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***Beur, Blanc, Black: The Banlieue Talks Back* in Novels, Films, and Graphic Novels**

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***Beur, Blanc, Black: The Banlieue Talks Back in Novels, Films, and  
Graphic Novels***

by

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## **Dedication**

To my grandmother and to my mother.



## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to all of the people who loved and supported me on this dissertation journey.

***Beur, Blanc, Black: The Banlieue Talks Back in Novels, Films, and  
Graphic Novels***

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This dissertation analyzes works by persons who grew up in the French *banlieue*, the economically-disadvantaged suburban areas that have become a metonym for conversations about integration, crime, and violence in France. I focus on the time period 1999 to 2016 because a number of heavily-mediatised events that have shaped perceptions of the *banlieue* in the French imaginary took place at this time. During the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century, a number of events—the 2005 riots, the headscarf debates, and numerous terrorist attacks domestically and internationally—have fossilized a particular conception of the French *banlieue* within the French and international cultural memory as a lawless space of destruction, a hotbed of Islamic extremism, and a dangerous place for women. This study elucidates problems of authorship, authenticity and representation in the *banlieue*, and analyzes why *banlieue* authors tend oscillate between mediums. I identify unique stylistic elements in each medium that are shifting assumptions about integration, mobility, and social dynamics in the *banlieue*. I argue that *banlieue* artists use novels, films and graphic novels to contest the myth of the *banlieue* as an urban ghetto.

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# BEUR, BLANC, BLACK: THE BANLIEUE TALKS BACK IN NOVELS, FILMS, AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

## Introduction

In the summer of 2016, I spent six weeks working with the large collection of novels, films, and graphic novels at the Médiathèque Abdelmalek Sayad in the Musée National de l'histoire de l'immigration, the only museum in France dedicated to the history of French immigration.<sup>1</sup> Although my initial reason for going to the library was to look at their collections in Francophone literature of immigration, it was here that I began to realize the extraordinarily diverse and large quantity of novels, films, and graphic novels on and about the French *banlieue*. As I learned then, and as this dissertation will show, there is a lot more to *banlieue* literature and film than Faïza Guène's 2004 novel *Kiffe kiffe demain* and Mathieu Kassovitz's 1995 film *La Haine*.<sup>2</sup> There is also a rich, and woefully understudied, tradition of *banlieue bande dessinée*.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration*, formerly the *Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration*, which opened in 2007, was the first museum exclusively dedicated to immigration in Europe. The museum has been criticized for its location, which is the Palais de la Porte Dorée, which was the site of the 1931 colonial exhibition in France. Artifacts from former French colonies in Africa and the Caribbean were kept in the Palais de la Porte Dorée until they were transferred to the Musée du Quai Branly, which opened around the same time. The decision to create a museum entirely focused on the history of immigration in France marks an important moment in France's understanding of its immigration history, correcting a commonly-held assumption that immigrants did not come to France until after World War II. For more on the museum and its symbolic significance, see Carol Ann Dixon, "Decolonising the museum: Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration," *Race & Class* 53, no. 4 (2012): 78-86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396811433115>. Andrea Meza Torres, "The Museumization of Migration in Paris and Berlin and Debates on Representation," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 9, no. 4 (2011): 5-22.

<sup>2</sup> These are two of the most widely-known, read, and studied works about the *banlieue*.

As I read my way through the library that summer, I found that many of these *banlieue* texts were actively working against characterizations of the *banlieue* and stereotypes that had been crystalized in popular culture (including films like *La Haine*) and media reporting of events like the 2005 riots. These literary works turned *black*, *blanc*, *beur*, the vision of the ethnic makeup of *banlieue* inhabitants popularized by the black, Jewish, and Arab trio of friends in *La Haine*, on its head. They demonstrated a more complex form of diversity in the *banlieue*, one that challenges traditional notions of who lives there, how they relate to one another, and their relationship both to the French metropole and the space of the *banlieue*. Some texts, such as Samuel Benchetrit's film *Asphalte* (2014) and Nine Antico's graphic novel *Le goût du paradis* (2008) challenged visual conceptions of who lives in the *banlieue* by telling stories with white protagonists. Other texts, like Abd al Malik's film *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* (2014) directly rewrote the experiences of Hubert, Vinz, and Saïd in *La Haine* to highlight the real risks of violence and delinquent masculinity in the *banlieue*. Most surprising of all, as can be seen in texts such as *Kiffe kiffe demain* or Sylvie Ohayon's film *Papa was not a Rolling Stone* (2014), all of these works, regardless of medium, contained a real love for the *banlieue*, in spite of the stereotypes, propagated by earlier novels, films, and graphic novels, which characterized it as a dangerous space devoid of hope and culture. These films, novels, and graphic novels talked back, not only by refusing these stereotypes, but also by showing the tremendous creative potential within the *banlieue*. Their authors leveraged the unique stylistic elements in the novel, film, and graphic novel to create a counter-discourse about the *banlieue*.

The summer of 2016 was a particularly interesting time to be at the Médiathèque Abdelmalek Sayad because the library was transitioning from a research library where works could only be consulted in house to a lending library that would make its collections available to anyone with a public library card. The head librarian, Charlotte Perdriau, was taking advantage of this transition to reorganize the collections, which had ballooned out since the library had opened in 2007. Generous funding had allowed the purchase of what had become, in her opinion, an overwhelmingly-vast collection of works. Many of these, such as the *banlieue* novels, films, and graphic novels that intrigued me, did not deal directly with the immigrant experience, and thus were not pertinent to the goals of the library, which was to present a curated collection of media connected to immigration. Just as I was discovering the extraordinary richness of *banlieue* novels, films, and graphic novels, Charlotte was in the process of removing these very same works from the public collection, hiding them from view and returning them to dusty shelves in back rooms. Quite often, I would look up a book in the catalogue, only to find that it was no longer on the shelf.

In my conversations with Charlotte, she explained that this *banlieue* literature did not belong in their collections because the Musée National de l'histoire de l'immigration was a museum that dealt with immigration. *Banlieue* novels, films, and graphic novels were neither written by immigrants nor did they describe the process of immigration. Furthermore, she said, even if they had been thematically coherent with the remainder of the collections, the quality of these *banlieue* works was so uneven that the vast majority of them did not deserve to be included in the collections. They were not written in a style



that corresponded to the previously established canon of French or Francophone classics and lacked the stylistic eloquence of works by literary giants such as Kateb Yacine or Assia Djebar or Tahar Ben Jelloun. These *banlieue* texts were doubly stigmatized: they were thematically irrelevant, and stylistically lacking.

When I asked Charlotte where the *banlieue* books and films she was removing from the shelves were going, she said that, at the moment, they would still be kept at her library, but that they would no longer be a part of their public collections. They would, however, still be available to researchers who were aware that the library possessed these collections, which were not publically advertised.<sup>3</sup> Deemed inadequate and inappropriate for their public collections, the books would no longer be available for readers and scholars to stumble upon as I had that summer; only those who knew that the library already possessed these collections and thought to ask for them would have access.

To this day, these books remain hidden on dusty shelves in the back rooms of the museum. No library finds them suitable for their collections; the curators of the Médiathèque Abdelmalek Sayad rightly argue that these works are not about immigration, and, due in no small part to readings of these works that emphasize the value of their political commentary, libraries other than the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, whose mission is to collect everything published in French, debate the merits of purchasing and collecting such texts in the name of preserving French literature. By making a case for these works both as politically-engaged texts and as innovative texts

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<sup>3</sup> Since Charlotte Perdriau knew that I was in the process of creating a bibliography for this project, she asked if I would send her my bibliography of *banlieue* literature and film, so that she could share it with any interested researchers. These same bibliographies can be found as appendixes to this dissertation.

transforming the medium of the novel, film, and graphic novel in this dissertation, it is my hope to help these homeless novels, films, and graphic novels find a home, not just in the academy, but also within the cultural imaginary of what it means to be *French* and a French artist in the twenty-first century.

## **HOME AND HORIZON OF EXPECTATIONS**

Finding a home for a written or visual text<sup>4</sup> is deeply intertwined with the audience's horizon of expectations for that text, which Hans Robert Jauss describes as "the relationship of an individual text to the succession of texts."<sup>5</sup> The commonalities found between texts establish certain generic norms that the reader will come to expect out of subsequent texts which appear, through their subject matter or their author, to be related to that group. When an unknown text evokes themes or ideas or styles that are familiar from earlier texts, they are read through the lens of the attributes prescribed to this preexisting category of texts. The texts at the Médiathèque Abdelmalek Sayad, for instance, are related through their common theme of immigration, and thus the horizon of expectations for any text found there is that it would be related to this theme because it evokes, according to Jauss, "the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier

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<sup>4</sup> Here I use the term "text" in the sense that Roland Barthes does to refer to a piece of artistic expression that is constituted by "its subversive force in respect of the old classifications" (*Image, music, text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 157). When compared to a work, which is burdened with specific associations and thus limited in its interpretive possibility, a text is a field of infinite, unrestricted possibility. (For more see "From Work to Text", *Image, music, text*, 155-165) Furthermore, by text I do not mean to imply simply written words, but rather to use a term that can encompass all forms of artistic expression, both written and visual.

<sup>5</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an aesthetics of reception*, trans. Timothy Bathi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 23.

texts.”<sup>6</sup> The first problem with these *banlieue* novels, films, and graphic novels, however, is that they did not fit within this horizon of expectations for texts in the immigration mode, and thus they were excluded from the collections.

As the positionality of *banlieue* texts at the Médiathèque Abdelmalek Sayad demonstrates, the relational dependency created by an audience’s horizon of expectations can be particularly problematic for texts that do not fit as neatly into preexisting categories, such as the *banlieue* novels, films, and graphic novels in this dissertation. These texts constitute a new mode of representation that has not yet been well-defined, which is the experience of living in the *banlieue*. While related to immigration and evocative of many themes found in postcolonial novels written outside of France, these texts are recounting a completely different experience because their protagonists are within French society, and French citizens, who still feel the effects of stigmatization and exclusion based on their home. Many elements of these texts draw from previously-established genres and traditions, such as the *beur* novel which recounts the experiences of second generation Arab immigrants in France. *Banlieue* texts are still in the process of developing the horizon of expectations for the *banlieue* mode, and are written at a key moment of definition, both by the authors themselves and by the academy at large, for these texts.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jauss, *Towards an aesthetics of reception*, 23.

<sup>7</sup> The notable exception here is the *banlieue* film which is already a well-established genre (See, among others, Carrie Tarr, *Reframing difference: beur and banlieue filmmaking in France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005)). Nevertheless, *banlieue* film is typically considered in isolation from other representational media, whereas it is my goal in this dissertation to consider them as a collective whole.

Since the norms for the *banlieue* mode are still in the process of development, these texts are more likely to be understood through the lens of their individual authors, and the experiences of their ethnic origins, as has been the case both with texts produced by *beur* and black authors.<sup>8</sup> Such texts have been defined, not by the particular themes that they discuss, but by the authors themselves, who, after achieving success or critical acclaim surrounding a particular text, becomes a representative figure for that text itself. It is at this moment that the writer becomes an Author in the Barthesian sense, meaning he or she takes on a life that is both independent of the text and yet which influences how the text is read. The Author acquires a reputation for a particular aesthetic or theme; for instance, J.K. Rowling writes about Harry Potter, Hergé draws Tintin, and M. Night Shyamalan brings supernatural thrillers with a dramatic plot twist to the screen.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, novels, films, and graphic novels written by people who grew up in the *banlieue* have become associated with the *banlieue*, especially when it is also the setting for their stories. This association has both brought attention to their work, but also determined the audience's horizon of expectations. Due to the social and political movements taking place within the *banlieue* at the beginning of the twenty-first century that have kept the *banlieue* a problem area that needs to be solved every election year<sup>10</sup>, the association with the *banlieue* often made these texts quite marketable. Nevertheless,

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<sup>8</sup> See Alec Hargreaves, *Voices from the North African immigrant community in France: immigration and identity in beur fiction* (Providence: Berg Publishers, 1991) and Dominic Thomas, *Black France: colonialism, immigration, and transnationalism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Barthes, *Image, music, text*, 142.

<sup>10</sup> The 2005 riots played a major role in the 2007 elections, especially given that the winner, Nicholas Sarkozy, was much maligned for his remarks about the *banlieue* during the riots in his role as Minister of the Interior; in the 2012 and 2017 elections the *banlieues* recurred as a topic of discussion.

this popularity has come with a particular horizon of expectations that the texts by these authors will only reflect the social and political problems attributed to the *banlieue*, which has limited the way in which they have been read and interpreted.

## **THE BANLIEUE**

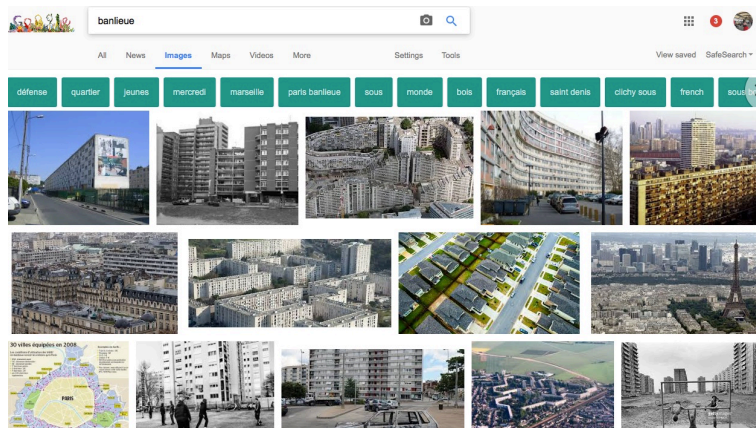
The *banlieue* is a space that is simultaneously very easy and very difficult to define. The word itself means “suburbs,” and yet the term brings with it a whole host of additional associations, which are easily revealed by a simple Google search. The images in the search are not of quintessential suburban imagery, but rather of endless rows of giant, towering concrete buildings<sup>11</sup> devoid of people (see Figure 1). In French, the term, which dates back to the twelfth century, has been defined with minimal variation in the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* as an “ensemble des agglomérations qui entourent un centre urbain et participent à sa vie et à ses fonctions.” There is nothing in this definition to suggest that the *banlieue* refers to anything other than suburbia; however, French-English dictionaries often add that the word has a pejorative connotation, and is, in the words of Larousse, “often associated with social problems such as delinquency.” Etymologically, the word *banlieue* already carries a stigma, as it shares root words with *ban* (authority, banishment, banal) and *bande* (gang), all words associated with a sense of abandonment. The *lieue* refers to the position of the *banlieue* a *lieue* (league) away from

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<sup>11</sup> Habitation à Loyer Modéré, or HLMs, are rent-controlled housing projects created in the wake of World War II to respond to France’s housing crisis. During this time, many lower-middle-class French families lived in these buildings. When they moved out of these buildings by the late 1970s, more immigrant families moved in and their presence was “sometimes regarded by French tenants as a mark – if not indeed the cause – of the deteriorating conditions in HLM estates” (Alec Hargreaves, *Immigration, Race and Ethnicity in Contemporary France* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 71). For more, in addition to Hargreaves, see Pierre Bourdieu, *La Misère du Monde* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1993).

the city center, further connoting a sense of distance and separation from the mainstream and majority that reflected the medieval *banlieues* that were one league away from the city walls.

FIGURE ONE



A Google Image search for “banlieue.”

The word *banlieue* is so laden with negative associations that it is best understood as a discursively-constructed entity that is constantly in flux. Sylvie Durmelat has suggested that the *banlieue* be understood as a “discursive mode” because “the term *banlieue* does not merely designate a peripheral urban space... [it] signifies the way one relates to urban space, and it is constantly shaped and reshaped by ongoing negotiations and power relationships.”<sup>12</sup> Likewise, Beatrice Turpin argues that the concept of the

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<sup>12</sup> Sylvie Durmelat, “On Natives and Narratives from the *Banlieues*,” in *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France*, ed. Susan Ireland and Patrick J. Proulx (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 120. As Durmelat has shown, the way that the *banlieue* is understood and viewed is shaped by the events that have taken place there. Furthermore, the way in which the *banlieue* is viewed is shaped by how others have viewed and described it and, as shown above, these descriptions can come from many different fields, ranging from news media reports of events to personal eyewitness accounts to academic analyses to fictitious films and novels.

*banlieue* is constructed by power relationships that create a space “*formé par l’homme*.”<sup>13</sup>

As a result,

l’espace n’est en effet jamais fermé sur lui-même, il est toujours multiple, à la fois historique et social. Formé de relations entre agents, tissé de discours, produit et producteur de discours, il est relié aux acteurs qui le construisent et le mettent en scène et structuré par des imaginaires.<sup>14</sup>

Both Durmelat and Turpin’s definitions of the *banlieue* draw attention to the extent to which the space is created and shaped, not only by the events that take place there which create a reputation, but also by the words that people use to talk about and structure that space. The *banlieue* is defined by the people who live there and the events and social issues and problems that are attributed to that space.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, the horizon of expectations for *banlieue* novels, films, and graphic novels is shaped both by the history of the *banlieue* and the life the *banlieue* has taken on in the French cultural imaginary.

Since the Middle Ages, the *banlieue* has been a space for people at the margins of society, both literally and figuratively. In the Middle Ages, when the term was created,

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<sup>13</sup> Beatrice Turpin, “Introduction,” *Discours et sémiotisation de l’espace: Les représentations de la banlieue et de sa jeunesse*, ed. Beatrice Turpin (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2012), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Turpin, “Introduction,” 7.

<sup>15</sup> As Turpin argues, much like a language, the words used to describe the *banlieue* have also changed over time, and other words have also been used to represent the space, such as  *cité*  and  *quartier* . These words and additional qualifiers such as “*difficile*” become especially necessary outside of Paris because while *banlieue* has very specific connotations in Paris and other major cities such as Lyon or Marseille, these associations with the *banlieue* do not exist in the same way in smaller towns and cities. Thus, the meaning is often clarified and/or solidified through the use of additional words and terms to specify the space, such as “ *cité* ,”  *quartier* , or the addition of “*difficulté*.” These labels, especially “*difficile*” and “*sensible*,” are used to euphemistically allude to the socioeconomic problems present in these places: “L’appellation renvoie cependant à une mémoire discursive qui peut être actualisée plus ou moins allusivement par le contexte – ici, la pauvreté, nommée ou l’immigration par allusion métonymique et peut-être, de manière plus vague, le sous-emploi, l’échec scolaire, la démission parentale... Flou, le lexème fonctionne comme euphémisme et masque la question sociale, celle du chômage, de la pauvreté, du manque de perspective, question le plus souvent évacuée du discours des médias consacré aux banlieues” (Turpin, “Discours médiatiques et sémiotisation de l’espace: La banlieue et ses grands ensembles,” 112).

the *banlieue* was the place where the municipality exercised the “droit de ban,” which is “le droit d’ordonner, d’interdire, de juger, de faire payer une redevance.”<sup>16</sup> Inhabitants of these peripheral spaces were already connected to the city center, as they were required to give a certain amount of their grain back to the administration. The *banlieue* was also the place outside the city walls to which the city authorities would banish people. While it has stopped being a place of literal banishment, as it was in the Middle Ages, the *banlieue* nonetheless remains a place where people at the economic, social, and political margins of society have congregated. Whether these inhabitants are the factory workers and communists of the nineteenth century, or the immigrants and minorities of the twentieth century, they represent the poor parts of society who are excluded from mainstream *French* society.

While the Habitation à Loyer Modéré (HLM) towers of the present did not exist in the *banlieue* of the nineteenth century, the medieval stigma of a place at the margins of society had carried over. As industrialization changed the cityscape, the *faubourgs*, neighborhoods where the working-class factory workers lived, were an “espace pollué, désagrégé, malade .... un espace symbolique d’une certaine grisaille physique et morale.”<sup>17</sup> These spaces were associated with the color grey which evoked “la tristesse, la poussière, un environnement sombre” and were often associated with alcoholism.<sup>18</sup> The stuffiness of these precursors to the contemporary *banlieue* stood in contrast to the liberty

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<sup>16</sup> Turpin, “Discours médiatiques et semiotisation de l’espace: La banlieue et ses grands ensembles,” 114.

<sup>17</sup> Isabelle Papieau, *La construction des images dans les discours sur la banlieue parisienne: Pratiques et productions esthétiques* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996), 9 - 12.

<sup>18</sup> Papieau, *La construction des images*, 19, 23.



and freedom of life in the open countryside which was slowly being overtaken by these harbingers of a rapidly-industrializing France.<sup>19</sup> In the 1930s, the construction of larger tower buildings, known as the “grands-ensembles,” began with the creation of the cité de La Muette. This building first housed guards, then suspected spies, and, finally, many Jews and prisoners of war during World War II before its demolition in 1976.<sup>20</sup> Eli Lotar’s 1946 documentary *Aubervilliers* further stigmatized these towering buildings by linking the conditions of squalor in the *banlieue* to the colonial city.<sup>21</sup> Despite its storied history, these “grands-ensembles” became a model for affordable public housing (HLMs) in the wake of World War II, which decimated France and left a need for large quantities of accessible housing. Just as the cité de La Muette was demolished, construction on many other towers was nearing completion.

In the wake of World War II, there was an attempt, with the construction of HLMs by architects such as Le Corbusier, to rebrand the *banlieue* as a space of possibility. Inspired by socialist rhetoric, these utilitarian spaces were meant to encourage equality through the creation of identical spaces where hierarchy did not exist, representing a social unity that reflected a larger vision for French society at that time.<sup>22</sup> These HLM towers were initially meant to symbolize the hopeful start of a new life by providing public, sanitary and community services that were not previously available to

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>20</sup> Peter J. Bloom, “The State of French Cultural Exceptionalism: The 2005 Uprisings and the Politics of Visibility,” in *Frenchness and the African Diaspora: Identity and Uprising in Contemporary France*, ed. Charles Tshimanga, Didier Gondola and Peter J. Bloom (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), 229.

<sup>21</sup> Bloom, “French Cultural Exceptionalism,” 237.

<sup>22</sup> Papieau, *La construction des images*, 158.

these communities more people moved in; however, as more people moved in, these spaces changed dramatically.<sup>23</sup> Since the people moving in were primarily poor people at the margins of French society, these symbols of progress and modernity became “un espace où des personnes se sont senties contraintes de vivre, car elles n’avaient plus d’autres possibilités et savaient de plus qu’elles ne pourraient pas s’en ‘échapper.’”<sup>24</sup> The HLM towers became either transitory spaces for people who stayed until they made enough money to move to more affluent neighborhoods, or places where people stagnated because they could not afford to move somewhere else. Instead of neighborhoods of progress and possibility, the *banlieue* became “quartiers d’exil.”<sup>25</sup> The sentiments associated with the *grands-ensembles* have led, in the 2000s, to a massive demolition project of *grands-ensembles* to rid the *banlieue* of these places that are “synonymes de ghettos, de mal-vivre, d’exclusion.”<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, these towers remain a part of many French suburbs, often coexisting just across the street from the quiet, tree-lined streets of wealthier suburbs, a visual reminder of class differences in France.

The stigma associated with the *banlieue*, and, particularly, the *cités* that house its poorest inhabitants in *grands-ensembles*, has only grown with time, especially after the *banlieue* become more associated with immigrants in the 1970s, when a large number of North Africans moved into the HLMs in the *banlieue*.<sup>27</sup> The link between the *banlieue*

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<sup>23</sup> Jean-Marc Stébé and Hervé Marchal, *Mythologie des cités-ghettos* (Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu, 2009), 27-30.

<sup>24</sup> Stébé and Marchal, *Mythologie des cités-ghettos*, 30.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Béatrice Giblin, ed., *Dictionnaire des banlieues* (Paris: Larousse, 2009), 202.

<sup>27</sup> Hargreaves, *Immigration, ‘Race’ and Ethnicity*, 71.

and immigration has since solidified to such an extent that, by the mid-1990s, Alec Hargreaves argues that the “spotlight has shifted” from immigration to the “problems of the banlieue” which became a “coded language for minority ethnic settlement.”<sup>28</sup> The *banlieue* is now a metonym for immigration, and, particularly, the question of integration, which is to say, the blending of minorities and immigrants into French society.<sup>29</sup> This stigma of immigration and its associated problems is exacerbated by the lack of economic opportunities for many people in the *banlieue*, where unemployment, and, particularly, youth unemployment, is consistently higher than it is in any other part of France.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Alec G. Hargreaves, *Multi-ethnic France: immigration, politics, culture and society* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 2.

<sup>29</sup> There has been a well-documented reluctance to discuss race and ethnicity in the French context, although this has been changing in recent decades. In 1988, Gérard Noiriel published his landmark study *Le creuset français: Histoire de l'immigration XIXe-XXe siècles*, in which he made argues that France is a country with a long history of immigration and seeks to debunk the myth that issues of “intégration” of minority populations are new ((Paris: Seuil, 1988), 7). Noiriel’s book makes a strong case that immigration could no longer be considered a problem exterior to France, but rather an interior one with which France had been grappling for centuries (10).

The publication of Michèle Tribalat’s 1995 studies represents another crucial watershed moment in this conversation and a step forward in the attempt to correct the French “amnésie collective” Noiriel laments in *Le Creuset français* (19). Where discussions of race and ethnicity, even in academic contexts, were strongly taboo before, they are now becoming increasingly common. Hargreaves notes 1997 as a key turning point in conversations about race and race relations with both the left and the right acknowledging the need for policies acknowledging and combatting racial discrimination in addition to policies focused on social disadvantage (*Multi-Ethnic France*, 186-188). Despite these steps forward, French law still makes it illegal for census data to be collected on race, ethnicity, or religion, making it difficult for social scientists to effectively quantify the populations of perceived minorities.

The discourse on *intégration* has also become mixed with the discourse on the *banlieue*, a phenomenon that was exacerbated by the 2005 riots. As Nina Buckler describes, “Le discours sur les banlieues... se mêle au discours de l’immigration, et par conséquent à celui de la nationalité, de l’identité et de l’étrangeté. Les populations urbaines sont ainsi confrontées à une double stigmatisation, sociale et raciale à la fois.” (Nina Buckler, “*Les géôles de la différence?*”: *Quelques identitaires postmigratoires d’une minorité noire en France urbaine* (New York: Peter Lang Editions, 2013), 27.)

<sup>30</sup> While the French government does not collect official census data about race, unemployment in France overall, and especially among French youth, was very high in the 1990s. National unemployment was around 10%, higher than in most other western European countries, and youth unemployment was around 40%. See Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 163. Dominic Thomas also describes the banlieue as “spaces of exclusion are defined by harsh living conditions, violence, police brutality and elevated levels of unemployment. The harsh realities on the ground prove to be quite the contrary to the exoticism associated with Charef’s ‘Orientalist’ title; what we have here then, is an account of a lost generation, victims of the

In addition to immigration and the questions of integration with which it is associated, a series of events since the late 1970s have cemented an association between the *banlieue* and violence. Since the 1980s, riots have been a recurring phenomenon in the *banlieue*, repeatedly associating the *banlieue* with images of burning cars and angry youth. In the *banlieue* alone, prior to the 2005 riots, there were riots in the Mignette neighborhood, a suburb of Lyon, in July 1981 (although they were not referred to as such), followed by more riots in Vaulx-en-Velin, another suburb of Lyon, and then in Mantes-la-Jolie, outside of Paris, in 1990. Since that time, urban riots have been occurring rather regularly, including in Nanterre in September 1995, in Toulouse in December 1998, in Grigny and Corbeil-Essonnes in 2000, in Yvelines in January 2002, in Strasbourg in October 2002, and in Avignon in December 2003.<sup>31</sup> These riots have been characterized in a different way from other protests in France. For instance, youth protests against a measure to deregulate labor laws just months after the 2005 riots; however, these protests, which lasted a full month longer than the riots (from February 2006 through April 2006) were not characterized with the same violent rhetoric used in coverage of the 2005 riots.

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failed economic and social integration policies of the 1980s and 1990s that will arguably provide the coordinates for the uprisings of 2005”—see Dominic Thomas, “Postcolonial Writing in France” in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 612.

<sup>31</sup> For a more comprehensive list and analysis of the events leading up to the 2005 riots, see Laurent Mucchielli, “Autumn 2005: A Review of the Most Important Riot in the History of French Contemporary Society,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 5 (2009): 731-751.

This violent imagery already localized within the *banlieue* was exacerbated by the unprecedented media coverage of the 2005 riots,<sup>32</sup> which contributed to stereotyping of the *banlieue* inhabitants as violent and volatile, while also charging these images with racial associations<sup>33</sup> that exacerbated discourse about integration.<sup>34</sup> Other events such as the Khaled Kelkal bombings in 1995, the ongoing conversations about gang rape and violence against women and young girls in the *banlieue* in the early 2000s, and associations between the *banlieue* and the perpetrators of multiple terrorist attacks in Paris and Nice in 2015 and 2016 have continued to link the *banlieue* and violence in the French cultural imaginary.

Throughout its history, the *banlieue* has been cast as a social problem that needs to be solved, whether this is a problem of where to put the people outside of the city in the Middle Ages, the problem of where to put the immigrant workers who rebuilt France in the wake of World War II, or the problem of how to integrate the people who live there today. The horizon of expectations for a *banlieue* text or a text by an author from the

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<sup>32</sup> For an extensive critique of the way in which media discourse manipulated perceptions of the riots and, by extension, the way that the *banlieue* was perceived, see Laura Costelloe, "Discourses of sameness: Expressions of nationalism in newspaper discourse on French urban violence in 2005," *Discourse & Society* 25, no. 3 (2014): 315-340.

<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that the media has often been critiqued by people in the *banlieue* for the reductive stereotypes it creates about its inhabitants, particularly as they relate to race. John P. Murphy, in "Baguettes, Berets and Burning Cars: The 2005 Riots and the Question of Race in Contemporary France," *French Cultural Studies* 22, no. 1 (2011) reports his findings from interviews with French youth in the *banlieue* before and after the riots: "Most of my interlocutors suggested that the French media promote racism...they blamed the way media accounts are produced, arguing that journalists 'set up' outer-city youth to make them appear socially and culturally incompetent" (40). This is also supported by literary accounts, such as Rachid Djaidani in *Boumkoewr*, where the media is again seen as "creating" the racial stereotypes about the *banlieue*, an episode which will be analyzed in detail later in this dissertation.

<sup>34</sup> Salvator Erba, *Une France pluriculturelle: le débat sur l'intégration et les discriminations*, Paris: Librio (2007), 7.

*banlieue* is shaped by this same conception of the *banlieue* as a problem, and readers approach these texts expecting to read about immigration, integration, violence, and socioeconomic marginalization. The period that I chose for this dissertation, 1999 to 2015, is especially relevant because it marks a moment during which writers, directors, and graphic novelists are playing a key role in shaping the horizon of expectations for *banlieue* texts and, in many cases, directly challenging preexisting norms for texts set in this space. The artists I introduce in this dissertation are redefining the horizon of expectations for work on the *banlieue* because they represent major stylistic innovations in their genre, while still using their works as politically engaged tools which engage directly with social, political, and economic debates about the *banlieue*.

#### **WRITING ABOUT THE BANLIEUE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

The period of 1999 to 2015 is a key moment in the development of a counter-discourse about the *banlieue*; however, by focusing on this period I do not mean to imply that there were not films, graphic novels, and novels produced about the *banlieue* before this time.<sup>35</sup> In fact, before 1999, a number of works about the *banlieue* were produced and representations of the *banlieue* in fiction began to take shape through texts such as Azouz Begag's *Le Gone du Chaâba*, Mehdi Charef's *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, and films like *La Haine*. In many ways, the artists working after 1999 are revisiting these forms of representing the *banlieue* that had already been used quite extensively before

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<sup>35</sup> Plenty of the *beur* novels were set in the *banlieue*, many of the *beur* films were also set in the *banlieue*. The release of Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* in 1995 affirmed the existence of the already-nascent *banlieue* film genre, while, as Isabelle Papieau's study shows us, the *banlieue* has been a recurring subject for graphic novelists as well. These texts have been critical in shaping the way that the *banlieue* has been understood in the cultural imaginary.

this time period. Thus, artists' decisions to revisit this subject is already significant, as it indicates that issues that were raised in *banlieue* texts before were never solved. The texts between 1999 and 2015 are talking back<sup>36</sup>, not only to the dominant discourses of France but also to the works that preceded them.

The works emerging between 1999 and 2015 are marked by an explicit focus on the space of the *banlieue* and on an individual's experiences within that space more so than by an author's affiliation with a particular racial or cultural group. Characters are defined not by their racial or ethnic origins but rather by the *banlieue* where they came of age. This period also marks a very productive time in *banlieue* art, when many novels, films and graphic novels set in the *banlieue* were produced.<sup>37</sup> These works are also significant because, even though they were works of fiction, they had a major impact on the way that the *banlieue* was understood, even influencing what issues the mainstream media chose to investigate in the *banlieue*.

This is best illustrated by the impact that Fabrice Genestal's fictional film *La Squale* (2000) had on perceptions of violence against women in the *banlieue*. The film opens with a scene of a young Arab girl being gang raped and the horrific violence of this fictional scene sparked a national conversation about real-life sexual assault and violence against women in the *banlieue*. Even though this opening scene had little to do with the plot of the film, the gang rape it depicted nonetheless became the focus of all of the

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<sup>36</sup> Here I use talking back in the same way as bell hooks, to mean speaking as equals to an audience that previously considered them to be different.

<sup>37</sup> See the appendixes to this dissertation.

commentary on the film. The placement of these stories in the society section of newspapers, rather than the cinema or culture sections, created the false sense that this movie had been based on actual events.<sup>38</sup> The imagined realism of the film was bolstered by the release of a number of best-selling *témoignages* detailing the mistreatment of young Arab women and girls in the *banlieue*, including Samira Bellil's *Dans l'enfer des tournantes* and Fadela Amara's *Ni Putes ni soumises*. These *témoignages*, coupled with the activism by social organizations like *Ni Putes ni soumises* which were created to address these problems, expanded this conversation about sexual aggressions in the *banlieue* by providing real-life evidence of what had started as a storyline in a work of fiction. The ensuing discourse about the epidemic of gang-rapes in the *banlieue* perpetuated images of terrified young girls who were the victims of violent men.<sup>39</sup> These events served to reinforce the mythological figures in the *banlieue* of the innocent young Muslim girl, the violent angry Arab man, and an intractable, repressive Islam, all of whom became powerful figures in the French imaginary.<sup>40</sup> Just a few years later, this same rhetoric of protecting innocent girls from the violence of angry, radicalized men

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<sup>38</sup> Laurent Mucchielli, *Le scandale des 'tournantes' : dérives médiatiques, contre-enquête sociologique* (Paris : La Découverte, 2005), 11-12.

<sup>39</sup> Laurent Mucchielli identifies the combination of these events leading to a highly-mediatized "scandale des tournantes" in which these literary and visual texts were propelling a national conversation about the epidemic of "tournantes," even though the word itself had never appeared in the Agence France Presse or any of the five major French national newspapers (*Le Monde*, *Libération*, *L'Humanité*, *Le Figaro*, *La Croix*) before 2000 (Mucchielli, *Le scandale des 'tournantes'*, 16)

<sup>40</sup> Pierre Tévanian states "like the national obsession with illegal immigration from 1993 to 1998 and the economic insecurity of 2001 and 2002, the headscarf controversy was actually a new occasion to deflect questions of unemployment, insecurity, and discrimination by imposing an ethnic and cultural rather than a socio-economic or political explanation of the situation." ("A Conservative Revolution within Secularism: The Ideological Promises and Social Effects of the March 15, 2004 'Anti-headscarf' law," in *Frenchness and the African Diaspora: Identity and Uprising in Contemporary France*, ed. Charles Tashimanga et. al (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), 198)



was used by the Stasi Commission when they justified their decision to ban headscarves (and, technically, any other ostentatious religious symbols) in public schools in 2004.<sup>41</sup> As the above example of *La Squale* demonstrates, a fictional text exerted remarkable influence on reality, both by identifying a problem in the *banlieue* and reinforcing rhetoric which was used to pass laws to correct this problem.

The 2005 riots were also tied to cultural production about the *banlieue*. Many novels published following the riots, including Ahmed Djouder's *Désintégration*, Mohamed Razane's *Dit Violent*, Karim Sarroub's *Racaille*, and Dembo Goumane's *Dembo Story* all of which were published in 2006. Other films released before the riots, such as Pierre Morel's *Banlieue 13* (2004) suddenly seemed like a prescient vision of the turmoil which rocked the *banlieue* in November 2005. Rap music was also linked to the riots, with some commentators suggesting that the violent imagery in rap songs was responsible for inciting the riots themselves.

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<sup>41</sup> The passage of these laws had a complex history that could itself be the subject of a dissertation. One of the main factors identified by Mucchielli is a media discourse that created the illusion of a much greater problem. While this debate was first held in 1989, it ramped up again as media coverage shifted from the phenomenon of the *tournantes* to one that obsessively covered the headscarf. In 2003, the *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Libération*, and *Aujourd'hui en France* ran more than 100 front-page articles covering the theme of "la laïcité" and "la voile", with a further 1,284 articles published during this year on this subject in *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, and *Libération*, which roughly amounts to one article, per day, per newspaper (Pierre Tévanin, *Le voile médiatique. Un faux débat : « l'affaire du foulard islamique »*, (Paris : Éditions Raisons d'agir, 2005), 15). All this media attention created a problem where, in reality, a very small portion of the population (only between 1,000 – 2,000 students) were even wearing the headscarf in schools during this period (Tévanian, "A Conservative Revolution within Secularism", 187). The same voices that had been active in the *tournantes* movement, and especially Fadela Amara's movement *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* was particularly outspoken in raising awareness about the veil and drawing a link between that and the oppression of women. Scholars such as Joan Scott have also noted how this focus on young women and girls, Islam and the *banlieue* were metonyms for a larger problem, saying "the old concern about women and religion (and the state's particular responsibility for the weaker sex) was transposed in 2003 onto Islam but with a twist: Muslim girls stood in for all vulnerable children, and the supposed pressure from their fathers, brothers, and imams to wear headscarves recalled the once formidable power of Catholic priests" (Joan Wallach Scott, *The politics of the veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 107).

Artists' experiences with the riots nonetheless demonstrate that, when an artist represents the *banlieue*, regardless of the medium in which he or she is working, the artist is expected to take on a representative role. This further narrows the horizon of expectations for *banlieue* texts. Indeed, the extent to which the author's background factors into the public's willingness to accept a creative story as a work of fiction instead of commentary on a social group or issue has been well-documented in the field of postcolonial studies. Gayatri Spivak has argued that audiences are more likely to see work by postcolonial writers as a source of information than as a creative piece of writing. Instead of seeing postcolonial writers as creative individuals, Western audiences expect these writers to act as "native informants," which Spivak describes as "certain members of the Indian elite [who] are of course native informants for first-world intellectuals interested in the voice of the Other." Though Spivak is speaking about India, her analysis could well describe any colonial or postcolonial subject who is being perceived as a spokesperson for their ethnic or religious group.<sup>42</sup> "Native informants," wherever they are from, are expected to be spokesperson for the entire group with which they are associated, in spite of the fact that "the colonized subaltern *subject* is irretrievably heterogeneous."<sup>43</sup> Thus, when colonial or postcolonial writers are perceived as "native informants" the audience expecting this information is denying the inevitable diversity of life experiences and opinions that come with any group of people and are

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<sup>42</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in *Can the subaltern speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind Morris and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 42.

<sup>43</sup> Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 42.

instead expecting that people share identical experiences, just because they all live in the same place or pray in the same way.<sup>44</sup>

Abdelkebir Khatibi's work on the Maghreb indicates how the role of "native informant" is more often than not imposed upon the colonized subject, or the postcolonial individual, much to the discomfort of that individual. Khatibi describes the rise of the "arabe de service" during the Algerian War as a way for the French left to assuage its own guilt about the war. The demand for such works was so high that "chaque maison d'édition posséda son 'Arabe de service.'"<sup>45</sup> This "Arabe de service" was meant, through his literature, to provide insights into Algerian life that French intellectuals would not otherwise understand. Much like the *banlieue* authors today, these "Arabes de service" were deeply uncomfortable with the role that had been thrust upon them; Kateb Yacine, Malek Haddad, and Mohammed Dib were all horrified that the violence in Algeria was simultaneously propelling the sales of their books in France.<sup>46</sup> Today, *banlieue* artists are serving the same role as the "Arabes de service" from the Algerian War, except they are meant to act as native informants about the *banlieue*. Much like the "Arabes de service"

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<sup>44</sup> Angéline Escafré Dublet also identifies this phenomenon in French art. She argues that French historiographies did not value the cultural contributions of immigrants until diversity entered the political and cultural register in the early 2000s. Before then, she argues, France emphasized the universal qualities of art, which ignored the individual (and ethnic) circumstances in which it was produced. When this art did receive critical attention, it was analyzed more for its economic and social insights than for its cultural value. (*Culture et immigration: de la question sociale à l'enjeu politique 1958-2007* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014)).

<sup>45</sup> Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Le roman maghrébin: essai* (Rabat: Société Marocaine des Éditeurs Réunis, 1979), 33.

<sup>46</sup> Kateb as quoted and translated by Seth Graebner in "Kateb Yacine and the Ruins of the Present," *SubStance* 36.1 (2007): 139.

before them, even if they themselves do not seek out the role, they have been irrationally tasked with representing the diverse experiences of an entire group of people.

For instance, in the period following the 2005 riots, *banlieue* artists were expected by the media to act as spokespersons for the *banlieue*, identifying and solving the social problems the riots brought to light. Some artists embraced this role of “native informant.” For instance, rappers Médine and Abd Al Malik often speak about problems relating to the *banlieue*, Islam, and racism both in their music and other projects which include treatises, books, and documentaries.<sup>47</sup> Médine even published an op-ed in *Time* magazine in 2005 in which he declared, “I was born and raised in France. I've been a citizen since birth. How much more French can I be?”<sup>48</sup> Likewise, graphic novelist Halim Mahmoudi has published several op-eds detailing the *beur* experience, immigration and integration in France, as well as life in the *banlieue*.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See Abd Al Malik's *Qu'Allah bénisse la France* (2004), *La guerre des banlieues n'aura pas lieu* (2009), *Le dernier français* (2011), *L'Islam au secours de la République* (2013), *Place de la République* (2015), *Camus, l'art de la révolte* (2016) and Médine's book *Don't Panik* (2012) with Pascal Boniface, and his documentary “I'm Migrant Don't Panik” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnKtEkNZWcI>).

<sup>48</sup> Médine is not the only one to make a statement like this. Faïza Guène makes a nearly identical statement in an interview when she says, “People say that people like me should be more integrated.... But what does that mean? I was born in France, I went to a French school, I speak French, I live in France. It is difficult to do the things that are apparently needed to be accepted if that means denying things that are a part of my culture. It is as if—and this is a bit brutal but is true—we (children of immigrants) are told, 'You are children of the republic, but you are bastard children. You are very welcome here but with the following conditions.... The great symbols of France, the cultural richness etc. .... All that is inaccessible.... It has got nothing to do with me or our lives,” see Brinda Mehta, “Negotiating Arab-Muslim Identity, Contested Citizenship, and Gender Ideologies in the Parisian Housing Projects: Faïza Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain*,” *Research in African Literatures* 41.2 (2010): 176-177.

<sup>49</sup> See Halim Mahmoudi, “Je suis dessinateur de presse, arabe... Mais seulement ami avec Charlie!”, *Huffington Post Maghreb*, January 12, 2015, [http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/halim-mahmoudi/je-suis-dessinateur-de-pr\\_b\\_6455050.html](http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/halim-mahmoudi/je-suis-dessinateur-de-pr_b_6455050.html); Halim Mahmoudi, “Mon vote n'a pas la peau blanche” *Huffington Post Maghreb*, May 3, 2017, [http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/halim-mahmoudi/mon-vote-na-pas-la-peau-b\\_b\\_16406104.html](http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/halim-mahmoudi/mon-vote-na-pas-la-peau-b_b_16406104.html); Halim Mahmoudi, “Etat d'urgence en France: Analyse d'un terrorisme d'état,” *Huffington Post Maghreb*, January 29, 2016, [http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/halim-mahmoudi/etat-urgence-france\\_b\\_9113182.html](http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/halim-mahmoudi/etat-urgence-france_b_9113182.html).

Other *banlieue* artists, particularly authors of novels, such as the members of the collective Qui Fait La France? have been much more reluctant to take on the role of spokesperson. Faïza Guène specifically has vehemently resisted the expectation that she be a native informant for the *banlieue*. While Guène has spoken directly about social issues, including the riots and racism,<sup>50</sup> she is, at best, a reluctant spokesperson:

Unfortunately, second-generation immigrants are so under-represented in France that as soon as someone appears on the scene, the media transforms this person into A Leader, A Representative, a Master of Thoughts...As if ONE person could represent all the diversity you have in the banlieues! I have always refused this function. But sometimes, there are so many clichés, you feel obligated to give your opinions. But when I choose to give it, I do it only in my own name.<sup>51</sup>

As the trajectories of Azouz Begag or Fadela Amara, both of whom are writers who have built successful careers through taking on representative roles in the government, demonstrate, if an author gains notoriety through his or her written work about immigrants, *beurs*, or the *banlieue*, it is quite possible to leverage this experience into politics. The number of writers turned civil servants further demonstrates the slippage between artistic work and public policy. Nevertheless, despite many overtures by the French government to follow in the footsteps of Rachid Dati, Fadela Amara, Yamina

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<sup>50</sup> Guène has said in interviews that she prefers the term social revolt to riots, and has said "For me, the riots weren't a surprise. They were inevitable. Perhaps not to that extent but you can't let people live like that and always push the problem to one side...People don't burn things for nothing. There must be something that isn't right." ("A call from the suburbs; THE INTERVIEW," Sydney Morning Herald (Australia), August 30, 2008, LexisNexis Academic. ; She has also spoken with the Guardian Weekly about her difficulty finding an apartment due to the racism she encountered ("Guardian Weekly: Weekly review: High riser: Faiza Guene's first novel was a sensation, but she remains an outsider," *Guardian Weekly*, June 27, 2008, LexisNexis Academic.)

<sup>51</sup> Faïza Guène, Interview by Fatimah Kelleher, *Wasafiri* 28, no. 4 (2013): 5-6.

Benguigui and Rama Yade as a spokesperson or advocate, Guène has refused all of these representative roles.<sup>52</sup>

Even for authors who resist it, this role of the “native informant” factors into the horizon of expectations for *banlieue* texts, especially *banlieue* novels. These novels, if they are read at all in an academic context, are simply seen as representative windows into the *banlieue* experience instead of as complex, dynamic works of art, a definition which has been crystalized in the scholarship about these works that emerged in the period from 1999-2015, which also marked by a key moment of definition in the academy for both *banlieue* novels and *banlieue* film. (*Banlieue bande dessinée* is, as I argue in Chapter 3, simultaneously omnipresent and remarkably under-theorized.) *Banlieue* novels have been the topic of a few recent studies by scholars such as Vinay Swamy, Alec Hargreaves, Dominic Thomas, Nina Buckler, and Illaria Vitali. Nevertheless, the vast majority of works of fiction set in the *banlieue* and created by people who grew up in the *banlieue*, with the notable exception of Faiza Guène’s *Kiffe-Kiffe Demain*, has not been studied, particularly in the American academic context. Even research that deals with fiction set in the *banlieue*, such as Thomas’s *Africa and France* (2013), rarely engages in sustained literary analysis of the work, opting instead to highlight the social or political elements in the texts.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> "Guardian Weekly: Weekly review: High riser: Faiza Guene's first novel was a sensation, but she remains an outsider," *Guardian Weekly*, June 27, 2008, LexisNexis Academic.

<sup>53</sup> In contrast to *banlieue* literature, the early-to-mid 2000s marked the crystallization of *banlieue* film as a field of academic study with the publication of Carrie Tarr’s seminal monograph, *Reframing difference: Beur and banlieue filmmaking in France*, in 2005, which was followed by a series of other studies on *banlieue* film. See also Will Higbee, *Post-Beur Cinema: North African émigré and Maghrebi-French filmmaking in France since 2000* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Sylvie Durmelat and

The period from 1999-2015 also marks a moment in which *banlieue* authors began to define their own work in an attempt to shake the horizon of expectations that came with the title of *banlieue* author. For instance, a collection of young authors who wrote about the *banlieue* formed the collective Qui Fait La France? in 2007.<sup>54</sup> The name of the group evokes the homonymic phrase “Kiffer la France,” a commonly-used verlan term that means “to love/be crazy about something or someone.”<sup>55</sup> This phrase neatly sums up their mission: to demonstrate that, in their racial and ethnic diversity they are representative of the people who make up present-day France, and that they simultaneously have a great deal of love for France. In their manifesto, released in 2007 as an introduction to a collection of short stories, *Chroniques d’une société annoncée*, they affirm their desire to write politically engaged work, while not being confined by the horizon of expectations for the *banlieue*.<sup>56</sup> The formation of this collective simultaneously marks the crystallization of the genre of the *banlieue* novel and

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Vinay Swamy, ed., *Screening Integration: recasting Maghrebi immigration in contemporary France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), Cristina Johnston, *French Minority Cinema* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2010), David Alexandre Wagner, *De la banlieue stigmatisée à la cité démystifiée: La représentation de la banlieue des grands ensembles dans le cinéma français de 1981 à 2005* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), Dayna Oscherwitz, *Past Forward: French cinema and the post-colonial heritage* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010).

<sup>54</sup> The other members of the collective are Samir Ouazene, Khalid El Bahji, Karim Amellal, Jean-Eric Boulou, Dembo Goumane, Faïza Guène, Habiba Mahany, Mabrouck Rachedi, Mohamed Razane, Thomté Ryam.

<sup>55</sup> Dominic Thomas, “Postcolonial writing in France,” 616.

<sup>56</sup> In their words: “Parce que, catalogués écrivains de banlieue, étymologiquement le lieu du ban, nous voulons investir le champ culturel, transcender les frontières et ainsi récupérer l’espace confisqué qui nous revient de droit, pour l’aspiration légitime à l’universalisme” (Collectif Qui Fait La France?, *Chroniques d’une société annoncée* (Paris: Stock, 2007), 8).

demonstrates an attempt by some of its authors to shape the horizon of expectations for this genre.<sup>57</sup>

As is suggested by the rhetoric of *Qui Fait La France?*, there was a desire among so-called *banlieue* authors to no longer be limited by the horizon of expectations for the *banlieue* genre. They wanted to show that their writing could be interpreted and understood on a different level than simply that of the “native informant” representing his or her experiences in the *banlieue* and reflecting the social problems there. Though *Qui Fait La France?* was a movement limited to novelists, their rhetoric nonetheless reflects a trend across mediums in which *banlieue* writers, filmmakers, and graphic novelists are creating works which push pass the horizon of expectations for the *banlieue* mode with the aim of redefining expectations for this mode. One of the main ways in which they are doing so is by leveraging sophisticated stylistic, literary, and filmic representational devices in their works. These authors remain politically engaged by using these devices to engage with social, political, and economic debates about the *banlieue*, but, instead of passively reflecting these problems, they actively push against stereotypes and characterizations and propose new and different solutions in their work.

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<sup>57</sup> The formation of this collective was doubtless also in dialogue with a larger moment of self-definition on the part of Francophone literature, in which a number of Francophone authors, including Edouard Glissant, Tahar Ben Jelloun, and Alain Mbanckou, were advocating for the use of the term “littérature-monde” as opposed to “littérature francophone” to describe their work in their manifesto “Pour une littérature-monde en français” which was published in *Le Monde* in March 2007. This move likewise marks a resistance against academic categorizations of their work and how this has dictated the horizon of expectations for their texts, as can be seen in their resistance of the Francophone label that had been—and continues to be—applied to their work and implies—rightly or wrongly—an association with the French metropole which, in their opinion, largely no longer exists.



## CHAPTER SUMMARIES

The chapters of this dissertation are organized by medium so as to highlight the unique stylistic innovations taking place in *banlieue* novels, films, and graphic novels between 1999 and 2015. This approach complements other interpretations of *banlieue* texts which, through their focus on political engagement, have often pigeonholed the *banlieue* artists they feature into the role of “native informant.” By adopting an approach which demonstrates how these authors use literary, filmic, and artistic devices to engage with political debates and contest stereotypes, I foreground these authors’ creative engagement with their respective mediums while acknowledging the sociopolitical critiques present in each text.

Chapter 1, Polyphonic (Dés)Intégration, examines how *beur* authors use the literary style of polyphony, which I define as the presence of multiple genres, languages, and cultural registers to problematize the assumption that minorities residing in the *banlieue* are not integrated into French society. Through a style that harmoniously blends references to both French and international cultural contexts, these works demonstrate the integration of their protagonists into the fabric of French society while identifying a larger issue in the *banlieue* which has been obscured by discourses about racial and religious integration: the alienating and restrictive experience of poverty in the *banlieue* which limits opportunities and keeps people in the *banlieue* both stuck there and vulnerable to radical and extremist discourse as the only recourse to their situation. In *Boumkoeur* (1999), Rachid Djaïdani uses polyphony to counter claims that people in the *banlieue* are not conversant in the French language by showing how their language use

reflects a mastery not only of French, but also of numerous other languages. In *Allah Superstar* (2003), Y.B.'s protagonist creates an identity that is based on a dizzying array of polyphonic cultural references that demonstrate an integration not simply into French culture, but also into a larger, globalized world while showing the dangerous desperation that results when *banlieue* residents' integration is not acknowledged by the French metropole. Finally, in my reading of Faïza Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain* (2004), I show how Doria's seemingly-lighthearted polyphonic cultural and television references mask the deeply difficult experience of poverty and lack of opportunity in the *banlieue*, which is what all three authors identify as the real culprit in the lack of integration of *banlieue* residents in France.

Chapter 2, Cartographies of (Im)Mobility, draws from a combination of film and geographical theory to analyze three autobiographical *banlieue* films: Abd Al Malik's *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* (2014), Sylvie Ohayon's *Papa was not a Rolling Stone* (2014) and Samuel Benchetrit's *Asphalte* (2015). I argue that these films can be read as counter-maps which refute traditional and stereotypical characterizations of the *banlieue* space while drawing attention to how this space limits the social mobility of the films' protagonists. These counter-maps, which participate in a longer tradition of filmic resistance to *banlieue* tropes that began in the early 2000s, bring color and sound to representations of the *banlieue*, adding elements that these directors were not able to include in the autobiographies on which they based their films. These films reimagine the *banlieue* while revealing the complicated dynamics of mobility both within the *banlieue* and between the *banlieue* and its metropolitan center. Ohayon's film tackles

representations of La Courneuve, the recurring site of many *banlieue* films, creating a brightly-colored counter-map set to a soundtrack of 1980s hits that stands in contrast with the grey, forlorn imagery typically associated with this *banlieue*. Al Malik breaks with filmic tradition to represent a *banlieue* outside of Paris by setting his film in Strasbourg and using the same black and white neorealism of *La Haine* to critique Kassovitz's depictions of delinquent masculinity. Bechtrit envisions a surreal *banlieue* which juxtaposes the cold, desolate exteriors of the HLM towers with the warmth of human interaction taking place within its walls. Nearly a decade after the 2005 riots, these films revisit traditional forms of representing the *banlieue* to draw attention to how socioeconomic factors continue to limit the social mobility of the vast majority of people living in the *banlieue*.

In Chapter 3, (Re)Framing Stereotypes, I discuss the medium-specific elements of caricature, framing, and sequence in *bande dessinée* to show how authors use these elements to reframe stereotypical figures and *banlieue* tropes. Through an analysis of Nine Antico's *Le Gout du paradis*, Gilles Rochier's *TMLP: Ta mère la pute*, and Halim Mahmoudi's *Arabico* and *Un monde libre*, I argue that each author challenges preexisting conceptions about the *banlieue*. Antico confronts stereotypes of the vulnerable young woman in the *banlieue* by presenting an empowered young girl discovering her sexuality, Rochier complicates notions of gang violence by providing the background stories that are lost in media coverage of violent incidents, and Mahmoudi re-contextualizes the often-vilified Arab male within the experiences of a young boy confronting police violence.

As my opening anecdote about the Médiathèque Abdelmalek Sayed shows, these texts are, with a few exceptions, decidedly on the margins. They are hidden in libraries and ignored, not only by the majority of academic researchers, but often also by the French public. Even texts that have enjoyed tremendous critical success in the academy, such as Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain*, which has become practically synonymous with *banlieue* literature, were titles with which the majority of people I encountered on my travels throughout France were unfamiliar. Furthermore, as is especially the case of *banlieue bande dessinée* and, to a lesser but still operative extent, *banlieue* novels, there is a dearth of critical scholarship. This oversight erroneously suggests either that *banlieue* works do not exist or that the ones that have been published are unimportant. While I would not presume to have the final word on contemporary representations of the *banlieue* in this dissertation, my hope is that this research serves as a jumping off point for further scholarship that is willing to engage on both a political and a literary level with the many important *banlieue* novels, films, and graphic novels produced since 1999.

Many of these texts represent debut works by authors in a genre that is still trying to find a place within French literary movements, as the formation (and subsequent dissolution) of the collective Qui Fait La France? demonstrates. The dearth of analyses of these texts should not consign their authors to the role of “native informant,” making them representatives of a space with little creative engagement or autonomy. My approach foregrounds the medium-specific stylistic elements that the authors use without denying the politics inherent in the representation of such a politically-charged space.

Traditionally, the *banlieue* has been read through the lens of colonization, as the continuation of the *bidonvilles* that housed many Algerian immigrants in the wake of the Algerian War. Since many of the *banlieue*'s current residents continue to have origins in Algeria and the rest of the Maghreb, the residents of the *banlieue* have often, themselves, been read as postcolonial subjects. While acknowledging the role that this colonial history plays in the contemporary *banlieue*, this project builds on the relationship between the *banlieue* and postcolonial studies<sup>58</sup> and adds to the conversation around *banlieue* texts by reading them outside of the lens of the colonial subject and as more than the byproducts of literatures of immigration or pale imitations of Francophone North African literary movements. I read these *banlieue* works, many of which have not been analyzed previously, as in dialogue with larger theoretical conversations taking place both within and outside of the (post)colonial realm. It is for this reason that I incorporate theoretical frameworks from outside of postcolonial studies, such as cartographical film theory, which, in a French context, has traditionally been applied to urban films that take place in Paris, and polyphony, which was first used to describe Dostoyevsky's Russian novels, in addition to showing how these texts participate in a counter discourse that reflects debates in the postcolonial world.

This project makes a contribution not just to scholars of French literature seeking new realms of inquiry, but also to the field of urban studies, where the spatial structure of

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<sup>58</sup> See Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). For an analysis of the French case specifically, see Achille Mbembe, "The Republic and its Beast: On the Riots in the French *Banlieues*," Trans. Jane Marie Todd, in *Frenchness and the African Diaspora*, Charles Tshimanga et. al, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

the city and the impact of these spatial hierarchies on the people who live within it is of central concern.<sup>59</sup> Connecting these texts to urban studies, an interdisciplinary field of study that cuts across national boundaries, echoes the stated goals of the authors themselves, who are seeking to create a community that is centered around space—the *banlieue*—and not around their parents’ country of origin. Furthermore, this reading invites connections between the *banlieue* and other marginalized urban spaces outside of France. While *banlieue* authors are quick to draw parallels between the *banlieue* and the American ghetto, the insights from this project, and in particular the way in which these authors unite around the shared experience of poverty and the impact this produces on their own lives, suggest that these texts bear witness to the marginalized communities created by urbanization in cities around the globe, regardless of race, religion, or (post)colonial context.

This project also presents a road map for further scholarship on the *banlieue*. It is for this reason that I include a bibliography, both of *banlieue* works across mediums and of *banlieue bande dessinée* so that these materials are more accessible to scholars. Currently, these important works are scattered across archives and library collections, making a comprehensive study of the genre a challenge. By collecting these works in one

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<sup>59</sup> This is in line with the approach that Jean-Marc Stébé and Hervé Marchal take in *Mythologie des cités-ghettos* where they read the *banlieue* in the context of both the Jewish ghettos of the Holocaust and the American ghettos. Urban studies, which is an inherently interdisciplinary field, also invites consideration of the many factors that shape the *banlieue*, and other urban spaces like it, including racial segregation, globalization, migration, masculinity, urban violence, the relationship between the city center and its surrounding suburbs. See, among others, David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2009), Loïc Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), Saskia Sasson, *The Global City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), Max Weber, *The City* (New York, The Free Press, 1966), Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

place, this project serves as an archive for these texts and as a resource for future scholars seeking to learn more about the *banlieue* and urban spaces from a literary and filmic perspective.

I seek to validate these *banlieue* texts' existence, not only for the insights they can provide into the social, political and economic circumstances of people living in the *banlieue*, but also as works of art produced by stylistic innovators who are leveraging the creative possibilities of the medium in which they are working. By acknowledging these texts as works of art without negating their political and social engagement, we can change and continue to broaden the horizon of expectations for the *banlieue* mode until it can be acknowledged for what it actually is: twenty-first century French literature written by French citizens about their experiences in urban spaces in France.

## Chapter One: Polyphonic (Dés)Intégration

“Dans la fiction, passé colonial et présent hexagonal peuvent commencer un dialogue qui reste, ailleurs, souterrain.”

-Sylvie Durmelat, *Fictions de l'intégration* (192)

The flexibility of fiction makes it possible to broach contentious issues through a less restrictive format, allowing its authors to shed new light on real-life debates by formulating their argument in a different, often non-linear fashion. Although Sylvie Durmelat is addressing the ability of fiction to tackle questions of the colonial past, fiction can also speak to other “souterrain” debates and provide new perspectives on equally complex topics, including integration. In this chapter, I focus on three key novels that emerged at the beginning of the twenty-first century which not only engage with these questions of integration but also set the standard for the way that subsequent *banlieue* novels would tackle these same issues: Rachid Djaïdani’s *Boumkoeur* (1999), Y.B.’s *Allah Superstar* (2003), and Faïza Guène’s *Kiffe kiffe demain* (2004). I argue that these novels use polyphony to respond to debates about integration in France through their manipulation of language, their mixing of and emphasis on various forms of cultural capital to complicate definitions of Frenchness, and their illumination of the crucial role that access to economic opportunity plays in integration. Using polyphony, these authors harmoniously blend allusions and references that resist reductive or stereotypical characterizations. As such, they are able to produce a more nuanced portrait of the issues that are typically obscured by other, more linear or conventional approaches. In the case



of the polyphonic *banlieue* novel, while contradicting and entering into dialogue with some of the main issues of the integration debate—language use, connection to and knowledge of French culture—these novelists are also able to draw attention to what they see as the root of the problem: economic issues such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunities for advancement.

As John Bowen explains in his analysis of the headscarf controversies, a debate which got at the heart of integration in contemporary France, this particular issue was so tenacious because, due to the (admittedly very small portion of) women wearing the headscarf, France “has now become a country of visible differences” which are particularly noticeable in “the poorer suburbs of Paris, Lille, or Lyon” where one finds “the most variegated mixtures of color, dress, and language.”<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the format of the novel allows authors and readers to engage directly with these same questions of visible difference in France. Within the space of a novel, polyphony, evokes and responds to the visible differences that are particularly apparent on the streets of the *banlieues* Bowen identifies. Polyphony is a style of writing which through its musicality, harmoniously blends markers of difference (from different languages to cultural references) within an otherwise homogenous text. Due to the polyphony within the text, these markers of difference do not threaten the unity of the story or diminish their narrators’ Frenchness. Rather, the successful blending of these polyvalent references suggests that the presence of visible differences either in a text or on the streets in France need not be perceived as a

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<sup>60</sup> John R. Bowen, *Why the French don't like headscarves: Islam, the State, and public space* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 246.

direct challenge or threat to national identity. Put simply, polyphony challenges the presumed homogeneity that underlies Republican French identity.

As Bowden goes on to say, integration in France is not a two-way street (immigrants are expected to change their lifestyles to become more French, whereas French people are not expected to challenge their notions of what it means to be French). If the model of integration in France is also based on what Mirna Safi and Amy Jacobs describe as “the hypothesis that the host society is characterized by a unified core that could be qualified as ‘non-ethnic’ or ‘average,’” then polyphony in the *banlieue* novel implicitly challenges the presence of this core within France by showing a plurality of perspectives, languages, and references that make up these characters’ feelings of Frenchness and their French identity.<sup>61</sup> These references in polyphony both implicitly and explicitly address French concerns about integration by showing a mastery of and conversance with the French language and French culture, while also posing a different challenge to the French: if these novels are about French citizens talking in French about their experiences in France, what about them is not representative of a French identity? By asking these questions, these novels compel their readers to dissociate integration, which Étienne Balibar reminds us is simply “belonging to a *de facto* historical and social entity” (his emphasis) from what the idea of integration in the French context has come to represent, which Balibar describes as the “conformity to a mythical ‘national type.’”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Mirna Safi and Amy Jacobs, “The Immigrant Integration Process in France: Inequalities and Segmentation,” *Revue française de sociologie* 49 (2008): 5.

<sup>62</sup> Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, nation, class: ambiguous identities*, Trans. Christ Turner (New York: Verso, 1991), 222.

Here, Balibar distinguishes between the sense of belonging that ought to be conferred by French citizenship and the expectations that integration has come to represent, which is that all French citizens conform to an idealized, and largely inaccessible, vision of “Frenchness.” Likewise, the protagonists in polyphonic novels challenge what, exactly, conformity to this mythical national type ought to look like by affirming their Frenchness while celebrating the influences of other cultures in their lives.

As I will show, the polyphony in these *banlieue* novels has resonances that extend far beyond the musicality that the term polyphony implies. These novels are polyphonic not only on a musical level, but also in the deliberate resonances they produce with other texts, their references to or incorporation of images, their combination of multiple genres within a single work, and their bringing together of multiple cultural viewpoints. These polyphonic texts imagine a textual community where multiple cultures are not in conflict but rather coexist harmoniously, in a nonhierarchical structure.<sup>63</sup> This responds directly to debates about integration by showing how the communities in the *banlieue* are perfectly conversant in all aspects of French identity, from the language to the canonical and popular culture references in French culture. Through their manipulation of language and their creation of a web of references that include France but also stretch beyond it, these polyphonic texts are affirming that persons in the *banlieue* are perfectly integrated in France on a cultural level. Nevertheless, in spite of this tremendous cultural knowledge, all of these characters still find themselves on the margins of society because their

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<sup>63</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

cultural capital does not translate into economic capital and opportunities. Thus, these novels simultaneously refute claims that lack of cultural knowledge or religious difference is the driving factor behind the lack of integration of the *banlieue* into French society by showing that poverty and a lack of economic opportunity are the real obstacles to integration.

In the pages that follow, I will show how polyphonic strategies initially adopted by postcolonial North African writers have been adapted by the second and third generation writers *issus de l'immigration* to discuss their experience of living and growing up in the *banlieue*. After defining polyphony, I illustrate how *Boumkoeur*, *Allah Superstar*, and *Kiffe kiffe demain* use polyphony to engage with debates about integration. I show how *Boumkoeur* exemplifies linguistic wordplay to show that mastery of the French language and all of its registers is not the issue in integration, how *Allah Superstar* responds to assertions that people in the *banlieue* know nothing about France by showing its titular character's mastery of a wide range of cultural references which are both specific to France and extend outwards towards the international community. Finally, I highlight the under-discussed economic issues foregrounded in *Kiffe kiffe demain* to show how poverty and lack of economic opportunities is repeatedly identified in all three of these novels as the actual obstacle to integration.

When read with the perspective of the present, the debates about integration and homegrown terrorism brought to light in these polyphonic texts predicts many of the same debates brought about both by the 2005 riots, and, a decade later, the attacks on Charlie Hebdo, the November 13<sup>th</sup> attacks, and the attacks in Nice, all of which brought

debates about integration and homegrown terrorism back to the forefront of French political and social discourse. By proposing that the issue behind integration is not race or religion or even cultural differences, but rather the lack of economic opportunities available to people in the *banlieue* that force them to find recognition, both social and economic, from other means, these novels describe some of the same obstacles to integration singled out by the 2005 riots. Much like the 2005 rioters, who were not united by race or religion but rather by a shared experience of poverty,<sup>64</sup> the characters in these polyphonic *banlieue* novels see themselves as French persons and are frustrated by the fact that their zip code cuts them off from accessing the same capital opportunities when they see themselves as every bit as French as someone living in the fifth arrondissement in the heart of Paris.

## **POLYPHONY AND THE BANLIEUE NOVEL**

### **Defining polyphony**

I define polyphony as the presence of multiple elements (genres, languages, points of view, historical events, bodies, and cultures), all of which are given equal weight within the text which precludes a finalizing discourse that values one of these elements more highly than another. Polyphony was initially a musical term that referred to the simultaneous presence of multiple melodies within a single song. Singing different tones and words which nonetheless combine to create a greater, harmonious effect has

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<sup>64</sup> Hugues Lagrange, "The French riots and urban segregation," in *Rioting in the UK and France*, David Waddington, et. al eds (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 121. Marwan Mohammed, "Youth gangs, riots, and the politicization process," in *Rioting in the UK and France*, David Waddington, et. al eds (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 171.

been an effective way of reframing difference as a source of beauty and inspiration and not as a point of conflict and dissonance. In fact, polyphonic music is so effective at creating unity that singing polyphonic songs has long been a strategy for creating a shared, communal identity.<sup>65</sup> The need for the multiple melodies to come together in order to create something more richly resonant than any individual musical thread echoes the process of community-building in which numerous approaches to thought from a diverse array of individuals contribute to society.

Polyphony as a theoretical term relating to literature was coined by Mikhail Bakhtin to describe Fyodor Dostoyevsky's work. For Bakhtin, Dostoyevsky's writing exemplified the first truly polyphonic novel due to the absence of a "final, finalizing discourse that defines anything once and for ever."<sup>66</sup> Dostoyevsky's novels, in Bakhtin's reading, are characterized by the lack of definite moral or lesson that is to be drawn from them, as there is an absence of an overarching narratorial authority which instructs the reader on how to read and interpret the novel. This absence is created by a multiplicity of fully-formed, "independent and unmerged voices and consciousness...a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world" all of which are given equal weight to the word of the author himself.<sup>67</sup> Characters and their different opinions are the driving force behind Dostoyevsky's novels and since they are all presented as fully-formed, thinking and rational individuals, in Bakhtin's reading, these multiple

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<sup>65</sup> Jui-Chi Wang, "Singing Polyphony: An Asian Experience," *Music Educators Journal* June 2015: 85.

<sup>66</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, Caryl Emerson, trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 251.

<sup>67</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, 6-7.

discourses, some of which are in conflict with each other, preclude the possibility of reading the moral of the novel in a single way.

I extend Bakhtin's concept of a plurality of consciousness of characters within a novel to include a preponderance of genres and voices, from other languages to different registers of speech, existing within a single work: a novel that turns to poetry, and then to theater, and then back to prose or a rap song that samples not only other rap in multiple languages but also clips from news media while gesturing towards canonical works of literature. While Bakhtin restricts polyphony to the novel, I would also claim that this phenomenon traverses genre boundaries in *banlieue* cultural production. Although it is beyond the scope of analysis for this dissertation, rap music is an excellent example of this. French rapper Médine, for instance, will rap in French, English, and Arabic, while including clips from news media. Likewise, French rapper Youssoupha will gesture to Sartre and canonical French paintings as he recounts the difficulties of life in the *banlieue*. Like Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's rhizomes, these differentiated chords comprised of literary references, languages, and genres in a polyphonic text can disconnect and reconnect, folding into one another and creating new significations in the process.<sup>68</sup> Rhizomatic thinking is inherently nonhierarchical and lacks a central organizing principle or authority.<sup>69</sup> As in rhizomatic thinking, the connections that are evoked by polyphony often happen at an unconscious level, filling the brain with an

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<sup>68</sup> Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), see in particular "Chapter 1: Introduction."

<sup>69</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21.

image, or series of images, which disappears by the next reference. In analyzing the effect of polyphony in *Boumkoeur*, *Allah Superstar*, and *Kiffe kiffe demain*, I linger on the purpose that these individual significations serve and reflect on how this multiplicity of associations enhances or complicates the message of the story.

By incorporating references and allusions to multiple cultures, countries, and genres, the goal of the polyphonic *banlieue* novel is not to emphasize the specificity of these individual cultures, but rather to allow all of these references to coexist and show how identity in the *banlieue* extends beyond national boundaries and does not hinge on binaries. Since many of the combined elements in a polyphonic text are not changed from their original form, but rather incorporated as they are into the text, the author's goal is not to blend these references into something cohesive and new, but rather to show how they can coexist harmoniously in the same space, and to draw connections between different languages, genres, or cultures. Like Abdelkebir Khatibi's *Double Critique*, which criticizes the essentializing tendencies of narratives coming out of both the East and the West and calls for the creation of a *pensée-autre* that resists this dualistic, reductive approach, polyphony is an alternate strategy that engages with difference without reducing these differences to stereotypical or easily-opposed divisions.<sup>70</sup> Polyphony is thus a way for artists to resist reductive characterizations of both the East and the West, or to see the two as diametrically opposed. Polyphony allows these authors to envision and share a new vision of culture that does not find its name in dominant

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<sup>70</sup> Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Double Critique* (Rabat: Oukad Publications, 1990), 30.



discourse about the *banlieue* which focuses on a tension between Frenchness and the Other. Indeed, authors of the polyphonic *banlieue* novel like Guène and Rachid Santaki do not even identify with this binary opposition because they do not see themselves as outsiders, but rather as French citizens living in France.<sup>71</sup> Polyphony then is a textual strategy in which they can resist these reductive characterizations and binary oppositions and envision identity in their texts in the way that they experience and see it personally.

This kind of plurality and polyphony in texts has long been a hallmark of many of the highly stylized, high-modernist works of Francophone fiction such as Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Harrouda*, Assia Djébar's *La Soif*, or Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma*, in which a multiplicity of voices or perspectives represents various social or political perspectives.<sup>72</sup> Authors of the polyphonic *banlieue* novel import polyphony into France and, in their writing, create a cacaphony of references to different novels, songs, films, as well as the use of various perspectives, to accomplish the same goal of representing a world that cannot be reduced to a single point of view. These novels create particularly complex webs of cultural referents consisting of American, French, and Arab popular culture drawn from film, television and movies, classic English and French-language literature,

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<sup>71</sup> Kathryn A. Kleppinger, *Branding the 'Beur' Author: Minority Writing and the Media in France, 1983-2013* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 28.

<sup>72</sup> Indeed, elements of polyphony are recurring in analyses of North African Francophone literature. Alison Rice plays on the sound of FrancoPHONY to stress the musicality in the works of Assia Djébar, Hélène Cixous, and Jacques Derrida. For her these works are polyphonic because they mix "the 'je' with other voices that interweave in the text at varying *intervals*, both in the musical and temporal sense" (Alison Rice, *Time Signatures: Contextualizing Contemporary Francophone Autobiographical Writing from the Maghreb* (Landham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 2.) In her subsequent monograph, *Polygraphies*, Rice expands FrancoPHONY in Francophone texts to an idea that includes a blurring between fact and fiction where the text is transformed into a "space where multiple truths lie, where subtle, complicated truths prove to be all the more convincing precisely because of this paradoxical structure" (Alison Rice, *Polygraphies: Francophone Women Writing Algeria* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 6.).

and global consumer culture. The polyphonic *banlieue* novel is thus an updated method of textual resistance against a hegemonic discourse that continues to try to unify the disparate voices that make up the experience of the (post)colonial subject. If the result of North African Francophone writers' texts was the creation of a new nation<sup>73</sup>, however, the polyphonic *banlieue* novel instead engages with debates in France about integration.

### **Differentiating the polyphonic *banlieue* novel and the *beur* novel**

Although both polyphonic *banlieue* novels and *beur* novel have been written by French persons with North African roots<sup>74</sup>, the polyphonic *banlieue* novel marks a shift from the *beur* novels<sup>75</sup> that preceded it because it is not focused on the specificity of the experience of a single ethnic group but rather on the connections between multiple ethnic communities produced by their shared experience of poverty, as well as the protagonists' connections to an international community that extends far beyond France. The

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<sup>73</sup> A great deal of the Francophone literature emerging out of Algeria in the 1950s and 1960s during and following the Algerian War, for instance, was linked to the creation of a new nation. See, among others, Réda Bensmaïa, *Experimental Nations: Or, the Invention of the Maghreb* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), especially page 8: "My nations are experimental in that they are above all nations that writers have had to imagine or explore as if they were territories to rediscover and stake out, step by step, countries to invent and to draw while creating one's language." This phenomenon is particularly evident in work such as Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma*, where Nedjma is often interpreted as a symbol of the Algerian nation. For more on Nedjma-as-nation, see, among others, Patrick Crowley, "The Etat Civil: Post/colonial Identities and Genre," *French Forum* 29, no. 3 (2004): 85.

<sup>74</sup> Here I am deliberately avoiding using the term *beur* to label these persons. The term is used to designate first-generation, French-born children to parents from North African nationalities. The term is a form of *verlan*, a kind of French slang, that is derived from the word *arabe*, which is then reversed to make *beur*. As the term gained more mainstream popularity, however, many first, second, and third generation North Africans began to reject the term to describe themselves. Some adopted the term *rebeu* (a *verlan* form of *beur*) while others rejected any association with the term whatsoever, especially because it carries such strong identifications with the *banlieue*, which is not applicable for many middle and upper-class persons of Arab origin in France. For a more historical context of the term, see Alec Hargreaves, *Voices from the North African Community in France: Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1997), esp. pp. 29-30.

<sup>75</sup> For a full discussion of the stylistics and context of the *beur* novel, see Hargreaves, *Voices from the North African Immigrant Community*.

characters in the polyphonic *banlieue* novel are speaking about a different historical period since their parents tended to immigrate later than those of the first generation of *beur* writers and the novels are not only set in the *banlieue* but make the setting of the *banlieue* a major part of their work. Most crucially, poverty, more so than “foreignness” is the driving factor that defines and marks these characters.<sup>76</sup> If the authors of *beur* novels express a schizophrenic pull between two poles of identity (their Maghrebi roots and their Frenchness) the authors of the polyphonic *banlieue* novel do not even entertain the idea that they are anything other than French.<sup>77</sup> Identity in the polyphonic *banlieue* novel is more akin to the diasporic identity theorized by Stuart Hall, one “which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*.”<sup>78</sup> In the polyphonic *banlieue* novel, writers craft a space where all of these different aspects of identity can coexist and blend harmoniously together, as opposed to clashing and causing more doubts about identity.

Although the examples I provide in this chapter are all texts written by authors of Maghrebi origin, persons of various races and religions have written polyphonic *banlieue* novels. Indeed, in contrast to the *beur* novel, the hybridity envisioned in the polyphonic *banlieue* novel is not simply one that brings together two cultures, as is often seen in *beur*

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<sup>76</sup> Rebecca E. Léal, in “Française de deuxième génération: Constructions of Girlhood in *Banlieue* Literature” likewise argues that “*Kiffe kiffe demain* represents a clear break from the Maghrebi-French literary tradition of the *Beur* novel that preceded it” for many of the same reasons outlined above: the difference in the period of the parents’ immigration, Doria’s age, Doria’s poverty, and Doria’s self-effacing qualities” (*FLS* 15 (2015): 142-144).

<sup>77</sup> For more on identity in the *beur* novel see Hargreaves, *Voices from the North African Immigrant Community*, 20.

<sup>78</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural identity and diaspora,” in *Identity: community, culture, difference*, Jonathan Rutherford, ed. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 235.

novels that unite North African and French culture. Because the polyphonic *banlieue* novel is not primarily preoccupied with race or religion as defining markers of their identity, authors of the polyphonic *banlieue* novel also resist the role of what Gayatri Spivak calls the “native informant”<sup>79</sup> or what Mireille Rosello, applying Spivak to the *beur* author’s experience, has described as the “reluctant witness.” In Rosello’s formulation, the author is expected to provide information about their North African community and immigrant culture for their audience and, in the process, grudgingly “participates in reinforcing the stereotypes of the North African community in France.”<sup>80</sup> While the authors of the polyphonic *banlieue* novel are often asked to be “native informants” about the *banlieue*, this still marks an evolution from the *beur* novelists, who were expected to speak more about the North African experience than for the *banlieue* as a whole.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, as Katheryn Kleppinger has shown in *Branding the Beur Author*, the authors who are asked to do so, such as Guène and Djaïdani, actively resist, because they do not see themselves as anything other than French, and therefore do not see how they can possibly represent the views of outsiders in France.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, *Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 42.

<sup>80</sup> Mireille Rosello, *Declining the Stereotype: Ethnicity and Representation in French Cultures* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998), 4.

<sup>81</sup> As the authors of the collective *Qui Fait La France* have shown this is also a position that *banlieue* writers resist, as they are constantly trying to get their work to be seen as more than just representative of the *banlieue*. See Collectif *Qui Fait La France?*, *Chroniques d’une société annoncée* (Paris: Stock, 2007).

<sup>82</sup> Kleppinger, *Branding the ‘Beur’ Author*, 28.

## BOOMKOEUR

Language, and the manipulation thereof, is the cornerstone of polyphony in the *banlieue* novel. As Roland Barthes has said, the subversive and non-conformist use of language is one of the hallmarks of French literature:

Il ne reste, si je puis dire qu'à tricher avec la langue, qu'à tricher la langue. Cette tricherie salutaire, cette esquive, ce leurre magnifique, qui permet d'entendre la langue hors -pouvoirs, dans la splendeur d'une révolution permanente du langage, je l'appelle pour ma part, littérature.<sup>83</sup>

Indeed, the polyphonic literature of the *banlieue* entails significant wordplay, and, particularly, a manipulation of different languages and linguistic registers that coexist within the text. This can be seen through a reading of the polyphony of language in Rachid Djaïdani's 1999 novel *Boumkoeur*, a best-seller that catapulted Djaïdani into the national spotlight, earning him appearances on shows like Bernard Pivot's "Bouillon de culture." The novel is primarily narrated by Yaz, a twenty-one-year-old unemployed man living in the *banlieue*. Yaz decides to write about his life and that of those who live with him in the *banlieue*.<sup>84</sup> On his search for source material, he meets Grézi, a thug who promises to tell him his stories in exchange for shelter in a bunker. Instead, Grézi traps Yaz in the bunker and holds him hostage with the intention of asking for ransom money from Yaz's family. While they are both trapped in this bunker, time becomes less linear,

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<sup>83</sup> Roland Barthes, *Leçon* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), 16.

<sup>84</sup> Although Djaïdani rejects this characterization of his work, many critics have described *Boumkoeur* as autobiographical. See Leonor Merino Garcia, "Blacks, Blancs, Beurs: Une herbe folle, créatrice, langagière, rebelle à toute autorité dans Boumkoeur," in *Cross-cultural relations and exile*, Salvatore Bancheri and Daniele Yssa Sayegh, eds. (Ottawa: Legas Publishing, 2005), 80. Also Sylvie Durmelat, "On Natives and Narratives from the *Banlieues*," in *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France*, Susan Ireland and Patrice Proulx, eds. (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2001), 120.

and Yaz and Grézi go through a process of self-discovery as they relive and share key moments in their lives.<sup>85</sup> Eventually, Grézi is arrested and sent to prison, leaving Yaz is free to tell his story. Language and the implications of its use, register, and manipulation are at the heart of *Boumkoeur*.

Since Yaz is repeating stories told to him by people in the *banlieue*, a multiplicity of voices narrate the story. Yaz's "Daron" (father) recounts his boxing career and subsequent move to France in an interlude in the middle of the novel. The novel is bookended by two narratorial shifts. The beginning of the novel is introduced with an endorsement of authenticity by the rap group Suprême NTM affirming that the novel is an accurate, true-to-life portrayal of existence in the *banlieue*. Towards the end of the novel, Grézi takes over the story through a letter to Yaz that he dictates to a literate friend in prison. Yaz includes the entire letter in his story (the shift in narration is accompanied by a change in font). These multiple narrators act as a kind of *téléphone arabe*—the gossip chain through which information spreads in the *banlieue*—within the novel itself. Stories are presented by unreliable narrators, and the reader is left to determine the reliability of these narratorial voices. Furthermore, this plurality of voices speaks to the impossibility of a single narrative voice to accurately represent the thoughts, wishes, desires, and motivations of an entire population. Instead, the abundance of cultures and

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<sup>85</sup> Laura Reeck provides a Lacanian analysis of *Boumkoeur* with particular attention to the mirror stage, and how writing becomes a form of discovery for both Yaz and Grézi. See Laura Reeck, "Unauthoring the Text," in *Literature and the Writer*, Michael Meyer, ed. (Amsterdam: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004): 43-58.

perspectives within the *banlieue* is reflected through this variety of narrators in the polyphonic *banlieue* novel.<sup>86</sup>

This profusion of narrators is, unsurprisingly, accompanied by an abundance of languages, among them, French, English, and Arabic. By including numerous other languages in the novel, and still having the novel be perfectly comprehensible to the average French speaker, Djaïdani is showing that the coexistence of these languages within a single space does not *have* to lead to problems of incomprehensibility, even if his narrator, Yaz, claims that he cannot understand these languages. For instance, Yaz does not speak his parents' native tongue, Arabic, and thus is limited in his ability to communicate with them. When Yaz's father speaks to him, Yaz claims "il a dit des mots dans sa langue que je ne comprends pas...Faudrait que j'apprenne à parler le dialecte de mes ancêtres pour pouvoir lui répliquer."<sup>87</sup> Even within this claim, however, the use of the article "des" already introduces doubts about the real incomprehensibility of what the Daron is saying. It is not that all of the words the Daron says are inaccessible to Yaz, but rather some of them. This is shown all the more clearly by the fact that Yaz and his father clearly are able to communicate, since his father tells him the story of the glory days of his own boxing career. Even more crucially, in this sentence, Yaz notes that, in order to fully understand, he has an obligation to learn some of his father's culture if he wants to fully bridge the gap between them. In this way, he is modeling the kind of cultural

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<sup>86</sup> This can also be seen in Benmiloud's *Allah Superstar* and Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain*; in *Allah Superstar*, the narrator's voice is, at times, replaced by newspaper articles and a very long index at the end, while in *Kiffe kiffe demain*, Doria's own story is punctuated with vignettes about her other neighbors and friends in the *banlieue*.

<sup>87</sup> Rachid Djaïdani, *Boumkoeur* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), 122.

exchange, and give and take, that ought to take place between two persons who are trying to understand one another. This is further modeled through Yaz's own translation of *banlieue* language and culture to the reader. Through his presentation of both registers, Yaz demonstrates his mastery of both *verlan* and the French language and forms a bridge between those very same incomprehensible *banlieue* youths and the French language as it is conventionally understood.

The variety of languages in the novel is not limited to national languages. There is also a great deal of physical language, such as the language of the cat<sup>88</sup>, a physical language that Yaz's brother uses to communicate with his mother and siblings without raising the ire of his father. Bodily language in the form of athletic ability is a defining feature of several characters in the novel from Yaz's former girlfriend who left the *banlieue* due to her abilities in sports, to Yaz's father, whose boxing career brought him to France and led him to settle there permanently. The onomatopoeia in the novel adds another layer of physicality to the novel as the reader hears the physical sounds of the characters and objects as they move around. The door goes "clic clac", a head hitting the floor goes "bim bam" and Yaz's manuscript goes up in smoke with a "paf."<sup>89</sup> By far the most omnipresent sound is the "ron-piche ron-piche" of the "refrain du dodo," which Yaz repeats throughout the novel, turning it into a kind of chorus akin to that of the rap songs

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<sup>88</sup> Cats are omnipresent in the novel from the very first pages, where Yaz says "Y a pas un chat à cette heure matinale" (10). Given Yaz's own remarkable survival through various events, drawing parallels between Yaz's survival and cats' supposed nine lives could be a fruitful line of future scholarly inquiry.

<sup>89</sup> Djaïdani, *Boumkoeur*, 104, 153, 115, 159.



from which Djaïdani doubtless drew inspiration.<sup>90</sup> Actually hearing, and not just imagining, the sounds of Yaz's world draws attention to the multiple valences of various registers of sound and noise, all of which are used to communicate thoughts and ideas. This focus on sound and linguistic registers lends a musical, poetic quality to the work that reads like a polyphonic hybrid of a novel, diary, and song.

Bakhtin notes that the presence of multiple languages within a single text can illuminate unique features of each individual language, and that the novel is a form which is ideally suited to this type of exposition: "the novelistic hybrid is an artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another."<sup>91</sup> The presence of so many different languages brings the reader's focus to language, and thus, the polyphonic *banlieue* novel illustrates the stakes that are inherent in our choice of words and linguistic registers. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of different languages can result in a better understanding of both languages.

The wordplay in the novel continuously draws the reader's attention to the importance of knowing multiple linguistic registers. Yaz uses homophones with phrases such as "Maman a pleuré pour lui toutes les larmes d'une mer."<sup>92</sup> Here, he plays on the identical sounds of *mère* and *mer*, writing the word that is a homophone of the word that

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<sup>90</sup> In addition to the musical qualities of Djaïdani's prose, he also makes direct references to rappers and rap music. Furthermore, the novel begins with a preface by the rap group Suprême NTM, again encouraging a connection between Djaïdani's work and rap.

<sup>91</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, trans. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 361.

<sup>92</sup> Djaïdani, *Boumkoeur*, 34-35.

makes grammatical sense: oceans cannot, cry, whereas mothers can. He thus draws attention to the importance of orality in the text since it is only by hearing the sound “mer” in one’s head that the reader will supply the intended term, “mère.”<sup>93</sup> In a single sentence, the text draws attention to the particular differences between written language and spoken language. In spoken French, there would be no difference between “mère” and “mer,” and, had that sentence been read out loud, the listener would likely have assumed the word being referred to is “mère.” Written French, by contrast, makes it possible to specify the meaning of the sound. Full comprehension of this sentence, however, requires an understanding of both registers; without the written word, the wordplay is largely lost, whereas without knowledge of the sounds of the words, the sentence would be illogical.

Just as written and spoken French are two elements, or registers, of the French language that are used in different social situations, Bakhtin emphasizes how language is dialogic, which is to say, in dialogue with a variety of other sociocultural relationship and hierarchies. Language can act as a physical record of sociocultural relationships which might otherwise be difficult to identify.<sup>94</sup> The novelist is uniquely suited to portray, in these multiple languages, how each language is representative of “specific points of view on the world.”<sup>95</sup> The novel, in its committing of language to a written form, thus serves as a record of the fact that no language exists in a vacuum. Bourdieu also links language use

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<sup>93</sup> In inverting the expression “une mer des larmes,” this phrase also acts in the same way that the *verlan* that permeates the novel is formed, acting, perhaps, as a tool or guide to help the reader decode the expressions in the text.

<sup>94</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 291.

<sup>95</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 291.

to social standing, arguing that language is reflective of a variety of hierarchical structures that are implicit in any spoken exchange: “utterances are not only (save in exceptional circumstances) signs to be understood and deciphered; they are also *signs of wealth*, intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and *signs of authority*, intended to be believed and obeyed.”<sup>96</sup> Language, then, is about much more than simply using words to communicate an idea or accurately reflect a situation. Each word one chooses serves as a marker of social and economic positions: one’s education, one’s wealth, one’s power. When they are strung together into a phrase, these words communicate not only a basic idea, but also a wealth of information about the speaker’s socioeconomic position, as well as that of his interlocutor. In order to effectively communicate an idea and, furthermore, to be understood and taken seriously, a person must have a great degree of situational and cultural understanding of his interlocutor, and choose his words and linguistic register carefully. Otherwise, he risks being misunderstood, as the following episode between Yaz’s “Daron” and his boss, “Napoleon,” illustrates.

In an anecdote about his father speaking to a French man, Yaz demonstrates the colonial baggage that language use carries, and how French people, either consciously or unconsciously, can replicate the colonizer-colonized relationship through their use of language.<sup>97</sup> Yaz’s “Daron” uses the word “*maître*” when talking to his employer, a word

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<sup>96</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Ed. John B. Thompson, Trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (New York: Polity Press, 1991), 66.

<sup>97</sup> Extensive critical work has been done on the complicated relationship between the postcolonial Maghrebi writer and his/her relationship to the French language. See, among others, Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Le Roman maghrébin: essai* (Rabat: Société Marocaine des Editeurs Réunis, 1979). In more recent years, several critics, including Achille Mbembe, have argued that the banlieues represent a new kind of colony within the French metropole, a kind of “postcolony.” For the postcolony, see Achille Mbembe, *On the*

which already connotes the existence of a social hierarchy. Yaz's own nickname for his father's boss, "Napoléon" further solidifies the colonial context of this relationship, since Napoleon was the one who led France's first colonial forays into Egypt<sup>98</sup>, setting the precedent for the colonization of Algeria in the 1830s. Much like the language used to describe these two figures, one of which is steeped in Arabic and the other of which carries colonial baggage, Yaz laments that Napoléon's language recreates the colonial dynamic:

Face au Daron, Napoléon retrouve une émotion de colonisateur sortant des mots que même le dictionnaire a du mal à saisir. Le Daron l'écoute et acquiesce des oui de la tête. Il n'ose participer à la conversation qui le dépasse. Alors il reste en admiration devant son maître.<sup>99</sup>

This passage demonstrates how language usage reflects and shapes power dynamics, particularly as they relate to education.<sup>100</sup> In front of the uneducated "Daron," the Frenchman is only interested in showing off his own education, which is something that the "Daron" does not possess. Furthermore, he is using this language to emphasize his own authority and position of power. This enables the Frenchman to talk *at* the "Daron" without ever talking *to* him, as the "Daron" has neither the language nor the education to

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*Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). For an analysis of the French case specifically, see Achille Mbembe, "The Republic and its Beast: On the Riots in the French *Banlieues*," Trans. Jane Marie Todd, in *Frenchness and the African Diaspora*, Charles Tshimanga et. al, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

<sup>98</sup> For more about France's complicated relationship with the Arab world and North Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century, see Henry Laurens, *Les Origins intellectuelles de l'expédition d'Égypte. L'orientalisme islamisant en France (1698-1798)* (Istanbul: Isis, 1987); Ian Coller, *Arab France: Islam and the making of modern Europe, 1798-1831* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>99</sup> Djaïdani, *Boumkoeur*, 122.

<sup>100</sup> Pierre Bourdieu also links language, education, and one's relationship to power—see Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, especially his notes on the economy of linguistic exchange, pp. 38-61.

engage with him. Due to the other power dynamics at play (boss and employee, native and immigrant, educated and uneducated) the “Daron” is not in a position to engage with the Frenchman, or to say that he cannot understand something. Faced with this situation, the “Daron,” who is so vocal and aggressive at his home where his interlocutors can understand him, is reduced to silence. An opportunity for linguistic or cultural exchange that might further integration—in which both characters share their diverse life experiences with one another, or one in which the Frenchman is exposed to the French of someone for whom it is not their native language—is lost. Instead, both men, who might have much to learn from one another, reinforce their current socioeconomic positions through this linguistic exchange.

In addition to reflecting the socioeconomic positions of people in an exchange, the linguistic register that one chooses also affects the extent to which they are listened to and the extent to which these ideas are taken seriously. For instance, “Napoléon” above uses his embellished, literary, and educated French to reinforce his authority and gravitas. As Bourdieu suggests, communication is not simply about mastering the language and speaking it correctly, but also using the appropriate linguistic register for the situation:

The competence adequate to produce sentences that are likely to be understood may be quite inadequate to produce sentences that are likely to be *listened to*, likely to be recognized as *acceptable* in all the situations in which there is occasion to speak.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 55.

Ideas, then, have a different value based on the way in which they are expressed, in other words, the language and linguistic register in which they are shared. The same idea can have a great deal of value or minimal value depending on the language and register—or currency—in which it was uttered. Through its manipulation of language, polyphony in *banlieue* novels like *Boumkoeur* draws attention to this system, while also envisioning an alternate space counter to dominant discourses where all of these utterances are equally valued.

The varying social value of linguistic registers is best shown in *Boumkoeur* through its use of *verlan*. This linguistic register has historically been marginalized because it has been designed to confound interlocutors who are not familiar with it.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, *verlan* is, as Ruth Scales has observed, a language which “acts as a means for the displaced and marginalized youth population to unite themselves under a common identity.”<sup>103</sup> Likewise, Grant Farred posits the use of vernacular as a “form of singular intervention” in the existing power hierarchy as established by language use which remains “conscious of its difference and Otherness” and turns it into a source of empowerment.<sup>104</sup> The juxtaposition of *verlan* and more standardized French in the novel places the spotlight on these tensions inherent in choice of linguistic register.

*Boumkoeur* demonstrates the tensions inherent in one’s choice of language, and how this affects the possibility of integration. As Yaz explicitly states, using *verlan*

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<sup>102</sup> *Verlan* is a form of French backslang. For more analysis of *verlan* as it relates to *Boumkoeur*, see Durmelat, “On Natives and Narratives,” esp. 123.

<sup>103</sup> According to Ruth Scales, “Language acts as a means for the displaced and marginalized youth population to unite themselves under a common identity” (see Scales, “*Kiffe kiffe demain*,” 130).

<sup>104</sup> Farred, *What’s My Name?*, 15.

alienates those who speak it from the metropole: “Les jeunes à présent se sont ghettoïsés avec leur mixage oral qui laissent sur la touche de l’intégration.”<sup>105</sup> Here, Yaz shows the different valences that languages have in the French context, and argues that the use of *verlan*, the “mixage oral” ghettoizes the young people who speak it. Speaking *verlan* acts as a direct barrier to their integration in France because it is impossible for its speakers to communicate with anyone but each other. Yaz proves this by, three times in the novel, coupling a “phrase non-décodée” and “décodée.” One is written in *verlan*—“Grézi, Ouvre, c’est Yaz...Zi va, virrou la teport, c’est Yaz que j’té dis, fais pas le baltringue”—and the other, in grammatical, easily-comprehensible French—“Grézi ouvre, c’est moi Yaz, je suis de retour, fais pas l’imbécile, ouvre.”<sup>106</sup> By juxtaposing these two registers side by side, Yaz shows how knowledge of French does not necessarily help one to decipher *verlan*, and, likewise, how *verlan* is very different from the French on which it is based. Yaz goes so far as to suggest that *verlan* is so different it is barely French. When listing languages spoken in the *banlieue*, he clearly differentiates between French and *verlan*: “il y a du gitan, de l’arabe, du verlan et un peu de français.”<sup>107</sup> In Yaz’s view, *verlan* itself is a language distinct from French that contains so little French that even fluency in French will not help one to understand it.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, even those who are completely conversant in *verlan* sometimes have difficulty deciphering it; as Yaz says,

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<sup>105</sup> Djaïdani, *Boumkoeur*, 66.

<sup>106</sup> Djaïdani, *Boumkoeur*, 58.

<sup>107</sup> Djaïdani, *Boumkoeur*, 45.

<sup>108</sup> A similar sentiment is expressed in Kechiche’s *L’Esquive* (2004) where the *verlan* spoken by the children in the film—much of which was difficult to understand—was juxtaposed against the *langue de Marivaux* as these same children prepared to perform *Le jeu de l’amour et du hasard*.

*verlan* is “si complexe qu’il m’est pratiquement impossible de le comprendre.”<sup>109</sup> Even Yaz, the novel’s *verlan* expert, does not, at times, understand what is being said.

One of the main attractions of *verlan*, however, is precisely this: its incomprehensibility and inaccessibility to people outside of the *banlieue*. This language, according to Rania Adel Hassan Ahmed, is “un champ de négociation constant entre le français tel qu’il est enseigné et appris à l’école, et une multitude d’autres langues, plus ou moins proches du français, et bien souvent issues d’ex-colonies françaises.”<sup>110</sup> One’s choice of language in the *banlieue* is a constant negotiation of the various social, cultural, and economic associations that come with each register and using *verlan* is a form of resistance to dominant discourses. Bourdieu likewise notes that, when faced with the possibility of communicating in a number of different linguistic registers, there is an element of self-censorship as one adapts language for the appropriate audience, and market, as these both dictate “what it will be possible or not possible to say.”<sup>111</sup> Using *verlan*, particularly in circumstances where it is not “appropriate” is a way for speakers to resist dominant power hierarchies. As Yaz, who is himself conversant both in French and *verlan*, proves, those who speak *verlan* do so not because they are incapable of speaking French, but because they are making an active choice to manipulate the language and to turn it into a different code that becomes both a marker of their social position in the *banlieue* and a rejection of the French metropole.

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<sup>109</sup> Djaïdani, *Boumkoeur*, 45.

<sup>110</sup> Rania Adel Hassan Ahmed, *Le français des cités, d’après le roman “Boumkoeur” de Rachid Djaïdani*, (Dissertation: Université de Ain-Chams Egypte, 2005), 6.

<sup>111</sup> Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 77.



Language, however, has also been a crucial part of the formation of the French national identity. As Benedict Anderson has argued, language, and particularly, written language, forms the basis for national consciousness, especially in European countries, by unifying fields of exchange and communication. While the benefit of this imagined linguistic community is that there is a greater possibility for the exchange of ideas, one of the problems with it is that it also provides possibilities for exclusion, as the fixity of print language creates a hierarchy of language in which the most official language is the printed version.<sup>112</sup> This is particularly the case of the French language, in which one's linguistic competency in French is deeply intertwined with one's adherence and belonging to national identity. Drawing from Barthes, Joel Vessels argues that "the basis of the imagined community of the French nation-state, its 'fictive ethnicity,' is fixed from the center by way of an adherence to a 'linguistic community.'"<sup>113</sup> This linguistic community of French speakers is a fundamental key to French identity, so much so that "language competency, and, even more, literacy, allow access to the national cultural space" because it provides "a shared point of departure."<sup>114</sup> Other French thinkers have echoed this sentiment. Sociologist Dominique Schnapper has said that "one is French through the practice of language."<sup>115</sup> Likewise, Étienne Balibar has argued that language

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<sup>112</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983), 44-45.

<sup>113</sup> Joel Vessels, *Drawing France: French Comics and the Republic* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 18-19.

<sup>114</sup> Vessels, *Drawing France*, 18-19.

<sup>115</sup> Schnapper quoted in Cristina Johnston, *French Minority Cinema* (Paris: Editions Rodopi, 2010), (11): "One is French through the practice of language, through the learning of a culture, through the wish to participate in an economic and political life."

is perceived to be a key component of French ethnicity, and that it is meant to be transferred to new arrivals to France through the school system so as to keep the imagined French community cohesive through their adherence to the same language.<sup>116</sup>

The linguistic polyphony in *Boumkoeur* participates in what Michel Laronde predicts will be the deterritorialization of language during the “post-*francophonie*” period in which “‘deterritorialization’ will denounce monolingualism as a myth *inside France as well*; it will deter the artificial language that has long been the support of and reference for conventional literature” (his emphasis).<sup>117</sup> The presence of multiple languages and linguistic registers in these French polyphonic *banlieue* novels destabilizes the notion that the monolingual Frenchness of the Académie Française is representative of French identity in contemporary France. In so doing, the power to define language is also shifting from the center to the periphery, as the periphery is creating and producing language which is then picked up and popularized by the center. Through his extensive creative wordplay and manipulation of language, Djaïdani elevates *verlan* to an art form that is worthy of inclusion in the French literary canon. By immortalizing *verlan* in a best-selling, critically-acclaimed novel, Djaïdani affirms that *verlan*, and, most crucially, the people who speak it, has a place in France.

The final major shift in valence of linguistic registers in *Boumkoeur* is produced through the use of English that gestures to a community outside of France and the

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<sup>116</sup> Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, nation, class: ambiguous identities*, Trans. Christ Turner (New York: Verso, 1991), 98.

<sup>117</sup> Michel Laronde, “Displaced discourses: Post(-)coloniality, Francophone Space(s), and the Literature(s) of Immigration in France,” in *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies*, ed. Anne Donadey and Adlai Murdoch (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 189.

Francophone world. While the *beur* novels that came before Djaïdani's primarily code-switched between Arabic and French, Djaïdani's novel primarily switches between English and French.<sup>118</sup> English words abound in the text: "mon brother", "ma sister", "cameraman", "le shake," to name a few. Ilaria Vitali, who has also noted this linguistic shift, suggests that *banlieue* youth at this time chose English because it is "la langue véhiculaire de la modernité et de la technologie."<sup>119</sup> Speaking English is a way of aligning oneself with a vision of progress and modernity. I would like to extend Vitali's argument further to suggest that Djaïdani's linguistic choices represents the beginning of a shift in audience from the French metropole to a global audience that extends far beyond France.<sup>120</sup> For Bakhtin, with modernity comes the death of the national language and the birth of "an actively polyglot world" in which "the period of national languages, coexisting but closed and deaf to each other, comes to an end."<sup>121</sup> Indeed, France at the turn of the twenty-first century was also in the process of becoming an increasingly

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<sup>118</sup> Ilaria Vitali compares *Boumkoeur* and Mehdi Charef's seminal *beur* novel, *Le thé au harem d'Archy Ahmed* (1983), arguing that there has been a shift from references that vacillate between French and Arabic (in Charef's work) to more globalized references in Djaïdani's work. See Ilaria Vitali, "De la littérature beure à la littérature urbaine: Le Regard des "Intrangers," *Nouvelles Études Francophones* 24, no. 1 (2009): 174.

<sup>119</sup> Ilaria Vitali, "De la littérature beure à la littérature urbaine: Le Regard des "Intrangers," *Nouvelles Études Francophones* 24.1 (2009), 172-183.

<sup>120</sup> Alec Hargreaves suggests that *beur* authors desire to be incorporated into the French literary canon (see Hargreaves, *Voices from the North African immigrant community*). Dominic Thomas makes a similar argument in "New Writing for New Times: Faïza Guène, banlieue writing and the post-Beur generation" *Expressions maghrébines* 7, no. 1 (2008): 33-51. Here, I am departing from both of their viewpoints by suggesting that *banlieue* writing is not just about becoming part of the French literary canon. Instead, this desire for recognition extends far outside of France in a recognition of France's shifting position in the world with the adoption of the Euro and the expansion of the European Union in general.

<sup>121</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 12.

global society, particularly with the nation's adoption of the Euro currency in 1999.<sup>122</sup> As the Eurozone continued to strengthen the connections between its member countries, languages inevitably collided more. Djaïdani's novel both acknowledges the increased language contact that is an inevitable aspect of membership in the Eurozone, while showing how these languages are not necessarily a threat, but rather can be productively combined to create new artistic and creative forms, such as the style of the polyphonic *banlieue* novel. These languages do not clash, but rather blend together in a polyphonic harmony. This connection to other cultures is not simply created through language. As my analysis of *Allah Superstar* will show, the multiplicity of linguistic registers is mirrored by a web of references that both includes France and extends far beyond its national borders.

### **ALLAH SUPERSTAR**

Polyphony is not simply the presence of multiple languages and linguistic registers in a text, it is also the plurality of references to all aspects of culture coexisting within a single text. If *Boumkoeur* put the spotlight on how language use is in dialogue with debates about integration in the *banlieue*, then *Allah Superstar*, published just a few years later in 2003, expands on the conversation by using polyphony to respond to concerns about the extent to which *banlieue* inhabitants are conversant in French culture. Benmiloud's novel *Allah Superstar* centers on Kamel Léon, a nineteen-year-old *beur*

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<sup>122</sup> The Euro was slowly phased into the French economy. In 1999, the euro was the official currency but only on paper; no bank notes were in circulation. On January 1, 2002, euro bank notes were introduced, and the French franc was completely phased out on February 17, 2002. For more, see [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/euro/countries/france\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/euro/countries/france_en.htm).

who aspires to stardom as a pathway out of the lower class. Unable to find a job beyond flipping hamburgers at *Quick* in spite of his education and skills, Kamel decides to capitalize on his Arab background, something with which he did not previously feel a strong attachment, and write a one-man sketch inspired by the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in order to gain fame and recognition. His strategy works and after a *fatwa* is issued against him, Kamel catapults to fame, selling out shows at the Olympia, the esteemed Parisian music hall that has hosted performers from Édith Piaf to Dalida to the Beatles. In a surprising twist at the end, Kamel becomes a suicide bomber and blows up the Olympia during his own packed comedy show there. The newspaper article at the end of the novel indicates that, ultimately, Kamel has achieved his goal of fame and recognition, albeit as a terrorist. Like *Boumkoeur*, Benmiloud's *Allah Superstar* was quite popular; Vinay Swamy describes it as taking "the 2003 French literary 'rentrée' by storm with its unabashed and clever use of this telereality-driven popular culture."<sup>123</sup>

Through a dizzying array of references to everything from the early popular reality show *Loft Story* to Albert Camus's classic *L'Étranger*, Kamel demonstrates a perfect mastery of all aspects of French culture. This cultural mastery, however, is not enough to socially integrate him into French society, and so he has also developed a web of references that extend far beyond French culture. These range from American consumer culture, such as Nike's "Just do it" slogan to Anglophone literary and filmic culture ranging from Shakespeare's *Othello* to *Pretty Women*. Kamel's references are a

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<sup>123</sup> Vinay Swamy, "The Telereal Republic: Nation, Narration, and Popular culture in Benmiloud's 'Allah superstar,'" *Yale French Studies* 114 (2008): 130-131.

response to and inevitable byproduct of globalization, which Stuart Hall sees as the next phase of colonialism, as both processes represent cultural exchange and appropriation.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, all of these references can be seen as belonging to what Jean Baudrillard describes as the “hypermarket of culture,” in which all aspects of culture—from literature and film to popular culture to television to brands and consumer goods—are commodities that can be purchased and exchanged. Baudrillard further sees participation in this hypermarket as a force which maintains its consumers “in a state of mass integration” through their conspicuous consumption of the cultural objects it makes available.<sup>125</sup> Participation in this hypermarket of culture is a way to showcase and maintain one’s integration into its culture.

Bourdieu argues that this exchange of cultural capital, much like one’s choice of linguistic register, can designate and influence one’s position in society. Bourdieu defines cultural capital as “a form of knowledge, an internalized code or cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artifacts.”<sup>126</sup> Like Baudrillard, Bourdieu links the consumption of culture to a form of knowledge about the culture that creates those objects. While some of this cultural capital is embodied (mannerisms and mechanisms of the body learned from one’s social group) many of them are also objectified, cultural

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<sup>124</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity,” in *Culture, Globalization, and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 19-20.

<sup>125</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres and simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 67.

<sup>126</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 7.

goods or objects, which can encompass all of Baudrillard's "hypermarket of culture." All are indicative of one's social class, or aspirations to a particular social milieu.<sup>127</sup> Much like with linguistic registers, Bourdieu believes that one's access to cultural capital affects one's ability to interact with the world, as well as how one are perceived, saying, "the position of a given agent in the social space can thus be defined by the position he occupies in the different fields [of capital], that is, in the distribution of the powers that are active in each of them."<sup>128</sup> Just as one speaks the language of the class or culture to which one aspires, one also reads the same books, watches the same television and films, and purchases the same things as those common in the culture to which one aspires. Furthermore, as Mike Featherstone argues, this practice is particularly common among people of lower social classes, as they are the ones who have the most to which to aspire, and are thus more likely to consume particular kinds of culture with the hopes that this will elevate their own position in society, making the conspicuous consumption of culture all the more relevant to discussions of poorer areas such as the French *banlieue*.<sup>129</sup>

Identity in *Allah Superstar* is created through exactly such conspicuous consumption and display of cultural objects, which Kamel exchanges for a degree of cultural recognition or prestige. This is precisely what Kamel does with his references to French culture. Kamel references everything from SOS Racisme's 1980s slogan, "touche

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<sup>127</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The forms of capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, J. Richardson, ed. (New York: Greenwood), 243.

<sup>128</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 230.

<sup>129</sup> This is, as Mike Featherstone describes, particularly the case for "those below, who watch the celebrity and elite consumption in the media," because when they consume culture, "their consumption is more the consumption of dreams." (Mike Featherstone, *Consumer culture and postmodernism* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2007), 20.)

pas à mon pote” to the 2001 soccer match between France and Algeria to French writers Michel Houellebecq and Céline to rappers from Dieudonné to Doc Gynéco to NTM.<sup>130</sup> All of these aspects of French culture are a way for Kamel to demonstrate his fluency, not just in the French language, but also in its history and culture. The individual references themselves are even more revelatory, though, as all of them are reflective of France’s long history of immigration. SOS Racisme was designed to help people experiencing racism. Soccer matches have long been a tool of integration, as was particularly notable when France won the 1998 world cup with its *black, blanc, beur* team that, for the moment it was victorious, was held up as a model of successful French integration. (Pride in the team deteriorated significantly when they stopped winning.)<sup>131</sup> Michel Houellebecq and Céline have both been outspoken in their fear of difference, Céline for his antisemitism and Houellebecq for his Islamophobia. Doc Gynéco, who is of Guadeloupian origin, and the rappers of NTM, who are of Martinican/Chinese and Portuguese/Breton ancestry are reflective of the multicultural nature of France. Furthermore, they represent people of non-French origin who have been successful enough to be claimed as French, which reflects Kamel’s own aspirations to Frenchness via fame. These few references, which are by no means all of the references to French culture in the novel, also demonstrate the multiple levels at which polyphonic cultural references can resonate. On the surface, these would seem to be references to aspects of

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<sup>130</sup> Benmiloud, Yasser. *Allah Superstar* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2003), 204, 190, 202, 208, 211.

<sup>131</sup> Alec G. Hargreaves, *Multi-ethnic France: immigration, politics, culture and society* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 163.



French culture that assert Kamel's own Frenchness, while on a deeper level, these references also reflect the multicultural status that has always been an important aspect of France.

Much like the people he references, Kamel sees himself both at the center and periphery of French culture. He describes himself as an "intranger," a play on Albert Camus's famed "Étranger," which he describes as the feeling that "tu es un étranger dans ton propre pays."<sup>132</sup> The juxtaposition of "étranger" with "ton propre pays" underscores the dual feelings of foreignness and belonging which are central to the experience of the "intranger." Kamel never doubts that he is French, it is his "propre pays," and yet he is still made to feel like a foreigner there. The reference to Camus adds another layer of depth to the concept of the "intranger" since Camus, who was raised in Algeria yet claimed as a French author and has been critiqued in Algeria for the lack of depth in his portrayals of Algerian characters, likewise exists on the border between two cultures.<sup>133</sup> Camus's experience, which makes him more of an "intranger" to his native Algeria than to France, is a foil of Kamel's experience. In spite of his enthusiastic participation in the hypermarket of French culture, which make him feel perfectly French, he is still aware that he will not be accepted as a full member of French society and will always remain an outsider.

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<sup>132</sup> Benmiloud, *Allah Superstar*, 237.

<sup>133</sup> See David Carroll, *Albert Camus the Algerian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 24; Abdelkader Aoudjit, *The Algerian Novel and Colonial Discourse: Witnessing to a Différend* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 70, 140.

Ultimately, Kamel's conspicuous consumption of French culture is not adequate for Kamel to gain any type of entry into mainstream French society. Paradoxically, it is only when Kamel capitalizes on his mastery of other cultural registers that he becomes recognized in France. Kamel's full name, Kamel Léon, is reflective of the fact that he is the son of an Algerian man and a French woman. His name is half Algerian (Kamel) and half French (Léon) and thus he can use either name to take advantage of the cultural capital that comes with either an Algerian or a French name. The names are at their most powerful, however, when they are combined. Taken together, the name "Kamel Léon" is a homonym for "caméléon," an animal which, by Kamel's own account, is one "qui prend la couleur de l'époque."<sup>134</sup> This is precisely what Kamel does when he realizes that his mastery of French cultural capital is not enough to integrate him because he will always be an "intranger": he takes on the "couleur" of his "époque" and capitalizes on Islamophobia in the post-9/11 age.

Kamel's sketch is reflective of the way in which he turns his "intranger" status into an asset. According to Kamel, "si tu es bronzé dans ce pays tu as que deux possibilités: soit tu fais peur soit tu fais rire. Dans le deuxième cas c'est mieux payé et moi j'ai fait mon choix."<sup>135</sup> His sketch to make the public laugh, which is about the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and radical Islam, is credible coming from him because he himself is a Muslim man. By Kamel's account, as a Muslim man and French citizen, he is a source of fear, because he is Muslim, but he is also amusing for his audience because he

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<sup>134</sup> Benmiloud, *Allah Superstar*, 178.

<sup>135</sup> Benmiloud, *Allah Superstar*, 52.

is connected to French culture and thus his jokes are still coming from a familiar place. This is particularly evident when Kamel's fame skyrockets following the issuance of a *fatwa* against him. The community is so prejudiced against Muslims and Islam that they only become interested in performers who are actively rejected by, or choose on their own to reject, the Muslim community. Here, Kamel is playing a role, capitalizing on a different form of cultural capital, his familial history, and using the connections and associations that produces in an attempt to gain fame that is much more successful than his conspicuous consumption of French culture. An example of this can be seen through Kamel's manipulation of his beard; while he himself doesn't have a beard, he adopts a fake one in order to play the stereotypical Arab terrorist, so that he visually adheres to what his audience would be expecting from an Arab comedian.<sup>136</sup>

Much like Yaz in *Boumkoeur*, Kamel in *Allah Superstar* also looks beyond the French metropole when creating his identity to a greater international community. Since metropolitan France will not legitimate him, Kamel looks past France to a globalized and globalizing community—the European Union and, of course, the increasingly dominating American global consumer culture—and seeks to gain legitimacy and recognition there instead. Gordon Matthews suggests that, in a globalizing world, the consumption of

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<sup>136</sup> Kamel's resourcefulness in this situation also connects him to a broader train of optimism in the face of adversity that is found in many polyphonic *banlieue* novels. While he acknowledges the difficulties that this situation presents for French Arabs, Kamel instead focuses his narrative on how he manipulates this identity for his own personal gains. Much like Yaz in *Boumkoeur*, Kamel does not wallow in self-pity at being misunderstood or coming from a disadvantaged neighborhood. Instead, he turns his situation into a lucrative opportunity in which he capitalizes off of the way that he is perceived by French society: he chooses to *faire rire son public*. If he is going to be reduced to his identity of a dangerous young Arab man from the *banlieue*, and he cannot shake this identity, then instead he will exploit it for every centime possible.

goods becomes a new touchstone for identity which is replacing ethnic or national identities as a primary mode through which individuals mark their affiliations with groups. Unlike ethnic or national identities, which are tied to a specific place, one's "market identity" is universal because it "is based on belonging to no particular place, but rather to the market in both its material and cultural forms—in market-based identity, one's home is all the world."<sup>137</sup> A market-based identity is not tied to any single international culture and thus present the types of opportunities for integration that would allow an "intranger" like Kamel to feel at home because it removes the question of countries altogether.

Indeed, Kamel rejects the concepts of roots entirely as a method of conceptualizing his identity, saying "moi ce qui m'intéresse c'est pas les racines c'est les branches...l'important c'est pas d'où tu viens mais où tu vas."<sup>138</sup> This presents a flexible way of conceiving selfhood which is not rooted in one's origins, but rather allows one to take control of one's identity through the branches that one creates outwards beyond a specific identity to create an identity beyond one's ethnic or religious origins. Kamel's polyphonic references to all aspects of French and international culture create branches that, like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic conception of identity, create a non-hierarchical version of self where all of the aspects of an individual's identity, from their ethnic origins to the country they call home to the culture they consume, are placed on

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<sup>137</sup> Gordon Matthews, *Global culture/individual identity: searching for home in the cultural supermarket* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 9.

<sup>138</sup> Benmiloud, *Allah Superstar*, 48.

equal footing. Kamel's concept of the self is not about being rooted in any single identity, but rather about having the freedom to extend his branches outwards to what he identifies with, regardless of whether it corresponds with or is connected to his ethnic origins. Indeed, Kamel's *branches* extend far beyond a binary of France/Algeria or the center/periphery of France, towards a desire for a global recognition of his identity.

Kamel connects his "branches" outside of France, and a key component of Kamel's creation of a more international identity is media and consumer culture references that acknowledge of the growing primacy of American culture. Kamel cites everything from American video games to Malcolm X to Woody Allen because "c'est encore la culture américaine qui domine."<sup>139</sup> Kamel's attraction to American popular culture is in line with what Sylvie Durmelat identifies as a larger trend in the French *banlieues* in which American popular culture acts as a unifying force. Within the multicultural space of the *banlieue*, the shared experience of "la culture populaire américaine et les expériences télévisuelles constituent un capital culturel que peuvent partager les Antillais, les habitants d'origine nord et ouest africaine, et les Franco-Français."<sup>140</sup> American popular culture, since it also comes from outside of France and is thus not laden with the same colonial baggage, is a neutral thing with which all of these communities can identify and around which they can build a shared sense of commonality. Kamel, however, does not leave American culture in a vacuum, preferring instead to build branches between his American cultural references to French or other

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<sup>139</sup> Benmiloud, *Allah Superstar*, 143.

<sup>140</sup> Sylvie Durmelat, *Fictions de l'intégration* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), 197.

cultures. In the process, he traces a path for France to bridge the gap between its national culture and the demands of a globalizing, Eurozone, Schengen Area France. Kamel accomplishes this by putting references derived from multiple cultures in close proximity, for instance, he mentions the American TV shows *Seinfeld* and *Friends* in the same sentence as the seventeenth-century French fabulist La Fontaine, or lists New York City alongside Paris and Algiers.<sup>141</sup> The goal in bringing these references together is not to emphasize separate cultures but rather to show how these different national cultures connect and find commonalities in an international context, which again emphasizes the non-hierarchical nature of Kamel's rhizomatic identity.

As this identity, which is built upon a combination of references to multiple cultures, suggests, Kamel's goal was never just to be recognized in France. As the title of the novel, *Allah Superstar*, indicates, Kamel's aspirations are to become not just a star in France, but a superstar who is known, discussed, and referenced around the world. Both words are notable for the fact that they are universal terms which cut across cultures—"Allah" as a word remains unchanged whether in Arabic, French, or English, as does "superstar." In coding itself within two such universal terms which remain unchanged regardless of language, the novel is speaking outwards to an audience beyond France. As the title indicates, Kamel's vision of fame is something global: he wants to be an international superstar. He wants a *fatwa* issued against him because it is the fastest way for him to gain international recognition:

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<sup>141</sup> Benmiloud, *Allah Superstar*, 58, 79.

une *fatwa*, voilà ce qu'il me faut pour devenir à la mode. C'est plus rapide que 'Star Academy', ça dure plus longtemps, tu voyages dans le monde entier, tu donnes des conférences, tu descends dans des palaces, tu montes sur scène avec U2, tu prends le thé avec le Pape, une bière ou deux voire trois avec Chirac, une vodka givrée avec Poutine, un cigare humide avec Clinton, une grosse ligne avec Bush Junior, un masque à gaz avec Saddam Hussein, à chaque fois que tu dis une connerie tout le monde entier il t'écoute.<sup>142</sup>

Kamel's willingness to acquire fame *à tout prix* is pushed to an extreme here: he will happily risk death threats in order to gain an audience. Furthermore, his language in this passage draws attention to the extent to which, due to the marginalization he has experienced his entire life, the thing he values more than anything is being heard. Fame would give him an audience with powerful leaders and figures around the world: the pope, then-president of France Jacques Chirac, Russian president Vladimir Putin, former American president Bill Clinton and then-president of the U.S. George Bush, and even Saddam Hussein. Not only would he be able to meet them, but Kamel envisions extended conversations that would take place over drinks (or drugs). He pictures a level of familiarity that suggests these types of interactions would not be isolated incidents; he would have the ear of any powerful figure he wanted. Most revealing, though is the last bit of Kamel's vision, where the entire world would listen to him any time he said anything, no matter how stupid. Kamel is hungry for attention, and all he really wants is to talk and be heard by the people around him.

Unpacking the polyphonic references in Kamel's imagined scenario are also crucial to understanding his vision of fame. On the surface, this imagined scenario

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<sup>142</sup> Benmiloud, *Allah Superstar*, 49.

closely parallels what actually happened to writer Salman Rushdie in the 1980s: his books flew off the shelves, and he even found himself on stage with U2, following the issuance of a *fatwa* against him by Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini. Kamel, however, is not satisfied with recognition within France; as we see in the above-quoted passage, his cultural references look outward, beyond France. Stardom for Kamel is not simply beers with Chirac—a metonym for recognition in France—but also acknowledgement by the Pope—a stand-in for the Christian community—Russian and American leaders, the Middle East, and internationally-renowned cultural phenomena like the rock band U2. Kamel’s gaze beyond France is indicative of a larger phenomenon in the polyphonic *banlieue* novel in which the conversation extends from the periphery beyond the French metropole. This stands in sharp contrast with the *beur* novels that preceded the *banlieue* novel which were typically concerned with characters’ relationships between Algeria and metropolitan France, or between the periphery of France—the *banlieue*—and its center—the metropole. With its mosaic cultural touchstones—be they linguistic registers, as is the case in *Boumkoeur*, or cultural, as is the case in *Allah Superstar*, the *banlieue* novel uses polyphony to reach out towards an international community where binary references and individual religious or racial identities were no longer relevant.

Kamel’s story, in which a young man who felt perfectly French makes himself more foreign in order to gain recognition, fame, and opportunities that he couldn’t simply by presenting himself as French, presents a cautionary tale of integration. As Kamel becomes more famous, he gets a bus advertisement where each side of the bus features of picture of Kamel, one without the beard, with the caption “cet homme est un terroriste”



and the other, which reads “ce terroriste est un homme.”<sup>143</sup> Much like the bus advertisement, the story of Kamel Léon forces the reader of *Allah Superstar* to sympathize and identify with a young man without knowing that he is going to become a terrorist. Kamel, who was always perfectly integrated into French culture, as his expert manipulation of French cultural capital indicates, became less integrated in French culture because this cultural capital is useless to him: it does not get him a better-paying job and it certainly doesn't get him the international fame to which he aspires. Even though Kamel is perfectly integrated, since French society does not recognize this because of their own personal prejudices, he has to find other avenues to achieve recognition.

*Allah Superstar*'s commentary on integration becomes chillingly prescient when considering the many homegrown terrorist attacks that took place in France in 2015 and 2016 such as the Charlie Hebdo attacks on January 7, 2015, the series of coordinated attacks on November 13, 2015, and the attacks in Nice on Bastille Day in 2016. As such, it predicts the very real dangers that making French citizens feel excluded from their own country can have, not just on the individual (Kamel slowly falls apart over the course of the book) but also on French society as a whole. As a text, *Allah Superstar* further shows how books can be used to predict certain moments in French society. This echoes what Richard Grusin has referred to as the premediation of certain moments in our post-9/11 era. In it, the media continually replays traumatic events, such as 9/11, a process which

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<sup>143</sup> Benmiloud, *Allah Superstar*, 186.

both cements the importance of such attacks, as it is impossible to forget them when they are constantly being revisited, and also predicts and prepares people for future attacks.<sup>144</sup>

This is particularly the case with art, as Joel Black argues is the case of film in his book

*The Reality Effect*:

In the age of ‘instant preplay’ it’s become common to see movies about sensational events (wars, storms, epidemics, assassinations) before they take place. There’s a fair chance that the next feature film you see may turn out to be a preview of an actual event—a newsreel of some real news story—that has yet to occur.<sup>145</sup>

Although Black is talking about the role of film in predicting these events, books such as *Allah Superstar* show that literature can also participate in this premediation of terrorist attacks. Indeed, *Allah Superstar* is one of a growing body of literature and film of homegrown terrorism which, well before the attacks that took place in 2015 and 2016, nonetheless depicted how French citizens who grew up in France could become terrorists, among them Sasha and François Vataux’s graphic novel *Salt Pit* (2008), Philippe Faucon’s film *Désintégration* (2011), and Julien Suaudeau’s novel *Le Français* (2015). All of these works make a point of showing both the mastery of cultural capital on the part of these characters while also showing how their lack of economic opportunity in spite of their possession of this capital drives them towards Islamic extremism. As such, they identify poverty as the root of the problem of integration while critiquing claims that lack of linguistic or cultural knowledge is the culprit. The dangers, difficulties, and

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<sup>144</sup> Richard Grusin, *Premeditation: affect and mediality after 9/11* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 8.

<sup>145</sup> Joel Black, *The Reality Effect* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 23.

alienating nature of this poverty are important elements of both *Boumkoeur* and *Allah Superstar*, but they are particularly apparent in Faïza Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain* (2004).

### **KIFFE KIFFE DEMAIN**

Given their mastery of cultural capital that is demonstrated through the use of both language and references to the hypermarket of culture, it is clear that both Yaz in *Boumkoeur* and Kamel in *Allah Superstar* have every reason to feel as French as they do. Their immense cultural capital ought to translate to ownership of a national, French, identity which, according to Trica Danielle Keaton, gives its holders “the authority to *name* or *constitute* who is French” a title which is “a highly coveted form of symbolic capital having the quality of nobility” in that it differentiates the people who possess this title from those who do not.<sup>146</sup> One of the main ways in which this cultural capital ought to translate is “rights and economic opportunities” which open the doors to additional privileges and possibilities for mobility.<sup>147</sup> Having the cultural and linguistic capital that Yaz and Kamel demonstrate ought to be sufficient to capitalize on these rights and economic opportunities. This is, after all, what Balibar identifies as one of the foundational ideals of the French school system: through their participation in the French school system, newcomers become integrated into French society, and can enjoy the privileges that come with that integration.<sup>148</sup> The problem for Yaz and Kamel, though, is that in spite of their mastery of this capital, and their participation in the French school

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<sup>146</sup> Trica Danielle Keaton, *Muslim girls and the other France: race, identity politics, and social exclusion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>147</sup> Keaton, *Muslim girls*, 15.

<sup>148</sup> Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, nation, class*, 98.

system since birth, they have not had access to the economic opportunities available to those who did not grow up in the *banlieue*.

An emphasis on the inability of characters to translate their immense cultural and linguistic capital into economic opportunities is the last defining feature of these polyphonic *banlieue* novels. All of these novels contrast their characters' mastery of the country's capital, from language to cultural references, with their poverty. Taking Faïza Guène's 2004 novel *Kiffe kiffe demain* as an example of this dimension, which is present in all three novels, I will show how these novels indicate that the issue that is really at the core of the problem in these integration debates is not the mastery of French culture or language, but rather the lack of access to economic opportunities for *banlieue* inhabitants.

*Kiffe kiffe demain* tells the story of Doria, a young 15-year old Moroccan girl growing up in the *banlieue*, who is coming to terms with her identity after her father abandons her and her mother to marry a woman who will bear him a son in Morocco. Unlike Yaz and Kamel, Doria is fairly unremarkable; she has no exceptional scholastic talent and no hidden comedic genius. School is not particularly interesting for her and, unlike Kamel, Doria has no desire to leave the *banlieue*. The novel focuses on Doria's transformation and personal growth as she comes to terms with her father's departure both with the help of her friends and the many social workers and services that intervene to help her. Even more so than *Boumkoeur* or *Allah Superstar*, whose recognition was limited to France since neither have been translated, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, was an international best-seller. After the novel's publication in August 2004, *Kiffe kiffe demain* became an instant success, not just in France or in the Francophone community, but

internationally—it sold over 400,000 copies in France, and has been translated into over 25 different languages.<sup>149</sup> Its polyphonic writing style rapidly became synonymous with the *banlieue* both in France and internationally.

Like Djaïdani and Benmiloud, Guène plays with linguistic registers and makes references to various forms of cultural capital, showing the extent to which Doria is integrated both into the French community and a broader, international milieu.<sup>150</sup> However, Guène also does not shy away from presenting the social and economic setbacks and disadvantages Doria and her neighbors, friends, and family face on a regular basis simply. Guène systematically presents the markers of socioeconomic exclusion that serve to ghettoize and marginalize *banlieue* residents from *every* race and religion. Even if Doria does not pity herself for her poverty, the novel makes it very plain just how poor Doria is. She frequently comments on her lack of clothing, lamenting when a bird poops on the only jacket she has, or feeling shame that her mother has purchased her a pajama top instead of a sweater because it was cheaper.<sup>151</sup> In spite of the prevalence of this

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<sup>149</sup> While there is no denying the success of the novel—it sold over 400,000 copies and has been translated into over 25 different languages (Nadir Dendoune, “Faïza Guène, écrivain à part et entière,” *Jeune Afrique*, 16 April 2014)—this is not to suggest that the novel has been read, recognized, or accepted for the work of *literature* that it is, at its core. Indeed, this refusal to see the novel as anything other than a popular phenomenon is solidified by the refusal of the French literary establishment to recognize her with any formal, major literary prizes (“Guardian Weekly: Weekly review: High riser: Faiza Guene's first novel was a sensation, but she remains an outsider.” *Guardian Weekly*, June 27, 2008, LexisNexis Academic.).

<sup>150</sup> This has been the subject of significant scholarship. See, among others, Patricia Geesey, “Global Pop Culture in Faïza Guène’s *Kiffe kiffe demain*,” *Expressions maghrébines* 7, no. 1 (2008): 63. In the same article, Geesey also describes how Doria engages in what James Lull calls the ‘push and pull’ aspects of culture. For more on ‘push and pull’ cultures, see Lull, *Culture-on-demand*. See also Scales, “*Kiffe kiffe demain*.”

<sup>151</sup> Faïza Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain* (Paris: Hachette, 2004), 128, 74.

theme in the novel, however, critics, with the notable exception of Brinda Mehta, have largely ignored this integral part of Guène's novel.<sup>152</sup>

Guène employs many polyphonic references in order to highlight Doria's poverty. Through her extensive use of references to television and brands, Doria contrasts the popular associations with international brands with her own experiences which reinforce her feelings of poverty and social exclusion. Mehta characterizes Guène's use of popular culture, and, particularly television, as an act of "dissident creativity."<sup>153</sup> I would suggest that this "dissident creativity" highlights the way in which Doria's limited access to particular products made her feel like more of an outsider. For instance, limited funds always compel Doria to purchase off-brand products. As a child, she didn't play with Barbies, but rather with imitation Barbie dolls called Françoise, and now, as a teenager, she can still not afford to buy any of the mainstream brands of products because they are too expensive.<sup>154</sup> Doria's characterization of playing with Françoise dolls, instead of real Barbies, shows the ways in which these experiences have marked her:

Quand j'étais petite, je coupais les cheveux des Barbie parce qu'elles étaient blondes, et je leur coupais aussi les seins parce que j'en avais pas. En plus, c'étaient même pas de vraies Barbie. C'étaient des poupées de pauvres que ma mère m'achetait à Giga Store. Des poupées toutes nazes. Tu jouais avec deux jours, elles devenaient mutilées de guerre. Même leur prénom, c'était de la merde:

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<sup>152</sup> Brinda Mehta's is the only work I've found which makes socioeconomic critique the primary focus of her analysis of *Kiffe kiffe demain*; she describes Doria as a "cultural 'guerrilla'" whose voice underscores "the ways in which youth culture consists of a new global phenomenon, capable of a critique of both capitalist globalization and the separatist forms of nationalism and cultural identity" (Brinda Mehta, *Dissident Writings of Arab Women* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 186).

<sup>153</sup> Mehta, *Dissident Writings of Arab Women*, 184. See in particular her chapter "Writing from the banlieue: identity, contested citizenship and gender ideologies in Faïza Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain*."

<sup>154</sup> Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 41, 83.

Françoise. C'est pas un prénom pour faire rêver les petites filles, ça! Françoise, c'est la poupée des petites filles qui rêvent pas.<sup>155</sup>

Doria's decision to describe the dolls first as Barbies indicates both that she is aware of the brand name equivalent and that she aspires, at first, to pretend that she owned those instead of the knock-off equivalent. There is a prestige associated with Barbies, who are universal, even if Doria herself never had access because all her mother could afford was the "poupées de pauvres." Françoise is also a name that evokes the inherent Frenchness of this knock-off product, which is not nearly as desirable as Barbie, its globalized, mainstream equivalent. Like Kamel and Yaz, both of whom align themselves with a globalizing culture through their references to Anglophone culture, Doria also wants to possess and consume this doll, which she views as superior to the French version. Unlike Barbie, who, is connected to a larger market and therefore symbolizes greater possibilities, Françoise is for little girls who do not dream, because their poverty cuts them off from a larger, global market and the associations that market provides.

Doria frequently compares her life to television shows, which she uses as a means of escape from her daily life but also as a way of connecting her experience to the outside world, creating a sense of solidarity. Doria watches TV shows like *Little House on the Prairie* with rapt attention, putting herself in the place of the characters because "j'aimerais trop être quelqu'un d'autre, ailleurs et peut-être même à une autre époque."<sup>156</sup> She frequently compares her life to television shows, which shows both an awareness of

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 73.

her position in the novel as a character and an inability to correctly judge the situation in which she finds herself, since she is in a novel and not a TV show. This reference to the Ingalls family, however, demonstrates just how far-removed the stories with which she identifies are from her own situation. Like the Barbies she never got to play with, Doria's life in the *banlieue* is miles and centuries away from the prairies of Minnesota, and yet these are still the closest examples she can find to her own situation.<sup>157</sup> Nevertheless, these references also lend a universal quality to the narrative: people from wildly different socioeconomic backgrounds can nonetheless watch the same television shows, and, indeed, many television shows cut across national boundaries and are watched and known by people around the world.

The polyphony in *Kiffe kiffe demain* also demonstrates Doria's social exclusion in the Cité du Paradis and how her position there separates her from the rest of society. She describes how the cité du Paradis, where she lives, is physically separated from the much more affluent zone pavillonnaire Rousseau, by “des grillages immenses qui sentent la rouille tellement ils sont vieux et un mur de pierre tout le long. Pire que la ligne Maginot ou le mur de Berlin.”<sup>158</sup> Here, these two social classes are separated from one another by a wall whose fortifications recall the Cold War and the barricades built between France and Germany to deter attacks, making the intermingling of the wealthy and poor classes seem like the brutal invasion of France by unwanted forces. Even though these two

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<sup>157</sup> Doria is not the only *banlieue* character to draw parallels between her situation and that of the Ingalls family on the television series *Little House on the Prairie*. Other *banlieue* novels where characters mention the show include Houda Rouane's *Pieds-blancs*, Rachid Santaki's *La Petite cité dans la prairie*, Dembo Goumane's *Dembo Story*, and Sylvie Ohayon's *Papa was not a Rolling Stone*.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 91.



neighborhoods are right next to one another, any type of exchange between them is not only discouraged, but practically impossible because of the giant barrier between them. This giant obstacle not only physically separates, but also extends psychologically to also keep the adult inhabitants of the housing estate far away from the upper echelons of society. For instance, even though Doria's mother has lived just a half hour from the Eiffel Tower for over 20 years, she does not see it in person until Doria takes her there.<sup>159</sup>

Just as she makes an attempt to connect with the outside world through television references, Doria also feels a deep connection to the other people she meets that are in her same, impoverished situation. Perhaps because this lower social class is so socially stratified from the others, Doria is highly aware that her economic plight is not unique. She repeatedly expresses solidarity with those from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds. Nevertheless, the ways in which she envisions helping these people serve to only further demonstrate her own poverty and the extent to which it limits her imagination of what a wealthy, or even comfortably middle class, life could look like. When she encounters a man playing the accordion on the metro for money, she feels shame that she has no money to offer him, and that instead she turns her head away and pretends not to see him when he walks by her to ask for money, even though she followed him from car to car to listen to his music. Doria is troubled by her own behavior, and she promises that, were she to win the lottery, “je lui offrirai une superbe caravane tout équipée.”<sup>160</sup> Even if she won the lottery and had all the money in the world

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 31.

to spend, the nicest accommodation she can imagine for this man is a camper trailer. Not only would this not be a permanent home for this man, he would also be perpetually dependent on others to assure his mobility, since the camper trailer does not have an independent motor. While this is, without a doubt, an upgrade from homelessness, it is still a far cry from the homes to which a middle or upper-class individual might aspire. Nevertheless, this episode does show that, while Doria is painfully aware of her own poverty she does not use this as an excuse to turn inwards. Instead she looks outwards, feeling solidarity with the other poor people she encounters, coupled with a desire to help them, as much as possible.

While there may be a desire and solidarity among the poor to help each other, one undeniable contention of the novel is that, for the most part, it is impossible to escape the *banlieue* without some sort of outside intervention from someone who is accepted as part of France, because it is through this connection, not the mastery of social or linguistic capital, that characters can concretely improve their situations. A character's linguistic or cultural capital is irrelevant unless they find someone who is considered part of the French system to advocate for their access to services and opportunities. Doria and her mother are the beneficiaries of a "défilé d'assistantes sociales," from a psychologist whom Doria sees at school to a woman who comes to their home regularly and helps Doria's mother to take classes to improve her French and find a better job. The Frenchness of both of these social assistants is stressed by Doria in numerous ways. Although Doria never gives the actual name of the social worker who visits her home, she calls her a number of nicknames, all of which begin with "du" (Dumachin, Dutruc,

Dubidule), all of which emphasize the woman's Frenchness by poking fun at the number of French names which do begin with "du." While, normally, these names indicate that the people are from places that are a bit more glamorous (Dubois, Dupont, Dumont, etc.) they nonetheless indicate the way in which French identity, from its surnames, is rooted in the place from which people come, while simultaneously showing how ridiculous these names would be if this same logic of basing names on origin were applied to persons living in the housing estates in the *banlieue*.

However much Doria mocks the social workers for their Frenchness, it is undeniable that this Frenchness is crucial to connecting Doria and her mother and the social services that allow them to improve their lives. Despite the cynicism with which Doria views these people, the social services they provide are integral to helping Doria and her mother find their economic footing following the departure of Doria's father, who was the family's only breadwinner. Doria even grows at the end of the novel to love "notre chère et adorée assistante sociale" when she finds out that she is sending them on a seaside vacation, something which she had never previously dreamed was possible.<sup>161</sup> Doria realizes that this woman wants to help her, even when her attempts at doing so are somewhat clumsy. Furthermore, Doria's mother, who is illiterate at the beginning of the novel, is completely transformed by the French classes in which the social worker enrolls her. By the end of the novel, Doria remarks "Je sais pas ce qu'ils lui ont fait à la formation mais elle est plus la même. Elle est plus heureuse, plus épanouie."<sup>162</sup> Doria's

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 144.

mother's mastery of the French language is presented as a tool that opens up a whole new part of the world to her. Enveloped in this narrative is a more pointed insistence on the need for more social programs to help those in the *banlieue*. The novel makes it clear that, without the help of these people, Doria's mother would still be a cleaning woman at the hotel and their little family would be struggling even more to make ends meet.

In spite of the optimism with which Doria portrays the opportunities provided by these social assistants, the novel also asserts that the only way in which people in the *banlieue* can gain access to them is if they can convince a French person to pity them enough to connect them to these services. Those who do not possess exceptional academic or athletic abilities, such as Doria and her mother, have no way of accessing opportunities on their own. Even though Doria is a French citizen who ought to have just as many opportunities for advancement and success as any other French citizen, she does not have the same opportunities as someone like her friend Nabil, who is more academically gifted than she is. Instead, Doria is stuck in a hairdressing track that does not particularly interest her and which does not set her up for a successful financial future. Likewise, Doria's former neighbor Hamoudi, who spent his youth and twenties engaged in drug dealing and petty criminality, cannot find a way out of this lifestyle until he falls in love with a French woman, Lila. As she reflects on Hamoudi's transformation, Doria says his story proves "qu'il n'y a pas que le rap et le foot. L'amour c'est aussi une façon de s'en sortir."<sup>163</sup> Doria's statement shows that the path for escaping the poverty of

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 157.

the *banlieue* is still very narrow. Without the outside intervention of social services, as happened for Doria's family, the randomness of falling in love, or the equally-rare prodigal talents in rap music, soccer, or school, there are very few ways to escape the more insidious aspects of a community marked by limited social mobility and poverty.

While she does not dwell on it, like Benmiloud does in *Allah Superstar*, Guène also shows what happens when people in the *banlieue* who need these social services do not receive them. She recounts the cautionary tale of her cousin, Youssef, who is accused by the police of being part of a drug smuggling and car-stealing ring. Despite the loving portrait Doria paints of him as a kind-hearted, well-intentioned boy who would never have done any of the things of which he is accused, Youssef is sentenced to a year in prison. While there, he rapidly adopts a radical interpretation of Islam, showing how easily even a good, kind-hearted boy can be manipulated in prison. Before going to prison, religion did not particularly interest Youssef, but “aujourd’hui, il parle de péchés graves, de punitions divines” even if before “il allait même s’acheter des chips au bacon en cachette.”<sup>164</sup> Much like Kamel in *Allah Superstar*, the story of Youssef shows how when people are not given economic opportunities, they find themselves in situations which make them easy targets for recruiters to brainwash them with ideas of radical Islam. Youssef is not the only example Doria provides; she likens his case to Hamoudi's noting that Hamoudi, who also spent time in prison, had tremendous trouble finding a non-criminal job following his release, and so was forced back into the same circle of

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 175-76.

theft and petty crime that landed him in prison in the first place.<sup>165</sup> Here, again, we see a demand that the proper social services are provided to these individuals so that they do not slip through the cracks of the system and fall into a life of petty crime, at best, and, at worst, into radical Islam.

Just a year after *Kiffe kiffe demain* was published, in 2005, riots broke out in the *banlieues* of Paris to protest the deaths of two young men, Zied Benna and Bouana Traoré, who were electrocuted while hiding from the police in an electricity substation. These protests quickly spread to the rest of the country, reaching almost 300 towns and cities total.<sup>166</sup> While riots are not a particularly uncommon phenomenon in France—people regularly take to the streets to protest<sup>167</sup>, urban rioting in the *banlieues* had been a regularly recurring phenomenon since the early 1980s<sup>168</sup>, and even car-burning is a relatively common form of protest<sup>169</sup>—these riots were unique because of the damage they caused to material goods, making them the most significant protest in France since

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>166</sup> For a more extensive and evocative description of the events that sparked the riots see, among others, Ferdinand Sutterlüty, “The hidden morale of the 2005 French and 2011 English riots,” *Thesis Eleven* 121, no. 1 (2014): 38-56.

<sup>167</sup> Within the same year as the riots, there were violent student strikes and massive transport strikes which were classified under the long-standing culture of protest in France (Harlan Koff and Dominique Duprez, “The 2005 Riots in France: The International Impact of Domestic Violence,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 5 (2009): 726).

<sup>168</sup> In the *banlieue* alone, there were riots in the Mignuettes neighborhood, a suburb of Lyon, in July 1981 (though they were not referred to as such), followed by more riots in Vaulx-en-Velin, another suburb of Lyon, and then in Mantes-la-Jolie, outside of Paris, in 1990. Since that time, urban riots have been occurring rather regularly, including in Nanterre in September 1995, in Toulouse in December 1998, in Grigny and Corbeil-Essonnes in 2000, in Yvelines in January 2002, in Strasbourg in October 2002, and in Avignon in December 2003. For a more comprehensive list and analysis of the events leading up to the 2005 riots, see Laurent Mucchielli, “Autumn 2005: A Review of the Most Important Riot in the History of French Contemporary Society,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 5 (2009): 731-51.

<sup>169</sup> In the first 7 months before the 2005 riots started, 22,000 vehicles were burned. See Matthew Campbell, “The fire next door,” *The Sunday Times*, November 13, 2005, 1.

those in May 1968.<sup>170</sup> While there was only one death and one injury as a direct result of the riots <sup>171</sup>, the rioters took a tremendous toll on material objects: 10,000 private vehicles were burned and 30,000 rubbish bins were destroyed, along with hundreds of public buildings, buses and post office vehicles. Overall, the total cost of the material damage over the course of those three weeks amounted to more than 200 million euros.<sup>172</sup>

The damage to material objects suggests that a main reason for the riots was a lack of access to capital and the social segregation that was produced as a result. Hugues Lagrange argues that the riot's unique character had to do, primarily, with the "incapacity of these youths to access social positions...combined with the new effects of ethnic segregation in poor neighborhoods in France."<sup>173</sup> Marwan Mohammed agrees that the riots occurred because they were "carried out by vulnerable people who lack political leverage and enjoy little access to national political structures."<sup>174</sup> In the *Zones Urbaines Sensibles* or deprived urban areas in which the bulk of the rioting occurred, the economic—and resulting social—inequality is palpable: one out of four workers are unemployed (twice the national ratio), more than one out of three adults lacks advanced education (versus one out of five nationally), and more than one out of every four

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<sup>170</sup> Koff and Duprez, "The 2005 Riots in France," 714.

<sup>171</sup> One man died in a fight, and another disabled woman was severely injured in a burning bus, but otherwise there were no civilian casualties. This stands in sharp contrast even to a riot which took place a few years earlier, in Villiers-le-Bel, where approximately 75 police officers were hit by ammunition. See Fabien Jobard, "Rioting as a Political Tool: the 2005 riots in France," *The Howard Journal* 48, no. 3 (2009), 235-36.

<sup>172</sup> Koff and Duprez, "The 2005 Riots in France," 714.

<sup>173</sup> Hugues Lagrange, "The French riots and urban segregation," in *Rioting in the UK and France*, David Waddington, Fabien Jobard, and Mike King eds., (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 121.

<sup>174</sup> Marwan Mohammed, "Youth gangs, riots, and the politicization process," in *Rioting in the UK and France*, 171.

families is a single parent family (again, twice the national average).<sup>175</sup> Despite linkages made between the riots and race, the rioters themselves never claimed to speak for any particular racial group, and the physical targets of the violence were not racial.<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, the majority of the rioters were born in France and, thus, French citizens; only 7% of those who were arrested over the course of the riots were born overseas.<sup>177</sup>

Looking back on these polyphonic novels in the wake of the 2005 riots, many of the same themes were present in the novels. The protagonists likewise were not as concerned with their racial or religious identities as they were with mastering French cultural capital and creating a shared identity based on their history in the *banlieue*. Racism continues to be operative in contemporary French society and impacts peoples' access to economic opportunities. Nevertheless, as these novels show, in order to combat racism effectively, it is essential to also acknowledge and address the very real economic inequalities that are only exacerbating these gaps and leaving openings for fundamentalists to take advantage of frustrated, vulnerable young persons in the *banlieue*.

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<sup>175</sup> Christine Fauvelle-Aymar, Abel François and Patricia Vornetti, "The 2007 presidential election and the 2005 urban violence in French 'deprived urban areas,'" in *Rioting in the UK and France*, 184. Campbell, "The fire next door" also notes unemployment for young people in France (24%) was at an all-time high for Europe in general, and that some estimated unemployment among minority youth to be as high as 40%.

<sup>176</sup> Jobard, "Rioting as a Political Tool," 237. It should further be noted that there is extensive disagreement about what exactly the riots represented. Achille Mbembe sees the riots—and the treatment of the *banlieue* in general—as an extension of the phenomena of colonial France (see Achille Mbembe, "The Republic and its Beast: On the Riots in the French *Banlieues*," Trans. Jane Marie Todd, in *Frenchness and the African Diaspora*, Charles Tshimanga et. al, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009). Slavoj Žižek, however, sees the riots as a *passage à l'acte* that was devoid of any larger meaning (see Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 69.

<sup>177</sup> Nabil Echchaibi, "Republican Betrayal: Beur FM and the Suburban Riots in France," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (2007): 302.



## CONCLUSION

While, as these novels demonstrate, this access to economic opportunity is at the heart of the problems of integration, these aspects have received little critical attention. I would suggest that this is because, as Guène, Benmiloud, and Djaidani are well aware, there is actually a tremendous amount of capital to be found in the *banlieue*, and, especially in a *banlieue* that is unified across racial and religious boundaries. By insisting on a narrative of race and religion and linguistic differences as the key factors creating tension in the *banlieue*—be it in analyses of the riots or in analyses of the texts with the *banlieue* as its setting—critics are obfuscating these systemic, underlying socioeconomic and class issues which are also much more difficult to resolve. The polyphonic *banlieue* novel acts as a counterweight against this narrative, as its authors refuse to make racial or religious difference the key factors in their novels. Long before the riots, which, in their attack of material objects—cars, post offices, garbage bins—drew attention to access to capital in the *banlieue*, Djaidani, Benmiloud, and Guène were making similar claims in their novels. Through their polyphonic *banlieue* novels which demonstrates their mastery of cultural capital through its manipulation, they demonstrate that access to capital in all its forms is the crux of the problem of *integration* in France.

These novels' engagement with debates about integration is all the more important because they were all quite popular. As Yaz so presciently states in the opening pages of *Boumkoeur*, “faut en profiter, en ce moment c'est à la mode, la banlieue,” and, indeed, writing about the *banlieue* was a way for these authors to receive both critical and

commercial attention.<sup>178</sup> Through the success of these three novels, coupled with the 2005 riots which renewed interest in debates about integration, the *banlieue* novel becomes, as Durmelat suggests, a new kind of discursive mode.<sup>179</sup> Because of the unprecedented sensation it produced, *Kiffe kiffe demain* in particular became the gold standard of polyphonic *banlieue* narratives, and Guène's writing style was imitated by numerous writers—*beur* and otherwise—in the years that followed.<sup>180</sup>

The influence of *Kiffe kiffe demain*, *Allah Superstar*, and *Boumkoeur* is apparent in the *banlieue* novels that emerged following the 2005 riots. Novels by both *beur* and non-*beur* writers, from Houda Rouane to Jean-Éric Boulou to Rachid Santaki, all imitate, to a greater or lesser extent, this polyphonic style of writing about experiences in the *banlieue*. These new novels, regardless of whether they placed the spotlight on violence, as in Razane's *Dit Violent*, or female identity, as in Rouane's *Pieds-blancs*, featured protagonists who imitated Doria, Kamel, and Yaz's disaffected narration styles, affinity for multiple languages, and proficiency in international popular culture. Thematically, these narratives all affirm an identity that is not based on racial or religious differences and use references which look past the French metropole to gesture towards a global audience creating an international space on the French periphery. In so doing, all of these

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<sup>178</sup> Djaïdani, *Boumkoeur*, 13.

<sup>179</sup> Sylvie Durmelat describes it as “a discursive mode...the concept of the *banlieue* thus signifies the way one relates to urban space, and it is constantly shaped and reshaped by ongoing negotiations and power relationships...these authors show us that an ‘authentic’ narrative on the *banlieue* does not exist in and of itself, but becomes authentic only as a result of the discordance and play of difference that takes place between and within their narratives, an discordance that is usually absent from television shows and news programs on the *banlieue*” see Durmelat, “On Natives and Narratives,” 120.

<sup>180</sup> See, among others, Houda Rouane's *Pieds-blancs* (2006), Rachid Santaki's *La petite cité dans la prairie* (2008), Farida Tahī's *Merde in France* (2011), Benjamin Rosenberg's *Francebitume* (2012).

*banlieue* novels update and respond to the standard *beur* caught-between-two-cultural-identities schizophrenic narrative that was the previous model for writing about identity in the *banlieue*.<sup>181</sup>

The success of the polyphonic *banlieue* novel, both commercially and critically, and, particularly, the international success of *Kiffe kiffe demain* coupled with the 2005 riots, created a renewed interest in the space of the *banlieue* that opened up a path for authors of other ethnicities and backgrounds to share their own stories in new media and forms beyond the polyphonic *banlieue* novel. While persons of Arab origins continued to create narratives about the *banlieue* in the years that follow, the polyphonic *banlieue* novel also opened up doors for narratives written by other persons from the *banlieue*, including those of Jewish, Italian, and African origin. These narratives would also take on new forms, including film and *bande dessinée*, to address other issues, such as social mobility and stereotyping, in the *banlieue*.

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<sup>181</sup> See Hargreaves, *Voices from the North African immigrant community*.

## Chapter Two: Cartographies of (Im)Mobility

“*Banlieue* films characteristically show characters walking through the streets as if to underscore the slowness and local nature of their movements...they repeatedly figure characters pushing mopeds or motorbikes as if to underscore their struggle to retain mobility in a world of flows.”

- Martin O’Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema* (173)

In *banlieue* films<sup>182</sup>, characters’ mobility on screen has often been a stand-in for their social mobility. As Martin O’Shaughnessy describes, more often than not, characters are immobile both on screen and in the narrative itself, rarely moving outside of the *banlieue* or advancing their socioeconomic position. In Mathieu Kassovitz’s *La Haine* (1995), for instance, the characters Vinz, Hubert and Saïd may be constantly in motion, but their trajectory forms a closed loop, from the *banlieue*, into Paris, and then back to the *banlieue*. As their experiences in Paris demonstrate, the likelihood that they will ever be able to enjoy the freedom to roam about Paris, much less live there one day, is out of the question: through a combination of their race and socioeconomic factors, they are stuck in the *banlieue*. This circular trajectory has, as Carrie Tarr notes in *Reframing Difference*, her seminal monograph on *banlieue* filmmaking, become a

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<sup>182</sup> *Banlieue* films have been the subject of a great deal of scholarship, an overview of which is beyond the scope of this chapter. For more, see, among others, Carrie Tarr, *Reframing difference: beur and banlieue filmmaking in France* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2005); Will Higbee, *Post-Beur cinema: North African émigré and Maghrebi-French filmmaking in France since 2000* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Sylvie Durmelat and Vinay Swamy, *Screening integration: recasting Maghrebi immigration in contemporary France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Cristina Johnston, *French Minority Cinema* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2010), David Alexandre Wagner, *De la banlieue stigmatisée à la cité démystifiée: La représentation de la banlieue des grands ensembles dans le cinéma français de 1981 à 2005* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011); Dayna Oscherwitz, *Past forward: French cinema and the post-colonial heritage* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010).

recurring trope of *banlieue* cinema.<sup>183</sup> Other films, such as the action thriller series *Banlieue 13*, do not even allow their characters the possibility of escape from the *banlieue*, as they are literally enclosed in the space by a towering, heavily-guarded wall. While some *banlieue* films, such as Zaïda Ghorab-Volta's *Jeunesse dorée* (2001), which shows two female *banlieue* characters who are able to move freely outside of the *banlieue*, defy the stereotype, stories like Ghorab-Volta's remain the exception.<sup>184</sup> Regardless of whether the characters are male or female, this lack of mobility simultaneously produces a dual feeling of being stuck in the *banlieue* while reinforcing feelings of non-belonging because the characters do not find any place where they feel like they have the opportunity for either literal mobility on screen or social mobility in their careers.<sup>185</sup>

Off screen, lack of social mobility is a major issue for the vast majority of *banlieue* residents. As Alec Hargreaves indicates, the targets of the riots themselves (material objects such as cars) were chosen because they were emblems of a social mobility that the rioters themselves lacked.<sup>186</sup> In Hargreaves's analysis, which is in line with the observations of the polyphonic *banlieue* novels in Chapter One, the

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<sup>183</sup> Tarr, *Reframing difference*, 120.

<sup>184</sup> Ghorab-Volta's story is all the more exceptional because it is a story of two teenage girls going on a road trip, and thus features two female characters with a great deal of freedom and mobility. This defies the recurring image of women in the *banlieue* whose mobility is limited by overbearing male authority figures, an image perpetuated by films such as *La Squale* and *Samia*. For more, see Tarr, *Reframing difference*, 112.

<sup>185</sup> As Tarr describes, "from *Le thé au harem* to *Wesh wesh*, it is also evident that their films have difficulty in finding a place for their *beur* (and other *banlieue*) protagonists to settle. Though there may be opportunities for 'poaching' activities in the interstices of regulated spaces, they have no space to call their own." (Tarr, *Reframing Difference*, 212)

<sup>186</sup> Alec Hargreaves, *Multi-ethnic France: immigration, politics, culture and society* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 135-136.

contemporary obstacles to integration in the *banlieue* are not ethnic differences, but rather the prejudices of dominant social groups which are keeping these lower classes stuck and immobile, both physically and economically, in the *banlieue*.<sup>187</sup> Hargreaves goes on to assert that, due to the chronic unemployment (up to 40% in the most disadvantaged *banlieues*) “a new generation of teenagers saw little, if any, reason to hope for any abatement in the chronic unemployment and discrimination which during the 1990s had become the norm in such areas.”<sup>188</sup> As Étienne Balibar has noted, the issues of social mobility are made all the more apparent to residents of *cités* and *grands-ensembles* by the contrast between the wealthy *banlieues* and the much-poorer parts of these same neighborhoods that are in close physical proximity but “separated by a social abyss and a permanent antagonism.”<sup>189</sup> Residents of the poorer *banlieues* are constantly haunted by the visual reminders of the social mobility which they themselves are unable to achieve. The 2005 riots have become emblematic of this issue, however, over a decade later, there has still been no substantial change to opportunities for social mobility for *banlieue* residents.<sup>190</sup>

As the ten-year anniversary of the riots approached, the 2012 presidential elections in France served as yet another reminder of the stagnancy of social mobility in

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<sup>187</sup> Hargreaves, *Multi-ethnic France*, 139.

<sup>188</sup> Hargreaves, *Multi-ethnic France*, 163.

<sup>189</sup> Étienne Balibar, “Uprisings in the Banlieue,” *Constellations* 14, no. 1 (2007): 48.

<sup>190</sup> See Rachid Santaki and Brahim Chiki, *La France de demain* (Paris: Wildproject Editions, 2015); Dider Fassin, *Enforcing order: an ethnography of urban policing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013); Azouz Begag, *Ethnicity & equality: France in the balance*, trans. Alec G. Hargreaves (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Dominic Thomas, “Introduction: Racial Advocacy in France,” *French Cultural Studies* 24, no. 2 (2013): 149-160; Alec Hargreaves, *Multi-ethnic France: immigration, politics, culture and society* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

the *banlieue*. Debates over immigration and integration, two issues associated with the *banlieue*, took center stage in the elections.<sup>191</sup> The rising popularity of the Front National, spurred by a combination of Marine Le Pen's takeover of her father's party and the previous president Nicholas Sarkozy's own conservative politics which had normalized some of the Front National's more extreme positions, indicated growing racism and fear of immigration in France.<sup>192</sup>

While Sarkozy represented limits on immigration and tougher requirements for nationalization, François Hollande, the first socialist president since François Mitterrand in 1981, positioned himself in opposition to Sarkozy's more conservative policies. Hollande won the election precisely because he was not Sarkozy, and because of the strong belief among the electorate that he would be able to reduce social inequalities. This hope, however, quickly turned to disillusionment and just a year and a half after he was elected a whopping 76% of the French people no longer had confidence in his governing abilities because of his failure to affect any meaningful change.<sup>193</sup> The disappointment over Hollande and his inability to effect any of the social change he had

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<sup>191</sup> Of particular import were concerns over the presence of Muslims in France, and the unexamined conviction among all of the political parties that multicultural diversity posed a threat to France and French identity, a conviction which was relayed by the media in their reporting of the elections. For more, see Ariane Chebel d'Appollonia, "Immigration and the 2012 Elections in France," in *France After 2012*, ed. Gabriel Goodliffe and Riccardo Brizzi (New York: Berghan Books, 2015), 181-183.

<sup>192</sup> Gabriel Goodliffe, "The Resurgence of the Front National," in *France After 2012*, ed. Gabriel Goodliffe and Riccardo Brizzi (New York: Berghan Books, 2015), 112-113.

<sup>193</sup> Mariette Sineau and Bruno Cautrès, "Expectations of the New President," in *The 2012 French Election: How the electorate decided*, ed. Pascal Perrineau (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 215-221. According to Sineau and Cautrès, the period between the first and second rounds of the election, according to polls, 71% of the French electorate believed Hollande would be able to reduce social inequalities and generally protect the French people from the effects of the economic crisis (215). By October 2017, according to polls, 76% of the French said they did not have confidence in Hollande, and 50% of those people said they had no confidence at all.

promised (with the exception of marriage equality), coupled with the undeniable rise of the far right with the Front National, which received 17.9% of the vote in the first round of the election, served as a further reminder of the stagnation of social mobility in many parts of France, including the *banlieue*.<sup>194</sup>

Although the *banlieue* film genre was most prevalent in the 1990s, in 2014, over 10 new *banlieue* films were released.<sup>195</sup> Filmmakers revisited the genre, which had been complicit both in producing, and in some cases, contesting, stereotypes about class and social mobility in the *banlieue* to address their disillusionment with the lack of change regarding issues of social mobility and representations of the *banlieue*.<sup>196</sup> Three of the films released during this period were *Papa was not a Rolling Stone* by advertising agent turned writer Sylvie Ohayon, *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* by rapper Abd Al Malik, and *Asphalte* by writer and filmmaker Samuel Benchetrit. These three films were all auto-adaptations of the writer/directors' own autobiographies—Al Malik's *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* (2004), Benchetrit's *Le Temps des tours* (2005), and Ohayon's *Papa was not a Rolling stone* (2011)—an unusual, though not unprecedented, move.<sup>197</sup> The films, which are set in La Courneuve, Neuhoof, and Champigny-sur-Marne, recount the

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<sup>194</sup> Gabriel Goodliffe, "The Resurgence of the Front National," *France After 2012*, ed. Gabriel Goodliffe and Riccardo Brizzi, 112.

<sup>195</sup> In addition to *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* and *Papa was not a Rolling Stone*, which will be analyzed in this chapter, see Marie-Castille Mention-Schaar's *Les Héritiers*, Céline Sciamma's *Bande de filles*, Hicham Ayouch's *Fièvres*, Marianne Tardieu's *Qui vive*, Barbara Pueyo's documentary *D'ailleurs mais ici*, Virgil Vernier's *Mercuriales*, Camille Delamarre's *Brick Mansions*, all of which were also released in 2014.

<sup>196</sup> See among others, Johnston, *French Minority Cinema*; Tarr, *Reframing difference*.

<sup>197</sup> While many *banlieue* films are adapted from books, with the exception of the aforementioned Charef, the majority of these were not auto-adapted by the writer. In the case of Begag's *Le gone du Chaâba* or Soraya Nini's *Ils disent que je suis une beurette*, the films were adapted to the big screen, but by different directors (Christophe Ruggia and Philippe Faucon respectively).



writer/directors' childhoods, and center on the artistic passions that inspired and enabled them to leave *banlieue*.

Although the autobiographies on which the films were based were successful—Ohayon won the “Prix de la Cloiserie des Lilas,” while Al Malik’s book, coupled with his highly successful album *Gibraltar* in 2006 turned him into a symbol of French integration—all three authors took the opportunity of retelling the story in film to add a different dimension that they could not present in the format of the novel. In this chapter, I argue that in translating their autobiographies to film, these directors used the medium to create cartographies of (im)mobility, which I define as filmic counter-maps that use color and sound to counter perceptions of the *banlieue* while drawing the viewers’ attention to questions of mobility. Drawing from a combination of geographical and filmmaking theory, I show how these three films can be read as a form of counter-mapping, or maps which resist dominant cartographical models, to highlight the equally-essential, human texture of space, from its color palette to its sounds to the mobility of persons within that space, all of which are elements not shown by traditional maps. As autobiographers, Ohayon, Al Malik, and Benchetrit have a contract with the viewers, a Lejeunian *pacte autobiographique*, to introduce them to their *banlieue* as they remembered it in the 1980s, filtered through the lens of their memories and experiences within that space. As filmmakers who set the people in this space in motion, these directors also engage with and complicate imagery of mobility, and particularly social mobility, in the *banlieue*.

I will begin this chapter by exploring the connections between films and maps before theorizing and illustrating how Ohayon, Al Malik, and Benchetrit's filmic autobiographies can be read as cartographies of (im)mobility of the *banlieue*. Paying attention to how mobility in the *banlieue* is portrayed in film is crucial because film, in particular, is uniquely suited to influence our notions and understanding of the *banlieue*. The potential impact of filmic impressions of the *banlieue* has already been recognized by scholars of *banlieue* film, including José Baldizzone, Alec Hargreaves, and David Alexandre Wagner.<sup>198</sup> Portrayals of the *banlieue* in cinema can be used to raise social awareness, however, foregrounding these economically-disadvantaged spaces and the tensions within them can also cement viewers' preexisting stereotypes about the *banlieue*. My goal is to highlight the ways in which portrayals of the *banlieue* and mobility within it shape these filmic impressions, bringing to light a new way of reading not just *Papa was not a Rolling Stone*, *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* and *Asphalte*, but *banlieue* films more generally.

## **READING FILMS AS MAPS**

Typically, representations of space and mobility within it have been the purview of geographers charged with creating maps; however, conventional cartographic processes encounter numerous limitations when depicting cities and their surrounding

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<sup>198</sup> See José Baldizzone, "Y a-t-il une vie au-delà du périphérique?" *Cahiers du cinéma* 59/60 (1994): 10; Alec G. Hargreaves, "No Escape ? From 'cinéma beur' to the 'cinéma de la banlieue'," in *Die Kinder Der Immigration - Les enfants de l'immigration*, Herausgegeben von Ernspteter Ruhe ed. (Würzburg : Königshausen & Neumann, 1999), 117; Thomas Guénolé, *Les jeunes de banlieue mangent-ils les enfants ?* (Paris : Éditions Le Bord de l'eau, 2015), 41.

areas.<sup>199</sup> Not only do conventional maps provide little-to-no insight into the specific topographies of individual city spaces, the static medium of the map also poses challenges when representing mobility. Cartographers have bemoaned the fact that a static map is a poor tool for showing mobility because it cannot move itself, and thus is already distanced from the act of movement. De Certeau critiques traditional maps of peoples' routes—which are typically lines on a topographical map—because these lines

only refer, like words, to the absence of what has passed by... The operation of walking, wandering, or 'window shopping,' that, the activity of passers-by, is transformed into options that draw a totalizing and reversible line on the map. They allow us to grasp only a relic.<sup>200</sup>

Conventional maps of movement are, by necessity, reductive, transforming the three-dimensional process of movement into a two-dimensional line on paper. These lines and charts bear little resemblance to the actual experience of movement.<sup>201</sup> Thus, a traditional map-making process for showing mobility is an act of representation and based in forgetting, since there is nothing in traditional cartography that can do anything other than gesture at the process of moving through a space in a way that obfuscates many of

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<sup>199</sup> Nancy Peluso, "Whose Woods Are These? Counter-Mapping Forest Territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia", in *The Map Reader: Theories of Mapping Practice and Cartographic Representation*, Martin Dodge, Rob Kitchen, and Chris Perkins, eds. (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 422-430.

<sup>200</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The practice of everyday life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 97.

<sup>201</sup> Philip E. Steinberg, "Sovereignty, Territory, and the Mapping of Mobility: A view from the Outside," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99, no. 3 (2009): 467-95; Robin James Smith and Kevin Hetherington, "Urban rhythms: mobilities, space and interaction in the contemporary city," *The Sociological Review* 61, no. 51 (2013): 4-16 ; Camille Schmoll and Giovanni Semi, "Shadow circuits: urban spaces and mobilities across the Mediterranean," *Identities* 20, no. 4: 337-92; Holly Willis, "Writing Images and the Cinematic Humanities," *Visible language* 49, no. 3: 78-99; Heather Zwicker, Kisha Supernant, and Erika Luckert, "Social Mobility: Charting the Economic Topography of Urban Space," *Television & New Media* 18, no. 4 (2017): 375-388.

the above-discussed dynamics.<sup>202</sup> Most urgently, as Burnett and Carter describe, traditional maps of movement obscure people who are not in the dominant power dynamics, making invisible the movement of these people who are already underrepresented and marginalized.<sup>203</sup>

Proposed solutions to the insufficiencies of traditional mapping processes have taken the form of critical cartography, a subset of geography started by John Brian Harley and Denis Cosgrove that recognizes the limitations of conventional maps and seeks to create alternatives that address these limitations. One part of critical cartography is counter-mapping, a concept created by Nancy Peluso in the 1990s to define maps which defy typical cartographic conventions, but nonetheless bring aspects of a space to the foreground which might otherwise be ignored by conventional methods of mapping. As Peluso describes, counter-maps

greatly increase the power of people living in a mapped area to control representations of themselves...counter-maps thus have the potential... for contesting the homogenization of space on political, zoning or property maps, for altering the categories of land and forest management, and for expressing social relationships in space rather than depicting abstract space itself.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> De Certeau is not the only one who is upset about this. Tim Cresswell in *On the move: mobility in the Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2006) describes how “mobility is absent the moment we reflect on it. It has passed us by” (57).

<sup>203</sup> D. Graham Burnett describes how, in the creation of a map of mobility, “instead of being an exploration—an active engagement with place—the passage becomes a fixed inscription...The dialogues of foot and ground, light and eye, breath and breeze all vanished, and with them the territorial claims of wanderers and nomads, whose relationship with place was rooted in participation (methexis), not representation (mimesis).” See D. Graham Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 171.

<sup>204</sup> Peluso, “Whose Woods Are These?”, 274.

Counter-maps are a way of providing critical information about a space which would not be found in a conventional map. In particular, a counter-map can provide insights into the relationship between a peripheral space like the *banlieue* and the movement and social dynamics between it and the city center, while also providing additional information about the color, texture, and sounds of that space. As Peluso describes, counter-maps are often created by the very people inhabiting the spaces that they are mapping, which lends a further personal touch and authenticity to the representations of the space which pull it out of the realm of abstraction and add a human element.

Cinema is derived from the Greek word “kinema” which means both motion and emotion, and, as these etymological roots suggest, film can serve as just such a counter-map that highlights the emotion and motion of a space. These filmic counter-maps, a form of alternative cartography, address the insufficiencies of traditional maps that highlight the overall layout of a space while obscuring other, equally critical insights into the emotional richness of the individuals who make up that space. Indeed, although the connection between films and mapmaking is a relatively new one, there is nevertheless a robust collection of scholarship on films and maps, films as maps, and maps in film.<sup>205</sup> In the French context in particular, the duality of meaning of *plan*—for both a map and a filmic shot—further invites this connection. Christian Metz spoke of the “mobile

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<sup>205</sup> See, among others, Tom Conley, *Cartographic Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Sebastian Caquard and D.R. Fraser Taylor, eds., *The Cartographic Journal Cinematic Cartography Special Issue* 46.1 (Feb. 2009); Les Roberts, *Mapping Cultures: Place, Practice, Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2012); Guiliana Bruno, *Atlas of emotion: journeys in art, architecture, and film* (New York: Verso, 2002).

topography” in film, highlighting the importance of geographic space<sup>206</sup> in film.<sup>207</sup> Tom Conley built on Metz’s characterizations in his 2006 monograph, *Cartographic Cinematography*, in which he argues that

films *are* maps ... As the person who gazes upon a map works through a welter of impressions about the geographical information it puts forward—along with his or her own fantasies and pieces of past or anticipated memory in dialogue with the names, places, and forms on the map—so also do spectators of a film who see moving pictures on a screen mix and sift through souvenirs and images of other films and personal memories.<sup>208</sup>

Like Peluso’s counter-maps, the map-like qualities of film that Conley identifies add a personal dimension to a place and are a way of shaping, and perhaps even challenging, a viewer’s associations with that place. Films set up a dialogic relationship between the viewer and the director, who uses a combination of images, sounds, and colors to bring a place to life and to translate his or her particular impressions of this place to the viewer. Despite the provocative ideas he presents in his introduction, the majority of the analysis he presents in the remainder of the text stops short of the provocative possibility that films, themselves, could be counter-maps. Conley generally focuses his analysis in the monograph more on the presence of actual maps in films, or on applying cartographic or spatial analytical tools to films, rather than seeing the two as fully combined.

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<sup>206</sup> Theorization of films and maps falls into the broader category of spatiality studies in films. However, analyzing filmic space through a cartographic lens represents a move away from Henri Lefebvre’s work on space which separates space from social practice. By contrast, understanding the representational space in film as a map reconnects filmic space and social practice, seeing methods of spatial analysis as tools to understand a larger issue, rather than as an end to themselves.

<sup>207</sup> Christian Metz, *L’*enonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film** (Paris: Méridiens-Klincksieck, 1991), 25-36.

<sup>208</sup> Conley, *Cartographic Cinema*, 2.

Nevertheless, his monograph marks a crucial step in deepening the connections between the cartography and filmmaking by combining them into a singular, theorized practice.

Following Conley, other researchers and artists have contributed to the conversation of how films can enhance, complement, and even counter traditional cartographical practices.<sup>209</sup> In a special issue of *The Cartographic Journal* in 2009, Sébastien Caquard and DR Fraser Taylor built on the affective possibilities for film to intervene in representations of space with the term “cinematic cartography,” which “combines the documentary side of cartography with the fictional side of cinema.”<sup>210</sup> This “hybrid form of cartography” simultaneously capitalizes on the scientific objectivity of cartography and the ability to convey “different forms of emotions and sensations about places throughout cinematographic language.”<sup>211</sup> A few years later, in 2011, François Penz and Andong Lu suggested in their introduction to the edited volume *Urban Cinematics* that film could provide “complementary evidence of the ‘soft’ side of the

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<sup>209</sup> Between 2007 and 2008 artist and filmmaker Patrick Keiller produced an art installation, “Cities of the Future,” that presented interactive historical maps of streets in nineteenth-century England where audience members could “ride” down certain streets by clicking on that street and watching archival video footage from trams and trains in the area during that period. Keiller’s exhibition, which is itself a kind of counter-map, shows how film could complement and enhance traditional cartographic representations of the city by providing insights into the visual texture and movement of people in nineteenth-century England. Keiller’s exhibition is described in detail in Julia Hallam and Les Roberts, eds., *Locating the moving image: new approaches to film and place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 18-20.

<sup>210</sup> Sébastien Caquard and DR Fraser Taylor, “What is cinematic cartography?,” *The Cartographic Journal* 46, no. 1 (Cinematic Cartography Special Issue, Feb. 2009): 7.

<sup>211</sup> Caquard and Taylor, “What is cinematic cartography?,” 7.) The contributors to this special issue came up with several of their own terms to describe the specifics of this practice. Sébastien Caquard used the term “cinemaps” to describe “maps in motion developed specifically in cinema for narrative purposes.” (Sébastien Caquard, “Foreshadowing Contemporary Digital Cartography: A Historical Review of Cinematic Maps in Films,” *The Cartographic Journal* 46, no. 1 (Cinematic Cartography Special Issue, Feb. 2009): 46.). Teresa Castro spoke of “cinema’s mapping impulse,” a term which describes the filmic processes that “underlie the understanding of space,” such as panoramic or aerial shots which function, like maps, to orient a viewer in a particular space. (Teresa Castro, “Cinema’s Mapping Impulse: Questioning Visual Culture,” *The Cartographic Journal* 46, no. 1 (Cinematic Cartography Special Issue, Feb. 2009): 11.)

city” by depicting urban processes that were obscured by more quantitative approaches.<sup>212</sup> In their introduction to the 2014 volume *Locating the Moving Image*, the most recent attempt to pull together these divergent approaches to analyzing films as maps, editors Julia Hallam and Les Roberts describe this type of cinematic cartography interested in reading films as maps as spatial ontology.<sup>213</sup>

### **CARTOGRAPHIES OF (IM)MOBILITY**

My interest in this chapter is most in line with Hallam and Roberts’ definition of spatial ontology, since I am theorizing the way in which *Asphalte, Papa Was Not a Rolling Stone*, and *Qu’Allah Bénisse La France!* can be read as counter-maps, and how they provide insights that are obfuscated by traditional cartographies of the *banlieue*. In these films, the depictions of the color, texture and sound of the city, coupled with the mobility (or lack thereof) for characters create a filmic cartography of (im)mobility for the *banlieue*. These autobiographical films re-animate the filmmakers’ past impressions of a place, bringing these memories back to life and sharing these filmmakers’ “mental maps,” the “spatial representation we make in our minds of the acts and action taken in

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<sup>212</sup> See especially chapters 14-16.

<sup>213</sup> They identify five thematic areas “that constitute what in broad terms may be provisionally defined as ‘cinematic cartography’”: (1) the appearance of maps and mapping in films; (2) mapping of practices of film production and consumption; (3) maps of places where the film is made or marketed; (4) maps of cognitive or emotional elements in a film; and (5) film as spatial critique.<sup>213</sup> They map these areas onto three overarching critical frameworks: (1) spatial historiography, which uses spatial methods to provide insight into historical practices of film production and exhibition; (2) spatial practice, which emphasizes the social, cultural, and economic processes of filmmaking; and (3) spatial ontology, which is interested in the extent to which film itself can be regarded as a map. For more, see Julia Hallam and Les Roberts, “Introduction,” in *Locating the moving image: new approaches to film and place*, Julia Hallam and Les Roberts, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 8-10.



our everyday lives,” of the past with their spectators.<sup>214</sup> Traditionally, mental mapping, as explained by Christian Jacob, is an individual exercise which “cannot be translated into general terms even though its substance is made from a mixture of personal and collective impressions.”<sup>215</sup> Films, however, present just such an opportunity to translate this mental map into something that is accessible, not just to the filmmaker and original owner of the mental map, but to the audiences of the film, which is able to see the world through the filmmakers’ eyes. Autobiographical films like *Papa was not a Rolling Stone*, *Asphalte*, and *Qu’Allah bénisse la France!* are recreating the writer/director’s own memories of a particular space and place with the express purpose of exposing the mental maps that are in the directors’ heads to a more general audience.

The mental counter-maps maps by autobiographical *banlieue* filmmakers also respond to the politics and possibilities for mobility in the *banlieue*. The filmmakers present their own views of mobility by telling tales of mobility or immobility and capitalizing on filmic practices that highlight the mobility or lack thereof of their various characters. Within the space of the *banlieue* and, especially, *banlieue* films, questions of mobility are integral to perceptions of *banlieue* space. Once the spaces of the *banlieue* have been mapped by film, the film “provides a basis for motion around them and along the channels between them,” allowing the film to be read as “an advanced cartographical apparatus, combining the act of location and enabling the tracking of motion and

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<sup>214</sup> Conley, *Cartographic Cinema*, 19.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

locomotion.”<sup>216</sup> In this way, film acts as an updated version of Franco Moretti’s plot maps in the nineteenth century novel that “show the city as a place of movement both orderly and disorderly.”<sup>217</sup> Through its simultaneous recording of time and space, film can be read as a Bakhtinian chronotope, “a representative scene of conjunction between time and space, cultural history and cultural geography.”<sup>218</sup> Film is not only complementing quantitative urban metrics with qualitative information about the city, but also contributing to discourses on the ease with which characters can navigate between spaces.

Film is a unique medium for portraying memory and simultaneously conveying the emotional, affective aspects of one’s memories of a particular space or place that are obscured in traditional mapping methods. *Papa was not a Rolling Stone, Qu’Allah bénisse la France!*, and *Asphalte* create a critical cartography of the *banlieue* which reveals, through filmic portraiture, the narratives of the individuals who live in a space and the ways in which they move about it, while also providing an impression of the space through the use of sound and color. The color palettes, music and soundscape of these film complement the human stories, creating a particularly strong link between the audience and the characters in the *banlieue*. Mobility is shown not just at the narrative level of each film, which are tales of social mobility, but also through directorial choices made by the filmmakers. These choices include the mobility that characters are afforded

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<sup>216</sup> Wow Ding, Arie Graafland and Andong Lu, “Introduction,” *Cities in transition: power, environment, society*, Wow Ding, Arie Graafland and Andong Lu eds. (Rotterdam: nai010, 2015), 2.

<sup>217</sup> Ding, Graafland and Lu, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

on screen, and the impressions of mobility in space created by the use of a variety of filmic techniques, from the tight or wide framing of characters to the range of motion they are allowed. The combination of these tactics not only adds to the impressions of the *banlieue* but also demonstrates the extent to which these directors continue to be haunted by the possibilities for mobility both within and outside of the space of the *banlieue*.

The portrayals of color, sound, and mobility in the film combine to create a qualitative counter-map of the *banlieue* that provides alternate, yet equally vital, information that is obscured by traditional map-making methodologies. In my analysis of these films, I show how each filmmaker creates a particular texture of the *banlieue* and then sets the characters in this world in motion to challenge traditional imagery of the *banlieue* as established within the filmic *banlieue* tradition itself as well as notions about the possibility of mobility—both social and the permissible zones for bodies to occupy—within and outside of the *banlieue*. Through a comparison of each of the three films, my aim is to show the ways in which these processes can be used to produce different effects, as well as to highlight the extent to which these films are in implicit and explicit dialogue not only with one another, but also with the larger tradition of *banlieue* filmmaking.

### **PAPA WAS NOT A ROLLING STONE**

*Papa was not a Rolling Stone*, which was released in August 2014, tells the story of Stéphanie (Doria Achour), a young girl with passions for both dance and advertising, who is coming of age in La Cité des 4000 in La Courneuve. Although it is based on her own life story, Ohayon changes the name of the film's protagonist from Sylvie, her own name, which she used in the book, to Stéphanie. In the book, Ohayon explains that she

would have been named Stéphane had she been a boy. In naming the protagonist of her autobiographical film *Stéphanie*, Ohayon sets up her viewers familiar with the autobiography to see the film as the story of a Sylvie who could have been, had a few things gone differently. This name change immediately distances the film from the book and sets a more autofictive tone for the film. Even if the conclusion of both the book and film is ultimately the same (Sylvie and Stéphanie are both admitted to the Sorbonne), the trajectory departs from the story at several points. Some characters, such as Stéphanie's close friend Fatima, and plotlines, like Stephanie becoming pregnant, are added to the film.

Ohayon's film was heavily critiqued by reviewers. Noémie Luciani, in her review for *Le Monde*, lamented that the film did not delve deeper into the issues it presented, saying "à raconter sans vraiment questionner, la réalisatrice manque les belles opportunités qui auraient donné à son film une vraie force." She goes on to critique the film for not presenting anything that hasn't been shown on the silver screen before.<sup>219</sup> Likewise, the reviewer for *Télérama* found the film naïve, saying "le melting-pot, l'amitié et la réussite républicaine terrassent les galères en tout genre comme dans un conte trop naïf."<sup>220</sup> While film critics appreciated the bright color palette and poppy 80s soundtrack, they found it difficult to find any substance underneath this heavily-stylized surface.

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<sup>219</sup> Noémie Luciani, "Papa Was Not a Rolling Stone: grandir à La Courneuve dans les années 1980," *Le Monde*, October 8, 2014, [http://www.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2014/10/07/papa-was-not-a-rolling-stone-grandir-a-la-courneuve-dans-les-annees-1980\\_4501551\\_3476.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2014/10/07/papa-was-not-a-rolling-stone-grandir-a-la-courneuve-dans-les-annees-1980_4501551_3476.html).

<sup>220</sup> C.M., "Papa was not a Rolling Stone," *Télérama*, October 15, 2014.

The color and sound in the film, however, are precisely what add the substance that so many critics found lacking. *Papa was not a Rolling Stone* is set in La Courneuve and, specifically, the Cité des 4000, which is notorious, on the small screen and big screen, as a bleak, desolate place rife with crime and lack of opportunity. News footage of La Courneuve during the 1980s reveals a recurring thematic vocabulary—“dégénéré,” “insalubre”—characterizing La Cité des 4000 as a place where “on ne vit pas, on survit.”<sup>221</sup> Indeed, as David Garbin and Gareth Millington describe in their study of La Courneuve, the Cité des 4000 is “one of the most infamous *grands ensembles* of mass housing built in the 1960s” while La Courneuve is “perhaps the most stigmatized Parisian *banlieue*.”<sup>222</sup> This was the same area Nicholas Sarkozy promised he would “nettoyer les cités au Kärcher” and, as Garbin and Millington’s study of La Cité des 4000’s residents showed, it is a place that is so stigmatized that its inhabitants cannot even leave this stigma at home.<sup>223</sup>

Many residents of the Cité des 4000 described facing additional discrimination in employment because they were from La Cité des 4000.<sup>224</sup> This stigma was all the more frustrating for inhabitants as they recognized

a gap between the reality of life in Cité des 4000 and how the media and politicians represent their abode. This sense of injustice is not concerned solely with the symbolic since they perceive the stigma attached to La Courneuve as

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<sup>221</sup> I INA Société. “Destruction de la barre Debussy à la cité des 4000 | Archive INA.” Filmed February 18, 1986. YouTube video, 2:07. Posted July 23, 2012. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Pz11cojTN8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Pz11cojTN8); INA Société. “Vivre à la cité des 4000 à La Courneuve en 1983 | Archive INA.” Filmed July 11, 1983. YouTube video, 4:57. Posted July 9, 2012. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRTHyqbJKJc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRTHyqbJKJc)

<sup>222</sup> David Garbin and Gareth Millington, “Territorial Stigma and the Politics of Resistance in a Parisian *Banlieue*: La Courneuve and Beyond,” *Urban Studies* 49, no. 10 (2012): 2068.

<sup>223</sup> Garbin and Millington, “Territorial Stigma,” 2068.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 2073.

intertwined with discriminatory practices, such as on-going ill treatment by employers, colleagues, service providers and of course the police. The stigma is therefore ‘enforced’ and reproduced by a variety of sources (from ‘above’ and ‘below’) resulting in diffuse effects that do not impact upon all residents equally.<sup>225</sup>

The stigma of being from the Cité des 4000 not only followed its residents through all aspects of their daily lives but was also an obstacle that was impossible to combat, as it is constantly reinforced. One of the many places in which these stereotypes of the Cité des 4000 are produced and repeated is in movies. Even from the very beginning, movies such as *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* focused on the Cité des 4000 as an empty shell that lacked a cultural center.<sup>226</sup> The choice to film more recent polemical *banlieue* films such as *La Squale* in the Cité des 4000 further reinforces the association between this place and the same stigmatizing images of violence and lack of social mobility.<sup>227</sup>

Ohayon grew up in the Cité des 4000, and, in recounting her impressions of that place in film, the cartography of her film depicts what Jonathan Raban describes as the “soft side of the city”:

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 2074.

<sup>226</sup> Ravi Hensman, “Oracles of Suburbia: French Cinema and Portrayals of Paris *Banlieues*, 1958-1968,” *Modern & Contemporary France* 21, no. 4 (2013): 445.

<sup>227</sup> Bruno Levasseur also speaks to the stigma associated with La Courneuve on the silver screen in his article “De-essentializing the Banlieues, reframing the nation: documentary cinema in France in the late 1990s,” *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 6, no. 2 (2008): “this highly stigmatized *banlieue* town of La Courneuve, situated a few miles away from the heart of Paris, in the badly reputed *département* of Seine-Saint-Denis, 93., has been used in filmmaking to represent a special urban territory in France. The ‘cult place’ of French cinema (Lemonier 2005:214), its proximity to the capital and notoriety have made it a prominent choice of location for a long list of ‘*banlieue films*’ and, as such, it has often been used to criticize and focus upon another vision of the nation, removed from traditional perceptions” (101). Levasseur references the documentary films *Une Poste à la Courneuve* (1994), *La ville est à nous* (2000), and *Renoir des 4000* (2002), noting how all of these focus on the ordinariness and banality of life in La Courneuve and how this focus on the normal is, itself, a form of resistance.

The city as we imagine it, then, soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, and nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate on maps, in statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture.<sup>228</sup>

Film can capture the human elements of the city that are often lost in quantitative measurements. This qualitative approach to understanding a place reveals information about the intangible elements of the city that are the things that we perceive first, and which often affect us at a subconscious level – the smells of the city, the city soundscape, the movement of cars and public transportation along the street, the faces of people we see walking by. Taken together, these elements create our first impressions of the city, which are often what we first recall when we hear the name of a city.

Within this context, Ohayon's filmic counter-map of La Courneuve becomes all the more significant. Working directly against the stereotypes of La Cité des 4000 as a dark, gloomy, desolate place lacking in opportunity, Ohayon takes full advantage of the hyper-saturated color palette of the 1980s and creates a *banlieue* that is bright, colorful and full of love. These directorial choices produce a mental map of La Cité des 4000 which is completely at odds with conventional imagery of the housing estate as a grey, dangerous, and decaying space. The 1980s Technicolor dream world in *Papa was not a Rolling Stone* presents the space of the banlieue as a world full of color and light. (Even at night, the banlieue is not an ominous black, but rather a soothing, dark, calming midnight blue.) The majority of the characters wear neutral colors, making the bright sunny backgrounds of graffiti in primary colors, wall murals, and red doors, pop all the

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<sup>228</sup> Jonathan Raban, *Soft City* (London: Hamilton, 1974), 2.

more. Combined with the catchy, poppy, soundtrack that is resplendent of the 1980s, viewers are transported back in time to a world of high ponytails, neon leotards, and high-waisted jeans.

By choosing a bright, luminous palette, Ohayon also connects her film to a filmic tradition of resistance to the grey, dark colors of the *banlieue*. Films such as *Un deux trois soleil*, for instance, eschewed the dark palette of the *banlieue* in favor of one full of light. When speaking about her film, Ohayon emphasized a desire to humanize the *banlieue* in her film and to show that “si on apprenait à se connaître les uns les autres, on verrait que ce sont les mêmes ressorts qui font bouger l’humanité, quel que soit le milieu sociale.”<sup>229</sup> The bright colors and catchy 1980s soundtrack welcome viewers into the space of the film, encouraging the viewers to get to know this space and appreciate the people who live within it.

Ohayon further highlights the brightness of the *banlieue* by contrasting it with a darker, moodier Paris that takes on the visual feel of a dangerous place. In so doing, Ohayon inverts the typical *banlieue* narrative in which the *banlieue* is the dangerous space and Paris is its safer, cleaner, brighter cousin, echoing other *banlieue* films like *La Haine*, in which Vinz, Saïd, and Hubert also encounter significantly more danger and police violence in Paris than they do in the *banlieue*. The contrast between the city center and the *banlieue* can be seen most intensely when the characters are traveling in between

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<sup>229</sup> Elodie Rousseau, "De La Courneuve à Paris VIII : parcours de Sylvie Ohayon, héroïne et réalisatrice de Papa was not a..." *Au Féminin*, 13 Oct. 2014, [www.aufeminin.com/sorties-cinema/sylvie-ohayon-rencontre-avec-la-real-de-papa-was-not-s1068910.html](http://www.aufeminin.com/sorties-cinema/sylvie-ohayon-rencontre-avec-la-real-de-papa-was-not-s1068910.html).



the two places; as they head towards Paris the color begins to drain and deepen, and when they return to the *banlieue*, the colors intensify and brighten. Color also allows Ohayon to quickly code Stéphanie and her *banlieue* friends and the Parisians at the Sorbonne. The rich brown leather satchels and deep forest green and dark purple sweaters atop dark jeans of the Parisians at the Sorbonne contrasts with the bright, faded blue jeans of the *banlieusards* and their comparatively light and muted colors (see Figure 2). By manipulating colors, Ohayon is also assigning the viewer particular emotional associations with each space. The bright, colorful happy *banlieue* in La Courneuve is contrasted with a somber, moody Paris that is full of browns, greys and dark colors. This contrast allows for the film to play with assumptions about danger and safety. Typically, the *banlieue* is the dark moody, dangerous space while Paris is the one that is full of light. Here, Paris, is the source of danger, a concept that is reinforced by Fatima's advice to Stéphanie at the end of the film to be careful in Paris because "C'est pas comme ici à la cité, c'est dangereux."

FIGURE TWO



*Stéphanie and her friends in light, washed-out colors*



*The students of La Sorbonne in richer hues*

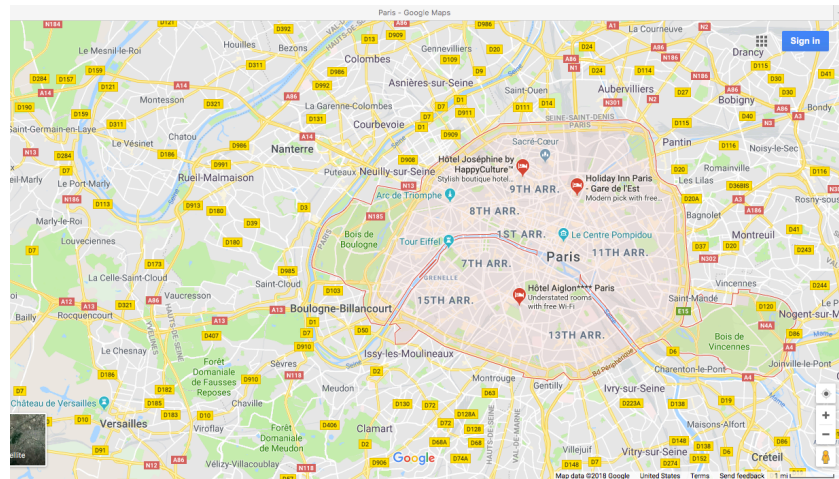
Color and sound are not the only ways that Ohayon challenges traditional narratives of La Cité des 4000. Counter-maps also work against traditional borders, broadening them by blurring the boundaries between spaces. Maps of cities, for instance, tend to privilege the city-center and might not even fully show the surrounding suburbs. The suburbs, when they are shown, are always placed in relation to the dominant center

and so appear inconsequential, creating false divisions between the city and the spaces surrounding it (see Figure 3). This is particularly relevant in a city like Paris, which is wholly dependent on its suburbs to provide additional housing and workers to run the city, as there is not space enough for all of these people within the boundaries of the Boulevard Périphérique.<sup>230</sup> Mapping practices which draw artificial boundaries between the city and its center create a false sense of division that disguises the movement which is constantly taking place between city and its center. Ohayon works against this practice in the opening scene of the film which is not set in La Cité des 4000, or even in La Courneuve, but rather at a club in the heart of Paris. By starting her *banlieue* film in the center of Paris, Ohayon is not only setting up an implicit dialogue between Paris and its center, a common trope in *banlieue* films, but also widening the map of the *banlieue* to include Paris, thus challenging the idea that the map of either the *banlieue* or Paris should be cut off at the Boulevard Périphérique.

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<sup>230</sup> High housing prices within the city itself have been steadily pricing out middle class families from living in the city center. For more, see Marie-Hélène Bacqué, Eric Charmes and Stéphanie Vermeersch, “The Middle Class ‘at Home among the Poor’ – How Social Mix is Lived in Parisian Suburbs: Between Local Attachment and Metropolitan Practices,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 4 (2014): 1211-33.

FIGURE THREE



*Maps of Paris by Google Maps (above) and the Paris Office de Tourisme (below)*

While the immediate filmic impression created by *Papa* was not a Rolling Stone is of a bright, happy space of friendships and camaraderie, much like in Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain*, this lighthearted outer shell masks a much more dramatic and darker portrait of the precarity, and, indeed, the impossibility, of social mobility in the *banlieue*. The difficulties in escaping the *banlieue* are a recurring theme which is reinforced by the

repeated use of Jean-Jacques Goldman's song "Envole-moi," throughout the film. The lyrics provide an insight into Stéphanie's inner monologue, as Goldman croons "J'ai pas choisi de naître ici / entre l'ignorance et la violence et l'ennui." Stéphanie, too, did not choose the life into which she was born. In contrast to the song, however, there is nobody who comes to fly her away from the *banlieue*. While Stéphanie, through her exceptional performance on the BAC which secures her a place at the Sorbonne, is able to achieve social mobility, she is only able to do so through a combination of her own work and the support of her family and friends. Throughout the story, Stéphanie needs help from her best friend Fatima, her boyfriend Rabah, her grandmother and her mother, all of whom assist her in some way, from driving her to school on the first day to giving her money for an abortion. Stéphanie's escape from the *banlieue* is all the more remarkable given her self-absorbed, absent-minded mother who provides little support for Stéphanie and her abusive stepfather who actively works against her achieving success. Even at school, Stéphanie receives no support from either administrators or her peers. When Stéphanie brings her binder full of advertisements to the school counselor, she is admonished not to dream too big, and when she reads a composition in class about her desire to leave La Courneuve and move to Paris, her classmates mock her.

Mobility in space, as Doreen Massey reminds us, is related to power. Underpinning a characters' mobility in the *banlieue* is an often-invisible network of factors which dictate where that character can go and why. Massey refers to these as "power-geometries," which represents the power dynamics which dictate different possibilities for movement for individuals. According to Massey,

Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it.<sup>231</sup>

The same power geometries operating within a single space can have a very different impact on individuals or groups depending on their relationship to the dominant strains of power. Thus, while one's ability to move in and outside of space is an important consideration, it is only the beginning of truly understanding the entire system of politics which underlie a character's ability to move within and outside of a space.

Stéphanie, with her drive and academic and artistic abilities, is part of a different set of power-geometries than her other friends and family in the *banlieue*. In a literal prefiguring of her social mobility at the end of the film, Stéphanie is a whirlwind of movement on the screen throughout the film. When she first appears on screen, she is walking quickly home to do her homework, in sharp contrast to all of the people she encounters in the street, all of whom seem to be fixed in place. (There is even the same stereotypical group of people pushing a motorcycle that O'Shaughnessy critiques in *banlieue* films.) Stéphanie is not just able to move freely from place to place, but she also is a talented dancer, a skill which provides her with an exceptional talent for movement and which could have been her other ticket to fly away from the *banlieue* had she so chosen.

The film is punctuated by scenes of Stéphanie dancing as she prepares for a competition. The link between dancing and Stéphanie's success is reinforced by a

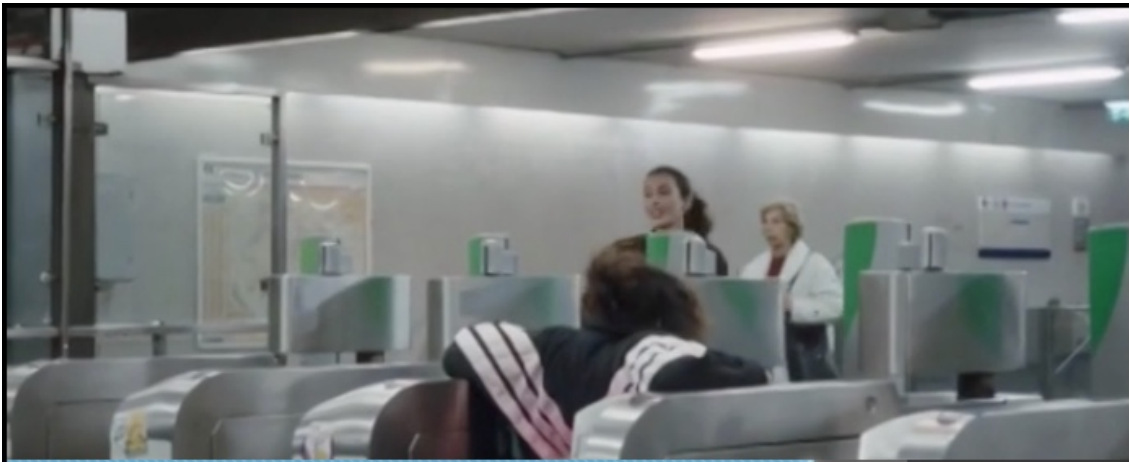
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<sup>231</sup> Doreen B. Massey, *Space, place, and gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 149.

montage scene that cuts back and forth between her performance at the dance competition and her preparations for the BAC. The frenzied movement of her contemporary dance visualizes the inner turmoil of her brain as she prepares to jump over this hurdle while also demonstrating the choice Stéphanie has to make. At the moment that she receives the “mention très bien” on her BAC, the camera cuts to her attempting a jump at the dance competition and falling. The jump cuts between the two scenes contrast the two Stephanies, one who dances with her hair down and who is experiencing her lowest point, and the serious Stephanie who wears her hair up and who is proudly celebrating her academic accomplishment with her friend Fatima. The juxtaposition of these two moments demonstrates the choice and sacrifices Stéphanie made in giving up her dance dream so that she can pursue her other dream of going to the Sorbonne, while also showing how these two dreams are incompatible. The contrast also reinforces the idea that Stéphanie had multiple tickets out of the *banlieue*, and simply had to choose which one appealed to her the most, further reinforcing the idea that she belongs to a different set of power geometries.



FIGURE FOUR



*Fatima stuck in the turnstile.*



*Stéphanie helps Fatima in through the other door.*

While Stéphanie is shown as constantly in motion, her movement both around the *banlieue* and, especially, in Paris is all the more striking because of the lack of movement of her friends and family, who are effectively imprisoned by the same power-geometries which permit Stéphanie's movement. Stéphanie moves in and outside of Paris and the *banlieue* with the same facility and comfort through which she walks through her own



neighborhood, or twirls her way through dance class, but her friends do not enjoy this same flexibility and freedom. When Stéphanie needs to go into Paris to purchase a pregnancy test because she is aware of the social stigma attached to teenage pregnancy in La Courneuve and does not want her classmates and friends to know she might be pregnant, she takes her best friend, Fatima, with her for moral support. Neither of them purchases RER tickets, electing instead to jump the turnstile, a common feature of *banlieue* films since Madjid and Pat were shown doing the same in Charef's *Le thé au harem d'Archimède*. While the athletic dancer Stéphanie is able to leap over the turnstile with ease, Fatima, who is heavier, cannot make the jump and ends up stuck in the turnstile (Figure 4). After Stéphanie extricates her from the turnstile, Fatima is again reliant on Stéphanie to exit La Courneuve. Stéphanie must jump back over the turnstile and open the exit door so that Fatima can walk through it. This scene shows quite literally how, even though Stéphanie is mobile enough to climb over the turnstiles, and, by extension to navigate Paris, with ease, her friend Fatima cannot. It is only with Stéphanie's help and support to come back and get those that she leaves behind that the other people in the *banlieue*, like Fatima, will be able to achieve mobility.

Fatima is not the only one of Stéphanie's La Courneuvian friends who has difficulty moving about in the city. After Stéphanie has been accepted to the Sorbonne, her boyfriend Rabah drives Stéphanie and her friends to Paris to see what the girls are wearing so that Stéphanie will fit in on her first day at school. In a panning shot which begins with the Parisian students chatting outside the school and turns slowly towards Stéphanie and her friends in front of Rabah's car, we see that everyone is in motion

except for the people from La Courneuve, who are fixed in place. While the Parisians can approach them, Stéphanie's friends are immobile and unable to transgress the invisible barrier to get closer to the Sorbonne. This scene is echoed at the very end of the film, when Rabah drives Stéphanie to her first day of school. Well-dressed, prepared, and accepted, at least by the school system, Stéphanie is now able to transgress the boundary created by the sidewalk to go into the school. Rabah, however, is left on the other side, an immobile outsider looking in.

While Stéphanie is ultimately able to achieve her dream of going to the Sorbonne, scenes such as these visually reinforce the exceptionality of Stéphanie's narrative. The close bonds that Stéphanie forms with many of the people in La Courneuve, from her grandmother to her friend Fatima to her boyfriend Rabah, also serve as reminders of the many comforts Stéphanie must leave behind and reinforce the idea that, no matter the difficulties she encountered, La Cité des 4000 was also a place where Stéphanie felt loved. Ohayon's mental map includes the suffering that is associated with leaving a place. The viewer must experience this discomfort with Stéphanie and see how, for her, the decision to go to the Sorbonne and to leave the *banlieue* was not an uncomplicated decision, and that she made many sacrifices along the way.

### **QU'ALLAH BENISSE LA FRANCE!**

If Ohayon's *Papa was not a Rolling Stone* is a dark tale hidden behind a veneer of lighthearted imagery and bubbly music, then Al Malik's *Qu'Allah Bénisse La France!* is the exact opposite: a love story shot in the same gritty black and white cinematography of *La Haine* with a hip-hop soundtrack that aligns it with countless other *banlieue* films.

The result is a cartography of mobility that, paradoxically, presents love, compassion, and a desire for beauty as the only qualities which allow for a few, lucky individuals to narrowly escape from death or incarceration in the *banlieue*. *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!*, which was released in December 2014, tells the story of how Régis<sup>232</sup> (Mark Zinga), Al Malik's first name before he converted to Islam, was the only one from his *banlieue* in Neuhof, Strasbourg to leave. This escape is due to a combination of his romantic relationship with Nawel (Sabrina Ouazani), an Arab girl in his neighborhood who nourishes his interest in Islam, as well as Régis's specific talent for writing and music and philosophy, and a fair amount of luck. Drawing closely from Al Malik's actual life, the film chronicles Régis's life of petty crime, followed by his attempts to break into the music scene, and the obstacles he runs into along the way. Although at first Régis funds his musical aspirations by stealing from tourists and selling drugs, eventually, he is able to make an honest living from his craft that allows him to fully cut ties from the unsavory money-making sources he relied on out of necessity during his adolescence.

Like Ohayon, Al Malik's film was not well-received by critics, who found it heavy-handed with its representations of violence and sententious. A review in *Les Échos* by Thierry Gandillot describes his experience as a spectator as "un peu désemparé devant la violence dont il témoigne...[le film] se veut porteur d'espoir, mais peine à convaincre."<sup>233</sup> Fabrice Pliskin in his review for *Le Nouvel Observateur* also critiqued the

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<sup>232</sup> To differentiate between the film's protagonist and its director, I use Régis to designate the character and Al Malik to refer to the director.

<sup>233</sup> Thierry Gandillot, "Hippocampe et Hypokhâgne," *Les Échos*, December 10, 2014.

film for being too heavy, both subject-wise and with its moralizing voice-over, saying “le film semble presque toujours s’enivrer de sa propre sagesse pachydermique, comme si le public était un petit frère moitié sauvageon, moitié demeure.”<sup>234</sup> All reviewers recognized that the film was meant to have a didactic element, however, the voice-over, which broke the realism of the film, was not considered to be an effective tool. Though *Qu’Allah bénisse la France!* did draw some favorable comparisons with *La Haine* (nearly every review mentioned the connections between the two films) it was clear that reviewers did not see Al Malik’s film as remotely on the same level of artistic ingenuity, or even social commentary, as Kassovitz’s film.

One of the most significant aspects of the film, however, is not its relationship to *La Haine* but rather its setting, Strasbourg. It is unusual for any French film, and, particularly, for a *banlieue* film, to be set outside of Paris. While the move is not unprecedented—Christophe Ruggia’s *Le Gône du Chaâba* (1998) was set in Lyon and Bernard Blier’s *Un, deux, trois soleil* (1993) was set in Marseille—the choice to move outside Paris nonetheless marks a break with the tradition of *banlieue* filmmaking. Strasbourg is particularly significant since, unlike La Cité des 4000, it has not been frequently featured in film, *banlieue* or otherwise.<sup>235</sup> The only other film set in Strasbourg’s *banlieue* is the 2002 thriller *Nid de Guêpes*. Other than its setting, this film

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<sup>234</sup> Fabrice Pliskin, "C'est Raté. Malik sulpicien. Qu'Allah Bénisse la France," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, December 11, 2014.

<sup>235</sup> Some of the films set in Strasbourg include Ridley Scott’s *The Duelists*, José Luis Guerin’s *In the city of Sylvia* (2007), and Philippe Claudel’s *Tous les soleils* (2011). The beginning of Guy Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes: A game of shadows* was filmed at the Strasbourg cathedral and parts of Rachid Bouchareb’s *Indigènes* (2006), as well as some other World War I and World War II films, were also filmed in Strasbourg.

shares little in common with typical *banlieue* movies, which tend to favor coming of age stories over dramatic car chases. As such, *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* represents the first film set in Strasbourg that fits squarely in the *banlieue* genre.

The setting of Strasbourg is particularly interesting for a *banlieue* film, which is already concerned with questions of identity, since Strasbourg is located in Alsace-Lorraine, a space where inhabitants' identities and, even nationalities, have shifted over the decades since the region has, at various times in French history, been either French or German. As a result, John Western argues that "Strasburgers are the inheritors of a hybrid identity."<sup>236</sup> While the reasons for Strasbourg's hybrid identity (rivalries in the era of state-forging nationalism) are different from the reasons for hybrid identity in the *banlieue* (immigration), both spaces nonetheless symbolize a place where identity is forged around more than just a relationship to France. Indeed, much like the many first, second, and third-generation immigrants in the *banlieue*, who find themselves forced to choose between the national identities of their parents and the identity of their birthplace, France, the people Strasbourg have felt equal pressure to choose either a French or a German identity "to the exclusion of the other."<sup>237</sup> Nonetheless, in perhaps the same way that *banlieue* characters like Doria in *Kiffe kiffe demain* have begun to do, the residents of Strasbourg take great pride in their identity as Alsatian and as being from Strasbourg,

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<sup>236</sup> John Western, "Neighbors or Strangers? Binational and Transnational Identities in Strasbourg," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 97, no.1: 159.

<sup>237</sup> Western, "Neighbors or Strangers?," 163.

even though this identity does not fit neatly into pre-defined categories of national identity.

The importance of presenting a hybrid identity, both as it relates to the *banlieue* and as it relates to Strasbourg, can be found in Al Malik's choices both in setting and casting. While the film features many prominent landmarks of Strasbourg, such as the cathedral and Petit Paris, Al Malik also strives to make the film representative of the *banlieue* beyond Strasbourg by shooting scenes in Paris and Marseille and bringing in extras from *banlieues* across France. In the director's commentary, Al Malik explains he wanted to show the heterogeneity of the *cités* by bringing in amateur actors from Strasbourg as well as people from the *banlieues* of Paris, Lyon, and Marseille, saying "pour moi c'est important que toute la France soit là."<sup>238</sup> As such, the film's cartography represents an homage to the other *banlieues* and an attempt to tell a *banlieue* story which does not center exclusively in Paris. Al Malik also widens the cartography of the film far beyond Strasbourg, creating the sensation that Strasbourg is connected to a wide web of cities and countries, from Paris to Marseille to Morocco. The choice to include these different places makes the *banlieue* of Strasbourg seem less closed in and restricted, as it is understood to be part of a much wider web of places.

Al Malik's desire to represent the humanity of an underrepresented *banlieue* like Strasbourg is reflective of what Maria Hellström Reimer identifies, in *Urban Cinematics*, as the "'vivifying' effect of film" which "brings 'life' into attention: material life, mental

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<sup>238</sup> Abd Al Malik and Nawell Azzouz, Audio Commentary, *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!*, Dir. Abd Al Malik (Ad Vitam, 2014).

life, everyday life, potential life.”<sup>239</sup> Film brings a human element into our conception of the city showing us the people who occupy the city skyscrapers and ride the busses and trains on mass transit routes. Al Malik’s film, which was filmed on location and engages over 200 local extras from Strasbourg and Neuhof, acts as a kind of ethnography.<sup>240</sup> By choosing to include real people from his neighborhood, and his life (Al Malik’s real mother appears in the audience of Régis’s wedding), Al Malik is fitting in with a larger trend among *banlieue* filmmakers who return to their own neighborhood to shoot the movie and involve as many people from their home neighborhood as possible.<sup>241</sup> This also speaks to the responsibility that Al Malik and many other *banlieue* filmmakers feel to go back to their neighborhoods and offer opportunities in whatever ways they can, showing that Al Malik is forever mindful of the people he left behind when he left the *banlieue*.

Al Malik is conscious that he is presenting his audience not just with his own life, but also introducing them to a new city, Strasbourg, and takes care to show the emotion of the space through his focus on the individual experience, not just of himself, but also of the other characters, and even extras, in the film. Al Malik said that he made an aesthetic choice to show “la beauté des cités” with the idea of showing “une démarche

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<sup>239</sup> Maria Hellström Reimer, “Urban Anagram: A bio-political Reflection on Cinema and City Life,” in *Urban Cinematics*, ed. François Penz and Andong Lu (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 224.

<sup>240</sup> Jean-Yves Dana, “Qu’Allah bénisse la France’, un conte moderne entre foi, amour et musique,” *La Croix*, December 10, 2014.

<sup>241</sup> Tarr, *Reframing difference*, 183. Tarr further notes that the Ghorab-Volta does this with the two protagonists in her film *Jeunesse Dorée*.

positive, mais sans faire le déni des problématiques sociales.”<sup>242</sup> He shows the faces of men and women as they go about their daily lives. Following the in media res opening at Régis’s first concert, the first establishing shots of Strasbourg and Neuhof encourage the viewer to look at and see all of the many different faces which make up Strasbourg and Neuhof. These faces are shown before any images of towers that might lead the viewer to make associations with the *banlieue*, obliging the viewer to recognize the humanity of the inhabitants before applying any stereotypes associated with where they live. This ethnographic theme is further emphasized by the use of close shots which focus in on these faces, beseeching viewers to remember that the people living in the *banlieue* are humans just like everyone else. Since the camera cuts so quickly between so many different faces, none of which is the actual Abd al Malik, it is difficult for the viewer to know who the protagonist of the film is for quite some time, giving the story a kind of universal quality. Even if the narrative does primarily focus on Régis, his story is one that has parallels with those of the many different individuals who grew up in Neuhof at this time.

On an aesthetic level, *Qu’Allah bénisse la France!* is also connected to the wider tradition of *banlieue* filmmaker through the use of black and white, which, as critics noted, recalls Kassovitz’s *La Haine*. This connection was not accidental. Following the publication of *Qu’Allah bénisse la France!* in 2004, Kassovitz encouraged Al Malik to

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<sup>242</sup> AFP, "Le rappeur Abd al Malik déploie ‘sa’ banlieue sur grand écran," *Le Point*, November 7, 2014. [http://www.lepoint.fr/culture/le-rappeur-abd-al-malik-deploie-sa-banlieue-sur-grand-ecran-07-11-2014-1879418\\_3.php](http://www.lepoint.fr/culture/le-rappeur-abd-al-malik-deploie-sa-banlieue-sur-grand-ecran-07-11-2014-1879418_3.php)



turn the book into a film, and, when Al Malik chose to do so, he used the same director of photography, Pierre Aïm, that Kassovitz used in *La Haine*.<sup>243</sup> Aside from the high-contrast cinematography, several shots from *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* are also deliberately evocative of *La Haine*. For instance, the iconic *beur-blanc-black* shot of Vinz, Hubert, and Saïd walking in *La Haine* is reworked in *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* with Régis at the center and his white and Arab friend walking on either side of him. Both films begin with scenes of police in riot gear in the *banlieue* and both films contain voiceovers that guide the viewer through the experience of the film.

*Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* is further connected to *La Haine* through its rap soundtrack, although, unlike in *La Haine*, the majority of the songs are written by Al Malik and performed by the actor Marc Zinga who plays Régis. Rap is an important intertext in the film, as it is a kind of poetry that permeates the film on multiple levels. It not only provides a background for the film, but is also used at key moments to tell the story, such as when Régis is crossing over the straits of Gibraltar and the song “Gibraltar” which tells the same story, is playing over these images. Rap is also Régis’s ticket out of the *banlieue*; it is through his exceptional ability that he is even able to leave the *banlieue* at all and make a different life for himself.

Unlike *La Haine*, however, on a narrative level, *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* is a story of movement with an upward, and not a circular, trajectory of social mobility

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<sup>243</sup> Annie Coppermann, “‘Qu’Allah bénisse la France’: Dans la cité, la paix après la haine?” *Les Echos*, December 10, 2014, <http://blogs.lesechos.fr/annie-coppermann/qu-allah-benisse-la-france-dans-la-cite-la-paix-apres-la-haine-a15119.html>.

achieved by a person with exceptional talent. While, like Stéphanie in *Papa was not a Rolling Stone*, Régis represents a “success story” of a person who have achieved social mobility out of the *banlieue*, both of these characters, like the majority of real-life individuals who make a life for themselves outside of the *banlieue*, possessed exceptional artistic and academic abilities. As Rachid Santaki and Brahim Chiki explain in their book *La France de Demain*, this pattern of social mobility which is exclusive to those with exceptional skills only serves to further impoverish the *banlieues*. Instead of being able to give back to and enrich the *banlieue*, these people leave the *banlieue*, draining it of the very people with the greatest potential to improve it. Even those who leave the *banlieue* and take on a representative role in government or politics to improve it, such as Azouz Begag, Fadela Amara, and other elected officials “issus de l’immigration,” are, in Santaki and Chiki’s view, still too far removed from the actual realities of the *banlieue* to meaningfully or helpfully represent the needs of the people in this community.<sup>244</sup> As directors who likewise capitalized on their exceptional academic and artistic talents to leave the *banlieue*, both Ohayon and Al Malik are in dialogue with this debate in her film, something which is particularly evident in *Qu’Allah bénisse la France!*.

Over the course of the film, Régis moves from petty thief to successful artist, from rapper on the streets at the beginning of the film to a rapper selling out large arenas at the end. Once again, this tale of social mobility is made possible only by the extraordinary talent that Régis possesses for lyric-writing and music-making. Much like

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<sup>244</sup> Santaki and Chiki, *La France de demain*, 62.

Stéphanie, whose artistic talent is not enough to propel her out of the *banlieue*, Régis is also a student of exceptional academic ability. He is particularly gifted in philosophy, doing so well in the class that his teacher recommends him for hypokhâgne, the preparation for upper level philosophy study, at the *École normale supérieure*. Régis, however, chooses to pursue his passion for music-making over his passion for philosophy, although he intertwines references to philosophy in his lyrics.

Like Ohayon, Al Malik prefigures Régis's social mobility by showing his character to be nearly constantly in motion. Like Stéphanie, Régis is also first presented in motion. The opening sequence, which starts *in media res*, is a close up of Régis's face, eyes open and looking upwards, as if talking to God. His head moves down, and we see him bouncing in place, mouthing the lyrics of a rap song quietly to himself. In a key difference from Ohayon, however, Al Malik affords all of his characters, and not just Régis, a great deal of mobility. Régis is not the only character who is presented in motion in the opening sequence. After lingering on Régis for just a few more seconds, the camera pans away and shows close up shots of the other members of the group, before turning back to Régis as he walks out through the door and onto the stage to perform for the crowd. The camera—and the story—then cut back to Régis and his same friends several years before, walking down the street together before one of them stops to throw a rock at a police car. They run away, and the camera cuts to the other faces and people of Strasbourg and Neuhof. All of these people are in motion, either walking down the street, running, riding bikes, getting on public transportation.

Unlike Ohayon's film, or, indeed, most *banlieue* films which center on an opposition between the city center and its outskirts, Al Malik's film eschews this binary in favor of showing a fluidity of movement for his characters between Strasbourg and Neuhof. There are no invisible barriers separating out where people can and cannot go in the film, and characters appear to move freely, although, on deeper examination, this is an illusion. Instead of restricting their ability to move, Al Malik shows how, for many, the lifestyle of drugs and petty thievery in the *banlieue* leads to peoples' incarceration and untimely deaths. While characters are free to move about, the individual choices that they make are what restricts their social mobility. Much like in the book, we see Régis lingering on his own choices and their ensuing repercussions, although the exposition of the book is replaced by voice-overs of Régis as he reflects on his life up to the present moment.

As in the book, where an entire page is dedicated to listing the names of the people he knew from his neighborhood who died too young, the film likewise pays homage to the many people who passed away in their youth. When Rachid is murdered in a drive by shooting, all of his family, friends and acquaintances from the neighborhood gather to pay their respects by his grave. As the imam speaks to them about the afterlife, the camera focuses on two groups: the women and the men, who are standing separated. As the imam speaks, first we see one woman, Isabelle, disappear from the crowd (Figure 5). As her body disappears from the screen, her name and the reason for her death (an overdose) lingers behind. The camera then moves to focus on the group of young men who are standing there. First one young man disappears, then another and another. In the

end, of the sixteen men who were initially standing there, only nine remain, and the screen is covered with the names of not only those who stood among the original sixteen but also of others who died due to overdoses, car and motorcycle accidents, suicides, and shootings. In all, a total of eighteen names appear on screen. The men who remain range in age from young to old and are white, black, and Arab. Some are religious figures, others are working, still others are unemployed. The randomness with which the men disappear introduces the element of chance into who did and did not survive.

The disappearing bodies and the lingering names and reasons for their deaths act as ghosts who haunt the screen, not just in this scene, but throughout the film, highlighting the truly exceptional nature of Al Malik's ability to escape the *banlieue* for a different life. Much like Ohayon, who carries the memories of all of the friends and family who supported her in her journey to the Sorbonne, Al Malik carries with him the memories of the many people who he knew growing up who died before they had a chance to make a different life for themselves. As in his book, Al Malik felt compelled to give these people a name and a voice, which complexifies the "success" narratives of those who made it out by forcing viewers to see the faces of the many people who were unable to do so. Furthermore, the cinematography in this scene draws attention to the fact that these deaths disproportionately happen to men, asking the viewer to consider what types of lives they might have led, had chance not placed them in the *banlieue*.

FIGURE FIVE



*Isabelle disappearing from the screen*



*The men disappearing from the screen*

Al Malik's cartography of mobility emphasizes the exceptionality of his own story as well as the very real dangers that can be posed by life in the *banlieue*. Much like in Ohayon's film, we see a story of social mobility that is tempered by both the sacrifices that had to be made and a real guilt at witnessing and watching those who were left

behind. These two moments at the cemetery in *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* are representative of the many moving photographs that punctuate the film. Al Malik periodically interrupts the constantly-moving landscape of Régis and his friends with introspective, black and white shots which are slightly-mobile photographs designed to linger on those who got left behind or to highlight these moments of exceptionality of Régis's social mobility. These scenes, such as one shot of him standing on the roof of his apartment building, silhouetted by the sun, or two birds flying across the sky following a touching scene between Régis and Nawel, verge on poetic.<sup>245</sup> These moving photography scenes serve as key moments of reflection and introspection in the film, a picturesque break from the flurry of movement on camera which highlight particular themes in the film. For instance, in a moving photograph towards the beginning reminiscent of the iconic cover of The Beatles' album, *Abbey Road*, Régis and his four friends cross the street carrying rap equipment. By the end of the film, however, only one of them, Régis, has actually realized his dream of making music. While Régis is enjoying his success on the stage, the screen is split into three parts that show the parallel trajectories of three of the four young men who crossed the road, and how he was the only one who made it to the stage and not into prison. This image reminds us that, despite the greater mobility within space enjoyed by all characters portrayed in *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!*, Régis is

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<sup>245</sup> Al Malik's written work about the *banlieue* have shown a longstanding interest in black and white photography of the *banlieue*; *La guerre des banlieues n'aura pas lieu* (2010) and *Le Dernier Français* (2012) are both accompanied by black and white photography of the *banlieue*. He used the same photographer, Fabien Coste, who shot those photographs for his books as he did in the film, creating a sense of homogeneity in his portrayals of the space across genres (Al Malik, and Azzouz, "Audio Commentary").

still the only one of all of the many faces of Neuhof presented throughout the film who is able to escape. The movement of characters that seemed to portend greater mobility from all at the end is revealed to be an illusion, as Régis's escape remains the exception, rather than the rule. Ultimately *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* is a story of luck that is just as much about Régis's own success as it is about those he left behind.

Both *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* and *Papa was not a Rolling Stone* use neo-realist approaches to tell two stories of social mobility that are, nonetheless, haunted by the visual reminders of those who were left behind. Both films are set in real places and, while the director's make an attempt to reframe those spaces with their use of sound and color, and to influence the audience's interpretations of these spaces with the use of voice-overs, they nonetheless strive to approximate reality. This neo-realist approach, with devices which disrupt the viewer's experience of viewing the film and break the illusion of continuity, such as the use of voice overs or obvious imagery such as characters getting stuck in train turnstiles or characters disappearing from the screen, presents a clear and unified message to the viewer: the protagonists' social mobility was exceptional, and they are haunted by a certain guilt that they were the only ones among their childhood friends to achieve social mobility. By contrast, the final film to be analyzed in this chapter, *Asphalte*, takes a different approach. By creating an otherworldly portrait of the *banlieue* which does not have as direct a referent in reality, *Asphalte* lingers on the many people in the *banlieue* who do get stuck or left behind, and finds the beauty and humanity in their stories, as well.



## ASPHALTE

In contrast to Ohayon and Al Malik, both of whom present protagonists in a flurry of motion in a neo-realist approach, Benchetrit in *Asphalte* lingers on those who are not moving in a setting that is subtly surreal. *Asphalte* shows in excruciatingly slow moving detail the struggles, both internally and externally, of these characters to set themselves (and their lives) back in motion, thus presenting a cartography of immobility. Not only are the places the characters can go limited, but moving at all requires a herculean effort. Recalling the formula of interconnected stories that Benchetrit used in both the written series *Les Chroniques de l'Asphalte* (2005, 2007, 2010) and his film *J'ai toujours rêvé d'être un gangster* (2008), *Asphalte*, which was first released at a special showing at Cannes in May 2015 and then to a larger public in October 2015, presents three stories of relationships that are all loosely connected by the space of the apartment building in which they take place. In one, a misanthropic handicapped man, Sterkowitz (Gustave Kervern), tries to seduce a nightshift nurse (Valeria Bruni Tedeschi) during his nighttime excursions to get food from the hospital vending machines. In another, a lonely schoolboy, Charly (Jules Benchetrit), who is an aspiring filmmaker, helps an aging actress, Jeanne Meyer (Isabelle Huppert), find her footing after professional failures force her to move to the *banlieue*. In the last, an American astronaut John McKenzie (Michael Pitt) lands on the rooftop of the building and spends two nights at the twelfth-floor apartment of an Arab woman, Madame Hamida (Tassadit Mandi), whom he befriends in spite of their language barriers.

In contrast to *Papa was not a Rolling Stone* and *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!*, Benchetrit's film was well-received by critics. Sori Chalandon, writing for *Le Canard Enchaîné*, described the film as "extravagant, aérien, élégant."<sup>246</sup> Critics marveled over the minimalism in the film; Corinne Renou-Nativel in her review for *La Croix* beamed, "Samuel Benchetrit fait merveille avec ce récit décalé et minimaliste."<sup>247</sup> Several critics, including Jacques Mandelbaum for *Le Monde*, lauded the film as a fresher portrayal of the *banlieue*, one that was "très éloigné de la chronique sociologique ou du film de genre sur la banlieue... mais où la diversité peut inopinément fleurir, la solidarité émerger, la beauté sourire, le meilleur advenir."<sup>248</sup> This emphasis on diversity may, on the surface, seem surprising since the film only featured two minorities (an American man and an Arab woman). Nevertheless, the film does deal with questions of difference, although it does so differently from many *banlieue* films.

The portrayal of diversity has been a central issue in both *banlieue* films and the analysis of these films. In much of the scholarship on *banlieue* films, though, there has been the recurring theme that minority-authored, and, especially, *beur*-authored, films provide a counter-discourse to portrayals of *beurs* and the *banlieue* in both the media and other films. In her seminal monograph on the subject, Carrie Tarr dubs this type of filmmaking "reframing difference." This practice, according to Tarr, "has been

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<sup>246</sup> Sori Chalandon, "Asphalte : (Les désorientés)", *Le Canard Enchaîné*, October 7, 2015.

<sup>247</sup> Corinne Renou-Nativel, "'Asphalte', arithmétique de la chute", *La Croix*, October 7, 2015.

<sup>248</sup> Jacques Mandelbaum, "'Asphalte' : ascenseur pour la tendresse", *Le Monde*, October 7, 2015.

dominated by the need to counter the stigmatization of the *beurs*, and the *banlieues*, in dominant media discourses, including the cinema.”<sup>249</sup> According to Tarr,

*Beur*-authored films are ... informed by the need to reassure majority audiences that fears about 'otherness' are unfounded. Thus, they draw on realist modes of filmmaking to demonstrate the basic humanity of the *beurs*, placing them at the center of the diegesis, privileging points of view which make them the subjects rather than the objects of the gaze, and constructing them as complex individuals whose feelings and emotions are likely to elicit sympathy.<sup>250</sup>

Tarr’s analysis shows how *banlieue* filmmaking is informed both by media discourses and the stereotypes it produces, as well as the now-30-year-old tradition of *banlieue* filmmaking. Tarr notes the urgency of cinematic portrayals of the *banlieue* which portray the human elements present in the *banlieue* and to elicit audience sympathy for these protagonists in the hopes that this will translate to a greater understanding of the *banlieue* as a home for real, individual humans and not just as a locus for a laundry list of social problems. Tarr further draws attention to the unique dynamics in which *banlieue* films are created, and highlights the particular urgency for socially-engaged *banlieue* filmmakers to humanize their subjects and, by extension, the space of the *banlieue*.

According to Tarr, *beur* authors of *banlieue* films have a greater stake in how themselves and their fellow minorities are portrayed and thus are more likely to create more humanizing portraits. When comparing white-authored and *beur*-authored *banlieue* films, Tarr argues that the former foreground “cross-race male violence” while the latter are “more concerned with how individual ethnic minority (*beur*) youths confront and

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<sup>249</sup> Tarr, *Reframing difference*, 210-211.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

negotiate problems of identity and integration in a social context in which they are both excluded on grounds of both class and ethnicity.”<sup>251</sup> In other words, *beur*-authored films delve deeper into the socioeconomic issues behind the minority experience in France while white-authored films such as *La Haine* perpetuate the stereotype of the *banlieue* as a violent space filled with poor, resentful minorities. While Tarr draws attention to the important role that *banlieue* films can play in creating a counter-discourse that complicates portrayals of the *banlieue* in other media and film by humanizing its inhabitants, the binary she creates between white and *beur*-authored films is problematic. Most critically, Tarr’s binary ignores the work of other minority *banlieue* filmmakers such as the ones analyzed in this chapter. Where do filmmakers of African origin, such as Al Malik, fit on this spectrum? Or films authored by Jewish persons of North African origin, such as both Ohayon and Benchetrit?

Benchetrit does reframe difference in *Asphalte*, but without following many of the neo-realist tropes of the typical *banlieue* film. Instead, he creates a surreal, otherworldly cartography of immobility whose distance from reality allows him to reframe the same questions of diversity, inclusion, and exclusion by turning the experience of isolation in the *banlieue* into something lyrical and poetic. Benchetrit’s otherworldly vision of the *banlieue* allows him to problematize the tropes of the *banlieue* genre itself by dramatizing the way that the *banlieue* is frequently portrayed in the media. He nonetheless situates his film in the *banlieue* genre by playing into certain stereotypes of

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 99.

banlieue imagery, such as the dilapidated HLM towers and decaying *grands-ensembles*. Finally, like many *banlieue* filmmakers Tarr references, Benchetrit introduces a human element to the *banlieue*, but his interconnecting stories eschew the hierarchies of protagonist and supporting characters by presenting six, equally-fleshed out characters in whom the audience is equally invested. This non-hierarchical web of protagonists avoids the clichés of one individual with extraordinary abilities leaving the *banlieue* by instead focusing on how those who remain within the *banlieue* navigate the space and achieve progress and mobility of a different kind through their rediscovery of the power of human connection.

Unlike many *banlieue* films, in which the images of tall, looming towers form the backdrop for action which takes place across a much larger space, Benchetrit turns his gaze inwards, focusing on just one HLM tower and the people within it. The mental map depicted in the film is a small one that centers on one apartment building, the housing project where Benchetrit grew up.<sup>252</sup> While the book upon which the film was based, *Le Temps des tours*, was set in Marne-La-Vallée, very little context is given for the film's setting other than three establishing shots at the beginning of the film (Figure 6). The first is an image of a housing estate that is in the process of being demolished. The walls of the rooms on the side of the building have been torn away and we see the interior of the rooms, exposed to the viewer's gaze, previewing what the film viewer will be doing, which is looking in on the interior lives of the people living in this building. A large

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<sup>252</sup> While this is not directly indicated in the film, the book upon which the film is based is, likewise, centered around the apartment building where Benchetrit grew up.

bulldozer next to the building serves as a reminder that the demolition is ongoing, and acts as a nod to the ongoing process of demolishing many housing estate demolition projects which has continued throughout the 2000s.<sup>253</sup> The camera cuts to the next shot, which is zoomed in on the telephone wires across the street from the building and emphasizes the grey, cloudy sky. The last shot is of the front of what is presumably the same building from the first shot. It shows the traces of life of the people who live there, even if the image itself is completely devoid of people, a marked contrast to both Al Malik and Ohayon's *banlieue* cartographies which were full of people in motion. Instead, like an explorer discovering a new landscape, or an astronaut landing on a new planet, the viewer searches for evidence of human life, such as laundry and bicycles on the balconies. Each balcony is also furnished with a satellite TV dish, suggesting a connection to elsewhere as the dishes search for images of a different, more picturesque world. (Later in the film, Sterkowitz will take pictures of the images he sees on TV in an effort to impress the nurse he's befriended by pretending to have traveled to the places his satellite TV dish picks up.) These opening shots set the viewer up as a self-conscious spectator who is gawking at the desolation of the housing estate and wondering who could possibly live in such a bleak, dilapidated space. This experience makes literal the voyeurism with which spectators approach many *banlieue* films, which are often irrationally tasked with representing the experiences of all *banlieue* residents through a single story told over a couple hours.

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<sup>253</sup> Maurice Blanc, "Démolition des grands ensembles et mixité sociale," *Espaces et sociétés* 1 no. 124-125 (2006): 185-189.

FIGURE SIX



*In order clockwise from left to right, the three establishing shots of *Asphalte**

By not providing any other contextual clues for the setting of the film, Benchetrit is playing on viewer's own assumptions and images regarding the *banlieue*. The image of a disintegrating housing estate immediately situates the film in the *banlieue*, and, on the basis of these first three shots, his portrayal of the space appears woefully unimaginative, stereotypical, and outdated. As David-Alexandre Wagner's study of *banlieue* imagery shows, tall, looming housing estates were an inescapable feature of the opening shots of films set in the *banlieue* between 1984 and 1996, however, films made after this period

tended to seek more creative ways of situating viewers in the *banlieue*.<sup>254</sup> By beginning his film with these three abrupt images of a disintegrating housing estate, Benchetrit seems to be going back to these dated methods of portraying the *banlieue*. Just as spectators think they know what type of film they will see, the camera cuts to a room inside the building, which is filled with people of all ages and races, revealing the rich inner lives of the building's residents. While the opening would seem at first to indicate a conformity with stereotypes of the *banlieue*, the contrast produced between these opening images actually sets the viewer up for a story which, despite its initial appearances, does not at all fit the narrative of typical *banlieue* films.

Benchetrit also plays with viewers' expectations for a *banlieue* film by challenging the stereotypes of who lives in the housing estates. Typically, housing estates in *banlieue* films are populated by racial minorities—Arabs, Portuguese, and Africans—and the groups of characters reflect the same *black, blanc, beur* ethnic makeup popularized in *La Haine*. By contrast, the inhabitants of the housing estate in *Asphalte* are nearly all white, and all of the protagonists, with the exception of Madame Hamida, who is Arab, are white. This marks a departure from the majority of *banlieue* films, including *Papa was not a Rolling Stone* and *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!*. Furthermore, Benchetrit takes Isabelle Huppert, one of the biggest French film stars who is recognized not just in France but also internationally, and places her in the same dilapidated housing estate which would, in a typical *banlieue* film, be occupied by lesser-known minorities.

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<sup>254</sup> Wagner, *De la banlieue stigmatisée à la cité démystifiée*, 285.



Benchetrit makes little effort to transform Huppert, who, in the role of Jeanne Meyer, a washed up actress forced to move back to the *banlieue* to save money, basically plays herself had her career not taken off. He further invites the audience to make a connection between Jeanne and Huppert by showing Charly and Jeanne watching one of Jeanne's earlier films, *La femme sans bras*, which is actually footage from Claude Goretta's film *La Dentellière* (1977) in which Huppert starred. By placing Isabelle Huppert, an icon of French cinema and metropolitan French identity, in the *banlieue* and making her just as immobile and stuck as any of the other persons in the housing estate, Benchetrit is drawing a connection between metropolitan France and his center, and showing his viewers that the *banlieue* is not simply home to minorities and immigrants.

Jeanne is not the only white character in the film, and, like all of the other white French adult characters in the film, her mobility is restricted. Cinema can further highlight what Bourdieu has termed *hexis*, which is to say "one's relationship to the social world and to one's proper place in it" which is "never more clearly expressed than in the space and time one feels entitled to take from others."<sup>255</sup> Film shows the thought processes of an individual before entering a space, and through camera angles, extradiegetic music, or voice overs, gives the viewer a significantly more in-depth understanding of this individual body's relationship with the space it can occupy, in other words, with the areas it can and cannot move into. In *Asphalte*, Benchetrit creates a *hexis* of French whiteness that challenges prevailing stereotypes about the possibilities for

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<sup>255</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 474.

movement within the *banlieue*. Jeanne, a white French woman, never leaves her floor of the housing estate, and the nurse never strays from the hospital courtyard. Sterkowitz, a white French man, is confined to a wheelchair that makes moving even a few feet a tremendous struggle. By contrast, Madame Hamida, the only protagonist of color in the film, moves freely around the *banlieue*, going to the market to pick up ingredients to make couscous for John, or visiting her son in prison. Likewise, John, an American man, travels from outer space, to the French *banlieue*, and back to America over the course of the 100-minute film. By making a film that is set in a “typical” *banlieue* space, which is to say, a graffiti-covered apartment building where poverty is rampant, and yet eschews the typical racial dynamics of the *banlieue* film, and the mobility associated with them, Benchetrit is challenging the pervading stereotypes about the *banlieue*. By re-inscribing white stories into the *banlieue*, he is showing that minorities are not the only people who live in the *banlieue* and, furthermore, they are not the only ones whose social mobility is restricted by the power-geometries in the *banlieue*.

Benchetrit’s play with color does not stop with the race of his characters, but rather, continues with the color palette he selects for the film. Much like the Instagram photos the square aspect ratio of the camera evokes, the film appears to have been put through a filter that distorts the colors, creating an eerie, surreal environment for the characters. Throughout the film, Benchetrit sticks to a highly symbolic and unnatural color palette of sickly greens, alarming fire-engine reds, and cool blues that reinforce the idea that this story is taking place in an otherworldly space. Benchetrit’s fascination with the otherworldliness of color in the *banlieue* was first developed in *Le Temps des tours*,

the book upon which the film is based, where he also lingers on the colors of the *banlieue* through John's eyes. In the book, much like in the film, John is alien outsider looking at his surroundings from the windows of Madame Hamida's thirteenth-floor *HLM* apartment. John's description of the sky is particularly striking

Le ciel est étrange, nous sommes pourtant en fin d'après-midi et sa couleur est proche du rose ici, le ciel ne dégage pas une lumière naturelle, c'est autre chose, comme un éclat chimique...En fait le ciel est électrique comme le sont les néons accrochés partout dans le paysage...Des milliers de néons.<sup>256</sup>

The sky in Benchetrit's *banlieue* is something other-worldly. The sun never shines in either his book or his film. Benchetrit creates an equally unnatural, chemically-colored sky in the movie when Sterkowitz and the nurse look up at the sky and see that, instead of the expected blackness of nighttime, it is instead all neon reds and blues.

Though he does not use verbal descriptions of color in the film, Benchetrit nonetheless recreates this same, otherworldly mental map of the *banlieue* through the colors and lighting that he chooses. If the light outdoors is too grey and cold, the light indoors is at times unnaturally yellow and green, creating a sickly, unnatural environment. Likewise, when his characters, such as Sterkowitz, do step outside at night, they are bathed in the very same unnatural neon lights—harsh blues, deep reds, all of which deliberately eschew the warm orange-yellow glow of natural sunlight. In drawing attention to the neon lights of the *banlieue*, Benchetrit is evoking not just the unnaturalness of the landscape, but also the industrial past of the *banlieue*, and,

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<sup>256</sup> Samuel Benchetrit, *Chroniques de l'asphalte tome 1: Le temps des tours* (Paris: Julliard, 2005), 172.

especially, the people who were brought to work in the factories that fueled the progress of the *trentes glorieuses* in the wake of World War II.<sup>257</sup>

This unusual color palette portends an equally bizarre filmic counter-map of the *banlieue*. Everything about the *banlieue*, from the tall, gray, buildings to the uncanny absence of people in the street, is otherworldly, which is reinforced by the fact that this entire scene is being described from an astronaut who just himself returned from outer space. Even the sky cannot take on its usual natural color palette of blue, white, or gray; instead it is a pinkish color without any natural light. Just as there is nothing natural in Benchetrit's *banlieue* (trees and grass are notably absent from the film) there is nothing natural about the colors that one finds; they are all industrial, manufactured. Entering the *banlieue*, as is not so subtly hinted by John the astronaut crash landing from outer space, is akin to landing on a different planet that is not governed by the same rules of nature, and might not even be natural at all.

The otherworldliness of the *banlieue* Benchetrit creates is reinforced by the soundscape of the film. There is very little sound in the movie, and even the character's

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<sup>257</sup> Benchetrit has a longstanding fascination with the contrast between this unnatural environment of the contemporary *banlieue* and the idyllic green fields that used to be the vacation spots of the *bourgeoisie* and inspiration for nineteenth-century impressionist paintings. In *Chroniques de l'Asphalte tome I*, he reminds his readers: "Ça avait été la campagne ici. Je vous assure, la vraie campagne. Avec des champs à parte de vue, des forêts, et peut-être même des animaux sauvages. Pas facile d'imaginer que ces tours n'avaient pas toujours été là" (155). The contrast that is evoked in this passage between the simple, bucolic beauty of the pre-HLM *banlieues* and the cold, gray, decaying towers is striking. This evocation of the countryside reminds the reader that the countryside surrounding Paris used to be a destination for the nineteenth century tourist who wanted to get out of the city and enjoy the quiet, simple beauty of the countryside. In evoking the countryside, Benchetrit also reminds his readers that the tall concrete towers of the *banlieues* were not always there; indeed, they are a relatively new phenomenon. Nevertheless, he also demonstrates the extent to which it is unfathomable for the average person either inside or outside of the *banlieue* to imagine a world without them.

speech is somewhat short and halting, creating a relatively silent environment. This silence is punctuated by the eerie sounds of what turns out to be a garbage dumpster opening and closing. Throughout the film, these sounds are interpreted by the characters as everything from babies crying to tigers roaring. Inside the apartments, the characters listen to the wind howling and hear the creaking footsteps of people walking above and below, a constant reminder that these characters live in an apartment building with other people. In the absence of other sounds, this reinforces the humanity of the people living in the space.

There is almost no extradiegetic music in the film except for a haunting piano melody that designates moments of connection between the characters. The diegetic music is equally limited: the rap songs on a boom box played by two of Charly's friends, the thumping beats of a car as it drives by the front of the building, and Cock Robin's 1985 hit, "When your heart is weak," which John McKenzie listens to as he floats aimlessly in space. This song, a one-hit wonder in Europe in the 80s, is the only song with intelligible lyrics in the entire movie, and serves as an important intertext since it is one of the few things, other than the old TV sets in the characters' apartments, that situates the film in the 1980s. Much like "Envole-moi" in *Papa was not a Rolling Stone*, the lyrics of "When your heart is weak" also prefigure the actions and inner thoughts of the characters. The verse "I'm gonna come without warning / when your defenses are down and you're in / a desperate need / Oh, I bet then, you'll welcome me" effectively summarizes the plot of the entire movie, in which these three pairs of characters find each other unexpectedly and change one another's lives in profound ways.

Instead of creating a cinematic cartography that extends between Paris and its *banlieue*, or even seeks to reshape the *banlieue* in which it is set, Benchetrit keeps the setting of his film small. All but one of the three interwoven stories take place entirely within the space of the apartment building, and, even in the story that takes place outside of them—that Sterkowitz and his nurse—the setting is incidental, as the majority of the medium and close up shots do not show much of their surroundings. This close camerawork draws the viewer towards the characters, producing a feeling of connection that is as intense as the relationships between the two characters. In the absence of humanity or movement outside, the film focuses on the interior worlds of its characters, both literally (their internal homes) and figuratively (their internal states of mind). The square aspect ratio of the camera, recurring close-up shots of faces, and almost complete lack of panoramic or wide-angle shots further reinforce this, creating a world that is so drawn in and closed together, it almost feels artificial.

Within this surreal world, attempts at movement are equally unnatural. Movement, on the rare occasion that it does happen, represents a herculean effort. Only half of the characters are ever shown moving: Charly, who is briefly seen on his bike, John McKenzie, who falls from space, and Sterkowitz, who makes a harrowing trip to see the nurse he befriended at the hospital near the housing estate. Sterkowitz, who was wheelchair bound after a freak exercise bike accident left his legs unusable, gets stuck in the elevator on his way to visit the nurse. Terrified of missing her, as he promised that he would take her photo that night, he forces his way out of the elevator and, for the first time since he was placed in the wheelchair, he walks all the way to the hospital. The

journey takes him all night and most of the morning, and, to add suspense, the camera cuts between Sterkowitz's journey and the other two stories. Once he has made it out of the building, Sterkowitz is shown crossing the same construction site shown in the opening shot of the film. The camera and the scenery around him remains immobile as he slowly makes his way forward until his pained face fills the entire screen. The next shot, of a mountain of rubble he must either climb over or walk even farther to maneuver around, emphasize the enormity of this challenge. Nevertheless, Sterkowitz makes it to the hospital in the morning, just as the nurse is finishing her night shift, and just in time to take a picture.

In contrast to *Papa was not a Rolling Stone* or *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!*, *Asphalte* presents a cartography of immobility, showing a housing estate in which people get so stuck it literally takes supernatural forces to get them moving again. This force could be Sterkowitz and his superhuman efforts to extract himself from the elevator and miraculously walk, without the assistance of his wheelchair, or John McKenzie, who literally falls from outer space and onto the roof of the housing estate in a NASA landing accident. Furthermore, the visual world created in the *Asphalte* both feeds into and challenges viewers' assumptions about the *banlieue*. On the one hand, viewers are presented with the same derelict, dilapidated buildings covered in graffiti, however, the assumptions about the people who live in there are challenged. Not only is whiteness reintroduced to the *banlieue* space, reminding viewers that it is not simply home to immigrants like Madame Hamida, but the entire space is also humanized through moving portraits of love and connection that tell universal stories that could extend beyond the

walls of the apartment building to apply to people of all kinds of races and socioeconomic backgrounds living in all manner of spaces. While everyone except the American John McKenzie ends up stuck in the *banlieue*, even at the end of the film, it is this eerie, otherworldly space that is confining them and not any insurmountable problems that are inherently wrong with the characters themselves. In Bencheitrit's formulation, it is not race or religion but rather the space of the *banlieue* which acts as a sticky trap that even ensnares actress Isabelle Huppert and makes it difficult for anyone to escape.

## CONCLUSION

While traditional maps may obscure these power dynamics operative in movement, and, particularly, social mobility, film, by contrast, can show all of the power dynamics underlying characters' movement in space and their relationship to it. If, as De Certeau has described, "the city is a zone of cultural conflict whose individual citizens inhabit a textual system of which they themselves are not the authors,"<sup>258</sup> then films are a way of upending these power dynamics. Autobiographical *banlieue* films especially place the power of storytelling back in the hands of *banlieue* inhabitants, allowing them to show a fuller portrait of mobility in the *banlieue* by highlighting the factors the factors which influence their mobility in space. These factors are traditionally relegated into different fields where they are not brought together; an economic analysis of the *banlieue*

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<sup>258</sup> Quoted in Adrian Fielder, "Poaching on Public Space: Urban Autonomous Zones in French *Banlieue* Films," in *Cinema and the City*, eds. Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2001), 272.



rarely makes its way onto a map of the *banlieue*, while political science studies of the space may ignore the stories of individual citizens brought to light by an anthropological study. Films like *Papa was not a Rolling Stone*, *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!*, and *Asphalte* bring together all of these disparate threads into a single, unified vision of social mobility for the viewer.

While these films were released within a year of one another and share the commonality of being auto-adaptations of the directors' autobiographies, they present three different filmic counter-maps of the *banlieue*. These films are each counter-maps in that they offer far more information than that which is typically presented on a standard map. Through different approaches, the cartographies of (im)mobility in these films show the texture and dimension of the *banlieue* and humanize the people within it so that they are not just another dot on the map, or another number in a larger data set. Furthermore, each film deals in depth with the question of mobility, which can range from the simple ability to leave home, as in *Asphalte*, to the possibilities for social mobility for those with exceptional talent, as in *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* and *Papa was not a Rolling Stone*.

Ohayon's film paints a bright, happy portrait of a *banlieue* where people are free to move about and develop deep connections, but which is impossible for most to leave. Even those who do leave, such as her protagonist Stéphanie, suffer greatly as a result. Al Malik's portrait of Neuhof and Strasbourg widens the map of the *banlieue* beyond the outskirts of Paris and suggests that it is nothing other than the characters' individual choices, which can lead them to overdose on drugs or be caught up in crime rings that could lead to their untimely deaths, that restricts the mobility of people there. Even those

with exceptional talent, such as Régis, can still find themselves caught up in this world and it is only through sheer luck and chance, as well as talent and determination, that he makes it out. Finally, Benchetrit lingers fully on immobility, telling the only story of the three in which none of the characters leave the *banlieue*, and, indeed, a story in which none of the characters even express a desire to leave the *banlieue*. Instead, he shows the incredible effort it can take to move, even within the space of the *banlieue*, let alone to move outside of it.

In addition to chronicling space and mobility within it, these films are also deeply emotional. Giuliana Bruno's concept of the 'architexture' of film shows how film is an exceptional tool for capturing the many memories that are stored within the space of the city. For Bruno, film is as "an architextural manifestation of social texture" which holds within it a wealth of richness in memories of space, putting those on display for the world to see. Film accomplishes this through its motion which "fundamentally 'moves' us, with its ability to render affects and, in turn, to affect."<sup>259</sup> It is this affective quality of film that further differentiates the filmic map from a traditional map as it is this affect that sticks with viewers and continues to mold their impressions of the space in a way that is more profound and lasting than looking at a map. Likewise, *Papa was not a Rolling Stone*, *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!*, and *Asphalte* are all meant to provide an affective portrait of the *banlieue* and its residents, and, particularly, to encourage their viewers to think about the emotional cost of social mobility in the *banlieue*, even when it is successful.

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<sup>259</sup> Bruno, "Motion and Emotion," 26.

Each of these films also present a unique perspective on leaving the *banlieue*. Leaving is not merely about escaping the *banlieue*, or even building a better life for oneself. Rather, the experience for those who do leave the *banlieue*, as was the case for each of these directors, is enormously complex. In each film, we see the directors working through the exceptionality of their own trajectories, and we see how each is haunted by the many people that were not able to follow them. Whether these characters stay fixed in the *banlieue*, emotionally supporting those who leave, as was the case with Stéphanie's friends and family, or they are ghosts in a cemetery, as with Régis's friends and acquaintances, or they make connections in the same apartment building, as is the case in Benchetrit's film, the people they left behind never fully leave the minds of these directors. In these films, we see the directors working through a guilt that they escaped when others did not, as well as the fear and isolation they experienced as they took the necessary steps to leave the *banlieue*. These emotions complicate the simplistic narrative of bright and talented people leaving the *banlieue* to pursue a better life. Furthermore, these themes go beyond typical *banlieue* films, speaking to and addressing universal themes that are not specific to a zip code but rather are part of the fraught process of growing up, no matter where we call home. These questions of visually representing home become all the more pertinent in autobiographical *bande dessinée*, as artists must find a way to draw their memories and use non-mimetic caricatures to represent these memories, while also striving to represent the complexity of their past and avoid stereotypes.

### Chapter Three: (Re)Framing Stereotypes

“So *is* there *BD* about the *banlieue*?” This was, without a doubt, the question I got asked the most frequently as I was conducting the research for this chapter. Even at the specialized *bande dessinée*<sup>260</sup> libraries in Angoulême and Brussels, my requests for “*banlieue BD*” were met with puzzled stares. While some *bande dessinée* is tagged as “*banlieue*” at both the Cité Internationale de la bande dessinée et de l’image in Angoulême and the Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée in Brussels, the use of the tag is somewhat haphazard, leaving out works that clearly speak about the *banlieue* and including others that are, at best, tangentially related.<sup>261</sup>

This lack of attention to *bande dessinée* about the *banlieue* on the part of the archives is also reflected in academia. Though there have been numerous studies published recently to introduce an Anglophone public to the Francophone *bande dessinée* tradition, there are no monographs that deal directly with *bande dessinée* about the

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<sup>260</sup> I use the French term, *bande dessinée*, for French comics as opposed to its English translation (comics) because of the wildly different histories in legitimacy and reception of Francophone versus Anglophone comics (for more, see, among others, Charles Forsdick, Laurence Grove and Libbe McQuillan, *Francophone Bande Dessinée* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi: 2005). While French and Belgium *bande dessinée* have always been a respected and recognized part of the national culture and identity—they are often referred to as the “neuvième art”—Anglophone comics have struggled to receive a similar level of cultural legitimacy. (Granted, this attitude has been changing in recent years. Particularly after the publication of several key Anglophone texts that were marketed as “graphic novels” to indicate that they were aimed at adults—Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Alan Moore’s *The Watchmen*—Anglophone comics have been seen as something for adults. The Anglophone academy has been following suit, in particular thanks to the efforts of scholars such as John Lent and his *International Journal of Comics Art*. Nevertheless, the position of comics in Anglophone countries remains distinctly different from that in Francophone countries, where *bande dessinée* has been directly marketed at adults since the 1960s and the first university comics course was offered in the 1970s (Forsdick, Grove, and McQuillan, *Francophone Bande Dessinée*, 7-10).) Thus, to recognize the unique history and position of Francophone comics, a tradition from which the comics in the present study draw considerably, I choose to use the term *bande dessinée* when referring to French comics.

<sup>261</sup> To see my own compiled list of *bande dessinée* about the *banlieue* from 1999 to present, please refer to the Appendix.

*banlieue* in English, and there is only one in French.<sup>262</sup> Isabelle Papieau's *La Banlieue de Paris dans la bande dessinée* (2001) was published at the beginning of the period that interests me (1999-2015), however, it is mainly concerned with *bande dessinée* that was published in the 1980s and reflects a *banlieue* from the 1960s (or earlier). While her work is critically important for both its recognition of the fact that there *is* a tradition of *bande dessinée* about the *banlieue* and for its identification of some key tropes and stereotypes that exist in *bande dessinée* about the *banlieue* from this period, she has left the analysis of the present tradition of *banlieue bande dessinée* up to other scholars.

There is also a general lack of shorter articles or book chapters that offer an either an overview or close analysis of *banlieue bande dessinée*, although Mark McKinney's "Framing the Banlieue" is an important exception.<sup>263</sup> Here, McKinney draws parallels between American "blaxploitation" films and Francophone *banlieue bande dessinée*, arguing that the interest in both comes from a place of voyeurism, and that the works themselves tend to perpetuate and reinforce stereotypes that circulate in the media.<sup>264</sup> This is an important observation; however, it was published before the release of several *banlieue bande dessinée* albums that directly challenged the blaxploitation-esque tropes

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<sup>262</sup> For more general overviews of the Francophone *bande dessinée* tradition see Ann Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée: Critical Approaches to French-language Comics* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007); Forsdick, Grove, and McQuillan, *Francophone Bande Dessinée*; Laurence Grove, *Comics in French: The European Bande Dessinée in Context* (Berghahn Books, 2005); Matthew Screech, *Masters of the Ninth Art: Bandes dessinées and Franco-Belgian Identity* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005); Bart Beaty, *Unpopular Culture: Transforming the European Comic Book in the 1990s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

<sup>263</sup> Mark McKinney, "Framing the Banlieue," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 8, no. 2 (2004): 113-126.

<sup>264</sup> McKinney, "Framing the Banlieue," 118.

found in much of the mainstream *banlieue bande dessinée* McKinney identifies. Nearly a decade and a half later, McKinney's overview, which was published in 2004, is by no means comprehensive.

Paradoxically, the lack of interest in *banlieue bande dessinée* on the part of *bande dessinée* archives and academia is not matched by a lack of *banlieue bande dessinée* itself.<sup>265</sup> To the contrary, *bande dessinée* about the *banlieue* could (and should) be the subject of an entire dissertation. Furthermore, many *banlieue bande dessinée* works have received official recognition either in the form of prizes at Angoulême, or, in the case of one author, Halim Mahmoudi, a prominent position in the permanent exhibits of an official French museum, the Musée nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration.<sup>266</sup> While a comprehensive analysis of this material, which is very much needed, is beyond the scope of this dissertation chapter, I will nevertheless provide an overview of some of the major series, themes, and methods of presentations used in *banlieue bande dessinée*.

Understanding the milieu from which the works I analyze in this chapter come is essential to understanding the trends to which they are reacting and responding.

In this chapter, I am focusing on autobiographical and autofictive *bande dessinée*

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<sup>265</sup> In my research at both the Cité Internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image and the Centre Belge de la bande dessinée, I was surprised by the incompleteness of their *banlieue bande dessinée* holdings, particularly at the Cité Internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image, which is meant, among other things, to be a repository for all Francophone *bande dessinée* that has been published since the creation of the center in to house all *bande dessinée* that has been published since the center's inauguration in 1990. Nevertheless, I found that the most complete *banlieue bande dessinée* collection could be found at the Bibliothèque Nationale de la France in Paris, provided that one was requesting specific titles.

<sup>266</sup> Gilles Rochier, Berthet One, Nine Antico, and Adrian Fournier, all of whom grew up in the *banlieue* and have written about their experiences there, are some of the more recent winners of prizes at Angoulême for their *bande dessinée*.

accounts of childhood and young adulthood written by persons who grew up in the *banlieue*: Gilles Rochier's *TMLP: Ta mère la pute* (2011), Nine Antico's *Le goût du paradis* (2008), and Halim Mahmoudi's *Arabico* (2009) and *Un monde libre* (2014). Like the novels in Chapter One and the films in Chapter Two, these all represent the authors' first *bande dessinée* albums. I examine how these authors reframe *banlieue* stereotypes propagated by both the media and other *bande dessinée* by pivoting the media's camera to show different sides of the story that may not have previously been seen. The use of the sequential medium of *bande dessinée* allows these authors to provide—and allowing the reader to perceive simultaneously—the full scope of events that led to a particular moment. I aim to show how each of these authors tackles a different stereotype: the Arab for Mahmoudi, the delinquent, violent gang of young men for Rochier, and the vulnerable young girl living in the *banlieue* for Antico. Before moving to my analysis of each author's individual work, I will provide an explanation of how frame and space work in *bande dessinée*, and what possibilities they present to reframe stereotypes, followed by a brief overview of the field of *banlieue bande dessinée* out of which they arise.

### **(RE)FRAMING STEREOTYPES**

Regardless of the style in which it is drawn or the stories that it tells, all *banlieue bande dessinée*, like *bande dessinée* generally, depends on caricature and symbols. The emphasis on the symbolic is particularly relevant to depictions of the *banlieue*, which is defined by symbols. As I argued in the introduction, although the word *banlieue* technically refers to any suburban area of France, the term nonetheless recalls very specific imagery that is not reflective of all of the areas surrounding metropolitan centers.

A quick Google image search for “*la banlieue*,” for instance, brings up images of large concrete jungles dotted with tall, looming towers, groups of young men in hooded sweatshirts, and burnt cars, not images of the wealthier suburbs that surround major French urban areas. These are the same images that recurred in the corpus of *banlieue bande dessinée* texts discussed above.

More so than anything else, towering housing estates, *HLMs*, have come to define the *banlieue* as it exists in the popular imagination. Papieau notes that the *HLM* tower reigns supreme in the *banlieue* skyline: “Brisant, désintégrant les foisonnements multiformes de terrains cultivés ou en friches, les grands ensembles s’imposent, prophétiques d’un progrès nourri d’une illusoire négation de la nature.”<sup>267</sup> Initially, these towers were meant to represent progress, as they provided much-needed additional housing and signaled, according to their creators, the beginnings of a modern-day utopia.<sup>268</sup> Today, however, the overabundance of towers and concrete is a direct negation of the utopia that was promised when these structures were initially built. In the introduction to his album of photographs, *Douce Banlieue* (2005), Gérard Mordillat argues that towers dominate the *banlieue* to such an extent that they themselves reproduce the very stereotypes with which they are associated, saying that the “décor sinistre des ‘HLM blêmes’” creates the image of the *banlieue* as “un abcès, le lieu commode où se creusent plaies et blessures, le point d’origine du bruit et de la fureur, la

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<sup>267</sup> Isabelle Papieau, *La banlieue de Paris dans la bande dessinée* (Paris: Harmattan, 2001), 47.

<sup>268</sup> Isabelle Papieau, *La construction des images dans les discours sur la banlieue parisienne: Pratiques et productions esthétiques* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996), 158. See also Jean-Marc Stébé and Hervé Marchal, *Mythologie des cités-ghettos* (Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu, 2009), 27-30.



source d'angoisses tenaces et de fantasmes en tout genre."<sup>269</sup> The term "HLM blêmes" can here be understood as a pun; it combines the French acronym for moderate-rent housing (Habitation à loyer modéré) with the word for "pallid" while simultaneously playing on the word "emblèmes" (emblems), notwithstanding the latter's more nasally pronounced prefix. It thus encapsulates the extent to which the symbol of the *HLM* towers over the space of the *banlieue* stigmatizing it as a locus of economic poverty, violence, and crime.

Walter Lippmann defines the stereotype as "une représentation partielle et inadéquate du réel, mais adaptée aux intérêts de ceux qui le produisent et l'utilisent, résistante à toute modification et évaluation rationnelle."<sup>270</sup> While there is no reason that *HLM* towers necessarily should be places of poverty, violence, crime, and unemployment, they nonetheless are stereotypically associated with these ideas because of real-life events that have taken place in and around these towers. The *banlieue* is a site of poverty and unemployment disproportional to the rest of France<sup>271</sup>, and the many riots that have taken place in the *banlieue* since the 1980s have solidified a connection between the *banlieue* and violence.<sup>272</sup> These stereotypes are then reinforced and

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<sup>269</sup> Gérard Mordillat and Frédérique Jacquet, *Douce banlieue. Une mémoire ouvrière* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2005), 247.

<sup>270</sup> Quoted in Ferdinando Fava, "Banlieue de Palerme: Déconstruire les stigmates, semiotiser autrement," in *Discours et sémiotisation de l'espace: Les représentations de la banlieue et de sa jeunesse*, ed. Béatrice Turpin, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012), 78n3.

<sup>271</sup> While the French government does not collect official census data about race, unemployment in France overall, and especially among French youth, was very high in the 1990s. National unemployment was around 10%, higher than in most other western European countries, and youth unemployment was around 40%. See Alec Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 163.

<sup>272</sup> Dominic Thomas also describes the *banlieue* as "spaces of exclusion are defined by harsh living conditions, violence, police brutality and elevated levels of unemployment. The harsh realities on the ground prove to be quite the contrary to the exoticism associated with Charef's 'Orientalist' title; what we

exploited, either by politicians looking for a bump in the polls around elections, or by artistic works which reproduce the same stereotypes to sell more *bande dessinée*, until they take on such a life of their own that their relationship to fact becomes dubious.

Building on Lippmann's definition of the stereotype, Béatrice Turpin stresses the image-based qualities of stereotypes, saying "à la base du stéréotype il y a également des actes d'invention collectifs qui recomposent un partage collectif d'icônes: le stéréotype joue donc comme une fiction opératoire et demeure un savoir en quête d'objectivation."<sup>273</sup> The stereotype produces an icon (an image such as the *HLM* tower) that is born from the combination of collective inventions. In *Declining the stereotype*, Mireille Rossello likewise emphasizes the image-based nature of stereotypes, even those which originated from text, saying "the stereotyping process turns the text into an image because it transforms the symbolic freedom of endless assembling and disassembling into a symbolic lack of flexibility."<sup>274</sup> While, in Rosello's view, text presents the possibility for greater nuance and flexibility, the image is the inflexible product of the combination of these more flexible words and phrases. Once the stereotype has been transformed into an image, it takes on an iconic, representative status that is immediately memorable and conveys a great deal of information within a single image.

While comics are a combination of words and images, more so than words,

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have here then, is an account of a lost generation, victims of the failed economic and social integration policies of the 1980s and 1990s that will arguably provide the coordinates for the uprisings of 2005"—see Dominic Thomas, "Postcolonial Writing in France" in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, Ato Quayson, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 612.

<sup>273</sup> Fava, "Banlieue de Palerme," 78.

<sup>274</sup> Mireille Rossello, *Declining the stereotype: Ethnicity and Representation in French Cultures* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1998), 23.

images are the key communicative element of comics because of their symbolic value. In the introduction to their volume, *The Language of Comics: Word and Image*, Robin Varnum and Christina Gibbons remind their readers not to forget the multifaceted, symbolic power of images, saying

Pictures seem more transparent than words, but often their transparency is illusory. They convey ideas and values...pictures (especially simplified cartoon pictures) are abstractions. They suppress certain aspects of experience and foreground others. Like words, **images can serve as symbols**. (emphasis mine)<sup>275</sup>

Comics rely on the symbolic power of images to transmit all kinds of information, from concrete aspects such as the setting to more abstract ideas such as characters' emotions or foreshadowing of events to come.

Like Rossello, Roland Barthes identifies language as a more flexible, subversive tool than the image. In *Leçon*, Barthes suggests that we can subvert stereotypes through a nonconformist use of language which refuses clichés. To challenge stereotypes through language, all one must do is “tricher avec la langue” using literature. It is through “cette tricherie salutaire, cette esquive, ce leurre magnifique, qui permet d’entendre la langue hors-pouvoir” that one challenges stale, preexisting frameworks by bringing new ideas into the conversation.<sup>276</sup> While Barthes looks to language to subvert stereotypes and clichés, comics and graphic art can intervene in similar and even more powerful ways. Through a medium which combines the power of language and wordplay with the

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<sup>275</sup> Robin Varnum and Christina T. Gibbons, “Introduction,” in *The Language of Comics: Word and Image*, Robin Varnum and Christina T. Gibbons, eds., (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2007) xii.

<sup>276</sup> Roland Barthes, *Leçon* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), 16.

symbolic inflexibility of the image, comics artists can redraw, reframe, and in the process, call into question readers' associations with particular stereotypes.

In the introduction to their monograph, *Postcolonial Comics: Texts, Events, Identities*, Binita Mehta and Pia Mukherji suggest that comics can perform just such a “deconstructive image function.” These “deconstructive image functions” respond to Timothy Brennan’s critique of dominant “economic image-functions,” which are visual systems that “encode rules of perception that regulate and determine ‘usable’ ideas of global peripheries” with the aim of maintaining present systems of imperial power.<sup>277</sup> In the *banlieue*, for instance, such “economic image-functions” might be the *HLM* towers, the violent street gangs, or the submissive Arab girl in need of protection from a misogynistic *banlieue* culture. Such images and stereotypes serve to keep the *banlieue* at the margins of society and to separate it from the rest of France, which is seen as distinct from these problems. Comics can challenge these “economic image-functions” by expanding the “global public sphere” where “the imperatives of the sign – drawing, art, photography, images or comics – can now no longer be perceived as cultural symbols [that communicate] obsolete authenticities.”<sup>278</sup> Instead, comics can reshape the ideas associated with these same images by placing them within a different context.

If we look, for instance, at the space of the *banlieue* and the comics that have been created about it, we see that it, too, has its own visual economy of symbols: tall, looming

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<sup>277</sup> Binita Mehta and Pia Mukherji, “Introduction,” in *Postcolonial Comics: Texts, Events, Identities*, eds. Binita Mehta and Pia Mukherji (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3.

<sup>278</sup> Okwui Enwezar, “Rapport des Force: African Comics and their Publics,” *Africa Comics*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2006, 18.

tower buildings; police in riot gear; young persons in athleisure street wear; leering reporters filming images to broadcast on mainstream media outlets. Of all of these symbols, the most common, appearing in every *bande dessinée* set in the *banlieue* that I could find, is the tall, looming skyscape of towers, which are often used to set the scene in the opening frames of the story. In their classic form, these HLM towers dominate the frame (and sometimes an entire page): a collection of tall, looming buildings devoid of people except for traces of graffiti. Greenery is often wholly absent. Instead, all that is presented is a seemingly endless mass of concrete, punctuated by tall towers that block out the sun.<sup>279</sup> While their form and placement may vary, the presence of a tower is a sure indication of the *banlieue* setting, an undeniable icon of the landscape that is, at best, problematized or challenged (cut in half, surrounded by greenery, relegated to the background), or, at worst, left to revel in its stereotypical glory.

Of course, these symbols do not exist in isolation in comics. These symbols are combined and contextualized with other drawings to form images which are sometimes left on their own or accompanied by text. This combination of text and image can

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<sup>279</sup> These depictions of the *banlieue* in *bande dessinée* are a reflection of depictions of the *banlieue* in other mediums. Marie Claude Taranger, in “Télévision et ‘western urbain’: enjeux et nuances de l’information sur les banlieues, *Les Cahiers de la Cinémathèque : Revue d’histoire du cinéma banlieues* 59/60 (1994), bemoans the caricatured portrayal of the *banlieue* in the news media: “d’abord c’est le décor: des tours, des barres, du béton, la proximité d’une grande ville. Et une fois le décor pose ... tout vient avec. Les acteurs? Au premier plan, des ‘jeunes’ ‘immigres’ d’un côté, et de l’autre: des policiers et/ou ‘des Français de souche’, voisins ou commerçants. Au second plan, personnages secondaires et figurants. Indispensables: le chœur des amis et parents, un ou des éducateurs ou autres travailleurs sociaux; facultatifs: le voisinage, le maire, d’autres responsables. L’action connaît peu de variantes: comme on le sait, c’est un drame. Le scénario type commence avec un vol de voiture, ou de bière, ou de croissants, ou encore un contrôle de police, ou ‘dans des circonstances mal établies’. Un ‘jeune’ ‘immigre’ est tué ou blessé par un policier, un commerçant, ou un voisin irascible. S’ensuit une ‘explosion de violence’: heurts avec la police, voitures incisives, commerces pillés et saccages, déclarations officielles. Puis le rideau tombe. C’était ‘Le malaise des banlieues’” (60).

produce a variety of different meanings. Barthes sees text as either anchoring a polysemic image or relaying it, which is to say, imbuing it with additional meanings.<sup>280</sup> McCloud, in the *Invisible Art*, likewise notes the importance of the play of text and image in comics by identifying a system of seven text-image relationships, each of which reveal a different type of information.<sup>281</sup>

These combinations of image and text are then enclosed within an individual frame and arranged on a page. Several comics theorists, including Eisner and Groensteen, caution against equating framing in film and framing in comics. The key difference, according to Groensteen, is that filming involves cropping an image that exists in the real world and relegating it to the off-screen, unseen part of the film. By contrast, comics authors have the freedom not only to shape their frames in any way they wish, but also to transcribe a mental image which exists, already, in a frame in the author's mind.<sup>282</sup> Thus, frames in comics are not a restriction, as they might be in the case of a camera that must crop the image, but rather can change to fit the boundaries of the full image as it already existed in the author's mind. Furthermore, the sequential nature of comics, in which the same space is often represented through several frames that the reader views simultaneously, provides the artist with the ultimate freedom to represent precisely that

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<sup>280</sup> Quoted in Miller *Reading bande dessinée*, 100.

<sup>281</sup> Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994) notes these functions as the following: (1) self-sufficient text, in which images only have an illustrative function (2) self-sufficient image, in which text serves as a soundtrack only (3) redundant frames, where the text and the drawing send the same message (4) additive, in which the text amplifies or specifies the message in the drawing, or vice-versa (5) parallel, in which words and drawings have no apparent connection (6) montage, in which the text is an integral part of the image and (7) interdependence, where text and image work together to express an idea that either one could not convey separately (161-163).

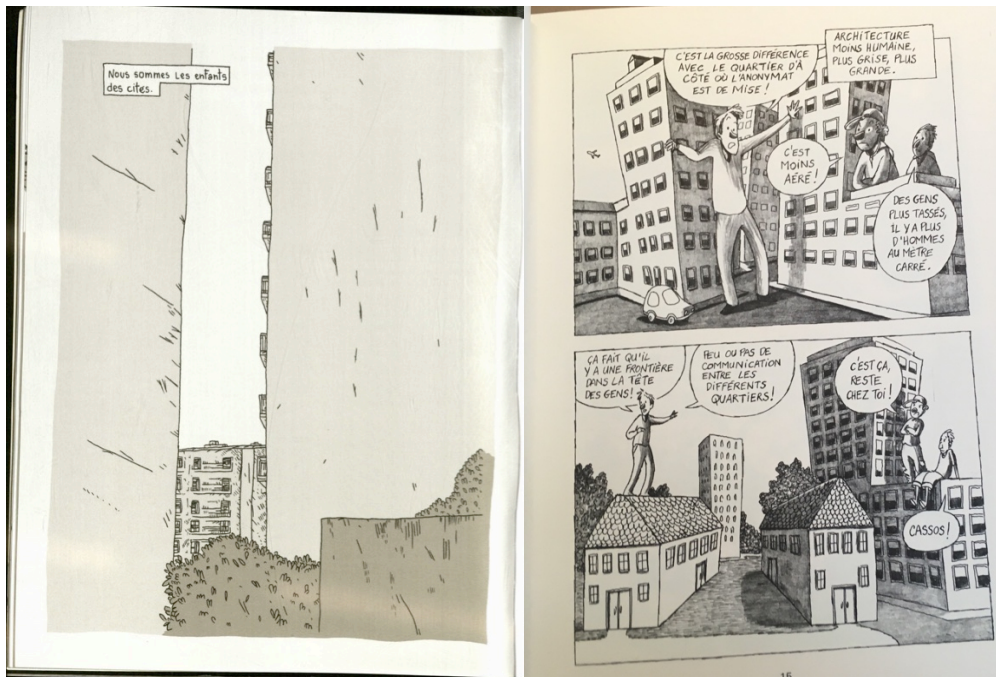
<sup>282</sup> Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 40.

which she pleases. To return to our earlier terminology, we can say that comics artists have the flexibility to arrange and manipulate the symbols they choose into a setting which precisely emphasizes or minimizes that which they wish to see. Thus, comics are an ideal medium for contesting the very logic of symbols and icons which they employ, as the author has the can reframe these symbols in any manner.

FIGURE SEVEN



*Clockwise from the top: Le goût du paradis, p. 12; Jeunes: des nouvelles de la cité, p. 15; TMLP (no page numbers)*



To illustrate this, let us return to our earlier example of towers looming in the background of *banlieue* narratives in *bande dessinée*. Using the tools above, there are numerous ways in which certain *bandes dessinées* reframe the symbol of the tower (Figure 7). Some involve a very filmic cropping of the tower so that the entirety is not shown, which significantly reduces the looming effect (see *Le goût du paradis*, TMLP). Others change the perspective on the tower entirely, showing it from above instead of below, as Gilles Rochier does in *Dernier Étage* (2004), or showing the towers next to the predominantly suburban houses that surround them, as Julien Revenu does in *Ligne B* (2011). Signs of life in the form of laundry hanging, people, greenery, or blue skies further serve to humanize the space. Taking advantage of the flexibility of realism in comics, the collectively-published *Jeunes: Des Nouvelles de la cité* (2004) depicts a *banlieue* in which the people are larger than the towers, again creating the effect of diminishing the towers. Still other artists may elect to keep the stereotypical representations of the towers in one frame, as Mahmoudi frequently does in *Arabico*, but then juxtaposes these stereotypical representations with close ups of human faces and the interior spaces that they occupy within the towers which, again, has the effect of humanizing the space. Others push the looming tower to a logical extreme, taking advantage of white space to represent a single tower that diminishes against a broad expanse of white space, once refusing the looming imagery of towers. The creative reframing of stereotypical images such as towers in the *banlieue* nearly always portends a more nuanced narrative; indeed, all of the examples referenced above tell stories that actively push against the caricatures found in mainstream *bande dessinée* and the media.



By creating a different *visual* narrative, *bande dessinée* artists who choose to eschew standard visual clichés set their readers up for an overall narrative that is going to further dismantle the stereotypes found in mainstream *banlieue bande dessinée*.

### **BANLIEUE BANDE DESSINÉE SINCE 2000**

Of the *bande dessinée* that deals with the *banlieue* directly, which is to say, the setting of the *banlieue* is a significant part of the story, a large number are humorous works which conform to visual stereotypes about the *banlieue* (Tehem's *Malika Secouss*, Seth El Diablo's *Lascars*, Dikeuss's *Les Assistés* and the later *Les Banlieuzards*, Morgan Navarro's *Flipper le flippé*, Relom's *Cité d'la balle*, see some sample covers in Figure 8). They often focus on groups of friends who follow the *black-blanc-beur* model set forth in *La Haine*. All of the aforementioned works follow the daily exploits of multiethnic groups of young men except for *Malika Secouss*, which is one of the few *banlieue bande dessinée* with a female protagonist who possess agency beyond being an object of sexual desire. These misadventures are often driven by boredom or a lack of access to resources and exploit characters' lack of education (here, *verlan* is framed not as an exercise in creativity, as it was in Rachid Djaïdani's *Boumkoeur* or Faïza Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain*, but rather as a marker of stupidity), clothing and physical appearance, and socioeconomic circumstances for humor. Other humorous works about the *banlieue*, such as Manu Larcenet's *Nic Oumouk* series, Charb's *Salle des Profs*, or Jak + Geg's *La Bande à Ed*, build on these simplistic representations to offer a more pointed critique of systems and issues in the *banlieue* from disability, to the school system, to the importance of education; however, these pockets of social commentary are nearly lost beneath the

numerous social and ethnic stereotypes within the texts. Several of these series, such as *Nic Oumouk* and *Malika Secouss* have been published with major houses (Dargaud and Glénat), showing that these types of stereotypical portrayals are quite commercially viable.

FIGURE EIGHT



Cover art for *Les Banlieuzards* and *Cité d'la balle*

Plenty of *bande dessinée* takes the subject of the *banlieue* as the opportunity to tell a very dark story that is not meant to be humorous in the slightest. Such narratives center on police violence (a theme that appeared much more in the wake of the 2005 riots, see Julien Revenu's *Ligne B* or Rim'K's *Ghetto Poursuite*), drug trafficking (Alexis De Raphelis's *Le Bloc* or Fred Bernard's *Little Odyssée*), the manipulative and distorting

projections of the media (Adrian Fournier's *Sur le terrain*), or a dystopic futuristic rendering of the *banlieue* transformed into some kind of highly-securitized police state akin to that envisioned in Pierre Morel's *Banlieue 13* film series (Baru's *Noir*, Nekodem's *Manioka*). While these themes often also appear in the humoristic *banlieue* narratives mentioned, this darker *banlieue bande dessinée* does not attempt to cut the bleakness of the subject matter with any type of humor. The color palette and drawing style of these series further reflects this tendency towards a kind of dramatic miserabilism, with minimal use of color, and a great deal of shadowing or imagery of violence. These stories rarely have a happy ending. At their most extreme, the reader witnesses the decline of a 'good' kid into the derelict depths of *banlieue* crime. Generally, like the films analyzed in Chapter Two, these narratives insist upon the general impossibility of success in, or, barring that, escape from, the *banlieue* and the many limitations it places upon the ambitions of even its most precocious inhabitants. These stories are nearly always exclusively masculine. Women, when they do feature, are often relegated to extremes: either vulnerable sisters and mothers or hyper-sexualized prostitutes.

Both of these genres of *banlieue bande dessinée* are rife with stereotypical representations of the *banlieue*. In particular, the humorous works tend to uncritically reproduce highly problematic ethnic stereotypes. While no work has been done on the reproduction of ethnic stereotypes in *banlieue bande dessinée* specifically, the racist representation of minority characters in comics has been the subject of a great deal of

scholarship.<sup>283</sup> In *Black Images in the Comics: A Visual History*, Fredrik Strömberg analyzes representations of black characters in over 100 comics from around the world and suggests that the use of stereotypes is so pronounced in comics because “it is harder to differentiate between persons from a national group other than one’s own” and that artists’ work reflects “what society has deemed acceptable at a certain point and time.”<sup>284</sup> Nevertheless, in his forward to the same book, Charles Johnson rejects this idea, arguing that stereotypes reflect a “lack of invention, daring, or innovation” for a cartoonist who “is content to uncritically work with *received*, prefabricated imagery and ideas minted in the minds of others.”<sup>285</sup> Such an uncritical engagement with difference cannot help but reproduce the same preexisting notions of alterity and heighten feelings of difference and separation instead of bringing works together.

McKinney applies this problematic re-presentation of difference directly to *banlieue bande dessinée*. Noting the parallels between the French *banlieue* and the American ghetto (both suffer from higher rates of economic poverty and unemployment, tend to have high concentrations of minorities, and are notorious for creating police problems in the form of riots and violent uprisings), McKinney has suggested that humorous *bandes dessinées* are reminiscent of “blaxploitation” films produced about the

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<sup>283</sup> McKinney’s article “Framing the Banlieue” touches on this briefly, but this is not the main focus of his work, even though he has looked at the creation of stereotypes of ethnic minorities in comics in a colonial context. For more on this, see McKinney, *Redrawing the French Empire in Comics* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013).

<sup>284</sup> Fredrik Strömberg, *Black Images in the Comics: A Visual History*, Foreword by Charles Johnson, (Korea: Fantagraphics Books, 2003), 23, 24.

<sup>285</sup> Charles Johnson, “Forward,” in *Black Images in the Comics*, 12

American ghetto between 1970 and 1974.<sup>286</sup> Many of these works, especially the comical ones, are created by persons with no direct link to the *banlieue*, and thus they tend to reproduce the same clichés that are seen and heard in the media. As McKinney correctly argues, “the voyeurism of the typical petit bourgeois cartoonist...of *banlieue* comics can be close to, and even indistinguishable from, the production and consumption of negative journalistic clichés about the *banlieue*.”<sup>287</sup> Indeed, many of the plots of these *bande dessinée* seem to be ripped straight from sensationalistic headlines. The plots are typically driven by characters’ negative relationships with the police, fueled by their often-failed attempts at crime and petty thievery, or feature their equally-unsuccessful attempts to seduce women, who are rarely fully-developed characters.

The lack of fully-fleshed-out female characters who do not fall into one of those two extremes is another cliché that has been operative in *banlieue bande dessinée* for some time, as Isabelle Papieau has argued in *La banlieue de Paris dans la bande dessinée*. In her analysis of works about the *banlieue*, she likewise found that the majority of female characters fell into one of these two extremes, saying “Le '9eme art' semble figer la femme des banlieues dans des clichés où elle est, tantôt garante de l'ordre familial, tantôt vecteur de fantasmes.”<sup>288</sup> The roles available to women in *bande dessinée* are limited: mothers or objects of sexual desire, neither of which are roles which allow them to exercise much agency. As these limited roles suggest, *banlieue bande dessinée* is

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<sup>286</sup> McKinney, “Framing the Banlieue,” 113.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>288</sup> Papieau, *La banlieue de Paris*, 97.

a very male-dominated field of cultural production with next-to-no female practitioners. The only two female practitioners of *banlieue bande dessinée* I was able to find were Nine Antico, whose *Le goût du paradis* will be analyzed in detail later in this chapter, and Leslie Plée whose *Points noirs et sac à dos* (2012) picks up similar themes to Antico's. Unsurprisingly, these are also one of the few works that feature female protagonists who are not relegated to one of Papieau's two binary extremes.

There have been some attempts to create more nuanced portrayals of the *banlieue* in *bande dessinée* that defy the above-discussed clichés to a certain extent. Of these, Tito's *Tendre Banlieue* series (1983-2010) is, without a doubt the most well-known and commercially viable. To my knowledge, the *Tendre Banlieue* series, with 20 albums total, is the longest-running *bande dessinée* series about the *banlieue*. This run was facilitated when it was picked up by a major publishing house, Casterman, in 1991. The series focuses on young teenagers in the *banlieue* (a different group and, quite often, a different *banlieue* each episode) and touches on a number of themes that are rarely seen in *banlieue* works of any medium from disability to homosexuality to divorce. Tito, who was raised in the *banlieue* and continues to live there to this day, bases each of his stories on interviews with adolescents who serve as the models for his characters. He writes with the deliberate goal of reframing stereotypes, saying

Certains parisiens imaginent toujours que banlieue rime avec cités dangereuses. Bien entendu, je ne veux pas militer comme un aveugle pour la banlieue, je suis bien conscient qu'il y a des problèmes partout. Mais il y a aussi une multitude de banlieues. Et oui, il est possible d'être heureux au-delà du périph'!"<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Tito, interview by Emmanuelle Jacquet, *Enlargeyour paris.fr*, January 30, 2015.

Throughout the series, Tito challenges the reader's assumptions and preconceptions both about the space of the *banlieue*, and, especially the often-maligned *jeunes de banlieue*<sup>290</sup> who inhabit it. He generally does this by placing 'good' white kids in the *banlieue* and showing how they are victims of inaccurate stereotypes. (Of the twenty albums, only three—*Le grand frère*, *Appel au calme* and *Les Yeux de Leïla*—feature a non-white person on the cover.) There are, however, a number of peripheral and secondary heroes and heroines (who avoid the mother-whore binary) from a number of racial backgrounds. In spite of its lack of diverse protagonists, Tito's series nonetheless produces a much more nuanced portrait of the *banlieue* than is typical. Especially with his initial episodes set in the 1980s, he did so with a sensitivity to humanizing the *banlieue* and talking about complex social issues well ahead of *banlieue bande dessinée* artists.

Since the mid-2000s, there has been a considerable rise in the number of non-fiction *bandes dessinées* that talk about the *banlieue* and which present a portrayal that avoids many stereotypes. The majority of these are based on interviews with a single subject conducted by the author, who then adapts the story of the interviewee to *bande dessinée* (Maximilien Le Roy's *Hosni: SDF+*, Edmond Baudoin's *Véro*). Others, such as the collectively-published *Jeunes: Des nouvelles de la cité* (2004), and Damien Roudeau's *Villiers Rebelle* (2013) compile interviews with multiple subjects to challenge stereotypes about places or figures that are much maligned, such as Cerisaie (for Roudeau) or the *jeune de banlieue*. Still others are inspired by news events, such as

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<sup>290</sup> See Thomas Guénolé, *Les jeunes de banlieue mangent-ils les enfants?* (Paris: Editions Bord de l'eau, 2015).

France Info's *Le Jour ou...* (2012), which is a compilation of different news events covered by the radio station, including ones with a focus on the *banlieue* such as the 2005 riots, or Gregory Ponchar and Philippe Squarzoni's *Crash-Text* (2005), which presents the true story of a mother who threw her baby out of an *HLM* window. In what may be the precursor to a larger trend, in 2016, Helkarava released *La Banlieue du 20 heures*, a *bande dessinée* adaptation of a sociological study by Jérôme Berthaut critiquing the manner in which the television station France 2 reports on the *banlieue*.<sup>291</sup>

The 2000s have also seen the rise in popularity of autobiographical *bande dessinée*, both in the medium at large and within the subset of *bande dessinée* that treats the *banlieue* specifically. This is part of a larger trend of autobiographical *bande dessinée* which began in the 1980s, largely in the independent *bande dessinée* sector, and has continued to grow in popularity since then. Bart Beaty has identified autobiography as “the genre that most distinctly defines the small-press comics production of Europe” and suggests that it has gained particular traction in these sectors as “autobiography holds a promise to elevate the legitimacy of both the medium and the artist.”<sup>292</sup> While autobiography remains an important genre for alternative publishing houses, the success of Marjane Satrapi's *Persopolis* from the previously underground publishing house

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<sup>291</sup> This is part of a larger series by Casterman called Sociorama, which has created *bande dessinée* adaptations of numerous sociological studies on topics ranging from the refugee crisis in Calais to pornography to surgeons to popular television series.

<sup>292</sup> Beaty, *Unpopular Culture*, 141. On this same page, he traces this phenomenon to the 1990s, saying, “since the beginning of the 1990s, autobiography has become an increasingly prominent genre within the small-press and independent comics scene, with strengths in a number of European nations. Indeed, autobiography has become the genre that most distinctly defines the small-press comics production of Europe.”



L'Association in 2000 brought the autobiographical *bande dessinée* to the mainstream. Ann Miller identifies autobiography as taking “the medium into new areas of subjectivity...through albums portraying not so much action as interaction in a contemporary, usually urban milieu.”<sup>293</sup> Given the urban specificity of the autobiographical *bande dessinée*, it was only a matter of time before autobiographical *banlieue bande dessinée* emerged.

Like non-fiction *bande dessinée*, autobiographical *bande dessinée* tends to present stereotypes and caricatures in a more thoughtful fashion. Since 2000, numerous autobiographical and autofictive accounts about the *banlieue* have been published primarily, though not exclusively, with smaller publishing houses. In addition to *TMLP*, Rochier has published numerous autofictive short comics and fanzines about his childhood in the *banlieue* from the fanzine *Envrac* to shorter comics such as *Dunk*, *Chicken and Blood*. Adrian Fournier's *Les Plans de la ville: psychogéographie intrinsèque des grands ensembles* (2009) chronicles a series of interrelated episodes focusing on themes of childhood, young adulthood, police violence, love, loneliness, family and race in the *banlieue*. Edmond Baudoin collaborated with Cécile Wagner in 2003 to create *Les Yeux dans le mur*, a *bande dessinée* based on Wagner's own childhood experiences in the *banlieue*. Finally, Berthet One has garnered attention recently with his two-part series, *L'Evasion* (2011, 2015) talking about his experiences in prison following a young adulthood of crime in the *cité*. In addition to signing with a major publisher (*La*

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<sup>293</sup> Miller, Reading *bande dessinée*, 57.

*Boîte à bulles*), Berthet has received numerous accolades from the *bande dessinée* community, including the inaugural *prix transmuraille* at the Angouleme's annual *Festival de la Bande Dessinée* in 2009.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will concentrate on the autobiographical work of three *bande dessinée* practitioners: Nine Antico's *Le goût du paradis* (2009), Gilles Rochier's *TMLP: Ta mère la pute* (2012), and Halim Mahmoudi's *Arabico* series (2011 – 2014). I will show how each takes on a different *banlieue* stereotype—the stereotypical violent gang, the Arab, and the *jeune fille de banlieue*—and through the interaction between image, frame, and text, reframe that stereotype using the strategies outlined above. Each of the three artists grew up in the *banlieue* and is speaking about childhood experiences that occurred there.

Although these specific works remain relatively underground compared to mainstream *bande dessinée*, all of these artists have nonetheless gained significant recognition, either through prizes at the Festival International de la Bande Dessinée in Angouleme or by publishing with major *bande dessinée* publishing houses. Antico and Rochier have both been recognized at the Festival International de la Bande Dessinée; Antico's *Le goût du paradis* was selected for the “prix du meilleur premier album” in Angouleme in 2009 and Rochier's *TMLP* won the “prix fauve révélation” in 2012. While Mahmoudi has not been recognized at Angouleme, his work has received the “Bulles en Fureur” prize in 2011, and it was also nominated for the “prix région centre” at the BD Boum festival in 2014. Furthermore, Mahmoudi's work has been exhibited at the Musée de l'Histoire de l'immigration in Paris and fourteen pages from his autofictive work *Un*

*monde libre* have become part of the museum's permanent collections.<sup>294</sup> Mahmoudi and Antico have both published their works with major publishing houses—Soleil for Mahmoudi and L'Association and Glénat for Antico. While Rochier has not published with a major publishing house, his work is very connected to the fanzine culture in *bande dessinée* and thus it is an important part of his identity to remain removed from major publishing houses.<sup>295</sup> Paradoxically, Rochier's work has received the most recognition and attention as *banlieue bande dessinée*; even people who are not very familiar with the tradition of *bande dessinée* in and about the *banlieue* are likely to have heard of him.<sup>296</sup>

While the stories told and attention to the subject matter of these three artists differs a great deal, they are all connected by a shared rejection of the quintessential *banlieue* stereotypes and a refusal to depict the *banlieue* in the stereotypical fashion discussed in the review of *banlieue bande dessinée* above. Although none of the artists resist drawing the *HLM* towers, or showing multiethnic groups of friends, they do so in a way that challenges the normal stereotypical conventions in such portrayals. These

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<sup>294</sup> While the plot of *Un monde libre* focuses more on the experience of being a child of immigrants and finding one's origins, the fourteen pages exhibited at the Musée de l'Histoire de l'immigration narrate an old Arab tale with visuals of a woman who is trying to emigrate.

<sup>295</sup> In interviews, Rochier says that he prizes the independence that staying with small publishers affords him, as he is only compelled to write a story when he has something explicit that he would like to say (Gilles Rochier, interview by Philippe Peter, *DBD 68*, November 2012).

<sup>296</sup> In addition to my own anecdotal experience in speaking to people about these three authors—Gilles Rochier was the most likely to be recognized—Rochier has also received a great deal of attention in magazines dedicated to *bande dessinée*. He has had long form interviews and full-page spreads in several important magazines, including *DBD 68*, *Comix Club No. 8*, *Kaboom*, and *Jade*. In a 2012 newspaper article in *Le Point*, he was even dubbed the “chroniquer de la banlieue.” Editor of *6 pieds sous terre* Jean-Christophe Lopez declared that his distinctive style would shape future portrayals of the *banlieue* in *bande dessinée*.

authors directly challenge the symbolic imagery associated with the *banlieue* through a combination of their written and visual strategies.

## **NINE ANTICO**

Nine Antico is a *bande dessinée* artist who, today, is most associated with stories about women and their sexuality, many of which are set in the United States.<sup>297</sup> *Coney Island Baby* follows the story of pin-up model Bettie Page with porn actress Linda Lovelace in the 1950s, while *Autel California* tells the story of a teenage girl's obsession with American rock culture in the 1950s and 60s. Though she has been associated with "BD girly," *bande dessinée* by women, about women and aimed at women which often focuses on heroines' sexuality or their affinity for shopping, Antico refuses the term, calling it pejorative. "Oui, mes personnages sont féminins, mais est-ce qu'on lui a dit que c'était girly, Madame Bovary?" she asks, noting that the term is typically only applied to stories about women for women.<sup>298</sup>

Although she currently lives and works in Marseille, Antico grew up in the *banlieue* of Seine-Saint-Denis, a neighborhood with a reputation for producing street thugs, drug dealers, and prison sentences, much more so than as a place where white Italian girls develop crushes on boys in *collège*. Nevertheless, this is precisely the story she tells in her first graphic novel, *Le goût du paradis*, which was published in 2008 with Ego Comme X, a publishing house which tends to focus on autobiographies. The story,

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<sup>297</sup> *Coney Island Baby* (2011), *America* (2017), *Autel California* (2014, 2016)

<sup>298</sup> Quoted in Bertrand Langlois, "Nine Antico, ne lui parlez pas de la BD 'girly'," *Le Parisien*, April 6, 2017. <http://www.leparisien.fr/flash-actualite-culture/nine-antico-ne-lui-parlez-pas-de-bd-girly-06-04-2017-6829953.php>

which is told in a series of short episodes, centers on Antico's childhood and the beginnings of her teenage sexual awakening, as well as her alienation from her childhood best friend who seems to be developing way faster than she is. In interviews, Antico describes being drawn to *bande dessinée* because it allows her to foreground and play with different images and ideas:

“What I relish are all the different kinds of ellipses and movements. There's something about its rhythmic side which also really pleases me; I even love the white space passing between those frames. The image which shows one thing while the text reveals another... For me, all this is what the *bédé* has to offer.”<sup>299</sup>

Antico is well aware of the subversive power of *bande dessinée* that can be achieved through a combination of words and images and their careful placement and combination in frames, the styles and conventions of which she learned with her first graphic novel, *Le goût du paradis*.<sup>300</sup>

Antico creates an unabashedly girly space with her pages. From the flower-covered chapter markers to the rounded edges of the frames, the story reads visually like the diary of every teenage girl in comic form. The narration, which focuses on stories of first loves, changes during puberty, and fitting in at school, reinforces this effect. This tone is set in the opening episode of the story, where Nine<sup>301</sup> invites her friends over from school and her plan to impress the girls with her father's pornographic magazines backfires. When her friends go home, Nine is haunted by fears that her friends will tell

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<sup>299</sup> Nine Antico, interview by Cynthia Rose, *The Comics Journal*, October 1, 2014.

<sup>300</sup> Nine Antico, interview by Gilles Suchey and Eric Litot, *Contrebandes*, April 10, 2010.

<sup>301</sup> Antico uses her own name for her protagonist. To differentiate between Antico the author and Antico the character in the *bande dessinée*, I refer to the author as Antico and to her character as Nine.

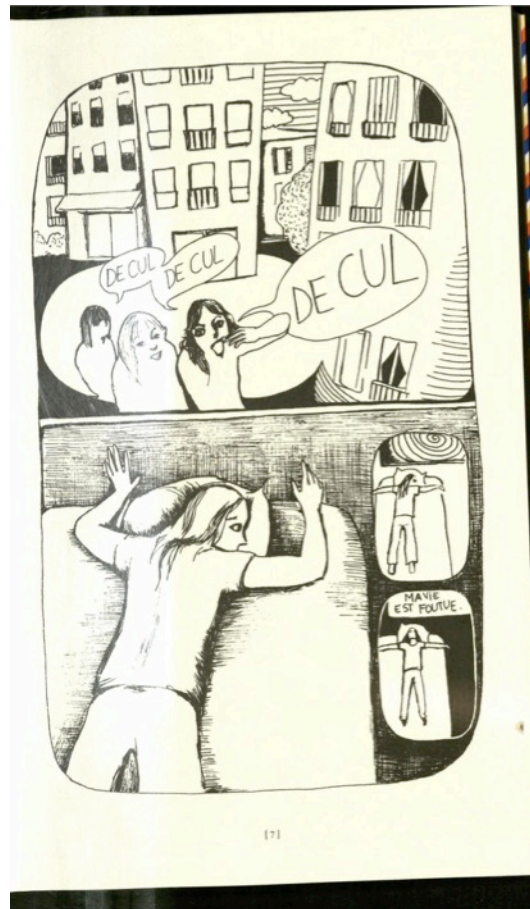
the whole school that her father has a stash of pornographic magazines and she will be even more alien at school than she already feels. Nine's desperation to fit in with the other girls at school, even though she does not, is a dynamic that is heightened through the visual portrayal of the story. In all of the initial frames she is separated from the rest of the girls, often through placement in a different frame. When she is found in the same frame, she stands on the opposite side from the group or hovers, ghost-like and barely-sketched, in the background. This episode sets the tone for the episodes in *Le goût du paradis*, which focus on the dynamics between girls and how they shift with the onset of puberty.

The story of a teenage girl's sexual awakening is not new (in fact, *Le goût du paradis* was favorably compared to Simone de Beauvoir's *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*), however, this story is set, very subtly, in Seine-Saint-Denis. Antico leaves few clues of the larger setting of her book, which takes place nearly exclusively in interior spaces: her home, friends' homes, and school. There are no representations of the outside of these interior spaces until page 7, where a cluster of tall towers visually signifies the *banlieue* setting. Antico avoids associating her narrative with Seine-Saint-Denis until the end of the book, on page 91, when she mentions Seine-Saint-Denis's "93" postcode. By delaying both visually presenting the space of the narrative as taking place in a *banlieue*, and naming this space specifically Seine-Saint-Denis, Antico allows readers to form their own associations with the space before the name Seine-Saint-Denis brings forth the stereotypical associations typically made with the space.

The images Antico does provide of the exterior space of Seine-Saint-Denis, such

as the one in Figure 9, refuse many of the key *banlieue* tropes. The drawing shows five apartment buildings of variable height, which are not shown in their entirety but rather cut off before their tops, reducing the sensation that these buildings are towering over its inhabitants. The characters are also not trapped within the space, but shown in free motion, crossing the page. The stereotype of an all-encompassing concrete jungle is also contested through the inclusion of greenery in the form of some shrubs and bushes, and, most crucially, the sky, with a few fluffy white clouds. The three characters in the frame are also women, marking a key difference from many representations that would normally show men outside, with women relegated to interior spaces, unless they are love objects for the male protagonists. Finally, the characters are put in a spotlight, which makes *them* and not the apartment buildings the focus of the image. They are laughing (in fact, they are making fun of Nine), once again refusing a trope of miserabilism or sadness. These female characters have free agency to move about the space in which they find themselves, and they exercise this freedom enthusiastically.

FIGURE NINE



Le goût du paradis, p. 7

Antico further dissociates this imagery of the tower from more stereotypical representations of the *banlieue* through the sequence of this frame and the other frame on the page. In comics, the author has the freedom to arrange these individually framed images on a page and then to group these pages into a book. (Groensteen describes all of these frames—the strip, the layout of the page, the layout of the double page, and the book—as multiframe, which have no apriori borders or frames, only those created by the author herself.) These frames are then spaced apart—often by a literal gutter, but always



by at least a figurative ellipse—which invites a comparison over their juxtaposition.<sup>302</sup> For Groensteen, this very element of juxtaposition of symbols within multiple frames, the simultaneous coexistence and separation of interdependent icons (symbols) on the same page, which he terms “iconic solidarity,” is the essence of comics. While this larger layout is not *always* significant—to determine when to analyze it more closely, Groensteen suggests asking whether layout is regular or irregular, and whether it is discrete or ostentatious—this juxtaposition and reframing of typical symbols has tremendous subversive potential.

On this page, Antico juxtaposes this image of the towers with a separate image of Nine lying face down on her bed, looking like the epitome of teenaged misery. Thus, the towers are not only an insignificant backdrop to the image in which they are placed, they are further minimized by the imagery on the rest of the page, which emphasizes the suffering and embarrassment of a teenage girl that could happen anywhere in the world, and not the particular setting of the *banlieue* itself. Here, the *banlieue* is nothing more than a décor, a backdrop to a larger, universal story about the trials and tribulations of being a teenage girl.

Throughout *Le goût du paradis*, Antico deliberately creates narratives and images that are rarely associated with the space of Seine-Saint-Denis. Best known by its “93”

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<sup>302</sup> McCloud, ever the fan of typologies, identifies six main kinds of ellipse in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (Harper Perennial, 1994): (1) moment to moment, blinking from one frame to the next (2) action to action, in which we see a character doing an action that is in the process of unfolding (3) subject to subject, the change of focus in subject while sticking to the same theme (4) scene to scene, in which frames are separated both in terms of space and time (5) point of view to point of view, which allows for the presentation of two or more different perspectives on the same moment in time and (6) dissolution of continuity, in which two frames are juxtaposed without any logical connection between them (78-80).

postcode, this department is the poorest in France, and has become nearly synonymous with hordes of troubled young men and burning cars. When Seine-Saint-Denis comes up in the news, it is usually associated with urban violence, typically perpetuated by males either in the form of destruction of property or a menace to young women. Girls in Seine-Saint-Denis are nearly always discussed in the context of sexual assault: the extent to which they are at risk of it, girls who have experienced sexual assault, strategies for girls to avoid sexual assault. As mentioned in the Introduction, the violent gang rape that opened up Fabrice Genestal's 2000 film *La Squale*, which was partially filmed in Seine-Saint-Denis, led to a flurry of national attention about sexual assault in the *banlieue*.<sup>303</sup> To this day, headlines about girls in the *banlieue* continue to focus on sexual assault, with sensational headlines such as "L'humiliation des filles" or confessional tones such as "Elles racontent la vraie vie dans les cités".<sup>304</sup> Much like the depiction of the gang rape in *La Squale*, these stories are quite sexually charged, but in a manner that denies the girls and young women involved any form of agency. At the time Antico was writing and publishing *Le goût du paradis* in 2008, there was a national conversation about her same subject, the sexuality of teenage girls in the *banlieue*; however, this conversation was one that painted these girls as terrified victims in need of protection from the menacing males of the *banlieue*, not as empowered young women exercising sexual agency.

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<sup>303</sup> See Laurent Mucchielli, *Le scandale des "tournantes": dérives médiatiques, contre-enquête sociologique* (Paris: Éditions de la Découverte, 2012).

<sup>304</sup> Claire Chartier, "L'humiliation des filles," *L'express*, June 6, 2001.

[https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/l-humiliation-des-filles\\_490400.html](https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/l-humiliation-des-filles_490400.html); "Elles racontent la vraie vie dans les cités," *Elle*, February 27, 2008 <http://www.elle.fr/Societe/Les-enquetes/Elles-racontent-la-vraie-vie-dans-les-cites-497879>

Through the combination of its setting and its focus on the pleasurable (and quotidian) aspects of young female sexuality, Antico in *Le goût du paradis* challenges the stereotypical portrayal of a young woman in the *banlieue*. Antico replaces the media images of girls who are afraid to go out with images of Nine staying up late into the night talking to her best friend about boys, using oranges to imagine what she will look like with breasts, playing spin the bottle with her crush, and anxieties about getting her period.<sup>305</sup> There is no shame around these explorations in sexuality. Nine kisses four different boys over the course of the story, but unlike the girls in the headlines, she does not worry about getting a ‘bad’ reputation or being punished by some looming older brother figure because she is promiscuous. She is simply curious, exploring and fully in control of her own sexuality.

This focus on empowering young girls is reinforced by an absence of any fully-fleshed out male characters. In a refreshing reversal of gender roles, the boys in the story are the objects of the female gaze and fetishized. As a young girl camping with her friend, Antico dreams about penises.<sup>306</sup> When she gets older, she watches the boys who get erections at the swimming pool.<sup>307</sup> None of the boys in the story are given any further agency beyond their bodies (which are typically reduced to the way that they hold their necks) and whether they will kiss Nine or hold her hand. The boys are a means to an end; tools she uses on her own empowered sexual explorations. While Antico’s father is not

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<sup>305</sup> Nine Antico, *Le goût du paradis* (Paris: Les Requins Martaux, 2011), 33, 22, 76, 80.

<sup>306</sup> Antico, *Le goût du paradis*, 33.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

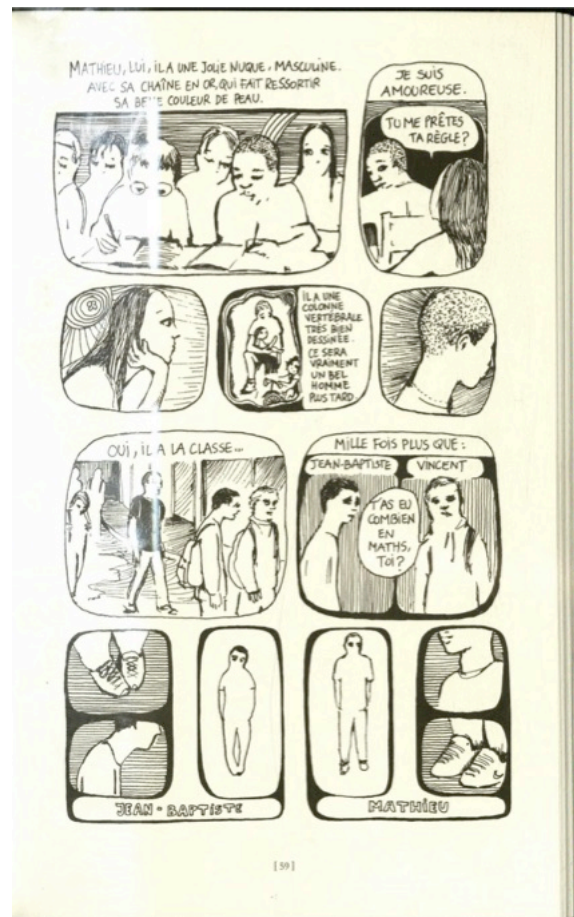
presented as an object of sexual desire, he, too, remains a distinctly peripheral character who only shows up as a periodic reminder of Antico's own whiteness and Italian roots.

Even when the boys are not distilled to their sexual organs, their bodies are still dissected and critiqued. The young Antico is very particular about how boys hold their necks, as well as the shoes they wear. In one scene (FIGURE 10), she presents and compares the necks and shoes of the different boys, putting them under her visual microscope and presenting visual and verbal typologies of what the ideal boy should look like.<sup>308</sup> She speaks of how the way their hold their necks indicates the extent to which they will grow into handsome men, and the picture Nine images shows that she is further imagining how her crush, Mathieu, would be as a father. She presents side-by-side comparisons of Mathieu's lean body with that of Jean-Baptiste, while also showing how they hold their necks and the types of shoes they wear. Not only is Mathieu less rotund than Jean-Baptiste, he also has better posture and wears Nike sneakers. Through her portrayal of men, Antico challenges stereotypical depictions of women and girls in *banlieue bande dessinée* identified in the corpus above where women are reduced to objects of sexual desire and men are looming predators by subverting the camera's gaze and turning men into the objects of sexual desire.

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 59.

FIGURE TEN



Le goût du paradis, p. 59

In addition to foregrounding female sexual agency in the *banlieue*, Antico also focuses on her experience of whiteness in the *banlieue*. In interviews, Antico has stated that her anxieties over her own whiteness were meant to be a central point of the story: “Avec *Le goût du paradis* je voulais aborder quelque chose d’original: le complexe d’être blanche et le rejet de ce qu’on représente, parfois.”<sup>309</sup> For Antico’s character, Nine, there

<sup>309</sup> Nine Antico, interview by Gilles Suchey and Eric Litot, *Contrebandes*, April 10, 2010.

is nothing more shameful than her and her family's whiteness in a multiethnic space like Seine-Saint-Denis. While Nine avoids much overt discussion of difference, from the beginning, the multiethnic character of the space in which she resides is nonetheless made apparent. For instance, as Nine is imagining what the kids at school would say if they knew about her father's collection of "magazines de cul", the names she provides, Ermann, Karim, and Mikael, have roots in countries other than France.<sup>310</sup> Karim is a name of Arabic origin and Mikael is a spelling of Michel which originated in Scandinavia. Likewise, Nine's childhood best friend, Nounou, is of Asian origin, and Nine is exposed to this culture when Nounou's mother teaches her how to eat with chopsticks. The boys Nine is interested in at school are all non-white because she prefers the way that they hold their necks.<sup>311</sup> Nine's own background is also non-French. She is Italian, which, like the ethnicities of her friends and crushes, is only hinted at through a few small details until her family's annual vacation to Italy towards the end of the book.

Nine's shame about her whiteness is first introduced early on, when she is imagining the kids at school making fun of her. In the frame (FIGURE 11), Nine stands with her parents in the same pose that might be adopted for a family photo. Her two parents, dressed professionally (her father in a collared shirt and slacks, her mother in a skirt and heels) stand smiling next to Nine, whose exaggeratedly large rolled eyes bely the embarrassment of the awkward teenager unwillingly roped into posing for a family photograph. In the background to the side of them, a pig looks directly at the reader, as

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<sup>310</sup> Antico, *Le goût du paradis*, 6.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

though he, too, were meant to be part of the family photo. Around them all, in big, exaggerated block letters, Nine's laments: "Ils doivent bien le savoir qu'en plus d'être blancs, on est des cochons." Not only does Nine feel ostracized because she is one of the few white people in a multi-ethnic space, but she further relates her family to pigs, a creature known for its poor temperament and which generally has pejorative associations. By relating her white family to pigs, Nine shows the extent to which she finds her whiteness shameful.

#### FIGURE ELEVEN



*Le goût du paradis, p. 6*

This shame about her family's whiteness foreshadows the times at which Nine is horrified by her own race. When she watches "Hélène & Les Garçons," she is disgusted by the white characters she sees on the screen, but immediately adds "c'est à cette race

que j'appartiens,” conceding that the white kids at school always saved her a space at the cafeteria, invited her to their parties, and, like her, did their homework and got good grades.<sup>312</sup> Nine has a conflicted relationship with her whiteness, noting that it does make her part of a group, but that this is also a group to which she does not wish to belong as she is horrified by many of its actions. A few pages later, Nine declares “les blancs sont des bouffons,” enumerating in a full-page spread all of the things that white people do wrong.<sup>313</sup> As she does with her crushes, Nine puts white people under the microscope, and shows in minute detail how they are shameful clowns, from the clothes they wear, to their lack of romance, to the terrible way that the boys crane their necks forward. What started as a shame in being different turned into a full-blown horror of her race.

The story, which is told in black and white, visually reinforces the whiteness of all of its characters—regardless of their ethnicity—through a ghost-like portrayal. Antico uses detail sparingly, and characters are frequently missing a mouth, or noses, or their limbs disappear into the whiteness of the page. Despite the variance in ethnicities of the characters she portrays, they are all drawn as white ghosts, with subtle markers of difference like chopsticks or the use of names with origins outside of France. Antico herself in the story has particularly ghost-like qualities; she is drawn with more or less definition depending on her mood and how powerful or in control of a situation she feels. By creating a world of white ghosts, Antico is perhaps reflecting the French tendency to

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 60.



avoid conversations about race,<sup>314</sup> however, she could also be visually imagining a world in which race is insignificant, and, instead, the other qualities one brings to bear on a situation are the relevant ones for which one is judged.

In drawing attention to the presence of whiteness within the space of the *banlieue*, Nine reflects the same sentiment expressed in Samuel Benchetrit's *Asphalte*: as much as popular imagination, fueled by the media, may characterize the *banlieue* as a space of minorities, there are, nonetheless, white persons who live there, too. Much like Benchetrit's choice to place Isabelle Huppert, an icon of French cinema, in the *banlieue*, Nine's parents, who appear to be employed in white-collar jobs, also do not fit the stereotypes of the people occupying HLM towers. The state of dress of Nine's parents (Figure 11) further shows that the children who live in the *banlieue* are not all the products of parents who are unemployed or working factory jobs. Nine's parents are clearly both dressed for white collar work; as we see a few frames earlier, her father carries a briefcase with him to work every day. Nine's mother is also obviously educated, as she is the one who teaches her childhood best friend Nounou how to read. Nine's mothers' painted nails in this frame further communicate a certain social status; if her nails are this well-maintained, it is unlikely she is working with her hands on a daily basis. With this focus on whiteness, Antico reminds her readers that there are more than just Muslim girls in need of rescuing from people who are forcing them to wear the headscarf in the *banlieue*. Furthermore, by making whiteness a point of conflict in the

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<sup>314</sup> Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, French law has prohibited collecting census data that identifies residents based on their race or religious beliefs.

story, she reminds her readers that the *banlieue* is home, not only to Arab and Muslim immigrants, but also other immigrants and French citizens, thus reshaping the reader's image not only of the girls who grew up there, but also of the communities that live there.

### **GILLES ROCHIER**

Of the three artists analyzed in this chapter, Gilles Rochier is, by far, the one who has produced the greatest amount of work related to the *banlieue*. He created the fanzine *Envrac*, a series of short episodes about the *banlieue*, in 1996, and has continued producing *bande dessinée* since then. His *bandes dessinées* *Dernier étage* (2005), *Temps mort* (2008), *Dunk, Chicken and blood* (2008), *Love and that fucking duck* (2009), and *Les frères Cracra* (2009) are all also set in the *banlieue* and portray the adventures of their various male protagonists, from a quest to buy a pair of Dunk sneakers to childhood friends to anxieties about unemployment. Unlike Antico and Mahmoudi, Rochier had no formal training, and started working on *bande dessinée* during a period of unemployment at the suggestion of his wife.<sup>315</sup>

Rochier has a conflicted relationship with the *banlieue*. Like many rappers or soccer players often say about their own art, Rochier credits *bande dessinée* with getting him out of his neighborhood, saying “la BD m’a sauvé en me sortant du quartier.”<sup>316</sup> Although he has since gone on to produce works that are not set in the *banlieue* (*La Cicatrice*, in 2014), he says the *banlieue* recurs in his work because it's where he lives

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<sup>315</sup> Giles Rochier, interview by Xavier Guilbert, *Jade 661U*, January 2015, 58.

<sup>316</sup> AFP, “Gilles Rochier, chroniqueur de banlieue, révélation d’Angoulême,” *Le Point*, February 3, 2012. [http://www.lepoint.fr/culture/gilles-rochier-chroniqueur-de-la-banlieue-revelation-d-angouleme-03-02-2012-1427063\\_3.php](http://www.lepoint.fr/culture/gilles-rochier-chroniqueur-de-la-banlieue-revelation-d-angouleme-03-02-2012-1427063_3.php)

and grew up, and so he knows the area. For him, the setting is not consequential so much as the stories themselves, saying “si j’avais habité la campagne, je pense que j’aurai raconté le même type d’histoires à la campagne.”<sup>317</sup> The stories he wants to tell about “les misères sociales” are, in his mind, not unique to the space of the *banlieue*. Nevertheless, he has gained a considerable amount of recognition for his work, something with which he struggles as he feels this recognition eclipses other figures in the community who contribute more than he does, such as his father. In reference to his father, a social activist, Rochier laments, “Il fait cent fois plus de trucs que moi, et moi j’arrive avec un livre et ils veulent mettre une rue à mon nom.”<sup>318</sup> He is frustrated by the disproportionate way in which different experiences in the *banlieue* are either emphasized or minimized because it does not adequately represent reality, which is a theme that is quite strong in *TMLP: Ta mère la pute* (2012).

*TMLP* is Rochier’s first full-length graphic novel about the *banlieue*. In it, he tells the story of a murder that took place amongst his childhood friends when they were growing up in Ermont, a city in the *banlieue* north of Paris. The title of the novel refers to an insult that was never spoken among the group of friends because it was too incendiary; the one time someone did use it, he ended up dead. The work is autofictive and was an idea that Rochier had been developing for some time before he put it on paper. Since so much of the story is drawn from his own personal recollections, Rochier says, finding the distance to write about it was particularly challenging. It took him ten years to create

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<sup>317</sup> Gilles Rochier, interview by Mael Rannou, March 21 2009.

<sup>318</sup> Giles Rochier, interview by Xavier Guilbert, *Jade 661U* (January 2015): 59.

*TMLP*: eight years to perfect the storyline and then a further two and a half years to write and draw it.<sup>319</sup>

Rochier's story challenges media reporting of violent incidents, in the case of this story, a knife fight in the *banlieue*.<sup>320</sup> Rochier describes *bande dessinée* as a form of communication, a particular kind of language. Rochier explains that when he draws "j'ai l'impression de parler, de dessiner avec mon langage...est-ce que c'est possible que je pense que mon texte et mon dessin, c'est mon langage – et que vous, vous appelez ça de la bande dessinée?"<sup>321</sup> In this case, Rochier uses the medium to create a particular language of violence that runs counter to the images of violent, bloodthirsty youth perpetuated by the media.<sup>322</sup> In particular, he creates a dialogue between the images he produces and the narration he associates with these images.

While knife fights in the *banlieue* may seem normal according to media reports, the abnormality of such a violent event for Rochier and his friends is shown by the ways in which the frames for the moments surrounding this event are drawn. Following the knife fight, there is the only page of the story that has not been divided into square or rectangular frames (Figure 12). In contrast to the clear, clean linear lines and boxes that contained the episodes up to this point, the images here have no frames at all. They are nothing more than pictures accompanied by large blocks of texts, a visual reinforcement

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<sup>319</sup> AFP, "Gilles Rochier, chroniqueur de banlieue, révélation d'Angoulême."

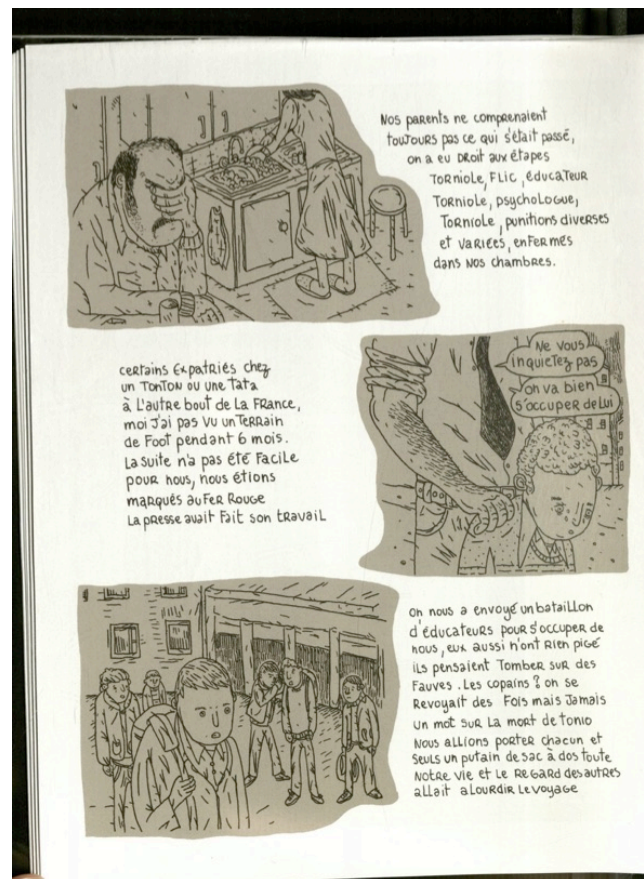
<sup>320</sup> Here, Rochier is fitting in with a larger tradition of distrust of the media which is often represented in *bande dessinée*; most recently it has been the focus of Helkarava's *La banlieue du 20 heures* (2016), but it also features prominently in Adrien Fournier's *Sur le terrain* (2011).

<sup>321</sup> Giles Rochier, interview by Xavier Guilbert, *Jade 661U* (January 2015): 56, 57.

<sup>322</sup> See Guénolé, *Les jeunes de banlieue*.

of the extent to which the knife fight and its aftermath were out of the ordinary and changed everyone's lives. The suffering of the individual characters is further reinforced by the images of Rochier's father covering his eyes, and the other images of children staring down at the ground.

FIGURE TWELVE



The abnormality of this event is supported by the accompanying text. Rochier narrates, “la suite n’a pas été facile pour nous, nous étions marqués au fer rouge la presse avait fait son travail.” Rochier immediately connects media reporting of these events to the difficulties that the kids faced following the murder. In addition to having to come to

terms with the violence they witnessed, the boys were also marked by what took place due to the swarm of reporters who talking about the murder. More than stating the obvious challenges that witnessing a knife fight would present to young kids, Rochier blames the media for the difficulties they encountered following the fight. Not only did the media spread the story, turning a tragedy into something that could sell newspapers, but it further branded these boys in a way that made it impossible for them to forget about what had happened and move on.

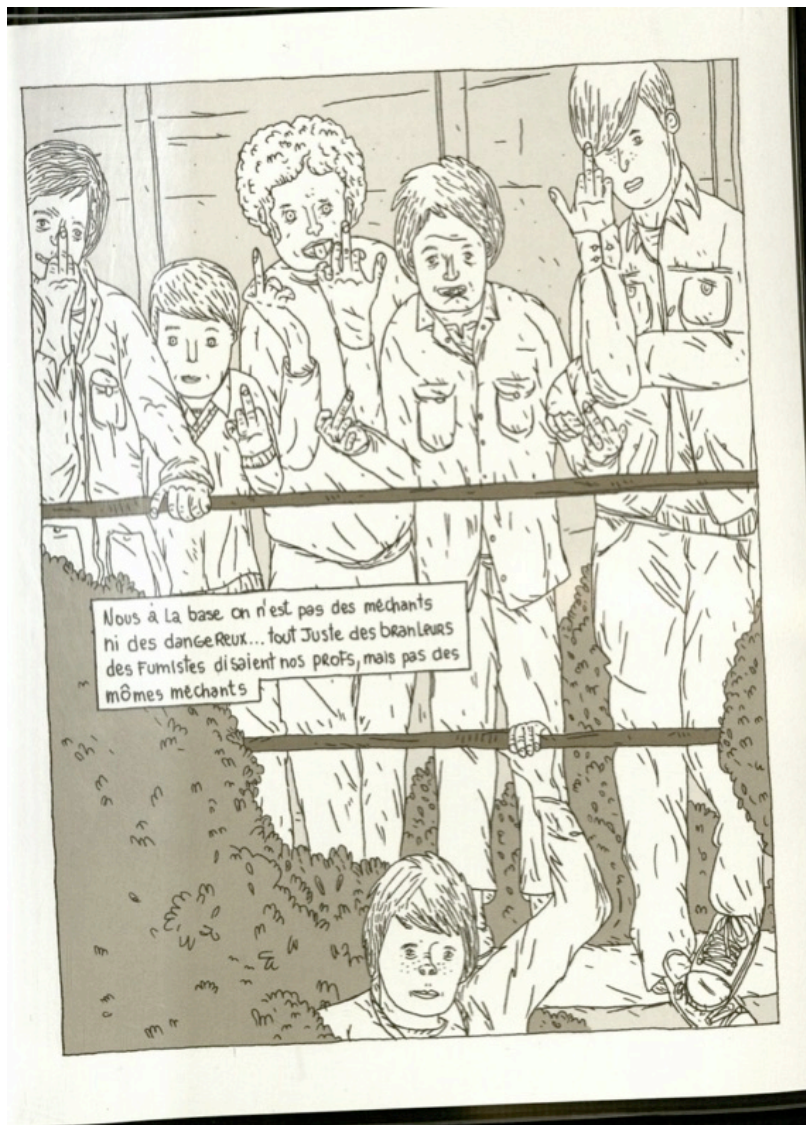
While his most direct critique of the media is found in this sequence, Rochier sets up the remainder of the story to counter what the media is saying. Rochier's story can be read as a corrective to the media's account of similar knife fights, which reduced this story, and many like it, to a few lines and some statistics about violence. Taking full advantage of the freedom of *bande dessinée* to fill the space of his many pages however he chooses, Rochier is able to portray a more nuanced reality of the circumstances that led to the murder. His coverage of the murder focuses on the individual boys, getting to know them and their dynamics, and provides readers with an understanding of the circumstances in which they grew up. By placing this violent and disturbing event in context, Rochier does not make it seem banal, but rather offers the information necessary to make it comprehensible as more than just another violent episode in the *banlieue*.

In addition to using the written narration of the book to reframe these events, Rochier visually reframes the story and its characters. The hand-lettered text creates a feeling of childhood innocence, and the randomly varied upper and lower-case letters add an element of unrefined roughness that mimics the way that a child might write. Rochier

also depicts close ups of the faces of many of his characters, which makes readers engage with them as people and not simply as the stereotypes they might have in their head. His approach to framing also creates a rhythm that slows down time. Many pages are not divided into multiple frames but rather are dominated by a single image, encouraging the viewer to linger on that image for a longer time than she might were it part of a sequence of nine smaller images on the page. These pages without frames visually encourage the reader not to place the characters in stereotypical boxes. The freedom of movement for these characters is all the more significant given that the *banlieue* is typically dominated by chain link fences and bars that keep characters confined in a space.

The crude drawing style of the characters, coupled with the somber color palette of black, white, and shades of brown, creates a dark space a visual space that hinges on juxtapositions, much like the book itself. Despite the violent subject matter and aggressive title, the episodes shown in the story generally take an innocent tone. The reader follows the young boys playing soccer, obsessing over a cassette of Barry White's songs, and riding bicycles and skateboards around the neighborhood. These somewhat idyllic childhood rites of passage are, nonetheless, undercut by an ever-present element of danger lurking in the background. The young boys run from an older gang of boys that tortures them by dragging them out into the woods and forcing them to stay in a dark swampy bog all night, and they are also terrified by a menacing man on a motorcycle who mysteriously reappears as a supermarket clerk over the course of the story.

FIGURE THIRTEEN



As this juxtaposition suggests, the boys are standing on the edge between a very violent future and one in which they are able to make a successful life for themselves. At the beginning of the story, before the murder takes place, they are simply boys who grew up in a rough part of town, but who still have the playful innocence of childhood. The opening frame of the story is a full-page portrait of Rochier and his group of friends, all

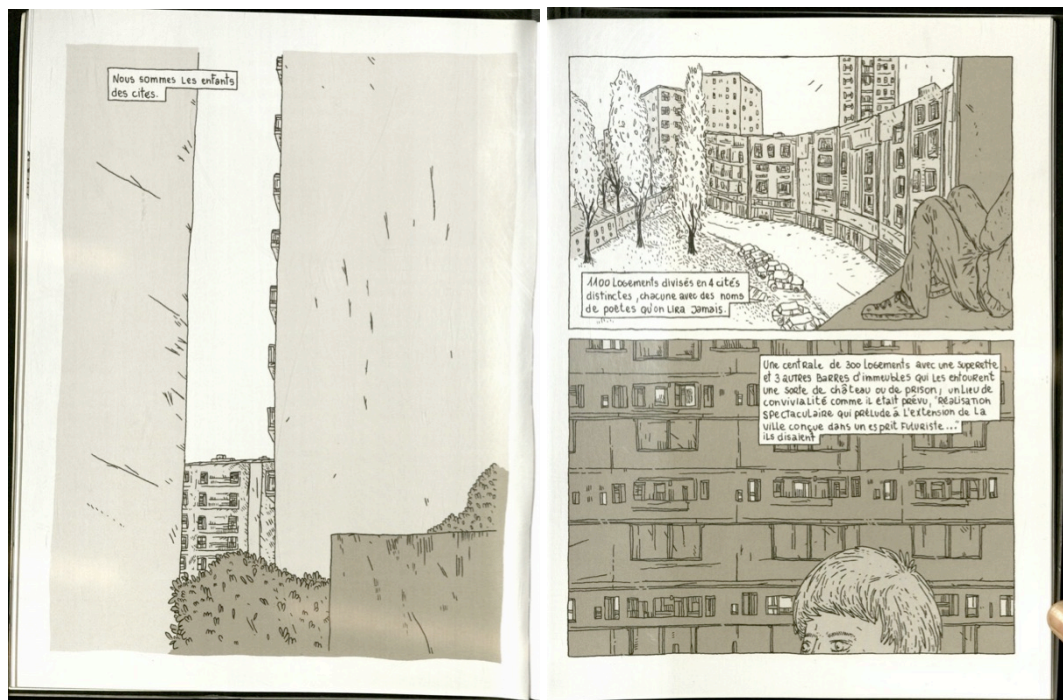


of whom are standing up and giving the middle finger to the reader (FIGURE 13).

Though this may at first seem aggressive, they are all staring directly at the reader, which directs the reader's gaze to their faces. These faces are not angry, but rather silly: the boys are smiling or sticking out their tongues. They may be kids from the *banlieue*, but they are not dressed in the stereotypical athleisure wear that is found on other *banlieue* gangs in *bande dessinée* such as those in *Les Lascars* or *Les Banlieuzards*. Rather, they wear hand-me-down jeans, collared shirts, and sweaters.

This contradiction in their appearance is reinforced by the text on the page, which explains, “Nous à la base on n'est pas des méchants ni des dangereux...tout juste des branleurs des fumistes disaient nos profs, mais pas des mômes méchants.” The text belies the reader's expectations upon opening a book with the title “Ta mère la pute” about the *banlieue* by acknowledging the stereotype of these boys being “des méchants” and “des dangereux.” The use of an indefinite article here both sets these characteristics as stereotypes of young men in the *banlieue* while also challenging the assumption that these boys are, at their core, violent. At the beginning of the story, these boys may be lazy slackers, but they are not dangerous kids. The story continues with their childhood antics of playing soccer and pranking an annoyed neighbor who deflates their soccer balloons. Again, this is a far cry from the typical antics of gangs of *banlieue* kids found in *bandes dessinées* like *Les Lascars* or *Les Banlieuzards* where characters are perpetually up to petty crime, drugs, and unsuccessfully attempting to seduce girls.

FIGURE FOURTEEN



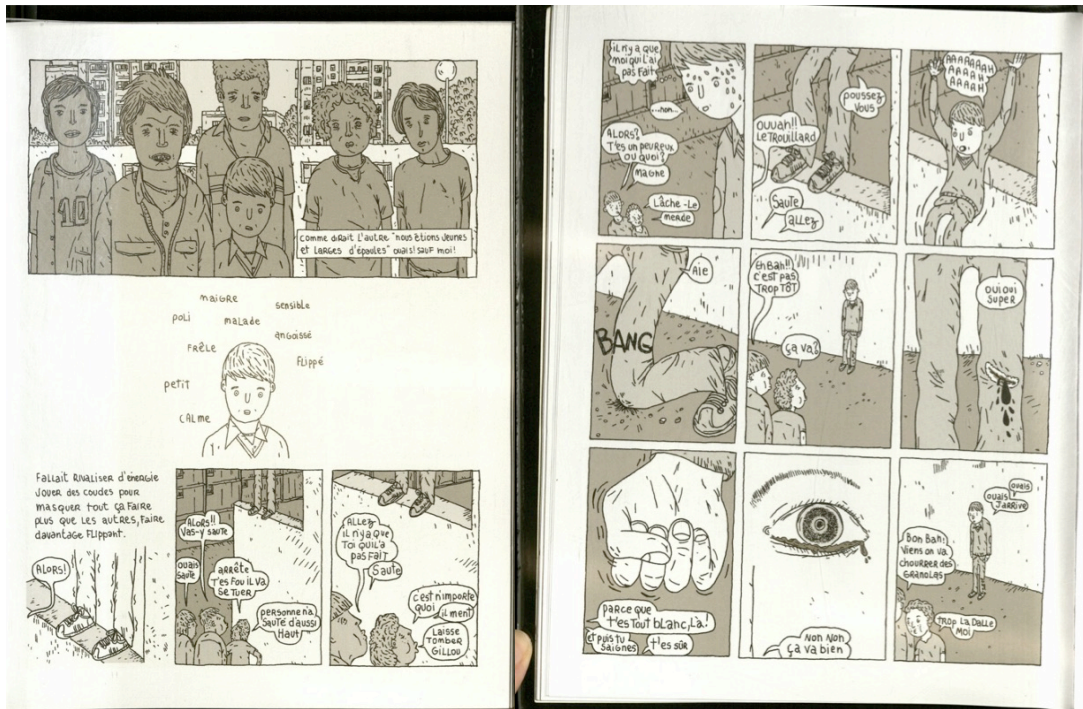
Like Antico, Rochier waits before associating his characters with the *banlieue*. It is only after we get to know the group of protagonists as boys who are just like any other that Rochier introduces the textual descriptor “les enfants des cités” accompanied by a double page spread of images of the tall towers that make up the landscape of the cité (FIGURE 14). Again, Rochier plays with the tension between childhood innocence and the potential for violence as the looming towers and lone brooding boy are a far cry from the boys eating rotten apples under a tree in the park from the previous page. The first image of the towers occupies an entire page, visually connoting the massive size of these buildings. A narrow space between the two towers produces a feeling of claustrophobia, while the split page to the right presents what we see if we walk through that gap, introducing an element of voyeurism on the part of the reader. While the images of the

towers veer on the stereotypical, even though they are cut in half or shown with greenery, the accompanying text challenges these portrayals by presenting the history of the construction of these buildings. The narrator explains that they were meant to be a “réalisation spectaculaire qui prélude à l’extension de la ville conçue dans un esprit futuriste...”, a hope which is contradicted by the image, which is neither spectacular nor futuristic. The images in the pages that follow depict much more sinister scenes of kids getting beat up and all of the neighborhood kids assembled, with knives, for a fight, a preview of the violent episode at the climax of the story, where one kid is killed.

Even while acknowledging the violence of the place in which he was raised, however, Rochier still challenges many of the stereotypes in place about gangs of boys in the *banlieue*. He disputes the concept of stoic masculinity by showing himself crying after his friends goaded him into jumping off a high wall and he fell and scraped his knee (FIGURE 15). The episode, which takes place over two pages, starts showing how, as the smallest of the group of boys, he feels the need to prove that he is just as big and strong as the rest of his friends by jumping off a high wall. The episode is told in a sequence of twelve small frames, creating a sense of rapid movement, especially in a narrative that is dominated by pages with no more than four frames. As he stands on the wall for the first six frames, we see his legs shaking, his friends goading him to jump, the sweat on his face, and the look of pure terror when he finally jumps. He lands on his knee, scraping it, and his friends walk away, while he stands, alone, against the wall. The final frames of the sequence show his hands clenched in a shaking fist as he tries not to cry, and the tears forming in his eye. The young boy may be trying to act big and tough, but the story, and,

particularly, the way in which it is framed and presented visually, nonetheless shows that he is still a kid.

FIGURE FIFTEEN



Much like the polyphonic *banlieue* novels in Chapter One, which drew attention to their characters' poverty and the desperation that resulted from it, Rochier brings the extreme poverty of his neighborhood to the fore. On the second page, he describes how everything that he and his friends have is a hand-me-down that is one step away from disintegrating. In a frame that shows a close-up of a pair of muddy shoes and pants that are too long and dragging on the ground, Rochier writes, "Les pompes usées jusqu'à la mort les fringues trop grandes de nos frères et cousins sur le dos trois poumons dans le coffre, les jambes jamais usées, le cuir de notre ballon pleurerait sa race." Nothing the boys

own is remotely new because their families are too poor to buy them anything. The poverty of some families is so extreme that the mothers, on the last few days of each month, would prostitute themselves at the bus stop near the cité in order to make enough money to make ends meet that month. This is where the title, “Ta mère la pute” comes from. The boys all knew that this prostitution took place, and so they would avoid the area by the bus stop at the end of each month. They never discussed it amongst themselves since daring to suggest that someone’s mother was a prostitute was an unspeakably inflammatory insult. Even after Rochier himself has left his *cité*, when he returns he runs into an old friend who fell into a life of crime, and he describes his “tatouages... fait à l’aiguille à coudre et le sédatif maison” and his “sourire sécurité sociale, une dent sur deux est là” both of which show the physical evidence of extreme poverty on the body.

By bringing music into his story, Rochier might initially appear to be buying into clichés of gangs of boys listening to rap music and trying to make their own (an episode that actually does take place in the first volume of *Cité d’la Balle*), but here, once more, Rochier defies his reader’s expectations. As the story was set in the late seventies, before rap music came to France<sup>323</sup>, the music that the boys are all obsessed with is a cassette of Barry White’s music. Along with the cassette player, this cassette becomes their most collectively prized possession that they share amongst themselves. Barry White, an

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<sup>323</sup> Rap music came to France from New York in the 1980s, and the first rap song in French was created in the early 1980s. See André J. M. Prévos, “The Evolution of French Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture in the 1980s and 1990s,” *The French Review* 69, no. 5 (1996): 713-725.

American R&B and soul singer, was incredibly prolific during the 1970s, producing 10 studio albums over the course of the decade. While White's dulcet baritone vocals and sentimental subject matter are generally not associated with violence, it is the obsession with this cassette and, more specifically, an argument about who stole it, that ultimately leads to the knife fight between the boys, showing that danger can come from unexpected sources.

The layers of youthful innocence, music, and poverty introduced over the course of the book complexify an episode that, in the newspaper, would be reduced to the knife fight itself. The shorter version of events would not be able to include the many aspects that contributed to the events that led up to the murder and would doubtless also ignore any events that took place in its wake. By contextualizing these same images and icons of violence within the larger sequence of events that took place, Rochier's narrative serves to challenge these depictions of violence in the *banlieue* and encourages the reader to think and see the world around them in a more critical fashion.

### **HALIM MAHMOUDI**

Halim Mahmoudi is a French citizen born to Algerian parents who grew up in a cité in Oissel, outside of Rouen. Though he describes his culture as "Muslim," he himself is not religious and religious themes do not feature in his work.<sup>324</sup> He studied design at the École supérieur d'art et de design at Amiens, then moved to Quebec for three years

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<sup>324</sup> Halim Mahmoudi, interview by Sceneario.com, *Sceneario.com*, October 2009.  
[http://www.sceneario.com/interview/halim-mahmoudi-pour-arabico-tome-1\\_ARABI.html](http://www.sceneario.com/interview/halim-mahmoudi-pour-arabico-tome-1_ARABI.html)

where he worked as an editorial cartoonist.<sup>325</sup> In 2009, he published his first album, *Arabico Tome 1: Liberté*, with Les Éditions Soleil, a major publishing house and the only large, minority-run *bande dessinée* publishing house in France, which was founded by Mouroud Boudjellal, brother of the cartoonist Farid Boudjellal.<sup>326</sup> *Arabico* was initially conceived as a three-part series, titled “Liberté,” “Égalité,” and “Fraternité,” but only the first two volumes were published before the project was discontinued. The volumes are now all out of print. In lieu of a third volume of *Arabico*, in 2014 Mahmoudi published the graphic novel *Un monde libre* with Des ronds dans l’O, a smaller publishing house. Like Rochier’s *TMLP*, Mahmoudi’s books are not strictly autobiographical; nevertheless, in interviews, Mahmoudi has acknowledged that there are autobiographical elements in both of *Arabico* and *Un monde libre* which make the work autofiction.<sup>327</sup>

Mahmoudi appreciates the universal power of *bande dessinée* as a medium that can reach a maximum number of people, since “La BD, plus accessible que la littérature, est un langage universel qui s’adresse à tout le monde.”<sup>328</sup> Due to its combination of the written and the pictorial, *bande dessinée* is a language that can be understood by all.

Mahmoudi’s approach in *Arabico* was to take an inaccessible (and uncommon to *bande*

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<sup>325</sup> Halim Mahmoudi, interview by Coline Bouvard, *BDZoom.com*, November 27 2009. In the interview he describes himself as follows: “Je suis français, d’origine algérienne. J’ai grandi près de Rouen, dans une banlieue dite sensible. J’ai poursuivi mes études à Amiens, à l’ESAD, en option Design. Je suis arrivé à Toulouse en 2001, avant de partir au Québec pendant trois ans. J’y ai noué de nombreuses collaborations en tant que dessinateur de presse, avant de revenir sur Toulouse en 2006.”

<sup>326</sup> McKinney, “Framing the Banlieue,” 114.

<sup>327</sup> Halim Mahmoudi, interview with Antoine Chosson, Vincent Marie, and Yvonnick Segouin, Musée National de l’histoire de l’immigration, November 2013, <http://desrondsanslo.blogspot.com/2013/11/entretien-avec-halim-mahmoudi-un-monde.html>.

<sup>328</sup> Quoted in Karl Falcon, “Des Racines et Des Bulles,” *AlgerParis 4* (Juillet-Août 2014): 94.

*dessinée*) story, that of the childhood experiences of a young Arab boy and his encounters with racism that make him realize his otherness, and reframe them in such a way that they are accessible to a wider audience.

*Arabico* tells the story of a young boy who is known as “l’abricot” to his friends and family. (Since he has no other name, I will likewise refer to him as “l’abricot.”) The origins of this name are unclear, however, apricots are grown in both Algeria and France, so it could be a reference to his dual cultures, and, particularly to his Middle Eastern culture, in which apricots are a prized and popular fruit. The title of the book, *Arabico*, comes from his baby sister mispronouncing his name as “l’arabico,” a term which recalls “bicot,” a pejorative term for persons of Maghrebi origin. By referencing this term, while transforming it into a diminutive, Mahmoudi challenges the way Arabs are perceived in France and places questions of identity and racism at the center of the story. The question of identity is a central theme for the story, since “l’abricot” does not know if he is French or Arab. In spite of his birth in France, he feels a connection to his Arab origins and is not sure how to bring these two identities together. This innocent question becomes a fully-fledged identity crisis when he loses his identity card and becomes convinced that he is a “sans-papier” who must hide from the police. Because of this, he stops going to school because the administrators there are not sympathetic to his problems. The young boy, who is already mistreated by the police when he does innocent things like go buy bread, becomes increasingly scared of the police, to the point that he runs away from an approaching police van. When the police catch him, they assume that he is the Arab boy accused of stealing a car earlier and call him in for questioning. Since “l’abricot” is too



afraid to speak, the police are convinced he is a “sans-papier” and brutally mistreat him. Although he is eventually saved by his family, this first encounter with police brutality and intolerance deeply marks him, showing him that the police have no pity for the Arabs they meet, even when they are young and innocent. These are themes which are rarely dealt with, even in *banlieue bande dessinée*.

In addition to presenting an unconventional story, Mahmoudi also uses the graphic novel as an opportunity to introduce his readers to Arab culture. As such, he takes part in a long tradition of Algerian francophone writers, from Mohammed Dib to Mouloud Feraoun, who wrote novels which Abdelkebir Khatibi called “romans ethnographiques” because they presented Arab culture and daily life to a French public.<sup>329</sup> Likewise, with *Arabico* Mahmoudi strives to immerse its readers in an Arab world that present the aspects of Arabic culture in a positive light. The title, accompanied by the brown-skinned boy on the cover, who is then shown wearing a traditional fez and djellaba, clearly denote that the protagonist of the story will be Arab. “L’abricot” himself is always dressed in the red, green, and white of the Algerian flag, another nod to his national origins.<sup>330</sup> The opening page of the album further reinforces this goal by immersing the reader in a world of brown speech bubbles, as opposed to the traditional white ones. While these colored speech bubbles are only used to signify certain time sequences, their effect on the first page is striking since speech bubbles in comics are

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<sup>329</sup> Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Le Roman maghrébin* (Rabat: Société Marocaine des Editeurs Réunis, 1978), 28.

<sup>330</sup> This is particularly striking in a scene where he is accompanied by his white and black friends, whose two jackets combined make the tricolor of the French flag, further creating a contrast between Khalid’s origins and culture and those of these two friends (19).

*always* white. Furthermore, many of the speech bubbles on this first page are filled with transliterated Arabic expressions which are translated in footnotes at the bottom of the page, making the space even more Arab. By including these Arabic expressions and phrases, the album is also serving a didactic purpose of introducing the reader to a culture and language with which they might not otherwise be familiar.

In contrast to the ambitious didactic goals of the graphic novel, *Arabico* is drawn in a bright, commercial style with clear influences from the Franco-Belgian comics tradition (Figure 15). Bécassine, the classic young Breton housemaid and one of the first French comics characters, was always drawn with a round face, a rounded nose, and bright red cheeks. This same way of drawing faces was mimicked in Tintin, Spriou, and Fantasio, all of whom are young male protagonists of classic French and Belgium comic books. They each have bright red spots on either side of their rounded noses. The rounding of the face and nose were copied in several other classic *bande dessinée* characters, from Gaston Lagaffe to Les Schtroumpfs. Picking up on this tradition, Mahmoudi has drawn “l’abricot” and the other characters in *Arabico* with the same soft, rounded features that connect them to a Franco-Belgian comic style. Mahmoudi, in choosing this style, indicates to his audience that he is interested in connecting his characters to a French tradition, more so than to an Algerian one.

FIGURE SIXTEEN



*Clockwise from left: Arabico, Bécassine, Spirou, Fantasio, Tintin*

“L’abricot” is especially similar to Tintin, as they both also share simple black dots for eyes and a single line for eyebrows, which change to show their facial expressions. The only differences between them are that “l’abricot” has slightly darker skin tone and black curly hair, while Tintin has light skin and bright red hair. If Tintin, one of the most iconic figures in French comic books, is meant to represent the classic little French boy, then in copying this visual style, Mahmoudi is trying to create a similar

role for a young Arab boy with his drawing of “l’abricot” while asserting that he is just as French as Tintin. This is copacetic with a long tradition within Tintin where, over the course of his travels, Tintin encounters other boys who are similar to him, but are drawn to represent their ethnic differences. One of the most well-known examples of this is Tintin’s friend Tchang Tchong-Jen whom he encounters on his trip to China. Tchang is meant to be a mirror image of Tintin, reflected through the prism of his Chinese background. The name “Tchang Tchong” has the same repetition of “Tintin”, albeit refracted through a very racist 1930s conception of Chinese language and culture. Visually, Tintin and Tchang Tchong are nearly mirror images of one another; the only major differences between them are Tchang’s slightly darker skin tone and black hair. With “l’abricot,” who is also drawn in a style similar to Tintin, Mahmoudi creates yet another mirror to Tintin. This time, the character is reframed as an Arab boy, and is not found in some far-flung country hundreds of miles from France, but rather in Tintin’s own backyard: the *banlieue*. In connecting Tintin and “l’abricot,” Mahmoudi reminds his readers that the two are not very dissimilar from one another.

In addition to drawing “l’abricot” in a commercially accessible style, Mahmoudi made several other attempts to make *Arabico* as appealing to a mainstream audience as possible. He chose a bright, accessible, and inviting color palette. The album is in full color with a palette of warm pinks, reds, and browns, a color scheme that was clearly inspired by the protagonist’s nickname. Much like the *banlieue* filmmakers analyzed in Chapter 2, Mahmoudi is creating a particular impression of the *banlieue* by manipulating the colors that are associated with it. Instead of cool, dark colors that impart a sense of

danger and foreboding, the warmth of the pages of *Arabico* encourages feelings of human connection. Furthermore, when the subject matter does get darker, such as when “l’abricot” is being interrogated (and assaulted) by the police, the warmth of the colors on the page serves to downplay the violence of the scenes and keep those episodes from being so aggressive as to be inaccessible to a general audience.

In addition to the commercial drawing style he employs for the characters, Mahmoudi adds many elements that reinforce *Arabico* as a *comic*, with aspects designed to appeal to young children who might not be old enough to understand the themes of discrimination or police brutality that are also present in the story. The frames are full of onomatopoeia for everything from the dripping sink to the scratching of pens to the protagonist’s baby sister sucking on her pacifier. In a fight sequence, the characters’ karate-like kicks are accompanied with a quintessentially comic “BAM” and cars screeching and turning around corners are accompanied by a flurry of lines and written “VROOM”s.<sup>331</sup> The speech bubbles gain their quintessential sharp, pointed edges when people are screaming.<sup>332</sup> The entire story is told with speech balloons; there is no additional overlay of narration to guide and contextualize the episodes within the frames. Each page is densely packed with a web of frames, and the characters never jump out of these encasements as the narration proceeds smoothly from one frame to the next, thus preserving a classic *bande dessinée* narrative style that is easy for the general public to follow. At 48 pages, the typical length for a serialized album, *Arabico* is short enough for

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<sup>331</sup> Halim Mahmoudi, *Arabico, Tome 1: Liberté* (Paris: Quadrants Soleil, 2009), 21, 35.

<sup>332</sup> Mahmoudi, *Arabico*, 44.

a child to read the entire in a single sitting, although for those with even shorter attention spans, it is further divided into three shorter episodes (“Famille,” “Les amis,” and “Louise”).

When describing the genesis of *Arabico*, Mahmoudi said that it was important for him that the story be published with a big publishing house so that it was accessible to a wide audience because it is an affective story that is meant to touch as many people as possible.<sup>333</sup> He also said that the drawing style was, likewise, a deliberate choice meant to make the text pleasing to as large a public as possible, even though other drawing styles interested him more. Initially, he had wanted to publish with the publisher L’Association, an independent publishing house known for its alternative comic books, and would have drawn in a correspondingly alternative style. Had he published with L’Association, he would have made *Arabico* “avec un petit personnage principal, des hachures, des gribouillis, avec un effet très brouillonné,” however, he ultimately concluded that “c’est élitiste.”<sup>334</sup> In the world of *bande dessinée*, adopting a style that is more sketched-out and does not include full color is much less conventional than a full-color album drawn with clearly-demarcated edges. While a sketchier drawing style might appeal to persons who were already familiar with *bande dessinée* and appreciated the more unusual drawing styles found in underground work, the more conventional style made the album more

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<sup>333</sup> In describing his intention for the story, Mahmoudi said “Le récit se veut subjectif, venant ‘non pas de l’intérieur d’un pays ou d’une banlieue, mais à l’intérieur même du cœur humain. À l’abri des chiffres de l’immigration, de ceux de la famine, des guerres, du chômage out des humeurs boursières.” (Halim Mahmoudi, interview by Kenza Sefrioui, *Tel Quel*, March 2015)

<sup>334</sup> Halim Mahmoudi, interview by Coline Bouvart, *BDZoom.com*, November 27 2009.

accessible to a wide audience that might include people at the center, as well as at the fringes, of society.

One could critique *Arabico* for its lack of distinctive style, but it is precisely these attempts at universality, and its attempt to break into the mainstream, that make it unique. Other serialized comics with minority protagonists in the *banlieue*, such as Téhem's *Malika Secouss* or Manu Larcenet's *Nic Oumouk*, tend to eschew any sustained engagement with the difficulties minorities encounter, from police violence to questions about their identity and their feeling of belonging in France. Texts that do deal with these themes at great length, such as Rochier's aforementioned *TMLP* or Julien Revenu's *Ligne B* are marketed only to a smaller, adult audience that is seeking out unconventional stories. *Arabico* is thus unique in its attempt to present these complex questions of identity, police violence, and lack of economic opportunities for minorities in an accessible format that is designed to appeal to as broad a public as possible.

Despite Mahmoudi's best efforts to make this unconventional story appealing to a wide audience, *Arabico* was a commercial failure. The series was canceled after the publication of just the first two volumes in the three-part series. Both albums are now out of print and can only be found in *bande dessinée* archives.<sup>335</sup> Unfortunately, the commercial failure of *Arabico* is reflective of larger conditions within the market for *bande dessinée* in which stories with minority protagonists do not sell well. While *Malika Secouss* has been fairly commercially successful, Mourad Boudjellal, who runs the Soleil

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<sup>335</sup> The Centre Belge de la bande dessinée in Brussels and the Cité Internationale de la bande dessinée in Angoulême both have a copy of the first volume of *Arabico*, however, the only archive with a copy of both volumes is the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

publishing house that published *Arabico*, has lamented that portrayals of North African working-class characters, even from well-known and well-respected creators such as his brother, Farid, whose *bande dessinée* was among the first to have main characters who are *beur*, have much less broad commercial appeal than genres like heroic fantasy.<sup>336</sup>

Nevertheless, Mahmoudi's attempt to make a commercially viable story that tackles these themes is an important one, even if it was, ultimately, a failure.

#### FIGURE SEVENTEEN



*L'Abricot in Arabico*



*Khalid in Un monde libre*

Following the commercial failure of the *Arabico* series, Mahmoudi published the last volume of the series with a smaller, independent publisher. In the process, he changed his style radically, fully embracing the idea of telling the story in a way that appeals to an audience that appreciates alternative *bande dessinée*. *Un monde libre*, the

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<sup>336</sup> McKinney, "Framing the Banlieue," 114-115.



follow up to *Arabico*, is presented in a much darker manner that removes many of the stylistic devices that were used to appeal to a younger market in the first two volumes of *Arabico*. While *Un monde libre* does not bear the same title as the *Arabico* series, the protagonists are, visually, identical (FIGURE 17). *Arabico*'s full-color design and short length were clearly designed to be accessible to children while *Un monde libre*'s longer length (with long digressions and narrative text that are presented outside the speech bubbles), black-and-white composition, and overt images of violence and sexual activity are destined for a more adult audience. Nevertheless, although the stories have different tones and were written for different audiences, *Arabico* and *Un monde libre* tell part of a connected story as the protagonist grows up and becomes more self-aware of his position in the world. Thus, I suggest that these three books (*Arabico Tomes 1 & 2* and *Un monde libre*) can be read as a connected series. With both stories, Mahmoudi uses *bande dessinée* to reframe the stereotype of the Arab boy, both through his visual representation of Arabico (who finally receives a name—Khalid—in *Un monde libre*) and through the narrative, which shows how the specters of colonization continue to directly and indirectly shape the experiences of second and third generation Franco-Arab children.

FIGURE EIGHTEEN



Cover art for *Un monde libre* and *Arabico T. 1*

This difference in tone between *Arabico* and *Un monde libre* is immediately obvious from a comparison of the two covers. While *Arabico* presents the face of its young protagonist, the cover of *Un monde libre* is dominated by images of white *banlieue* towers standing tall against a black background (FIGURE 18). Above the title, which divides the cover into two frames, is a picture of a man in a hooded sweatshirt walking down the street with his back towards the reader. On one side of the street are police cars, while, on the other, young men wearing hooded sweatshirts and baseball caps are throwing things at the police car. Blue and red flames encase the scene, creating an image that is simultaneously reminiscent of a dystopic French flag and the 2005 riots. The connection to the riots is further reinforced by the image on the back cover, which

shows a person throwing a firebomb while another person with a backpack jumps over a barbed wire fence, evoking the same power plant that electrocuted Zyed Benna, Bouana Traoré, and Muhittin Altun. The combination of these images set up a story that is going to deal much more explicitly with real-life episodes of violence and rebellion in contemporary France.

The reader who is intrigued enough by the cover to open the book will discover that the story presented in *Un monde libre* is also much more complex, nuanced, and darker, than the one in *Arabico*. The plot of *Un monde libre* begins about a decade after where *Arabico* left off, giving us a different, slightly older protagonist, Khalid, who is also a French citizen of Algerian origin living in the *banlieue*. The story told here centers both on the experience of immigrants coming to France and on Khalid's own journey back to see his family in Algeria and learn about his roots. Like *Arabico*, the theme of identity runs strongly through the story, as evidenced by the three chapter titles: “se comprendre,” “comprendre le monde,” and “se faire comprendre du monde.” Over the course of Khalid's journey, the reader is presented with episodes of police brutality, the experience of racism, difficulty finding work, and images of uprisings both in France—the 2005 riots—and the rest of the world. Despite the darkness—both visually and in the story—of many of the episodes within the text, ultimately the message is a simple one full of hope: love conquers all.

Mahmoudi intended to produce different effects when creating the *Arabico* series and *Un monde libre*, which were aimed at different audiences. He describes the difference as follows:

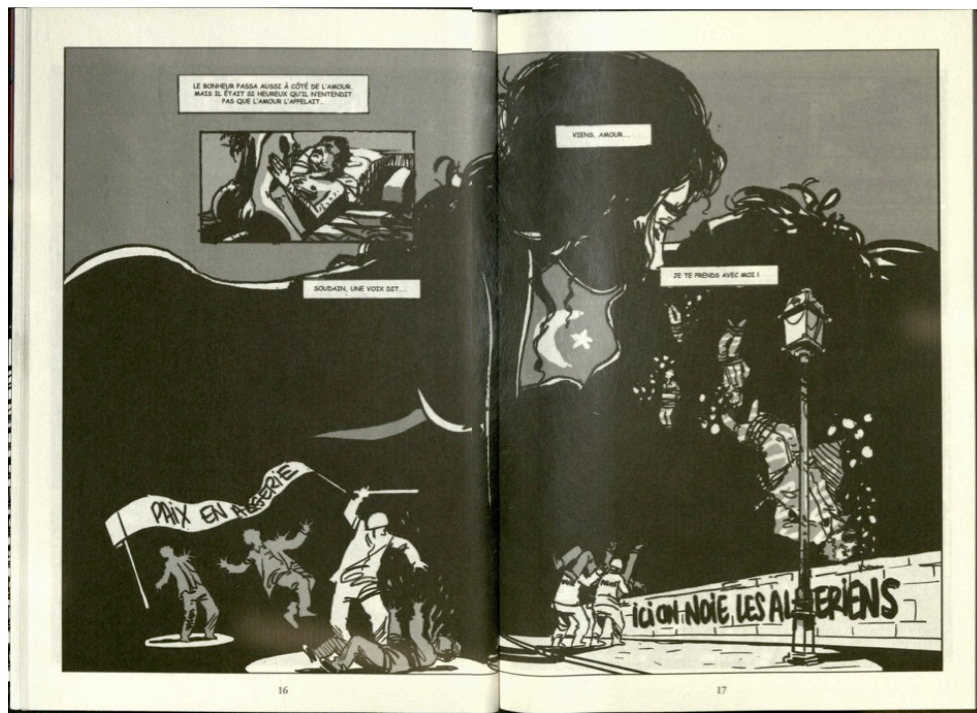
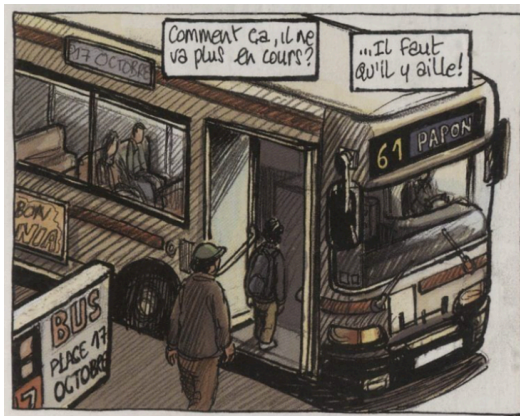
*Arabico* est pour moi le symbole d'une seule et unique quête: soi-même. Dans *Un monde libre*, le personnage finit de découvrir qui il est: un être humain qui vit sur terre avec de l'amour et du temps, et qui finit par accoucher de ce qu'on appelle le bon sens.<sup>337</sup>

We see a clear evolution in the sophistication of the character and the complexity of the lessons that are learned, while *Arabico* is interested only in telling the highly subjective and personal experience of one small child's quest for identity, *Un monde libre* contextualizes this individual quest within a larger social, political, and economic context. By giving his protagonist a name—Khalid—Mahmoudi also gives him a more concrete purpose and context within society. If the little boy in *Arabico*—who is never even given a name—thinks the answer to the question of *who* he is can be reduced to whether he is French or Arab, Khalid already knows the answer to this question—he is both French and Arab—but is not satisfied until he understands both the place from which he comes and the socioeconomic dynamics that brought his family to France.

## FIGURE NINETEEN

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<sup>337</sup> Halim Mahmoudi, interview by Dee Brooks, *La Nouvelle Vie Ouvrière*, September 2014, 19.



*17 Octobre in Arabico (30) and Un monde libre (14, 16-17)*

Mahmoudi deals with themes of police brutality, violence, colonization, and its after-effects in France with considerably more vitriol in *Un monde libre* than he did in *Arabico*. For instance, when he speaks about colonization in *Arabico*, he does so subtly, hinting at France's colonial past with images in the background which will only be

apparent to an observant reader who is already familiar with France's colonial history. At one point in the story, Khalid waits at a bus stop called "17 octobre" for the #61 bus, named Papon, a clear reference to the massacre of Algerians in Paris, where many Algerians peacefully protesting the war were thrown into the Seine River by a police force captained by Maurice Papon on October 17, 1961 (FIGURE 19).<sup>338</sup>

By contrast, when he is drawing *Un monde libre*, Mahmoudi makes the colonial context the focus of his story. The book opens with the immigration story of Khalid's parents, and, later, we see Khalid's trip back to Algeria to visit his family. Instead of indirect references in the form of bus stops and numbers, there is copious imagery of the Seine Massacres, from the iconic "Ici on noie les Algériens" signs to images of the protestors calling for "paix en Algérie" (FIGURE 19).<sup>339</sup> The way in which history lessons in France cast colonization in Algeria in a positive light is also critiqued when a student asks his high school teacher why they are not talking about the suffering of the Algerians during colonization.<sup>340</sup> In another episode, Mahmoudi takes the reader back to the colonial exhibitions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century where Africans were literally displayed in cages for white French people to gawk at.<sup>341</sup> While the man running the fair and the little girl's mother tell her to keep her hands away from the cage,

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<sup>338</sup> For a brief introduction see, among others, Benjamin Stora, *Algeria 1830-2000: A Short History*; Richard J. Golsan, "The Papon affair: memory and justice on trial," ed. Richard J. Golsan, trans. Lucy B. Gols and Richard J. Golsan (New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>339</sup> The phrase refers to graffiti that was drawn along the banks of the Seine following the Seine Massacre, and was also the title of a recent documentary by Yasmina Adi released in 2011. An image of the graffiti has become a metonym for the entire massacre, which was, until quite recently, the subject of much official silence.

<sup>340</sup> Halim Mahmoudi, *Un monde libre* (Paris: Des Ronds Dans L'oe, 2014), 30.

<sup>341</sup> Mahmoudi, *Un monde libre*, 49-50.

she reaches her hand out and holds the hand of the boy, and, in that moment, she imagines them not just as friends, but as lovers. By telling this episode through the eyes of young children, Mahmoudi makes this story even more heart-wrenching, which further draws the viewer's attention to the barbarity of this aspect of France's colonial past.

In an interview, Mahmoudi lamented the fact that many of these experiences of discrimination and social marginalization were experienced in isolation, as they were not discussed between friends or family members, much less acknowledged by the government, but rather "on a toujours parlé à notre place." Due to this silence, Mahmoudi expresses frustration that he never knew whether the difficulties he had experienced growing up were specific to him or part of larger systemic problem.<sup>342</sup> *Arabico* and *Un monde libre* act as correctives to this concern.

The overall effect of both *Arabico* and *Un monde libre* is to challenge his reader's stereotypes about young Arab men in the *banlieue*, a group that continues to be maligned in France through a complex combination of colonial history, socioeconomic class, and, since the 1990s, and, especially the Khaled Kelkal bombings in 1995, a growing fear of terrorism.<sup>343</sup> Algeria was a former colony of France, and the complex history of

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<sup>342</sup> One of Mahmoudi's goals, according to his interviews, is to help people with the feeling that their experiences are lived in isolation: "Tout d'abord, on a toujours parlé à notre place, dans les médias et partout ailleurs. On est pas représentés et tout me disait que ce que j'avais à dire n'allait intéresser personne. Pour la légitimité, il se trouve qu'en plus de l'isolement social, on connaît la honte du dénuement, et donc personne ne parle, ni dans les familles, ni avec les amis. Alors rien me disait clairement si ce que j'ai subi moi, a été subi par presque tout le monde! Il a fallu attendre les documentaires de Yamina Benguigui, les films d'Abdelatif Kechice, Rabah Ameur Zamaïche, ou encore le rap de La Rumeur, Casey etc... // *Même la littérature ne s'intéressait à nos vies que depuis quelques années, depuis Faïza Guène et son 1er roman à succès 'Kiff Kiff demain' [sic] ...Alors les médias, vous imaginez?*" (Halim Mahmoudi, interview by Sceneario.com, *Sceneario.com*, October 2009).

<sup>343</sup> According to Alec Hargreaves in "Muslims and the Middle East," *Contemporary French Civilization* 40, no. 2 (2014): 236, "Since the 1990s, new actors have come to the fore: young men from Muslim



colonization, followed by the painful and violent decade-long war of decolonization in the 1960s and the second Algerian Civil War in the 1990s, have created stereotypes of Algerians as violent.<sup>344</sup> Furthermore, persons of Arab origin—or persons who appear to be of Arab origin—are much more likely to suffer from various forms of discrimination, from difficulties finding employment to being more likely to be stopped by the police.<sup>345</sup> These difficulties are all the more frustrating for persons of Arab origin because there is a large gap between what the media identifies as important—a recurring discourse about violence—and issues that persons of Arab origin would like solved—namely their frustration with certain governmental policies and economic marginalization.<sup>346</sup>

*Arabico* and *Un monde libre* are significant because they tackle issues that are not normally found in *banlieue bande dessinée*. While the antagonism between police officers and *banlieue* youth is a recurring subject in *banlieue bande dessinée* (see *Cité d’la balle, Les Banlieuzards*), these conflicts are typically set up as the payout for

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immigrant families who have grown up in France, small but growing numbers of whom have engaged in acts of terrorist violence within and outside the hexagon linked to the politics and religions of the Middle East.”

<sup>344</sup> See, among others, Benjamin Stora, *Algeria 1830-2000: A Short History*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse, *Integrating Islam: political and religious challenges in contemporary France* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2006); John Bowen, *Can Islam be French?: pluralism and pragmatism in a secularist state* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Rashid Messaoudi, “Algerian-French Relations: 1830-1991 A Clash of Civilizations,” *Algeria: Revolution Revisited*, Edited by Reza Shah-Kazemi (London: Islamic World Report, 1997); David Prochaska, “The Return of the Repressed: War, Trauma, Memory in Algeria and Beyond,” *Algeria & France 1800-2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia*, Edited by Patricia M.E. Lorcin (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006).

<sup>345</sup> See Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*; Azouz Begag, *Ethnicity & Equality: France in the Balance*, Translated by Alec Hargreaves (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Gerard Noiriel, *Le creuset français : histoire de l’immigration, XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1988); Dominic Thomas, *Africa and France: Postcolonial Cultures, Migration, and Racism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

<sup>346</sup> Carrie Tarr, *Reframing difference: Beur and banlieue filmmaking in France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 6.



humorous jokes. In *Arabico* and *Un monde libre*, by contrast, the reader is confronted with the experiences of police violence and its psychological effects on a young boy, or the struggles of a young man trying to define himself in a racist world.

Mahmoudi's focus on themes like colonization, racism, and police brutality sets him apart from the other French authors of Arab origin in this dissertation, and, I would argue, represents a sentiment that is generally *less* apparent in contemporary work about the *banlieue*. As Mahmoudi begins to do in *Un monde libre*, it is much more typical to acknowledge one's origins and then contextualize them within the larger experience of poverty in the *banlieue*, as both Djaïdani and Guène do in their novels. Nevertheless, it is perhaps easier to avoid explicit discussions of difference when one is working in a non-visual medium such as the novel, which does not require its authors to present physical depictions of its characters. Furthermore, while there is at this point an established tradition of *beur* literature, the tradition of *beur bande dessinée* is much less firmly established, which might also make including these elements of colonial history more urgent, as they are topics that have not been discussed in too many *bande dessinée* before this time.

## CONCLUSION

Although they use very different strategies, Antico, Rochier, and Mahmoudi all apply the medium of *bande dessinée* to contesting stereotypes about the places they used to—and, in some cases, still do—call home. All three take an additive approach, providing information and context that is often ignored in the service of a larger, dominant narrative. As such, all three authors bear witness to events that took place and,

through their written and visual testimony, ensure that these stories are not lost, but rather become part of the larger narrative about the *banlieue*.

Most crucially, these artists' work is representative of the creative possibilities of the medium of *bande dessinée* to challenge stereotypes, which is a phenomenon that can be found in many other *banlieue bande dessinée*. Adrien Fournier's first graphic novel, *Les plans de la ville: psychogéographie intrinsèque des grands ensembles* (2009) represented an ambitious effort to chronicle young adulthood and the anxieties that come with that in the *banlieue*, and, like Antico and Rochier, focuses primarily on the white inhabitants in the *banlieue*. Other artists have used the medium to tell stories that might not otherwise reach a larger audience. *Jeunes: Des nouvelles de la cité* (2004) a collaboration between 20 different artists, tells the stories of children who grew up in the *banlieue* and their thoughts about where they grew up. Helkarava's *La Banlieue du 20 heures* (2016), published with Casterman's Sociorama, represents an ambitious effort to translate a sociological study by Jérôme Berthaut about media reporting of the *banlieue* into *bande dessinée* format.

Other *banlieue bande dessinée* has taken a less realistic approach while still challenging stereotypes. For instance, *Shaango* (2006-2014) tells the story of a young man who discovers he has super-strength powers that he can use in his own vigilante justice efforts in the *banlieue*. One of Rochier's other short *bandes dessinées*, *Bastion* (2016) removes characters from the story altogether, and instead presents a series of images of *HLM* towers that are covered in graffiti that spell out different words that advance the plot. Céline Wagner and Edmond Baudoin's creative collaboration, *La*

*Patience du grand singe* (2006) introduces elements of magical realism to the *banlieue* by telling the story of a giant ape who appears in the parking lot of a Carrefour.

Other *bande dessinée* artists have tried to create stories that are more accessible to a general public that might not be able to afford to purchase a graphic novel, which tend to be more expensive than novels. In addition to Rochier's aforementioned *Envrac*, *L'homme des banlieues* was a very popular four-volume magazine series that ran from 2004-2006. It showed a variety of depictions of the *banlieue* by authors with differing perspectives. In so doing, it avoided many of the stereotypical depictions of the *banlieue* both through the ethnicities of the characters depicted, the settings (some of which focused on traditional suburban houses instead of *HLM* towers), and the stories themselves, which sought to represent experiences of *banlieues* beyond the Parisian *banlieue*.

Although *banlieue bande dessinée* has not received nearly as much scholarly attention as *banlieue* novels or *banlieue* films, the works presented in this chapter demonstrate that there is nevertheless a great deal of innovation taking place in this medium and, particularly, in the way in which it represents the space of the *banlieue* and the experiences of its residents. All of the artists analyzed in this chapter, and the majority of the artists producing *banlieue bande dessinée*, are still living, and it will be important to watch what they continue to produce. As I hope to have shown here, this chapter is only the beginning of what could easily become a lifetime of research into *banlieue bande dessinée*.

## Conclusion: (In)Voluntary Spokespersons

For many of the authors studied in this dissertation, these works represent their first—though not last—novels, films, or graphic novels.<sup>347</sup> Since all of these authors have gone on to work on topics beyond the *banlieue*, the *banlieue* has effectively been a launching pad for careers that have continued with varying degrees of success. When making the move outside of the *banlieue*, many of these authors chose to work in different mediums. Film, in particular, has been a popular medium of expression for many *banlieue* authors. Indeed, all of the authors studied in this dissertation, with the exception of Gilles Rochier and Halim Mahmoudi, have dabbled in directing their own short films or feature films, or made filmmaking their main creative profession. Since all of the authors studied in this dissertation are still living, and all have been actively producing work since they released the works studied here, it is important to consider what these artists have done after producing these first texts, how they have used the setting of the *banlieue* to launch their career, and the extent to which the *banlieue* has continued to define their subsequent work, especially when it is not related to the *banlieue*.

As these artists have moved forward in their careers, their relationship with the *banlieue* and the horizon of expectations<sup>348</sup> it brings has become increasingly complex. While the label can be leveraged to bring attention to their work, it also creates a certain

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<sup>347</sup> The two exceptions here are Samuel Benchetrit's film *Asphalte* (he had previously directed several films) and Gilles Rochier's *Ta Mère la pute* (while this represents his first full-length *bande dessinée* album, Rochier had been active in drawing shorter comics for nearly a decade before publishing *TMLP*).

<sup>348</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an aesthetics of reception*, trans. Timothy Bathi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 23.

set of expectations on the part of readers and viewers that dictates the way in which it is read and understood. Both at the beginning of their careers and as their careers have progressed, these artists have taken different approaches to the *banlieue* label, ranging from embracing it in order to increase sales and gain attention to rejecting it from the very beginning. The fact that all of these authors have tried to move away from the *banlieue*, a setting drawn from their personal lives, over the course of their careers further complicates the relationship between not only their work and the *banlieue*, but also with the labels of autobiography and autofiction. In some cases, this move away from the *banlieue* has been easy and the resulting works have been met with equal—if not greater—critical claim, while other authors have struggled significantly to shed this label. In particular, when minority *banlieue* artists have moved away from the setting of the *banlieue*, they have had to work much harder to have these other works accepted. Often, they have taken drastic measures, ranging from changing their name to adopting a different medium, in order to be accepted as artists who do more than act as (in)voluntary spokespersons for the *banlieue*.

To conclude this dissertation, I examine what these authors have done following the works studied in the preceding chapters, and suggest why some authors have been more successful than others at shedding the *banlieue* label to don the mantle of *French* author. The relationship with the *banlieue* label for each author is shaped by a combination of their racial and religious backgrounds, as well as the medium in which they work. Novelists tend to have the hardest time shedding the *banlieue* label, while artists working in *bande dessinée* and film have had much greater commercial and critical

success in choosing topics that extend beyond the *banlieue*. Race is the other key factor. Visible minorities have had a much harder time being recognized as French artists in their own right, regardless of the medium in which they work, or the number of generations of French citizenship in their family. Their work is often labeled as autobiographical or autofictive and these labels are used to suggest that minorities, and, especially, those of Maghrebi origin, are not actually engaged in creative projects, another layer of racism that certain *banlieue* authors confront.

### **MOVING TOWARDS THE VISUAL**

Many *banlieue* artists have worked in multiple mediums, and all but two of the writers and graphic novelists analyzed in this dissertation have chosen to work in film at some point in their careers. Faïza Guène worked on several short films both before and after the publication of *Kiffe kiffe demain*. These films included *La Zonzonnière* (1999), *Rumeurs* (2002), and *Rien que des mots* (2004). She also produced a documentary titled *Mémoires du 17 octobre 61* in 2002. Several years before he wrote *Boumkoeur*, Rachid Djaïdani was an actor in several films, including a key *banlieue* film: *Ma 6-T va crack-er* (1996). He continued to act following the publication of *Boumkoeur*, before moving to the director's chair, from which he directed a number of documentaries and two films: *Rengaine* (2012) and *Tour de France* (2016), both of which were critically acclaimed.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Both *Rengaine* and *Tour de France* were selected to be shown as part of the Quinzaine de réalisateurs at the Festival de Cannes. Additionally, *Rengaine* won the Prix FIPRESCI de la Critique Internationale at Cannes, the Prix Michel-d'Ornano at the Festival de Deauville, and the Lune d'Or at the Festival international du film indépendant de Bordeaux, and was nominated for the César du meilleur premier film in 2013. *Tour de France* also won the prix du Jury du festival de film francophone d'Athènes, and was nominated at the Festival International du Film d'Aubagne 2017, the Lumières de la presse étrangère 2017, and for five prizes in the Quinzaine des réalisateurs.

The interplay between writing and film continues with the graphic novelists. Nine Antico, for instance, has directed one short film, *Tonite* (2013) and is working on a feature film, *Playlist*, with the Sombrero Films production company.

Likewise, the three filmmakers analyzed in Chapter Two are also writers, who, in addition to writing their autobiographies which they then adapted into a screenplay for their own autofictive films, have written novels of their own or engaged in other, non-filmic, creative endeavors. Samuel Benchetrit's breakout novel, *Récit d'un branleur*, was published in 2000. In addition to the three tomes of his autofictive *Les Chroniques de l'Asphalte*, he has also published *Le Coeur en dehors* (2009), *Chien* (2015), and *La nuit avec ma femme* (2016). He also produced two theater pieces: *Comédie sur un quai de gare* (2001) and *Moins deux* (2005). Prior to directing *Papa was not a Rolling Stone* (2014), Sylvie Ohayon published three novels: the autobiographical works *Papa was not a Rolling Stone* (2011) and *Les Bourgeoises* (2012) and her first work of fiction, *Bonnes à (re)marier* (2014). Following the release of the film, Ohayon has continued to write, producing *L'Une contre l'autre* (2015), *Ravie* (2016), and *Micheline* (2017). Prior to directing *Qu'Allah Bénisse la France!* in 2014, Abd Al Malik recorded four studio albums—*La Face à face des coeurs* (2004), *Gibraltar* (2006), *Dante* (2008), and *Château Rouge* (2010)—and published four books—the autobiographical *Qu'Allah bénisse la France!* (2005), and the more politically-engaged treatises *La guerre des banlieues n'aura pas lieu* (2009), *Le dernier Français* (2012), and *L'Islam au secours de la République* (2013). Following the release of his film, Al Malik has continued to produce music and write. He has released his fifth studio album, *Scarifications*, in 2015 and has

published two more books: *Place de la République* (2015) and *Camus, l'art de la révolte* (2016).

The back and forth between literature and film in the *banlieue* authors studied in this dissertation is reflective of a larger trend among *banlieue* artists, the majority of whom tend to work across multiple media. For instance, graphic novelist Adrien Fournier created an animated web series called *Les Locataires*. Likewise, rapper Médine turned his 2008 single “Don’t Panik” into a multimedia brand, releasing a book, *Don’t panik: N’ayez pas peur!*, that he co-wrote with Pascal Boniface, and a short documentary, “I’m Migrant Don’t Panik,” that he also directed.

The move towards visual culture, and the desire to represent ideas visually, is also reflective of a larger trend within French society. According to Jan Baetens and Ari J. Blatt in the introduction to their edited volume, *Writing of Images*,

the steadily growing impact of image culture has prompted a number of writers to mobilize the visual as a conduit for sustained consideration of, among other things, national identity, ethics, aesthetics, globalization, race, terrorism, the family, politics, class, the reshaping of new individual and collective subjectivities, or the enduring legacy of literature itself.<sup>350</sup>

Visual culture, in other words, has become a method for exploring all kinds of ideas, including more serious topics that might, in other centuries, have been reserved for written media. As a result of the increased seriousness of the topics that are engaged with in a visual manner, Baetens and Blatt argue that in “this culture of the image... a new kind

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<sup>350</sup> Jan Baetens and Ari J. Blatt, “Editors’ Preface: Writing and the Image Today,” in *Writing and the image today*, Jan Baetens and Ari J. Blatt eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 2.



of hybrid textuality is emerging, one that implies the waning autonomy of any one medium.”<sup>351</sup> A novel is no longer, necessarily, any more suited for serious topics than a film or graphic novel, and as a result artists are more inclined to experiment with the mediums in which they tell a story. Artists are moving between mediums because a single one no longer suits all of their storytelling objectives. In fact, the only two artists studied in this dissertation who have not gone back and forth between film and writing are the *bande dessinée* artists Halim Mahmoudi and Gilles Rochier, whose work already combines the written word with visual elements.

### **THE BURDEN OF THE AUTHOR**

Artists are also working in multiple mediums in order to combat certain expectations that come with the reputation for telling stories set in the *banlieue*. Once these authors have gained critical success for writing about the *banlieue*, they are no longer simply creative individuals telling stories of their own imagination, but rather, they are bounded by the expectations that come with the reputation for telling stories about the *banlieue* specifically, and these expectations can make it challenging for their audiences to accept their decision to tell other stories because their audiences have come to expect certain stories from these *banlieue* Authors.

Roland Barthes distinguishes between the writer, the individual who creates the text, and the Author, a “modern figure, a product of our own society” who becomes a larger-than-life figure whose own reputation eclipses the written text and defines the way

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<sup>351</sup> Baetens and Blatt, “Editors’ Preface,” 3.

in which that text is understood.<sup>352</sup> Unlike the writer, who is free to create stories about any topic and experiment with a variety of different styles and techniques, the Author has a particular reputation that dictates what the text can contain and how it ought to be read: “to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing.”<sup>353</sup> The Author limits the way that the text is interpreted, giving artificial value to certain readings of a text over others.

These limits placed on the Author, which do not exist for the writer, create a very specific set of expectations that come with this Author’s name, which dictates what this Author’s audience will expect. Hans Robert Jauss uses the term horizon of expectations to designate “the relationship of an individual text to the succession of texts,” however, this term can also be used to designate what the reader expects from the Author. Once a writer has become an Author, a particular horizon of expectations with that name is established, as “the new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts.”<sup>354</sup> While capitalizing on the readers’ horizon of expectations can be an excellent way to sell texts and continue to develop a reputation as an Author, this same combination of Author and the horizon of expectations that come with it can also be extremely constricting.

The phenomenon of the title of Author coming with a certain, constricting, horizon of expectations is well-illustrated by the career trajectory of a popular culture

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<sup>352</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image, music, text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-143.

<sup>353</sup> Barthes, *Image, music, text*, 147.

<sup>354</sup> Jauss, *Towards an aesthetics of reception*, 23.

favorite: J.K. Rowling. After many years as a writer trying to get the first Harry Potter book published, Rowling finally succeeded. When *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was published, in addition to the critical acclaim that came with it, Rowling also received the mantle of Author, which she continued to establish with the subsequent books she wrote in the Harry Potter series. As an Author, Rowling was not seen as a writer with a talent for imaginative storytelling about any subject, but rather, as the creator of the wonderful wizarding world of Harry Potter and his friends. This Author title, and the horizon of expectations that came with it (her readers wanted books about Harry and his friends, or, at the very least, books set in the Harry Potter universe) turned her into a billionaire that had people lining up for hours, first to purchase the books the night they came out, and then later to watch the movies inspired by her books.<sup>355</sup> This very same mantle of Author, however, also came with the expectations that she would continue to tell the story of Harry Potter and his friends, or, at the very least, continue to tell stories set in the larger Harry Potter universe, which she did successfully and lucratively for many years with companions to the main seven books such as *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*.

Just like the *banlieue* authors in this chapter, when Rowling sought to do something completely different, this very same horizon of expectations that had catapulted her to fame became an enormously constricting disadvantage. *The Casual*

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<sup>355</sup> James B. Stewart, "In the Chamber of Secrets: J.K. Rowling's Net Worth," *The New York Times*, November 24, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/24/business/in-the-chamber-of-secrets-jk-rowlings-net-worth.html>.

*Vacancy*, her first venture into the non-wizarding world, flopped.<sup>356</sup> J.K. Rowling the Author of Harry Potter could not, it turns out, be successful telling stories set in other worlds, no matter the quality of her writing, because of the horizon of expectations associated with her name. The confines under which Rowling the Author was forced to operate became even more clear when, a few years later, she published a different book in the genre of crime fiction, *The Cuckoo's Calling*, under the pseudonym Robert Galbraith. This book was much-better received.<sup>357</sup> Even after Rowling was revealed to be Robert Galbraith, she has continued to publish under the name, “to maintain the distinction from her other writing,” and, doubtless, to capitalize on the audience’s horizon of expectations for this new Author, Robert Galbraith, and the growing critical acclaim associated with him, all of which has allowed her to explore a new genre free from the Author mantle of J.K. Rowling.<sup>358</sup>

In an analogous fashion to Rowling, after publishing their first works about the *banlieue*, the artists in this dissertation also gained both a reputation for talking about the *banlieue*, and, with it, received the mantle of the Author who speaks about the *banlieue* and the horizon of expectations that came with it. Once these writers became Authors who talked about the *banlieue*, the horizon of expectations on the part of their audience was that they would continue to offer insights about the *banlieue*. While this Author

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<sup>356</sup> See, among others, Michiko Kakutani, “Darkness and Death, No Magic to Help,” *The New York Times*, September 27, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/27/books/book-review-the-casual-vacancy-by-j-k-rowling.html>.

<sup>357</sup> The series is so successful it has been turned into a TV series by the BBC.

<sup>358</sup> Robert Galbraith, “Robert Galbraith,” *Robert-Galbraith.com*, accessed 21 Dec. 2017, <http://robert-galbraith.com/about/>.

mantle and its associated horizon of expectations was effective at selling their work, it also meant that, as was the case with Rowling and her audience, the French public was much less likely to accept works by these Authors that were not connected to the *banlieue* and the social problems associated with it.

The tenacity of these norms has varied significantly based on the medium in which the *banlieue* artist is working. Of the three genres examined in this dissertation, the novel has been the least flexible for artists who wish to take on other subject matters. From an economic standpoint, this is surprising because an analysis of recent market trends in France reveals that book sales have actually been increasing, not decreasing.<sup>359</sup> Nevertheless, very few authors who begin a career by writing about the *banlieue* are able to successfully transform this into a literary career in which they also tackle subjects beyond the *banlieue*. Many *banlieue* novelists just wrote one story about the *banlieue* before quitting their writing careers entirely, as can be seen with Ahmed Djouder's *Desintégration*, Houda Rouane's *Pieds Blancs*, and Dembo Goumane's *Dembo Story*, to name just a few.

Those writers who started out writing about the *banlieue* and have gone on to write about other topics have had a great deal of difficulty doing so. The trajectories of Guène and Djaïdani, both of whom received a great deal more critical acclaim and public recognition that ought to have made continuing their writing careers easy, reveals the limitations that the *banlieue* Author title places on writers. Djaïdani's two books

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<sup>359</sup> Ed Nawotka, "French Publishing Sales Rose 4.25% in 2016," *Publisher's Weekly*, 6 July 2017. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/financial-reporting/article/74171-french-publishing-sales-rose-4-25-in-2016.html>

following *Boumkoeur, Mon nerf* (2004) and *Viscéral* (2007), still made the *banlieue* a central aspect of the story even if *Mon nerf* can be read as an “anti-*banlieue* novel”.<sup>360</sup> It was really only when Djaïdani switched to film that he began telling stories that were no longer set in the *banlieue*. The success of his documentary, *Sur ma ligne* (2006), led Djaïdani to push back in the labeling of *Viscéral* as simply a “*banlieue* novel,” even if it was set in the *banlieue*. This success further emboldened him to begin to move all of the stories he told in film away from the *banlieue*. While *Réngaine*, often described as the *beur* and black Romeo and Juliet, still dealt with minority communities, Djaïdani’s most recent film, *Tour de France*, features characters far away from the *banlieue*, on a journey around the sea ports of France. The critical success of both films suggests that audiences may be more receptive to stories by *banlieue* authors that extend beyond the *banlieue* when they are told in a different medium.

When we compare Djaïdani’s career to Guène’s, we see that the change in medium might have been essential to having audiences accept work on new topics. Guène, who has still chosen to work primarily with the genre of the novel, made an attempt to stretch beyond the *banlieue* with her third novel, *Les gens du Balto*, a mystery novel that was neither set in the *banlieue* nor dealt with the *beur* experience.

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<sup>360</sup> Kathryn A. Kleppinger, *Branding the ‘Beur’ Author: Minority Writing and the Media in France, 1983-2013* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 182: “*Mon nerf* is particularly remarkable because it subverts themes commonly identified in *beur* or *banlieue* writing. *mon nerf* is, in a sense, an ‘anti-*banlieue* novel’ in that it actively refuses the stereotypes driving the reception of more clearly engaged *banlieue*-centered texts. Mounir does not dwell on an identity crisis...he is not geographically isolated and does not complain about the distance between his home and the center of the city...his parents are hard-working, supportive, and love him unconditionally...he is not part of the more dangerous gangs...With his inability to perform sexually he is also a distinct departure from the stereotype of the hyper-sexualized young men in the *banlieues*. His crisis of masculinity is thus quite different from those who exhibit macho behavior; he is paralyzed and unable to act at all.”

Unfortunately, critics still associated her book with the *banlieue*, and in her fourth book, Guène returned to her familiar world of characters of Maghrebi origin and the challenges they faced in France, albeit from a different, male, perspective in *Un Homme ça ne pleure pas*.<sup>361</sup> Most recently, Guène released *Millénium Blues* in January 2018, and it appears that, with this text, Guène has perhaps achieved her goal that she be recognized and respected “as nothing other than a French writer.”<sup>362</sup> Regardless of the horizon of expectations that came with the Author title when she published *Kiffe kiffe demain*, Guène is determined to be recognized as a French writer who can both write about the *banlieue* and tell stories that are completely unrelated. *Millénium Blues*, which was released 14 years after *Kiffe kiffe demain*, has been framed as a book about the experience of a young woman growing up and the changes that have happened to Generation Y over the past 30 years. Based on the interviews and press releases on the book in January, it appears that critics have accepted Guène’s characterization of this book and focused on the content and style of the book, instead of on Guène’s origins.<sup>363</sup> Nevertheless, this moment of being recognized as an author, and not as a spokesperson for the *banlieue*, only came after 14 years of pushing back against this characterization, which shows how difficult the mantle of *banlieue* Author can be to shed, especially for writers.

As the differing career paths of Guène and Djaïdani have shown, the medium in which one works can have a tremendous impact on the ease with which one is able to

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<sup>361</sup> See, for instance, Payot Mariane’s review of *Les gens du Balto* in *L’express*, “Voyage au bout du RER,” *L’express*, October 2, 2008, [https://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/les-gens-du-balto\\_823064.html](https://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/les-gens-du-balto_823064.html).

<sup>362</sup> Quoted in Kleppinger, *Branding the ‘Beur’ Author*, 227.

<sup>363</sup> La Grande Librairie, “‘Millénium blues,’ le roman d’une génération de Faïza Guène,” YouTube video, 12:27. Posted February 2, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agi\\_hvlyBds](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agi_hvlyBds).

transfer between topics, as audiences' horizons of expectations for these mediums differ. The expectations for artists telling visual stories about the *banlieue*—either in television or in graphic novels—have not been nearly as constricting as the horizon of expectations for *banlieue* novelists. For instance, graphic novelists Mahmoudi and Rochier both published several graphic novels about the *banlieue* and became known for recounting these experiences. When they chose to transition out of this topic, however, they were able to do so with relative ease. Following *TMLP*, Rochier has diversified his portfolio to include topics that no longer address the *banlieue*, from illness with the appearance of a mysterious scar in *La cicatrice* (2014) to community gossip in *Tu sais ce qu'on raconte* (2017). Mahmoudi has just recently released a book that deals with neither the *beur* experience nor the *banlieue*, *Petite Maman*, in September 2017. Reporting on this *bande dessinée* by *Le Monde* did not mention Mahmoudi's *banlieue* origins, and characterized it as a story that raises awareness about the violence against children taking place in France, showing that Mahmoudi was able to treat an entirely different subject without being confined by the same horizon of expectations of the *banlieue* Author.<sup>364</sup> Nine Antico has also had great success in transitioning away from the *banlieue* in all of her works following *Le goût du paradis*. Now she is known much more for work that focused on young women from around the globe discovering their sexuality. The successful transitions on the part of Antico, Rochier, and Mahmoudi points to the openness of *bande dessinée* readers to accept stories by these authors that treat a variety of different topics.

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<sup>364</sup> Gaëlle Dupont, "La maltraitance des enfants, traitée sans pathos en bande dessinée," *Le Monde*, October 17, 2017. [http://www.lemonde.fr/bande-dessinee/article/2017/10/17/la-maltraitance-des-enfants-traitee-sans-pathos-en-bande-dessinee\\_5202060\\_4420272.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/bande-dessinee/article/2017/10/17/la-maltraitance-des-enfants-traitee-sans-pathos-en-bande-dessinee_5202060_4420272.html).



Indeed, persons working in visual mediums like comics or film have the greatest amount of flexibility in terms of the diversity of topics that they can present within a single genre. Perhaps the fact that neither Mahmoudi nor Rochier has felt the need to expand beyond the medium of comics suggests that it combines the written word with visual elements in such a way that makes a single story accessible to a wider audience and simultaneously satisfies the desire to portray a story in a way that one has control over both how it is visually seen and how it is narrated. Indeed, when people read graphic novels, they are much more likely to rely on visual cues, as so much that is of narrative significance in a graphic novel, from the division of frames to the speech bubbles to the sequence of action to characters' physical attributes, is visually-based.<sup>365</sup> The medium is so visual that, in addition to needing to be able to read the speech bubbles and any accompanying text, the reader of a graphic novel must also be trained in reading images.<sup>366</sup> These images, which do more than simply illustrate an action, propel the story forward in a manner which requires the reader to be actively drawing conclusions about the visual similarities and differences between panels.

The combination of reading image and text in comics simultaneously requires skills needed to understand a novel and a film. Reading a comic requires the active participation on the part of the reader to make inferences and draw conclusions that is akin to the process of reading a novel, where much must be inferred based on available

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<sup>365</sup> Emily M. Maniace, "Reading Process Comparison between Graphic novel and Traditional Novels" (Masters' thesis, SUNY Brockport, 2014), 17-18.

<sup>366</sup> Maniace, "Reading Process," 29. See also M. Rice, "Using graphic texts in secondary classrooms: A tale of endurance," *English journal* 101, no. 5 (2012): 37-43.

information. Comics, however, also provide the reader with visual information that is received passively, which is akin to the experience of the viewer of a film. Since comics already provides the artist with the flexibility to use aspects of writing and film simultaneously, the practitioners of comics thus may feel less of a need to alternate between the written and the visual.<sup>367</sup>

Like *bande dessinée* artists, filmmakers, who also work in a visual medium, have generally had more flexibility in terms of the subject matter they portray, even when they tell stories about the *banlieue*. While Samuel Benchetrit represents the only true career filmmaker of those studied in Chapter 2, both he and Djaïdani, who today would be better-described as a filmmaker than as a novelist, have both had the flexibility to tell stories that treat a variety of different topics while holding onto their core audiences. Neither have been limited by the horizon of expectations for the *banlieue* Author. As Djaïdani's career proves, transitioning to film can also be a strategy for gaining a wider audience that may be more receptive to the variety stories an artist wants to share. Sometimes, the same story can be much more readily accepted in one medium than it is in another. For instance, Djaïdani's novel *Mon nerf* was an unsuccessful flop, but the documentary he produced about the process of writing that same novel was highly successful and aided in his transition to filmmaking by establishing him as a *writer* and

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<sup>367</sup> Laurence Grove says, “as innovative prototype moves to becoming new cultural norm, hybrid forms mixing text and image (or image and text) come to the fore” (Laurence Grove, *Text/Image Mosaics in French Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 7).

not as a writer-who-writes-about-the-*banlieue*, which is the way that he had been seen before because of the success of *Boumkoeur*.<sup>368</sup>

Although Djaïdani's success as a writer led him to entirely cast off his mantle of novelist (which, one could argue he always wore reluctantly, given that he had initially envisioned *Boumkoeur* as a film, not a novel), the vast majority of the authors studied here have continued to work in both visual and written mediums simultaneously. In addition to her short films, Guène has published four novels following *Kiffe kiffe demain: Du rêve pour les oufs* (2006), *Les gens du Balto* (2008), *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* (2014), and *Millénium Blues* (2018). Benchetrit continued to write and direct films, and following *Asphalte*, he is adapting his most recent novel, *Chien*, to the big screen in a film that has already been screened at the Festival du film de Locarno, and will be released to the general public in 2018. Antico has continued to produce *bande dessinée* following the young adulthood of female characters and their sexual explorations. Several of her *bande dessinée* following *Le Gout du Paradis* has been set in the U.S. (*Coney Island Baby*, 2010; *Autel California*, 2014 and 2016) and all of her work centers on young, female characters and their explorations of their own sexuality. Ohayon has yet to release another film, and has instead concentrated on novels, which she has been producing at the rate of approximately one per year.

Many of these *banlieue* artists are conscious of the interplay between the written word and the moving picture and have spoken about it directly. Antico has drawn a direct

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<sup>368</sup> Kleppinger, *Branding the 'Beur' Author*, 182.

link between the process of making a film and her creative process in making a *bande dessinée*, characterizing the later as a more accessible and immediate form of filmmaking, since all it takes is a pen and paper. Antico applies filmmaking processes and techniques when making her *bande dessinée*, saying “je fais de la bande dessinée comme si je faisais un film...quand je découpe une page, c’est comme si j’avais la caméra dans l’œil.”<sup>369</sup> Antico sees her *bande dessinée* as an extension of the film process—a kind of alternative film that is more immediate and accessible than film itself, but one in which the frames of her *bande dessinée* are akin to the frame created by the film camera’s lens. Djaïdani sees a similar kind of synergy between his written works and film, noting that he used the “tick-tock” rhythm of a film reel to maintain forward momentum in his sentences when writing *Boumkoeur*, which he had initially conceived of as a film before his editor persuaded him to write it as a book.<sup>370</sup>

In contrast to both Antico and Djaïdani, Guène sees her films playing an altogether different role from her novels. For Guène, her films and novels are directed at different audiences and thus serve alternate purposes:

les films traitent de sujets de société tout en étant inscrits dans la vie quotidienne des jeunes, ce qui a été pour moi à de nombreuses reprises d’excellents leviers de débats lorsque j’allais à la rencontre d’élèves dans des collèges ou lycées. Ils s’identifiaient souvent aux problématiques traitées, et tout en passant par le film, cela les ramenait à eux et à leurs opinions. J’ai l’impression que ces courts-métrages ont été davantage un outil pédagogique, une démarche presque sociologique beaucoup plus qu’une oeuvre cinématographique. Une démarche très différente de mes romans je crois.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Nine Antico, interview by Gilles Suchey and Eric Litot, *Contrebandes*, April 10, 2010.

<sup>370</sup> Kleppinger, *Branding the ‘Beur’ Author*, 173.

<sup>371</sup> Quoted in Dominic Thomas, “Documenting the Periphery: The Short Films of Faïza Guène,” *French Forum* vol. 35 no. 2/3 (Spring/Fall 2010): 198.

Guène, who has led workshops with teenagers in the *banlieue*, sees film as playing a didactic role that introduces spectators to a subject matter in a way that is more immediate and approachable than a novel. While Guène is adamant that her novels are creative works of fiction that involve extensive artistic choices—something she has to insist on all the more vehemently in order to combat assumptions that her work is autobiographical—she sees the role of her film as less creative enterprise and more as a practical, sociological enquiry and study. She exercises artistic freedom and creative possibilities in her writing, while her films serve a different, practical purpose of outreach and community impact, a way of sparking conversations about pertinent social issues and problems that the people she works with might encounter.

As the above cases demonstrate, the medium in which these authors tell the story dictates the extent to which they are beholden to audiences' horizons of expectations. The horizon of expectations is the least constricting for artists working in visual mediums, who are able to tell stories about the *banlieue*, even for an extended period of time, as is the case with Rochier and Mahmoudi, and then transition easily into subjects that are not about the *banlieue* while retaining an audience. By contrast, as the comparison between Djaïdani and Guène's career trajectories demonstrate, the horizon of expectations is the most constricting for *banlieue* writers who attempt to tell stories that are not related to the *banlieue* in the same novel format.

## RACE AND THE HORIZON OF EXPECTATIONS

The horizon of expectations about the *banlieue* has played a significant role in shaping the extent to which authors embrace the *banlieue* label for commercial purposes or to gain critical notoriety. The *banlieue* brand and its accompanying horizon of expectations, however confining it may be, is also a way of transforming a Text, which cannot be classified, into a Work, which brings with it both an audience and a certain horizon of expectations for that Work and the Author who produces it. Whereas the Text, according to Barthes, “cannot be contained in a hierarchy, even in a simple division of genres,”<sup>372</sup> the Work “is caught up in a process of filiation... a *determination* of the work by the world (by race, then by History), a *consecution* of works among themselves, and a *conformity* of the works to the author.”<sup>373</sup> The *banlieue* Work is viewed in relation to all of the other texts that have been created about the *banlieue* and the extent to which these texts conform to these previously-established norms and conceptions of what this place ought to look like and how it ought to be perceived. This *banlieue* label, in other words, can be used as a way of getting a work recognized by placing it in relationship with other texts and leveraging the audience’s horizons of expectations for it accordingly.

The *banlieue* and the associations that came with it were something that gave the artists in this dissertation, who have all since gone on to pursue different careers, the critical recognition and publicity that they needed before they went on to tackle other subjects. For instance, Paul Smaïl, a pseudonym under which a number of *banlieue* works

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<sup>372</sup> Barthes, *Image, music, text*, 157.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

were published, was very successful both commercially and critically because people falsely assumed he was a writer of Moroccan origin. When Paul Smaïl was revealed to be French writer Jack Alain Léger, who had just published an Islamophobic treatise, however, other *beur* and *banlieue* writers, especially Azouz Begag, were highly critical of him.<sup>374</sup> As this case shows, the *banlieue* label is one that authors can use to gain notoriety and be recognized, but it is one that can and has been exploited. An examination of the artists in this dissertation reveals two different strategies for dealing with the *banlieue* brand and the extent to which they used it to transform their Text into a Work: embracing it, or fighting against it, and the effect of this decision is deeply colored both by the authors' own race and the medium in which they are working.

Some artists were able to use the *banlieue* as a stepping stone that did not define their artistic careers. In addition to the role that medium plays in making this transition, racial and religious background also played a key role in determining the extent to which an artist got stuck with the *banlieue* label, as well as the extent to which artists used it in the promotion of their own work. White artists Gilles Rochier, Nine Antico, Sylvie Ohayon, and Samuel Benchetrit were split in terms of the extent to which they labeled their work as being part of the *banlieue* in order to transform their Text into a Work. While Antico and Benchetrit leaned very briefly on this crutch, Rochier and Ohayon have self-identified with the label more freely and frequently. Nevertheless, all benefitted from

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<sup>374</sup> For more on the Paul Smaïl controversy, see Azouz Begag, "Of Imposture and Incompetence: Paul Smaïl's *Vivre me tue*," *Research in African Literatures* 37, no. 1 (2006): 55-71; Lia Brozgal, "Hostages of Authenticity: Paul Smaïl, Azouz Begag, and the Invention of the Beur Author," *French Forum* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 113-130.

the *banlieue* initially to gain notoriety. Due to their race, these authors have been equally free to shed the *banlieue* label with just as much ease as they were able to do it. By contrast, Faïza Guène, Rachid Djaïdani, Halim Mahmoudi, and Abd Al Malik, the *beur* and black artists studied in this dissertation, have had a much harder time shedding this label, a fact that cannot solely be explained by the medium that they chose to work in.

Antico did not rely on her *banlieue* background in promoting *Le goût du paradis*, however, the initial cover art for Ego Comme X featured Nine drawing graffiti on a wall, bringing it closer to the *banlieue* than the current cover with Les Requins Marteaux, which features Nine in a swimsuit. Although the presence of the *banlieue* in *Le goût du paradis* was made a bit more apparent by the first cover for the album, the press surrounding the album was just as interested in her discussions of sexual discovery, which, Antico has said in interviews, was her intention.<sup>375</sup> None of the critics who interviewed her expected her to act as a spokesperson for the *banlieue* or the experiences of the people who live there. While one could say that Antico has been pigeonholed in a different genre with equally tenacious stereotypes, that of writing about women and women's sexuality, the *banlieue* label never stuck. Perhaps because she garnered attention with other themes, particularly her penchant for depicting sex, Antico has never needed the label of *banlieue* to get her work recognized and, as such, has never been constricted by the audience horizon of expectations for a *banlieue* Author.

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<sup>375</sup> Nine Antico, interview by Gilles Suchey and Eric Litot, *Contrebandes*, April 10, 2010.



Much like Antico, Benchetrit, who has generally approached his connection to the *banlieue* in a similarly oblique way, relied on a *banlieue* story to launch his career but did not find himself defined by this choice. One of his first short films, *Nouvelles de la tour L*, tells the story of an undercover police officer attempting to trick a drug dealer at the foot of an HLM tower into making a deal, and shows how the drug dealer thwarts the policeman's attempts. Following that short film, however, Benchetrit has had an easy time shaking the label and going on to do other things. Unlike many of the other artists studied in the dissertation, Benchetrit did not begin his career with an autobiography, or a book that was critically construed to be autobiographical; his breakout novel, *Récit d'un branleur* (2000), chronicles the young adulthood of a directionless man growing up in Paris who keeps trying, and failing, to find happiness. Though there are some decidedly autobiographical elements that enter into the work – the names of the characters Marie (his first wife) and Dede (one of his childhood friends) appear in the book—the press surrounding the book's release never suggested it was anything other than a work of fiction. The *banlieue* is also absent from his first feature film, *Janis et John*, which features a couple living in a posh, if monotone, building that avoids the conventional *banlieue* tropes of looming, disintegrating towers, and, again, critics never characterized the film as one that was made by a *banlieue* filmmaker, showing that Benchetrit, too, was able to dodge the horizon of expectations that come with the title of *banlieue* Author.

Unlike Antico and Benchetrit, Sylvie Ohayon and Giles Rochier are two authors who very consciously self-identified using the *banlieue* label, making their own biographical connections to the space central to the promotion of their creative work.

Perhaps drawing from her own background in marketing to sell her own work, Ohayon was complicit in crafting her own label as the *jeune fille de la Courneuve* in order to gain notoriety. Unlike Guène and Djaïdani, two other *banlieue* writers who crafted stories set in the *banlieue* that were not autobiographical, Ohayon drew *Papa was not a Rolling Stone* directly from her own childhood experiences and marketed it as a book that told her life as it actually had been. Furthermore, in contrast to Guène or Djaïdani who pushed back against the *banlieue* label and were reluctant to speak for the group as a whole, Ohayon freely gave her own thoughts and representations of the *banlieue* in interviews.<sup>376</sup> Rochier, likewise, never pushed against the classification of his work as “*banlieue*” and referred frequently to his own personal connections to the space.<sup>377</sup>

In spite of both becoming very associated with the *banlieue* label, both Rochier and Ohayon were able to easily shift into other subjects. Ohayon has now transitioned into writing about topics that are not about the *banlieue*, such as a revenge story of a wife against her husband’s mistress (*Ravie*) or a woman finding herself after a divorce (*Bonne à (re)marier*). Although he did move on to talk about other topics following the success of *TMLP*, Rochier has spoken about the challenge of leaving the *banlieue* as a primary setting for his stories. When talking about *La Cicatrice*, he describes that it was challenging to leave the milieu of the *banlieue*, which had become a kind of comfort zone, and that even as he was telling the new story, “c’est vrai que la banlieue me

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<sup>376</sup> See, for instance, her quotations in Elodie Rousseau, "De La Courneuve à Paris VIII : parcours de Sylvie Ohayon, héroïne et réalisatrice de Papa was not a..." *Au féminin*, October 13, 2014, [www.aufeminin.com/sorties-cinema/sylvie-ohayon-rencontre-avec-la-real-de-papa-was-not-s1068910.html](http://www.aufeminin.com/sorties-cinema/sylvie-ohayon-rencontre-avec-la-real-de-papa-was-not-s1068910.html).

<sup>377</sup> Gilles Rochier, interview by Philippe Peter, *DBD 68*, November 2012.

manquait, alors j’ai ajouté un passage dans un quartier.”<sup>378</sup> While working on *La Cicatrice*, Rochier said “j’ai l’impression d’être sur une autre planète en train de travailler. Je suis pas dans mon domaine, je n’ai rien, je n’ai pas d’oxygène, il me faut beaucoup de références, de photos, c’est pas évident quoi.”<sup>379</sup> Despite these challenges, Rochier has also been able to move beyond the *banlieue* in his subsequent works while retaining his audience, showing that despite leaning on the title of *banlieue* Author for over a decade, he was still able to transition into telling other stories.

The ease with which Benchetrit, Antico, Rochier, and Ohayon escaped the *banlieue* label has less to do with the way that they handled the *banlieue* in their stories and much more to do with their race. The degree to which the *banlieue* label and its accompanying horizon of expectations is constricting changes quite a bit when looking at non-white authors, and, particularly, non-white authors who gained the mantle of Author from books they had written. Race plays a major role in the flexibility of an audience’s horizon of expectations for an Author, as can be seen in the following comparison of how Rochier and Guène’s characterizations of their use of the *banlieue* have been perceived. Rochier described the *banlieue* as a point of recurring fascination. He devoted many of his albums, from *Dernier Étage* to *Les Frères Craca*, to the topic and also worked on a fanzine about the *banlieue*, *En Vrac*, for many years.<sup>380</sup> He explains the recurrence of the *banlieue* because it is the thing with which he is the most familiar and describes the

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<sup>378</sup> Gilles Rochier, interview by Philippe Peter, *DBD* 68, November 2012.

<sup>379</sup> Gilles Rochier, interview by Mael Rannou, March 21 2009.

<sup>380</sup> Rochier self-describes as being “fasciné par les grands ensembles” (“Gilles Rochier, chroniqueur de banlieue, révélation d’Angoulême,” *AFP*, February 3, 2012.)

*banlieue* as “un terrain de jeu...un décor.”<sup>381</sup> Guène uses a similar language when describing her novels saying, “le quartier est un contexte [dans mes livres] pas un personnage.”<sup>382</sup> Unlike Guène, however, Rochier was able to characterize the *banlieue* as a “décor” for his stories and not have the *banlieue* define his entire career. Even though Guène describes the *banlieue* as a background feature in her work, it is nonetheless the aspect of her work that is brought to the foreground.

This discrepancy between the way in which authors characterize their work and the extent to which these characterizations are accepted is reflective of a larger trend in the way in which works by minority *banlieue* authors are characterized. Guène and Djaïdani, both of whom are of Maghrebi origin, and both of whom gained critical recognition first as writers, were immediately given both a *banlieue* and a *beur* label following the release of *Boumkoeur* and *Kiffe kiffe demain*, even though the former is arguably a mystery thriller and the latter is just as much focused on a teenage girl’s self-discovery as Antico’s *Le goût du paradis*. Nevertheless, these labels were insistently applied to both Djaïdani and Guène from the very beginning of each of their careers, even though neither one of them self-identified as a *banlieue* author. For instance, *Kiffe kiffe demain* first gained publicity and popularity following a two-page spread by the *Nouvel Observateur* which started off a flurry of French media attention.<sup>383</sup> The article, published on August 19, 2004, called Guène the “Sagan des cités” and the “petite soeur de Jamel

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<sup>381</sup> Gilles Rochier, interview by Mael Rannou, March 21 2009.

<sup>382</sup> Faïza Zerouala, “La littérature de banlieue, une littérature périphérique?”, *Le Courrier de l’Atlas* 68 (2013), 70.

<sup>383</sup> Anne Fohr, “Le monde selon Faïza,” *Le nouvel observateur*, August 19, 2004.

Debouze," immediately branding Guène as both coming from the *banlieue* and being *beur*.

In *Branding the Beur Author*, Katherine Kleppinger traces the evolution and usage of the label “*beur* author,” both by the media and by authors themselves, to promote work by young authors of Maghrebi origin. While *beur* authors from the 1980s and early 1990s who wanted critical recognition had to play the game of spokesperson, contemporary authors have had more success in pushing back against this characterization without suffering the same pushback.<sup>384</sup> In her study of Guène and Djaïdani, Kleppinger notes that they both resisted this label while also profiting from it. Guène, for instance, initially refused any questions about the *banlieue* in general with the statement that she was “an artist, not a sociologist”, even as newspaper articles around France described her as the “Sagan des cités.”<sup>385</sup> As much as Guène has resisted this label, though, it did provide her with the television and media appearances that got her book to sell 100,000 copies in two months when the average book sells only 500-800 copies.<sup>386</sup> As Kleppinger describes, the “*beur*” label is a kind of brand, or marketing tool, that makes their novels more visible but it “has also become a stain or tattoo that prevents authors labeled as such from erasing their background in favor of a neutral reading of

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<sup>384</sup> Kathryn Kleppinger contrasts the trajectories of Farida Belghoul, who wrote *Georgette*, and Azouz Begag, who wrote *Le Gône du Chaâba*, arguing that Begag only got the success he did because he was willing to take on the role of *banlieue* spokesperson. See *Branding the ‘Beur’ Author*, 92-119.

<sup>385</sup> See Sarah Weisz, “Le phénomène Faïza,” *Le Point*, December 2, 2004, 66; Médioni Gilles “Succès – Faïza, on la kiffe,” *L’Express*, 15 Nov 2004, 94; “Faïza Guène romance la vie de la cité,” *Ouest France*, September 14, 2004.

<sup>386</sup> Kleppinger, *Branding the ‘Beur’ Author*, 1 (note).

their works.”<sup>387</sup> Although the *beur* label gives writers notoriety at the beginning of their careers, it became difficult to get rid of; they are literally, as Kleppinger describes, branded. In addition to the *beur* or black label, minority authors like Djaïdani and Guène are also labeled with the *banlieue*. As such, they are expected to serve as dual spokespersons for both the *beur* community and the *banlieue*, performing the role of what Spivak has called the “native informant” who is expected to teach and represent the thoughts, cultures, and beliefs of all *beurs* and all persons in the *banlieue*.<sup>388</sup>

Of course, Guène and Djaïdani are not the only artists of color studied in this dissertation. Mahmoudi and Al Malik have encountered similar pressures arising from the Western audience’s horizon of expectations that the *banlieue* Author of color serve as a “native informant.” The main difference between Mahmoudi and Al Malik when compared to Guène and Djaïdani, however, is that the former two have more readily accepted, and even sought out, the mantle of spokesperson and community representative. Both Al Malik and Mahmoudi have frequently voluntarily put themselves in the position of spokesperson and informant for either France’s black community, France’s Muslim community, or France’s *beur* community.<sup>389</sup> Mahmoudi, for instance,

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>388</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, *Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 42.

<sup>389</sup> See Halim Mahmoudi, “Je suis dessinateur de presse, arabe...Mais seulement ami avec Charlie!”, *Huffington Post Maghreb*, January 12, 2015, [http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/halim-mahmoudi/je-suis-dessinateur-de-pr\\_b\\_6455050.html](http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/halim-mahmoudi/je-suis-dessinateur-de-pr_b_6455050.html); Halim Mahmoudi, “Mon vote n’a pas la peau blanche” *Huffington Post Maghreb*, May 3, 2017, [http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/halim-mahmoudi/mon-vote-na-pas-la-peau-b\\_b\\_16406104.html](http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/halim-mahmoudi/mon-vote-na-pas-la-peau-b_b_16406104.html); Halim Mahmoudi, “Etat d’urgence en France: Analyse d’un terrorisme d’état,” *Huffington Post Maghreb*, January 29, 2016, [http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/halim-mahmoudi/etat-urgence-france\\_b\\_9113182.html](http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/halim-mahmoudi/etat-urgence-france_b_9113182.html).

describes the creation of *Arabico* as a very conscientious effort to fill a hole in chronicling the experiences of *beur* youth in *bande dessinée*, indicating the representative role that he intended for his work.<sup>390</sup> Guène and Djaïdani, by contrast, have never framed their work in the same manner. For them these topics only come up in interviews in which they take care, to the greatest extent possible, not to act as spokespersons.

Regardless of whether they seek out the questions or not, Mahmoudi, Al Malik, Guène and Djaïdani have all been asked questions that are never asked of their white counterparts, even when they are presenting works that are equally as politically engaged, if not more so. Furthermore, the combination of the *banlieue* and *beur* label, or any label designating one part of an additional minority, whether donned willingly or unwillingly, is difficult to shake. For instance, Al Malik has yet to produce any work where he is doing anything *other* than acting in that spokesperson role. Likewise, Mahmoudi had to take extreme measures when he wished to diverge from his previous plotlines. When he released his most recent album, *Petite maman*, in September 2017, Mahmoudi also dropped his last name in the promotion of *Petite Maman*, opting for the potentially more neutral name “Halim.” The fact that Mahmoudi took such an extreme measure to camouflage his own background and perhaps to entice a different group of readers, for *Petite maman* is indicative of the uniquely difficult position in which *banlieue* authors of color find themselves when they wish to take on different subject matter.

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<sup>390</sup> In describing his intention for the story, Mahmoudi said “Le récit se veut subjectif, venant ‘non pas de l’intérieur d’un pays ou d’une banlieue, mais à l’intérieur même du cœur humain. À l’abri des chiffres de l’immigration, de ceux de la famine, des guerres, du chômage out des humeurs boursières.’” (Halim Mahmoudi, interview by Kenza Sefrioui, *Tel Quel*, March 2015)

## BANLIEUE NETURALITY?

A recurring theme among minority *banlieue* artists who do not like the limitations of the horizon of expectations for the *banlieue* label is the demand that their works be read neutrally. The *beur* authors in this dissertation have been adamant that they do not want to be confined by the *banlieue* label because it is so constricting. Guène has been very vocal about the limitations that come when one interprets her work as that of a “native informant” about the *banlieue* and *beur* experience: “cela m’enferme dans un ghetto.”<sup>391</sup> The *banlieue* confines writers like Guène within a horizon of expectations that makes it challenging for them to treat topics beyond the *banlieue*. To escape these limitations, Guène has suggested that the solution to this problem is to read their works neutrally.

Essentially, what Guène is calling for is, to return to Barthesian terminology, a death of the (*banlieue*) author. When they are no longer considered Authors, *banlieue* Authors once more become writers, and their Works revert back to a Text, which “is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation,” the interpretation of which is dictated by the reader and not the Author.<sup>392</sup> Once separated from their writing, the *banlieue* author would still be able to be associated with his or her work, but the text would be opened up to a greater variety of interpretations because the audience would not have a pre-established horizon

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<sup>391</sup> Quoted in Zerouala, “La littérature de banlieue,” 71.

<sup>392</sup> Barthes, *Image, music, text*, 159.



of expectations for the work based on the Author's biography and background. Rather, the Author would be perceived as a writer, and, when associated with his text,

he does so as a 'guest'. If he is a novelist, he is inscribed in the novel like one of his characters, figured in the carpet; no longer privileged, paternal, atheological, his inscription is ludic. He becomes, as it were a paper-author: his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work; there is a reversion of the work on to the life (and no longer the contrary) ...the I which writes the text, it too, is never more than a paper-I.<sup>393</sup>

At the point that their writing is read in this way, *banlieue* minority artists would be read in the same way as their white counterparts, and would be given the same amount of creative freedom and ability to move away from the confining and constricting horizon of expectations that is placed on the minority *banlieue* artist.

The death of the *banlieue* author is made challenging, however, by the fact that so many artists do use the *banlieue* label to promote their work. This is not simply limited to the white authors studied in this dissertation; like Mahmoudi and Al Malik, there are plenty of other minority *banlieue* authors who act as spokespeople. One of the best-known examples of this is Azouz Begag, who started out as a novelist when he wrote *Le gone du Chaâba* in 1986, but then transitioned into the role of politician and spokesman over the course of his career. Another, more controversial example, is founder of Ni Putes Ni Soumises Fadela Amara, who likewise used her positionality as a minority from the *banlieue* as a platform for her political activism. Minority authors who do not want to be branded with either the *beur* or the *banlieue* label are existing in a system which counteracts this desire because there are so many other people who are happily accepting

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 161.

this label and the role of spokesperson that comes with it. Such claims work directly against a neutral reading of work about the *banlieue* since it makes their authenticity directly dependent on the authors' own lived experiences.

Furthermore, the fact that many of these works are politically engaged makes the kind of neutral reading that *banlieue* authors desire for their work even more of a challenge. If these works are addressing systematic issues of racial and economic inequality in France, and if these issues are localized in a particular place—the *banlieue*—as I have argued in this dissertation, it is impossible to completely separate out the *banlieue* from the text. Whether or not they were intended to be the author's focus, all texts about the *banlieue* address a political element – be it the questions of integration from Chapter One, mobility within and outside of the space of the *banlieue* in Chapter Two, or the stereotypes concerning how the *banlieue* and its inhabitants are portrayed in Chapter Three. Coupled with a desire on the part of critics and the reading public to better understand a place that has, as shown in the introduction, been a locus for debates about immigration, integration and identity in France, this makes that very same neutral reading of *banlieue* work that Guène seeks nearly impossible. Nevertheless, as I have done in this dissertation, we must acknowledge both the political and social factors at play in these works and the unique stylistic devices that the authors use to innovate within their specific mediums. We must recognize that, much like their lauded Francophone predecessors (Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* or Assia Djebar's *La Soif*), these newer *banlieue* works can be both politically engaged and works of art engaged in their own complex dialogue with the norms and conventions of their genre. Acknowledging

these facts gets us one step closer to Guène's desired "neutral" reading of these twenty-first century works of French literature and film.

## Appendix A: The French Banlieue in BD

- I. Deal with banlieue directly (in title, or in back cover/paratext materials, but either way, the banlieue is a *significant* part of the story)
  - a. Non-fiction
    - i. Based on academic studies
      1. Helkarava, *La Banlieue du 20 heures* (2016): tells the story of Jimmy, a young journalist who quickly becomes disillusioned once he begins working for France 2 and reporting about the *banlieue*, and sees the extent to which reality is manipulated for the purposes of a selling a news story; based on a sociological study by Jérôme Berthaut (part of a whole series called Sociorama that does this for a variety of social issues)
    - ii. Based on interviews
      1. Maximilien Le Roy, *Hosni: SDF+* (2009): based on interviews the author did with a homeless man, tells the trials and tribulations of a homeless man in Lyon and his life now in a small apartment in the *banlieue* (he also grew up in the cité before he became homeless), also has a bunch of interviews/photos at the end with various different homeless individuals
      2. *Jeunes: Des nouvelles de la cité* (2004) : based on interviews with 20 different children from the cité, we have a different artist illustrating a story that corresponds to each interview
      3. Edmond Baudoin, *Véro* (1999) : fictitious story inspired by conversations the artist had with young people in prison, seeking to represent their lives in these “quartiers en difficulté” with the story of Willy, who is trying to escape his life in the *banlieue* but cannot
      4. Damien Roudeau, *Villiers Rebelle: Carnet de rencontres à la Cerisaie* (2013) : (not really a BD, more of an illustrated book, self-identifies as a “reportage dessiné”), an artist went to Cerisaie to draw the inhabitants, one of the many efforts to rebrand the cités/quartiers where the riots took place, mixes drawn portraits of the inhabitants with real photos, and interviews about the history of the neighborhood, the social issues there, and its inhabitants
      5. Edmond Baudoin, *La mort du peintre* (2004) : based on interviews he conducted in the early 1990s following the radicalization of Vitrolles, includes interviews with inhabitants, documents, etc. to show how this used to be a

very diverse place before becoming *the* spot for the rise of the FN

6. Albert Drandov + Dikeuss, *Amiante: Chronique d'un crime social* (2005) : a BD based on interviews that focuses on asbestos mining and how it posed severe health risks for the miners and people who lived near the mines (which were located in the *banlieue*), highly socially-engaged and incorporates a variety of mediums (newspaper articles, letters, photographs, BD pages) to tell the story
- iii. Based on news events/history
    1. *Le Jour ou... France Info 25 Ans d'Actualités* (2012): collection of works by different authors illustrating different news events, of course includes coverage of the 2005 riots which is probably the only relevant part to the *banlieue*
    2. Gregory Ponchard + Philippe Squarzoni, *Crash-Text* (2005): based on a true story of how a woman threw her baby out of an HLM window, tackles how events are portrayed in the news media, critical of a system that leaves a lot of people behind
- b. Fiction
- i. Baru, *L'Énragé* (2010) : young man growing up in the cité finds a way out of his current life through boxing
  - ii. Julien Revenu, *Ligne B* (2015) : a man trying to make it in the *banlieue* in the face of the constant violence he deals with on a regular basis, and his stupid job
  - iii. Dedola + Merwan, *Jeu d'ombres, Part 1 & 2* (2016) (2017) : kind of thriller about activism/militancy in the *banlieue*
  - iv. Rim'K, *Ghetto Poursuite* (2010) : about a group of *banlieue* youths who effectively go for a joy ride, lots of commentary about media portrayals and again the idea of “putting on a show” for the cameras
  - v. Séverité Lambour + Laurent Houssin + Olivier Martin + Benoît Springer, *Allée des Rosiers, 1. Tuile sur tuile* (2007) : tells a series of interlocking/overlapping stories about kids living in an HLM, tackles issues such as police profiling, employment difficulties, etc.
  - vi. Tito, *Tendre Banlieue* (1980s – 2010) : series of 20 books telling the story of different young people growing up in the *banlieue* and the challenges they face,
  - vii. Fred Bernard, *Little Odyssée* (2008) : two young boys, Pline and Aristote, flee the police as they chase them for drug trafficking,

- reflecting on their life in the cité and what got them to that point in the first place
- viii. Wasterlain, *Jeanette Pointu #19: Les Amazones et 5 autres vies de femmes à travers le monde* (specifically, “La Petite Fugueuse”) (2004) : one of a series of episodes of the adventures of Jeanette Pointu, a photographer following the story of a young girl in the *banlieue* who runs away, we see the recurring theme of mistrust of the media by the community in the *banlieue*
  - ix. Jean-Christophe Chauzy + Thierry Jonquet, *La vie de ma mère, Face A + B* (2003) : adapted from the book *La Vie de ma mère* by Thierry Jonquet (1994), tells the story of a young boy, Kevin, living in Belleville who falls in love with Clarisse, a pretty rich girl and tries to impress her (technically not the *banlieue*, but Belleville, nevertheless the décor and themes are identical)
  - x. Laurence Tramaux + Tom, *Tatonic* (2011) : focuses on a group of people from the *banlieue* who all are fleeing it, for different reasons, on a boat to Guadalupe, back cover proudly proclaims that it is “loin des clichés du genre” which is not wholly inaccurate
  - xi. Céline Wagner + Edmond Baudoin, *La Patience du grand singe* (2006) : loosely based on Wagner’s childhood in the *banlieue*, tells the story of a giant ape that appears in a shopping center
  - xii. Ivan Brun, *Lowlife* (2005) : contextualizing the experience of the *banlieue* within the other experiences of poverty around the world (comprised of a series of short stories depicting the lives of people at the margins in various places around the world, including the French *banlieue*)
  - xiii. Leslie Plée, *Points noirs & sac à dos* (2012) : tells the trials and tribulations of a teenage girl growing up in the *banlieue*, typical girly storylines (fitting in, puberty, boys, etc.) that avoids most if not all of the standard *banlieue* clichés
  - xiv. Alexis De Raphelis, *Le Bloc* (2008) : about a young boy in the cité who becomes involved in gang violence
  - xv. El Diablo + Eric Salch, *La Rage de vaincre* (2006) : collection of stories about different characters living in the *banlieue*, generally centered around sex
  - xvi. Fanny Michaëlis, *Géante* (2013) : a young girl, Véra, in a bleak *banlieue* with an overactive imagination mixes her dream world with reality to create a Freudian landscape of vaginal and penile imagery; ostensibly tells the story of a love triangle between her, Agnès and Abel, fascinating from a women, gender and sexuality perspective
  - xvii. Adrian Fournier, *Sur le terrain* (2011) : sharp and pointed critique of the media; follows a news camera crew as they go recording

stories about the various cities and neighborhoods in France, including the Parisian *banlieue*

c. Humoristic fiction

- i. Seth Eldiablo, *Lascars* (2008-2009) : a BD based on a TV series (1998) of the same name, typical humor BD in/about the *banlieue*
- ii. Tehem, *Malika Secouss* (1998 – 2009) : follows the adventures and antics of Malika Secouss and her friends in the *banlieue*, mostly humorous
- iii. Morgan Navarro, *Flipper le flippé* (2012) : the *banlieue* but with animals, focuses on Flipper, a dolphin, who is in love with Laetitia, and the daily antics he engages in; contains many references to other TV and film programs (Loft Story, Scarface, etc.)
- iv. Relom, *Cité d'la balle* (2009-2011)
  1. Vol. 1 (2009) : series of stories about a young gang of boys living in the *banlieue*, using the format to tackle several of your typical stereotypes (go find a job, loss of virginity, etc.), mise en scene of the riots, poking fun at the whole angle of becoming famous through rap (very self-aware/clever humor)
  2. Vol. 2 (2011) : the gang is sent to a rehabilitation center on a farm and gets up to a whole series of antics in the countryside
- v. Charb, *Salle des Profs* (2012) : about a school in the middle of a forgotten *banlieue* somewhere, dark satire about problems with the school system, etc.
- vi. Manu Larcenet, *Nic Oumouk* series (*Total souk pour Nic Oumouk*, *La France a peur de Nic Oumouk*) (2005-2007)
  1. *Total souk pour Nic Oumouk* (2005): Nic Oumouk, an Arab boy, is constantly butting heads with Edukator, a superhero bent on teaching the kids how to write, spell, and speak properly; Nic becomes obsessed with getting enough money to find his absent father, and so gets involved in a range of petty thievery
  2. *La France a peur de Nic Oumouk* (2007): starts with mise en scene of riots, Nic gets sent to a rehabilitation camp in the countryside where he works on a farm and uncovers a scheme where a company is growing genetically modified animals and plants to drive down the price of kebab sandwiches
- vii. Dikeuss, *Les Assistés* (2002) : story that contains many of the same characters/planches from the later *Les Banlieuzards*, tells similar story of stupid antics of a *banlieue* gang and their adventures in petty crime, parties, and sex

- viii. Dikeuss, *Les Banlieuzards* : same characters as *Les Assistés*, presents a series of typologies of “les habitants de la banlieue” (le lascar, la zoulette, le sapeur, le dealer) along with the humoristic antics of his *banlieue* bande of fools
- ix. Jak + Geg, *La Bande à Ed* (2006) : about a young boy in a wheelchair (Ed) and his antics with friends in the *banlieue*, very interesting from a disabilities studies perspective
- x. *L’homme des banlieues: Revue de bande dessinée* (2004 – 2006) : four-volume magazine series with a collection of short BDs about the *banlieue*; starts out trying very much to refuse typical stereotypes of the *banlieue* both with the race of the characters depicted and the storylines (which focus more on the mundanity of suburbia), over the course of the development of the magazine, however, we get more of the stereotypical stories with images of tall, imposing towers, street gangs, and dystopic futures
- d. Superhero fiction
  - i. Kade + Tir, *Shaango* (2006-2014) : a four-volume series that tells the story of a young man who discovers he has superpowers and tries to use them to do good in the *banlieue*, deals with racial discrimination race relations, police violence, the riots, media, and politicians
- e. Dystopic futuristic fiction
  - i. Al Coutelis + Bollée, *A.D. Grand-Rivière: Culture Diktat* (2001) : noir type story imagining the rise of a far-right party, TNT (obvious stand-in for the Front National) in France and its effect in the *banlieue* and on other minority populations
  - ii. Baru, *Noir* (published: 2009, written: 1995-1998) : contains *Bonne année 2016* and *Bonne année 2047*, dystopic imaginings of the *banlieue* in the future following the rise to power of the *Front National*, Baru decided to publish these stories in the wake of the 2005 riots, noting that “ce désastre était largement prévisible pour tous ceux que préoccupent un tant soit peu les questions sociales dans ce pays”
  - iii. Nekodem, *Manioka* (2009) : follows the story of a drug dealer in a dystopic walled-off *banlieue* set in the future who discovers he has a superpower that allows him to rise to power in the *banlieue*, though despite his efforts to use his powers for good, he finds that keeping order in the *banlieue* is not that simple
- f. Fiction centered around objects (often trains)
  - i. Robert Pouret + Lise Moreau, *Le contrôleur de la ligne B* (2013) : almost like an illustrated poetry book, focusing on the RER B train and the people who ride it



- ii. Edmond Baudoin, *Le Petit train de la côte bleue* (2007) : companion to *La mort du peintre*, chronicles his experience riding the train from Marseille to Vitrolles in 1993 (primarily imagery of the countryside/trains that he sees *en route*)
  - iii. Gilles Rochier, *Bastion* (2016) – short BD that consists entirely of images of one building, Bastion, with graffiti spelling out different words, simultaneously playing with the medium of BD (the absence of words in the text) and the representations of the *banlieue* (since it's just images of buildings with very few people)
- g. Autobiography
- i. Gilles Rochier, *TMLP: Ta Mère La Pute* (2011): based in the author's own childhood experience, tells the story of him and his friends growing up in an HLM, and the code of honor, etc. they have there (describes as autofiction)
  - ii. Nine Antico, *Le Gout du Paradis* (2008) : autofictive childhood experiences of a young girl growing up in the *banlieue*, focus on her burgeoning sexuality, and her uncomfortable relationship with her own whiteness (she is of Italian origin)
  - iii. Edmond Baudoin + Céline Wagner, *Les Yeux dans le mur* (2003) : based on Wagner's childhood experiences in the *banlieue*, focus on problematizing the use of the word *banlieue* and keenly aware of the stereotypes associated with the space
  - iv. Berthet One, *L'Evasion* (2011-2015) : two-part series by a man who grew up in the  *cité*  but was imprisoned at age 29, and created a BD talking about his experiences in prison
- h. Autofiction
- i. Gilles Rochier, *Dernier étage* (2004) : series of stories centered around the space of the apartment building, telling stories that take place on the top floor of the apartment building
  - ii. Gilles Rochier, *Dunk Chicken and Blood* (2008) : about a young boy in the *banlieue* who wants a pair of shoes, tries to get them legally (i.e. by getting a job, earning money) but then someone buys the last pair, so he kills them
  - iii. Gilles Rochier, *Love and that fucking duck* (2009) : meant to be a follow up to *Dunk Chicken and Blood*, picks up with him cleaning off his shoes, tells the story of how he befriends a girl who ends up trying to kill him
  - iv. Gilles Rochier, *Les Frères Cracra* (2009) : about a young boy in the *banlieue* who befriends nine brothers who live next door, who teach him how to do things like smoke weed and drink too much, before they die in a car crash on their way to the sea
  - v. Gilles Rochier, *Temps Mort* (2008) : a depressed protagonist who is unemployed, thinking about making BD-drawing his full-time

- occupation, sketches the inhabitants of the *banlieue* in which he lives, and then is attacked by someone
- vi. Gilles Rochier, *Demain je vais à Metz* (2011) : about his own struggles with depression, structured around his therapy appointments, his trip to Metz for a BD festival, includes heavy praise for the author of *Les Larmes d'Ezichiel*
  - vii. Gilles Rochier, *Envrac* (2002) : started out as a small underground magazine (fanzine), this publication date represents when it was turned into a more official-looking hardback edition, little vignettes of people living in the *banlieue* based on Rochier's personal experiences; website [envraccity.wordpress.com](http://envraccity.wordpress.com)
  - viii. Halim Mahmoudi, *Arabico vol. 1 & 2 (Liberté, Égalité)* (2009): meant to be part of three-part autofictive series, the third one hasn't come out yet, tells the story of the author growing up in the *banlieue* and his experiences with the school system, police, racism, etc.
  - ix. Halim Mahmoudi, *Un monde libre* (2014) : darker retelling of childhood and familial history, journey to come to terms with his own identity
  - x. Adrien Fournier, *Les Plans de la ville: psychogéographie intrinsèque des grands ensembles* (2009) : large volume collection of a series of inter-related shorter stories focusing on themes of childhood, young adulthood, police violence, love, loneliness, family, race in the *banlieue*

## II. Deal with banlieue indirectly

### a. Non-fiction

- i. Philippe Cohen + Richard Malka + Riss, *La face karchée de Sarkozy: La première BD-enquete* (2006) : a BD documenting the rise to power of Sarkozy, the title is a direct commentary on his comment that they would wash the *banlieue* with a power-washer (most interesting part of this is the format, the idea that once again it is a collaboration between credible sources meant to share real, accurate information, albeit in a humorous fashion)
- ii. David Debeaux-Thomas + Yannick Chambon, *Août 44: Villeurbanne se soulève* (2004) : an historical BD telling a story of resistance to the Nazis during WWII in Lyon, again very much steeped in/based on historical facts, and meant to have a didactic purpose (relation to *banlieue* is that Villeurbanne is/was a *banlieue* of Lyon)
- iii. Étienne Davodeau + Frédérique Jacquet, *Jeanne de la Zone* (2008) – very loosely a BD (more like an illustrated picture book) telling the story of a young girl growing up in a burgeoning *banlieue* in the 1900s

- iv. Riad Sattouf, *La vie secrète des jeunes* (2007) (2010) : the whole concept is things that he overhears and/or sees in his day-to-day life, some of which (but by no means all or most) takes place in the banlieue/cité
  - v. Séra + Bénédicte Desforges, *Flic* (2012) : the adaptation of a *témoignage* written by a female police officer, originally published with Éditions J'ai Lu (which published many of the *témoignages* dealing with sexual violence in the early 2000s), falls into tradition of BD being used to dismantle stereotypes, but connection to the *banlieue* is tenuous, at best
  - vi. Sasha + François Vataux, *Salt Pit* (2008) : a story based on a real place – Salt Pit – a secret CIA prison in the north of Afghanistan, tells the fictitious story of a young French man, Frank (who changes his name to Ali following his conversion to Islam) growing up in the *banlieue* of Orléans and how he gets wrapped up first in radical Islam and then how he is taken prisoner, tortured and dies in the Salt Pit
- b. Fiction
- i. BDs of immigration stories
    - 1. Jérôme Ruillier, *L'Étrange* (2016): story of immigration told with animals, always told from the perspective of someone who isn't the immigrant, so we get the real impression of being an outsider looking in, peppered with quotes by Sarkozy et. al. on immigration, def. part of a movement to “humanize” immigrants
  - ii. Friendship/community
    - 1. Coyote + Nini Bombardier, *Les Voisins du 109* (2006) : family moves into an apartment building in the *banlieue*, discover a whole host of colorful characters
    - 2. Coyote + Nini Bombardier, *Les Voisins du 109* (2008): more antics with the family in the apartment building, celebration of diversity
    - 3. Farid Boudjellal, *Le chien a trois pattes* (2005): story about neighbors living in an apartment building, a man who befriends a three-legged dog and is slowly dying, great ruminations on love and friendship and all that
    - 4. David Snug, *Je suis très déçue par ton attitude* (2008): a story about an improbable friendship between a man and a bear, relationship to the *banlieue* is really quite a stretch, at best it refers to *banlieue* in the sense of the countryside (i.e. non-Parisian sense)
  - iii. Leaving the *banlieue* for the countryside

1. Jean-Yves Ferri + Manu Larcenet, *Le retour à la terre vol. 1 La Vraie vie* (2002) : about a couple that leaves the *banlieue* for the countryside
  2. Tarek + Batist, *Les chaussettes trouées, tome 2.* (2006): another group from the *banlieue* comes to the countryside
  3. Jean-C. Denis, *Tous à Matha: Première partie* (2010): group of teenagers leaves the *banlieue* one summer to go to escape their problems at the beach
- iv. History
1. Etienne Le Roux + Luc Brunschwig , *La Mémoire dans les poches* (2006) : a family opens up their home to child refugees during WWII
  2. *Les Larmes d'Ezechiel* (2009)
  3. *Petits Bonheurs*
  4. *Jeanne de la zone*
  5. Baru, *Les Années Spoutnik* : series about a working class  *cité* in the 1950s
- v. Backdrop for other story, often contain vignettes of commentary
1. Unclassified
    - a. Mezzo + Pirus, *Le Roi des Mouches* : a series of interconnected stories taking place in suburbs somewhere...relationship to France and/or French specificity unclear
    - b. Edmond Baudoin, *Roberto* (2007): story about the trials and tribulations of an Italian immigrant; contains a whole vignette at the end with *banlieue* characters commenting on how they're always misrepresented and used for very specific narrative purposes that don't actually or accurately represent reality
    - c. Antoine Ozanam + Guillaume Singelin, *Pills* (2010) : set in an alternate universe where a variety of pills and drugs that provide out-of-body experiences are legal, story of a young rich woman, Emma, who is trying out all of the substances as part of a journalism project, she ends up in a  *cité* following a drug trip and befriends the people living there, heavy manga influences
    - d. Découdrai + Singelin, *The Grocery* (2011-2016) : five-volume series about Baltimore, MD and the people who live there

- e. Nitric, *Ultime voyage en Alchemie* (2012) : Adrian, who grew up in a *banlieue*, goes to an alchemy competition in Prague
  - f. *Les Poulets de Kentucky* : story set in the American suburbs of Kentucky, about a white police officer and his Hispanic-American friend who grew up in the ghettos (so veiled racial commentary)
2. Humor (\*\* indicate potential overlap with “wholly dedicated to the *banlieue*” list)
- a. Stanislas, *Le savant fou* (1998) : genius living in the *banlieue*, designing all kinds of things that do and don’t work, silly, humoristic series
  - b. Jenfevre + Pat Perna, *Tuning Maniacs* (2005-2008): stories of band of kids working at an auto mechanic shop and the stupid shit they do, there are a few small commentaries about race/racism that creep in over the course of the four-volume series
  - c. Alexandre + André Amouriq, *Dojo: le temple des arts martiaux* (2007-2008): about two kids from the *banlieue* who are learning Japanese martial arts, largely focused on that though occasionally has undertones about safety in the *banlieue*, and seems to also be particularly adamant about challenging stereotypes about women in the *banlieue* (and just women’s abilities in general)
  - d. Tehem, *ZAP Collège* (2002)\*\* : follows the adventure of a young boy from the nice part of town who goes to collège with a bunch of kids from the *cité*, a kind of *intégration à l’envers*, *banlieue* is mostly used as a backdrop for the typical young stupid actions of children
  - e. Marsault, *Breum* (2016) : connection here is that the author is from the *banlieue*, the BD itself is a collection of one page humorous stories which do not seem to connect to the *banlieue*
  - f. Monsieur B, *Yoman kiffe le skate* : similar in tone/conceit to the Tuning Maniacs/Dojo series (i.e. *banlieue* barely appears but is ostensibly the setting), focuses on groups of skaters
3. Detective/mystery/crime fiction (\*\* indicate potential overlap with “wholly dedicated to the *banlieue*” list)
- a. Jean-Charles Kraehgen + Sylvain Vallée, *Gil St. Andre, vol. 6-8* (2003-2006) : set in Lyon, Gil St.

- André—a young, sexy, charismatic lawyer—helps a young Arab girl in distress \*\*
- b. Séra + Piatzszek, *Le temps de vivre* (2011): dark detective/crime/mystery novel about a man going to (criminal) extremes to care for his wife and daughter and provide a comfortable life for them living in the HLM\*\*
  - c. Berlion, *Histoires en ville* (2006): the *banlieue lyonnaise* being used once again as the backdrop for seedy crime stories
  - d. Luc Brunschwig + Laurent Hirn, *Le sourire du clown* (2013): set in a cité that is left completely forgotten following a murder, challenges all kinds of stereotypes about the *banlieue* most notably the one where religious leaders are expected to keep a place in check in times of chaos, also we see a mise en scene of *banlieue* violence and the different ways it is dealt with both in the media, by the people experiencing it, and by the elected officials who are charged with fixing the problem \*\*
  - e. Pierre Christin + Annie Goetzinger, *Agence Hardy: Banlieue blanche, banlieue rouge* (2006) : a detective series set in the 1950s with an agency investigating a murder on the Ile Seguin, the former location of the Renault car factory, outside of Paris
  - f. Erroc & Francois Dimberton + Jean Trolley + Camille W. De Prévaux, *Le Dessinateur #1: Caroline* (2008): a revenge story by the father whose daughter was raped in a *banlieue* train, he makes it his life's work to avenge his daughter's death by killing as many people as possible
  - g. Pierre Boisserie + Frédéric Ploquin + Luc Brahy, *Le Temps des Cités* (2008-2010) : a three-part series police investigation of a crime story set in the *banlieue*
  - h. Manchette + Tardi, *Griffu* (2010) : detective story about crime happening in the *banlieue*
  - i. Hippolyte + Brako, *Nous ne serons plus jamais des enfants* (2007) : noir/crime story with a focus on how the characters' *banlieue* upbringing contributed to their contemporary criminal activity \*\*
  - j. Chauvel + Lereculey, *Nuit Noire: Edition Intégrale* (2001) : characters fleeing the *banlieue* following a

crime, fits into the fugue narratives as well as the road movie tropes

- k. Tardi, *Une Guêpe de bois en plomb* (2006) – (Written in the 1990s), yet another example of the banlieue being used as a backdrop for a crime/mystery story

## Appendix B: Other Banlieue Texts

*From research conducted at the Médiathèque Abdelmalek Sayad at the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration (Paris) and the Centre de Conservation et de Ressources at the Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (Marseille) in Summer 2016.*

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**Autofiction** refers to a mode in which the author fictionalizes and/or stylizes his or her lived experiences in a creative process that involves a (re)writing and (re)presentation of the self with the aim of contesting a dominant discourse. This process entails a reframing of past, present, or future events—both real and imagined—through the construction of a narrative.

**Banlieue testimonials** are written or photographic accounts directly linked to an individual's past experience, and meant to be a metonymy for a larger group's collective experience. These may be written by the individual in question, or based on interviews with said individual.

**Polyphony** is the presence of multiple elements (genres, languages, points of view, historical events, bodies, and cultures), all of which are given equal weight within the



work of art that precludes a finalizing discourse. Polyphony in works set in the *banlieue* entails extensive code-switching, allusions to high and low culture—art, music, literature, film—from within France and abroad, and references to brands and consumer culture.

**(Dés)Intégration** plays on the tension between inclusion and exclusion from mainstream French society, and refers to works produced in the wake of the 2005 riots that expound on these questions of belonging.

**History (Re)imagined** indicates works which draw upon historical or media sources and mix real-life events with fictionalized characters and/or circumstances.

**(In)visible bodies: *Banlieue in BD*** collects BD about the *banlieue* with a focus on the body: both how it is presented and how it moves through space.

## AUTOFICTION

- Benchetrit, Samuel. *Asphalte*. 2015. **(film)**  
Loose adaptation of the first volume of *Chroniques de l'asphalte*, centering around three connections: a young Benchetrit and an aging actress, an American astronaut and a Muslim woman who lives on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor, and a man in a wheelchair and a woman who works at the local hospital.
- Benchetrit, Samuel. *Chroniques de l'asphalte*. Julliard, 2005. **(novel)**  
A 5-part chronicle of the life of Benchetrit, a Jewish filmmaker and writer who grew up in the *banlieue*. First three volumes have been published.
- Madé, Yann. *Cher Moktar*. La boîte à bulles, 2016. **(BD)**  
Tells the story of a young Breton boy growing up in the 1970s and 1980s in an HLM, speaking about his own experiences and those of the many immigrants he encounters.
- Mahmoudi, Halim. *Arabico Tome 1: Liberté*. Quadrants, 2009. **(BD)**  
Conceptualized as part of a three-part series: Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité. First volume tells story of a thirteen-year-old Franco-Algerian boy.
- Mahmoudi, Halim. *Un monde libre*. Ronds dans l'O, 2014. **(BD)**  
Graphic novel with similar themes to *Arabico* but steeped in more African mythological traditions.
- Malik, Abd al. *Qu'Allah Bénisse la France*. 2014. **(film)**  
Film dramatization of Malik's childhood memoir, *Qu'Allah bénisse la France* (2004).
- Ohayon, Sylvie. *Papa was not a Rolling Stone*. 2013. **(film)**  
Tells the story of Stephanie—a character based on Ohayon—who tries to escape the 4,000 housing estate in La Courneuve (on the outskirts of Paris) through her dual passions for dance and literature.
- Patricot, Aymeric. *Azima la rouge*. Flammarion, 2006. **(novel)**  
Story of a young girl, Azima, in the *banlieue*, told from the perspective of 5 different characters: Azima, Prof, Caissier, Cloporte, and Surveillante. Patricot was a professor in the *banlieue* for some time.
- Santaki, Rachid. *La petite cité dans la prairie*. Éditions le bord de l'eau, 2008. **(novel)**  
Santaki's first book, tells the story of him growing up and founding the magazine 5styles. Preface (by Bzit) characterizes it as "la version papier de la chanson 'Banlieusards' de Kery James" (13).

## BANLIEUE TESTIMONIALS

- Amara, Fadela. *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*. La Découverte, 2003. **(text)**  
Amara's autobiography, mixing stories of her own childhood with those of her neighbors, as well as the story of the founding of "Ni Putes Ni Soumises" and its first major march. Co-written with Sylvia Zappi.
- Aris, Gilles, et. al. *Jeunes: des nouvelles de la cité*. La Comédie Illustrée, 2004. **(BD)**

- Compilation of 20 comics by 20 different graphic artists who base their stories on conversations with different youths from the *banlieue*. Framed by a three-part story, “Ici c’est la mort,” of a boy who grew up in foster care.
- Bellil, Samira. *Dans l’enfer des tournantes*. Gallimard, 2003. **(text)**  
 Story of Bellil’s life and gang rape, as well as her recovery and healing process following. Co-written with Josée Stoquart.
- Bersali, Nora, et al. *Génération beurs: Français à part entière*. Autrement, 2003. **(photos)**  
 Portraits of a series of visible *beurs* that also contain written portraits based on interviews. Subjects include Yamina Benguigui (documentary filmmaker), Farid L’Haoua (activist in the *marche des beurs*, and Magyd Cherfi (writer of some of Zebda’s songs).
- Biramah, Fatou and Audrey Diwan. *Confessions d’un Salaud: Histoire vraie d’un braqueur, dealer, taulard*. Denoël, 2004. **(text)**  
 Story written by two journalists based on interviews they did with a black Muslim boy from the *banlieue*.
- Bodard, Yves. *Banlieues: De l’émeute à l’espoir*. Regain, 2007. **(text)**  
 Memoires of a former schoolteacher working in the *banlieue* of Orléans from the late 1980s to the mid 1990s.
- Boussaa, Natacha. *Il vous faudra nous tuer*. Denoël, 2010. **(text)**  
 Testimonial by Boussaa of her involvement in the demonstrations against the CPE in March 2006.
- Clichy Sans Cliché. *Clichy sans cliché*. 2006. **(photos)**  
 Book of photographs containing work by a variety of photographers (both French and non) who were invited into Clichy to take photographs of the neighborhood in an effort to rebrand and humanize the space in the wake of the 2005 riots.
- Clichy Sans Cliché. *Nouvelles de la banlieue*. 2008. **(text)**  
 Collection of stories by 11 different writers invited into Clichy to explore the neighborhood and then write a story based on their impressions of their time there. Follow up to the 2006 Clichy Sans Cliché photography project during which photographers were invited to do the same thing. Mixes the formal writing of the invited authors—Sylvian Tesson, Boualem Sansal, Lydie Salvayre, Tania de Montaigne, Éric Reinhardt, Jean-Bernard Pouy, Koffi Kwahulé, Régis Jauffret, Olivier Brunhes, Nancy Huston, and Guy Bedos—with quotes and short stories by residents of Clichy.
- Dabitch, Christophe. *Immigrants: (13 témoignages, 13 auteurs de bande dessinée et 6 historiens)*. Futuropolis, 2010. **(BD)**  
 Intersperses comics with articles by scholars, discussing subjects such as the immigrant experience, women, and political refugees.
- Desbiolles, Maryline. *C’est pourtant pas la guerre: recueil*. Fiction & Cie, 2007. **(text)**  
 Short stories based on interviews and conversations the author had with the inhabitants of the *banlieue* in Nice.
- Fabre, Dominique. *Des nuages et des tours*. Éditions de l’Olivier, 2013. **(text)**

- Snapshots of different aspects of the *banlieue* based on her conversations with Thierry Guichard and Philippe Savary, and notes from the 5 years she spent at la porte d'Ivry.
- Garanger, Marc, et. al. *L'étranger*. Éditions Bleu-Autour, 2005. **(photos)**  
 Playing on the word étranger (and fully aware of its debt/reference to Camus), mixes short stories, interviews, histories, and testimonials of strangers (immigrants, but also persons at the margins of society) with photographs of their faces to challenge the use and signification of the words. (NB: Garanger took the controversial portraits of unveiled Algerian women during the war in the 1960s.)
- Goumane, Dembo. *Dembo Story*. Hachette, 2006. **(text)**  
 Talks about his own life in and out of prison, concludes with a postface in which he beseeches his reader not to make his same mistakes.
- Jamila Aït-Abbas. *La Fatiha: Née en France, mariée de force en Algérie*. Michel Lafon, 2003. **(text)**  
 Author's autobiography about an arranged marriage in Algeria co-written with Marie Dreyfuss and Maggy Noël.
- Laffort, Bruno, ed. *Entre ici et là-bas: des maghrébins racontent*. Editions Karthala, 2014. **(text)**  
 Collection of testimonials from residents of Saint-Denis about their daily lives. Sought to profile a wide variety of backgrounds, immigration statuses, ages, etc. in this sociological study. Heavily inspired by the work of Abdelmalek Sayad and Pierre Bourdieu.
- Leïla. *Mariée de force: document*. Oh! Éditions, 2004. **(text)**  
 Autobiography about an arranged marriage in France. Co-written with Marie-Thérèse Cuny.
- Lepoutre, David and Isabelle Cannoodt. *Souvenirs de familles immigrées*. Odile Jacob, 2005. **(text)**  
 Book coming out of a workshop conducted by three teachers with their students, in which the students were to talk to their families about their past. Mixture of testimonials, photographs and analysis.
- Méliane, Loubna. *Vivre libre*. Oh! Éditions, 2003. **(text)**  
 Testimonial based on Méliane's childhood in Dijon and experiences with *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*. Themes include integration, arranged marriage, sexuality. Co-written with Marie-Thérèse Cuny.
- Mordillat, Gérard and Frédérique Jacquet. *Douce banlieue. Une mémoire ouvrière*. Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2005. **(photos)**  
 Collection of photographs of workers from the *banlieue* with an emphasis on those of Saint-Denis, mixed with workers' testimonies, part of the effort to rebrand the *banlieue* in the wake of the 2005 riots (published in December).
- Mounsi. *La Noce des Fous*. Éditions de l'Aube, 1990. **(text)**  
 Stories based on a series of interviews the author did with various persons in the *banlieue*.
- Ohayon, Sylvie. *Papa was not a Rolling Stone*. Robert Laffont, 2011. **(text)**

Ohayon, a third generation Jewish Tunisian immigrant, tells the story of her childhood growing up in La Corneuve, starting with familial history from before she was born to her own struggles to accept herself and to gain recognition in her career after she left the *banlieue*.

Senni, Hamid and Brigitte Dusseau. *De la cité à la City*. L'Archipel, 2007. **(text)**  
Co-written *beur* success story, emphasizes how leaving the *banlieue* and, in his case, France (permanently) were key to achieving success. Includes ruminations on the riots, education, and split identities.

*Talents des cités: Des parcours dans la ville*. 2002. **(text)**  
The inaugural volume of a series of works dedicated to showcasing the accomplishments of young people coming from *quartiers sensibles*. Nearly one edition a year has been released since. Joint initiative of the Ministère délégué à la Ville et à la Rénovation Urbaine, the Délégation Interministérielle à la Ville, the Boutiques de Gestion, and the réseaux Jeunesse et Sport.

Zachmann, Patrick. *Ma Proche Banlieue*. Éditions Xavier Barral, 2009. **(photos)**  
Zachmann, a photographer, revisits a series of photos he took of people living in the Marseille *banlieue* in the early 1980s and returns to the area to retake the same photos with the same original subjects. Also contains essay by the author in which he talks about the differences in the *banlieue* and how it has changed over the 20 years between the two series of photographs.

Zoubir, Latifa. *Je m'appelle Latifa: une "intégration à la française."* Denoël, 2009. **(text)**

Autobiography of a woman who was a *porte-parole* for Ni Putes Ni Soumises, but who then distanced herself from the movement. Focus on familial strife and questions of integration, and how her decisions to leave the *banlieue*, and to publish works such as this, caused significant strain on her familial relationships, at times making them impossible.

## POLYPHONY

Djaïdani, Rachid. *Boumkoeur*. Seuil, 1999. **(novel)**

Centers on daily lives of inhabitants of a *cité*.

Djaïdani, Rachid. *Mon Nerf*. Seuil, 2004. **(novel)**

Narrative of childhood in the *banlieue*.

Djaïdani, Rachid. *Viscéral*. Points, 2007. **(novel)**

Narrative takes place over a short time frame, boxing is a major theme here.

Guédiguian, Robert and Sylvian Dorange. *L'argent fait le bonheur*. Émanuel Proust Editions, 2005. **(BD)**

Retelling of the film, *L'Argent fait le bonheur* in BD, set in Marseille.

Guène, Faïza. *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*. Hachette, 2004. **(novel)**

Story of the fifteen-year-old Doria, who lives in the *banlieue* with her mother.

Le Boucher, Dominique. *Café-crème*. Les Diabes Bleus, 2006. **(text)**

Short stories.

- Le Boucher, Dominique. *Squatt d'encre rouge*. Chevrefeuille Etoilée, 2003. **(novel)**  
Paintings are a major intertext in this work, as well as flying, birds, escaping the city.
- Rouane, Houda. *Pieds-blancs*. Philippe Rey, 2006. **(novel)**  
Tells the semi-autobiographical story of Rouane through protagonist Norah Rabhan, a 25-year-old teacher in a ZUP who talks about her childhood, experiences teaching, arranged marriage to and eventual child with her husband.
- Ruillier, Jérôme. *Les Mohamed*. Sarbacane, 2011. **(BD)**  
Ruillier (who is not *issus de l'immigration*) *adapts* Yasmina Benguigui's book and documentary film, *Mémoires d'immigrés* (released 1998 and 1997, respectively) to the *bande dessinée* format in a drawing style reminiscent of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980). Like the film and book from which it draws its inspiration, Ruillier's graphic novel is divided into three parts—*les pères*, *les mères*, and *les enfants*—and blends stories of immigration with the story of a white man who is sending his daughter to a school whose population is 80% immigrant.
- Sané, Insa. *Du plomb dans le crâne*. Editions Sarbacane, 2008. **(novel)**  
Set in 2005, as the riots are taking place. Divided into three acts like a play, alternates between perspective characters, has a *bande-son* and a link to the author's MySpace page.
- Sekloka, Edgar. *Coffee*. Editions Sarbacane, 2008. **(novel)**  
Traces the life of Koffi, a boy growing up in the *banlieue* to an African mother and absent father. Contains a *bande-son*. Author is also a rapper.
- Smaïl, Paul. *Ali le magnifique*. Denoël, 2001. **(novel)**  
Narrative replete with references to popular and consumer culture, as well as references to nineteenth century literary giants, especially Rimbaud. Begins with a disclaimer by the author (who is later revealed to be Jack-Alain Léger using a pseudonym).
- Tagli, Philippe. *Même la neige devient grise quand elle tombe en banlieue*. Seuil, 2004. **(novel)**  
Centers on Arthur, a young boy in the *banlieue* who runs a gang, deals drugs, and falls in love.
- Y.B. *Allah Superstar*. Grasset, 2003. **(novel)**  
Tells the story of Kamel Hassani, who is obsessed with becoming a comedy superstar and will do anything for fame. Told in first person narrative format, followed by a newspaper article and an "In Memoriam" which functions as an index of the many popular culture references in the novel.

## (DÉS)INTÉGRATION

- Ben Jelloun, Tahar. *Les raisins de la galère*. Fayard, 1996. **(novel)**

- Tells the story of Nina, a young girl of maghrebi origin. Themes of immigration, politics, France and Algeria, the condition of women.
- Benameur, Jeanne. *Présent?* Folio, 2006. **(novel)**  
In the wake of the 2005 riots, a schoolteacher reflects on her own experiences teaching in the *banlieue*.
- Benia, Mouss. *Panne de Sens*. Points Virgule, 2003. **(novel)**  
Story of a boy growing up in France to parents *issus de l'immigration* who send him back to Algeria where he finds himself. Also notable for the inclusion of a blonde narrator.
- Boudjedia, Nor Eddine. *Little Big Bougnoule*. Editions Anne-Carrière, 2005. **(novel)**  
Story of a perfectly well-integrated architect, *issus de l'immigration*, who returns to his familial homeland in Algeria to find himself by wandering through the desert.
- Boulin, Jean-Éric. *La question blanche*. Stock, 2008. **(novel)**  
Narrator coming to terms with his whiteness growing up in a *banlieue* predominately populated by minorities.
- Boulin, Jean-Éric. *Supplément au roman national*. Stock, 2006. **(novel)**  
Focusing on subjects of intense media scrutiny in France including Kamel Berek, François Hollande, and Yann Guillois. Emphasizing shared humanity across socio-political-economic divides.
- Djouder, Ahmed. *Désintégration*. Stock, 2006. **(novel)**  
Chronicles the story of first and second generation of Maghrebi immigrants into France while also providing colonial context.
- Faucon, Philippe. *Fatima*. 2015. **(film)**  
Tells story of Fatima raising her two daughters alone, trying to help her oldest daughter through her first year of medical school, issues of language (French vs. Arabic) are prominent. Based on a series of letters the real-life Fatima wrote to her daughter, which also feature prominently in the film narrative.
- Faucon, Philippe. *La Désintégration*. 2012. **(film)**  
Shows how Djamel, a charismatic fundamentalist, turns three young men against French society and into terrorists. Focuses on the story of Ali, who is doing everything right — going to school, trying to get an internship, in a loving family (though he has an absent, ailing father), and juxtaposes Ali's désintégration with his brother Rachid's very successful integration (job and non-Muslim fiancée).
- Jones-Gorlin, Nicolas. *Mérovée*. Léo Scheer, 2008. **(novel)**  
Told from a cop's perspective who falls in love with Rachid, an inhabitant of the *banlieue*. A gay love story. Author is a journalist-turned-writer who is no stranger to controversy.
- Malik, Abd Al. *La guerre des banlieues n'aura pas lieu*. Points, 2011. **(book)**  
Mixture of photography with his discussion of the *banlieue*, chapters are introduced by pictures producing an interplay between word and image.

- Razane, Mohamed. *Dit Violent*. Gallimard, 2006. **(novel)**  
Introduction to the *banlieue* through the eyes of protagonist Mehdi, a young man who loves boxing and who killed his abusive father. Key themes include sexuality, Islam, violence. Strong critique of French state.
- Sarroub, Karim. *Racaille*. Mercure de France, 2006. **(novel)**  
Foregrounding of the body (opens in media res with a circumcision ceremony), relationship with women, discussion of the riots, integration and belonging.

## **HISTORY (RE)IMAGINED**

- Aït-Taleb, Hamid. *De grâce*. Editions JC Lattès, 2008. **(novel)**  
Looking back at the events of 17 October 1961. Contains a list of historical sources/references for the narrative.
- Bachi, Salim. *Moi, Khaled Kelkal*. Grasset, 2012. **(novel)**  
Based on events of this terrorist who caused a bomb to explode at Saint-Michel in 1995. Contains chronology of the actual events that transpired.
- Boulin, Jean-Éric. *Nous aurons de l'or*. Seuil, 2014. **(novel)**  
Novel set in the future, reimagining the riots and their repercussions for France, mixed with the love story of a protagonist who is split between two worlds—France and America.
- Santaki, Rachid. *Business dans la cité*. Raconter la vie, 2014. **(novel)**  
Described as “fiction dans le 93”, contains many fast-paced car chase scenes.
- Santaki, Rachid. *Des chiffres et des litres*. Le Masque, 2012. **(novel)**  
Title once again playing with popular culture, contains mixture of fiction and history.
- Santaki, Rachid. *Flic ou caillera*. Le Masque, 2013. **(novel)**  
Story set during the 2005 riots. Inclusion of an Arab/verlan dictionary/glossary at the beginning of the book, and a bande-son.
- Santaki, Rachid. *Les anges s'habillent en caillera*. Editions Maisons Rouges, 2011. **(novel)**  
Film adaptation also made. Book inspired loosely by real-life events, incorporation of real newspaper articles into the narrative.
- Sarroub, Karim. *Le complexe de Mohamed*. Mercure de France, 2008. **(novel)**  
Psychoanalytic and semi-autobiographical novel, set in the future, and using the future to work through current media events.

## **(IN)VISIBLE BODIES: BANLIEUE IN BD**

- Alagbé, Yvan. *École de la Misère*. Amphigouri, 2013.  
A love story touching on themes of memory, forgetting, race, and biracialism.  
Unusual format (larger comic panes, use of brush strokes style, black and white).
- Alagbé, Yvan. *Nègres jaunes et autres créatures imaginaires*. Amphigouri, 2012.



- Re-release of *Nègres jaunes*, which was originally published in 1994, along with some additional short pieces that Alagbé worked on following the publication.
- Baru. *L'Enragé*. Casterman, 2007.  
Story of a young boy who gets into boxing.
- Baru. *Noir*. Casterman, 2009.  
Collection of comics, mostly developed between 1995-1998, and published in response to the 2005 riots. Set in the future.
- Baudoin, Edmond. *Roberto*. 6 Pieds sous Terre Editions, 2007.  
Tells the story of a little boy born in France by first generation Italian immigrant parents.
- Boudjellal, Farid. *Le Beurgeois*. Soleil Productions, 1997.  
Introducing concept of the *beurgeoisie* into bande dessinée, highlighting the out-of-touch nature of wealthier *beurs*.
- De Raphelis, Alexis. *Le Bloc*. Sarbacane, 2008.  
Decline of a young boy in the *banlieue* who gets into the wrong crowd and, eventually, dies.
- Dikeuss. *Les banlieuzards*. Septième Choc, 2008.  
Presents typology of different characters one would encounter in the *banlieue*—*le lascar, la zoulette, le sapeur, and le dealer*—along with comics showcasing their antics.
- Gabus, Pierre and Romuald Reutimann. *Cité 14*. Packet / Les Humanoïdes Associés, 2007-2013.  
Tells stories about the *banlieue* through the distancing layer of animals.
- Goetzinger, Annie and Pierre Christin. *Agence Hardy – Tome 4: Banlieue blanche, banlieue rouge*. Dargaud, 2006.  
Detective story set in 1950s Parisian *banlieue*.
- Larcenet, Manu. *Nic Oumouk Tome 2: La France a peur de Nic Oumouk*. Dargaud, 2007.  
Opens with a *mise en scene* of the riots.
- Mechkour, Larbi and Farid Boudjellal. *Les Beurs*. Albin Michel, 1985.  
Highly colorized, highly characterized portraits of characters, supposed to be a mix of *One Thousand and One Nights* with *beur* culture.
- SOS Racisme. *Rire Contre le Racisme*. 2006.  
Collection of various cartoons to discuss the different aspects and experiences of racism, using humor to raise awareness, and aimed at children.
- Téhem. *Malika Secouss*. Glénat, 1998-2008.  
Stories of youth in the *banlieue*, aimed at children.
- Tito. *Tendre Banlieue*. Bayard, 1983 – 2010.  
Focuses on various characters growing up in the *banlieue*, some recurring, as they go through childhood, emphasis on the humanity of individual characters, refuses any type of sensationalist narratives.

## BANLIEUE (UNCLASSIFIED)

- Bachi, Salim. *Le grand frère*. Les Éditions du moteur, 2010. **(novel)**  
Retelling of the master/slave story with Rachid and the grand-frère.
- Belaïd, Lakhdar. *World Trade Cimeterre: roman*. Cherche Midi, 2006. **(novel)**  
Roman policier with echoes of and references to 9/11 set in Roubaix.
- Berquet, Nadia. *Cité des Fleurs*. HB, 1997. **(novel)**  
First person narrator telling story of her large extended family growing up in France.
- Berquet, Nadia. *La Guerre des fleurs*. HB, 2005. **(novel)**  
Story of eight children who are of dual French and Algerian origin coming to terms with the immanent death of their mother.
- Beyala, Calixthe. *Le Petit Prince de Belleville*. Albin Michel, 1992. **(novel)**  
Introduction to the neighborhood of Belleville through the eyes of a seven-year-old protagonist split between her African and French identities.
- Genestal, Fabrice. *La squale*. 2000. **(film)**  
The film that, arguably, kicked off the conversation about *les tournantes* due to its inclusion of a very graphic gang rape scene.
- Imache, Tassadit. *Des nouvelles de Kora*. Actes Sud, 2009. **(novel)**  
Constructed as a story-within-a-story with our protagonist, Michelle, trying to write the story of Kora, in spite of her own unreliable memory. Interwoven with comments on Moroccan and Algerian culture, writing as both a bodily experience and a kind of madness, and ruminations on 9/11.
- Imache, Tassadit. *Presque un frère: conte du temps présent*. Actes Sud, 2000. **(novel)**  
Tortured love story between Sabrina and Bruno in the *banlieue*.
- Jarry, Grégory and Otto T. *Petite Histoire des Colonies Françaises, Tome 5: Les Immigrés*. FLBLB, 2012. **(BD)**  
Using the BD format to pack a deceptively large quantity of information about the history of immigration in France from the dawn of industrialization to the present.
- Jonquet, Thierry. *La vie de ma mère!* Gallimard, 1994. **(novel)**  
Life of boy growing up in the *cit*é.
- Lacoche, Philippe. *HLM*. Éditions l'Archipel, 2000. **(text)**  
Collection of short stories about the *banlieue*.
- Maisonneuve, Michel. *Un génie de banlieue*. Gaïa, 2008. **(novel)**  
Roman policier-esque detective/mystery story set in the *banlieue*.
- Mounsi. *La Cendre des villes*. Editions Stock, 1993.  
Tragic love story.
- N'Dongo, Mamadou Mahmoud. *Bridge Road*. Du Rocher, 2006. **(novel)**  
Set up like a detective novel, sideways glance at journalism of the *banlieue*, partially set in the U.S.
- N'Dongo, Mamadou Mahmoud. *El Hadj*. Serpent à Plumes, 2008. **(novel)**  
Fragmented writing style with bits of testimony.

- N'Sondé, Wilfried. *Fleur de béton*. Actes Sud, 2012. **(novel)**  
 Story of a little girl, Rosa Maria, who dreams of leaving *la cité de 6,000*. Focus on youth culture, the streets, hip hop (dance), and graffiti.
- Racheline, Michel. *Tendre banlieue*. Gallimard, 1979. **(novel)**  
 Story of Nono and his travels through the *banlieue*.
- Robinson, Charles. *Dans les cités*. Seuil, 2011. **(novel)**  
 Story of an ethnologist who comes to a *banlieue* quartier to get to know its inhabitants, the goal is clearly to provide a comprehensive profile of life in the *cités*.
- Rosenberg, Benjamin. *Francebitume*. Harmattan, 2012. **(novel)**  
 Author is extremely young. Opens with a gang rape scene, then it is the story within a story of a young boy who is trying to write a novel in order to impress a girl who, he later finds out, was gang raped in the opening scene.
- Savov, Svetlan. *Lucky, voleur de chevaux*. Noir sur blanc, 2006. **(novel)**  
 Stream of conscious narrative, includes many reflections on what it is like to be a foreigner, nationality, etc.
- Skalpel. *Fables de la mélancholie*. B Boy Konsian, 2012. **(novel)**  
 Narrative written with goal of dismantling stereotypes about the *banlieue*.
- Sorman, Joy. *Du Bruit*. Gallimard, 2007. **(text)**  
 Love letter to rap culture in the 1990s, specifically the rap of NTM.
- Tadger, Akli. *Bel-Avenir*. Flammarion, 2006. **(novel)**  
 Narrative of a young man trying to find a job steeped in fairy tales and love stories.
- Tahi, Farida. *Merde in France*. L'or des fous, 2011. **(novel)**  
 Story of youth setting up their own organization and accompanying concert to combat racism and violence in the *banlieue*.
- Tchak, Sami. *Place des fêtes*. Gallimard, 2001. **(novel)**  
 Unreliable narrator who refuses to give his name.
- Thuân. *Chinatown*. Seuil, 2009. **(novel)**  
 Book translated from Vietnamese, set in Belleville, and the protagonist watches her life flash before her eyes as she is on the metro.
- Wagner, Malika. *Effacer sa trace*. Albin Michel, 2016. **(novel)**  
 First person female narrator providing a portrait of urban life.
- Yémy. *Suburban Blues*. Robert Laffont, 2005. **(novel)**  
 Literary reimagining of the *banlieue* as *Lieubannie*. Black narrator, insertion of many English words, song lyrics, and languages. Themes of desire to escape, women and the narrator's relationships (or lack thereof) with them.
- Zitouni, Ahmed. *Avec du sang déshonoré d'encre à leurs mains*. Éditions R. Laffont, 1983. **(novel)**  
 Early work about the *banlieue* that plays with the tension between the real and the fictional.

## SECONDARY SOURCES: BANLIEUE

George, Pierre et al. *Études sur la banlieue de Paris: essais méthodologiques*. Librairie Armand Colin, 1945.

Older study most useful for its analysis of the genealogy of the expression “banlieue.”

Gérôme, Noëlle et al. *La banlieue en fête: De la marginalité urbaine à l'identité culturelle*. Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1988.

Looking at the construction of the myth of the *banlieue* through literature, cinema, and politics with the aim of fighting against the negative image of the *banlieue* in French society.

Guénolé, Thomas. *Les jeunes de banlieue mangent-ils les enfants?* Editions Le Bord de l'eau, 2015.

Outlines the causes, history, and some ideas for preventing *balianophobie* and the fear of the *jeune de banlieue*, set in the context of the wake of the January 2015 attacks on Charlie Hebdo.

Kacem, Mehdi Belhaj. *La psychose française: Les banlieues, le ban de la République*. Gallimard, 2006.

Response to the riots written by a Franco-Tunisian actor, writer, and philosopher arguing that the riots represent a new form of democracy and are emblematic of the failure of the current democratic system.

Lepoutre, David. *Coeur de banlieue: codes, rites et langages*. Éditions Odile Jacob, 1997.

Study of the youth of the *banlieue*, most interesting for remarking a perceived deficiency of sociological studies of the *banlieue* at the time of its publication.

Merriman, John M. *The Margins of City Life: Explorations of the French Urban Frontier, 1815-1851*. Oxford University Press, 1991.

History of the inhabitants and space of the nineteenth-century faubourg.

Morin, Edgar and Patrick Singaïny. *Avant, pendant, après le 11 janvier*. Editions de l'aube, 2015.

In the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks, delves into the history and politics of integration in France with a focus on its populations of North African origin.

Mucchielli, Laurent. *Le scandale des “tournantes” : dérives médiatiques, contre-enquête sociologique*. Éditions la découverte, 2012.

Revisits the period between 2001-2003 through a critique of media coverage of the gang rapes, says it is part of a larger project to hide real economic problems under the veil of cultural and ethnic terms and problems. Notes three key figures in this characterization: the gang rapist, the person forcing a girl to veil who doesn't want to, and the anti-Semite. Contains many charts of the usage of various terms by the media during this period.

Papieau, Isabelle. *La banlieue de Paris dans la bande dessinée*. L'Harmattan, 2001.

Examining how the *banlieue* has been portrayed in *bande dessinée* with a particular emphasis on the presentation of the body in the *banlieue*, women, boxing, and the relationship between text and image.

Papieau, Isabelle. *La construction des images dans les discours sur la banlieue parisienne: Pratiques et productions esthétiques*. L'Harmattan, 1996.

Looking at how the *banlieue* was constructed, imagined, and mythologized in nineteenth century literature.

Philipponneau, Michel. *La vie rurale de la banlieue parisienne: Étude de géographie humaine*. Librairie Armand Colin, 1956.

Looking at the *banlieue* from a geographical perspective, also has some useful analysis on the etymology and history of the word *banlieue*.

Poisson, Georges. *Évocation du Grand Paris*. Les Éditions de Minuit, 1961.

A three-volume series that gives detailed information and history of all of Paris's *banlieues*.

Santaki, Rachid and Brahim Chikhi. *La France de Demain*. Éditions Wildproject, 2015.

Collection of essays (with a preface by Benjamin Stora) by a teacher (Chikhi) and a writer (Santaki), discusses issues of growing up in the *banlieue*, education, and Islam, among others.

Stébé, Jean-Marc and Hervé Marchal. *Mythologie des cités-ghettos*. Le Cavalier Bleu, 2009.

Drawing upon Barthes's *Mythologies*, argues that the *banlieue* has also been mythologized and that, since its origins in the Middle Ages, it has been a visual and spatial realm of difference, namely poverty.

## SECONDARY SOURCES: LITERATURE

Bénayoun-Szmidt, Yvette and Najib Redouane. *Qu'en est-il de la littérature "beur" au féminin?* Harmattan, 2012.

Collection of chapters on the status of beurette literature including the works of Ferrudja Kessas (*Beur's Story*), Malika Wagner, Sorya Nini (*Ils disent que je suis une beurette*), Minna Sif, Samira Bellil, Zahia Rahmani, Fadela Amara, Loubna Méliane, Fatima Besnaci-Lancou, Faïza Guène, Leïla, etc.

Bucker, Nina. *"Les géôles de la différence?": Quelques identitaires postmigratoires d'une minorité noire en France urbaine*. Peter Lang Editions, 2013.

Views black French literature in her study as "témoignages" that "peuvent être considérés comme des tentatives de désenchaînement qui visent à libérer l'individu de son statut de "subalternité," à savoir des "géôles de la différence" (5).

## SECONDARY SOURCES: THE RIOTS

Cortesero, Régis and Éric Marlière, eds. *Les émeutes de 2005, dix ans après: Rétrospective et perspectives*. Agora Débats/Jeunesses No. 70, 2015.

Collection of articles on the riots from a social perspective (the *jeune de cité's* experience in the world, the rhetoric on gangs), as well as the role of spectacle

and community-creation in the riots. In addition to the editors, Guillaume Teillet and Fabien Truong contribute to the volume. Also includes a timeline of the riots.

## SECONDARY SOURCES: IMMIGRATION

Arab, Chadia. *Les Aït Ayad: la circulation migratoire des marocains entre la France, l'Espagne et l'Italie*. Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009.

Traces migratory circulation of Moroccan populations in France, Spain, and Italy.

Barzman, John and Éric Saunier, eds. *Migrants dans une ville portuaire: Le Havre (XVIe – XXIe siècle)*. Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2005.

Along with scholarly articles, contains a series of interviews with migrants in Le Havre during the spring and summer of 2005.

Bastienier, Albert. *Qu'est-ce qu'une société ethnique? Éthnicité et racisme dans les sociétés européennes d'immigration*. Presses Universitaires de France, 2004.

Argues that telling immigrants they must integrate is contributing to their exclusion: “La conception française de la nationalité... minimise en effet gravement les problèmes politiques et sociologiques impliqués par la nouvelle donne du peuplement européen... elle perpétue une théorisation du social où n'interviennent nullement les propriétés de recombinaison perpétuelle des cultures entre elles, y compris dans leurs relations antagonistes” (9).

Blanchard, Pascal et al. *Le Paris Arabe: Deux siècles de présence des orientaux et des maghrébins*. Éditions la découverte, 2003.

Traces the historical presence of Arabs in France. Emphasis on cultural as well as economic contributions of Arab immigrants.

Blanchard, Pascal et al. *Le Paris Noir*. Éditions Hazan, 2001.

Tracing the history of black persons in Paris with a particular focus on the black body—both that of *le sapeur* and the portrayal of the black woman.

Boudimbou, Guy. *Habitat et modes de vie des immigrants africains en France*. L'Harmattan, 1991.

History of African immigrant community in France.

Domergue, René. *L'intégration des Pieds-Noirs dans les villages du Midi*. L'Harmattan, 2005.

Primarily focuses on the history of the pieds-noirs community in France.

Erba, Selvator. *Une France pluriculturelle: le débat sur l'intégration et les discriminations*. Éditions 84, 2007.

Argues that the riots reinforced the image of the crisis and failure of the French integration model. Suggesting France change its model to resemble that of other countries, such as the U.S. Traces history of immigration, the politics of discrimination, and the debate over affirmative action, all to argue that France needs to acknowledge and address discrimination faced by immigrants.

Escafré-Dublet, Angéline. *Culture et immigration: de la question sociale à l'enjeu politique 1958-2007*. Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014.

- Argues that French historiographies do not value the cultural contributions of immigrants until diversity entered the political and cultural register in the early 2000s because France has always placed its emphasis on the universal qualities of art, and thus ignored the individual (and ethnic) circumstances in which it was produced. Divided into six chapters tracing period from 1958-1989, while the conclusion shows how an economic and social reading of immigration in the 1960s and 1970s became a cultural reading of immigration in the 1980s.
- Gervereau, Laurent et al. *Toute la France: Histoire de l'immigration en France au XXe siècle*. Éditions d'art, 1998.  
Tells the story of immigration and diversity in France. Focuses on all of the different immigrant populations and ethnicities in France, from Italians to Chinese to Arabs.
- Marès, Antoine and Pierre Milza, eds. *Le Paris des étrangers depuis 1945*. Publications de la Sorbonne, 1994.  
Emphasis on longstanding role of Paris as a diverse, cosmopolitan community and thus as a microcosm of French society at large.
- Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration. *Albums, des histoires dessinées entre ici et ailleurs. Bande dessinée et immigration, 1913-2013*. Futuropolis, 2013.  
Catalogue accompanying exhibit at the museum from 16 October 2013 – 27 April 2014, provides comprehensive history and overview of BD and its intersections with the immigrant experience across cultures.
- Noiriel, Gerard. *Gens d'ici venus d'ailleurs: La France de l'immigration, 1900 à nos jours*. Éditions du Chêne, 2004.  
History of immigration and the immigrant experience told through 300 black and white photographs to which Noiriel provides commentary.
- Noiriel, Gérard. *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France (XIXe-XXe siècle): Discours publics, humiliations privées*. Fayard, 2007.  
Twenty years after the publication of *Le Creuset Français*, Noiriel picks up the same theme of the history of immigration, using the questions of anti-Semitism and racism as his *fil conducteur*. Wants to show the political dimensions of these social problems, and how they are both woven into individuals' daily lives. Using the tools of social history to study the history of discourse.
- Palidda, Salvatore, ed. *Migrations critiques: Repenser les migrations comme mobilités humaines en Méditerranée*. Éditions Karthala, 2011.  
Interdisciplinary approach, links the war on terror to a broader war against immigration, in other words, a war against any "irregular" members of society.
- Piazza, Serge Dalla. *Ces étrangers parmi nous: au carrefour du social*. L'Harmattan, 2011.  
Details the various immigrant populations existing in France from Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Also includes appendix of the various religions that presently exist in France.
- Pizzorni, Florence and Abderrahmane Moussaoui. *Parlez-moi d'Alger: Marseille-Alger au miroir des mémoires*. Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2003.

Exhibition catalogue from a 2003-2004 exhibit at the Fort Saint-Jean in Marseille. In addition to articles about the immigrant experience, contains contributions by Francophone authors including Leila Sebbar and H el ene Cixous.

Stora, Benjamin and Linda Amiri, eds. *Alg eriens en France. 1954-1962: la guerre, l'exil, la vie*.  ditions Autrement, 2012.

Exposition catalogue for exhibit at the Cit  nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration, collection of articles that focus on the life and experience of Algerian immigrants in France during this time period. Includes chapter on events of 17 October 1961.

## SECONDARY SOURCES: RELIGION/LA CIT 

Arkoun, Mohammed and Jacques Le Goff. *Histoire de l'islam et des musulmans en France du Moyen  ge   nos jours*. Albin Michel, 2006.

Traces the Muslim myth in French history back to the years of Charlemagne and the *Chanson de Roland* and then forward to the present. Contains fantastic chronology of key dates relating to Muslims in France.

Geisser, Vincent. *La nouvelle islamophobie*. La D couverte, 2003.

Four chapters center on (1) the link between colonial Islamophobia and the "new Islamophobia"; (2) Media and public discourse around Islam creating a climate of Islamophobia in the wake of 9/11; (3) the fight over who are "victimes l gitimes" of racism; (4) how Islamophobia negatively affects moderate Muslims.

Mabilon-Bonfils, B atrice and Genevi ve Zo a. *La la cit  au risque de l'Autre*. L' ditions de l'aube, 2014.

Outlines how la cit  is used presently not in its original intended form, but to survey and control minority populations and to link difference to the figure of the enemy.

Malik, Abd al. *Place de la R publique: Pour une spiritualit  la que*. Indig ne  ditions, 2015.

Published in the immediate wake of Charlie Hebdo (February), discussing Islamophobia and how Muslims, particularly those in the *banlieue*, are living as a colonized people where they do not find a place in French society. Argues that *la cit * is a form of religion for the French, which is an interesting angle. Accuses *Charlie Hebdo's* caricatures of contributing to the rise of Islamophobia and racism against Muslims. Speaks of the crucial need for France to belong to all of its inhabitants. Cites Camus and C saire, among others, in his argumentation.

Rognon,  velyne and Louis Weber. *1905-2005: La La cit , un si cle apr s*.  ditions Nouveaux Regards, 2005.

Compares France's *la cit * with brands of secularism in other countries. Argues that Islam in France has become exclusively associated with the *banlieue* and the social problems there, and that *la cit * is thus being used to fight against these social and economic problems.



Tévanian. *Le voile méridatigue. Un faux débat: "l'affaire du foulard islamique."* Éditions Raisons d'agir, 2005.

Examines newspaper and media discourse surrounding the headscarf and how that contributed to the passage of the 2004 headscarf ban in schools. Most notably ties a media-driven "clash of civilizations" in the wake of 9/11 to the headscarf debate.

Vassort, Patrick. *Mais qui a voulu tuer Charlie?* Éditions le bord de l'eau, 2015.

According to Vassort, "ce qui a tué Charlie...c'est la peur et le secretarisme dont nous avons fait preuve collectivement" (40). Accuses Dalil Boubakeur of making a dangerous parallel between humor/irreverence and a call to hatred that left the editors of *Charlie Hebdo* particularly vulnerable to fundamentalists.

## Bibliography

- "A call from the suburbs; THE INTERVIEW," Sydney Morning Herald (Australia), August 30, 2008, LexisNexis Academic, Accessed November 8, 2016.
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