12

THE FRENCH 'BANLIEUES'

Realities, myths, representations

Christina Horvath

In January 2015, just a few days after the attacks on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* and the kosher supermarket, Hyper Cacher, French prime minister Manuel Valls used the word 'apartheid' to describe the deep-seated territorial, social and ethnic divides that separate the disadvantaged urban fringes called 'banlieues' from the rest of the country. The polemical term was deliberately chosen to shock French audiences grown accustomed to the word 'ghetto.' Since the 1980s (Vieillard-Baron 2011; Robine 2004), French politicians have increasingly resorted to derogatory terms with regard to working-class suburbs, the most memorable example being the word *racaille* ('scum') used by Nicolas Sarkozy to qualify the authors of the 2005 banlieue uprisings. This deprecating rhetoric has indisputably contributed to stigmatising the predominantly high-rise social housing estates and turning the originally neutral term 'banlieue' into a byword for ethnic and territorial segregation, in which 'ban' no longer stands for the perimeter around a town falling under the jurisprudence of the local authority, but for banishment (Belhaj Kacem 2006).

This chapter aims to evaluate how official representations of the banlieues and counter-narratives relate to myths and reality. It will show how, since the 1980s, banlieues have been turned into France's major social problem by biased political and media representations and urban policies promoting a territorial approach to ethnic and socio-economic inequalities. The first section will focus on the rise of the banlieue myth and examine the suburbs' progressive decline in public imagery. The second will look at major public debates which have been shaping the banlieues' image in recent years. Finally, the last section will explore how a range of counter-narratives have been developed by residents and artists in response to the myth of the ghetto.

The planning of a social problem

The construction of French banlieues arose from centralised urban planning, guided by political and economic influences emanating from the centre (Angélil and Siress 2012). The relegation of poor communities to the urban margins began with the major modernisation of Paris between 1852 and 1870. The works undertaken by Baron Haussmann resulted in a lasting divide between the city core and the margins, replacing previous forms of vertical segregation with a horizontal one (Merlin 2012: 9). Geographer David Harvey sees this division as an organised spatial hierarchy in which the 'dangerous classes,' insalubrious housing and polluting industries were evicted

from the city core while power was asserted through the polarisation of centre and periphery (Harvey 2003).

France responded to the post-war housing shortage by constructing government-subsidised housing on a large scale. Between 1945 and 1975, thousands of housing units were constructed in the periphery of most French cities, taking Le Corbusier's *Radiant City* (1935) as a blueprint for social change. The Swiss architect recommended free circulation, abundant green spaces and separate function-based zones for dwelling, work, recreation and transport. However, in order to quickly resorb the population of substandard housing and slums, quantity was prioritised over quality.

Whether banlieues were originally constructed to become ghettos is a much debated question. According to Merlin, the initial population of the 'grands ensembles' were predominantly middle-class families with young children (2012: 54) who moved out when this form of suburban living had become unpopular. Tissot (2007) claims that there was a fair degree of social diversity among the initial banlieue residents and it was not before the sanitisation of the slums in the mid-1970s that immigrants, especially those from North Africa, were let into the public housing estates. However, Angélil and Siress argue that many 'cités' were originally intended to keep workers from the former colonies at a safe distance from the city centre (Angélil and Siress 2012: 59–60). Annie Fourcaut proposes a more nuanced vision by revealing that working-class housing estates on the so-called red belt[1] around Paris were not just places of territorial exclusion but also privileged sites for the integration of successive waves of migrants from France and elsewhere. They facilitated the emergence of working-class elites and the formation of political opinions (Fourcaut 2004: 196). This view is also supported by Dikeç, who sees banlieues not only 'as "badlands" but also as sites of political mobilisations with democratic ideals' (Dikeç 2007: 22).

The first critiques of large-scale banlieue construction emerged in the 1960s. They pointed to the monotonous architecture as well as the absence of some essential facilities including businesses, public services and initially even schools. The decline of banlieue architecture, however, was due to economic factors rather than to the residents' discomfort. In the early 1970s, the oil crisis marked the end of 30 years of economic prosperity in France. A major shift in the government's approach to housing made low-interest loans available to many middle-class families, enabling them to buy their own homes (Merlin 2012: 71–80). Then, the first wave of urban violence in the 1970s inspired state responses in the form of urban policies, initially conceived for the 'social development of the neighbourhoods' and later aiming to reconquer no-go areas (Dikeç 2007: 15).

Urban policies

Desponds (2015) distinguishes three main phases of the policies conceived to tackle urban segregation in banlieues after the 1979 urban unrests in the Lyon suburb of Vaulx-en-Velin. The first phase started in 1973 with the Guichard report announcing the fight against segregation. During the following decade, the construction of new housing estates was abandoned and significant inter-ministerial funding was allocated to improve the infrastructure and to combat urban decay, discomfort, sociocultural exclusion and poverty in 39 selected areas.

The second phase, concerned with urban renewal, lasted from the Vénissieux riots in 1981 until the creation of the ANRU (Agence Nationale pour la Rénovation Urbaine; National Agency for Urban Renovation) in 2003. In his 1983 report commissioned by the socialist government entitled 'Ensemble refaire la ville' ('Let's remake the city, together'), Dubedout, the mayor of Grenoble, advocated social development and recommended proactive urban policies to

extend the 'right to the city' to all. However, the new focus on at-risk neighbourhoods (called *quartiers sensibles*, or 'sensitive neighbourhoods') implied centring state action on specific urban spaces rather than the entire national territory. As a consequence, social disadvantage became increasingly territorialised. In Tissot's words, 'poverty, inequality or unemployment are no longer discussed, or rather, they are discussed only through territorial categories' (Tissot 2007: 2). During this period, the number of neighbourhoods supported by urban regeneration programmes rose from 148 in 1984 to 751 in 1996 when these areas of intervention were named *Zones Urbaines Sensibles* ('Sensitive Urban Areas') or ZUS. In 1991, the Ministry of Urban Affairs was created, acknowledging that the 'banlieue question' had become one of France's most burning social problems. A new vocabulary was adopted, in which some banlieues were labelled 'difficult' or 'disadvantaged.' This change of terminology was indicative of the increasing ethnicisation of the debates on poverty and the emergence of a state discourse linking the question of 'quartiers sensibles' to immigration rather than economic hardship (Tissot 2007: 19–49).

Finally, the current phase started in 2003 with the adoption of a National Programme of Urban Renovation (PNRU), whose objective was to 'break up the ghettos' through physical renovation, economic development and restructuring. To achieve the ideal of 'social mixity' (Avenel 2005: 65), the 2003 Borloo Law introduced large-scale demolition and redevelopment projects. The so-called GPUs (Great Urban Projects) linked to city contracts on 50 designated sites expected to produce 200,000 demolitions, 200,000 rehabilitations and 200,000 new social housing units between 2004 and 2008. The CUSCs (Urban Contracts of Social Cohesion) were introduced in 2006, and then abolished in 2014 along with the ZUS, supplanted by the new *Quartiers Prioritaires* (QPs), reducing the number of targeted neighbourhoods from 2,492 to 1,300 (Desponds and Bergel 2015). Today the geography of urban interventions relies on one single criterion, low income, and targets areas where the residents' revenue does not reach 60% of the national average.

The French state's approach to urban inequalities has been heavily criticised by a number of commentators. Tissot's analysis reveals how, between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s, the welfare state and its redistributive policies based on urban planning were abandoned in favour of urban policies relying on the ethnic stigmatisation of social problems. Dikeç associates the shift with the adoption of neo-liberal strategies driven by the logic of competition and effectiveness instead of caring. Urban neo-liberalism manifests itself through the institutionalisation of urban policies based on the market, sharpening socio-economic inequalities and new, aggressive strategies of policing and surveillance aimed at particular groups (Dikeç 2007: 25–26), as well as the criminalisation of poverty and the increased use of the penal system. These analyses concur in their denunciation of hardening public policy discourses that stigmatise banlieue residents while occulting the challenges they face, such as domination, poverty and unemployment. Most commentators agree on the systemic disadvantage and ethnic discrimination resulting from place-based rather than people-based social policies and condemn the abandonment of the welfare state in favour of increasingly repressive policies.

Media representations and the myth of the ghetto

Audio-visual media are believed to have also significantly contributed to the current predominantly negative perception of the banlieues in the public imagination. The shift, which occurred around 1980 in journalistic practices, can be held responsible for the prevailing biased treatment of the suburbs. According to Champagne (1991, 2011), events are produced by journalists collectively. Local and national newspapers, news magazines, public and private radio stations and television channels participate in the selection, classification and ranking of news items that will

be turned into events, while they themselves are subjected to pressure from advertisers, pollsters, politicians and audiences. Synchronisation and focalisation are two journalistic processes that have resulted in the relative uniformity of themes and interpretative frameworks used across the French journalistic field.

Until the 1980s, 'serious' news media with high symbolic capital were able to impose a predominantly political vision on events. However, the privatisation of TF1 and the rise of private channels increased the influence of economic priorities on the production of information. This new economic logic prompted journalists to dramatise events to provoke collective emotions while the pressure to cover events rapidly before other media captured them significantly reduced investigative journalism and in-depth analysis. In addition, initial representations often persist, even after they were proven inaccurate and revoked, since the prejudices on which they were based are constantly reactivated.

Sedel (2014) analyses how media treatment of the banlieues has evolved since the 1970s. Journalists' initial interest in deficient public transport links, poverty, delinquency and immigration was supplanted in the 1980s by the emerging new theme of 'banlieue youth.' In the 1990s, when anti-racist movements lost their impetus, urban violence and delinquency became the dominant themes (Sedel 2014: 52), followed by insecurity; a topic introduced during the 2002 electoral campaigns. Mutations in the framing prompted a shift in the ways in which information was collected and processed. Treatment of the banlieue became less political while empathic approaches gave way to a new ethos that Sedel describes as 'fact fetishism' (Sedel 2014: 53). Since then, banlieue-themed articles have been increasingly delegated to less prestigious services and less specialised and experienced journalists, whose main informants are no longer community leaders, teachers or social activists but police officers and law courts. Editors in chief encourage exclusive focus on extraordinary events such as riots or cases of delinquency while more ordinary events are no longer worth of coverage. Nevertheless, as Garcin-Marrou (in Carpenter and Horvath 2015) and Turpin (2012) show, differences in the framing do persist. They depend on the type of the media (written/audio-visual) as well as their political orientations (left wing/right wing).

According to Champagne (1991), marginalised populations have very little influence over their own media image. They do not have sufficient command of the forms of expression specific to the media and even tend to borrow from dominant discourses to speak about themselves. For example, by adopting the self-definition 'banlieue youth,' the journalists of the Bondy blog, an alternative media created by the Swiss news magazine *Hebdo*, have subscribed to a designation that was imposed upon them (Sedel 2011). As a result, the bloggers' identity remains vague and subject to tensions between their personal experience and professional journalism, popular slang and legitimate language, and working-class roots and middle-class aspirations. Consequently, the public representations of working-class banlieues remain largely dominated by binaries (Vieillard-Baron 2011: 28) and the myth of the banlieues, inscribed in a specific ideological context and fostered by a range of stereotypical images and cultural references 'tends to elude the complexity of urban dynamics, the rich input of immigration and segregating processes emanating from the centre' (Vieillard-Baron 2012: 39).

Banlieues at the heart of contemporary debates

Since the 1980s, banlieues have been at the heart of many public debates. This section attempts to sum up some of the current polemics that continue to shape the perception of the suburbs, incessantly adding new features to the myth of the ghetto. First we will consider whether banlieues are actually the lawless ghettos or no-go zones depicted in some media-political

discourses. Then we will focus on what sets apart the repeated waves of urban violence occurring in banlieues from other forms of violence generally recognised as political protest movements. Finally we will examine whether working-class suburbs present a higher concentration of gender discrimination than other areas in France before scrutinising recent stereotypical representations of banlieues as fertile places for radical Islam and breeding grounds for terrorism.

Since the 1980s, banlieues have been increasingly compared to ghettos by politicians, journalists and researchers. The 2002 election campaign, in which most parties denounced ghettoisation, was a turning point in the vulgarisation of this metaphor. The word was first used by SOS Racisme in 1987 (Robine 2004) to justify their transformation into a permanent organisation. The leaders of the association argued that most inequalities in France originate from unequal access to urban space. They denounced racist practices in social housing allocation and warned against school segregation as well as the rise of ethnic communities which challenge Republican unity. According to Robine, this discourse was deliberately vague to allow SOS Racisme to discredit other political forces, raise funding and shape the representations of the periphery to conform to their needs (Robine 2004: 146).

Many researchers reject the word 'ghetto' as illegitimate in the French context. They point to the banlieues' great ethnic and social diversity, arguing that the integration and dispersion of immigrants are still ongoing processes. Vieillard-Baron (2011) shows that neither economic disadvantage nor foreign nationals were sufficiently concentrated to justify the use of this term while other criteria – geographic segregation, stigmatisation and belonging to the same ethnic and religious community – were simply not met. Wacquant (1992) also contests the analogy between France and the United States, not only because of the two countries' different levels of poverty, exclusion, dereliction and marginalisation but also because banlieues, unlike the African-American ghettos, concentrate populations of different ethnicities who belong to similar social classes. Racial polarisation is deeply rooted in North American history and is inscribed in institutions as well as in mindsets, far more than in France. Importing such foreign concepts without regard for their original use and context is perilous, not only because it blurs the understanding of territorial segregation in France but also because it aggravates the banlieues' symbolic stigmatisation.

In the 2000s and 2010s, however, the rising violence, segregation and radicalisation in French banlieues were interpreted by some as the signs of a process of ghettoisation. Kokoreff and Lapeyronnie (2013) distinguish three phases of this process: the age of '*galère*' (slang word for 'difficulty') in the 1970s and 1980s, the age of 'violence' in the 1990s and, finally, the age of the 'ghetto' from the 2000s. According to sociologists, the violent riots, deepening gender divides, radical forms of religiosity, and hostility towards the state and its institution indicate the banlieues' increasing isolation from the rest of French society. Far from being unanimously adopted, the idea of ghettoisation has been frequently used in dominant discourses to obscure the banlieues' great diversity and to justify the state's top-down, territorial approaches to social inequalities despite evidence of their inefficiency.

Are riots political protests or acts of aimless violence?

Another much debated question is whether riots should be interpreted as political protests. Rioting in banlieues started in the late 1970s and it has continued ever since, reaching an unprecedented peak in November 2005 with three weeks of uninterrupted unrest spreading across France and provoking a state of emergency. Since the 1981 unrests in the Lyon suburb of Minguettes, riots have essentially followed the same pattern: they occur in former working-class neighbourhoods hit hard by unemployment. They involve young men, mostly of immigrant

origin who are often subjected to humiliating stop and search practices performed by the police. According to Mucchielli (2012), most unrest is triggered by the accidental killing of youths by the police. The 2005 riots started after the teenagers Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna were electrocuted in an electric sub-station in Clichy-sous-Bois, chased by the police. Riots generally have no leaders nor political claims and consist mostly of torching vehicles and throwing projectiles at the police, although they may occasionally also include vandalising buildings or ransacking businesses.

While Nicolas Sarkozy and other political leaders viewed the 2005 events as the work of experienced delinquents and mafia-like organisations, some social scientists propose different interpretations. Murphy (2011) shows that the French model of public contestation requires announced intentions, established spokespersons, well-disciplined membership with relatively high social standing, clear management and supervision of the protest, as well as claims about the general interest. Since the events of November 2005 did not follow this model, they were almost unanimously condemned as acts of aimless violence, revealing an important divide between marginalised postcolonial populations designated as the 'internal enemy,' and the police violating banlieue residents' rights instead of protecting them.

Mucchielli (2006, 2012) suggests that banlieue upheavals express the despair of marginalised youths who suffer from long-term unemployment as a result of failing at school and suffering from racial and social discrimination. Other commentators (in Waddington et al. 2009: 107–123) argue that the 2005 riots were a reaction to urban renovation operations which, after the adoption of the Borloo Law in 2003, endeavoured to solve social problems by demolishing and reconstructing high-rise social housing estates, thereby increasing the vulnerability of the most insecure groups threatened by expulsion. Moran (2011) emphasises the media's responsibility in the upheaval by demonstrating how the foregrounding of sensationalist material by journalists encouraged large-scale destruction as a way of gaining public visibility, venting anger and articulating concerns about salient social issues in the banlieues. Kokoreff, Mouhanna, Rigouste, and Mohammed (in Waddington et al. 2009) conclude that the primary motivation for rioting was a deep-seated feeling of rejection and injustice, which constitutes a common experience among the children of postcolonial immigrants involved in strained relations with everyday institutions.

Many commentators highlight that, rather than being part of the solution, the police have worsened the problem. Mouhanna (2009) demonstrates that the maintenance of public order and the tight control of protesters through space saturation techniques and intimidation are major priorities for the French police while mediation, negotiation and prevention are neglected. Often fearful of the residents, police officers regard themselves as outsiders and show contempt for ethnic minority youths who, in their view, do not qualify for full citizenship rights (Waddington et al. 2009: 179). As a result, police conduct is undoubtedly an important catalyst for the unrest.

Is gender segregation specific to banlieues?

In December 2016, a report broadcast on France 2 revealed that female clients were not welcome in a Muslim-owned café in Sevran, Seine Saint-Denis. By suggesting that women in French banlieues were intimidated by mostly Muslim men of North African origin, the programme reactivated earlier polemics about gender segregation specific to postcolonial populations in France, including debates about headscarves at schools and burkinis on French beaches. While some reactions relied on the interpretative framework of the Islamic threat, others interpreted this event through the prism of the 'virtuous mask of Republican racism,' elaborated by Nacira Guénif-Soulaimas (2006b) after the publication of the manifesto 'Ni Putes Ni Soumises'

in 2003. This highly visible protest movement, which called for a demonstration 'against the ghettos and for equality' and denounced the recrudescence of violence against women in banlieues (Amara and Zappi 2003), caused a profound divide among social scientists and intellectuals. Some warned against the 'Orientalist notion of a "victimised Muslim woman," who must be rescued by Westerners' (Selby 2011: 446) and cautioned against viewing certain forms of gender violence as specific to banlieue populations while obscuring others. They also highlighted the symbolic and political advantages some assimilated minority ethnic women gain in France from displaying their eroticised bodies as a sign of Republican loyalty (Guénif-Souilamas 2006a).

Other commentators, like Alidières (2010), however, caution against underplaying female suffering in the banlieues. They insist on including an ethno-cultural or ethno-religious dimension to the study of gender violence in banlieues (Alidières 2010: 71), even if this involves the risk of ethnicising gender violence and stigmatising postcolonial males. The discriminatory nature of this suggestion is highlighted by Delphy (2006) and Fernando (2014, 2016), who criticise the majority ethnic French feminists for discriminating against veiled Muslim women by excluding them from the fight against sexism.[2] Fernando in particular demonstrates that gender discrimination is always linked to other forms of discrimination 'as long as racism exists, the critique of indigene patriarchy is a luxury' (Fernando 2016: 42).

Are banlieues breeding grounds for terrorism?

Finally, the latest debates are concerned with home-grown terrorism. In a speech following the terrorist attacks in November 2015, Emmanuel Macron alluded to the responsibility of French society for letting a breeding ground ('terreau') develop on which Islamic radicalisation could prosper. Although Macron did not mention whether this breeding ground had a connection to the banlieues (the word itself does not even feature in the speech in which only the word 'faubourg' is mentioned on one occasion), he alluded to France's increasingly endogamous elites enjoying the 'luxury of [...] living further away from the locations where the Republic had surrendered' and social mobility had faded away (Macron 2015). This statement established a causal link between the failed social mobility of banlieue youths and their radicalisation. Is there, however, any evidence supporting that working-class banlieues with high concentrations of Muslim populations are turning into breeding grounds for terrorism?

Muslim religiosity has been widely associated with segregated lifestyles, susceptibility to violent terrorism, and the rejection of European values and identity (Koopmans 2013). For many commentators who have analysed terrorist profiles in the aftermath of the 2015 and 2016 terrorist attacks, there is undoubtedly a link between radicalisation and growing up in poor and dysfunctional immigrant families in working-class banlieues. Identifying similarities in the terrorists' background and trajectories, Mouterde and Baruch (2015) reveal that those who experienced learning difficulties at school and spent some time in penitentiaries are more likely to become radicalised. This is also confirmed by Khosrokavar (2013), whose research shows how the overcrowding and understaffing of French prisons, along with the high staff and inmate turnover, the rigid application of secular principles and the lack of acceptable means for many inmates to practise their religion facilitate conversion to radical Islam. Seen by some as the 'religion of the oppressed' (Khosrokavar 2013: 288), Islam channels the deep frustrations among inmates. Khosrokavar notes a shift in recruitment strategies in that recruiters tend to form duos or trios rather than larger groups and are more discreet about their radical views. He reveals that, paradoxically, a radical form of Islam, Salafism, 'is the most potent obstacle towards radicalization in the sense that it absorbs many young people's need for a new identity in rupture with society and transforms it into a non-violent sectarian attitude' (Khosrokavar 2013: 305).

Other researchers have challenged the widespread belief that in France, a country where traditions of secularism conflict with some Muslims' desires to make claims about the social or political value of their religious practices, Muslims are alienated from mainstream society due to their religiosity. On the contrary, as Maxwell and Bleich (2014) show, many Muslims are strongly attached to their Frenchness and factors associated with immigrant integration are more relevant for their self-identification as French than religiosity (Maxwell and Bleich 2014: 156).

Counter-narratives in rap and popular culture

While the aforementioned debates have influenced how banlieues are perceived in the public space, they have also triggered responses from suburban populations who are more often objects than subjects of discourses formulated about them. Some of these representations produced by residents and artists do little more than reproduce widespread clichés. Other discourses produced by rap musicians, film-makers and writers, however, reflect an internal vision of the banlieues and function as counter-narratives that challenge official narratives and stereotypical images.

In her recent book, Bettina Ghio (2016) sheds light on rhetoric strategies used by rap artists to depict the suburbs. She dispels the myth that rap always has a testimonial value and provides an authentic insight into banlieue life. She shows that rappers frequently resort to commonplace metonymies and metaphors by equating banlieues with concrete and prisons. The fact that these images have hardly changed over the last three decades demonstrates their symbolic rather than realist nature. Ghio also reveals that lyrics by La Cliqua, NTM, IAM, Sinik, La Rumeur or Casey have not been produced in isolation. These artists have established multiple links with French literature, which has been an important source of inspiration for them.

Another genre turned towards banlieue life is ethnic stand-up comedy. Laurent Béru's 2011 study highlights how the North American genre has been appropriated by a new generation of minority ethnic comedians from the banlieues. Béru focuses on the French television show Jamel Comedy Club (2006–2008), which was successful in launching a new generation of young comedians, such as Thomas Ngijol, Wahid Bouzidi, Fabrice Éboué, Paul Séré, Sébastien Dedominicis, Blanche Deconnick, Nouhoum Diawara, Amelle Chabi, Frédéric Chau, Patrice Kouassi and Youssoupha Diaby. These artists share similar demographics and have a strong interest in ethnically connoted musical genres like rap, zouk or dombolo. Ethnic stand-up comedies often use slang and neologisms and imitate oral speech. They speak about banlieues and denounce racial discrimination, colonial history and racial segregation by playfully overstating clichés and parodying mainstream discourses about immigrants, banlieue youths and Islamic radicalisation in peripheral neighbourhoods. Both popular genres use the word 'ghetto' as a form of self-identification. They draw inspiration from hip-hop culture and North American contra-hegemonic movements to promote the use of culture as a tool to enact social change in marginalised communities.

Banlieue cinema

French films also engage with the banlieue both as a theme and a setting. Higbee (2007: 38) finds this engagement 'problematic, in the sense that these representations risk falling into the same over-determined clichés of the rundown *cité* as the emblematic site of exclusion, criminality and "otherness."' While suburban housing estates have been present in the French *cinéma d'auteur* (Godard, Carné, Brissau, Le Péron) since the 1960s, it is only in 1995, after the simultaneous release of Dridi's *Bye-Bye*, Chibane's *Douce France*, Bouchaala's *Krim*, Gilou's *Raï* and, most importantly, Kassovitz' *La Haine*, that the term banlieue cinema was coined. Tarr

(2005) note the importance of the intersecting categories of banlieue and French-Maghrebi film-making, even though this production only represented about 5% of the national cinematographic production until 2000. Reeck (2018: 78) explains this low percentage with French society's resistance to the sociopolitical themes (economic integration, social mobility, cultural differences) these films tend to focus on.

More recently, banlieue film-making has taken two opposite directions: some directors have allied themselves with mainstream comedy while others have turned to drama and guerrilla film-making. Ferenczi (2015) notes that since the 2010s the suburbs have established themselves as popular settings for TV series and box office successes like *Intouchables* (2011) or *De l'autre côté du périph* (2012), where the daily life of those living in banlieues is no longer shown. Guerrilla films, such as Djaïdani's *Rengaine* (2012) or Tessaud's *Brooklyn* (2014), provide a correction to this by renewing 'with the type of social and committed cinema that shows its times' (Reeck 2018: 78) whereas a second shift is concerned with the emergence of female directors who disrupt the banlieue film's traditionally male-centred aesthetics. Tarr (2005) notes that female characters first appear in 'white male-authored films' (Tarr 2005: 111) such as *Samia* (Faucon 2001) and *La Squale* (Génestal 2000), however the recent success of *Bande de filles* (Sciamma 2014) and *Divines* (Banyamina 2016) points to a rise of a more inclusive visual culture in which there is more room for minority ethnic female protagonists and for engaging with the challenges of female coming of age in the urban periphery.

Banlieue narratives in literature

Banlieue literature started around the new millennium, a few years after the emergence of the banlieue film. Its development was triggered by a new territorially rather than ethnically defined identity and interethnic camaraderie, which was first depicted in Charef's *Thé au Harem d'Archimed* (1984) and Kassovitz' *La Haine* (1995). Since their beginning, banlieue narratives have developed strong links with rap, ethnic stand-up and banlieue film. Ironically, their focus on a generation of young people brought together by shared space and class belonging rather than ethnicity has mirrored the French state's territorial approach to socio-ethnic inequalities. In a context of rising inequalities, banlieue literature has attempted to voice new, hybrid, postcolonial identities and denounced socio-ethnic discrimination and French colonial nostalgia.

This new literary production has gained greater visibility with the manifesto *Qui fait la France?*[3] published in 2007 by Karim Amellal, Jean Eric Boulin, Khalid El Bahji, Faïza Guène, Dembo Goumane, Habiba Mahany, Samir Ouazène, Mabrouck Rachedi, Mohamed Razane and Thomte Ryam in a book of short stories entitled *Chroniques d'une société annoncée*. The manifesto states the signatories' ambition to reintroduce social criticism into the contemporary literary agenda. They accuse mainstream literary productions of obstinately turning toward middle-class individualism and identified nineteenth-century realist novelists engaging with major social issues as their literary models. The manifesto constitutes a brief moment of solidarity and alliance between writers pursuing similar objectives and aesthetic principles.

Banlieue narratives written from an internal viewpoint can be divided into various categories, including fiction and testimonies, single-author texts and collective publications, life writing (biography, autobiography, Bildungsroman) and other literary subgenres (crime fiction, anticipation novel, science fiction). Although banlieue fiction draws on the traditions of the 'beur generation,' around the new millennium, it freed itself from the models established in the 1980s and 1990s. Rachid Djaïdani's first novel *Boumkœur* (1999), prefaced by the rap group Suprême NTM, marked the beginning of a new literary production which aims to express the thoughts, cultural references and everyday experiences of youths living in the French urban

periphery. This marketplace success, selling more than 100,000 copies, was followed by a series of narratives by Djaïdani (2004, 2007) as well as by Mouss Bénia (2003, 2006), Thomté Ryam (2006), Mabrouck Rachedi (2006, 2008), Skander Kali (2008), Insa Sané (2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012), Mohamed Razane (2006), Karim Amellal (2006), Ahmed Djouder (2006) and others, focusing not only on young male characters living in France's underprivileged housing estates and voicing their concerns about institutional racism, discrimination and police violence targeting banlieue youths but also on their affective attachment to their neighbourhoods, solidarity with their group of peers and even love for French culture, language and literature. Soon after their emergence, banlieue narratives began to diversify. Female authors such as Faïza Guène (2004, 2006), Houda Rouane (2006), Habiba Mahany (2008, 2010) and Isabelle Pandazopoulos (2009) produced first-person narratives focusing on female coming of age in the banlieues and reflecting on particular challenges facing young Muslim women seeking love, independence and integration in a society that tends to stigmatise them.

From the late 2000s onwards, both male and female novelists started experimenting with new genres and aesthetics. Kaoutar Harchi's *Zone cinglée* (2009) is a dystopian novel reminiscent of Classical myths that depicts a war-ridden banlieue in which young men are attracted to and consumed by the hostile city centre while mothers seek to set up an army of children to protect the living from the dead. Cloé Korman's *Les Saisons de Louveplaine* (2013) is a gothic novel that explores the mysteries of an ordinary banlieue where illegal dogfights and drug trafficking co-exist with neighbourhood conviviality and academic excellence. Rachid Santaki's crime novels (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014) explore crime, boxing and police corruption in the city of Saint-Denis. Sylvain Pattieu's *Des Impatientes* (2012) shows how two teenage girls excluded from their suburban high school for misconduct become strike leaders in a central Paris furniture store where they find employment. In the 2010s there emerges a stream of witness narratives including *Les Gars de Villiers* (2011) and *Nous . . . la cité* (2012) in which groups of banlieue youths explore their everyday experience in writing, supported by journalists, educators and writers.

Most of these narratives share a plethora of writing strategies, including the use of slang and neologisms to imitate oral speech, humour to parody clichés and verbal violence to denounce mainstream discourses about the periphery, an emphasis on young characters' lives to show the challenges banlieue youths face, the representation of everyday life to contest the medias' exclusive focus on spectacular events and the representation of dramatic events which appeals to the reader's sympathy and identification with the suburban protagonists' struggle for recognition and respect.

Conclusions: diversifying representations of the French urban periphery

As we have seen previously, official representations of the working-class suburbs in media-political discourses and neo-liberal urban planning agendas concur to depict banlieues as homogeneous no-go zones where France's main economic and social problems are concentrated. The myth of suburban ghettos, where delinquency, crime, and Muslim fundamentalism prosper, are deeply rooted in a long genealogy of discourses established since the nineteenth century about the 'dangerous classes' living in the periphery. These discourses encourage top-down approaches focusing on security and control instead of integration, social mobility and bottom-up community initiatives.

Current debates about the banlieues are characterised by a tension between validating the myth of the ghetto and resisting it. While discourses about ghettoisation and aimless violence, de-politicisation and religious practices defying Republican principles tend to homogenise the urban periphery, resistance to this bias seeks to demonstrate the diversity that characterises the

peripheral space and its inhabitants and show the great variety of practices and identities that develop in France's working-class suburbs.

Residents whose ordinary lives are rarely depicted in the media, have attempted to express their own vision of the banlieues. They have developed new forms of journalism using blogs, social media, YouTube channels and other online platforms. Artists emerging from banlieues have also engaged in various art forms, ranging from music and stand-up comedy to film and literature to reach out to wider audiences and subvert some of the dominant discourses. The residents' discontent has also recently been expressed in organised forms of political action, such as militancy and social activism. An example of this is ACLEFEU (Association Collectif, Liberté Égalité Fraternité Ensemble et Unis, pronounced '*assez le feu*' or 'no more burning'), a movement promoting voter registration in banlieues, as well as collecting citizen grievances across France and organising neighbourhood debates to give voice to marginalised working-class populations. Although these reactions have difficulty matching the broad reach of dominant narratives, they have contributed to diversifying the ways in which the urban periphery is represented.

Notes

1 Working-class suburbs around Paris where the Communist Party was deeply rooted and wielded municipal power since the 1920s and 30s.
2 See Gill Allwood's chapter in the present volume (Chapter 5) for a further overview of the ways in which gender parity in French politics has largely favoured women from superior socio-economic groups rather than women from more diverse backgrounds.
3 A play on the words '*qui fait*' and '*kiffer*,' which can be translated as 'Who makes/loves France?'

References

Alidières, B. 2010. Face à l'insécurité et aux violences faites aux personnes de sexe féminin en banlieue: éléments pour une approche géopolitique des représentations. In *Hérodote*, 136:1, 56–75.

Amara, F. and S. Zappi. 2003. *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*. Paris: La Découverte.

Angélil, M. and C. Siress. 2012. The Paris banlieue: peripheries of inequity. In *Journal of International Affairs*, 65:2, 57–67.

Belhaj Kacem, M. 2006. *La psychose française. Les banlieues: le ban de la République*. Paris: Gallimard.

Carpenter, J. and C. Horvath. 2015. *Regards croisés sur la banlieue*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Champagne, P. 1991. La construction médiatique des 'malaises sociaux.' In *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 90, 64–76.

Champagne, P. 2011. Le coup médiatique. Les journalistes font-ils l'événement? In *Sociétés et Représentation*, 2:52, 25–43.

Delphy, C. 2006. Antisexisme ou antiracisme? Un faux dilemma. In N. Guénif-Souilamas (Ed.), *La République mise à nue par son immigration*. Paris: La Fabrique, 81–108.

Desponds, D. and P. Bergel. 2015. 'La banlieue': des dynamiques complexes derrière un mot trop ordinaire. In J. Carpenter and C. Horvath (Eds.), *Regards sur la banlieue*. Brussels: Peter Lang, 23–38.

Dikeç, M. 2007. *Badlands of the Republic*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Ferenczi, A. 2015. Vingt ans après 'La Haine,' les cités, toujours grandes absentes des écrans.' In *Télérama.fr*, 1 June.

Fernando, M. L. 2014. *The Republic Unsettled*: *Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Fernando, M. L. 2016. Liberté, égalité, féminisme? In *Dissent*, 63:4, 38–46.

Fourcaut, A. 2004. Les premiers grands ensembles en région parisienne: ne pas refaire la banlieue? *French Historical Studies*, 27:1, 195–218.

Ghio, B. 2016. *Sans Fautes de frappe: rap et literature*. Marseille: Le mot et le reste.

Guénif-Souilamas, N. 2006a. La Française voilée, la beurette, le garçon arabe et le musulman laïc. Les figures assignées du nouveau racisme vertueux. In N. Guénif-Souilamas (Ed.), *La République mise à nue par son immigration*. Paris: La Fabrique, 109–130.

Guénif-Soulaimas, N. 2006b. The other French exception: Virtuous racism and the war of sexes in postco-lonial France. In *French Politics Culture and Society*, 24:3, 23–41.

Hargreaves, A. G. 2014. De la littérature de 'beur' à la littérature de 'banlieue': des écrivains en quête de reconnaissance. In *La Marche en héritage*, *Africultures*, 97, 144–149.

Harvey, D. 2003. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. New York: Routledge.

Higbee, W. 2007. Re-presenting the urban periphery: Maghreb–French filmmaking and the *banlieue* film. In *Cinéaste*, Winter, 38–43.

Horvath, C. 2015. L'authenticité des 'voix de la banlieue' entre témoignage et fiction. In J. Carpenter and C. Horvath (Eds.), *Regards sur la banlieue*. Brussels: Peter Lang, 183–198.

Horvath, C. 2016. Écrire la banlieue dans les années 2000–2015. In B. Wallon (Ed.), *Banlieues vues d'ailleurs. Les Essentiels d'Hermès*. Paris: CNRS Editions, 47–68.

Horvath, C. 2017. Droit de cité au féminin: femmes, espace et violence dans les récits de banlieue contem-porains. In E. Faure et al. (Eds.), *La ville: quel genre?* Paris: Le Temps des Cerises, 69–97.

Khosrokhavar, F. 2013. Radicalisation in prison: The French case. In *Politics, Religion and Ideology*, 14:2, 284–306.

Kokoreff, M. and D. Lapeyronnie. 2013. *Refaire la cite*. Paris: Seuil.

Koopmans, R. 2013. Fundamentalismus und Fremden-feindlichkeit: Muslime und Christen im europäis-chen Vergleich. In *WZB Mitteilungen*, 142, 21–25.

Macron, E. 2015. Speech at the University of Gracques on 21 November 2015. Available at: https://en-marche.fr/articles/discours/discours-a-luniversite-des-gracques [Accessed: 31.01.2018].

Marlière, É. 2005. *Jeunes en cité: diversité des trajectoires ou destin commun?* Paris: l'Harmattan.

Maxwell, R. and E. Bleich. 2014. *What makes Muslims feel French? In* Social Forces, 93:1, 155–179.

Merlin, P. 2012. *Des Grands ensembles aux cités: L'avenir d'une utopie*. Paris: Ellipses.

Moran, M. 2011. Opposing exclusion: The political significance of the riots in French suburbs (2005–2007). In *Modern and Contemporary France*, 19:3, 297–312.

Mouhanna, C. 2009. French police and urban riots: Is the National Police Force part of the solution or part of the problem? In D. Waddington, F. Jobard and M. King (Eds.), *Rioting in the UK and France: A Comparative Analysis*. Portland, OR: Willan Publishing.

Mouterde, P. and J. Baruch. 2015. Y at-il un profil type des djihadistes français? In *Le Monde*.

Mucchielli, L. 2006. *Quelques reflexions critiques sur la 'psychopathologie des banlieues'*. Paris: J.-M. Tremblay.

Mucchielli, L. 2012. *Le scandale des 'tournantes': Dérives médiatiques, contre-enquête sociologique*. Paris: La Découverte.

Murphy, J. P. 2011. Protest or riot?: Interpreting collective action in contemporary France. In *Anthropological Quarterly*, 84:4, 977–1009.

Reeck, L. 2011. *Writerly Identities in Beur Fiction and Beyond*. Plymouth: Lexington Books.

Reeck, L. 2018. Gender and genre in banlieue film, and the guerrilla film Brooklyn. In *Journal of Romance Studies*, 36:1–2, 76–90.

Robine, J. 2004. SOS Racisme et les 'ghettos des banlieues': construction et utilisations d'une representa-tion. In *Hérodote*, 2, 134–151.

Sedel, J. 2011. *Bondy Blog*. Le travail de représentation des «habitants de la banlieue» par un média d'information participative. In *Réseaux*, 170:6, 103–133.

Sedel, J. 2014. Les ressorts sociaux de la médiatisation des banlieues. In *Savoir/Agir.*, 28:2, 51–56.

Selby, J. A. 2011. French secularism as a 'guarantor' of women's rights? Muslim women and gender politics in a Parisian *banlieue*. In *Culture and Religion,* 12:4, 441–462.

Tarr, C. 2005. *Reframing Difference: Beur and Banlieue Filmmaking in France*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Tissot, S. 2007. *L'État et les quartiers. Genèse d'une catégorie de l'action publique*. Paris: Seuil.

Turpin, B. 2012. *Discours et sémiotisation de l'espace: Les représentations de la banlieue et de sa jeunesse*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Vieillard-Baron, H. 2011. *Banlieues et périphéries*. Paris: Hachette.

Wacquant, L. 1992. Banlieues françaises et ghetto noir américain: de l'amalgame à la comparaison. In *French Politics and Society*, 10:4, 81–103.

Wacquant, L. 2016. Revisiting territories of relegation: class, ethnicity and state in the making of advanced marginality. In *Urban Studies*, 53:6, 1077–1088.

Waddington, D., F. Jobard and M. King. (Eds.). 2009. *Rioting in the UK and France: A Comparative Analysis*. Cullompton: Willan.