

From revolts to new democratic openings

© by the author Marie-Hélène Bacqué

(*) Author(s) Address and/or contacts

Université Paris Ouest Nanterre, LAVUE Mosaïques

mariehelene.bacque@sfr.fr

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Urban revolts have become a recurring event in the underprivileged areas of large cities across the Western world. The recent revolts in Ferguson, followed by Baltimore, have reignited public debate over the causes and meaning of such events, the legitimacy of violence and its political dimension.

Ten years ago, the French *banlieues* (outlying, generally distressed suburbs) were set ablaze following the death by electrocution of two teenagers who sought refuge from police in an electric transformer, without the police coming to their assistance¹. This happened in Clichy sous Bois, one of the poorest cities in France, on the outskirts of Paris. Following an initial mobilisation by inhabitants and the first violent incidents, the government reacted with denial; then, after a second incident – the tear-gassing of a mosque by police –, the movement spread across France and lasted for nearly three weeks. At the time, these revolts received a great deal of media coverage in France and internationally.

Following the events, discussions focused on many of the same questions raised in the aftermath of the recent events in Baltimore. Some researchers have analysed these revolts as “proto-political”, others as “supra-” or “post-” political; regardless which, they are almost always differentiated from political action².

Were these revolts an expression of the inability of subalterns to make themselves heard and to organise? I will draw on the experience of the ACLEFEU collective that was created during and in the aftermath of the revolts in Clichy sous Bois to show that the events were a starting point or catalyst for various types of political mobilisations, which differ in both their conflicting strategies and in the collective “we” they seek to define. These mobilisations did not lead to the creation of THE social movement in the *banlieues* that was expected by some intellectuals. But they nonetheless all point up the question of recognition³, probe the notion of citizenship in the French republican context and in doing that give rise to new democratic perspectives. This paper will examine the political effects of the 2005 revolts in terms of the political mobilisation and debate they have sparked in French society, understanding the revolts “*as a moment (however fragile, uncertain, reversible) of the unfolding of a political process (or, as one now says philosophically, a ‘political subjectivation’) that belongs to the consciousness and action of those who are its bearers*”⁴. It will lead me to analyse the revolts in their historical context before analysing what followed.

ACLEFEU is an acronym for *Association collectif liberté égalité fraternité ensemble unis* (Collective association for liberty equality fraternity united together); in French, the

¹ A May 2015 verdict exonerated the police officers accused of failure to assist a person in danger.

² Régis Cortosero et Eric Marlières, « L'émeute est-elle une forme d'expression politique ? », *Agora débats/jeunesse* n°70, 2015

³ Nancy Frazer, *The Radical Imagination : Between Redistribution and Recognition*, 2003.

⁴ Etienne Balibar, « Uprisings in the Banlieues », *Constellations*, Volume 14, No 1, 2007, p.47-71 p.61

acronym is pronounced “*assez le feu*” (“enough with the fire”) which, as we shall see below, is the baseline of the group’s project. Today, ACLEFEU is undoubtedly one of the best organised and most long-standing examples of collective expression that arose in the aftermath of the revolts. I will analyse it in terms of what it stands for, but also in terms of its relationships with other movements and coordinated initiatives, and its relationships with French institutions⁵.

The 2005 revolts, a moment in the *people’s history* of France⁶

The 2005 revolts were not the first to rattle France’s “*quartiers populaires*”⁷; indeed, several similar events had occurred since the 1980s, notably in the *banlieues* around Lyon⁸. These revolts were part of an historical tradition of popular revolt in France and correspond to a repertoire of action adopted since the Ancien Régime. And yet this was the first time that they spread sporadically across the entire country and lasted for three weeks. Like the previous revolts, they were nonetheless confined to underprivileged areas.

Many reasons have been put forward to explain the events. Some observers see them as a challenge to the French republican system of integration, which is very different from the multi-cultural English or North American models⁹. Others focus on relations with the police¹⁰, on the racialized and post-colonial aspects¹¹ or take a class-based approach. Some analyses underscore the weight of local contexts¹² or national public policies. In reality, no single factor can suffice to explain the revolts; retracing the history of underprivileged areas points up just how interlinked the many factors all are.

French urban history was marked notably by the construction in the 1960s of large social housing complexes on the periphery of cities. These were quickly abandoned by the middle classes who actually only transited through them briefly. In many cases, these areas underwent a process of physical obsolescence which was compounded by a lack of upkeep and a pauperisation process.

⁵ Interviews were conducted with several members of the group. Participant observation also took place during different initiatives: at the thirtieth anniversary celebrations for the March for Equality, during organised family vacations. Moreover, having co-written a report on inhabitant participation in underprivileged areas with the group’s main leader, the author of this paper had the opportunity to take a tour of France’s underprivileged areas with him and meet over three hundred association actors and activists from different networks. Lastly, this article is based on roughly twenty interviews conducted with members of groups and young municipal election candidates and elected officials from 2008 to 2014.

⁶ This is a reference to Howard Zinn

⁷ The term “*quartier populaire*” referred to throughout this paper as “underprivileged area” does not have a true equivalent in English. The term working class does not explain the diversity of the “popular classes” and the term poor refers foremost to a social situation with negative connotations tied to a lack of economic wealth. The term “*populaire*” here is about the people; it will be translated by popular.

⁸ Michel Wieviorka (dir.), *Violence en France*, Paris, Seuil, 1999,

Fabien Jobard, « The 2005 French urban unrests : data-based interpretations », *Sociology Compass*, no 4, vol. II, 2008, p. 1287-1302.

⁹ Harlan Koff and Dominique Duprez, « The 2005 Riots in France: The International Impact of Domestic Violence » *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* Vol. 35, No. 5, May 2009, pp. 713-730

¹⁰ Cathy Schneider, *Police Power and Race Riots: Urban Unrest in Paris and New York* (Philadelphia: Penn Press, 2014)

¹¹ Mustapha Dikec, *Badlands of the Republic. Space, Politics and Urban Policy*, 2007. Oxford: Blackwell.

¹² Michel Kokoreff, *Sociologie des émeutes*, Paris, Payot, 2008

Like many Western countries over the past few decades¹³, this history is tied to deindustrialisation, social precarity and social disaffiliation¹⁴, which also resulted in a diversification and fracturing of the working class between those who had a specific status and those who did not; those with qualifications and those without any¹⁵; and those who were French citizens and those who were not.

This process occurred alongside the demise of State socialism and involved an overt weakening of the workers' movement and its organisations. France (as Italy) was surely unique in the influence of the French Communist Party from the post-war era until the 1980s. More specifically, in Paris's suburbs, the "red *banlieues*" were cities led by the Communist Party that had a system for social and political integration that was built on a mix of social identity, political identity and relationship with a territory. This configuration began to unravel in the late 1970s and took with it local forms of social organisation¹⁶.

The history of France's underprivileged areas is also closely tied to the history of immigration, which intensified in these areas when the reunification of families became possible in 1976. Their history is marked by a series of movements about the working conditions of immigrants, the legalisation of undocumented migrants and housing conditions. In the 1980s, what is known as the "*Beur* movement" was formed, notably following the 1983 March for Equality and Against Racism. Such mobilisation needs to be understood through the lens of the history of social movements in France, but also in connection with the country's colonial past. January 2005 (before the revolts) also saw the call of the "Indigenous of the Republic" which led to the creation of the Party of the Indigenous of the Republic (PIR) and, in November, the official launch of the *Conseil représentatif des associations noires de France* (CRAN – Representative council of black associations of France)¹⁷. Although neither movement originated in an underprivileged area and while their support base in the *banlieues* was limited, their creation highlights the introduction into the public debate of questions related to the recognition of minorities and colonial subjects.

Starting in the 1980s, the government implemented an "urban" social development policy aimed at underprivileged areas considered "in difficulty"¹⁸. While, by designating specific areas, this policy enabled the development of a set of social and urban programmes, it also stigmatised them without ever addressing the underlying issues.

¹³ William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged : the Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1987.

¹⁴ Robert Castel, *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale*, Paris, Fayard, 1995.

¹⁵ Luc Boltanski et Eve Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1999.

¹⁶ Marie-Hélène Bacqué et Sylvie Fol, *Le devenir des banlieues rouges*, Paris, L'Harmattan 1997.

Marie-Hélène Bacqué et Yves Sintomer, « Affiliations et désaffiliations en banlieue, réflexions à partir des exemples de Saint-Denis et d'Aubervilliers », *Revue française de sociologie*, 42-2, 2001 ; p.217-248

¹⁷ Each of these movements addresses the question of ethno-racial relations in the French context in its own way. Broadly speaking, the CRAN is a movement of the "blacks of France" that is primarily interested in the issue of discrimination against minorities whereas the goal of the Party of the Indigenous of the Republic is "to form a de-colonial government".

¹⁸ This policy was in part inspired by the aborted "model cities" experience in the United States; later, it also resembled empowerment zone programmes in some respects.

Loïc Wacquant has shown that underprivileged areas in France are not the same as North American ghettos; but they belong to a “new type of underprivileged area” which is emerging across Western neo-liberal cities and involves processes of marginalisation and the urban segregation of what Marx called “the surplus of labour” (Bacqué, XX).

The political legacy of popular neighbourhoods, a multifaceted heritage

Given the above, it might look like the conditions were ripe for a set of demands to emerge for social justice and against discrimination. But the 2005 revolts did not convey a clear set of demands. Above all, they were the expression of a demand for recognition – or even for existence – from an economically marginalised and spatially segregated population faced with stigmatisation, racial discrimination and the rise of Islamophobia.

And yet, was the lack of prepared discourse actually proof of a political void? There has been a major shift in the way people relate to politics over the past few years, including a notable “disengagement” from institutional politics. Among the underprivileged and particularly among youth, this has manifested itself through very high levels of voter abstention. This disengagement does not mean disinterest in political debate or issues; rather, it reflects a sense of not feeling represented¹⁹. Abdou, who was twenty years old during the revolts and has been involved with different groups since 2008, has explained this as follows:

“They will say that we are a generation that grew up apolitical, meaning that not many people had any political culture. It was the decline of parties, the demise of ideologies. We were 10 years old when the Berlin wall came down. We grew up in that context.”

And yet in 2005, he already had many political references. He mentioned those transmitted via the Hip Hop movement in the 1990s; he was also familiar with the *Movement immigration banlieue* (MIB – *Banlieue* immigration movement), which was created following the March for Equality in 1983. Films like Spike Lee’s *Malcolm X*, released in France in 1992, also had a strong impact on his generation, showing it a possibility for mobilisation and introducing it to the civil rights movement, which remains an inspiration for Abdou.

The preceding generation – those between thirty and forty years old at the time of the revolts – had the abovementioned references, as well as others like the workers’ movement and the experience of associations and non-profit groups. As Mohamed Mechmache, the current president of ACLEFEU, who was 35 at the time of the revolts, has noted:

“I was trained in the non-profit sector, through popular education. We talked with the Communists who were active locally. There were activists around me; I knew activists in the neighbourhood from the MIB and the movement against the “double peine” (deportation of foreign nationals on completion of a prison sentence). I was involved in association life locally.”

¹⁹ Céline Braconnier, Jean-Yves Dormagen, « Une démocratie de l’abstention. Retour sur le non vote et des conséquences politiques lors des scrutins municipaux et européens de 2014 », *Hérodote*, 2014/3 n° 154, p. 42 à 58

Here, Mohamed Mezmache refers to his diverse political heritage: that of the workers' movement and popular education, movements tied to immigration, the history of Algerians in France and more specifically the "Beur" movement. To this we can add his family history, since some members were involved in the struggle for independence during the Algerian War.

Thus, rather than a political void, it is more appropriate to talk about a mismatch with political representation and partisan politics. The relationship between inhabitants in underprivileged areas and left-wing French political parties has also been mired by deception at both the municipal and national levels. A year before the revolts researcher Olivier Masclat published a book²⁰ that analysed this rift.

Relations with the governing right-wing were also tense in 2005 following disparaging comments made by the Interior Minister²¹; national security policy that had a tendency to criminalise youth from underprivileged areas and was the source of ongoing tension with police; and repeated controversy over girls wearing headscarves at school, a polemic that divided both the political right and left. From this perspective, the government's reaction to the riots was very much in the same vein: a refusal to question or even investigate the way police reacted during the first days; the decision to impose a curfew – a measure not taken since the Algerian War in 1955, and which tasted like a bitter reminder for many families of Algerian descent; and the criminalisation of those rebelling via accelerated trials.

It was on this backdrop of disavowal rather than political disinterest that the 2005 revolts broke out.

Naming the revolts: The challenges of interpretation

Given they had no clear discourse, nor any spokespeople, the revolts were "destined to 'be spoken' by those at the reins of cultural capital"²², i.e., the media, researchers and political representatives. Some researchers saw "a refusal to interact"²³, interpreted as a sign of the events' post-political dimension; others discredited the violence of the revolts on the one hand and the rebels as legitimate political actors on the other hand. The challenge that such interpretations posed to the set of actors mobilised in underprivileged areas is as such patent. This has been a topic of importance for ACLEFEU.

The first issue was a matter of vocabulary. What should the events be called? Words are important since they immediately convey an interpretation. Some media, particularly in

²⁰ Olivier Masclat, *La Gauche et les cités, un rendez-vous manqué*, Paris, La Dispute, 2004.

²¹ On 26 October 2005, a few days before the events in Clichy, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy stated in Argenteuil, a city in the *banlieue* of Paris: "You've had enough of this pack of riff-raff! Well then, we are going to get rid of it for you!"

²² Gérard Mauger, *L'émeute de novembre 2005. Une révolte protopolitique*. Bellecombes-en-Bauge, Editions du Croquant, 2006, p.126, translated here.

²³ Alain Bertho, *Le temps des émeutes*, Paris, Bayard, 2009, p.13.

the United States, referred to the revolts as Jihad or intifada. More often, the term riots was used. As one ACLEFEU leader has noted:

“When firefighters or fishermen – who are sometimes far more violent than the inhabitants of the banlieues – get mad, there’s no mention of riots. You hear about angry fishermen, angry firefighters, angry farmers. In doing so, their movement is described and, in some ways, justified. Banlieue inhabitants, on the other hand, are violent thugs with no education. That is why we have chosen to use the expression “social revolt”, since everything written in the books of grievances that ACLEFEU compiled across France after the events underscored that it was indeed a social and political crisis and that behind the revolts there were demands.²⁴”

The decision to use the term *revolts* is a way of defending their political legitimacy and, for many groups and associations in underprivileged areas, that is very important²⁵.

A second issue has been to define the actors involved in these revolts. Mohamed Mechmache, the ACLEFEU leader, has as such noted:

“When we talk about the revolts, we talk about what was destroyed, but not about the people who were there, who were mobilised. (...) There were a lot of people outside, an enormous number of people. The youths weren’t the only ones expressing their anger. There were also parents, fathers and mothers who were there. A lot of people found themselves with a warrant for detention, were subject to tear gas, Flash-Ball shots, insults and psychological violence. Children saw helicopters flying overhead, with projectors glaring into their bedrooms. Very elderly men, like my father, found themselves face-to-face with a CRS (security police) company as they left the mosque in the evening and were forced to walk home single-file along a wall.

For Mohamed Mechmache, the revolts were not solely about angry youth. They involved the inhabitants of underprivileged areas more broadly not only because they were concerned by the underlying issues, but also because they were affected and mobilised by the events at different levels. The ACLEFEU leader describes a “we” of inhabitants from underprivileged areas that differs greatly from the categories defined by the media: delinquents, louts and “riff-raff”²⁶. This “we” contradicts the divide found in the media and portrayed by some researchers between “rioters” and “inhabitants” and instead constructs a community of interest and experience. But it also rejects the categories used by other groups like the “Indigenous of the Republic” who distinguish between “whites” and “indigenous”.

Three registers of action: from social movement to representative democracy

For some activists in associations and regular citizens, the revolts were a political catalyst. The positions adopted by the government and in the media – and the social and racial contempt they embodied – played a non-negligible role in fuelling this political awakening. Nassim was twenty-three years old in 2005 and very quickly found himself

²⁴ Interview, March 2015. This is why I have also chosen to use the term revolt.

²⁵ Several times during the interviews conducted, those interviewed immediately noticed that I used the word revolt, which for them was a sign of confidence.

²⁶ Investigation following the revolts into the youth who stood trial has shown that the majority were not previously known to police.

in the ACLEFEU mindset:

"... All the communication from the government and the treatment, in accusing, questioning and blaming the events on these inhabitants, on this community, by saying that it was due to immigration, due to rap music, to polygamy; due to everyone except to the disintegration policy that had been conducted over the past 30 years. (...) For me, that was the trigger, the slap in the face."

It is as such that the ACLEFEU collective was created in haste, bringing together different actors involved in the events, some individuals involved in the violence and others who attempted to temporise it. Although ACLEFEU was founded during and following the revolts, its foundations rested on positions that took a step back from the events. The collective was formed "to put a definitive end to the fire"²⁷. Its goal was to be heard and recognised as a political actor; this involved taking the revolts as a starting point to broaden the debate, to formulate demands and more broadly raise the question of citizenship and political representation in underprivileged areas at both the national and local levels. To do so, the group was inspired by the different political legacies outlined above and more specifically by the *Beur* movement, the 1983 March for Equality, the Washington March and the French Revolution. Its first president was a former March participant and it initially had quite close ties to the MIB. The core of the group quickly formed around about forty active members.

Several strategies were embraced to impact political debate: for one, the revolts needed to be transformed into a clear political message – this was notably the role of the books of grievances, a clear reference to the register of action used during the French Revolution –, and thus a social movement and part of France's republican history. Another strategy aimed to get involved in the field of electoral politics by mobilising voters as well as running candidates. Following from this and to reinforce its local anchoring, ACLEFEU got involved in a third register: solidarity and even social advocacy, which is similar in some respects to community organising in the United States. Over the years, these different registers of action have occasionally been at odds with each other; they are the focus of discussions within ACLEFEU and amongst movements from underprivileged areas and involved with immigration issues more broadly.

The fit between the different registers probes the relationship between institutions and social movements. Archon Fung and Olin Wright have analysed different participatory measures and approaches to show that it is possible to harness the logic of counter-power to participatory or deliberative governance (2008). In a similar perspective, anthropologist Catherine Neveu has called for a move away from oppositional thinking between "institutions" and "social movements", since they are neither distinct nor disjointed universes²⁸. She has indeed shown a dual movement of filiation and crossover on the one hand and of distinction on the other hand, as seen in various experiences such as in community development corporations in the United States and participatory budgets in Brazil. Such relationships are not incompatible with forms of reciprocal autonomy; it could even be argued that such autonomy is a necessary condition for deliberation.

²⁷ Excerpt from the "Social and citizen contract", February 2007, translated here.

²⁸ Catherine Neveu « Démocratie participative et mouvements sociaux. Entre domestication et ensauvagement ? », *Participations*, n°1, p.188-211.

But ultimately, the real question raised in discussions between the different groups from underprivileged areas and surrounding immigration is likely more about the “we” that emerges in these negotiation- and autonomy-based relationships. The “we” of ACLEFEU has been forged through its different registers of action and represents the inhabitants of Clichy sous Bois – but it has laid the foundation for a “we” of inhabitants from underprivileged areas more broadly. It as such resembles these inhabitants: i.e., it is comprised mostly, although not entirely of visible minorities and Muslims. It is as such not a “we” of rioters, nor an indigenous “we”, nor a sectarian “we”. It is a “we” built on the shared experience of a community and on civic ties that question a narrowed interpretation of citizenship.

Building a social movement of national scope: from books of grievances to the “Ministry of the banlieue crisis”

One of the first initiatives taken by ACLEFEU was to organise a Tour de France of underprivileged areas in the French *banlieues* to have people write in books of grievances.

“We came up with the books of grievances idea; the goal was to go talk to people to understand the state of things, what caused the revolts and compile the replies in books to be given to the National Assembly. (...) The starting point was the values of the Republic: liberty, equality, fraternity. We said to ourselves: ‘These values are great in theory, but when you look at what’s actually happening, they don’t exist in practice’. We managed to build momentum, mobilise the media and bring some fundamental questions back to the forefront.” (Mohamed Machmache)

The issue of citizenship was central to this approach, as was constant reference to the values of the republic and notably to equality. Indeed, the summary documents edited by ACLEFEU state in their preamble: *“Like the sans-culottes of the French Revolution of 1789, our approach seeks to make the voice of the people audible to the nation’s dignitaries. History appears to repeat itself: today like yesterday, the central tenet of the Revolution is clearly defectible in these books: Equality.”* The goal was as such to pursue a tradition of popular struggle and renew with the history of the republic; to write into France’s history the struggle in popular neighbourhoods and especially immigration, and as such to bestow it with legitimacy. As Nassim has noted, describing the revolts in writing was also an approach that, in its own way, addressed the issue of citizenship raised by the youths who burn their identity cards.

The group collected over 20 000 contributions (statements and proposals) in the one hundred and twenty towns visited²⁹, where it was often hosted by local associations. Topics for discussion were suggested and contributors expressed themselves orally at first, then in writing. A synthesis of the grievances was drafted by members of the group and, on 25 October 2006, following a March of Grievances – another reference to the March for Equality, as well as to the civil rights movement –, the books of grievances were presented to French deputies and senators.

The grievances were also a means of putting questions to candidates in the upcoming

²⁹ According to data provided by ACLEFEU

2007 presidential elections. Following the *Assises de quartier* (“Conference of underprivileged areas”), which presented a synthesis of the grievances expressed, the group presented candidates with a *Social and Civic Contract* that was directly inspired by the books of grievances. ACLEFEU as such inched its way into the electoral debate.

Over the next few years, the group regularly redid tours of France and managed to secure a national audience.

In 2012, when the topic of popular neighbourhoods was conspicuously absent from political debate and programmes during the next presidential election campaign, ACLEFEU invited itself into the debate by occupying a mansion in the ritzy fourth arrondissement of Paris to symbolically set up a “Ministry of the *banlieue* crisis”.

Getting involved in representative politics

The register of interpellation did not stop the group from also getting directly involved in the electoral side of politics. Starting in 2006, ACLEFEU launched a campaign to get people to register on the electoral roll in collaboration with famous sports figures and musicians who were visible minorities, like Joey Starr, a singer in the very popular French rap group NTM. Other groups and networks took a similar approach. The campaign was very effective at the municipal level and was renewed during the 2012 presidential elections. It nonetheless also had to contend with a very powerful trend towards electoral demobilisation amongst the underprivileged population that it could not offset entirely.

More overtly still, the group ran an independent candidate in the 2007 legislative elections in the Clichy sous Bois constituency and won over ten percent of votes – thus ensuring its recognition as a political force at the local level. During the 2008 municipal elections, the *Affirmation* political movement was initiated by members of ACLEFEU; it called for the creation of independent lists, as well as the inclusion of visible minority candidates on left-wing lists in municipal elections across France. In Clichy, this second path was embraced: leveraging its success in the legislative elections, the group allied itself from the first round of voting with the list of the outgoing socialist mayor and won five municipal seats, including four with portfolios. The same strategy was rolled out during the 2014 elections.

This political orientation has nonetheless been a source of tension, with the group almost splitting apart in 2008 while preparing the municipal elections. Discussions with other collectives in other cities were also tense.

But in many underprivileged towns in 2008, a new generation of activists described as “activists from the *cités*” entered politics on independent lists, some of which worked together in the *Emergence* collective that asserted its political autonomy. These independent lists presented themselves as neither right wing nor left wing. Yet they still had to choose to ally with different political parties’ lists. Some candidate lists negotiated their way onto right wing lists in 2008 and especially in 2014. While the electorate in popular neighbourhoods had for a long time been considered “naturally” left-leaning, this choice worked to the advantage of right wing parties, at least in municipal elections. This is one of the fault lines underpinning the different groups from underprivileged areas.

Securing local rooting through community work

Alongside its electoral work, ACLEFEU has laid the foundations of its local rooting by organising an array of initiatives such as homework help groups, women's groups and family vacations. The two pillars of these activities are sociability projects and civic training.

This practical application of citizenship has provided an opportunity to recruit new members to the group, like Ahmed, 23 years old, for whom the 2005 revolts are but a distant childhood memory:

"I joined ACLEFEU in order to set up a project with youth, with middle school students, to give them the opportunity that I had, to try and pass on a bit of my experience. I set up a tutoring project and company visits with middle schoolers from Clichy."

Ahmed was elected in the 2014 municipal elections under the ACLEFEU banner. The three registers of action outlined above are both at odds with each other and yet interconnected. ACLEFEU is funded by public authorities in the context of urban policy programmes which means that the group's activities also have a connection to government institutions, rely on calls for tender and have to comply with administrative evaluation and control mechanisms. They initiate civic experiences via the construction of shared projects and in negotiating with "others", whether these are "other" socio-ethnic groups or other institutional actors. They are also a driver of politicisation.

ACLEFEU's different registers of action offer at once an extension, an interpretation (one among many) and a response to the social revolts of 2005. This interpretation raises a whole series of questions that notably probe the notion of citizenship.

New democratic openings?

Gradually, a "local movement of national scope" – to borrow the expression used by the president – has been constructed on all of these registers of action. That expression itself underscores the energy and contradictions inherent in the post-revolt period. Starting in 2007, ACLEFEU was part of the creation of the *Forum social des quartiers populaires* (FSQP – Social forum of popular neighbourhoods) that sought to be "a collective voice and force for popular neighbourhoods"; it failed and was disbanded in 2013. This failure followed in the footsteps of other unsuccessful attempts to organise a social movement of the *banlieues* following the 2003 March for Equality.

But alongside this, a set of local groups has formed, as well as networks like *Stop contrôle au faciès* ("Stop appearance-based police controls") and the *Brigade Anti-Nérophobie* ("Anti-negrophobia brigade") focused on topics surrounding discrimination and post-colonialism. Groups of candidates and elected officials have organised around the topic of political representation, as well as made different attempts at lobbying and creating forums for debate. In 2014, the president of ACLEFEU was one of the founding members of *Pas sans nous* ("Not without us"), a coordination of popular neighbourhoods whose aim is to serve as a union representing such areas. This coordination is an offshoot of a report that Mohamed Mechmache drafted at the request of the Socialist minister for urban affairs, François Lamy, which was co-written with the

author of this paper, on participation in urban policy³⁰. This mission is proof of the distance covered by the group and notably of its legitimacy in the political sphere. It also points up that the question of participation and citizenship in popular neighbourhoods has become a public policy issue. It confirms the articulation of a countervailing power strategy and a participatory deliberation, what Fung would call deliberative activism.

“To exist is to exist politically”. This phrase by sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad (1985, translated here) is often quoted by activists from underprivileged areas, albeit they do not always give it the same meaning. The 2005 revolts clearly raised the issue of existence and the ACLEFEU example shows the extent to which involvement in the sphere of politics and citizenship was a major part of collective action following the revolts. But what does it mean exactly to exist politically? Firstly, it means to have full citizenship, to have and exercise all civic rights. One of the main demands of movements focused on immigration remains the right for non-European immigrants to vote in municipal elections – a Socialist party promise for the past thirty years. Visible minorities are slowly getting involved in electoral representation. Research currently being conducted in the Seine Saint-Denis department (in which Clichy sous Bois is located), shows that their representation on town councils has increased from 10% in 2001 to 23% in 2008 and 31% in 2014³¹. But there are still many barriers at the national level and in political parties: the glass ceiling has yet to be shattered.

But Sayad defines civic rights even more broadly: “*civic rights are to exist per se*” (p.30, translated here) and “*without this existence being subordinate to any other external end, to any end other than itself. It is the chance to exist in itself, to legitimately exist, without having to justify this existence in any way*”. To exist politically therefore also raises the question of existence, which is tied at least in part to the issue of recognition developed by other schools of thought (Honneth, Frazer). In his text written in 1985 – twenty years before the revolts – Sayad refers to immigrants and their children in his call for this right to exist. Thirty years on, the problem remains unchanged in its substantive dimension for subsequent generations: indeed, it is the right to exist itself that some veiled women demand. But the question of existence or recognition has become part of the public debate, as the question of the French colonial history and post-colonialism.

Lastly, still according to Sayad, civic rights also refer to equality in the “distribution of the community’s wealth”, in the handling of education and before the law. This equality – which is one of the republican principles constantly recalled by ACLEFEU activists – is at loggerheads with racial discrimination, which for the time being has not been tackled by any serious policy, and social inequalities, which have only worsened over the past decade. But here also, even if the last months mark a fall in the French policies, it is no more possible to deny racial discrimination exists.

Ten years after the revolts, public policies haven’t change, neither has the social situation of the popular neighbourhoods residents. A large new national social movement hasn’t raised. But changes have occurred in different forms of claiming recognition and citizenship that are to be understood in a the *people’s history* of France

³⁰ This report was drafted based on numerous meetings in popular neighbourhoods, notably but not only amongst members of the ACLEFEU activist network. Before being delivered to the Minister, it was discussed with a hundred association leaders at a citizens’ conference.

³¹ Marie-Hélène Bacqué et Anne D’orazio To be published, 2015

but also in an international the *people's history*. Following Nancy Frazer, calls for social justice and redistribution, for recognition and democracy are nevertheless at the root of a project for change. Now, for groups from underprivileged areas to move towards the construction of a social movement, what needs to be tinkered with is the fit between recognition and justice.

work in progress- ask before quoting