will be working. They differ not only sociologically, by their provincial origin, but also physically, by their ethnic features, from the people with whom they are dealing. Their teachers made explicit reference to this difference when, at the end of their training and learning of their posting, they exclaimed, in a tone of mingled derision and commiseration: "Tough luck, buddy, you'll soon see: you're going to the jungle!" or "You'll be living among the savages!" Racialization is in fact an essential element in the relationship between the police and neighborhood residents. It is based both on the objective difference in their phenotype and, still more, on the subjective difference that emerges from the representations each has of the other. The lack of representation of the general population of France among police officers is remarkable indeed, particularly when compared to many other countries in Western Europe or North America, which have prioritized diversity among the police in their public security policy. It relates to institutional factors that make it especially difficult for minorities to gain access to the professions of law enforcement, including multiple forms of dissuasion or even discrimination, notably in recruitment tests. Admittedly, there are a few officers from the overseas territories in police stations in the banlieues, but those of North African or sub-Saharan African origin remain rare, even absent from some services, including the anticrime squad I studied, which had never had any minorities on its team.

The police who work in the banlieues are therefore mainly white men who have been given the task of pacifying neighborhoods described as a "jungle," inhabited mainly by people of African origin who have been represented to them as "savages" – two terms which also recur frequently in the officers' own comments about the projects and their residents. Remarkably, almost exactly the same terms were used by the Chicago police in William Westley's study: "The Negro is a savage just out of the jungle."²⁹ That this pioneering work dates from 1950, that is, from a time when African Americans were the subject of both spatial and legal segregation under the Jim Crow laws, should not lead us to minimize the significance of this language. Words are important, and those used by the officers comparing residents of the projects to "monkeys," as denounced by local organizations, and assimilating them with "animals," as I heard in chats over coffee, left little doubt as to the connotations of these terms. Even those who never used such insulting language often saw the banlieues

as presenting the dual face, impenetrable and dangerous, evoked by the terms “jungle” and “savages.” To paraphrase Joseph Conrad, working in the projects meant for them plunging into the heart of darkness.

To understand the relationships between law enforcement and housing projects, between the police and the youth in particular, I asserted earlier, in reference to Georges Balandier, that it was helpful to grasp them through the notion of “situation.” From the description I have given of its historical context and political signification, it does not seem inappropriate to qualify this situation as post-colonial. The term means here a state of affairs subsequent to a colonial history, in which the present has formally broken with the past but retains the traces of it. Both objectively, considering the immense majority of men and women of African origin (mostly from former French colonies or French overseas territories) among project inhabitants, and subjectively, in the representations of the police and sometimes the experience of the residents (with more illustrations being provided in the course of the analysis), it is difficult to deny the colonial legacy. Furthermore, as I shall point out later, reference to colonial history can also surface explicitly in the discourse and practices of some police officers or officials. However, I am not seeking to equate relations between law enforcement and the population of the banlieues with those pertaining in the colonies, or claiming that all residents of the projects share a common colonial origin: both these assertions would be factually inaccurate, even if each contains a portion of truth. My aim is rather to reveal a reality that the sensitivity of the debate around Republican integration *à la française* tends to elude or conceal.

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“The anticrime squad is a necessary evil,” the chief of police for one district in the département of Seine-Saint-Denis, generally considered especially “difficult,” confided to me one day. He had just listened to the presentation I had given on my research and, in his role of expert, wanted to express his approval of the picture I had proposed of the squad: “True, we don’t approve of their ways of working, but we have to admit that we’re glad to have them sometimes.” A few months later, an inspector general in the National Directorate of Public Security, to whom I quoted this observation (without, obviously, identifying my informant), replied with indignation: “That’s out of order. It’s a tragically wrong way of seeing it.” The assertion lent credence to the idea that anticrime squads create problems, he added; “But the squads don’t create problems, they reveal them.”

And he concluded: “Anticrime squads are a necessary good.” Yet he himself, though otherwise very appreciative of the policies introduced by the minister of the interior from 2002 onwards, had told me a little earlier that when he had assumed the position of director of public security in a *département* of the Paris region, in the mid-1990s, he had found that these special units constituted what he called a “corrupt system” resulting from “people staying in the same position for too long,” working through “co-optation on the basis of relationships rather than objective criteria,” which fostered “clannishness, a gang mentality, all that is dangerous within our institution.” His top priority then had been the restructuring of the anticrime squads.

The commissioner responsible for this delicate task described quite vividly the reality he had encountered when he took up his post: “I’d seen clearly how things worked. I wasn’t at all happy with that way of working, which was based on buddy relationships with people who weren’t trained and had been recruited through individual friendships that weren’t always very healthy. We’d ended up with a situation where there was a pack leader and a pack that caused, rather than solved, problems when they went out on patrol. We had to bring the anticrime squads back under control, because that was what damaged us most in the eyes of outsiders.” When I asked if the problem was specific to the *département* where he worked, he replied: “It was like that in other places as well.” Approvingly, the senior official gave me the reason for what he said was the larger corruption of the system: “The problem was that the directors often felt indebted to the anticrime squads, because they were the resource they could always rely on in the last resort. They weren’t scared, they were tough, they went for it. This had created a corrupt system where the managers didn’t dare meddle too much with structures that served them in some way. The top brass love the anticrime squads because they bring in the numbers.” Ultimately, the district commissioner who stated his opinion after my presentation and the senior official who contradicted him vehemently later were telling me exactly the same thing, except that the latter disapproved of practices that the former did not disown. Both knew what was happening on the ground, distanced themselves from the methods used, and were even aware of the disturbance they caused among local residents, but still took the view that the squads provided a useful service in imposing their law of fear – in other words, they were a necessary evil.

The forerunner of the anticrime squad was created in Paris in 1971 by commissioner Robert Broussard. It then comprised uniformed officers empowered to operate at night against crime in the capital.

But it was not until the mid-1990s that this structure became what it is today, composed of officers, usually in plain clothes, working mainly in cities with housing projects corresponding to the administrative “sensitive urban zones.” It is therefore the only law enforcement unit entirely designed for, and principally dedicated to, policing disadvantaged neighborhoods. The night-time anticrime squad was set up in 1994, and the day squad in 1996, when issues of insecurity were being redefined by Charles Pasqua, then minister of the interior. While official discourse increasingly commingled immigration and crime, a set of measures was introduced, firstly to concentrate police resources in the banlieues, and secondly to redefine their mission, notably by broadening their powers. It was in this way that so-called “preventative checks” – that is, checks undertaken without even the suspicion of a crime having been committed – were authorized, and rapidly became an essential element in the activity of anticrime squads in the projects. At the same time, judicial procedure was substantially modified, encouraging officers to refer minor incidents to court more systematically, and allowing them to be dealt with rapidly through the creation of the summary court appearance procedure. It is therefore in this very distinct context that these special units, imagined to re-establish order in the banlieues, were conceived. In other words, the anticrime squads represent the armed wing of a policy introduced in the mid-1990s, one that had both police and court powers at its disposal, targeted on the projects, at the juncture where the issues of immigration and crime came together.

The “target” metaphor here is not a mere figure of speech. It forms part of the image anticrime squads have of their job, one that is usually unspoken, but sometimes becomes explicit. For example, the Courbevoie anticrime squad badge depicts, against the background of the French national flag, the tall blocks of a stylized representation of a housing project seen through a gunsight: its bellicose message could not be more clear. No less suggestively, the badges of the Brunoy, Ivry-sur-Seine, Boissy-Saint-Léger and Colombes squads show, respectively, a pack of wolves in front of an apartment block, a panther with its claws ripping through a neighborhood in darkness, a spider trapping a complex of high buildings in its web, and, though it is uncertain to what extent this is a conscious allusion to the incident that unleashed the 2005 riots, a fist gripping lightning flashes above a housing project. Although it should not be interpreted simplistically as a faithful reproduction of police ideology, the iconography used for these insignias proudly displayed on the clothing of anticrime squad officers provides something of a representation of it.³⁰ It reveals the relationship of hostility and the potential for aggressive approaches

that is the basis for their action. For this is not merely an inconsequential set of images. These representations, like a mirror, reflect a certain truth about the anticrime squads' way of working, and are realized in their turn in their practices.

Indeed, a classic "good cop / bad cop" model operates on the ground, between uniformed officers and members of the anticrime squad: the former are held to be sometimes too soft to face up to delicate situations, while the latter appear to be fully legally enabled to impose themselves in all circumstances. "The young people aren't scared of police in a marked car," a commissioner who was also a national union representative told me, "but they are scared of the anticrime squads because they know full well they won't back down, that they're trained to question them and they'll go all the way." He added, with a degree of admiration: "They're the only ones who are feared." And it is true that, in the city's neighborhoods, the teenagers dreaded the appearance of unmarked cars occupied by men in plain clothes: regardless of whether they had done anything wrong, they knew that nothing good would come of it for them, and they were rarely mistaken. The anticrime squad was fairly predictable in this regard. A young uniformed officer, an avid collector of Warhammer game figurines,³¹ spoke to me one night of his reasons for joining the police as we patrolled the city in a marked car: it was the range of jobs, he told me, the mixture of the social dimension and peace-keeping that he liked. When I asked him whether he might one day apply to join the anticrime squad, he replied vehemently: "No, I don't like that kind of work: they go for conflict too much. I like to talk and I prefer to negotiate with people to solve problems." He hesitated, then added: "And I'm not . . . not . . . tough enough." Toughness was indeed the quality required in the unit I worked with, and most of its members had plenty of it.

In order to become a "baqueux," the ironically pejorative nickname based on the acronym "BAC" that the teams often used for themselves, one had to be proactive, recruitment being voluntary, and one had to obtain the approval of the sergeant major in charge of the squad, which implied affinities. Most of the officers who talked to me about why they had been interested in becoming a member of the anticrime squad explained they wanted to break with routine police work and get involved in more action. A certain aura about these intervention units, which were as admired as they were feared, and a relative independence from the hierarchy, added to the allure they held. The key was nevertheless co-optation by the sergeant major. Here not only subjective elements of personal preference but also objective forms of reproduction came into play. In the precinct

I studied, the sergeant major had been working in the squad for more than 15 years, and had made it a little state within a state. His brutal methods, for which he had received several internal reprimands, and which had in particular resulted in him being forbidden to patrol at night (an interdiction he did not respect), had become the norm. New recruits had to conform or leave, and only a few experienced and rigorous officers had been able to escape his sway. There were also formal conditions: recruits had to have served for at least 2 years, and had to pass accreditation tests. Due to the low number of candidates, the requisite length of service was reduced in some départements to 18 months. This fact in itself is revealing, demonstrating that the attraction of these posts was ultimately relative, as was confirmed by my informants, who told me that fewer and fewer volunteers were coming forward. The tests comprised mainly assessments in sport and self-defense, but also psychological tests, which were not extremely selective considering the physical aptitude of some and the mental attitude of others. Knowledge of legal procedure, however, was not taken into consideration; yet in the unanimous opinion of their superiors, it was precisely in this area that the work of the anticrime squad was most problematic, since many of the statements of offense they took down could not be used in further investigations because of juridical errors in the way they were recorded.

Thus the anticrime squads occupy a distinctive position within the police. Special units with few members – in the station where I conducted my research, 1 in 20 officers belonged to the anticrime squad – and operating in a highly autonomous manner – the sergeant major was only accountable to the head of police – they enjoyed a mixed reputation within the institution, both among other rank-and-file officers and in the eyes of the senior officers. On the one hand, they are almost an elite corps, as officers can only join after passing tests, albeit they are not highly selective, and theoretically operate in difficult cases, which are relatively rare. On the other, they are seen as quick to resort to brutality and uncontrollable by their hierarchy, poorly trained in police administrative procedures and often creating as many problems as they are supposed to solve. An ambiguous status, then, that mingles respect and fear, prestige and shame, power and inefficiency. The fact that it is these units that have been given the task of re-establishing the rule of law in the projects can only be understood in the context of the way the banlieues have for several decades been represented as sites of anomie.

In a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, the deployment of this resource has put in place conditions that make it possible to confirm the grounds for its presence. All urban riots in France since the early

1980s, indeed, followed the death of youths in the context of interactions with the police, and more specifically, in the case of the most recent and most serious disturbances, with these special units. But above and beyond these fortunately rare events, the everyday activity of these crews was also used to justify their existence, since their focus on the projects gave rise to arrests for crimes that did not excite the same severity in neighboring areas (such as the use of marijuana), or that resulted directly from their violent confrontations with young people (such as the offense of insulting and resisting the police). Thus, the consequences of their own actions led the anticrime squads to feel affirmed in their role of controlling urban disorder and preventing juvenile delinquency. If they had not existed it would have been necessary to invent them, if only to prove that they were socially useful.

Such is the situation that prevails in the French banlieues. The structural factors that explain and perpetuate the segregation of precarious and stigmatized groups, often immigrant or minority communities, are largely overlooked by public authorities, which systematically discredit reference to these factors, describing them as “sociological excuses.”³² What most politicians fail to realize, however, is that there is simply no need for excuses. The alarmist representation of insecurity, and the permanent escalation between parties goes against the statistical evidence, which indicates, on the contrary, a steady fall in crime, with a few exceptions, and even, for some offenses, a lower frequency in the housing projects than in the corresponding cities. The hardship of life in these disadvantaged neighborhoods stems mainly not from problems of insecurity, although these do exist, mainly in the subjective form of concern and fear: they are, above all, issues of unemployment and poverty, quality of housing and the environment, reputation of the area and discrimination against their residents.

It therefore becomes necessary to create a language to justify the deployment of the police in these disadvantaged neighborhoods. The rhetoric of war that counters the alleged guerrilla war in the projects is translated into spectacular occupations presented as conquest of threatened territories. The representation of the banlieues as a jungle and their residents as savages calls for recourse to special teams better trained for man hunting than for police procedure, who readily represent themselves as predator animals and whom their hierarchy sometimes compares to packs. Now that the socio-historical picture has been outlined, we may turn to the everyday experience – ultimately rather removed from these dramatic and violent images – of police work.

Ordinary

Our theoretical impulse is often to think of agency in terms of escaping the ordinary rather than as a descent into it.

Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, 2007

It makes about as much sense to have police patrol routinely in cars to fight crime as it does to have firemen patrol routinely in firetrucks to fight fire.

Carl Klockars, *Thinking About Police*, 1983

In the Internet Movie Database's classified index of films, it appears at the top of the "best corrupt cop titles," well ahead of features such as *The Usual Suspects* and *Sin City*. The television series *The Shield*, created by Shawn Ryan in 2002, tells the story of an anti-gang unit in Los Angeles whose members have no compunction in breaking the law, torturing suspects, killing criminals, helping themselves to the stolen property and drugs they seize, and deceiving or even physically eliminating their more principled colleagues – all practices whose ultimate aim is purportedly to restore order to working-class neighborhoods with a predominantly Latino and African American population. The series, which has won numerous awards, is based on real-life events that caused a scandal in the United States in the late 1990s, when the violent and mafia-like practices of the Rampart Division of the Los Angeles Police Department were revealed, resulting in criminal convictions and internal disciplinary action against many officers. Early on in my research, I discovered that detective Vic Mackey and his Strike Team, the central characters, whose

adventures fictionalize the brutality of this infamous law enforcement unit, were heroes to the anticrime squad with whom I was working. Several pictures of the detective adorned the cupboards and one wall of their squad room, between a poster for the film *Zero Tolerance* (with the taglines “A testosterone-filled film,” and “Confront, retaliate, tolerate nothing”) and a photo of a gleaming Ferrari Dino (against which a handsome man was being subjected to a suggestive body search by two attractive young women in mini-skirted uniform). The portraits of Vic Mackey, more austere, emphasized his rugged physique, bald head, hard features and unflinching gaze, sometimes hidden behind dark glasses.

The members of the anticrime squad seemed to identify with these characters, who also wore a “civilian uniform” of jeans, T-shirt and leather jacket. As with their fictional counterparts, their hierarchy tolerated a wide degree of autonomy in the conduct of their activities, and they rarely had to provide an account of them, in contrast to other branches of the police. Like them, up to a point they were permitted to disregard legal procedure in order to impose their rules, on the principle that their legitimate end justified any irregular means they might use. In essence, while not necessarily attracted by the extremes of deception and brutality exhibited by the fictional characters, my patrol companions recognized themselves in their spirit of freedom and their show of power. They often told me with satisfaction that, when an operation involving uniformed police was going badly, their arrival would immediately calm the individuals concerned. They were much readier than their colleagues to use force, but in general their presence was sufficiently menacing and their reputation well enough established to dampen any urge to react in their public, who were aware that things would inevitably escalate into a confrontation that would culminate in charges of insulting and resisting the police.

Their harshness aroused fear: they knew it, and were proud of it. Their actions, moreover, incorporated a more or less conscious element of performance, as if they were playing the role of bad guy in a movie or on television. If they had anything in common with the teenagers from the projects, it was their fascination with Internet sites dedicated to amateur films of police chases, video games involving war and violence, and crime drama series and films. Their tastes in movies differed, however, with the police apparently preferring *36, quai des Orfèvres*, while the youth would rather watch *La Haine* (a large poster of the former covered the wall of one of the offices in the police station, while the positive comment on the latter I let slip in response to an officer’s question earned me a look of suspicion).¹

But *The Shield* was universally popular: its radical immorality overcame the invisible division between police and youth.

Yet, if the members of the anticrime squad seemed to see themselves, at least in part, in the dubious characters of this fiction, there was one aspect in which they could only envy them – the intensity of their life as police officers in Los Angeles, as constructed by the script. The breathless pace of each episode, with riveting scenes depicting major crimes, leading to the violent questioning of suspects and ending with cases being solved, often by unorthodox methods, bore slight resemblance to the quiet routine of the anticrime squad, which objectively differed little from that of the uniformed police posted to related roles in maintaining public order in the same neighborhoods. Unlike their television heroes, they had to admit that the lot that fell to them was usually inactivity. I am not suggesting, though, that the officers were not working (the police are often reproached for spending more time in their offices than out on the streets): on the contrary, those I observed spent long hours, day and night, patrolling towns in their district in search of offenders and criminals.

The problem was that they rarely found any, for even in a banlieue that had a reputation as problematic, antisocial behavior and criminal activities do not reach such levels – in other words, are not sufficiently frequent or accessible – as to supply work for five or six teams of plain-clothes and uniformed officers roaming the district, plus those who may be called in, depending on the timing or the situation, such as département-level anticrime squads and riot police companies sent in as reinforcements, to say nothing, of course, of the emergency assistance crews, the traffic control officers and, for some cases, criminal investigation inspectors. Hence, “live” calls for those whose job it is to maintain public security – transmitted to them by the precinct after filtering – are rare, often no more than two, three or four in an eight-hour shift, and, more importantly, concern incidents that do not generate any administrative record that can be credited to officers in their reports. There are shifts when there are no calls at all, or insignificant ones about incidents that the callers have blown up or even invented, or simply where intervention proves fruitless, because the problem has been solved by the time the police arrive or because the criminals fled at the approach of sirens and flashing lights. The picture, then, contrary to what most media reports and officers’ accounts suggest, is one of long periods when time seems to stand still, interrupted by a few calls over the radio that involve the crew interrupting their patrol to proceed to the location specified, which may be at the other side of the district, often in vain. The

public security teams are thus by default occupied in driving slowly through the neighborhoods, seeking out suspicious facts that they find only rarely on their aimless rounds, and which they substitute with checks targeted at youth from the projects, immigrants and Roma.

One ordinary evening, January 2006. After a brief exchange of information about the events of the day, I go out with one of the teams, comprising two young rank-and-file officers. We begin our round at approximately 9.30 p.m. Shortly thereafter, we receive a call about shots being fired in a project bordering on a small wood. We set off swiftly, tires squealing on the asphalt, toward what we believe to be the location specified. When we arrive, the driver is seized by doubt: we do not seem to be at the correct address. After asking on the radio for repeat information about the exact location of the gunfire, the officers realize they are on the wrong side of the wooded park. In the meantime, more details about the events have become available: witnesses say they heard shots and saw a man with a shotgun run off and get into a car. The crew sets off again, slowly this time, crisscrossing the neighborhood and scrutinizing the surroundings. After half an hour of searching, we finally meet a passer-by walking his dog. One of the officers explains why we are there and asks if he saw or heard anything. The man says he did not. No doubt as convinced by this reassuring response as we are realistic about the slim chances of finding any possible suspect so long after the event, we leave after confirming that the other team is equally empty-handed. The remainder of the night passes with no further calls, cruising the deserted streets and projects, driving through apartment parking lots in search of stolen vehicles. The weather is too cold to offer any chance of finding someone in the streets who could be a potential candidate for a stop and frisk.

A few days later. Early in the shift, reports come in of a man seen climbing the wall around the site of a small supermarket in a project within the district. Two patrol cars are dispatched. Once the crew I am accompanying is in sight of the shop, the driver decides to go a long way round so as not to attract the attention of the suspect. He finally stops the car 200 yards from the spot where the offense was reported to have occurred. We go the rest of the way on foot, but get lost in a dead-end pathway. We have to retrace our steps. When we finally get near to the site where the suspect has been seen, 20 minutes have passed since the call came over the radio. There is no one in sight. The officers take up position to stake out the location, in the cold. A quarter of an hour later, the silence is broken by a noisy and untimely message on a radio that one of the officers neglected to

switch off. His colleagues curse him for his forgetfulness. They nevertheless realize that the alleged criminal, if he ever existed, has escaped their grasp some time ago. In the end they decide to leave. Returning to their vehicles, they meet four teenagers with sports bags, evidently on the way home from training, as the boys confirm: they are members of a local handball team. They nevertheless have to submit to an identity check and a body search, while the officers formulate some vague admonitions about wandering around the streets at night. The two teams set off again on patrol through the town. There is only one other call, around midnight, regarding a domestic dispute involving a couple who assert that they have made up when the police arrive at their home. Nothing else, not even the opportunity to find and stop a possibly undocumented immigrant around the train stations, which the officers scrutinize conscientiously as they pass by. Admittedly, January is not a month when residents of the banlieues tend to meander at night, and the state of emergency declared after the recent riots continues to have a dissuasive effect.

In light of these aimless wanderings, it is worth remembering that the anticrime squad's reason for existence is precisely to catch criminals in the act. The senior officer who explained their job to me when I started my research used an expression I was to hear often: these special units were supposed to "pounce." Their purportedly discreet appearance and vehicle, their well-tested training in running and self-defense techniques, their knowledge of local geography acquired through long hours of patrol, and their speedy intervention, grounded in courses taken by some for fast driving, all these elements brought together in virtually elite squads were supposed to rid the banlieues of petty and major criminals.

But the reality I witnessed day-to-day, and that my companions on patrol confirmed to me, was altogether different. As one of them stated after an especially quiet night: "What's frustrating is that tomorrow, we'll hear that several crimes were committed during the night, but the police were only informed after the event." And as he was speaking of the recent increase in burglaries in the district, I asked him how many times he had caught a burglar in the act. "To catch a burglar, you have to get damned lucky," he replied; "You need luck's own luck." Another day, discussing the same topic, one of his colleagues even quantified this "luck": "It's simple. I've been in the squad seven years, and it's only ever happened to me once. And even then the stupid asshole had got himself shut into the house he broke into and couldn't get out. All we had to do was pick him up." Since he was a rank-and-file officer in his first posting after leaving the police academy, who had told me a few days earlier that

he had joined law enforcement in order to “arrest thieves,” this was a troubling revelation: one could imagine no greater gap between the expectation of the job and its reality. This officer often spoke to me of his disappointment. When he took up his post, he imagined he would be part of a particularly “lively” intervention unit. Now he was just waiting for a transfer to the small town in southwestern France where he had grown up. The inactivity also prompted one of his team mates to change his shift: “I left the night squad,” he told me, “because nothing ever happened.” But even during the day, the activity was far from hectic, as he quickly realized. This is what the description of an ordinary day illustrates.

One day in March 2007, 2 p.m.: the crew arrives at the station; after conversing over coffee, two officers leave on patrol, while the second team, which I will be accompanying that day, is temporarily grounded while one of its members appears before a disciplinary panel following a complaint of violence against him; his colleague remains in the station courtyard, chatting with a young female agent. 4 p.m.: the officer who was being questioned returns and the team sets off for the gas station; when they arrive there, the driver realizes he has forgotten the gas charge card; they return to the office and then back again to the gas station; cruise around several housing projects and through a number of parking lots to search for stolen vehicles that may have been hidden in garages whose doors have been broken down; nothing peculiar is found. 5.30 p.m.: there is a call concerning a suspicious helicopter flying over the jail in a neighboring town; it is feared that a prisoner is attempting to escape by air; departure at full speed, flashing lights and sirens, screeching down streets that are extremely busy at this time of day; on the section of the highway taken to get to the jail, an attempt to overtake at 100 miles per hour between the outer lane and the crash barrier almost ends in an accident, but at the last moment the elderly driver of the vehicle in front sees us in his rearview mirror and cuts across the next lane, almost colliding with another car; less than ten minutes later, when we arrive at the location, we find several other police vehicles and learn that the suspect aircraft was in fact a helicopter ambulance taking a patient to the nearby hospital; we leave and stop at a fast-food restaurant not far away. 6.30 p.m.: we set off on patrol again; in front of us, a white van, immediately identified as belonging to Roma people and therefore considered suspect; lights and siren; the officers check and search occupants and vehicle, the exchange is polite and the operation yields nothing; once again, patrolling through the projects; brief stop at the police station to drop off the gas card that might be needed by others; drive to a public construction site

where an officer thinks he has spotted a stolen excavator about which a complaint has been filed a few days ago; a telephone check confirms that the vehicle does belong to the company that is using it; it was a false alarm. 7.30 p.m.: the radio reports the theft of a cell phone by three “black individuals” wearing “hooded track suits” in the older part of town; the team leader immediately suspects a youth from the neighboring housing project whom he knows from previous offenses and decides to patrol systematically through the avenues, scrutinizing the residents outside the apartment blocks, searching for the presumed culprit; there are indeed plenty of young African men, most wearing hooded track suits, who also look us up and down without sympathy; having failed to locate its suspect, the crew decides not to stick around and instead moves to the victim’s home; the woman, who welcomes us into her house, seems touched by the attentiveness of the officers, who exhibit courteous professionalism; however, the description they are given does not fit with the young man suspected by the officers; the team leader invites the victim of the robbery to report it the next day. 8.30 p.m.: last rounds of the projects on the way back to the police station; in a parking lot, two young men of North African origin are sitting in their car smoking; identity check with body search, pockets emptied on the hood, hands up against the doors of the car; under the rubber mat beneath the driver’s seat, one officer finds a small ball of hashish; one of the youths explains that it belongs to him and is for his personal use; the officer, in a threatening tone, talks of crime, arrest, custody; in the end they decide not to embark on any procedure, because it is already the end of the day, they tell me afterwards, and handing the suspect over at the station would take time in filling out the paperwork and would delay the officers’ return home, all for a “case” that would not amount to much. The team therefore returns to the station; it is past 9 p.m., when their shift would normally finish, and their night-shift colleagues proffer sarcastic compliments on this excess of zeal.

In spite of an unusual level of activity, the day’s total is disappointingly meager: two calls (one that turned out to be a false alarm, the other ending in no more than a recommendation to the victim); two checks (on four people, either Roma or Maghrebis, and no arrest); one verification on a construction vehicle that had not been stolen; an accident narrowly avoided on the highway when getting to the location of an event that had been misinterpreted; long hours of cruising around unproductively on a late winter’s day. No act can be added to the statistics for the crew’s record that day. At least the patrol officers have the consolation of admiring thanks from a grateful resident.

If activity is limited during the day, it is even lower at night, especially after 1 a.m., but officers generally appreciate the freedom of action they have at those times when, their senior officers having left and local residents being at home, they can work without the encumbrance of supervision and without undesirable witnesses present. At night, any individual walking or driving is potentially suspect, particularly in certain neighborhoods. Here is an example of an anti-crime squad night patrol that same month.

One night in March 2007, 9 p.m.: the night shift arrives and exchanges notes about recent events with their day-shift colleagues; 30 minutes later, they leave to begin a systematic patrol through the district; a call about a scuffle that has broken out between youngsters outside a cinema; we drive there rapidly and find a quiet neighborhood; just in case, a group of five teenagers spotted on their way home a little further on is stopped and frisked; the police ask what they know about the altercation – apparently nothing; they allow the youths to leave, admonishing them brusquely to keep on the right side of the law, while taking down their names and addresses in a little notebook; a few minutes later, they finally find the person who called the police station, who says she does not want to file a complaint; we return to the patrol. 10.30 p.m.: a call to an alarm going off in a home on the other side of the district; the car takes off at top speed through virtually deserted streets, the speedometer quickly reaching 110 miles per hour; we arrive at the location without mishap, but not without some heart-stopping moments for narrowly avoided accidents, at the same time as a marked police car; a tour around the outside of the house reveals nothing; a neighbor appears when he sees the flashing lights and says that he was the one who called the emergency number; in fact, the alarm went off that morning, he explains to the officers, who are frustrated at having rushed to the scene for nothing, but the noise was more of a problem at night and he eventually contacted the police station; we go back to cruising the neighborhoods, which are settling back into sleep and the cold. 11.30 p.m.: we follow a car the officers guess belongs to “gippoes”; they therefore check the identity of the passengers and search the vehicle; after several comments peppered with derogatory insinuations, they let them go. 12.30 a.m.: we are summoned to a brawl in a Roma camp; we follow a muddy track through a field and discover, on the edge of a wood, a group of trailers, about which the crew leader comments “Look at the shitheap they live in”; uniformed police are already there; one of them, wearing a riot helmet, is being laughed at by his colleagues for this excess of protective gear; an argument has broken out between two families, a young man has been injured;

his relatives are contemplating revenge; there are many adults and children outside, and an atmosphere of agitation; the officers try to find out what happened, and eventually give up trying to understand; they note that no one wants to file a complaint, and content themselves with a few threats thrown out to the camp as a whole should any new incident arise; an ambulance that has just turned up takes the injured man to the hospital. 1.30 a.m.: we return to the police station, record the actions taken; meal in the squad's mess room; visit to colleagues in the control room. 2.30 a.m.: we go out again; nothing more happens until the shift ends at 6 a.m.

The night's record for this shift, which has seen more activity than usual, is still modest: three calls (one for an incident without further consequences, one somewhat frivolous, one for a more serious matter but which did not result in any arrest, even though the assault and battery might be thought to prompt further investigation); two checks (on seven individuals, Roma on the road and youth from the projects); and at least a few anecdotes to recount the next day, complaining about the irresponsibility of people who call the police for no reason, or passing derogatory remarks about the deplorable living conditions of the Roma people.

This film-script account of the events of an anticrime squad's day or night shows that it has little in common with the kind of action which is presented in fictional narratives and probably corresponds to what the majority of the public, and perhaps even some elements among the police, imagine. In my experience, time spent in response to calls often amounted to approximately 10 percent of the shift time; it was rare that it rose to 20 percent (five calls per team per night shift was a maximum that was rarely reached), with the rest of the time being devoted to random patrols, and to the administrative recording of actions taken. But this is not unique to France. Television series may depict thrilling adventures and cases resolved in 52 minutes, but this does not mean that the work of patrol officers in the inner cities of New York or Chicago is very different from that of their counterparts in the outer cities of Paris. A number of studies conducted in the United States reveal that officers on patrol spend between 30 and 40 percent of their time responding to calls (on average five calls per team per hour in cities), only 7–10 percent of which are related in some way to offenses or crimes, and between 40 and 50 percent of their working day on random patrol and paperwork, with the rest of the time devoted to various tasks.² If we compare this situation to my admittedly more limited observations, it therefore seems that the proportion of law enforcement activity taken up by responding to calls from residents is higher in the United

States, while the lower demand from citizens in France results in a larger proportion of officers' time being left for their own initiatives, as expressed in the high number of stops and frisks.

The actual activity of the anticrime squad is thus far removed from the mission it was charged with, and the imaginary world it has invented for itself. Cruising around quiet streets and peaceful neighborhoods, the police wait for occasional calls that almost always turn out to be pointless, either because they relate to mistakes or hoaxes, or because the teams arrive too late or bungle the case due to their clumsiness, or because there is no cause for any official questioning or arrest. In other words, the work they do is very different from the aspirations that led them into this profession, and the images presented by their heroes on movie or television screens. The long hours spent in a car killing time in conversation about their weekend gardening, the new video game they discovered, their disappointment that their transfer to a better district – if possible, closer to home – has once again been postponed, or the lenient government policies that supposedly encourage immigration and therefore crime, punctuated by stops and frisks on youngsters sitting chatting on a bench in their neighborhood or Roma travelers returning to their camp, bear no relation to their erstwhile dream of police work. If I were to choose one word to describe the predominant feeling in these patrols, it would certainly be “boredom.”

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So what is the point of patrolling the streets of the banlieues? More precisely, are the police of any use in the war on crime? Most rank-and-file agents, and certainly the majority of the senior officers and commissioners, would unhesitatingly answer affirmatively. If not, what would be the point of spending taxpayers' money on sending crews out on patrol day and night, they would say. Both the general inspector I met with to talk about his experience as former regional director of public security, and the district chief of police who authorized my study, had not the slightest doubt that their officers were rendering a service to the nation as they roamed around the projects. But I noted a slight difference in the arguments put forward by these two knowledgeable informants: the senior official seemed to attach more value to operations against urban disorder, while the commissioner placed more emphasis on the fight against crime. Similarly, despite the moments of disillusionment they expressed in my presence, the members of the anticrime squad remained convinced of their usefulness to society. The question may thus seem trivial. But it has absorbed criminology departments and law enforcement institutions

for some 50 years in the United States, leading a number of social scientists and some commissioners to assert that, contrary to common belief, random patrols had no effect on the crimes they were supposed to prevent.

Although a few specialists had already questioned the seeming efficacy of this activity, it was with the Kansas City experiment on preventative patrols, conducted in the 1970s at the initiative of the chief of police and with the help of a research unit, that certainties began to falter.³ This unprecedented study, unique at the time, compared three zones of the city: in the first, “reactive,” crews limited their activity to responding to residents’ calls; in the second, “proactive,” they at least doubled the time they spent on patrol; in the third, serving as a “control” zone, they continued their previous mixture of activity. The results of a full year of operations and measurement appeared identical: neither attacks on persons, whether assault and battery, sexual assaults or muggings, nor attacks on property, whether burglary or damage to vehicles, varied significantly as a result of the different systems implemented; similarly, the experience of crime and the feeling of insecurity as reported by residents and business owners showed no variation between the zones, nor did the level of satisfaction with the police; and it turned out that in all three cases, 60 percent of the officers’ time was spent on activities not directly related to law enforcement, including a quarter bearing no relation at all to police work. The authors concluded that it appeared that officers “did not typically spend all their time aggressively battling crime.” Ultimately, it was evident that the patrols used preventatively had no effect on crime, either in terms of offenses recorded by law enforcement or from the point of view of residents’ perception of risk.

This study had a major impact because 80 percent of beat officers considered car patrols through neighborhoods to be the very foundation of their work. Certain elements of the method were criticized, and follow-up investigations attempted to refine the results. In particular, it was shown in research conducted in Minneapolis that patrols generated a slight decline in crime and antisocial behavior when, rather than being conducted at random, they focused on specific hot spots – for example, known zones of drug-dealing or prostitution networks.⁴ But these results presuppose high levels of crime that are found more frequently in large cities in the United States than in French banlieues. When initiatives copying the Midwest experiment were recently taken in France to reorient patrol work toward what were considered to be hot spots – for instance, in the département of Seine-et-Marne, east of Paris – they yielded somewhat disappointing results.⁵ However, it has to be acknowledged that, as

far as criminality is concerned, Coulommiers, where the study was carried out, is a town with a population of 14,000 celebrated for its medieval Commanderie of the Knights Templar and its odorous Brie cheese: it is not Minneapolis. In sum, the fact remains that it had been established, following rigorous evaluation, that cruising the city in a car without a specific aim while awaiting calls was justified neither in terms of combating crime nor even in terms of reassuring residents through a visible presence.

Some years later, a working group set up by the US federal government collated the data available on this issue, and came to the following conclusions, summed up by criminologists Jerome Skolnick and David Bayley: "First, increasing the number of officers does not necessarily reduce crime rates or raise the proportion of crimes solved. Second, random motorized patrolling neither reduces crime nor improves chances of catching suspects. Third, two-person patrol cars are no more effective in reducing crime or catching criminals. Furthermore, injuries to police officers are not more likely to occur in one-person patrol cars. Fourth, saturation patrolling does reduce crime, but only temporarily, largely by displacing it to other areas. Fifth, patrol officers individually make few important arrests. Cops spend most of their time passively patrolling and providing emergency services."⁶ In the authors' view, however, this "devastating" conclusion should not encourage defeatism. On the contrary, their point was to dispel false notions, which were both costly and dangerous, and to start again on new foundations based on successful experiments that could furnish a source of inspiration.

Although differences in national contexts may be assumed, these researchers' analysis deserves examination in light of French practices, which are almost never evaluated and systematically reproduced. The assertion that more officers are needed is advocated by all political parties in government; the presence of car patrols, and more especially of anticrime squads, constitutes the main plank of public security policy; the usual practice is to have two, often three, and sometimes four officers in each vehicle; the idea of saturation has gained momentum; finally, the fantasy of arrests continues in spite of evidence of inactivity. The gap between available knowledge and the practices that are perpetuated prompts a question: why is a system that has been shown to be ineffective, at least in terms of its main purpose – the fight against crime – being maintained, and even, in places, extended?

Criminologist Richard Ericson attempted to answer this question through close observation of police work in an average city in Ontario over the course of several hundred patrols.⁷ He too confirms the

minute amount of time spent overall on interaction with the public, whether that be responding to calls or in identity checks, with an average of 76 minutes per 8 hours, and concludes: "Beyond the narrow view of police work as crime work, one can see that the presence of police officers has become an end in itself, whether they merely are seen driving around the streets or proactively or reactively intervene in the life of others. They are 'the law,' they represent order, they embody law and order." In fact, this Canadian study cogently demonstrates that law is always subsidiary to order: on the one hand, the law generally functions to give an acceptable form to decisions taken in line with a certain vision of order in the social world; on the other, the law is applied unequally to different individuals, in such a way as to maintain a specific social order. Thus, according to this author, rather than maintaining public order, what the presence of police patrols insures is "the reproduction of social order"; in other words, it is a way of reminding people of their place, most particularly their place in relation to the state and those tasked with implementing its repressive policies.

Of this pattern of law following order, in the sense that recourse to the law serves to justify the interpretation of order, I detected frequent evidence in the satisfaction expressed by members of the anticrime squad whenever they discovered a new point of law that would allow them to trap those they wanted to teach a lesson because, as they often put it, "they treat us like idiots." At break time in the office, which also served as a common room, stories were shared and information exchanged. One night, a beat officer related how the previous day he had taken 12 points off the driver's license of a youngster for driving in the emergency lane on the highway – an offense that normally merits the loss of only 3 points – despite the fact that members of this unit consistently reiterate that they do not get involved in traffic control. "I slapped seven charges on for the same offense, so the bastard'll lose his license," he exulted, since each driver is normally allotted an initial capital of 12 points. He explained specifically that he had added speeding, obstructing traffic, dangerous overtaking, and even illegal parking for stopping when requested, increasing the penalties each time the young man protested. I asked him why he had been so harsh: "Because he took the piss out of me and I don't like that." I pressed for details: "I asked him why he was in the emergency lane and he made up an excuse, saying he was in a hurry because his girlfriend was sick." His colleagues congratulated him and the team leader piped up: "Hey, this is great, I've just found a way to get guys that drive around with their music at full volume." Taking out his notebook, he proudly proclaimed: "I made a note of

it, it's called disturbance of public peace. It's Article 48-2 of the Public Health Code, and it can result in criminal proceedings." This kind of offense was thus becoming a potential weapon in relations with the young people of the poor neighborhoods.

A few days later, one of the officers put it clearly: "Did you see the 130 euros for the bastard that spat on the ground in public?" He was referring to a fine imposed on a high school student in January 2006, for spitting on the ground at a bus stop in Lyon. The charge sheet had cited a decree issued on March 22, 1942 – by the government of Marshal Pétain, as the officers ironically noted in reference to this improbable legacy of the Vichy regime – in a context of endemic tuberculosis that allegedly justified the then-stringent public hygiene precautions. The anticrime squad officer continued: "It's great, this thing. If I see anyone spitting, I'll slap a charge on him, and with a bit of luck it'll end with him resisting the police. It's a done deal: you hit the bastard with a 130 euro fine, he's not happy, he gets pissed and bingo! Resisting the police." He was certainly not the only one to dream up such scenarios. Several months after this event, in an outer-Paris neighborhood, an African teenager chatting with his friends outside his high school who turned away to spit on the ground without noticing the presence of the police at a distance also had his identity checked and was even summoned to court. Yet he offered no resistance.⁸ Such anecdotal knowledge of legislation could thus allow police officers to make the law, as it were, rather than applying it. One night when we were cruising around the center of town, the sergeant major recognized a man in his thirties: "Isn't that Boudjema? I thought he was in jail. Hasn't he just been convicted?" One of his colleagues explained that the judge had given him six months, suspended. "Don't worry: he'll get it. We'll have no problem finding something to make him break his suspension order. I tell you: he'll serve his time." I do not know whether the sergeant major succeeded in implementing his threat.

Inequality before the law of the police was evident on many occasions. The example of breaches of the legislation on drugs is instructive in this regard. In France, as elsewhere in Europe and in North America, marijuana use is known to be common among young people: 30 percent of 17-year-old boys and 20 percent of 17-year-old girls state that they have smoked it in the past month.⁹ Marijuana use accounts for 90 percent of police arrests regarding drugs, involving 125,000 individuals per year, to which can be added 15,000 others arrested for using together with reselling and drug dealing. Owing to their crowded living conditions, working-class youths from projects generally tend to smoke marijuana outside, whereas middle-

class youngsters living in residential areas typically smoke indoors: the former are therefore more at risk of being caught than the latter. But police action adds a double layer of inequality to this structural disparity, through their actual practice: first, they check and search many more of the youth in the projects; and second, when they find a substance, they are more lenient with the middle-class. This is what I eventually understood.

Several times when parties were organized by university students in the clubs or bars of the city, I found myself out with the anticrime squad monitoring the area around these gatherings. Dozens would be drinking and smoking on the sidewalks. Yet, there were never any identity checks or body searches. But when we left to patrol the surrounding projects, we would start the usual stop-and-frisk routine. These operations seldom bore fruit, since the youths knew that if they were out at night they were at high risk of being searched. Significantly, when they did, the officers' attitude varied according to the public. One night, as they were on foot looking for young Africans they suspected of drug possession, they came across two students of European origin smoking on a lawn, and, on searching them, found a larger quantity of marijuana than would suggest personal use. After a couple of admonitions, they let them go, having confiscated their drugs. When, later, in a nearby project, a small lump of the same substance, only enough for a few joints, was found in the pocket of a youth who was chatting with friends, he was taken to the police station. Such strict treatment of drug offenses was not systematically applied to young people in projects, but it was consistently absent in relation to middle-class youngsters.

There were more disturbing considerations, though. On several occasions, the police pointed out to me men they knew were dealers, and whom I sometimes saw taunting officers. However, questioning them would have been pointless, because the individuals concerned did not carry their products on them: this work was left to the police investigative division, who conducted long-term investigations into drug networks. Thus, the offenses against drug laws targeted by the anticrime squad related to users rather than dealers, and project youths rather than university students. Here, too, legislation served not so much to make the law respected as to remind each individual of the social order. Therefore, one might better consider the efficacy of police work in disadvantaged neighborhoods against criteria other than the one usually used: the reduction of crime. Patrols exert a form of pressure on those populations that are seen as threatening by virtue of their mere existence – that is, young people from working-class neighborhoods, mostly belonging to minorities – regardless of any

objective danger. What is at stake is not so much the protection of public order as the maintaining of social order. I will offer another example.

One night in the spring of 2007, when the hours spent on patrol had been especially dreary, with not a single call or person questioned, around midnight, the anticrime squad was informed that some young people were having a party in a small park close to a project. Two cars went to the location. There was no noise, no music, nothing out of the ordinary. Just as we were about to leave, one of the officers pointed out a group of a dozen youths seated on benches around a picnic table. They had not seen us and we stayed a few moments watching them from a distance. We could hear the muffled sound of voices. All was calm. The leader of one of the two crews, an experienced man whom I never saw behaving other than courteously, said: "Come on, there's nothing going on, they're not disturbing anyone, leave them alone, let's go." But his colleagues in the other car insisted: "They shouldn't be out at this time of night. We're checking them." So six officers approached the youngsters, most of whom were young men, around 20 years old, celebrating a birthday; there were bottles of soda on the table, no smell of marijuana. "Identity check!" announced one of the officers loudly. One by one, the young men had to give their name, show their papers, empty their pockets and, apart from the girls, be searched. The episode lasted about 15 minutes, in almost total silence. Nothing out of order was found. As we left, we saw the group picking up their things and moving away, vexed: "We've fucked up their party," one of the officers commented with satisfaction.

Imposing order by making it clear that they can use their power as they wish is the mission members of the anticrime squad adopt by default, once they realize that they are not, as they imagined when they chose to work with this unit, arresting "thieves and thugs." But clearly this definition of their job cannot satisfy the public expectation of efficacy, as understood by the Ministry of the Interior. "Performance evaluation" sits at the heart of contemporary reforms of the state, and what could be called "government by result," a practice that, as Albert Ogien shows, sets up a tension between a management logic of accounting and economics, and a democratic logic of transparency and responsibility.¹⁰ The famous Organic Law on Financial Legislation (LOLF, *Loi organique des lois de finances*), passed in 2001 and described as a sort of financial Constitution, provided the general framework for this approach. While the production of statistics to evaluate the performance of public services and hence to justify state expenditure poses problems in all sectors, it takes a singular form in

the domain of security. The monthly publication of statistics by the Ministry of the Interior means that these data serve less to evaluate efficacy than to communicate the purported successes of the government and, of course, to generate debate and polemic around the interpretation of the results. Rather than the “statisticization of politics” that bureaucratic reasoning suggested, what we are seeing here is a politicization of the figures.

From the point of view of a police station in the Paris region, this “politics of numbers,” as it is generally termed, was experienced as a powerful constraint, coming both from above, in the form of guidelines, and from below, in the form of statistics. Given the pressure applied by the president on the minister of the interior, by the minister of the interior on regional directors of public security, by the directors of public security on district chiefs of police, by the chiefs of police on the heads of anticrime squads, and by the latter on their subordinates, it was difficult to escape the “culture of results” on the ground. At the time I was carrying out my research, some police officers had recently claimed, on television, that they were required to make a certain number of arrests each month, and this revelation had caused controversy and made it a sensitive subject. When I talked with one of the chiefs of police about it, he denied issuing any such instructions. But he acknowledged that he did examine officers’ performance closely, and deemed those who made few arrests inefficient. When I asked one officer in the anticrime squad about the pressure exerted on them, he replied indignantly: “They make me laugh when they say we don’t have to meet targets. Hypocrites!” He explained that the sergeant major had asked each crew to “do 30 arrests each month” – a goal that, given actual crime levels, was virtually impossible to achieve. The apparent contradiction between the chief of police who rejected any suggestion of orders and the patrol officer who asserted there was a target was thus resolved by the fact that it was the sergeant major leading the anticrime squad who set the figure at 30, and his unit was the only one not subjected to detailed evaluation by the chief of police. The beat officers were indeed given specific orders, but they were only accountable to their squad leader, who transmitted the overall figures to his superiors. The autonomy of the unit made it possible both to even out the results (since high-performing officers could partly make up for their colleagues’ failings) and to avoid overly close scrutiny of the reasons for arrests (thus concealing the less illustrious operations, remote from their missions). “Racking up the numbers” proved to be not a simple matter.

For a long time, the results demanded by the central authorities related only to quantification of misdemeanors and felonies as

recorded by the national police and the gendarmerie. But these figures were ambivalent for governments, because an increase in the number of incidents recorded might well indicate higher levels of police activity, but could also be interpreted as a deterioration in public safety. These data are still produced, but two new elements have been introduced since the early 2000s.¹¹ First, “quantifiable targets” have been set: what matters is no longer simply reckoning up actions, but comparing them with a desired level of performance. Second, the “clearance rate” has become a crucial factor: this indicator is not in itself new, but it has not previously been pushed to the fore in this way.

It is probable that for many this “culture of results” goes without saying. It is, after all, reasonable to suggest that the police should measure their efficiency in terms of incidents recorded and incidents solved in relation to a specific target. The problem is less theoretical (how can a policy be assessed?) than practical (how can the number of crimes observed and resolved be increased when they are actually declining, and are often committed in conditions that make it virtually impossible to find the culprits?). On the one hand, both police statistics and victim surveys indicate a steady fall in the majority of the most serious crimes, while observation of the activity of patrols does indeed show that the numbers of calls received and of productive stops and frisks are low. On the other, the clearance rate for a substantial proportion of crimes, particularly thefts and burglaries, is below 10 percent. Hitting targets thus requires solving this double equation of declining crime levels and irregular clearance rates.

The solution police officers have logically come up with is to complement the number of arrests they make for attacks on property and persons, which are the main justification for their profession, with actions both easy to accomplish and easy to resolve, but far removed from their primary mission. These relate essentially to two types of offense: breaches of the drug laws, and breaches of immigration law, in other words to “shiteux” (dopeheads) and “sans-papiers” (illegals). An anticrime squad officer gave me an example: “In theory we’re meant to do 30 arrests a month. That’s what the sergeant major asks us for. Last month my crew only made 24. So we do some dopeheads and illegals to make up the figures. It was the commissioner himself who told us to do that.” I asked him whether going beyond the fixed goal could earn them a better evaluation: “Not really, because if we make more than 30 it’s good but there’s a risk they’ll be disappointed if the figures go down the next month.” He pointed out that this policy was not unique to their district: “In the police station I was in before, our squad leader told us: ‘You’ve got to take six or seven into custody each month.’ So we did it with

illegals.” Officers consider breaches of drug and immigration laws “interesting situations”: not only are they easy to “get,” they are by definition solved since the discovery of the alleged crime presupposes the identification of the culprit. They consequently improve their performance in both absolute figures and the clearance rate.

Operations relating to the drug laws do not always involve arresting dealers: even when they are known to the police, dealers can only be “got” if they are caught in the act, a result that involves weeks or even months of surveillance and phone taps by specialist investigation services; patrol officers are often even told to leave them in peace so as not to get in the way of their colleagues’ activities. Their operations therefore focus on users, or those alleged to be reselling if the quantity they have in their possession is deemed to be greater than what they might have for personal use. They are based on stops and frisks, which have a potential high yield for law enforcement. However, given the prevalence of marijuana use among young people, the police do not of course systematically bring in all those found in possession of small amounts of hashish, but, depending on the attitude of the individual concerned, on what they know of his past, on what kind of lesson they wish to impart, on whether they are in a good mood, and on the level of their performance at that point, they make a decision to arrest him or simply to threaten to do so the next time. Actions relating to immigration laws have been consistently encouraged by the successive ministers of the interior, who have made the deportation of illegal aliens a symbol of their repressive policies, and of their politics of numbers. During certain periods of my research, in particular just after the presidential election and the announcement of a target of 26,000 deportations per year, subsequently increased to 28,000, officers were regularly sent to train stations in the district to carry out systematic checks on individuals whose physical appearance suggested they were foreign immigrants. Such a profiling was obviously uncomplicated to conduct.

Both drug users and illegal migrants are thus easy prey. A little too easy for some officers in the anticrime squad, who complained about being reduced to these activities, which they regarded as beneath them. One of them, referring to drug law offenses, railed: “I didn’t get into this job to pick up dopeheads. I joined the police to catch thieves. I can see that what we’re doing is pointless. The only thing that counts is racking up the numbers. A kid with a gram of hash, that’s one arrest, and the bosses are happy.” Another, speaking of actions relating to immigration law, said: “I just refuse to get involved with that, but some of my colleagues go for it. It’s too easy: I could meet the targets too, all I’d need to do is go to the migrant workers’

hostel and no problem, I could find some to bring in for questioning.” These two offenses are thus described as adjusting variables. One officer told me that they use drug law and immigration law offenses “as necessary” – which in effect means all the time, since the number of incidents related to misdemeanors and felonies is well below the target set. He added that the ideological position of individual officers would determine whether they focus more on one or the other of these offenses – a tendency I myself observed. The more xenophobic ones are logically inclined to use breaches of immigration law: “I’ve always said there are too many illegal immigrants,” one of them, well known for his verbal and physical violence toward foreigners when questioning them, said to me. “So whenever I can arrest one, I do.” His colleagues, less obsessed with the issue of immigration, preferred to pursue breaches of drug laws: “I’m not here to arrest poor people who haven’t done anything and aren’t bothering anybody,” one rank-and-file officer stated; “I prefer to take in drug users for questioning – at least they’re screwing up.” Hence a moral division of labor is established, based on ideological stances.

But, independently of their personal choices, the members of the anticrime squad assert that both drug law and immigration law arrests bear no relation to the idea they have of their mission. “Our work makes no sense,” one of them indicated, exhausted by the pressure of quotas. In the evaluation of their unit, this inadequacy disappeared, because the sergeant major presented the chief of police with overall totals for arrests and average clearance rates, which presented their performance in a favorable light. The efficacy of the anticrime squads was never questioned, whatever the reality of their performance in relation to the crime and disorder that prompted their creation.¹² The politics of numbers therefore responds neither to the management requirement to rationalize public spending nor to the democratic expectation of transparency in public services – despite the fact that these represent, in contemporary governance, the two official justifications for it.

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The routine of the police is doubly out of line: with the way it is popularly presented in movies and on television, and with how it is politically exhibited via the politics of numbers. On the one hand, boredom rather than adventure is the rule. On the other, what emerges is inefficiency rather than performance. Much of this gap between perception and reality has to be attributed not to individual officers, but to the conditions in which they exercise their profession: they are expected to do something other than what it is possible for them to

do. They must carry out patrols, although it has been known for 30 years that these have little of the desired effect, in neighborhoods where they are supposed to control crime, which is in fact declining. Moreover, they must prove, on the basis of statistics, that the fall in crime and the rise in clearance rates are due to their activity, and, by a kind of sleight of hand, replace drug dealers with drug users, and dangerous felons with illegal aliens. This double game, in the service of a policy they initially appreciated because it seemed to support them, but which they subsequently realized meant they had to cheat in order to legitimize it, is a source of disappointment and frustration. Often, in their daily or nightly rounds, they complained that – among other things – this job was not what they hoped for, and about the thankless role they were asked to play. Others, as I shall show, strove not to be drawn into this deviation of their work. I have to admit I was pleasantly surprised to note that, on the monthly performance charts now pinned up in the anticrime squad's meeting room, the crew with by far the best results in terms of arrests was the one that demonstrated the greatest professional competence and ethical rigor: it was relatively successful in tracking down "hoodlums and thieves," and I never saw these officers taking the easy way of increasing numbers by questioning people under the drug or immigration laws. But they were certainly the exception rather than the rule.

Being inactive in an all-action profession – or at least a profession that others see as such – is complicated. Officers must remain alert, because incidents can arise – even if they are rare – and call for rapid and appropriate reactions. One night when I went out with a team consisting of the sergeant major and two of his men, a call came in as we were filling up with gas: "You've got to get here, we need help." The colleagues in trouble provided no further information, but their tone as they gave the address was worrying. After a moment of panic at being temporarily unable to move as they did not think they could interrupt the filling of the tank and at being unable to make the radio work so as to get details on the incident, they sped off, the car swerving dangerously at intersections and roaring along the long straight roads. We quickly arrived at the outskirts of a residential neighborhood of small houses. The driver switched off the headlights and entered the street slowly. Everything seemed calm. The other anticrime squad car was nowhere to be seen. We received another call: "Where the hell are you, guys? Good job we've managed to sort it out by ourselves." The sergeant major then realized the problem with the address: we were on the right street, but the wrong town. It was too late to correct the mistake. We went back to quiet cruising through the dark, as if nothing had happened, having missed one of

the rare actions of the night: in this case the other crew had checked the identity of two Turkish men sitting talking in a car, and as one of the officers, well known among fellow officers for his brutality, told us laughing, they had roughed them up until the situation degenerated; eventually they got the men under control and brought them in for questioning on the grounds of “insulting and resisting a person having the authority of enforcing public order” – a classic of its kind.

As with anything rare, calls are precious. On hearing a radio message alerting them about an incident under way, the crews immediately brighten up. The emotion expressed is anticipation of action rather than of an actual case: the perspective of an enjoyable experience prevails over the hope of recording a crime. In this regard, there is often talk of the danger police officers confront, and the fear that may lead them into ill-considered actions. The only real danger I perceived involved speeding to the location of a call or chasing another vehicle – however, the risk was much more to other drivers or pedestrians than to ourselves. As to fear, I never saw any trace of it: not only do anticrime squad officers make it a point of honor never to wear bulletproof vests, their high levels of tension clearly owe more to pleasure than to anxiety. The possibility that firearms might be in evidence at the scene of an incident only increases their impatience to get there. One quiet evening, we were called because gunshots had been heard in a bar in the city center. The team leader, a man in his forties who was still at the peak of fitness, was keyed up at the prospect of what was to follow. To his great regret, once we arrived we found the bar closed and, having asked local residents, we came to the conclusion that the call must have been either a mistake or a hoax.

The excitement aroused by calls derives not only from the potential action to come at the incident location, but also from the action into which the team is pitched immediately en route. The anticipation of the operation appears to justify speeding and risk-taking: there is no time to lose. Yet the chief of police regularly reminded crews that car chases, and high-speed journeys in the urban area in general, were forbidden, because they were too dangerous for his vehicles, his men and the general population. He knew that many accidents were caused by these practices: in general occasioning no more than dents to vehicle bodywork, but sometimes involving knocking down pedestrians unfortunate enough to be in the crew’s path, or resulting in the death of those being chased. Patrol officers themselves also fell victim, and two-thirds of violent deaths in service were due to accidents. The commissioner, however, realized that, despite his instructions, such chases were endemic, and he only reprimanded officers when an

accident occurred: they would in turn complain bitterly that he seemed more concerned about the state of the car than the danger his men had escaped. In the eyes of these officers, any call justified breaking the rules. It did not necessarily have to be an emergency: the message was enough. On one of my first trips out on patrol, in June 2005, we were called out to deal with a brawl in a housing project. When we arrived, it turned out that once again the call was a hoax. The crew returned to their patrol, grumbling. Half an hour later, we heard that there had been another call, from the public telephone in the same project. We were already quite far away and there was not the slightest chance we could get there to catch the hoaxer, but we sped off through the city streets at 100 miles per hour. Needless to say, when we arrived the culprit was nowhere to be found.

I saw evidence that chases acted as entertainment, legitimized by calls, each time we received a message about a sports car being driven at full speed on the highway. Wherever we were, even if we had returned to the station, we would set off in pursuit. There was absolutely no chance of the chase succeeding, given our delay in reaching the highway and the fact that our car had much less horsepower than these vehicles. The crews I went out with never caught one and always returned empty-handed – but happy. They had their dose of excitement for the night, even if it was at the cost of putting residents and drivers at greater risk than the dangers from which the police were claiming to protect them. Moreover, in the absence of such an opportunity, they seemed to live vicariously, watching clandestine “runs” on Friday and Saturday nights on an avenue in the city that was transformed into a racetrack, with dozens of vehicles full of onlookers parked up on the sidelines.¹³ Several times I spent half an hour or an hour in an anticrime squad car with officers who were observing, with a mixture of scorn and envy, “pimped-up” cars, their owners showing off the paintwork and gunning their engines. I was surprised that they allowed these illegal and dangerous games to take place, but they explained that it was too complicated to intervene, given the number of people present, which only a massive operation could have brought under control. So we would stay for a while contemplating the spectacle of these automotive duels, powerless but delighted to find a way of occupying our time.

The rarity of calls and the avid enthusiasm with which they were received had another consequence, in this case for those at the location. The state of tension of the police was in inverse proportion to the frequency of interventions. Given the idleness most officers had to endure, the smallest incidents would spark an astonishing burst of

energy, and would often be treated out of all proportion to their importance. For example, in the episode described above, where a hoax call prompted an impromptu race through the city streets, the car I was in arrived at the destination just about the same time as two others. The three vehicles screeched to a halt in the middle of the street running through the project, blue lights flashing. Eight officers split into pairs and scoured the alleyways on foot. At one point, one of them saw a black youth at a distance, and it was decided that he might well be the suspect. A chase began, as the youngster had run off on seeing the officers barreling toward him. As he entered one of the apartment blocks, the officers found themselves in front of a closed door, and rang all the buzzers, yelling at the residents to open up. It was midnight, and I saw lights coming on one after the other in the apartments. The few seconds it took to gain entrance to the building were evidently enough for the boy to get back to his home. When the police rushed into the stairwell, it was empty. They knocked on every door, calling on the occupants to ask if someone had just entered their unit. But they did not dare to embark on a systematic search of the 20 or so apartments. The tenants got off with a serious scare, and no doubt also a lesson reminding them of the place they occupied in society.

That police might launch such a spectacular operation, rudely awakening these inhabitants and violently exposing them to a noisy invasion of their private spaces in search of a prankster they thought they recognized on the basis of his presence a good 15 minutes after the hoax call was placed, has become part of the ordinary life of projects and seemed to pose no problem to the officers. The boy was black, he lived in such a neighborhood, and he had run off at the sight of their coming to stop him – three factors that testified to his guilt. I recalled the story told by the African American historian Robin Kelley, about the night when, as a student in New York, on his way home, he ran to catch the last bus. He was suddenly surrounded by officers who ordered him to drop his bag, knocked him to the ground with a nightstick, and handcuffed him face-down in the dirt. “Why did you stop me? What have I done? – You ran, nigger! Criminals run.”¹⁴ The members of the anticrime squad were also convinced they had their culprit, that the residents were in league with him, and that the affront was serious enough to merit this punitive expedition. They departed cursing the “bastards,” not without having conducted several aggressive and humiliating identity checks on youngsters of Arab origin a little further on in the same project, where they were sitting on a bench chatting; like the lamb in La Fontaine’s fable,¹⁵ these youngsters had to submit to the law of

the strongest, paying for the alleged misdemeanor of one of their fellows.

In this routine of inactivity punctuated by moments of generally unproductive animation, criminals are occasionally caught in the act. Such successes involve a rare coming together of favorable factors, most particularly the fortuitous chance of the crew finding themselves in the right place at the right time, and the competence of the officers attending the incident. One evening in May 2007, a call came in about a fight in a bar a few hundred yards from where the car I was in was parked. The team leader was an experienced agent: second in his class at the police academy, he chose a regional intervention unit imagining it would be an exciting job; after a few months during which he felt not much was happening, he joined the anticrime squad, on which he had served for 12 years when I met him. We set off, together with a marked police car with uniformed officers. At the bar, the doorman pointed out a man of about 30, of African origin, whom he accused of having tried to push his way in when he was refused entry, for reasons that were not specified. A uniformed officer handcuffed the supposed intruder, who protested weakly, asserting that he just wanted to get a drink. Two of his friends came up: "You can't arrest him just for that, he hasn't done anything, he was on the guest list." The officer replied firmly but courteously: "We'll look into that and if he really hasn't done anything, nothing'll happen to him." The men continued to argue, close to the car where their friend was now seated. The anticrime squad leader stood in front of them, nightstick lifted, threatening: "Back off!" The men complied. An employee of the bar then mentioned the existence of an ax the intruder was alleged to have brandished in an attempt to force his way in. "That's bullshit! Does he look like he would have an ax?" the men argued indignantly, pointing to their friend. An observer at the scene might have felt that the prospect of a questioning was excessive given the facts that he had been reproached (merely arguing when refused entry to a bar), and that the accusation of carrying a weapon seemed far-fetched (particularly as it was only made several minutes after the initial report). As the officers were searching the nearby hedges for an unusual offensive weapon, the crew leader suddenly flourished a red-handled ax. "As per usual, he didn't do anything!" he said triumphantly. Such captures are rare, though, and are celebrated in style: on the approach to the precinct, a car carrying a suspect often puts on siren and flashers for a triumphal arrival that will arouse the curiosity of colleagues.

Notwithstanding these moments of professional celebration, in light of the everyday routine of patrols, the task assigned to anticrime

squads can seem like a “mission impossible.” Set up to fight crime in normal times and to control disorder during periods of disturbance, in support of the more traditional security services, these special units most often find themselves, on the one hand, confronted with a relative paucity of incidents and crimes, and, on the other, suspected by senior officers of provoking problems rather than resolving them. Rarely called out by local residents, and proving ineffective when they are, at least in the key area of attacks on property and robbery with assault, the perpetrators of which are seldom caught, they have to respond to political pressure by conducting stops and frisks on youth and foreigners, seeking out marijuana users and undocumented immigrants, “interesting situations” that enable them to bump up the numbers, through arrests for offenses readily solved. This reorientation of police action toward these easy targets may satisfy part of French society, more concerned with ideological considerations than with actual consequences. But it is unlikely that it meets the expectations of the majority of the population, especially those who, in surveys, express the greatest concern about security issues – in other words, those living in the so-called “sensitive urban zones.” For these people, law enforcement often exacts a high cost, in terms of stigmatization, humiliation and brutality, in return for a limited effect on crime and disorder. In these conditions, it is understandable that the authorities show little inclination to evaluate police activity or accept independent audits, particularly given that anti-crime squads, initially designed to operate in the most problematic areas, are now being established throughout France as a supposed response to a lack of security contradicted by the objective facts.

Interactions

We need to identify the countless patterns and natural sequences of behavior occurring whenever persons come into one another's immediate presence.

Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, 1967

Policemen generally view themselves as performing society's dirty work. As such, a gap is created between the police and the public. Today's patrolman feels cut off from the mainstream culture and unfairly stigmatized.

John van Maanen, "Observations on the Making of Policemen," 1973

The documentary *Flics de France*, shown on television in 2005, was trailed with glowing previews that emphasized the honesty of this study of police officers of Arab origin. One sequence stood out, and was indeed extracted from the rest of the film and posted on a number of websites under the title: "Girl from the projects insults a cop from the projects."¹ Inside a van belonging to one of Paris's public security teams, accompanied by two colleagues, a pretty, smiling young uniformed female officer, who has been introduced to viewers as a Muslim of North African origin, has an exchange (here highly expurgated) with a handcuffed teenage girl who has just been taken in for questioning along with her friend, and whose face we do not see. "Is it the first time you've been taken to the station? – . . . – How old are you? – Fourteen. – Are you proud of yourself? I can see you think it's funny. – Oh, you're getting on my nerves, shut up. – What? – Stop talking! – I'm supposed to stop talking to you? OK!" Silence, then

the young officer pretends to be speaking to her colleagues but indirectly addresses the teenager, prompting an immediate reaction from her: “They don’t get it, they’re too young. – I’ve been keeping my mouth shut till now, but you’re sucking my cunt, you keep looking at me. – Why, you think I’m scared of a big bad 14-year-old like you? Why are you so full of hate? – Stop talking to me. Stupid bitch, go fuck your mother, just dig it. You think you’re sorted ’cos your uniform says police, well you just go back to where I live, you’ll get well fucked.” The dialogue continues in the same vein for three minutes, the girl persisting in her provocations (“Shove your insulting offense up your ass!”), her insinuations in relation to her Arab origin (“We cleaned you out of your village like vermin”) and her offensive remarks about her new country (“Your precious France is a shit-hole”), the officer answering sarcastically without raising her voice (“You grew up in a project even more charming than mine”) or showing any impatience (“You think I’m going to charge you with insulting behavior, but I couldn’t care less”), while her two colleagues remain quiet, looking elsewhere. As they get out of the van, there is one last exchange as the door closes: “Is that it, d’you feel better? – Shut the fuck up!” The officers and the youngsters brought in for questioning enter the police station.

Usually, we expect from documentaries a form of truth, a realistic representation of the facts, which assumes a degree of verisimilitude by approximation: what is supposed to be true should appear plausible. Yet the scene presented here is highly improbable. Each of the protagonists appears to be playing her role for the camera. The ethnically diverse police force is shown in the best light, the victim of foul-mouthed aggression from a girl from the projects. The young officer, whose pleasant face is seen in close-up, keeps her cool at the same time as prompting the adolescent to speak each time she falls silent. The girl, seen only as a skinny silhouette, takes advantage of the presence of the camera to insult the police with impunity. The two other officers remain silent and distant: one hides his irritation by gazing out the window of the van, the other smiles awkwardly as if nothing was happening. It is difficult to imagine that in the real world the police would permit themselves to be subjected to such verbal abuse without intervening to silence the individual or even that a youngster arrested would take the risk of acting in this way. One also wonders about the director’s intention in including this lengthy sequence in the documentary. Is she trying, like the prefectural public relations department, to counter the violent image associated with the police, by showing the aggression they are themselves exposed to and the astonishing placidity with which they absorb it? Is her aim,

as claimed on the websites to which the videos have been uploaded, to highlight the altercation between officer and teenager, both female, both of North African origin and both raised in the projects, where one has succeeded in integrating into French society, and the other has excluded herself? The movie is well intentioned toward the police and their ethnic minorities, however highly ambiguous, simplistically emphasizing that the difficulties encountered by these officers arise from the public and not from the institution.² Sympathetic but uncritical, this indulgent depiction is unconvincing: neither the police nor the youth from the banlieues would recognize themselves in it, but the public will have retained a caricatured image of (over)tolerant police faced with intolerable rudeness from antisocial youth.

There is no doubt that a level of tension exists in interactions between youth and the police. But the asymmetry, quite logically, operates in the opposite direction to that portrayed in the documentary: it is the police who possess not only the legal authority but also the coercive power, and the youth are well aware of it. It has been said that the most common interaction is the stop and frisk. This is law enforcement officers' usual means of entering into contact with their public, whether or not a crime has been committed. Among the hundreds of such incidents I witnessed, almost the only ones in which the individuals concerned displayed insolence involved youngsters from middle-class or wealthy backgrounds, particularly students who evidently had no experience of this kind of situation and seemed unaware of the potential consequences of their behavior. Yet in none of these cases – which were anyway quite infrequent, since these groups rarely face such procedures – did the officers seek to escalate the tension in order to provoke a scene that could later be set down as insulting and resisting the police. Conversely, when checks were carried out in the projects or on the streets of the city, young people, mostly of working-class background and non-European origin, almost always kept a low profile, only speaking when they were asked a question, not reacting to the abusive or racist comments and aggressive or humiliating treatment some officers subjected them to, simply presenting their papers and submitting to the body search. Accustomed to and even blasé about these repeated irritations, knowing quite well what would happen if they protested, they appeared to be waiting until the bad moment passed, silent, expressionless, for the only way not to lose face in this confrontation was not to enter into any transaction with the police.

In fact, contrary to popular belief, identity checks and body searches “go smoothly” in the vast majority of cases, in the sense that young people submit to them without complaint, even when they

are exposed to verbal provocation and physical pressure. They know from experience how unequal the balance of power is (any slip results in immediate arrest, which generally involves physical coercion with an arm lock, being hurled to the ground, and handcuffing) and their position in relation to the law (a charge of insulting or resisting the police is taken much more seriously in the courts than complaints of brutality by the public). They therefore do not risk “getting smart” with the officers, who sometimes want nothing more, particularly in encounters with young people they have already had dealings with and are trying to “get.” But there are, of course, also cases where the interaction unfolds calmly because the law enforcement agents act with civility. Certainly stops and frisks can vary widely depending on the unit carrying them out. In general, uniformed patrol officers take a less aggressive stance and have less of a tendency to confrontation than their anticrime squad colleagues.

One late afternoon in May 2005. It has been a quiet day at the local police station, and uniformed officers set off to patrol a nearby project. They tell me its name, and I ask why they are choosing that area rather than another: “It’s a hot spot,” they explain. And it is true that the neighborhood has the reputation of being one of the city’s main marijuana-dealing sites: among youth, it is known as Little Colombia. But, as mentioned before, beat officers are not permitted to intervene in this type of crime, which is the subject of long and complex investigations by the drugs squad. Their activity is limited to demonstrating their presence to the residents, carrying out a few checks and, once in a while, questioning drug users. They approach three youngsters of non-European origin who are chatting outside an apartment block. They know them well, but ask for their papers, which the three boys patiently produce, telling the officers they have already been stopped a little earlier by another patrol. No matter: identity check, body search, once again. They submit to the routine exercise with resignation. Finding nothing, but spotting a cigarette butt on the ground, one of the officers says curtly to the youngest, who looks barely 18 years old: “Do your parents know you smoke joints? – No sir. – Well if you don’t want us to tell them, go and smoke somewhere else! You’re annoying people. (Pointing to the cigarette butt): Just look at you littering everywhere! – . . . – (In a more conciliatory tone): If you want to smoke, there’s the wood just over there, go in there! You won’t be bothering anyone there.” Since the remains of a discarded joint can hardly serve as grounds for questioning, the team gets back into the car and, several minutes later, moves off toward the very wood the officer had pointed out.

A group of a dozen neatly dressed high school students, mostly white, is sitting on benches eating sandwiches. The three officers approach the teenagers, who are clearly not known to them. They ask them to stand up and begin the checks and searches, recording each one's name and address in a little notebook. No one says anything, apart from replying politely to their firm questions. Just as they are about to leave, one officer notices a little lump of hashish that one of the youngsters probably threw away when they caught sight of the police. "Whose is that?" No reply. "If no one owns up, we're going to take you all down to the station and you'll spend the night there." One of the boys says the drug is his, although it is clear that it was going to be used by the whole group. The officer takes him aside: "This time we'll let you go, but that's your last chance. We've got your name. We won't let you off next time. – I understand, officer, thank you." At once magnanimous and menacing, the officer seems not to remember the advice he gave moments earlier to the other youngsters: to smoke in the wood rather than the street. But the two situations I witnessed also suggest that he might well not have exhibited the same degree of tolerance toward the individuals from the apartments: high school and university students are almost always treated more leniently over drug use than youth out of the school system, often apprentices or jobless, generally of non-European origin.

By contrast, the practices of the anticrime squad are generally markedly rougher and more provocative than the uniformed officers' approach described here. One late afternoon in summer 2007, we are cruising along a main street of the city. Suddenly the team leader notices three young black men known to him, in a luxury German car. He switches on the flasher and siren. The young men, elegantly dressed, stop, while the patrol vehicle comes to a halt crosswise, blocking the road in spectacular fashion. Identity check, body search, aggressive questioning in a disrespectful tone, all accompanied by offensive jokes, in full sight of passers-by who do not miss the opportunity to stare. The young men, impassive and somber, remain silent. Since the same officers stopped them only the day before, they know they are not following up any specific crime, apart perhaps from the spark that might result in an incident. After ten minutes the officers allow them to resume their journey. "They're not showing off no more now, the bastards," laughs the leader of the crew.

A little later, as the night begins to seem endless and the anticrime squad has been cruising around for two hours without receiving a single call or observing any notable incident, we stop by a car parked

alongside others in a lot outside a gym. There is a young couple inside. In general the police do not disturb these intimate scenes, perhaps at most amusing themselves by shining a flashlight into the interior of the vehicle in the hope of surprising the couple lovemaking. This time, for no particular reason, perhaps because they are bored, the officers make the two passengers get out for a check. Conversation with the boy, who appears to be of European origin, and from a low-income background: "(While looking at his identity card) What's your name? – (The boy says his name.) – Where d'you live? – (The boy gives the name of the nearby project where he resides, and which the officer knows perfectly well because he patrols there nearly every night.) – Don't know it. Where d'you live? (The boy repeats the name of the project, this time adding: "It's just down the road.") – I don't know where that is. (The boy, confused, indicates the name of the city we are in.) – That's not an address. – (The boy finally understands and provides his full address.) – Well, finally! That's a proper address. How old are you? – 19. – (Scornfully): What d'you do? – I'm training to be a boilermaker." The exchange continues, while a colleague searches the car and another calls the station to determine whether the boy is known to the police or the vehicle has been reported for any particular reason. After several aggressive questions to which the youngster continues to reply with timid embarrassment, the officer issues a last warning: "Don't get smart!" Getting into the police car, he says to his colleagues, as if feeling the need to justify his aggressive behavior: "Shit, he's not even 20 and he's full of it already!" As with all of these checks, the police seem satisfied with the lesson they have given to the youth – but what is it they are teaching them?

These exchanges between the police and the youth from the projects represent habitual modes of interaction in identity checks when things proceed normally – that is, when the former are demonstrating their authority with varying degrees of roughness and hostility, while the latter submit more or less docilely until it is over. It is through stops and frisks that the police most frequently come into contact with residents from the projects, mainly young men. They correspond to a procedure framed within quite strict limits by Article 78-1 and succeeding provisions of the French Penal Procedure Code (*Code de Procédure Pénale*), and are undertaken mainly as either investigative policing in the context of a breach of the law, or administrative policing for the purposes of crime prevention. In the first case, a person may be subjected to an identity check because there are "one or more plausible grounds for suspecting that s/he has committed or attempted to commit an offense, or that s/he is preparing to commit a felony or

misdemeanor, or that s/he might supply information useful to the investigation, or that s/he is sought by the courts.” In the second case, the law states that “a person’s identity may be checked, whatever his/her behavior, in order to prevent a breach of public order, in particular an attack on the security of persons or of property.”³ It was the law of August 10, 1993, drawn up by the then minister of the interior Charles Pasqua, that introduced this major expansion of the police’s scope for conducting checks, not only in the absence of any crime, but also regardless of the individual’s behavior. It represented a turning point in the deployment of law enforcement in poor neighborhoods, making police discretion legally admissible in this matter, almost without limits.

As officers told me, not without cynicism, “in theory, we have to follow strict rules, but in practice, the Penal Procedure Code lets us do what we want.” Yet this was not entirely true, since the Constitutional Council (*Conseil Constitutionnel*) had reminded the police that it was for the judiciary, generally in the person of the liberty and custody judge (*JLD, Juge des Libertés et de la Détention*), to confirm the legality of identity checks; and, in addition, the National Committee on Security Ethics had several times emphasized that groundless identity checks, not to mention body searches, were to be avoided.⁴ But the officers took no notice of this kind of admonition, which in any case had no practical consequences for them in terms of sanctions, and conducted what they considered the basic act of policing as they saw fit. As a case in point, one evening in the spring of 2005, uniformed officers patrolling on foot in a neighborhood of modest detached houses saw three boys of North African origin, about 15 years old, playing soccer peacefully in a small square. For no reason, they decided to conduct a stop and frisk. “I live just over there, don’t search me here,” begged one of the teenagers; “I don’t want my mother to see.” But the three had to submit to the humiliating ordeal of the body inspection in full view of their neighbors and the boy’s mother, who came to find out what he was being accused of.

One of the commissioners, who was better informed about the law than her subordinates and well aware of their practices, said to me: “These kids are checked even when they haven’t done anything and don’t look like they’re getting up to anything. It’s illegal, but we do it all the time. They’re used to it, they hand over their papers, they’ve always got them to hand. And they empty their pockets. That’s forbidden too, if we have no reason to suspect them of anything, but we do it anyway.” Quite apart from the illegality of the checks (with regard to the Penal Procedure Code) and their illegitimacy (since those concerned are neither accused nor suspected of any crime),

what is remarkable in these comments is her recognition of the relationship of subjection that they set in place. On the one hand, such acknowledgment confirms the arbitrariness of the police's choice of who is checked and how, as they exempt themselves from the law and even from any need to justify their actions. On the other, it points to the submissiveness the youth must demonstrate by yielding to this practice, without protesting at the discrimination to which they are subjected, and by putting up with the shame generated by the actions and words which often accompany the encounter.

As the commissioner described them, and as I saw them conducted, stops and frisks represent a pure power relationship that functions as a recall to order – not to public order, which is not under threat by youngsters quietly conversing on a bench or joyfully playing soccer, but to a social order, which is one of inequality (between the police and the youth) and injustice (with regard to the law and simply to dignity) that has to be impressed in the body. The continuous repetition of the same experiences in a mortifying routine is a genuine physical education through which the individual interiorizes his social position. The habit of humiliation is designed to produce the habitus of humility. However, to learn inequality is not quite the same thing as to learn injustice. In the first case, a relation of domination is inculcated (the discovery of the police's power); in the second, a relation of subjection is instilled (the acceptance of one's own powerlessness). Inequality is objective, injustice subjective. Not only through their frequency but also by the way they take place, stops and frisks establish a distinction between citizens and subjects. Citizens are rarely checked, and when they are it is generally in a polite manner, but they think they have the right to complain if they believe it has been done wrongly. Subjects are often checked, and when they are it is often in a supercilious way, but they know they only have the right to remain silent. Thus it becomes clear how this practice, which many minimize as harmless, defines the relationship of some categories of the population to the state, and, more broadly, to politics. In general, a relationship of mistrust of public institutions is established, a fact demonstrated by the particularly high rates of abstention in elections among these constituencies. And, once in a while, there comes a time when explosions occur and give rise to rebellion.

In an interview I conducted with him during the riots, in October 2005, the chief of police acknowledged the part played by the stops and frisks in generating tensions between young people and law enforcement that could erupt in violence of the kind that had recently broken out. "It's true that these are improper checks and I understand why it bugs these kids," he admitted. "But it's like a game. I'm the

cop, I'm going to check you. You're the alleged culprit, you submit to a check. Of course it doesn't serve any purpose, except to perpetuate the unhealthy atmosphere between the police and the youth." He continued for a moment, expanding on this idea of the uselessness and even harmfulness of identity checks, but suddenly stopped, probably judging that he had gone a little too far in confiding to a stranger and, moreover, a researcher. "Identity checks can be useful sometimes," he said; "If a crime is committed and we realize afterwards that the individual we've checked was present, that makes him a suspect. And also, sometimes it's the other way around, we don't do enough. That happens when vehicles are set on fire, because you have to check the onlookers, the perpetrator is often there." I objected that, in my experience, stops and frisks in the projects were usually focused on young people the police knew well, and with whom they were even to some degree familiar: under these circumstances, seeking out criminals did not seem to me to be the primary reason for identity checks. He avoided this question but, misunderstanding my meaning, reacted strongly to the idea of familiarity: he thought I meant police officers addressing the youngsters in an informal way, whereas I was talking about mutual acquaintance: "I don't accept anyone calling young people 'tu,'⁵ I do all I can to combat that practice!" he exclaimed indignantly. At the time, his response seemed completely disproportionate, since this linguistic practice appeared to be so benign compared to the aggressiveness, vulgarity and scorn that his officers often displayed. But I now believe he was correct to be so concerned about the issue, since calling people "tu" was indeed what authorized this violence in interaction. Later, though, when I asked about the room for maneuver he had with respect to his officers, he did recognize his powerlessness: "It's too difficult to make them understand the fine line between doing too many identity checks and not doing enough. If I ask them to cut down, they'll say to me: 'Come on, you have to decide what you want.' If you want to catch criminals, you have to do checks." The chief of police, not prepared to admit to the practice of "racial profiling" and the application of the "politics of numbers," was also ultimately unable to take his analysis to its logical conclusion, despite its implication that the work of the officers in disadvantaged neighborhoods was in pursuit of objectives other than the fight against crime.

The residents of the projects themselves clearly understood that something else was being played out in these interactions between law enforcement and young people. They had a word for what was going on: "provocation." At an early age, boys would learn from their parents or older siblings that they should not react to the police's

“provocations.” A teenager of African origin described to me how the officers behaved as they cruised around the projects: “They’re always dissing us: ‘What’s up then, you gang of little cocksuckers?’ They needle us: ‘You not scared, then? Don’t get smart there!’ And when we don’t say nothing, they carry on. One day I’m coming home from high school, I’ve got my hand through the belt of my jeans. They pass close to me and say, like they’re laughing at me: ‘Go on then, have a good feel!’ They were driving with the window down. I look at them and suck my teeth.”⁶ The officers were probably unaware of the meaning of this sound, because they did not stop. Indeed, silence should be the only response from teenagers. However the police talk to you, you must say nothing, let them carry on, otherwise it will be worse: this was essentially the message they received from adults.

There is a paradox in this inversion of roles: contrary to widespread opinion, according to which the youth provoke the police, who have no choice but to respond in order to demonstrate the authority of the law, in the projects it is often the officers who provoke the youngsters, anticipating a reaction that might justify a physical response on their part. For example, during a late afternoon patrol through one project, the anticrime squad car was driving at walking pace behind a 15-year-old boy of African origin who, from the bag he had slung over his shoulder, was evidently returning from school. One officer wound down the car window and jeered racist insults at him. After about 20 seconds, overwhelmed and in tears, the teenager, who had managed to control himself up to that point, burst out: “Leave me alone!” Immediately the car stopped, the three officers got out and surrounded the boy threateningly. Once they had checked and searched him roughly, they prepared to take him in to the precinct, since he was a minor and his parents would have to come and pick him up there. Thanks, however, to the intervention of a woman who was passing by and assured the police that he was a nice kid who made no trouble and begged them to let him go home, he was able at the last minute to avoid questioning. Fortunately for this student, then, the encounter ended with no more than intimidation, which will have inculcated in him, at less cost, the lesson continually reiterated: you must always keep quiet in front of the police.

We should not, of course, underestimate the provocation in the other direction, from young people toward law enforcement agents. Officers complain that they are increasingly subject to insults and attacks. However, we need to understand that these actions take place in very different contexts from the identity checks, in which the power relation is overly unequal from the onset: in general, it is from

a distance and when they are in a group that teenagers dare to engage in such practices.

One winter's day, in the early evening, we were cruising around the fringes of a project in which incidents had occurred during the preceding days, following a number of aggressive identity checks. I had particularly noticed how much more frequent stops and frisks had become following the recent introduction of the law of March 18, 2003, which imposed a penalty of two months' imprisonment and a heavy fine on groups congregating in a building lobby.⁷ In cold weather, young people, who usually meet in the street, tend to take shelter in these spaces so as to keep warm, while chatting and smoking: this gives rise to police intervention and the threat of sanctions. The situation that night was tense, and from a distance we saw, close to an apartment block, the silhouetted figures of teenagers who appeared quite fired up. Our driver took the road circling the project, where we found a marked police vehicle parked on the sidewalk about 50 yards from the group of boys. "Assholes! I can't believe it! They've gone off on foot and left their car there with no one to watch it! It'll get vandalized," our team leader predicted. We continued on our way, at normal speed, and when we passed the same spot again two minutes later, we were not surprised to find the empty vehicle with its windshield shattered, apparently by a stone. The anticrime squad officers joked sarcastically about the incompetence of their colleagues, but they knew there was a risk of this kind of occurrence even in the absence of such an obvious error. The deterioration in relations with residents of the projects does indeed increase the likelihood of brief altercations, during which both insults and missiles are hurled at the police. These confrontations, which arise when there is little chance of the young people in question being recognized (often at night) or caught (because they are carried out from a distance), are often triggered by a previous law enforcement operation the youth see as brutal and unjustified. They reveal the anger of those involved as much as their powerlessness and frustration, but do not exclude an element of play, which may be present on both sides.

Thus the confrontation between the youth and the police in the banlieues follows the codes of either of two main configurations. In the individual relationship, which checks establish in exemplary fashion, submission to the officers, who are known to hold almost unlimited power, is the rule. In the collective relationship often brought to the fore by a perceived abuse of authority, hostility may emerge on the side of the youth, in the form of verbal and physical aggression, but from a position of relative safety. There are, however, variations in this pattern, generally in unusual situations, like the

following example which I have reconstructed from a series of interviews with both law enforcement agents and local residents.

One late afternoon in winter, two young men of Senegalese origin were coming home from a basketball game when they spotted two friends by the side of the road being stopped and frisked by two police officers on motorcycles. They greeted them laughing, with a “Salaam alekum.” The officers replied: “We’re in France here, we speak French.” The tension rose rapidly, the police calling the boys “filthy apes” and “filthy niggers,” and the boys responding with “French assholes.” The two agents then called for reinforcements and set off in pursuit of the youths who had run off toward their home, in a middle-class neighborhood of detached houses close by. Within minutes, several police vehicles, including the anticrime squad, arrived at the site. A crowd gathered, made up of inhabitants of this quiet residential complex unused to such events. To the sound of insults and hoots from the indignant crowd, a large contingent of helmeted police broke the window in the front door and entered the house, striking the two boys with nightsticks, throwing their mother brutally to the floor, shoving onlookers roughly aside, while, unknown to them, a neighbor filmed the scene. An evangelical pastor from the United States who lives nearby told me a few days later, in the tone of someone who knows about such things: “They way they struck those teens, it was like Rodney King! People were really traumatized and shocked.”⁸ The outcome, however, was less tragic: law enforcement officers in the district where I conducted my research were undoubtedly less violent than the Los Angeles police, but the result in terms of court proceedings was also more limited. The boys suffered serious bruising, fortunately without further complications, and their parents filed a complaint. The court procedure was halted after several months, when the motorcycle officer deemed primarily responsible for the eruption of violence was killed in an accident.

The following weekend there was a demonstration in solidarity with the boys, in the city center, and a public meeting was organized three weeks later, involving residents of the neighborhood, city council representatives, religious leaders, including an imam – but no one from the police attended. What was most distressing, some said, was the racist insults toward the teenagers. When I discussed this with the chief of police from the district, he told me the affair had been blown out of proportion, and that, while the amateur filmmaker, whose footage was broadcast on national television news, showed the officers making insulting comments to the teenagers, he had only begun recording after the latter had made equally offensive remarks toward the former. However, this defense, arguing that the

officers were simply reacting to verbal aggression, was based only on their own statements. When I spoke of it to one of the members of the anticrime squad who knew well the motorcycle officer initially implicated, he seemed to take a different view, saying simply: "I wouldn't be surprised, he's a crazy brute."

Without judging the truth of these two versions, on which the courts will in any case not be called to rule, given the circumstances, the unusual social and spatial inscription of this scene seems to me noteworthy: a family of African origin, but belonging to the middle class and living in a residential neighborhood. There is no doubt that this statistical anomaly explains – at least partially – the sequence of events: firstly, the officers mistook who they were dealing with, or at least acted with them as they would have done with youngsters from the projects, who are accustomed to such treatment (as the female commissioner pointed out to me); secondly, the boys were unaware of the rules of the game with law enforcement for black youths (to take up the image used by the chief of police), or rather failed to understand the consequences of talking back, being who they were. The pastor gave voice to this anomaly as he spoke to me, not without some naive sympathy: "Those kids are good-looking, well-behaved, intelligent. They're not riffraff. They're high-class kids" – a quality the police had perhaps failed to recognize because of the color of their skin.

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In an often-cited paper, John Van Maanen describes and analyzes that generic category of individuals that US police officers designate with the term "assholes."⁹ This category, he explains, is distinct from others – "suspects," who are thought to have committed a misdemeanor or crime, and "the general public," whose only dealing with police is in lodging a complaint. According to the sociologist, "assholes" constitute an undifferentiated group of persons who may range from social workers to young activists, and include the homeless and alcoholics, who are subject to the attention of the police, mainly in the form of checks, and who tend to respond inappropriately, questioning what the police want with them, disputing the legitimacy of their act or challenging their authority. Depending on a range of assessment criteria, the reaction of law enforcement to such an uncooperative individual may be brutal or didactic, dissuasive or tolerant.

In the neighborhoods where I worked, no such designation is used, although the reality it points to of course exists, as the preceding examples have shown: the category generally covers persons belonging

to the white majority, in this case often university students, or sometimes middle-class or upper-class individuals such as teachers and physicians, who, typically, tend to protest when police stop their vehicle and ask to see their papers, or even, in what they imagine to be their civic duty, intervene when they witness a violent arrest. In most cases the police let them go, shrugging their shoulders at the individual's insolence, but in some cases, particularly when the person in question has interfered in an affair that does not concern him or her and in which he or she might become a witness, the confrontation can escalate to a charge of insulting and resisting the police. However, in general, these are not the people officers are out to get. The category exists, but it does not have a name.

Law enforcement is interested in an entirely different category of individuals: those they almost systematically call "bâtards" (bastards). Other generic terms are sometimes used – they often talk of "cocksuckers" or "shitheads," or even of "assholes," in reference to teenagers – but it is the word "bastard" that officers most often use to refer to the young people of minority (mainly black and Arab) origin in the projects, although the term is sometimes extended to other young people who "hang about" with them, live in the same projects, and share external attributes, especially the way they dress. "When I think that we risk our lives to catch bastards who are let out the next day and never punished," an officer said to me, disheartened, and then caught himself up with a smile for my benefit: "Bastards – I mean: criminals, have to be politically correct!" In fact, the word is not intended as an insult. Uttered without emphasis or anger, it is a mundane way of designating the officers' target. It could be objected, admittedly, that the young people concerned may also use this term among themselves.¹⁰ But the meaning, in that case, is very different because it forms part of a verbal game: it is a joke insult, since the person who utters it knows he will get it back, given that he generally belongs to the same social and ethnic group as the person with whom he is speaking.

The use of the word by the police, however, carries no overtone of humor. It clearly implies contempt, but without even a tone of invective. Officers say "bastard" in the same way they would say "guy," "dude," "youngster" or even "woman." Entirely routine within the anticrime squad, it is used above all by those officers who most overtly express their hostility toward young people from the projects, particularly those of minority origin. Although, as noted above, the terms "savages" and "apes" operate as occasional descriptors, the word "bastard" functions as an ordinary noun that can be defined more precisely by adding a reference to, for example, an

“African” or an “Arab,” a “black” or a “Beur.”¹¹ For instance, one night in May 2005, an anticrime squad crew was cruising slowly, scrutinizing any residents who were still outdoors. Teenagers from the neighborhood watched us from the sidewalk. The team leader remarked to me: “They don’t like us, the bastards. We don’t like them either. I’m honest, I don’t hide it.” He hesitated for a moment and then added: “But I still have buddies who are blacks and Arabs.” This last sentence, presented as a sort of defense against an imputation of racism, effectively made explicit what the first statements had left unsaid, since it might have been possible to imagine he was speaking of young people in working-class neighborhoods in general; in fact, the word did indeed designate a racialized category. Moreover, the concession the crew leader appeared to be making to his multicultural friendships proved somewhat relative when, two days later, he told me that no black or Arab would ever set foot in his home.

Using “bastard” as a common noun, rather than a specific insult, is not insignificant. It suggests that the connotations of impurity, indetermination and devalorization the term implies have become routinized.¹² While its semantic limits are subject to variation, it is worth noting that it is usually used to refer to young people from immigrant families but who often have French nationality, for whom the French language has no adequate term (“children of immigrants,” “second generation” or even, in a supposedly poetic expression, “from far away”), and whose true identity is not even known (the terms “North Africans” or “Algerians,” “Africans” or “Malians,” are readily used to describe French youngsters who themselves do not always know their true citizenship¹³). Thus a particular form of socioracial stigmatization is inscribed in the very name given to these young people who are from France, but seen as coming from elsewhere. The term contaminates not only the image those using it have of the individuals concerned (a “bastard” is not quite a youngster like any other), but also the practices that are permissible in relation to them (a “bastard” certainly merits less respect than another teenager). This language has a performative power. To call young working-class people, most of them of minority origin, “bastards” is to bring into existence a biological category of infra-citizen, which is to be especially mistrusted, and in relation to which specific practices become legitimate.

There is an obvious comparison to be made with another term: “*racaille*” [scum].¹⁴ This term was infamously popularized by Nicolas Sarkozy when he was minister of the interior, during a visit to a project in Argenteuil days before the outbreak of the riots of 2005.

The officers among whom I carried out my research almost never used the word, which holds connotations of the criminal margins of the working class. In their preference for “bastards,” these officers constituted their ordinary public as an undifferentiated mass in which the deviant youth become difficult to distinguish from the honest youth, since they share the same physical, social and territorial characteristics. Unable to come up with a sort of spontaneous sociology that would allow them to make a distinction between criminal profiles and others, they fall back on an elementary phenomenology that makes their target the whole of young people of minority background, living in housing projects or moving around city centers, and whom they identify principally on the basis of their external appearance and their presence in public spaces.

To adopt a demographer’s term, being a young person of color in a banlieue has become a “proxy” for crime – in other words, an approximation considered sufficiently accurate to be substituted for the reality sought. These are the people who are most often subjected to stops and frisks, those toward whom the police behave aggressively, the ones who often end up being brought in for questioning. Indeed, if it has become impossible to “tell the difference between youngsters and hoodlums,” to use the phrase of the head of police, it is because, to law enforcement agents, they all look the same. As the mayor of the city told me, describing a scene reported to him by the person concerned, “when they do an identity check on a big black guy in the street, it doesn’t cross their minds that he might have a Master’s in economics or a Ph.D. in history.” At first sight, and particularly if he is dressed casually, and even worse if he wears a hooded sweatshirt, he is simply a “bastard” like the others.

As research on the police in North America has shown, a somewhat undifferentiated view of the general public is a common trait of the image the police have of society.¹⁵ It is based on their feeling that they are misunderstood and unappreciated by citizens. In return, it permits them to consolidate their group against a population seen globally as hostile. But this image still allows for a series of distinctions that form the basis of differentiated attitudes and behaviors. Police aggressiveness is focused on certain categories, sparing others. Basically, their perspective on the social order, and especially on the economic order, is a legitimist one. There is certainly nothing surprising in this, given the mission they are charged with by the state. But in light of their modest social status, their position is actually more emotional and more radical than might be thought. On the one hand, they often exhibit contempt for working-class people, despite the fact that many of them are from similar backgrounds, and on the other,

they demonstrate esteem for wealthier individuals, whom they seem happy to protect.

In this respect their attitude toward young people is quite revealing: in their discourse as well as in their practices they make a clear distinction between middle- or upper-class youngsters and those from the projects. On the night of a party organized by students from a private professional school, I was aboard one of the police vehicles parked outside the location where the celebrations were taking place. The patrol officers remarked to me, with a tone of awe that seemed unmingled with envy: "Imagine being able to pay \$20,000 to study!" They appeared to be more disappointed by these young people's naivety than irritated by their ostentation: "They walk around talking on their brand-new cell phones, out on the street – it's no wonder they get them stolen!" A few yards away, on the sidewalk, a number of students were clearly drunk, most of them smoking marijuana and creating a rowdy disturbance, but the officers did not intervene to check and search them. Evidently, they were there not to curb the excesses of gilded youth, but to ensure that they were able to enjoy themselves without fear that the other youth, from the nearby projects, would intrude and spoil the party with thefts or fights. Indulgent and protective, they were the guardian angels responsible for watching over these young men and women, rather than keeping a check on them.

The same applied to adults: just as residents of the projects were the subject of sarcastic comments, better-off individuals were treated with deference. An anticrime squad officer described to me an arrest of which he seemed particularly proud. Three days earlier, an SUV had been reported stolen: "A \$120,000 Land Rover! With a \$12,000 Rolex inside as well!" he exclaimed, with an admiration that bore no resentment. The case was not too difficult, since the vehicle had a tracking device that allowed it to be easily traced. The rest was just a matter of waiting, and after a 12-hour stake-out, they caught the thief, a "Malian," red-handed, "without even damaging the vehicle," he added proudly. The owner of the car, well versed in good etiquette, promised a case of champagne to show his gratitude, and the head of police told his men he would save them a bottle or two to reward their heroic deed.

Residents of the projects enjoy no such benevolence from law enforcement agents, who find it hard to imagine there are honest people living there. Even the crimes they fall victim to add to their disrepute. I often heard officers commenting on the dilapidated state of apartment blocks in a tone of contemptuous disapproval: "Look at that! The lobbies were only just repainted and there are already

tags all over!” The only time I heard any of them show some sympathy toward the inhabitants was one officer who felt sorry for the owners of vehicles burned out in the riots of 2005. “Those poor people that work to pay for a car and then get it burned by these little assholes,” he said to me. But this phrase seemed doubly ambiguous. On the one hand, it adopted the official discourse of the time, with an ironic undertone. On the other, it allowed him to further reinforce the stigma on the youth, who were seen to be attacking their own parents. Thus it seems the sincerity of this compassion toward residents from the projects should be regarded with some caution. In general, no distinction was made between parents and their children, the former being not only held responsible for the latter’s misdeeds, but also suspected of being complicit in their crimes through their silence.

Officers often complained about this vow of silence. It was readily ascribed to the fear of reprisals from local crime bosses that might result from any collaboration with law enforcement. It is certainly true that the police did not always act with the necessary confidentiality about their informers. One night a man reported that three young people were causing noise pollution with a car, which even resulted in an altercation with residents of the project. The anticrime squad team I was with proceeded to question three boys who met the reported description. They were told to stand in the middle of the street in the beam from the police car headlights, with the person who had reported them remaining hidden in the dark. The man confirmed that the boys were the culprits. A short while later, at the station, attempting to get them to admit they had committed the offense, the officer interrogating the youngsters, at the end of his tether, yelled: “Stupid asshole! You might as well admit it: the gypsy recognized you!” The lieutenant witnessing the scene told me later that this was a mistake, for the name of an informant should never be revealed to a suspect. But the reticence displayed by residents of the projects toward the police had much more to do with their previous experience of their operations: almost every time someone called them, the situation seemed to get worse, and the disorder to be greater after than before.

However, on closer examination – in which the officers rarely engaged, considering all inhabitants of these neighborhoods with the same suspicion – substantial variations were evident in the way people reacted to the police. One late afternoon when I went out on foot with a uniformed team, we met another group staking out a small square where they thought drugs were being sold. Passing by, a Caribbean woman stopped us and suggested that we should spend

the evening there too, as there were “a lot of young people smoking” in the area. After observing the site for a few minutes, the officers burst into the square where several young people were talking, causing them to run off: there was nothing to suggest they had been committing any crime, but they had no desire to be publicly exposed to the ordeal of a stop and frisk – or perhaps they had hashish with them. Not knowing where they had fled, the officers asked an elderly woman of European origin who was looking out of her ground-floor window whether she had seen anything. When she said she had not, they commented, resignedly: “These people always claim they don’t know anything.” Banging on the doors of the apartments that opened onto the square, they eventually entered one and proceeded to check the identity of the tenant, a North African man in his thirties who had just returned from work and reacted strongly to this rough intrusion into his home. A number of teenagers watched the scene from several dozen yards away, and an African man took one of them, his son, aside, ostentatiously rebuked him for being outside instead of doing his homework, and strictly ordered him back to the family apartment.

Here, then, one can identify four very different attitudes on the part of residents: first, collaboration; second, mistrust; third, animosity; and fourth, one that seems harder to interpret, for while it gave the impression of an enthusiastic demonstration aimed at presenting oneself in a good light for the police, one might wonder whether it was not rather a preventative tactic, making a show of severity to avoid the son being subjected to a risky check and search. Whatever the case, contrary to the remarks of the officers, who thus deprived themselves of potential allies, residents of the projects did not always react to their presence in the same way: some saw them as a threat to themselves and their families, while others were more trusting. “It’s good they make sure the young people aren’t getting up to anything stupid,” said one woman happily after her son had just been subjected to a stop and frisk close to her home. Such comments, which manifested some support for the police, were welcomed in the moment they were uttered, but did not seem to have any lasting effect because the officers continued indiscriminately to imagine all the inhabitants as hostile.

Paradoxically, the group the police considered most reliably cooperative was the Roma. Their relationship with them was complex. The officers showed deep contempt, seeing them as dishonest and dirty: “From the Gippoes, we only picked up crap,” and “Romanians are filthy,” they would generalize, sometimes making a distinction between the former, pejoratively called “Manouches,” who have lived

in France for a long time, and the latter, designated by their supposed citizenship, although many of them were in fact from Bulgaria. Each time they made one of their rare forays into Roma camps, or one of the frequent traffic checks to which Roma vans were subject, they seized the opportunity to express their scorn and even disgust openly. But there was one category of Roma they found fascinating – the young people, especially for their driving skills. Some of these youths would amuse themselves by driving sports cars at such speeds that the police almost never managed to catch up with them: “They’re totally crazy! When they put their foot down, in a Peugeot 406 Turbo or an Audi Quattro, you can’t keep up with them.” But they had to acknowledge a good side to them, a sort of integrity in their criminality: “It’s true they’re hard to catch. But once you catch them, there’s no problem. They play by the rules, they don’t make a fuss. Even if we’ve roughed them up a bit they won’t tell tales. They’re not like those other bastards, blacks and Arabs, they’ll file a complaint. But the Gippoes aren’t the type to hit their head on a wall, split their skull open and say you did it.” The Roma habit of complete capitulation once they were arrested, whatever the offense, made the police see them as “good customers” who accepted “sportingly” that they had lost the game and had to pay the price, in the form of verbal and physical assaults about which they would not complain, and eventually a court sentence. “They’re straight-up. They’re players. If they win, they win, but if they lose, they lose.” They demonstrated submission to the law of the strongest, but also to the reign of chance: as a result, they could be expected not to make any trouble.

Despite what I often heard, the police still managed to recognize certain “honest people.” These were mainly white inhabitants of neighborhoods of detached housing and residential areas of the city. They were generally only referred to in the context of being victims of crime: burglary, mugging, vandalism to cars. In these cases, a degree of fellow feeling was established, the police acting courteously, and the victims seeming reassured. We sometimes met them on patrols, too, when a police operation led them to appear: they would come to their window or out onto the street in their slippers to see what was going on. Conversations might arise, generating a degree of complicity against the criminals in question or crime in general. Uniformed officers posted to local precincts on the outskirts of the city were certainly acquainted with some of the residents, but this was far from what is known in other countries as community policing, and in France as “*police de proximité*” (literally vicinity police): since 2002 this expression is, in any event, banned from official discourse, since it is stigmatized by the right-wing government as the

epitome of the left's mistakes in the domain of law enforcement.¹⁶ However, it seems that some echoes of it remain in police practices.

Thus, one evening when we were cruising slowly through a street of small stone houses, the crew leader, seeing a middle-aged man at his window, stopped the car and chatted briefly with this chance informant while standing in the street. He explained that the mission of his unit was to fight crime and ensure safety, and emphasized how important people like this man could be in achieving this goal. Eventually he gave him his cell-phone number, telling him not to hesitate to call if he saw anything untoward or suspicious in the neighborhood. This exchange was doubly remarkable, since it was the only one of its kind that I observed in my 15 months of research, and it took place on a particularly quiet street. I mused as I got back into the car that this conversation was unlikely to result in any substantial change in the crime statistics. (I knew, by contrast, that criminals "bound" by the threat of "bringing down" their suspended sentence, for example, were definitely much more valuable informers, but they were deemed the property of the investigative services, particularly the drugs squad.) This kind of faint echo of the short-lived vicinity policing also seemed to pertain among the senior officers. One day, as I was conversing with the deputy chief of police in his office, his cell phone rang in his pocket. He answered, and I heard him talking in a friendly way to a resident of the city who had not been able to get through to law enforcement in relation to a minor incident. He told me afterwards that this was an elderly lady he had met at a neighborhood meeting, at which he had spoken about the work of the police and had given out his number – to be used only for emergencies, he had stipulated, though this fact seemed not to have been taken in. This episode revealed an effort to establish links between the police and the community – or, more specifically, the imagined community of honest people, who, it was taken for granted, were not to be found in the projects.

Beyond the accepted discourse about loss of trust in the police that seems to encompass the whole of society together as a uniformly hostile mass, complex and ambiguous distinctions emerge in the interactions between the police and their public. The image that the officers have of society leads them to construct relatively homogeneous categories around a friends/enemies polarity that complicates the dichotomy described above, between honest people and hoodlums. Of course, some of the friends may prove ungrateful, particularly when they speak up in support of a black or Arab man who is being brutally questioned, and, conversely, some enemies can turn out to be trustworthy, notably by accepting the punishment inflicted

on them without a murmur, as Roma do. But the main difference introduced by this new opposition is that it is no longer based on a relationship to crime or the law. The distinction between honest people and hoodlums was grounded on a presumption of guilt. The distinction between friends and enemies implies a framework of susceptibility. Residents of the projects, members of minorities and working-class youth, with a large subset in the intersection between all three of these groups constituting the category of “bastards,” are defined as susceptible to committing crime or to being complicit in crime, whether actively or passively. From their perspective, officers patrolling these neighborhoods are therefore justified in indiscriminate checks and searches on young people, but also in treating them without respect and roughing them up, and at the same time retaining the possibility, if things turn bad – for example, if insults are hurled or missiles thrown in response – of generalizing these practices to all residents in the course of punitive operations that spare neither adults nor children.

But the boundaries of the enemy population fluctuate. They may extend almost infinitely depending on the circumstances, to include the mayor of the city suspected of defending residents in his area for political reasons, members of a tenants’ association accused of protecting criminals, journalists who report incidents involving law enforcement, filmmakers who depict life in the banlieues, and probably social scientists. The people to whom this most commonly – but also most disturbingly – applies are the youth workers in charge of teenagers in specialized prevention services or in local community centers. The police find it especially difficult to establish the distinction between these professionals and their clientele because many of them are young, and of modest background and immigrant origin. Thus, through a kind of moral contamination, they may be treated with the same aggressiveness and contempt as those under their care, and, if they are young men, may themselves undergo the same ordeals of stops and frisks. The experience is all the more traumatic for these professionals because by brutally ranging them alongside the youth, the police eliminate all possible authority they may have over these youth (how can you respect special educators who are seen as potential criminals?) and reduce them to a social and racial condition shared with them (ultimately, everyone living in the projects looks the same).

One evening in June 2007, around midnight, as I patrolled with an anticrime squad crew, we received a call reporting the presence of a group of teenagers outside a Youth Judicial Protection (PJJ, Protection Judiciaire de la Jeunesse) care hostel.¹⁷ At that point, this was

all we knew. According to information imparted to me later by a patrol officer, it was alleged that, as a car waited at a red light, one of the boys had shouted “Fuck France!” and another had made as if to throw his shoe at the car; the driver had then reported the incident to the police station. In the account I was subsequently given by the youth worker, as she was talking with the teenagers about their experiences in prison, a conversation that prompted quite powerful emotional reactions on their part, a car stopped; thinking she was being threatened, three men “with shaved heads” got out and offered to defend her, displaying a hostile attitude toward the adolescents, and then left. Whatever the truth of this troubling, but common, divergence between versions of the same event, the team I was with proceeded to the location. We approached on foot and took up a hidden position at the corner of the street to observe the scene. Outside the hostel, a sizable building with a small garden surrounded by fences, five or six boys aged 15 or 16, of African origin, were chatting with a young woman in the parking lot. From time to time an exclamation or a burst of laughter reached us, and the teenagers exchanged friendly punches or played at chasing one another. Over the 15 minutes that we hid watching them, we saw no incident involving drivers; cars in any case passed infrequently at this late hour. Suddenly, five vehicles, three marked cars from the public security unit and two unmarked anticrime squad cars – in other words, almost every officer available at that time in this district with a population of approximately 200,000 – burst onto the scene, as if some serious breach of public order was taking place. A dozen agents, in uniform or plain clothes, surrounded the youngsters; we joined them. The boys appeared to have done nothing worse than hang outside in the evening chatting and teasing one another in the company of their counselor.

This fact did not escape the police. Most of them remained silent, but stayed there threateningly a few yards from the group, occasionally exchanging perfectly audible insulting comments: “Look at the little assholes!” or “What are they still doing out, the cocksuckers?” But it seemed that they found the greatest fault with the youth worker, a young North African woman. Four of them took her aside, asking aggressively what the teenagers were doing outside their hostel at that hour. She explained calmly that it was a hot night, the youngsters were a bit agitated and they had come out to chat. The officers reproached her harshly for having followed them outside rather than making them come in, and held her responsible for the resulting disorder, adding offensive comments about her profession. Hurt, she retorted: “But I’m doing my job! – It doesn’t look like it.

– (Softly): It’s true we don’t do the same job you do . . . – Fortunately! – . . . but we’re also looking after youngsters in difficulty, and contrary to what you think, we get good results. – You call that good results? – (Indignantly, with a forced smile) You are joking, aren’t you, officers?” Later, she admitted to me that at that moment, the way things were going, she was afraid she would end up in custody. She told me above all of the embarrassment and humiliation she felt, hearing her professional activity dismissed in front of the minors of whom she was in charge, “treated like a little girl in front of the schoolteacher” who “confronted me like I was stupid.” At the same time she recognized that it was lucky she was a female, for if not she would certainly have been subjected to an identity check and body search, as had happened some weeks earlier to one of her male colleagues, in the course of a similar episode.

After a tense verbal exchange with the counselor under the gaze of the youngsters, the police ordered them back into their hostel. The boys obeyed coolly, grumbling. As they re-entered they seemed particularly animated. A youth worker in his fifties, who had stayed indoors watching the scene, hailed the departing law enforcement agents with evident exasperation: “Thank you, officers, thank you for your help!” When I later evoked this scene with her, the young woman, recognizing that her previous experiences with the police had gone much more smoothly, told me how much this episode had shocked her, adding that from now on she would think twice before contacting them if problems arose at the hostel. Although she believed until then that her institution shared with law enforcement a common mission of preventing crime, she now realized that the police viewed youth workers as enemies, on the side of the youngsters, she said. But this discovery was nothing out of the ordinary, it being long established in sociological studies, especially in North America, that what binds the world of the police most effectively is the hostility they perceive on the part of the general population, which justifies their own hostility toward the public. Manifest hostility toward youth from the projects, latent hostility toward those seen as protecting or excusing them for alleged professional, ideological or ethnic reasons: in the case of this counselor, it may be that all three reasons pertained.

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Thus the theater of law enforcement intervention is often a scene of drama. This statement can be understood in two ways. Firstly, in relation to the real world: for the individuals undergoing or witnessing police questioning, the spectacle in which they are involved or

which they are merely observing holds a powerful emotional charge at the same time as arousing a sense of the seriousness of what is at stake. Secondly, in relation to the written expression of it: the accounts of both journalists and sociologists attempt to reconstitute, more or less felicitously and artfully, something of the emotion felt and the seriousness perceived. But drama is not the only literary form that can help us to grasp and give an account of the experience of the actors.

There would certainly be value in being better able to recognize, and hence to explain, the comedy that is played out in the interactions between the police and their public. This is not a matter of describing the humor officers exhibit and the jokes that circulate within their world. Of course, as in many professions, there are codes of humor and types of jokes more or less specific to the milieu, and police station canteen humor can hold its own against hospital night-shift humor. Here, however, I am suggesting something quite different. I propose to think differently about the theater of police operations, paying attention to certain comic forms, particularly comic situations; failing to reveal these makes it impossible to grasp the work of law enforcement in its entirety and its diversity. The element of comedy is usually involuntary – differentiating it clearly from humor and jokes. It is the interaction itself, and the playing of the actors during the course of the interaction, that produces comedy, often unknown to the individuals concerned – at least the officers: it is not certain that it entirely escapes their public. I have often thought, as I witnessed a scene, that if it had been filmed it would not fail to make viewers laugh. This would not necessarily be the result obtained if they heard officers' very specific humor and jokes – proof that these are indeed two distinct realities. We could therefore use the term “comic epiphanies” to describe these kinds of recognition – almost revelation – of the comedic aspect of police work.

I have already provided examples of such striking scenarios: the panicked reaction to a colleague's call for help at the moment when officers were at the gas station, culminating in a late arrival at the wrong address; the extreme risks taken driving at high speed to a correctional facility, only to find that the helicopter suspected of being part of a prisoner escape was in fact a civil security craft transporting an emergency case to the hospital; a marked patrol car left unguarded outside a housing project during a confrontation with a group of teenagers, prompting an ironic prediction of damage that did indeed occur minutes later; the radio that was not turned down and blasted a loud message as two crews lay hidden trying to catch a burglar.

Sometimes the scene may even turn to farce. One night we were called to an offense at a “commercial property at 36, Rue des Peupliers.” On arrival the officers found neither the business nor the street number. Thinking it was a mistake, they made their way instead to “36, Avenue des Peupliers,” a short distance away, but with no more success. They decided to retrace their steps and investigate a large building on the street they had initially explored. The “commercial property” was in fact a higher education institute. The security guard on duty confirmed that the call to the police had come from his service. We entered the building with him and had begun to systematically search through the corridors when we suddenly unintentionally set off the alarm. For several minutes we tried to find a way to turn it off, but in vain. We were thus obliged to continue combing through the building amid the deafening noise. After a long, rather aimless tour, from empty classrooms to deserted common rooms, we arrived at the library, where we inspected between the rows of books. Just as we were leaving, the security guard and I failed to realize that the heavy wooden door of the reading room was closing behind us, shutting the two officers inside among the books, their cries drowned out by the strident alarm. It was some time before we noticed their absence and managed to extricate them from their predicament. We set off once more and spent another 30 minutes looking around, during which our noisy and bumbling search would have allowed any thief to escape without difficulty. Aware of the absurdity of the situation, and disappointed at coming away empty-handed once again, the officers nevertheless showed no sign of irritation. For them it was just one of the mundane episodes that make up their everyday routine, dependent on calls and patrols, testifying to their forgetfulness or imprudence in a profession that values guile and circumspection. Settings and characters, spaces and objects seem often to resist them, as demonstrated by their meanderings through the town in search of an address that at best they identified too late, or interventions so clumsy that they almost never culminate in the hoped-for arrest of a criminal in the act.

Obviously, residents themselves often develop various forms of obstruction to police work. One late afternoon in the winter of 2006, as the patrol was coming to an end without having encountered any incident of note during the shift, the crew I was with entered a project, and the leader, perhaps to prove he was not letting the lack of action send him to sleep, told me with a knowing smile that we were going to visit an apartment block supposed to conceal small-scale marijuana dealing. After parking the car, we walked assuredly toward the entrance to the building. Through the frosted glass of the

thick door, which only opened with a code number the officers had forgotten to bring with them, we could perceive slender silhouettes and hear male voices. The crew leader briefly considered the best course of action, and decided to bang on the door. Silence fell inside. "Who is it?" someone asked. A moment of hesitation. The officer, who I sensed was uncertain as to the next move, finally called out in an authoritative voice: "Police!" Immediately the shadows disappeared like a flock of starlings. One of the officers ran off around the back of the building, suspecting there might be an escape route through the basement. A resident, a man of African origin in his thirties, arrived at this moment, obviously coming home from shopping. The crew leader ordered him to open the door, and the man did so. The officers rushed into the lobby. Their colleague who had gone to the other side of the apartment block re-emerged from the basement, indicating that there was indeed an exit on the other side, through which the youngsters had most probably fled. While one of the officers embarked on an exploration of the false ceiling, looking for drugs that might have been hidden there, the other two roughly checked and searched two teenagers caught on the stairs, though there was nothing to suggest they had anything to do with the group that had initially been in the lobby. To his surprise and mine, the man who had opened the door for us was subjected to the same humiliating and brutal ordeal. He protested his innocence, but without letting him speak the officer who had gone round the back of the building, and was therefore unaware of the assistance this peaceable tenant had given his colleagues, yelled at him to "shut up," shoving him against the wall and roughly inspecting his body and clothes. It appeared that, owing to the color of his skin, he was placed rather too hastily into the category of suspects. The team leader, who realized the mistake, nevertheless did not dare say anything on behalf of this providential collaborator who was being treated like a criminal. A few minutes later, without finding anything suspicious but not without provoking some alarm among residents, we left.

For the officers, it was the end of the day. I found it difficult to ascertain whether they realized the disturbing nature of this episode: the determined walk toward the building, the unfortunate forgetting of the door code, the excessive haste of the operation, the belated check for a possible alternative exit and, to crown the debacle, the proud, movie-cop cry of "Police!" – as if the individuals behind the glass door would docilely open up, submit to the usual humiliations and risk an arrest, when escape through the basement allowed them easily to avoid all of this. But I had been able to sense their agitation via their nervous attitude toward their three temporary

hostages, despite the fact that, in the case of two of them, nothing suggested misconduct and, in the case of the third, everything indicated that he was keen, if somewhat coerced, to come to the aid of the police. To continue the theatrical metaphor, then, this operation might be described as falling into the tragicomic genre, though there is no certainty that all the participants would share this view. The youngsters who fled would probably recount the story to their friends with laughter; the three who were subjected to searches would certainly feel resentful; as for the officers, they did not seem inclined to rehash this inglorious moment among themselves. This is no doubt one of the characteristics of the police show: not everyone laughs – or cries – at the same moment; for any given scene, not only the actors but also the spectators have very different experiences.

Yet, the metaphor of theater, regularly employed in interactionist sociology, and the reference to games, often used by commentators – including, as we have seen, those within the police – have their limits. Of course, if we seek to get a sense of the performance of the police, the image they want to project or simply the image they do project, the stylistic register in which they inscribe their attitudes and their behaviors, the idea of theater does help us to understand this second-level form that is afforded them by their authority (sometimes), their power (always), but also their uniform (even if it consists of jeans and sports jacket over a T-shirt), their weapons (an armory that is constantly enriched and diversified) and the image of their profession (fed by movies, videos and websites). Similarly, if we wish to understand the action of the police and their interactions with their public, particularly youth in working-class neighborhoods, the idea of a game undeniably throws into relief the way both take on roles, with the police acting “the mean guys” and the youngsters playing “the smart guys,” their mutual provocations responding to and amplifying one another, and with a “cops and robbers” scenario that seems to endlessly reproduce the succession of altercations and chases. But this evocation of both theater and a game creates a literary or ludic distance from the violence of social relationships.

Any presentation of the self proceeds from a performance, and any interaction with others involves role-playing, but restricting ourselves to this reading, as many commentators do, risks failing to grasp the essential: the life behind the theater, and behind the game, the experience. For the residents of the projects, indeed, experience of the police is often what shapes their life, normalizing it, determining it and, sometimes, even ending it – symbolically, through imprisonment, or literally, through death.

Violence

But even the most “advanced” state can resort to threats of violence or to open violence against “disorderly” citizens whenever the normal institutions for generating social consensus are weakening or changing.
Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping*, 1992

Through the hostility and through the stereotype, the police become a close, social group, in which collective action is organized for self-protection and an attack on the outside world.
William A. Westley, *Violence and the Police*, 1950

A little over a year after the riots of 2005, en route to a university in another country where I was to give a lecture on the recent urban disorder, I was preparing to pass through baggage control at the Paris Charles de Gaulle airport when a security guard, a man of around 30, told me to turn back and join another line. Without really understanding the reason for this instruction, I did as he asked. When I passed him again minutes later, in the correct lane this time, he apologized and justified himself: “Sorry sir, but I had no choice. There are cameras watching us and if I’d let you through they’d have fined me.” I replied that it was not a problem, but he continued: “The police watch us.” After a moment, becoming increasingly agitated, he added: “Whatever, I don’t like them, I never greet them. Each to his own.” Intrigued, I asked if he had already had dealings with the police. “They killed my cousin. It happened a few years ago, in the south of France,” he told me, his voice still charged with emotion and animosity. “Shot in the head, because they thought he was in a stolen car.

He wasn't, but he died just the same." It was difficult to continue the conversation, whatever my desire to do so, in such inappropriate circumstances. I noticed at that point that my informant was of North African origin.

Shortly thereafter, seated on the plane, I opened my newspaper. The entire back page was devoted to the story of a 19-year-old high school student who had drowned trying to escape police who were chasing him because he and a friend had been painting tags on the highway's noise barrier.¹ After crossing the eight lanes of the road, the two boys had separated, one jumping over a 30-foot ravine to hide in bushes, the other running away through the undergrowth. The manhunt organized by three anticrime squad teams located the latter by the edge of the water. Terrified to see the police coming, he had dived in, but soon disappeared, without anyone attempting to come to his aid.² "Hunted, flushed out like an animal by the anticrime squad, all for a scribble on a wall," the father of the victim, a locksmith, said sadly. He related how afraid his family – Jews from the Greek city of Salonika – were of the police, a fear transmitted through generations since World War II when French officers had snatched his grandmother and aunt and taken them to the Drancy internment camp to be deported to Germany. The investigation of his son's death, conducted without any reconstruction of the facts, ended in a decision that there was no case to answer. "It was designed to blacken the youngster and whitewash the police, who didn't try to help him," the general secretary of one of the police unions stated bluntly. In its report, the National Committee on Security Ethics highlighted the disproportionate resources deployed in relation to the offense, the inability to evaluate the risks the two boys had taken, and finally the failure to render assistance to a person in danger.

Thus, within less than one hour, I had twice been confronted with an account of the death of a young man, either killed or pursued by the police. Suddenly brought up close, the violence of the relationship with law enforcement was being forcibly impressed upon me, through the whispered confidence of a security guard and the unsought revelations of a newspaper article, at the very moment that I was preparing to present my work on the recent riots. What struck me much more than the coincidence of these discoveries was that it seemed to point to how banal these deaths in police operations were – and not only banal, but banalized. If one began to pay attention, one could get a measure of their reality, but, conversely, if one was not specifically interested in the subject, it was possible to ignore it.³ Without passing judgment on these particular examples, what I found remarkable was the way they divided the social world between those confronted with

such cases on an almost daily basis, and those who probably would never have to face them.

In the film *Freedom Writers*, which became popular among teenagers in the banlieues at the time I was ending my fieldwork, one scene seemed to especially touch them. The heroine, a young woman who has chosen to teach in a high school in a difficult neighborhood in Long Beach, California, but comes up against hostility from her students, gives them a little exercise one day: using red tape, she marks a line down the middle of the classroom and asks those who have lost a friend to violence to stand on it. The students of color, Latinos and African Americans, come forward, leaving one white boy standing aside. She poses the question again – this time who has lost two, three and finally four or more friends. Each time everyone remains in the same place.⁴ Responsive to the pathos of this scene, young French viewers seemed to identify with the Californian students. In the film, this overstated but effective episode serves to raise awareness of a hitherto invisible social inequality in relation to the very fact of being alive: in France, as in the United States, certain sectors of society and geographical areas are much more at risk than others of premature death from violent causes, some being directly or indirectly related to police activities. But this transatlantic parallel should be put into perspective: in US cities the generalization of possession, carrying and use of guns, and more broadly the brutalization of social relations, result in a rate of accidents and homicides out of all comparison with that of the French banlieues, the rate of deaths by firearms per 100,000 being ten times higher in the United States than in France.

But death is only one of the possible outcomes of violent interactions between the police and the youth – fortunately the least common. In general, physical violence, when it occurs, takes the form of beating during questioning, interrogation or custody. While bodies and certainly minds retain the traces of this violence, the administrative and judicial record is much more forgetful. People who fall victim to it often hesitate to file a complaint. When they do so, the police are generally slow to record their grievances. But even when both conditions are met, investigation is rare, and sanctions exceptional. In Fabien Jobard's study, both internal administrative investigation by disciplinary committees and external judicial investigation by examining judges ended in a "no further action" decision in approximately nine out of ten cases, which were thus definitively closed.⁵ In other words, given the number of situations that could result in court judgments, and the leniency of the institutions responsible for assessing them, an actual trial for police violence is an exceptional event. I shall

now analyze such an occurrence, when I was able to follow the proceedings in the district court, interview the public prosecutor and, thanks to his diligence, gain access to all the documents in the prosecution's case file.

As the public prosecutor told me, the reason the seven police officers had been summoned before the court, indicted for acts of violence, was not so much the seriousness of the incidents as their coverage by the media. The swollen face of one of the two victims, a Turk, had made the front cover of the Turkish cultural monthly in France; it was also featured in a national daily newspaper in Turkey, all too happy to be able for once to return the accusation of failure to respect human rights that France was using to oppose this country's entry into the European Union. The Turkish Consulate General had referred the matter to the *préfecture*, which had demanded that the case be treated in exemplary fashion. An investigation had been conducted, resulting in proceedings being brought. The public prosecutor confirmed that it was indeed exceptional for so much attention to be focused on a case of alleged police violence. The file prepared by the disciplinary unit of the Regional Directorate of Public Security included 117 interview transcripts, which I could consult, including 81 statements from complainants, suspects and witnesses; the trial itself occupied the court for an entire afternoon, whereas such cases generally merited no more than a few minutes. Yet there was nothing factually distinctive about this case, to judge from the dozens of referrals for similar ones on which the National Committee on Security Ethics issues its opinion.

One January 1, around 4.30 a.m., the officer on duty at a local police station received a call from a resident in a nearby project about a fight at a family party. A second one, more urgent, followed shortly after, this time reporting gunshots. Later, it emerged that young people from the neighborhood had tried to get into the community hall where the party was being held, that an argument and a scuffle had ensued, and that the head of the family had called the emergency number. It remained unclear, though, whether, anxious that the police seemed not to be coming, he had mentioned gunshots to persuade them of the urgency of the matter, or whether his message had simply been misunderstood. At the station the night had been calm up to that point, and by the officers' own admission, they were "well lubricated" as they had generously celebrated the New Year. After the second call, the duty officer informed the three other local stations in the district, asking them also to send crews. Arriving at the location before the others, he entered the deserted complex on foot with his team and they made their way to the place near the community

hall where the altercation was supposed to have taken place. They heard loud voices, from which they estimated – though they could not see them – that there might be around 20 people on the premises. But there was no fight, nor even any dispute, so it seemed that things had settled down. Still not fully reassured, the police went back to their car to await reinforcements. The other crews showed up, and there were now 20, and soon 30, officers at the scene. As the duty officer stated later in military terms: “Me and my troops secured the scene after I had given the order to split into two groups, the first under my command, the second under the command of the sergeant major from the neighboring station. Our two groups then lost sight of each other, as they secured the project while we approached the individuals who were arguing.” When they saw this substantial deployment of police, most of whom had donned riot gear, with helmets and nightsticks, the few individuals still at the location quickly dispersed. The organizer of the party, who had reported the incident, introduced himself to the officer to explain what had happened. Although he was unable to describe the young men who had disrupted their evening, he confirmed that there had been no gunshots and that calm had soon returned.

Nevertheless, meanwhile, the 30 officers had rushed through the alleyways of the project in pursuit of individuals who had run off at the sight of the police. After a few minutes of stampeding and shouting watched by awakened residents, many of whom were now at their windows, some protesting vociferously at this disturbance in the middle of the night, the officers returned with their captives: two men, handcuffed, looking in a bad state. One was of Caribbean origin, the other Turkish. According to the police, the former had hit an officer and resisted arrest, whereas the latter had shouted an insult, fallen as he tried to escape, and struggled when the handcuffs were being put on. In the opinion of all the officers subsequently questioned, there was great confusion. Eventually brought to the station, the two men were placed in custody on grounds of “insulting and resisting law enforcement,” after having been examined by a private physician who confirmed that they were well enough to remain in the precinct. However, when they were released the next day, they consulted the forensic specialist at the public hospital who recorded serious injuries and gave them certificates for sick leave – one of them for seven days, the other for five.

This is how the facts can be summarized before we consider in greater detail the documents produced during the investigation and the testimony heard in a trial where only the Turkish man filed a lawsuit, the Caribbean man simply appearing as a witness. According

to the information gathered during the inquiry (in which it is worth noting that, surprisingly, not 1 of the 81 witnesses interviewed was a resident of the neighborhood, since, apart from the 2 victims, statements were sought only from police officers and several firefighters who had provided first aid) and to the evidence heard at the trial (in the answers to questions put by the judge and the public prosecutor), the arrest of the two men can be reconstructed as follows.

The Caribbean man, who was alternately described as being “of black race” and “of African type,” was in fact the nephew of the organizer of the party. He had just left the hall to return home when the police arrived. As might be expected, accounts of what happened differ depending on their source. According to the police version, when one of them approached him, the man “kicked the officer in the ribs without any warning.” Several officers rushed to the defense of their colleague, and, trying to make use of their tear gas canister, they accidentally sprayed it on themselves, sparking an outbreak of alarm among their ranks. Panicked, they distributed nightstick blows blindly right and left, injuring one another and heightening their agitation still further. As the suspect defended himself, they had to get rough to bring him under control, but all violence ceased once he was handcuffed. Four officers were taken to the hospital for treatment, mainly, it appeared, due to blows received from their colleagues. The man’s version was somewhat different. As he was leaving the party, he was hit in the back with a nightstick, started to run and was hit again, this time in the face by another officer. “That really infuriated me,” he admitted, and he defended himself. Blinded by tear gas, he was thrown violently to the ground, kicked and hit in the back, abdomen, arms and legs. Once he had been handcuffed, he was taken to the precinct where two officers roughed him up another time, while a third, attempting to punch him, was held back by his colleagues. The medical certificate made reference to bruising to his face and hematomas in various places on his body. Despite the marked divergences between the two versions, the investigation and trial helped to establish a number of facts. Through cross-checks between the various accounts given by the officers, and their answers to questions in court, it was shown that the one who had asserted in his statement that he had been kicked at the start of the incident had lied, that the witness had indeed been hit in the face with a nightstick without warning, beaten when he was already handcuffed lying on the ground, and roughed up once again at the police station, including by an off-duty officer who had come in to celebrate the New Year.

The Turkish complainant, a restaurant owner who had been living in France for approximately 20 years, was coming home from a celebration at his friends', and just happened to be in the street near the party when he was stopped by law enforcement. In this case, accounts were also contradictory. In the police version, they heard someone insulting them and turned around to see the man they thought was the author of the invective. They approached him. He started to run and tripped: "He wasn't moving, I thought he'd hurt himself," said one officer who stated that he handcuffed him quickly, but added that the man started to struggle, and had to be brought under control by other officers come to back him up. Here too the plaintiff's version differed significantly. When he saw people running off in all directions, he took fright: "I panicked and I started to run too," he said. The police pursued him, one of them tripped him and he was rained with blows as he shouted that he had not done anything. Once he was handcuffed, the beating continued. As he was being taken to the precinct in the van, he passed out several times. In his deposition he stated that he recognized his main assailant as the officer in plain clothes who was not on duty that night, but his testimony, which would have entailed grave consequences for this agent, was set aside by the disciplinary unit examining the case, on the grounds that the suspect had been confused by alcohol and emotion. The certificate drawn up in custody by the private physician, as the complainant, hands cuffed behind his back and covered in blood, was barely able to stand, simply noted: "individual conscious, lucid, not complaining of anything." The next day, the public forensic doctor indicated, however, "a large antero-superior perforation of the left eardrum, inner-ear hemorrhage, extensive purple bruising behind the ear, periorbital hematomas, superficial grazes, bruising to the forehead," and "a left acromio-clavicular sprain" as well as numerous lesions on the rest of the body. Here again, cross-checking of the police officers' statements and answers to questions in court established both reckless use of force, as they even managed to hit one another, and blows administered when the man was under control and handcuffed, resulting in serious injuries.

The investigation of these incidents, which resulted in the conviction of the officers, focused on the violence rather than any justification that might be advanced for it. In fact, while this may be a relevant factor in the case, the inquiry and the trial sought not so much to establish whether there was provocation on the part of the two men as to determine the conditions under which violence was used. The fact that the Caribbean man might have kicked a police officer for no reason, or that he was hit twice with nightsticks, including once

in the face, leading him to lose control, and that the Turkish man might have cursed the police or simply run off like the other residents of the project, were apparently not the major factors in the evaluation of the acts of violence. It seems probable, nevertheless, that the hypothesis of the Caribbean man returning home from a party and attacking a police officer gratuitously in full view of 30 of his helmeted colleagues, seemed hardly more credible to the persons present in the court than the assertion that the Turkish man, departing from his friends' home, had been recognized in the dark as the person uttering insults against the police, when the officers themselves had testified that invectives were being shouted at them from the upper floors of the apartment blocks. But the matter at issue was not whether there were valid reasons for the questioning, but the actual conditions of the use of force.

The two crucial factors in determining whether there is a legal qualification of police violence are the disproportionate and unjustified use of force. A large body of evidence pointed to disproportionate recourse to coercion: the photos of the victims and their medical certificates, with one officer summoned before the disciplinary unit, speaking about the condition of the Turkish complainant, admitting: "When I saw the guy, I thought they'd gone a bit far"; but there were also the almost naive statements of the police who explained that, in the confusion, they injured one another with kicks and nightsticks, unable to aim their blows accurately at their suspects. The utilization of the tonfa, a defense baton considered to be a weapon that can cause serious injury, especially to the head, was judged excessive, given the unequal numbers and the grounds cited. The use of force was also deemed unjustified once the individuals being arrested were placed in a position where they could not harm the police: the public prosecutor told me he was pleased that he had managed to read between the lines of the officers' statements, and particularly that he had got them to unwittingly admit in court that blows had been struck at the two men who were already handcuffed, first at the scene of the arrest and later in the precinct. This evidence was a key element in his closing speech.

In addition to these two critical factors, there was a series of aggravating circumstances not directly cited in the judge's verdict, but explicitly referred to in the report of the National Committee on Security Ethics. Firstly, it was confirmed that officers who had attended the incident were under the influence of alcohol. The sergeant major acknowledged, "I don't think these mistakes would have happened were it not that some officers had been drinking." This fact explains not only the excessive violence but also the numerous clumsy

actions undertaken. Secondly, there was the presence of an officer who was not on duty, who admitted having consumed alcohol and who attempted to avenge his injured colleagues by beating the two men with their hands cuffed behind their backs, one at the police station, the other at the hospital. The Committee therefore emphasized: "It is clearly established that a disciplinary offense took place." The judge probably took these two factors into consideration in his final decision.

However, there was a third noteworthy element, which was highlighted in the Committee's report, and was borne out by both the officers' statements and the evidence provided in court. When the punitive operation was launched, the sergeant major leading the group of officers whose job was, as he put it, to "secure the scene" attempted to galvanize his troops, shouting: "We lost the Algerian War. 40 years ago we chickened out. We're not going to do it again today. Take no prisoners: it's no holds barred!" After 37 years with the police, he had reached the highest rank possible for a patrol officer and was a few months away from retirement. When questioned by the disciplinary unit, he conceded: "I've no call to deny it, and if anyone had asked me that's what I would have said." But he tried, almost jokingly, to justify himself: "I said it to lighten things up. It made everybody laugh. My officers were really tensed up. We could hear stones falling on the cars. But it wasn't meant at all in a racist way. Anyway I've been living in an Arab environment for 30 years. My first wife was an Arab, and my second one is too. I really said that to relax the younger officers, because some of them were quite wound up." It might well be imagined that his revelation during the investigation, and its confirmation in court, would constitute an aggravating circumstance because they suggested that the treatment meted out to the two men, who were easily identified as being non-European, was not unrelated to their physical appearance and their assumed origin. During this period, provisions for combating racism (the law of January 20, 2003) and discrimination (the law of February 25, 2003) had just been reinforced with tougher penalties, including for law enforcement officers, and a shift of the burden of proof in favor of victims. But this argument was not put forward in court. When I expressed my surprise to the public prosecutor, he told me – seeming to ignore the new legislation – that cases brought on issues of racism and discrimination never succeeded, because it was impossible to establish intention with any certainty.

The closing speeches by the lawyers for the police were relatively brief. They did not attempt to exonerate their clients – the facts were well established since some had confessed and others had been more

or less explicitly denounced by their colleagues – but tried to attenuate the crime. Their rhetoric emphasized three elements. The first argument invoked was the local context, which they did not hesitate to paint in alarmist tones: “You have to realize: this is a war zone. Once a police officer comes out of the police station, he’s a target.” They carried on: “In these neighborhoods, you have to adapt to circumstances. When they are exceptional you have to react in an exceptional manner. When they’re normal, you have to react normally.” In other words, what might be intolerable in another context became acceptable here, given the local situation where anything was possible. A second point related to the officers, as the lawyers attempted to demonstrate for each both his individual qualities – “He is a victim of his own devotion to duty” – and his collective virtues – “There is a laudable solidarity that develops among them.” Thus, violence was portrayed as the sign of dedication and fellowship. This was in particular the basis for the defense of the off-duty officer, as his lawyer sought to induce the court to forget his drunkenness and brutality: “He has a sense of duty. When help is needed he stays. He gives a hand.” No one reacted to this unusual reading of professional deontology. A third factor was cited in relation to the action itself. The lawyers attempted to minimize the excessive use of force: “You’ve heard my client admit: I made this mistake. Words, and actions too, sometimes outrun thought.” This, it was suggested, was not a beating, as the witness statements, photographs and medical certificates had suggested, but a simple excess of zeal. Moreover, the lawyers argued that the facts needed to be re-evaluated morally to account for the unjustified use of force: “It was not a desire for vengeance, but a desire for justice.” The blows inflicted on the men in custody at the precinct attested to the ethical probity of the officers.

However, the lawyers did not resort to a fourth line of argument habitually used in court: that which consists in accusing the victims in order to discredit them, searching their past for factors that might make them appear disreputable and therefore presenting ill-treatment as, if not justified, at least excusable. In particular, no one referred to the attack the Caribbean man was alleged to have launched without reason, or the insult the Turkish man was supposed to have uttered when he saw the police. The lawyers probably realized that such justifications would not be well received in this context, given the contradictions between the officers’ statements. Their arguments were thus ambiguous, and almost comical, especially regarding the Turkish victim: “I do not say that he said those words, I do not say that he did not . . . He says that he ran, perhaps this was not the best decision, but I do not reproach him for it.” One of the lawyers even

risked a joke, alluding to the photos that had been exhibited: "It was certainly a vigorous questioning. Having seen the poor man's face afterwards, you could hardly say otherwise." But this humor seems not to have amused the judge.

Finally, of the four kinds of argument that provide the customary rhetorical framework of this sort of trial, and more broadly the justification by the police when violence is alleged, the lawyers only used the first three: the context of the action, the qualities of the officers, and the description of the acts. The public prosecutor rejected the excuses concerning the police, stating that, on the contrary, he expected them to behave in an exemplary fashion, and refuted the minimization of the brutality, emphasizing that it was unacceptable. However, significantly, he took up the argument about the dangerous environment of the projects, as if to reduce the scope of his own accusation and find attenuating circumstances for those he was seeking to convict: "We're all aware how difficult this job is, the incredible conditions in which police interventions take place." Given the facts that were demonstrated during the investigation and the trial, particularly in relation to the calm atmosphere that reigned in the project at the point when the crews arrived and the spectacular disorder they had provoked by intervening, themselves drunk and aggressive, this line of argument might seem surprising, but it testifies to how difficult it is for the prosecution, even in a case where the evidence seemed so clear, to adopt a position entirely independent of the police – as if, in a final flourish, it was necessary to remind the court that the two institutions were on the same side. This indulgence of prosecutors toward law enforcement agents is actually common in France: it attests to their increasing dependence on the executive power, as they are, unlike the judges, under the control of the Ministry of Justice, to the point that, in its decision of May 6, 2009, the European Court of Human Rights denied them the status of "judiciary authority." The National Committee on Security Ethics was less indulgent in its report, arguing that the "incredible conditions" the public prosecutor alluded to related to how the intervention was conducted rather than the context in which it took place.

The verdict, read some weeks after the trial, was ultimately both symbolic and merciful. Symbolic, because five of the six officers charged received sentences of four months' imprisonment, while the sixth was acquitted: it is exceptional that the police are convicted for acts of violence, but the case was so obvious and so public that leniency would have been incomprehensible to many. Merciful, because the sentences were suspended and were not entered into the open criminal record (which is available to local and national government

authorities, as opposed to the closed record, which is accessible only to the judicial authorities): in other words there was no ill effect on the officers' careers. Thus, although unusual in terms of the judicial statistics, the sentence was nevertheless very moderate. Aware of the favorable treatment they had received, the officers did not appeal the judgment. The court's message therefore seemed to answer the hopes of one of the defense lawyers: "Come to a verdict that teaches them a lesson," he had suggested, pleading for clemency in the judge's decision. "Remind them of the law they are charged with upholding." But three years after the trial, there was room for doubt whether the lesson of the verdict had been fully absorbed by the officers: the complainant had not received 1 cent of the 12,000 euros of compensation the six officers had been sentenced to pay him. In response to repeated inquiries, the National Directorate of Public Security asserted that it did not know where the officers were. The victim's lawyer referred the case to a succession of different incumbents in the post of minister of the interior, who invariably replied that the services concerned would be questioned. Ultimately, in one of the very rare trials for police violence that had led to a verdict unfavorable to them, the penalty, minimal though it was, had not been executed. The message the state authorities were sending to the courts seemed clear: police impunity should remain the rule, and if judges took it upon themselves to convict law enforcement officers, the penalties would not be applied.

The case brought against the police on charges of violence was paradoxically both exceptional (as a case) and exemplary (in terms of what it revealed). On the one hand, it resulted from a set of circumstances that come together only on rare occasions, since it required that the victim file a complaint, that the grievance be recorded, that the case be referred to the prosecutor, that an investigation be ordered, that a dismissal be avoided, that a trial be held, and that a guilty verdict be reached. With each stage in this chain of unlikely events, the number of cases diminishes, ending with only a few dozen in which officers have actually been sentenced in the past decades, with no guarantee that the sentences will be enforced. What is presented here therefore corresponds to a procedure that is not at all representative of the way allegations of excessive use of force are generally treated, since the great majority never get to court. On the other hand, the case was a moment of truth that revealed the mechanisms through which police violence is produced and justified. Every situation is of course unique, but it is clear how a particular configuration of circumstances may give rise to the unleashing of brutality. The images of a hostile environment and a dangerous

operation led the police to talk of a project to be “taken over” and “secured,” justified both riot-control equipment and deployment in large numbers, and finally even prompted the war cry rallying the troops that added a neo-colonial slant to the operation. As a result, despite the fact that it started with a family party where the guests had almost all dispersed and the intruders had already left, that the organizer confirmed that everything had calmed down, and that the site was indeed quiet, none of these factors could overcome the mental picture of the situation the police had drawn for themselves. This representation of the scene, and its practical consequences in terms of the way the situation was to be managed, had the effect that the officers surged out in pursuit of individuals peacefully leaving the party, or returning from a friendly celebration, who did not understand what was happening, and ran off as a reflex action. In the scramble, some of those fleeing were apprehended at random and a cycle of brutality began, in which resisting law enforcement or simply protesting good faith resulted in increased aggressiveness, sometimes further aggravated by the clumsy distribution of blows and the incompetent handling of weapons. Once it was over, collegial solidarity, the more or less direct involvement of various agents, and the social cost of any accusation of fellow officers in terms of future ostracization, meant that the police all felt under a vow of silence, and that, if anything was to emerge or even if there was to be an investigation, false statements would be made for the protection of their colleagues and their self-preservation. Hence while it is unique, the configuration of circumstances around this operation on that New Year’s Eve nonetheless reveals the more general enabling conditions of police brutality. And while it did not result in justice being rendered, the trial at least helped to throw light on issues that usually remain invisible and unintelligible, opaque and obscure.

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Expressing surprise at the existence of police violence could be considered as remarkable in itself. From a sociological point of view – and thus beyond the specific situation in France – violence is in fact constitutive of the very role of law enforcement. In modern societies, it is to the police that the state delegates its “monopoly of the legitimate use of physical violence,” in the terms of Max Weber’s classic definition.⁶ Beyond this general sociological principle, theoreticians of public force, particularly in North America, have made their own Egon Bittner’s dictum, that the “use of force is the essence of the police role.”⁷ In other words, above and beyond the diversity of tasks entrusted to the police – whether arresting a wrongdoer, containing

a demonstration, preventing a domestic dispute from degenerating, giving verbal warnings to careless drivers or providing first aid to an injured person – what distinguishes them from other professional groups and even from other citizens is the possibility, if they judge it necessary, of using force to resolve the problem, and also the fact that everyone is aware of this, and behaves accordingly.

For the Canadian sociologist, modern societies are unlike past civilizations in that they seek peace by peaceful means. As a general rule, recourse to force nevertheless becomes legitimate in three specific contexts: self-defense against aggressors; the power of coercion attached to certain professions in relation to certain population groups, for example prison officers in relation to detainees; and finally, the institution of the police, for which the use of force is “essentially unrestricted,” provided that it results in death only in exceptional situations, that it is justified not on personal grounds but on the grounds of the collective good, and that it does not derive from a simple desire to harm or vent one’s anger: “Aside from these restrictions there exist no guidelines, no specifiable range of objectives, no limitations of any kind that instruct the policeman what he may or must do. Nor do there exist any criteria that would allow the judgment whether some forceful intervention was necessary, desirable, or proper. And finally, it is exceedingly rare that police actions involving the use of force are actually reviewed and judged by anyone at all.” The conclusion is clear: “In sum, the frequently heard talk about the lawful use of force by the police is practically meaningless.” In other words, not only are there no directives and no principles underlying the action, but there is also no analysis or sanction after the event. The use of force is left entirely to the discretion of officers, with virtually no external scrutiny. It thus becomes conspicuous why the boundary between the recourse to force and the exercise of violence is so difficult to define, however much one strives to identify it: just as war is no more than an extension of politics, violence is simply a continuation of the use of force.

The distinction between the two terms is essentially normative. The police must know how to use force, but must not exercise violence. However, given the absence of guidelines, of criteria, of evaluation, and of judgment with regard to the appropriate way of using force, it is easy to see how, for law enforcement officers, violence is a concept almost without content, except in extreme cases identified as such:⁸ in their eyes, the use of force is simply a means to achieve an end such as bringing an individual they are arresting under control. This view is far from being shared by the rest of the population, who interpret forcing suspects to the ground, and subjecting them to

painful armlocks, throat compressions, suffocation and beatings as intolerable brutality: some attempt to intervene, to object publicly through testimonies or, nowadays, to film in order to later provide evidence. Where the police say they are using force, the public sees violence.

One captain admitted that, when an individual is arrested, sometimes the methods used may seem excessive.⁹ “It shocks people,” she said, “whereas in fact, it’s just taking precautions,” because “if someone refuses to cooperate, we don’t know to begin with if we’re dealing with a dangerous criminal or just a driver without a license.” But she acknowledged: “There’s a fine line between robust questioning and a police blunder.” Contrary to popular opinion, she continued, the tried and tested techniques used by police officers allowed them “to avoid taking risks themselves and even to prevent the individual being brought under control from injuring himself.” She agreed, however, that the outcome did not always prove these precautions effective: during a demonstration of an arrest organized for a group of representatives by a prefect keen to prove that this type of intervention was harmless, the two police instructors who were “playing” the scene, one as suspect, the other as officer, ended up in the hospital with bruises and sprains. The captain was smiling as she recounted this anecdote. But I found it instructive, since it suggested that, for her as for probably many of her colleagues, the distinction between force and violence ultimately lay in the intention: in this case, it was hard to imagine that the two officers had voluntarily injured one another; thus the fact that there were physical consequences did not indicate that there had been violence, but at most an inappropriate or clumsy application of force. These injuries paradoxically attested to the fact that when people were hurt during their arrest, it was a merely involuntary collateral damage. Yet in real situations, where officers are questioning not colleagues but suspects, their intention is much more difficult to divine. At best, when statements have been made and recorded, a disciplinary committee or investigating judge can arrive at a firm conviction as to the intention. But as a general rule, the distinction based on this criterion is not operative.

In practice, the features used to identify police violence – and potentially taken as the basis for a court verdict condemning it – are technical rather than psychological, as we have seen from the case described above. In any operation, the use of force must be justified and proportionate: justified with regard to the danger (legitimate defense) or the crime committed (sufficiently serious), and proportionate to the action being taken (immobilization and handcuffing)

and the physical characteristics of the individual concerned (strength and resistance). When the use of force is unjustified (beating a handcuffed individual, physical coercion for a mere lack of documents), disproportionate (suffocation or compression leading to prolonged inability to breathe, relentless beating resulting in serious injury) or both (shooting in the back an unarmed person who is running away), one speaks of police violence – in other words, acts that could lead to a court conviction. Of course, there are other actions that could theoretically prompt a judicial investigation or trial, such as failure to render assistance to an individual endangered by a police operation (the case of the death of the two boys electrocuted in Clichy-sous-Bois in 2005), or a traffic accident that suggests culpable recklessness or deliberate endeavor (the case of the death of the two youths hit by a police vehicle in Villiers-le-Bel in 2007): these are not strictly speaking cases of violence, but rather of the violent extension of a police operation, leading to death by indifference or imprudence or even implicit criminal intention.

Whether direct or indirect, police violence as identified in administrative and judicial inquiries presents three essential characteristics. Firstly, it is strictly physical: it is manifested as an action on a body. Secondly, it has easily identifiable consequences: usually injury, less often death. Thirdly, it is defined in relation to a professional standard: the police officer must demonstrate discernment in the use of force, which must be justified and proportionate. These three characteristics might seem obvious: this is in effect how police violence is always represented.¹⁰ Moreover, this administrative and judicial definition is so much taken for granted that it has been adopted by all sociological studies of the police in the last 50 years, in both North America and Europe. For example, William Westley investigates police violence, Jean-Paul Brodeur studies police coercion, Jill Nelson examines police brutality, and Fabien Jobard analyzes police blunders, with reference to what might be called an internal definition: that is, one established in relation to criteria that the police administration agrees to recognize and that the judiciary institution strives to apply.¹¹ There are certainly compelling scientific reasons, both practical (speaking the same language as officers and magistrates) and methodological (adopting the perspective of the groups under study), for confining oneself to this position. But it is worth wondering what might be gained in understanding the violence exercised by the police – thus differentiated lexically from “police violence” as understood by the disciplinary or judicial authorities – if we were to question this definition, not in order to contest its validity, but to get a sense of its limits.

The analysis I propose here aims to grasp violence as an interaction which, first, affects the integrity and the dignity of individuals, not just their body and flesh; second, may be deeply grounded, and therefore unseen; and third, involves an ethical, rather than strictly normative, component. In other words, I want to move away from the three standard criteria defining police violence. This approach is resolutely distinct from the procedure of disciplinary committees and investigating judges, because it aims not to establish grounds for punishment, but to contribute to understanding. Officers sometimes affirm that giving a good slap to a teenager who has committed a minor offense, as they could have done without fear in other times (and as probably still happens today more often than is generally believed), has a pedagogical value, but they could add that these benign punishments tend to be replaced by much more mortifying practices, and more lasting injuries, that do not involve the use of physical force.

Setting these two assertions side by side in fact suggests that we could go beyond the administrative and judicial definition, which leads to condemnation of the slap, at least in principle, but usually results in the humiliation being ignored. In this way we could begin to reflect not in the terms in which the police and judiciary think of actions, but from the point of view of how they are experienced by the public, and more specifically the victims. And this inversion of the perspective would not be limited to the experience of individuals who have had dealings with the police, but would include the broader view of society, that is, the manner in which society delegates to the police the power to treat some people outside of the law, and even to disregard their human rights. Thus by rejecting both the reductionism of the disciplinary and the judiciary (which limit violence to the excessive use of physical force) and its reproduction by the social scientists (who adopt the official definition of officers and magistrates in order to study it), we could allow ourselves to undertake a critical reading of violence in Walter Benjamin's sense of the term: "The task of a critique of violence can be summarized as that of expounding its relation to law and justice. For a cause, however effective, becomes violent, in the precise sense of the word, only when it bears on moral issues."¹² It is these moral issues that we need to explore.

On the face of it, distinguishing physical violence from moral violence is easy. Typically, one takes the form of a slap, and the other that of humiliation: in the first case only the body would be affected, while in the second the entire person would be violated. In practice, however, the distinction is less clear than it appears. Powerlessness in front of excessive use of force in itself involves a moral dimension of abasement, in the unjustified imposition of handcuffs, for example;

conversely, the mortification caused by harassment and humiliation has corporeal implications, particularly in strip searches carried out in custody. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois point out: "Violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality – force, assault, or the infliction of pain – alone. Violence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim. The social and cultural dimensions of violence are what gives violence its power and meaning."¹³ Violence is therefore always more than it seems. Nevertheless, the distinction proposed here remains valid in that it can give presence to a reality that is habitually dismissed. Moral violence is generally ignored by official definitions and sociological analyses. Common, it remains invisible, for it leaves no traces, at least none on the body, it does not serve as grounds for complaints, and it is not subject to sanctions. Yet this is still violence, in the sense that these practices breach the integrity and the dignity of individuals, but it is never named as such.¹⁴ Because it is not named, it has no existence in social terms. Because it is not recognized, justice cannot be rendered. Yet it is this violence that has no name, and no justice, that constitutes the everyday experience of adolescents, youth and men living in the projects.

The relationship between physical violence and moral violence is historically constituted. Indeed, the pacification of contemporary societies has as a consequence the repression and penalization of physical violence, whereas moral violence, less easily identifiable, is not submitted to the same form of social control and legal sanction. Thus moral violence has become a sort of substitute violence. In most countries – the United States being a remarkable exception – this evolution is relatively well established in relation to torture (the most brutal forms of which decline, to be replaced by more effectively destructive psychological techniques) and to punishment (which no longer consists of physical ordeals but of programs of imprisonment and rehabilitation).¹⁵ But it also extends more broadly to the various domains in which violence can be exercised. This observation should not be regarded as a denial of the persistence of physical violence in general and among law enforcement agents in particular, but rather implies a shift toward moral violence, for which the cost–benefit ratio is, for the individual exercising it, much lower. The effects are probably deeper and more lasting, while impunity is guaranteed, since, although it is sometimes possible to offer corporeal proof of blows received, it is much more difficult to demonstrate that degrading acts have been committed: a deputy commissioner told me that if there was any suspicion of violence toward an individual who had been questioned, the doctor was called (this was only true up to a point,

as I found out), but physicians would record physical not psychological traces. It is notable that, while trauma is claimed and investigated everywhere after any violent event, in victims, witnesses and even perpetrators,¹⁶ the issue is never raised for those who have endured police abuse of force, as if they were outside the moral community of potential trauma sufferers.

During my research I rarely observed physical violence. There were a number of reasons for this. Firstly, it may not be such a frequent occurrence, a fact that surprised one sergeant major in charge of a police station, who said “When you see what goes on, how we’re spat on, pelted with missiles, insulted, I’m surprised there aren’t more blunders.” Secondly, my presence made it even less likely, and officers told me several times, with a meaningful smile, that if I had not been there, the individuals being questioned would have “had a rough few minutes.” In other words, in the occasional instances a suspect was being beaten, it happened out of my sight.

One night, three young men, arrested after they had been reported driving through a park in the city in an SUV, were brought into the precinct – two were white, the third of Arab origin. One officer, whom I had often heard making racist and xenophobic remarks, turned his aggressiveness on the Arab youth. After intimidating him verbally during the questioning and finally extracting an admission of guilt, he took him into an empty room in the police station to try to get him to denounce his friends, who continued to deny their involvement. His colleague accompanied him and closed the door behind them, preventing me from following them – an exceptional occurrence during my research, since I was usually free to move around. From the corridor, I heard the first officer singing an opera aria at the top of his voice while the second yelled questions, but this din only partially covered the sharp sound of slaps and the dull thud of blows.¹⁷ The two officers felt authorized to knock him about not only because he had shifted from suspect to guilty party, but also because they had just found out about his previous offenses, which meant he was unlikely to bring any complaint against them and in any case unlikely to be believed. When the three exited the room two minutes later, I understood that the boy, whose reddened face betrayed the ill-treatment he had just undergone, had not accused his friends. This type of practice has a name among law enforcement officers in the United States: the “third degree,” a technique consisting of inflicting physical or mental torments on a person who has been arrested in order to extract a confession.¹⁸ I was exposed to it from a distance on a few occasions, and less often in the station than in the street, during an arrest or in the car as suspects were taken to the station.

Just as has been shown in relation to torture, I found it quite difficult to distinguish how much of it derived from the desire to obtain information, and how much from something closer to a form of punishment or even revenge.

This kind of brutality certainly happened more frequently than I was able to witness. At the very least, the youngsters seemed to consider it entirely routine. In the study I conducted in a class for learning-disabled students in a middle school in the conurbation, all had similar stories to share. One of them, a boy of North African origin, remembered an occasion when law enforcement agents came into their project following a call from neighbors disturbed by the noise of motorbikes. When they arrived, the officers saw a group of teenagers crowded around a few bikers. Spotting the police, the adolescents ran off and the officers gave chase, one of them using his Flash-Ball but failing to hit his target: "We were sitting, we saw them, we got up and ran off, and bang! It all kicked off. I was surprised they used the weapon." The boy had time to hide in a parking lot with his friend, but his twin brother fled in a different direction and was caught. He added: "They hit him and let him go. I mean, they beat him, they really laid into him, he was all bruised up when I saw him after. He said, they just hit me and didn't even take me in. He couldn't believe it." The practice of physical punishment, which patrol officers often refer to nostalgically, seemed alive and well in light of the stories these adolescents told me, the only difference being that usually, as in this case, it was the slowest or most unlucky among them who took the hit for his guilty friends.

Although scenes of brutality were the exception rather than the rule in what I observed, scenes of humiliation were quite common. They arose daily in the street during identity checks and body searches, or when individuals being arrested were handcuffed without justification, then in the police car bringing individuals for questioning, and eventually in the station. There was a wide range of behaviors, from unpleasant remarks to racist comments, from ostentatious signs of contempt to stops and frisks enacted in front of neighbors. Each time, the point was to institute a relationship of abasement and mortification at a moment when the individuals concerned were captives of a situation that forced them to submit to torment without responding, in order to avoid being charged with insulting and resisting the police. They were even more likely to remain silent if the crimes the officers were accusing them of were relatively minor, or not established, or even non-existent, allowing them to cling to the possibility of prompt release, which an inappropriate reaction would put at risk. This treatment, in circumstances where innocence could be assumed, or even

confirmed in the case of routine stops and frisks, is in itself indicative of the ordinary nature of this violence.

Often aggressiveness was focused around subjects thought to be wounding, particularly the individual's precarious situation, aiming to produce both guilt and shame. Here are two examples. A youth of North African origin was suspected of having been involved in a scuffle in the project where he lived. In the street, where he had been stopped, a patrol officer questioned him: "You're not working? – No sir, I'm on unemployment benefit. – Yeah, you're loafing around off our money. – It's not been long, sir, only 4 months. There are people that stay on it a lot longer. I know someone who's been on it 26 months. – Yeah, right, you're going to wait 26 months. – No sir, but if you think it's easy for an Arab like me to find a job . . . – Seek, and you shall find. You're full of bullshit!" Another day, a man of sub-Saharan origin had just been stopped for a problem with the insurance on the car he was driving. On the back seat of the car taking him to the police station, the officer interrogated him: "Have you been in trouble with the police before? – No. – Be careful. Anyway, we'll check. (silence) – How old are you? – 28. – Are you working? – No, I haven't found a job. – Are you married? – Not yet. – (With increasing contempt): Don't you get it? You're 28, at your age you should have a job, a family, a house, go on holiday, have a normal life, you know? Look what you're doing with your life. It's a mess!" Given that the first individual, a youth from the Arab minority, and the second, an African immigrant, belonged to groups that studies indicate suffer massively from employment discrimination and have unemployment rates two to three times higher than French people of European origin, remarks of this kind had a good chance of reaching their target, adding denigration and humiliation to injustice.

The harassment could take harsher forms. I still retain the painful memory of a youth of North African origin shut into the plexiglass-walled room in the precinct that rendered its occupants visible to all the officers passing by. I can still see his despairing expression and hear his insistent cry: "I'm not gonna get five months in prison! On my mother's life, I'm not going back to jail!" Around him, officers went about their duties, some indifferent, others laughing and watching him from a distance, still others approaching to provoke him, and some apparently getting annoyed. The young man continued his litany: "I was at the red light, I didn't do nothing, they stop me and tell me I'm going to jail. On my mother's life, I won't do the five months! I don't want to go back to jail!" He was one of those who have accumulated convictions with suspended sentences, have been

incarcerated several times, believe that they have drawn a line under their past and can now return to normal life having paid for their misdeeds, and who discover, during a routine check, that an old sentence has been activated and is sending them back to prison.¹⁹ The police had a list of people being sought for these reasons, and, recognizing the young man when he pulled up to a traffic light, had stopped him. In his transparent enclosure, where he threw himself against the walls yelling, he seemed like a caged animal exposed to the jibes and provocations of the officers. A little while later the sergeant in charge of the anticrime squad, who had just entered the station, stood in front of him without saying a word, as if purposely mocking him. The young man resumed his lament. The officer watched him from a few feet away, haughty and silent, making sarcastic comments each time he seemed to be calming down. When the sergeant left after several minutes, one of his colleagues took over, attempting in his turn to exasperate the youth without really managing to arouse his interest. Annoyed, he approached him threateningly, again without success. Later he told me, as if regretfully: "I was this far from hitting him." His colleague commented: "If you hadn't been there . . ." The sentence hung in the air. In fact, contrary to what they thought, physical suffering would have added little to the moral suffering, which had reached a peak: this was probably why the young man seemed not to recognize the officer's hostile presence. In limiting themselves to irritating him with their mimicry, their laughter, their indignation, the police surely achieved the violence to which they aspired. Ultimately, they did not even really know this person, who had been arrested by their colleagues: he was not one of those they dreamed about bringing a suspended sentence down on one day. But the jail term he would serve and the distress it provoked obviously did not suffice for their satisfaction: they still considered they had to harass him.

As a general rule, unlike the violence manifested in relations between persons or groups – be it fights in the school yard or confrontations between rival gangs – police violence, whether physical or moral, is exercised in a radically and institutionally unequal manner. On one side are individuals who have not only the monopoly of the legitimate use of force, but also exclusive access to effective use of it given the circumstances. On the other are individuals who are doubly captive, owing to both the physical coercion they undergo and the latent threat weighing on them if ever they should have the bad idea of talking back. Whether detained, handcuffed or simply surrounded by officers, the person exposed to their power is rendered structurally inferior: he is bound to submit, and any protest or rebel-

lion can only lead to even greater submission. Violence is therefore almost always strictly unilateral. But it is also targeted. It is not applied to all. It affects almost exclusively males, mainly young men, of working-class background, living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, usually of immigrant origin or belonging to a minority. It is rarely inflicted on women, or more mature people, of middle-class or upper-class background, living in residential neighborhoods, or of European appearance.

However, as the examples cited above show, one further element needs to be added to understand the attitude of the police toward the population they subject to violence: the belief that officers are dealing with a person who is guilty, with respect both to the act for which they have stopped him and to previous offenses which they may have found by checking the records of the Reported Offense Processing System.²⁰ In the moral work of denigration that operates to render violence not only possible but desirable from the point of view of the police, recognition of the crime committed and of a criminal past is essential. An individual who is a “shit” or a “fag,” as I heard them described, can be treated as such. As we have seen, though, the capacity of law enforcement for discernment is often poor, and any young man from the projects may, until proved otherwise, find himself ranged with the generic category of “bastards,” and subject to the ordeals reserved for them.

One of the disturbing aspects of the various accounts and observations of violence, like those I describe here, is the emotions that accompany them. Enjoyment of hitting or humiliating a defenseless individual is both a characteristic of the officers involved (though obviously, not all are), and a fact that needs to be understood (well beyond the ranks of the police). In his philosophical study of the excessive use of force, Étienne Balibar emphasizes that a third term needs to be added to violence and power – that of cruelty:²¹ “The phenomenology of violence must include, at the same time as its intrinsic relationship to power, its relationship to cruelty, which is a different thing.” From a sociological perspective – and probably from a political one too – the issue is not to investigate the psychic or even anthropological foundations of the pleasure experienced in striking a handcuffed man or humiliating a prisoner, but to understand what makes it possible and acceptable. It is not a matter of pronouncing moral generalities about violent impulses, but of grasping how such acts come to be performed without eliciting disapproval. What makes cruelty possible is the image the police have of their public – or one part of their public – as an enemy fundamentally different from them. Hostility is not enough; a radical othering is also required: the other

cannot be another oneself. What makes cruelty acceptable is the construction of the individual targeted as a guilty party who deserves what happens to him: his fault can be the specific crime for which he is arrested or, more generally, his criminal past, his attitude toward society or even his mere presence in the world. Violence must be able to find a minimum of justification in the idea the perpetrator has of the person who is subjected to it and who must be made to pay. This is what political leaders work to achieve: by describing adolescents as “wild kids” (“sauvageons”) or youth as “scum” (“racaille”), the ministers of the interior – respectively, the Socialist Jean-Pierre Chevènement and the Conservative Nicolas Sarkozy – contribute to making violence possible, and when it occurs, even when it results in death, to making it acceptable, by presuming the victims guilty even if they are not. Thus the production and legitimization of violence are set in a political context that goes beyond law enforcement and involves the highest authorities of the state.

The analysis I propose here diverges from the customary social science approaches to these questions, especially in France. Indeed, when I presented a paper based on my study at a research seminar on violence, one sociologist, disturbed not by the facts I had discussed but by my reading of them, exclaimed: “All the same, people aren’t killed in police stations every day, plenty of people come out alive!” I had not described any homicide committed by officers, having limited myself to my own ethnographic observations and my commitment to describe the routine of police practice. Her remark, and the emotion expressed within it, troubled me. Is it enough to know that people are not killed in police stations every day? Should we reduce the definition of violence to its extreme physical forms, or even to murder? This reaction to my analysis arose in the context of a crucial period for the social sciences in France, a point when there had been a shift from a critical sociology to a sociology of critique,²² in which denunciation had given way to interpretation of denunciation, and a degree of mistrust of anything that might cast doubt on the researcher’s neutrality had developed. In the choice between involvement and detachment, evoked by Norbert Elias, it was admitted that social scientists should avoid the former and opt for the latter.²³ In the case of law enforcement, the issue was particularly sensitive: limiting oneself to denouncing police violence meant doing the same as human rights organizations with less competence, and the added value of research disappeared; conversely, simply reconstituting the grammar of denunciation meant abandoning consideration of the meaning of violence, therefore renouncing the commitment of the researcher.²⁴ In the first case, scientific autonomy with

regard to political action seemed to be challenged; in the second, it looked as if the political aspect of scientific work was being avoided.

The path between these two positions is narrow. I believe, nevertheless, that it can be negotiated, provided that one agrees on two requirements. Firstly, analysis must be based on ethnographic investigation: spending time in places and with people over a prolonged period makes it possible to observe scenes that can be resituated in their context, while remaining aware that the presence of the observer obviously generates an interference with what he is observing, and in particular substantially reduces the likelihood of violence occurring.²⁵ Secondly, the analysis must propose a framework of interpretation: the interaction between the police and the public cannot in itself provide the keys to understanding violence unless one takes into consideration the enabling conditions of this violence, especially the relationship to power and the justification of cruelty.²⁶ That the majority of suspects leave precincts alive is certainly reassuring, but it should not divert us from the everyday invisible violence that occurs there. That the majority of officers, most of the time, do not indulge in brutality is equally worthy of note, but does not eliminate the need to reflect on those who do, and those who witness these scenes or are aware of them but do not react. In one sense, my colleague was right: if the anthropological approach derives from an aptitude for amazement, I was still prepared to be amazed by the routine nature of the violence perpetrated by the police on certain groups of the population.

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But the fact that the violence of the police escapes the gaze of the average citizen, and even of the researcher, is hardly surprising. Everything possible is done to prevent the reality of this violence emerging into the public arena, and more particularly being brought into the courts. Complaints of brutality or references to beatings in witness statements are almost always discouraged and discredited.

One evening, in the central precinct, an officer was drawing up a report on a 14-year-old boy of Malian origin who was suspected of having stolen a bicycle, questioning him at the same time as writing up the document. After verbally reconstructing the sequence of events for the boy, who did not seem to understand what he was told, the law enforcement agent concluded: "Were you involved in stealing a bicycle with two other persons today at about 7 p.m.? – No sir. – You shouldn't tell lies. Anyway, your alibi doesn't hold water, your friend said he had been with you for 20 minutes, and the theft occurred 30 minutes before we questioned you. – . . . – Were you with two other

persons before you met your friend? – No sir. – So how do you explain the fact that the victim has identified you as one of the three thieves? – I don't know." Silence. The officer carried on typing, and then continued: "Have you anything to add? – Yes sir. Why did the officer slap me? – What officer? – The black officer. – There wasn't a black officer. – Yes there was, he was on a motorbike, my friend'll confirm it. – No, I'm telling you there was no black officer." I saw the law enforcement agent type out the boy's supposed response: "I have nothing more to add." Having finished recording it, the officer read the entire statement over to the boy and showed him where to sign. The adolescent kept his cool and protested softly: "You haven't put down that the officer slapped me. – I'm warning you, there are two crews that will testify against you and say that you're lying. The judge won't like that. – . . . – Do you still want me to put it down? – Yes. – You're going to go up against the officer you're accusing, it'll be your word against his, and what's more he'll accuse you of defamation. – But it's true, sir. There were other guys around, they'll back me up." Wearing of the argument – but probably mostly because I was there – the officer finally noted down what the boy had said.

As we have seen in the case of the trial described earlier, and as this exchange also demonstrates, officers have a whole range of techniques for dissuading anyone who wishes to register an allegation of violence. It includes intimidation, here with the successive references to the contradictory testimony other officers will provide, to the confrontation with the alleged perpetrator, and to the threat of a charge of defamation. It also involves denial: the officer accused was supposedly not present at the scene of the questioning. It finally entails mere refusal: the officer taking the statement fails to record the allegation of slapping. In this case, the officer displayed his whole rhetorical arsenal. But nothing worked, as the boy proved to be stubborn and brave. Yet, there is little chance that any further action will have been taken and, if it has, it is to be feared that the prediction of the officer has proven true and that the adolescent was considered a liar.

Deterrence usually works, though, and, even in the court case, it should be noted that in the end the Caribbean man did not file a complaint and the Turkish victim only resolved to do so because he was supported by community associations and the case had sparked a scandal in Turkey. There was another case that seemed to me even more remarkable. In a housing project, a confrontation took place one Sunday afternoon between a small group of teenagers and law enforcement officers, for reasons that were unclear: insults flew on

both sides, stones were thrown by the youngsters and live rounds were shot by the police. One of the bullets hit a young man from the neighborhood who was returning from a soccer game with friends and was more than 100 yards away from the police. He was taken to the hospital and treated in preparation for an operation to extract the bullet, before being taken into custody. His family was devastated, and he himself admitted he had been scared he would die from his life-threatening wound. In the neighborhood, the anger aroused by the event led to several days of tension, with the commissioners holding different opinions on what line to take. One argued that the police should not return to the location, in order to avoid inflaming the situation; the other thought, on the contrary, that they should make a show of heavy presence. The wounded man, of North African origin, was easily exonerated, especially given that he had never had dealings with law enforcement and had a job in the area. He still declared himself astonished at this unexpected favorable decision, having perfectly understood that the presumption of his innocence could not be taken for granted. His lawyer stated that he would most certainly be filing a lawsuit for voluntary assault with a firearm, once examination of the bullet extracted and ballistic analysis had confirmed that the shots did indeed come from the police – a fact of which there was little doubt, since cartridges had been found at the site. Yet he never did. When I expressed my surprise to the anticrime squad officers, they told me they had explained to the young man that, since he had “little brothers who had already been in trouble,” it was better for him to hold back. And so he did. He had got the message.

When, despite these generally crippling obstacles, police brutality did actually become the subject of a complaint or was recorded in a statement, or, more often, when law enforcement agents could reasonably foresee that this was likely (for anticipation was fundamental here), the most effective response was a countercharge of “insulting and resisting a person holding public authority.”²⁷ In this way, officers switched from being the perpetrators to becoming the victims of violence. Any traces left on the bodies of individuals questioned, and often certified by a physician, then became simply the marks of legitimate action by the police who were defending themselves at the same time as attempting to control and arrest the offender.

It would, of course, be wrong to portray the officers as systematically and cynically seeking to disguise their brutality by transferring guilt to the person they have subjected to physical violence. This situation no doubt does occur, even after the event, when the ill-treatment meted out has had serious consequences and the officers need to

reconstruct a credible scenario to explain death or serious injury during questioning, as happened in the case of the trial where the Turkish man filed a lawsuit against the police. But usually, it is in the heat of the moment that verbal and physical provocations, of which I have given many examples, enable officers to push the individual to commit an offense. The person being questioned rarely falls for this ploy, because the youth are generally wise to it, and some, who have already served jail time as a result of such altercations, are even informed by experience. It does happen, though, that the youngster, lowering his guard or simply unfamiliar with this situation, is caught out and answers back or, worse still, fights back: then the chain of events proceeds rapidly, and the reaction is often brutal.

In one case recounted to me by a special educator, the police had been called to a Youth Judiciary Protection hostel. One adolescent had hit another, and a scuffle had broken out. When they arrived, the anticrime squad officers found the youngsters had calmed down. Despite that, they had questioned them roughly. One officer spat on the floor in front of their feet, "trying to provoke them," but while the boy who had thrown the first punch in the initial fight "didn't respond," the other lost his temper; he was slapped twice and brutally "brought down to the floor," before being taken to the precinct. "When I arrived," the director of the hostel told me later, "the teachers were completely in shock, one of them was in tears, she kept saying it wasn't fair." In the face of the provocation by the officer, it was the adolescent who was the original victim who had cracked, while his companion, the aggressor, had stood firm. The police had sanctioned the innocent and ignored the culprit.

Everyone at the precinct knew about these practices, and the charge of "insulting and resisting" served as a marker of the quality of relations between the officers and the youngsters, or more precisely of the level of violence displayed by law enforcement agents. In a conversation around the coffee machine, one officer expressed satisfaction to her colleagues that throughout her seven years in the force, she had never had to resort to it. She had served mainly in posts related to "transport," primarily in transfers between the prison and the court. These were sometimes trying moments for prisoners, who would learn, when they appeared before the judge, that, having been on remand up to that point, they were finally being sentenced to jail, or would receive notification of a penalty of which they had not been previously aware. "When I saw they were upset, I left them in peace, and even if they expressed their anger, I didn't answer them," this officer explained. She added, however, that some of her colleagues took malicious pleasure in needling prisoners until they provoked a

situation that might be described as insult and resistance. On another occasion, an anticrime squad officer, who had switched to day shifts because he no longer wanted to be associated with his colleagues' violence and racism, told me proudly that in three years in his current post, he had had only two cases of insulting and resisting the police.

Speaking with commissioners, I also learned that they paid special attention when their officers reported this offense. "When I've got an officer who's stacking up a lot of insult and resistance charges," one of them told me lucidly, "I suspect an inability to manage situations, or even a tendency not to manage his own aggression." But this monitoring on the part of the hierarchy had few consequences, unless the offense was reported in the context of violence where the individual questioned had suffered serious injury. Internal sanctions were minimal, taking the form of warnings, or perhaps a change of schedule, transferring the violent agent to day shifts where there was obviously better monitoring of activities: this was the penalty conferred on two anticrime squad officers well known for their excessive use of force. Conversely, Fabien Jobard and Sophie Névanen's study of convictions for offenses against persons holding public authority where no other offense was committed shows that offenders received prison sentences in 10 percent of cases of insult alone, 18 percent of cases of resistance, and 20 percent of combined insult and resistance cases; in more than a third of these cases, the sentence was over two months.²⁸ In other words, contrary to what the commissioners were suggesting to me, the charge of insult and resistance is not really a two-edged sword: the implications for those being questioned are much more serious than the consequences for the police, and officers may even benefit financially if they file a civil suit, as a result of the compensatory damages they can expect from a trial.

For a youngster from the projects – and, even more, for an illegal migrant or a Roma traveler – there are thus many discouraging obstacles in the way of seeing the police violence he alleges acknowledged. But one factor is somewhat eroding what William Westley, elsewhere in the book quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, called the police's "law of silence": the spread of video cameras, whether used by amateurs or in surveillance systems. This novel form of evidence, made available to journalists and lawyers, and often posted on open-access websites, is beginning to make police brutality more visible. During the course of my research, amateur footage of two young people being beaten up by police officers following a car accident in Mont-Saint-Aignan, near Rouen, on April 6, 2007, had been widely circulated in the media and was the subject of animated conversations in the anticrime squad. The video showed the police

repeatedly kicking the driver and his passenger as they lay on the ground, already handcuffed, choking one of them, crushing the other's head against the roof of the car, and finally setting an unmuzzled dog onto them.²⁹ Even the members of the anticrime squad with whom I worked seemed impressed. But still most episodes of violence occur out of sight of cameras, leaving no traces, except on the bodies and in the memories of those who suffer them.

On my last visit to the Youth Judicial Protection hostel, where I had conducted several interviews, I arrived in the midst of a lively discussion between the director and a boy of Malian origin, aged approximately 16, in the presence of one of the youth workers. "Did you note down the patrol number? You know, you have to react in the moment. Do you understand, Alassane?" The adolescent, muttered: "Anyway it won't make any difference." But the director replied with enthusiasm: "It depends. That's not true. Of course, it might not be any use. I won't tell you it's certain to work. But it comes to a point where that's also our job: we're here to protect you. When people go too far, you have to respond and that goes both ways. Just because they're cops it doesn't mean they have the right to hit you."

As the conversation went on, I was able to reconstruct the episode that had occurred earlier that morning. The boy and two friends had been playing noisily in a little square close to the hostel. Two patrol officers asked them for their papers. Since they were only yards from their lodging, the three of them had gone out without their identity documents. All they had was their travel card, which in general is deemed sufficient identification for a minor since there is a photograph on it. But the officers were not satisfied, and, despite the boys offering to retrieve the documents from their room, they decided to take them to the precinct, which was obviously an abuse of authority, if not a transgression of the law. But the boy named Alassane had run off back the hostel, fetched his identity card and returned to show it to the officers. This honest action proved to be an unfortunate mistake. Instead of recognizing his good faith, the officers began to handle him roughly for having fled, and then to insult and slap him. Alerted by the noise, one of the youth workers ran up and tried to intervene: "They were so violent I got involved. They were shouting at him. Stuff like: 'I'm going to kneecap you,' several times. And then 'You're a failure in your family, you're a failure at school, little faggot.' It was so violent, what they were shouting, it was incredible, I've never heard anything like it."

At the point when I entered the hostel, the young woman, who had just brought the adolescent back in, was thus trying, together

with the director, to get him to file a complaint so that this violence would not go unrecorded. But the boy was clearly reluctant to do so, and although he seemed distressed by the blows, the curses and especially the insulting comments, he was minimizing them: “No, it’s nothing, it doesn’t matter. – I don’t agree, you mustn’t leave it at that, you have to make a complaint.” (The adolescent, getting angry): “Yeah, if I had been by myself, I would have hit him. I was had. – No, you were right to behave that way, otherwise they’d have taken you into custody. But that means we have to do something as well. It’s good that the police exist, because there are some dangerous people around, but they’re not there to do things like that to you. – . . . – If you don’t do anything, nothing’ll happen, you’ll go to bed tonight, you’ll get up tomorrow morning, and it won’t change anything. If you do something it might change, we can’t be sure of it, but it could change something. – (The boy, stubbornly): No, it doesn’t matter, it’s in the past, it’s done. – You know, recently, there was a human rights committee that brought out a report on just this subject that said police wrongdoing was going unpunished and calling for that to be put right. – (The adolescent, by now furious and shouting): There’s no point!” The director got involved in the discussion: “They’ve even taken some cops into custody.” But the conversation was halted by the departure of the teenager, impatient to go back to his friends. In all probability, as happened in another case of police violence against a boy from the hostel about which the director told me, he would not file a complaint. Unlike the adults in the institution who were defending principles, he understood through his own experience that the game was too unequal and he could only lose. He swallowed his frustration and rage.

Discrimination

Racial discrimination includes all acts with intended or unintended negative or unfavorable consequences for racially or ethnically dominated groups.

Philomena Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism*, 1991

The degree of police discrimination is less than what would be implied by a superficial reading of the social distribution of stops, arrests and other exercises of police power.

Robert Reiner, *The Politics of the Police*, 2000

While unfamiliar in the French context, the expression “driving while black” is widely understood in the United States. As Henry Louis Gates writes, it is a traffic offense well known to African Americans: being stopped while driving one’s car for no apparent reason other than the color of one’s skin. It has generated a substantial volume of social science literature, and the existence of this discriminatory practice has been statistically confirmed both by surveys of people of color’s experience of the police and by analyses of police traffic checks.¹ This is indeed discrimination in the strict sense of the term, in other words, unfavorable treatment based on an illegitimate criterion: firstly, being subject to repeated identity checks and vehicle searches can certainly be defined as an unpleasant experience, often amplified by the aggressive attitude of the officers conducting the procedure, and secondly, undergoing this ordeal on the basis of suspicion arising from one’s physical characteristics, or more accurately from the prejudice attached to them, can obviously not be justified in law or even morality.

This form of discrimination is set in the broader context of what is known as “racial profiling,” or, more explicitly, the use of a racial criterion to decide whether to take an action with regard to individuals, for example, stopping and searching of pedestrians, even where no offense has been committed: what is often known in French as a “*contrôle au faciès*,” meaning literally an “appearance-based check.” Since the early 1990s, racial profiling, in particular for what is designated as “stop and frisk,” has been extensively covered in the United States media, criticized by human rights organizations and even debated in political circles, giving rise to hearings in Congress, with the adoption of state laws forbidding the practice.² By contrast, in France, until very recently, the issue was as little discussed in academic research as it was in the public arena.³ Indeed, exposure of the practice was subject to a dual censorship: scientific investigation was forbidden on the grounds that it was illegal for statistics to identify people via their origin, while anyone raising it in the public sphere was subject to prosecution by the Ministry of the Interior.⁴ Does this mean that French police officers were better able to avoid racial discrimination than their US counterparts? Does the fact that it is not discussed mean that it does not exist? It is more difficult than it might seem to answer these questions.

If the residents of housing projects read social science publications on the police – though sales figures suggest that this is as unlikely among this group as it is among the rest of the population – they would certainly be surprised to note that, until recently, the issue of racial discrimination had almost never been discussed, and in the rare cases where it was, the rhetorical caveats, combined with methodological arguments, might have led one to believe that it was impossible to establish with certainty that such discrimination did indeed exist. Where researchers invoked ethical scruples (not automatically assuming that the police were racist) and academic principles (taking into account multiple factors that might have a bearing on allegedly discriminatory behavior), these improbable readers might have suspected a degree of pusillanimity, perhaps hypocrisy or even complicity. They would, in short, have found themselves in the same situation as workers in the automobile industry in Detroit in 2008, unemployed following mass lay-offs and unable to pay their mortgages, discovering that economists were wondering whether the social situation in their city had something to do with the financial crisis.

In fairness to those sociologists who are studying the police, one must first acknowledge that if, for a long time, they failed to perceive racial discrimination, social scientists studying other institutions similarly failed to recognize it; indeed, France as a whole was blind to it

until the late 1990s, the very term itself being almost absent from French vocabulary.⁵ There is therefore no cause to specifically reproach those specializing in the study of the police. Moreover, once we begin to consider racial discrimination, we discover, as researchers in Britain and the United States have done for half a century, that understanding it poses real difficulties in terms of measurement and, above all, of representation.

Yet things seem simple on initial reading. Let us consider the following illustration. One evening in May 2005, an anticrime squad crew was patrolling in the city center. In a square, young people of African origin were chatting. The sergeant major made a hostile comment about them, and when I told him that his opinion might change were his children dating youth belonging to a minority, he replied peremptorily: "My daughters would never bring a boy like that home. They know how I feel." But as if to forestall the conclusion I might draw from his remark, he added: "It's not that I hate foreigners. Poles, Russians, I've no problem with them. No, blacks and Arabs are the ones I have a problem with." A little later, we were passing by a middle-class apartment complex. The sergeant major observed: "See, I've never been in that complex in all the time I've worked here. I don't even know what it's called." His colleague asked: "Is it public housing?" Answer: "Not necessarily, but there are hardly any blacks and Arabs." Silence followed, then he pulled himself together: "Not that there aren't whites who wreck everything, well, little French kids who don't want to get left behind and copy their black and Arab buddies!" His colleagues laughed. His reasoning seemed irrefutable. In neighborhoods where there were no "blacks and Arabs," the police did not set foot because there was no problem. When "whites" were responsible for disorder, it was because they wanted to imitate the "blacks and Arabs." Thus the fact that the police went more often into neighborhoods with a high level of racial segregation, even when they were not called there, and also concentrated their activities on people of color, even when no offense had been committed, seemed justified. The patrol continued through the district, without any incident relieving the monotony. There were no calls that night. And since nothing was happening, they would conduct stops and frisks.

These checks relied on a habitual two-stage process of selection: territorial (patrolling through the housing projects and the city center) and individual (stops and frisks on the basis of a subjective assessment of situations and individuals). Cruising slowly around the side streets of a project, they noticed a young man of North African origin alone in his car in a parking lot. The police vehicle stopped, and the

officers interrogated him about what he was doing; he replied that he was waiting for a friend. They brusquely demanded that he show his papers, made a telephone inquiry to ascertain that his car was not stolen, searched both vehicle and driver, with pockets emptied, legs spread and hands on the car door for the usual pat-down. We set off again. Further on, five young people of Arab and African origin were conversing on a bench in front of an apartment block. The officers recognized three of them and pointed them out by name. Nevertheless, they proceeded to carry out another stop and frisk, which produced no greater result than the previous one. It was accompanied by several sarcastic and offensive remarks.

As we continued our random patrol, heading toward a neighborhood near the train station, we passed a vehicle stopped in a parking bay. Inside, two men of African appearance, aged about 30, were talking quietly. We stopped alongside them. The sergeant major told them through the window to drive on. The car set off, drove a few yards, the police followed them and immediately switched on the flashing light and siren. The trap was closing. The vehicle stopped and the officers conducted identity checks and body searches of the two men, who turned out to be Congolese. This time the police found some grist for their mill: the car was uninsured. The driver tried to explain: it was not his, he did not know it was not insured, and he was taking his friend, who had drunk a little too much, home. Disregarding this public-spirited action, which would certainly have been applauded by the traffic police, the officers shoved him roughly into their car and took him to the station, immobilizing his vehicle so that it could be taken to the pound. After logging the case on the computer and placing the driver in custody, the crew happily set off again to the city center. Passing a van coming in the other direction, the sergeant major stared into the cab and instructed the officer driving to turn round. They caught up with the vehicle. The driver and his passenger, both Turkish, were subjected to an identity check and body search. The former's papers were in order, but the latter had none. The driver, a young man, quietly pleaded with the officer: "Look, he's just come to look for work, he hasn't done anything, he hasn't stolen anything." The sergeant major, immovable, replied firmly: "I'm not here to discuss the law, I'm here to uphold it." The undocumented individual was taken to the precinct to be kept in custody before probably being sent to the administrative detention center, where a deportation order could be made unless a judge opposed it. En route the officers cracked jokes, finding the man's difficulty in expressing himself in French particularly amusing: "Are you Turkish? – Turkish, me, yes. – Where's Turkey? – Turkey? – Is it in Europe, your country? – Europe? – You're a real

parrot, aren't you?" (At the time, the debate about Turkey's possible entry into the European Union was being aired widely in France, and the government had several times repeated its opposition to the move, citing the absence of common values.) On arrival at the precinct, we met the senior officer in charge of the control room, who commented mockingly: "So, anticrime squad, you're going after illegal aliens now?" In a transparent allusion to the alleged invasion by immigrants to which he often referred in my presence, the sergeant major replied: "I'm defending my country!" The officers had every reason to be satisfied with their night: two arrests meant two incidents recorded and, moreover, "cleared" – even if their colleagues did comment sarcastically on these rather inglorious captures.

According to Erving Goffman, the understanding the protagonists involved in a situation have is essentially: "What is it that's going on here?"⁶ For him, there is no single answer to this question, though, because it depends on the point of view adopted, and he gives the example that "what is play for the golfer is work for the caddy." One can pose the question in relation to the routine shift just described. For the police, what happened? Ten men were checked, two were arrested. Six were French citizens, black or Arab, two others were Africans, and the last two were Turkish. From the officers' point of view, the fact that all belonged to ethnic minorities or were immigrants was simply due to a combination of two logics: first, there are more of them in public spaces, and thus they are more at risk of being checked, and, second, they are those most suspected of committing crimes, and therefore offer a better return when questioned. The police simply did their duty by maximizing their chances of questioning individuals within a population delimited by the criteria of appearance – and the outcome seemed to bear them out, with the two arrests. Now one can turn the gaze the other way. For those whose identity was checked, what happened? Given that none of them had committed any identifiable offense, and that the officers already knew some of them, the stops and frisks can only be discriminatory practices – and, according to them, this is confirmed by the fact that it was only after scrutinizing them for some time, and without any anomalous behavior on their part that might have prompted the decision, that the law enforcement agents decided to question them. Given this divergence of perspective, can we say that there was racial discrimination? Not only those involved in the scene, but also outside observers, have opposing views on this query: French people in general, like the residents of the projects, would say there was discrimination; most sociologists would agree with the police that there was not.

Indeed, the French generally consider racial discrimination as being common, an awareness certainly linked with the recent acknowledgment of the problem in the public sphere. Firstly, among the 27 member states of the European Union, France ranks second, after the Netherlands, in terms of the proportion of the population that believes “discrimination based on ethnicity” is “very or fairly widespread”: 79 percent agree with this statement.⁷ Secondly, when asked to indicate more specifically in which circumstances “a person of foreign origin is very likely or fairly likely to suffer discrimination,” the French mention the police in first place and the gendarmerie in fourth: 67 percent and 59 percent of respondents respectively hold this view.⁸ Moreover, individuals who state they belong to a minority are more likely than the general population to say that discrimination is frequent, either because they have suffered it or because they have witnessed it.⁹ Finally, in a recent study, 39 percent of those polled in France, and 42 percent of those surveyed in the Seine-Saint-Denis département, stated that officers in the police and gendarmerie are racist; these figures rose to 46 percent and 51 percent respectively when respondents were asked if “people of foreign origin” were treated less well than “people of French origin.”¹⁰ Thus French people as a whole, and especially those belonging to minorities, are more likely than most other Europeans to see racial discrimination as widespread and the police as the primary cause of it.

But when the subject was spontaneously brought up in conversation by officers, there seemed to be a broad consensus denying its existence in their practice. Most of them would undoubtedly have agreed with the statement of a sergeant who was second-in-command at a local police station: “People think there’s a lot of racism in the police. I think there’s less than in other places.” Even among those officers who made racist remarks in my presence, few admitted to deliberately discriminating against people of color, and they therefore implicitly seemed to draw a distinction - quite pertinent, actually - between racism and discrimination. Hence the police would claim that they discriminate less than other professions. Depending on the situation, this denial might be supported by personal grounds (“my partner is of immigrant origin”), professional claims (“some of our colleagues are people of color”) or general arguments (“we focus on applying the law of the land without distinction as to origin or color”). Racism was not entirely denied, but it was reduced to a marginal issue, the “black sheep” who, it was claimed, unfortunately exists in all professions and institutions. Conversely, they turned the reproach back on the residents of the projects, accusing them of racism against the majority (“they call us ‘filthy whites’ or ‘filthy

French' ") or against minorities ("I've got a Caribbean colleague and he says he sometimes gets called 'filthy black' in the street"). There were therefore no grounds for suspicion of the police: they were the victims, not the perpetrators, of racist acts. As one deputy commissioner explained: "What's hard is that we're always having to defend ourselves against accusations of discrimination. We don't go after Arabs or blacks, we go after people." In other words, all officers agreed in deploring the assumption that they were racist and the idea that they might discriminate.

Turning to the views of social scientists, Donald Black carried out a pioneering study in three US cities in the late 1960s, examining "the social organization of arrest."¹¹ After analyzing almost 6,000 police operations, with the aid of 36 researchers, he focused only on arrests of individuals, in order to understand the factors associated with them. The seriousness of the offense and the existence of evidence were determining factors, as was the attitude of the person reporting the crime, where there was one. But when these factors were similar, the risk of being arrested appeared to be markedly higher among African Americans than among whites, clearly suggesting there was racial discrimination. However, one variable seemed to play a decisive role in this process of differentiation: the behavior of the suspect. If he was deemed "deferential" or "polite" by the officer questioning him, the proportion of arrests was almost identical, whatever the color of the person concerned. Most of the disparity in the rate of arrests was related to the higher frequency of behavior considered "aggressive" among black suspects. The disturbing conclusion was assertive: "no evidence exists to show that the police discriminate on the basis of race."

It should be emphasized, though that most of the situations observed originated in complaints by victims, and that the remainder were offenses the officers had witnessed: the context was thus very different from that I have described in the French banlieues, where, in the absence of reported crimes, police work is centered on so-called "preventative stops." Moreover, in the US study, the attitude of the person questioned – whether or not it was respectful – only influenced the decision on whether to arrest in cases where the police were responding to requests from the public – in other words, situations of individual confrontation between complainant and suspect. In these events it was established that officers, most of whom were white, behaved differently depending on whether the plaintiffs were white or black: it is therefore difficult to extrapolate the results to the French outer cities.

Since this article was published, a number of studies, mainly in the United States, have attempted to show more precisely what was actu-

ally due to racial discrimination and what should rather be attributed to other elements such as the kind of crime, the characteristics of the complainants, the behavior of the suspects, and the level of poverty in the neighborhood.¹² This research has produced contrasting results, depending on the type of intervention (identity checks, official questioning, formal charge) and the place of observation (varying according to country and even to city). Overall, they indicate that law enforcement is harsher on African Americans, but that it is difficult to isolate ethnicity from what statisticians call “confounding factors.” In other words, for most researchers, while it is established that minorities are overrepresented among those checked and searched, questioned and arrested, charged and physically ill-treated, this is not solely due to officers’ racism; what is more, even when the existence of the latter is established, the studies do not necessarily confirm that discriminatory practices do exist.

To sum up: French people, particularly those belonging to a minority, are convinced that racial discrimination occurs most frequently in interactions with law enforcement agents; police officers, whatever their rank, are firmly of the view that they are no more racist than the rest of the population, or probably even less, and that they are unjustly accused of discriminating among the public when it is in fact they who are the target of racial stigmatization; social scientists, often using statistical studies as evidence, explain that not all differentiation is discrimination, that not all discrimination is racial, that racial discrimination is not necessarily the product of racist intent, and that racist prejudices do not automatically lead to practices of racial discrimination – in short, that the issue is highly complex (though at least they are examining it, which, we should remember, was not the case until recently in French research).¹³ Whom are we to believe? Or rather, how are we to make sense of these contradictions?

An analytical distinction has to be made here between racism and discrimination: the first relates to beliefs (in the existence of races and racial attributes), and sentiments (of superiority and hostility); the second refers to attitudes (contempt and aggressiveness) and practices (stops and frisks or questioning and arrest not justified by any offense). Discrimination is objectified through actions, and does not automatically imply racism. It is theoretically possible to be racist and not discriminate, because one has an interest in not doing so, and it is possible to discriminate without being racist, because one has an interest in doing so. With regard to this distinction, there are two features that recur in almost all the studies carried out in Britain and the United States. Firstly, there is a racism embedded in what is sometimes called “police culture,” especially among rank-and-file

officers.¹⁴ Secondly, law enforcement agents enjoy broad autonomy in decision-making in their routine activities, a fact described as “police discretion.”¹⁵ The point, therefore, is: do generally racist officers holding discretionary power in their management of the public actually engage in discriminatory practices?

It might seem surprising, or even pointless, to ask this question, since a positive answer could be anticipated. However, one cannot eliminate the possibility that, despite these two factors (racism and discretion), law enforcement agents do not discriminate among the public, either because they have a strong sense of duty, or because they fear sanctions, or perhaps because discrimination carries highly negative social and legal connotations. This is what David Bayley and Harold Mendelsohn asserted in their pioneering study of the police in Denver: “Policemen might be prejudiced, unsympathetic, and not adequately informed about minorities, but they could still feel constrained to treat minority persons fairly.”¹⁶ Is there a similar disarticulation in the French context? Can racism and discrimination be so easily separated?

Returning to our initial scene, did the police only check minorities because they are racist, as those concerned believe, or because they will achieve better results among these groups, as they claim? British sociologist Michael Banton distinguishes two forms of discrimination, corresponding precisely to these two interpretations.¹⁷ Categorical discrimination proceeds from assignment, and is based on prejudice: black or Arab individuals have certain negative characteristics that discredit them and justify treating them unfavorably. Statistical discrimination reasons by probability and aims at efficacy: individuals with certain objective attributes more often engage in the kind of practices that are being investigated, and it happens that they are black or Arab. In other words, discrimination on the grounds of prejudice is ideological and racist (it stigmatizes), while discrimination on the grounds of probability is pragmatic and racialist (it differentiates). In the first case, the police, by malign intent, will seek to penalize individuals belonging to minorities, for example by questioning them more often because they feel hostile toward them. In the second case, making a strategic calculation, they will focus on individuals of minority background, for example by checking their identity more often because it achieves better results. Clearly, the first attitude would be considered illegitimate, notably by the upper echelons of the police, while the second may be deemed less shocking on the grounds of its neutrality, simply aiming to improve returns.

On the ground, it is true that both arguments can be heard, sometimes put forward by one and the same officer. One openly boasted:

“I don’t like blacks and Arabs, and if I can find a way to piss them off, I make sure I do.” Another asserted more cautiously: “I’m not racist, but the reason I check blacks and Arabs more often is because they screw up more often.” Informal conversations suggest, however, that the latter may well broadly share the former’s racist views. But rather than discussing to what extent the invocation of probability is a tactical move aimed at concealing prejudice, it seems more promising to concentrate on the way in which this distinction is generally interpreted.

In relation to prejudice, it is claimed that the mere fact a law enforcement agent makes racist statements does not necessarily mean he discriminates. In relation to probability, it is argued that the mere fact that he discriminates does not necessarily mean he is racist. The two statements are logically unarguable and empirically irrefutable, but their political and moral consequences are also unanswerable. In one case, the agent who asserts he is racist is exonerated (he does not discriminate in practice), and in the other, the one who admits to discriminating is justified (he is simply demonstrating discernment). Thus, the issue of racial discrimination as a reprehensible practice is dodged, either because it cannot be objectivized, or because there is allegedly a reason for it. Can we disentangle ourselves from this alternative? Analysis of the activity of the police on that May evening in 2005, which was both ordinary and exemplary, offers a way forward. The situation is interesting, because it involves proactive rather than reactive activity: the police had not been called and therefore were entirely in control of the choice of whose identity to check, in a context where there was no evidence of any crime having been committed in the various situations they encountered. Two urban environments can be distinguished: the housing projects, and the city center.

In the projects, the officers stopped and frisked young people who were outside as night was falling, on a pretext that at first sight seems unfounded but not discriminatory. If one refers to the criteria defined in the Penal Procedure Code, the checks were neither investigative (no crime had been committed) nor preemptive (it is difficult to claim they were preventing anything); in other words, there was no legal justification, as the officers themselves admitted in private and as their superiors agreed in the conversations I had with them. In the case of the five boys, the law enforcement agents even knew most of them and should have spared them this ordeal. However, they could defend themselves against charges of discrimination by pointing out that they simply checked those they encountered on their patrol, all of whom happened, by pure coincidence, to belong to minorities. This

conclusion is also suggested by a sophisticated study by the British Home Office research service, which concludes that what appears to be selection on racial criteria is merely the consequence of the greater “availability” of certain groups in certain public spaces.¹⁸ However, the question remains as to why random checks are systematically carried out for a crime that in this case could be described not as “driving while black,” but as “strolling while black.” Here, the remarks passed at the beginning of the shift – and which are just one illustration, among many others, of what I heard in the anticrime squad – offer a key to understanding. On the one hand, they manifest explicit prejudices toward certain groups (“It’s not that I hate foreigners . . . blacks and Arabs are the ones I have a problem with”). On the other, they suggest that the locations for patrols are chosen on the basis of preconceptions (they do not go where “there are hardly any blacks and Arabs,” since it is they who “wreck everything”). It is clear that if, rather than assuming that the police stop more young people from minorities because they are more “available” in public space, we ask why they go to certain neighborhoods, why they check individuals they already know simply because they are outdoors, and why they do so while simultaneously asserting their racist opinions, it may change the answer to the question of whether racial discrimination occurs.

In the city center, the configuration is easier to decipher. The police stopped vehicles driven by men whose physical appearance suggested they were immigrants. On this occasion, they were correct, since the first two were Congolese and the second two Turkish. The “politics of numbers,” which focuses primarily on the statistics of deportations, is a decisive factor here – if not in the motivation for these practices, at least in the justification given for them. Nevertheless, the identity check was illegal – even more so the arrest with a view to deporting the individual concerned – because it was “appearance-based” (literally, after the officers had “stared out” the individuals in question), and in both cases conducted in the absence of any assumed offense; numerous court decisions have reiterated the condemnation of this practice.¹⁹ From a jurisprudence perspective, the subterfuge in asking the driver of the first vehicle to start the car so as to carry out a perfectly valid vehicle check in no way justified the identity check that followed, and the equally valid check of the second car did not authorize the identity check on the passenger. One realizes the unintentional irony of the crew leader’s response to the Turkish man arrested: “I’m not here to discuss the law, I’m here to uphold it,” he asserted at the very moment when he was breaking it. Yet, in the minds of the police, the end justifies the means, and the illegal method

ultimately allowed them to uncover two offenses, one of driving without insurance, the other a breach of immigration law. It could be argued that, even though they performed an illegitimate action, they only did so for the sake of efficacy. This would suggest that the racial discrimination, which was objectively indisputable given that the stop was decided on the basis of physical appearance, was not simply the result of prejudice, but derived from reasoning on the basis of probability. But the mockery in the car (“Where’s Turkey? Is it in Europe, your country?”) and the comments at the police station (“I’m defending my country!”) leave little doubt as to the intent behind the sequence of events.

Ultimately, even if there are analytic grounds for distinguishing between racism and discrimination, prejudice and probability, it is obvious that in law enforcement practices the two easily become entangled. Yet, it is often possible to pass off decisions that are intentionally discriminatory and could be the subject of court sanctions as simply the effect of statistical logic: officers assert that they stop more young people belonging to minorities in the projects because they are more often outdoors, and more people of color in public places because they are more likely to discover a crime that way.

Sensitive to this argument, Fabien Jobard, one of the few French sociologists to have specifically investigated these issues, writes:²⁰ “There is no evidence of a racial bias in the choice the police make to approach a given individual or group of individuals, regardless of the signs of racism that may be observed here and there.” He adds: “This factor strongly contradicts the various collections of testimony on ‘appearance-based checks’.” But in the same essay, he describes how, on a country road, officers decided to stop a vehicle that “was entering a dirt road alongside the train track, an indication that the occupants might be Gypsies getting up to something that merited police attention” – a decision he describes as “discrimination based on behavior” (entering a dirt road) and hence not racial. However, this reaction should be considered in the context of the prejudices expressed by the officers against Roma, and the frequency of identity checks targeting them – even when they are not entering a dirt road alongside a train track. A little later, the author describes how, in a project, during an aggressive stop and frisk of a dozen young people guilty of nothing more than being out in the street late at night, one officer, after volubly insulting a young Arab man with a known criminal record, whom he had previously described as “vermin” and a “bastard,” and after slamming him against a wall, addressed him provocatively: “I’m a racist, so what?” Here, the sociologist described this practice as “discrimination on the basis of territory” (living in a

project), therefore, once again, not racial: one might be tempted, though, not to rule out racist intent a priori, particularly when it is invoked by the officer himself.

The relationship between discrimination and racism is most certainly complex, and any interpretation of police practices toward minorities and immigrants needs to take into account many variables, such as socioeconomic status (minorities and immigrants generally belong to the working class, or even the underclass), neighborhood (the poor reputation of some projects strongly influences police practices), and behavior (despite the fact that individuals belonging to these groups are not necessarily more insolent than average). Regardless, this complexity should not lead us to minimize either discrimination or its relation to racism, as do many researchers. In this respect, two principles should be upheld.

Firstly, discrimination occurs when differential treatment of a group proves to be unfavorable and based solely on belonging to that group (without necessarily being racist). Going to specific neighborhoods to stop and frisk mainly black or Arab individuals who have committed no crime and do not appear to be preparing to do so may be enough to objectively constitute racial discrimination, even if there are more individuals from these minorities in the street, and even if officers assert it is for the purpose of efficiently combating crime, an outcome proven to be highly improbable as previously discussed. Moreover, studies have shown that the decision not to pursue investigation following questioning, on the grounds of lack of evidence, is more frequent for minorities and immigrants, indicating that these actions derive from punitive intent rather than any legal justification.²¹ Secondly, it is hard to imagine that an individual can be racist on the one hand, and practice discrimination on the other, without the two being linked, as if cognitive and emotional activity had no influence on social practices. Even supposing discrimination, when it occurs, can be justified by statistical logic, it remains the case that prejudices, and their subjective translation, may still reasonably be considered as having a more or less direct and visible influence on decisions to stop and question an individual. Indeed, studies have shown that officers who express racist ideas discriminate more in their practice than others, with regard to both suspects and victims.²² Agreement on these two principles would no doubt help to bring, at least to a certain extent, the feelings of French people, particularly those of immigrant background, and the positions of law enforcement agents, which are often backed up by sociological analyses, into closer alignment. However, even if such agreement was reached, we would still need to refine our understanding of these phenomena further.

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How, then, are we to analyze racist attitudes and discriminatory practices within the police? It is important here to grasp the diversity and the subtleties of racialization – understood as the process of differentiating between individuals or groups on the basis of a racial description.²³ In their understanding of the social world, officers readily make use of racial categories: these are of course the most visible characteristics, and therefore carry some relevance (it is easier to identify the individual being sought if he is depicted in terms of his physical appearance, rather than as of working-class background or with secondary education), but they are also the most loaded with preconceptions (a set of prejudices is attached to each of the groups thus defined).²⁴ Racialization may accordingly be simply instrumental, but it can have negative connotations as well. Here again, it is not always easy to distinguish between the two.

In the first analysis, officers are making use of a typology that is claimed to be purely descriptive. For instance, the lists of individuals being sought pinned on the walls of the anticrime squad office identified them with the initials “RN” and “NA,” indicating “race noire” (of black race) and “Nord-Africain” (North African). Radio calls in the cars use less specific but similar terms, speaking of “blacks” (using the English word), “renois” (verlan slang for “Noirs”) or “black-osses” (adding a pejorative suffix), and “Arabes”, “beurs” (verlan slang for “Arabes”) or “rebeus” (ironically the verlan slang for “beurs”). In addition to these two categories, the most frequently used, there are the “Manouches” or “Nouches” (which could have for equivalent “Gippos” or “Gips”), and sometimes, derisively, “cousins,” who are occasionally distinguished from the “Romanians,” although it should be noted that these native classifications among the police have no objective ethnic, national or geographical basis. We may consider this typology as racial pragmatics. Stating, in a neutral tone, that a cellphone has just been stolen by “three individuals of black race,” or later, “three youths of African appearance” can be viewed as simply supplying an identifying feature on the same level as indicating that they are “in white tracksuits” or “wearing a black hooded sweatshirt.” There is consequently no automatic reason to view this usage as racist or even discriminatory.

On a deeper level, however, the typology is enhanced by derogatory references. The most marked distinction is drawn between the “blacks” and “rebeus” on the one hand, and the “Gippos” and “Romanians” on the other. They belong to two distinct worlds – that of the projects (even though many are stopped in the city center or

in train stations) and that of the camps (even though some of them live in houses). The attitude toward the former tends to be one of hostility, toward the latter one of contempt. This difference is sometimes expressed via a subtle linguistic nuance: “You’re shit,” officers say to the former; “They live in shit,” they say about the latter. “Blacks” and “rebeus,” most of them French, are the most frequent and least appreciated clients of law enforcement: they are the “bastards,” those who “hang around,” who “loiter suspiciously,” who “wreck everything,” who “vandalize buildings,” who “get in people’s way” in apartment-block foyers; effectively, their very presence is deemed an encumbrance that inconveniences residents in the same way it irritates the police. When I asked one officer, who had just railed against these “little jerkoffs,” whether he made any distinctions, he replied: “The blacks are just like the Arabs, except they’ve no brain.” The “Gippos” and the “Romanians,” on the other hand, seemed less problematic: people saw little of them, they were discreet, set apart from society in their camp grounds or far away in abandoned zones. Because they were not settled, owing both to the permanent expulsions they were subject to and to the fact that they tended to set up camp in a succession of different sites, they were described as parasites: “We’ll never get rid of the Gippos,” one officer grumbled with a sort of resigned yearning for eradication. “Romanians just breed, they’re everywhere, now they’re in the European Union, they’re everywhere,” said another in a distressed, anxious tone.²⁵ Officers draw distinctions between the two. “Gippos” are from France, “Romanians” are from elsewhere. Hygiene conditions are allegedly much worse among the “Romanians” than the “Gippos”: “Our Gippos call the Romanians filthy – what more d’you need to say?” Their ways of earning a living and relations to deviance are also distinguished: “With the Gippos there’s so much crime, the men steal diesel out of trucks, the women pick pockets in the subway”; conversely, “Romanians are poorer and more honest . . . but they learn quickly.” Thus the language shifts from an apparently neutral functional typology to a description that is both generalizing and stigmatizing. Racial pragmatics is often fed by racist ideology.

Racialization of the public comes particularly to the fore in conversations among colleagues in the work context. For example, one night, during a discussion between the day- and the night-shift teams in the office that served as a changing room and mess room, one officer asked whether a prisoner in the nearby prison belonged to the Basque separatist network. Another retorted, using an extremely insulting term for North Africans inherited from the colonial period:

“He’s definitely not a Basque; he’s got a *crouille* name. He’s not one of us!” A while later, one of his colleagues was playing with a rubber toy and joked to me, probably in part by provocation: “It’s my new weapon, it’s for catching blacks and Arabs. You throw it at blacks and Arabs and it instantly paralyzes them.” At another point, a third officer was relating an anecdote about the brother of a boy they had stopped a little earlier: “He was a basketball player. One day the shirts and the nets disappeared. It was him that stole them. It wasn’t hard to work out: he was the only Arab on the team!” Did these remarks imply specific ways of acting? Since the well-known article by British political scientist P.A.J. Waddington on “police canteen sub-culture,”²⁶ it is generally agreed that it would be wrong to extrapolate remarks made by police officers among themselves during breaks or meals to their practices on the job: there is a “discrepancy between canteen racism and actual treatment of black people,” asserts this author, on the basis of a number of empirical studies carried out in Britain. According to him, not only do the anecdotes and jokes form part of the performance that officers stage for one another, they also offer a sort of heroic or ironic counterpoint to an activity that is markedly uneventful. If one adopts this perspective, there is therefore no relation between the theater of the precinct and the scenario of the street.

Are there grounds for such an assertion? One may partially subscribe to this thesis, and conceive of conversations among colleagues as so many moments of more or less playful release during which officers put on a show for their peers and, where appropriate, for the researcher, inasmuch as this kind of provocation forms part of his initiation into the field. Ultimately, the quality of police work is no more determined by the jokes told in the mess room than is the quality of hospital work by the off-color jokes bandied about in the ward duty room among physicians. The assertion that racist comments do not automatically lead to discriminatory practices is thus reasonable. However, in my experience, the former were strongly predictive of the latter.

In the case of the three anticrime squad officers whose remarks I quoted above, there is little doubt – either to me or to their senior officers – about the existence of this link. Evident efforts had been made to avoid taking me out with the first of them, but I sometimes happened to meet him out on patrol when several crews were collaborating on an operation. He readily provoked youngsters and migrants, and had been moved to the day shift following violent behavior: “He was surprised to find that there are things you can’t do in the daytime,” a deputy commissioner told me. The second of

the three, whom I often witnessed at work, revealed himself eager to engage in conflicts with residents of the projects and to display his arrogance toward the Roma he stopped; the number of times he had been summoned before the disciplinary committee for failure to abide by ethical guidelines was impressive. The third member of the team, who was especially aggressive in his identity checks, spent only a brief period with the anticrime squad, and I never found out whether his departure was a punishment for actions his superiors judged unpredictable and dangerous. Conversely, officers whom I never heard passing racist comments in the station tended to behave respectfully and sometimes even tolerantly toward the individuals with whom they dealt. This limited observation suggests that those analyzing law enforcement practices should not overstate the counter-intuitive logic that dissociates racist words from racist actions. Racism within the station canteen is certainly a performance, but it can also have performative efficacy: in other words, it can produce in the field what it articulates in the precinct.

It is, in fact, during the course of interventions that the shift from racist discourse to discriminatory practice occurs. One night in November 2008, the police were called to a Youth Judicial Protection hostel; it was housed in a large detached property that could accommodate approximately 12 teenagers, but was rarely fully occupied. At that time only 5 youngsters, 2 of African ancestry, 2 of North African origin, and 1 Pakistani, were in residence. During the preceding days, spent at “holiday camp” by the sea, relations between the adolescents and their special educators had deteriorated following thefts. With everyone just returned to the hostel, tensions were heightened; one of the youngsters became violent, started vandalizing the building and set off a tear gas canister. It was at this point that the youth workers decided to call the police to calm the troubled boy. A few minutes later, half a dozen vehicles arrived at the location, sirens blaring. Without greeting the adults or attempting to determine what had been happening, around 20 officers rushed up to the second floor where the teenagers had taken refuge and were pretending to be asleep. The police pushed their way violently into the bedrooms, insulting their occupants indiscriminately while shouting “Where’s the *bougnoule?*,” employing the abusive and racist word to designate initially black people and later North Africans in the colonies. They pulled the teenagers roughly out of bed and pushed them onto the landing. A female officer, claiming that a boy had insulted her from the hostel window, rushed up to one of the two black youngsters and slapped him in the face. Her companions burst out laughing. One officer pointed out that this was not the youth in question and she

had struck the wrong one, which set the law enforcement agents' laughter off even more.

On the bedside table of one of the African boys was a box in which he kept small objects and souvenirs that were significant to him. His family name – Koné – was inscribed on the box. One of the officers picked up a marker and wrote the letters “a” and “n” over the “é.” “It’s Conan the Barbarian!” he chuckled. The others found the joke hilarious. The youth workers told me afterwards how shocked they were at the humiliating and unjust way the adolescents were treated. Feeling abused by an intervention they had requested but which was turning out badly, they tried to explain to the officers that only one of the boys was responsible for the disturbance. In vain: three of the teenagers were roughly handcuffed. One of them, who was vigorously resisting questioning, asserting that he had not done anything wrong – as the adults present confirmed – was forced to the ground and struck by four officers. Satisfied, the crews returned to the precinct with him in tow. The events had lasted only a few minutes. The youth workers were in dismay. They had called on law enforcement to restore order. They realized that the situation was now more tense than it had been before the intervention, and that it would take them a long time to reestablish trust with the teenagers, wounded as they were by the injustice and violence to which they had been subjected. As if to make reparation for the damage, one youth worker offered to testify in support of the youngster who had been slapped, should he decide to file a complaint, but he, wise from experience, understood that there was nothing to gain from embarking on such a course. He resolutely rejected her assistance: the case was closed.

Racial stigmatization does of course often take more attenuated, less physical forms, but these are not necessarily any less wounding. One night in March 2007, an anticrime squad car was driving along a country road. The shift had been quiet, with only two calls, neither of which resulted in any action that could be recorded in the night’s log. In front of us, a car signaled and entered onto a dirt track. “Gippoes!” announced one of the officers, mentally assessing both the state of the vehicle and the proximity of a traveler camp. He hesitated a few seconds and added: “Let’s check them.” Flasher on; car stopped. The officers surrounded it. Inside was a family – a man of about 40, his wife and their children. Checks on their identity and the car began, with a call to the control room to ascertain whether the vehicle had been declared stolen. The father was subjected to a hostile interrogation and replied humbly, almost apologetically: “Have you been here long? – We arrived two days ago. – How long

are you staying? – We don't know yet, but probably a while, because my mum is seriously ill, she's got cancer and she's in hospital. – Always the same stories!" The officer did not imagine the explanation could be true, but even if it was it would only reinforce his conviction, which he had expressed earlier, that these people were parasites who burdened the country.

After asking where the man worked, to which he answered that he did not have a job, the officer continued, this time in a tone of anger tinged with sarcasm, while the man was finding it difficult to hide his irritation: "And why aren't you looking for work? – Do you think it's easy for us to find a job? – Do what everyone else does, sign up with the National Employment Agency!²⁷ – And you think the Employment Agency'll find us work? – Well you've certainly got enough dough, anyway – you all drive Porsche Cayennes! – But we haven't got cars like that, look at ours!" This was in fact an old Renault, the pitiful state of which underlined the somewhat impoverished appearance of the family's clothing. But it required more than this to overturn the common belief that Roma were actually wealthy. The often-told story of a family of travelers who settled and built themselves a grand house and owned a luxury SUV had become a sort of myth that circulated in precincts, and had come to represent the Roma as a whole. Even when it was belied by evidence of the deplorable living conditions of most of those stopped on the road or visited in their camps, it fueled suspicion and resentment toward the group and individuals belonging to it. The exchange between officer and driver continued in this vein until the car and its occupants were allowed to leave, since everything was fully in order. As with other checks on Roma that I witnessed, no offense had been identified. But although they were not able to press any charges, the officers who had taken part in this humiliating routine consoled themselves with the thought that, at least, they had given these undesirable nomads "a bad time."

The two scenes I describe here invite a reconsideration of the way this topic is generally approached. In order to know whether discrimination has occurred, it is not enough to tally stops or arrests, as do the majority of North American and West European studies. Measurement of these practices is of course necessary, and helps to establish that some groups are more likely than others to be subject to them, even if, as we have seen, such observations are always contested and denied. In this respect, we need to emphasize the importance of the first French study of the issue, which established that, in Paris train stations, even when the relative proportions of different groups are taken into account, "blacks" and "Arabs" were, respectively, six

and eight times more likely to be stopped than “whites.”²⁸ It was, henceforth, no longer possible to reject the reality of racial profiling, at least in the context of stops and frisks in public places, which was the topic of the survey. But, in addition to undertaking research that demonstrates statistically that minority individuals are more likely to be stopped and frisked, it is also essential to consider the way they are treated during these interactions. Statistics must be accompanied by observation. Discrimination must be understood qualitatively as well as quantitatively. The persons concerned probably suffer at least as much from the humiliation they have undergone, the injustice they have felt, the contempt that has been shown for them, the threat placed over them, as from the actual check or even questioning.²⁹ Thus in the Youth Judicial Protection hostel, the racist insults, the slap administered, the defacing of the keepsake box, and the officers’ mockery of the teenagers represented wounding events, just like, for the Roma stopped and frisked, the comments and insinuations about the mother’s sickness, the situation of unemployment and the illicit wealth. There is no shortage of examples in France. To mention only one case, a complaint was filed with the National Committee on Security Ethics about an operation in which law enforcement agents, looking for a suspect they believed had taken refuge in a Roma camp, emptied caravans of their occupants using tear gas, and herded the members of the community together, forcing them to kneel on the ground.³⁰ It is impossible to imagine inhabitants of a residential neighborhood in which a fugitive was suspected of hiding being subjected to such harassment.

But these two accounts also reveal another aspect of racialization: discrimination always presupposes failure to discern. Appearance or origin is both what separates individuals from others and what brings supposedly similar people together: officers who practice discrimination act as if all blacks or all Arabs shared the same cultural and moral characteristics. This generalization, based as much on the prejudices of their professional milieu as on any previous experiences in the field, then leads to officers being incapable of discernment: racial identification serves as necessary and sufficient evidence in deciding how to behave. In the episode at the Youth Judicial Protection hostel, the teenagers, each one of color, were treated in the same way, without distinction between the one guilty of disorder and the others who had done nothing wrong: one boy was slapped by mistake and two were questioned without justification. In the case of the vehicle check, the family seemed to embody every fault ascribed to Roma: they were allegedly liars, profiteers and hypocrites, regardless of the fact that they were unknown to the police and guilty of no

crime. A youth worker told me how shocked she and her colleagues had been when, during a stop and frisk in the street, the North African youth worker accompanying a group of teenagers had, despite his protests, been subjected like the adolescents to the ordeal of an identity check and body search, hands against the wall and legs spread for pat-down.³¹ To the police, he was just the same as the youngsters under his care.

Although discrimination and racism are more often – and more logically – linked than some analysts argue, it would be a mistake not to take into consideration the caveats as to method and language suggested by these researchers. Not all racist prejudice gives rise to discriminatory practices, and not all discriminatory practices necessarily derive from racist prejudices. The two scenes described below mirror one another in the way they reflect, almost symmetrically, this dual distinction.

One afternoon in July 2005. The crew I accompany is the one I have most often heard making offensive comments toward immigrants and minorities. Passing a restaurant: “Hey, a Gippo! Isn’t that Lagrène?” In the parking lot, the officers have recognized a young man at the wheel of an expensive black sports convertible, with two passengers, one from sub-Saharan Africa, the other of North African origin. We stop, and the sergeant major approaches the youth, whom he will later tell me he has “known since he was a kid.” The exchange is ironic on both sides. The officer pretends astonishment that the youth could afford to buy this luxury car. The latter retorts, laughing, that it is second-hand and he did not pay much for it. The sergeant major points to the two passengers and says, in a tone that is half hostile and half scornful: “So Gippoes are hanging out with Arabs and blacks now? What’s the world coming to? You never used to like each other, Gippoes and Arabs and blacks.” The youngster does not respond to the provocation and seems unruffled by this apparently nostalgic evocation of the good old days of imagined ethnic conflicts. The matter goes no further: no check and no search. As we drive off, the other officer states quite loudly: “I don’t like Arabs and blacks.” He says nothing about “Gippoes,” perhaps because his dominant emotion at that moment is envy: for several minutes, he continues to marvel at the expensive sports car. Here, the manifestly racist tone of the conversation was not accompanied by discriminatory practices, and the sparring was limited to a tense verbal exchange.

One evening in June 2007. The crew I am with is headed by a competent and reserved young officer. He has achieved the best results in terms of arrests of criminals. We see two youngsters on a scooter. They are not wearing helmets. The two boys are of European

origin. The officers tell them to stop, and ask for the scooter's papers. The driver has no documents – no driver's license, no registration certificate, no insurance card. He explains that his father, currently on a business trip to Italy, has taken the papers with him. The story seems improbable, and one might be justified in also wondering whether the scooter is stolen. I imagine that it will be impounded and the teenagers taken to the precinct to check their identity. But the dialogue continues. The two boys explain that they are studying at a vocational training school and live in a neighborhood of detached houses a few miles away. It seems they arouse the sympathy of the officers, who do not display the professional coldness or even threatening aggressive attitude I am used to observing, which would be expected under these circumstances. In the end, to my surprise, they decide to let the boys ride away without even recording the offense, merely advising them to go straight home. Having many times seen young people belonging to minorities in the housing projects given citations simply for not wearing a helmet, I find it difficult to interpret the leniency exhibited here as anything but preferential treatment. The appearance and manners of the youth, socially similar to those of the police, seem to have inspired a trust that would be difficult to fathom in the kind of relations these same officers, whom I have never heard make the slightest racist remark, maintain with young people of non-European origin. As James Wilson writes: "The 'friendly cop' who ignores minor misdeeds is often thought to be benevolent, but because he must choose which and whose misdeeds to ignore, he is in some sense discriminatory."³² This favoritism based on personal affinity is a form of injustice.

Two circumstances, then, presenting almost diametrically opposed attitudes: racism without discrimination in one case; discrimination without racism in the other. In the first situation, discretionary power came up against its limit (there were no legal grounds for any punishment), while the second offered the opportunity to exercise it (but through the offer of a magnanimous solution). Thus the interaction between the police and their public offers a key insight into the issues around racism and discrimination in all their complexity – provided, perhaps, that we do not restrict ourselves to interactional analysis. Whether these issues are manifested in brutal form, as in the episodes at the hostel and the vehicle check, or in more diluted expressions, as in the anecdotes of the sports car and the scooter, the scene being played out extends further than what can be perceived in the relationship between law enforcement and young people. Further support to this argument is provided by an event reported by sociologist Jérémie Gauthier.³³

In a neighborhood near Paris, the police are called following a brawl between two young men. One, of Arab origin, is accused of having insulted the girlfriend of the other, who is white. The latter has hit the former, who shows traces of blows received, with an iron bar. By the time several police cars arrive, calm has been restored; the two young men, who are unknown to the police, give contradictory accounts, and the father of the young woman, who witnessed the altercation, plays down the incident, stating that there have not been any real grounds for fighting. Matters could thus rest there, unless the injured man decides to file a complaint, which he seems disinclined to do. Against all expectation, however, it is the latter whom the anticrime squad decides to take to the station, on the pretext that he will be able to explain the case to the investigative division and with the assurance that he will not be held there. But, several minutes later, the youngster of North African origin finds himself in the precinct, “half-naked and handcuffed to the bench reserved for those under questioning.” After being interrogated by an officer who addresses him in disrespectful terms, he is finally released, “but still noted in the police files as the perpetrator of ‘intentional violence’.” This final detail adds an interesting twist to the event, since it informs us that the young man is thus added to the list of individuals of Arab origin contained in the Reported Offense Processing System and Canonge databases.³⁴ Although a victim, at the police station he becomes electronically recorded as an offender. Moreover, not only are these two databases used by the police, the first to search for information on individuals whose identity they are checking, and the second to allow victims to identify suspects visually, but it is known that the count of family names contained in them feeds polemics on the overrepresentation of teenagers and youths of North African or sub-Saharan origin in the crime statistics. In the district where I conducted my research, I discovered that, of 48,000 individuals recorded in Canonge, 1,147 had the first name Mohamed, and 174 the first name Pierre (to take two common given names used, respectively, by Arab Muslims and French whites). Even if the type of situation described above explains only part of this disproportion, it shows that racial discrimination grounded on prejudices contributes to producing ethnically differentiated facts, which reinforce these prejudices.

How are we to explain the astonishing sequence of events reported by the sociologist? In an attempt to account for it, the author refers to “interactional reorganization,” suggesting that, having assessed the altercation, the officers ultimately decided there was a risk that the young Arab man might seek revenge, and for this reason took

him to the station. Thus a “new framework” was defined, shifting from deciding who was responsible in a quarrel to assessing the likelihood of a behavior. Labeled as a potentially dangerous “client,” the Arab man became “police property” – in other words, “the object of discretionary use of coercive corporeal practices,” such as privation of liberty, handcuffing, undressing: this change of status was enacted through the handling of the dispute passing from uniformed officers, who had arrived first at the scene, to the much more aggressive anti-crime squad. This is a good description of what was played out in the interaction. But is it sufficient to enable us to understand what happened? Rather than restricting ourselves to this single encounter, we can go further by asking the broader question: What are the conditions that render possible such a reversal of situation, which leads to one teenager, injured by an attack with an iron bar that the father of the perpetrator’s girlfriend did not believe was justified, changing status from victim to suspect? How can we comprehend the facts not only that he was taken to the precinct on the false pretext of possibly filing a complaint, and with the misleading promise that he would not be held, but that he was ultimately subjected to a double punishment – both the humiliation of being shackled half-naked to a bench and having his details recorded in a police file that can be consulted at any time?

Here we need to distinguish the justification the actors give for their actions and the interpretation that can be made of them. The justification was the risk of a further altercation. In fact, objectively, there were no grounds for assuming this: the attitude of the young Arab man was calm and respectful. Furthermore, at that point, the police had no information on his past: only later did they discover a few minor brushes with the law, to which, paradoxically, the altercation in which he had just been injured was soon added. Nevertheless, he was immediately suspected of wanting to exact revenge, and this was the rationale for taking him in. It was therefore on the grounds of neither his behavior nor his history that he was subjected to this unfair treatment, but because of what he represented and hence what was assumed about him. Even though they made no “reference to the imagined origin or skin color,” and even though they did not “show any racist intent toward him,” clearly the officers brought discriminatory practices into play, firstly by arresting the victim rather than the perpetrator of the violence, and secondly by subjecting him to degrading treatment that would not be conceivable in relation to the other. The image the officers immediately formed of him branded him an “Arab youth from the projects,” and therefore someone who not only should be regarded as suspicious but also could be dealt

with roughly. For a law enforcement agent who has been inculcated with the idea that venturing into the banlieues means entering dangerous territory akin to a “jungle,” whose residents are “savages,” the youth of North African origin by definition possesses social properties implying that these practices go without saying. When a check on his identity revealed that he did indeed live in a project, and that he had already had dealings with the police, it merely confirmed what they already knew just by looking at him: that he was doomed to be questioned and abused, that he was a subject for the anticrime squad rather than uniformed officers, and that ultimately he could be punished for violence he had endured, not perpetrated. One could argue that a range of factors came into play together here: the fact that he was Arab, that he seemed to be of working-class background, that officers thought he lived in a problematic neighborhood, that they imagined he had a criminal record. But it is precisely this association of prejudices that makes it possible for police action to be almost automatically targeted on particular groups and for measures to be imposed on them that would not be contemplated in relation to others.

Thus the interpretation of racial discrimination in the behavior of the police toward the youth needs to go beyond the question of racist intent and beyond the analysis of the mere interaction. It is the institution of law enforcement, and society more broadly, that produce the racialized categories that officers put into action on the ground, transforming minority youths into suspects, just as political discourse has done in recent decades in linking immigration and crime. Rather than focusing attention on racial discrimination as an individual act, we need to examine institutional racism as a collective practice. According to Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, who first put forward this distinction, individual racism consists of “overt actions by individuals,” while institutional racism is “less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts” – in other words, inscribed in institutions.³⁵ There is in effect a spontaneous tendency to interpret racism and discrimination as facts related to persons. This is what the police themselves do when they assert they are not racist, while at the same time admitting that some among them are. Similarly, the courts, in the rare cases in which they examine suspicions of discrimination, ascribe responsibility for it, if it is confirmed, purely to the accused. Reacting against this individualizing reading, structural explanations have been put forward that integrate the historical dimension of racism, emphasize the social roots of discrimination, and examine the role of the state in the production and reproduction of these phenomena.

The point here is not to contrast the microsociological level of interactions between individuals with the macrosociological level of relations between groups, but rather to consider them together. As Philomena Essed writes, on the one hand, “structures of racism do not exist external to agents – they are made by agents,” and, on the other, “specific practices are by definition racist only when they activate existing structural racial inequality in the system.”³⁶ With regard to the police, then, we need to grasp the two dimensions, restricting ourselves neither to an analysis that, by reducing the problem to a marginal issue, avoids asking questions about the institution, nor to a reading that, by dint of demonstrating generality, releases individuals from their responsibilities. A number of countries have taken this route: France, however, seems reluctant to explore it.

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Aïssa Ihich, age 18, Mantes-la-Jolie, May 1991; Youssef Khaïf, age 23, Mantes-la-Jolie, June 1991; Mohamed Bahri, age 18, Vaulx-en-Velin, October 1992; Makome M'Bowole, age 17, Paris, April 1993; Ibrahim Sy, age 18, Rouen, January 1994; Khafif Amamra, age 20, Bron, April 1994; Fabrice Fernandez, age 24, Lyon, November 1997; Abdelkader Bouziane, age 17, Dammarie-lès-Lys, December 1997; Habib Ould Mohammed, age 17, Toulouse, December 1998; Riad Hamlaoui, age 25, Lille, April 2000; Mohamed Berrichi, age 28, Dammarie-lès-Lys, May 2002; Mourad Belmokhtar, age 17, Nîmes, March 2003; Bouna Traoré, age 15, and Zyed Benna, age 17, Clichy-sous-Bois, October 2005; Lamine Dieng, age 25, Paris, June 2007; Mohsin Sehhouli, age 15, and Laramy Samoura, age 16, Villiers-le-Bel, November 2007; Hakim Ajimi, age 22, Grasse, May 2008; Mohamed Benmouna, age 21, Firminy, July 2009; Malek Saouchi, age 19, Woippy, January 2010; Wissam El-Yamni, age 30, Clermont-Ferrand, January 2012; Ahamadou Maréga, age 17, Ivry-sur-Seine, March 2012; Amine Bentounsi, age 29, Meaux, April 2012; Youssef Mahdi, age 24, Melun, June 2012.

The litany of names of young men of Arab or sub-Saharan origin who have died during interactions with the police punctuates the list of urban riots that have broken out in French projects in the last 20 years, and if a multiplication of victims is observed in 2012 it is largely because of the more systematic recording by non-governmental organizations, a fact which underlines the general under-reporting until recently.³⁷ The circumstances of these deaths vary, from a shot fired at a vehicle attempting to escape a road check to the point-blank shooting of a man handcuffed in a precinct, to a collision between a police car and a motorcycle during a chase. The profile of the victims

ranges from petty criminal through campaigning activist, to the teenager who found himself in the wrong place by chance. Inquiries often reach the conclusion of legitimate self-defense or unfortunate accident. Officers are rarely charged, and sanctions are exceptional. These dramatic events have given rise to various social mobilizations, in addition to the riots themselves, including artistic expressions.³⁸ Local and national governments, however, have held back from engaging in any investigation or analysis of what might have led to such tragedies, generally restricting themselves to accusing the victims and adding the indignity of disgrace to their families' pain.

This situation is in marked contrast to what has happened in other countries facing similar problems. Britain in particular has been examining relations between the police and minorities for 30 years. Two public inquiries played an essential role in the rise in collective awareness of these difficulties, in reflecting on their causes, and in seeking solutions. The 1981 *Scarman Report* was commissioned by the British government following the riots that broke out in Brixton in response to an intensive and brutal stop-and-search operation in this London neighborhood. The 1999 *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report* was commissioned by the Home Secretary six years after the death of the teenage victim of a racist crime that the police had manifestly failed to investigate.³⁹ These cases represent two different circumstances – violence and a murder – that involve law enforcement in different ways, through their active aggression in the first case, and their culpable passivity in the second. But they also represent two moments of truth for British society and the British police.

A central point in these reports was the question of institutional racism, and their conclusions on this issue are diametrically opposed. While it recognized the excessive character of the interventions by the police among the black population and emphasized the deep gap between law enforcement and local communities, the *Scarman Report* exonerated the police from the suspicion of systematic discrimination: “‘Institutional racism’ does not exist in Britain: but racial disadvantage, and its nasty associate, racial discrimination, have not yet been eliminated.”⁴⁰ In the months that followed the publication of this document, there was nevertheless debate, and reforms were introduced to bring police and citizens closer together: a new code of conduct for the police was drawn up, and an independent complaints authority was created. Two decades later, the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report* tackled the collective responsibility of London law enforcement much more directly: “Institutional racism exists in both the Metropolitan Police Service [MPS] and in other Police Services and other institutions countrywide.” The report stressed, however,

that it was not suggesting either “that in its policies the MPS is racist” or that “all police officers are racist.”⁴¹ Its seventy-or-so recommendations included that racist acts should automatically lead to disciplinary proceedings, that the courts should strictly apply the law on discrimination, that data on stop and frisk statistics should be published, and that recruitment for the police should reflect the diversity of the population. In conclusion, the report asserted “that the debate about policing and racism has been transformed by this inquiry and that the debate thus ignited must be carried forward constructively and with imagination into action.” Notwithstanding deaths and riots, French society does not seem inclined to open up a similar reflection around racism and discrimination.

Even the High Authority for Combating Discrimination and Promoting Equality (HALDE, Haute autorité de lutte contre les discriminations et pour l'égalité), in principle the body best placed to take on these questions, has never tackled them.⁴² During a debate at the École Normale Supérieure in which I took part alongside Louis Schweitzer, the president of the High Authority, I asked him why no action had ever been taken on police practice, and whether there were any plans to envisage such an initiative in the future. He replied that it was a complicated issue, that he did not see it as a priority, and that it was therefore not on the agenda. Yet this was at a time when polls showed that French people saw relations with the police as the main source of racial discrimination. The timidity of the entity officially charged with combating discrimination signified that the police were likely to be safe from any investigation or action on this issue for a long time to come.

The only public institution that has concerned itself with the problem is the National Committee on Security Ethics. In its 2005 report, for the first time it devoted a chapter to “The role of discrimination in failures to meet ethical standards.” It made reference to 68 cases in which such failures had been identified: half involved discrimination in which the authors of the report spoke of a “feeling of impunity” and the “law of silence.” The recommendations related to the training and supervision of police officers, respecting the law on identity checks, the proportionate use of force during questioning, and the need for disciplinary sanctions in cases of “discriminatory remarks or actions.” However, both the analysis and the recommendations were limited in their impact by the Committee’s terms of reference, the professional profile of its chair and, more broadly, the fact that, in the French context, issues of discrimination are considered to be a matter for legal casuistics. Addressing the issue on a case-by-case basis does not favor the kind of broader perspective that

has been developed by commissions of inquiry in English-speaking countries, and remains insufficient for understanding how individual racism finds fertile ground in institutional racism. And this is precisely what needs to be understood.

In the anticrime squad with which I conducted my research, racist comments went hand-in-hand with discriminatory practices. Both were known to all and appeared to pose no particular problem within the police. It might seem surprising, but the production and reproduction of this dominant habitus – which few escaped – are easy to understand. The head of the unit was notorious for his ideological positions with regard to immigration and minorities. With nearly 20 years of service, it was he who had the upper hand in recruitment. Just as he opposed female recruits – believing them unsuited to a manly profession – he rejected any application from an officer belonging to a minority who might have wanted to join his group. He explained to me that this was because he doubted their loyalty. “You never know if, when it comes to the wire, they’ll be with us or their brothers,” he said. Thus the anticrime squad in this district had consisted entirely of white men since it was set up. But in addition to this unofficial selection by gender and origin, entry into this special unit required ideological affinities. This worked both ways: on the one hand, the officers who applied did so with full knowledge of the views held within the group, and some told me, conversely, that they would not apply precisely for that reason. On the other, the head of the squad could gauge applicants’ sensitivity either directly via informal discussion, or indirectly through union activity. All conditions were therefore in place for a microcosm where racism and discrimination flourished.

Nevertheless, to ensure that these conditions remained unquestioned, it was necessary that senior officers not intervene and that the disciplinary system be tolerant. This is, in effect, what I observed. While the commissioners showed no tendency toward racism or xenophobia, they seemed to have little influence over discriminatory practices that they considered of marginal importance. At the same time, although some members of the anticrime squad had been summoned before the disciplinary committee several times over the months, following violence toward individuals of immigrant or minority origin, sanctions assumed the form of reprimands rather than transfer to another unit. No one seemed to want to disturb this little fiefdom of deviant practices. As senior officials had told me, this set of circumstances was common in the world of anticrime squads. Ultimately, had they not been created allegedly to bring order to the projects where government policy led to high concentrations of immi-

grant and minority populations? Racism and discrimination were therefore the price to be paid.

There were some exceptions to this seemingly unanswerable logic, as a crew leader who had just joined the anticrime squad told me one night. It was World Music Day, and the city was calm. Our conversation in the car lasted around three hours as we were cruising through the neighborhoods, going from one local concert to the next. This man was a little older than his colleagues, approximately 40 years old, and had come late to the profession, after working as a plumbing and heating technician. He had spent several years in the anticrime squad in a town even more problematic than the one where he was now. I had noted that, in the precinct, he never made racist comments, and that in the street, he behaved respectfully toward the public. Two things he said seemed to me remarkable. Firstly, he stated how alien racism was to him: “You know, all this business of whites, blacks . . . and mixed-race, as they call them – to me it makes no difference. Let’s be reasonable. I was raised in a project in the Paris suburbs, my buddies were blacks and Arabs. I played football and there were blacks and Arabs on my team. So when they come out with their racist stuff, I don’t see things that way.” He continued to say that the unit he had belonged to before had both female and Arab members: “I remember Bachir. We often went out together with the anticrime squad. Between us, we weren’t an Arab with a white guy. He was just a good officer. We trusted one another absolutely. One day when we came face to face with about 30 youngsters threatening us, we knew we had to rely on each other.” Essentially, he was highlighting an issue that every commission of inquiry tasked with combating discrimination in law enforcement, in Western Europe and North America, consistently points out: the importance of recruiting officers who more closely resemble the populations with which they are dealing.⁴³ This crew leader, who had spent his childhood in a project, felt no more in the “jungle” or among “savages” than did his Arab colleague when he patrolled in disadvantaged neighborhoods. The anticrime squad he first served in had accepted both social and ethnic diversity. And this was precisely what was missing in his new environment.

Politics

Can the ethical demands made on politics really be quite indifferent to the fact that politics operates with a highly specific means, namely, power, behind which violence lies concealed?

Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 1919

Because police practices have a considerable effect on the lives of many citizens, one might suppose that politics (taken broadly as the conflict over the goals and personnel of government) would determine the prevailing police style.

James Q. Wilson, *Varieties of Police Behavior*, 1968

When, after a break of several months, I returned to my research, the 2007 presidential election campaign was under way. On the first day, having arrived at the police station when the anticrime squad teams had already gone out on patrol, I settled down in their meeting room to await their return. Pushing lightly on the door, which was generally left open, I saw a large poster of Jean-Marie Le Pen, at the time the leader of the far-right National Front, completely covering its other side. I was not entirely surprised by this affinity between police officers and this political leader, as I had often heard them make remarks that the latter would not have disavowed, and several times, as they talked in low voices amongst themselves, they had even referred to him by his first name, with evident approval: "Did you hear what Jean-Marie said yesterday?" Some of them, indeed, were quite at ease revealing their sympathies and their opinions on ideologically sensitive subjects in front of me. In the car, during quiet periods, the conversation would sometimes turn to politics, and particularly to

their favorite subject: immigration. “The problem in France is the aliens, the blacks and the Arabs,” they told me. When I pointed out that the blacks and Arabs in question were often French citizens born in France, they would reply: “We’ve let too many immigrants in, with their huge families. Now they live on benefits paid with our money. The parents don’t work, and aren’t respected any longer. The kids do whatever they like and get up to no good.” Thus the link was established between yesterday’s immigration and today’s projects. One of them pointed the finger at the guilty parties: “It’s all the fault of the left, and Mitterrand,” referring to the Socialist president in power from 1981 to 1995. I asked if he thought the current right-wing government, under Nicolas Sarkozy, was more effective. “I’ll be honest with you,” he confided: “I’m not left- or right-wing, I’m on the extreme.” His two colleagues smiled at this revelation, which told them nothing they did not already know. I learned later that they shared his convictions. The fact that some anticrime squad officers voted for the National Front was therefore not new to me.

Nevertheless, I found the presence of the poster somewhat disconcerting, since it suggested two things: first, that this political position was sufficiently widely held, or at least imposed, within the group for no one to object and second, that political propaganda could be publicly displayed in police offices, indicating a violation of the supposed neutrality of the institution, but above all a lack of the restraint that one might have imagined would exist, if only from fear of internal sanction. Minutes after I had arrived, the teams returned from their patrol. For obvious reasons, I made no mention of my discovery, and we went out as usual. When I returned two days later, the poster had been removed. Also gone was one of the photos of Vic Mackey, the violent and corrupt detective from the television series *The Shield*: the first night I had noticed that, on this photo, the officers’ hero had the three letters “KKK” traced in pen on his forehead. The officers obviously felt that the poster and the photo offered their occasional visitor too many compromising signs.

Yet, even in the absence of these signals, no heightened sensitivity was required to divine the political sympathies of the anticrime squad as soon as one entered their office. The back wall was covered with a French national flag, which could, of course, have been considered a simple mark of patriotism, but two series of stickers blatantly applied to their metal lockers removed any possible doubt. The first, in yellow, bore the slogan “Fight racism . . . Stop immigration!” with a parodic reproduction of a road sign showing a red circle with a diagonal line crossing over a caricature of an Arab immigrant remotely reminiscent of Nazi imagery concerning the Jews: the silhouette of a

hook-nosed man wearing a djellaba and slippers with a fez, and carrying a bundle on a stick. The second set of stickers showed a French tricolor flag emblazoned with the word “Patriot” in Gothic letters, above a Frankish helmet below which the numbers 7, 3 and 2 could be read. While the first sticker was not difficult to interpret, the symbolism of the second initially puzzled me, until I understood that the numbers referred to the date of the Battle of Poitiers, during which, according to French history books, “Charles Martel stopped the Arabs,” or, in other words, supposedly interrupted the expansion of Islam toward the North. This date has become the rallying number for many far-right groups that share a radical and aggressive Islamophobia, including the 732 League, whose insignia is almost identical: a blue, white and red rosette crossed by this number in Gothic script.¹ However, as indicated earlier, the anticrime squad officers seemed more concerned with immigration than religion, with demography than identity: the reference to this historic date reflected their hostility toward Arabs rather than Muslims. While the poster and the photo had been removed from the office when I returned, the stickers remained. To be more precise, whereas initially only the first sticker (with its suggestive silhouette) had been present, the second (with the Gothic lettering) appeared during the second year of my research – as if, in a context in which xenophobia and Islamophobia were officially encouraged by the government, the police were becoming bolder.

In the spring of 2007, indeed, just before the general elections, political symbols began to be more ostentatiously displayed within the anticrime squad. Some officers started to sport a black T-shirt with the blue, white and red French flag on the front and, on the back, the word “Patriot,” the Frankish helmet and the date 732. In warm weather, they would remove their jackets and proudly exhibit this sign of allegiance to an extremist group when they descended on the projects. During the same period, teenagers in the banlieues began to wear T-shirts produced by local brands, such as “BAK 93.” The interpretation of these as “Brigade anti-Kärcher,” “Brigade anti-koke” or particularly “Brigade anti-keufs” caused police unions to file a suit for insult. The Bobigny public prosecutor’s office brought a case against the owner of this small business, and his stocks were seized several times.² The police seemed more tolerant toward the xenophobic symbols displayed among their ranks than the provocative messages exhibited by the youth. When I asked them about the significance of the inscriptions on the police T-shirts, the officers replied, clearly unconcerned as to whether I believed them or not, that it was a rock band (just to make sure, I checked that this was not the case). I wondered what the residents of these projects, many

of them Arabs and Muslims, might think when they saw law enforcement agents walking around in their conspicuously aggressive clothing. But which of them would have complained to the state about the lack of neutrality – and, more specifically, to whom could they have done so?

In a conversation I had with one of the deputy commissioners during this same period, he evoked the political position of his officers: “Actually most of them tend toward the left. But, it is true that in our district almost all the right-wing and far-right officers are in the anticrime squad.” After a moment of reflection, he added: “I don’t know why.” It is a commonly held belief that police officers “tend toward the left,” mainly on the basis of their voting in union elections. On closer examination, though, the matter is far from self-evident. In the 2006 election, which had a turnout of 80 percent, 41 percent of patrol officers and crew leaders voted for the National Federation of Autonomous Unions (UNSA-Police, Union nationale des syndicats autonomes-police), which is said to have Socialist affinities; 15 percent for the recently constituted General Police Union (SGP, Syndicat général de police) associated with the Workers’ Force union (Force ouvrière), whose political line was difficult to determine; 36 percent for Alliance, considered to lean strongly to the right; and the remaining 6 percent for two unions linked to the far right. Among the commissioners, 58 percent voted for the National Police Commissioners Union (SCHFPN, Syndicat des commissaires et des hauts fonctionnaires de la police Nationale), which was close to Nicolas Sarkozy, then minister of the interior of the right-wing government; this figure was admittedly lower than in previous elections but confirmed that the senior members of the police were solidly conservative. As for middle-ranked officers, 53 percent voted for the National Union of Commanding Officers (SNOP, Syndicat national des officiers de police), seen as more toward the left.³ However, it should be added that the relative positions of the unions and the officers’ voting patterns reveal not so much partisan sensibilities (which both deny, in any case) as professional concerns and competition between organizations (particularly over the human and material resources at the disposition of law enforcement). During this period, the “politics of numbers” imposed by the Ministry of the Interior from 2002 onwards had focused discontent among unions whose opposition to the government was nevertheless far from a sign of a partisan commitment: it expressed the rejection of one policy, but not necessarily condemnation of the party that promoted that policy. In other words, there is no certainty that an officer voting for UNSA-Police was necessarily left-wing; conversely, the fact that the SGP opposed the Ministry of

the Interior's stance did not mean it could be seen as close to the Socialist party.

To return to the predilection of right-wing and far-right officers for the anticrime squad, it related to two distinct but convergent logics. On the one hand, the values generally borne by these special units highlight virility, force and order, if necessary by stretching the law – a combination of elements more readily found in right-wing parties. On the other, in this particular case, the mode of recruitment to this unit, predicated on decisions made by a sergeant major who did not hide his xenophobic and racist views, resulted in cooptation on the basis of these same political affinities, reinforced by a self-selection operated by those officers who did not apply because they thought they had no chance or felt no desire to transfer to this group, given their ideas or temperament. There was therefore nothing surprising in the concentration of far-right officers in this anticrime squad. Moreover, it would be inaccurate to see the situation described here as an exception within the police. This is what the general inspector at the National Directorate for Public Security and the national representative of one of the police unions, both of them close to the conservative government of the time, had on the contrary suggested, describing the local configurations they had encountered in the places they had worked as a common reality. They were referring to units in which “rather unhealthy personal friendships, sometimes political” risked proving “dangerous to the senior ranks.” And indeed, the tolerance exhibited toward this phenomenon in the precinct where I worked might seem surprising, given the potential consequences had it become known.⁴ Admittedly, one of the deputy commissioners told me it was he who had requested that the poster of Le Pen be taken down, but he also explained, in relation to the T-shirts, that it was difficult for him to intervene: “If I issue penalties or threaten punishment, they’ll stop wearing them, but they won’t speak to me any more. And I need their information on what’s happening on the ground. I have to maintain their trust.” Although he disapproved of this practice, he lived with it. When I completed my study, the T-shirt was still frequently worn among the anticrime squad.

How are we to understand such a breach of the so-called “Republican covenant” at the heart of the very institution that is supposed to uphold it? Attention has been drawn recently to the militarization of law enforcement in a number of countries, in light of the development of new strategies and technologies, especially in contexts of urban disorders. For the anticrime squads, though, there is another factor at work, one that might be termed paramilitarization. Along-

side the uniformed police, whose equipment and methods are increasingly resembling those of the regular army, especially in operations concerned with maintaining public order, the special units operating in disadvantaged neighborhoods, made up of plain-clothes officers who enjoy a great deal of autonomy in relation to the institution and are authorized to use force and to bend the law to a much greater extent than their colleagues, resemble the paramilitary groups deployed in various places on the planet. Sociologists who have examined the paramilitarization of the police, most notably in Britain,⁵ generally focus their analyses on the difficulties and issues at stake in terms of efficacy of action and hence of restoration of order, on the one hand, and the use of violence and thus the dangers of this process, on the other.

There is, however, another relatively seldom discussed aspect of this phenomenon: political affiliation. Unlike the army, and even the police, who are supposed to work completely impartially for public security, paramilitary movements are frequently characterized by more or less explicit political links with one extreme or the other of the political spectrum. The adjective “paramilitary” is applied to very different structures in widely diverse contexts, though, and the special units in France and Britain that are denoted as paramilitary cannot be compared to the groups described by this term in Ireland a few decades ago or in Colombia today. Yet the idea of paramilitarization gives a sense of this tendency to supplement the regular police, or replace them with squads whose mission, clothing, arms, style of intervention and relationship to the hierarchy place them at the fringes of the official structure. This logic readily leads to recruitment along specific lines that favor radical politicization. The anticrime squad I studied offers a noteworthy illustration. Released from most of the usual constraints and duties of regular law enforcement, it did not hold back from open expression of its far-right leanings.

These dangerous liaisons were certainly not found in all members of the unit. Although certain officers barely disguised their ideas, however extreme in their fantasy of eradication of certain populations, some revealed nothing of their political views, at least in front of me, while others showed more moderate preferences. For example, one of the crew leaders related to me how appreciative he was of the then minister of justice, Rachida Dati. He had been involved in the security provision for her visit to a town in the conurbation for an election meeting. He supported her proposals for harsher punishment of criminals and, more generally, the repressive policies she intended to implement, but he also admired her personal career as a woman of North African origin who had overcome both gender and ethnic

discrimination, moving from the projects, where she was raised, to the government, in which she was often described as a token minority. His far-right colleagues would no doubt have agreed with him on the first point (the approval of her severity), but probably not on the second (the admiration for her social ascent).

Opinions within the anticrime squad were therefore relatively varied, but they did not seem to go beyond a more moderate right. Contrary to the commissioner's statement, I never heard an officer say anything that could suggest left-wing thinking. But this observation was undoubtedly predictable. First, studies conducted in countries where the point can be addressed openly in questionnaires indicate that the vast majority of the police define themselves as conservative, and state that they vote for a conservative party in the general election.⁶ Second, the choice to join intervention units with a reputation for hardness clearly suggests a much closer relationship to order and coercion than to law and justice.⁷ Thus the fact that the proportion of supporters of the far right found in anticrime squads is not only higher than among the general population, but also above that in the rest of the police force, was to be expected. My description should logically correspond to the rule rather than the exception. Perhaps it is only in France that people can still think that police officers "vote left," as journalists maintain at each union election, and that a commissioner can express surprise that his anticrime squad is composed of officers with "right and far-right" sympathies. Essentially, the only remarkable fact here is that in the district where I conducted my research, outward signs of partisan affinities that one might have supposed compromising could be so openly displayed.

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As with any other public institution, the police are in theory accountable to the society for which they are supposed to ensure order and security. The question is: to whom are they accountable in practice? Traditionally, two modalities of government are distinguished in this regard. In the first, the police have a sense of commitment to the authorities, in the form of either the state or local government: the phrase "the prince's police" is sometimes used in France. In the second, the police consider themselves to be at the service of the community, whether that be the nation or the residents of a town: this is known as a "people's police."⁸ Actually, in order to apprehend the effective allegiances of the police, one needs to refine this picture, considering the degree of centralization of authority: when the authority is local, the community holds the greater weight, and in the United States, for instance, the police are accountable to the mayor, who is

in turn accountable to the local population, or at least to his constituency. But if one maintains, to keep it simple, the initial distinction between state and community, British law enforcement would appear to be the prime example of the people's police, while the French system would be seen as the paradigm of the prince's police. In both cases, these orientations are definitely not recent inventions, but the result of long-established traditions dating back at least to the mid nineteenth century.

This is not, of course, to suggest that contrasted national histories and their contemporary inheritance represent the key to interpreting law enforcement practice as a whole. Thus, it is important to note that in France, alongside the secret police and the investigative police, which were administered at national level, security was also maintained in the Third Republic by municipal forces, while Britain has long combined community policing with law enforcement controlled by the state, whose modes of intervention have become markedly harsher over the last 30 years. Nevertheless, the fact remains that a commissioner or even a beat officer is likely to act differently depending on whether he is responsible to a distant, abstract entity such as the government, or to a concrete, proximate collectivity such as the residents of a town or village. On the one hand, in the first case, the duty of the police is to abide by the instructions of the minister of the interior, which often follow partisan logic (for example, increasing the number of arrests of illegal migrants to meet the expectations of the most conservative constituency), while, in the second case, the police tend to orient their priorities toward more locally perceptible objectives (the local population feels more directly concerned by crime, particularly by property crimes, which officers tend to be less interested in because of their low clearance rate). On the other hand, in terms of regulation, the police feel less under the control of a distant power (especially when they believe it to be on their side) than of a proximate authority (which is the recipient of residents' complaints about discrimination or violence). In fact, most studies agree that a state police is more answerable to political demands, while a community police responds better to social expectations, but that the latter is at risk of local vote-catching, while the former suffers more from party politics. How do these models manifest themselves on the ground?

Power always needs the support of the police in order to govern. There are two ways of explaining this general formula. Firstly, the government needs public force to assert its authority: hence the concern it always exhibits for the professions charged with applying it. Secondly, the way public force is used defines the style of a regime:

hence the importance for citizens to pay attention to police practices. These two elements, then, are constants, but the form they take varies in different times or contexts. With the rising prominence of the issue of security in contemporary societies, and its instrumentalization by political parties, what the police do has become a major concern for government in many countries. In France, both right and left parties have taken the measure of this question. Whichever is in power has to prove its efficacy against crime, whereas its opposition has to establish the opposite. Although their analyses differ, right and left are thus involved in escalating the discourse on security, providing alarmist statistics, which as we have seen bear little relation to the objective situation, but echo the public's subjective apprehension of it.

This spiral has essentially developed over the last 20 years, most notably since Charles Pasqua returned to the post of minister of the interior in 1993, for it was he who put the issues of crime and immigration on the agenda, in response to the rapid rise of the far right. After a period of Socialist government led by Lionel Jospin which contributed to making security a major issue that transcended party divisions, the trend gained momentum in 2002, when Nicolas Sarkozy became minister of the interior, in a global context in which the 9/11 attacks had sparked renewed concerns about security and in which, in France, Jacques Chirac had just been re-elected president after a campaign centered on the theme of insecurity.⁹ This shift thereby saw the police becoming key to the legitimization of government policy. The declared presidential ambitions of the new minister of the interior and his consequent importance in the government added further to the growing centrality of law enforcement in the conquest of the state apparatus.

An opportunity to gauge the extent of this development was offered by the riots of the fall of 2005. Nicolas Sarkozy's demonstration of unflinching support for the police after the accident that cost the lives of the two adolescents in Clichy-sous-Bois, followed by the release of tear gas in a mosque by law enforcement agents; the way he lumped together rioters, criminals and immigrants, even though any such link was belied by the facts; his grandstanding presence at the location alongside the officers; his criticism of judges suspected of being over-lenient; and finally the declaration of a state of emergency that allowed the police virtually unlimited powers of intervention in the banlieues – all were met with approval not only by officers, but also by a large majority of French people, as evidenced by the exceptionally high ratings for personal popularity and support for his policies in the polls conducted during and after the disturbances. This

political positioning of the minister of the interior was set within a radical electoral strategy based on sacrificing minorities in order to seduce the majority. In the presidential election won by Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007, the proportion of those voting for him was 25 percent lower in the “sensitive urban zones” than in the surrounding conurbations, and 33 percent lower than in the rest of the country.¹⁰ Even if his success cannot be ascribed solely to this dimension of his campaign, it is generally acknowledged that his approach to the security issue, most notably during the 2005 riots, was a decisive factor.

Viewed from this perspective, law enforcement has become a major political resource for government. But are matters perceived in the same way on the ground? In general, two contrasting readings of the relationship between the police and politics are possible. Some, who adopt a more or less Marxist approach, see a relationship of instrumentality: government, and through it the dominant classes, use the police to serve their own ends, thus ensuring their own reproduction. Others, making more or less explicit reference to Weberian theory, see a form of insularity: in practice, the police free themselves from government control and, like any bureaucracy, function with a considerable degree of autonomy. In other words, the police are regarded either as the “armed wing of the state” or as a “state within the state.”¹¹ In arbitrating between these two analyses, it is important to take into account the specific context (instrumentality is more probable under powerful ministers, like Joseph Fouché with Napoleon, or under strong regimes, such as the Vichy government), but also the specific missions (insularity is greater in the domain of public security, to apprehend crime perpetrators, than in that of public order, to control or repress a riot). The choice I made to describe the officer’s everyday routine, particularly on patrol, where all studies indicate that the beat officer has greatest discretionary power, clearly highlights the autonomy of local law enforcement in relation to national policy, most notably in the case of the anticrime squads; I have pointed out the considerable independence they enjoyed even within the precinct. Yet, in spite of this insularization – of which the episodes I have described offer abundant evidence – especially when they occur at night in the absence of senior officers, one should not underestimate the instrumentalization the police are subject to, and more generally the way politics interacts with their activity.

For commissioners – as the one in charge of the district told me – each appointment of a new minister of the interior is marked by the deployment of “new guidelines” that “reflect the moods of the minister” onto prefects, directors of security and chiefs of police.

When I conducted my research, two new measures were related, unsurprisingly, in terms of statistics, to “clearance rates, and also incidence of violence,” and, in terms of stop and frisk operations, to “breaches of immigration law, on which the prefect is requesting a special effort,” the commissioner stated, adding: “These past few years, we’ve been asked to focus more on train stations, because there’s a double benefit – arresting criminals and aliens.” The shifts in national policy were obviously not marked by the wholesale substitution of one action for another, but rather by what one of his colleagues described to me as “layers of priorities,” which he viewed as a sedimentation of “fashionable trends” that successive ministers imposed on them to mark their passage through the Ministry of the Interior: computerization of services, under Pierre Joxe; community policing, under Jean-Pierre Chevènement; results culture, under Nicolas Sarkozy. This “veering” in one direction and then the other was certainly experienced as constraints on practice, especially because government officials did not always have the means to follow up the new guidelines, but none of the commissioners I spoke to about these subjects revealed any indication of his programmatic or partisan preferences. In their attitude toward the incumbent minister of the interior at the time of my research, they were certainly aware of the role he was making them play by asking them to arrest undocumented immigrants and focus on violence, thus effectively legitimizing both the practice of “racial profiling” in stops and frisks, and the complaints for “insulting and resisting” law enforcement, but they adopted a sort of formal neutrality, confining themselves to “covering” their officers when they were accused by residents of discrimination in the first case, and brutality in the second.

Rank-and-file officers were not so rigorous in maintaining impartiality. Their tone was freer than that of their superiors, especially when I spent long periods of time with them, and their often radical political engagement led them to reveal their opinion more readily, as mentioned earlier. Nicolas Sarkozy’s two periods as minister of the interior had delighted many. Officers felt he was closer to them, more aligned with their cause, and more familiar with their problems than his predecessors. Above all, with his arrival at the Ministry they detected a change of climate in relation to law enforcement, an end to the suspicion that hung over them, the prospect of what they imagined to be virtually unconditional support. While they had been suspicious of Pierre Joxe, who had issued their first code of ethics two decades earlier, they trusted his successor, who promised to defend them in practically all circumstances. It is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to determine to what extent a change of government

majority and rhetoric influences police practices. Do officers feel freer to inflict ill-treatment when they see a shift from the language of professional ethics to the discourse of the war on crime? This question was publicly raised in April 1993, following the successive and gratuitous killing of three teenagers by the police in Chambéry, Paris and Wattrelos, with no excuse of self-defense, during the week following Charles Pasqua's return to the Ministry of the Interior. At the time it was difficult to go beyond simple conjecture. When I conducted my research, it was equally difficult to grasp the immediate consequences of Nicolas Sarkozy's appointment and stance. The most that can be acknowledged is that the anticrime squad officers showed an unprecedented degree of confidence in the protection they believed they would henceforth enjoy.

While in this context the subjective approach has its limits, it is possible to offer an objective analysis of the effects of the new policy. For 20 years, successive governments have responded to anxieties about social changes and increasing inequalities by translating them into the language of insecurity. Over and above their differences, these policies have converged toward a form of policing that corresponds to what Denis Salas calls "penal populism."¹² The powers of officers have been extended, particularly as regards stops and frisks, leading to a virtual absence of control. Harsher penalties for offenses against persons holding public authority have been introduced, the extensive use of this category being encouraged. Acts that were hitherto tolerated, such as hanging out in the lobbies of apartment buildings, have become offenses which were newly introduced in the law, and ones like marijuana use (which was generally ignored in the past) have been more systematically prosecuted. Judges have seen legislation on trifling misdemeanors toughened, for instance the exchange of blows on a school playground, and their leeway in rendering decisions reduced, with the introduction of minimum sentences. The distinction between minors and adults, in relation to justice, has been gradually whittled away, allowing for imprisonment at a younger age. Since 2002 this process has gained impetus, with a proliferation of laws (approximately 40 for the Penal Procedure Code and 30 for the Penal Code, in only five years), including the introduction of new legislation on security almost every year.¹³ Over the same period, substantial resources were allocated to the police, who were given quantitative objectives. The increase in numbers of anticrime squads throughout the country thus gives an indication not only of the selected priorities but also of the preferred methods. Hence this set of measures outlines an almost exhaustive and systematic response to the complaints and demands of the police. Government is therefore

giving them the means implied in its policy, expecting them in return to implement it. The effects can be measured in terms of the numbers arrested, remanded in custody and sentenced to imprisonment: the population incarcerated has seen a rise unprecedented in the history of France. Much more than subjective shifts that are difficult to identify, these are objective developments that testify to the convergence of demand from government and expectations by the police.

It is now possible to answer the initial query about whether the relations between the police and politics are more on the side of instrumentality or insularity. The government certainly instrumentalizes the police, their statistics and their actions: far more than was the case a decade ago, law enforcement agents are used by government to legitimize its decisions, even at the cost of falsifying the figures they produce and diverting them from their mission. But correspondingly, the police are becoming more insular, by taking responsibility for what is imposed on them: in short, officers choose to do what they are ordered to do not by fortuitous chance, but precisely because of the predictable convergence between their expectations and government objectives. This circularity should be no surprise in relation to the anticrime squads: they were precisely set up and developed for the purpose of carrying out a policy; by justifying their own existence, they confirm the priorities of the government. The more they operate in an insular fashion (through the use of their discretionary powers), the more they reinforce the logic of instrumentality (placing themselves at the service of power). However, in view of the increasingly vehement union reactions to the politics of numbers, and the daily protests of officers even in the anticrime squads, there are grounds for asking whether, like Kafka's machine in *The Penal Colony*, the cycle of policiarization of politics has begun to get jammed.

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An important, but unnoticed, shift occurred in the mid-2000s: the police became victims. This professional body that, by definition, presented itself as the epitome of force, suddenly began to display its weakness. The reversal can be dated with relative precision. In 2005, when the riots that had erupted in Clichy-sous-Bois multiplied throughout France for several weeks, the government highlighted the burning of private property, particularly vehicles and businesses, and public property, especially schools and libraries. Although some officers were injured, the figures generally suggesting a few hundred, the Ministry of the Interior made very little mention of them, as senior public security officials thought at the time that publishing such sta-

tistics risked unintentionally revealing the vulnerability of the police, inciting young people to more aggressiveness. In 2007, confrontations that also arose following the death of two teenagers, but that this time were limited to two nights and restricted to the area of Villiers-le-Bel, prompted a very different reaction from that opted for two years previously. On the one hand, the police launched a mass operation, sending a contingent of 1,000 officers to the neighborhood concerned, which allowed them to quickly take control at the start of the riot. On the other, violence toward officers was systematically publicized, with the number of injured communicated to the press rising from around 40, according to the public prosecutor, to 130, according to the Ministry of the Interior, over the space of a few hours, which made these events a turning point in the history of urban disorder.¹⁴ Thus two saturation processes were in operation in the new official strategy. The human saturation by the mass influx of officers was widely discussed by observers, both journalists and sociologists – and with good reason, since it was articulated as such by the authorities. But the media saturation through communication of the violence toward the police has received little attention – precisely because it emerged not as an operation designed to construct facts, but rather as a simple reflection of reality.

Of course, it is not my intention to deny the physical harm sustained by officers (in Villiers-le-Bel, the commissioner who arrived at the scene of the accident on the first evening was violently attacked, receiving blows to the face from an iron bar); my aim is rather to examine the conditions and implications of a policy that henceforth consisted in revealing what up until then had been concealed. We need to take the measure of this shift in discourse. It represents an almost complete inversion of the state's technique of communication allowing it, as it were, to regain control over the moral and affective assessment of confrontations between the youth and the police made by the media and, beyond, by the broader public. There were two victims of the 2005 riots – the electrocuted children, whose death sparked the events. There were 130 victims of the 2007 disorder – the officers injured by the young people from the project whose two friends had been killed. These latter two individuals could not accede to the status of victims, since the public prosecutor's office immediately announced that their death was the result of a road accident for which they were entirely responsible, and it took several months before judicial investigations suggested the active part played by the police vehicle. The statistics do not disclose everything about this new presentation: whereas in Villiers-le-Bel, press releases by the police initially made no mention of the use of firearms, the theme of "shot-

guns” rapidly became the topic of all comments by rank-and-file officers and their unions.¹⁵ Here again, it was not the first time in recent decades that the police had to “take bullets” in the context of clashes with young people – although it remains a quite rare event. However, for the first time, they not only revealed it to the media, but placed it at the heart of public debate and, shortly thereafter, of legal action.

Does this mean, as is generally assumed, that the law enforcement profession is becoming increasingly dangerous? It is more difficult than it might seem to answer this question. Only very fragmented data are available on violence against the police, and their interpretation must take into account the changes in complaint procedures. I previously offered two examples of these difficulties, and hence uncertainties. In the altercation between teenagers and the police over the nuisance caused by an all-terrain vehicle, I mentioned that the local union had issued a statement about officers being “seriously injured” during an “attack of an indescribable savagery,” whereas my further inquiry revealed that only one of them had sprained his ankle when chasing after the driver of the vehicle. In the court case brought for brutality against the Caribbean and Turkish men, I indicated that the police reported injuries during the arrests which they ascribed to the “resistance” of their suspects, but which proved to be the result of blows they had inflicted on one another.¹⁶ In other words, statistics on physical injury sustained by law enforcement agents pose the same problems of interpretation as the crime statistics they count: on the one hand, we need to take into account cultural developments in the perception of what comprises an injury that merits report; on the other, we must consider the tactical aspects of the report in terms of the anticipated benefits. In short, the issues at stake in this counting of victims are both anthropological and political.

The only reliable information obviously relates to death, and the best source is a website that lists all the “French officers who have fallen in the line of duty” over the last two centuries.¹⁷ Taking the last 40 years – the only ones for which the data gathered seem sufficiently reliable, given the vagaries of memory and the limits of archives – the following progression may be noted: 236 deaths during the 1970s; 235 in the 1980s; 160 in the 1990s; 65 in the 2000s. Since unaccounted deaths, if there are any, are more likely to be those that occurred in earlier periods, we can affirm that there has been a spectacular reduction in police mortality over the last 20 years, with the number of officers dying in the course of duty plummeting to a quarter of its previous rate. Besides, it appears that almost two-thirds of these deaths resulted from traffic accidents, with only a third due

to homicide, representing on average 2 officers per year, compared with 8 per year a quarter of a century ago. To put the figures in perspective, suicide among police officers is 20 times higher. This fall in mortality is even more remarkable if we compare it with other countries. Considering only the deaths of officers who were victims of criminal acts in the last decade, the figure is 511 in the United States, 25 times more than in France, and 15 in Britain, that is, 25 percent fewer than in France: in both cases, of course, these figures do not include the larger number of accidental deaths.¹⁸ A more local, but no less significant, representation of these figures can be offered. Criminologist Peter Moskos, who worked as a young police officer in Baltimore in the early 2000s, dedicates his book to his 10 colleagues killed in the city during the time of his research.¹⁹ Over the similar period of my investigation, fortunately, no one died in the line of duty in the district in which I was working, or in the neighboring districts, or indeed in the whole of the *département*. The only accounts I heard of deaths of officers related to traffic accidents or misuse of their weapons.

The media abundantly report on the rare murders of police officers, but rarely mention their frequent deaths from more mundane causes such as car accidents: government and unions find it much easier to arouse public sympathy or anger in response to the former than the latter. For example, in 2010, the French president put forward the idea that naturalized individuals who attempt to kill someone holding public authority should be stripped of their nationality, and the French parliament passed a law to this effect, despite the fact that it turned out that it would have affected at most one person, and perhaps none, during the preceding decade.²⁰ The debate prompted by this legislation played out over several weeks in the media, which routinely presented officers as victims not only of criminals, but more specifically of criminals “of foreign origin,” without mentioning the statistical reality of the issue, or raising the comparison with accidental death rates. While the politicians were animatedly embracing a cause without substance, in districts like the one where I conducted my research commissioners strove to defend a realistic and responsible approach, emphasizing the prevention of traffic accidents through a ban – albeit rarely enforced – on vehicle chases.

It was thus at the point when mortality rates among the police had fallen to an unprecedented low that they began to present themselves publicly as victims of violence, a discourse focusing almost exclusively on the residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods, in spite of the fact that they are almost never involved in murders of officers (the authors of which are deranged persons or dangerous felons). The

police, and in particular their union representatives, are not unaware of this paradox. When questioned about it, they reply that, while homicide rates have dropped, attacks are on the increase: they are dying less, they explain, but are more often injured. To back up this assertion, they point to the statistics on offenses against persons holding public authority, especially insult, resistance and violence against the police, affirming that these offenses have gone up by more than a third over the last five years.²¹ But, as we have seen, these crimes are being artificially augmented as the result of a deliberate policy. In the precinct where I carried out my study, everyone knew it, and an officer who “racks up insult and resistance cases” was considered to be revealing impulsive behavior toward his “clients,” to the extent that those who boasted of the largest number of arrests for this offense were also those most often called before the disciplinary committee. One of the anticrime squad officers, who had made it his specialty, told me that, during the previous year, he had appeared six times before the committee, which was rather lenient, and added with frustration that “in these conditions” it was no longer “worth making stops and frisks to arrest the bastards: all it does is cause us trouble.” However, he continued to fall back on this practice to reach his monthly target, which he struggled to achieve.

The institution, moreover, sends ambiguous signals on this topic since, on the one hand, it is conscious that charges of insult and resistance are more indicative of the brutality of its agents than of youth violence, but, on the other, it encourages officers to use this resource to generate charges that result both in individuals being questioned and in solved cases, enabling them to improve their performance on the two central planks of the politics of numbers: statistics of arrest and clearance rates. Officers are even invited to initiate civil proceedings, in trials in which their legal fees are entirely paid by the Ministry of the Interior, and at the end of which judges often grant them substantial financial compensation.²² Thus there is a form of vested interest – in terms of both career advancement and financial advantage – in the status of victim.

Furthermore, the patrol officers I came into contact with seemed to adopt this status easily: to my surprise this was how they always talked about their experience. Each time we were cruising through the district, particularly when lack of activity was beginning to sap the energy of my companions, I was struck by the recurrence of a discourse that mingled recriminations against society and complaints about their own lot. The recriminations were directed alternately at their superiors, who did not support them, judges, who released their suspects, journalists, who caricatured their profession, local council-

lors, who always took the side of residents against them, and the general public more broadly: "Of course, it'll be the police's fault again," was one often-repeated refrain, especially when an event occurred in which law enforcement clearly was being brought into question, offering them real-time confirmation of their suspicion of unfavorable prejudice against them. Similarly, their complaints took any pretext, whether their salaries, their vehicles, their working conditions, the politics of numbers, the ingratitude of management, the image of their profession, often concluding with "If I'd known it would be like this I wouldn't have chosen to be a cop," to which some added that they had already prepared and been on the point of submitting their letter of resignation. Yet the unpopularity and defiance they imagined was belied by opinion polls, which showed that, despite the increasing grievances of the population toward them, the police remained one of the institutions held in highest esteem.²³ But it seemed that patrol officers did not read these surveys, and they continued to lament the hostility of the public.

The gloomy tone of their complaints and the depressing atmosphere that can result from it is, however, nothing new. There is a peculiar melancholy attached to the profession of police officer, as represented by an entire literary genre in the disillusioned, often solitary, sometimes alcoholic characters that it takes as its heroes. There are two main ways in which this depressive mood is new, though: first, the legitimacy bestowed by society on this representation, in the public disclosure of the vulnerability of police officers; second, the externalization of their psychological difficulties, formerly attributed to the constraints of the job, but now projected onto the situations in which they are led to intervene. The figure of the victim and the concept of trauma that accompanies it and bears witness to it bring these two aspects together. On the one hand, over recent decades, victimhood and trauma have acquired a positive moral valence they did not previously have. On the other, the notion of a victim suggests an external cause, while trauma confirms that the individual concerned is not a pathological subject, but a normal subject affected by an abnormal event.²⁴ Within just a few years, one has moved from the disparaged picture of the depressive officer hiding in shame, which the institution removed from public gaze, to the valorized image of the traumatized officer who can have his suffering recognized, and who can be put on display by public authorities even in the courts.

The decision of the Ministry of the Interior to create the Operational Psychological Support Service illustrates this development: opened in 1996 with a staff of 2 psychologists, it now employs

approximately 60, who offer 17,500 sessions per year. Comments from 2 patrol officers are emblematic of the change. "When I started in the job, schoolboy pranks were our way of relieving stress. A good drinking session helped as well. We'd never have dreamed of seeing a shrink. That was for depressives and junkies!" one remembered. "Human drama has always been what this profession deals with, but strangely enough, when you join the police, you're never really prepared for it. You have to admit that television doesn't help: the cops of the series are always shown as strong men, with no feelings. I can tell you, that bears no relation to what goes on in the street," said the other. What has now legitimized this conversion of officers to psychology is that, in its current form, it explores not so much their personality and its disorders, which was the case before, as the traumatic events to which they are exposed. One major explains: "The worst of all is the stories of the children brought in by the juvenile squad, most of all about the victims of sexual assault." A police union official added: "In the difficult outer cities, our colleagues' routine work has become impossible: they get metal petanque boules thrown at them from the top of the apartment blocks, they're sprayed with gasoline. In those no-go zones, it's good to get in the habit of debriefings with a shrink so you don't lose it completely."²⁵ The shift from the officer's experience to the union representative's demand shows the work of politicization that operates around this new perspective on the profession, which moves from talking about victims who need to be taken care of to speaking of oneself as a victim. I do not know if any of the anticrime squad officers with whom I was working ever made use of the services of a psychologist, as the subject never came up, but they were certainly open to this representation of the patrol officer as the victim of a traumatic situation. Thus the victimization of the police was the response to the criminalization of society, defining a new moral economy with the anticrime squad officers as the principal actors.

Morality

Moral reality can be studied from two different points of view. One can set out to explore and understand it and one can set out to evaluate it.

The first of these problems must necessarily precede the second.

Emile Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*, 1924

The policeman was beset by the same profound questions of moral philosophy as any other member of mankind.

William K. Muir, *Police: Streetcorner Politicians*, 1977

In the early stages of the riots of 2005, the anticrime squad crew I was working with that evening proceeded to the site of a fire that had broken out in a primary school in the city. When we arrived at the location, we found other police vehicles already there, as well as firefighters busy putting out the blaze. In the parking lot where the officers had assembled under the curious and anxious gaze of residents watching us from their windows, a small explosion suddenly occurred a few feet from us. It was a Molotov cocktail. No one was injured, and no damage was recorded. The officers scrutinized the surrounding area, shrouded in darkness, in search of the individual who had thrown the missile – in vain. After a brief discussion, they decided to move off to search the environs.

On the other side of the sports field that bordered the complex of public housing apartment blocks, approximately 50 yards from where we were gathered, they glimpsed a number of silhouetted figures, some of them wearing white hooded sweatshirts, and, despite the length of time that had elapsed since the missile was thrown, the

officers decided that these distant shadowy forms in the dark must be our attackers. So we rushed over in their direction, but by the time we reached where they had been standing, of course no one was there. We spent some time scouring the nearby alleys running between two- and three-story buildings, but our loudly advertised presence apparently proved dissuasive. Moreover, when we crossed through this small complex, we found several riot police vans stationed in an adjacent street, awaiting potential calls for them to intervene. Reinforcements had arrived in the city, in anticipation of urban disorder in the days to come – which ultimately failed to materialize. After a moment's conversation with their colleagues, the officers I was accompanying returned to their car. In the meantime, the firefighters had departed, and the residents were back in their apartments, so we resumed the routine of our night patrol.

About three hours later, on an evening with no further events, as we passed along a street several blocks from where the Molotov cocktail had been thrown, we saw three youngsters of North African origin, aged about 18, chatting outside an apartment block. The sergeant major told our driver to stop, and his colleagues approached the boys for the usual stop and frisk. One of the three explained that he did not have his documents with him, as he lived two stories above and had just come down to meet his friends. He offered to go up to his parents' apartment, with an officer if required, to fetch his identity card. The officers refused and took him in. Like many youngsters of his age at this time, he was wearing a white hooded sweatshirt. This was enough to make him the prime suspect in the case, and he was treated accordingly. During transit, and particularly at the precinct, he was questioned aggressively, threatened with being taken into custody if he did not confess, and finally shut into the room with Plexiglass walls.

His name was Abdelkrim Bouaziza. It did not appear in the Reported Offense Processing System, but a very similar one, Abdel Karim Bouaziza, did, corresponding to the file of a youth who had been accused of a minor crime several years earlier (and there was of course no information as to whether he had been convicted and sentenced, since in this national database case files are almost never updated on completion of court proceedings, therefore preventing the innocent from being distinguished from the guilty). One of the anti-crime squad officers questioned the youngster on this similarity: "What's your name? – Abdelkrim Bouaziza, sir. – And Abdel Karim Bouaziza, who I've found in the database and lives at the same address as you, who's that then? – That must be me, sir. – So which is your real first name? – Abdelkrim, sir. – Are you shitting me? Is

your name Abdel Karim or Abdelkrim? – It’s the same, sir, it’s just written different.” The officer was losing his temper, not knowing, or not caring to know, that the transcription of names from another language into French often presents such problems, all the more so in this case because there are in fact several different French transcriptions of this Arabic first name. He repeated the same question five times, shouting louder and louder at the despairing youth. Calming down a little, the officer remarked, stressing the third syllable of the name (which is pronounced identically to “crime” in French): “*Abdelkrim*: with a name like that you were always going to be a troublemaker!” He turned to his colleague, evidently satisfied with his joke, then resumed his questioning and wrote up his report. Since nothing could be found against the youth, the officers ended up letting him go. It was 1 a.m. Buses would no longer be running. It would certainly take him at least 40 minutes to walk home.

To be sure, one might take the view that he was lucky to be released in this way – at least more fortunate than many others who were interrogated in close proximity to the locations of urban disorder during this period. While the minister of the interior had demanded that his services implement a repressive policy in the projects and was attempting to intimidate judges by condemning in advance their leniency, the minister of justice had also weighed in, requiring public prosecutors to systematically fast-track those charged through the courts and to seek immediate prison sentences. Thus, in the context of the state of emergency that had been declared, exceptional measures seemed to be the order of the day.

Two studies conducted later examined the cases referred to the Bobigny District Court during the riots, relating to crimes allegedly committed in the Seine-Saint-Denis département, an area that saw more than 10 percent of all such offenses tallied in the country.¹ The first study related to 115 adults, most of them aged under 21, half of whom were accused of property crimes, and one-third of offenses against persons holding public authority. It indicated that one-third of these individuals were acquitted, a rate seven times higher than in normal circumstances. This rise was due to the poor quality of the evidence submitted rather than to clemency on the part of judges, since, by contrast, when defendants were convicted they were sentenced to imprisonment in nine out of ten cases, an exceptionally high rate suggesting the severity of the magistrates. The second study related to 86 minors, two-thirds of whom were accused of vandalism, and one-third of insulting and resisting the police. It showed that half of these cases were dismissed on the grounds of lack of evidence, and a further 25 percent of defendants were acquitted because they were

given the benefit of the doubt; but it also revealed that police brutality was claimed in 40 percent of cases, all of which, significantly, concerned teenagers already known to law enforcement.

In other words, while, throughout the course of these weeks, patrol officers questioned many individuals in the neighborhoods around the riots, and while the investigative police massively referred cases to the public prosecutors, ultimately, the magistrates could not exhibit the severity demanded of them not due to leniency on their part, but because of the weakness of the proofs with which they were presented. Contradictory testimony, flagrant lies and flimsy arguments explain the decisions. In reality, the dramatic context of the riots and the pressure from the government simply serve to highlight a more general fact: the gap between the officers' idea of the grounds for arresting suspects, and the judges' capacity to determine their guilt on the basis of the evidence submitted.

Yet, rather than prompting self-criticism among the police and encouraging them to proceed in a more rigorous manner, this divergence reinforced their conviction that they were working "to no purpose" because the judicial system was releasing the criminals they had arrested. This was probably the beat officers' most frequent complaint. "We catch thieves, and judges set them free," one anti-crime squad officer said to me one day as he listed his reasons for being disillusioned with his job, adding: "You really wonder what's the point in what we do. In court the word of a little jerkoff carries as much weight as ours." This theme was a constant topic of discussion. One night in May 2007, when I was out on patrol with three officers, conversation turned to this subject. They recounted an incident which took place the day before. As they were cruising around a project, windows down, stones were thrown at them from behind an embankment. They rushed out of the car, and scrambling over the bank, caught sight of a group of "young blacks." They chased them. Two of the youngsters entered an apartment block. The officers launched after them, but when they entered the building foyer there was no one there. They ran up the stairs, and on one of the upper floors found two teenagers of African origin who appeared calm, but whom they strongly suspected of being their attackers. But the police deployed the usual routine in such cases: questioning, handcuffs, transfer to the precinct and custody for the night.

The following day the boys were brought before the judge. Unsurprisingly, they denied having participated in what the officers called an "ambush." More troubling for the latter, although their statement described one of the suspects as wearing green pants, the judge saw before him two youngsters who had come directly from their custody

cell, and were both wearing black pants. He therefore summoned the police to face the accused. The officers were reluctant to appear, and asked for the meeting with the youths to be postponed until the evening, just before they went on duty. The judge was compliant and agreed to extend custody. When the two sides met each other, both stood by their version: the police claimed that these were indeed their attackers, despite the disparity in clothing; the boys asserted that they were not in the group that threw stones. "It makes you sick," one of the law enforcement agents remarked; "Nowadays they give more credence to criminals than sworn officers." His young colleague added: "You're right. They don't believe us. A cop's word isn't worth nothing no more." Rather than pursuing this grievance, the crew leader, who had previously worked in much more demanding environments, reproached his patrol companions: "But guys, you're talking bullshit! It's procedure. Procedure, that's what it's all about. Nowadays the case files we present to judges have to be completely watertight. Otherwise they won't get through." He paused a moment before continuing: "And why is that? Because there were too many police abuses, we took too many liberties. It's like us with the youngsters: we don't trust them. Well, you know what? The judges feel the same way about us." However, he was the only officer in the anti-crime squad to make this kind of lucid observation about a fact that was nevertheless obvious: magistrates cannot convict on the basis of the flimsy evidence submitted to them. In this case, there were two distinct problems: the first, an issue of form, concerned the poor quality of the investigative police reports; the second, an issue of content, related to the actual proof of the alleged facts. For nothing indicated that the two boys belonged to the group that had thrown stones, and, even if they had, nothing proved that they were themselves involved in the attack on the police car, since the officers inside it had not seen their opponents, hidden behind the embankment. But neither of these doubts seemed to carry any weight with the officers. Apparently convinced that they had tracked down the perpetrators, to them the attitude and decision of the judge were based simply on bad faith and ill will.

This distrust of the judicial system has serious consequences. Since officers generally believe that judges do not render justice, they feel they have the right to take the law into their own hands on the ground. Of course, this principle of substitution is never explicitly stated in public, and it may often remain unconscious: to acknowledge it would be to admit to a form of illegality in the work of the police. The issue, moreover, is not new; in its old form, often nostalgically cited, this principle was realized in the retribution meted out to

the petty thief, thereby avoiding paperwork and sparing him a court appearance when it was felt that the actual facts of the case did not necessarily merit anything more than this “lesson” taught him. This manner of resolving a problem *in situ* is applied in various contexts, from calming a domestic dispute that, with judicious intervention, can be prevented from escalating into an official complaint, to summary punishment of a criminal when officers are unconvinced they will be able to establish his guilt if they follow the customary procedures. As Albert Reiss noted in his study in Detroit and Chicago during the 1960s, patrols do not generally result in arrests “because the officer exercises his discretion not to make such arrests,” preferring to exercise other options.² Rendering one’s own justice is thus simply an extension of police discretion.

In order to comprehend practices that seem contrary to the democratic expectation of the separation of powers of the police and the judiciary when they involve a form of immediate retribution, one therefore needs to grasp the justifications, understand the viewpoint of law enforcement agents, and recognize that where most observers see flagrant abuse of ethical precepts, the officers themselves are convinced they are acting in accordance with the moral code of their profession. They joined the force to arrest “thieves and thugs.” If judges are not going to hand down the convictions they expect, these criminals should at least receive punishment from those who arrest them. In the officers’ view, this is simply justice. However, their justification is doubly problematic, even from their perspective. On the one hand, the retribution has far less to do with justice (punishing the guilty) or pedagogy (teaching them a lesson) than with straightforward revenge, often for an act supposedly committed at an earlier time, which may well have been due to provocation rather than criminal intent. On the other, the retribution is not targeted (at a presumed culprit) but blind (inflicted on whoever the police have managed to catch), and may involve recategorization of the offense so as to provide a motive for the punishment that is acceptable to the police administration, and even in court.

To return to the Molotov cocktail incident: because the perpetrator was not caught in the act, the focus turned to making a youngster from the project “pay,” despite the fact that it was statistically unlikely and legally unprovable that he had actually thrown the missile. Three hours later, at some distance from where the event took place, with no distinguishing features for suspects who were seen from too far to be identified, and on the basis of nothing more than similar, but quite common, clothing, the officers thought they had their man. Noting a vague resemblance in appearance, they used the pretext of

an identity check without giving him the chance to produce his documentation when he was just yards away from his home and could have been accompanied there, as specified in the Penal Code. Of course, in complete absence of evidence, the case would never be submitted to the court, but the procedure, which involved transfer to the station, a long wait, demeaning harassment, intimidation techniques, and eventually release in the middle of the night with no possibility of getting transport home allowed the officers to exact a form of retaliation against one of those toward whom they felt a deep hostility. This is obviously not an isolated case: young people often complain of these stops and frisks ending in the precinct that serve as an excuse for humiliation.³ They are well aware that these are simply forms of mortification against which there is virtually no recourse, given their lack of credit within society.

Thus the justice rendered by the police, especially by the anticrime squads for whom it represents an unspoken *raison d'être* – putting pressure on the projects and their residents for the purposes of maintaining a particular form of social order – is more akin to reprisals in response either to recent incidents (an offense committed) or conversely to a more diffuse concern (the behavior of the youth in general – or even their mere undesirable presence). The retribution meted out to the poor neighborhoods takes one of two forms, of which I have given various examples. In the first of these it consists of a random punishment: a youngster is arrested to “take the rap” for the others. This is the paradigm of the wolf and the lamb: if it was not him, then it was his brother, or another of his relatives. Usually the teenager in question is not chosen entirely at random, and most sociological studies, as well as information collected in the field, indicate that officers often punish an individual “already known to the police,” or, as I heard officers say on several occasions, an individual with whom they have a personal score to settle. But if they do not find this ideal suspect, they can fall back by proxy on any person presenting similar social, ethnic and residential characteristics, in other words, a youth of working-class background and frequently immigrant origin living in one of the projects. The second form of retaliation comprises punitive operations: a stairwell, an apartment block or more rarely an entire neighborhood is “taken hostage.” This is the principle of collective punishment: in such cases, all residents are subjected to the repressive action. The search for a suspect generally serves as the rationale for breaking down the door of one or more apartments, overturning or destroying furniture, shoving or roughing up the people present, most of whom have nothing to do with the alleged offense. It will be noted that these two models – arbitrary punishment

and punitive expedition – also correspond to military practices in time of war, where exemplary execution and reprisal operations are the rule, despite the fact that they run counter to the laws of armed conflict. In the banlieues, of course, such retribution takes attenuated form, but what we are seeing here is a sort of common matrix of intervention which has been legitimized and fostered in recent times by the martial rhetoric of politicians.

One might logically be tempted to interpret this aspect of law enforcement as deviance within deviance.⁴ First, police would be deviating from their stated mission when they make use of discretionary power – but it is established that discretion is actually an unstated norm that is an essential characteristic of law enforcement. Second, they would be deviating even from the generally tolerated arbitrariness – in their indiscriminate selection of individuals, with no evidence of guilt, and in their recourse to methods that breach the dignity of the person. However, from the perspective of the officers, it is more pertinent to understand these practices not as deviant, but as inscribed in a moral economy of police work – in other words, in a set of values and emotions that make it possible to comprehend what otherwise would appear unreservedly immoral.⁵ This moral economy places two elements in tension. On the one hand, there is a principle of justice in which an ideal of punishment of offenders and criminals comes into conflict with the reality of the demands of judicial procedure. According to this principle, it is acceptable to mistreat an individual whom one presumes to be guilty – all the more if one is not convinced that the courts will later convict him. On the other, there is a logic of resentment that ultimately relates not only to the everyday public encountered by police officers but also to society as a whole, and judges in particular. This logic is expressed in deep frustration at the ingratitude of the public at large and the inefficacy of judges.

The tension between a principle of justice that infringes on the democratic order (the police are not supposed to mete out justice themselves) and a logic of resentment relating to the role assigned to them (performing the dirty work of repression without really having the means) helps to explain what is observed in everyday law enforcement practice. The moral economy of police work echoes a set of social representations of deviance that have profoundly altered over recent decades. Not only has the definition of those who are considered deviant been substantially broadened, manifesting itself, as has been shown, in the increasing criminalization of behaviors, but this extension is associated with a characterization of deviants in social, racial, and ultimately moral terms. The radicalization of public dis-

course contributes to producing and legitimizing the police ethos by generating hostility within the social world and demanding ever stricter measures.⁶ Intolerance (of certain groups within the population) is accompanied by intolerance of tolerance (which the judges are assumed to display). Patrol officers thus feel entitled to render justice themselves – and it is a socially targeted justice.

The examples I give in this book relate to situations in which the individuals questioned or brutalized are unlikely culprits, but there are of course cases in which there is firm evidence of the guilt of arrested suspects. In these conditions, obviously, the moral pressure on the officers to render justice in the name of society is all the stronger, with even more powerful justification for their sense of resentment. They may in fact convince themselves that they are authorized to perpetrate violence which they know will not lead to any consequences, since the word of the criminal carries little weight compared to that of agents holding public authority. During my research in one of the prisons in the Paris region, I heard one day a general announcement over the loudspeakers throughout the buildings, alerting guards to an incident and calling for reinforcements. I later asked what had happened and learned what prompted the only rebellious behavior that occurred during the months I was there. Two young men of African origin were being held on remand, awaiting trial for alleged violence toward the police that they adamantly denied. In the prison they were considered model inmates, with whom no one had ever had any problem. When they were summoned to court, they were taken out of their cells and, before entering the police van, were subjected to the standard body search by prison officers, precautionary but not invasive. However, in a departure from usual procedure, the police imposed a second search, in this case a strip search, in which they required the men to adopt humiliating positions normally prohibited in French prisons, and they responded with brutality to the two men's protests. It was in this context of humiliation and brutalization that the men rebelled, leading to the disorder which prompted the call for help. The prison officers who described the incident said they were shocked by the actions of their law enforcement colleagues, for which they could find no other explanation than gratuitous retaliation by proxy.

The violence was not always physical – it could also be psychological. One night, during the coffee break, an anticrime squad officer mentioned the name of a young man of North African origin, clearly known to his colleagues, and indicated that he had seen him the day before, in the midst of a small crowd of onlookers near the smoldering remains of a car that had been set ablaze. It was late October

2005 and the first vehicle fires had recently broken out. The sergeant major asked: “Rashid Djelaoui? The little guy that used to be a junkie? – Yeah, he’s a real short-ass. – You mean that real skinny guy? – Yeah, I think he’s got AIDS or something. – Great, that’ll make one less little shit.” After a moment’s reflection, he resumed: “I hope you picked him up? – Well, there wasn’t really nothing I could charge him with, apart from he’s always acting a bit weird. – But what was he doing out at three in the morning? – He said he’d gone to buy cigarettes at the bar in the center. – Did he have the pack on him? – No, he told us he’d given it to a friend on the way back. –Yeah, right!” A few weeks later, the officers had the opportunity to settle their scores with this man. As we were leaving the precinct, a call came over the radio: he had been spotted at the wheel of a stolen car. A chase through the city streets began. It was rush hour, and traffic jams impeded the pursuit, in which at least ten police vehicles were involved. Ours, stuck in traffic, was barely moving, and the driver was getting annoyed. When we finally managed to get free, with squealing tires and revving engine, we set off in the wrong direction, as, apparently, did other crews. From U-turns to driving the wrong way down one-way streets, it was a tumultuous journey, in which we luckily avoided an accident, finally arriving at the location where other vehicles had intercepted the fugitive. The frustration at not being the heroes of the day was mitigated by the satisfaction of the capture made.

Back at the station, the man was questioned in the presence of his girlfriend. He was about 30, emaciated, with missing teeth, and seeming much weakened by illness. He immediately admitted to the offense and attempted to apologize: “Yes, you’re right, it’s my fault, I messed up, I have to pay for it.” At the same time he tried to reassure his girlfriend, who was upset because she had not realized that she was in a stolen car, but the police officers belittled him, punctuating their offensive remarks with: “You see the kind of guy you’re hanging out with, ma’am?” During the questioning they brought up his AIDS diagnosis in front of the woman, who was clearly unaware of it and broke down when she heard this news. The man also seemed overcome by this public revelation in circumstances that offered so little opportunity for explanations. Far from being embarrassed by this untimely exposure and its doleful consequences, the officers continued to push further, covering him with shame, obviously enjoying their ability to cause difficulties with his girlfriend. His admission of guilt, his acceptance in advance of his punishment, and the prospect of his death in the near future did not assuage their feelings of aggression toward him: the revelation of his condition, the despair it

aroused, and the disapproval it allowed them to express made his disarray the more profound, and their triumph the more complete. For the officers, the violence they inflicted was of a moral nature, not only in that it provoked moral suffering rather than the physical pain that is generally involved in what is known as police brutality, but also because it was set in a moral framework: the point was to inflict punishment on the culprit, while priding themselves on being on the side of good with regard to both the crime he had committed and the irresponsibility he had demonstrated toward his girlfriend. Humiliation thus became a deserved retribution. In the expansion of Adam Smith's ideas, the term "moral sentiment" is usually applied to the emotions associated with values, such as the compassion one feels on seeing a being that is suffering.⁷ Here, we might rather speak of a form of moral resentment.

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The moral economy of law enforcement, characterized by this tension between a principle of justice and a logic of resentment, offers an overall frame for the interpretation of police work, and more specifically the work of anticrime squads. Obviously, it does not give an account of the wide range of moral positions that may be observed when conducting research in a precinct. Despite the many converging forces, both organizational and professional, pushing them in this direction, not all officers are ready to brutalize or humiliate the individuals they bring under control, stop and frisk, or question and arrest. Commissioners are aware of this, and, as we have seen, those who are close enough to their teams know well the propensity of some to "produce insult and resistance" and, conversely, the correct attitude exhibited by others toward their "clients." They may even realize that the latter approach is often more efficient than the former. It is therefore important to understand that the moral economy of law enforcement is not an automatic predictor of the individual ethics of police officers. I shall now turn to these individual ethics, in order to comprehend the variations on the theme of morality.

In this context, I was particularly struck by a conversation I witnessed in a police station corridor. One night in October 2005, when I was in the anticrime squad office, a young uniformed female officer came in to say "hello" to her colleagues, and was met with a few flirtatious remarks. She was on duty that night in the unit where undocumented immigrants were held while awaiting transfer to the administrative detention center near Charles de Gaulle airport prior to their deportation. A moment later she reappeared with two cans of soda she had obviously just bought from the drinks machine. The

sergeant major called out brightly: “Who’s that for? – For two of my African detainees. – They don’t need to drink. Have you seen how they treat them in Morocco? They let them die in the desert. And they’re right. – Oh, they’re sweet, you know. – Yeah, right! And when I think that’s what our taxes are being spent on! – No, I bought these with their money. – All the same, you shouldn’t! – I told you, they’re nice. If they were mean of course I wouldn’t do it, but . . . – Find a better home for your sympathy. How about whales, or seals? Not that trash! You’d be better signing up for Brigitte Bardot’s animal protection association!”⁸ The officers burst out laughing. Half-offended, half-amused, the officer went off to her unit. I caught up with her to talk for a few moments about this conversation, but I noticed that she seemed defensive, and even apologetic about what she feared would be taken for weakness on her part.

This scene is remarkable on several levels. It illustrates, in exaggerated form, the contrast between two opposite moral attitudes: the female officer manifests empathy for her detainees that leads her to exhibit some generosity; the sergeant major expresses an antipathy to immigrants that results in an aggressive stance. But it becomes clear, during the course of the exchange, that the tendency toward animosity or even cruelty enjoys greater legitimacy than the disposition toward kindness: insensitivity is the norm here, and compassion is deviant. In the local ethos, officers are more comfortable with the idea of leaving an undocumented immigrant to suffer than with the contrary idea of coming to his aid. It is not our job to be Good Samaritans, they think. And, indeed, the minister of the interior at the time had himself expressed anxiety at the excessive tendency of some precincts to seek to get closer to the public. More specifically still, he offered an example, three days after this conversation, by demonstrating his indifference to the pain of the families whose children had died from electrocution in a police chase in Clichy-sous-Bois, neither showing sympathy nor expressing his condolences, but instead accusing the two victims of crimes they had not committed and thus besmirching their memory. It therefore seemed hardly appropriate to display moral sentiments toward a category of population that the authorities were doing everything in their power to hold in reciprocal hostility with law enforcement: in the projects, as in warfare, there should be no fraternizing with the enemy.

Of course, it will be objected that a joke, even in bad taste, should not be taken too seriously. Sociologists are correct to insist that black humor within a group is not necessarily translated into dark acts in the real world. Laughing about the misfortune of immigrants does not mean that one will act in a xenophobic manner. While agreeing

that a distinction certainly needs to be drawn here, I nevertheless tended to take the officers' vindictive mockery fairly literally. A week earlier, indeed, I had been involved in an edifying discussion with two officers with whom I was on patrol in the afternoon. When I asked them why they preferred day to night shifts, they explained that they could no longer bear "what goes on at night," referring in part to the inactivity and boredom, but also mentioning "the shit that you hear and see." The young sergeant went into more detail: "At the beginning we thought that was the right thing, like everyone else, we really went for it, we tried to become part of the group. But then after a couple of years, it started to bother us. I couldn't stand it any more. I'd had enough of hearing colleagues talking racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic crap all through the night. I'd had enough of seeing certain things and having to keep quiet about it." His colleague added: "Even when you don't agree with what's being said and done, you can't show anything. So you keep quiet and close in on yourself. We don't want any bother. We don't like what we're hearing and seeing, but we keep it to ourselves. Until there was a chance to change to the day shift. So that's what we did." The two officers were obviously of one mind in their appraisal of the anticrime squad's work, and their new hours allowed them to form a team that was better insulated from peer pressure.

Intrigued, I asked what specifically had shocked them in their night-shift experiences: "Here's just one example, to show you. You remember that really cold winter, a few years ago? This happened on one of the coldest nights – it must have been below zero. Well, maybe not around here, but they'd forecast that kind of extreme temperature in the east of the country. At one point we were cruising around, we drove past the train station. There was an African guy out there. I don't know how he'd got there, wearing just pants and a T-shirt and little sandals. He was shivering with cold. All the doors to the station were locked, so he couldn't get in there. He was wandering around looking for shelter. I said: Come on, let's take him to the precinct, at least he'll be in the warm for the night. And you know what, the answer was no. The other men on the crew refused to take him in. I'm sure in warmer weather they would have checked his identity, he probably didn't have any papers, so he would have ended up at the police station. But it was so cold, and they preferred to let him freeze. I wonder whether he survived. I can tell you, I often think back to that night, even now." A little later, when we were alone, I asked him if we could meet again to continue our discussion, at his convenience, away from the precinct. It was the first time I had solicited such a formal interview with a patrol officer, but he refused. I found his

response interesting. He first objected: "No, I'll get in trouble if I tell you what I know and what I think." I reassured him that the meeting would be confidential, and that my research was anonymous. He then replied: "If I talk to you and explain how I see things, it'll tarnish the image of the police, and I don't want that."

In his study of consumer reactions to deterioration in the quality of a product or service, economist Albert Hirschman shows that there are three possible attitudes: "exit, voice, loyalty." The first, exit, consists in no longer buying the product or service, resulting in difficulties for the business or organization that force it to correct the problem, in order to regain the confidence of its customers. The second, voice, is manifested in a protest addressed directly to the business or organization, or communicated to an authority which is supposed to monitor them, or to anyone likely to pay attention, in the hope that this expression of dissatisfaction will force change. The third, loyalty, is a default response, since it implies renouncing action, which obviously has little impact on the situation.⁹ This tripartite model can be applied more generally to relations within an institution.

In the case of law enforcement, the final option, passive loyalty, is the rule. Even if they disagree with their colleagues' practices, officers keep silent. As is recognized by all sociological studies conducted in both North America and Western Europe, secrecy is the most widely accepted form of defense within the police.¹⁰ The efficacy of this pact of silence is reinforced by officers' sense of the public as hostile. To divulge information would be to yield to the enemy, or at least to give him arms he could use against the police. In other words, it represents a betrayal. The second possibility, voice, is therefore the exception. Any officer who took the risk would be immediately marginalized by his colleagues and unfavorably evaluated by his superiors. Denouncing fellow officers to senior officers or to the disciplinary committee, or any other body, is obviously strongly resented by peers. As for public declarations to the media, the very few officers who have ventured into this terrain, except in the framework of union action, have been subject to sanctions which can extend as far as dismissal.¹¹ In these conditions, the first possibility, exit, emerges as a less costly alternative when an officer is unhappy with or frustrated by a situation he witnesses. In its most modest form, this can consist of a change of schedule, allowing him to work with other colleagues in the same unit; sometimes it extends to reassignment to another service or even to another district, which has the advantage that it can be classified as routine transfer. In extreme cases, it goes as far as resigning, a possibility mentioned by a number of officers in my

presence, though they justified it each time by reference to working conditions and salary rather than moral considerations. The choice of many not to join the anticrime squad because they do not share its values or its style can be assimilated to this position: it is a sort of exit by anticipation.

In light of this model, it is easy to interpret the trajectory of the two officers who confided their distress. At first, they felt genuine solidarity with the group: new to the profession and trying to ingratiate themselves with their colleagues, they made little objection to the discourses, to which they contributed their share, and the practices in which they were also involved. This conformism is probably the most common attitude in most institutions, including the police. Subsequently, they began to feel uneasy at the racist attitudes and violent behavior of their unit: since the option of speaking out was professionally and psychologically too difficult to undertake, they chose the passive option, manifested through closing in on themselves and maintaining a sort of mental distance from the other officers. Finally, when they had the opportunity, they left, moving to the day shift so as to no longer be complicit in actions they disapproved of: thus they were able to align themselves with their ethical principles by breaking with the dominant ethos. Significantly, this decision did not exclude a deontological consideration, not so much toward other officers but with regard to the police as an institution. At least, this was the way the sergeant justified refusing me an interview: he did not want to sully the reputation of a profession to which he remained attached. Accordingly, these two officers' confidences revealed the moral dilemmas, ethical commitments and concerns for good practice they faced in their work and their career.

However, it seems to me that the model of three options – exit, voice, loyalty – cannot altogether explain the entire range of situations. A fourth choice can be identified, of which I shall offer an illustration. When, after a break of several months in my research, I returned to the precinct, some new members had joined the anticrime squad. The sergeant major remained, together with his most faithful collaborators, who shared his moral and political opinions. But others had left, and there were new recruits. One of them was a young sergeant from a working-class urban neighborhood in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. Unimpressed by the youth of the banlieues, he demonstrated firmness, but within the rules. In terms of catching offenders red-handed, he proved more efficient than his colleagues, being a fast runner, a fact that had often enabled him to apprehend a fleeing suspect. He therefore had little interest in undocumented immigrants or marijuana users who were not necessary to make his

quota. Another recently recruited sergeant was somewhat older. He had been brought up in a project in the Seine-Saint-Denis département. He exhibited no particular aggressiveness toward the residents of “sensitive urban zones,” who were nothing novel to him, having spent a number of years in a similar unit in a much rougher district than the one where he was now working. On occasion I saw him remain patient in the face of a teenager’s insolence, succeeding in the end in making him be quiet, but without letting the situation get out of hand. When I was cruising at night with a crew led by one of these two officers, I observed that stops and frisks were less frequent, and interactions with the public less confrontational. Admittedly, the hierarchical relations within their small teams of three were not such that a sergeant could impose his way of behaving or thinking on a patrol officer: hence, practices still varied, and some racist and violent officers allowed their habits free rein even when they were under the command of these two sergeants; nevertheless, the climate seemed less hostile than in other crews.

This development surprised me so much that I asked the deputy chief of police whether new instructions had been issued, but he told me that this was not the case. I concluded that it was individuals rather than the institution that accounted for the relative change. The two new recruits were, moreover, fully accepted by their colleagues and appreciated by the head of the anticrime squad: the young one because his efficiency and modesty made him a valuable addition to the group, the older one out of respect for his age and experience. They no doubt also corresponded to the type of officer that the senior official of the Ministry of the Interior whom I had met hoped to recruit; he told me that, when he assumed office several years before as the département director of public security, he had made strenuous efforts to bring order to his anticrime squads. However, the change I observed in the precinct remained limited, and applied mainly to a few officers.

The attitude of these two sergeants did not seem to fall under the heading of either exit, voice or loyalty. In effect, they were making the choice to remain in the special unit, but without adapting to the local habitus. They were never heard making racist allusions or xenophobic comments in conversation. They exhibited neither contempt toward projects nor resentment toward judges. In many respects, they demonstrated moral pragmatism. Voicing opposition would have been costly and futile – and in any case, that was not their style. Conforming was unnecessary – it was not explicitly requested. There would have been little more point in leaving – they liked their job and aimed to progress in their career, the first hoping for a promotion to senior officer, the second to sergeant major. They were thus able

to carry out their work in accordance with correct procedure within a group whose values they did not share, but within which they seemed respected. Their moral pragmatism was manifested in their actions and justification for them. On the one hand, the older officer explained to me, as he had told his colleagues, that it was understandable that judges no longer trusted the police and no longer gave credence to their statements: "We've lied to them too much, we've cheated too much, we've told them too many tall tales. They're not stupid, they are well aware of it." On the other hand, the younger one stated that the demands of the law were such that they actually had to cheat in statements and lie in their reports in order to convict individuals they were convinced were guilty: "The other day, when there was that disorder around the train station, we identified the vandals, we managed to catch three of them. They'd filmed everything on their cellphone, but because we're not from the investigative police, we weren't supposed to take the phones and look at them, so we weren't able to use that as evidence. In those cases, it's better to make stuff up." All the same, their pragmatism in relation to crime did not prevent them from demonstrating a degree of legalism in their relations with the public. They emphasized to me that checks should be made "in a specific context," and I certainly did not see them depart from this principle; nor did I ever witness them insult or beat a young person. They were living proof that a different anticrime squad ethos was possible.

This pattern was the exception, though, close to one of the four types of officer in the British police identified by Robert Reiner. He calls this type the "professional," who has an "appropriately balanced appreciation of the value of all aspects of policing."¹² High school students in a special class for learning disabilities whom I asked about their experience of the police seemed to share my assessment that this type of officer was rare. All of them mentioned the harshness of the stops and frisks, but then one boy, apparently suddenly remembering an extraordinary episode, exclaimed: "Sir, I want to tell you something. I reckon, not all cops are like that. Once, in my life, it happened to me. They'd stopped me, made me get in the car, and they were laughing, joking, they were really friendly! I swear to you, I was shocked, I was staring at them, I was shocked. It was like a miracle! They were even talking to me, like a normal person! But once we got to the station that all stopped, and there were others there that were needling me." This story of revelation obviously contained an element of performing and boasting in front of his friends. In fact, the other students looked at him with incredulous smiles.

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After a tragic accident in which the young Joachim Gatti lost an eye and had part of his face shattered by a Flash-Ball bullet during a peaceful protest march, on July 8, 2009,¹³ a group of 40 directors made a series of films under the common rubric “Insult and resistance,” thus ironically using the formulation of the typical offense used by the police to cover their own brutality. One of these shorts presents a text and a series of images that seem to respond to and contradict one another in an overlapping echo.¹⁴ On the one hand, the text cites the articles of the Code of Ethics of the national police, adopted in 1986, intoned in a soft, neutral voice-over: “Article 1: The National Police works nationwide to guarantee the right to freedom and defend the institutions of the French Republic, to maintain peace and public order, and to protect persons and property. Article 2: The National Police fulfills its mission in full respect of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, of the Constitution, of international conventions and laws. Article 7: Placed at the service of the public, the police officer behaves toward members of the public in exemplary fashion. He maintains absolute respect for persons, whatever their nationality or origin, their social background or their political, religious, or philosophical convictions. . .”¹⁵ On the other hand, an image, projected onto the wall of an apartment block, shows helmeted officers dislodging from a public square undocumented immigrants probably doomed to be deported. Some are carrying old women, with varying degrees of care, while others are beating an individual with nightsticks. There is a series of scenes of violent confrontation. The gap between principles and reality, between ethics and practice, is clear. At the end of the sequence, a quotation from George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* offers, as it were, a key to this juxtaposition. “These contradictions are not accidental, nor do they result from ordinary hypocrisy: they are deliberate exercises in doublethink. For it is only by reconciling contradictions that power can be retained indefinitely.” And, indeed, the tension between the mission of maintaining order and fighting crime, and the obligation of respecting human rights and the dignity of persons is permanent and structural in law enforcement everywhere. The late adoption of an official code of ethics for law enforcement in France crystallizes this dialectic between force and democracy.

However, any code of ethics remains relatively unconnected to the way in which problems arise and are resolved. It states principles, but offers no information on how they are to be applied, particularly when, as in the present case, the contradictions that arise are so

powerful as to set the principles completely at odds with reality. How, then, can we better grasp this reality? In his study of police officers in a town in the United States, William Ker Muir reformulates this tension in a moral language of virtue, which he regards as more appropriate to explaining the diversity and complexity of their attitudes:¹⁶ “A policeman becomes a good policeman to the extent that he develops two virtues. Intellectually, he has to grasp the nature of human suffering. Morally, he has to resolve the contradiction of achieving just ends with coercive means.” According to this author, possession of the first virtue means having a “tragic sense,” the sense that all human beings share the same condition and therefore deserve the same treatment, whatever their differences and individual characteristics. This position is diametrically opposed to the “cynical viewpoint” in which the world is divided into opposite camps defined as friends versus enemies, or civilized versus savages, or neighbors versus foreigners, or strong versus weak, preventing any form of empathy between the groups thus delimited. Possession of the second virtue means having a “moral equanimity,” in other words, a dispassionate view of the use of force as part of the social mission of the police for the collective good, whereas “conflicted morality” leads officers to doubt whether coercion is justified and question the consequences in terms of individuals’ freedom. Four possible combinations can be derived from these two categories: the “good policeman” being the one who does not hesitate to use force when he deems it necessary, but remains capable of exhibiting empathy and fairness, whereas the three other types pose problems of either justice (cynical outlook) or security (moral conflict), or both.

The construction of a typology is, however, always reductive, and it might be preferable to adopt a more flexible approach, based on the identification of criteria on the basis of which both diverse ways of being an officer and the possible variations and shifts around a given position can be identified. The first criterion for differentiation is the moral community that the police constitute in the everyday, through their discourse and their practices. By moral community, I mean the set of persons, real or virtual, with whom the officers imagine they share a common humanity. There are then two possibilities: either this community is inclusive and encompasses all individuals a priori, that is, prior to any appraisal of individual qualities; or it is exclusive and rejects a priori – therefore, without any real assessment of their value – certain categories. The second criterion for differentiation relates to the moral obligation officers feel toward their profession and the set of norms associated with it. Here again, there are two possibilities: either this obligation serves as a more or

less implicit point of reference in the exercise of their duty, imposing respect for both the law as a general principle and rights as attached to individuals, or it becomes minimal, leading in particular to unjustified or disproportionate use of force and the distortion of authority into abuse of power. Thus the first criterion is ethical, revealing the relation to the public, and, more generally, to the world, while the second is deontological, constituting the relation to the profession, and, more broadly, the institution. These criteria can be combined in observation of the work of law enforcement and in the characterization of police officers.

Considering the anticrime squad I studied in light of this set of criteria, it is clear, though, that one configuration dominates out of all those possible: the majority of the officers combine an exclusive sense of their moral community with a minimalist interpretation of their moral obligation. On the one hand, they divide the world into a series of binary categories that renders any sympathy with most of the actual public they encounter unimaginable. On the other, they have no scruples about using force, the end justifying the means, and even, in some cases, take pleasure in doing so. Consequently, it is no surprise to learn that they rarely experience “moral conflict,” for their capacity and desire to exert forms of violence are fulfilled in relation to a population they have rejected in advance, placing them in a radical otherness as enemies, or, more specifically, as “savages” (in the case of the youth in the projects), “undesirables” (in the case of undocumented immigrants), and “parasites” (in the case of Roma travelers). None of these three categories has any place in their moral community; and their repressive activity appears unregulated by any moral obligation. This configuration has found resonance with the security policy instituted over the last 20 years, and especially in the decade when my study was conducted. First, the government’s discourse constantly introduces divisions within the population, in terms of origin, religion, way of life or mode of dress, stigmatizing certain groups and attributes, and challenging the idea of living together in harmony. Second, government practice takes the form of collective punishment of projects, mass expulsion of illegal aliens, and ostracization of the Roma people.

Although dominant, this configuration is not the only one that exists. On the one hand, as in the case of the two officers who switched from night to day shifts, some express doubt as to the use of violence and discrimination practiced by their colleagues. They do not fully accept a moral division of the world that could risk leaving an African to die of thirst or cold, either in a joke or for real. They certainly feel uneasy in the exercise of their profession, and encounter

dilemmas they were only able to resolve through defection. On the other, as with the two sergeants whose discourse and practice ran counter to the ethos of their unit, some manage to maintain a less Manichean view of the world that allows them to manifest sympathy, or at least a correct attitude, toward the people they come across, whoever they may be. They are sparing in their use of force, preferring to rely on their authority. Nevertheless, they feel at home in the institution, and do not question the abuses, mistreatment and unlawful practices, restricting themselves to doing their job well. In short, the former, because they seek to change the model, have moral conflicts, which they attempt to resolve by abandoning the field, while the latter, who have adopted another way of operating from the outset, have no such troubles of conscience, allowing them to remain without being overly disturbed. The consequence, however, is that even the officers who deviate from the dominant configuration, based on exclusion and coercion, have only marginal impact, since some, in their disappointment, find no way out other than leaving, while others, pragmatically, lose interest in changing things.

Given these conditions, we can get an idea of the moral impasse in which anticrime squads, and, beyond them, all the police who operate in the banlieues, find themselves. At the end of my research, it therefore seemed to me highly unlikely that any critical reflection on their practices could emerge. But was it completely out of the question? In the final meeting I had with one of the commissioners, whom I appreciated for his honesty and modesty, a few months after the end of my fieldwork, we discussed a number of subjects, but focused primarily on the operation, several weeks earlier, involving 1,000 officers, armed and helmeted, in a project in Villiers-le-Bel. The pretext was the arrest at dawn of 37 individuals who were accused, on the basis of anonymous tips, of having been involved in the riots that had followed the deaths of the two youngsters hit by a police car. This commissioner, totally devoted to his mission of public security – of whom it was said he had sacrificed his family life to his profession, and whom I would indeed see in his office or in the field throughout the day and late into the night, who strove to understand his officers even when they committed acts contrary to their code of ethics, and who gave his cellphone number to residents at the neighborhood meetings he organized – seemed somewhat disillusioned when he spoke about the militarization of the police, the transformation of these operations into spectacle, and the pointless violence perpetrated against innocent residents. However, as was his custom, he refrained from spelling out his reservations too much, not as if he did not trust me, but as if he was seeking to protect his institution.

After an hour, as it was already late in the evening, he walked with me back to the door of the precinct and asked what I was going to do now. I replied that I had just begun an ethnographic study of prisons. His eyes brightened and a smile appeared on his face: “Like Michel Foucault did,” he said, suddenly animated. “I read *Discipline and Punish* when I was doing my senior officer training. I really liked that book.” He said a few words in praise of the French intellectual, then bade me goodbye. As I left this police station for the last time, I found myself optimistically contemplating the idea that, as long as there were officers appreciatively reading such philosophy, there was perhaps still hope for critical reflection in the police.

Conclusion

Democracy

I readily admit that public tranquillity is a great good; but at the same time I cannot forget that all nations have been enslaved by being kept in good order. A nation which asks nothing of its government but the maintenance of order is already a slave at heart, – the slave of its own well-being, awaiting but the hand that will bind it.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1840

The police in democratic society are required to maintain order and to do so under the rule of law. The tension between the operational consequences of ideas of order, on the one hand, and legality, on the other, constitutes the principal problem of police as a democratic legal organization.

Jerome Skolnick, *Justice without Trial*, 1966

In the mid twentieth century, there seemed to be two co-existing models of policing: on the one hand, the US cop; on the other, the British bobby.¹ The former, charged with doing the dirty work of society, maintained a relationship of reciprocal hostility with his public. The latter, represented as closely linked to the community, appeared moved by a sense of his civic duty. The aggressive cop was noted for his routine violence and inherent racism; the unarmed bobby was praised for his reassuring presence and professional commitment. Of course, this contrast should not be exaggerated, and these two types of officer had many features in common, notably the gap between their official mission of applying the law and the diversity of the tasks they actually carried out. Nonetheless, an important distinction emerged, in terms of the philosophy of the profession,

between “enforcing order” and “peace keeping,” in the literal sense of two terms which designate the police in French: “forces de l’ordre” and “gardiens de la paix.”

Over recent decades, the general evolution of policing worldwide has been toward the harsh version of law enforcement.² Or, more precisely, this harsh version has been almost systematically imposed as a form of government of the most precarious and marginalized groups, notably working-class communities and ethnic minorities. A key element in this process has been the spread of a securitarian ideology, backed up by discourses that fan public fears to justify more repressive policies, a rise in police numbers, and the escalating severity of penalties, regardless of whether there is an objective increase in crime and criminality, and often even when they are falling. The geographical segregation of the poorest groups, especially those of Third World immigrant origin, has considerably aided this shift, both by allowing police action to be focused on specific neighborhoods, and by rendering this reality invisible to the majority. But it has also been facilitated by changes in technology, with the move from foot to vehicle patrols, the development of more sophisticated and routinely carried weapons, and the computerization of services that results in the systematization and multiplication of files on individuals convicted, suspects and even victims.

France has not been immune to this change. In fact, the French police, like those in other countries, already had long experience of sharply differentiating their activities depending on the various categories of public. In nineteenth-century Paris, the proletarians were viewed as dangerous elements that threatened the social order and merited police attention.³ In mid-twentieth-century Paris, the Algerian population, in spite of being French nationals, was seen as undesirable, and well-documented raids on the neighborhoods where they were concentrated went along with a whole trail of violence, harassment, racist insults and illegal detentions.⁴ The continuity running through these repressive practices toward certain sectors of society, from the laboring classes to working-class populations, and from colonial subjects to immigrants and minorities, should therefore not be underestimated: the activity of law enforcement has always been focused on groups whose economic and social vulnerability was easily inverted into the threat of crime and a peril to security.

However, the three major shifts of the last half-century that I have noted here – in ideology, geography and technology – have been especially marked in France.⁵ Indeed, there has been a clear acceleration in the process since the mid-1990s – even more so since the early 2000s. On the one hand, the police have been accorded increasingly

wider prerogatives and greater resources, both oriented principally toward the most socially disadvantaged territories and groups. Illegal migrants, Roma people, and above all the residents of the projects have been the target of these changes, particularly with the creation of special units such as the anticrime squads, which were virtually designed specifically for them. On the other, legislation has been adapted, giving the police more scope in their operations, broadening the range of incidents that can be defined as crimes, encouraging harsher punishment and imposing increasing constraints on judges. The extension of grounds for stop and search, the establishment of a procedure for summary court appearance, the penalization of behaviors considered vaguely threatening, and the introduction of minimum penalties for repeat offenders are just some of the transformations that have had a profound influence on repressive practices.

At the same time, the regulatory bodies that offered a possibility of recourse for citizens, although they were of only recent introduction, have been first marginalized, and then abolished – including the National Committee on Security Ethics – while the only slightly older research institutions that allowed independent scrutiny have fallen under the control of the government, notably what recently became the National Institute for Advanced Studies in Security and Justice. Finally, the Ministry of the Interior has increasingly been taking court action against those who, through either their acts or their writings, call the dysfunction of the police into question. Even when these cases had no chance of succeeding, their aim was to discourage all criticism, given the cost they involved for those accused. Thus, rather than submitting police practices more rigorously to the law and the institutions of the Republic, the law and institutions of the Republic have been modified to bring them more into line with police practices.⁶ Not all these developments are specific to France, of course, and elements of them can be detected in most democracies. But France has offered especially propitious conditions for such changes, and they have therefore been more accentuated there. There are two factors behind the relatively exceptional French case: one organizational, the other socioeconomic.

Firstly, law enforcement is principally a matter of national jurisdiction, despite the recent development of municipal police forces and private security. In particular, anything relating to sensitive neighborhoods is the almost exclusive domain of the national police. There are two important consequences of this situation: one political, the other practical. On the political side, in contrast to what occurs in many other Western countries, the French police serve not the people, but the state. This situation disconnects rank-and-file officers and the

police hierarchy from citizens, to whom they do not feel accountable and whom they tend to view as opponents, or even enemies. Conversely, it ties them to the political machinery, and in the context of increased centralization and politicization of this machinery, the minister of the interior and the president become their only interlocutors. On the practical side, while in many other countries police officers are under local control and are locally recruited, in France they are recruited to the national force from all over the country. This means that officers often work far from their home region for many years, beginning their careers with no experience in the districts with the most difficult reputation.

Secondly, law enforcement has become the favored tool for managing social problems, at a time when widening inequalities, and the recognition of discrimination, could have paved the way for a different kind of social justice policy. The choice to highlight security issues was prompted by electoral calculations, in campaigns that claimed to combat the rise of the far right while taking up its preferred themes, resulting in at least two outcomes. On the one hand, statistics on crime have become subject to continual manipulation and instrumentalization in order to justify the apparatus of repression: the classification of an increasing number of behaviors as offenses, and the pressure exerted on police officers to insure that mere insolence gives rise to criminal charges, have made it possible to obscure the structural decrease in misdemeanors and felonies; in a vicious circle of doom-mongering, these practices have been so effective that the left has been caught up in them and has participated in the alarmist frenzy, pointing to the increase in recorded incidents as an indicator of the failure of the right-wing government. On the other hand, the main effect of the politics of fear has been to shift the threshold of moral tolerance in French society, making practices that would earlier have been condemned seem normal: to offer just one example, in the early 1990s, racial profiling in stops and frisks prompted campaigns to eliminate them; 20 years later,⁷ they had become routine, but no longer aroused much protest.

These conclusions are not entirely new. The past two decades have seen a considerable expansion of the French social science literature on these issues, often offering fruitful parallels with work carried out in North America and other parts of Western Europe. In this book I have tried to go beyond these general observations – or, rather, to look deeper into them. I have sought to penetrate the world of the police, to explore its everyday routine, to grasp its logics. From within, certain facts which seemed initially difficult to recognize or interpret became visible and intelligible. It is to these “discoveries”

that I would like to turn now – or, to put it simply, to the principal results of my research. Although they relate mainly to the anticrime squads, the spearhead of police action in the banlieues, who were the crews I most often accompanied, these findings can to some extent be extrapolated to all law enforcement agents operating in the same locations, and often in concert with these special units.

The police operating in the projects do not resemble the residents. There is a sociological distance between them that is rarely found to the same extent in other countries. Patrol officers, like their superiors, are mainly white men, originally from rural areas and small towns, who are sent for their first posting to cities where a large proportion of the population consists of poor families of immigrant origin concentrated in housing projects. Even so, comparison of the sociological profiles of police and residents might suggest that their common working-class origins would bring them closer together. In fact, as has been observed in other contexts, this apparent similarity only serves to accentuate the effects of separation and the desire to mark the distinction. This objective difference is accompanied by a subjective tension. It is known that most police officers throughout the world believe the population is hostile toward them, and that this conviction justifies their own reciprocal hostility toward citizens. To this general circumstance can be added another, specific to the banlieues, although not unique to France. Through the combination of training and socialization, young recruits are led to envisage the place where they are going to work as a “jungle,” which has been portrayed to them as dangerous, and its inhabitants as “savages,” referred to in their everyday parlance as “bastards.” Before they have even set foot in this enemy territory, much of their future relationship with residents has already been determined. There are, however, atypical cases of officers who have grown up in working-class neighborhoods, often even in the projects. Their familiarity with this environment often spares them the feeling of being in alien territory that, among their colleagues, could quickly transform into aggressiveness. Nonetheless, I did not have the opportunity to observe whether a similar social proximity existed in the case of Arab and black officers: since it was created, no person of color had ever served in the anticrime squad, and there were very few among the uniformed officers in the rest of the station.

Once they arrive in the field, officers find themselves facing an astonishingly contradictory situation. They are supposed to arrest thieves and hoodlums, as they put it; this should be all the easier given the supposedly worrying increase in crime, which would justify their vigorous action, and considering they have been assigned quotas,

under the auspices of a culture of results. But, in fact, they spend days and nights patrolling, receiving remarkably few calls, often failing to arrest the rare perpetrators of offenses, who flee before they arrive, and hence unable to meet the expectations of their superiors. The ensuing tension is resolved in two main ways. Firstly, in order to achieve the target set, the officers are forced to fall back on two scenarios, neither of which corresponds to either their mission or their aspirations: breaches of the law on drugs, where searches provide them the opportunity to arrest marijuana users; and breaches of immigration law, where racial profiling leads them to stop undocumented immigrants in preparation for their deportation. Such tasks, which they consider trivial given their professional training, may be demoralizing, even though their political leanings may impel some to rejoice at this easy prey. Secondly, so as to combat this designated enemy, they must replace the reactive approach of responding to calls – of which there is a lack – with a proactive one, which involves confronting the local population. In practice, this translates to stops and frisks in the projects and sometimes in the city center, focused primarily on teenagers and young men. These checks are generally not legal – still less the accompanying body searches. Since they are often carried out on individuals already known to the police, who are constantly subjected to such practices, they are also pointless, as the officers themselves admit, at least in terms of catching criminals.

Reflecting, then, on this set of elements, and comparing them with experiments conducted in a number of countries which almost always establish that patrols serve neither to bring down crime statistics nor to reduce the feeling of insecurity, we are forced to conclude that the work of the police in the banlieues has a function other than that claimed. In reality, by virtue of the power relation that is instituted during the stops and frisks and through the humiliations accompanying them, these interactions accomplish something very different from maintaining public order. They are a recall to the social order. They remind each individual of his place. They signify to the youngster from the projects that he is a subject of the state who can be checked at will by those who hold the monopoly of legitimate violence in his name. Moreover, as police officers are happy to boast, these interactions do not necessarily only fulfill this function of political pedagogy: they can also result, with the help of a few verbal or physical provocations, in a reaction of frustration that can then be converted into insulting and resisting the public authority, in other words, a crime subject to severe punishment by the courts, which has risen sharply over the last 20 years.

Here I must anticipate two objections. Firstly, the analysis I propose on the basis of the empirical evidence I have gathered seeks to offer a global picture of the police in the projects. As in any social description, there are of course variations in the patterns I reveal – from one police officer to another, from one service to another, from one district to another. To demonstrate it, I would have preferred to conduct a second study in another site, but I was unable to elicit the required authorization. I have nevertheless tried, whenever the data permitted, to present and discuss examples of differences in orientation or even divergence between officers; they may be few, and they are still significant. Indeed, on the basis of what I witnessed, and also of my interviews with commissioners and officials, it seemed to me that the facts reported and the logics reconstructed were sufficiently confirmed by the repetition of similar observations from various individuals, from police officers to high officials, to present them as generally significant, if not universal. Secondly, my description of the banlieues and the interactions that play out there between the police and the public does not seek to deny that law enforcement agents face real problems of crime, and sometimes provocation and violence. Even though this was rarely the case in the district where I carried out my research, which was much less dangerous than the officers imagined it to be, it is obvious that crime exists, justifying the work of the police. Similarly, there is no question of asserting that provocations and violence are unique to officers, and, as others have shown and as some of my informants told me, the dramaturgy of law enforcement reveals surprising symmetries between the police and the youth. Thus, my position on these issues is not a matter of taking the moral high ground, but simply the choice of a point of view: I gave precedence to understanding from the side of the police, even if I occasionally went over to the side of the projects. Essentially, in response to these two possible objections, I shall say simply that I took seriously the mission that society has conferred on public force, and therefore sought to comprehend how that mission came to be developed in this way in certain geographical areas and among certain population groups – in short, how a petty undeclared state of exception had come to be instituted.

This exception, the result of a policy progressively imposed as the only possible solution and therefore presented as self-evident, bears a high cost for French society, and, paradoxically, in terms of security. Not only, as we have seen, has it been established that patrol work as it is typically practiced is generally ineffectual, but also it has been demonstrated that, even in its aggressive form, such as the anticrime squads, the marginal benefits of reduction in crime are canceled out

by the perverse effects of the resentment generated and the disorder provoked: exasperated and alarmed by the brutality of law enforcement operations that often aggravate problems they were supposed to resolve, residents no longer have confidence in public institutions, which they see not as serving them but, on the contrary, as contributing to their stigmatization.

However, my observation of this failure, which was implicitly confirmed by several of my informants at various levels in the law enforcement hierarchy, does not imply a challenge to other modes of operating, less spectacular but more efficient in preventing or penalizing crime, particularly the problem-solving and community policing approaches developed in other periods or in other countries. It simply invites us to consider the policing of the projects, with the cycle of violence it produces, the firing of so-called “sub-lethal weapons” in response to stones thrown, the residents of these neighborhoods then feeling threatened as much by the police as by criminals. Futile in terms of their objectives, degrading for the inhabitants, dangerous for the officers and costly for the state finances, these practices have only been able to develop because they have not been subjected to the evaluation that, in theory, is applied to all public action. The quantification of data that has developed under the aegis of the so-called “politics of numbers” serves a very different end: to legitimize power by raising anxiety about the increase in crime and reassuring the public about the efficacy of the police.

But there is also a price to pay in terms of citizenship. The population of the projects, already suffering multiple inequalities, is subjected, with the acquiescence or indifference of the majority, to a policy of repression justified neither by the local situation nor by the results obtained. Harassment through repeated stops and frisks, punitive expeditions against the whole of a neighborhood in response to provocations by a few individuals, and spectacularly disproportionate and impressively violent operations for the purpose of questioning suspects serve no other function than to remind these people how little the values of the French Republic mean as far as they are concerned. The fact that the law is not applied equally to all and that rights are not recognized as identical for everyone signifies a renunciation of the equality that is yet so emphatically trumpeted by institutions. The fact that, on the basis of their place of residence, the color of their skin, their assumed origin and their social background, individuals are presumed to be criminals, justifying humiliating and brutal practices inflicted in public, without any possible recourse to justice, constitutes an assault on dignity that strikes at the heart of the very possibility of communities living together. Those who are

thereby affected find it increasingly difficult to tolerate such situations, either making peaceful use of the resources of democracy via protests, or sometimes viewing violence as a last, desperate – and, of course, futile – resort.

Ethnography is therefore intimately bound up with democracy. The study I conducted represents an invitation to reflect on the forms of living together and on the role of public institutions in regulating it. In other words, it is meant to be a contribution to an anthropology of the state. If the two aspects of ethnography – genealogical and etymological – are taken seriously, it must be at once inquiry and writing, long-term presence in a field and reconstitution through text of a social reality. This dual level of endeavor implies a dual requirement for comprehension and veridiction: comprehension of what is being played out in a local setting and what is at stake in a broader context, and veridiction in the sense of public statement of truths that, though they will always be incomplete and biased, are nonetheless built on solid empirical and theoretical foundations. In a democratic arena, both are indispensable. We need to understand the world in which we live, and we need to speak the truth about it even when that truth is not easy to hear. Hence the ethical and political necessity to defend the right to produce ethnographies of those places where, as Walter Benjamin put it,⁸ the exception tends to become the rule.

I was sometimes asked – and continually asked myself the same question – why I was writing this book. I would like to think that it is addressed to those who are open to reflecting on democracy not as a vague ideal to be achieved, but as a concrete political form for which the problem of law enforcement, and the choices to which it gives rise, are crucial, and I would like to imagine that officers as well as their superiors, politicians as well as citizens recognize themselves in this ambition, so that a debate that French society has lagged far behind others in engaging, can finally be opened up. My work would then find its full sense as an attempt to bring into being a public anthropology.

Epilogue

Time

From changes accomplished in society I was all the better able to extract important truths, worthy of being used as the cement which would hold part of my work together, for the reason that such changes were by no means, as at the first moment I might have been tempted to suppose, peculiar to the epoch in which we lived.

Marcel Proust, *Time Regained* 1927

In other times, the police knew where they stood. There were the honest people and there were the hoodlums, who were robbers, pimps, murderers. Today, the hoodlums are different. It's minor incidents, petty crime. We can't tell the difference between honest people and hoodlums
any more.

Chief of police, district in the banlieues of Paris

When I was a boy, in the 1960s, I lived in a project in the greater Paris region. It was bounded on one side by what were known as "Emergency projects," rows of tiny dwellings constructed under the auspices of the "Low-Cost Housing for the Needy" program, and quickly transformed into slums, and on the other by a "Lopofa project," meaning a complex of "Working Family Homes" apartment blocks. These Emergency and Lopofa projects, built with the aim of gradually eliminating the insanitary housing and shanty towns of the post-war and post-colonial period, accommodated the urban proletariat and underclass, including many immigrants from South Europe and North Africa who had arrived with their families, which at that time often included many children. Distinct segregation and virulent racism were the order of the day. There was no shortage of security

problems. Some of the alleys in the emergency projects were less than reassuring, and several of the stairwells in the Lopofa project were rather lively. We knew that there were “hoodlums” and “hooligans” in the neighborhood. On certain days, we would watch from our balcony as the police arrived in the yards of the little houses below us and leave with a man they had just arrested. On summer evenings, we would hear the revving of motorbikes, which irritated the adults, and when we went out for a walk, the sound of voices from the neighboring apartment blocks floated down to us. Once in a while a patrol officer would arrive at the grade school I went to, and a pupil would be called out of class; we would learn later that he had been involved in wrongdoing, such as setting fire to the little local cinema or taking part in a burglary. Although our apartment was never broken into, our car was stolen several times from the parking lot outside the block where we lived.

However, I cannot say that my family experienced any sense of insecurity or even exclusion. Certainly, the neighborhood was to some extent stigmatized, and when, ten years later, they had the resources, my parents did what many in the working class did: they bought a small house on a plot a few hundred yards away, near another project larger than the one we were leaving. At that time the social mobility of the working class was such that many were able to glimpse the possibility of such a residential progression, even though an as yet unnamed racial discrimination was already operating a selection process distinguishing between who could leave and who had to remain. But before this modest migration to a less disadvantaged nearby neighborhood, and this longed-for accession to property ownership, we lived in a project that was not yet under an “Urban Social Cohesion Contract” (it would be placed under one three decades later), among a population that had not yet been rehoused in an “Urban Priority Zone” (as would happen several years afterward). Many of our classmates belonged to those South European and North African immigrant families who made up two-thirds of the non-native population in France. They had only one generation less than me in their immigration history, and their social background was virtually the same as mine. Confident in the Republic’s watchword of equality, parents put up with their living conditions in the belief that things would be easier for their children, who would be French.

As far as crime is concerned, I have no idea what the statistics were for our neighborhood or our town, but considering the evolution of national figures and the socioeconomic characteristics of the place where we lived, it is likely that most of the crimes and misdemeanors,

in the current extensive definition, were no less frequent than they are today in comparable urban zones, and that, within the more restricted delimitation which then prevailed, they were probably more so. Even taking the two issues that currently seem to most preoccupy local and national government, there is certainly more than one conclusion that can be drawn from their apparently ineluctable increase: as regards violence, the incidence was certainly no lower at that time – including the way teachers would strike students, and adolescents fought one another – but these rarely ended with a trip to the police station, or, if they did, they did not lead to a complaint being recorded. As regards antisocial behavior, while the term did not exist and the statistics were therefore not collated, there is no doubt that in these working-class neighborhoods social relations, particularly relations between generations, were at least as troubled as they are now, but were probably better tolerated. Yet I have no memory of an oppressive police presence, of constant stops and frisks, of massive security operations sparked by the least altercation. The police only became visible – in uniform, and in limited numbers – when a major problem arose or an arrest ordered by a judge had to be made. What is more, they were somewhat less alien to this environment than they are today, because many officers from the region, and their families, were housed in the large project bordering on the one where we lived.

Those years of mixed residential communities, where working-class families lived together regardless of their origin and where the residents of projects shared similar social backgrounds, seem far off now. It is even difficult for us to imagine that time, when more serious crimes were committed but generated less of a sense of insecurity, when the police were not expected to exert relentless pressure on poor neighborhoods, when – as the commissioner quoted in the epigraph points out – the police knew how to tell the difference between honest people and hoodlums. Actually, as at every point in history, it is our perception of reality rather than reality itself that has shifted, sometimes to the opposite view. Yet this self-evident fact is forgotten by nostalgic commentators and played on by cynical ones. The former hark back to what they believe to be the features of a golden age in which human relations were less harsh because the social world was more homogeneous, whereas they are merely describing the characteristics of what was their own privileged world. The latter try to make us believe that such a golden age did indeed exist, in order to build their political or intellectual success on the observation of a contemporary social and moral disorder that calls for repressive solutions.

When we left that neighborhood, after ten years, one of the largest public housing projects in the country – 4,000 apartments for approximately 13,000 people – had just been built on an adjacent site, to accommodate residents of the southern districts of Paris, which were then being completely reconstructed, and to absorb the inhabitants of the slums – including “our” Emergency projects, which were to be demolished, and a number of “our” Lopofa apartments, from which some of the families were being rehoused. It was the start of the period of the so-called “zones d’aménagement concerté” – that is, integrated development zones – that was soon to crystallize the difficulties of the banlieues, and the so-called “politique de la ville,” the national program of urban development.

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Today, as I pass through the projects in the conurbation where I conducted my research, at first sight I find them little different from the neighborhood where I lived as a child. Some are slightly larger, but also have better facilities. The work of city planners and architects is quite successful there, creating homes that are certainly more welcoming than those I knew. Residents are also generally attached to their neighborhood, and the recent demolition of a decidedly dilapidated project sparked many protests from inhabitants, despite the new, better housing they were offered in its stead. What has changed are the social conditions and ethnic origins of the residents. Levels of unemployment and precarious employment are higher, not only because of the general downturn in the economy, as has long been maintained, but because of specific discrimination against people living in these neighborhoods. The proportion of the population that is of immigrant origin, mainly from North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, and recently from the Indian subcontinent, is higher, not because of lax immigration policies, as police officers believe, but because policies of segregation have not been sufficiently combated. Many towns do not have the required minimum number of public housing places, preferring to pay fines to the state rather than play their part in accommodating working-class and minority families, and this creates widening divisions between towns: most large cities have seen disparities of all kinds between projects and the rest of the expanding conurbation, pointing to growing gaps within towns too. This combination of factors speeds up the marginalization of impoverished groups, especially those originating in immigration from former colonies. It is on these groups that law enforcement is now focused.

It is not generally known that the word “police” originally designated good public administration of a territory (in the Middle Ages),

and then good governance of a population (during the Enlightenment), before it became restricted to the domain of public order. Over recent decades, the state has largely relinquished the first two of these functions – despite the efforts of those who seek to promote an increasingly under-resourced urban development policy – and confined itself to the third. This evolution has accelerated since the 1990s, when those in government realized the potential for this orientation to be no longer simply a policy by default that masked a lack of concern for issues of social justice, but a policy in its own right that overtly linked the two topics likely to exacerbate anxiety and fear: immigration and security. Saturation of these neighborhoods with police then became the favored method of dealing with the social question – which government played a large part in transforming into a racial question – by explicitly linking minorities and crime.

Hence a form of statistical discrimination substantially facilitated by spatial segregation operated, with the result that, by association, the entire population of the projects – particularly teenagers – but also the whole categories of people of color and Roma people, in train stations or on the road, became sufficiently suspect, simply by virtue of belonging to these groups, to be subjected to identity checks and body searches which in the best cases inflict a degree of harassment, but sometimes degenerate into verbal and physical violence, as a matter of routine. Thus, nowadays, it is no longer robbers who are arrested, but drug users from ethnic minorities, at the same time that young drug users of middle-class background are spared; similarly, it is no longer pimps who are stopped and frisked, but undocumented immigrants, often family men who have been living in France for many years and have never had dealings with the courts. Many officers openly express dismay at this new role they are asked to play: instead of fighting crime, they must satisfy themselves with taking on the role of instruments of government communication. However, their respect for authority, their duty of secrecy, the protection of their job and, for some, their ideological adherence to this repressive policy lead them to accept and perpetuate these unheroic practices. To hold them responsible for the deterioration in relations with the public, notably in projects, would be to ignore both the constraints that government imposes on them collectively and the efforts made by some to fulfill their mission while respecting the people they have to deal with. It is therefore a policy rather than individuals that needs to be analyzed – the policy that constitutes or legitimizes practices that are often illegal, requiring novice officers to perform the thankless tasks of an ineffectual repression, and assigning them the most

vulnerable groups as targets for their activity. And it is the collective inability to challenge or even to be surprised by this policy that needs to be questioned.

It has become rare in contemporary society to interrupt the ceaseless flow of information presented as self-evident and take the time to reflect on why – or simply how – we have arrived at where we are. How, in a period of almost continuous economic growth, have we allowed inequalities to increase to the point where they influence the values placed on lives, with some being mistreated with impunity? How, in a country that so ardently defends its democratic principles, have forms of segregation and discrimination in relation to certain groups flourished, rendering them unprotected by the law? How, finally, have we compelled the police to play this role of insuring social order rather than public order? “One can nowhere discover any sufficient reason for everything’s coming about as it has. It might just as well have turned out differently,” writes Robert Musil: “What is even more peculiar is that most people do not even notice it. They have only vague recollections of their youth, when there was still an opposing power in them.” It is never too late to begin to notice that things could have turned out differently – and hence that they still could. All that is needed is a little of that opposing power that one might have possessed in earlier times, and to think not of the youth past, but of that to come.

Notes

Prologue – Interpellation

- 1 Louis Althusser (1976) endeavors to analyze the operation of what he calls “ideology” and thence to interpret the way in which the state “constitutes subjects.” The concept of interpellation has been influential, notably in the US through the interpretation put forward by Judith Butler (1997).
- 2 Michel Foucault himself (1982) moved from subjection to subjectification, the article “The subject and power” marking the point when he began to articulate these two concepts, which can also be construed in terms of “discipline” and “emancipation,” as Marcelo Otero (2006) suggests.
- 3 John Dewey (2005 [1934]: 56) is developing Wilhelm Dilthey’s analysis of lived experience.
- 4 A concept I have put forward in a very different context (Fassin, 2007), but which is also valid in this case.
- 5 Gérard Mauger (2006) juxtaposes the events against the discourses to which they gave rise.
- 6 Alain Badiou, “L’humiliation ordinaire” [“Ordinary humiliation”], *Le Monde*, November 16, 2005 (unless otherwise indicated, English translations of quotations from works published in other languages are provided by the author of this volume).
- 7 Vincent Crapanzano (2008) discusses this distinction in his article on the *harkis*.
- 8 Ludwig Wittgenstein (2009[1953]: 4) wrote this preface in German at Cambridge in January 1945.

Introduction – Inquiry

- 1 As Dominique Monjardet points out in the passage cited in one of the epigraphs to this chapter (2005: 14), in France, requests for authorization to study the police are systematically met with immediate refusal or put off (after being communicated to the Ministry of the Interior). He notes only one exception prior to 1981 (an investigation on hand-rails in two police stations), but also remarks that in the 1980s, when the left was in power, the number of studies increased particularly at the Institute for Advanced Studies of Homeland Security (IHESI, Institut des hautes études de la sécurité intérieure), a sign of the importance of the political context. It will also be noted that Monjardet himself published his first book on the police under the penname of Pierre Demonque (Monjardet, 1983), in order to ensure that he could continue his research. This precaution would perhaps no longer be sufficient today, and I realized after some time that, even without publishing anything, one cannot be sure of being able to continue one's work.
- 2 There is an obvious relation to Carl Schmitt's famous definition (2005: 5–7) "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception." Schmitt was referring to the state of emergency in its most radical form of suspension of constitutional freedoms on the grounds of extreme need. I use the term "petty exceptions" here to evoke the way in which these limited zones of restriction of freedoms become routinely applied.
- 3 Increasing the number of sites is not essential, however, and we learn no less about the work of the police from the monographs by William Westley (1970 [1950]), John Van Maanen (1988) and Peter Moskos (2008) than from the comparative studies carried out by James Wilson on eight municipalities (1968), or Jerome Skolnick and David Bayley on six towns (1986), all in the USA.
- 4 The chronology proposed here explicitly refers to Nicolas Sarkozy's role in the process described, since he became minister of the interior in 2002 and president of the Republic in 2007, personally keeping control over security issues, which had been so important in his political ascension. However, there has been a certain continuity in the politics of censorship toward research on the police, starting with Charles Pasqua, a conservative minister of the interior in the early 1990s, who was Sarkozy's political mentor. The brief interludes with the left in power under Lionel Jospin did not reverse the trend.
- 5 Set up in 1989, IHESI quickly became a center for research on the police and for exchange between researchers and police officers (Erbès, 2008). INHES, which replaced IHESI in 2004, did more than just add the theme of external security to that of internal security in the post-9/11 context; the reform consisted effectively of a refocusing on the principle that the police themselves could study the police, and a political take-over through the appointment of Pierre Monzani, a former adviser to Charles Pasqua, as director (Mouhanna, 2007). When the INHES became the INHESJ in 2009 (partly in response to the recommendations

- contained in a report by Alain Bauer to the president), under the directorship of André-Michel Ventre, a former general secretary of the Police Commissioners Union, it took on some of the responsibilities of the Ministry of Justice, notably bringing in-house the gathering of justice statistics through the National Observatory for Crime and Judicial Responses (Observatoire national de la délinquance et des réponses pénales).
- 6 The fact that prefects are regularly summoned by the Ministry of the Interior to account for the performance of their public security services – particularly as regards deporting illegal immigrants – and the reprimands meted out to the less efficient among them, are an indication of the new power relations pertaining since 2002. The penalties imposed on the prefects of the départements of Manche and Isère in 2009 and 2010 respectively, both of whom were dismissed by the president following public disturbances, and replaced by former police officers, further increased the pressure on prefectural authorities, and hence on the entirety of the regional and local public security services.
 - 7 The most notorious case was that of Jean-Hugues Matelly, a head of a squadron in the gendarmerie and member of a research team at the National Scientific Research Center (CNRS, Centre national de la recherche scientifique), whose article criticizing the plan for closer links between the national police and the gendarmerie, published on the progressive news website Mediapart, led to him being struck off the list of senior gendarmerie officers by presidential decree, on March 12, 2010. This decision was overturned on January 11, 2011 by the Council of State, the body providing the government with legal advice and acting as court of last resort in France, which instructed the Ministry of Defense to reinstate him and granted him damages against the state. Despite this embarrassing repudiation of the government, the aim of intimidating members of law enforcement services was certainly achieved.
 - 8 Deputy director of the Center for Sociological Research in Law and the Institutions of Justice (CESDIP, Centre de recherches sociologiques sur le droit et les institutions pénales), Christian Mouhanna (2007: 41) himself resigned from INHES shortly after it was set up, rejecting the takeover of research into the police by the Ministry of the Interior.
 - 9 A number of other studies involving a period of observation of police work – usually short, primarily owing to time limits imposed when authorization was given – were undertaken during this period, including research on criminal investigation services (Proteau, 2009), on the criminal investigation services and emergency squads (Pruvost, 2007), on the vice squad (Mainsant, 2010), on public safety services (Gauthier, 2010) and on anticrime squads (Jobard, 2005).
 - 10 Dominique Monjardet (1996: 5) played an important part in this “opening” of the police to outside eyes, particularly in his role as technical adviser to the director of IHESI when it was set up in 1989, and then as chair of its science committee. The *Cahiers de la sécurité*

intérieure [*Journal of Internal Security*] was a major vector of exchange between social scientists and law enforcement.

- 11 Jean-Marc Erbès (1996: 296), who describes himself as a “smuggler” who was able to bring sociological analysis into the police force, which he describes as a “black box,” was the first director of IHESI. In his view (2008: 205), “the sociologist made visible what was not visible in a profession and an organization,” and it was in this spirit that he developed research at IHESI.
- 12 Here I draw on the title of one of the first ethnographic studies of the police, carried out by the sociologist Albert Reiss in the United States (1971). It is worth noting that his analysis of police violence and racism provided the impetus for reform of the police, particularly in New York.
- 13 The two studies (Vincenzo Cicchelli, Olivier Galland, Jacques de Mailard and Séverine Misset [2006], *Enquête sur les violences urbaines. Comprendre les émeutes de novembre 2005. L'exemple d'Aulnay-sous-Bois*, Paris, Centre d'analyse stratégique; and Michel Kokoreff, Pierre Barron and Odile Steinauer [2006], *Enquête sur les violences urbaines. Comprendre les émeutes de novembre 2005. L'exemple de Saint-Denis*, Paris, Centre d'analyse stratégique) commissioned by the Center for Strategic Analysis (CAS, Centre d'analyse stratégique), which is attached to the prime minister's office, brought interesting insights into the perception of the riots among the local population and among police officers, but both their conditions of production and their dissemination were narrowly framed by this institution directly dependent on the government. For this reason I myself refused an invitation to conduct a similar study for this center. In my fieldwork, by contrast, I enjoyed genuine independence.
- 14 William Westley's doctoral thesis (1970 [1950]: 111), submitted to the University of Chicago in 1950 and considered a pioneering study of law enforcement, was not published until twenty years later.
- 15 Samuel Lézé's study of psychoanalysts (2010: 37) reveals the wealth of ingenious strategies his informants deployed to block all possible observation, and even discussion, of their work.
- 16 In his article on myths and realities about law enforcement, Jean-Paul Brodeur (1984) remarks that crime and the police have in common the fact of “not being accessible to theory”; but the difference between the police and crime is that the former's opacity is sometimes protected by the law.
- 17 In a text written in collaboration with Léonore Le Caisne (2008), Laurence Proteau reports an apparently contradictory experience, describing the ease and pleasure of her work in a police station compared to the resistance and boredom she encountered in her study of a penitentiary. In addition to the sociological reasons she discusses (the prison officers' sense of low status contrasting with the value ascribed to the investigative work of the judicial research unit) and the identifiable psychological elements (the attraction the young social scientist felt

- toward the atmosphere of excitement apparent in police work compared with the unease experienced in the closed institution of the prison), the chronology of the two studies offers an important clue: Proteau's research in the police station was conducted in 2001 and 2002, just before the new minister of the interior began to take back control over scientific inquiry.
- 18 I should note exceptions here, starting with Michael Banton (1964), who carried out one of the first studies of the police in Britain, but also more recently Benjamin Chesluk (2004) in New York, Ben Penglase (2009) in Rio de Janeiro, Susana Durão (2008) in Lisbon and Kevin Karpiak (2010) in Paris.
 - 19 Here I adopt Alban Bensa's phrase, used in a collection of essays gathered around and beyond his ethnography of the Kanaks of French New Caledonia (2006: 7).
 - 20 Reducing otherness means seeing the subjects we study not as "other" but as "different," argues Jean Bazin, a specialist on the Bambara of Mali (2008: 48).
 - 21 The questions I raise here arise more acutely in other research, notably that relating to certain political worlds such as the extreme right-wing National Front in France, studied by Daniel Bizeul (2007), and Lega Nord in Italy, studied by Martina Avanza (2008). Nevertheless, both authors agree that, even in these extremist groups, issues of loyalty are crucial.
 - 22 I hasten to add that I see no particular merit in the choice of these subjects for my research, and have my reservations about declarations made by those who see anthropologists as the heroes of our time, devoting themselves to research in the service of the "voiceless" and the "oppressed."
 - 23 As Geneviève Pruvost (2007: 142), who carried out a five-week study in an outer-city police station near Paris, remarks: "Police officers cannot control themselves to the point of radically transforming their behavior" and "while they can briefly 'pull the wool over the sociologist's eyes,' they will not do it for any length of time." In support of this claim, she cites a series of situations she witnessed, which constituted clear "breaches of police ethics."
 - 24 Not wishing to create difficulties for my informants, particularly at a time when political sanctions on police officers have become routine, I restricted myself to applying a somewhat greater degree of anonymity than I originally committed to, since certain details could easily have breached it. I have tried to obscure the traces for potential inquisitors. In certain cases where an individual's job might have made them recognizable, I have avoided mentioning details of their career and when indicating the sex of a senior official or high-ranked officer would have made her identifiable, I treated it as masculine. I have sometimes, in reproducing certain conversations where it was relevant, included the names of individuals. It goes without saying that these are pseudonyms – but I have tried to keep their ethnic signification. The sociodemo-

graphic data presented here are extracted from the most recent INSEE census; for reasons which will easily be understood, they do not provide all the details that might be desired. Similarly, I judged it best not to give excessively precise details on the interesting history of the conurbation where I was working.

- 25 This development of a study that originates in the question of inequality and discrimination and then moves on to the work of the police can also be seen in the scientific trajectory of other researchers, such as David Smith (1983), who in the 1980s headed the major British inquiry *Police and People in London*.
- 26 Thus John Van Maanen (1988: 113) reports how, when the officer with whom he was on patrol had gone on foot to track down a suspect, he was asked to take the driver's place and drive the police car in an effort to corner the man, a task at which he failed miserably. Similarly, Fabien Jobard (2006: 226) describes how, when the officers he was accompanying performed a somewhat aggressive stop and frisk in a housing project and decided to empty a six-pack of beer that had been bought by the youngsters then being body-searched, he offered advice on how to open the bottles and ended up taking on the job himself, arousing the anger of the youths. While, in the first case, it seems the researcher had no choice but to comply, in the second it was the social scientist himself who took the initiative of assisting the police.
- 27 The position I defend does not exclude still more demanding choices, such as that made by Peter Moskos (2008) in Baltimore a few years ago, when he became a police officer himself, taking a training course and undertaking a period of field training, to gain in-depth understanding of the logics of the war on drugs launched in the projects in the United States during the 1980s. His dual role as political scientist and police officer was known to his colleagues and his superior officers.
- 28 Howard Becker (1967), who at the time was president of the American Sociological Association, gave this title to his address to the annual conference of the Society for the Study of Social Problems in 1966.
- 29 Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995), who has written in particular on poverty and violence in the Brazilian Nordeste, on a closed institution for AIDS patients in Cuba, on a squatter camp in South Africa, and on international organ trafficking, is well placed to defend a "militant anthropology."
- 30 The same is true of all those of whose ideology and practices the researcher disapproves, but whose point of view she aims to reconstruct faithfully in her research. Thus Faye Ginsburg (1993) describes the problems raised by her inquiry into pro-life campaigners in North Dakota.
- 31 I have written elsewhere (Fassin, 2011: 245) about what I understand by a critical position on the threshold of the cave, in reference to Plato's metaphor – that is, one which alternates scrutiny from within and from without, knowledge of the milieu and reflection at a distance.
- 32 The essays in Caroline Brettell's volume (1993) relate to a particular audience – those who are the object of anthropological analysis.

- 33 The sociology of law enforcement, which has emerged relatively recently, began to develop in France at the very time when the conditions for its expansion became increasingly difficult, owing to the restrictions placed on researchers.
- 34 The master of the social documentary is Frederick Wiseman, who often emphasizes that, while his films are based on real-life action, the work of the director intervenes in the way they are filmed, the choice of scenes, and the dramatic structure. In *The Wire*, produced by the cable network HBO, former police reporter David Simon deploys a somewhat symmetrical strategy, making a fiction that is nourished by real facts collected from his investigatory days. In both cases, there is much to learn for ethnographers.
- 35 Ethnography as a method places the researcher in a singular relationship of commitment because of the closeness it generates with individuals, but also because of the topics it often engages with today (Cefaï, 2010). Hence a tension arises between the researcher's responsibility to one and the other.

1 Situation

- 1 Released in 2004, *Banlieue 13* (*District 13* in the English version) was directed by Pierre Morel and produced by Luc Besson. It takes up the theme of John Carpenter's *New York 1997*, in which Manhattan has become a giant prison. The responses of young viewers on the site www.videocritiques.com are, with few exceptions, highly enthusiastic, often emphasizing the "realistic" nature of this fiction, or simply the "reflection" it elicits.
- 2 The construction of walls is, however, no mere fantasy, but in fact corresponds to a policy recently developed in a number of countries in the West, as Wendy Brown (2010) notes. In terms of how they are used to separate social classes, it is, however, worth remembering that, as Setha Low points out (2003), they usually serve not to enclose the poor, as in the film, but to protect the wealthy.
- 3 In France, the départements are often designated in everyday language by their number, and here the number 93, which is said as "quatre-vingt-treize," echoes the "treize" of 13. Seine-Saint-Denis is the emblematic département of the "social question" as well as the "racial question" (Fassin and Fassin, 2006). It has been struck by deindustrialization and unemployment, has served as an overflow for the poor and immigrants expelled from Paris through urban renovation programs, and counts the highest proportion of working-class inhabitants of sub-Saharan and Northern African descent.
- 4 On a visit to the pedestrianized area of Argenteuil, on October 26, 2005, Nicolas Sarkozy said on camera to a resident of the neighborhood who was speaking to him out of her window: "You've had enough,

haven't you? You've had enough of this bunch of scum? OK, we're going to get rid of them for you" (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=bs2tiewzwxI – all URLs cited in these notes were last accessed on June 30, 2011). Following the death of a child hit by a stray bullet in a gang shoot-out in the Quatre Mille project in La Courneuve, the minister of the interior declared, on June 20, 2005, that the project needed to be “cleansed with Kärcher” in reference to a pressure washer used for heavy cleaning (*Le Monde*, June 21, 2005). Both expressions became associated with the future French president's contemptuous and offensive attitude toward the banlieues.

- 5 These quotations are taken from a press release from the Alliance union, a letter from the local branch of the Human Rights League addressed to the state prosecutor, and the minutes of a meeting at the town hall. For reasons of confidentiality, no more precise references can be given. The police operation and its repercussions were the subject of an article in the regional daily newspaper.
- 6 In an article in *Le Monde* on July 21, 2010, headed “Nicolas Sarkozy: eight years of ‘declarations of war’,” Samuel Laurent recalls how, as minister of the interior, and subsequently president of France, he has made martial rhetoric commonplace in relation to crime, but also in relation to “reckless drivers” and “school truancy,” among other new public enemies.
- 7 Egon Bittner (1970: 49) considers here the conjunction of two evolutions: the deployment of the rhetoric of the war on crime and the transformation of police action into military action.
- 8 Flash-Balls are firearms using balls with the “stopping power of a .38 caliber handgun” and Tasers are electroshock weapons provoking “neuromuscular incapacitation.” Although sold as “non-lethal” by their manufacturers, they may cause severe injuries, including death. During the weeks in which I was writing this chapter, two people died in France after being hit by these weapons. The first was a 38-year-old Malian man, an illegal immigrant, who died after being shot twice with a Taser gun following an argument with his roommate, on November 29, 2010, in Colombes. The second, a 40-year-old man of North African origin, died on December 13, 2010, after being shot in the chest with a Flash-Ball at point-blank range by an officer from the Marseilles anticrime squad who had come to question him, in the workers' hostel where he lived (see www.france-info.com/france-justice-police-2010-11-30-un-homme-meurt-atteint-par-deux-decharges-de-taser-500340-9-11.html and www.rfi.fr/france/20101213-mort-suite-tir-flash-ball-France).
- 9 For a discussion of the militarization of the police, see Mathieu Rigouste's essay (2008: 93 and 97) on the “domestic war.” He quotes a general – “a veteran of Algeria and former adviser to Pierre Joxe and Jean-Pierre Chevènement” – both former ministers of the interior and of defense, who, in an article in the journal *Défense*, wrote: “The latent guerrilla warfare in disadvantaged banlieues could spread outside of them and become a civil war.” Mathieu Rigouste also cites a commander at the

Military School who told him at the time of the disorder in 2005: “If it was up to me, I would have sent the troops in long ago.” Actually, since then, several right-wing representatives have openly expressed the same idea on the occasion of local unrests, along with the former socialist presidential candidate Ségolène Royal.

- 10 An analysis of the events in Villiers-le-Bel can be found in Luc Bronner’s article “Les émeutes de 2007 ne ressemblent pas à celles de 2005 [The 2007 riots are not like those of 2005],” *Le Monde*, November 28, 2007. A website was set up to publish an alternative account, arguing that the reportage had been made up by the journalist and contributed to the discrediting of the inhabitants: “Soutien aux inculpés de Villiers-le-Bel [Support for those charged at Villiers-le-Bel],” www.soutien-villiers-lebel.com.
- 11 A year after Villiers-le-Bel, following the death of a youth in a car accident during a police chase, skirmishes in a neighborhood of the small town of Romans-sur-Isère resulted in an operation involving 320 officers. See Luc Bronner and Isabelle Mandraud, “La France promeut un modèle anti-émeute d’exception” [France promotes an anti-riot model of exception],” *Le Monde*, October 18, 2008.
- 12 According to the study carried out by Geneviève Pruvost et al. (2003), 39.3% and 39.7% of rank-and-file officers spent most of their childhood respectively either in the country or in a small to medium-sized provincial town; the respective rates are 28.3% and 37.3% for ranked officers, and 23% and 45.9% for commissioners. By contrast, only 12.3% of all police officers have lived in the banlieues during their childhood, with the lowest rates among the rank-and-file officers.
- 13 In a remarkable convergence which reveals the power of these clichés, Hélène Carrère d’Encausse, the permanent secretary of the Académie Française, used virtually the same terms as this police sergeant to explain the riots of 2005: “These people come straight from their African villages. But Paris and the other cities of Europe are not African villages. For example, everyone asks: ‘Why are African children in the street and not in school?’ The answer is clear: many of these Africans are polygamous. In one apartment there may be three or four wives and 25 children. They’re so overcrowded they’re not even apartments any more, but heaven knows what! So we can understand why these children are running around in the street” (*Libération*, November 15, 2005). The theme of polygamy as an explanation of urban disorder was also used by Gérard Larcher, then junior minister of employment, and Bernard Accoyer, then chairman of the right-wing political party in the French parliament (*Le Monde*, November 16, 2005). A sociologist, Hugues Lagrange, encountered a remarkable public success with a book (2010), in which he similarly explained the criminality of teenagers of African origin by polygamy and culture, accusing his colleagues of political correctness for not acknowledging this reality. I made a critical analysis of his thesis in the *Revue Française de Sociologie* (Fassin, 2011).

- 14 Quoted by Jérémie Gauthier (2010), who moderates it by noting – somewhat optimistically, given the low level of ethnic diversity among law enforcement agents – that there is “a growing number of officers with origins in the waves of sub-Saharan and North African immigration.”
- 15 The book *The Sociology of Black Africa* (1970 [1955]), which appeared during the period of decolonization, introduced to French social sciences the contributions of British anthropologists to analysis of change and conflict. The concept of the “colonial situation” was inspired by Bronislaw Malinowski’s “contact situation,” as criticized by Max Gluckman.
- 16 It should nevertheless be emphasized that the chief of police’s probabilistic reasoning (minorities are present in large numbers in this town and it is therefore logical that they represent a high percentage of those subjected to identity checks) has nothing to do with the sophist reasoning of polemicist Éric Zemmour (“French people of immigrant origin are more often subject to identity checks because most drug dealers are Blacks and Arabs”), as supported by the former Socialist minister of the interior Jean-Pierre Chevènement. In the first case, the link is strictly statistical and the intention to discriminate is therefore refuted; in the second, the causal relation is claimed but fallacious, and conversely serves to justify racial discrimination. See www.rue89.com/2011/01/11/proces-zemmour-acte-i-je-ne-fais-que-decrire-la-realite.
- 17 In *Le Ghetto français* [*The French Ghetto*], Éric Maurin (2004) analyzes the reality of segregation in France, on the basis of a sample of “neighborhoods.” He shows, in particular, that “the difference in the proportion of non-French people between one neighborhood and another is up to three and a half times higher than if they were evenly spread over the area of France. It is the highest indicator of inequalities between neighborhoods.” While he notes that the situation had not become any worse over the previous twenty years, one should consider, on the one hand, that there had been a net fall in the non-French population in France over that period, and, on the other, that, to the extent that children of immigrants now virtually all hold French nationality, the indicator used (i.e. the number of non-French residents) is increasingly less relevant as a measure of segregation, which must now properly be termed “racial segregation.”
- 18 In the French context, much more than is the case in North America, the references to origin and color, and the descriptions “ethnic” and “racial,” are often viewed as disturbing. It is true that, on this subject, the issue of terminology is always delicate, but precautions are even more necessary for a French audience, to whom one has to explain that to speak of racial discrimination does not mean that races exist, but that discourses and acts presume their existence. In a country where the first national survey on racial discrimination never used the words “racial” or “discrimination” in its questionnaire (Fassin and Simon, 2008), it is necessary to assert that failing to name these categories and

- to study what they represent means resigning oneself to the perpetuation of facts to which silence allows society to be blind.
- 19 The data cited are extracted from the 2010 report by the National Observatory for Sensitive Urban Zones (ONZUS, Observatoire national des zones urbaines sensibles), extranet.ville.gouv.fr/docville/Rapportonzus2010/ra_onzus_2010cp.pdf, supplemented by the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE, Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques), “Les zones urbaines sensibles en Île-de-France en 1999 [Sensitive urban zones in the Île-de-France region in 1999],” *INSEE-Île-de-France à la Page*, December 2001, and “La population des zones urbaines sensibles [The population of sensitive urban zones],” *INSEE Première*, December 2010.
 - 20 It should be noted that, by convention, an immigrant is a person born in another country and into another nationality, now residing in France, while a foreigner is a person living in France who does not have French nationality. According to INSEE, in France there are 5.1 million immigrants, a figure that has been rising since 1990, and 3.6 million foreigners, a figure that has fallen over the same period. Of the immigrants, more than 2 million are French (by naturalization). Of the foreigners, 550,000 were born in France (80 percent of whom are less than 18 years old and plan to apply for French nationality). See INSEE, *Recensement de la population. Nationalités-Immigration [Population Census. Nationalities, Immigration]*, July 29, 2009, www.insee.fr/fr/publics/communication/recensement/particuliers/doc/fiche-nationalites-immigration.pdf.
 - 21 Under the Law on Solidarity and Urban Renewal, towns with a population greater than 3,500 are required to offer 20 percent social housing. Evaluation completed on the tenth anniversary of the law showed that 931 metropolitan boroughs were failing to achieve this aim. The town with the lowest level, only 3.6 percent, is Neuilly-sur-Seine, where Nicolas Sarkozy was mayor for a long time. See Myriam Chauvot, “Paris, Neuilly et Nice, mauvais élèves du logement social [Paris, Neuilly and Nice, falling behind in social housing],” *Les Échos*, December 27, 2010.
 - 22 As Laurent Mucchielli (2004) shows, the crime statistics of the Ministry of the Interior rose spectacularly in 1993, immediately after the appointment of a new minister. Unless one is to believe that the mere presence of Charles Pasqua in this post generated a greater number of crimes, one must admit that the cause of this rise was the changes in the way crimes were reported and recorded; and, indeed, a set of measures introduced at that time broadened the police’s powers and encouraged greater severity in dealing with incidents which until then would have been considered minor, hence leading to an inflation of the crime figures.
 - 23 The developments very briefly summarized here are drawn primarily from a series of studies conducted and published by the Center for Sociological Studies in Law and Penal Institutions (CESDIP, Centre d’études sociologiques sur le droit et les institutions pénales) in its *Ques-*

- tions Pénales* (Mucchielli, 2008; Zauberman et al., 2008, 2010). More detailed analyses and more in-depth discussion can also be found in Aubusson et al. (2002) and Zauberman et al. (2009).
- 24 The “State 4001” (“état 4001”) collates the statistics for incidents recorded by the police and the gendarmerie. The data presented here are drawn from the above-cited ONZUS report (figures on sensitive urban zones and conurbations), and from *La Criminalité en France* [*Crime in France*], published by INHESJ: www.inhesj.fr/?q=content/rapport-2010. To make the figures comparable, I have related the absolute values to the population of Paris as given by INSEE for the same period.
 - 25 INSEE’s annual survey of the living conditions of households offers both an overview of security issues and an appreciation of how they develop over time. The statistics briefly summarized here are drawn from general analyses (Le Jeannie, 2006), supplemented by specific studies presented in the 2010 ONZUS report previously cited.
 - 26 James Wilson and George Kelling’s article “The Broken Windows” (1982) had a profound impact in the United States and beyond. On the basis of social psychology experiments showing that an abandoned and damaged vehicle very quickly became the object of acts of vandalism by neighborhood residents, the authors suggested that, rather than serious crime, it was minor damage that posed a problem in disadvantaged neighborhoods, paving the way to a gradual slide toward marginality and crime. While the conclusions they drew from this observation in terms of police practices are questionable, the idea that abandonment by the authorities is a factor in insecurity is worthy of consideration.
 - 27 This reference to Louis Chevalier’s book on Paris in the first half of the nineteenth century (1973) reminds us of the long history of the link between social questions and security issues, but at the same time highlights the difference between the industrious city of the past and today’s precarious banlieues.
 - 28 My aim is not to suggest that insecurity was created entirely for the purposes of Jacques Chirac’s presidential campaign in 2002, and Nicolas Sarkozy’s work at the Ministry of the Interior in preparation for his own campaign five years later: the perception of the problem is set within the context of a longer cycle, as Philippe Robert and Marie-Lys Pottier (2004) show. Rather, I wish to consider the way in which politicians react to a diffuse and fluctuating feeling by crystallizing and instrumentalizing it.
 - 29 Cited in William Westley (1970: 103). And lest one should think this is merely a figure of speech, he quotes: “The high level of crime among the colored is due to the fact that they still have one foot in Africa.”
 - 30 Other illustrations in this bestiary are scorpions, bats, eagles, cobras, tigers, rhinos, bears and a few fantastic animals. See, for example, www.voituredepolice.niceboard.com/t31p25-ecussons-des-brigades-anti-criminalite.

- 31 Warhammer is a tabletop war strategy game. It is made up of miniature figures representing armies of fantasy warriors armed with powerful weapons, with evocative names like Iron Warriors, Night Lords and World Eaters.
- 32 Lionel Jospin, at the time Socialist prime minister, used this phrase in an interview with *Le Monde* on January 7, 1999: “As long as we keep accepting sociological excuses instead of focusing on individual responsibility, we won’t resolve these problems.” However, he does not have the monopoly on this condemnation of sociologists, which is widely shared in political circles.

2 Ordinary

- 1 *36, quai des Orfèvres* [36th Precinct] (2004), directed by former police officer Olivier Marchal, centers on the rivalry between the respective chiefs of the anti-gang squad and the research and intervention squad in the mission to arrest a gang of armed robbers. *La Haine* [Hate] (1995), written and directed by Mathieu Kassovitz following the death of a young Zairean man in police custody, recounts the life of three friends in a housing project in the Paris region in the days after one of their friends has been beaten up by police and lies in a coma. *36, quai des Orfèvres*, which was nominated for several of the French cinema industry’s César awards, presents a view of law enforcement from the inside, with the reassuring image the police have of themselves, as an organization devoted to the fight against crime. *La Haine*, which won the Best Director award at the Cannes Film Festival, offers the opposite perspective: the view of young people from housing projects on police violence.
- 2 This is how Peter Manning, in his book *Police Work* (1997 [1977]: 97–101), summarizes the organization of the main activities involved in patrol work. He notes that, ultimately, the police spend little time directly involved in the fight against crime.
- 3 The Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment (Kelling et al., 1974) was conducted by the Police Foundation, the largest private organization for research into the police in the United States.
- 4 The Minneapolis Hot Spots Patrol Experiment (Sherman and Weisburd, 1995), conducted in 1988–9, in a larger city with higher levels of crime, compared a zone where patrols went on as usual with another where frequency of patrols was increased. It focused specifically on the locations perceived as most dangerous, where police passed through regularly or even parked their vehicles and got out of them to walk through the neighborhood, the better to perform their task of prevention. The study did indeed show a slight fall in misdemeanors, but not in felonies, in the places where the targeted patrols were closest together.
- 5 Although the experiment was carried out in the whole département, the results were analyzed in detail only in Coulommiers (Frédéric Ocque-

teau [2008], “La sécurité publique à l’épreuve de la LOLF. L’exemple de la DDSP de Seine-et-Marne et de la CSP de Coulommiers,” CERSA-CNRS).

- 6 The authors also indicate that improving response time has no effect on arrests and that crimes are not solved through criminal investigations by police officers (Skolnick and Bailey, 1986: 4–5).
- 7 And he concludes: “In summary, the police sell themselves as crime fighters but do not spend much time on this activity per se. Rather they spend time ordering the population in ways which sometimes include the use of the criminal law” (Ericson, 1982: 197 and 198).
- 8 The case was heard on December 12, 2008. The commissioner giving evidence of the offense asserted that this was an “irresponsible and dangerous act,” and reminded the court grandiloquently that “Kafka and Orwell died of tuberculosis.” But the judge at the Evry police court ruled the reference out of order. See www.leparisien.fr/essonne-91/au-tribunal-pour-avoir-crache-par-terre-12-12-2008 and www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2008/12/11/le-crachat-au-banc-des-accuses.
- 9 The number of people experimenting with drugs in France is estimated at 12.4 million, including 3.9 million who use them at least once a year, and 1.2 million regular users. Given these facts, one can imagine how easy it would be to “bump up the numbers” with marijuana use. But questioning and convictions for this offense are specifically targeted. See Observatoire français des drogues et des toxicomanies [French Observatory for Drugs and Drug Addiction], *Drogues. Chiffres clés [Drugs: Key Statistics]*, June 2010, www.ofdt.fr/bdd/publications/docs/dcc2010.pdf.
- 10 Using the example of higher education and the imposition of indicators that serve to measure its efficacy, Ogien (2010: 35) shows that “the success of the operation rests less on the power of persuasion wielded by publishing the substantive value of the statistic than on the implicit use of its social value, in the sense that what it counts on is the deference and fascination that invoking and publishing the statistic should not fail to arouse.” With respect to police statistics, the magic potency of figures has increased as they have been more frequently presented in public, and received greater media attention.
- 11 On June 26, 2002, Nicolas Sarkozy addressed senior police commanders in these terms: “I ask you for total commitment . . . You must set quantifiable targets for improving efficiency, in terms of reduction of crime and increase in clearance rates.” On July 5, the minister of the interior told the senior ranks of the gendarmerie: “We have to move to a results culture, with all that brings with it in terms of risk and uncomfortable consequences” (Monjardet, 2006).
- 12 In his study of the implementation of the LOLF in relation to police activity in the Seine-et-Marne département, and more specifically in the Coulommiers district in 2005, Frédéric Ocqueteau (2008) shows how the data are presented and used by public security services. The main goal is to make it appear that there is a fall in incidents recorded (suggesting effective prevention) and a rise in clearance rates (indicating

- efficient investigation). Furthermore, the deterioration in performance on drug dealing is disguised by the increase in incidents related to simple drug use, which are easier to identify and solve (since drug use and drug dealing offenses are equally counted as breaches of drug laws); the 100 percent increase, in two years, in questioning of undocumented immigrants allows the police both to comply with the instructions of the Ministry of the Interior in this area and to increase clearance rates (since, of course, 100 percent of breaches of immigration law are solved).
- 13 “Runs” are illegal street races, generally over a short distance of a few hundred yards. Although this is a long-established practice – especially in the United States in the 1960s, as depicted in George Lucas’ 1973 film *American Graffiti* – it has recently developed and become extremely popular among teens and young people, in the wake of Rob Cohen’s *Fast and Furious* movie series, the first of which was released in 2001.
- 14 Now professor of history at the University of Southern California, following similar posts at New York University and Columbia, Robin Kelley (2000: 23) notes, in his account of this experience: “I might as well have been in Johannesburg in the days of apartheid, or for that matter, any ex-colonial metropole where the color line keeps the world’s darker people under an omnipotent heel. Whether we are speaking of North Africans in Paris, West Indians in London, indigenous peoples in Sydney, Australia, black people in Birmingham (Alabama or England), or Palestinians in the West Bank, relations between the police and people of color have been historically rooted in a colonial encounter.” Reports from the National Committee on Security Ethics (CNDS, Commission nationale de déontologie de la sécurité) suggest that the parallel with France is not without foundation.
- 15 In Aesop’s fable of the wolf and the lamb, recreated by Jean de la Fontaine, the wolf wants to find a justification to kill the lamb who is quenching his thirst in a river. He accuses the young animal of having spoken ill of him the previous year: “How could I have done so if I wasn’t born yet?” replies the lamb. “If it wasn’t you, then it was your brother,” insists the wolf. “I haven’t any brother,” implores the lamb. “Then it’s one of your kind” concludes the wolf who pounces on his poor victim. And the moral of the fable is: “The reason of the stronger is always the better.”

3 Interactions

- 1 The documentary, whose title can be translated as “Cops from France,” was made by Juliette Senik, with the support of the France 3 TV channel which first broadcast it in 2005. The following appears on the KUIV Productions website: “Siham, Moustapha, Kahouter, Karime, Sidi-Jaffar, all around 20 years old, are police officers in a volatile neighborhood in Paris. Whether practicing Muslims or not, whether steeped in

the ‘good culture of the home country’ or far removed from their traditional culture, they seem to live comfortably with their mixed French – North African identity. But often, in the course of the everyday activities of a simple cop, they are accused of ‘betraying’ their origins, and in front of their fellow officers, they are forced to choose their camp.” An unexpurgated version of the dialogue can be seen at wn.com/Gamine_de_cité_insulte_une_flic_de_cité.

- 2 The movie *Polisse*, directed by Maiwenn, awarded the Jury Prize at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival, reveals similarly sympathetic attitudes toward the police by depicting in a Manichean way a child protection unit confronted by tragic social dramas. The most improbable scenes follow one another, showing compassionate officers attempting to alleviate the suffering of the weak, crying at the misfortune of an African woman, and resisting the aggressiveness of a reactionary Muslim man.
- 3 The two quotations are taken from Article 78-2 of the Penal Procedure Code, the first referring to the law of June 10, 1983, and the second to the law of August 10, 1993.
- 4 In its decision 93–323 dated August 5, 1993, the Constitutional Council stated that: “the practice of generalized and discretionary identity checks is incompatible with respect for individual freedom,” and that “the authority concerned must, in all cases, justify the particular circumstances that indicate a risk of breach of public order serving as grounds for the check” (www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr). In its 2008 study of the ethics of security forces’ actions in the presence of minors, the National Committee on Security Ethics stressed that “groundless identity checks or identity checks undertaken on the grounds of physical aspect alone should be avoided,” and that “repeated identity checks on minors whose identity is perfectly well known to officers are forbidden” (www.la-cnds.eu/rapports/ra_pdf/Etude_Mineurs.pdf).
- 5 In French, and even more in France, the use of the “tu” personal pronoun (2nd person singular), usually reserved for friends and family, implies disrespect when used in other circumstances, in particular with people one does not know, since, in that case, the “vous” (2nd person plural) is required.
- 6 “Sucking one’s teeth” (“tchipper” in French slang) involves making a hissing sound out of the corner of one’s mouth to express irritation. “It’s a way of saying ‘Get out! Get lost!’” a young girl explained to a journalist. Another, more explicit, added: “It’s a way of saying ‘Go fuck yourself!’ without using the words.” See www.liberation.fr/vous/01092320229-les-blancs-aussi-tchipent-mais-c-est-pas-pareil.
- 7 The law of March 18, 2003, “for interior security,” also known as the Sarkozy II Law, after the then minister of the interior, marked overall a repressive turn, mostly against project youth, Roma people and prostitutes. It was followed by the law of March 9, 2004, “relating to the adaptation of justice to developments in crime,” also known as the Perben II Law, after the then minister of justice, which defined new crimes and further extended the powers of the police.

- 8 The Rodney King case involved the beating of an African American man by officers from the Los Angeles Police Department on March 3, 1991: King received 56 nightstick blows and 6 kicks from five or six officers who had arrested him for speeding and fleeing the scene of a crime, and suffered multiple fractures and injuries. As the scene was filmed, the press seized the story and King became a symbol of the police's racist violence. In a first trial, held in a court in a residential suburb in April 1992, a jury that included not a single African American acquitted all the police officers; this verdict triggered riots in Los Angeles in which 43 died and over 2,000 people were injured. In a second trial, in March 1993, two of the officers were sentenced to 30 months in jail (Cannon, 1999).
- 9 This text (Van Maanen, 1978) is a classic of the sociology of the police. The author calls for a study of everyday interactions between the officers and their public – that is to say, those which result in neither arrest nor violence and enable us to make sense of the common understanding of law enforcement.
- 10 This was the argument put forward by the president of the British Police Federation to defend the use of the phrase “black bastards” among the police in the 1980s: it was an everyday expression in British society, he claimed. His audience was not convinced of the harmlessness of the banalization of such vocabulary (Rowe, 2004: 2).
- 11 The English word “black” is an informal but generally not pejorative noun to designate black persons, whether of African or Caribbean origin. The French term “Beur,” which comes from the “verlan” slang based on the approximate inversion of the syllables of a word, in this case “Arabe,” similarly serves to name a person of Arab origin. Both substantives are typically used by adults attempting to avoid terminology deemed racially offensive by resorting to what they imagine to be the language of the youth. Ironically, the latter almost never utilize these formulations, which are considered to be outdated and are replaced by “Renoï” (verlan for “Noir,” meaning black) and “Rebeu” (verlan for “Beur” . . .).
- 12 According to the *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* [Historical Dictionary of the French Language], a “bâtard” [bastard] is a “child born out of wedlock,” and, by extension, a “being that is not of pure breed,” or even a “thing that has undergone a change that diminishes it.”
- 13 As INSEE surveys show, many minors born in France to non-French parents state they are “French” or are stated to be so by their parents, although they do not hold French nationality (200,000 in 1999). The many recent changes in the law on the right to French citizenship have contributed to this confusion (www.insee.fr/fr/publics/communication/recensement/particuliers/doc/fiche-nationalites-immigration.pdf).
- 14 Fabien Jobard (2006) offers an analysis of this word and its use, considering it as a pejorative synonym for “young people ‘known to the police,’” to use the customary expression.

- 15 This is pointed out in particular by John Van Maanen, who sees it as central to understanding three fundamental traits of “police subculture”: feeling that one belongs to a marginal group hated by the general public; protecting one’s own against external threats; keeping a low profile to avoid problems.
- 16 Sebastian Roché (2005) recounts the history of vicinity policing, from its introduction by Jean-Pierre Chevènement to Nicolas Sarkozy’s highly publicized abandonment of it.
- 17 Youth Judicial Protection is a public service under the Ministry of Justice, in charge of the care of minors who are considered to be delinquents or in danger. Its youth workers, who intervene under the authority of a magistrate, work with teenagers either still with their family or incarcerated in a juvenile prison or placed, as is the case here, in a hostel.

4 Violence

- 1 See Jacky Durand’s article “His wailing wall,” *Libération*, May 26, 2007: www.liberation.fr/portrait/0101103211-son-mur-des-lamentations. The case was cited as referral 2005–15, analyzed in the 2005 report of the National Committee on Security Ethics: www.la-cnds.eu/rapports/ra_pdf/ra_2005/cnds_rapport_2005.pdf.
- 2 It should be remembered that “saving a person who has fallen into the water” is one of the skills in which police are trained. In this case, the National Committee on Security Ethics noted the contradictions in the police officers’ justifications for not acting: on the one hand, they spoke of the risk they would have exposed themselves to, while on the other they asserted that they had judged that the young man was not in danger. The inquiry showed that, contrary to the officers’ claims, the current that night was not strong, there was no movement of water through locks, the water temperature was 52 °F, and the officers present had done no more than shine their flashlights on the drowning scene.
- 3 As expressed, in their own way, by some rappers, such as Hamé, of the group La Rumeur, who has several times been unsuccessfully indicted by the state for defamation in relation to one of his lyrics. The most inflammatory phrase was: “The reports of the Ministry of the Interior will never count up the hundreds of our brothers killed by the police without any of the murderers being troubled” (see www.rue89.com/2008/06/02/la-rumeur-contre-sarkozy-le-marathon-judiciaire-se-poursuit and www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2010/06/25/le-rappeur-hame-relaxefin-d-un-long-combat-judiciaire).
- 4 The film, a moral drama, is directed by Richard LaGravenese. In 2007 it was awarded the Humanitas Prize, set up to “encourage writers who create contemporary media to use their immense power in a humanistic way.” In the movie, the violence the youth fall victim to is primarily gang violence.

- 5 Through analysis of a series of statistics, Fabien Jobard (2002: 257) shows that, over a period of 50 years, court sentences for police violence have gone from 1 or 2 per year to around 20 per year in the late 1990s. He sees in this a sign that “the individual impunity of officers is tending to diminish gradually,” but notes that “these elements should not lead us to underestimate the astonishing leniency of the judgments.” If we take into account the obstacles to filing a complaint, and the number of complaints filed despite this (around 600 per year during that period, which are probably among the most serious ones), the yearly average of 20 convictions for violence remains a very modest performance on the part of justice.
- 6 Max Weber’s definition of the state (2004: 33) is well known: “a human community that (successfully) lays claim to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence within a particular territory.”
- 7 It should be noted that Egon Bittner’s definition (1970: 36–9) breaks with the traditional view – held by the police themselves – that police action is grounded in the “application of the law.” Apart from the fact that police officers do not necessarily apply the law, a considerable proportion of what is considered their legitimate activity lies outside this definition: the reference to the faculty to use force (rather than its actual use) therefore seems more accurate, and more generally applicable.
- 8 In Jean-Paul Brodeur’s study conducted in Quebec (1994: 478), 2.33 percent of officers admitted to using coercion and 51.7 percent said they opposed the use of constraint.
- 9 Illustrations of some of the techniques can be found on a police union website (unsapolicel3.free.fr/Investigation%20SUS/appir/pdf/iit.pdf); a call for them to be banned appears on the site police-personnebouge.free.fr/. Following the death of a young man as a result of asphyxiation when he was being questioned using the technique of thoracic compression, on October 9, 2007 the European Court of Human Rights ruled against the French government, and “deplored the fact the French authorities issued no precise guidelines in regard to this kind of immobilization technique” (see European Court of Human Rights, *Saoud v. France*, Appeal 9375/02).
- 10 See, for example, the widely disseminated photo of a man suffering from a double fracture of the jaw and facial injuries following police questioning. On February 12, 2011, a routine vehicle check at Aulnay-sous-Bois degenerated when the officer searching the driver allegedly lingered at his crotch, prompting a protest from the man and a violent reaction from the agent. The victim later declared he was astonished by the violence of the anticrime squad officers toward him, given that, as a security guard, he had met them occasionally in the course of his work (yahoo.bondyblog.fr/201102230001/tabasse-par-des-agents-de-la-bac-machoire-fracturee/).
- 11 It is remarkable that the work that is often considered the founding text of the sociology of public force is entitled *Violence and the Police* (Westley, 1970). Jean-Paul Brodeur’s article (1994) on coercion and the

- police discusses Egon Bittner's thesis. The collection edited by Jill Nelson (2000) was published in response to the murder of a young African immigrant, Amadou Diallo, killed by 19 police bullets in New York. Fabien Jobard's study (2002) was the first French analysis of the issue of police violence to be based on victims' interviews, court records and media analysis.
- 12 According to Walter Benjamin (1996), the singularity of the police lies in the fact that they bring together two forms of violence: "lawmaking and law-preserving violence."
 - 13 In the introduction to their anthology of violence, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 1) go further: "Focusing exclusively on the physical aspects of torture/terror/violence misses the point and transforms the project into a clinical, literary, or artistic exercise, which runs the risk of degenerating into a theatre or pornography of violence in which the voyeuristic impulse subverts the larger project of witnessing, critiquing, and writing against violence, injustice, and suffering." This makes clear how important it is to consider in detail the most routine and invisible forms of police violence.
 - 14 The definition I adopt implicitly here is substantially the same as the broad definition offered by Françoise Héritier (1996: 17 and 19): "We shall use the term violence to describe all physical or psychical constraint likely to engender terror, displacement, unhappiness, suffering or death of an animate being." A little later on, she also talks of "the encroachment of physical or moral territory."
 - 15 Here we can see a sort of extension of the ideas either of Norbert Elias (2000 [1939]) on civilization, or of Michel Foucault (1995) on punishment, but more precise considerations relating to torture can also be found in Darius Rejali's work (2007).
 - 16 This conspicuous process of expansion of "the empire of trauma" (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009) concerns individual as well as collective events, experienced either directly or indirectly (for instance via television). Certain categories seem to be excluded though, and people living in the projects seem to be among them.
 - 17 Ironically, discussing the reform of custody and the possibility of introducing measures whereby a lawyer would be present throughout its duration, Michel Antoine Thiers, general secretary of the French national police officers' union, said on national radio on May 31, 2011 that these new constraints risked damaging the "relation of trust" built up between the police officer and the individual being questioned in the enclosed space of the interrogation room (www.france-info.com/chroniques-le-plus-france-info-2011-05-31-premier-bilan-de-la-reforme-de-la-garde-a-vue).
 - 18 In their book on violence written in the aftermath of the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles, Jerome Skolnick and James Fyfe (1993) explain that the origin of this term is shrouded in mystery, but that the reality of the practice is long-established and widespread, despite having been condemned as early as 1931 by the Wickersham Commission.

- 19 A 2009 report by the General Inspectorate of Judicial Services (IGSJ, Inspection générale des services judiciaires) noted that there were a little over 82,000 people with suspended sentences, 90 percent of which were for less than one year's imprisonment, half of which related to adjustments to penalties currently being served and half to sentences which would give rise to imprisonment. See IGSJ, *Évaluation du nombre de peines d'emprisonnement ferme en attente d'exécution* [Evaluation of the Number of Prison Sentences Awaiting Implementation], Ministry of Justice, La Documentation française, March 2009. The minister of justice and the president made much of this report, condemning the low rate of implementation of sentences and calling for greater vigilance on the part of judges. See farapej.blogspot.com/2009/08/rapport-de-linspection-generale-des.html. However, the incident concerning this man whom “justice caught up with” occurred prior to this polemic.
- 20 Set up in 2001, the Reported Offense Processing System (STIC, *Système de traitement des infractions constatées*) contains information derived from interviews with persons charged for and victims of crime, approximately 33 million individuals – in other words, more than half the French population, including 5 million suspects and 28 million plaintiffs. It has been widely criticized, particularly by the National Commission for Database Protection and Liberties (CNIL, *Commission nationale informatique et libertés*), because it is not subject to the usual checks, is not updated when persons charged are acquitted, and above all because it is used as a database of suspects in business management inquiries, leading to people being refused employment. Only 17 percent of the records entered are deemed correct (www.cnil.fr/en-savoir-plus/fichiers-en-fiche/fichier/article/stic-systeme-de-traitement-des-infractions-constatees).
- 21 The issue, Balibar writes (1996: 70), is to “understand why power must be not only violent, powerful, brutal but also ‘cruel,’ that is, why it must draw from itself, and produce for those who exercise it, an effect of ‘enjoyment’.” He also calls this an “excess of cruelty.”
- 22 During the 1990s, French sociology became polarized around two approaches: on one side the critical sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, which strives to reveal relations of power and domination down to their least visible forms, and on the other Luc Boltanski's sociology of criticism, which prioritizes making explicit the syntax of social action, removed from any political analysis. In the first decade of this century, it is clear that, both intellectually and institutionally, the latter approach has become dominant. I have given an analysis of this polarization and suggestions for going beyond it (Fassin, 2013).
- 23 In fact, Elias (2007 [1983]) suggests that a form of inescapable dialectic between commitment and distance is characteristic of the social sciences, distinguishing them from the natural sciences: because, unlike the biologist or physicist who are human beings studying cells or atoms, the sociologist is a human being studying other human beings, he/she is always the committed subject of his/her scientific work, even if he/she strives to establish a distance from his/her objects.

- 24 An illustration of this opposition can be seen in the contrast between Catherine Wihtol de Wenden and Sophie Body-Gendrot's 2003 book, which condemns racial discrimination and violence among the police, and the 2005 article by Dominique Linhardt and Cédric Moreau de Bellaing, which analyzes the legal arguments behind condemnations of police violence in the complaints filed with the General Inspectorate of Services.
- 25 With regard to this subject, Fabien Jobard (2002), who studied interviews with prisoners who claimed to have suffered violence, is correct to expose the limits of what he calls "discursive facts": while these discourses are important in understanding violence, they offer only one point of view.
- 26 On this subject, see Robert Worden's (1996) synthesis of the various sociological, psychological and organizational models put forward to explain the excessive use of force.
- 27 Under the French Penal Code, insult relates to "words, gestures or threats, unpublished writing or images of any kind, directed towards a person holding public authority, in the exercise of or at the time when s/he is exercising his/her profession, and of a kind likely to undermine his/her dignity or the respect due to his/her position." It is punishable by up to 12 months' imprisonment and a 15,000-euro fine (Articles 433–6 and 7). When the offense is committed by several persons, the penalties are doubled.
- 28 In their statistical study of 845 people charged, Jobard and Névanen sought to discover why prison sentences were more common for "North Africans" (23 percent) and "blacks" (25 percent) compared to "Europeans" (13 percent). They found that the higher rate (double in the case of "black" offenders) is mainly due to the seriousness of the offense and whether the case involved a repeat offender; in other words, no racial discrimination was involved in the severity of the sentence (Jobard and Névanen, 2007). However, I have shown how the groups likely to end up in court on this charge were socially and racially constituted.
- 29 The similarity to the Rodney King case in Los Angeles is remarkable, even extending to the quality of the image, but since that case in 1991, techniques of producing and disseminating images have improved considerably (www.dailymotion.com/video/x1n26y_violence-policiere-a-rouen-2_news). Amateur footage of police violence is often uploaded to YouTube and DailyMotion.

5 Discrimination

- 1 Henry Louis Gates (1995: 58–9) emphasizes how the experience African Americans have of law enforcement in the United States shapes their attitude to authority and their trust in institutions. Many studies have established the subjective and objective reality of this practice. Richard

- Lundman and Robert Kaufman (2003) showed that African American and Hispanic drivers confirmed the existence of the offense of “driving while black,” and asserted that they were more often stopped while driving, more often stopped when no offense had been committed, and more often stopped by officers behaving in an inappropriate manner than were white drivers. Patricia Warren et al. (2006) demonstrated that discriminatory practices in road checks occur mainly in urban contexts – which allow officers to identify drivers physically – and less on highways, where the speed makes this more difficult.
- 2 In 2012, racial profiling became a major issue in New York City: of the 700,000 stops and frisks, a figure regularly increasing over the years, 85 percent concerned African Americans and Hispanics with no other grounds than their being young men of color in the street; the gender bias is also remarkable, with women representing 2 percent of the checks. As a result of the public pressure exerted by human rights organizations and media coverage, which led to changes in law enforcement policies, the total number of stops and frisks declined by 34 percent during the second quarter of 2012. See http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/s/stop_and_frisk/index.html.
 - 3 Pioneers for their research on this question, Renée Zauberman and René Lévy (1998, 2003) explain the lack of French studies of racial discrimination in terms of an abstract ideal of the French Republic that makes it possible to justify failure to measure or acknowledge the existence of unfavorable treatment of minorities in the name of a conception of citizenship that leaves no place for individual identities.
 - 4 These two factors are linked, since in a curious “catch-22,” it was the absence of empirical evidence of “appearance-based checks” that was used to prosecute people who had criticized their existence. Since it was illegal to gather this evidence, not only did the practices continue with impunity, but condemnation of them was punishable. The case initiated by Daniel Vaillant as Socialist minister of the interior, in which his Conservative successor, Nicolas Sarkozy, filed a civil suit against an educational publication, *Vos papiers!* [*Your papers!*], was based on this argument. The book, published by the main Magistrates’ Union, aimed to inform the public about their rights in relation to identity checks. On January 18, 2007, the Court of Appeal in Paris convicted the author and publisher of defamation, on the basis of the following sentence: “Identity checks based on appearance, although forbidden by law, not only are common but are on the increase.” The Court’s decision was quashed by the Court of Cassation a year later. See www.syndicat-magistrature.org/L-affaire-vos-papiers-unmarathon.
 - 5 See my article “L’invention française de la discrimination [The French invention of discrimination]” (2002). Racial discrimination certainly did not begin at this point, but its sudden emergence into the public arena can be dated to the first official reports – notably that of the High Council for Integration (Haut conseil à l’intégration) in 1998 – and the creation of the Group for Studying and Combating Discrimination

- (Groupe d'étude et de lutte contre les discriminations), set up by the Ministry of Solidarity in 1999. In a survey I conducted of the French national press between 1980 and 2005, I found only rare occurrences of the word “discrimination” until the late 1990s and they only concerned other countries, in particular South Africa and the United States: the problem seemed not to exist in France.
- 6 As Erving Goffman (1974: 9) explains, the answer to this question presupposes the choice of a viewpoint for description and the prevalence of an analytic unity that are arbitrary, but that “participants would recognize to be valid.”
 - 7 Eurobaromètre, *Discriminations dans l'UE en 2009* [*Discrimination in the European Union in 2009*], Report for the European Commission, 2009. See ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_317_fr.pdf. The survey of French people was conducted by INS SOFRES.
 - 8 IFOP (Institut français d'opinion publique), *Les Français et les discriminations* [*The French and Discrimination*], Report for SOS Racisme, 2009. See www.ifop.com/media/poll/991-1-study_file.pdf.
 - 9 In their study conducted in the United States, Ronald Weitzer and Steven Tuch (2002) also show that belonging to a minority is highly predictive of experience of police discrimination.
 - 10 The survey was led by Sebastian Roché under the European Euro-Justis program. For a summary, see tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/actualite/societe/20110525.obs3880/sondage-exclusif-la-police-raciste-pour-40-des-francais.
 - 11 The study was carried out in Boston, Chicago and Washington, DC. Black's article (1971) is drawn from responses from 176 adults, and such a small sample size often results in differences that are shown by statistical tests (not carried out by the authors) to be not significant. It concludes that “the police arrest blacks at a comparatively high rate, but the difference appears to result primarily from the greater difference at which blacks show disrespect for the police” (Black, 1971: 1109).
 - 12 For a review of the abundant literature on this issue, see Lawrence Sherman's article (1980) and Robert Reiner's more recent book (2000).
 - 13 One exception should be noted: the study conducted in the late 1970s by René Lévy (1985) on decisions taken following questioning on the public highway. The presence of a “North African type,” as the police often put it, was by no means the most strongly determining factor in decisions to bring charges. During the next quarter of a century, there were no statistical studies on racial discrimination by law enforcement agents.
 - 14 Sociologists have long agreed that police officers, as a whole, hold racist prejudices. The former president of the American Society of Criminology, Jerome Skolnick (1994 [1966]: 78), showed that even those who say they entered the police without preconceived ideas cannot express their disagreement in front of other officers, for fear of being rejected by their colleagues. However, very few admit that their hostility toward African Americans leads them to discriminate.

- 15 Sociological studies established long ago that “police discretion” is one of the essential characteristics of law enforcement. Political scientist James Wilson (1968: 83), former professor at Harvard University, who can hardly be suspected of critical radicalism, defined this power as “the decision whether and how to intervene.” All researchers stress the almost unlimited powers of patrol officers, who can decide whether or not to stop or to question an individual, and how an offense is to be categorized.
- 16 David Bayley and Harold Mendelsohn (1969: 162–4) show that one-third of police officers believe they have to treat African Americans and Hispanics more strictly, and that this selective severity is due both to absence of norms and to racist prejudices. However, they conclude that the “primary lesson to be learned is not that prejudiced policemen treat minority people unfairly, but rather that policemen, regardless of personality, often feel constrained to use physical force more commonly in minority areas than elsewhere.”
- 17 Michael Banton’s model (1983) is adapted from the economic approach and applied to police work. For him, categorical discrimination, based on prejudice, is immoral, illegal and counterproductive. However, statistical discrimination, based on probability, is neutral, acceptable and efficacious: “1. Amongst the general public there are people responsible for criminal actions. 2. The responsibility of many individuals can be ascertained only by police intervention and investigation. 3. Police resources are limited. To use them economically policemen must learn to identify which sorts of people to investigate. 4. Police images of the best sorts of people to investigate vary from one kind of offence to another; these images vary in their reliability.” This apparently unanswerable logic allows Michael Banton to justify statistical discrimination, provided that the police’s ideas are not allied to prejudice – but it turns out that the boundary between non-racist and racist stereotypes is less clear than he assumes it to be.
- 18 The study conducted by Joel Miller (2000), while it established that police officers carry out more stops and frisks in areas where there are higher crime levels and where there are also higher-than-average proportions of people from minority ethnic groups, sought to validate the hypothesis that frequency of stops and frisks was simply linked to frequency of contact: what the authors called the “availability of populations.” Using cameras, they therefore counted and racially classified the individuals present in public places, and then compared these figures with the stop-and-search statistics. It emerged that overall black people are not overrepresented, and are sometimes underrepresented among those checked and searched, in relation to their respective proportions in these areas.
- 19 See, for example, and among many others, decisions by the Poitiers Court of Appeal, which quashed an arrest following a “check on the occupant of a vehicle, unspecified,” on June 19, 2003; by the liberty and custody judge in Lille, who released a person after an “appearance-

- based check,” on June 13, 2007; and the Créteil liberty and custody judge, who issued a similar decision on a “highway check followed by an identity check” on September 9, 2009.
- 20 Fabien Jobard’s essay (2006) in a collection on race issues is the first synthesis of discrimination practiced by the police in France. Following the line of several US and British studies, he attempts to relativize the evidence that the police discriminate racially in the matter of identity checks.
 - 21 John Hepburn’s research (1978) is worth noting in this respect. He studied 28,000 stops and questionings carried out over one year in a Midwest city, and showed that, despite taking age, sex, type of crime, and the racial composition of the neighborhood into account, non-whites were markedly overrepresented among those questioned and ultimately released without further investigation – in other words, those people against whom one may reasonably conclude the police had very little evidence.
 - 22 Robert Friedrich (1977: 321), using the data from Donald Black and Albert Reiss’s study of three US cities, showed that, while black police officers were generally more aggressive and more efficacious but also more relationally neutral than their white colleagues, among white officers there was a statistical relationship between expressed hostility toward blacks, the rate of questioning of black suspects, and the quality of service to black victims: racism predicted, so to speak, discrimination.
 - 23 In this chapter I consider only racial discrimination. It is, however, remarkable, in the current context of Islamophobia, that religious prejudices are never mingled in with racial discrimination. During a period when stigmatization of Muslims and discrediting of Islam had become commonplace in the public arena, when intense debates on the veil had just provisionally ended in the adoption of a law banning girls from wearing the hijab in schools, and when the proposed construction of a mosque in the city where I conducted my research had generated strong opposition, I heard police officers speak of these issues only rarely. They did not concern them, and on one of the rare occasions when Islam came up in the conversation during one of our patrols, I realized that the subject, about which they had scant knowledge, was of little interest to them.
 - 24 The various forms of racial typology that thrive in police language do not feature in the analysis by Valérie Boussard et al. (2006) of the police “categorization of users” and “professional rhetoric,” no doubt because they are all too obvious.
 - 25 In her study of relations between the gendarmerie and the Roma people, Renée Zauberman (1998: 426), who uses the term “anti-Gypsy racism,” offers a powerful explanation of the police’s singular attitude to this group that escapes the usual political categories: “When people talk about getting rid of Arabs or black people, they mean sending them back to their country. But where is the Gypsies’ country? They become

- the subject of a discourse of collective destruction. Possibilities put forward range from hoping for natural disaster to murderous fantasy.”
- 26 P.A.J. Waddington (1999) shows that “the canteen is an arena separate from the street.”
- 27 The National Employment Agency (ANPE, Agence nationale pour l’emploi) was at that time the name of the French government agency providing advice and support to jobseekers. As the man asserted, Roma are “legally discriminated” against for employment in France. In spite of being members of the European Union, Romanians and Bulgarians (the measure has been extended to all citizens of these countries) face special restrictions when looking for a job, which, on top of the common prejudices against them and the precarious conditions they live in, make it almost impossible to work legally.
- 28 Significantly, considering how difficult it has been for French social scientists to address these issues, the study (Justice Initiative, 2009) was initiated and funded by a US institution, George Soros’s Open Society Foundation. The project was led by Indira Goris and Rachel Neild, from this Foundation, and the survey was coordinated by two French researchers, Fabien Jobard and René Lévy, the former being, ironically, the sociologist who had earlier denied the existence of racial discrimination in law enforcement.
- 29 In this regard, an interesting parallel could be drawn between the series of short films *Mon Premier Contrôle d’Identité* [*My First Identity Check*] by the collective “Stop le contrôle au faciès [Halt the Appearance-based Stop]” and the *New York Times* short documentary *The Scars of Stop-and-Frisk*, based on the interviews with Tyquan Brehon, a young African American from Brooklyn who calculated that, from 15 to 18, he had been checked and searched for no other reason than the color of his skin at least 60 to 70 times. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_xfqM6xxxg and <http://video.nytimes.com/video/2012/06/12/opinion/10000001601732/the-scars-of-stop-and-frisk.html>.
- 30 This case was described in the CNDS’ 2005 report (2005: 509), which referred to “reprisals.”
- 31 However, not all anticrime squads intervene in the same way, and one special educator told me of her earlier experience in a disadvantaged neighborhood in the Paris region, where the police, when called to the Youth Judicial Protection hostel, collaborated closely with staff to resolve problems with youngsters.
- 32 James Wilson (1968: 284) adds perceptively: “The requirements of justice are quite different from those of benevolence: the former enjoin us to treat equals equally, which is to say by rule, and the latter encourage us to be considerate even though a rule must be broken and thus one person given (unfair) consideration over another. What is benevolence to the beneficiary becomes malevolence to the neglected.”
- 33 Jérémie Gauthier (2010) deconstructs the scene, attempting to go beyond the self-evident racial discrimination: this exercise, while interesting in the discussion of the situation as pure interaction, nevertheless

- fails to take into account the broader social context that makes such a scene possible. This is what happens to most sociological studies conducted in France on the topic of racial discrimination within the police and what accounts for the frequent denial of its very existence.
- 34 The Canonge is a photographic database of persons who have been charged, and can thus be used to link a description, especially one given by a victim, to a set of photos of possible suspects.
 - 35 Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton (1967: 4) illustrate this distinction with a striking example: “When white terrorists bomb a black church and kill five black children, that is an act of individual racism by most segments of the society. But when in that same city – Birmingham, Alabama – five hundred black babies die each year because of the lack of proper food, shelter and medical facilities, and thousands more are destroyed and maimed physically, emotionally and intellectually because of conditions of poverty and discrimination in the black community, that is a function of institutional racism. The society either pretends it does not know of this latter situation, or is in fact incapable of doing anything meaningful about it.”
 - 36 While not denying the dual – individual and institutional – nature of racism, Essed (1991) shows how the articulation of the two needs to be understood in everyday practices.
 - 37 This list only provides a limited view of victims and does not include the deaths of older migrants “in the hands of the police,” to quote a report by Amnesty International: www.amnesty.fr/AI-en-action/Violences/Mauvais-traitements/Actualites/France-un-rapport-sur-5-cas-de-deces-aux-mains-de-la-police-4072. An attempt to create a systematic recording of all deaths occurring during interactions with the police can be found at www.atouteslesvictimes.samizdat.net. The website reports ten known deaths in this context for the first six months of 2012.
 - 38 The Immigration and Outer Cities Movement (MIB, Mouvement de l’immigration et des banlieues) was set up in 1995 to campaign against institutional racism and police violence. Filmmaker Mathieu Kassovitz made *La Haine* in 1995, following the death of Makome M’Bowole, who was shot in the head by a police inspector during his questioning. From the Toulouse group Zebda to the rappers of Ministère AMER and of La Rumeur, singers have denounced racism and police discrimination toward minority youth.
 - 39 By contrast, in France, at the trial of the officer who ten years earlier had shot Youssef Khaïf when he was driving a stolen car, the boy’s mother stated: “For ten years the police have constantly harassed me, telling me: ‘There’s no point to what you’re doing for your son. You can’t do anything to us. We’re stronger.’” The acquittal of this officer who fired the fatal shots proved them correct. See the article by Mogniss Abdallah, “L’affaire Youssef Khaïf dans les médias [The Youssef Khaïf case in the media],” *Vacarme*, January 15, 2002.
 - 40 See the *Scarman Report* (Leslie Scarman [1981], *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders, 10–12 April 1981*, London, Home Office,

paragraph 9.1), where the most the author will acknowledge is: “Racial prejudice does manifest itself occasionally in the behaviour of a few officers on the street. It may be only too easy for some officers, faced with what they must see as the inexorably rising tide of street crime, to lapse into an unthinking assumption that all young black people are potential criminals” (paragraph 6.35).

- 41 See the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report* (William Macpherson of Cluny [1999], *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report*, London, Home Office, paragraph 6.39), which takes the view that institutional racism is constituted by “the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin,” and can be detected in “processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people” (paragraph 6.34).
- 42 A practical guide to combating discrimination was produced in response to “police requests to help deal with difficulties encountered in the field.” It contains applicable legal texts and model interviews – in other words, it is based on the assumption that discrimination arises from the public and not within the police. See www.halde.fr/spip.php?page=article&id_article=11558.
- 43 On this subject, see the analysis by criminologist Mylène Jaccoud (2003) of Montreal’s experience of increasing ethnic diversity in the police force.

6 Politics

- 1 One can get a hint of the ideology that has developed around the legend of the Battle of Poitiers from the film made by “HeilNecken,” which ends with these words, also rendered in stylized Gothic script: “The vanquished enemy was thrown back from our frontiers. Europe was saved. Let us remember that the blood of those brave men still flows in our veins.” See www.youtube.com/watch?v=zkbftbgaski. The 732 League is presented in a video clip; see www.fdesouche.com/127995-la-ligue-732-rend-hommages-aux-victimes-du-terrorisme-islamiste.
- 2 The three phrases play on the anticrime squad’s initials of BAC, and indicate respectively “anti-Kärcher squad” (a reference to the brand of the high-pressure hose cited by Nicolas Sarkozy in his “cleansing” speech), “anti-drug brigade” and “anti-cop brigade.” See the articles by Jacky Durand, “BAK 93, des vêtements qui froissent la police [BAK 93, clothes that get under the police’s skin],” *Libération*, February 14, 2007, and Jessica Lopez-Escure, “Vrais ‘produits de banlieue,’ les tee-shirts provocateurs s’arrachent dans les cités [Authentic ‘products of the outer city,’ provocative T-shirts are snapped up in the projects],” *Les Échos*, 22 September 2010.
- 3 Given the period when I was conducting my research, I have cited the results of the 2006 rather than the 2010 union elections. The headline

of the *Figaro* article, “Un syndicat de gauche revient en force dans la police [A left-wing union returns in force among the police]” is to say the least a simplification, given the overall results of the elections in the three categories (www.lefigaro.fr/france/20061124.www000000212_un_syndicat_de_gauche_revient_en_premiere_place_dans_la_police). UNSA-Police lost its majority in the 2010 elections to the SGP in association with a dissident faction of UNSA called Police Unity (Unité Police). The SNOP maintained its dominance at this election. The SCHFPN, which in 2008 adopted the simpler acronym SCPN, won 66 percent of the votes. For a more substantive analysis of this remarkably volatile union landscape, see Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle’s article (2010).

- 4 The presence of racist symbols in police stations can be subject to disciplinary measures if it is made public. For example, in May 2011 the préfet of La Réunion suspended a brigade major because a flyer had been posted in his station referring to the “Niktamère” (a reference to the phrase “Nique ta mère,” or “Fuck your mother”), an “animal endangered in its country, North Africa,” which “usually responds to the name Mohamed, Mouloud, Kader, Rashid or Mourad” and “may not be hunted, hence the risk of proliferation that threatens the equilibrium of our Judeo-Christian system” (www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2011/05/27/97001-20110527filwww00409-reunion-tract-raciste-chez-les-gendarmes).
- 5 See, for example, the debate between two experts on the British police, P.A.J. Waddington (1987), who defends this paramilitarization on grounds of its efficacy and the reduced risk to the police, and Tony Jefferson (1993), who takes the opposite stance.
- 6 In one study in Britain, 80 percent of officers defined themselves as “Conservative,” a quarter saying they were even on the right of this party; in terms of votes at general elections, between 74 and 86 percent had voted for the Conservative party. In another study, in the United States, police officers were described as showing “support for the right and the far right” in the large majority of cases (Reiner, 2000: 96).
- 7 In the view of Dominique Monjardet (1996: 160–6), the relationship to law, which is also a relationship to order and the use of force, and the relationship to the other, which is also a relationship to justice and to society, are the two elements that structure differentiation within the police. As others have done elsewhere, he shows that during training in police academy, a negative opinion of the law increases (rising from 52 to 75 percent) and openness to the other decreases (falling from 29 to 11 percent). At the end of training, 50 percent of rank-and-file officers express a desire to join a special public security unit.
- 8 This distinction is discussed by Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle (2006: 32). For a history of the British police, see the first part of Robert Reiner’s book (2000); for a history of the French police, see Jean-Marc Berlière and René Lévy’s work (2011).
- 9 As Dominique Monjardet (2006) points out, in 2001 Lionel Jospin’s Socialist government had introduced legislative measures to combat

- terrorism within the framework of amendments to a draft law on petty crime and anti-social behavior. A study by TNS Media Intelligence, moreover, showed that space given to the topic of crime in the media had increased by 126 percent between February and March 2002 (in other words, just before the presidential election), and fell by 50 percent after the election, and that the media had devoted twice as much space to insecurity as to employment, and eight times as much as to unemployment, during the four months preceding the election.
- 10 According to the study carried out by Christine Fauvelle-Aymar, Abel François and Patricia Vornetti (2009), the abstention rate in the 2007 presidential election was exceptionally low, at 20.8% in “sensitive urban zones” in the first round of voting, compared to 36% in 2002. Considering the votes for each candidate, in the first round Sarkozy received 21.9% of the votes in “sensitive urban zones,” 29.1% of the vote in the surrounding cities, and 31.2% of the vote nationwide (in the second round, the figures were 37.8%, 49.4% and 53.1% respectively). The remainder of the vote went largely to left-wing candidates (42.6%, compared to 34.5% in the surrounding cities and 29.4% in the country as a whole), rather than to the far right, as is often maintained (the far right received 10.6% of the vote in “sensitive urban zones,” compared to 9.1% and 10.4% respectively in the surrounding cities and nationwide). However, the weight of the “sensitive urban zones” is, obviously, modest as a proportion of the electorate as a whole.
 - 11 Following Jean-Paul Brodeur (1984), Patrice Mann (1994) examined this question, but argued that there was not necessarily a contradiction between instrumentality and insularity, since state control and centralization (which promote instrumentality) on the one hand, and professionalization and unionization (which lead in the direction of insularity) on the other, are clearly not mutually exclusive in practice.
 - 12 However, the analysis put forward by Salas (2005), a judge, covers a longer period, going back to the French Revolution, and a broader problematic, which he terms the “will to punish.”
 - 13 For a more detailed list of new legislation and new court procedures, see the essays by lawyers Jean Danet (2008) and Christine Lazerges (2008) in the collection edited by Laurent Mucchielli.
 - 14 On November 27, 2007, the number of injured officers was stated as 40, according to the public prosecutor, 77 according to the Synergie union, 82 according to other police sources quoted by the France Info radio station, and finally 130 according to information supplied by the Ministry of the Interior to Agence France Presse. This last inflated estimate became the only official figure, never checked by journalists.
 - 15 Describing “youths armed with shotguns, shooting almost at point-blank range,” a beat officer said “You get the feeling they came with an intent to kill,” while an official of the Synergie union asked rhetorically: “How are you not going to be scared when the guy in front of you pulls a shotgun out of his sleeve?” In the article relating those facts,

the journalist evoked a “new threshold of violence.” See www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/tirs-de-plombs-de-chasse-peur-des-policiers.

- 16 It is, however, unusual that this kind of exaggeration or even alteration of the facts is brought to the attention of the public or the courts. Such was the case in 2011, in a trial in which police officers were convicted of wrongly accusing a driver of knocking one of them down, when the officer’s injuries had in fact been caused by a vehicle driven by one of his colleagues. If this falsification had not been discovered, the driver would have received a heavy penalty, since he would have been charged with voluntary violence or even attempted murder of a police officer (www.leparisien.fr/aulnaysous-bois-93600/sept-policiers-condamnes-pour-mensonge-la-colere-de-leurs-collegues-10-12-2010).
- 17 While in other major Western countries, data on deaths of law enforcement officers are collected by institutions, the only French site was set up at the initiative of an individual (www.victimesdudevoir.com/les-victimes).
- 18 These statistics relate only to homicides, and do not include accidents. For the United States, see www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/nation/guns/officers-killed-by-guns. For Britain, see www.policememorial.org.uk/Rolls_of_Honour/Statistics/Statistics_2000-2009. It is worth noting that practices in relation to carrying weapons are closely correlated with these data on mortality. While officers in Britain do not routinely carry weapons, the entire society in the United States is, in contrast, over-equipped: according to a study by the National Institute of Justice, 44 million US citizens, or 25 percent of adults, own at least one firearm, three-quarters of these owning more than one, in accordance with the right enshrined in the Second Amendment to the Constitution (www.ncjrs.gov/txtfiles/165476.txt).
- 19 The 10 deaths occurred within the space of seven years, all in the line of duty; Moskos shows how much harsher this job has become in the context of the “war on drugs” (Moskos, 2008).
- 20 This calculation was made by Laurent Mucchielli (www.rue89.com/laurent-mucchielli/2010/10/01/decheance-de-nationalite-pour-la-police-ou-sur-son-dos).
- 21 As Marie Boëton noted in the March 22, 2010 issue of *La Croix*, on the basis of comments by Yannick Danio, the national representative of the Unité SGP police union, “it seems that it is becoming increasingly difficult for police officers to do their job, despite the steady fall in the number of deaths in the course of police interventions” (www.la-croix.com/Actualite/S-informer/France/Moins-de-policiers-tues-en-service-mais-plus-de-violences-physiques_ng_2010-03-22).
- 22 In a report for the TV documentary series *Envoyé spécial* [*Special Correspondent*], a lawyer who specialized in representing patrol officers who file civil suits for insult and resistance, and had an annual contract with the police for this work, explained that the damages and interest claimed range between 150 and 500 euro. In the case study presented, a sergeant major, who had already filed 30 civil suits in nine years for

offenses against a person holding public authority, faced a young woman who was accused of having made comments about a “robust” questioning of two youths and of having struggled when she was subsequently pinned to the ground before being taken to the police station. The lawyer asked for damages of 1,800 euro for the three officers who had arrested her. Although she was acquitted in the initial trial, when four witnesses testified in her favor, in the appeal, where no witnesses testified, she was sentenced to a fine of 900 euro, to which was added 400 euro of damages and interest to be paid to each officer. In total the court action cost her six months of her salary (www.dailymotion.com/video/xagc88_la-police-ne-paye-pas-outrage-et-re_news). See also the article by Fabien Jobard and Sophie Névanen (2007), which shows that 50 percent of police officers file civil suits in cases of offenses against persons holding public authority.

- 23 The study carried out by Sébastien Roché under the European Euro-Justis program showed that 74 percent of French people and 65 percent of the residents of the Seine-Saint-Denis département stated they had confidence in the police, a rating lower than that for the gendarmerie, but higher than that for education, justice and the Pôle Emploi [national employment agency]. Even among 18- to 29-year-olds, the level of confidence was 72 percent for France as a whole and 57 percent for Seine-Saint-Denis (tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/actualite/societe/20110525_obs3880/sondage-exclusif-la-police-raciste-pour-40-des-francais).
- 24 For a genealogical and sociological approach to the construction of the figure of the victim and the concept of trauma, I take the liberty of referring the reader to the book I co-wrote with Richard Rechtman (2007), in which we analyze the moral inversion that took place in the late twentieth century.
- 25 These extracts are taken from Marie Boëton’s article of January 26, 2010, in *La Croix* (www.la-croix.com/Actualite/S-informer/France/Les-policiers-se-confient-davantage-aux-psychologues_ng_2010-01-27).

7 Morality

- 1 Michel Mazars’s study of adults charged points out that these were mainly French people born in France, contrary to what had been said or implied at the time (Michel Mazars [2006], “Le traitement judiciaire des violences urbaines: leçons d’une étude de cas,” Note de veille no 16, Paris, Centre d’analyse stratégique). Aurore Delon and Laurent Mucchielli’s study (2007) emphasizes that, in more than eight out of ten cases, minors were questioned in the immediate aftermath of the offense, in the context of chases in which “in the mêlée, officers often caught those who could not run as fast as the others.”

- 2 The singular is used here because, in contrast to the French situation where police officers usually go out in threes or fours, in the United States, the patrol officer is generally alone in his car. Albert Reiss (1971: 19ff.) offers several examples of these off-the-cuff decisions.
- 3 Thus a judge describes “not only violent stops and frisks, but also being held for four hours in the police station for an identity check” (Delon and Mucchielli, 2007: 3), to which the youth are frequently subjected, with no choice but to submit to this irksome ordeal.
- 4 The issue resembles the classic archetype cited in the criminological literature (Klockars, 1980), dubbed the “Dirty Harry” case after Don Siegel’s 1971 film of that name, starring Clint Eastwood: the story deals with a policeman who acts immorally in a moral cause, giving criminals their just desserts, notably shooting dead a serial killer in the street. The difference in the French projects is that firstly, the police are not dealing with killers or rapists, but with petty crime or often simply antisocial behavior, and secondly, the individuals punished are not necessarily those who committed the offenses.
- 5 For a discussion of moral economies, particularly of the contributions of historian E. P. Thompson, political scientist James Scott, and historian of science Lorraine Daston, I have proposed a definition that differs substantially from theirs (Fassin, 2009): “The production, distribution, circulation and use of moral sentiments, emotions and values, norms and obligations in the social space.”
- 6 This formulation is informed by Weber’s analysis (2003 [1958]) of the “spirit of capitalism.” This ethos, which Weber also sometimes terms “mentality,” relates to the disposition to behave well in life: in the case of capitalism, “the earning of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life” appears as a good from the point of view of Protestant morality – whereas many Catholic religious orders, on the contrary, emphasize poverty.
- 7 According to Adam Smith (1976 [1759]), the feeling of sympathy that one feels for others, particularly for their suffering, is the foundation of our moral sense.
- 8 The actress Brigitte Bardot, who had been a sex symbol in the 1960s, after her role in the film *And God Created Woman*, and served as a model for the official face of Marianne, the Republican emblem whose bust adorns many official buildings, later turned into an animal rights activist famous for her involvement in the condemnation of seal hunting. From the 1990s on, however, she became mostly known for her overt sympathies toward the National Front and her offensive statements against Islam.
- 9 In his book Albert Hirschman (1970) is interested chiefly in defection and speaking out. The third term, loyalty, is ambiguous and perhaps unfortunate, for on the one hand it denotes the renunciation of action (a defeatist position), while on the other it emphasizes a real attachment to the institution (loyalty). I try here to show that some police officers may exhibit loyalty to their institution by not criticizing it, but still either practice defection, or maintain support for it.

- 10 Like other sociologists, Egon Bittner (1980 [1970]: 63) links “esprit de corps” and the “code of secrecy,” which he sees as a central characteristic of the institution.
- 11 Apart from the case cited above of gendarmerie officer Jean-Hugues Matelly, who was fired by the French president and then reinstated by the Council of State, we can point to that of Sihem Souid, a female officer who wrote a book on racist and xenophobic abuses among the border police, *Omerta dans la police* [*Omerta among the police*] (Paris: Cherche-Midi, 2010). The border police disciplinary service proposed to the Ministry of the Interior in May 2011 that she be suspended from duty for 18 months (including a 6-month probationary period on her return) (see www.lepoint.fr/societe/la-policier-e-auteur-d-un-livre-polemique-exclue-18-mois-24-05-2011).
- 12 The three other types are the “bobby,” who corresponds to the “ordinary copper applying the law with discretionary common sense to keep the peace”; the “uniform-carrier,” described as “the completely cynical disillusioned time-server who’ll never answer the phone if he can help it – it might be a job at the other end!”; and the “new centurion,” represented as “dedicated to a crusade against crime and disorder” and “seeing [himself] as the repository of all truth, wisdom, and virtue” (Reiner, 2000: 102). The large majority of anticrime squad officers more closely resembled this latter type, with the addition of the systematic use of force that other authors (Muir, 1977) highlight in this model of the police, particularly in the United States.
- 13 See “Soutien à Joachim Gatti [Support Joachim Gatti]” (www.vacarme.org/article1797). The press release from the Seine-Saint-Denis Prefectoral Office reproduced by Agence France Presse stated: “We are cognizant of the fact that a young man lost his eye but so far there is no reliable evidence linking this injury with the Flash-Ball shot.”
- 14 *Exercice de double pensée* [*Exercise in Doublethink*], by Caroline Deruas. See www.mediapart.fr/content/exercice-de-double-pensee.
- 15 The Code of Ethics of the National Police is set out in Ministry of the Interior Decree 86–572 (www.interieur.gouv.fr/misill/sections/a_1_interieur/la_police_nationale/deontologie/codedeontologie).
- 16 On the basis of portraits of four officers, William Ker Muir (1977: 222–6) constructs a model in which the two principal dispositions (regarding the characterization of human nature and the legitimacy of coercion) can be used to define four moral categories of officer.

Conclusion – Democracy

- 1 As studied by William Westley (1970 [1950]) and Michael Banton (1964), respectively.
- 2 This has included a considerable increase in severity in the United States (Wacquant, 2004; Moskos, 2008).

- 3 See Louis Chevalier's classic text (1973 [1958]), and the recent book by Jean-Marc Berlière and René Lévy (2011).
- 4 See Emmanuel Blanchard's study (2007) of Algerians in Paris after World War II.
- 5 For an illuminating overview of the French police, see Christian Mouhanna's book (2011).
- 6 As Jean-Paul Brodeur points out (1984), whenever there are protests against police practices moving "above the law," it is the law that is changed rather than police practices.
- 7 This was, at least, the case at the moment I was writing the French version of this book. Interestingly, the public discussions it prompted when it came out at the end of 2011, as well as the simultaneous mobilization of non-governmental organizations such as Open Society and Human Rights Watch, led to the reopening of the debate, which even became one of the main themes of the presidential campaign of the spring of 2012.
- 8 In his well-known essay "Theses on the philosophy of history" (1968 [1940]: 257).

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