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Policing the banlieues

Fabien Jobard

The French banlieues often awaken, in American audiences, representations inspired by the ghettos or shrinking neighbourhoods of North American cities. The differences between ghettos and American cities are however numerous and the two social geographies are not really comparable. In order to minimize the risks of confusion and ethnocentrism (a disease that is equally widespread on either side of the Atlantic), we propose to begin by clarifying what is meant by "policing the banlieues". Next, we will study the security policies that have been evolved there, emphasizing the consequences of the 2005 riots.

1. Violence and insecurity in the banlieues

The term *banlieue* is a strong lexical marker that for over a century has carried all the fears associated with the city, primarily alterity, deviance and disadvantage (Hargreaves 1996, 607). However, it is essential to understand what it is like to live in these places before turning our attention to crime and insecurity.

1.1. Banlieue: what is that?

"Banlieue literally means suburb, but it carries different connotations from the British or North American suburb" (Dikeç 2007, 7)¹. *Banlieue* is in contrast the widely used term designating an urbanized area on the outskirts of a large town. Literally, *banlieue* means "banned location": in the Middle Ages, such areas were under the control of the main town and did not enjoy the rights and freedoms the local authorities in other towns had. From the end of the 19th century, industry and its workers gravitated to the banlieues in response to the low ground and property rentals being asked of them. The French economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s and the need for a foreign workforce, combined with the expulsion of French living in Algeria and of pro-French Algerians following the latter country's declaration of independence in 1962, produced a massive increase of the population residing in the banlieues. Huge social housing estates (called *cités*) were raised to accommodate this influx. Such locations were placed firmly under the spotlight when the first wave of French rioting occurred at the end of the 1970s. Progressively, the word "banlieue" has become synonymous in the public imagination with a swathe of social problems such as urban deprivation and degeneration, illiteracy, drug abuse, and criminality and violence. Among the more recent issues

¹ For a general overview, see the comparative perspective in Body-Gendrot 2000 and the glossary in Waddington, Jobard & King 2009.

associated with these areas are: inter-racial conflict, Islamic fundamentalism, violence against women, police brutality and, of course, riots or urban disorder.

Focusing on the poorest neighbourhoods of French cities, three elements mark a profound difference with the inner cities of the United States. The first is the rarity of firearm use. Though increasingly available to drug traffickers, firearms remain little used², rarely produce collateral victims and the police, on their part, use them as rarely as elsewhere in Western Europe countries where officers carry firearms on duty³. As a result, regardless of the intense concern about violence in the French suburbs, violent death is rarely in the realm of the probable, except when it comes to drug traffickers. The second is the small impact of the penal turn in France. France undeniably is among those countries that have experienced a significant increase in the severity of punitive sanctions and particularly detention, since the 2000s. But the French situation remains light years away from that of the United States, and to a certain extent, Great Britain: the detention rate in the USA is about 700 for every 100,000 inhabitants, 150 in Great Britain, to France's 100 to 110. This difference is not only arithmetic. Judges on one side and the European Court of Human Rights on the other have always been careful to limit the discriminatory and irreversible effects of penal policies, so that in France there is neither mandatory sentencing nor a three-strikes provision nor whole life sentences (without parole). Contrary to the USA, where "high incarceration rates led researchers to claim that prison time had become a normal part of early adulthood for black men in poor urban neighbourhoods" (Pettit & Western 2004, 151), young criminals in France do not necessarily see a life behind bars on their horizon and we join David Garland (2019) here in observing that in reality the USA is in fact an "exceptionalism" in the West. Lastly, since at least 1945, France has boasted a health and welfare system that provides for the populations concerned (including illegal migrants) a safety net from which their counterparts in the run-down North American neighbourhoods do not benefit. Thanks to a "conservative welfare regime" that is still almost intact (Esping-Andersen 1999, 81-86), the living conditions of unemployed, unqualified young men in France's run-down urban areas, however deplorable, are still more enviable by far than those of their peers in the United States. Though these elements may appear to be circumstantial, it seems necessary to call attention to them, in order to define the configurations we are talking about and which are often overlooked by American colleagues when they study the case of the French banlieues.

² Even if data of the causes of violent deaths must always be considered cautiously, firearms homicides comprise between 100 and 200 a year in France (downwards trend – s. gunpolicy.org and Mucchielli 2008). In Paris and its surroundings (7 Millions inhabitants), overall homicide rates are very low (1,2 per 100.000 in 2016 and 2017, source: police data), which is three times lower than in New York City, marked by a historically low homicide rate these last years. In Seine-St-Denis, the rate is as high as 1,6 (Besson 2019, 17).

³ In the last 40 years, around 10 persons have been killed every year by police gunshots, including off-duty deaths (du Roy & Simbille 2019), which is around 30 times less than in the United States.

Coming back to the ghetto idea, what sociological research of the last two decades has shown more than anything is the phenomenon of a very high concentration of wealth in large urban areas, ergo the creation of rich ghettos, driven by the financialisation of the economy. With the effect that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the wealthy middle classes (young university professors, for example) to live in the city-centres and many therefore settle in the nearby suburbs. On the other hand, the response of the authorities since the beginning of the 2000s has very often consisted of massive urban renovation, involving the destruction of high rises, replaced by small, affordable, individual housing. The French banlieues, then, are territories undergoing a profound upheaval, home in many cases to a diversity of populations sharing a relatively small space. The further you go from the city-proper, however, the more visible are those former tower blocks, shunned by the middle class and fled by the lower-middle or working-classes, often of North African (formerly Spanish and Portuguese) descent; they, too, seeking accommodation closer to the city-proper (Paris, Lyon, Lille, Strasbourg ...), by getting on the property ladder. Thus, the French banlieues are in perpetual flux, despite that within the greater Paris urban area (seven million inhabitants on about 1,000 square kilometres), the towns marked by serious social issues are the same as 30 or 40 years ago, while the city of Paris itself (two million inhabitants per 100 square kilometres) becomes ever richer. In the poor suburbs, a number of phenomena seem constant: high exposure of residents to crime, heightened feeling of insecurity, high demand for police and ... militarization and brutalization of the police.

1.2. Security, insecurity and feeling of insecurity in the banlieues

Delinquency remains very significant in the disadvantaged urban areas of large cities. To take the example of Paris and the greater Paris area (12 million inhabitants over 12,000 square kilometres), victimization surveys show consistent results for the past 30 years (Zauberman, Robert, Névanen, Bon, 2013). First, in this vast and contrasting space, all crimes are about twice as frequent as the national average: assault, but also robberies without violence, burglaries and attempted burglaries, theft of and from cars (the latter, however, being the only crime which has seen a significant decline in 20 years). In this space, then, where rich and poor, descendants of migrants and French of long descent all live together, just under a quarter of those questioned in the sample reported being afraid to go out in the neighbourhood at night, compared with just under a third thirty years ago. But fears about safety have fallen, particularly compared to concerns about economic issues (unemployment and poverty): only 15% of those surveyed considered it one of the “problems that should be treated as a priority by the government” in 2013, versus 40% in 2001⁴. In Seine-St-Denis, a symbolic department, located north of Paris and south of Charles de Gaulle airport and

⁴ The last survey was carried out two years before the 2015-2016 attacks.

including some of the poorest towns in France, 34% of residents claimed to be afraid to go out at night in their neighbourhood, while this figure stood at 22% among Parisians. Nearly three quarters of all parents in Seine-Saint-Denis declared that they feared for their children's safety while outside (70%), whereas this fear affected only half of Parisian parents. These residents of poor suburbs feel that their environment is undignified (loitering youth, substance abuse and damage to property ...) and are much more inclined than others to want to leave. In the Ile-de-France department, it is among these inhabitants that the demand for police presence is the highest.

But we have so far only talked about Paris and its surrounding area. When we look at all poor neighbourhoods of French cities⁵, everything points to higher levels of insecurity than elsewhere (de Maillard et al. 2019). First, the level of fear in their neighbourhood⁶ (26% in 2018) is quite significantly higher than the rest of the population (13% in other neighbourhoods of wider urban areas), to the extent that they will sometimes or often avoid going out for safety reasons⁷ (19% compared to 10% for the population of non-poor-inner-city neighbourhoods and 14% for the population of urban areas of over 100,000 inhabitants). These residents of poor neighbourhoods are much more likely to have witnessed drug use or drug dealing in the past 12 months (30% in 2018 versus 10% in the surrounding urban areas - Rémila, 2018, 204-205).

What is the State's response in terms of the fight against crime in these suburban towns? Paradoxically, the State provides a police response that is both notoriously insufficient and particularly brutal, militarized and distant.

2. The police in poor suburban towns

The concentration within the city of Paris of all the seats of state power and most of the country's wealthy, in addition to the tourist flows essential to the economy, make Paris one of the European cities with the highest number of police per capita (one police officer per 100 inhabitants). But beyond the ever-so-dense inner city, the banlieues paint a different picture: an urban landscape of social high-rises where police presence is scarce. One is reminded of the nationwide wave of riots in 2005, which began in Clichy-sous-Bois, a poor town in Seine-St-Denis (see above) about twenty kilometres from Paris, where two children died in what started as a simple identity check (Jobard, Waddington, King 2009). The police officers carrying out the check were

⁵ Technically speaking, we refer here to the *quartiers prioritaires de la ville* (high-priority city neighbourhoods), that is the 1,300 neighbourhoods with a population over 1,000 which are poor both compared to France as a whole and compared to the city in which they are located.

⁶ "Persons over the age of 14 who sometimes or often feel unsafe in their neighbourhood between 2007 and 2018".

⁷ "Persons over the age of 14 who sometimes or often avoid going out alone for safety reasons between 2007 and 2018".

from a mobile riot-control police unit (*Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité*, or CRS) because the city of Clichy (30,000 inhabitants) did not have a police station at the time. It is a tragically paradoxical effect of the riots that they focused attention on the town's situation and led to a police station being built there and opened in 2010. The mayor of the town at that time often told the story of how, when he had first arrived there in 1978 to open a paediatrics surgery, the town hall (then under communist leadership) displayed a banner on its façade that read, "We demand a police station for our town" (Dilain 2006). Riot police, under-staffing, identity checks, riots ... the city of Clichy summarizes the ongoing situation of policing in the banlieues today.

2.1. Police demography in the banlieues

In poor towns, schools are under-funded and so is the police. The State attempts with its small means to remedy the situation, but France's financial balance (subjected to public spending checks by the European Union) does not allow much leeway. In Seine-St-Denis, teachers are absent more often than in the rest of France and, more importantly, there are 1.5 times fewer chances of finding substitute teachers than elsewhere. Yet, the educational needs are far higher than elsewhere. By the end of primary school for instance, two-thirds of pupils in poor neighbourhoods cannot read and in the department the percentage of students making 25 or more mistakes in a dictation has increased from 5,5% in 1987 to 20% in 2015 (Cornut-Gentille, Kokouendo 2018, 12 and 25). The difficulty of teaching in this department is undeniable: 36% of primary school teachers stay in their school for less than two years (versus 26.5% nationwide) and this figure rises to 50% in middle schools, *collèges*, which educate children aged 11 to 15 (Cornut-Gentille, Kokouendo 2018, 43).

The reason I bring up these facts is to highlight what our society's fascination with the most spectacular features of policing in the suburbs (violence, militarization, etc.) too often relegates to the background: the police is a public service and as such its budgetary logic is subjected to the extremely inequitable logic of public service as a whole.

Since the police is a nationwide service, when a police officer gets assigned to a suburban town, they do their utmost to get out of that posting and closer to their hometown (often medium-sized cities or provincial towns). The fiscal policy initiated in 2008 drastically reduced the number of police and gendarmes nationwide (*Cour des Comptes* 2011, 47). Yet the State, because it has the authority to do so, first assigns new recruits to those suburban towns (Paris and its three surrounding departments account for 60% to 70% of postings of police academy graduates). And before 2012, due to budget cuts, the number of positions open for new police officers became scarcer (4,700 law enforcement positions were opened in 2007, just over 500 in 2011 and 2012). Fewer police officers are posted in the suburbs, but just as many still want to get out: the poor and violent banlieues continue to have less police than elsewhere.

Some municipalities with high crime rates (Bondy, Sarcelles, Stains ...) have a police per capita rate of 1 for 400 or 500 inhabitants⁸. At the departmental level, in 2012 there was one police officer for 95 inhabitants in Paris, one for 350 in Seine-St-Denis and Val-de-Marne (the two poor suburban departments bordering Paris), one for 240 in Hauts-de-Seine (the rich suburban department) (Ocqueteau 2017, 22). When related not to departmental population but to the number of reported offences, the inequalities between poor municipalities strongly affected by crime and rich municipalities are even more obvious, a fact that the press has not failed to pick up on (Mandraud 2009). At the end of the first decade of the century, there were almost as many police officers (5,000) in the Hauts-de-Seine (a rich suburb west of Paris) as in Seine-Saint-Denis (a poor suburb north of Paris), yet the latter department's victimization rate is more than twice as high.

The system also results in the poor suburbs being the areas where there is the greatest proportion of inexperienced police officers: 20% of police in Paris and the three surrounding departments are in their qualifying year, i.e. still in training. While the average tenure in a given constituency is 16 years, it is half as long in Seine-Saint-Denis, where 70% of the workforce have less than 5 years of seniority in the postings where they are assigned. Yet, to offset their inexperience, these young recruits prefer a more "thin blue line" vision of their institution than their elders, believing themselves less accountable than their elders accountable to any chain of command (Roché 2016, p. 311). What you get are young police officers, "ill-experienced beginners" according to the Cour des Comptes (Cour des comptes 2011), outsiders what is more, who with precious little preparation have to face very harsh working conditions. Sociologist Jérémie Gauthier, during his observations of the police in the banlieues, heard the following from the mouth of the town's police commissioner: "Policing here is pitting immigrants from the inside against immigrants from the outside" (Gauthier 2010, 267), underlining that the police officers in the banlieues are immigrants from quiet provincial towns, faced with ethnic minorities (regarding this remark, see Fassin 2013, 239). The commissioner's remark illustrates the sense of superiority within management and the lack of support from the chain of command (whose numbers are also limited), reflected in the particularly high suicide rate of police officers in France (approx. 1.3 times higher when age and sex are taken into account - Pelletier 2019). Those who remain are often disillusioned with their institution and mistrustful of the outside.

⁸ Police per capita in New York City is 1 for 165, in Chicago 1 for 200 and in Los Angeles 1 for 310 inhabitants (source: FBI, UCR 2018)

While the municipalities of wealthy cities and suburbs can afford to run a municipal police force (albeit with far lesser powers than the national police)⁹, poor municipalities cannot compensate the State's short fallings in this way. Neither has the political situation helped to improve the situation. The 2015 attacks (which left 238 dead) struck the hearts of cities and prompted the government to assign even more police officers to city centres, in particular on permanent guard at official buildings, Jewish places of worship or at major sports events or celebrations. Social movements, such as the protests against the labour law reform in 2016 or the yellow vests in 2018-19, have also increased the need for additional units of the National Police or the National Gendarmerie in city centres. As always, it is the forces stationed in the suburban towns that are drained, to swell the ranks for these large-scale operations in city centres.

Consequently, failing to increase everyday police presence, since the mid 1990s, the State has favoured the militarization of police in the banlieues.

2.2. The militarization of the police in the banlieues

To make up for having a stable, confident, professional police force occupying the field, the State is tempted to resort to various kinds of militarized units. Two of these are the riot police units of the Police (CRS) or the Gendarmerie (EGM or *Esquadron de gendarmerie mobile*) (see Restelli in this volume), which are stationed at most for a few weeks in any one neighbourhood and then leave. Others are smaller units attached to the local commissariat, but armed and equipped, especially regarding uniform, like the paramilitary units described by Kraska (1997) — even though, once again, unlike in the USA, these units do not make use of their firearms, or very rarely.

So, the State attempts to fill the policing gap by sending in large riot police units such as the CRS or EGM, which are stationed in different barracks in France and dispatched as necessary to such a neighbourhood in such a banlieue, when they are not assigned to protest policing operations in city-centres, in the event of large demonstrations or prevention of terrorist attacks (at sporting events or celebrations). Assigned to a given neighbourhood in an unknown banlieue for a few hours or a few days, these units, who know neither the residents nor the environment, resort to rather summary tactics: restoring order in critical situations and carrying out identity checks when there are no emergencies. From my own observations of police teams in the Paris' banlieues, I found that when such a police unit is assigned to these towns, the town's regular police officers complain because these imported police officers do virtually nothing but

⁹ Even the city of Paris, though heavily endowed with police officers from the National Police, has a sort of municipal police force, the *direction de la prévention, de la sécurité et de la protection*, generally entrusted to a commissioner seconded by the National Police and which employs around 2,000 officers (de Maillard, Zagrodzki 2017).

identity checks and thus monopolize local police radio channels (identity details are sent to the central commissariat to check if the person is wanted or has a record, etc.). This temporary, distant police force does little to address the need for police presence felt by the residents. Their mode of action is distant and demonstrates the contempt of state employees, rather than a closeness to the population and an ability to listen. This behaviour is exacerbated by the fact that these officers will never have to answer to those residents, since they will leave the area at the end of their assignment. There have been numerous ethnographic observations of these demonstrations of contempt, ranging from unwarranted ID checks to outright displays of violence which are rarely ever punished (Jobard 2005, Fassin 2013, Gauthier 2015).

In 2012, the government created *zones de sécurité prioritaires* (High-priority safety areas), or ZSPs, to focus police resources in specific urban areas and encourage greater involvement of police in local life, be it at the political, administration or civil society level. But these ZSPs were never able to resist extreme budget trends nor the inevitable redeployment of troops to counterterrorism or other newsworthy operations. The police is a power that is inherently at the mercy of petty crime news reporting (to which it is quite rightly expected to respond). A commissaire in Seine-Saint-Denis might delight in seeing the recruits he had requested for so many years finally joining his ranks, only to have them leave his command a few weeks later for an emergency posting of officers in Marseille following a shooting. When three police officers were attacked with a Molotov cocktail in their patrol car in October 2016, the ministry decided to send 103 officers to the Essonne department. However, in the face of the police protests generated by the attack, the ministry announced that in all ZSPs, officers should thereafter patrol in threes, effectively reducing the sought-after police coverage in these urban areas. Examples abound in this sense. Empirical observation of policing in the ZSPs seems rather to show little change in the tactics of local police there (Darley, Gauthier 2018, 82). Riot police are posted in such and such a neighbourhood for longer than before (a few weeks), though still temporarily, particularly when current events call them once again to their initial vocation (patrolling terrorist target sites or supervising demonstrations in city centres).

In 2018, a new national measure, the *police de sécurité du quotidien* (Daily safety police), was announced by the French government, following on from the ZSPs (whose actual makeup remains vague, having never been the subject of any serious evaluation). The plan, launched with great media hype, illustrates just about every inadequacy of policing policy in the banlieues. First, the purpose was to roll out a police force that is close to people's needs, but from the start the government's choice of wording was militaristic, the project's target urban areas being called "Republican recapture zones", with the attending understanding that these were total no-go-areas, where the rule of law was not guaranteed — an image which is delusional as we saw in the first part of this study. Second, it was clearly a communication exercise targeting the French who live far from these neighbourhoods (where electoral turnout is very low), putting on a

display of toughness and redress, since, on the ground, France's budgetary situation made a mockery of the plan. The 7,500 officers assigned to the plan will at best make up for the losses recorded between 2007 and 2012 and in the whole of France, the measure has only been rolled out in 15 neighbourhoods (which each benefitted from a net increase of 100 police officers and gendarmes). The analysis is thus unchanged: the government no longer knows how to carry out urban policing (foot patrols, dealing with the public, intervening in domestic disputes, etc.) and even if they did, they wouldn't have the means to do so.

As a result, the tendency towards militarization of the police in the banlieues is hardened, since it is always easier for the authorities to have a police force at their command, responding to their every order, than to let police units decide locally how to respond to what residents want — a style of policing which is never easy anywhere as we know (see Skogan in Chicago), but even less so in these poor areas compounded by social issues.

Paris and its suburbs have experienced a clear process of centralization and militarization since a bill was adopted in 2009. The bill created a city police force, the *police d'agglomération* and gave the police prefect command of all the public safety forces of Paris and its three surrounding departments, a total of 30,000 officers. This centralization goes hand-in-hand with the militarization of a good deal of the police force, designed to be "propelled" into areas of unrest from the safe distance of command centres under the authority of the Paris Prefecture. The extreme unease of certain police departments, incapable of responding to the simultaneous urban riots of 2005, due to a lack of manpower and coordination (Dufresne 2013, 55-66), reinforced the priority given to having reserve forces to detach to events anytime, with the unfortunate consequence of a much diluted every day police presence.

This tendency towards centralization can also be seen on a smaller scale. Budget cuts increasingly led to Anti-crime brigades (*Brigades anti-criminalité*, or BAC) within police stations being pooled (with the merging of several or sometimes all the police stations in the department). These units were made up of police officers with a knowledge of their territory (or at the very least its criminology, or its "clientele" to be more precise, see Maillard and Jobard in this volume). They subsequently became part of increasingly large units crisscrossing ever vaster territories, ready to be "propelled" by a command centre to deal with a case of unrest in some pinpoint of the district or department. Occasionally, even, the departmental BAC units have merged with the departmental protest policing units (known as the *Compagnies de sécurisation*, or Security companies).

Of course, this trend towards savings, centralization and militarization has a strong impact on police practices and on the equipment used by the police. Public safety forces in the banlieues face two types of crime: petty crime, which is a burden on

residents' day-to-day activities in the neighbourhood (low-level violence, assault or rowdiness in public spaces and in public transport in particular, occupation of hallways and entrances of buildings and various annoyances, etc.), and organised crime such as drug trafficking and attendant crime, including gun crime. The second type accounts for a good deal of police time, though due to the particularly high demand for cannabis in France (one of the highest in Europe), this has little effect on supply. Regarding the first type, the observations of Didier Fassin and Fabien Jobard in their respective banlieues bear witness, at several years' interval, to similar practices on behalf of the Anti-crime brigades: a small gathering of young men at the foot of a building, listening to music or simply drinking and chatting loudly together, prompts an intervention by this police unit, which rapidly turns into a degrading ceremony or a humiliation ritual for the young people involved, sometimes accompanied by physical violence.

Consequently, over the years, tension between residents and police has reached the point that a third type of crime has emerged as a priority for the authorities: crimes targeting the police. Stone-throwing, insults and ambushes have become the drivers behind new public safety policies targeting what has become known in policing terms as "urban violence". With the effect that, in a context where victimization and concern for safety are high, one of the defining characteristics of the police in the poor banlieues is their preoccupation with their own safety. A paradox that could be almost comical, if it weren't for its dire consequences on the lives of the residents (and, incidentally, the police, themselves).

The most visible consequence of this heightened concern of police for their own protection is the spread of rubber-bullet weapons within their ranks. As we know, in Europe, such weapons were used by the forces deployed in Northern Ireland. In France, they were introduced in small numbers, according to an instruction from the general director of the national police in July 1995. At the time, their use was "strictly limited to cases of self-defence" when intervening in situations where officers were at risk ("threats by knife, public brawls, ignoring of roadblocks, etc."). A single gun was kept at officers' disposal in patrol vehicles and could be used only with the authorisation of the patrol chief. When Nicolas Sarkozy, the future president, became Minister of the Interior in 2002, he instigated a wave of purchases of these weapons to, in his own words, "impress the thugs". Following the 2005 riots, he declared: "The past events have led us to reinforce and adapt equipment and uniforms. As an example, I have ordered the purchase of nearly 460 Flashballs" (the name of the brand of riot gun, then produced in France). In 2007, following riots and very violent clashes, triggered by the death of two youths during a police chase in Villiers-le-Bel, a banlieue far from Paris, Nicolas Sarkozy, the newly-elected president, ordered the purchase of a new type of riot gun, the LBD, with greater fire power. An instruction from the director of the police in August 2009 stated: "Destined initially to equip certain specialized units, the use of this rifle has progressively been extended to all units

operating in difficult neighbourhoods. From now on, it is intended to be used by all units faced with violent situations". So we see how, from a weapon designed for use by police in self-defence —though from the outset specifically intended for officers operating in the banlieues— this weapon, which "cannot be qualified as non-lethal because of the serious injuries it is likely to cause" (according to the wording of the 1995 instruction), became widely issued to police operating in the banlieues in situations likely to be "violent" ... A proviso which covers more or less every policing situation, always likely to be violent. The results of the widespread distribution of this weapon are unequivocal: around twenty people have lost an eye in banlieue areas since 1995, not to mention the results of the spread of its use to the arsenal of protest policing (see Restelli in this volume).

These rubber bullet guns are not the only gear to have been introduced in reaction to the 2005 riots. In the weeks that followed, were also purchased: 2,800 tear gas canisters, 6,700 "bliniz"-type rubber-bullet projectiles, not to mention the 875 bullet-proof helmets and 5,500 more of the helmets usually used by the CRS and EGM riot police. Though certain weapons were withdrawn from the police endowment, such as offensive grenades or other ammunition, on the whole, the new arsenal contributed to the militarization of police operating in the banlieues. Because even the protective gear —the helmets and other gear (shin-guards, hard-shell gloves, leg-guards, chest- and shoulder-pads, etc.), offers residents a vision of a Ninja-like police force, impervious to dialogue. A trait actually boasted by the Minister of the Interior in 2010, who, on launching yet another police unit for the banlieues, stated that he did not want "social-worker-come-big-brother-type police officers in shirtsleeves", but rather officers in "combat gear". Of course, their intervention tactics are not to be compared with those of the SWAT described by Kraska, in particular regarding the use of firearms, to which they resort far more rarely. But the proliferation of such units contributes to building a police force that is hemmed in on itself and feels besieged by a local population that it needs to maintain at safe distance.

2.3. Police practices in the banlieues

One should never underestimate the impact of the word "banlieue" on the collective imagination, because the term itself truly has the effect of a self-fulfilling prophecy. As we have shown in the chapter on identity checks, France's highest court of law, the Court of Cassation, very clearly ruled that anti-discrimination laws are not to be applied in the same manner in areas renowned for a high crime rate, as is the case of all the housing projects of the banlieues (particularly those whose name has been associated for decades with urban violence, in spite of the fact that they have been entirely renovated). In these territories, the police can carry out identity checks on any person, whatever their behaviour, and by virtue of the place where the check occurred,

such person will never be able to prove the discriminatory nature of the check before a judge (Jobard & de Maillard *infra*).

This high court decision highlights the extent to which informal norms but jurisdictional norms, too, paint a picture of a very different police in the banlieues. A police force whose officers have had it drilled into them, since the police academy, that they will be sent into tough neighbourhoods and that the glory of the profession resides in the plainclothes units of the commissariat, driving out drug dealers and **perpetrators of street crime**. A representation of the profession that is corroborated by the endless reporting of violence in the banlieues, especially under Nicolas Sarkozy (2002-2012, first as Minister of the Interior and then as President of the Republic). The new recruits cannot fail to notice, either, that ordinary, standard policing activities are carried out mainly by those officers that didn't make it into the elite units of the commissariat. Quite rightly, these police men and women see their assignments as temporary, and, aspiring only to getting back to their home county, they are little involved in local life: they do not live in the town where they work, do not use the local facilities or services (if they play football, it is in their home team) and return home when they are on leave, enjoying preferential fares for police and military on train travel. If, out of some personal conviction or by way of default, an officer assigned to a banlieue wishes to stay there, then the only vague incentive for him or her will be to join the limited local aristocracy of the plainclothes police units, for which they will have to prove their ability to demonstrate authority and firmness in their interactions with the public.

All this contributes to maintaining and perpetuating a policing tradition that James Q. Wilson would class as "legalistic style", due to the very privileged position of law enforcement over peace keeping (de Maillard, Hunold 2016). This legalistic style is defined in my eyes above all by the narrowing of the police officers' lens on a target population they consider as their own "clientele". Subjects they identify as being their sole responsibility, either because, according to them, the natural figures of authority (the family, for example) do not play their part, or because the youth in question are no longer supported by any institution (be it school or the job market), or finally because, once again according to them, the penal system does not do its job properly and releases offenders instead of keeping them out the way. This apprehension of the population and of their own mandate has two consequences. The first is a pre-emptive use of force and the particularly violent nature of interventions, as documented by Didier Fassin in his observations. These, when they are reported to the law, rarely prompt any earnest desire to investigate.

The following episode is revealing in this regard. On 2 February 2017, a police brigade was patrolling in a town in Seine-St-Denis marked by intense drug trafficking. The brigade (one on those touted by the Minister in 2010 when he explained that he did not want to see any more police officers "in shirtsleeves") stopped and searched some

young men, placing them against a wall, hands flat, legs apart. One of the young men was slapped by a police officer, upon which Theo Luhaka, a 21-year old black man stepped in, causing the other officers to intervene. They pinned him to the ground and one of the police officers proceeded to violate the young man's anus with his extendable baton, causing an internal injury of ten centimetres, with "irreversible" consequences, as certified by a medical report from August 2019. The incident was filmed by the town's CCTV cameras and the images were broadcast on the internet, generating an intense emotional response and bringing forward a great number of accounts of similar behaviour from earlier arrests, mostly in housing estates in the banlieues. As had been the case following the insults and sexual violence on the youths in Paris' 12th arrondissement (see Jobard & de Maillard *infra*), the public realised that not only was the police *modus operandi* in the banlieues more aggressive than elsewhere, but it could also be exceptionally humiliating and degrading. Particularly where young men from immigrant families – many of whom live in these towns – were concerned. The police appeared to be perpetuating a tradition of sexualising altercations, conferring sexual undertones to body searches, frisks, verbal warnings or acts of aggression, thus carrying on an entrenched colonial tradition (Blanchard 2008).

Ultimately, it is not surprising to see, as studies segmented by residence have shown since at least the early 1990s (Gorgeon 1994), that police officers are strongly suspected of discriminatory, racist or violent behaviour. In the recent Eurojustis-France survey, 39% of respondents not living in social housing in France answered "yes" to the question, "are the police racist?", versus 48% of respondents living in housing projects in the banlieues north of Paris. When asked if they thought the police were guilty of carrying out "unwarranted checks on certain persons", the proportions were respectively 25% and 48%. The gap is the same regarding police brutality: half the residents of housing projects in Seine-St-Denis consider police interventions "too aggressive", versus 36% of residents of other areas.

Conclusion

If there is one problem area for the police in France, it is the banlieue, if we take that to mean those poor municipalities located in the vicinity of large cities. It is a problem not so much because of the violence and street crime that are, indeed, more common there than elsewhere, but because of the history of how police are deployed in those areas. This is characterized by chronic understaffing and the subsequent resort to a militarized, defensive style of policing, which increases pre-emptive use of violence by these state employees. So, a self-fulfilling prophecy plays out, against a backdrop of racial segregation in these territories, home to a population which, though diverse, is far poorer and more often from abroad or from French overseas territories than in other French cities, thus perpetuating a French tradition of violent police control of immigrant populations. The structural trends of this state of affairs remain unchanged:

budgetary constraints of the French State, geographical segregation despite the (very relative) gentrification of the municipalities closest to the cities-proper, under-industrialization of the economy, which produces a constant supply of young men with no qualifications who are almost invariably ill-suited to the skilled trades specific to the service economy. The police in the banlieues are called upon to manage the negative externalities generated by these trends, while the rest of the population looks on in indifference, concern or outrage. The rise of social protests since 2016 (with massive demonstrations against the labour law reform in 2016 and the yellow vest movement of 2018-19) is hardly likely to pacify police operations in the banlieues, even if the police brutality usually seen in the banlieues has in these cases targeted French citizens who are neither from the banlieues, nor of migrant descent. Indeed, with officers in high demand for policing large demonstrations in the cities-proper, the local police stations of the banlieue are even more scarcely manned than usual, meaning that the forces operating there are often paramilitary units. What is more, a tragically paradoxical effect of the violence suffered by police officers during the demonstrations is that, in retaliation, this legitimizes their increased militarization, which will undoubtedly impact the police equipment, organisation and tactics in the banlieues. Moreover, since voting participation is low among those inhabitants, there is ultimately little chance that the frame of reference underlying policing behaviour and strategies in these areas will change.

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