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Urban violence in France and England: comparing Paris (2005) and London (2011)

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Urban violence has a long history in England and in France. Analysing the recent disorders in Greater Paris in 2005 and London in 2011 reveals many similarities regarding mobilisation potential, precipitants, preparations, contagion and responses. Economic disadvantage and policies neglecting the margins are very significant in the contexts compared here. Disorders give globalisation its confrontational dimension, without immediately resorting to political claims. Much of the explanatory dimensions are similar (economic hardship, lack of life chances, political disenfranchisement, police–youth tensions, rumours, street cultures and the accuracy of the flashpoint model). The 'running comparison' for Greater Paris and London reveals, however, divergences: the importance of looting in England; the role of social media; the protection of two outer rings given to Paris, as well as other dimensions. The national responses also display divergences. With regard to ameliorating deprivation, measures are likely to remain incremental rather than sudden. New cycles of urban violence are thus to be expected.

Keywords: urban disorders; deprivation theory; flashpoint model; social housing; local responses

France and Britain in perspective

Collective violence is hardly new to Western cities and it has a long history in England and in France. This subject is to be examined closely by closely comparing mass rioting in Paris in 2005 and London in 2011. My approach uses an interactive framework that incorporates key variables. These variables identify how riots begin, how they mature, and how they end. Highlighting these processes allows an understanding of how the conjunction of critical events in specific contexts can set off a social conflagration as well as shape inter-relationships between key actors.[1] This approach also reveals a good deal about the dynamics of collective violence in societies as diverse as the French and the English.

The contexts and specific circumstances of such violence weigh heavily in the analysis. The impact of globalisation at the turn of the twenty-first century cannot be underestimated. It transforms metropolises, creates new centralities in the world and new marginalities and it impacts on the scope and leverage of welfare states. In a recent work, Body-Gendrot (2012) has emphasised that the irresponsible acquiescence of central governments to budget deficits and mounting debt has translated

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into major crises entailing austere fiscal policies and drastic cuts in social services in many European countries. These choices responding to financial diktats have generated more dependency in households at the bottom of the social ladder, more family crises and broken homes and in general, moral disenchantment. More specifically, at the local level, economic mismatch, spatial entrapment, the disruption of traditional arrangements, of values and of collective efficacy – all these variables transform the mechanisms of social control that are exerted in low-income working-class neighbourhoods, in the most salient cases (Sampson 2012).

In 2010–2011, negative emotions, such as anger and fear, changed into public protests by 'indignant' citizens in Latin American, Israeli, European and American cities (Body-Gendrot 2011a). But overall, voices of dissent remained peaceful and they were heard. All urban regimes need to respond to popular 'voices', in particular regarding collective violence exerted in the public space and defined as an action that 'immediately inflicts physical damage on persons and objects, involves at least two perpetrators and results in part from coordination among those who perform the damaging acts' (Tilly 2003, p. 3).

Few analyses look at how collective violence erupts and with what consequences. A comparative approach leads to analyse contexts of social and economic forces at work and dynamic trends of violence (which will be studied here). Analysing them allows to grasp how they fit in a whole set of theories and practices, and what continuities or ruptures they introduce. The responsibility of the police (or the lack of) in the escalation of violence is not dealt with here but in other works (see Body-Gendrot 2008, 2012). Collective violence does seem to occur in waves characterised by periods of upheaval and followed by periods of quiescence. Historically, the political experiences of France and England have been central not only to the development of enlightenment, democratic ideas and rules of law, but also to social insurgency, confrontations and protest, in which poor people are driven to violence to express their emotions and their claims in modes of 'violent bargaining' (Hobsbawn 1959, Chevalier 1984). At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, public and private elites perceived working-class disorders as a threat to their political, social and economic order; they reacted by criminalising collective protest, on the one hand, and on the other, by praising the virtue of public tranquillity (nothing much seems to have changed since). Subsequently, the growth of working-class organisations, the integration of religious minorities, reform efforts and improvements, the spread of literacy, welfare provisions and so on explain how gradually social peace was brought (Anderson 2011).

Major class conflicts came to an end in the 1950s, despite persistent socio-economic and cultural inequalities. Bargaining techniques replaced modes of violent face-to-face conflicts and, in working-class neighbourhoods, a relative calm accompanied three prosperous decades after Second World War. Incidents that did occur were singular and isolated such as those of Nottingham and of Notting Hill in London in 1958, immediately designated as 'race riots' by the British government. In France, the episode of May 1968 showed the potential of students' unrest, followed by a wide working-class mobilisation and a general strike, leading to a major political crisis putting the country to a halt. In the 1970s, a radicalisation of young political activists emerged with groups resorting to extreme violence.

The year 1981 was marked by disorders in large social housing estates in a distressed neighbourhood, Les Minguettes, at the periphery of Lyon. Youths of

immigrant origin were stealing cars and joyriding all night long around the estates before burning the cars in the presence of TV crews. French citizens were stunned by what they saw on television as, although the boredom of life in social housing was beginning to be documented, there had been no general awareness that the public housing estates could be a source of trouble. Moreover, the prevailing idea at that time was that immigrant workers were not in France to stay. Consequently, the problem of their social integration was not studied seriously. But some political elites knew that, since the immigration flux had been stopped at the end of the 1970s, immigrant workers had brought their large rural families to France and that, unable to commute regularly as in the past, they were now settling in France for good in dreadful environmental conditions (Body-Gendrot 2000).

The Minguettes events gave birth to a social policy of prevention, labelled *politique de la ville*, in the 1980s. *Politique de la ville* does not mean urban policy for a city as a whole but a policy targeting neighbourhoods with suppress in social housing estates and subsidising them for education, health, employment, crime, and social integration. It was a comprehensive, utopian policy aiming at 'changing life'. An exalted atmosphere reigned around this new urban policy, based on an etiological approach, with affirmative territorial actions targeting deprived districts frequently characterised by numerous social housing estates (Body-Gendrot *et al.* 2011).

A hypertrophy of social prevention policies marked the 1980s, each mayor fighting to have his/her share of the national bounty (i.e. subsidies and staff). Such social prevention policies did not bring any awareness of the macro-mutations affecting industrial cities in terms of segregation, crime, disenfranchisement, and, globally, complexity. In the field, actions were never targeted enough, goals and practices were not tightly articulated nor coordinated. Minor tools were used to address the major trauma caused by post-Fordism, i.e. a high rate of unemployment and also deep cultural transformations.

In the first half of the 1990s, in a context of economic crisis, each year, between 10 and 15 clashes occurred between youths and the police in what the French call sensitive areas. By the end of the 1980s, most national efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion were diluted. Increasing concerns with crime brought about a popular backlash and many left wing mayors lost their positions in the local elections of 1987. Stricter law enforcement was then invoked and 1997 marked the return of the National Police as a major actor. Anti-poverty and anti-exclusion policies found themselves in disfavour.

Repetitive disorders since the beginning of the 1990s seem to have produced nothing but a strong contribution to political shifts within the French public sphere (impacting on fear of crime, fear of immigration, hate crime, extreme-right voting patterns, etc.), which finally nurtured and legitimated law-and-order policies as the main strategic option (Waddington *et al.* 2009, p. 235). Meanwhile, due to the economic crisis, the situation in the most deprived neighbourhoods deteriorated. The instability and destabilisation of work, one of the bases of social integration turned a swathe of the population into a marginal population (Castel 2000, p. 528).

In England, in the 1970s and 1980s, signs of looming social tensions appeared in multicultural cities (for instance, in Leeds in 1972, 1974 and 1975) before widely reported incidents took place in Brixton, the object of a large and well-known report (Scarman 1985). Disturbances also occurred in major inner-city areas containing relatively compact African-Caribbean populations. The 1990s also saw clashes

between white youths from working-class housing estates and police after some incidents such as car thefts or ram-raiding (Waddington 2007). Further, at the beginning of the 2000s, violent disorders occurred between nationalist, frequently hooligan, whites and Asian young men in the northern textile towns in crisis such as Oldham, Burnley and Bradford. Some of these incidents revealed the racial content of events, too often hidden by the generic term riot.

The opportunity is now given to us to learn more from the perspective of this urban violence. If the challenges are frequently the same, if the origins and developments look alike, the intensity and contagion which followed the initial incidents were unusual. Using Paris (2005) and London (2011) as centre pieces, we may ask: What was the basis of these disorders? Can they best be explained as the major product of economic disadvantage, the consequence of policies of social austerity and, of social prejudice – or as some theorists call it, 'deprivation theory?' Does deprivation theory alone provide the best explanation to these events or are there other variables that can shed light on these episodes? How might they be identified? Are such disorders likely to happen again?

Conceptualising public disorders

Although researchers have learned to develop a cautious ignorance regarding why outbreaks of disorder happen here and now, some assumptions seem to hold. Theories on public disorders in Europe have been influenced by American theories that analysed the racial riots occurring in American cities the 1960s. The Kerner Report (U.S. Riot Commission 1968) discarded explanations emphasising the role of agitators, and showed instead that rioters were quite similar to the residents in the neighbourhoods where riots took place (this assumption will prove to be true in the two case-studies examined here). Urban disorder occurred in places with a 'reservoir of grievances', the Report said, regarding police harassment, poor housing and lack of jobs and here again, this point is supported by the following study. Other commentators insisted on the lack of official channels for grievances which gives importance to street counter-cultures and to rumours. This phenomenon is aggravated by racial segregation concentrating and isolating families with social problems and by generalised hostile beliefs shared by such communities. Although Europe does not experience the extreme social, economic, political and cultural forms of deprivation caused by a 'soft apartheid' in African-American ghettos (Massey and Denton 1992), these points hold here. British criminologist Waddington (2007, p. 41) rightly remarks, however, that societies do not divide clearly into law abiders and deviants. Among other explanations, the role of the media in transforming victims of recession into 'folk devils' and in creating 'moral panics' cannot be minimised (Cohen 1972, p. 28, Hall *et al.* 1978, p. 16).

The challenging 'flashpoint frame of public disorder' defines six interdependent levels of analysis (structural, political/ideological, cultural, contextual, situational and interactional). It is:

> flexible enough to encompass a variety of types of disorders, while allowing for the uniqueness of each situation . . . In highly charged situations, a particular incident (the throwing of a brick, an arrest or police charge) may spark off disorder. Such

> "flashpoints" are interpreted symbolically as indicating the underlying attitude of the other side. Particularly important are intensifiers . . . (Waddington 2007, pp. 51–52)

Allowing disorders to take place in some communities and not in others. A caveat seems justified, however, regarding the terms used, illustrating differences in the comparison of England and France. They have been socially constructed and their use and meanings differ. For instance, in Britain, *community* refers to the cohesion of a neighbourhood, to a sense of common belonging, which can be ethnic and racial, but not necessarily. It is also an administrative tool of management, regarding security. Other forms of social bonding and commonalities such as social networks have more recently appeared and institutions, such as the police, need to adapt their practices as such. The term *community* is handled with mistrust in France, except when referring to the nation or to Europe.

The term *disorder* is here preferred to *riot* (the interchangeable use of terms like *violence*, *disorders*, *outbreaks*, *disturbances,* intends mostly to refer to a rupture of order). As suggested by Tilly (2003, p. 18), *riot* expresses a political judgement rather than reflects an analytical distinction. For historian Hobsbawn (1959), riots must be understood as a prelude to a negotiation. They appear as 'acts of disorganisation, destruction, injuries, the object, the choice of targets or victims, the circumstances, the implementation and/or the effects of which acquire a political meaning – i.e. tend to change the behaviour of others, in a situation of bargaining, with consequences on the social system' (Nieburg 1969).

The disorders studied here have little to do with such types of 'riots'. They do not trigger negotiations between speechless protesters and power-holders. Although less lethal, they can be devastating, however, in terms of image and jobs for the neighbourhoods where they happen. It may take months, even years, for places to recover. A stigmatised locality may be deserted by investors, employees, businesses, tourists, students and potential residents. There were worries about the impact that the 2011 disorders might have on the Olympic games of 2012 in London and consequently the security issue was paramount. The potentiality of urban disorders should thus be taken seriously in a study of challenges faced by cities.

Regarding deprivation theory, it stresses mounting and cumulative burdens on populations in poverty and on discriminated minority groups. The withdrawal of public assistance from inner cities, shrinking public services, cuts in educational support and awareness of inequality and injustice do matter, along with outrage at ethnic and racial discriminations.

While there is something to be said for deprivation theory, nevertheless, it does not provide a comprehensive explanation for the events which transpired in London and Paris. If deprivation alone explained the Greater London and Greater Paris riot/protest, one would expect that these metropolises would compare unfavourably to other cities in their level of economic hardship. Both our analysis and others suggest otherwise. Greater London with 7,560,000 residents did and continue to do comparatively well on most indices of economic hardship. Globally, levels of poverty, unemployment and other distress factors show that a host of other British cities fare far worse than London. The same can be said for the Parisian region, one of the wealthiest regions in Europe. Inequalities come mostly from an increased wealth at the top.

It is difficult to prove that, nationwide, disturbances are determined by budget cuts. Such determinism is questionable. Historically, improvements in the living conditions of people in poverty rather than deterioration have contributed to start revolutions.

Last, deprivation theory, in the follow up of Marxist theories, depends upon violence being caused by a vertical hierarchical relationship between a dominant establishment (in the form of global actors or a controlling government) and disadvantaged classes. This may be so, but collective violence should not hide horizontal and multi-sided communal conflicts also taking place among impoverished populations divided by age, gender, origins, identities, etc. Around one-seventh of the population has lived in London for less than five years, suggesting a substantial level of in-migration within a very short period. Only under a third of Londoners is born locally. This 'churn' of population weakens social cohesion (Travers 2011, pp. 308–309).

In 2005, collective violence occurred in French neighbourhoods benefiting from the *politique de la ville* evoked earlier. About 30–40 different nationalities characterise the residents located in massive social housing estates. Yet in majority, they are French and frequently under 25. This feature points to a fragmentation in neighbourhoods also suffering from stigmatisation. These considerations suggest that a complex skein of factors, including but not limited to deprivation intervene in such events.

The correlation is indeed affected by a complexity of factors. First of all, data indicating deprivation give a static picture of neighbourhoods. They do not reveal the high turnover of residents which is more important in these zones than elsewhere. Due to population losses, the statistics get worse. In 2005, many disturbances occurred in free enterprise zones (Lagrange 2009, p. 111). Usually located in the most deprived zones, they had generated a high level of unmet expectations that led to anger, especially among the youth.

Also undermining the deprivation theory in the Paris case, interviews reveal a wide diversity of attitudes and perceptions among residents. In metropolitan Paris, only 20–25% of the residents want to leave their neighbourhood. A majority opts to stay, hoping to benefit from larger or better apartments. The voice of the marginalised, angry disenfranchised and older residents, usually echoed in the media, do not convey a wholly accurate picture.

Likewise, in London, 'capital of a notoriously pessimistic nation', only 13% of residents are either 'very' or 'fairly' dissatisfied with living in this city. In a 2010 MORI poll, 'the range of shops' was selected as the most popular thing they liked about this city, followed by transport, job opportunities, parks and open spaces (Travers 2011, pp. 309–310). Such opinions may explain the shock residents experienced in 2011 at seeing their city so much dislocated by upheavals.

An interactive framework

The interactive approach chosen here emphasises the operation of multiple forces which, in the course of events, come together to produce a particular outcome (Skocpol 1979, Goldstone 1991). These forces may be independent of each other initially, but they interpenetrate as events unfold. Thus, the decline of employment opportunities for inner city residents may be independent of increased school

dropout rates which put youth on the street, socio-economic tensions which augment police–community tensions, yet in combination with other circumstances which hurt the community; these factors can combine to create a highly combustible compound.

Analysed through an interactive framework, collective violence can be understood in incorporating the mobilisation potential, precipitants, preparations, timing and political/bureaucratic responses. *Mobilisation potential* refers to the relationships and attitudes that facilitate or inhibit collective violence (Goldstone 1991). This potential has two constituent parts: (1) deprivation and (2) integration/disintegration. (1) Deprivation occurs within logical and causative contexts. The collective violence studied here did not emanate from Bond Street or the Champs Elysées but mostly from the impoverished neighbourhoods of London and the outskirts of Paris. Action took place close to depressing, massive, social housing estates in the northern suburbs (*banlieues*) of Paris, then it gradually reached the national scene, an unusual phenomenon since, usually, urban disorders taking place on the same site for three or four nights at most are territorially contained by police forces. In London, after the initial flashpoint in Tottenham, contagious disturbances rapidly spread to other geographical regions. Deprivation evokes economic hardship, the diminution of real and/or perceived opportunities for social mobility, and widening inequalities between the affluent and the rest of the population. (2) Integration/malintegration relates to the kinds of organisation that potential demonstrators join or associate with. Is there here integration into traditional types of family or civic structures in an atmosphere of peace? Or, is there hostility on the streets and formation into gangs of youths, amidst a mood of anger (Body-Gendrot and Savitch 2012, p. 505)?

The *triggering, precipitating event or spark* as analysed by Waddington (2007, p. 54) introduces the territorial dimension to publicised episodes that brings to a head or catalyses cumulative grievances. Triggering events are usually filled with drama or tragedy of one kind of another. The spatial dimension needs to be emphasised in a theoretical perspective: the 'sense of place empowers protests' (Kimmelman 2011) and only cities' public space allows such empowerment. The media give visibility to people occupying space or taking to the streets because it strikes and resonates with their audience. Place where disorders take place haunts imaginations. *Preparations* refer to a process in which potential rioters become mentally ready to engage in collective action/violence. Responses depend upon effective leadership. They throw light on the direction taken by the demonstrators as well as whether the participants changed.

The following section compares collective violence in Paris (2005) and London (2011). It is a 'running comparison' for each city, as previously undertaken in a study comparing Los Angeles and Paris (Body-Gendrot and Savitch 2012). It starts with a brief summary of the facts.

Paris and London under pressure

Facts in Paris and London

Paris

The 2005 outbursts occurred on 27 October, in Clichy-sous-Bois (referred to by its shortened nomenclature as Clichy), a deprived urban zone of 28,300 residents, in Seine-Saint Denis, 15 kms, north-east of Paris. Three youths (of Turkish, Malian and

Tunisian descent) trying to escape a police patrol, came upon an electric power substation. They ignored the signs and went into the building. Two of the three youths were electrocuted. A rumour immediately spread that the police had provoked the incident. Within hours, about 100 young men descended onto the streets, chanting 'Dead for nothing!' They threw rocks at city buses and the police then set 23 cars ablaze (Body-Gendrot 2008, p. 264, Waddington *et al.* 2009, p. 4). Two additional nights of intermittent rioting followed. Public buildings were targeted: a fire station was stoned, windows were broken, bus shelters vandalised and a postal centre set ablaze. Cars were burnt. The next day, 400 anti-riot police were sent into the neighbourhood of Chêne Pointu where the families of the youths lived. The violence subsided and a silent march of 500 protesters took place. But a second stage started three nights later, when a tear gas canister fell into the entrance of a store-front mosque in Clichy, causing panic among the elders and the families. The police were accused of having perpetrated this, disrespecting Islam, while the police denied any wrongdoing. Thereafter, seven localities north of Paris experienced large scale violence – clashes with the police, while cars and public buildings, mostly schools, were vandalised or set on fire. Eighty localities were the sites of violence in the Parisian region. The third stage took place a few days later, when the rest of the country, namely 274 localities, including middle-sized cities with deprived neighbourhoods, became involved in the disturbances. The apex marking the transition from local, sporadic incidents to a national epidemic of disturbances was reached on the night of 7 November. On the whole, after 18 nights of destructive violence, no one had been killed in the clashes with the police, but the total cost of damage was estimated between 200 and 250 million euros (Body-Gendrot 2008).

London

After the shooting of Mark Duggan (who was of mixed ethnicity), by police officers in Ferry Lane, Tottenham Hale on 4 August 2011, small-scale disorder started in this poor neighbourhood north of London.[2] The family and 120 supporters from Broadwater Farm marched peacefully to the police station but their request to speak with a senior police officer was not met. Bottles were thrown and two police cars were set on fire that evening. Intense looting took place in two large local stores and the police were unable to stop it, until dawn. More looting of shops and some clashes with the police followed the next day, north of Tottenham in Enfield and two officers were hit by a speeding car. The rampage continued. There were minor outbreaks of disorder in London, including Oxford Circus and Hackney. The third night 'saw one of the most intense 24 hours of civil unrest in recent English history' (Singh *et al.* 2012, p. 14). Twenty-two out of the thirty-two London boroughs were affected, a man was critically injured trying to stop a fire; in Croydon, a 28 year old was shot dead. Birmingham, West Bromwich and Nottingham also experienced serious unrest; on the whole 66 locations experienced rioting (The Guardian/LSE 2011, p. 17, Singh *et al.* 2012, p. 10). Rioting continued the next day, in other parts of England including Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool. Three South Asians were killed in Birmingham while protecting their shops. Overall, five people lost their lives and a hundred more lost their businesses and homes. As in Paris, what usually started as a local riot and remained so reached the national stage after a few nights. Damage estimates average £200–£300 for claims but more than half a billion pounds if one

includes police overtime (£50 million) and the loss in tourism in the months following the events (Singh *et al.* 2012, p. 28, p. 33).

Mass mobilisation potential

Deprivation in Paris

The department (county) experiencing most of the violence, Seine-Saint-Denis, has the highest unemployment rate in nationally. The percentage of unemployed households was 13.9% at the end of the summer of 2005 (vs. 9.8% nationally). The number of those receiving public assistance went from 38,000 to 48,000 between 2002 and 2005 (Kokoreff 2008, p. 156).

Clichy is the poorest locality in the Department of Seine Saint Denis. About 80% of housing is public housing, half of it towers, hastily built in the 1960s and over nine stories high. The rate of unemployment reached 23.5% in 2004 (16% in 93) and 31% for those under 25. Dependent families make up 67.4% of the population and 46.6% are under the poverty threshold. About 33% of the residents are non-national immigrants and among them, 60% are jobless. In its neighbourhood, Chêne Pointu, (1500 housing units), immigrants comprise 45% of the population and young people under 24 almost form the majority (Kokoreff 2008, p. 166).

Integration/malintegration in Paris

The topic of integration is all the more difficult to handle here as there is no ethnic/racial categorisation in France. Only the distinction French/non national applies, ignoring the importance of French second or third generations of foreign origin in these *banlieues*. Lagrange offers some clues. In the second week of unrest, a number of localities with large families of African origin were the scene of riots and among these families, 'there is clearly a marked tendency toward delinquency and school under-achievement . . . The concentration of large families correlates very significantly with the geography of the riots . . . and their level of segregation' (Lagrange 2009, p. 113).

The segregation of place translates into isolation and concentration of problems such as poor schooling, stigmatisation, delinquency and economic disinvestment. 'The rate of unemployment among the 15–25 year old does not appear empirically as a factor fuelling riots' (Lagrange 2009, p. 120). But, the feeling of unfairness is widespread. The localities where the sub-Saharan families settled were not 'riot-zones' in the 1980s and the 1990s. But like their London counterparts, these young men have no stake in the existing political and social order, no hopes and no dreams. There is no transmission of a culture of protest from the older ones to the youngest. Yet older brothers who graduated have found themselves jobless due to discrimination and their frustrations are well-known in tightly knit-communities of this type. Local community organisations experienced serious cuts between March and September 2005 all over Seine-Saint-Denis and suspended service-delivery (Lagrange 2006, p. 125). In any case, they did not see their role as political advocacy for the have-nots. Channelling these residents' claims is thus non-existent.

They are not structured gangs in the Greater Paris area but groups of petty delinquents, between 13 and 25, territorially structured making a living, out of

various illegal activities. They are not organised according to race and ethnicity but around sub-cultures which are both modes of protection and obstacles to integration into the mainstream. These sub-cultures allow to 'go by'. Young people defend their turfs from nearby predators, for instance, in the entrance-halls of the housing projects and at the same time, they defend their codes of honour. Such youths frequently throw missiles at firemen along with postmen, teachers, social workers, bus drivers, not to mention doctors, delivery people and storekeepers for their intrusion into or disrespect of guarded turfs. This hostility has led adults to abandon whole areas (Body-Gendrot 2000, pp. 189–193).

Deprivation in London

London is by no means at or near the bottom of the deprivation ladder. The 'extremes of wealth' have reached levels not seen since the 1920s and the gains from economic growth have flown disproportionately to the wealthy. According to a recent study, the top 10% of earners received the vast majority of benefits of the 'productivity miracle' of 1996–2005 (*The Economist*, 4 April 2009, special report on the rich, p. 3). The crisis starting in 2008 did not affect the way bankers were rewarded. The City bonuses were estimated at £6 billion in 2009 (*The Economist*, 24 October 2009, p. 40). These excesses of wealth make the poverty of populations submitted to measures of austerity unbearable.

The profiles of the juveniles brought to court after the August riots reveal indeed that 46% of them lived in the 10% lowest income homes, 42% were in receipt of free school meals, and 66% had special educational needs. According to a study by A. Rae from the University of Sheffield, while 10 years ago, people in poverty lived equally in the inside or the outside boroughs of London, currently a majority of people in poverty live outside London: 'With its history of public housing, London has always been . . . a medley, incomes jostling together across the city. Now the poor are to be pushed centrifugally, faster and faster. The banlieuefication of London is under way' (Miéville 2012).

Low income and joblessness are compounded by endemic hopelessness, especially for youths. Tuition fees have gone up, youth services have been cut:

> Time and time, young people mentioned lack of opportunities, the cuts and the ending of the Educational maintenance allowance . . . a disillusionment with a wider set of social changes – changes collectively that may be further marginalizing those who already felt socially disadvantaged and peripheral (The Guardian/LSE 2011, p. 25, Singh *et al.* 2012, p. 15).

Integration/malintegration in London

There is no evidence that gangs played a significant role in initiating mass violence. The Singh *et al.* (2012) report established a typology of rioters, a heterogeneous group. It points out is that gangs were frequently the first on the scene and the most organised, thus opening the way for others to follow. It distinguishes violent aggressors, a smaller group responsible for the most serious crimes, from late night shoppers, opportunists and spectators. The London rioters' profile is slightly different from that of the French. For instance, 9 out of 10 stopped rioters were already known to the police and had received a caution or a sanction. But as in France, most of them

were male (90%), young (74 were aged 24 or under), of various origins 46% black, 42% white, 7% Asian. What happened in 2011 were not 'race riots' and the comparison of these events is then made easier with France. Similarly, interviewed youths said that they had little stake in the existing political and social order and could act remorselessly. When asked if they felt 'part of British society', only 51% of them said they did against 92% of the population as a whole. The sense of being invisible was widespread, as is the case with the French youths (The Guardian/LSE 2011, pp. 25–26). A collective pessimism is expressed about the future, as in France.

The vast majority of young people in London, however, did not take to the streets, even those who had similar disadvantages in life and came from the same backgrounds. They felt able to look positively to the future. They stated that they had a place in society that that they did not wish to jeopardise, This was also the case in France (Body-Gendrot 2008, Singh *et al.* 2012, p. 13).

Some deprived sites did not experience disorders. Among the reasons come the level of deprivation, the amount of social capital people have invested in their local communities, the physical environment, transport links and the preventative actions of local services and people (Singh *et al.* 2012, p. 12). This observation holds for the French case-study.

Triggering event

Paris

The mishandling of the Clichy incident by the Minister of Interior (Nicolas Sarkozy) occurred in a highly charged emotional atmosphere. One local teenager explained that:

> things accumulated. It had been in the air for a long time, it needed to explode and it will explode again . . . The two youngsters who died in Clichy, many of us knew them. Had we engaged in peaceful demonstrations, it would have achieved nothing. The only means for us to be heard was to torch cars while on TV. I would say it worked. (Le Parisien, 5 November 2005, cited in Body-Gendrot, 2008, p. 269)

London

The anger caused by the death of Mark Duggan ['Shot for Nothing', according to a testimony reported by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) report (2012, p. 34)], in an historic context of antipathy between some members of the black community of Tottenham and the police activated by rising tensions and rumours of 'assassination', transformed into transgressions of the rules and into massive looting. Opportunities to loot took over fighting the police, once the perception of impunity gained ground. For some, it was a chance to make history, an excuse to be noticed (Metropolitan Police 2012, p. 66).

Preparations

Paris

Several sets of actors were involved among the rioters. First, a fraction of 15–20-year old young men from Clichy, frequently of immigrant origin (because immigrants are

the major component of the working classes in France) started the disorders, acting out, displaying their emotion and anger after their friends' deaths.

Second, more violent and older individuals brought the chaos to a head. Their diverse motivations had to do with revenge (some of them had been fired from firms or institutions) or a will to destroy the status quo or other causes. In between, a lot of passive watchers hesitated to join in, while others tried in vain to stop the violence.

London

After momentum gained speed and contagion spread, rioters engaged in acts which tested authority (missile throwing, halting traffic and looting). The trend changed from an expression of anger against the police to opportunistic looting at local shops (Singh *et al.* 2012, p. 12). For the most part, over a thousand burglaries were carried out with impunity, they were endlessly covered by television showing people looting at will and activated by Blackberry messages (BBM) allowing participants to share, plan and act. 'Social media was described as the "virus" that helped the "contagion" of the riots to spread' (Singh *et al.* 2012, p. 52). Disenfranchised young people demonstrated that they could take to the streets and defy authority without much cost, restraint or penalty. Besides the organised and violent aggressors who were very prepared and interested in what they could steal, late-night 'shoppers' were quite prepared and often made the effort to hide their identities, opportunists and spectators were not prepared, acting out, having fun in a kind of euphoria, did not hide their face and even taking time to record what was going on with their mobile phones, despite so many CCTVs registering their actions [20,000 hours of CCTV were recorded in London during those four nights (Singh *et al.* 2012, p. 24)].

Contagion

In France, no locality experienced more than four nights of riots (Cinchelli *et al.* 2006, p. 3) but what was unusual in 2005 was the contagion over a number of weeks that spread from the north of Paris to almost 300 neighbourhoods in various cities and the length of time the unrest went on – roughly 21 days.

There are several explanations for the increasing contagion over time. As mentioned, the local mayors' calls at first were not heard by the Police Headquarters in Paris choosing to protect a game at the national stadium in Saint-Denis rather than stop the rioters four nights after the beginning of the mobilisation. As in London, they did not anticipate the media coverage either.

The drama of massive arson also attracted international television. At the start, the media began counting the number of burnt cars, the number of cities, and affected neighbourhoods. The result was a top ten of the 'hottest' cities, which stimulated youth of nearby cities to engage in still more violence and damage (Cinchelli *et al.* 2006, p. 35). After 10 days, the disorders spread to provincial cities and the number of torched cars and acts of vandalism exceeded 1400 in 274 localities. On 7 November, about 1200 cars were burnt in 300 localities. That night marked the apex of the contagion; 40% of problem areas in three regions, the most industrialised and the most socially polarised, were hit by outbreaks of disorder. As the weather turned cold, and after massive arrests, the violence subsided.

As in the London case, the media acted as a magnifying glass for isolated incidents, rewarding negative heroes, making sense out of their acts but after a while, denouncing them for their excess. The media were the translators of the events, using the same images to weave a single narration. As in Britain, most adults in the affected location, did not support the offenders, but many said that they 'understood' these violent reactions. The riots of 2005 shook the nation, but only briefly. Many voters turned towards the right and some to the extreme right. Others remained indifferent or as a symbol of protest abstained from voting. Already existing social schisms deepened.

London effectively experienced three stages of collective violence but as in France, nowhere more than four nights. What began as a peaceful protest on 4 August escalated into violent local upheaval during the evening of 6 August. It spread to wider parts of the Haringey borough and changed from anger directed at the police to the opportunity to loot local shops, as the shortcomings of order maintenance had become obvious. Then the disorder intensified rapidly with social networking coordinating involved groups. On the third day, the contagion spread geographically and rapidly in many cities. Most adults in the affected neighbourhoods did not support the offenders, but a number of them felt empathy with these youths. The police were obviously unprepared to contain such rioting, as the Metropolitan Police report has acknowledged (2012, p. 32). The hierarchical chain of command was rigid, very little information had come from intelligence in the borough, communication was inefficient and as in France, there had been no anticipation of the kind of urban violence that could be expressed by diverse young people, activated by social media and 24-hour televised coverage. Only on day four, when London and other cities were flooded with police resources, was order restored.

Making sense of disorders

Several questions come to mind. How visible or obvious are the linkages between globalisation, inequalities and urban violence? In other words, does the current globalisation phase promote and accommodate unbearable inequalities, which in turn generate social tensions and dissent, thereby hampering the economic, political and social well-being of cities (Body-Gendrot 2011a)?

These modes of public protest can be partly explained as the major product of economic disadvantage, and the consequences of policies neglecting what takes place at the margins, impacting particularly on poor, futureless young males. The local resentment of power relations translates into resistance of power relations (Keith 1993). Perforce, any attempt to deal with collective urban violence needs to confront the issue of deprivation. It has been said before that the preventative approach of *Politique de la ville* attempted to comprehensively address the residents' social problems without much success. *The New Deal for Communities* programme at the turn of millennium (Lowndes and Sullivan 2008) had the same type of comprehensive design in the UK. Whether or not collective violence actually leads to public policy benefits is debatable. In the 1970s, Rittel and Webber introduced the concept of 'wicked issues' (1973). To John Stewart, they are 'multi-faceted issues which defy simple solutions and cannot be solved in traditional ways' (2000, p. 110). Problems like poverty and social exclusion are 'wicked' because there is no agreement on their nature. All proposed solutions are questionable, and no one's expertise is accepted as

fully authoritative (Body-Gendrot *et al.* 2011). Findings indicate indeed that under certain conditions, welfare programmes were expanded as a result of collective violence. In UK, research on the effects of mass rioting on budgets lends credence to this proposition (John 2006). On the other hand, our own assessment of rioting in France showed a public backlash, a 'compassion fatigue' after 2002, against increasing public assistance for marginalised (subtext immigrant) communities. In recent years, national measures of redistribution were not locally granted according to levels of distress but to risk potential, regarding rioting; in the UK, economic losses hit poor urban areas regarding jobs, incomes, entitlements, government-sponsored social and cultural services and cuts implemented in a very short period of time. 'These conditions were far more significant in provoking the riots than the unwarranted killing of a young man by the police' Sassen remarks (2010). Youth unemployment (under 25) in the UK stands at 22.2% (vs. 8.4% nationally in November 2011) against, respectively, 21.7 and 10.0 in France (Gatinois 2012).

What is new is that disorders hitting cities and modes of protest using urban spaces and new modes of communication make highly visible precisely what is ignored in the public discourse of elites – injustice and emotions (Body-Gendrot 2011a). Reservoirs of accumulated grievances boost upheavals in disadvantaged places where those who act out are quite similar to the residents who do not. Deprived of official channels of communication and of political representation, mobilised young people utter a cry and draw attention on their fate. They do not want a revolution, they require attention. Youths whose culture has been moulded by television are eager to be seen, this is recurrent in most disorders, whether in Los Angeles, Clichy, London or Bristol. Some of them, more politicised, want a recognition of the unfairness of their humiliating conditions of living. 'Violence? It is to be 20, with no job and the police on your back', someone wrote in 1981 at Les Minguettes. Translated in short, intense, damaging actions, the rebellion carries expectations: 'Being part of' is indeed a generalised claim formulated in the testimonies in both countries.

In their repertoire of collective action that these young people have, the street is a construct, resulting from practices, identities and connections. Cities are both the material support and the symbolic stake that disorders and protest need (Body-Gendrot 2011a, 2011c). Public space brings together people who are heterogeneous. The year 2011 marks a rupture with previous upheavals in Britain, where the race issue was dominant. The London events are close to the French ones in that respect: all at once, disempowered youths who maybe previously fought each other feel commonalities. Inequality is a powerful social divider but here, in these circumstances, a merger. There may be consequently a correlation between macro-economic developments, a rising awareness of inequalities and the dialectics of order and disorder (Body-Gendrot 2011a, b).

Disorders are a form of interaction. When they hit cities, situations of disorder are both an opportunity as well as an event (Body-Gendrot 2012). They often highlight issues that are being ignored in the public discourse, like situations of injustice. They do not necessarily hit the headlines but they make a difference. They form a connection between the global and the local. They give globalisation its confrontational dimension, without immediately resorting to political claims. The urban sites targeted by dissenters, protestors and activists embody what global cities are, not only in terms of flux and wealth but also of social failures. Mobilisations are

a mode of social expression, they reinterpret public space and organise a drama in the context of marked and contentious territories (Sassen 2010, Body-Gendrot 2012). Theoretically, they can be perceived as a signal that disjunctive democracies are going too far in their excesses. If elites do not pay attention to the have-nots, they cannot ignore their violent transgressions as primary forms of revolt, all the more so if, as in Britain, their rebellion is predatory and consumerist.

The usual reaction of conservative politicians and bureaucracies is to externalise and criminalise trespassers. Prime Minister Cameron highlighted the moral decay and 'sick culture' of the looters, not part of the mainstream. The problem, he said, was not poverty, but a culture that glorifies violence, shows disrespect to authority and says everything about rights but nothing about responsibilities. In the same provocative manner, then Minister of Interior Nicolas Sarkozy, expressed his will to power hose a specific public housing project in June 2005 and then to get rid of the 'scum' (young juvenile delinquents) on 26 October, a day before the riots started. In 1987, Benyon had observed that conservative politicians most frequently ascribe disorders to criminality and greed. Violence is perceived as mindless or subversive, revealing failures in education and a breakdown in family life and proper values (1987, p. 32). In 1985, during a debate at the House of Commons, the British Prime Minister underlined excitement linked to violence, in turn triggering serious crime and greed leading to looting, that are 'certain fundamental and unflattering truths about human nature' (Body-Gendrot 1993, p. 173). Both D. Cameron and N. Sarkozy expressed similar views but they also differed a lot. Cameron pointed out at gang culture as one of the major culprits; he criticised police tactics as too timid and announced that he would seek guidance from William Bratton, the former commander of police forces in Boston, New York and Los Angeles and now chairman of Kroll Associates – a move vehemently criticised by police unions and by the Home Secretary, T. May who strongly opposed breaking with a centuries-old tradition of having only British citizens in the police force. Gangs were never denounced in the French disorders, the police unions tend to co-produce policies with Ministers of Interior in France and the police are almost never denounced by government members and, finally, a prevailing anti-American trend in the culture would prevent turning to an American police chief for heading a police force in France.

It is difficult to argue that uprising brings long term gains to the affected populations. Looting may be a manner for the excluded to grasp something, anything, and to 're-enchant a dull and frustrating daily life' (Crettiez and Sommier 2002, p. 26). But neighbourhoods where disorder takes place suffer heavily. Yet, that the issue was not even a theme of debate during both the presidential campaigns in France in 2006–2007, then in 2012, shows the indifference of the mainstream. Protest is not enough.

Among various divergences, the importance of looting in Britain is noteworthy, not that there was no looting in France in 2005. It is likely that some stores were looted but very little comment was made on such transgression, by comparison to the attention paid to clashes between police and youths and to arson in France.

The role played by the social media marks a second difference. They gave the disadvantaged teens the power to get together, to plan, to share. Twitter first organised the disorders but Blackberry was used more often on the second night when outbreaks of disorder hit 30 locations (Sassen 2010). It was an elaborate and

effective type of organising, already used during the Arabic spring and not controlled by the police.

Why unrest spread rapidly from one neighbourhood to another in London is also an interesting difference with Paris. Seen from London, affluent Paris looks like a medieval fortress, well protected by two ring roads (Body-Gendrot 2011c). Outbreaks thus usually take place at the margins, in locations where households' handicaps pile up. The boundaries of London neighbourhoods and of other British cities are less sharply delineated. There are wealthy areas near the centre, which are within walking distance from those less well off. Also, integrated and mixed council housing is found in neighbourhoods at the core of the city, whereas this is rarely the case in Paris affluent areas.

The unrest spread in a majority of London neighbourhoods, from east to west, according to opportunities. Fluidity and mobility allowed youth bikers, their BBM in hand, to move on rapidly from one area to another, taking advantage of what was at hand, or with an aim in mind that was revealed later. Vandalism also hit socially mixed areas.

The national dimensions

In examining urban unrest comparatively, it is remarkable to notice how much the explanatory dimensions are similar (economic hardship, lack of life chances, political disenfranchisement, police–youth tensions, rumours, street cultures and territorial contests and the accuracy of the flashpoint model) and yet also, how they differ on either side of the Channel, when it comes to responses. Or do they?

At the local level, mediators, volunteers (some of them religious leaders), parents and associations mobilised in symbolic demonstrations of unity and solidarity; they revealed that the residents are not without resources. But there is a time for residents' mobilisation, which is not the time when civil unrest first erupts.

Schmitt presents *order* as an effect and a major accomplishment of sovereignty, 'in principle, an unlimited competence for the state' (quoted in Brown 2009, p. 78); in other words, an order not emanating from law results from situations of exception, allowing the state to place its sovereignty above the law (Agamben 1998). In the French case, a state of emergency was pronounced by decree on 9 November, referring to a law passed in 1955 at the beginning of the Algerian war. Prefects were required to deport undocumented foreigners implicated in the outbursts. In terms of judicial efficiency, the curve of massive arrests (2808 were stopped during the crisis) followed the curve of disorders and reveals that summary processes translated into massive sentencing. According to a judge in the Parisian region, in more than one third of the cases, charges were dismissed because police evidence was not convincing enough. Most of the youths were accused of throwing stones (*caillassage*) and missiles at the police; others were indicted for arson or vandalism. Those convicted were sentenced, on average, to four months of incarceration, including two and a half months of suspended sentencing. In the British case, those who were caught were more heavily sentenced and some localities even decided to evict delinquent families from public housing units.

That no commission of investigation was convened by the French government in 2005 can be interpreted as an unwillingness to implement strong changes before the imminently forthcoming national elections and to let the national police talk. The

review of police behaviour was left to internal police corps and such option differs strongly from the British culture.

Regarding the 2011 disturbances, the official reports from commissions appointed by public authorities or emanating from higher education institutions or the media acknowledged that the country has neglected part of the younger generation deprived of hope and of future. Such reports open the path to reforms. In that respect, England seems more successful at implementing reforms – or promises of reforms. The danger of populism is not a problem that conservatives dread.

The distressed condition of disadvantaged urban zones has been emphasised in the reports. In 2010, governmental action had focused on education and improved policing. But, soon, with the budget deficit growing, numerous cuts impacted on public services, including the police. Privatisation and community mobilisation were encouraged. Extensive British television coverage was devoted to victims and to their emotions during the 2011 events. Self-help and innovative collective actions intending to repair damage were praised, local authorities called for denunciation, and images caught by CCTVs were used. Such orientations point at important national differences.

It would be unthinkable in France to publicly incite citizens to denounce troublemakers and have their pictures published on the newspapers' front pages. The very word 'denunciation' translates as *délation*, invoking dark episodes during the Vichy regime. In a country with a strong Catholic tradition and a revolutionary heritage, youths whose lives are chaotic, whose parents are overwhelmed and whose education is dysfunctional, are rarely pointed at as 'shaming' the nation. A culture of 'excuse' prevails. Juvenile court judges write editorials to support such a culture. That these youths belong to communities disintegrating from inside and outside is readily admitted. Nevertheless, in France this surface 'compassion' does not generate more public mobilisation of solidarity with the *banlieues* among the governing majorities.

Conclusion

The murky problem of why riots occur can also be illuminated by thinking about the obverse: why do not riots occur more often in situations where we might expect them? The answer can best be obtained initially, by acknowledging that civil strife is relatively rare, and next, by suggesting that when collective violence does occur, it is catalysed through a labyrinth of relatively discreet, highly dispositional events which, at a defining moment, fold into one another (Body-Gendrot and Savitch 2012, p. 505). It is this combination of chance, context, and causation which has guided our study.

Sadly, repetitive disorders seem to lead nowhere, and there has been no significant difference of approach between Left and Right governments. Which Left? It seems that although cities try to be on the frontline to alleviate risks, the Left differentiates itself from the Right only incrementally in its mode of urban and political management. This is partly due to the limited leverage of political parties and their complacency regarding global financial and economic decisions.

The difficulties and strings of failure associated with re-distributive programmes have already been mentioned. Nevertheless, without some reduction in levels of disparity, violence of one kind or another (collectivised rioting, individualised crime) is likely to persist. The avenues to success are familiar – early intervention, reinforced education, jobs, decent housing, improved municipal services and the like. The task

here heavily falls on government, but international NGOs could be enlisted into viable programmes with a consultation of residents.

Any gains with regard to ameliorating deprivation are likely to be incremental rather than sudden and periods of frustration and 'rotten compromises' are expected. The uncomfortable reality is that liberal democratic states often do not have the political capacity to eliminate deep-seated poverty and broken families, or provide more equity. Still, all 'wicked' problems can be alleviated and the sheer effort serves as a symbol of public commitment (Body-Gendrot and Savitch 2012, p. 515). In our noisy and competitive democracies, the appearance of effectiveness is cultivated with symbols, such as the opportunistic uses of urban concerns.

Currently, in the long term, civil unrest is a symptom of how disjunctive democracies have become and how institutions remain mentally cut off from populations that are unable to articulate their demands except violently, now and then, or under the mode 'we are the 99 per cent'.

Still, despite a generalised malaise of civilisation *à la Freud*, the dispersion of situations does not allow a convergence of local resistances into a social movement, even less in a revolution.

Notes

1. This approach was tested in a joint work comparing the Los Angeles and the Paris riots by Body-Gendrot and Savitch (2012).
2. These accounts follow the Guardian/LES report (2011), the Metropolitan Police report (2012) and the Singh *et al*. report (2012).

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