

## 1

## Violence and the postcolonial welfare state in France and Australia

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What can analyses of violence in marginalised communities in France and Australia teach us about the evolving structures of the postcolonial welfare state? This collection originates from a workshop that was held in October 2007 at the University of Sydney for the purpose of exploring this question. It represents a conversation between scholars working on violence in Australian Aboriginal communities and those studying violence in immigrant communities in France, particularly in relation to rioting. The rationale for bringing these two largely distinct bodies of research into communication is that in both countries violence in marginalised communities occurs in situations that can be interpreted in terms of two broad and superimposed frameworks that have not sufficiently been analysed in relation to one another: postcolonial society and the welfare state.

In analyses of the roots of violence in marginalised communities, there is a tendency, resisted in this collection, to draw exclusively on either one or the other of these frameworks—to suggest that the basis of the violence is broadly socio-economic, while neglecting its specific and long-term historical conditions, or conversely to see it as a feature of a culture that has been warped by the abuses of colonialism, without sufficiently acknowledging the more recent and generalised impact of welfare structures. The latter approach can be seen in ‘culture’-based interpretations of Aboriginal violence, although interestingly, at the time of the workshop, a sharp focus on welfare structures as the

primary underlying cause of Aboriginal violence was emerging in the context of the Intervention by the federal government into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory (NT) of Australia. This major political and social event had begun only weeks before the workshop. Of the chapters in this volume that focus on violence in Australia, two (by Watson and Howard-Wagner) deal explicitly with the Intervention, which is ongoing, and what it highlights about the governance of Aboriginal communities in Australia.

Despite their very different histories, Australia and France share the typical postcolonial experience of unresolved conflicts. In different ways, the legacies of colonial violence and appropriation are 'carried into the present as traumatic memory, inherited institutional structures, and often unexamined assumptions' (Good et al. 2008, 6). The persistent residues of colonial violence manifest in multifarious ways in contemporary outbreaks of violence both in Indigenous Australian communities and in communities in France with a large number of immigrants from former colonies and their descendants.

France and Australia are also highly modernised societies. Postcolonial violence in these societies can be clearly demarcated from those of decolonising nation-states undergoing modernisation, such as Zimbabwe and Pakistan. In France and Australia, the welfare state, in the broad sense of that social institution committed to the maintenance of a reasonably fair and dignified condition of living for the population of a nation-state, has modulated postcolonial conflicts. The structural limitations and policy failures of the welfare state have become sources of discontent and suffering in these two societies, leading to interactions between marginalised groups and the state that are punctuated by instances of violent contestation.

These broad commonalities and salient differences, which formed the starting point for the workshop's critical analyses of manifestations of violence in France and Australia, immediately raise the problem of how to understand the entanglement of the postcolonial and the welfare state. The precise relationships between the welfare state and the postcolonial have never been adequately characterised, being often

regarded as distinct categorisations of institutional forms and states of historical transition. Yet, the recent comparative research on advanced marginality, which is itself motivated by a need to comprehend violent confrontations in contexts of persistent disadvantage, has drawn attention to a need to understand the intersections, as well as the variations, between the postcolonial and the welfare state (Wacquant 2008).

Particularly significant is the fact that the postcolonial background to contemporary violence throws into relief the racial and ethnic dimensions of forms of marginality. In order to account for this violence it is necessary to take into account the nexuses between the social and the racial within nation-states. Ethnically and racially marginalised groups tend to be comparatively limited in the scope and dimensions of their social agency, having limited access to mainstream politics and being subjected to normalising kinds of governmental regulation. These groups recurrently experience higher levels of policing and they regularly have higher imprisonment rates. It is clear in this context that the role of the state is not limited to that of mediating conflicts which arise independently in civil society. Rather, the exercise of state authority is itself a matter of conflict and disputed legitimacy. This disputation is disclosed by some of the ways in which marginalised groups instantiate violence, especially those modalities of violence that bear the marks of the frustrations of diminished citizenship and that are precipitated by perceptions of police abuse. The latter is exemplified, for example, by the riots that have sometimes followed the deaths in custody of Indigenous Australians and police shootings of youths of migrant descent in France.

Could there be a relationship between contemporary state sanctioned violence and the widely discussed ideas of the decline or crisis of the welfare state? One suggestion is that fiscal constraints and the broad trends of globalisation have resulted in the welfare state being reconfigured into an increasingly punitive regime (Bauman 1998; Wacquant 2008). It is claimed, in effect, that the state's resources are increasingly concentrated on the means of coercive regulation of populations, as demonstrated by certain nation-states increasing rates

of imprisonment and the intensive policing of groups experiencing social dislocation and marginalisation. To the extent that they involve the selective application of state violence as a means of political governance, these developments have analogies with the dynamics of colonialism. The colonial analogy can be extended to the demands for these modes of state action emanating from broader public perceptions of the implications of social divisions, as in the need for force to manage unruly populations like the youth of housing estates and Indigenous communities. It is plausible to claim that these social processes amount to a type of internal colonisation, insofar as they legitimise unequal treatment and undermine the subordinated groups' capacities for self-determination. In this sense, these processes are seemingly paradoxical, being contrary to the explicit policy regimes of welfare state societies like France and Australia.

The postcolonial dimension of these welfare states is highlighted in their persistent forms of 'marginality' and impoverishment. A number of chapters in this collection concentrate on the recent violence in suburban France, which generally has involved a large number of youths of immigrant backgrounds, many of whom can trace their family history directly to former French colonies. In relation to Australian Aborigines, the postcolonial dimension of coercive regulation in the name of welfare is even more evident. At the time of the Australian Bicentennial in 1988, the anthropologist Jeremy Beckett made an initial contribution to understanding the interface between the welfare state and colonialism. With reference to the idea put forward by Robert Paine, Beckett drew attention to the contradictory and unstable juxtaposition contained in the term welfare colonialism; it simultaneously connoted 'citizenship (welfare) and its denial (colonialism)' (Beckett 1988, 14). In our view, the contemporary violence in advanced postcolonial societies exposes facets of this paradoxical combination that were not initially well understood and that require contemporary clarification.

Beckett rightly emphasised the logic of incorporation that shaped the development of welfare colonialism and how it represented a response by the postcolonial state, in countries like Australia and Canada, to the extreme poverty and marginality of indigenous communities, on the one

hand, and to the increasing indigenous demands for self-determination and the full actualisation of the rights of citizenship, on the other. It is almost beyond dispute that the intervening period has revealed how the logic of incorporation can frustrate and negate the latter demands. As Beckett already appreciated, the contrast between the 'solicitous' treatment of citizens by the welfare state and the more straightforwardly exploitative quality of colonial domination did not signal any significant alteration in the asymmetrical distribution of power and decision-making. In his opinion, 'another contradictory feature of welfare colonialism is its need to secure the assent of its subjects as evidence of their political enfranchisement' (Beckett 1988, 14) However, later postcolonial welfare state policy developments, like the Intervention, challenge even this aspect of liberal-democratic citizenship and contribute to new forms of indigenous disenfranchisement. Recent manifestations of postcolonial violence highlight the limitations of the incorporative logic of 'welfare colonialism' and the dissatisfaction provoked by postcolonial states' modes of adapting to the advances made by movements for self-determination. This collection fulfils a need to re-examine these themes and to contextualise contemporary violence in relation to modifications in welfare states. It does this especially through the field research it draws upon, the innovations in social theory that it extends and the collection's comparative format, which provides novel insights into the particular configurations of the postcolonial and the welfare state.

The comparative aspect of this project is facilitated by the fact that a number of scholars working on violence in Australian Indigenous communities draw upon the rich conceptual resources of French theory in developing their interpretations of experiences in the field. This use of frameworks and ideas generated in a foreign context enables insights not available from within a purely local perspective, but it also involves a degree of adaptation, testing and extension of the theoretical material in response to problems and ethnographic material specific to Australian settings.

The opening chapter, by Gillian Cowlshaw, is a good example of this process. Cowlshaw takes up Axel Honneth's theory of recognition,

also employed by Emmanuel Renault in his analysis of the perspective of young French rioters, included later in this volume. Cowlshaw uses Honneth's theory as a frame within which to interpret the everyday engagement in violence of the Murri people living in Bourke. The fact that conventional societal sources of recognition and respect are inaccessible for many of these people helps to explain the violence that forms part of everyday life, and occasionally flares into greater visibility in the form of riots. Violence is a way both to protest against the experience of invisibility and discrimination, and to force a highly ambiguous measure of recognition and respect.

Cowlshaw then extends this analysis in two directions. She introduces the dimension of gender, observing that like Murri men, Murri women also engage in violence and regard it as socially appropriate and enjoyable in situations where it would invoke censure from whitefellas. This ethnographic data contradicts the stereotype which depicts Aboriginal violence as essentially a matter of male aggression, typically directed toward submissive women. Secondly, she examines the courtroom process which is the usual sequel to Murri violence, especially riots, noting that while this process affords a certain form of recognition or at least visibility, it comes in a form that tends to confound any political impulses. It is not designed for the purpose of providing the kind of political recognition that could result from listening to and understanding Aborigines. Instead, in the courtroom as in the media, Aboriginal violence tends to provoke either moralistic judgment or pity in the form of compassionate discourses which Cowlshaw critiques as disrespectful. Both these approaches fail to recognise the immediate experiences of pleasure and power, as well as the underlying powerlessness or political ineffectiveness in the Aboriginal relationship with violence.

Aboriginal scholar Irene Watson provides another perspective on the relationship between violence and politics in Aboriginal experience. Like Cowlshaw, she also draws upon the resources of French theory, including concepts developed by Derrida, Rancière and Badiou. She deploys these in conjunction with insights drawn from personal experience as a legal activist to provide a challenging critical response

to the Intervention as it had unfolded by the time of the workshop. In her chapter, this initiative is situated in relation to the violence that is historically and conceptually embedded in the Australian nation and the lives of its citizens, white and Aboriginal. Watson mounts a cutting critique of the paternalism which continues to allow the Australian government and other organisations to assume the mantle of 'saviour,' 'crusader,' or 'protector' in relation to Indigenous peoples. In exploring this problem, she picks up Wendy Brown's question regarding human rights as a framework for addressing violence: 'if [humanitarian interventions] reduce suffering, what kinds of subjects and political (or antipolitical) cultures do they bring into being as they do so, what kinds do they transform or erode, and what kinds do they aver?' (Brown 2004, 453). In applying this question to the raft of measures involved in the Intervention, Watson suggests that the consequences for Aboriginal political agency have been disastrous: the 'political subjects that are reproduced [by the coercive measures of the Intervention] are Aboriginal peoples who continue to be subjugated by the state/colonial body, having no possibility of shifting to or opening up a de-colonised space.'

Dierdre Howard-Wagner comes to similar conclusions in her chapter, which seeks to situate the Intervention in its more recent historical and political context. She examines the logic of governmentality that structured the Australian government's dealings with Aboriginal communities in the early years of the twenty-first century, culminating in the Intervention. She shows that under the Howard government the approach taken to Indigenous affairs was dominated by the interplay between neoliberal and neo-conservative modes of governance. On the one hand, in pursuit of neoliberal economic goals, the rhetoric of 'shared responsibility' was used, not to recognise and enhance Indigenous Australians' capacities to direct the process of recovery and revitalisation of their own communities, but rather to justify the introduction of neoliberal 'market values' and 'mainstream' Australian norms of private home-ownership and 'active entrepreneurship' as the solution to the dysfunction of Aboriginal communities. On the other hand, particularly once the Intervention was underway, neo-conservative politics simultaneously justified the withdrawal of certain

liberal rights of Aboriginal citizens, and the abrogation of the limited rights to self-determination that had earlier been granted to some of their communities, in favour of paternalistic controls which claimed to address the moral deficiencies of Aboriginal parenting and guarantee social order.

The contradictions of this approach—demanding greater individual economic responsibility, while withdrawing basic individual liberties, and at the same time undermining communal structures of responsibility—were obscured in the atmosphere of crisis which was cultivated in the wake of a damning report on child abuse and neglect in Indigenous communities of the Northern Territory. Although this report provided the catalyst for the Intervention, its recommendation of genuine consultation with Aboriginal peoples to design initiatives to overcome the problems it identified was notably disregarded in favour of a style of governmental response more consonant with previous with the version of ‘shared responsibility’ already evident in the Howard government’s approach to Indigenous affairs.

The shift to a neoliberal/neo-conservative mode of governance in relation to Indigenous communities has been justified by identifying welfare dependency as the key to understanding the problems of alcoholism, child abuse, pornography, entrenched unemployment and despair evident in many Indigenous communities, suggesting that if this is eliminated in favour of integration of Indigenous peoples into the liberal market then the primary cause of these problems will have been removed. As Howard-Wagner points out, what is overlooked in the simplicity, and short memory, of this analysis is the trauma of violence, including abuse and neglect: its long history reaching back to the beginnings of colonisation; its entrenchment in institutionalised racism; its burden as suffered in the form of economic and social exclusion; its transgenerational perpetration within Indigenous families; its destructive power (Dodson 2003).

Justine McGill also challenges the idea that violence in Indigenous and other marginalised communities can be attributed to a failure of or incapacity for responsibility on the part of their members, and proposes a mode of ‘sharing responsibility’ that is radically different to



the thinking which gave rise to the 'Shared Responsibility Agreements' introduced in 2004 by the Australian government in an attempt to promote self-regulation in Indigenous communities. Her analysis indicates that the violence of the 'powerless' represents a vitality which demands and could support a radical shift in the relationship between marginalised citizens and the state, provided that the state relinquish the fantasy of total control and leave space for marginalised peoples to contribute actively to the future not only of their own communities, but also of the state itself.

McGill reaches this conclusion via an analysis of power and powerlessness in the context of rioting, arguing that it is not only the powerlessness of the marginalised that is exposed at these crisis points. The powerlessness of the state also comes into focus when governments, whether in Australia or in France, respond to explosive violence in marginalised communities with displays of repressive strength that mirror the impulsive and spectacular violence of the rioters. Underlying this typically disproportionate reaction of the state to a visibly weak and politically disorganised opponent lies a potent sense of the failure of the state to meet the needs of these disaffected citizens. In spite of decades of government programs designed to address the social problems in sectors of the population that carry the weight of postcolonial history, such problems appear to be increasing rather than diminishing. From this perspective, riots can be understood as a periodic form of 'counter-violence' pitted against the less visible, but far more destructive violence of institutionalised racism.

If the Intervention and the many issues it raised provided the framing example of violence in the postcolonial welfare state of Australia for the workshop, the French counterpart was the 2005 riots. There are several reasons for the detailed engagement with the late-2005 riots in France: first, the riots received widespread coverage in the international mass media and they generated innumerable commentaries. However, there undoubtedly was a substantial degree of false projection to these analyses. In the Australian context, for example, the 2005 French riots were subjected to the diametrically contrasting analyses of attributing

them to either the surfeit of multiculturalism in France or the absence of French multiculturalism (see Browne & Mar 2006). It is likely that the 2005 French riots actually served as a pretext in these analyses for expressing positions on the unresolved meaning of multiculturalism in Australia. There is then a need for a better understanding of the context of the 2005 French riots and the claims that are being made in this enacting of discontent.

Second, the riots obtained a substantial signification and were sometimes seen as crystallising a basic social dilemma of the age. There are a number of variations on this interpretation and differences can be seen in the scale of analysis: the riots were viewed as emblematic of the problems and crises of globalisation, from another angle the riots were viewed as instancing the generic problems of European welfare states and the difficulties that these nation-states encounter in integrating migrant populations of different ethnic and religious orientations to that of the dominant culture (see Balibar 2007; *Annales* 4/2006; Lagrange & Oberti 2006), another framework of analysis emphasised the national particularity of the French state and economy, especially the alleged failures of the state and economy from the perspective of liberal market reforms, such as was espoused in the anniversary of the riots issue of the magazine *The Economist*. On this view, the riots revealed the substantial malaise and denial that had gripped France, thereby pointing to a society at an impasse owing to economic paralysis and a lack of social and cultural integration. In some respects, this perspective too seeks to fit the riots into a pre-existing agenda, while nonetheless drawing attention to some difficult and intractable social problems: urban decline, discrimination, resentment and social exclusion.

Third, the riots and their underlying social problem have been the topic of specific debates within France. These discussions are surveyed in several papers, giving an English-language readership an opportunity to assess the various positions that have developed. Even so, the debates concerning the riots in France have been marked by attempts to define an appropriate or adequate framework of analysis. In part, this reflects the riots' different registers of signification, but there are other complications, such as their relationship to the history

of political contestation in France and the difficulties of an appropriate representation of the rioters' own perspective. The chapters by the two French contributors to the collection, Didier Fassin and Emmanuel Renault, each seek to clarify some dimensions of the riots that have been the subject of misunderstanding, or some measure of misrepresentation. In fact, the context of the riots, outer suburban *cités* (housing estates) and *banlieues*, appear to offer an already well-established framework of interpretation.

The *banlieues* have come to be equated with a decaying urban milieu, populated by immigrants and their children. More often implicit, but occasionally explicit, in this vision are the connotations of criminality, incivility and ethnically generated violence. However, as Emmanuel Renault explains in this collection, there are actually a considerable variety of *banlieues*. Not all of them fit the stigmatised stereotype of the outer suburban housing estates. Given the specificity of the term *banlieue* and its regular use in this collection, it is necessary to clarify the connotations of *banlieue* at the outset, particularly for English-speaking readers that are unfamiliar with its meaning. In his recent book *Urban outcasts*, Loïc Wacquant makes the following clarifying comments about the term *banlieue* that are worth quoting at length:

Technically, the term *banlieue* designates a peripheral town or zone administratively attached to a larger urban centre. Originally, in the French medieval city, it referred to the ring on one league (*lieue*) falling under the ban or juridical authority of the city. A *banlieue* can thus be bourgeois or working class, affluent or impoverished. Since the mid-1980s, however, the word has been increasingly reserved to denote lower-class districts of the urban periphery harbouring high densities of deteriorating public housing (projects known as *cités*) considered prime breeding grounds for the 'urban ills' of the age, combining economic deprivation, ecological degradation, social dislocations, postcolonial immigration and youth delinquency (Boyer 2000). Such *cités* are typically composed of large estates of cheaply built high rises that generate an atmosphere of monotony and dread. (Wacquant 2008, 4, Note 5)

The meanings and resonances of the contemporary violence in France can only be properly understood in terms of the historical background that has shaped the patterns of immigration and the public imagination. In 'Colonial violence and post-colonial France', Robert Aldrich surveys the historical connections between French colonialism and violence, as well as the legacy of this violence and its persistence as a form of memory and a symbol for contemporary social struggles. Violence was an important part of the 'arsenal' of colonialism and it was a major factor in imperial expansion and resistance to it. Violence was present in the European metropole, but Aldrich emphasises the key difference of colonial violence was its links to the racial cleavage of the periphery. Frantz Fanon (1968) famously saw in this a justification for the necessity of decolonising violence in order to cleanse the colonised of the psychic taint of the coloniser. While acknowledging the importance of Fanon's views in underlining the presence of violence in colonialism and decolonisation, Aldrich seeks to correct the simple polarity of Fanon's account of coloniser and colonised. Aldrich finds that violence in the French colonial world was far more manifold, multidimensional and multifaceted, for example, he points to how violence reached a point in Algeria where it had 'erupted in all directions'. Indeed, this is one of a number of reasons why the heritage of violence has 'proved longer lasting' than Fanon 'foresaw'. In fact, the complications of colonial and decolonising violence, which Aldrich establishes through a detailed analysis of various episodes, have produced a history of veiling and obscuring. It is only recently that some major features of colonial violence, including the fighting for the French nation by troops sourced from colonised populations, have been revealed in France, especially in the popular media and public commemorations.

Like many of the contributors to the collection, Aldrich highlights how French colonialism and French republicanism involve a considerable tension of basic principles. The history of their co-existence raises then a number of questions. If republicanism and colonialism do not negate each other then is it possible that one can inhabit the other? If the latter is the case then is the colonial within the Republic or are the Republican values within the colonial? Interestingly, these respective

alternatives are the points of reference for two contrasting women's political organisations that have recently emerged within French immigrant communities. Their disagreements over these questions are conveyed by their respective titles: '*Ni putes ni soumises*' [Neither whores nor submissive] and '*Les Indigènes de la République*' [The natives/Indigenous of the Republic]. Elizabeth Rechniewski examines these two protest movements in the chapter 'Violence, identity and the postcolonial French state', considering each of them to be variations on identity politics. Rechniewski contends that the situation of women in the *banlieues* and *cités* has been overlooked in the recent public discourses on violence. These women's struggles are, she argues, initially ones of self-definition. Violence towards women by men from the *banlieues* as well as the disputation by women of the ethnic and religious origins of male violence served as catalyst for these two movements. By contrasting the politics and identity claims of '*Ni putes ni soumises*' and '*Les Indigènes de la République*', Rechniewski shows that homogenising claims about the political position of women of migrant descent are misleading. Both of these women's movements, she argues, 'can be seen as positioning themselves to speak with an exclusive voice for the populations of the *banlieues*, in a field left largely vacant by mainstream and alternative political parties.'

In their respective political organisations, '*Ni putes ni soumises*' and '*Les Indigènes de la République*' each conforms to new social movements, especially in their emphases on struggles over social identity. Rechniewski draws on the theoretical perspectives of new social movement theory but qualifies their frameworks through the use of the notion of social fields, which is inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1990). The notion of field draws attention to the more structural and relational facets of contestations over identity. Rechniewski is then able to propose correlations between a typology of different orders of violence: physical, symbolic and distributive, and the origination or constitution of this violence in the state, civil society and community. On the basis of this typology, Rechniewski shows that the orientations of the different women's movements reveal differing focuses, either on physical, symbolic or distributive violence. Given that '*Ni putes ni sou-*

*mises*' and '*Les Indigènes de la République*' very much define themselves in relation to the state and Republic, at issue are the values of the Republic and whether they should be extended or limited. Although the movements may have an interest in presenting this as a stark choice between alternatives, this not the case in Rechniewski's opinion, neither the state nor the Republic are monolithic entities according to her.

Emmanuel Renault turns to the struggles of the youth in the *banlieues* and seeks to explicate the underlying demands of the 2005 French riots. In 'Violence and disrespect in the French revolt of November 2005', Renault contests the view that the riots were without political content. The riots or revolt, he argues, involved processes of politicisation. In other words, the riots concerned the construction of the definition of the political and therefore the definition of the threshold that separates the political from the prepolitical. The social denial of this feature of the riots has certain similarities with what Gayatri Spivak (2000) described as the denial of subaltern insurgencies in colonial India. That is, these denials show that the definition of the threshold between the prepolitical and the political is itself a matter of political conflicts. Renault finds a common thread to the youths' own justifications of the revolt and that which recurs in different guises in scholarly analyses. The violent reactions of November 2005 were to experiences of social disrespect and humiliation. Renault then draws on Axel Honneth's (1995) theory of the struggle for recognition to describe the moral content of these violent reactions to social disrespect. The resulting conceptualisation of how it is that collective experiences of injustice can lead to revolt enables Renault to evaluate and synthesise different perspectives on the riots. Significantly, what Honneth's framework provides is a way of comprehending the 'moral wound that justifies violent reactions' and Renault's own interviews with youth from the *banlieues* highlight these negative experiences of injustice. Renault's analysis demonstrates that the 2005 revolts had a rational component, even though it is not so much rationally articulated. In a recently published paper Renault and Jean-Philippe Deranty argue for a politicising of Honneth's theory of recognition (Deranty & Renault 2007). Renault makes use of the distinction developed at greater length in the earlier paper between a

struggle *for* recognition and a struggle *of* recognition to show how in the 2005 riots a demand for respect took the more politically confrontational conflictual form of an accusation concerning denied respect.

In 'The violence of racialisation: the 2005 riots as event', Didier Fassin overviews the complexities and ambiguities of the notion of race in France, in both popular and academic discourses. Despite its history of postcolonial immigration, race had been denied as a feature of French society for a long period. Race was rather viewed as a category of relevance to nation-states that institutionalised racial boundaries or a colour line, like the USA and South Africa. In French sociological and political discourses, race was largely assimilated to the categories of social inequality and Fassin recounts the resistance that the invocation of race encountered. However, the 2005 riots suddenly generated, Fassin argues, the exactly contrary position, that is, not simply the discovery of the salience of the category of race but also the dominance of discourses in the public sphere that reduced the riots and their implications to race, thereby obscuring the riots' connection to the social. Nevertheless, despite the deficiencies of this sudden reversal in perspective and the less than sanguine political connotations of some of the associated discourses, Fassin considers that the 2005 riots constituted a significant 'event'. The 2005 riots made racialisation visible in France, establishing then a temporal demarcation of before and after the explicit problematisation of race. Fassin suggests that what was specific to the veiling of race in France was the importance that had been ascribed to three overarching signifiers of social unity and identification: 'class', 'nation' and 'republic'. The riots then challenge some dimensions of each of these signifiers and hence, in turn, problematised basic assumptions about French society.

Of course, the veiling of race in France involved a certain denial of the forms of engagement with race that were actually occurring. Fassin's analysis is based on the ethnographic research that he had undertaken into police patrols in the *banlieues* and *cités*. Fassin's 'fragments of an ethnography' reveal how, far from conforming to the prevailing expectations concerning delinquent populations, the *banlieue* youth, especially those of immigrant backgrounds like Blacks and Arabs, have

developed relatively servile relations to the police, as a form of self-protection against police harassment and potential brutality. The police patrols, that Fassin observed, had an overtly racialised *modus operandi*. Like the riots of the past two decades that had preceded them, the 2005 riots were precipitated by the deaths of two youths of North African backgrounds and whose actions (which were to culminate in their electrocution) are comprehensible in terms of their prior experiences of police patrols. Drawing on EP Thompson's arguments on crowds, Fassin argues that the riots in the *cités* and *banlieues* have been triggered by the police crossing the threshold of the local moral order. He makes the important point that rioting is rare and never the immediate first option for these French citizens. Although the rioters were mainly male youth from these suburbs, there was nonetheless, Fassin notes, connections between them and the broader communities of the *banlieues*, which while they may not have condoned the riots, certainly understood the tensions that produced the discontent.

Craig Browne and Phillip Mar seek to explain the links between the lived experience of the collective violence and the broader structural sources of the discontent. Even though they find that these are irreducible to one another, Browne and Mar consider that the actions of the rioters gave certain expression to experiences of injustice and humiliation that can be traced to the major institutional structures of French society. In their chapter 'Enacting half-positions: creative disrespect in the 2005 French riots', Browne and Mar emphasise the non-discursive character of these actions and suggest that the novelty of the 2005 riots consisted especially in their unplanned coordination, turning a single incident into the massive riots which were national in scale and extended over several weeks. Despite the intensity of the riots and their spectacular character, they led only to the single death of a bystander from a heart attack. Given the riots then involved quite defined forms of interaction with the police and a rather limited range of physical targets, they argue that it is necessary to explicate the meanings inherent in these acts of violence and the ways in which the dynamics of a dialectic of control are mediated by those resources and normative rules that shape the rioters' actions. On the basis of their analysis of the riots' originating



contexts, active participants, developmental extension and concomitant factors, Browne and Mar claim to discern a distinctive structure to the riots. In their opinion, the riots should be understood as a kind of non-discursive action that embodied the frustrations of those members of French society with the least access to a public voice. Drawing on the distinction between the processes of system integration and social integration, Browne and Mar perceive that these violent actions are intrinsically related to the youthful actors occupying 'half-positions' in French society. Particularly that half-position of possessing citizenship rights but lacking full-time paid employment, and the attendant experiences of humiliation owing to the youth of the *banlieues*' ethnic and racial backgrounds.

In light of their analysis of the contradictions of half-positions and the particular modalities of these violent actions, Browne and Mar develop two central theses. First, that the riots themselves were a form of retribution for the perceived and experienced damages of material and symbolic denigration. Retribution being a kind of moral claim that is moulded in this case by the expectation that full membership in French society, whether as a citizen or paid employee, cannot be taken for granted and that even the tacit rules regulating the subordinated groups relations to the institutional authority of the police has been transgressed and violated. Second, the riots involved actions of creative disrespect, that is, performative actions that give expression to a frustrated social agency in the absence of other means of effective access to the public sphere, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, these actions are creative in making explicit the contestation over values and legitimacy. Creative disrespect arises out of the attempt of a collective to reassert some form of self-control in relation to institutional subordination. While careful to distinguish their understanding of creative disrespect from that of Gillian Cowlshaw, Browne and Mar draw on her analysis of riots among Indigenous Australian communities and find some parallels in the manner in which the 2005 French riots enacted meanings. According to Cowlshaw

Riotous, destructive or outrageous behaviour in Indigenous communities is usually explained reductively as the consequences of alienation,

unemployment and poverty. I contend that the logic of such public events goes far beyond such sympathetic but superficial diagnosis of aberrant behaviour. Riots are not sophisticated or effective politics but nor are they simply reactive violence. They contain coherent, logical and positive meanings and messages about Indigenous experience. (Cowlshaw 2004, 315)

The French riots of 2005 brought persisting but veiled circumstances to public attention. Even if the French state could effectively address the most direct sources of the rioters' discontent, it would not amount to anything like the end of a problem. France's legacy of postcolonialism is both a product of past action and continuing circumstances owing to the situation of the substantial immigrant populations from former colonies, such as Algeria. The latter has given rise to continuing questions in France over difference and integration, though tending to focus on the latter in relation to immigrants and their children. The difficulty here is the ambivalence, and in some cases hostility, among the broad French public towards citizens that due to their ethnic and racial composition do not meet the self-representation of the nation. It is now a long time after the so-called glorious years of economic recovery that underpinned the growth of the welfare state and that provided employment for migrants from former colonies. It is a cliché to speak of an impasse in the present circumstances, yet the violence of recent riots points to conditions of sustained discontent and the reliance of the French state on the coercive actions of the police in the *banlieues* and *cités*. The use of emergency measures that utilised laws framed for colonial conflicts, reflected the fact that the postcolonial applies not just to citizens from former colonies but also to aspects of the French state itself.

The chapters that address the recent violence point to different thresholds of these conflicts: Fassin highlights the threshold that made the riots an event that disrupts the occlusion of race in France and the implications of racialisation; Renault shows how the violent revolt in seeking to make visible the moral wounds of disrespect disclose the politicised conflicts over the threshold between the prepolitical and the political; Browne and Mar delineate the threshold at which the violation of the informal norms that had regulated conflicts escalates

certain aspects of their structuration and eventuates in actions that are circumscribed in a way that leads to creative disrespect and that are oriented toward retribution; Rechniewski draws attention to how the thresholds between the state, republic and collective identity are shaped in radically different ways by two women's political movements. Similarly, Aldrich points to how the threshold between past colonial violence and the postcolonial present is marked by persisting tensions that neither the colonisers, nor the colonised, as well as their descendants, have been able to come to terms with in its full complexity. The present circumstances that are shown to have shaped the violence in France make such a process even more necessary while contributing to the improbability of agreement over the past and the probability of the continuation of demands for justice and violent acts of discontent.

The chapters dealing with violence in Australian Indigenous communities can similarly be read as reflections on violence as a live marker of lines of power. Like Renault, Cowlshaw highlights the contested interpretative dimension of violence; in her case the focus is on who holds the power to define social interactions as unacceptable interpersonal violence. Watson emphasises the lines of colonial power that frame the constructions of Aboriginality which both organise practices of state violence and provoke and sustain resistance to it. Howard-Wagner's analysis of the Howard government's Intervention in the Northern Territory shows how it marks a significant shift to a new, coercive mode of governance; while McGill analyses riots in marginalised communities and state responses to them as moments when, against the flames of burning cars, the interdependence of the powerless and the powerful is sharply outlined. As a whole, the collection's diverse critical perspectives build a complex picture of the contemporary violent disordering of postcolonial welfare states.

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