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Coming of Age in the Parisian Banlieues:
Young Adult Fiction as a Vehicle for Empowerment

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Submitted for the degree of PhD
To the National University of Ireland, Galway
College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies

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Declaration

I, the Candidate, certify that the Thesis is all my own work and that I have not obtained a degree in this University or elsewhere on the basis of any of this work.

Signed: Ruth Scales

Date: April 30th 2015

Abstract

Over the last number of decades the French *banlieues*, residential suburban areas surrounding major cities, have become increasingly visible in French society. The residents of these zones are predominantly working class, with immigrants and their descendants comprising a significant proportion of the population. These areas are characterized in the French imagination by unemployment and low-income families and are portrayed as inherently negative, troubled and violent. The vast majority of media reports concerning these regions highlight this negative, violent aspect, and the *banlieue* youth are portrayed as simmering with rage, liable to erupt into scenes of riots, violence, clashes with police, car burnings and theft. Such images are now very familiar to the French public, owing to zealous media exposure. The youth population of these zones must therefore be empowered, in order to overcome these various problems and stereotypes. Such empowerment could lead these young people to act in a manner that benefits the community at large, which could pave the way for major social change in these maligned regions. To this end, young adult literature is a particularly conducive tool for enabling social change and can act as one of the mediums through which efforts to empower the young *banlieue* population are being made. This thesis examines the work of three authors – Faïza Guène, Mabrouck Rachedi and Habiba Mahany – all of whom are of Algerian descent and grew up in the Parisian *banlieues*. All three write stylistically innovative novels for young adults, portraying the *banlieues* in a realistic and optimistic manner. The thesis will explore the strategies used by these authors in their attempt to address the misperceptions and misrepresentations faced by the youth population of the *banlieues*, and will demonstrate that these novels can act as a significant means of empowerment for these marginalised young people.

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Introduction

The French *banlieues*,¹ residential suburban areas surrounding many of the country's major cities have, in recent decades, become burdened with many ideologically-loaded connotations, and are now viewed as decaying regions, that have been described as a "desolate universe filled with asphyxiating concrete towers and desperate inhabitants who longed for escape".² Predominantly perceived as rife with crime and conflict, they occupy a particular, and highly stereotyped, place in the French imagination. These stereotypes, which extend to the populations residing in these peripheral areas, were encapsulated by Annie Ernaux, who claimed in *Les Années*:

Les banlieues occupaient l'imaginaire sous la forme confuse de blocs en béton et de terrains boueux au bout des lignes de bus et de RER vers le nord, de cages d'escalier puant l'urine, de vitres cassées et d'ascenseurs en panne, de seringues dans les caves. Les « jeunes de banlieue » constituaient une catégorie à part des autres jeunes, non civilisée, vaguement redoutable, très peu française même s'ils étaient nés là, que des profs admirables, des flics et de pompiers allaient « affronter » courageusement sur leur territoire.³

Representations such as this render life difficult for the young people of these areas, the "jeunes de banlieue" discussed by Ernaux, who must confront these prejudices and clichéd images imposed on them by the majority French population. Recently, there has been a wave of young adult⁴ novels emerging from the Parisian *banlieues* that respond and react

1 It is difficult to find a satisfactory English translation for the term *banlieue*. These zones are sometimes compared to American ghettos, but 'ghetto' implies a racially homogenous, inner-city region and the *banlieues* are ethnically diverse areas on the outskirts of major urban areas [for a comparative study of a French *banlieue* and an American ghetto see: Loïc Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).] Likewise, it would be misleading to translate *banlieue* as 'suburb', as this has specific, middle-class connotations in English. For this reason, the term has been left in French throughout.

2 Richard Derderian, *North Africans in Contemporary France: Becoming Visible* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 59. Derderian was here discussing a 1983 song by Karim Kacel: Karim Kacel, *Banlieue*, Song, (Pathé-Marconi E.M.I., 1983).

3 Annie Ernaux, *Les Années* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2008), 155.

4 The distinction between children's literature, young adult literature and other types of literature for younger readers is vague and, at times, fluid. [For in-depth discussion of these concepts, see: Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Pam Cole, *Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century* (Columbus: McGraw-Hill, 2008); Jonathan Stephens, "Young Adult: A Book by Any Other Name...: Defining the Genre," *The ALAN Review*, 35, no. 1 (2007), <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/v35n1/stephens.html>; Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, "Defining Children's Literature and Childhood," in *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt and Sheila G. Bannister Ray (London: Routledge,

to the context in which they are being produced. Such novels attempt – through their themes, style, and the language in which they are written – to dismantle these stereotypes, counteract negative perceptions and portray a more positive representation of these zones. Young adult literature is a particularly conducive tool for enabling social change. It can be a powerful medium and has the potential to have a profound effect on young people’s perceptions and ideas.⁵ This study will analyse eight novels, four by Faïza Guène,⁶ two by Mabrouck Rachedi,⁷ one by Habiba Mahany,⁸ and an additional novel co-authored by Rachedi and Mahany.⁹ All of the books under investigation have been published in the 21st century, with the earliest among them, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, appearing in 2004. This renders them particularly appropriate for an examination of the strategies used by the authors in an attempt to portray the *banlieues* in a more realistic and positive light, particularly as Penny Brown claims that books for children “have always evolved to reflect the changing times, and therefore offer considerable insights into the culture of which they are a product.”¹⁰ These authors write stylistically innovative novels for young adults that portray the *banlieues* in a realistic, yet optimistic manner. Very little work has been undertaken on young adult literature emerging from the *banlieues*, and this analysis will

1996).] In criticism of this literature, young adult literature is, at times and of necessity, subsumed within the broader category of children’s literature. Thus, for the purposes of this thesis, the terms “children’s literature” and “children’s books” will be considered all-inclusive, encompassing the entire spectrum of childhood from infancy through to late adolescence. “Young adult literature” will therefore be understood to represent a subsection of this literature: that which is read by adolescents, generally aged between twelve and eighteen. These concepts will be elaborated further in Chapter One.

- 5 This concept will be elaborated in Chapter One.
- 6 Faïza Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain* (Paris: Hachette, 2004); Faïza Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs* (Paris: Hachette, 2006); Faïza Guène, *Les gens du Balto* (Paris: Hachette, 2008); Faïza Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* (Paris: Fayard, 2014).
- 7 Mabrouck Rachedi, *Le poids d’une âme* (Paris: JC Lattès, 2006); Mabrouck Rachedi, *Le petit Malik* (Paris: JC Lattès, 2008). Rachedi has in fact published two further books. The first of these, *Éloge du miséreux*, [Mabrouck Rachedi, *Éloge du miséreux: De l’art de bien vivre avec rien du tout* (Paris: Michalon, 2007).] is not a novel, however, but a satirical survival manual for the unemployed, teaching them everything they need to know to survive in a consumerist society. His most recent book, *Tous les hommes sont des causes perdues*, published in March 2015, constitutes a significant departure from his earlier work, thematically, but also stylistically and linguistically. There is little basis on which to compare it to his previous novels, and it does not engage with the areas under investigation in this thesis in a meaningful manner. [Mabrouck Rachedi, *Tous les hommes sont des causes perdues* (Paris: L’âge d’homme, 2015).] Consequently, neither of these titles was included in the corpus.
- 8 Habiba Mahany, *Kiffer sa race* (Paris: JC Lattès, 2008).
- 9 Mabrouck Rachedi and Habiba Mahany, *La petite Malika* (Paris: JC Lattès, 2010).
- 10 Penny Brown, *A Critical History of French Children’s Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 4.

demonstrate that these three authors can, through their literary output, empower young residents of these marginalised zones by portraying a more positive identity for the *banlieue* youth, and in so-doing counter the negative representation, heretofore predominant.

The latter part of the twentieth century marked a turning point for the French *banlieues*, one that propelled them into the public consciousness to an unprecedented degree. These outlying zones had long been home to a large working-class population, owing to cheaper rents and a high concentration of industrial and manufacturing activity. The French working-class population was augmented, in the years following World War Two, with an increased immigrant population, initially composed primarily of migrant workers, many of whom were later joined in France by their families. The first generation of immigrants arrived when work was plentiful during a period of economic prosperity, and consequently the majority were able to gain meaningful employment and provide for their families. Increased economic difficulty in the years since, in conjunction with other factors, has rendered life in the *banlieues* more difficult, for both the French and immigrant populations. For the younger generation of *banlieue* residents, difficulty in obtaining employment, coupled with resentment of the discrimination they experience – exacerbated, for the population of immigrant origin, by several racially-motivated attacks – culminated in the early 1980s in a series of riots and car burnings, a symptom of the frustration felt by the youth population. These riots brought vigorous media and political attention to the *banlieues*, and their attendant social inequality issues.¹¹ This attention has waxed and waned in the decades since, with heightened media scrutiny and promises of political action, usually occurring following an outbreak of violence and unrest, interspersed with periods of silence and disavowal.

The *banlieues* are characterized in the French imagination by unemployment and low-income families and are portrayed as inherently negative, troubled and violent. In fact, the vast majority of media reports concerning these regions highlight this negative, violent aspect, and the *banlieue* youth are portrayed as simmering with a rage which is constantly bubbling just under the surface, waiting to explode into scenes of riots, violence, clashes with police, car burnings and theft – images which are now very familiar to the French public, owing to zealous media exposure. Mireille Rosello outlines how the *banlieues* have “become a cultural cliché, a metaphor, a shortcut for a vaguely

11 The timing of the riots coincided with the appearance, in the early 1980s, of the first novels written by the descendants of immigrants from North Africa. These novels, which will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter One, also helped to focus attention on the plight of those living on the margins.

formulated yet deeply seated malaise”.¹² According to Rosello, the term now “evokes one single type of urban landscape: dilapidated areas of social housing populated by a fantasized majority of ‘foreigners’ and especially of ‘Arabes’”.¹³ Nowadays the *cités* – or badly maintained council estates – have become something of a “symbolic crossroads where anti-Arab feelings crystallize around issues of housing: images of drug-ridden basements and of vandalized letter-boxes are often ethnically encoded”.¹⁴ This conflation of *banlieue* resident with ethnic minority has particular resonance for this research, as all of the authors under investigation are of Algerian origin, rendering the specific experience of this demographic highly pertinent. The decision to choose authors from this ethnic background was made for a number of reasons. The large number of Algerian immigrants residing in France means that, consequently, there are a large number of authors with an Algerian background producing literature for younger readers,¹⁵ as highlighted by Anne Schneider, who referred to “la prédominance des écrits d’auteurs d’origine algérienne au détriment d’écrivains issus d’autres pays du Maghreb : Maroc et Tunisie.”¹⁶ The issues dealt with by this group are complex and difficult, and can be found throughout the literature emerging from these zones – tropes of dual identity, integration, religion and racism are common. Given the specific historical context between France and Algeria, and the necessity of exploring some of the attendant questions that occur in the texts, it was deemed appropriate to limit the corpus to those of an Algerian background in order to augment the coherence of the thesis. Many of the difficulties which the young *banlieue* population must confront are not confined to those from an ethnic minority background, however, but shared by others residing on the urban periphery. Schneider claims that, despite the dual background of these authors: “Leur discours est majoritairement centré sur la France, du fait qu’ils sont français et que leur questionnement est centré sur la vie en France.”¹⁷ She further contends that these authors, rather than focusing on the past and referring constantly to Algeria, privilege “L’intégration, la double culture, le questionnement sur les racines ou sur les allers-retours entre les deux pays.”¹⁸ Given that

12 Mireille Rosello, “North African Women and the Ideology of Modernization,” in *Post-Colonial Cultures in France*, ed. Alec Hargreaves and Mark McKinney (London: Routledge, 1997), 240.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 For in-depth discussion of such authors, see: Anne Schneider, *La littérature de jeunesse migrante: Récits d’immigration de l’Algérie à la France* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2013).

16 Ibid., 63.

17 Ibid., 80.

18 Ibid.

the *banlieue* population, regardless of its ethnic background, struggles for acceptance by the majority population, and true “integration” into French society, these issues are pertinent to all young residents of these zones.

Since the 1980s, the youth population of the *banlieue* has become increasingly disenfranchised. Experiencing a sense of disconnection and alienation from the mainstream French population, in particular from agents of authority such as the police, these marginalised youths can feel disempowered and helpless to change their situation. Those born to immigrant parents may feel the extra weight of discrimination: as a result of their “foreign” appearance and names, and additionally by virtue of their status as *banlieue* residents. This disconnect is growing, and frustrations and tensions can sometimes spill over into conflict and violence, frequently sparked by an altercation with police, and sometimes taking on a national character, as with the infamous riots of 2005.¹⁹ This frustration and tension has had other consequences, as a small proportion of France’s Muslim community has become radicalised, with some young people travelling to Islamic countries to take part in jihadist operations. More recently, attacks such as those on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*,²⁰ have shown that France is, at times, at risk from some members of her disenfranchised and marginalised population. French Prime Minister Manuel Valls spoke, after the attacks, of an “apartheid territorial, social, ethnique’ à propos de certains quartiers en France.”²¹ He continued by stating that: “Tous les quartiers ne sont pas logés à la même enseigne, il y a entre 50 et 100 quartiers où la pauvreté, l’insécurité et l’échec scolaire s’accumulent,”²² and claimed that these regions are “poudrières sociales,”²³ primed for conflict. Additionally, a disproportionate percentage of the *banlieue* population is unemployed and discrimination based on having an address in certain *départements* can frequently have an effect on residents’ hopes for improved prospects.²⁴ Indeed, some members of this population find it easier and more lucrative to make money illegally. This illegal parallel economy, coupled with the fear of violence generated by the *banlieues*, as

19 The 2005 riots will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Four.

20 The attacks on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, a satirical newspaper which frequently published controversial images of the prophet Mohamed, something which is taboo in Muslim culture, took place on January 7th 2015. The incident will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

21 6Medias, “‘Apartheid’ en France : Manuel Valls persiste et signe,” *Lepoint.fr*, January 25 2015. Accessed: February 9 2015, http://www.lepoint.fr/politique/apartheid-en-france-manuel-valls-persiste-et-signe-25-01-2015-1899383_20.php.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 This will be discussed in Chapter Three.

well as a lingering anti-North African sentiment related to the trauma of the decolonization period,²⁵ contributes to the further discrimination of young *banlieue* residents, which in turn leads to further frustration and anger on their part, and so on in a vicious circle of mutual misunderstanding, fear and anger.²⁶

There is, therefore, a need for the populations of these zones to find a way to empower themselves in an attempt to overcome the problems they face. The recent *Charlie Hebdo* attacks and, in particular, the statements by the Prime Minister outlined above – which prompted the *Journal du Dimanche* to conduct research and name 64 potential “quartiers-ghettos,”²⁷ – lends added pertinence to the issues under investigation in this thesis, as young people from these peripheral regions must feel empowered to strive for change. In relation to young *banlieue* residents, Girault, Auzou and Fortin-Debart claim that their empowerment could lead to: “le développement d’une conscience critique et d’un pouvoir d’action des individus et des groupes sociaux, dans une perspective de transformation

25 This is a chapter in French history that many would rather forget. The Algerian war of decolonization, which took place between 1954 and 1962, was a particularly bloody conflict. Referred to at the time as *les événements* (the events), it was only officially acknowledged as a war in 1999. Owing to conscription, over one and a half million French soldiers (including well known political figures Jacques Chirac and Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder of the far-right *Front national*) fought in Algeria. Atrocities were committed by both sides, and at the advent of independence the *pieds-noirs* (French settlers) withdrew from Algeria almost overnight, leaving behind the *barkis*, the Algerian auxiliaries who had fought on the side of the French, many of whom were slaughtered for collaborating. Those who managed to escape to France, as well as economic migrants who have arrived from North Africa in the intervening years are, for some, a painful reminder of this protracted conflict. For in-depth discussion of the Algerian War, see: Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l’oubli : La mémoire de la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991); Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Martin Evans, *Algeria: France’s Undeclared War* (Oxford: University Press, 2012).

26 In the summer of 2013, I had the opportunity to spend some time in the *banlieues* of Paris, as part of the Banlieue Network Summer School. This provided me with the opportunity to explore various different aspects of life on the periphery and gain a deeper understanding of the vibrant cultural life in these areas. This school took place in Saint-Denis, but the various events were spread out over surrounding areas, such as Bondy, Drancy, Bobigny and La Corneuve. The school brought together researchers from a diverse range of fields – architecture, geography, sociology, linguistics, literature – whose research focuses on the banlieues. Attendees participated in academic discussions each morning, featuring different themes each day as a focus, while the afternoons and evenings consisted of workshops and urban walks, as well as cultural events and debates, frequently open to the public and which received significant local interest, in particular among the youth community. A noteworthy aspect of the visit was that, contrary to the claims of media reports, we were treated with respect by everyone we encountered, both during the scheduled events and while going about our daily business. This visit confirmed my belief that, while there are undoubtedly problems and difficulties in these areas, residents of these zones – and in particular, the youth population – are not as they are portrayed in media representations, and that the misunderstanding and fear is in fact a large factor contributing to the social problems faced by these young people.

27 Stéphane Joahny, Camille Neveux, and Marie Quenet, “Cette carte des 64 ghettos de France qui n’existe pas,” *Le Journal du Dimanche*, January 26 2015. Accessed: February 1 2015, <http://www.lejdd.fr/Societe/Cette-carte-des-64-ghettos-de-France-qui-n-existe-pas-714524>.

sociale et d'amélioration de la qualité de vie des communautés en jeu."²⁸ If these young people are empowered, by whatever means, to act in a manner that benefits the community at large, this could pave the way for major social change in these maligned regions.

Literature, and in particular that read by younger readers, acts as one of the mediums through which these efforts are being made as, according to Louie and Louie, literature can increase a young person's "belief in his ability to act, often resulting in capable action. Or, as Leslie Ashcroft has defined it, he has received 'nourishing belief in capacity and competence.'"²⁹ Kimberley Reynolds, a prominent children's literature scholar,³⁰ has highlighted the enormous potential that children's literature possesses for stimulating social and cultural change, the manner in which it can contribute "to the social and aesthetic transformation of culture by, for instance, encouraging readers to approach ideas, issues and objects from new perspectives and so prepare the way for change".³¹ Reynolds claims that writing for young people is "replete with radical potential."³² Given the potentially transformative nature of the books that children (or, in this case, young adults) read it is possible that seeing their usually maligned regions presented to them in a more recognizable fashion could empower young people from the *banlieue*, and allow them to see a way to escape their current displaced position.

This thesis will thus investigate the novels of Guène, Rachedi and Mahany. The corpus will be analysed thematically, stylistically and linguistically, and will draw on methodologies from sociology (including sociolinguistics), children's literary theory and postcolonialism, in order to explore the strategies that these authors are using to empower young residents of the peripheral zones. As discussed above, the three authors under investigation are

28 Yves Girault, Eva Auzou, and Cécile Fortin-Debart, "De la lecture critique du territoire à la notion d'empowerment : étude de cas d'un projet mené avec des adolescents en banlieue parisienne," *Éducation Relative à l'Environnement* 7 (2008): 184. The authors here reference: Carine Villemagne, "Le milieu de vie comme point d'ancrage pour l'éducation relative à l'environnement : réalité ou chimère," *Éducation relative à l'environnement : Regards – Recherches – Réflexions* 5 (2004-2005).

29 Belinda Y. Louie and Douglas H. Louie, "Empowerment through Young-Adult Literature," *The English Journal* 81, no. 4 (1992): 53. Louie and Louie here reference: Leslie Ashcroft, "Defusing 'Empowering': The What and the Why," *Language Arts* 64, no. 2 (1987).

30 See for example: Kimberley Reynolds, *Children's Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Kimberley Reynolds, ed. *Modern Children's Literature: An Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Kimberley Reynolds, *Children's Literature: From The Fin de Siècle to the New Millennium* (Tavistock, Devon, U.K.: Northcote House, 2012); Kimberley Reynolds, *Girls Only?: Gender and Popular Children's Fiction in Britain, 1880-1910* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

31 Kimberley Reynolds, *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1.

32 Ibid.

of Algerian descent, but all were born and raised in the peripheral zones of Paris. The relationship between Paris and its *banlieues* is an interesting one, and the thesis will explore the nuances of this relationship. It will provide an examination of the history and development of the Parisian *banlieues*, and will also outline the displacement of the lower classes to outlying areas. Thus, in order to provide this contextualising information in a coherent manner, while highlighting elements of the relationship between Paris and her peripheral zones that are reflected in the primary texts, the corpus was limited to those born and raised on the outskirts of Paris. This affords a greater comparison between the texts and authors, as it removes the need to allow for geographical specificities, which will be particularly significant in terms of the linguistic analysis.

In 2007, a collective of young authors from the *banlieues*, including all of the authors of the corpus, published a strongly-worded manifesto that sought to challenge the status quo of the French literary establishment. Their literature is radical in nature, and they outlined some of the reasons for this in the manifesto:

Parce que nous sommes convaincus que l'écriture, aujourd'hui plus que jamais, ne peut plus rester confinée, molle, douceuse, mais doit au contraire devenir engagée, combattante et féroce ... Nous, enfants d'une France plurielle, voulons promouvoir cette diversité qui est un atout et une chance pour demain, une force collective.³³

One of the objections that the members of *Qui fait la France?* sought to highlight is the fact that, having grown up in the *banlieue*, they are automatically categorized as *banlieue* authors. Yet, as outlined by Mabrouck Rachedi in his blog, *La nouvelle racaille française*, "les livres de banlieue, ça n'existe pas. Il n'y a que des livres, qui ont leur place partout un point c'est tout."³⁴ Alec Hargreaves has outlined how "Les écrivains dits de « banlieue », qui essayent ... d'alerter la nation sur les injustices qui la minent, ont le sentiment de subir un processus d'« invisibilisation »."³⁵ The members of this collective were therefore attempting to "connect writing to social action, and to bring the world and themes of the *banlieues défavorisées* to literature."³⁶ Acknowledging the multicultural background

33 Collectif Qui fait la France?, *Chroniques d'une société annoncée* (Paris: Stock, 2007), 7-9.

34 Mabrouck Rachedi, "23 raisons d'aller me voir au salon du livre demain," *La Nouvelle Racaille Française (blog)*. March 13, 2009, Accessed: September 10 2011, <http://www.metronews.fr/blog/nouvelleracaillefrancaise/2009/03/>.

35 Alec G. Hargreaves, "Traces littéraires des minorités postcoloniales en France," *Mouvements HS*, no. 1 (2011): 42. In his use of the term "invisibilisation", Hargreaves references: Romuald-Blaise Fonkoua, "Écrire la banlieue: la littérature des "invisibles", *Cultures Sud* 165 (2007).

36 Laura Reeck, *Writerly Identities in Beur Fiction and Beyond* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 146.

of the majority of authors in the collective, the manifesto elaborates: “Nous, somme d’identités mêlées, mettons toutes nos forces dans la bataille pour l’égalité des droits et le respect de tous, au-delà des origines géographiques et des conditions sociales.”³⁷ In fighting against their displacement and marginalization, then, these authors hope to legitimize their presence on the French literary scene, and by extension move one step closer to legitimizing the presence in France of those from an immigrant background and gain acceptance for them in French society.

The three authors under investigation in this thesis were all signatories of the manifesto, and consequently their novels constitute a point of intersection between this desire to legitimize the presence of authors from the *banlieues* on the French literary scene and the desire to hold a mirror to the elements that comprise *banlieue* culture, so that the young residents of these zones can see themselves reflected in French society. In fact, author, sociologist and politician Azouz Begag recommended, in 1992, that books produced by those of North African descent be taught in French schools, in order that:

... les enfants d’immigrés scolarisés puissent se reconnaître [sic] dans ces textes. La proposition est stimulante d’intégrer des textes qui renvoient à ces jeunes leur monde, leurs pratiques langagières dans des trames textuelles en français, où plusieurs niveaux de langues se mêlent, où le style pourrait être qualifié de métisse. Ces livres manifestent donc ce que devrait être l’intégration : conservation de l’altérité, de l’opacité, dans une identité collective, sans assimilation.³⁸

This idea can be expanded and, in lieu of referring solely to young people of immigrant origin, could be applied to the youth population of the *banlieues*. In showing these young people a positive reflection of themselves and their place in French society, these books can contribute to the creation of a more positive identity for the next generation of young *banlieue* residents and thus act as a means of empowering them. These authors employ several strategies in order to accomplish this goal. These strategies include: realistic portrayals of life in the *cités* with narratives that are sprinkled with references to the perceived identity of the *banlieue* residents; elements of African culture transmitted to the youth by older generations; and using an informal language, which accurately reflects that spoken by the young residents of the peripheral zones. By presenting French

37 Qui fait la France?, *Chroniques*, 9.

38 Cyrille François, “Des littératures de l’immigration à l’écriture de la banlieue : Pratiques textuelles et enseignement,” *Synergies Sud-Est européen*, no. 1 (2008): 155. François here references: Azouz Begag, “Écritures marginales en France : être écrivain d’origine maghrébine,” *Tangence* 59 (1999): 75.

young people, no matter their cultural or ethnic background, with a refreshingly realistic depiction of life in the *banlieues*, including open acknowledgment of the reputation of these zones; by incorporating multicultural elements and practices into their narratives, as well as explicitly referencing the cultural memory of their forebears; and by doing so in the colourful street language of the youth, these authors are attempting to empower the young generation of *banlieue* residents, and to show them that they need not be defined by the dominant perceptions of them in French society.³⁹ It is vitally important that young people, in particular those from areas with a bad reputation, understand that these dominant perceptions are merely stereotypes and caricatures, and that the decision to live up to them – or not – lies, to a large extent, in their own hands.

Chapter One of this thesis will provide the methodological and theoretical background and elaborate on the approach which will be used throughout, demonstrating how the combined approach of sociology, literary theory and postcolonialism, is an effective methodology that will contribute to the originality of the thesis. Chapter Two will briefly trace the history of the *banlieues* from the nineteenth century until the present day, and thus establish a pattern of excluding the poorest members of society from the urban centre, before examining the representation of the *banlieue* space in the primary texts. Chapters Three and Four will provide a thematic analysis of the primary texts; the former will examine issues relating to education, unemployment, ethnicity and gender; while the latter will focus on violence, media and political misrepresentations and racism. Chapter Five will present a stylistic analysis, discussing the innovative strategies used by the authors and the manner in which these strategies can contribute to the empowerment of young adult readers from the *banlieue*, as they are encouraged to identify with and internalise the messages of these texts. Finally, Chapter Six will comprise a linguistic analysis of the corpus, elaborating on the manner in which the authors' use of language contributes to the empowerment of their young readers.

This thesis is situated in the intersection of two usually separate fields: young adult literature and literature emerging from the *banlieues*. Combining the study of these areas, and examining how issues affecting the minority *banlieue* population are treated in literature for young adult readers, will provide a unique perspective on each and, by exploring the relationship between the young protagonists of the novels and their

39 Ruth Scales, "Kiffe kiffe demain: Strategies of Empowerment in the Novels of Faïza Guène," in *Children's Literature on the Move: Nations, Translations, Migrations*, ed. Nora Maguire and Beth Rodgers (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), 132-3.

maligned peripheral environs, will allow this research to demonstrate that the authors in question are attempting to empower the young people of the *banlieues*. Issues affecting the subgroup of the *banlieue* population of Algerian descent add a further dimension to this study. This is important as these young people are frequently confronted with overtly negative images of their environment and culture. Children's books can have a powerful effect on their young readers,⁴⁰ and young readers from minority cultures, in particular, can benefit from seeing characters similar to themselves reflected positively in literature. Given that adolescence is a time when people begin to have more empathy and to see the world from perspectives other than their own,⁴¹ young readers from outside of the Franco-Algerian and *banlieue* communities may also acquire a new perspective on these regions, which in turn will encourage increased understanding and empathy on their part. Studying these novels as young adult literature⁴² constitutes a new departure in the study of literature emerging from the peripheries of Paris. These eight texts have not previously been analysed together, and the three-fold approach to the investigation, incorporating thematic, stylistic and linguistic analysis has never been applied to these texts to date. This will enable a comprehensive overview of the potentially transformative nature of these novels and the strategies used by Guène, Rachedi and Mahany in order to empower their young adult readers. It is hoped that this research will pave the way for further nuanced studies of young adult *banlieue* literature which give equal consideration to social context, literary technique and language. My research thus constitutes a new departure in the examination of literature emerging from the *banlieues* and will make a significant contribution to already existing research in these fields.

40 This was discussed above in relation to Kimberly Reynolds, and will be developed further, in particular in relation to young people from minority cultures, in Chapter One.

41 For in-depth discussion of adolescent psychological development, see: Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1950); Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: International Universities Press, 1959); Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968).

42 Justification for this will be provided in Chapter One.

Chapter 1. “Tout est question d’angle”¹: Methodological Approach

This chapter will first outline the parameters of *banlieue* literature and Young Adult literature, as they are understood for the purposes of this thesis, and will then justify the selection of the authors and novels under investigation. It will argue for the hugely influential role literature can play in empowering young people, particularly those from minority cultural backgrounds. It will provide an overview of the critical context in which this thesis is situated and, finally, it will present the theoretical and methodological framework upon which the thesis rests, and explore the key concepts which will be used throughout.

1.1 Defining the Corpus

As outlined in the Introduction, this thesis will analyse the novels of Faïza Guène, Mabrouck Rachedi and Habiba Mahany in order to show that these authors are attempting to empower young *banlieue* residents by creating a more realistic and, consequently, more positive vision of their maligned regions than that usually seen in French society. For the purposes of this thesis, I will refer to the novels of the corpus as Young Adult (YA) *banlieue* literature. Before commencing the textual analysis, or outlining the methodologies which will be employed in the thesis, it is first necessary to define the terms *banlieue* literature and YA literature and provide some contextualising information, before explaining why this literature can be considered to fall within both of these categories.

1.1.1 “Banlieue” Literature

The 1980s witnessed the rise to prominence of the “*beur*”² generation in France, with the advent of the *beur* political movement. Disheartened by the lack of attention afforded to their marginal status and degraded living conditions, and further motivated by a series of

1 Rachedi, *Le poids d’une âme*, 103.

2 Term used to refer to the children of North African immigrants to France. Although there is some dispute over the origins of the term, the most widely accepted argument is that it is an inversion of the word *Arabe*. Although the term was initially one of empowerment, embraced by those to whom it was applied, it later came to be viewed as derogatory and exclusionary. For a more in-depth discussion of the origins of this term, see: Sylvie Durmelat, “Petite histoire du mot *beur* : ou comment prendre la parole quand on vous la prête,” *French Cultural Studies* 9 (1998).

racial attacks committed against members of France's North African population, a group of *Beurs* organised a march from Marseille to Paris. *La marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme*, which took place in 1983 and which was renamed *La marche des beurs* by the media,³ drew attention to this demographic. Almost simultaneously, members of this population began to garner attention on the literary scene, with the 1983 publication of Mehdi Charef's *Le thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*,⁴ followed in subsequent years by novels from Azouz Begag,⁵ Nacer Kettane⁶ and Farida Belghoul.⁷ According to Laura Reeck, this wave of authors:

... charriait les thèmes de la famille, de l'école et de la rue...L'horizon des personnages, encore pénétrés de "nostalgérie", dépendait en partie d'une attente d'un retour au pays natal, dans cette Algérie qui, déjà, n'avait plus rien de "natal" pour la plupart d'entre eux. Le ressac libéra, en un fracas assourdissant, un profond questionnement sur l'identité portée par des personnages interprètes-traducteurs servant de passerelles entre les parents et la société française.⁸

These themes came to characterise writing by this generation, marked by the experiences of their parents, and their struggle for acceptance in French society.

The authors under investigation in this thesis do not belong to the category of *Beur* literature, however, but form part of a wave that has arrived on the literary scene in the new millennium. This newer wave of authors has been given several different appellations, including *banlieue* literature, second-generation or third-generation literature, and migrant literature. Anne Schneider – whose research specialism lies in children's literature

3 For an inside perspective from one of the participants of the march, see: Bouzid, (*pseud.* Bouzid Kara), *La marche : Traversée de la France profonde* (Paris: Sinbad, 1984).

4 Mehdi Charef, *Le thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1983). Mehdi Charef is a French author, screenwriter and filmmaker. Of Algerian descent, he moved to France with his family when he was ten years old. He is widely credited with writing the first "beur" novel, although there was one book by a "beur" author published before *Le thé au harem* [Hocine Touabti, *L'amour quand même* (Paris: P. Belfond, 1981).] Nevertheless, Charef's novel was the first to bring widespread attention to the problems experienced by members of the immigrant community living in the *banlieues*. Hargreaves additionally claims that it laid "a template for what will later become labelled as *banlieue* writing." [Alec G. Hargreaves, "Banlieue blues," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Paris*, ed. Anne-Louise Milne (Cambridge: University Press, 2013), 220.]

5 Azouz Begag, *Le gone du Chaâba* (Paris: Seuil, 1986).

6 Nacer Kettane, *Le sourire de Brahim* (Paris: Denoël, 1985).

7 Farida Belghoul, *Georgette!* (Paris: Barrault, 1986).

8 Laura Reeck, "La littérature beur et ses suites," *Hommes et migrations* 1295 (2012): 122.

resulting from immigration as well as that dealing with colonisation and the Algerian war – discusses the multiplicity of labels in relation to literature for children and young adults by authors from this demographic:

...en effet, on parle volontiers de « la littérature coloniale pour l'enfance », des « récits d'émigration », des « migrations post-coloniales », des « romans de voyage », ou encore, expression intéressante à plus d'un titre, de « la littérature immigrante » pour l'enfance et la jeunesse dont on précise que les auteurs sont issus d'un milieu d'immigrants...⁹

Schneider believes that the fluidity of the terminology is partially because this literature, especially when addressed to children and young adults, “est une entité nouvelle qui annonce des changements dans la perception que l'on a d'elle.”¹⁰

I have chosen to refer to this literature as *banlieue* literature, a somewhat contentious label which succeeded “*beur* literature,” which had come to be viewed as marginalising.¹¹ Although the terms “*banlieue* culture” and “*banlieue* film”¹² had gained prominence in 1990s, it was not until the 2000s that “*banlieue* literature” entered widespread usage. According to Alec Hargreaves, the distinction between *banlieue* and *beur* literature:

...peut paraître évidente : la littérature “beur”, produite par des auteurs appartenant à la deuxième génération des Maghrébins de France ... tournerait autour de questions identitaires ancrées dans leur ethnicité tandis que la littérature de “banlieue”, associée notamment avec les auteurs du collectif multi-ethnique Qui fait la France ? ... s'inspirerait du vécu de personnes d'origines diverses - “Blacks” et “Blancs” autant que “Beurs” - ayant en commun le fait de vivre dans des espaces urbains périphériques défavorisés.¹³

9 Anne Schneider, “La littérature de jeunesse migrante, entre reliance et résilience, une littérature de l'universel,” in *Littérature pour la jeunesse et diversité culturelle*, ed. Virginie Douglas (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013), 91.

10 Ibid.

11 I will, however, incorporate the expression *beur* literature in discussing secondary sources that have made use of this term.

12 According to Carrie Tarr: “In French film culture, the problematic articulation of *beur* and French national identity was displaced in the 1990s by the focus on *banlieue* cinema, which allows white-French-authored and *beur*-authored representations of the *banlieue* to be grouped together without regard for the different discursive positions which they might be mobilising in relation to national identity.” Carrie Tarr, *Reframing difference: beur and banlieue filmmaking in France* (Manchester: University Press, 2005), 49.

13 Alec G. Hargreaves, “De la littérature “beur” à la littérature de “banlieue” : Des écrivains en quête de reconnaissance,” *Africultures*, January 22, (2014), Accessed: February 7 2015, <http://www.africultures.com/php/?nav=article&no=12039>.

He cautions against accepting this distinction too readily, however, as there is a significant amount of overlap between these terms:

D'une part, loin de se cantonner dans une problématique ethnique les écrivains issus de l'immigration maghrébine abordent souvent d'autres thèmes, parmi lesquels celui de l'exclusion sociale. D'autre part, le milieu social qui est au cœur de la littérature de "banlieue" est fortement ethnicisé.¹⁴

At its heart, then, the difference between both labels can best be distinguished by the timing, as both forms of literature are concerned "principalement (bien que pas exclusivement) de minorités post-coloniales reléguées dans les marges de la société française."¹⁵ Hargreaves has drawn attention to the use of the "banlieue" tag, claiming that it is merely a continuation of the marginalising of these authors, similar to the term "beur literature," which could potentially lead to stigmatisation: "Autre signe de cette exclusion, leurs écrits sont souvent traités comme une espèce de sous-littérature, classés comme de simples 'témoignages' sans véritable intérêt littéraire."¹⁶ However, there are several reasons why I believe that this term is the most appropriate in the context of this thesis.

Writing in 2008, Michèle Bacholle-Bošković considered whether a "Beur children's literature" could be said to exist. She investigated which authors in this demographic were writing for children, when the books began to appear and the major themes of the novels, and she deliberated over whether it could be considered a literature in its own right or if it was part of a national corpus. She concluded that "on ne peut pas parler d'une littérature beure de jeunesse comme on a parlé d'une littérature beure ... le corpus est très restreint."¹⁷ However, Bacholle-Bošković was largely considering novels for younger children. In a 2009 article entitled *Auteurs de jeunesse Franco-Maghrébins : Un modèle d'intégration?*, she gives the reasons why she believes that those authors writing for children should be considered in a manner different to those from the same demographic who publish books for adults: she believes that the authors she was investigating – including Azouz Begag – were not engaged in a process of challenging Franco-French hegemony in the way their contemporaries writing for the adult market were, as evidenced by the

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Michèle Bacholle-Bošković, "Et les enfants, alors? Une littérature beure de jeunesse?," *Expressions maghrébines* 7, no. 1 (2008): 171. She does not address any of the novels by the authors in the corpus, although three of them had been published in the years preceding the article's release, and a further three were published that same year.

fact that "leur ethnicité – et leur religion – n'est remarquée, ni n'est-elle pertinente."¹⁸ In fact, according to her investigations: "S'il existe une littérature de jeunesse arabo-française, elle aurait pour principal (voire seul) critère les origines de ses auteurs; éliminées les dimensions autobiographique, ethnographique, historique, même sociologique des textes et surtout, la dimension périphérique."¹⁹ The texts under investigation contradict some of these characteristics. Some of the novels in the corpus do address issues of ethnicity, a fact which is hardly surprising given the increased popularity and electoral success of the *Front national* in recent years. In particular, Faïza Guène's most recent novel, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, places a large emphasis on issues of ethnic tension and stereotyping, and Habiba Mahany's *Kiffer sa race* advocates strongly for the destruction of the boundaries between different ethnicities in France. Religion on the other hand, is treated in a strikingly different manner. Many of the novels mention religion in passing, yet it remains in the background for the most part, as will be outlined in Chapter Three.

Bacholle-Bošković outlines that "un faible nombre"²⁰ of the texts for young people written by the *beur* authors she was examining, "porte ouvertement sur le racisme, la violence dans les banlieues,"²¹ and that they frequently highlight daily life rather than privileging *le fantastique*.²² This is only partially the case in the texts under investigation in the thesis. While the authors frequently mention riots, violence, and police aggression – an important aspect of the realism inherent in these novels – these issues are rarely privileged and never constitute the central elements of the story.²³ That these matters are not ignored, but are not granted undue importance, highlights their place and relative insignificance in the lives of most of the residents of the *banlieues*, in stark opposition to the representations common in the mainstream media. As with the representation of ethnicity, racism is present in many of these novels although, as will be shown, it frequently operates on several levels and is not just directed at those from a minority background.

18 Michèle Bacholle-Bošković, "Auteurs de jeunesse Franco-Maghrébins: Un modèle d'intégration?," *Neohelicon* 36, no. 1 (2009): 73.

19 Bacholle-Bošković, "Et les enfants, alors?," 174.

20 Bacholle-Bošković, "Auteurs de jeunesse," 72.

21 Ibid.

22 This perhaps reflects the relative newness of writing from this demographic and serves as an interesting parallel with children's literature. In the beginning, children's literature focussed on everyday events and scenarios, before developing its own sub-genres, such as fantasy, sci-fi and the somewhat controversial "paranormal romance" categories. Perhaps, given time to develop and evolve, authors from the *banlieue* writing for a YA audience, will also turn to these subgenres.

23 Although riots between *banlieue* youth and police do play quite a prominent role in *Le poids d'une âme*, they mostly serve a catalytic purpose.

Further, while the novels of the corpus are realistic texts that privilege everyday life, the majority feature elements of the fantastic, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Five. All of these reasons prove that, contrary to Bacholle-Bošković's findings in relation to the non-existence of "beur" children's literature, the same cannot be said for the authors under investigation, who have, whether consciously or otherwise, created works of fiction that capitalize on the power of young adult literature to inculcate social change.

The term "*banlieue* literature" is thus useful as it clearly distinguishes these books temporally from *beur* literature and its association with the 1980s and 1990s. The lack of explicit mention of the authors' ethnicity or a reference to immigration – as in many of the expressions described by Schneider, such as *romans de voyage* or *littérature immigrante* – in the expression *banlieue* literature means that it is marked spatially, rather than racially. The term refers to the geographical boundaries of the *banlieue* space and this emphasis on space, rather than ethnicity, reflects the authors' greater preoccupation with location and finding a place in French society. Although all of the authors in the corpus are of Algerian descent, their novels have the potential to empower young *banlieue* residents from outside of this demographic, as will be elaborated throughout the thesis. Schneider has described the writing by those of Maghrebi origin as "une écriture dynamique qui cherche sa place à travers des formes nouvelles qui procèdent d'un mouvement infini de construction/ déconstruction/ reconstruction."²⁴ The novels under investigation are thus engaged in a process of reconstructing the *banlieue*, which will benefit their young readers from these areas, as they recognise their maligned regions presented in a more realistic and positive light. *Banlieue* literature will be applied in a purely geographical sense, used to refer to work by those who were born and grew up in these peripheral zones,²⁵ in order to inscribe it in a tradition of cultural outputs emerging from these areas. In claiming that this literature can empower young people from the *banlieues*, I believe that retaining the term *banlieue* literature can in fact aid in this endeavour, as these young people see that there are opportunities for them to succeed in varying ways, without rejecting or hiding their place of birth from public view. Asked about how they feel about the term *la littérature de banlieue*, Rachedi and Mahany claimed in personal correspondence:

24 Schneider, *La littérature de jeunesse migrante*, 20.

25 The term *banlieue* film has been applied to work situated in the *banlieue* whose directors are not themselves from these zones. As an example of this, Mathieu Kassovitz' 1995 *La Haine*, is included under the rubric *banlieue* film although Kassovitz himself is, according to Tarr, "not a product of the *banlieue*." [Tarr, *Reframing difference*, 63.] This has not generally been the case for *banlieue* literature, as this label "is generally reserved for writings by minority ethnic 'insiders', rather than majority ethnic visitors." [Hargreaves, "*Banlieue blues*," 213.]

Cela a été une chance et une malchance. Une chance alors qu'il y a eu un vif intérêt pour les banlieues après les émeutes de 2005. Les éditeurs, les médias ont pensé à juste titre qu'il y avait un phénomène social sous-représenté dans la littérature française, c'est pourquoi en 2006, il y a plus de livres que d'ordinaire à ce sujet. La chance a donc été que la curiosité s'est portée sur nos romans. La malchance a été que, à part quelques exceptions notables, l'aspect social a parfois pris le pas sur l'aspect littéraire. Nous nous retrouvons une nouvelle fois dans une périphérie, cette fois-ci culturelle.²⁶

As this research will examine the manner in which these novels can empower young *banlieue* residents, it will, of necessity, lean on the social aspect of the literature in question. Particularly because *banlieue* writing "remains identified as a fundamentally realist genre anchored in autobiographical experiences of a social milieu that is foreign to most readers."²⁷ Rather than focussing solely on the social question, as Rachedi and Mahany described, the thesis will, however, highlight the literary quality and stylistic innovation inherent in the texts. In this way, it will demonstrate the thematic, linguistic and stylistic strategies employed by the authors in their attempt to create a more positive identity for the *banlieue* youth.

1.1.2 Young Adult Literature

In its broadest sense, children's literature comprises books that are marketed to children, included in the children's section of bookshops, which feature child or adolescent characters, and which frequently also include illustrations. A large part of what constitutes children's literature can thus be said to lie in decisions made by publishers, and the demographic which they wish to target for the marketing of a particular text. This can be a vague boundary and has recently become more blurred with phenomena such as the increased popularity of graphic novels, increased adult interest in fantasy novels – traditionally seen as the purview of children – and, most crucially, the crossover novel,²⁸ whereby many books, regardless of intended audience or market, can cross over the boundaries of "adolescent" and "adult" literature and be enjoyed by both groups. Examples of crossover novels include the *Harry Potter*²⁹ series, Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*

26 See Appendix 3.

27 Hargreaves, "Banlieue blues," 222.

28 For in-depth discussion of crossover novels, see: Sandra L. Beckett, *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2008).

29 J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997); J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998); J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and*

trilogy,³⁰ *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*,³¹ or the more recent success, *The Fault in Our Stars*.³² The case of Harry Potter is particularly interesting as, upon recognising that the books were also popular with adults, publishers began releasing the books with two different covers – one with large, colourful illustrations, to be placed in the children's literature section of bookshops and another, more subdued, cover to be marketed to adults. This in turn has led to debates about the causes of this phenomenon, whereby a great number of adults read books that are ostensibly for children, with some critics claiming that this blurring of boundaries is a sign of the "dumbing down" of adults' literary tastes.³³ Conversely, occasionally books originally intended for an adult audience end up widely read by a teenage audience. So, in reality, although the publishing market has a lot to do with how a text is viewed, publisher's definitions are not necessarily helpful in defining children's literature.

In order to provide a working definition of YA literature, we must briefly consider what is meant by the term children's literature. For a long time, children's literature was believed³⁴ to be literature that was thematically and stylistically simpler than that produced for adults. In the past, many subjects – such as sex, violence, drugs, and death, among others – were generally deemed unsuitable for children's books, which were believed to have more obvious didactic ends. Over the course of the twentieth century, however, this narrow view was gradually questioned and problematized. Changes in critical perspectives on children's books have arisen also, due to their increased stylistic and thematic complexity, as evidenced by the array of texts dealing with previously taboo issues that have been

the Prisoner of Azkaban (London: Bloomsbury, 1999); J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000); J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003); J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005); J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

30 Philip Pullman, *Northern Lights* (London: Scholastic, 1995); Philip Pullman, *The Subtle Knife* (London: Scholastic, 1997); Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass* (London: Scholastic/David Fickling Books, 2000).

31 Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003).

32 John Green, *The Fault in Our Stars* (New York: Dutton Books, 2012).

33 See for example: Jasper Rees, "We're all reading children's books," *The Telegraph*, November 17 2003. Accessed: July 12 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/3606678/Were-all-reading-childrens-books.html>; A.S. Byatt, "Harry Potter and the Childish Adult," *The New York Times* July 7 2003. Accessed: July 12 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/07/opinion/harry-potter-and-the-childish-adult.html>.

34 For in depth discussion on the history of children's literature, see: Peter Hunt, *An Introduction to Children's Literature* (Oxford: University Press, 1994).

published in recent decades,³⁵ and an increase in stylistically innovative texts.³⁶ Although children's literature has its roots in didacticism,³⁷ and continues to serve didactic purposes, the majority of books for children published today are far removed from this earlier form of overtly moralistic novel. Penny Brown, in her two-volume *Critical History of French Children's Literature* which traces the history and development of writing and publishing for children in France from 1600 to the present day,³⁸ outlined the prevalence of such moral instruction in early children's novels:

The evolution of children's books in France had, since the seventeenth century, always been firmly associated with education and the process of socialisation, and ... the production of these books remained closely linked with a pedagogical agenda of one sort or another until after World War II. A didactic element is, in effect, one of the characteristics commonly adduced to distinguish 'children's literature' from 'literature' at large.³⁹

These early children's books aimed to teach children good manners and proper decorum, a type of literature which is rarely seen these days. Yet, contemporary works do retain didactic elements, albeit in a different way. As outlined in the introduction, Kimberley Reynolds believes that many novels focus on inculcating social change by encouraging readers to

35 See for example: Melvin Burgess, *Junk* (London: Andersen Press, 1996); Judy Blume, *Forever... : a novel* (Scarsdale, N.Y.: Bradbury Press, 1975); Linda Glovach, *Beauty Queen* (New York: Harper Teen, 1998); Rebecca Godfrey, *The Torn Skirt* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002); Julie Ann Peters, *By The Time You Read This, I'll Be Dead* (New York: Disney-Hyperion, 2009).

36 See for example: Markus Zusak, *The Book Thief* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006); Alice Sebold, *The Lovely Bones* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2002); David Almond, *Skellig* (London: Hodder Children's Books, 1998); David Almond, *My Name is Mina* (London: Hodder Children's Books, 2010).

37 For more on didacticism in children's literature, see: John Rowe Townsend, *Written for Children: An Outline of English-Language Children's Literature* (London: Miller, 1965); Lesnik-Oberstein, "Defining Children's Literature.,"; Perry Nodelman, "Pleasure and Genre: Speculations on the Characteristics of Children's Fiction," *Children's Literature* 28 (2000).

38 Interestingly, although Brown's history of children's literature in France continues up to 2008, she does not mention any writing emerging from the *banlieues*, or written by members of the North African community in France, although some authors from this demographic, including Azouz Begag, had been publishing books for children and young adults since the early 1990s. This omission is perhaps as a result of there being too few books by this demographic to be deemed worthy of inclusion in a text which spans such a long time-period, or perhaps because Brown herself was potentially unaware of the existence of such novels.

39 Brown, *Critical History*, 3.

approach ideas from new perspectives, and can thus contribute to social transformation. According to Peter Hunt, one of the foremost scholars of children's literature who has written extensively⁴⁰ on the subject:

Didacticism (in the sense of deliberate indoctrination or specific pedantry) is far from dead in modern children's literature, and it may be that because it is ineffective when it is obvious, it tends to disguise itself in modes of telling and controlling.⁴¹

The didacticism inherent in contemporary novels is much less obvious and overt than the earlier form, which may render the texts more likely to leave a lasting impression on young people, who are quite capable of understanding when they are being patronised. In fact, from the 1970s, books for younger readers became:

...less optimistic than those which had gone before, focusing on ways of coping with difficult situations rather than providing outright solutions. Correspondingly, the tone was less overtly didactic: authors assumed the role of sympathetic older siblings rather than wise instructors; Judy Blume's sympathetic treatment of real-life problems in her novels caused many children to write to her with their own confidences.⁴²

Most books aimed at the children's market contain an element of optimism, positivity or hope; in a 2009 review of the most common trends in Young Adult literature for the *International Reading Association*, Melanie D. Koss and William H. Teale noted that among their representative sample of books for young adult readers, "hopeful endings predominated."⁴³ Even if books for younger readers do not necessarily always have a happy ending, as traditionally seen in children's stories with a "happily ever after" outcome, the narrator will usually leave the reader with a sense that things are improving, and that there is hope for a better future.

The broad category "children's literature," then, can be broken down by age groups – which, again, are not definitively fixed, as categorisation within a specific age group is also a choice made by publishers and bookshop managers, and many children will read

40 See for example: Hunt, *Children's Literature*; Peter Hunt, ed. *Understanding Children's Literature* (London: Routledge, 1999); Peter Hunt, ed. *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History* (Oxford: University Press, 1995); Peter Hunt, *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991)..

41 Hunt, *Criticism*, 117.

42 Lucy Pearson and Kimberley Reynolds, "Realism," in *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*, ed. David Rudd (London: Routledge, 2010), 69.

43 Melanie D. Koss and William H. Teale, "What's Happening in YA Literature? Trends in Books for Adolescents," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 52, no. 7 (2009): 569.

books from other age categories. These age group categories include, for example, "0-4 years", "5-8 years", "8-12 years" and "teenage", "adolescent" or "Young Adult" fiction. It is the latter category with which this thesis is concerned, and our preferred term is Young Adult (YA) literature, following Alleen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth L. Donelson, both professors at Arizona State University who have written, jointly and separately, on the subject of YA literature. In their discussion of the appropriateness of the various terms used to describe literature for this age-group – such as YA, teen fiction or teenage books – the authors claim that they "confess to feeling pretentious when referring to a twelve- or thirteen-year-old as a *young adult*, but we shy away from using the term *adolescent literature* because as one librarian told us, 'It has the ugly ring of pimples and puberty,' and 'it suggests *immature* in a derogatory sense.'"⁴⁴ They believe that while confusion will remain about the correct term to use in reference to this type of literature, "at least in academic circles chances are that young adult is so firmly established that it will continue to be used for the near future."⁴⁵

YA literature, when compared to children's literature in general, is a relatively new concept, which only evolved after the concept of adolescence itself evolved in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, when teenagers began to be viewed as a distinct group, neither children nor adults.⁴⁶ Young adult novels came into their own in the 1960s and 1970s, with the rise of the "problem novel",⁴⁷ and authors such as S.E. Hinton – whose 1967 novel *The Outsiders*⁴⁸ is considered by many critics to be the first true YA book – and Judy Blume. Blume's books caused much controversy in the 1970s, as they deal with problems that parents can deem unsuitable for young readers, such as

44 Alleen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth L. Donelson, *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, 8th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2009), 3.

45 Ibid., 4.

46 For a discussion on the evolution of the modern conception of childhood, see: Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of childhood*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962). Similarly, for a discussion on the evolution of the concept of adolescence, see: Joseph F. Kett, "Reflections on the history of adolescence in America," *The History of the Family* 8, no. 3 (2003).

47 For discussion of problem novels, see: Alleen Pace Nilsen, "That Was Then ... This Is Now," *School Library Journal* 40, no. 4 (1994); Julia Eccleshare, "Teenage Fiction: romances, contemporary problem novels," in *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 1996); Sheila Egoff, "The Problem Novel," in *Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature*, ed. Sheila Egoff (Toronto & New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

48 S.E. Hinton, *The Outsiders* (New York: Viking Press, 1967).

masturbation (in *Deenie*⁴⁹) and questioning religion (notably in *Are you there God? It's me, Margaret*⁵⁰). Perhaps the most controversial of her books was *Forever*⁵¹, which dealt with the topic of first love and first sex. According to Blume herself:

Fear has always made people anxious, and we are living in fearful times. . . . Book banning satisfies a need for parents to feel in control of their children's lives. This fear is often disguised as moral outrage. They want to believe that if their children don't read about something, their children won't know about it. And if they don't know about it, it won't happen.⁵²

Despite this, Blume's books remain popular, and she remains "encouraged ... by how many children and their parents and teachers are speaking out and defending children's right to read. Her message is that parents have 'every right to decide what their child should read, but not what all children should read.'"⁵³ The YA literature market has continued to grow since the 1980s, with numerous new titles appearing each year, as outlined by Melanie Koss who claimed in 2009: "In the last decade, young adult literature has grown extensively, with significant numbers of books being published for the teen audience, ages 12–18."⁵⁴ It is now a very lucrative market, with huge opportunity for film adaptations and merchandising options.⁵⁵

There is also some fluidity inherent in the term YA, as outlined by Andrea Schwenke Wylie, as there are different conceptions of what constitutes YA literature in different parts of the world. For instance, in Australia the term "young adult literature" now includes college-age students. She cites Russ MacMath who, in an article entitled *New Voices in Young Adult Fiction*, described writing for this age group as "explicitly for the

49 Judy Blume, *Deenie* (Scarsdale, N.Y.: Bradbury Press, 1973).

50 Judy Blume, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Bradbury Press, 1970).

51 Blume, *Forever*.

52 Nilsen and Donelson, *Today's Young Adults*, 74.

53 Ibid.

54 Melanie D. Koss, "Young Adult Novels with Multiple Narrative Perspectives: The Changing Nature of YA Literature," *The ALAN Review*, Summer (2009). Koss here references: Thomas W. Bean and Karen Moni, "Developing students' critical literacy: Exploring identity construction in young adult fiction," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 46, no. 8 (2003); Kathleen T. Horning et al., "Publishing in 2005," *CCBC Choices 2006*, Cooperative Children's Book Center, University of Wisconsin, Madison. September 16, 2006, <http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/choiceintro06.asp>; Mary Owen, "Developing a Love of Reading: Why Young Adult Literature is Important," *Orana*, Australian Library and Information Association. March, 2003.

55 As evidence of this, consider the incredible success of the film adaptations of the *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *Hunger Games* franchises.

post-adolescent, 'over the age of consent' market."⁵⁶ So, like the broader category of children's literature, YA literature can be a blurry concept, often in the crossover zone or even adult literature zone. Nathalie Prince has discussed the problematic nature of the concept of YA literature, claiming: "Ce n'est pas tant la littérature pour adolescent [sic] qui pose problème que sa réunion générique avec la littérature pour enfants, même s'il est légitime de se demander ce qui distingue la littérature pour adolescent [sic] de la littérature adulte."⁵⁷ Although sometimes similar in theme and content, YA and adult literature are fundamentally different in key ways.⁵⁸ In order to investigate these differences, Jonathan Stephens examined a sample of YA novels to establish what is happening in 21st century YA literature, and what distinguishes it from literature for adults. He found that contemporary YA novels have five distinguishing characteristics: the first two being that they are written about teens, in a distinctly teen voice, while the third dictates that they feature the journey toward identity. Stephens' fourth condition is that the protagonists must tackle adult issues in their teenage lives and, finally, that they have the same potential for literary value as novels for adults.⁵⁹ This is in line with Steven VanderStaay's definition:

Young-adult literature is literature wherein the protagonist is either a teenager or one who approaches problems from a teenage perspective. Such novels are generally of moderate length and told from the first person. Typically they describe initiation into the adult world, or the surmounting of a contemporary problem forced upon the protagonist(s) by the adult world. Though generally written for a teenage reader, such novels – like all fine literature – address the entire spectrum of life.⁶⁰

This definition is a useful one and raises interesting questions, as adolescence, a time of increased reflection and introspection, is also when young people begin to think about their place in the world. As children grow into adolescence, they begin to see the world from the perspective of others to a greater extent, and this contributes to rendering adolescence an ideal time to encounter new ideas, which may, in turn, aid them in forming their opinions, beliefs and values. For the purposes of this thesis, then, YA fiction can

56 Andrea Schwenke Wyle, "Expanding the View of First-Person Narration," *Children's Literature in Education* 30, no. 3 (1999): 197. Wyle here references: Russ MacMath, "New Voices in Young Adult Fiction," *The Children's Reader* Winter (1996).

57 Nathalie Prince, *La littérature de jeunesse*, Collection U (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010), 10.

58 This is not to say that YA literature cannot also be read and appreciated by adults but that it is a unique genre with its own features.

59 Stephens, "Young Adult."

60 Steven VanderStaay, "Young-Adult Literature: A Writer Strikes the Genre," *The English Journal* 81, no. 4 (1992): 48.

be defined as literature which features young protagonists, and which is widely read by adolescents, although this is not to say that it is read exclusively by them. Many of the issues encountered in the books under investigation are relevant for people of all ages, as they address the entire spectrum of life, as per VanderStaay's definition. Although the authors in question were initially writing for the adult market, and are included on mainstream lists in publisher's catalogues, they fall under the category of YA literature, as they feature young protagonists, and describe the daily realities of life in a maligned and stigmatised area, which fulfils the criterion of the young protagonist tackling adult problems, provided in both of the definitions above. With one exception, all of the books in the corpus are also narrated in the first person, an important factor in aiding young readers to identify with the protagonists, which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

As described by Anne Schneider, who has written extensively on children's books written by those of Algerian descent, Faïza Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain* was originally published for the adult market, but was later reprinted as part of the "*Histoires de vie*" collection by Hachette's imprint *Le Livre de Poche Jeunesse*. Schneider hypothesised several possible reasons for this re-designation, including "une démocratisation de la littérature beur ou [un] discours suffisamment connu, légitimé littérairement pour justifier son passage en jeunesse".⁶¹ One possible reason why these authors initially did not consider their work to be YA literature lies in the potential marginalising effect of being included in such publisher's lists. In an interview with Michèle Bacholle-Bošković, Leïla Sebbar insisted that she does not consider herself a children's author, although she has published three novels that were included in the children's catalogue by her publisher. This demonstrates reluctance on the part of, at least some, authors to limit their potential audience by being considered children's authors. Guène's two subsequent novels, *Du rêve pour les oufs* and *Les gens du Balto*, are marketed to a dual audience, included under both the *Lectures adolescentes* and *Littérature française (XXe-XXIème)* categories on the *Livre de Poche* website. Guène changed publishers, moving to Éditions Fayard, for the publication of her most recent novel and *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* is categorised simply as *Littérature française* by this publishing house. Although the protagonist of this novel is older than her earlier protagonists, and the novel is more mature in content than some of the others, it comprises an extension and development of the themes addressed in Guène's earlier works. It features several young adult characters, and places an emphasis on key events

61 Schneider, "Entre reliance et résilience," 88.

in the childhood of Mourad and his sisters, with Mourad spending a significant amount of his narrative reflecting on stories from their youth. It has additionally been included in some lists of books for younger readers⁶² and it was consequently decided to include this novel in the corpus.

The situation of Mabrouck Rachedi and Habiba Mahany is somewhat less straightforward than that of Guène. Rachedi's novels (including *La petite Malika*, co-written with Mahany) were all published as part of the *Littérature française* collection of JC Lattès, while Mahany's solo effort, *Kiffer sa race*, is included under the category *Romans contemporains*. There are, however, several reasons why their novels have been included in the corpus. Foremost among these is that all of the texts feature child or adolescent characters. Sabrina from *Kiffer sa race* is sixteen years old, while *Le poids d'une âme*'s Lounès Amri turns eighteen over the course of the novel. There is ample evidence from Rachedi's blog that he facilitated several workshops with school students on *Le poids d'une âme*.⁶³ The format of *Le petit Malik* and *La petite Malika* is identical, and quite innovative, in that each chapter comprises a snapshot of a single episode in successive years of the protagonists' lives from the age of five until the age of twenty-six. When asked in an interview why twenty-six was the chosen cut-off point, Mahany explained:

26 ans correspond à peu près à la fin de « l'adulthood », cette période qui prolonge l'adolescence et précède l'âge adulte. On peut penser qu'à cet âge, on termine un premier cycle de vie et que l'on devient pleinement adulte... C'est pourquoi nous avons décidé de clore le déroulé de l'histoire à ce moment-là.⁶⁴

Thus the authors themselves believe that, although both Malik and Malika are twenty-six years of age by the close of their respective novels, they are still not truly adult characters, but form part of an in-between age-group: not quite children and not quite adults. One might even be tempted to refer to this concept of "adulthood" to which Mahany referred as "young-adulthood."

62 See for example: "Les Lectures de la librairie Millepages BD & Jeunesse," *Librest*, Accessed: January 7 2015, <https://www.librest.com/nos-lectures/2-millepages-bd-et-jeunesse/un-homme-ca-ne-pleure-pas,1884663-10-120.html>.

63 See for example: Mabrouck Rachedi, "Entre les murs," *La Nouvelle Racaille Française (blog)*. May 30, 2008, Accessed: September 27 2011, <http://www.metronews.fr/blog/nouvelreracaillefrancaise/page/31/>.

64 "Habiba Mahany et Mabrouck Rachedi en interview : un roman tendre sur la petite Malika que l'on voit grandir sur plus de vingt ans, écrit par un duo de frère et sœur," *La Fringale*, Accessed: January 6 2015, http://www.lafringaleculturelle.com/Habiba-Mahany-et-Mabrouck-Rachedi-en-interview-un-roman-tendre-sur-la-petite-Malika-que-l-on-voit-grandir-sur-plus-de_a145.html.

Upon its release, *Le petit Malik* was posited by many critics as a modern, urban version of the classic series for children, *Le petit Nicolas*,⁶⁵ although Rachedi has stated in interview that this was not a conscious decision while writing the book:

Pour tout vous avouer, « Le petit Malik » n'était pas mon premier titre et je n'avais pas envisagé d'y ajouter des illustrations. C'est mon excellente éditrice qui, lorsqu'elle a lu le manuscrit, a opéré le rapprochement entre le ton de l'un et de l'autre. Elle m'a suggéré le titre, que j'ai immédiatement trouvé très bon.⁶⁶

This *rapprochement* that his editor saw between Rachedi's text and the iconic French series is especially interesting. It shows that his editor was willing to place this text within the French tradition of children's books, and wished to stress this connection through the chosen title. This is especially pertinent, as *Le petit Nicolas* is viewed as "a celebration of childhood, and, to an extent, a celebration of transgression,"⁶⁷ elements which are also reflected in Rachedi's text. Aside from these similarities, and that the illustrations in Rachedi's text are similar in style to those in the earlier books – albeit with a more modern, urban flavour – there are further parallels between the two. They are both narrated in the first person, by child characters (although Malik, unlike Nicolas, ages throughout the novel and thus the narration becomes more mature in style, as well as content), both are episodic in nature, and the various episodes are presented in simple language, and in an oral, "realistic and caricatural"⁶⁸ style with liberal use of slang. It seemed a small step then, when the authors decided to co-author a text with a female protagonist, to provide an immediate connection to the first text by calling it *La petite Malika*.⁶⁹

This desire on the part of the authors to portray young characters, and the similarities between the two later texts and one of the most iconic children's texts in the French language, as well as the focus on issues and concerns related to growing up, render these novels YA literature. Particularly as they are part of a group of texts that form, "en effet, « d'œuvres frontières » entre la littérature de jeunesse et la littérature pour adultes, car elles

65 See for example: Victor de Sepausy, "Le Petit Malik de Mabrouck Rachedi, un Petit Nicolas modernisé," *ActuaLitté*, November 17, 2008, Accessed: July 11 2014, <http://www.actualitte.com/les-maisons/le-petit-malik-de-mabrouck-rachedi-un-petit-nicolas-modernise-5976.htm>.

66 Gangoueus, "Interview de Mabrouck Rachedi," *Chez Gangoueus (blog)*, February 14, 2010, Accessed: July 11 2014, <http://gangoueus.blogspot.ie/2010/02/interview-de-mabrouck-rachedi.html>.

67 Brown, *Critical History*, 301.

68 Ibid.

69 This latter novel is included on a list of novels suitable for high-potential children by the *Association Suisse pour les Enfants Précoces*. "Livres Pouvant Intéresser Les Enfants A Haut Potentiel," *Association Suisse pour les Enfants Précoces*, December, 2014, Accessed: January 19 2015, www.asep-suisse.org.

retracent le parcours⁷⁰ of child and adolescent characters, as outlined by Schneider. In personal correspondence with Rachedi and Mahany, these authors claimed that, although they did not set out to write for a young adult audience, or any particular audience, they are aware of their readership: "Lors de nos premiers livres, nous étions complètement inconscients. C'est après nos rencontres avec notre public que nous avons réalisé l'impact que nos personnages pouvaient avoir sur les gens, en particulier les jeunes."⁷¹ They have been able to further see the effect that their work has on young people, particularly from the *banlieues*, as they occasionally facilitate workshops and presentations with young people, both in schools and organised by community groups and multimedia libraries, and have insight into the profound impact their words can have on young readers:

Dans les écoles, on peut dire qu'il y a un phénomène d'identification immédiat qui nous facilite les choses. Quand ils pensent littérature, les jeunes pensent à des auteurs morts, ou très vieux, ou qui ont des noms « français » comme Martin Durand. Quand ils voient qu'une Habiba ou un Mabrouck qui ont des parcours qui ressemblent aux leurs, ont écrit des livres et qu'ils sont reçus dans des écoles, ils sont surpris et intéressés.⁷²

Rachedi, in particular, has claimed that "la plume est mon arme d'expression massive et les interventions scolaires sont mes armes de transmission massive."⁷³ This expression bears striking similarity to Annie Ernaux's statement on the power of writing: "Je le sens comme le couteau, l'arme presque, dont j'ai besoin."⁷⁴ When asked, in personal correspondence, to elaborate on these expressions, Rachedi explained:

Plus jeune, j'ai souffert que ma voix soit peu entendue. Je me disais que quel que soit mon message, aussi intéressant pourrait-il être (et à l'adolescence, je croyais très immodestement que ce que j'avais à dire était intéressant !), il ne pourrait pas être entendu. J'ai pu m'évader à travers la lecture. L'écriture a été un moyen d'avoir l'illusion du contrôle, au moins sur les personnages, et du partage, quand je faisais lire certains textes aux autres. Aujourd'hui, j'ai cette chance de pouvoir publier des romans, des

70 Schneider, *La littérature de jeunesse migrante*, 10. Schneider, here referring to the novels of Mohammed Dib and Leïla Sebbar, cites: Isabelle Nières-Chevrel, *Littérature de jeunesse, incertaines frontières* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006); Sandra L. Beckett, "Roman pour tous ?," in *Perspectives contemporaines du roman pour la jeunesse*, ed. Virginie Douglas (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003).

71 See Appendix 3.

72 See Appendix 3.

73 Gangoueus, "Interview de Mabrouck Rachedi."

74 Annie Ernaux and Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, *L'écriture comme un couteau: entretien avec Frédéric-Yves Jeannet* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011), 36.

nouvelles, des scénarios, des tribunes dans les journaux... Une façon de m'exprimer positivement (contrairement aux armes de destruction massive dont la formule est un détournement) et massivement.⁷⁵

These factors combine to confirm the wide teenage readership that these authors enjoy, as well as demonstrating that they are not only aware of this readership, but are also aware of the potential impact of their books, particularly on young people from the *banlieue*, who frequently, according to the authors, "manquent cruellement de confiance en eux, qui sont en déficit de repères."⁷⁶ In this way, they believe that their novels may empower young people from the *banlieue* and encourage them to be more confident and take control of their lives.

Although these authors did not initially intend to write books for YA readers, the presence of young protagonists, and the fact that the novels deal thematically with issues that impact young people render them suitable for inclusion in this category. The authors and, in some cases, the publishers, are aware of their young readership, which adds further credibility to this claim. Finally, the potential of these novels to empower YA readers, which the authors acknowledge, means it will be productive to examine these novels as YA literature, and will allow the thesis to establish the strategies that are being used to achieve this empowerment.

1.2 The Empowering Potential of YA Literature

Kimberley Reynolds believes that "at times of cultural change, children's literature becomes a place for visionary thinking and ... political engagement"⁷⁷ and she elaborates that while:

... childhood is certainly a time for learning to negotiate and find a place in society ... it is also about developing individual potential suited to a future in which societies could be different in some significant ways ... It is [thus] not accidental that at decisive moments in social history children have been at the centre of ideological activity or that writing for children has been put into the service of those who are trying to disseminate new world views, values and social models.⁷⁸

75 See Appendix 3.

76 See Appendix 3.

77 Reynolds, *Radical Children's Literature*, 16.

78 Ibid., 2.

The potentially radical nature of children's literature, presented here by Reynolds, should not be underestimated. Many children's literature critics, including Reynolds, Jack Zipes and Julia Mickenberg have posited this idea. According to Reynolds, "Mickenberg ... sees a connection between the student-led radicalism of 1960s America and the children's literature of the 1950s, which actively urged the young to change the world."⁷⁹ This connection gives hope that *banlieue* literature read by young readers will indeed have a positive impact on the way these regions are viewed, both from within and outside them, in the future.

Jack Zipes claims that despite the important role literature plays in the socialization process, it is important to be aware that both "production of literature and the act of reading must be viewed in light of socially determined channels through which language transmits class codes and values."⁸⁰ He further claims that there is a need for a non-conformist literature that challenges social expectations, a literature that would allow young readers the "freedom to establish their own identities with material and episodes that are believable and authentic when measured against their own experience."⁸¹ Ability to identify with fictional characters is important for child and adolescent readers, particularly when authors are attempting to effect social change, as this identification will allow young readers to view issues from the perspective of others, and encourage them to apply new insights to real-world situations. Writing for young people thus becomes, for Zipes, a social act "with political implications and directives which are not easily grasped but [which are] crucial for the qualitative advance of civilisation."⁸²

This becomes even more important for children from minority cultures. Multicultural children's literature can be defined as consisting of "literary works 'that are explicitly about multicultural societies' or 'are implicitly multicultural in the sense of inscribing readers from other cultures inside their own cultural dynamics.'"⁸³ In their book, *Critical Multicultural Analysis of Children's Literature*, Maria José Botelho and Masha Kabakow Rudman highlight the prevalence, in multicultural children's literature scholarship, of the

79 Ibid., 19. Reynolds here references: Julia L. Mickenberg, *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 26.

80 Jack Zipes, "Second Thoughts on Socialization through Literature for Children," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 5 (1981): 22.

81 Ibid., 26.

82 Ibid., 30-1.

83 Mingshui Cai, *Multicultural Literature for Children and Young Adults: Reflections on Critical Issues* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2002), 4. Cai here references: R.W. Dasenbrock, "Intelligibility and Meaningfulness in Multicultural Literature," *PMLA* 102, no. 1 (1987): 10.

metaphors of mirrors, windows and doors, of using children's literature "to provide ways to affirm and gain entry into one's own culture and the culture of others."⁸⁴ They claim that children's literature depicts experiences and ways of living that are different from the reader's own and that as such "It offers a window into society and creates a space where children can meet people across different lines of social difference ..., providing vantage points from which readers can view multiple lives."⁸⁵ Not only can reading literature lead children and young adults to encounter other cultures, it can also provide a vital means through which they can come to develop an understanding and respect for these other cultures. Mingshui Cai, one of the foremost scholars on multicultural children's literature, claims that many writers and educators:

... agree that reading multicultural literature can help people cross cultural borders to achieve mutual understanding and intercultural harmony. As Pat Mora points out, to ease ethnic tensions, literature can be put to work as an art form that "moves readers to hear another human's voice, and thus to experience the doubts, fears, and joys of a person who may not look or sound at all like us."⁸⁶

He claims that this aspect of multicultural literature, as well as its ability to encourage readers to consider the world differently and to identify – and potentially work towards solving – ethnicity-related problems, is "how multicultural literature functions to empower us."⁸⁷ Not only can quality literature featuring minority culture protagonists empower readers in general, but it can also have a major impact on the cultural identity of young people from those minority cultures. In their 2008 article entitled "Building Arab Americans' Cultural Identity and Acceptance With Children's Literature," Tami Craft Al-Hazza and Katherine T. Bucher emphasise the importance of literature in helping children develop their cultural identity, and in assisting them in understanding and accepting other cultures. Seeing their environments and culture reflected positively in literature can aid young people to build "a sense of cultural identity and self-esteem, especially within their cultural group,"⁸⁸ because as they "identify with the characters in

84 Maria José Botelho and Masha K. Rudman, *Critical Multicultural Analysis of Children's Literature: Mirrors, Windows, and Doors* (New York: Routledge, 2009), xiii.

85 Ibid., 17.

86 Cai, *Multicultural Literature*, 117. Cai here references: Pat Mora, "Confessions of a Latina author," *The New Advocate* 17, no. 4 (1998): 283.

87 Cai, *Multicultural Literature*, 134.

88 Tami Craft Al-Hazza and Katherine T. Bucher, "Building Arab Americans' Cultural Identity and Acceptance With Children's Literature," *The Reading Teacher* 62, no. 3 (2008): 210.

the stories they are reading, children form their morals, values, and concepts about the world."⁸⁹ This is important, as Al-Hazza and Bucher acknowledge that children who develop this strong sense of cultural identity and self-esteem try harder and work longer, accept more responsibilities and attain higher levels of academic success than those who do not.⁹⁰ By itself, however, this sense of cultural identity is not sufficient, as self-esteem and concepts of identity are also affected by outside influences, such as racial or ethnic discrimination. Therefore young people from minority cultures must see that their culture is accepted by members of the mainstream cultural community, and in order to achieve this, "the mainstream [must be] changed so that it makes accommodations and accepts the differences among students."⁹¹ Given the transformative power of the books that children read, as acknowledged by Reynolds above, one of the ways to do this is by including realistic and positive, rather than stereotyped, depictions of the minority culture in literature for young people. Al-Hazza and Bucher contend that:

In addition to serving as a "vehicle for socialization and change", literature allows children to

- Learn about their own culture and heritage and the culture and heritage of others
- Replace stereotypes with an understanding of the similarities and differences among diverse cultures
- Identify the problems faced by immigrants and refugees
- Understand "one's place in the world"
- "Forge a sense of interconnectedness and community"⁹²

Put more simply, as a result of reading multicultural literature:

... children of parallel cultures are beginning to see themselves reflected in the books they read, know their cultural heritage, and feel a sense of pride in being who they are and also being an equal member of the society. Children of mainstream culture are also starting to understand, accept, and respect parallel cultures.⁹³

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., 211.

92 Ibid., 212. Al-Hazza and Bucher here reference: Violet J. Harris, ed. *Using multiethnic literature in the K-8 classroom* (Norwood, M.A.: Christopher-Gordon, 1997); Katherine T. Bucher and M. Lee Manning, *Young adult literature: Exploration, evaluation, and appreciation* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2006); Don Gallo, "Making time for literature with Middle Eastern perspectives," *English Journal* 96, no. 3 (2007); Joyce Stallworth, Louel Gibbons, and Leigh Fauber, "It's not on the list: An exploration of teachers' perspectives on using multicultural literature," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 49, no. 6 (2006).

93 Cai, *Multicultural Literature*, 130.

Literature can thus serve as a means for young members of the minority culture (in this case, the *banlieues*) to see themselves and their culture reflected in a more realistic and positive light, a counterpoint to the overtly negative representations of these regions commonly presented by French media. On the other hand, young readers from outside of these regions, who usually only have access to prevalent stereotyped representations, are presented with a new and more realistic representation, and may come to develop a new understanding of these regions and their inhabitants.

1.3 YA *Banlieue* Literature in Context

Given the wealth of research, outlined in the previous sections, undertaken on children's literature in the Anglophone context, it is now necessary to examine the place and significance of children's literature scholarship in France, before questioning how the books of the corpus, which I am examining as YA *banlieue* literature, have been seen to date in that country.

There does not appear to be the same level of scholarly interest in children's literature in France as there is in Anglophone universities.⁹⁴ Although there are a number of critical works dedicated to this subject, most articles tend to be confined to research on pedagogic aspects of books for children, or translation issues. Nathalie Prince's book *La littérature de jeunesse* consisted of an attempt to establish a literary theory of characters in children's literature, by tracing the history of the genre, as well as examining the history of the perceptions of childhood in France. Penny Brown's two-volume history of French children's literature, mentioned above, was a comprehensive history of children's books in France, from 1600 to 2008. Isabelle Nières-Chevrel has published many books and articles in French on the subject of children's literature,⁹⁵ but her focus is on children's literature in general terms, as well as on the reception of children's books in France. Clinical

94 Although there are many literary prizes awarded for children's literature in France, there is no French Children's Laureate, unlike in many English-speaking countries, including the United Kingdom, USA, Australia and Ireland.

95 See for example: Isabelle Nières-Chevrel, "Études de réception et littérature de jeunesse : quelques aspects spécifiques," *L'Esprit Créateur* 49, no. 1 (2009); Isabelle Nières-Chevrel, *Introduction à la littérature de jeunesse* (Paris: Didier Jeunesse, 2009).

psychologist Annie Rolland's 2008 text, *Qui a peur de la littérature ado?*, examines the reasons why adults frequently fear both the power of children's literature to change the established order, as well as the transitory nature of adolescence.⁹⁶

In 1993, Jean Perrot and Pierre Bruno co-edited a volume entitled *La littérature de jeunesse au croisement des cultures*,⁹⁷ in which various contributors teased out issues relating to multiculturalism in children's literature, but this took a global perspective and contained very few discussions of the situation in France. Virginie Douglas edited a 2003 book titled *Perspectives contemporaines du roman pour la jeunesse*,⁹⁸ which examined issues related to children's books, and their future direction in the digital age. In recent years, there has been an upsurge in research and publications on children's literature in France.⁹⁹ And yet, comparatively little research has been undertaken to date on literature for children emerging from the *banlieues*.

Douglas also recently edited a volume of collected essays entitled *Littérature de jeunesse et diversité culturelle*¹⁰⁰ which contained essays from the francophone panels of the 2009 IRSCS¹⁰¹ congress, held in Frankfurt, which incorporates studies on a wide range of areas that fall into the category of multicultural children's literature, but only one essay in this collection deals with literature from the *banlieue*, or by authors of Maghrebi descent. Anne Schneider's 2013 *Littérature de jeunesse migrante: Récits d'immigration de l'Algérie à la France*¹⁰² addresses some of these issues and authors, but includes authors from outside the *banlieues*, and many who were born outside of France. This relative lack of research on children's literature emerging from the *banlieue* regions is notable, as there is an extensive amount of research on adult literature from the *banlieues*, and in particular a large body of work dealing with *Beur* literature.¹⁰³

96 Annie Rolland, *Qui a peur de la littérature ado?* (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 2008).

97 Jean Perrot and Pierre Bruno, eds., *La littérature de jeunesse au croisement des cultures* (Paris: CRDP De l'Académie de Créteil, 1993).

98 Virginie Douglas, ed. *Perspectives contemporaines du roman pour la jeunesse* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003).

99 For a list of some of these publications, see: <http://www.ricochet-jeunes.org/ouvrages-de-recherche/theme/29-litterature-de-jeunesse-generalites>.

100 Virginie Douglas, ed. *Littérature pour la jeunesse et diversité culturelle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013).

101 International Research Society for Children's Literature.

102 Schneider, *La littérature de jeunesse migrante*.

103 See for example: Michèle Bacholle, *Un passé contraignant : Double bind et transculturation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000); Jean Déjeux, *La littérature maghrébine d'expression française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992); Nada Elia, "In the Making: Beur Fiction and Identity Construction," *World Literature Today* 71, no. 1 (1997); Alec G. Hargreaves, "Resistance and Identity in *Beur* Narratives," *Modern Fiction Studies* 35, no. 1 (1989); Alec G. Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction: Voices from the North African Immigrant Community in France* (Oxford: Berg, 1997);

Charles Bonn, in 2000, spoke about the emerging "Maghrebi or immigrant" literature for children, but this comprised a general examination of this new form of literature, rather than investigating a particular aspect or author(s). At the outset, he asked himself: "pourquoi, dans le champ lui-même problématique de la littérature maghrébine francophone, la littérature de jeunesse, qui pourtant fleurit, est-elle si peu visible par les approches critiques?"¹⁰⁴ He believes that there is a need for marginalising labels such as *littérature de jeunesse* and *littérature maghrébine* to be discarded, and that these literatures should be "exhumées du ghetto réducteur où elles sont souvent reléguées."¹⁰⁵ However, Bonn's overview is not confined to literature produced in France but also includes discussion of texts produced in the Maghreb. As mentioned in section 1.1.1, Michèle Bacholle-Bošković carried out, over three articles published in 2008 and 2009, a preliminary examination of the corpus of authors of Maghrebi descent writing for children.¹⁰⁶ She also has a more recent publication, *Paroles d'auteurs jeunesse: Autour du multiculturalisme et des minorités visibles en France*,¹⁰⁷ which consists of detailed interviews with thirteen authors and one illustrator who she feels fall into the category of multicultural children's literature. There are several essays and theses dealing with one or more of Guène's novels,¹⁰⁸ and a lesser

Alec G. Hargreaves, "La littérature issue de l'immigration maghrébine en France : recensement et évolution du corpus narratif," *Expressions Maghrébines* 7, no. 1 (2008); Jeannine Murray-Román, "Hom(e)ing Devices: Locating Identity in the Work of Tassadit Imache," *The French Review* 77, no. 6 (2004); Mireille Rosello, "The "Beur Nation": Toward a Theory of "Departenance"," *Research in African Literatures* 24, no. 3 (1993); Michel Laronde, *Autour du roman beur: Immigration et identité* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993); Michel Laronde, "Les littératures des immigrations en France. Question de nomenclature et directions de recherche," *Le Maghreb Littéraire* 1, no. 2 (1997); Martine Delvaux, "L'Ironie du sort : le tiers espace de la littérature beur," *The French Review* 68, no. 4 (1995); Mustapha Harzoune, "Littérature : les chausse-trapes de l'intégration," *Hommes et migrations* 1231 (2001); Reeck, *Writerly Identities*; François Desplanques, "Les beurs, leurs vieux et les autres," *Hommes et migrations*, no. 1144 (1991).

104 Charles Bonn, "La littérature de jeunesse maghrébine ou immigrée: quelques paramètres d'une émergence," Accessed online: July 19, 2010 <http://www.limag.refer.org/Textes/Bonn/littejeunesse.htm> (2000).

105 Ibid.

106 Michèle Bacholle-Bošković, "Ce qui lisent nos "têtes blondes": minorités visibles dans la France contemporaine," *The French Review* 81, no. 5 (2008); Bacholle-Bošković, "Et les enfants, alors?"; Bacholle-Bošković, "Auteurs de jeunesse."

107 Michèle Bacholle-Bošković, *Paroles d'auteurs jeunesse: Autour du multiculturalisme et des minorités visibles en France* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013).

108 See for example: Brinda J. 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, no. 2 (2010); Marc Sourdot, "Mots d'ados et mise en style : Kiffe kiffe demain de Faïza Guène" *Adolescence* 4, no. 70 (2009); Anouk Alquier, "La Banlieue Parisienne du Dehors au Dedans : Annie Ernaux et Faïza Guène," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 15, no. 4 (2011); Anne Sirén, "L'argot des cités en tant que marqueur d'identité: Étude sociolinguistique des termes argotiques dans *Kiffe kiffe demain* de Faïza Guène" (Université de Tampere, 2014); Mattias

number which examine the work of Mahany¹⁰⁹ and Rachedi.¹¹⁰ Essays discussing each of the three authors appear across two recently-published works on *Beur* literature.¹¹¹ The collection of essays from the IRSCCL congress in 2009, mentioned above, includes an essay by Anne Schneider on what she terms *la littérature de jeunesse migrante*, and focuses in particular on literature written by those from a Maghrebi background in France. She claims that this literature:

... s'inscrit dans le mouvement : elle récusé les fondements sociaux et linguistiques originels et s'efforce de faire bouger les normes. Contre l'écrit, l'oral ; contre le français normé, l'argot, l'anglais, le parler des banlieues. Mais aussi contre le lyrisme et le réalisme : l'humour, le cynisme, la mise à distance.¹¹²

Hélène Yhuel's masters thesis, *La représentation de la population issue de l'immigration maghrébine dans la littérature destinée ou accessible à la jeunesse*, deals with representations of those from a Maghrebi background in twenty different novels for or "accessible to" children. Her choice of terminology in the title of her thesis reflects the difficulties that can be experienced when defining children's literature, and the sometimes fluid nature of the distinction between literature for children and that for adults and young adults. This mirrors the difficulty in naming, and the multitude of differing labels for, literature produced by those from an immigrant background in France. Yhuel draws on Charles Bonn's *Littérature de jeunesse maghrébine ou immigrée: quelques paramètres d'une émergence*, mentioned above, for her analysis of this, claiming:

Aronsson, "La réception sur Internet de *Kiffé kiffé demain* de Faïza Guène" (paper presented at the XVIIIe congrès des romanistes scandinaves, Göteborg, 2012); Nadia Bouhadid, "L'aventure scripturale au cœur de l'autofiction dans *Kiffé kiffé demain* de Faïza Guène" (Université Mentouri, 2008); Sabrina Fatmi-Sakri, "*Du rêve pour les oufs* de Faïza Guène ou l'ironie comme stratégie de l'écriture féminine," *Synergies Algérie* 13 (2011).

109 See for example: Mame Fatou Niang, "De L'Autre Coté Du Periph' : Les Lieux De L'identité Dans Le Roman Féminin De Banlieue En France" (Louisiana State University, 2012); Mireille Le Breton, "Reinventing the *Banlieue* in Contemporary Urban Francophone Literature," *Transitions: Journal of Franco-Iberian Studies* 7, Special Issue: Beyond Hate (2011).

110 See for example: Ilaria Vitali, "Pari(s) 'extra muros'. Banlieues et imaginaires urbains dans quelques romans de l'extrême contemporain," *Ponti/Ponts* 11 (2011); Kenneth Olsson, "Le discours beur comme positionnement littéraire" (Doctoral Dissertation, Stockholm University, 2011); Christina Horvath, "Voices from the Ghetto ? Banlieue Mythmaking in Contemporary French Narratives," *Transitions: Journal of Franco-Iberian Studies* 7, Special Issue: Beyond Hate (2011).

111 Najib Redouane, ed. *Où en est la littérature « beur » ?* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012); Najib Redouane and Yvette Bénayoun-Szmidt, eds., *Qu'en est-il de la littérature « beur » au féminin ?* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012).

112 Schneider, "Entre reliance et résilience," 87.

... la littérature de jeunesse et la littérature « maghrébine ou immigrée » sont liées dans leur évolution. Ce sont des espaces nouveaux pour la réflexion littéraire, et tous deux semblent échapper aux efforts de classifications car leur identité est ambiguë, et leurs frontières sont floues.¹¹³

This echoes claims by Roderick McGillis¹¹⁴ on the similarities between postcolonial theory and children's literature and confirms the fluid nature of the boundaries between these types of literature.

As has been shown, very little research has been undertaken on YA literature emerging from the *banlieues*. The texts under investigation have not previously been studied as YA *banlieue* literature, but I believe that viewing them in this manner is both timely and productive and will allow these novels to be examined in a new light. Additionally, these texts have not previously been studied in terms of their ability to empower young people from these maligned zones.¹¹⁵ This research seeks to redress this lacuna, by examining the empowering potential of these novels, and the strategies used by the authors in order to achieve this empowerment and create a new identity for young *banlieue* residents.

1.4 Methodological Framework Employed in this Thesis

This research is based on a threefold approach to the analysis of the corpus – thematic, stylistic and linguistic – and each aspect of the analysis will draw on different theoretical frameworks in order to inform the discussion of the texts and provide valuable contextualising information. These differing approaches can be divided into three broad categories, into which the methodological frameworks which will be employed fall: sociological, literary theory and postcolonial frameworks, each of which will now be discussed.

113 Hélène Yhuel, "La représentation de la population issue de l'immigration maghrébine dans la littérature destinée ou accessible à la jeunesse" (Master 2, Université Paris III - Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2011), 7.

114 McGillis' claims will be elaborated in section 1.4.

115 Some research has examined the empowering potential of *banlieue* film. See for example: Carrie Tarr, "'Grrrls in the banlieue': Philippe Faucon's Samia and Fabrice Gényal's La Squale," *L'Esprit Créateur* 42, no. 3 (2002); Claudio Dell'Oca, "Performative encounters in the French banlieue. From détournement to genre hybridization" (Ph.D, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2011); Bruno Levasseur, "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); David-Alexandre Wagner, *De la banlieue stigmatisée à la cité démythifiée: La représentation de la banlieue des grands ensembles dans le cinéma français de 1981 à 2005* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011).

1.4.1 Sociological Approach

It is difficult to separate literature emerging from the *banlieues* from the social context of the *banlieues* themselves, and thus there will be an emphasis placed on the contextual background in which the novels are situated. This is felt to be particularly pertinent as the authors included in the corpus are all very socially engaged, freely admit to endeavouring to change the public perception of the maligned areas in which they were reared, and actively try and disseminate this message, through school visits and participation in public debates. The novels will thus be analysed in light of the social issues and agents at work in the *banlieues*, as well as through the lens of media representation and public perception of these zones. A sociolinguistic approach will be taken to the analysis of language in the texts in Chapter Six. This chapter will be informed by work carried out on the sociolect in widespread use in the *banlieues* and, to a lesser extent, by French young people generally. This chapter will lean on work undertaken by Meredith Doran, Jean-Pierre Goudaillier and David Lepoutre, among others. Interviewed by Michèle Bacholle-Bošković, a children's author of Cameroonian descent, Louis Antangana claimed:

Il est vrai que certains romans contredisent la représentation que font les médias ...
Ce qui frappe les quartiers, ce sont les différentes discriminations. Un regard négatif
qu'on pose sur les cités ... Ensuite, un problème d'éducation se pose également. Les
jeunes n'ont plus de repères. Ils naviguent dans des bouts de culture de manière tout à
fait superficielle. Y compris avec la culture dite d'origine. Ils reprennent des imageries
qui ne sont pas la réalité.¹¹⁶

Given that this is the context in which "multicultural" authors see themselves writing, it is hardly surprising that many of them see their work as being socially engaged and committed not only to changing the perception of those outside the *banlieue*, but also to changing the self-perception of those who have grown up in these marginalised and peripheralised zones.

It is necessary to rethink the *banlieue* communities, in order to empower residents of these zones. New frameworks for viewing this minority population would enable a new understanding of *banlieues* residents, and in particular the youth, by the majority population, which in turn could lead to less animosity and tension between both groups in the future. One such framework is that advanced by Azouz Begag. Begag is uniquely well-placed to offer analysis on the *banlieues* and their residents. As a sociologist, he has

116 Bacholle-Bošković, *Paroles d'auteurs jeunesse*, 31-2.

vast experience researching and analysing social situations and data in order to form a cogent hypothesis. Additionally, his childhood in the peripheral areas of Lyon, first in the *bidonville* of Le Chaâba and, later, in the Cité de la Duchère, affords him deep insight into the lives of residents of the marginalised *banlieues*. Furthermore, the different types of *banlieue* resident that he recognises and characterised – which will be outlined below – can all be discerned in the novels of the corpus, rendering this framework an ideal conduit for both an analysis of the *banlieues* as well as for textual analysis of the novels of Guène, Rachedi and Mahany.

1.4.1.1 Begag's Framework

Begag believes that instead of viewing young *banlieue* residents as one homogenous group, a marked difference can be seen between differing subgroups of this population. He has devised three broad categories to explain certain types of behaviour frequently observed among these young people: *rouilleurs*, *dérouilleurs* and *intermédiaires*.¹¹⁷ The *rouilleurs* are the group frequently seen in media representations of the *banlieues*, to the point that the French public seem to think that they are representative of *banlieue* youth as a whole, but in actual fact these “subgroups experience the relation between identity and territory in very different ways and are treated differently by the media.”¹¹⁸ *Rouilleurs*, therefore, are the stereotypical *banlieue* resident that one pictures when one hears of violence and car burnings in the peripheral urban zones. They:

...are outside the normal social system. They depend for a living on a parallel economy fueled in part by drug trafficking. They have nothing to lose, and they set no moral limits on their behavior: they have no religion, no morality, no sense of civic responsibility, no fear...In the consumer society in which they live these youths buy respect by displays of external wealth designed to counterbalance their interior void. This tension between interior and exterior is an important element in the notion of disintegration.¹¹⁹

117 The category of *rouilleur* was explained by Alec Hargreaves in the English translation as ‘ruster’, although he claimed that the term ‘disjointed’ might better convey the sentiment. Similarly, he explained that a literal translation of *dérouilleur* would be de-ruster, although ‘mover’ would be a less awkward translation.

118 Azouz Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality: France in the Balance*, trans. Alec Hargreaves (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 43.

119 Ibid.

This is the subgroup that has earned a bad reputation for the *banlieue* youth as a whole, they “engender feelings of rejection and exasperation among the general population”¹²⁰ and it is this subgroup that is behind violence in the *banlieues*. If, as Begag believes, the “republican idea of the city has been gravely weakened by social exclusion and the desocialization of young ethnics”¹²¹ – it is this subgroup of young people that are the most visible expression of this rage, exclusion and desocialisation.

To counter this, Begag suggests that “those who have succeeded in society through education, hard work, humane values, and respect for their parents have a duty to disprove nihilistic rhetoric and to present themselves as more positive models for future generations.”¹²² By this, he means the subgroup that he has termed *dérouilleurs*, and which other people have in the past termed the *bourgeoisie*.¹²³ This subgroup comprises “people in the hoods [Hargreaves’ translation of *quartiers sensibles*] who have a stable job and income, future prospects, a good level of education, a stable family situation, a sense of citizenship, etc.”¹²⁴ All of these render *dérouilleurs* part of middle-class France, which means that they are “on the inside of French society and don’t have any personal need for policies aimed at integrating them.”¹²⁵ This places them in ideological conflict with the *rouilleurs* and the actions of the latter group damage the reputations of the *dérouilleurs*. According to Begag, what “really hurts the *dérouilleurs* is that they are almost invisible in media images of the *banlieues*. They are like trains that arrive on time ... But they are there nonetheless and seem to be growing in importance.”¹²⁶ According to Begag, then, for “a *dérouilleur*, mobility brings new parameters of identification that permit his or her personality to develop far more readily than in the closed world of *within, with us*.”¹²⁷

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid., 38. Young ethnics [*jeunes ethniques*] is a term first used by Begag to refer to the youth population of the *banlieues*. According to Alec Hargreaves: “The innovative use of the word *ethnic* as a noun rather than as an adjective signals both the pertinence and the peculiar role of ethnicity in shaping the experiences of these youths when compared with the generations that preceded them.” Alec G. Hargreaves, “Translator’s Introduction,” in Azouz Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality: France in the Balance*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), x-xi.

122 Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, 47.

123 This expression was coined by Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, by combining *beur* with *bourgeoisie*, and refers to the elite, highly successful members of the “*Beur*” population. The existence of the *bourgeoisie* has sometimes obscured the problems of the less successful members of this population. For more on this concept, see: Catherine Wihtol de Wenden and Rémy Leveau, *La Bourgeoisie: Les trois ages de la vie associative issue de l’immigration* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2001).

124 Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, 47.

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid., 79.

The existence of the subgroup of *déroutilleurs* provides hope for a better future for young *banlieue* residents. Begag points out, however, that "those who gain personal autonomy make brutally and unmistakably visible the immobility of those who rust where they are,"¹²⁸ which goes some way towards explaining why those who do manage to succeed, to obtain good jobs and earn respect, may find it difficult to connect with their friends upon returning to their native zones to visit family and friends. They risk outright rejection by their former peers.¹²⁹

Both groups represent opposite extremes of a spectrum of human behaviour. According to Begag, a third subgroup can be discerned, one in between the previous two models of behaviour for young ethnics, and he has termed this group the *intermédiaries*. He describes them as being "high school and university students, interns, short-term temporary workers, unemployed youths, etc., in search of stability, a firm point of anchorage, and a clear pathway to follow."¹³⁰ He places a lot of responsibility on those who constitute this subgroup as, in his opinion, the:

...fate of the hoods in the next few years depends to a considerable extent on what happens to those *intermédiaries*. Either they will find in the republican system the necessary tools with which to build a fulfilling future, thanks in part to the pioneering work of the *déroutilleurs*, or they will swell the ranks of the *cailleras* and of the prison population originating in immigrant communities and the hoods.¹³¹

Begag draws comparisons here between the situations that have developed in Brazil, Columbia and other American and Third World cities, and notes that if French "society proves unable to channel these precariously balanced youths in the right direction, the neighbourhoods in which they are concentrated will become entrenched pockets of poverty with all the social problems that go with this."¹³² He fears that the difficulties frequently faced by young *banlieue* residents when trying to acquire internships to complete their schooling will do little to encourage them to act as more positive role models, like the *déroutilleurs*, for future generations and will ultimately lead to more young *banlieue* residents going down the route of the *rouilleurs*.

128 Ibid., 80.

129 This will be discussed in Chapter Two.

130 Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, 48.

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid., 48-9.

It is clear from the above that Begag feels that something must be done to prevent a dystopian future from coming into existence. One method explored by today's generation of young authors emerging from the *banlieues* (who fall into the *dérouilleur* category by virtue of their academic and literary success) is the use of literature, and in particular that read by child and young adult readers, to advance a more positive identity for young *banlieue* residents than that reflected to them by French society. Representatives from each of the subgroups discussed above can clearly be discerned in the books of the corpus. It is possible that by holding a mirror up to these young people, and their life on the French periphery, they may be more conscious of the behaviour choices they make and the long-term repercussions of those choices for themselves, their families and communities. It is also hoped that French children who grow up outside of the *banlieues* will, through reading honest depictions of what life is like for their peers inside these zones, have more empathy for their situation, and the choices that they must make. More understanding could consequently lead to less prejudice and discrimination, which may encourage *intermédiaires* to identify with the *dérouilleur* subgroup rather than the *rouilleur* group: by seeing realistic novels set in their maligned region with hopeful endings and credible characters with whom they can empathise, young readers may find the motivation to move toward identification with the former group rather than the latter. As outlined by Al-Hazza and Bucher, seeing their culture presented to them positively in literature is a major aspect contributing to the empowerment of those from a minority background, and this may be aided by the use of the sociolect favoured by this demographic. This in turn may avert what Begag believes will otherwise be "the nightmare of its [France's] collapse into warring ethnic communities."¹³³ If, as Kimberley Reynolds believes, "at times of cultural change, children's literature becomes a place for visionary thinking and ... political engagement"¹³⁴ then the novels in the corpus are an especially significant means of empowering YA readers from the *banlieue* regions and simultaneously educating those from outside of these zones, and an important step on the journey to inculcate social change and lead to a more tolerant and inclusive future in France.

133 Ibid., 124.

134 Reynolds, *Radical Children's Literature*, 16.

1.4.2 Literary Theory Approach

In an article subtitled *Francophone Children's Books in a Postcolonial World*, Kiera Vaclavik claims that children and colonial subjects share certain characteristics, and thus:

... is it possible to see a range of similarities in the concerns, status and development of postcolonial theory and criticism on the one hand, and children's literature criticism on the other. Both spheres of scholarly activity are concerned with once marginalised forms and subjects.¹³⁵

She elaborates that, despite the similarities, the disciplines have evolved differently and developed different strengths and different weaknesses – or, as she calls them, blindspots. Postcolonial studies, she claims, has been mostly concerned with the writer, writing and production while, for the most part, overlooking the reader, reception and processes of resistance.¹³⁶ On the other hand, she highlights that children's literature scholarship focuses predominantly on Western texts and readers, and would benefit from being more inclusive. In this way, Vaclavik believes that these disciplines can benefit and learn from each other.¹³⁷

Current thinking in the field of children's literature – and in particular, multicultural children's literature – will inform the discussion. The thesis will lean on ideas advanced by various theorists working on what they term multicultural children's literature, outlined in section 1.2, that depicting characters from diverse backgrounds in a positive light in the books that young people read will have a positive effect on young people from both within and outside these minority cultures. This element of the analysis will draw on work by Kimberley Reynolds, who has examined the radical potential of children's literature; Al-Hazza and Bucher, Mingshui Cai, Botelho and Rudman, who all focus on multicultural children's literature; Michèle Bacholle-Bošković, who investigates "beur" and multicultural children's literature in the French context; and Roderick McGillis.

Additionally, Chapter Five, which will examine the stylistic aspects of the texts, will take established concepts from the field of narratology – such as narrative voice, focalisation and characterisation – and examine how these concepts apply to these YA novels. This element of the thesis will draw on work carried out by Gérard Genette, Andrea Schwenke

135 Kiera Vaclavik, "Damaging Goods? Francophone Children's Books in a Postcolonial World," *International Research in Children's Literature* 2, no. 2 (2009): 239.

136 Ibid.

137 Ibid.

Wyile and Janet Burroway, among others. It will also examine the organisation of the books – format, temporal arcs and illustrations – as well as further stylistic devices used by the authors, such as intertextuality and the use of fantasy, and will use ideas advanced by John Stephens and Rosemary Jackson in this aspect of the discussion. The chapter will use these frameworks in combination in order to demonstrate that stylistic choices made by these authors can contribute to the empowerment of their young readers.

1.4.3 Postcolonial Approach

Another contributory element to the radical nature of books for children and young adults is that children can be viewed as colonised people themselves. Roderick McGillis believes that children constitute a colonised group¹³⁸ because they are frequently denied a voice, and spoken for by adults. Reading progressive and radical children's books can allow the colonised child to break free from colonising adults, and encourage independent thought and reflection on various issues, in order to develop their own values and views on the world. McGillis outlines this belief, claiming that "children remain the most colonized persons on the globe."¹³⁹ He believes that writing for children and commenting on children's books are deeply colonizing activities, something which he believes is "apparent even in the literature that we label for them. As Jacqueline Rose pointed out ... the literature published for children is 'a way of colonising (or wrecking) the child.'"¹⁴⁰ McGillis is aware of the major contradiction inherent in the linking of postcolonialism and children's literature. On the one hand, he claims:

If we think of postcolonialism as a phenomenon of late twentieth-century political, economic, and cultural reality—a liberating from an outmoded paternalism curtailing a people's freedom of expression and movement— then children are to a great extent exempt from the benefits of such postness.¹⁴¹

138 Roderick McGillis and Meena Khorana, "Postcolonialism, Children, and their Literature," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 28, no. 1 (1997): 7.

139 Ibid.

140 Ibid. McGillis here references: Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 27.

141 McGillis and Khorana, "Postcolonialism, Children, and their Literature," 7.

While simultaneously he acknowledges that, on the other hand, children and their literature are in fact always postcolonial, if "by postcolonial we mean that which stands outside and in opposition to tradition and power."¹⁴² The somewhat marginal status of children's literature can, to an extent, be compared to the marginalised status of *banlieue* residents themselves. As stated by Meena Khorana: "It is the story of the 'other.' Post-colonial literature speaks in multiple voices; it gives agency to and embraces all hitherto marginalized segments of the population —children, women, untouchables, and ethnic and racial minorities."¹⁴³ Vivian Yenika-Agbaw, who believes in the power of reading for social change, writes that the postcolonial frame "enables cultural and ideological investigations of author-subject position, and it attempts to counterbalance the power relationship between the Eurocentric Self and Other by challenging the colonialist position of the inferiority of the colonized."¹⁴⁴ Given that, as mentioned above, critics such as Roderick McGillis have applied the term "colonised" to children in general, this renders postcolonial analysis still more appropriate for the study at hand, particularly as both postcolonial theory and children's literature criticism share a preoccupation with previously marginalised subjects. Thus the texts under investigation will be examined in relation to theories of postcolonialism, as they apply to the themes and issues raised by the texts, and will draw on work undertaken by Alec Hargreaves, Richard Derderian, Paul Silverstein and Todd Shepard, among many others.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided an introduction to the key concepts and definitions that will be used throughout the thesis, outlined the potency of YA literature as a means to empower young readers, provided the critical context in which this research is situated and, finally, outlined the theoretical and methodological framework upon which the thesis will rest. By applying ideas from relevant sociological research, such as Azouz Begag's proposed framework for viewing *banlieue* residents, and drawing on the work of those researching in the fields of children's literature and postcolonialism, this thesis will highlight the strategies that Guène, Rachedi and Mahany are using to achieve the empowerment of

142 Ibid., 8.

143 Ibid., 17.

144 Vivian Yenika-Agbaw, "Taking Children's Literature Seriously: Reading for Pleasure and Social Change," *Language Arts* 74, no. 6 (1997): 448.

young residents of the *banlieue*. Such a threefold approach has never been applied to these texts to date, this research thus provides a unique insight into the manner in which these authors are attempting to achieve their goals.

Chapter 2. “Tout était à construire”¹: History and Development of the Parisian *Banlieues*

Paris has a long history of displacing the poorest members of its population. From exporting the city’s sick to sanatoria on the outskirts of the city, to the destruction of working class neighbourhoods under Baron Haussmann, to the housing of (predominantly North African) migrant workers in *bidonvilles* at the city’s periphery after the Second World War, the city has continually marginalised the lower classes.² This chapter will briefly trace this displacement from the nineteenth century until the present day, and thus establish a pattern of excluding the poorest members of society from the urban centre. It will argue that this displacement and marginalisation continues to the present day, albeit sometimes in a more metaphorical than literal fashion, and will thus demonstrate the need for a new framework for viewing the place of the marginalised working class in French society. Finally, it will demonstrate how traces of this history of displacement are present in the novels of the corpus, both in the physical representation of the *banlieues* as they appear in the texts, as well as in the sentiments of marginalisation and disconnection felt by members of these communities.

2.1 History of the Parisian *Banlieues*

Cet espace, la banlieue, que l’on voit se constituer, dans sa forme moderne, aux alentours de 1850, dans une dépendance réciproque mais asymétrique avec Paris, la banlieue jouant le rôle d’espace servant mais où, cependant, elle parvient à préserver une autonomie relative, l’affirmant, parfois, de façon forte, qu’est-elle devenue aujourd’hui ?³

In order to ponder the above question, it is necessary to trace the development of the Parisian *banlieues* over the last two centuries, from their beginnings as primarily agricultural regions which were important sites for early industrial and commercial purposes and

1 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 225.

2 For more in-depth discussion of this than will be furnished here, see: Françoise Soullignac, *La banlieue parisienne: Cent cinquante ans de transformations* (Paris: La Documentation française, 1993); David P. Jordan, *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labors of Baron Haussmann* (New York: The Free Press, 1995); Stephane Kirkland, *Paris Reborn: Napoléon III, Baron Haussmann, and the Quest to Build a Modern City* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2013); Matthew Taunton, *Fictions of the City: Class, Culture and Mass Housing in London and Paris* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

3 Soullignac, *La banlieue parisienne*, 21.

which played a significant role in the military defence of the city. Although the *banlieues* initially came under the authority of the main city, this was no longer the case by the early seventeenth century. Around this time several aristocratic *banlieues* began to emerge, such as Versailles and Saint-Germain-en-Laye, and these areas have tended to remain quite affluent, even to the present day. From the nineteenth century, increased migration to the urban centres of France by the rural population caused the population of Paris to grow significantly. The *banlieues*, at this time, were commonly frequented by the upper classes as sites of weekend recreation where they could drink cheaper wine⁴ and enjoy the fresh air of the countryside immediately adjacent to the outskirts of Paris. This practice was common among the *bourgeois* population during the early part of the nineteenth century at which time there was already a social divide in existence between the *bourgeois* population who visited the *banlieue* for recreation and the permanent population, which consisted primarily of farmers and farm labourers. This social divide took a different form to that in existence nowadays, however:

Ce n'était pas, comme aujourd'hui l'opposition de secteurs entiers, mais l'alternance, à l'est comme à l'ouest, de communes bourgeoises et de communes populaires. Par la suite, si certaines localités parviendront à préserver leur caractère privilégié, la plupart d'entre elles, à l'est mais également à l'ouest – ainsi Argenteuil, Suresnes... – seront complètement submergées par le développement industriel et la construction de logements ouvriers.⁵

Migration from the urban centre of Paris to the *banlieues* began in earnest from the mid-nineteenth century, the oldest complex of houses in the peripheral zones dating from 1834.⁶ Initially, the decision to move out of the city and live in the peripheral zones was one taken by members of the relatively well-off classes who, aided by advances in rail travel, relocated to areas several kilometres from Paris, as well as to regions closer to Paris, such as the Marne, Saint-Cloud and Saint-Maur where they could enjoy "des maisons cossues dans un environnement boisé."⁷ There were also several holiday destinations favoured by the upper classes, such as Suresnes and Bougival. Argenteuil, in particular,

4 The *octroi*, a tax on any goods entering Paris, which was imposed upon passage of said goods through the city walls, meant that many items were available more cheaply outside the boundary of the city.

5 Soullignac, *La banlieue parisienne*, 52.

6 Ibid., 51.

7 Ibid.

was a destination favoured by the Impressionists.⁸ Various factors which occurred in the mid- to- late nineteenth century, however, caused the demographic of the *banlieue* regions to change.

As the population of Paris continued to grow, due primarily to internal migration, the *banlieue* population grew in tandem. From about 1849, the older ideal of a city as wholly integrated began to wane, to be replaced by the newer conception of a zoned city, in which dangerous neighbourhoods were to be isolated and quarantined.⁹ This created a power dichotomy between the working class and the *bourgeoisie*, which placed certain elements of the population in confrontation with each other. In 1847, Paris was facing an overpopulation crisis, owing to the increased "provincial" population living in the city, as tens of thousands of people had migrated to the city in search of work.

At the time, France was under the rule of Napoleon III, and he had a vision of a new Paris, one which would enable greater circulation of traffic in order to accommodate increasing numbers of carriages and the new omnibus system; greater ventilation and light, which would in turn reduce outbreaks of disease; and the construction of modern water and sewerage systems. The Paris he envisioned would also, by virtue of widened streets, allow greater control and observation of the working-class residents of the city, who would no longer be able to construct barricades in times of unrest. Only some of these reasons were publicly proclaimed by the emperor, however, whose speech at the inauguration of the Boulevard Sébastopol was revealing:

The municipal council ... must ... support new construction to lodge the sudden increase in population, so ... it must demolish in order to create new streets which permit light and air to penetrate the unhealthy quarters and build great arteries helping the development of the city, linking the center to the extremities.¹⁰

Despite the fact that the majority of these changes are often widely credited as Haussmann's, there can be no doubt that it was Napoleon himself who conceived of such drastic changes. Before he became emperor, he had an office in the Palais des Tuileries in which he had a giant map of Paris:

8 Ibid.

9 Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, 110.

10 Taunton, *Fictions of the City*, 9. Taunton here references: David Van Zanten, *Building Paris: Architectural Institutions and the Transformation of the French Capital, 1830-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

He knew that he would have the power and time to remake the capital, and he immersed himself into urban planning. He deepened his knowledge of the city and spent hours considering which connections to build, which neighborhoods to develop, which avenues and squares to build. Visitors would sometimes see him at his desk, drawing lines across the map with colored pencils. The future city was gradually taking form in his mind.¹¹

In order to implement the sweeping changes he had in mind, however, Napoleon needed a strong-willed and determined Prefect of the Seine, and he believed Georges-Eugène Haussmann, then Prefect of the Gironde, to be that man.

Haussmann was commissioned by Napoleon to implement planning reforms in Paris. The goal of these reforms included bringing ventilation and light into the city, as well as railroads, sewers and an improved water supply. In order to achieve these objectives, Haussmann razed a substantial proportion of the medieval city to the ground. In its place he built the many wide boulevards, squares, and grand buildings – such as the Opéra de Paris and Théâtre du Châtelet – that characterise modern-day Paris. He also implemented the uniform architectural style that is familiar to all visitors to that city, and provided clean water and sewerage systems. He provided large parks, such as the Bois de Boulogne and the Bois de Vincennes, for the residents of the city to enjoy. His “Parisian boulevards transformed many dark, damp neighborhoods, the starting points of many cholera outbreaks throughout the 1840s, into safe, manageable zones that people could enjoy.”¹² However, in the process of these changes, Haussmann destroyed many working class neighbourhoods and left very little of medieval Paris intact. The Île de la Cité, in particular, was dramatically different pre-Haussmann:

Staid institutional buildings and open spaces have replaced crowded houses on little squares and dead-end lanes. The lawyers, judges and clerks of the courts, the bureaucrats and officers of the police headquarters, the doctors, nurses, and patients of the Hôtel Dieu and the Sainte-Chapelle have replaced the shopkeepers, matrons, idlers, and the ragtag children who ran through the narrow, crooked streets.¹³

11 Kirkland, *Paris Reborn*, 61.

12 Kory Olson, “Presenting the Suburbs: Urbaniste en chef Henri Prost’s 1934 *Carte générale de l’aménagement de la région parisienne*,” *Contemporary French Civilization* 35, no. 2 (2011): 144.

13 Kirkland, *Paris Reborn*, 212.

There were many who desired to preserve the Île de la Cité as it was, who wished to turn the island into a sort of gothic sanctuary, "a place where one could experience the island of the fifteenth century as described by Hugo"¹⁴ in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Haussmann and Napoleon favoured pulling "down the old neighborhoods to open lines of sight onto the main monuments and build new structures that reflected modern taste."¹⁵ Accordingly, from 1858, demolition and reconstruction – including the restoration of Notre Dame Cathedral – began, eventually turning it into the centre of administration and policing in Paris that we know today.

The island that made Paris definitively lost the character and richness forged over centuries. One lucid observer wrote that "la Cité, the cradle of Paris, will soon only be a memory, after which it will only be a name." That is indeed exactly what happened.¹⁶

In destroying the old city streets, buildings and dwellings to make way for a more modern Paris, Haussmann displaced the urban poor to the areas which were, at that time, immediately to the outskirts of Paris. However, this was not the extent of Haussmann's changes to the city. The areas outside of Paris had long been a cause of concern for the administrators of Paris.

François-Jules Devinck, the chocolate entrepreneur on the city council, summarized the sentiment: "[A]n industrial city, composed of eighteen distinct municipalities, has established itself as a dangerous belt around the capital, benefiting from its schools, its hospitals, its theaters, of all of the advantages of its neighbor, without paying the *octroi* or contributing to the costs."¹⁷

In 1860, Haussmann undertook what is, according to his biographer David Jordan, arguably his "most significant and visionary achievement"¹⁸ when he annexed the *banlieues* and incorporated them into the administrative control of the city, an action which drew the existing "suburbs between the outer boulevards and the fortifications into the city and simultaneously exert[ed] a centrifugal force, drawing the displaced poor out of the city's center."¹⁹ The *banlieues* at the time were:

14 Ibid., 217.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., 222.

17 Ibid., 178.

18 Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, 284.

19 Ibid.

More rural than urban, sharply separated physically, psychologically and socially from Paris by the tax barrier, poor and largely unurbanized, beyond the reach of even the rudimentary sanitary provisions of pre-Haussmann Paris, the suburbs also included the *zone*, a barren stretch of land adjacent to the fortifications originally reserved for defensive purposes.²⁰

Haussmann's incorporation of the *banlieue* into the city of Paris led to a huge population increase: "Overnight, the city grew from thirteen to thirty-three square miles and gained 400,000 new inhabitants, taking its population from 1.1 million to 1.5 million."²¹ Thirteen towns, which had previously been outside the administrative control of the city, had some of their territory consolidated into Paris:

Eleven towns were dissolved and completely subsumed into Paris. Belleville, with a population of 55,000, was the largest of these, followed by Batignolles-Monceau ... and Montmartre... The others were Auteuil, Passy, La Chapelle, La Villette, Charonne, Bercy, Vaugirard, and Grenelle.²²

The *arrondissement* structure, still in use, was also established as part of the annexation, which created the *banlieue* regions in existence today, peripheral to the city. The annexation also caused many of the poor residents of Paris to be displaced, in some instances for a second time. Louis Lazare, an opponent of Haussmann, recounted a situation that faced many poor and working-class families:

Originally residents of the Halles neighbourhood, they were driven out by demolitions and were unable to return, because rents had doubled. The family moved out of the center of Paris to suburban Belleville, and their journey to work in the city was now lengthened. When Belleville was incorporated rents were raised, and they were forced still further from the center.²³

20 Ibid., 284-5.

21 Kirkland, *Paris Reborn*, 181.

22 Ibid.

23 Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, 289.

As a result of this displacement, "Haussmann's new Paris is melancholic precisely because of 'what it excludes but cannot forget.'"²⁴ As a result of the work carried out by Haussmann, the *banlieues* bear "the scars of how the land was appropriated, by and for whom,"²⁵ and one of the most significant aspects of Haussmann's legacy remains his "incorporation of the banlieue, coupled to his housing policies, [which] made the periphery home to the banished and the uprooted, a distillation of the anomie of modern city life."²⁶

After the fall of Haussmann and, slightly later, the collapse of the Second Empire, the displacement of the poorest members of Parisian society continued under the Third Republic. In 1928, Raymond Poincaré – who was President of the Republic from 1913 to 1920, and who also served three terms as Prime Minister – was shocked to discover, entirely by chance and while stuck in traffic, the conditions in which the residents of the *banlieues* were living. He described what he saw as: "une banlieue interminable, sans ossature, où le hasard seul semblait offrir un passage, [avec des] habitations noyées dans un indescriptible chaos.' The narrow streets and substandard construction, reminiscent of pre-Haussmann Paris, startled him."²⁷ Consequently, he established a planning authority to improve construction of housing and roads in the suburbs and, a few years later, put in place *la loi du 14 mars 1932*, which defined the Paris region geographically, rather than demographically, as consisting of a 35km radius around Notre Dame. As a result of these measures, urbanist Henri Prost was charged with presenting, in 1934, a dossier consisting of an urban development plan and a detailed map of the suburbs (the *Carte générale de l'aménagement de la région parisienne*) which "showed how expanding extra-muros development shifted power, influence and mental energy away from central Paris to its suburbs"²⁸ and "acknowledged the city's emerging suburban identity."²⁹ This acknowledgement of the emerging suburban zones was a break from tradition, one which "recognized the growing presence of the *banlieue* and though [sic] high-speed limited access roads provided solutions to bourgeois anxiety of encountering the working-class suburban

24 Waqas Jawaid, "City of Lights, City of Fire: Architectural Apartheid in the Paris Banlieue" (Bachelor of Arts in Architecture, Princeton University, 2010). Jawaid here references: Anne A. Cheng, "The Melancholy of Race," *The Kenyon Review*, *New Series* 19, no. 1 (1997): 50.

25 Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, 290.

26 Ibid.

27 Olson, "Presenting the Suburbs," 135. Olson here references: Pierre Remaury and Jean Royer, "Région Parisienne," in *L'œuvre de Henri Prost : Architecture et urbanisme*. (Paris: Académie d'Architecture, 1960), 146.

28 Olson, "Presenting the Suburbs," 136.

29 Ibid.

population."³⁰ In putting his map and plan together, Prost's two main priorities were thus "the lack of quality housing and the need to facilitate movement in the region."³¹ This was in stark contrast to the policies of the Napoléon III/Baron Haussmann era, during which:

Haussmann emptied much of central Paris of its problematic working class residents and many of them ended up in communities outside the city limits, areas that rarely received significant space on official maps. With this lacuna no longer acceptable by the 1930s, Prost sought to show the Comité supérieur what the suburbs looked like. Through this information, administrators could better monitor their residents and minimize any perceived working-class threat.³²

The plan put in place some access roads for the suburban regions, as well as conceiving of the *périphérique* ring road that surrounds Paris along the site of the former *Enceinte de Thiers*, the last of the defensive walls surrounding Paris which was demolished, in stages, between 1919 and 1929. The *Boulevard Périphérique* thus continues to form a barrier, both symbolic and literal, between Paris *intramuros* and the *banlieue*. According to Olson, "Even as development in the suburbs flourished in the early 1930s, Paris's former walled fortifications remained a mental barrier, a stubborn, fixed divide between city and suburb."³³ Prost's plan also included an early version of the A86 ring road, sometimes referred to informally as the *Paris super-périphérique*, although his version initially formed a significantly wider loop around Paris than the A86 in existence today. Not all of Prost's plans were implemented, however. Some of the elements that were executed were not carried out until after the German occupation ended, and still more elements were not constructed until the 1960s. Yet his plan was still relevant in the post-war years, as he "foresaw the rise of the suburb ... [and] his *Carte générale* anticipated a post-war agglomeration, where limited-access autoroutes and accompanying highway interchanges cultivated the individually-owned automobile's domination of the suburban cityscape and kept the embellished city free for business and leisure."³⁴

Interestingly, Prost's map showed Paris itself in dull, lifeless grey, while the suburbs were alive and colourful. This reflects the increasingly diverse and vibrant *banlieue* population and the population decline being experienced in Paris, as increasingly high

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 140.

32 Ibid., 141.

33 Ibid., 152.

34 Ibid., 153.

rents in the city forced members of the lower class population to seek more affordable accommodation on the outskirts of the city. In this way, Prost's map actually "documents the future of the metropolitan area,"³⁵ as even today "high housing costs continue to push lower-income families further away from the city's embellished centre toward the outer suburbs, where an insufficient transportation network necessitates long commutes and an isolated existence."³⁶ As acknowledged briefly above, "Years after their demolition, the city's walled fortifications remained a mental barrier in 1934, but Prost focuses attention and development on the land beyond them... [and] acknowledges to what extent residents living outside the central city contributed to the region's economic development."³⁷ Yet aside from shining a light on the *banlieues* and their residents, there were some negative implications in relation to these plans. The new roads seemed primarily designed to facilitate easier access to and from Paris for the middle classes – both those living in Paris proper, as well as those residing in the middle and upper class *banlieues* such as Versailles and Saint-Germain-en-Laye – without being disrupted or disturbed by the working class populations on the periphery. More importantly, however, "by both addressing and mapping the industrial *ceinture rouge*, it was hoped that, like Haussmann's revised central Paris, its population could be controlled more easily,"³⁸ and thus prevent an uprising, similar to the 1871 Paris Commune,³⁹ which began in economically-marginalised areas in Eastern Paris. In order to avoid a recurrence of this nature, the government knew that "keeping this potentially disadvantaged population in submission would require knowledgeable and effective supervision. Prost's suburban surveillance therefore presented a controllable territory, not Paris's topographic reality."⁴⁰ This surveillance is especially significant as, in recent years, Michel Foucault has been a figure of importance for those

... seeking to articulate a strong version of the thesis that social control is a primary function of architecture. For Foucault, Bentham's Panopticon – a prison carefully designed so that every prisoner is potentially under observation at all times – is both

35 Ibid., 154.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 153.

39 In the wake of Napoleon III's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war and the collapse of the Second Empire, Parisians were angered by the continued presence of German garrisons and feared that the conservative newly-elected National Assembly would restore the monarchy. Along with the National Guard, the workers of Paris revolted and established the Paris Commune, a short-lived government that ruled from March 18th to May 28th 1871.

40 Olson, "Presenting the Suburbs," 153.

a metaphor and a formula for the architecture of the modern state. It 'programmes at the level of an elementary and easily transferable mechanism, the basic functioning of a society penetrated through and through with disciplinary mechanisms'.⁴¹

Thus Prost's map would allow the ruling class in Paris to observe and control the potentially "dangerous" members of the *banlieue* population in a manner which had not previously been possible.

Continued displacement faced poorer members of society under the Fourth Republic. In the aftermath of World War Two, immigration from French colonies in North and, to a lesser extent, Sub-Saharan Africa increased dramatically. These immigrants were treated as second class citizens, despite having been promised citizenship and equality in return for fighting for the French in the war. Initially single men arrived to take up jobs that were suddenly widely available in France as a result of the increased industrialisation of *les Trente Glorieuses*.⁴² In many cases these men left behind wives and children, who they only saw during the month or two of holidays they spent back home each year. They frequently lived in squalid conditions in *bidonvilles* or shanty towns on the outskirts of urban areas, usually without electricity or running water. During the 1960s, there were eighty-nine *bidonvilles* in the Paris region, housing around 100,000 members of the poor immigrant worker population. Even after the introduction of the family reunification policy, which enabled families of immigrant workers to join their husbands and fathers in France, *bidonvilles* continued to be a common form of accommodation. Living conditions in these areas were chronicled in literature, notably in Azouz Begag's semi-autobiographical *Le gone du Chaâba*.

In 1956, the government set up a body charged with rehousing immigrant workers (predominantly from North Africa, Spain and Portugal) who had been living in these areas, and building housing to accommodate them. This body was called Sonacotral,⁴³ and built its first houses in Argenteuil in 1959. These houses were not of good quality, however, and many of the apartments were overcrowded, sometimes housing twice as many men as available beds – those who were working day and night shifts would alternate

41 Taunton, *Fictions of the City*, 15. Taunton here references: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1995), 209.

42 A period of just under thirty years, immediately following World War Two, during which France experienced a period of unprecedented economic prosperity.

43 *Société Nationale de Construction de logements pour les Travailleurs Algériens*. After Algerian independence it became SONACOTRA, and since 2007 it has been called Adoma.

use of the same bed. A separate body, LogiRep,⁴⁴ was charged with rehousing families with children in the Paris region. By 1989, it had provided 21,000 houses. Under the (second) presidency of De Gaulle, a lot of accommodation was provided by the state in an attempt to eradicate the *bidonvilles*. Relative to the scale of the housing crisis at the time, the state was slow to act in creating these agencies and providing accommodation for those living in squalor in what were essentially shanty towns. There were many reasons for this, but a major one was the conflict between the left and right wing parties. Many politicians on the left argued that:

...most Gaullist plans sought 'to deport the working class from the capital and reserve Paris for the privileged' in what they saw as a continuation of the social exile launched by Haussmann'... While they were outraged at the present condition of workers' housing, they were also critical of the kinds of solutions that the state was able to propose.⁴⁵

De Gaulle, however, needed to find a way to solve the housing crisis and:

Like Napoleon III, de Gaulle saw the re-planning of Paris as an urgent political requirement, and he needed a strong-willed official to do it: Delouvrier was to be his Haussmann. And like Haussmann, Delouvrier remodelled Paris on a huge scale. As Hall and Ward write, 'just as the city of Paris to this day is essentially Haussmann's creation, so the structure of the wider region is Delouvrier's'.⁴⁶

Delouvrier was initially charged with implementing the P.A.D.O.G.,⁴⁷ a plan which had already been conceived but not implemented, in order to redress the concentration of industry and commerce in the capital by moving people and industry out of Paris and into its environs.⁴⁸ However, Delouvrier soon realised that the P.A.D.O.G. would be inadequate and sought to design a new plan, which eventually became the six-volume *Schéma Directeur d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région de Paris*, "a comprehensive

44 Still in existence today, their website claims: "Depuis sa fondation en 1960 par Eugène Claudius-Petit, Ministre de la Reconstruction, ami de Le Corbusier, et « inventeur » de l'aménagement du territoire, LogiRep poursuit sa mission d'intérêt public en faveur de l'hébergement des personnes défavorisées et des familles." Groupe Polylogis, "Qui sommes-nous?," Accessed: June 20 2014, <http://www.polylogis.com/filiales/logirep/notre/qui>.

45 Taunton, *Fictions of the City*, 104. Taunton here references: Rosemary Wakeman, "Nostalgic Modernism and the Invention of Paris in the Twentieth Century," *French Historical Studies* 27, no. 1 (2004).

46 Taunton, *Fictions of the City*, 119-20. Taunton here references: Peter Hall and Colin Ward, *Sociable Cities: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1998).

47 *Plan d'aménagement et d'organisation générale de la région parisienne*.

48 Taunton, *Fictions of the City*, 120.

analysis of the geographic and demographic pressures acting on Paris in the 1960s.”⁴⁹ Delouvrier’s *Schéma Directeur* proposed developments that were significantly larger than those proposed in P.A.D.O.G: where the earlier plan had sought to build 70,000 new dwellings, confined to an area of 1200km², Delouvrier’s plan – based on the assumption that the population of Paris would continue to grow – proposed building 100,000 new dwellings a year. He conceived eight new towns, five of which were eventually built, in a radius of 20-30 kilometres around Paris, and connected to the capital by the RER and new roads. These five new towns (Évry, Melun-Sénart, Cergy-Pontoise, Saint-Quentin and Marne-la-Vallée) were not intended to be an extension of the existing *banlieues*, however, Delouvrier intended them to “...stop the anarchic development of the *banlieues*”.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the *villes nouvelles* built by Delouvrier had many of the same properties of the existing *banlieues* “in exaggerated form.”⁵¹ According to Hall and Ward, these “exaggerated properties” result from a phenomenon common to all countries that attempted to create satellite towns: “whether in France or Germany or Scandinavia, ... satellite towns have meant new developments which are physical extensions of existing metropolitan agglomerations, with either minimal physical separation or none at all.”⁵²

Little by little, then, the *bidonvilles* were dismantled and the residents moved into more permanent structures. One of the last of the large-scale *bidonvilles* to be demolished was in Nanterre, which was estimated to have 14,000 residents, who were not rehoused until the mid-1970s.⁵³ The *bidonvilles* were replaced with large modernist buildings, following the theories and ideas proposed by the architect Le Corbusier, described by Taunton as the most powerful advocate of architectural modernism in France, who was “elaborating a utopian urbanism... In 1925, Le Corbusier produced the *Plan Voisin*, a utopian scheme to enable the installation of frighteningly vast skyscrapers connected by raised roads and surrounded by recreational parks.”⁵⁴ The *Plan Voisin*, which would have required the levelling of the Right Bank, was never implemented, but his ideas were central to development in the *banlieues*. Le Corbusier believed that architecture could

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., 121.

51 Ibid., 122.

52 Ibid. Taunton again here references: Hall and Ward, *Sociable Cities*.

53 Some *bidonvilles* remain in France’s major metropolitan areas today, notably Paris, Lyon and Calais. The population of these modern-day *bidonvilles* is predominantly comprised of France’s Romanian and Bulgarian immigrants, although the *bidonville* in Calais is also home to residents from the Middle East and North and Sub-Saharan Africa hoping to gain access to the United Kingdom.

54 Taunton, *Fictions of the City*, 101.

contribute to the reshaping of society, by helping to stabilise class relations and protect the family. Accordingly, "The displacement of ultimately political ends into the realm of architecture, with good design averting the threat of revolution, is fundamental to the Corbusian approach. And it finds an obvious application in the Parisian *banlieue*."⁵⁵ The *banlieues* surrounding Paris have long been associated with far-left politics, and the Communist Party enjoyed great electoral success in these areas, leading them to become known as the *ceinture rouge* or red belt. The residents and administrators of Paris felt under siege from the settlements that were outside of its jurisdiction, where the *PCF*⁵⁶ frequently held power. After liberation from the German occupation, the *PCF* formed part of a coalition government until 1947, and consequently the "determination of the first *banlieusards* to destroy bourgeois society rarely seemed in doubt. It was under the influence of Corbusian modernism that architecture became the technology that the state used against the threat of revolution."⁵⁷ Henri Sellier, a French politician and mayor of Suresnes from 1919 to 1941, suggested that the administrators of Paris take what was good in Le Corbusier's plan, and apply it to the, still largely empty, terrain surrounding Paris.⁵⁸ It was cheaper by far for the government to construct large, multiple-unit buildings and thus the now immediately recognisable *grands ensembles* were conceived:

...it would be a mistake to read the history of social housing in France as a test run of Corbusier's plans. The failings of the *banlieue* are not Corbusier's failings. But Corbusier's thoroughly centripetal urbanism provides both a context for and a critique of the emergence of peripheral *grands ensembles* as the principal form of housing in the post-war period.⁵⁹

This housing provided for the working class immigrant population, and was hailed as a new beginning for this demographic. That this accommodation was far superior to the conditions that they had previously experienced in the *bidonvilles* is not in question – the new apartments had electricity, running water and most had flushing toilets. However, they were still on the margins of urban areas, and did nothing to encourage integration of their residents. This was compounded by the fact that there had initially been many native French residents in the newly-constructed *grands ensembles*. Yet when it became

55 Ibid., 102.

56 *Parti communiste français*.

57 Taunton, *Fictions of the City*, 102.

58 Ibid., 103.

59 Ibid., 101-2.

apparent that the apartment blocks had been cheaply constructed, with heating problems and a minimal effort to muffle noise between neighbouring apartments, as well as the weak transport links made available to residents, "the majority of the middle-class inhabitants of the *banlieue* left in favour of more central housing".⁶⁰ The organisations responsible for managing these *HLM*⁶¹ did not maintain the buildings, which meant that they degraded rapidly. Some were listed on "urban renewal" (demolition and rebuilding) programmes as early as the 1990s.⁶² This situation has still not been satisfactorily resolved, and according to Soullignac:

Dans un premier temps et comparés à l'état antérieur, ils procurèrent une grande satisfaction. Ce n'est que plus tard que les problèmes apparaîtront, que la médiocrité du bâti, le gigantisme des immeubles, leur caractère de « cité-dortoir » où se retrouve une population captive, appelleront des mesures de correction et d'amélioration qui, pour diverses qu'elles soient au cours du temps, cherchent, encore aujourd'hui, les moyens d'infléchir cette situation.⁶³

This degradation, coupled with the marginalised position – both geographically and socially – that the *banlieues* occupied, and continue to occupy, in French society, rendered life difficult for residents of these regions. Widespread unemployment, which began with the oil crisis of the 1970s and continued through the recession in the 1980s, hit the displaced *banlieue* population particularly hard. This demographic continues to be affected by a higher than average unemployment rate,⁶⁴ and limited opportunities for

60 Ciara Nash, "A Study of French Suburban Discourse from Sociolinguistic and Literary Perspectives" (Master of Arts, University of Limerick, 2012), 24.

61 *Habitation à loyer modéré*, this system was formed in 1950, and replaced an earlier subsidised housing programme *HBM* or *Habitation à bon marché*, which was supported by charitable donation.

62 The most recent such program is the *Métropole du Grand Paris* initiative, unveiled by Nicolas Sarkozy in 2009 and due to commence in early 2016. This initiative seeks to integrate the *banlieues* and the city proper by improving transport links and ease of access. It will also provide more housing in the peripheral areas and radically overhaul the administrative areas that comprise the greater Paris area. For more on this initiative, see: Sophie Gonick, "Disciplining the Metropolis: Grand Paris, Immigration, and the Banlieue," *Berkeley Planning Journal* 24, no. 1 (2011).

63 Soullignac, *La banlieue parisienne*, 70.

64 Although France's unemployment rate stood at 10.4% in July 2014 ["France Unemployment Rate 1996-2015," *INSEE*, Accessed: January 3 2015, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/france/unemployment-rate>.], that figure is much higher in the peripheral zones of Paris such as Clichy and Sevran. For discussion of the implications of this, see: Joe White, "The return of the state to the Parisian banlieue," *Opendemocracy.net*, March 19, 2013, Accessed: January 3 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/joel-white/return-of-state-to-parisian-banlieue>; Liam Halligan, "The heat rises in France's banlieues," *The Telegraph*, November 23 2014. Accessed: January 3 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11248098/The-heat-rises-in-Frances-banlieues.html>.; "Forgotten in the banlieues," *The Economist*, February 23 2013. Accessed: January 3 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21572248-young-diverse-and-unemployed-forgotten-banlieues>.

social development. A combination of all of these factors has led to many social problems in these zones, which in turn has led to the tarnishing of the reputation of these areas in the French imagination, in particular as a result of zealous media coverage, which began in earnest with the riots in the early 1980s and continues to this day. This causes further problems between the *banlieue* population, and the French population in general, and so on in a vicious circle of mutual misunderstanding, fear and anger.⁶⁵ Whereas this section has established a pattern of displacement of the poorest members of Parisian society to the margins of that city, the next section will discuss the *banlieues* as degraded physical spaces, and show the continued displacement of the residents, before highlighting the ways in which these spaces are represented in the novels under investigation in the thesis.

2.2 Degraded physical space/site of displacement

Cyrille François, in *Des littératures de l'immigration à l'écriture de la banlieue*, describes the *banlieue* as a space "à la fois concret et symbolique, réaliste et stéréotypé tel qu'il ressort des textes et à l'évidence dans sa double position de repli et d'attrait à l'égard de la mégapole qui fascine."⁶⁶ This description presents the *banlieues* as spaces that, whether viewed positively or negatively, realistically or based on fear and exaggeration, has certainly captured the imagination of the French public. Built to replace the *bidonvilles* that previously existed on the urban periphery, as outlined above, the *banlieues* are frequently compared to the American-style ghetto. Much debate has centred on the similarities between the two underprivileged zones, and a fear that these "territories of deprivation and dereliction to be feared, fled from, and shunned because they are ... [reputedly] hotbeds of violence, vice and social dissolution"⁶⁷ are becoming more like the ethnically homogenous, crime-riven, poverty-mired enclaves that the inner city areas of large American cities represent. This is a fear that seems very real for many journalists and members of the French population. However, Loïc Wacquant has referred to the term ghetto as "a confused conception that comes short of the level of analytic specificity, coherence, and parsimony minimally required of a scientific notion,"⁶⁸ and claims that the term variously denotes:

65 This will be developed in Chapter Four, which will discuss the misperceptions that exist regarding the *banlieue* population.

66 François, "Des littératures de l'immigration," 150.

67 Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts*, 1.

68 Loïc Wacquant, "A Janus-Faced Institution of Ethnoracial Closure: A Sociological Specification of the Ghetto," in *The Ghetto: Contemporary Global Issues and Controversies.*, ed. Ray Hutchison and Bruce D. Haynes (Boulder: Westview Press, 2012), 2.

...a bounded urban ward, a web of group-specific institutions, and a cultural and cognitive constellation (values, mind-set, or mentality) entailing the socio-moral isolation of a stigmatized category as well as the systematic truncation of the life space and life chances of its members.⁶⁹

In *Urban Outcasts*, a sociological study comparing the urban ghetto of Chicago's South Side with the *cité of les 4000* in La Courneuve, to the north of Paris, Wacquant himself puts the idea of the "ghettoisation" of France's urban periphery under intense scrutiny, in order to investigate the validity of the theory. He freely admits that there are very many similarities between these two undeniably disadvantaged areas, and lists these similarities as follows: both areas have a high concentration of ethnic minorities; both suffer from depopulation; both have notable divergences from the majority population in terms of age structure, household composition and levels of single parenthood; both have undergone deindustrialisation and suffer from high unemployment; and both have a bleak, oppressive atmosphere and are stigmatised by society. However, according to his research, the differences between these regions are far greater than their similarities: they have disparate organisational ecologies; the ghetto is racially cloistered and uniform compared with the ethnic dispersion and diversity of the *banlieue*; there are divergent rates and degrees of poverty; levels of crime and danger differ greatly between the two areas; and there are also very significant discrepancies between the government response to the respective situations in terms of urban policy and the degradation of daily surroundings.⁷⁰ Wacquant reached the conclusion that equating the *banlieues* and the ghetto is "both scientifically fraudulent and politically irresponsible."⁷¹ He makes this statement based on the differences between ghetto and *banlieue* listed above, but emphasises the role of the state and the fact that, no matter how displaced the *banlieue* residents may be, they are not as excluded from the mainstream French population as the ghetto residents are from the mainstream American population. Robert Castel, in *La discrimination négative*, claims that "on ne peut rendre compte de leur situation principalement en les considérant comme des exclus confinés dans des ghettos"⁷² and that youth of the *banlieues* "ne sont pas 'exclus'"⁷³ as many benefit from two major prerogatives of French citizenship, politics and social protection.

69 Ibid., 1.

70 Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts*, 145-60.

71 Ibid., 162.

72 Robert Castel, *La discrimination négative - Citoyens ou indigènes?* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), 27.

73 Ibid., 34.

Wacquant's dismissal of the validity of claims that *banlieues* are French ghettos, however, does not mean that he lacks sympathy for *banlieue* residents. In fact, quite the opposite is true. He believes that paradoxically, by virtue of its being less complete, the "experiential burden of territorial stigmatization weighs more heavily upon the residents of the declining French working-class *banlieues* than it does on their counterparts in America's dark ghetto,"⁷⁴ and claims that there is:

no question that the objective reality of urban inequalities and their distribution in space has changed significantly in France since the historic rupture of the mid 1970s and that the social misery and daily malaise of residents of popular neighbourhoods gone fallow have gained in depth and intensity.⁷⁵

Following from this, it can be understood that although the *banlieues* cannot be equated to the ghettos as they have evolved in America, it can be observed that the urban periphery in France has been equated to something that is "rather like a ghetto phenomenon."⁷⁶ Nevertheless, as Christina Horvath has pointed out, for authors emerging from the *banlieues*:

Instead of denying the unjustified parallels drawn between the North-American inner-city ghettos and the French *banlieue*, they find copious material for their literary creativity in this analogy and use it to conceive a positive identity of *banlieue* residents to whom [sic] they attempt to empower.⁷⁷

There are similarities between the two types of disadvantaged urban area, one being the degradation of the physical spaces that constitute these zones (although, in terms of government responses to this degradation, the French government – both local and national – has been much quicker to respond with urban policies, notably the *développement social des quartiers* (DSQ) policies, designed to prevent this degradation and dilapidation from becoming entrenched).⁷⁸ In his 2004 book, *Portrait du décolonisé arabo-musulman*

74 Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts*, 178.

75 Ibid., 141.

76 Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse, *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), 36.

77 Horvath, "Voices from the Ghetto?," 160.

78 There are a seemingly endless number of acronymic policies in place to counter the urban blight faced by those living in the peripheral urban zones. Some examples of these include ZUS (Les Zones Urbaines Sensibles); ZRU (Les Zones de Redynamisation Urbaines); ZFU (Les Zones Franches Urbaines); ZAC (Les Zones d'Aménagement Concentré); PNRU (Le Programme National de Rénovation Urbaine), which is overseen by the Agence Nationale pour la Rénovation Urbaine, created in

et de quelques autres, Albert Memmi writes scathingly on conditions in the *banlieue*. He refers to these zones as "une autre planète",⁷⁹ and paints a bleak picture of what life is like, referring to the:

...immeubles délabrés, aux ascenseurs dangereux, aux portes en contreplaqué, barbouillées de peinture écaillée, aux chaussées défoncées, où la boue règne en hiver et la chaleur en été; la banlieue est un désert privé de centre...⁸⁰

He also describes how those who experience "la moindre réussite fuient pour s'installer ailleurs, de sorte que la concentration de la misère et des problèmes demeure identique,"⁸¹ a fact which is highlighted by Mahany in *Kiffer sa race*, when Sabrina claims of her former neighbours, who have recently moved: "Le père Kocinsky a touché le gros lot au PMU. Ils étaient sympas, les Kocinsky mais faut les comprendre quand on a un peu de thune, on déguerpit direct de la cité, c'est comme ça."⁸² Recently, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls has referred to this phenomenon, and promised to "revoir"⁸³ the situation, claiming: "Si les gens qui partent sont ceux qui ont un certain pouvoir d'achat quand ceux qui les remplacent sont plus pauvres encore, on ne s'en sortira pas."⁸⁴

Memmi also discusses the ventures made by local *banlieue* youth to the urban centres of France:

Lorsque « les jeunes » descendent dans la vraie ville, celle des nantis, pour fuir la leur, ils ont l'impression d'une expédition, avec des sentiments émerveillés, envieux et agressifs ; et lorsqu'ils rentrent, leurs retours prennent l'allure mélancolique de trop brèves vacances.⁸⁵

2004 ; GPV (Les Grands Projets de Ville); and ORU (Opérations de Renouvellement Urbain). The latter has a sub-organisation for the Paris area, Grand Projet de Renouvellement Urbaine (GPRU) and was in fact temporarily replaced, for the period dating from 2007 to 2013, by the Contrats Urbains de Cohésion Sociale (CUCS). These policies, which began to appear from the 1970s onwards, attempted to improve the situation of the *banlieues* with mixed results. One aspect worth noting, however, is that many of these initiatives – though undoubtedly well-meaning – were put in place in the aftermath of various crises in the *banlieues* and the resulting attention from the media and the general public, and as such can be quite reactionary in nature.

79 Albert Memmi, *Portrait du décolonisé arabo-musulman et de quelques autres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 140.

80 Ibid., 141.

81 Ibid.

82 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 11.

83 6Medias, "Apartheid" en France."

84 Ibid.

85 Memmi, *Portrait du décolonisé*, 141.

This desire to leave the *banlieue*, even temporarily, is illustrated in *Le petit Malik*. When Malik is fifteen years old, the reader learns that he and his mother have enjoyed a holiday every year of his childhood. A combination of local government assistance and his mother's resourcefulness (arranging to share the camp-site expenses with two other families in financial difficulty) meant that they spent two weeks each year away from the *cité*. Places that they visited included Nice, Grasse, Saint-Paul-de-Vence and Saint-Raphaël, all of which he enjoyed. In later years, they travelled to places on the west coast, including Brittany and Normandy, but Malik did not enjoy these places as much, complaining: "Rendez-moi ma Mé-di-ter-ra-née".⁸⁶ Malik spent these holidays lying on the beach, trying to get as tanned as possible in order to be the envy of friends back in the *cité*. On his return, he never admits to this, regaling them with stories about all the girls he met and adventures he had while he was away, when in reality he spent a lot of time babysitting the toddlers of the families with whom they shared the accommodation expenses, although he claims that he did not care about this as: "J'étais prêt à tout endurer pour frimer loin de la cité. Pour être loin d'elle."⁸⁷ Interestingly, his least favourite place to go on holidays was Dourdan, in Essonne, where Rachedi himself grew up and still resides. According to Malik, Dourdan is "Le summum de nullité,"⁸⁸ and it was "le père fouettard des vacances, le trou du cul du monde, Pétaouchnock, le repoussoir absolu."⁸⁹ The campsite there was so awful, "même ceux qui y allaient, ils préféraient mentir qu'ils n'étaient pas partis."⁹⁰ This last statement is significant, as Malik had previously outlined that those residents of the *cité* who did not go on holidays usually chose one of two options: "Les uns lézardaient toute la journée au square pour donner le change niveau couleur de peau. Les autres restaient cloîtrés chez eux pour simuler un départ en vacances de leur vie."⁹¹ Although it was mainly because he was away from the mundanity of daily life in the *banlieue*, Malik really enjoyed the holidays. Yet he is able to contextualise them with the benefit of hindsight, and so when he claims that on these trips they lived like billionaires, he quickly qualifies this by claiming: "Milliardaires pour la cité s'entend, pour les richards du haut de la ville, c'était la destination normale et pour un non banlieusard, c'était une misère."⁹²

86 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 113.

87 Ibid., 112.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., 110.

92 Ibid.

The image of the *banlieue* as physically degraded to the point of dilapidation is common in representations of these zones, especially in media reports, which will be discussed in Chapter Four. Jeannine Murray-Román refers to this phenomenon when she says that the "Concrete and graffiti structures of the banlieues are the site for most of the novels written by and about the Maghrebian immigrant community in France."⁹³ Some examples of the ways in which *banlieues* are described by their own residents include the following excerpts from novels written by those who have grown up on the periphery: "Les lieux de divertissement étaient à des kilomètres, les lieux de culture à des années-lumière"⁹⁴; "À quoi bon essayer de construire dans cette cité toute pourrie"⁹⁵; and, upon finding some respite – and some cases of wine left lying about – Mehdi Charef's protagonist in *Le thé au harem d'Archy Ahmed* describes a "Moment de méditation et de paix. Au diable l'angoisse, le chômage, le béton."⁹⁶ These quotes all highlight the destitute, bleak nature of the *banlieue*, and the sense of isolation felt by some who live there. Robert Castel sums up the situation in the *banlieue*, in terms of the policies of urban renewal and rejuvenation when he says that "Plutôt qu'un ghetto, la banlieue est un chantier dans lequel nous avons beaucoup à faire, mais également beaucoup à apprendre."⁹⁷ Having shown that the representation of the *banlieue* as a degraded space is common in France – and in both internal and external representations of these regions – the next section will demonstrate the ways in which these representations are manifested in the novels of Guène, Mahany and Rachedi.

2.3 Representation of the *Banlieues*

Representation of the physical space of the *banlieue* is more common in the novels of Rachedi and Mahany than those of Guène. In fact, physical representation of the *banlieue* is extremely significant throughout the novels of the Rachedi and Mahany. In *Le poids d'une âme*, the *banlieue* is discussed in the narrative with frequent use of imagery evoking the architecture and the oppression which it can inspire in the residents. The physical appearance of the buildings is frequently described, both directly and indirectly. From the

93 Murray-Román, "Hom(e)ing Devices," 1142.

94 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 131.

95 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 46.

96 Charef, *Le thé au harem*, 144.

97 Castel, *La discrimination négative*, 118.

beginning of the novel, when Lounès wakes up in the morning, this imagery is present: "Après le café du matin, Lounès est posté devant la fenêtre de la cuisine, méditatif. Il fixe son reflet perdu dans l'architecture urbaine monumentale."⁹⁸ His trip from Évry to Grigny allows Lounès to reference the monotony of the urban landscape: "En six minutes et seize secondes, montre en main, Lounès passe du gris d'Évry au gris de Grigny. Aspect massif, couleurs ternes, l'architecture des cités se ressemble."⁹⁹ The *banlieue* and many of the connotations it usually inspires in the French imagination are also discussed in *Le poids d'une âme*, in which the author utilises the usual clichés and stereotypes, as well as familiar imagery, to great effect. In many ways, Rachedi plays up to and feeds on the *banlieue* stereotypes in the narrative, in particular through the character of Hocine, who Lounès goes to see immediately after his suspension. Lounès knows ahead of time that he will find Hocine on a bench at the Grigny metro station:

Yo mon frère ! Voilà Hocine qui l'interpelle depuis son banc. Lunettes fumées, Nike Requin aux pieds, casquette de travers, pantalon large, l'archétype de banlieue est planté à la gare de Grigny depuis toujours. À midi, à 20 heures ou à 2 heures du matin, tantôt seul, tantôt accompagné, Hocine se confond avec le décor.¹⁰⁰

Rachedi's cognisant and apt caricature of a common *banlieue* stereotype is a tongue-in-cheek reference to a commonly held perception. Lounès is conscious of the gang rivalry between the youths in his locality and that of Hocine. There had been some conflict with the police in Grigny the previous evening, which had been reported on the television news, and when Lounès hears this, he immediately knows that there will be a reaction in his own neighbourhood, which he welcomes as a distraction from the tedium of life in the *cité*:

Ça, c'est une vache de nouvelle, se dit Lounès. La Grande Borne est à quelques kilomètres des Pyramides, son quartier. Les gens là-bas sont les ennemis jurés des gens d'ici, allez savoir pourquoi. Les bandes d'Évry vont réagir pour se voir à la télévision. L'élection présidentielle approchant, la couverture médiatique sera belle. Tant mieux, du mouvement ! Marre de végéter dans une ville morne !¹⁰¹

98 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 17.

99 Ibid., 28.

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid., 20.

This awareness and acknowledgement of the unorthodox reasons for rioting may be shared by some *banlieue* residents and is indicative of the degree to which violence and boredom have become entrenched in these areas, that merely competing for television exposure with a neighbouring region has become a distraction.

Leaving Hocine on his bench in the metro station, Lounès "marche sans but dans les rues de Grigny, le regard perdu sur les cubes en béton. La laideur d'Évry lui manque..."¹⁰² This frequent reference to the oppressive grey concrete of the *banlieue* is mirrored in Lounès' mood. He constantly feels a sense of hopelessness and despair, and when he receives his suspension, he cannot see the point of protesting: "Lounès caresse son menton sans protester. En cours, chez lui, chez les flics, c'est partout la même rengaine. La justice expéditive laisse peu de place au dialogue, alors il faut se taire."¹⁰³ When he is imprisoned, he even makes a favourable comparison between his new accommodation and home: "Lounès examine sa cellule de 9 mètres carrés, elle ressemble à sa chambre, l'odeur des pieds d'Ahmed en moins ! Et il y a Canal +!"¹⁰⁴ This comparison reflects how oppressive Lounès and by extension, the reader can assume, many *banlieue* youths find their regions. Despite all of this negativity, however, when Lounès is falsely imprisoned and faces deportation, the *banlieue* community rally around him. Between protests and interviews and calling to see his mother, the family is made aware that they are looking after the interests of Lounès and his family. This sense of community compensates for many of the negative aspects of living on the margins. Preoccupation with the physical space of the *banlieue* also occurs in some of Rachedi's other work. For instance, one of his short stories in *Chroniques d'une société annoncée*,¹⁰⁵ the collection of short stories published by Qui fait la France?, features a character who suffers from severe neurosis and paranoid fears of an unknown "them", at whom he can never look. At the end of the story it transpires, albeit somewhat clumsily, that the "them" in question has been the tower blocks of his *cité*, so oppressive that he can feel the weight of them bearing down upon him.

Mahany also grapples with the physical representation of space in the *banlieue* in *Kiffer sa race*. She evokes clichés about the *banlieues* by using the physical representation of the tower. The tower in which Sabrina lives is central to her life. This is evident, as the

102 Ibid., 34.

103 Ibid., 24.

104 Ibid., 117.

105 Mabrouck Rachedi, "Détours," in Qui fait la France?, *Chroniques d'une société annoncée*, (Paris: Stock, 2007).

opening chapter is devoted entirely to Sabrina's ascent up the stairs of the tower, when she introduces the reader to the residents of the various floors. More significant than the neighbours and interior of the building, for Sabrina, is the roof of the tower itself. It is on this roof that Sabrina and her best friend Nedjma spend the majority of their time, and from this vantage point the city seems more manageable and less hostile. In fact, the novel is framed by the significance of the roof, as it opens with her claim:

Y a seulement quand je surplombe ma cité, en haut de ma tour, que je suis moi. J'ai toujours préféré geler avec les aigles plutôt que picorer avec les poules, même si c'est pas drôle là-haut et qu'il fait froid. Mais bon, y a le ciel bleu et surtout, y a personne sur mon dos.¹⁰⁶

Many of the significant events of the novel take place on the roof, such as when Sabrina prevents Nedjma from killing herself, and when Alphonse tells Sabrina the truth about his family's past. When events threaten to overwhelm Sabrina, she seeks refuge on her roof and she alludes to it as their safe haven at repeated intervals throughout the text, one of the reasons for this is that the height and distance removes them from the events of their neighbourhood, such as when a local pizza delivery man is involved in a fatal accident, which the girls viewed from their rooftop perch, fascinated by the ballet they watch playing out below, removed from the tragedy of the event. Sabrina posits several theories for the importance of the roof to the girls over the course of the novel. One of these is that they enjoy the altitude as a result of the poverty of their neighbourhood: "Être tout en haut, quand on a toujours été tout en bas, c'est une manière de compenser."¹⁰⁷ She also believes that, being surrounded by people and activities when on ground level, the roof affords the girls an opportunity for peaceful solitude, and to hide from their troubles. Although her concern for Nedjma leads her to believe that her friend may have other reasons for her love of altitude: "Elle a l'air fascinée, comme attirée par le vide."¹⁰⁸ This explains how, when Sabrina realises that Nedjma may be intending to attempt suicide, she immediately rushes to the roof in order to try and prevent this happening. She knows that she will find Nedjma there. Nedjma is standing looking into the void over the edge and Sabrina succeeds in preventing the suicide. Her intervention allows Nedjma to disclose the truth about her father to her best friend, which culminates in

106 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 7.

107 Ibid., 74.

108 Ibid.

her leaving home and moving in with the Asraoui family. Over the course of the novel, the young girl returns frequently to this refuge, and mentions it on other occasions. Yet, because of the events throughout the novel – both positive and negative – Sabrina has grown and developed. The penultimate paragraph is almost entirely an echo of the opening paragraph, but with significant differences:

Y a plus seulement quand je surplombe ma cité, en haut de ma tour, que je suis moi. Je préfère toujours geler avec les aigles plutôt que picorer avec les poules mais avec Alphonse, je me sens moins seule là-haut, j'ai moins froid. En plus, le ciel est bleu, trop je kiffe ma race.¹⁰⁹

The evolution in Sabrina's feelings towards the roof reflects her changed attitude towards her neighbourhood and her life in general. She is more open and more inclusive and is determined to change other people's opinions and encourage them to be more open too. This determination and openness are reflected in the fact that she no longer needs a refuge from the world. Mahany's use of this imagery, in particular how removed Sabrina feels from the *cité* from her rooftop perch, reflects the disconnect that can exist between *banlieue* residents and those from outside the peripheral zones. By the end of the novel, Sabrina no longer needs to take refuge or seek disconnection from the rest of the neighbourhood, reflecting Mahany's hope that the division between the *banlieue* residents and those from outside may one day be breached also.

Guène provides less physical representation of the *banlieues* in her novels than do Rachedi and Mahany in theirs, but references of this kind do appear sporadically throughout. For instance, Ahlème refers to the bleak nature of the tower blocks in her *banlieue*, claiming:

Je me tiens là, seule, au milieu de leur architecture excentrique, de leurs couleurs criardes, de leurs formes inconscientes qui ont si longtemps bercé nos illusions. Il est révolu le temps où l'eau courante et l'électricité suffisaient à camoufler les injustices, ils sont loin maintenant les bidonvilles.¹¹⁰

This direct linking of the current situation in the *banlieues* with the *bidonvilles* of the past allows Guène to highlight the oppressive nature of the high-rise buildings, a legacy of De Gaulle and Delouvrier, as outlined above. Guène does not shy away from presenting the

109 Ibid., 249.

110 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 29-30.

reality of life, and few details about life in the *banlieue* are hidden from the reader. Across all three of her novels, there are references to drug use and drug dealing, broken homes, murder, massacres, abusive fathers and brothers, police brutality, racism, oppression of women, the failures of the French state to protect its minority population. Far from being depressing or dark, however, this realism is an important aspect in terms of empowering the young *banlieue* population, who do encounter these issues in their lives: as in the real lives of a lot of young people, although these unpleasant events are visible they do not comprise the central elements of the narrative.¹¹¹ This is in stark contrast to the way in which these zones are usually presented to the French public and thus enables readers to see these regions described as they are, and not in a grossly caricatured and exaggerated form. Not only can this provide young *banlieue* readers with a more positive representation of their locality, but readers from outside these regions may acquire a new framework for viewing the *banlieues* and their residents.

Guène explores the concept of clichés and negative stereotypes in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*. On his first day at Gustave Courbet, Mourad had borrowed his cousin's¹¹² very expensive car in order to get to school. He had been reluctant to borrow the car but eventually agreed, at Miloud's insistence. His fears are confirmed when he arrives in class and his students ask if he is a drug dealer. This episode allows Mourad to teach his class about the danger of clichés, and also allows Guène to demonstrate that young people in the *banlieue* can often internalise the commonly held stereotypes about them to the extent that upon seeing a *Re-beu* in a nice car, they infer that he must be a drug dealer.

In *Les gens du Balto*, Guène attempts to describe a perceived division within the already marginalised *banlieue*. This is a relatively minor theme, yet one that is worthy of discussion. In his interview with the police, Taniël refers to a division between the relatively well-off residents of the *pavillons*, where he and his family live and those of *la grande cité*, mentioned above in the context of Magalie's parents having forbidden her from going there. Taniël, who does not share this perception, claims:

111 Although the police investigation of the murder of a local *bar-tabac* owner is the central thread linking the principal characters of *Les gens du Balto*, this is merely a device to allow us to enter the lives of the many protagonists.

112 Miloud, a *sans-papier*, has been living with a very wealthy older woman named Liliane. Miloud himself is a subverted stereotype: before introducing him, he is referred to as a shady character, living in a hostel and struggling financially as a result of his political status, yet when he greets Mourad at the airport, he is driving a Mercedes and brings Mourad back to Liliane's Haussmann-era building in the 16th arrondissement.

Au début, les mecs de la grande cité, ils croyaient que j'avais des thunes parce que j'habite un pavillon. Ils trouvaient ça super de vivre ici. Ils me disaient : « Au moins, vous avez la gare à côté et le centre-ville. » Tu parles ! Je sais même pas si on peut appeler ça une ville.¹¹³

Aside from this oblique remark, there are few references to this in the novel, yet it demonstrates how, even in a marginalised community, there are still those who are perceived as being better or worse off than others, leading at times to resentment. As such, its inclusion in the text is an important reflection of reality for those on the margins of society. The ability of Tanièl's friends to move past this and accept him as a member of their group provides a positive example of marginalised groups ignoring their differences, perceived or otherwise, and establishing a common bond. Divisions of this kind are also mentioned by Doria in *Kiffe kiffe demain*, who describes the situation in her neighbourhood as follows:

Il y a quand même une séparation bien marquée entre la cité du Paradis où j'habite et la zone pavillonnaire Rousseau. 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.¹¹⁴

Doria continues by describing the various different types of graffiti which decorate the *cité* side of the wall – from tags and rap lyrics to political slogans and messages. Doria's favourite piece of graffiti, "c'est un vieux dessin qui est là depuis longtemps, bien avant l'ascension du rap ou le début de la guerre en Irak. Il représente un ange menotté avec une croix rouge sur la bouche."¹¹⁵ This handcuffed angel could be seen as representing the silenced and peripheralised *banlieue* population, long-ignored, misunderstood, misrepresented and stereotyped by the majority population.

Le petit Malik also deals with the issue of class division within the *banlieues* themselves, and Rachedi seems quite preoccupied with this facet of life in the urban periphery. The question of class division arises more than once throughout the novel, although notably the instances are primarily confined to Malik's early years, and in particular to his school days. The first time class division is mentioned is when Malik is eight years old, when the local youth activity leader informs him and his friends of a scavenger hunt, during which they'd have to perform specific tasks and collect objects and trinkets, organised for

113 Guène, *Les gens du Balto*, 17.

114 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 90.

115 Ibid.

all the local children at the *Parc aux oiseaux*. The boys are delighted as they know every square inch of the park and, as Malik outlines: "On tenait notre revanche certaine sur nos ennemis héréditaires, les friqués du haut de la ville."¹¹⁶ He further explains that "une lutte des classes opposait les deux hémisphères de la ville. Eux nous narguaient avec leur arrogance bourgeoise alors nous on se vengeait avec nos seules armes, les poings."¹¹⁷ In an attempt to improve relations between the self-identified "poor" and "rich" children in *Le petit Malik*, the local mayor's office organised "un échange inter-pédagogique dans le cadre d'un programme de mixité-diversité-machin chose concocté par le roi du charabia bureaucratique ; tout ça pour dire que les pauvres allaient chez les riches et vice-versa."¹¹⁸ The boys are excited about this opportunity to spend a day at Paul Valéry, but only because they know that they can beat their rivals at football. During class-time they are forced to participate in a Spanish class, despite having never studied Spanish. The reader is not informed what happens on the return visit, but it is interesting that Rachedi chose to highlight these exchanges. It shows an understanding, on the part of those working in the municipality, that there is, at times, unrest between those living in the *banlieues* as well as the more widely known divisions between those who live *en banlieue* and those from without.

This division between the various parts of the town is echoed later in the book, when Malik is twelve. He is discussing the dynamic between himself, Salomon and Abdou and explains that "Une ligne de démarcation invisible nous séparait, Salomon habitait les quartiers pavillonnaires, Abdou, les nouvelles HLM et moi les barres délabrées de la cité."¹¹⁹ Elsewhere, in *La petite Malika*, Malika outlines some of the territorial wars that play out in the school yard, because the school catchment area encompasses three neighbouring towns and consequently "la guéguerre en dehors des murs se poursuivait à l'intérieur,"¹²⁰ mirroring what Malika terms "la logique des quartiers"¹²¹ whereby the school is divided into its various territories, their boundaries strictly enforced by students. Crossing into a rival gang's territory without negotiating permission led to retribution. When Malika returns to her former school as part of her teaching practice, she discovers that this aspect of "*banlieue* culture" which permeated the schoolyard, as well as the *banlieue* in general,

116 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 40.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid., 81.

119 Ibid., 79.

120 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 126.

121 Ibid.

has changed little in the intervening years: "la logique des bandes avait collé à la peau des descendants de Kevin."¹²² Malika feels somewhat nostalgic at this lack of change in her old neighbourhood, yet her nostalgia is tinged with anger that what she terms "gang mentality" still pervades the corridors of her former school. These class divisions are a facet of life everywhere, not just in the *banlieues*, and their inclusion in the text reflects the reality of the situation. Yet, as is illustrated by the friendship between Taniël and his peer group in *Les gens du Balto*, and the efforts of the municipality in *Le petit Malik*, such divisions are not presented as insurmountable by the authors. Thus, by a simple change in perspective or, in Malik's case, growing up and consequently outgrowing petty playground rivalries, these divisions need not be a major concern for the residents of the peripheral regions.

2.3.1 Transportation difficulties

As if to emphasise the displaced position of the *banlieue* communities, transport difficulties faced by those living in the peripheral regions of Paris are significant. Paris is the central hub for all public transport in the region, and frequently the easiest option for getting from one *banlieue* to another, even neighbouring ones, is by taking the train into Paris and then back out on a different line. This means that travelling a relatively short distance can take a substantial length of time, increasing the burden faced by many commuters. This is highlighted in some of the texts in the corpus, in particular *La petite Malika*. When Malika is nine, she accompanies her mother to work one day. The journey involves taking first the RER C, then RER B and finally RER A, and the journey takes two hours and thirty minutes to get into Paris, an hour and a half on the return leg: "L'écart de temps pour parcourir une même distance tenait dans les errements des lignes SNCF qui fonctionnaient toujours mieux dans le sens Paris-banlieue que l'inverse. La banlieue c'est plus facile d'y aller que d'en sortir."¹²³ In addition, the day that Malika accompanies her, the train stops half-way to Paris and the passengers are asked to alight, prompting Malika to comment: "Une loi de la physique moderne énonce que tout corps plongé dans un train de banlieue est soumis à la théorie de la relativité des horaires."¹²⁴ The feelings of displacement and marginalisation experienced by *banlieue* residents can

122 Ibid., 222.

123 Ibid., 45-6.

124 Ibid., 48.

only be exacerbated by facing such physical difficulty navigating their environment. In addition to the physical barrier, a psychological one can be added. Richard Rodgers, a renowned British architect, claimed of the forthcoming *Métropole du Grand Paris* project that he "knows of no other 'big city where the heart is so detached from its arms and its legs' by the 'staggering psychological barrier' between the *banlieue* and the city."¹²⁵ By highlighting the difficulties of the commute undertaken by Malika's mother, the authors are creating a sense of common ground experienced by those who live on the margins, yet Malika's wry humour about the situation shows that the residents of these zones accept these, relatively minor, hardships as part of everyday life on the periphery. While this issue is not addressed overtly in *Les gens du Balto*, the opening chapter – narrated by Joël – immediately informs the reader that the town in which the novel is set is situated at quite a distance from Paris: "On est à Joigny-les-Deux-Bouts depuis plus de cinquante ans. Une commune de 4500 habitants à l'extrémité d'une ligne de RER. Un endroit dans lequel vous ne foutez sans doute jamais les pieds."¹²⁶ This statement immediately draws the reader's attention to the fact that this suburban region of Paris is isolated, the furthest it could be from Paris while still having major transport links with the capital. Resources are limited at the end of the line, which causes Nadia Chacal to complain bitterly:

Sincèrement, quand papa nous a dit qu'on montait à Paris, dans ma tête, j'ai vu la tour Eiffel, les boutiques, l'ambiance. J'ai pensé que ça allait être la fête et que la seule chose que j'allais regretter c'est la mer. En vrai, c'est pas Paris ici, c'est rien du tout. C'est la campagne, il faut une heure et demie de train pour toucher la capitale.¹²⁷

She does, however, admit that they are lucky to have a "real" house now, as they previously lived in a cramped apartment in Marseille, whereas now their mother even has space for a vegetable garden. The fact that Nadia's complaints are immediately tempered by the advantages of their life in Paris shows that while Guène desires to honestly portray the difficulties faced by the *banlieue* population, she avoids according them undue importance, showing that even those residents who complain most bitterly about the lack of resources in Joigny-les-Deux-Bouts can recognise the privileges that life there affords them. This candour regarding the frustrations that can be experienced as a result of the difficulties of

125 Anne-Louise Milne, "The Singular Banlieue," *L'Esprit Créateur* 50, no. 3 (2010): 53. Milne here references: Angélique Chrisafis, "After the Pompidou, can Rodgers transform the secret, shabby divided side of Paris?," *The Guardian*, March 12 2009.

126 Guène, *Les gens du Balto*, 8.

127 *Ibid.*, 48.

living on the periphery, coupled with the moderating influence of humour, as in the case of *La petite Malika*, or appreciation of the advantages that living there can afford, as in the example from *Les gens du Balto*, is one of the elements that provides a more realistic image of the *banlieues* in these texts.

2.4 *Banlieue* Mentality

Although all of the authors in the corpus frequently emphasise the sense of community that can be experienced on the periphery, there is a phenomenon that also garners much discussion in these novels. In *Le petit Malik*, Rachedi terms this "la mentalité du ghetto",¹²⁸ which may occasionally be perceived in the behaviour and attitudes of some of the residents. Although elements of this *banlieue* mentality can also be found in the novels of Guène and Mahany, it features prominently in *Le petit Malik*, in that some of the characters directly reference this attitude and outlook on life. Malik shows signs of having the so-called "*banlieue* mentality" throughout the novel, but it becomes more pronounced as he enters his twenties. When he is nineteen, he attempts to play a one-on-one game of football with his former classmate Sam, who has since signed with Paris Saint-Germain. Because of Sam's fitness levels, Malik loses this game, as he grows tired and must stop playing long before Sam has exhausted himself. Sam then tells him that he was the best among them at football when they were children and that he should rightfully be playing the sport professionally, but that "Ton problème, c'est que tu t'es contenté de ton acquis, t'as jamais cherché à progresser ... Ici, tu stagnes."¹²⁹ Malik takes this advice badly: "Qui il était pour me dire ce que j'avais à faire ? J'avais rien à prouver. À personne."¹³⁰ He later shows signs of having this negative attitude in his dealings with his girlfriend Mélinda. Malik meets Mélinda when he works in Creditis as a telephone operator and they start to date. Malik feels that his status as *banlieusard* means that he is not good enough for her, and cannot understand what she sees in him. Upon losing his job, he ends their relationship as he feels that she deserves better. Their paths cross again two years later, and things become serious between them. Unfortunately, when he meets her parents for the first time, he is intimidated and awkward as a result of their different class backgrounds.

128 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 203. As already shown, the *banlieues* cannot be equated with the American ghetto, so I will instead use the term "*banlieue* mentality."

129 Ibid., 144.

130 Ibid., 145.

He overcompensates, reading several newspapers in the days leading up to the meeting, so that he can converse about serious topics, he wears a suit, and buys far too many gifts to bring to dinner. When he gets there, however, Mélinda's father (who is dressed casually) wants to discuss football and Malik, ill-prepared for this eventuality – coupled with jealousy of his childhood friend's successful professional football career – says little throughout the meal. He and Mélinda begin to fight and subsequently end their relationship. Both chapters dealing with Mélinda are significant as they display two manifestations of the "*banlieue* mentality." Malik's own feelings of inadequacy concerning his background, particularly in relation to those he views as socially superior, and the dramatic manner in which he overcompensates (by pre-emptively distancing himself from his girlfriend, and attempting to impress her parents to an irrational extreme) are sources of difficulty for the young man. Yet, as will be shown, this is not a permanent state of mind, and can be overcome, given the right circumstances and outlook.

Perhaps the most significant sign of this mentality in the novel, however, lies in the manner in which Malik treats Salomon, one of his dearest childhood friends. Malik has spent the majority of his life striving to be average, while Abdou and Salomon became a *rouilleur* and a *dérouilleur*, respectively. Abdou left school at sixteen, began dealing drugs and became involved in various illegal activities, culminating in his death at the age of twenty-six from a drug overdose. Salomon worked hard, went to university and left the *banlieue* in search of a better life. When Malik is twenty-two, Salomon returns. Watching his arrival from the window, Malik fails to recognise his old friend – now much slimmer and better dressed than before. When he realises who it is, he is about to rush down to greet him: "quand, soudain, j'eus honte. Qu'est-ce qu'il penserait de moi, qui avais stagné ? Est-ce qu'il se moquerait, lui qui semblait au top ?"¹³¹ Despite the fact that Salomon knocks on his door and waits outside his building for two hours, Malik is too ashamed to open the door. He is nevertheless proud of his friend, as later that evening he excitedly tells Abdou all about it. Abdou's response – to once again call Salomon a *sale Feuj* – banishes all traces of this excitement, and so: "Je m'installai aux côtés d'Abdou pour mater la télé."¹³² In the final chapter, Malik admits that he would probably never have seen Salomon again if not for Abdou's death. However, he telephones his friend to inform him of the tragic event and they attend the funeral together. Afterwards, Salomon and Malik go to a restaurant and talk, and it is here that Rachedi makes clear his feelings

131 Ibid., 165.

132 Ibid., 167.

on the "*banlieue* mentality." Salomon claims that Abdou "m'a rendu un grand service en me traitant de sale Feuj. Il m'a éloigné de l'esprit du ghetto, celui qu'on a aussi dans nos têtes."¹³³ Malik refuses Salomon's offer to hire him as a trainer for his football team, as he "prends pas la charité, merci."¹³⁴ This leads Salomon to retort: "Quand les autres s'appuient sur leurs relations, c'est du piston, quand c'est nous, c'est de la charité. Un cas typique de la mentalité du ghetto."¹³⁵ He eventually convinces Malik to accept, and they begin to develop a football squad, even including some teenagers in their games. Watching the others play, Malik is struck by a thought: "Parmi ces personnes-là, grandirait sans doute un Abdou. Peut-être un Salomon. Tout autour, il y avait la cité, immuable. Et il y avait ma vie, qui serait celle que je choisirais."¹³⁶ These words, the final words in the novel, show a change in attitude for Malik. Although little has actually changed in his life, he has accepted that his mind-set is largely responsible for how he views his position in life. Having recognised the "*banlieue* mentality" in himself, he can endeavour to overcome it. This is central to the novel's theme, and provides a realistic yet positive ending to the story. Malik now has a sense of purpose and feeling of control over his life. This is particularly significant, as it recalls Azouz Begag's reflection on the importance of the future direction of the *intermédiaires*, outlined in Chapter One. In this respect, *Le petit Malik's* ending perfectly reflects the sense of a momentous decision referred to by Begag, and Malik's new-found positivity leaves the reader in no doubt about which direction he will take. This may empower Rachedi's YA readers from the *banlieue*, as they may recognise elements of this mentality within themselves and strive to overcome this handicap and choose the *déroutilleur* route. If, as Reynolds has suggested, the "stories we give children are blueprints for living in culture as it exists, but they are also where *alternative* ways of living are often piloted",¹³⁷ then the inclusion of Malik's ability to overcome his *banlieue* mentality and envision a positive future can show YA readers from the *banlieue*, that they need not "swell the ranks of the cailleras"¹³⁸ but can "find the necessary tools with which to build a fulfilling future."¹³⁹

133 Ibid., 202-3.

134 Ibid., 203.

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid., 204.

137 Reynolds, *Radical Children's Literature*, 14.

138 Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, 48.

139 Ibid.

Another example of the "*banlieue* mentality" arises in *La petite Malika* as a result of the protagonist's academic success, in that she, both literally and figuratively, left the *banlieue* behind to further her education at *l'ÉNA*.¹⁴⁰ When she is nineteen, during her preparatory course, Malika visits her future university campus in Strasbourg. Upon arrival, she discovers that her suitcase has been taken, and is faced with a choice between alighting at her stop and remaining on the train to search for her bag:

Partir, c'était un saut vers l'inconnu les mains vides, rester c'était se gorger de l'espoir vain d'une apparition miraculeuse... J'ai choisi de bouger en descendant sans bagage. Puis j'ai réfléchi à ma vie dans le train-train de ma cité. Là aussi, j'ai décidé qu'il était temps de bouger.¹⁴¹

This episode is somewhat portentous, as Malika moves far from her roots, over the following years, as she studies at the university. Taking full advantage of the privileges afforded to students at a *grande école*, she travels, spends money and networks furiously, and begins to expect a lifestyle that is completely removed from the life she has known in the *banlieue*. She drifts apart from her childhood friends, Sarah and Mégane, and the gulf separating them seems untraversable. When she is twenty-two and back in her *cité* visiting her mother, she meets her friends and they spend the afternoon together. However, things are different between them as Malika's increased income means that she spends a lot of money on clothing, money that her friends could never afford and this creates an added layer of tension, prompting Malika to comment: "Le bon vieux temps n'existait plus. On s'est dit un au revoir qui ressemblait à un adieu, je tournais le dos à mes amies qui n'en avaient plus que le nom."¹⁴² This reflects a tendency, discussed by Azouz Begag, common among those left behind in the *cité*, when their *dérouilleux* friends manage to escape. According to Begag, *dérouilleux* are thus "perceived as doubly foreign: they are outsiders in the world they have newly entered, and they are no longer accepted where they come from. Getting a high-status job ... makes them automatically suspect."¹⁴³ He continues with examples of this rejection expressed by people who have experienced it, before wondering:

140 *École Nationale d'Administration*, an elite graduate school created by Charles de Gaulle in 1945, which educates and trains France's highest civil servants and state employees.

141 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 166.

142 *Ibid.*, 192.

143 Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, 80.

Why are those who get out rejected in this way? One of the reasons is that those who succeed, those who gain personal autonomy, make brutally and unmistakably visible the immobility of those who rust where they are. Like reflecting mirrors, the liberation of some reinforces the feeling of imprisonment among others.¹⁴⁴

Yet, Begag does not perceive the situation as hopeless, and believes that some good can come from this rejection: if those who return feel the need to justify themselves, they can become "the advocates of values such as effort, work, courage, solidarity, and respect for one's parents and for the individual. In so doing they become guides."¹⁴⁵ Indeed, Malika and her friends are eventually able to put their differences behind them, because Malika rediscovers her roots and her desire to return to the *cit * and help guide young students. Yet the transition period is not easy, and requires effort on the part of both Malika and her friends. When Malika initially tries to re-establish contact with her former friends by telephoning M gane, the latter is initially quite reluctant and behaves as though she believes Malika no longer has time for them:

- Bah tu es occup e, toi.
- Je ne suis pas une ministre !
- Je t'avais vue dans une  mission politique avec un s nateur, c'est vachement bien !
- J'ai quitt  le poste il y a un an. L , je suis revenue dans la r gion. On se voit bient t ?
- Oui, quand tu auras un peu de temps...
- Mais puisque je te dis que je suis libre !
- Tu racontes  a pour me faire plaisir.
- Mais non, j'ai repris les  tudes et ce n'est pas le baigne.
- Vu comme tu es s rieuse, je pr f re te laisser r viser...
- En quelle langue faut-il que je te dise que je *d sire* te voir ?
- Tu me diras en fonction de tes obligations, je ne veux pas m'imposer.¹⁴⁶

The inclusion of this conversation is significant, as it mirrors an incident from Rachedi's personal life¹⁴⁷ and a conversation that he had with a friend, and it is a tangible example of what Begag discussed. Yet, reflecting Begag's hope that the situation can be rendered positive, Malika and her friends are able to re-establish a connection and she goes on to guide and mentor young students in her capacity as a teacher in a disadvantaged *banlieue* school.

144 Ibid., 81.

145 Ibid.

146 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 212-3.

147 As outlined in his blog, *La Nouvelle Racaille Fran aise*.

The *banlieue* mentality is also referenced in *Kiffer sa race*, through the character of Bachir, a local man who has been unemployed for years. He decides to take the *concours* to become a police officer, for which Sabrina helps him revise and prepare, and he eventually succeeds in passing the examination. His best friend Toufik, also unemployed, had done everything to prevent his friend from passing his *concours*, as he did not wish to be alone in his boredom and misery. When his friend succeeded, Toufik never spoke to him again. Bachir, as a result of trying to improve his life, consequently loses his best friend.

There are also examples of this mentality in Guène's novels. Hamoudi in *Kiffe kiffe demain* spends the first half of the novel sitting in a stairwell, chain-smoking marijuana and shows little motivation to break this cycle. He later develops a steady relationship, obtains gainful employment and, as summarised by Doria, "est sorti de sa mauvaise passe".¹⁴⁸ He is no longer a *rouilleur*, but is now one of the *intermédiaires*. This provokes Doria to remark: "Ça veut dire qu'il n'y a pas que le rap et le foot. L'amour c'est aussi une façon de s'en sortir..."¹⁴⁹ referring to the two routes that the most gifted – and the luckiest – residents of the *banlieues* have traditionally been able to use as a means of escape. Interestingly, despite the fact that writing has long been a third option used by the children of immigrants living in the *banlieue*, ever since the *Beur* generation first came to prominence in the early 1980s, Doria makes no mention of this in her review of means to escape the poverty of the *banlieue*. Another example occurs in *Du rêve pour les oufs* as a result of Foued's friendship with local gang members, for whom he begins hiding stolen goods and cash. When Ahlème discovers some of his stash and confronts him, their conversation becomes heated, and he eventually admits that he looks after money and sometimes sells stolen goods for *les grands*, partly because he is fed up "de te voir tafer comme une chienne ... Toujours en train de courir pour gratter de l'argent par-ci par-là."¹⁵⁰ He also informs her that she does not understand what it is like to be a boy growing up in the *banlieue*, that it is different for girls: "Tu comprends pas, c'est la jungle! Faut les enculer avant que ce soit eux qui le fassent."¹⁵¹ Guène uses Foued to show how easy it can be for young men to get swept into the *banlieue* mentality. The despair that Ahlème feels at the path that Foued seems to have chosen, however, is referenced in a manner that, in itself, corresponds to a common *banlieue* stereotype. She remembers

148 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 152.

149 Ibid., 153.

150 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 98.

151 Ibid.

a song by the rap group IAM that she used to listen to constantly ten years previously: "Petit frère a déserté les terrains de jeux, il marche à peine et veut des bottes de sept lieues. Petit frère veut grandir trop vite, mais il a oublié que rien ne sert de courir, Petit frère..."¹⁵² Ahlème is terrified that Foued will be arrested and, as a result of his Algerian citizenship, deported. When the family visit Algeria she takes her brother to the post-office, ostensibly so she can telephone her friend, Tantie Mariatou, but in reality she wishes him to see first-hand the effect that deportation under the *double peine* rule has had:

Nous allons donc dans le coin VIP, réservé aux appels internationaux, et là je vois le sort de ceux qu'on a amenés se perdre ici purger leur deuxième peine. Leur regard est le même que celui de mes frères que je croise tôt le matin à la gare Saint-Lazare, ceux qui ont froid et qui marchent la tête baissée. Entassés autour de ces cabines, ces types, aussi français que Foued et moi, tiennent nerveusement leur combiné, ils regardent avec inquiétude le compteur tourner... Ils appellent leur mère, leurs potes, peut-être leur copine, ils essaient de parler fort pour couvrir le bruit, et j'ai l'impression qu'en fait, ils essaient de parler tout court. J'explique tout ça à Foued, il les regarde, et je crois qu'il est aussi bouleversé que moi.¹⁵³

The incident with Foued allows Guène to highlight the truly negative potential of the *banlieue* mentality. Ahlème refuses to allow her brother to become immersed in criminality, or to risk a prison sentence and possible deportation (as he is still an Algerian citizen). She decides, against the advice of her good friend and confidante Tantie Mariatou, to intervene and goes to see *les grands* on his behalf. Despite being terrified at the outset, she manages to go to the basement where the ringleaders congregate, and she discovers that one of *les grands* is Didier, a childhood friend with whom she even shared her first kiss. This is a bittersweet encounter for Ahlème, as she learns that he has spent time in prison and she cannot help but reminisce sadly:

Il avait des envies, des rêves et ce genre de trucs...Il ne se souvient sûrement pas de me l'avoir dit, il voulait faire du bateau, ceux avec les voiles blanches, et ça, depuis l'époque des glaces italiennes que son père nous donnait en cachette des autres enfants. Seulement, Didier, il pensait qu'il ne pourrait jamais faire du bateau parce qu'à Ivry, il n'y a pas de mer.¹⁵⁴

152 Ibid., 100-1.

153 Ibid., 150-1.

154 Ibid., 107.

In the course of their conversation, she discovers that they have been referring to Foued as *l'Orphelin*, which upsets her. She explains the situation to Didier, in particular her fear that if he is caught he will be sent to Algeria, and implores that he and his friends "ne gâchent pas la vie de petits comme ils ont gâché la leur."¹⁵⁵ She does all of this despite knowing that she will be unable to change the system, to make a difference, but her sense of responsibility and love for her brother compel her to try. Contradicting the stereotypes of trouble makers in the *banlieue*, Didier understands Ahlème's situation completely. In fact, "Il s'excuse, jure sur la tête de sa mère qu'il est désolé, me promet qu'il ne savait pas que Foued était mon frère"¹⁵⁶, and promises that the gang will keep Foued at a distance in the future. As Ahlème leaves him:

Je le remercie chaleureusement et je remercie Dieu aussi, je lui rends grâce d'avoir eu affaire à Didier plutôt qu'à l'autre chelou qui se fait appeler Escobar, parce que celui-là, pour mettre Foued à l'abri du biz, il aurait été capable de me demander une contrepartie, un truc dégueulasse en échange. Je suis prête à tout pour mon frère, même au pire, donc je suis contente de ne pas avoir été confrontée à ça.¹⁵⁷

These examples illustrate how easy it is for young male members of the *banlieue* population to internalise the mentality of marginalisation and believe that they have no options, sometimes despite facing catastrophic consequences for their actions. Although these authors present the *banlieue* mentality in various ways, they demonstrate that negativity and hardship can become entrenched. Yet, counterpoints to these examples are also provided in the texts: Mahany achieves this through the character of Bachir, whereas Rachedi and Guène portray Malik, Foued and Hamoudi moving away from the negativity in their lives and beginning to make positive changes. In so doing, these authors demonstrate that, no matter how entrenched the feelings of negativity and hopelessness, it is possible to escape from the *banlieue* mentality. Including elements of this mentality in the novels allows the authors to address the many issues facing the *banlieue* population in an open and honest manner. This acknowledgement is important for YA readers from the *banlieue*, as it is a part of the reality of life on the periphery, and some young people from these regions will face similar situations. In providing counterpoints and examples of characters that have moved away from this way of thinking, become more positive and resolved to change

155 Ibid.

156 Ibid., 108.

157 Ibid.

their situation for the better, the authors show these young people that this attitude is not definitive and that it is possible to overcome it. At the same time, they demonstrate to readers from outside the *banlieues* that there is more positivity in these regions than is commonly portrayed in media representations of the *banlieues* in France, and that not all young people from the peripheral zones share in the negative and defeatist attitudes of those most frequently seen in coverage of these areas.

2.5 Conclusion

The relationship between Paris and the surrounding *banlieues* is a complex one. From their beginnings as a site of recreation for the elite of Paris, and a tax-haven for poorer members of society who could not afford the *octroi* and, as a result of administrative decisions in the nineteenth century and twentieth centuries, there has been a long history of displacement of the inner-city working-class to these marginalised zones. This chapter outlined how these planning decisions, some of which were short-sighted in nature, led to a concentration of poverty in these peripheral areas and highlighted their current position as dilapidated spaces that comprise sites of displacement for the urban poor. The manner in which the *banlieues* are represented in the primary texts has two distinct axes: the physical representation of *banlieue* spaces, and a more figurative representation, the *banlieue* mentality. The authors illustrate that the sometimes oppressive nature of the *banlieue* architecture, and the marginalised nature of life in these regions, can lead to a *mentalité du ghetto*, to borrow Rachedi's term. Acknowledging these negative aspects of life on the periphery is important. By not according these negativities undue importance, however, the authors demonstrate that this *banlieue* mentality can be overcome. They achieve this by featuring characters who experience a shift in attitude and are more positive and willing to strive for change by the end of their narratives. Highlighting that these negative attitudes as a result of displacement are not inevitable, but something over which young *banlieue* residents have control, can contribute to the empowerment of this demographic through literature.

Chapter 3: “On n’y est pas si mal”¹: Changing the Perception of the *Banlieues*

The population of the *banlieues* face many difficulties as a result of the peripheral location of their homes. These difficulties are both physical and cultural, as these areas frequently lack amenities and thus residents have little or no access to culture, as highlighted by Rachedi in *Le petit Malik*: “Les lieux de divertissement étaient à des kilomètres, les lieux de culture à des années-lumière.”² This chapter will examine some issues of central importance to the *banlieue* population – education, (un)employment, ethnicity and religion, gender – and will highlight the manner in which these issues are treated in the texts of the corpus. These authors are not hesitant to address the many problems facing *banlieue* residents, nor do they attempt to dismiss them as unimportant. Yet, by confronting these issues directly, acknowledging them yet providing counterpoints, and highlighting at all times the mundane and quotidian aspects of life of the periphery, they demystify and de-dramatize these zones. In this way, they present a more realistic and optimistic vision of these areas, which may serve to empower YA readers from within the *banlieues* and promote greater understanding of these regions to those from without.

3.1 Education

Perhaps as a result of the fact that a large proportion of the *banlieue* population, particularly those from an ethnic or immigrant background, suffers from unemployment and underemployment,³ many amongst the “immigrant families in France perceive the education system as an important channel of social mobility.”⁴ This is significant as sociologist Pierre Bourdieu believes that the education system:

...which plays a crucial role in the reproduction of the distribution of capital and thus in the reproduction of the distribution of the structure of social space, has become a central stake in the struggle for the monopoly on dominant positions.⁵

1 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 147.

2 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 131.

3 This will be discussed in Section 3.2.

4 Dominique Duprez, “Urban Rioting as an Indicator of Crisis in the Integration Model for Ethnic Minority Youth in France,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 5 (2009): 757.

5 Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, trans. Laretta C Clough (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 5.

Bourdieu believes that the mechanisms of the educational institution are in fact rigged against those from a working-class background, which includes many among the *banlieue* population. He claims that through a:

...process very similar to the one that produces social differentiation between the sexes, the educational institution tends to produce embodied, and hence naturalized, social differences by enabling them, through official recognition, to become fully realized and lastingly inscribed in objectively measurable dispositions, constantly asserted in the objectivity of practices.⁶

Despite this, positions of power are viewed relative to one's existing economic situation, and consequently those from an immigrant background have identified education as a means to improve their prospects. Those who immigrated to France from North Africa hope that, through education, their children will be more prosperous than they were, and work in more prestigious jobs. This hope is encapsulated by Abdelkader in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*: "Trente-cinq ans à clouer des semelles ! Tac tac tac ! Toute ma vie, j'ai usé mes mains pour permettre à mes enfants de travailler avec leur tête !"⁷ Emphasising education as a means of escaping the harsh and difficult life on the margins of French society, which the *banlieues* represent is a feature of most of the primary texts under investigation in this thesis. There are many characters throughout these books who attempt to use – with varying degrees of success – the French education system in order to improve their situation. If not the protagonist, then a sibling, a close friend or a rival will be the person who tries to educate themselves to a better life.⁸

Education is seen as a means of escape from the poverty and monotony of life in the *banlieues*. Azouz Begag has claimed that, in comparison to the past, when the church, the army and political parties all played an important role in the lives of the *banlieue* youth, nowadays "l'école est aujourd'hui le seul maillon résistant mais elle devient de plus en plus un point nodal de contradictions et d'affrontements."⁹ These contradictions are born out of the fact that although education is seen as a means of escape, schools in

6 Ibid., 150.

7 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 12.

8 It is worth noting that the converse is also present in some novels by this demographic, however, as in the case of Balou in Charef's *Le thé au harem d'Arché Ahmed* – it is Balou who makes the infamous mistake referred to in the title of this book, and we learn that he never completed his education, yet he is shown to be much more successful than any of the main characters, even if this is as a result of rather questionable activities.

9 Azouz Begag, *L'Intégration* (Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu, 2003), 78.

France are also the site of many problems and controversies. The *affaire du foulard* has, over the years, been largely debated in terms of whether or not headscarves should be allowed in schools and other state-controlled institutions.¹⁰ Guène uses a dinner party debate between the protagonist of *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, his sister and several politicians to introduce a discussion of the headscarf ban in schools. Dounia discusses her fight for women's freedom, including the headscarf ban as an integral part, and success story, of that fight. Yet, Mourad counters that sometimes the ban can have the opposite effect, as a number of girls left school as a result of the law: "Elles ont tiré un trait sur toutes leurs ambitions, sur leur unique chance de sortir de ce système archaïque que tu prétends combattre."¹¹ This is not the first time that Guène has acknowledged Islamic dress in her work although the previous instance, in *Du rêve pour les oufs*, was a light-hearted reference. Ahlème, embarrassed by the obnoxious behaviour of a blind date in a restaurant, claims: "À cet instant précis, si on me l'avait proposé, j'étais OK pour la burka."¹² The more serious commentary in her most recent novel allows her to make the point that while there were, undoubtedly, many girls who were liberated by this ban, there were also unintended consequences that may have hindered the chances of others. Framing this discussion in a debate between characters allows Guène to highlight these issues of concern without making them central parts of the narrative or allowing them to dominate the plot in a cumbersome manner.

In relation to the belief that schools in the *banlieues* are violent and dangerous, Belmessous claims that a "surmédiatisation de ce phénomène nous fait croire qu'il a pris de l'ampleur."¹³ Yet the *banlieue* schools are frequently where the youngest and most inexperienced teachers are posted. Faïza Guène has spoken of this in an interview, where "She talks of teachers reluctantly sent to the suburbs on their first job 'almost as a punishment', so 'the desire to impart wisdom is nonexistent'."¹⁴ Even within *banlieue* schools, classes can be further segregated, as outlined by Van Zanten:

10 This issue will be discussed further in sections 3.3 and 3.4.

11 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 285.

12 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 41.

13 Hacène Belmessous, *L'avenir commence en banlieue* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), 23.

14 Angélique Chrisafis, "High riser," *The Guardian*, June 5 2008. Accessed: October 10 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jun/05/culture.news>.

...through a series of microdecisions made by teachers and administrators, immigrant pupils, particularly North African boys, come to be segregated in what are known as the "bad classes" ... These classes receive the most recently arrived and the least motivated of teachers, the worst premises, and the least prized teaching materials.¹⁵

Throughout several of the novels, these issues are addressed – both the troublemaking students and the potential disenfranchisement of the teachers. For instance, in *Kiffer sa race*, Sabrina frequently takes issue with the behaviour of her disruptive classmates, who slow the learning process (her classmates even cause a huge commotion when they are brought on a class trip to see a play in Paris, which leaves Sabrina feeling deeply ashamed), as well as behaviour in general throughout the school. This is evidenced from the very first day of the school year, when: "À peine la grille franchie, la première boule puante explose dans le couloir. Record battu, l'année dernière, il avait fallu attendre la pause de dix heures, qu'est qu'ils vont pas inventer l'année prochaine?"¹⁶ The situation is much worse in Doria's school, as during the course of the novel, the teachers go on strike to protest against the violence they, at times, experience in school. The catalyst for this event is an attack on the principal, M. Loiseau, in which a teargas canister was thrown at his head by a student, prompting Doria to remark on the irony that "La rare fois où il sort de son bureau histoire de vérifier que l'établissement tient encore debout, il se fait gazer."¹⁷ All but one of the teaching staff mount a protest in the aftermath, although many of the students do not support it, as they believe that it will not achieve anything, which Doria finds difficult to understand: "Comme si la majorité pensait que ça servait à rien et que c'était foutu pour nous de toute façon."¹⁸ Although Doria does not like M. Loiseau, she does not believe that teachers should have to endure such hardship, claiming: "même avant qu'il se fasse gazer, c'est grave que M. Loiseau se sente en sécurité seulement dans son bureau."¹⁹ This form of aggression is occasionally a reality of teaching in a ZEP,²⁰

15 Agnès van Zanten, "Schooling Immigrants in France in the 1990s: Success or Failure of the Republican Model of Integration?" *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (1997): 367. Van Zanten bases this statement on a 1995 study by Jean-Paul Payet: Jean-Paul Payet, *Collèges de banlieue. Ethnographie d'un monde scolaire* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1995).

16 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 25.

17 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 65.

18 Ibid., 66.

19 Ibid., 65-6.

20 *Zones d'éducation prioritaires*. The ZEP programme was established in 1981, and aimed to provide increased resources to schools in disadvantaged areas. The term ZEP is no longer in official use, having been replaced by the ÉCLAIR programme (Écoles, collèges, lycées pour l'ambition, l'innovation et la réussite). In informal usage, these schools are still referred to as ZEP and it features in the novels under investigation. For this reason, I have chosen to retain the term in the thesis.

and this incident thus reflects an unfortunate experience for some teachers. Its inclusion is thus an aspect of realism in the text. Yet Doria's reaction demonstrates that some of the students support teachers in their efforts, and that not all wish to see acts of violence committed against them.

In *Du rêve pour les oufs*, Ahlème describes how she left school as soon as she was able. Following her father's accident and subsequent inability to work, it was necessary for her to gain employment and support her family. Consequently, she desires more for her brother Foued, and hopes that he will have access to greater opportunities than she had. He has difficulties at school, however, and during the course of the novel, Ahlème is called in for meetings regarding his behaviour. Foued is eventually expelled, because he expressed a desire to take a sports-training course with a view to potentially having a career in professional football. This culminated in a fight, when the teacher mocked his dream – telling him that "tout le monde ne peut pas devenir Zidane."²¹ Ahlème is outraged when she hears this, as she believes that her brother was victimised by the system as a result of his origins: "Foued a été exclu du système scolaire parce qu'on a condamné d'avance son rêve."²² Negative and bitter teachers, jaded from a life of teaching in a ZEP and all the hardship that it entails are a feature of much of the literature from the *banlieues*. Teachers in ZEP schools can frequently be demoralised and disillusioned, owing to the difficult nature of their positions, and yet it is difficult to imagine treating a young student in this manner. Foued, however, is not blameless in this situation, as he reacts badly to the guidance teacher's claim, and has also been disruptive at school in the past. For instance, some of his school reports depict a less than ideal student:

L'élève Foued Galbi a uriné dans la corbeille à papier au fond de la salle de classe alors que j'avais le dos tourné, une odeur infecte a envahi mon cours. Je ne tolérerai plus ce comportement animal...

Foued G. est un perturbateur. Il fait le pitre et ne pense qu'à amuser la galerie au lieu de travailler. Il attend le silence pendant le devoir sur table afin de modifier sa voix pour prononcer des choses vulgaires et honteuses telles que « TEUB » ou « GLAND ». Ensuite toute la classe éclate de rire et je dois à nouveau faire la police pour calmer le chahut...

Foued Galbi me menace en plein cours. Je cite : « Je sais où t'habites, bâtard », « Je vais te casser la bouche, enculé, va ! ». De plus, hier, mercredi 16, caché dans le couloir, derrière un poteau tel un fourbe, il a prononcé des insultes graves à mon égard, je cite : « Denoyer tête de fion », « Denoyer gros cul », « Denoyer, ta femme elle est

21 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 129.

22 Ibid., 130.

grosse ». Avant cela, un jour de contrôle, il avait placé un chewing-gum dans la serrure de la salle de cours. Je n'ai pas pu ouvrir ma classe et nous avons dû reporter le devoir. Je réclame une sanction à la hauteur de la gravité des actes et surtout des propos du jeune individu, c'est-à-dire au moins un conseil de discipline suivi d'un renvoi définitif.²³

Following his expulsion, Ahlème obtains assistance from social workers in finding an alternative school for her brother, as she refuses to see him denied the opportunity of an education and improved job prospects.

At the outset of *Les gens du Balto*, Tanièl, one of the many protagonists, has also been expelled for hitting his guidance counsellor, but has yet to inform his parents. He continues to leave the house with his school bag each morning, but inside it "y a ni livres ni stylos. Juste ma PSP, mon tabac, mes feuilles et mon shit."²⁴ His unemployed father, Jacques, hopes that Tanièl will complete his studies, "histoire de pas se retrouver comme moi à cinquante-six ans au milieu du canapé du salon."²⁵ This mirrors the position taken by Ahlème in *Du rêve pour les oufs*, and shows that those who fail to complete their education can harbour deep regrets and strive to ensure that their children and younger siblings will have more opportunities available to them – even when this is in conflict with the desires of the younger generation. This reflects the view, prevalent among first generation immigrants from North Africa, that education is the most important aspect of life and that success is guaranteed to those who persevere with it. Towards the end of the novel, it transpires that Jacques had known that Tanièl had been expelled, and chose to remain silent in the hope that the conflict would dissipate and he would return to school. When it seems as if this might not happen (and in light of a pregnancy scare with Tanièl's girlfriend Magalie) Jacques has a long discussion with his son, and together they decide to go to the caseworker and find another school, or a training course for Tanièl to attend. As Tanièl eventually realises "Faudrait que je m'active ... On n'est pas condamné à l'échec ou alors ce serait une putain d'injustice la vie."²⁶ This statement contradicts the sense of hopelessness frequently experienced by youths on the periphery, and demonstrates a change in attitude for Tanièl. His new attitude may empower young readers, as they see that even Tanièl can overcome his disillusionment, and learn that he is only trapped

23 Ibid., 54.

24 Guène, *Les gens du Balto*, 21.

25 Ibid., 43.

26 Ibid., 138.

by his circumstances if he feels defeated and does nothing to improve his situation. His example demonstrates that even major setbacks, such as expulsion, do not preclude future success, if one is determined to make an effort.

Guène's most recent work, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, showcases education to a greater extent and in a different light than in any of her other novels. The protagonist, Mourad, has at the beginning of the novel, just completed his *CAPES*²⁷ exams and is awaiting the results. Mourad has always had a love of literature and, as he does not have many friends, reading becomes a means for him to hide from his solitude. In a way, however, it eventually leads to his increased isolation from others. He is encouraged in his scholarly pursuits by his parents – in particular his father, who views academic success as the most important achievement for his children. The father's opinion on education reflects that of Ahlème and Jacques, and is compounded in this instance by his own illiteracy. Abdelkader holds educated people in such high esteem that whenever he has an official meeting or wishes to appear intelligent he clips several pens to his shirt pocket, and dons a pair of false glasses with plastic lenses. When he wishes to read something, he asks Mourad to read it to him "avec l'accent de journaliste."²⁸ Interestingly, while Mourad is waiting to meet parents at his first parent-teacher meeting, "j'ai accroché deux stylos par leur capuchon à la poche extérieure de ma veste. C'était un hommage, le plus bel hommage que je pouvais faire au padre."²⁹

Mourad's first teaching post is in Montreuil, and he moves to Paris to begin work at Gustave Courbet school. (He soon wishes it was named after someone else, however, as every time he hears the name he gets a mental image of Courbet's famous *L'Origine du monde* painting – a close up of the genitals and abdomen of a naked woman lying on a bed with spread legs – which makes him uncomfortable.) He is so nervous about his new job that he begins to take copious amounts of Imodium³⁰ in order to deal with what he terms his *laxophobie*, his irrational fear that he will experience diarrhoea in class as a result of his nerves. This is not helped by the training course provided by *Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres*, which will not offer the module titled *Comment donner son premier cours* until two months after teaching begins. His first days at the school go reasonably well, he enjoys the company of the majority of his colleagues (with

27 *Certificat d'aptitude au professorat de l'enseignement du second degré*. One of two different exams leading to professional qualification as a secondary school teacher in France.

28 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 307.

29 *Ibid.*, 293-4.

30 A popular brand of medication used to relieve symptoms of diarrhoea.

the notable exception of his senior in the French department, Gérard), and he begins to find his feet in the classroom. Mid-October, however, sees the dreaded return of Medhi Mazouani from the *bled*.³¹ Medhi is a renowned trouble-maker, and begins misbehaving as soon as he enters the classroom. He has a sense that, at fifteen, his life is already wasted and he has no future prospects. The reasons for this become clear when Mourad meets Medhi's father at the parent-teacher meeting, and his father makes harsh comparisons between Medhi and his more intelligent older siblings. Despite Mourad's protestations and attempts to convince Medhi's father to help his son succeed, he remains resolute that his son will leave school and begin to work as soon as it is legally permissible. The inclusion of this story in the narrative reflects the reality that not all members of France's North African population view education positively, and that for Medhi, unlike Taniël, Foued and Mourad, this has damaged his attitude and confidence in his abilities.

Of all of Guène's novels, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* contains the most profound reflection on the French education system. This takes the form of a debate that occurs during a staff dinner party, held by Hélène, an English teacher at Gustave Courbet. Many of the teachers attending the dinner are frustrated with their job in a ZEP, the lack of resources, and the constant discipline issues which arise as a result. They argue back and forth about the level of discipline that teachers should be expected to carry out, whether parents have any interest in the happenings at school, and whether or not they have any time left, after disciplining their students, to actually educate them. Perhaps the most insightful statement made over the course of the debate comes from a teacher who has spent twenty years teaching in Seine-Saint-Denis, who claims:

Ça fait vingt ans que j'enseigne dans le 93 et, au bout du compte, j'ai pas vu de miracles ! Malgré toutes les réformes qui se sont succédé sous mes yeux ! Mes anciens élèves, pour ceux qui s'en sortent bien, ils sont vigiles au Carrefour de la porte de Montreuil, ou vendeurs dans des boutiques de sport ! Les nanas pas trop mal roulées, elles se retrouvent hôtesse d'accueil. Je vous parle même pas de ceux que je vois traîner toute la journée dans les PMU de la rue de Paris, à dépenser leur RSA en jeux de grattage ou au Rapido !³²

This damning indictment of the state's failed reform policies highlights a frustration with the education system from a viewpoint hitherto unseen in Guène's work. Yet there are also teachers at the dinner party who revel in their challenging job, and the element of

31 A North African term which means village or region.

32 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 260.

social work required when working in a ZEP. One teacher even claims that several of her students remain after class, in order to discuss their problems, and that she is afforded greater respect from them as a result of this: "Ils sentent qu'on les cadre aussi en ce sens."³³ The inclusion of this debate in the narrative is significant, as it adds some depth to Guène's treatment of education, particularly as she allows both sides of the debate to be voiced. This is one of only two novels in the corpus in which the teacher's viewpoint is included and provides an interesting insight and counterpoint to the students' perspectives.

Another teacher who is motivated to engage with her students is Catherine Lespinasse in *Le poids d'une âme*. She is the catalyst for the chain of events outlined in the book, as when Lounès is late for class yet again – despite having actually tried to be punctual on this occasion, he missed the bus as the driver pulled away even though he saw Lounès running to catch up – she sends him to the principal's office. The principal, frustrated at continuing discipline issues in the school, has just implemented a new disciplinary policy which results in Lounès' immediate suspension. Unwilling to face his family, he unwittingly gets swept up in a series of events beyond his control, culminating in his arrest and trial as a suspected drug dealer and terrorist. Lespinasse, who had discovered her husband in bed with another woman the previous evening, and is struggling to maintain her composure – at one point, she leaves her classroom to compose herself as there is: "Pas de place pour la faiblesse dans une Zone d'Éducation Prioritaire, il faut cacher ses blessures"³⁴ – is horrified to learn of his suspension and the role she played therein. Consequently, as Lounès' situation begins to look precarious, due to an over-zealous police inspector hoping for promotion, Lespinasse assists some of his classmates in organising a sit-in at the school, calling for a more thorough investigation of his case. When other teachers are reluctant to join in this protest, she counters with the claim:

Nous avons une occasion unique de nous rapprocher de nos élèves, saisissons-la. Nous nous plaignons sans cesse de leur démotivation et, quand ils agissent, nous nous désolidarisons? Pensez à la tranquillité de vos classes demain quand, aujourd'hui, vous aurez fait cause commune avec eux.³⁵

She convinces some of the teachers to form a committee in order to support their students, although the principal resolutely refuses to assist in their efforts. This support that Lounès receives from his teachers and fellow pupils, as well as the large number of supporters

33 Ibid., 258.

34 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 22.

35 Ibid., 102.

who are outside the *Palais de Justice* for his hearing, contribute to his eventual freedom. In this way, Rachedi shows how school and the education system can have both positive and negative effects on young people, particularly in sensitive areas like the ZEP. Through the words of Catherine Lespinasse, Rachedi also suggests a possible route through which relations between teachers and students in problem areas could be improved: if teachers are willing to show solidarity with students over issues which are important to them, it would be easier to engage the students in class and prevent troublesome behaviour.

In *Le petit Malik*, Rachedi provides an example of a profoundly negative effect that a well-meaning remark had on the young protagonist on his first day at school. Malik's first day was a difficult one for him, as a result of his mother's public affection and the attention he receives from his teacher because of the smell of her homemade *baklawas*. After lunch, he overcompensates for the morning's embarrassment by misbehaving during the afternoon class. As he is leaving at the end of the day, the teacher stops him and explains:

J'ai bien vu ton attitude pendant une heure. Tu sais, cher Malik, il y a deux manières de se faire remarquer : soit en étant très brillant en cours, soit en étant un cancre. Je pense que tu seras suffisamment intelligent pour faire ton choix.³⁶

This advice marks the direction that Malik will take. Not wishing to repeat the difficult experiences of that day, he decides that, in order to remain anonymous in class, he will consciously become an average student. His friend since infancy, Abdou, is a below average student who leaves school at the first opportunity, and their school friend Salomon is academically outstanding and goes on to be very successful (both friends perfectly fulfil the archetypes of Azouz Begag's *rouilleur* and *dérouilleur* respectively). However, as a result of his teacher's words, and regardless of his ability, Malik spends the remainder of his school life striving to be average and thus avoid unnecessary attention. This is despite his relative intelligence and, in particular, the fact that he likes to read and is quite sensitive to the themes of the prescribed novels. An encounter with another teacher, when he is fourteen, confirms his lack of motivation regarding schoolwork. The class is studying Saint-Exupéry's *Vol de nuit*, and the teacher has negotiated a discount, if they all buy their copy from the same bookshop. Malik already has a copy, received from an elderly neighbour, and refuses to ask his mother for money to buy another. The teacher treats him badly over this (even though he is so interested in the novel that he reads it

36 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 26.

in its entirety, prior to the first class on the topic) and insists that he buy the book, as the edition he owns is different to the one purchased by the class. Still unwilling to ask his mother for money for such an unnecessary expense, yet barred from returning to class without the "correct" edition, Malik steals the item from a bookshop. In so doing, he discovers that shoplifting is easy, and consequently "je me dis que c'était si facile de chouraver, alors pourquoi pas ce blouson? Et les derniers baskets à la mode? Dire que l'escalade avait commencé à cause d'un *Vol de nuit*."³⁷ Although he was engaged by the book, and had an opportunity to improve matters at school, his teacher's negative attitude leads him further astray.

As regards his friends' experiences at school, Abdou's lack of academic success is rendered more obvious to him by virtue of Salomon's brilliance, and so he focuses his frustration in Salomon's direction and mistreats him as a result. This eventually leads to the end of their friendship (for which Salomon expresses gratitude several years later, after Abdou's death, as it was his former friend's harsh treatment that encouraged him to keep working hard and ultimately to achieve his goals). The differing school experiences of the three friends, and the consequent effects on their lives, highlight the importance of education. That Malik turned away from potential academic success in favour of anonymity reflects a position taken by many young people, too self-conscious to cope with the attention of their classmates. The profound impact that both teachers mentioned had on his development is also significant, and shows how school can have an important impact on young people's prospects, whether they live in the *banlieue* or elsewhere. This emphasis on the universality of the educational experience, rather than the difficulties that can be experienced on the displaced periphery, is one of the factors contributing to the more positive image of the *banlieues* presented in Rachedi's work. By showing people (of all ages) that the education system has commonalities, regardless of social and cultural background, Rachedi contributes to the demystification of the peripheral areas and their inhabitants.

Alec Hargreaves has questioned whether the emphasis placed on education in fiction written by the North African community in France indicates that these authors are not representative of the North African population in general. He claims that although education is a recurring and important theme when discussing this literature, these writers tend "to be among the more successful products of the French educational system,

37 Ibid., 105.

therefore somewhat unrepresentative of their peers,"³⁸ and elsewhere that "for every *Beur* who has successfully capitalized on the French educational system, there are dozens who have failed."³⁹ It is true that successful writers from this background are viewed as forming part of the demographic known as the *bourgeoisie* and can therefore not be held up as a universal example. Of course, successful authors are not the only people that are included under the rubric of *bourgeoisie*, most members of the community referred to as the *Beurs* who leave the *banlieue* and obtain successful careers are included in this category. In fact, many members of this putative group – 'putative' as they themselves may reject the appellation as being condescending – have their roots in the *Beur* political movement of the 1980s, and specifically *La marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme*, mentioned in Chapter One. Paul Silverstein refers to this when he states that the:

...dissenters from within the *Beur* generation have accused successful *Beur* activists of constituting a cultural and economic 'Beurgoisie,' of utilizing the memory of their participation in the *Beur* Movement to justify their present position as 'the only legitimate public interlocutors' between the French state and North African immigrants.⁴⁰

Silverstein is particularly scathing when referring to *Beur FM*, the most well-known radio station for North African immigrants, which he claims ousted many smaller radio stations owned by members of the North African community. He also slates *SOS Racisme*, which he states has been accused of being the "'harkis of immigration,' of selling out the *banlieue* youth for their personal political advancement"⁴¹ because they wrenched the power and momentum being created by the burgeoning *beur* political movement of the 1980s away from the grassroots collective that initiated it, and placed it in the hands of a few elite members of the community. That is not to suggest that the *bourgeoisie* should

38 Alec G. Hargreaves, "Beur Fiction: Voices from the Immigrant Community in France," *The French Review* 62, no. 4 (1989): 662.

39 Hargreaves, "Resistance and Identity," 89.

40 Paul A. Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 170. Silverstein here references: Ahmed Boubeker and Mogniss H. Adbdallah, *Douce France: La saga du mouvement Beur* (Paris: Im'media, 1993); Saïd Bouamama, Hadjila Sad-Saoud, and Mokhtar Djerdoubi, *Contribution à la mémoire des banlieues* (Paris: Editions du Volga, 1994); Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, "Naissance d'une "Beurgoisie"," *Migrations-Société* 2, no. 8 (1990).

41 Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, 170. The *harkis* were Algerian auxiliaries who fought on the side of the French during decolonisation. At the advent of independence, the French settlers withdrew from Algeria immediately, leaving behind the *harkis*, many of whom were killed for collaborating.

be viewed negatively. Quite the contrary, other than a need to be careful not to allow the success of a few indicate successful integration for the whole community. Azouz Begag has spoken on this point, claiming he does not wish to be "l'Arabe qui cache la forêt."⁴²

Entry into the French education system can provoke an identity rupture for some young ethnics in *banlieue* communities. In many cases, Arabic is the predominant language during their first few years, as it is the language spoken in the home. Consequently, they can experience a linguistic displacement upon starting school, as French is the medium through which they are taught. This is not limited to the children of immigrants. In relation to the novels of Annie Ernaux, Alison Fell claims that Ernaux made "a clear distinction between the bourgeois language encountered at school and university and the language used in the family home. As a ... class migrant ... she gradually ceases to speak the language spoken by her parents."⁴³ Hargreaves has spoken of what he believes to be the two most difficult moments for the *Beur* community: "...when they are young children, with their entry into the French school system, and during adolescence, when they seek to exercise personal freedom."⁴⁴ From the time they enter the school system, many young ethnics speak French as their predominant language, frequently responding in French even when their parents speak to them in Arabic. This deepens the sense of linguistic displacement and creates a divide between two major aspects of their lives – their roots and origins and the society in which they have been raised. Hargreaves claims that this "divided cultural heritage ... has often combined with their material deprivation to slow their progress through the French educational system."⁴⁵ According to Bourdieu, Passeron and De Saint-Martin, children from a working-class background frequently have little to no exposure to cultural works, and consequently can feel disconnected from the education system, as:

...the teaching of culture always anticipates an experience of culture which is missing. The divorce between the language of the family and the language of school only serves to reinforce the feeling that the education system belongs to another world, and that what teachers have to say has nothing to do with daily life because it is spoken in a language which makes it unreal.⁴⁶

42 Begag, *L'Intégration*, 18.

43 Alison S. Fell, *Ernaux: La Place and La Honte* (London: Grant & Cutler, 2006), 56.

44 Alec G. Hargreaves, "Resistance at the Margins: Writers of Maghrebi immigrant origin in France," in *Post-Colonial Cultures in France*, ed. Alec Hargreaves and Mark McKinney (London: Routledge, 1997), 227.

45 Hargreaves, "Beur Fiction," 662.

46 Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Passeron, and Monique De Saint-Martin, *Academic Discourse*, trans.

For Bourdieu, cultural capital is a hypothesis that renders it “possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success ... to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes.”⁴⁷ He believes that while it can be acquired by anyone, “the best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment [is] the domestic transmission of cultural capital.”⁴⁸ Thus, those from lower classes can be at an immediate disadvantage in terms of their education, and must work harder in order to achieve success. This disconnect can be even more extreme for those who moved to France as children, who have previous experience of a different education system, and must learn the social structures of a new system. *Du rêve pour les oufs* provides an example of this rupture, as Ahlème must adjust to the school system when she moved to Paris from Algeria at the age of eleven. There is a much stricter atmosphere in the Algerian system – there were frequent beatings and when asked a question students had to stand before responding. She recalls being mocked for these habits when she first started school in France, and consequently “J’ai vite laissé tomber mes bons vieux réflexes, le truc de se lever pour s’adresser au professeur par exemple.”⁴⁹ In order to cope with the French education system, she changed from a polite and well-mannered girl and became “une vraie teigne”⁵⁰. This portrayal of two education systems, both harsh in their own way, which require drastically different approaches in order to survive them is significant, as it allows the reader to see the difficulties faced by the population of immigrant origin as they navigate between two differing cultural traditions.

Cultural traditions can sometimes have a negative impact on children’s education, as is the case in *Le poids d’une âme*. The Amri family is a large one, with ten children. Reflecting attitudes frequently held by immigrants from North Africa, when the oldest daughter Khadija reaches sixteen, after which education is no longer compulsory in France, her father Samir forces her to leave school so she can “forger son destin de femme au foyer. Promise à un cousin éloigné, pourquoi poursuivrait-elle au-delà de l’âge légal de scolarisation ?”⁵¹ Her teachers are dismayed by this, as she was a gifted and promising student. Catherine Lespinasse even attempted to intervene and persuade Samir to allow

Richard Teese (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 9.

47 Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital (1986),” in *Cultural Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 82.

48 Ibid., 84.

49 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 46.

50 Ibid.

51 Rachedi, *Le poids d’une âme*, 171.

his daughter to remain in school, to no avail. Khadija feels enormously guilty for relenting under this pressure from her father: as the oldest girl, her two younger sisters will have little choice but to follow her example when they turn sixteen. In the epilogue to the novel, however, we discover that Khadija, on the recommendation of Lespinasse, has been employed as a supervisor at her former school and will sit her *baccalauréat* as an external candidate. While not everyone who leaves school early is fortunate enough to subsequently return to their studies, these examples demonstrate that decisions of this nature are rarely final and that it is possible to turn things around at a later date. This positivity is an important aspect of the empowerment of the young generation of *banlieue* residents, as it shows that a change in attitude, and a willingness to accept the opportunities presented, is frequently all that is necessary for a more successful life, and that this is possible regardless of the circumstances of one's upbringing.

Hargreaves has pointed out that "education has enabled immigrant youth to articulate a much more critical view of French society than was feasible for most of their parents. It has also sometimes had humiliating consequences for first generation migrants in dealings with their own children",⁵² who very frequently become more educated than their parents. This is another significant aspect of the rupture and displacement frequently experienced by youths growing up in the French periphery. Across all of the novels in the corpus, many of the protagonists' parents are illiterate, and this can lead to conflict with their educated children. Malika has been exceptionally gifted from a very young age, greatly encouraged by her maternal grandfather, Papy Ali, who himself began to learn to play the oud at the age of sixty-seven. When he dies, he is found in bed clutching the instrument, prompting an awed Malika to comment "Jusqu'à la fin, il aura appris."⁵³ She excels at school from the outset, and her teachers immediately want her to skip a year. Her mother is reluctant, however, as she does not wish her daughter to become arrogant or, bizarrely, pregnant. Despite the protestations of Papy Ali – an enlightened man who secretly teaches his granddaughter French and Mathematics, and who despairs of his daughter's attitude: "À cause de son complexe scolaire, elle gâcherait tout"⁵⁴ – Malika's mother refuses to consider the idea. Later, when Malika is eighteen years old, the reader learns the reason behind Soraya's "complex" in relation to her daughter's education. Her mother is illiterate, having left school at a young age, as per the tradition for young women

52 Hargreaves, "Beur Fiction," 664.

53 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 23.

54 Ibid., 13.

in North African cultures, and thus has little understanding of what it means for Malika to be so academically gifted. Malika discovers her mother's illiteracy by chance, as her mother has kept it carefully hidden for years and regularly pretended to read newspapers. When the truth is finally discovered as a result of a fight between mother and daughter because Soraya refuses (is unable) to sign one of the forms that Malika must submit to *l'ÉNA*, she takes steps to become literate. This mirrors an event from *Kiffe kiffe demain*, as Doria's mother Yasmina is also illiterate, and following the departure of her husband, their social worker facilitates her in taking literacy classes so that she can obtain a better job and provide for her daughter.

Despite the potential conflict that can occur, education remains important for the future success of the *banlieue* youth. This importance is reflected by pioneering initiatives that have been developed by *Sciences Po*,⁵⁵ which has put in place "an additional entry channel...for high-flying students from lycées in disadvantaged urban areas. Because this works on a spatially defined basis, no one is hurt because of his or her ethnicity."⁵⁶ Admission for these students is based on the student's file and an interview, as opposed to the traditional method of admission – participating in the highly competitive *concours* examinations. Notably, other *grandes écoles* have been quick to follow *Sciences Po* in this initiative, which Begag sees as having started a positive chain reaction which has "launched a momentum that has already achieved manifest successes that are a credit to the Republic".⁵⁷ It is precisely such initiatives that are required in order to reduce unemployment in the *banlieues*, to at least bring it in line with the national average. Although, according to former soccer player and one of the early proponents of the *Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration*, Zaïr Kedadouche, this will not be sufficient as there is a need for other initiatives and other efforts. He therefore advocates a reform of the education system, as in his view, education is the most important step on the road to integration: "En diffusant le savoir, en développant l'intelligence, l'école s'impose comme le premier partenaire de l'intégration...Pour réussir à l'intégration, tout passe par l'école."⁵⁸

Initiatives such as those initiated by *Sciences Po* are highlighted in *La petite Malika*: as a result of one of these programmes Malika gains entry into the *École Nationale d'Administration*. Policies such as these are established in order to facilitate gifted pupils

55 *Institut d'études politiques de Paris*, popularly known as *Sciences Po*.

56 Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, 111.

57 *Ibid.*, 125.

58 Zaïr Kedadouche, *La France et les Beurs* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 2002), 130-3.

from disadvantaged backgrounds in attaining a higher level of education than would otherwise be available to them. When she initially begins the course, some of Malika's classmates are conscious of this:

Au début, les autres élèves me regardaient de haut, soi-disant parce que venant d'une ZEP, j'avais forcément été admise par discrimination positive, ce qui me valut le doux surnom de zépreuse. Ils ont vite réalisé que non, même si dans les premiers temps la rumeur a couru que mes copies étaient surévaluées.⁵⁹

As mentioned above, Begag believes that initiatives such as this policy of positive discrimination are crucial for the future development of the *banlieues*, in order to avoid a deepening of the chasm between the privileged classes and the marginalised poor in France:

These were courageous, pioneering efforts. They have set off a positive chain reaction in our society... Now I know that high school students in the hoods have registered in their mental geography and, more precisely, in their geography of accessible places the address of that famed institute in Paris... Psychologically high school students in the ZEPS are now thinking in terms of positive role models and "why not me?" whereas only a few years earlier their thinking was "that's not for me, I don't belong there!" ... These initiatives have breathed new life into the democratic values of our country after a quarter century of the empty and misleading discourse of integration.⁶⁰

In choosing to showcase a success story of these initiatives in their novel, Rachedi and Mahany are highlighting the opportunities that are available, even to those from disadvantaged areas. The initially hostile reaction of Malika's new classmates serves to demonstrate that these initiatives have their detractors, who believe that the recipients may not be as gifted or as deserving as those who enter these institutions by traditional routes. Yet, although this was the opinion of some of her classmates at the outset, Malika is quickly able to prove her ability and demonstrate that she is capable of succeeding even at the highest level. Malika's success at *l'ÉNA* provides an example to YA readers, that economic disadvantage does not equate to lack of ability. In so doing, the authors also highlight the positive impact of such initiatives, and their importance to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

59 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 157.

60 Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, 125-6.

In an interesting twist, upon completion of her degree, Malika obtains employment at a large corporation and earns a lot of money, but she is unsatisfied in her job (particularly when the company attempts to increase profits by capitalising on an earthquake in China). She realises that she wants to teach, to help others like her to succeed. She retrains as a teacher and gets a job in a ZEP school, very similar to the one where she herself studied, in terms of the slang being spoken and the gang-mentality that pervades the school. This act of coming full circle is seen by some – such as her boyfriend Manuel and his family – as a waste of her talent, but Malika finds her new job fulfilling, and is extremely happy to be able to “transmettre”⁶¹ the valuable lessons she herself has learned to other young residents of the *banlieue*, and each time “que je posais le pied au collège, je venais avec le sentiment exaltant que tout était à construire.”⁶² It is important to note that *transmettre* is a keyword for both Rachedi and Mahany in relation to their writing, and Rachedi has been quoted on several different occasions as referring to his work as *armes de transmission massives*, as detailed in Chapter One.

Although Malika is so gifted that she becomes almost a caricature, the role of school and education in this narrative is clear. Rachedi and Mahany are attempting to convey the point that regardless of how gifted, talented, or educated people are, it is not always necessary for them to abandon their roots. It is a perception held amongst those outside the *banlieue* that intelligent and successful people leave these regions, and this is indeed often the case. Yet at the same time, this novel makes the point that this is not necessarily always the case, that sometimes, the most gifted and intelligent people return and assist others to escape – not the *banlieues* themselves, but the negativity of the *banlieue* mentality, discussed in the previous chapter. They are attempting to emphasise that it is the *banlieue* mentality, and not the physical space, that traps people. In this way, Rachedi and Mahany present education as a potentially positive aspect of life in the *banlieues*, and one which is not necessarily an escape route out of the marginalised regions, but can be a way to a more positive outlook on life in these zones. Even through the hyperbolic character of Malika, they show that intelligence and the *banlieues* are not mutually exclusive and that opportunities are available everywhere, if one knows how to capitalise on them. Rachedi and Mahany both claim to have had a very positive school experience:

61 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 211.

62 Ibid., 225.

L'expérience scolaire a été globalement positive. Nos parents, qui n'avaient pas eu la chance d'aller à l'école, nous ont poussés à être les meilleurs possibles. Pour eux, notre salut passerait par-là, c'est pour ça qu'ils ont mis la pression très tôt à nos aînés, puis à nous-mêmes. Cela a été plus facile pour nous, qui avions déjà un environnement stimulant grâce aux parcours de nos grands frères et sœurs ... Nous n'avons pas été confrontés à la dévalorisation de l'image dont se plaignent les jeunes aujourd'hui en banlieue.⁶³

The positive portrayal of the education system by both authors is a reflection of their own positive experiences, and their desire to see others capitalise on the opportunities that a good education provides.

This idea of transmitting is also central to the way education is presented by Mahany in *Kiffer sa race*. Similar to the protagonist of *La petite Malika*, Sabrina is by far the most intelligent in her class. She attains the highest mark in every test without exerting herself. In contrast to Malika, who becomes somewhat isolated as a result of her intelligence, Sabrina's classmates accept her as the smart student. Some of them, notably Lamine (the most disruptive student in the class), even turn to her to confirm the veracity of the teacher's comments. The only complaint she receives from her teachers is that she does not participate actively in class and thus refuses to take a leadership role. She does feel a sense of isolation, with no one to challenge her academically, especially when she is mocked for her love of reading and the fact that she writes a journal. Her attitude, however, is that "la littérature, c'est pas un truc de riche, le savoir, c'est pas un domaine réservé. C'est pas parce qu'on nous a mis dans un ghetto qu'il faut qu'on se contente de ce qu'on a"⁶⁴ and she also outlines that, for her, "Les livres, les langues étrangères sont mes fenêtres vers un autre monde que la cité."⁶⁵ She further claims that although Zola, Balzac and Hugo wrote about the poorest members of the population of their time, people of the *banlieues* today have no one writing about them in the same way: "Si on se donne pas la peine de parler, personne nous écouter."⁶⁶ Sabrina is alone among her classmates in holding this opinion, reflecting the contention in *Academic Discourse* that, for students of working-class origin, the rift experienced between the cultural and linguistic experience of school and home:

63 See Appendix 3.

64 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 38.

65 Ibid., 53.

66 Ibid., 38.

...extends across all dimensions of life, from central areas of interest to the very words in which these are discussed; and it can be lived only with a sense of dualism or in a state of resigned submission to being excluded.⁶⁷

Sabrina's attitude to reading as a means of escape, and writing as a means of speaking out about the displaced position of her own community reflects Mahany's opinion, shared by Rachedi, that writing can act as a means of transmitting new ideals and values, particularly writing that is widely read by younger readers. In personal correspondence, Rachedi and Mahany explained the importance of reading during their childhoods "Lire, c'était ... notre façon de voyager, nous qui n'avions pas beaucoup de moyens."⁶⁸

Accustomed to effortlessly being top of the class, Sabrina must, this year, face some competition from a new student, Alphonse Mercier. This forces Sabrina to work harder than ever in order to maintain her position. The competition (fuelled initially by rivalry, and later by a sense of healthy competition between friends) causes both young students to push themselves harder and achieve more. Although the other students in the class accept Sabrina as one of their own, they are not happy when Alphonse arrives and begins to take her glory, while the teachers see the new student's arrival as an opportunity to demand more of them both. Sabrina, who is at first hostile towards Alphonse, later acknowledges that competition has been beneficial for her academic achievement: "Alphonse et moi, on a repris la bonne vieille compétition scolaire. Un jour c'est lui qui prend le dessus, le lendemain c'est moi. À la fin du trimestre, ça va se jouer au dixième pour se départager."⁶⁹ This sense of competition, and her mother's desire that her children – particularly her daughters – obtain a good education, means that Sabrina is highly motivated to excel at her studies. At the novel's close, she plans to attend summer classes in anticipation of being accepted on a preparatory course, which will be established in her school the following academic year, for entry to *Sciences Po*.

The French education system does not always work to the advantage of all of the students, however. *Kiffe kiffe demain's* Doria is only fifteen, and school does not seem to feature highly on her list of priorities. She usually refers to school only in relation to her report cards and to the frequent strikes by the teaching staff, and to tell the reader that she sees her psychologist Mme Burlaud as a result of a referral from her teachers. Doria

67 Bourdieu, Passeron, and De Saint-Martin, *Academic Discourse*, 9.

68 See Appendix 3.

69 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 223.

does not perform very well in school, despite getting extra assistance from her neighbour Nabil, who is a star student. For a while, it is thought that she will have to repeat a year. This does not happen, however, as "il n'y a pas assez de places pour tout le monde. Et dans ce « tout le monde », il y a moi."⁷⁰ So a place is found for her at a local *lycée professionnel*, to undertake a training course in hairdressing. This angers Doria's friend Hamoudi – who never finished school but who can recite Rimbaud. The choice of a poet whose ironic poems attacked what he saw as the mindless and petty values and customs of the *bourgeoisie* seems unlikely to be a coincidence. In choosing Rimbaud, a poet traditionally seen as the rebellious voice of the youth of his generation, Guène is consciously drawing a link between the marginalised populations on the periphery of society, as epitomised in the character of Hamoudi, and the rebel poet of the nineteenth century, who railed against the establishment of his day. Although Hamoudi sometimes had difficulty remembering all the words, "parce que le shit, ça te bouffe la mémoire"⁷¹, she nonetheless enjoys it "quand il me les dit avec son accent et sa gestuelle de racaille."⁷² It consequently annoys her deeply when he is harassed by those in authority: "Alors, quand je vois les policiers qui fouillent Hamoudi près du hall, quand je les entends le traiter de « p'tit con », de « déchet », je me dis que ces types, ils connaissent rien à la poésie".⁷³ Hamoudi wants Doria to fight the school board's decision, insisting that they have no right to deny her a place in school. Doria sees no point in doing this however, as she does not know what she wants to do and "personne m'a jamais expliqué dans quoi il fallait que je m'oriente."⁷⁴ This ambivalent attitude towards education reflects, perhaps, the attitudes that Guène herself witnessed as she grew up on the periphery. Given that a substantial proportion of the *banlieue* youth population are unemployed, for some it is difficult to recognise the benefit in excelling at school. The fact that Doria is drifting aimlessly along, waiting for someone to tell her what she should do in life, indicates a lack of motivation on her part, but her school fails to provide her with any form of direction or career guidance, which should be part of their remit. Thus Doria undertakes a hairdressing course without having much interest. In this instance, Doria's teachers let her down by failing to steer her towards a career that she may find stimulating.

70 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 107.

71 Ibid., 27.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., 28.

74 Ibid., 108.

Another instance in which the system itself causes problems is highlighted in *Le petit Malik*, when Malik is sixteen years old and leaving *collège*. He and his friends Abdou and Salomon, previously inseparable, are taking different paths: "Je passais en seconde de justesse, Salomon était admis avec les honneurs et Abdou était orienté en BEP."⁷⁵ The fact that Abdou is still in school, Malik attributes to the cynicism of the education system whereby "les mauvais élèves passaient pour être virés au plus vite. D'habitude, on se débrouillait pour les dégrader en quatrième, avant le Brevet des Collèges, pour embellir les statistiques de l'examen."⁷⁶ This tactic, designed to improve the school's performance ratings is indeed cynical, and could be damaging to the student's future prospects. However for some students, such as Abdou, it is clear that he will leave school at the earliest opportunity, therefore it is a matter of finding something for him to do until he reaches the age at which he can legally stop attending. In this instance, however, the tactic fails to have the desired effect, as "Même en rusant, on restait le plus mauvais établissement secondaire de la région."⁷⁷

The manner in which education is treated by these authors reflects the ambivalent attitudes often held by members of the *banlieue* communities. For the older members of the population, education is frequently seen as the key to successful integration into French society. Yet at the same time, schools (and particularly those in the ZEP regions) are frequently sites of conflict between the population of immigrant origin and the bureaucratic workings of the French state. Linguistic displacement can occur as a result of the French education system, which can create a division between school and home life, and thus entry into the French education system can be the cause of an identity rupture for some of the *banlieue* youth. Schools are often portrayed in *banlieue* literature in terms of extremes; the reader is presented with highly successful students, or else troublemakers who understand little and prevent other students from learning by disrupting class. While the representations of the education system in the novels of Mahany and Rachedi tend to showcase overachieving, highly talented students, Guène's portrayal is notably mundane. With the exception of Nabil, although it is implied that Nabil is not actually as gifted and talented as his excessively proud mother proclaims, these are average students who do not work too hard. Some students, particularly Taniël and Foued (from *Les gens du*

75 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 117. BEP is the *Brevet d'études professionnelles*, a diploma exam which can be taken at the end of high school by those who do not wish to pursue further academic study.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

Balto and *Du rêve pour les oufs* respectively) are cast in the troublemaker role but, in both cases, it is unclear if the fault actually lies with certain teachers who push these students to snapping point. Further, as discussed above, external perceptions of *banlieue* schools in general, as well as ZEP schools in particular can be quite negative, with the image of troublemaking students prominent. Violence directed towards teachers by students is also a common perception, one addressed by these authors in terms of the various conflicts mentioned above. In light of this, by presenting YA readers with an education system depicted in a realistic light, featuring a mix of students of all abilities, the authors highlight that schools in the *banlieue* differ little from schools elsewhere. In this way, by presenting this realistic version of school years – even on the periphery – they contribute to the creation of a more positive vision of life on the margins, and help to bring the perceptions of *banlieue* schools, and thus the *banlieues* in general, in line with those of schools everywhere.

3.2 (Un)employment

According to Tahar Ben Jelloun, the fact of having emigrated to France, and the subsequent displacement experienced by the immigrants and their offspring:

... a volé au père son corps, et à la mère sa jeunesse, mais elle impose en plus le vol de l'avenir des enfants et surtout instaure un système d'autorépression qui finit par déstructurer la famille, par la rendre victime d'une vision caricaturale du pays laissé derrière soi.⁷⁸

This quotation illustrates how the situation for those of immigrant origin has changed over the years. As outlined in Chapter Two, the first generation of North African immigrants – the ones who actually immigrated – were in fact migrant workers who arrived in France to work in the factories and construction sites of France's urban areas. Frequently these men, and later their families, lived in *bidonvilles* at the periphery of urban zones, yet because of this displacement, as well as the knowledge that they were filling a shortage in the labour market, they were well received at the time. When their children came of age, this marked "l'apparition d'une nouvelle génération de jeunes Maghrébins nés en France qui ne sont ni 'travailleurs' ni 'immigrés', et dont les pratiques culturelles deviennent

78 Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Hospitalité française: Racisme et immigration maghrébine*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Seuil, 1997), 153.

rapidement plus visibles que celles de leurs parents.”⁷⁹ This increased visibility, coupled with widespread unemployment – which hit the Maghrebi community in France particularly hard – caused by the 1980s recession and increasing reliance on technology in industry meant that the French population became increasingly aware that the “second generation immigrants” were not integrating successfully into French society. Begag claims that “le rapport à l'étranger fonctionne toujours sur le mode de la domination: pauvre, besogneux ... sous-prolétaire soumis économiquement et culturellement.”⁸⁰ This is indicative of how many view the *banlieue* population in France as a drain on the social services of the country. Loïc Wacquant refers to this when talking about the neologism *érémistes*,⁸¹ which he describes as “coined to capture the new reality of quasi-permanent rejection from the wage labour sphere,”⁸² which is as a result of widespread unemployment among the *banlieue* communities. *Le poids d'une âme* features some characters who could be described as *érémistes*, in particular some of the young men, several of whom – notably Christophe and Yazid, who are responsible for Lounès' arrest, and Hocine – are unemployed and spend their days killing time in the neighbourhood. Although Lounès seeks them out upon his suspension, they are mentioned only sporadically throughout the remainder of the novel. They do, however, appear again in the epilogue: “Hocine commente les matchs de football avec les potes sur un banc de Grigny. Christophe et Yazid regardent circuler les voitures sur un banc d'Évry, à l'ombre de la Tour numéro 5.”⁸³ This summary shows that nothing has changed for these three young men, and reflects the difficulties faced by some among the *banlieue* population, both in terms of finding a job, as well as getting trapped in a vicious cycle of despair and lethargy when unsuccessful.

Wacquant tends to blame this persistent and seemingly permanent “exclusion from wage labour of a segment of the working class [...for...] the correlative growth of the informal economy in declining urban areas ... [as a result of] what Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto called an ‘excess reserve army of labour.’”⁸⁴ This exclusion

79 Alec G. Hargreaves, “Une culture innommable,” in *Cultures transnationales de France : Des « Beurs » aux...?*, ed. Hafid Gafaïti (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), 28-9.

80 Begag, *L'Intégration*, 22.

81 From RMIste, meaning a person who is in receipt of RMI (*revenu minimum d'insertion*), the French equivalent of social welfare. The RMI was replaced by the RSA (*revenu de solidarité active*) for those over the age of twenty five in 2009 and was extended to include eighteen to twenty five year olds in 2010.

82 Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts*, 26.

83 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 211.

84 Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts*, 27. Wacquant here references: Fernando Enrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

from the job market is not confined to those of North African origin, and the widespread closure of factories and automation of manual labour has had an impact across France's working-class population. Guène deals with this in *Les gens du Balto*, as Jacques lost his job as a result of factory closure. Jacques is long-term unemployed and despairs of his status:

Avant, ma vie c'était : boulot à l'usine, café derrière l'usine, copains de l'usine, sorties avec le syndic des ouvriers de l'usine. Maintenant, enlève le mot « usine » et tu verras bien ce qu'il reste. Que dalle.⁸⁵

He spends his days sitting on the sofa watching game shows and soaps and he refers frequently to the good old days at the factory and in particular to his former boss, Marcel. He holds little hope of finding a job elsewhere. This has affected him badly and he feels emasculated as a result: "Ça fait bien longtemps que je me sens plus un homme. Seulement quelque chose d'inutile posé sur le canapé."⁸⁶ That Jacques is so disempowered by unemployment is a different perspective on the tendency towards absent, weak or otherwise debilitated father figures in novels emerging from the *banlieues*.⁸⁷ Jacques' case stands in sharp contrast to *Du rêve pour les oufs*, where *le Patron* has a brain injury, or *Kiffé kiffé demain*, in which *le Barbu* has abandoned his family. In this novel, Jacques is painfully aware of his situation but feels hopeless in the face of his circumstances, and powerless to change them. This is in sharp contrast to the overbearing, domineering and abusive presence of his wife Yéva, who has taken control of all of the decisions in their married life, which has potentially contributed to his emasculation and inability to extract himself from his powerless situation. However, Guène uses Jacques' character as an opportunity to subvert this trope. The murder of a local man, as well as his acceptance to participate in one of his beloved gameshows, shakes him out of his stupor. He decides to divorce his wife, whom he has despised for many years, to get fit, and to live a full life with plans and ambitions. This resolve leaves him happier and more content than he has been since he lost his job, and thus no longer as affected by his chronic unemployment as he was at the beginning of the novel. The inclusion of a character who has been unemployed for as long as Jacques, and was negatively affected by it, contributes to the realism of the

85 Guène, *Les gens du Balto*, 42-3.

86 Ibid., 95.

87 This tendency in novels by this demographic will be discussed in greater depth in section 3.4.

novel. Yet, Jacques' renewed positivity at the end shows that unemployment and despair do not always go together, and that there is still some hope in the *banlieues* despite the negativity and despair with which they are so frequently associated.

These high levels of unemployment in the *banlieues* have led to what Wacquant calls the catch-22 situation of the French government:

... the more it intervenes to stem public disorders in the declining periphery on the social front, the more glaring its inability to remedy the underlying economic marginalisation of its residents and the more its managers are called upon to provide social compensation, which can only feed the cycle of claims-making and recrimination.⁸⁸

Hacène Belmessous refutes the perception that most of the *banlieue* residents are living on social welfare, claiming that figures given by various newspaper and magazine journalists can be extremely misleading. As an example, he claims that newspapers reported, quite accurately, that a large proportion of *banlieue* residents depend on various forms of social welfare, yet failed to acknowledge that the study on which these figures were based also stated that:

Pour six ménages sur dix, en effet, les revenus d'activité constituent la première source de revenus ... Les prestations sociales, si elles occupent une place essentielle dans les ressources d'une partie des ménages, constituent en réalité qu'une fraction limitée du revenu total perçu par les habitants des quartiers.⁸⁹

He cites further examples of inflated figures quoted in newspapers, without any indication of the source, both in relation to economic issues, but also in relation to the number of prisoners of Maghrebi origin. He further claims that the government does not correct misperceptions such as the above, as it is eager to cast the blame for economic problems far from itself, saying that "à chaque récession, le pouvoir politique use de justifications erronées pour expliquer des phénomènes plus lisibles qu'on ne le croit."⁹⁰ By casting the blame for difficult economic circumstances onto a highly visible minority group, politicians can avoid taking responsibility for implementing economic reform. In relation to the media representation of violence in the *banlieue*,⁹¹ Wacquant has noted that politicians frequently adopt ideas purported by the media and contribute to their proliferation:

88 Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts*, 218.

89 Belmessous, *L'avenir commence en banlieue*, 77.

90 Ibid., 35.

91 This will be discussed in Chapter Four.

...politicians and para-politicians (members of the higher civil service, heads of public bureaucracies, leaders and co-ordinators of local associations, and pressure groups interested in issues relating to the city) have taken up this discourse for themselves and fuelled it with their own contributions.⁹²

The low levels of employment amongst *banlieue* communities in France can be partly attributed to discrimination on the part of employers. That rates of unemployment are higher for *banlieue* residents was confirmed in a study carried out by *l'Observatoire national des zones urbaines sensibles*, published in November 2011, which discovered that:

Sur le plan professionnel, 19,2 % des primo-arrivants sont au chômage, contre 9,5 % pour la population hors Zus. Dans la génération suivante, le chiffre s'élève à 28,6 %, contre 10,6 % pour le reste de la population. Par ailleurs, les personnes issues de l'immigration occupent les métiers les moins qualifiés, avec 52,2 % d'ouvriers et 4,4 % de cadres.⁹³

Sophie Pams, writing in *Le Point*, however, outlines essayist Paul Thibaud's explanation that these figures do not necessarily tell the whole story as "la hausse du taux de chômage entre les primo-arrivants et les descendants ne révèle pas une dégradation de la situation. 'Ceux qui trouvent du travail quittent les Zus ... Ce sont ceux en situation d'échec qui restent.'"⁹⁴ This phenomenon, whereby those who achieve success leave the *banlieues*,⁹⁵ thereby inadvertently causing poverty to become more entrenched in these regions, is highlighted in *Le petit Malik*. This is achieved through the differing trajectories of Malik's two friends Salomon and Abdou. Abdou, who had always struggled with his education, leaves school at the earliest opportunity and spends his time watching television in the basements of the tower blocks, earning money from criminal activities: "...Abdou magouillait dans des bizness douteux de recel d'objets volés, de deal de shit."⁹⁶ Salomon, on the other hand, worked hard at school and becomes very successful and does indeed leave the *banlieue*, fulfilling the stereotype outlined above. Guène addresses this issue in *Les gens du Balto*. In her police interview, Yéva bemoans her low-paying job and her husband's unemployment, as they have two teenage sons to support: "Ce qui est sûr, c'est qu'on

92 Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts*, 143.

93 Sophie Pams, "La mixité existe toujours dans les banlieues," *Le Point*, November 02 2011. Accessed: April 7 2013, http://www.lepoint.fr/societe/la-mixite-existe-toujours-dans-les-banlieues-02-11-2011-1391936_23.php.

94 Ibid.

95 This was discussed briefly in Chapter Two.

96 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 126.

est peut-être au pays des droits de l'homme, mais certainement pas au pays des droits de l'homme pauvre. Si j'avais du fric, je serais ailleurs qu'ici, loin de cette ville de ratés..."⁹⁷ This flight from the *banlieue* of those who are successful is an issue of concern to those who remain, and thus it is significant that it has been addressed in several of the novels in the corpus. Yet the fleeting manner in which it is addressed shows some unwillingness on Guène's part to dwell overly on it in this instance. Guène has chosen, despite her success, to remain living in the *banlieue*, as have Rachedi and Mahany. Addressing this topic in their novels is a means of highlighting the fact that many live in these areas out of necessity. If those who were successful chose to remain and contribute to the area, culturally as well as financially, they would be positive examples that the potential for success is not exclusive to more affluent areas but can also be achieved by residents of the *banlieues*.

A comparative study carried out at the *EPEE*⁹⁸ in 2007, investigated the difficulties that the population of North African origin may experience when attempting to find employment. Thirty-two CVs were sent out in response to 264 advertised posts. These CVs featured identical qualifications but different addresses, and some of the names were traditional French names, while others evoked a Moroccan background. The jobs in question were accountancy or wait-staff positions. It was demonstrated that:

Lorsque l'on recherche un emploi de serveur, les chances d'obtenir un entretien d'embauche sont au moins trois fois plus fortes pour les candidats qui signalent leur origine française par la consonance de leur nom et de leur prénom que pour les candidats qui signalent leur nationalité marocaine et qui ont un nom et un prénom d'origine marocaine. Dans le cas des comptables, ces différences sont plus marquées. Les candidats de nationalité et d'origine marocaines doivent en moyenne envoyer plus de dix fois plus de curriculum vitae pour obtenir autant d'invitations à des entretiens d'embauche que les candidats dont les noms et prénoms évoquent l'origine française.⁹⁹

Thus it can be quite difficult for *banlieue* residents to avoid discrimination when it comes to seeking employment, and statistics show a discrepancy between unemployment figures among youth in general and the youth population of immigrant origin. To demonstrate that this is restricted to the children of immigrants from former colonies, and is not as

97 Guène, *Les gens du Balto*, 150.

98 *Centre d'étude des politiques économiques*.

99 Emmanuel Duguet et al., "Discriminations à l'embauche: Un testing sur les jeunes des banlieues d'Île-de-France," *EPEE Centre d'étude des politiques économiques de l'université d'Évry-Val d'Essonne* (Paris, 2007).

great a problem for immigrants generally, Hargreaves discussed in 2007 how children of Portuguese immigrants from similar backgrounds and with similar qualifications did not have the same level of unemployment: "While long-term joblessness affected 25 per cent of unemployed Portuguese nationals, among out-of-work Maghrebis the rate was 44 per cent and among other Africans it stood at 48 per cent (INSEE 1994:85)."¹⁰⁰ When members of this community do obtain employment it may, in some cases, be more difficult to retain, as highlighted by Guène in *Kiffe kiffe demain*. Hamoudi is a young man of North African origin who, according to Doria, has "Une pure tête de Méditerranéen."¹⁰¹ He has served time in prison, although he refuses to tell her why as he believes she is too young to hear it. Since his release, he has had many part-time jobs and now relies on selling marijuana to survive, and he "peut pas mener une vie normale."¹⁰² He eventually finds employment as a night-time security guard at a technology rental business and he loves having a legitimate job. Unfortunately, not long after he starts working there, several thousand euro worth of stock goes missing, and although he swears he had nothing to do with it, no one believes him (not even his parents) and he loses his job. He believes he was blamed as a result of his North African appearance: "Je m'en fous, j'suis propre, j'ai rien à me reprocher, j'ai bien fait mon boulot et je me suis pas endormi une seule fois ! Le seul truc qu'ils peuvent me reprocher, c'est cette sale gueule..."¹⁰³ Hamoudi's dismissal was a major setback for him, and although he eventually manages to find alternative employment, the unfair treatment he received as a result of his North African heritage dented his confidence. It is only as a result of a new relationship that he gains enough confidence to seek employment once again.

Malik was also dismissed from his job, as a call centre operator, although not for racist reasons in this instance, rather as a result of the recession. He finds it difficult to accept the fact that he was let go, even though he was the best operator on his team. Yet, because of his *banlieue* roots he does not have a network of powerful connections:

Pourquoi moi alors que je drainais le plus gros chiffre d'affaires de l'équipe ? Ce n'était pas du racisme, puisque Redouane et Mahmoudou n'étaient pas dans la charrette. Juste, je n'avais pas de réseau. Jean-Denis et Grégoire avaient été pistonnés par leur père,

100 Alec G. Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France: Immigration, politics, culture and society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 54.

101 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 121.

102 Ibid., 87.

103 Ibid., 121.

Patricia par son oncle, Estelle par son beau-frère, Redouane par son frère, Mahmadou par un ami, Mélinda par un ex. Moi, j'avais répondu à une petite annonce, personne pour me soutenir.¹⁰⁴

Malik struggles with motivation for quite some time after this and does not regain a sense of purpose until five years later, after Abdou's death and his reunion with Salomon. Yet, as outlined in Chapter Two, he does find motivation when he recognises and casts off his *banlieue* mentality, which provides an optimistic counterpoint to his despondent attitude up to that point, and allows Rachedi to demonstrate that even the most hopeless situation can improve given the right circumstances and attitude.

Unemployment features in all of Guène's novels and Rachedi's two novels, but Mahany does not dwell on this topic, neither in *Kiffer sa race* nor in the co-written *La petite Malika*. In certain characters, such as Hamoudi, Jacques and Malik, employment causes despair and hopelessness. Yet it is rarely presented as an insurmountable obstacle. In her novels, Guène provides contextualising information to allow the reader an insight into the circumstances leading up to the character's joblessness, and they are frequently in a better position by the close of the texts. From despair at the outset, by the end of the novels, these characters have a sense of hope, or at least a sense of control over the direction that their lives are taking. In doing this, Guène is telling her young audience that they need not feel trapped by their circumstances. Further, she is attempting to show her readers that the dominant perceptions of the *banlieues* as sites of unemployment are merely stereotypes and caricatures, and that the decision to live up to them – or not – lies, to a large extent, in their own hands. She is not overly positive in her outlook, as this would likely alienate YA readers. She merely shows how, by a change in attitude, if not circumstance, one can decide the perspective to adopt, and thus how to react to it. In this way, she casts the *banlieues* and the circumstances of their populations, in a realistic light and attempts to convey a more positive image for the young people in these zones. Rachedi, on the other hand, highlights various effects that unemployment can have in the lives of young people growing up in the *banlieues*. He demonstrates the potentially devastating effect that long-term unemployment can have, as well as the possibility that things can improve for some of these people. In so doing, he shows his readers that contrary to popularly held opinion regarding these zones, not everyone from the *banlieues* is unemployed by choice, that sometimes circumstances lead to these situations, and that it is never too late to turn

104 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 159.

things around. These authors thereby present a more positive view of the *banlieues* and their residents, particularly for the reader unfamiliar with the situation in these zones, rather than the stereotyped views commonly presented by the media.

3.3 Ethnicity and Religion

In relation to the putative second generation *immigrés*, Alec Hargreaves stresses the incongruity of their inclusion under the category of "culture immigrée" despite not being immigrants themselves and the fact that the "pratiques hybrides dans lesquelles la langue et les points de référence dominants en France sont tout aussi sinon plus présents que ceux du pays d'origine."¹⁰⁵ He has also described how, in their daily lives, members of this population have "been compelled to migrate constantly between the secular culture of France and the traditions carried with them by their Muslim parents from across the Mediterranean."¹⁰⁶ This is an issue that many members of the North African community in France face at some point in their lives. Begag claims that although many of them were "born in *metropolitan* France, the children of immigrants continue to be perceived as the children of colonial subjects, as the descendants of 'natives'".¹⁰⁷ Despite being considered French citizens under the legal definition of the term, they have a series of stereotyped images projected onto them by those from outside the *banlieue* community. Elements of this stereotyped perception include being North African, Muslim, working class or unemployed, and torn between the competing influences of dual cultures. *Jeunes de banlieue* is, according to Robert Castel, an "expression sous laquelle il faut déceler cette double référence à la classe et à la race."¹⁰⁸ Writing on the situation of the *banlieue* youth, Michelle Bacholle says that being:

...nés en France d'immigrés maghrébins (principalement algériens), ils appartiennent à deux mondes. Ils sont arabes par leur culture et français par leur éducation, ils sont français par leur nationalité et arabes par leur ethnie. Mais ce biculturalisme, cette double appartenance finissent par équivaloir à une double exclusion, ni français ni arabe.¹⁰⁹

105 Hargreaves, "Une culture innommable," 29.

106 Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity*, 1.

107 Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, 109.

108 Castel, *La discrimination négative*, 8.

109 Bacholle, *Un passé contraignant*, 11.

This sense of displacement encapsulates the situation faced by many young ethnics in the *banlieue* today. Their parents frequently retain a strong attachment to the language, customs and culture of the country of their birth, while the younger generation are "en rupture avec les expressions culturelles de leurs parents, figées selon leurs propres termes dans une culture de l'immigration,"¹¹⁰ and consequently the *banlieues* have come to be seen as a site of social displacement, and a space within which to negotiate new identities. These dualities are often compared to having a "sense of identity [that] is always in some sense stretched between these poles [either side of the Mediterranean]."¹¹¹ The presence of dual identities can cause conflict, which are highlighted in the texts. Ahlème has a complex relationship with the country of her birth, which is apparent from the opening lines of the novel, when she bemoans how cold Paris is. She walks through the streets in the midst of crowds of people, all going about their business and occasionally she recognises her *frères* (as she refers to her countrymen) who, like her, suffer constantly from the cold: "Ceux-là, je les reconnais toujours, ils ont quelque chose dans les yeux qui n'est pas pareil, on dirait qu'ils aimeraient être invisibles, être ailleurs. Mais ils sont ici."¹¹² The feeling of melancholy evoked by this statement reflects the displacement experienced by immigrants from North Africa due to being so far away from home. This sentiment of being disconnected from her past life in Algeria is confirmed when she visits her family there. Although she enjoys herself and reconnects with her family, she nonetheless realises that she no longer belongs in Algeria, and she perceives a wide gulf separating her from her female cousins who remained there:

Mes jeunes cousines n'ont que le mot « mariage » à la bouche. Elles préparent leur trousseau, et à l'âge de Foued, elles sont déjà de vraies femmes. Leur vie est brodée sur leur tapis de paille aussi sûrement que la mienne est gravée sur le béton des immeubles d'Ivry.¹¹³

110 Marie-Hélène Buffet, "Culture, actions culturelles et intégration en France des populations immigrés et de leurs enfants," *Mots Pluriels*, 23(2003), Accessed: January 26 2011, <http://motspluriels.arts.uwa.edu.au/MP2303mhb.html>.

111 Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity*, 25.

112 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 7.

113 Ibid., 145.

This acknowledgement that her life is inextricably linked to the Parisian *banlieue* where she has spent the majority of her life is a very significant step for Ahlème. She knows that no matter how difficult her living conditions in France, the hardships she faces are manageable relative to what her family in the *bled* has suffered. It is for this reason that she outlines:

Je voudrais leur dire que là-bas, en France, ce n'est pas ce qu'ils croient, qu'à travers cette fenêtre déformante qu'est la télévision, ils ne sauront rien du réel. Les chaînes françaises qu'ils piratent pour regarder les feuilletons TF1 de l'été ne leur montrent pas la vérité...

Je ne m'autorise pas à leur dire tout ça, je ne veux pas passer pour madame Je-sais-tout. Ces gens ont connu une guerre civile, la faim et la peur, et même si la France n'est pas ce qu'ils croient, on n'y est pas si mal, parce que ici, c'est peut-être pire en fait.¹¹⁴

These realisations assist her upon her return to France, and are an important reflection of the attitude shared by many emigrants who return to North Africa on relatively brief trips. The honesty with which Ahlème outlines her, at times conflicted, feelings regarding her dual cultural background and dual identity is striking. However, Ahlème's new-found clarity upon visiting the *bled* gives the reader a deep insight into how immigrants can encounter divided loyalties. This is an important aspect of the novel, as it would give young readers who share similar backgrounds and circumstances a guideline for achieving perspective on their own lives, as well as allowing others an insight into the difficult situation faced by those of an immigrant background in France.

Ahlème has remained in frequent contact with her extended family in Algeria, although until the end of the novel she has not returned to revisit. While she appreciates the letters she receives from her aunts and cousins back home, Ahlème becomes frustrated with them at times. In particular, one of the letters from her aunt, Hanan, manages to arouse feelings of guilt for her failure to return:

Ta grand-mère est vieille et malade. Qu'attendez-vous ? Qu'elle parte sans vous dire au revoir ? Vous nous manquez énormément. Chaque fois que nous évoquons votre souvenir ici, c'est toute la maison qui pleure, les larmes coulent même sur les murs. Venez nous voir, que nous puissions profiter un peu de vous et réunir enfin toute la famille. Notre sœur, que Dieu ait son âme, vous a laissés orphelins, elle n'aurait sûrement pas voulu que nous soyons séparés si longtemps.¹¹⁵

114 Ibid., 146-7.

115 Ibid., 115.

She continues to berate Ahlème for her absence at family weddings and indicates that none of her younger cousins even know who she is. Ahlème knows that this *culpabilisation* is conscious, and remarks that: "C'est chez nous une des bases fondamentales de l'éducation."¹¹⁶ Once Hanan has exhausted this topic, she proceeds to include a list of items that the family wish Ahlème to purchase and send to Algeria. This list is extensive and includes: medicine for her grandmother, some Playtex underwear for her cousin, a hairdryer for the neighbours who work in a salon, anti-ageing cream for Hanan herself and some modern underwear for her cousin Naïma. The latter request is a source of humour in the text, as Hanan clearly has no idea what she is asking for: "Naïma, quant à elle, qui a fêté ses dix-sept ans la saison dernière, te demande quelque chose qu'elle appelle « strings », je ne sais pas ce que ça veut dire mais elle a dit que toi, tu dois sûrement savoir..."¹¹⁷ Ahlème's exasperation is evident when, immediately after reading the letter she muses:

Je me demande si cette lettre m'était vraiment destinée ou si elle aurait dû être expédiée directement au père Noël. Comme d'habitude, ça ressemble plutôt à une liste d'anniversaire en vérité. J'ai l'impression que je ne partage pas grand-chose avec eux, si ce n'est quelques souvenirs. Tout cela me semble bien loin.¹¹⁸

The complexity of this relationship with her past and present, her origins in North Africa and her future in France is a source of identity conflict for Ahlème, reflecting the real-life situation of many in the *banlieues*.

Dual heritage also, at times, causes difficulty and identity conflict in *Kiffer sa race*. In particular, naming is significant for Sabrina and she believes it contributes to identity. For instance, when she first speaks about the Tran family, her Vietnamese neighbours, Sabrina mentions that the Tran children all have French names: Jacqueline, Raymond and Sylvaine. Sabrina would not like to have a French name, as she believes that:

Si c'est ça l'intégration, raser les murs et porter des noms de Français moyens, je préfère être désintégrée sur-le-champ. Attention, je suis fière d'être française, c'est juste, à trop entrer dans un moule, y a pas, on doit avoir de sérieux problèmes d'identité.¹¹⁹

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid., 116.

118 Ibid.

119 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 11.

Given that the population of immigrant origin have competing cultural influences and points of reference, their identity can sometimes be uncertain, as suggested by Sabrina in the above quote. This is crucial to the understanding of the texts in the corpus. Nada Elia wrote in 1997 that *Beur* novels share "the desire to affirm one's presence through self-expression, a feeling of ever-elusive identity, of missing roots, of disintegration, and of unresolved angst."¹²⁰ According to Kobena Mercer, "Identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty."¹²¹ Identity is frequently uncertain during adolescence, regardless of ethnic or cultural differences. Robyn McCallum claims:

Concepts of personal identity and selfhood are formed in dialogue with society, with language, and with other people, and while this dialogue is ongoing, modern adolescence ... is usually thought of as a period during which notions of selfhood undergo rapid and radical transformation.¹²²

Young people of North African origin in France, and in particular those living in the peripheral *banlieue* regions, must thus accept their dual cultural influences and negotiate an identity that is neither wholly French nor wholly North African. As an example of this kind of compromise, Sabrina approves of her parents' choice of names for her and her siblings: "Linda, Sabrina et Adam, ils nous ont donné des noms arabes à consonance vaguement française, croyant peut-être que ça ferait oublier la couleur de notre peau."¹²³ She does not believe that they were very successful in this goal, and in fact, suspects that her mother chose their names from her favourite soap operas: Linda from *Dallas*, Sabrina from *Charlie's Angels* and Adam from *Dynasty*. Nevertheless, she appreciates the symbolism of their parents' choice of names.

Malika's North African and *banlieue* origins cause conflict with her boyfriend, Manuel, whom she meets at *l'ÉNA*, and who is from a very privileged Spanish family: "Chez nous, tout passait par le mot alors que chez lui, le non-dit était synonyme de bonnes manières. Seule la Méditerranée séparait l'Espagne de l'Algérie mais des années-lumière distinguaient

120 Elia, "In the Making," 47.

121 Kobena Mercer, "Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics," in *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 43.

122 Robyn McCallum, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 3.

123 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 18.

son milieu aristo de ma vie dans le quartier."¹²⁴ This is not ostensibly the reason for the end of their relationship, but in conjunction with the disappointment Manuel and his parents – "qui nourrissaient « de grands espoirs pour moi »"¹²⁵ – feel at Malika's decision to remain teaching in a ZEP following his proposal of marriage, it demonstrates that it can be difficult to reconcile two differing cultures and identities. This disconnect between their upbringings leads Malika to appreciate her background relative to his:

Dès leur plus jeune âge, les petits-enfants Sanchez étaient calmes et disciplinés, s'ébrouant dans leur grande salle de jeu. Ils ne jouaient pas ensemble mais à côté, confinés dans cette pièce immense. Des gamins bien élevés, oui, des gamins heureux, je ne sais pas. Je repensais au quartier où on sortait sans demander la permission et où on s'éclatait sans demander notre reste. On n'était pas les plus à plaindre.¹²⁶

Despite the privileged upbringing enjoyed by Manuel, Malika is much happier to have had a relaxed and happy childhood relative to the somewhat stifling atmosphere experienced by her boyfriend.

Richard Derderian claims that debates about immigration and identity are quite common nowadays, given the extent of modern global migration and increasingly heterogeneous populations, but it is the emotional level of these debates and the "intense fears that new ethnic minorities could potentially unleash ... ethnic and racial strife"¹²⁷ that makes France exceptional. Derderian further claims that "While infused with elements of ethnic and racial consciousness, suburban culture refers to a shared space, not any particular minority group."¹²⁸ Azouz Begag shares this view that these youths shape their identity in relation to a sense of belonging to a place, and age-group, rather than by ethnic origins. Similarly, Alec Hargreaves says that most second-generation Maghrebis reject "simplistic binary choices according to which [they] must be *either* French *or* Algerian,"¹²⁹ preferring instead to be "culturally hybrid."¹³⁰ Begag claims that one of the reasons:

124 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 179.

125 Ibid., 211.

126 Ibid., 204.

127 Derderian, *North Africans*, 1.

128 Ibid., 119.

129 Hargreaves, "Resistance at the Margins," 229.

130 Ibid.

... for the steady decline in ethnic in favour of territorial references lies in what we can call the *hollowing out* of these youths. The core of their personality has been reduced to the fusion of their personality with a place (the hood, the tower block, the entrance to their apartment complex, etc.)... These youths have been, so to speak, gutted of any feelings of family, social, or cultural solidarity...¹³¹

In his book, *Désintégration*, which consists of a harsh indictment of the plight of the second and third generations of immigrant origin and the struggles they face, Ahmed Djouder dwells on the lack of acceptance of this community by the French population at large. He talks of the French perception of young ethnics as:

Nous, les petits casseurs et les petits tagueurs de banlieue... Nos vies sont des problèmes qui se mordent la queue: pas de république? pas de fraternité. Pas de fraternité? pas d'accueil. Pas d'accueil? pas d'appartenance. Pas d'appartenance? pas d'identité. Pas d'identité? pas de transmission. Pas de transmission? pas de langage. Pas de langage? pas d'école. Pas d'école? pas de formation. Pas de formation? pas de métier. Pas de métier? Pas d'argent. Pas d'argent? pas d'appartement. Pas d'appartement? pas de point de départ. Pas de point de départ? pas de sens. Pas de sens? pas de valeurs. Pas de valeurs? pas de république...¹³²

Djouder shows how the integration problems facing the children of immigrants in France can be cumulative, and that a lack of respect afforded them can accumulate over time and affect their values and social beliefs to a huge degree. He addresses the French population throughout the book, in which he also expresses his frustration at the way in which young ethnics are always referred to by an ethnic marker, that although they do feel, naturally, some attachment to their parents' country of origin (in his case, Algeria):

...nous voudrions que cette Algérie renaisse de ses cendres. Nous regrettons de ne pas avoir été là pour elle. De ne pas l'avoir connue. De ne pas avoir participé à sa construction, à sa reconstruction. Vous savez pourquoi nous n'y étions pas? Parce que nous sommes français.¹³³

He also decries that his parent's generation was forced to renounce their roots – enforced displacement – in order to achieve an integration that was never completed:

131 Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, 95-6.

132 Ahmed Djouder, *Désintégration* (Paris: Stock, 2006), 101.

133 Ibid., 105.

Il y a Vous, les Français, et Eux, nos parents. Et Nous, leurs enfants... La tristesse de nos parents nous a intoxiqués. Leur refoulement de l'Algérie, leur renoncement, a réduit notre identité comme une peau de chagrin... On est algérien ou français, au choix, on bénéficie du statut de double nationalité. On est donc d'origine étrangère. Et même étrangers à nous-mêmes, dès l'origine. Aliénés.¹³⁴

It is interesting, therefore, to note that most of the novels in the corpus make frequent references to the cultural practices of North Africa. Several of the characters in each of the novels refer to their country of origin and its associated cultural practices and heritage. For instance, in *Kiffe kiffe demain*, the annual Livry-Garguin summer festival draws largely on North African culture and cuisine. Doria and her mother attend this festival annually and usually find "des stands de thé à la menthe et de pâtisseries orientales, le barbecue frites-merguez d'Élie, un animateur socioculturel du quartier, et une scène avec des groupes de musique qui défilaient."¹³⁵ The main act of the day is Cheb Momo, who plays the exact same set at the festival each year, which is, according to Doria "pas mal parce qu'à force, tout le monde finit par connaître les paroles par cœur, même ceux qui parlent pas un mot d'arabe."¹³⁶ Other elements of North African culture mentioned in the text include the decoration of their apartment, which has in the past caused Doria to feel that they were being viewed as exotic animals by their previous social worker, Mme Dutruc's predecessor:

Une fois, il a dit à ma mère qu'en dix ans de métier, c'était la première fois qu'il voyait « des gens comme vous avec un enfant seulement par famille ». Il ne l'a pas dit mais il devait penser « Arabes ». Quand il venait à la maison, ça lui faisait exotique. Il regardait bizarre les bibelots qui sont posés sur le meuble, ceux que ma mère a rapportés du Maroc après son mariage. Et puis comme on marche en babouches à la maison, quand il entrait dans l'appartement, il enlevait ses chaussures pour faire bien.¹³⁷

Contrary to this exoticised view of North African culture held by the social worker, Doria herself mixes her dual cultural heritage almost interchangeably throughout the novel. When it begins, she has just finished reading Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable*, and informs the reader: "Ça raconte l'histoire d'une petite fille qui a été élevée comme un petit

134 Ibid., 137-8.

135 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 51.

136 Ibid., 52.

137 Ibid., 18.

garçon parce que c'était déjà la huitième de la famille et que le père voulait un fils."¹³⁸ This has a particular resonance for her current situation, as her father has abandoned Doria and her mother for a similar reason.

Doria's mother and other women who emigrated from North Africa maintained a concrete link with their country of origin by attending sewing classes attended predominantly by other women from the Maghreb. Her mother explained that she had joined the class "parce qu'il n'y avait pratiquement que des Maghrébines et que ces réunions de femmes le mercredi après-midi autour de leurs machines à coudre Singer des années quatre-vingt, ça lui rappelait un peu le bled."¹³⁹ Even when dressing Doria for school when she was younger, Yasmina retained the traditions of her country of origin. On special occasions such as school picture day she, along with a lot of other mothers from North Africa, would put olive oil in their daughters' hair:

Comme au bled. Moi, j'aime pas trop mais je lui ai rien dit parce ça lui faisait trop plaisir de me faire jolie ... Sur les photos, j'avais les cheveux soyeux et brillants ... Mais en vrai, ils étaient gras et sentaient la friture ... Quand l'institutrice me caressait la tête parce que j'avais donné une bonne réponse, elle s'essuyait la main sur son jean. Le jour de la photo de classe, toutes les institutrices portent les jeans.¹⁴⁰

This is not the only time that the traditions of Doria's North African heritage caused discomfort to others. When she was a small child her mother would take her to the sandbox to play with other children. She recalls one incident when the other children:

...faisaient tous une ronde et ils ont refusé de me donner la main parce que c'était le lendemain de l'aïd, la fête du Mouton, et que Maman m'avait mis du henné sur la paume de la main droite. Ces petites têtes à claques croyaient que j'étais sale.¹⁴¹

Doria also mentions that she had a brief interest in collecting flyers advertising the services of local *marabouts* or witch doctors that were distributed at metro exits by Hindus. Her interest stems from stories her mother would tell her about *la sorcellerie* in Morocco. When her mother was young "une de ses voisines s'était fait marabouter au souk, à peine un mois avant son mariage. Ensuite elle est devenue chauve et à cause de ça, la cérémonie a

138 Ibid., 19.

139 Ibid., 33.

140 Ibid., 156-7.

141 Ibid., 90.

été annulée."¹⁴² The stories and traditions carried over to France by emigrants from North Africa and passed on to subsequent generations play an important part in the lives of the North African community in France. This dual heritage is thus an important element of cultural memory, and the presence in the novel of such anecdotes constitutes an important expression not only of Doria's heritage but that of Faïza Guène herself. The significance of cultural memory was outlined by Jan Assmann, who claims that:

Cultural memory has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time. These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance). We call these 'figures of memory'.¹⁴³

He further maintains that the concept of cultural memory "comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image."¹⁴⁴ Thus for earlier generations of North Africans in France, and for their children, the cultural memory of their ancestors is important in retaining their sense of belonging to that culture. This is reflected in Doria's discussion of the stories she heard and traditions she learned from her mother.

Doria is quite scathing in her description of their most recent visit to Morocco, where local women tried, despite her young age, to marry her to a local man whose nickname is "Rachid l'âne bâté,"¹⁴⁵ prompting Doria to claim: "Là-bas, il suffit que tu aies deux petites excroissances sur la poitrine en guise de seins, que tu saches te taire quand on te le demande, faire cuire du pain et c'est bon, t'es bonne à marier."¹⁴⁶ For this reason, she is quite relieved that there will not be a return visit to the *bled* in the near future as her mother, deeply humiliated by her husband's departure, has informed Doria that they will not be returning to Morocco. "Déjà, on a plus les moyens et ma mère dit que ce serait une trop grande humiliation pour elle. On la montrerait du doigt. Elle croit que c'est de sa faute ce qui est arrivé."¹⁴⁷ Doria and her mother both place a large proportion of the

142 Ibid., 56.

143 Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 129.

144 Ibid., 132.

145 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 22.

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.

responsibility for his departure on *mektoub*, or fate: "C'est comme le scénario d'un film dont on est les acteurs. Le problème, c'est que notre scénariste à nous, il a aucun talent. Il sait pas raconter de belles histoires."¹⁴⁸

The influence of their culture of origin is evident in Fatima and Samir, the parents in *Le poids d'une âme*. Similar to Yasmina, Fatima displays many signs of not having integrated into French society. Despite having lived in France for thirty years, she refuses to answer the telephone, as she lacks confidence in her French linguistic skills. This causes a delay in terms of figuring out what has happened to Lounès, as she is alone in the house for most of the day and thus the family miss several calls from Catherine Lespinasse, who attempts to alert the family that Lounès has been suspended. As with Doria's mother, Fatima has also maintained a strong connection with her roots: "Immigrée depuis trente ans, le français reste une langue étrangère. Avec ses amies, toutes maghrébines, elle communique en arabe."¹⁴⁹ The customs and traditions of North Africa and the dictates of Islam are of paramount importance to her. Even when attempting to deal with her son's possible deportation as the alleged head of an Islamist terrorist ring, she makes tea and serves pastries to the hordes of ostensibly well-meaning neighbours who arrive, many merely seeking gossip. When confronted about this by one of her sons, she replies that "une bonne musulmane sait accueillir en toute circonstance."¹⁵⁰ Fatima also observes the customs of her native culture in her dress, although this is not entirely by choice: "Ses longs cheveux ébène se cachent sous un foulard, une idée de Samir."¹⁵¹ Samir himself is a complex character. In contrast to the father figures portrayed in Guène's novels, he is very much present and influential in the lives of his family. Having arrived in France as a labourer in the 1970s, Samir has become disillusioned with his life:

Trente ans dans ce pays pour en arriver là, détesté de ses enfants, tous ses sacrifices pour rien. Si précieuse aux lendemains de la guerre d'Algérie, la main-d'œuvre maghrébine est devenue un fardeau pour la France en crise, et les petits gris de sales Arabes.¹⁵²

Samir had worked two jobs to support his large family, and uncomplainingly endured the glances and rude comments from his neighbours about living on the coffers of the state, but vents his frustration on his family.¹⁵³

148 Ibid., 19.

149 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 38.

150 Ibid., 100.

151 Ibid., 38.

152 Ibid., 66.

153 This will be discussed in section 3.4.

One of the more interesting ways in which Malika's North African heritage, and that of her schoolmates, is represented in *La petite Malika* occurs as part of the schoolyard games which the children play. When playing *un deux trois soleil*, a popular children's game worldwide, the group introduce a variation: each child will represent a different country. This leads to fierce competition, particularly when people begin to envy the choices of others, and the choices reveal a lot about how the children, a largely multicultural group, view themselves and their dual identities:

Fawzi avait choisi l'Algérie, Mahmoud le Maroc, Sarah, la Tunisie, leurs pays d'origine. Kevin avait choisi le 9-3 en gueulant « yo ! yo ! », Mégane, le Tennessee, l'État de naissance de Miley Cyrus, Priscille le Texas en hommage à Demi Lovato ... et Lucie la Californie comme Vanessa Hudgens ... Quand Ousmane a choisi le Palestine, tous les garçons étaient verts de ne pas avoir eu l'idée en premier. Ils ont tous voulu changer vu qu'Ousmane n'était même pas un Arabe.¹⁵⁴

Perhaps more revealing, however, is the reaction of the others upon hearing Malika's choice: "Moi, j'ai dit que j'étais la France. La honte que c'était ! Tout le monde m'a regardée comme si j'étais une gogole."¹⁵⁵ Malika feels obliged to change her allegiance, choosing instead Chechnya, although she must explain the political significance of this choice to her classmates. This episode illustrates how many of the children in the class, and particularly those from an immigrant background, display a desire to be linked to their country of origin, and an even stronger desire to display allegiance and empathy towards oppressed Muslim populations. Their reaction to Malika's choice of France also indicates that they do not feel any allegiance to the country in which most of them were born – or, at the very least, do not want to be seen to show this allegiance.

Almost all of the novels feature trips to the *bled*, either trips that occur during the course of the novel itself or descriptions of past visits. *La petite Malika* features such a journey, when Malika and her mother visit family in Sidi Bel-Abbès.¹⁵⁶ This trip, which takes place when Malika is twelve years old, is drastically different to Doria's description of her past visits to Morocco, or Ahlème's experiences when she returns to Algeria. Malika does not experience any profound revelation or insight into her dual identity and dual

154 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 19.

155 Ibid., 20.

156 A historically important town in Algeria, named after a Muslim nobleman who is buried there, Sidi Bel-Abbès is known for its significant links with the French Foreign Legion and was the headquarters of its first foreign regiment.

allegiance. In fact, the majority of the chapter comprises a description of the trials and tribulations experienced by the young girl and her mother when trying to evict a rat from their hotel room the first night (Malika ingeniously convinces her mother that if she can catch and remove the rat, she will be allowed to skip ahead a year in school). Unlike Ahlème and her brother Foued, who spend the majority of their time *au bled* bonding with their family members; Malika and her mother do not spend a single night in the aunt's home:

... quand elle a vu qu'on dormirait sur la couche de la grand-mère reléguée à même le sol, et que la fonction dévolue aux chats était de combattre une invasion de rats, ma mère a décidé qu'on serait mieux à l'hôtel malgré les protestations de la famille. Les règles de l'hospitalité, qu'ils arguaient, les lois du confort, qu'on répondait.¹⁵⁷

Nevertheless, Malika and her mother are both profoundly moved upon arrival in Algeria, although Malika – having never been to Algeria before – commits a series of what she terms “gaffes” on the way from the airport to her aunt's house, such as telling her uncle Youcef that her mother can drive if he is tired: “Une femme au volant ? Première gaffe.”¹⁵⁸ There is only one sentence that shows the connection that both women feel to Algeria, yet it captures the depth of that connection, and the ambivalent feelings that are inextricably linked with the experience of a returning emigrant: “Dès que l'on a eu foulé le sol algérien, les larmes ont coulé sur les joues de ma mère. Alors que moi aussi, j'ai pleuré, sans savoir pourquoi.”¹⁵⁹ Given that both Rachedi and Mahany have experienced, in their capacity as French-born children of Algerian immigrants, this return trip and all the attendant emotions, it is significant that they describe Malika's arrival and that of her mother in this manner. It provides an element of common ground between the authors/narrator and readers from a similar background, while demonstrating the complexity of emotion involved in a visit to the *bled* to those readers from different backgrounds.

Various superstitions and traditions from Tlemcen are mentioned in *Kiffer sa race*. When Alphonse turns out to be a new addition to Sabrina's class, after she encountered him in her roof-top haven, she complains that “L'ain me poursuit du toit de l'immeuble aux travées de la salle de classe!”¹⁶⁰ Here Mahany also includes a footnote translating *l'ain*

157 Ibid., 78.

158 Ibid., 76.

159 Ibid.

160 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 32.

as *mauvais œil*. Sabrina also mentions the celebrations when her father, Mohamed, is released from hospital. Neighbours, extended family and colleagues all gather to welcome him home, and Sabrina describes the scene that awaits him: "Je vous raconte pas les youyous à faire trembler les murs."¹⁶¹ Showing that the family and their friends continue to celebrate in a traditional North African manner demonstrates their attachment to their country of origin, despite years of living in France. The novel opens just as Sabrina's parents and older sister arrive back from a visit to the *bled*, and they bring gifts to Adam and Sabrina. Sabrina is bemused by the presents, claiming: "Les voyageurs, ils nous ont offert les cadeaux habituels, une djellaba pour Adam, une gandoura pour moi. Le plus dur dans ce cas, c'est de simuler la surprise. – Quoi???? ? Une gandoura. Merci Maman, je m'y attendais pas."¹⁶² They also bring back all of the ingredients for a couscous, as Sabrina calls it *made in Tlemcen*, which makes it taste better as the spices and semolina are more authentic than those available in France.

Cultures and traditions of the *bled* also feature heavily in certain sections of *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, as Mourad recounts stories about his grandfather, and reminisces about family trips back home, before Dounia insisted that she would not return – the beginning of her rupture with her family. Mourad's mother, Djamila, attempted to exorcise Dounia in one memorable episode, after yet another conflict between her and her sister, which resulted in Mina's hair being set alight. The reader is also treated to a humorous recounting of Mourad's circumcision in Algeria, how scared he was and how his mother insisted that his father collect the *bout* after it was removed. The family have also retained several customs from North Africa in their lives: Abdelkader obtained the Arabic TV stations on satellite, thus ending the need to change channels when an advertisement for shower gel appears on screen; Maroud's cousin Miloud listens to nothing but *rai*¹⁶³ and he also uses several Arabic expressions in his conversation, such as *hmar mette*, which Mourad translates as *un âne est mort*; Abdelkader wears a chachiya most of the time; when Mourad has a brief flirtation with his colleague Hélène, he immediately sees the impossibility of the situation, aware that his mother would never approve; Djamila clings tightly to North African conceptions of *nif* or honour, and they had traditional North African celebrations complete with an apartment full of people, food and *youyous*. Djamila, in particular, has romanticised life in Algeria, and whenever a problem arises with one of her children, she

161 Ibid., 159.

162 Ibid., 22.

163 A style of Algerian folk music originating in Oran.

dreams of how life would be in Algeria if they had remained, conveniently overlooking any hardships of life there. Whenever she is upset by what she perceives as ingratitude from her children she cries *el kebda*, Arabic for liver, as "Symboliquement, ça représente l'attachement d'une mère à ses enfants. On dit bien le fruit de ses entrailles."¹⁶⁴

At the end of the novel, Mourad's father dies. This results in the family returning to Algeria to inter him at his "ultime destination."¹⁶⁵ This visit comprises the final chapter of the text, and provides a sombre ending, in sharp contrast to the optimistic endings of the novels in the corpus. Yet Mourad takes comfort in the burial ritual in Algeria, the kind words of the men who accompany him on his journey to the cemetery with his father, as well as the men who prayed with him over his father's coffin in Nice prior to the flight to Algeria. Mourad's father has always told him that "Un homme, ça ne pleure pas", a phrase that recurs throughout the book, whenever Mourad is feeling emotional (including at Abdelkader's funeral, when Mourad realises that he never asked his father *why*). Yet when Noureddine Morceli won his gold medal at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, Mourad saw his father's eyes well up. Abdelkader claimed it was sinusitis. Yet his emotion at the success of an athlete from his home country¹⁶⁶ shows how strong the links with Algeria remained for Mourad's parents, even after decades of living in France. Mourad frequently expresses slight dismay at the fact that no one can start from scratch, and the final words of the novel close this thread satisfactorily: "Désormais, il nous faut repartir de zéro. Mais c'est toujours la même rengaine: personne ne repart jamais de zéro, pas même les Arabes qui l'ont pourtant inventé, comme disait le padre."¹⁶⁷ Using a return to the *bled* and a return to roots to close the novel, and tie together some of the various strands that have punctuated the narrative, gives the story a sense of completion. The fact that this is all based on the family being together in Algeria to celebrate Abdelkader's life adds an extra dimension to the story, one which highlights the importance of family to Mourad. In contrast to the other novels featuring trips to the *bled* for the protagonists, Mourad does not focus on being back, instead muses on the nature of death and reminisces about his father. This visit back to their place of origin allows Guène to bring the narrative to a close by showing the family having returned to their roots.

164 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 101.

165 Ibid., 312.

166 For discussion on the significance of sport in colonial Algeria, see: Philip Dine, "Shaping the Colonial Body: Sport and Society in Algeria, 1870-1962," in *Algeria and France 1800-2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia*, ed. Patricia M. E. Lorcin (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006).

167 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 315.

On the other hand, while she is studying at *l'ÉNA*, Malika comes very close to forgetting her roots. She distances herself from her former friends, and even her family, who are surprised by the change in her attitude. When Soraya and Boualem are moving house:

Je leur avais proposé de payer des professionnels mais l'offre leur a paru incongrue. Quoi, il faudrait payer des tiers pour soulever *leurs* cartons ? Boualem se tapait les travaux manuels depuis son enfance, il n'économiserait pas ses forces pour son chez-lui. Je me moquais gentiment de ces réflexes de pauvres et eux me répondaient avec le plus grand sérieux de ne pas oublier d'où je venais.¹⁶⁸

This is good advice, as Malika is in the process of forgetting her roots entirely, and alienating her childhood friends and family, yet unfortunately she does not manage to heed it completely. In fact, it takes a chance encounter with a former employee of her beloved Papy Ali for her to see the error of her ways. She meets the old man in the bank and, upon discovering her identity, he insists on taking her for a coffee, where they meet another former employee. They tell her how everyone in his employ loved and respected her grandfather, and that no one begrudged him his success, borne as it was from hard work and dedication. They also tell her that Papy Ali never forgot his origins, a point which is repeated at the end of the chapter to emphasise its significance and how much it influenced Malika: "Quand il a fallu rentrer, j'étais heureuse de mieux connaître papy, un homme dont le succès ne lui avaient pas fait oublier d'où il venait."¹⁶⁹ Family is an important factor in Malika's life and it is her familial bond with Papy Ali, and thus with her roots, that eventually allows Malika to rediscover and acknowledge her true background and origins. This is empowering for Malika, as following this rediscovery she re-evaluates her current situation and realises that she is not happy with the direction her life has taken. Her renewed connection to her roots allows her to make major changes, and demonstrates to YA readers the importance of family and retaining a sense of one's origins.

In *Du rêve pour les oufs*, Ahlème's move to France was a result of losing her mother during the civil war in Algeria, and she claims of her native land: "J'espère que j'aurai la force d'y retourner un jour, pour sentir à nouveau la terre du bled, la chaleur des gens et oublier l'odeur du sang."¹⁷⁰ Before the end of the novel, Ahlème, accompanied by her

168 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 191.

169 Ibid., 197.

170 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 65.

father and brother, does return to her *bled* for the first time since her mother's death. Although she returns to Paris afterwards, visiting the *bled* provides an element of comfort for Ahlème, who is better able to deal with the displacement she experiences and the difficulties of daily life, having reconciled with the ghosts of her past. The trip back to the *bled* also provides the opportunity for one of the only references to religion in the novel, when Ahlème's family take her father to the *marabout*, or witch doctor, in an attempt to cure him of his brain injury. While in Algeria, the family also visit the graveyard where their mother was interred and, as Ahlème outlines: "Nous avons fait une prière pour elle, pour les autres qui reposent là et aussi pour ceux qui les pleurent, pour nous, pour ceux de là-bas. Nous ferons une *sadaqa* en sa mémoire cet après-midi à la mosquée."¹⁷¹ Aside from this, there is no further concrete reference to religion, reflecting its lack of importance outside of a specific context in Ahlème's life, and perhaps also indicating that, for Ahlème, religion is inextricably linked to her country of origin and not to the country where she has lived for most of her life.

Ahlème's two closest friends, Linda and Nawel, have much stronger and more active ties to the *bled* than Ahlème herself. Both girls return annually and chatter casually, even flippantly, about their trips back home. At the outset, Nawel has just returned from a two-month trip to the *bled*, and when the two girls tell her that she has lost weight, she claims that it is due to "l'effet retour au bled"¹⁷², which they liken to "Des vacances régime"¹⁷³ as a result of various factors relating to North Africa: "La chaleur, les haricots verts remplis de filoches à chaque repas, les blagues de la grand-mère, les feuilletons chiliens... C'est sûr que tu maigris."¹⁷⁴ Linda and Nawel both have long-term boyfriends, whom they will marry, much to Ahlème's amusement. Guène uses this to highlight the fact that marriage practices can dramatically differ in North African culture, something with which those born in France to Maghrebi parents frequently struggle, when she outlines that the boyfriends:

...viennent carrément du même village qu'elles, au bled, voilà qui va faire plaisir aux parents. On dirait qu'on vit une sorte de retour à l'inceste. Au moins, ton frère, c'est sûr qu'il vient exactement du même endroit que toi, tu peux vérifier, demande à ta mère. Les filles trouvent que c'est pratique, parce que si les traditions sont différentes,

171 Ibid., 151.

172 Ibid., 13.

173 Ibid., 14.

174 Ibid.

les familles ne s'entendent pas sur tout ; et puis c'est compliqué pour l'éducation des enfants, si on ne parle pas la même langue... Moi, je dis que ce ne sont que les détails ridicules, on ne fonde pas un foyer sur des questions pratiques.¹⁷⁵

Linda and Nawel's opinions regarding marriage, and the necessity of marrying within the culture of origin of their parents and Ahlème's amusement at these same opinions reflect the differing attitudes that immigrants from North Africa – and their descendants – can hold regarding the necessity to integrate completely into French culture. Referencing cultural practices such as these, which constitute part of the everyday lives of many *banlieue* residents, helps illuminate the dual cultural and linguistic influences frequently experienced by these young people. Given that immigrants to France are expected to assimilate into the French way of life and discard any elements of other cultures that they may have retained, making visible other cultures in the texts highlights that France is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society.

In several of the texts in the corpus, when the young female protagonists, or their friends, are going back to the *bled* during the holidays, there is occasionally a fear that the holiday is a ruse and that they will not be returning to France but instead forced to stay with the extended family and marry against their will. A particularly illuminating example of this occurs in *Kiffer sa race*, when the protagonist's older sister, Linda, is being taken to visit the extended family in Tlemcen, after failing her *baccalauréat*, whereas in previous years the whole family had gone to the *bled* during the summer:

La seule invitée au grand voyage, c'était Linda, l'aînée. Pourquoi elle et pas moi? Je crois bien qu'une idée flottait, le genre d'idée qui nous a empêchées de dormir, Linda et moi: le mariage. Aussi moderne soient-ils, avec l'âge, les darons deviennent *old school* et se tournent vers les traditions du pays. Linda, elle a pleuré sa race pour rester en France, et moi, j'ai joué les chœurs, mais les vieux, ils avaient une idée fixe et ils s'y sont tenus. Ils ont juré que non, ils marieraient pas Linda. Je sais pas pourquoi, ça nous a deux fois plus épouvantées, leur ton doucereux.¹⁷⁶

Since their return from the *bled*, however, Linda has been acting coldly, is withdrawn and introverted, spending all of her time on her computer, has begun to lose weight and frequently prevents Sabrina from entering their shared bedroom. Linda's increasingly bizarre

175 Ibid., 13.

176 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 20.

behaviour causes Sabrina to worry as her sister "s'enfonce dans la vase en silence."¹⁷⁷ The reader subsequently learns the reasons for her strange behaviour, as her mother explains: "On a marié Linda."¹⁷⁸ Linda is quick to correct their mother ("C'est pas ce que tu crois ... On m'a pas mariée, j'ai *décidé* de me marier"¹⁷⁹) and it transpires that Linda has fallen in love with the very man that her parents wanted for her in Algeria. By showing how the parents wanted Linda to marry Lakhdar, and did not force the issue, and yet Linda fell in love with him anyway, she suggests that traditional, or as Sabrina termed it "old school" values and practices and modern conceptions of marriage can in fact complement each other.

David Blatt highlights what he sees as the "limited political participation of ethnic minorities in France in light of the interplay between government policies, collective action, and political discourses concerning national identity, ethnicity, and immigrant incorporation,"¹⁸⁰ and concludes that French politicians have not succeeded in rendering ethnicity non-existent by pretending that it should not, and therefore does not, exist. This refers to the fact that questions about ethnicity are not permitted in the French census, and consequently there is no official figure as to the number of French citizens of foreign descent. Questions on ethnicity do not appear on the census because it is illegal in "the nation of 'liberty, equality, fraternity' [which] considers all people should be equally French with no differentiation."¹⁸¹ However, Michèle Tribalat, a demographer at *INED*¹⁸² who has undertaken investigations into ethnicity demographics in France claims that differentiating does not necessarily equate to creating a hierarchy, and that not recognising the different ethnicities that constitute the population as a whole can have very damaging consequences. As an example of this, Kedadouche states: "On a ainsi donné des armes au Front national qui en a profité pour grossir le phénomène. Le manque d'information a donné une crédibilité au discours du Front national, maître dans l'art de la manipulation

177 Ibid., 64.

178 Ibid., 219.

179 Ibid.

180 David Blatt, "Immigrant Politics in a Republican Nation," in *Post-Colonial Cultures in France*, ed. Alec Hargreaves and Mark McKinney (London: Routledge, 1997), 40.

181 Angélique Chrisafis, "French presidential candidates divided over race census," *The Guardian*, February 24 2007. Accessed: July 23 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/feb/24/france.population>.

182 *Institut national d'études démographiques*. Institutions such as *INED* are authorised to examine ethnicity demographics. For more in depth discussion of Tribalat's investigation, see: Michèle Tribalat, *Faire France: une grande enquête sur les immigrés et leurs enfants* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995); Michèle Tribalat, *Assimilation: la fin du modèle français* (Paris: Toucan, 2013).

délirante des chiffres.”¹⁸³ He believes that there exists in France a *racisme absolu* as regards the North African community, in that its members are usually expected to be left wing or at least left-leaning in their political views, a form of political predeterminism which is rarely ascribed to other minorities. Both Kedadouche and Begag agree with Tribalat’s views, that it would be of great benefit to gather information on ethnicity in the census. Begag thinks that “the absence of statistical data on ethnic origins stands in the way of public action designed to correct inequalities.”¹⁸⁴ Using the example of attempts to increase diversity in the *Gendarmerie nationale* he claims:

As there is no official way of counting officers on the basis of their origins, there is no willingness to take concrete steps toward greater diversity and seemingly no political will to make fundamental changes to the system.¹⁸⁵

Hargreaves sums up the plight of young ethnics caught between two cultures when he says that “Brought up in France by parents who still speak of Algeria as their home, the Beurs carry within themselves conflicting cultural imperatives which make it impossible for them to feel unequivocally rooted in a single territorial base.”¹⁸⁶ In emigrating, their parents have become displaced and, as a result of the issues and conflicts surrounding the presence of the “second-generation” in France, this displacement has, in a sense, been passed on to their children.

This conflict between two identities becomes more crystallised when it comes to the issue of religion. Islam is deeply rooted in the psyche of the parents, as they grew up in a culture that had the Muslim religion as a central tenet, which is not the case for their children. In an interview with Alec Hargreaves, author Akli Tadjer stated: “Pour nos parents, l’Islam c’était très concret. Le problème, c’est que l’Islam est difficilement transmissible aux mêmes nés en France. Pour eux c’est abstrait.”¹⁸⁷ Reflecting this position, it is evident that religion holds importance for the protagonists’ parents, but is less significant in the lives of the characters themselves. Although parents are shown to have a deep attachment to Islam and its teachings throughout several of the novels, the manner in which their children discuss religion is often humorous. The only way in which their

183 Kedadouche, *La France et les Beurs*, 71.

184 Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, 118.

185 Ibid., 120.

186 Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity*, 53.

187 Ibid.

religion impacts significantly on their lives is their observance of the fast during Ramadan, although for many of the protagonists, this seems to be for cultural rather than religious reasons. Doria and her mother observe the fast, which is not always easy for Yasmina, as she works long hours and sometimes returns from work in tears:

Elle dit que c'est la fatigue. Pendant le ramadan, elle lutte encore plus parce qu'à l'heure de coupure, vers 17h30, elle est encore au travail. Alors pour manger, elle est obligée de cacher des dattes dans sa blouse. Elle a carrément cousu une poche intérieure histoire que ça fasse plus discrète parce que si son patron la voyait, elle se ferait engueuler.¹⁸⁸

Doria does not fare much better in school:

Le ramadan a commencé depuis un peu plus d'une semaine. J'ai dû faire signer à Maman un papier de la cantine précisant pourquoi je ne mangeais pas ce trimestre. Quand je l'ai donné au proviseur, il m'a demandé si je me foutais de sa gueule.¹⁸⁹

The reason the principal asks her if she considers him to be an idiot is significant, as he believes she has signed the permission slip herself, owing to the 'squiggle' that comprises the signature. This is as a result of Yasmina's illiteracy, discussed above. In contrast to the diligent way in which Doria and her mother observe the fast during Ramadan, her father was not at all strict and frequently consumed alcohol during fast days, much to Doria's embarrassment:

Je veux plus jamais avoir à attendre à l'extérieur du Constantinois, le bar du centre-ville, qu'il finisse de picoler pour le ramener à la maison parce qu'il se souvient pas comment rentrer quand il a bu. Ni aller me foutre la honte à Sidi Mohamed Market en achetant des gros packs de bière pendant le ramadan et descendre les bouteilles vides à la trieuse après. Quand les bouteilles s'explosaient à l'intérieur de la boîte à recyclage, ça faisait du bruit et tout l'immeuble savait combien de bouteilles mon père avait descendues.¹⁹⁰

In *Kiffer sa race*, on the other hand, Sabrina describes Ramadan in terms of her relief that, this year, Ramadan falls over the Christmas period: "Tant mieux, les journées étant plus courtes, le jeûne est moins long,"¹⁹¹ although she does acknowledge the difficulty of maintaining the fast when all around them people are consuming copious amounts of

188 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 14.

189 Ibid., 13.

190 Ibid., 119.

191 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 79.

delicious food. She outlines that her father, owing to his illness, could be excused from the fast this year, but his devout nature means he observes it anyway. Sabrina's racist neighbour Yvonne calls to visit the family each year when they celebrate the end of Ramadan, allowing Mahany the opportunity to explain the Muslim holiday:

L'Aïd-el-Kébir commémore le sacrifice d'Abraham, prêt à donner son fils pour Dieu qui, à la place, a exigé l'égorgement d'un mouton. À l'Aïd-el-Fitr, on se contente de se goinfrer, histoire de rattraper un mois de jeûne. C'est gâteaux à gogo, musique orientale, youyous & Co.¹⁹²

This information would not be common knowledge to a reader from a different religious tradition and thus comprises an important element of Mahany's attempt to enable readers from a Muslim background to identify with her character, while providing information about her faith to those from other cultures.

Doria's mother and her good friend Zohra (referred to as Tante Zohra by Doria) use many religious phrases and references in their everyday conversations and, in particular, frequently employ the Arabic phrase "inchallah", which Doria mocks gently, and calls it "le joker ... Ça veut dire ni oui, ni non. C'est « si Dieu veut » la vraie traduction. Mais ça, tu pourrais jamais le savoir si Dieu il veut ou pas".¹⁹³ Overhearing a telephone conversation between Zohra and her mother (who put the conversation on speaker phone) in which the two women repeatedly invoke God to help Zohra's son Youssef, Doria muses "On dirait que toutes les deux comptent beaucoup sur Dieu".¹⁹⁴

Mahany frequently uses the religious background of her protagonist for comic effect. For instance, as she is introducing the reader to the residents of her building, Sabrina mentions *Juliana la voyante*, who lives on the fourth floor. Sabrina confesses that, owing to superstition, she blesses herself when she passes by Juliana's door, even though she does not believe that her neighbour actually has any powers and is aware of the contradiction inherent in her using a Catholic ritual: "Quand je passe devant sa porte, je me signe à la catho, moi, musulmane. Dans les films d'horreur comme *L'Exorciste*, j'ai jamais vu le héros réciter la chahada alors je m'adapte, même si c'est hlam."¹⁹⁵ This citation also contains two footnotes, one explaining what the *chahada* is and the other providing a French

192 Ibid., 127.

193 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 46.

194 Ibid., 85.

195 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 9.

translation for the word *hlam*. Thus, Mahany attempts an explanation and normalisation of cultural practices that may seem unusual to readers from different backgrounds. Interestingly, Mahany uses Sabrina's brother, Adam, to illustrate how religious beliefs can be manipulated and used to gain a level of freedom that would otherwise be unattainable. Adam frequently informs his parents that he is going to the mosque, when in reality he is meeting his friends, prompting Sabrina to claim: "La mosquée, mon œil ! Tout ce barouf pour crapahuter avec ses mauvaises fréquentations."¹⁹⁶ This cynical manipulation of his parents' beliefs allows Adam to spend time with his friends and provides another example of humour and irreverence to the discussion of religion in the text, as well as showing that it is not always necessary to treat religion in a serious manner.

In *Le petit Malik*, rather than confining religion to Islam, commonly perceived to be the primary religion of the *banlieues*, Rachedi chooses to highlight once again the multicultural nature of life on the periphery. Abdou's family belong to an evangelical Christian church, the "Église évangélique du Renouveau Chrétien pour la Pureté de l'âme humaine et le retour de la Foi en Jésus sur terre".¹⁹⁷ The name in itself is humorous, and the church members distribute monthly fliers, the source of much amusement for Abdou's friends:

- Rejoignez l'Église évangélique du Renouveau Chrétien pour la Pureté de l'âme humaine et le retour de la Foi en Jésus sur terre !
- Hein ?
- Vous connaissez Jésus ?
- Le concierge de l'immeuble C ? Ouais, bien sûr !
- Jésus était le père, le fils et le Saint-Esprit ?
- Il souffrait de troubles de la personnalité ?
- Non, je vous parle de la transsubstantiation.
- C'est dégueulasse, ces histoires de changement de sexe !¹⁹⁸

Malik explains that the concept of the Trinity is "un concept difficilement concevable pour un musulman qui y voit des relents polythéistes".¹⁹⁹ Although Malik, Abdou and Salomon are inseparable through childhood, as they grow older Abdou, embittered by his friend's academic success, draws away from Salomon and begins to refer to him as a "sale

196 Ibid., 40.

197 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 117-8.

198 Ibid., 118.

199 Ibid., 119.

Feuj.”²⁰⁰ This emergence of religious tensions between the boys is remarkable, precisely because it is not based on any actual religious prejudice, and arises only as a result of Abdou’s desire to hurt his former friend. It is rendered all the more hurtful because, during the school exchange with *les riches*, discussed in Chapter Two, Abdou and Malik almost fought with one of the local boys when he used this same insult to taunt Salomon. Towards the end of the novel, Malik is reflecting on his life and the various twists and turns that it has taken. He summarises the events of the novel in this reflection, but perhaps the most poignant memory is when he remembers how inseparable he and his two childhood friends once were: “C’était à une époque où Salomon le feuj, Abdou le black et moi, Malik le beur, cohabitions dans la paix et le respect. Malgré nos différences.”²⁰¹ This is clearly a bittersweet memory for Malik, and it is compounded in the following, and final, chapter, as the next time he and Salomon meet is at Abdou’s funeral. This is a sombre moment, reflecting the fragile position held by those who choose a path of crime and delinquency. At the graveside, Salomon and Malik constantly meet each other’s eyes in mutual solidarity and support: “Lui le juif et moi le musulman priions ensemble devant une tombe catholique.”²⁰² This depiction of serious and sombre events is an element of the realism inherent in the texts, demonstrating that not everyone gets a happy ending. Yet the fact that the boys’ friendship transgressed ethnic and religious boundaries is a powerful testament to the multicultural nature of the *banlieue*. Although Abdou cut all ties with Salomon after childhood, his mother tells Malik and Salomon at the funeral that he continued to refer to his former friend as a brother: “Malik, Salomon et Abdou, les trois doigts de la main, c’était sa phrase.”²⁰³ This suggests that the younger generation in France may be more indifferent to ethnic, cultural and religious differences than were previous generations. This is stated openly in *Kiffer sa race*, as will be seen in Chapter Four. Although references to religion are very rare in *La petite Malika*, one notable incidence is yet another example of an irreverent attitude to religion in the texts. When Malika is seven years old, her mother’s latest boyfriend moves in with them just before Christmas, and there is initially some conflict over whether or not there will be Christmas presents in the house that year. Mouloud is conscious of what they would say back in the *bled*, if

200 Ibid., 120.

201 Ibid., 193. This trio of friends is reminiscent of similar multi-ethnic trios in *banlieue* cultural outputs, notably Kassovitz’s *La Haine*. [Mathieu Kassovitz, *La Haine*, Film, Canal +, 1995.]

202 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 200.

203 Ibid., 198.

they knew they were celebrating "la fête des roumis."²⁰⁴ Soraya, anxious that her children not be deprived of presents, ingeniously eases his worries by claiming: "Le Père Noël, il porte une longue barbe, c'est peut-être un bon musulman.' Voilà comment par la grâce d'une sentence maternelle Santa Claus déguisé aux couleurs de Coca-Cola s'est converti à l'islam."²⁰⁵ In this way, Rachedi and Mahany show how the potential conflict between two differing religious cultures can at times be solved by compromise.

In the introduction to *Integrating Islam* by Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse, Olivier Roy refers to the various "infernally couples' [that] are common in the West, which, in their easy linking of complex phenomena, seem to connect Islam to all of the problems of our era."²⁰⁶ He lists some of these "infernally couples" as being Islam and integration, Islam and Middle Eastern conflicts, Islam and terrorism, Islam and social exclusion in the *banlieues* (Roy discusses how the events of November 2005 have been dubbed the "Intifada of the Banlieues"²⁰⁷), Islam and the "clash of civilisations". Since the 1980s and increasingly throughout the 1990s and beyond, say Laurence and Vaisse, there has been an increasing conflation of Arab with Muslim, which is frequently associated with religious zealotry and fundamentalism. France has a complicated and often fraught relationship with her Muslim population. Castel claims that young Muslims in France have a particular image imposed on them, and that although they might not recognise themselves in it, they are pushed towards identifying with it.²⁰⁸ He also believes that Islam is treated as an unavoidable hereditary condition that is not given the equal rights owed to it by law.²⁰⁹ The complicated nature of this relationship is illustrated by the periodic eruption of controversies – such as the various heated debates on *la laïcité* and whether or not headscarves should be banned in schools and other government-run institutions. The eventual ban, in 2004, on the wearing of headscarves in schools²¹⁰ was followed by the more far-reaching ban in 2011 against wearing any garment that covers the face in any public place, with quite severe penalties:

204 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 28.

205 Ibid., 29.

206 Olivier Roy, "Foreword," in Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse, *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), x.

207 Ibid.

208 Castel, *La discrimination négative*, 78.

209 Ibid.

210 Currently, there is debate in France over the possible extension of this ban into universities.

Women wearing niqab will be fined €150 ... and be given a citizenship class to remind them of the republican values of secular France and gender equality. Any third party found to have coerced a woman into wearing the face covering, for example a husband or family member, risks a €30,000 fine and a year in prison.²¹¹

This issue is highlighted in one of the chapters of *La petite Malika*, when Malika is ten years old. Her mother wants her to wear a balaclava to school as it is very cold, but the young girl refuses. Rather than argue with her, Soraya gives her a scarf to wear, telling her that it is a magic scarf handed down through generations of their family. Malika, delighted with her new present, wears the balaclava in order to protect the magic scarf. When she removes it in school, the reaction from her classmates and teacher is swift and she is immediately brought to the principal's office. The episode escalates quickly with the arrival of newspaper reporters, tipped off by the principal, eager to garner publicity for the school. This episode will be discussed further in Chapter Four, but the incident highlights how Soraya's innocent and well-meaning attempt to keep her daughter warm is misinterpreted and misrepresented by others as an attempt to coerce the young girl into wearing a visible religious symbol in a secular environment.

David Blatt has written of fears that France would lose its national identity if its Muslim population continues to increase. In particular, he discusses an issue of *Figaro Magazine*, which appeared in 1985 and which depicted, on its front cover, a picture of Marianne wearing an Islamic headscarf and the caption "Will we still be French in 30 years?' ... The feature articles attempted to show that non-Europeans would soon constitute a frightening proportion of the national population, based on the (erroneous) demographic assumption that the immigrant birthrate would remain unchanged."²¹² These fears demonstrate a sentiment that is quite prevalent among certain sectors of French society. However the ban on wearing headscarves in any public place demonstrates that the "French value of individual religious liberty has ... been superseded by the perceived threat to national sovereignty and the French way of life."²¹³ Laurence and Vaisse further claim that religion is "filling a cultural vacuum in the banlieue, to the point that even ordinary physical activities like camping and soccer were being given religious significance."²¹⁴

211 Angelique Chrisafis, "Full-face veils outlawed as France spells out controversial niqab ban," *The Guardian*, March 3 2011. Accessed: October 23 2011 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/03/niqab-ban-france-muslim-veil>.

212 Blatt, "Immigrant Politics," 48.

213 Laurence and Vaisse, *Integrating Islam*, 167.

214 Ibid.

There is a danger that the vilification of Islam will actually encourage people to identify more with this aspect of their identity. Azouz Begag referred to this phenomenon when he called Islam:

...the *quick-drying cement* of an identity that is widely visible in the media and well positioned to capitalize on the bitterness of those who have been disappointed by the republican myth of equality.²¹⁵

There are, according to Laurence and Vaisse, signs of the gradual emergence of a clear community identity: when surveyed, many among the Muslim population of France increasingly state that they "feel Muslim" first, rather than French, male, Parisian or any of the other labels with which they could identify. Going on from this, they claim that "An identity denied is an identity that radicalizes"²¹⁶ and so warn that the French must be more accepting of their Muslim population, in order to avoid incubating a generation of Muslims that grow up feeling angry and persecuted by society, and consequently might be driven to actions that they otherwise would have deemed unnecessary. This danger is all the more real since the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in January 2015, in which brothers Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, of Algerian descent, entered the satirical newspaper's offices with guns and killed twelve people, including a Muslim police officer. This event, which was provoked by *Charlie Hebdo's* repeated representations of the prophet Mohamed, sparked a three-day manhunt which culminated in a raid on an abandoned warehouse in the Northern *banlieues* of Paris where both brothers were killed. During this time, another man, Amédée Coulibaly, who had shot and killed a police officer the day following the initial attack, took several hostages in a kosher supermarket in East Paris, four of whom he killed. Coulibaly, whose parents are from Mali, was an associate of the Kouachi brothers, having met Chérif in prison. All three men were members of Islamist cells, and had been involved in previous plots.²¹⁷ The incident served as a frightening reminder of the potential for radicalisation among fringe members of the Muslim population, with Manuel Valls acknowledging in the wake of the attacks: "c'est que, faute d'espérance, la dérive,

215 Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, 76.

216 Laurence and Vaisse, *Integrating Islam*, 90.

217 For more on the radicalisation process that culminated in these attacks, see: Angelique Chrisafis, "Charlie Hebdo attackers: born, raised and radicalised in Paris," *The Guardian*, January 12 2015. Accessed: February 5 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/12/-sp-charlie-hebdo-attackers-kids-france-radicalised-paris>.

la criminalité, l'islamisme radical trouvent un terreau fertile."²¹⁸ Guène highlights this potential radicalisation in *Kiffe kiffe demain*. The situation occurs as a result of Youssef's imprisonment. During his time in prison, Youssef begins to display a worrying tendency towards radicalisation. His mother, Zohra, visits him regularly, but she claims that she recognises him less and less each time she visits and Doria recounts her fears:

Elle a dit à Maman qu'il commence à tenir des discours très extrêmes ... Il a dû rencontrer des gens étranges en zonzon. Youssef, lui qui était si tranquille avant et surtout plus ouvert que la plupart des types de son âge...Aujourd'hui, il parle de péchés graves, de punitions divines. Avant il s'en foutait un peu de tout ça. Il allait même s'acheter des chips au bacon en cachette pour savoir quel goût ça avait. Je trouve ça louche ce changement trop soudain. Quelqu'un a dû profiter de sa fragilité carcérale pour lui rentrer des grosses disquettes dans la cervelle.²¹⁹

Doria continues to see Youssef as the boy she has known since childhood and who taught her to cycle. Her description of the difference between the Youssef she knew and the man he is becoming betrays her unease. His radicalisation is a cause of concern for Doria and her mother as well as for Youssef's family, and serves to draw attention to the fact that the lack of respect for minority populations in France can contribute to their sense of isolation and eventual radicalisation.

The inclusion of these various elements of North African traditions and cultural practices, both positive and negative, in the novels, demonstrates a desire on the part of these authors to include elements of their home culture and traditions in the texts. This desire may serve as a form of empowerment for YA readers of North African heritage by reflecting their social and cultural reality, and can also aid readers outside of this culture to gain an understanding of the intricacies of a culture with which they may be unfamiliar. This is in line with research by Mingshui Cai, outlined in Chapter One, on the importance of literature in enabling young people to understand and accept other cultures, and potentially work towards solving ethnicity-related problems. Including these elements of North African cultural and religious traditions into their narratives is an important element in the authors' endeavours to create a more positive, realistic and empowering representation of the *banlieue* through literature, and to foster a more inclusive society for young, marginalised residents of these zones. At the end of *Désintégration*, Ahmed Djouder pleads with the French population at large:

218 6Medias, "Apartheid" en France."

219 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 171-2.

Néanmoins, la France, en tant que personne morale, a un honneur à sauver qui doit
passer par une reconnaissance de ses oublis et manquements et rectifier le tir.
Comment?
En changeant de regard sur nous.
En portant sur nous un regard positif et tendre. Un regard positif et tendre.
C'est tout.
Vous verrez, la France, ce sera le paradis.²²⁰

His utopian vision for the future in France has echoes in the novels of the corpus. In varying ways, some more overtly than others, they all attempt to forge mutual understanding between the majority population of France and the residents of the *banlieue*. The inclusion of elements of North African culture is just one element of this empowerment, but it is a significant one. Its significance is both to the authors themselves, as an accurate reflection and representation of their culture, but also to YA readers, of all ethnicities, who can learn and gain respect for other cultures through the medium of YA literature. This increased knowledge can help to change the perception of YA readers from outside the *banlieues*, who may discard prejudices they may previously have held towards this minority group as a result of an insufficient understanding of their circumstances and background.

3.4 Gender and Family

As a large percentage of France's immigrant population (and consequently a large proportion of the *banlieue* population) comes from the Maghreb, the gender dynamics of this community are especially interesting and relevant to any discussion of the *banlieues*. Jane Freedman claims that:

Women of immigrant origin are ... represented as both the bearers of 'tradition' and agents of 'modernity', responsible both for perpetuating the boundaries of ethnic groups within France and for ensuring that these boundaries are made permeable to French culture.²²¹

This set of expected roles highlight "the specificity of these women's experiences and identities"²²² and the complex nature of the part they are expected to play in both protecting and transmitting the cultural norms of the country of origin while also facilitating

220 Djouder, *Désintégration*, 156-7.

221 Jane Freedman, "Women and Immigration: Nationality and Citizenship," in *Women, Immigration and Identities in France*, ed. Jane Freedman and Carrie Tarr (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 15.

222 Jane Freedman and Carrie Tarr, eds., *Women, Immigration and Identities in France* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 1.

successful integration into French culture. This section will elaborate on some of the gender-related issues that face the *banlieue* population, and will explore the manner in which these issues are represented in the primary texts.

Mireille Rosello has written of contemporary France, in which "immigration is reduced to a gendered caricature,"²²³ and although she means this in relation to "the menacing silhouette of armed young male delinquents"²²⁴ it can equally – if in a different manner – be applied to the situation of women in the *banlieues*. Differently, because when people think of the *banlieues*, the images that frequently come to mind are of the violent, unemployed youth population, and there is a relative absence of women in the predominant representation of these regions. In Rosello's words:

Maghrebi women do not seem to satisfy basic sensationalist requirements; instead, they enjoy the ambiguous privilege of being consistently omitted from such stereotypical pictures, as if the fact that they are not caught by cameras hurling stones at buses or fighting with the police means that *banlieues* are good enough for them.²²⁵

That women of Maghrebi origin are not associated with the *banlieue* in the public imagination is most likely due to the fact that their domain is primarily in the home. According to Freedman:

... for women of immigrant origin, access to salaried work has been limited both because of domestic and social pressure from within their communities – women of Maghrebi and Turkish origin have the lowest rates of formal employment in part due to the norms in their countries of origin – and because of reluctance by French employers to hire women of immigrant origin, especially those from the ex-colonies (there is a general differentiation in French opinion between immigrants of European origin and those from Africa and Asia who are more readily referred to as *immigrés* and can be seen to suffer greater discrimination from employers and others.)²²⁶

Consequently these women are less visible in French society than other members of the community, with the exception of the *affaire du foulard*,²²⁷ which in fact only affected a small minority of Muslim women, particularly the younger school-aged population.

223 Rosello, "North African Women," 240.

224 Ibid.

225 Ibid., 241.

226 Freedman, "Women and Immigration," 15-6. In stating that women of Maghrebi and Turkish origin suffer lower rates of employment, partly due to societal norms, Freedman references: Alec G. Hargreaves, *Immigration, 'race' and ethnicity in contemporary France* (London Routledge, 1995).

227 This issue was discussed in sections 3.1 and 3.3.

Laurent Dubois, who has argued that we cannot begin to understand the current debates about immigration and citizenship in France outside of the context of French colonial history, claims that the headscarf ban, while obviously a symbol of the values of republicanism and secularism associated with modern France, was also an expression of "the colonial history through which universalism has been merged with the particularistic exclusion of 'others.'"²²⁸

Freedman claims that "the intermeshing of both sexist and racist forms of domination and exclusion places women of immigrant origin in France in sometimes very difficult and oppressive situations."²²⁹ Changes to French laws, implemented for a number of years in the 1990s, revoked the automatic right to French citizenship for children born in France to parents of immigrant origin, who instead had to apply for French nationality. This meant that parents could apply for residency status, as long as they were providing for their children's needs, although this was rendered more complicated for those whose status is illegal:

... because of their illegal situation they cannot work legally in France and thus it may be deemed that they are not providing properly for their children, but they cannot get legal residence papers until they prove they are providing for their children.²³⁰

They are also unable to apply for child benefit or family allowance, nor are they granted access to social security and health care. Women of immigrant origin may thus find their:

...status as mothers devalued and encounter both legal and material difficulties in bringing up their children in France. Whilst dominant representations portray them first as wives and mothers, responsible for bringing up children who will integrate into French society, the social and legal conditions of this same society make this a sometimes very difficult task.²³¹

As will be discussed in Chapter Four, although fathers had some level of success in integrating into French society through their jobs, women – frequently working at home and having limited knowledge of the French language – were less successful in this respect. In an interview, Faïza Guène claims: "Aujourd'hui, on parle d'intégration, en s'adressant à nous, la deuxième génération, alors qu'on est nés en France. [...] C'est à nos mères qu'ils

228 Laurent Dubois, "La République métissée: Citizenship, Colonialism, and the Borders of French History," *Cultural Studies* 14, no. 1 (2000): 18.

229 Freedman, "Women and Immigration," 13-4.

230 Ibid., 23.

231 Ibid., 24.

auraient dû demander de s'intégrer."²³² Ahlème must contend with legal issues pertaining to immigration, as she and her brother are Algerian citizens and thus she must spend long hours at the immigration office, and she describes herself as:

Presque française. Il ne manque à la panoplie que ce stupide bout de papier bleu ciel plastifié et tamponné avec amour et bon goût, la fameuse french touch. Cette petite chose me donnerait droit à tout et me dispenserait de me lever à 3 heures du matin chaque trimestre pour aller faire la queue devant la préfecture, dans le froid, pour obtenir un énième renouvellement de séjour.²³³

An interesting aspect of the novel is that it opens with Ahlème visiting a job recruitment centre and closes as she joins the previously mentioned queue at the immigration office, and both of these locations are visited or referenced at intervals throughout. The novel is thus framed by the bureaucracy of the French state, reflecting its omnipresence in the lives of many in the *banlieue* communities. Those who do not possess valid papers are at risk of immediate deportation, without even the possibility of letting their loved ones know. In *Du rêve pour les oufs*, Ahlème waits several weeks for a telephone call from Tonislav, a Serbian man she has been seeing, before reading of his deportation by chance in the newspaper. Tonislav has fallen victim to harsh new immigration laws and the newspaper article describes the circumstances surrounding his deportation:

L'homme, âgé de vingt-sept ans, s'est présenté dans la matinée au bureau des étrangers de la préfecture du Val-de-Marne, à la suite d'une banale convocation. Il est arrivé sans crainte, en possession de la promesse d'embauche qui lui permettrait d'obtenir le titre de séjour de dix ans tant convoité. On lui a indiqué une salle dans laquelle il devait attendre quelqu'un de l'administration mais, à sa stupéfaction, ce sont deux policiers qui sont venus le trouver. Direction le centre de rétention du secteur. Avant le premier avion pour Belgrade...²³⁴

The article continues, claiming that the Interior Ministry denies engaging in entrapment measures, and that according to the association *Papiers pour tous*, Tonislav's case is the thirteenth of its kind in the previous few months. This organisation mirrors the real life organisation *Des papiers pour tous*, which fights against current immigration laws in France and for the regularisation of the *sans-papiers*, or those who do not have valid papers.

232 Mélanie Charpentier, "Interview de Faïza Guène," *Evene.fr*, August 17, 2006, Accessed: October 15 2014, <http://evene.lefigaro.fr/livres/actualite/interview-faiza-guene-reve-pour-les-oufs-kiffe-de-main-440.php>.

233 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 46.

234 *Ibid.*, 137.

There is no doubt that gender roles are an important aspect of the Maghrebi community, with the males of the community in a much more privileged position relative to female members of the population. The "familial model of reference [for Maghrebi families] is the product of a patriarchal system."²³⁵ This is referenced in *Kiffe kiffe demain* when Doria, who harbours much bitterness regarding her father's departure, imagines the celebrations that will take place in Morocco upon the birth of the much longed-for son, the catalyst for his departure:

...je sais exactement comment ça va se passer : sept jours après l'accouchement, ils vont célébrer le baptême et y inviter tout le village. Un orchestre de vieux cheikhs avec leurs tambours en peau de chameau viendra spécialement pour l'occasion. À lui, ça va lui coûter une vraie fortune – tout l'argent de sa retraite d'ouvrier chez Renault. Et puis, ils égorgeront un énorme mouton pour donner un prénom au bébé. Ce sera Mohamed. Dix contre un.²³⁶

The father's absence is a recurring theme in the cultural productions of the North African community in France, which will be discussed in further detail below, and in this instance his departure leaves his family at a severe disadvantage. The role the state plays in filling the void left by the departure of Doria's father cannot be ignored. In abandoning his wife and daughter to their own fate, or *mektoub* as Doria and Yasmina continually refer to it, *le Barbu* left them without a dominant male figure in their lives. In his absence, the state fulfilled his role in helping to provide for his family (although they also rely greatly on the kindness and generosity of local shopkeepers and friends). Dominic Thomas outlines the importance of the state in Guène's text:

Indeed, the French state functions metonymically for the Republic and suffuses the narrative: fifteen year old Doria attends public school, a range of State mechanisms mobilize in order to allocate her a social worker (symbolic agent of integration), and even her poverty is paradoxically inseparable from the state through the benefits she receives.²³⁷

Yasmina truly appreciates the assistance of state representatives. This is particularly evident when, at the encouragement of their social worker, she leaves her job as a chamber maid at a motel, and enrolls in an adult literacy class. Following her husband's departure,

235 Camille Lacoste-Dujardin, "Maghrebi Families in France," in *Women, Immigration and Identities in France*, ed. Jane Freedman and Carrie Tarr (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 57.

236 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 10.

237 Dominic Thomas, "New Writing for New Times: Faïza Guène, banlieue writing, and the post-Beur generation," *Expressions Maghrébines* 7, no. 1 (2008): 45.

Yasmina was placed at a severe disadvantage by her illiteracy, a trait that was, in the past, quite common among immigrants from the Maghreb, particularly among women. Becoming literate allows her to leave her former job cleaning rooms, for a racist boss, at a "Formule 1"²³⁸ motel and gain significant self-confidence. This empowerment further enables her to establish a much closer relationship with her teenage daughter. Further, in contrast to the somewhat oppressive presence of *le Barbu*, their social workers enable both women to discover their own independence, and they consequently have greater freedom without the father's presence than ever would have been possible in his continued presence. Situations such as this are highlighted by Camille Lacoste-Dujardin: "As soon as patriarchal authority gives way, the women in the family gain a certain autonomy."²³⁹ She even claims that this can also be the case when an immigrant father dies, outlining that those young Maghrebi women of immigrant origin "whose fathers have died comment on the freedom they have obtained and argue that they would not have this freedom were their fathers still alive."²⁴⁰ Yasmina's empowerment, enabled by agents of the French state, allows Guène to show that despite the social problems that are undoubtedly present in the *banlieues*, suitable state intervention can make a difference in the lives of local residents. The inclusion of this element in the narrative could be portrayed as a call to the government and population of France to continue, if not increase, efforts to assist disadvantaged and marginalised residents, by showing the successful outcome of state intervention in the lives of Doria and her mother.

Mahany plays on commonly held stereotypes regarding families of North African origin in France in *Kiffer sa race*. Sabrina's mother, Safia, is a strong and self-reliant woman. Early in the novel, Sabrina explains that her father and mother, distant cousins, had an arranged marriage, that her father arrived in Paris in 1971, that he had initially worked and saved money to bring his wife from Algeria to join him and that they had lived in a Sonacotra residence, until their second child, Sabrina, was born, at which point they moved to Argenteuil:

238 The boss at the *Formule 1* finds it amusing "d'appeler toutes les Arabes Fatma, tous les Noirs Mamadou et tous les Chinois Ping-Pong." [Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 14.] Fittingly, however, Yasmina's Algerian accent means that she pronounces M Schiont's name as M Schiant.

239 Lacoste-Dujardin, "Maghrebi Families," 66.

240 Ibid. Lacoste-Dujardin here references: Camille Lacoste-Dujardin, *Yasmina et les autres de Nanterre et d'ailleurs: filles de parents maghrébins en France* (Paris: La Découverte, 1992).

Dans cette tour verticale, nous avons grandi les unes sur les autres jusqu'à ce qu'Adam, le fils tant désiré, naisse. Les darons ont fêté l'événement pendant une semaine ... On s'entassait Linda et moi dans une chambre minuscule quand Adam se prélassait dans une pièce royale. Nous, filles, savions où était notre place...

Allez, j'arrête mes conneries, je vous menais en bateau. Sérieusement, vous croyez que ma vie, c'est ce ramassis de clichés ?²⁴¹

After ticking every stereotype off the list, Mahany then has her protagonist reveal that she has been joking, her mother arrived in France having already completed her *baccalauréat* and continued with her education in France prior to her marriage: "Son indépendance financière assurée et seulement à ce moment-là, elle s'est mariée."²⁴² In fact, Safia earns more than her husband, and the Asraoui family own their apartment. Sabrina's mother is the dominant one in the partnership, yet during the novel, Sabrina also unexpectedly discovers tenderness in her mother. This occurs when Sabrina's father is hospitalised, and Sabrina comes to realise that her mother is lost and vulnerable in the absence of her husband: "Derrière le masque de la matrone, j'avais oublié qu'il y avait une femme. Une femme qui aime son mari, pas qu'une mère."²⁴³ Although the young girl had always been aware of her father's tenderness towards her mother, Safia has always been so strong that Sabrina had never entertained the possibility of her vulnerability.

In Maghrebi society, where identity is for the most part collective, the family functions differently than in an individualistic society like France. In the Maghreb,

When one meets a stranger one does not ask, 'who are you?' but 'who are you from?' – in other words 'from which family?' The family is in this case a large patrilinear ensemble composed of the forefathers and all their male descendants in a long continuum, to which women are joined in function of their role in preserving and expanding the patrilineage.²⁴⁴

Fathers and male siblings therefore have a privileged position, and it is not all that unusual for female members of the family to be under the control of the men of the house – especially young women, as they are considered to be "the most vulnerable link in the family chain"²⁴⁵ in terms of the risks of compromising family honour. Fathers will

241 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 16-7.

242 Ibid., 17.

243 Ibid., 109.

244 Lacoste-Dujardin, "Maghrebi Families," 60.

245 Ibid., 61.

generally make most of the decisions in the family, and can sometimes be quite aggressive to family members, especially children – as “a strong demand is placed on the young to conform to the Maghrebi family model”²⁴⁶ – but Hervé-Frédéric Mecheri explains that in the eyes of the children, “un père qui ne sait pas commander n’est pas un homme.”²⁴⁷ In fact, he goes on to explain that, in the past, at least, some Algerian mothers actively encouraged their sons to beat their sisters, as authority (including violence) is what makes a man a man. Sabrina, from *Kiffer sa race*, experiences aggression and attempts at control from her domineering younger brother Adam, who does not approve of her friendship with a young black boy in her class. Adam turns off the television because of an on-screen kiss – claiming “Je suis un homme, c’est moi qui décide”²⁴⁸ – and immediately begins telling lies to their parents about Sabrina’s character. Sabrina expects that her privileged relationship with her father will come to her aid. He hesitates, however, as he himself has always turned off the television when he found a programme inappropriate and she understands that “le lien privilégié avec mon père vacille sous le poids de plusieurs siècles d’une tradition teintée de machisme.”²⁴⁹ Although her parents are, in many ways, very modern in many of their beliefs, her father struggles to ignore the burden of tradition and thus attempts to control his daughter’s viewing habits. Sabrina’s parents and older sister, Linda, have just returned from a trip to Algeria before the novel begins. This is the first summer in ten years that Sabrina and her brother have not returned to the *bled* with the family. In their absence, however, their parents left Adam in charge. This is the source of much conflict for Sabrina and her brother as, following her parents’ return, Adam will not renounce his “responsibility” towards his older sister. He shadows her constantly and attempts to prevent her from spending time with Fatoumata and Jacqueline, who are not of North African origin. That his mother is a strong, independent woman makes it difficult for Adam, the youngest and only son, to find his role within the family: “Il a du mal à se positionner sur l’échiquier familial où la dame a plus de pouvoir que le roi, alors, au lieu d’être un bon cavalier, il joue au fou dans la tour, mais c’est qu’un pion de rien du tout.”²⁵⁰ Throughout the novel, Mahany also demonstrates that all families can have conflicts and issues over control, that this is not specific to North African families

246 Ibid.

247 Hervé-Frédéric Mecheri, *Les jeunes immigrés maghrébins de la deuxième génération, et/ou, la quête de l’identité* (Paris: CIEM L’Harmattan, 1984), 16.

248 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 39.

249 Ibid., 40.

250 Ibid., 18.

in France. Jacqueline Tran's parents, for instance, who are of Vietnamese origin, are very controlling and frequently use guilt to get their daughter to dress and behave in what they believe to be an appropriate manner. They find it difficult to accept their daughter dating a French boy and wearing slightly more revealing clothes. Acknowledging that the issue of paternal and fraternal control does occur, yet not confining it to characters of a Maghrebi background helps to render more universal the experience of the North African community in France.

As outlined by Mecheri, then, the father is in command but, if the father is absent from the home, frequently a young son "refusera de faire ce qu'on lui demande, il ira se promener sans autorisation, il insultera sa mère si le repas n'est pas prêt, et cela dès le plus jeune âge."²⁵¹ In *Les gens du Balto*, Nadia Chacal clearly highlights the different upbringing which can, at times, be experienced by North African boys and girls. Given the patriarchal nature of Maghrebi society, boys were traditionally granted much more freedom than girls, who, particularly in bigger families, were expected to assume housekeeping duties and assist in the rearing of younger siblings from an early age. Among families that have moved to France, this cultural practice has tended to be more relaxed, however more household responsibilities can sometimes still fall on older daughters, while male members of the family – including, in some cases, younger brothers – can be seen as holding most of the authority. This unequal distribution of household tasks is emphasized in this example, as Nadia and her brother are twins:

J'étais rentrée des cours depuis plus d'une heure. J'avais eu le temps de faire mes exercices de physique-chimie, d'éplucher les légumes pour la chorba que maman préparait et de plier le linge dans l'armoire de mes trois petites sœurs. Voilà tout ce que j'ai fait pendant qu'Ali buvait ses litres de bière et se bagarrait avec son rival ...²⁵²

Of course this is not always the case, but as is evident in some of the texts under investigation in this thesis, domination by male members of the family can nevertheless be a concern for female members of the population. *Kiffe kiffe demain's* Doria refers at several intervals to an unfortunate local girl, Samra, who was imprisoned in her home and eventually forced to flee, out of fear of her father and brothers, as she had fallen in love with a Frenchman. The story was originally a short film, *La Zonzonnière*, directed by Guène when she was a teenager. Daughters that run away appear frequently across the

251 Mecheri, *La quête de l'identité*, 26.

252 Guène, *Les gens du Balto*, 102.

primary texts. Magalie's sister in *Les gens du Balto* ran away and now lives in Paris centre and has an older, married, Moroccan Jewish boyfriend who has four children. She no longer has any significant contact with her sister, which proves difficult for Magalie, and for which she blames her parents, and their attempts at controlling their daughters. She is scathing in her criticism of her parents and their parenting techniques and mocks them in a deeply mean-spirited way at every opportunity. At various points, she criticises her parents for refusing to allow her to see Taniël and because they have forbidden her from going to *la grande cité*, fearful that she too will run away like her sister. Even her parents' efforts at reconnecting with Magalie cause her to criticise them, and she is particularly critical of her mother's efforts at consulting psychologists and reading parenting books in an attempt to better understand her daughter's behaviour. In *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, the protagonist's older sister runs away and cuts off contact with her family, primarily as a result of conflicted relationships with her mother and sister. Their mother loves nothing more than cooking and feeding her family, and every family celebration is marked by a table burdened by the weight of her culinary efforts. This contributes to the conflict with her oldest daughter, as Dounia believes her mother is trying to fatten her, so that she will be unattractive, marry, have children and be a stay-at-home mother. Dounia has always treated her younger sister Mina badly, as a result of resentment or jealousy perhaps, and is in constant conflict with their parents until she leaves home definitively in her early twenties – she initially runs away with a Frenchman, Daniel, although the reader discovers, later in the novel, that Daniel was already married and thus the relationship did not last long. Dounia's definitive rupture with her family occurred on September 11th 2001, and Mourad talks about the two towers that fell that day – each of his parents in turn, from shock at Dounia's departure. Dounia is subsequently discussed only in negative terms and Mourad frequently refers to her as *l'Autre*. Dounia's departure cast a heavy shadow over the family, and upon discovering that she has titled her autobiography *Le Prix de la liberté*, Mourad remarks: "Je trouvais que c'était sacrément cher payé quand même. Dounia n'avait pas précisé que ce serait un tarif de groupe, parce qu'on la payait tous, sa liberté de merde, et ce depuis des années."²⁵³ Lacoste-Dujardin claims that running away is a form of revolt by the most oppressed members of the family, and that it can lead to:

253 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 205.

...rupture within the family... A remarkable force of character is needed for personal survival and individual achievement. If this does not occur the woman concerned may be left in a permanent state of rebellion against all forms of social authority, or worse, she may slide into delinquency, prostitution or drug addiction.²⁵⁴

Sometimes the collective nature of family identity in the Maghreb can be problematic for the young generation, born or having grown up in France. As a result of their French upbringing, they can frequently view themselves as individuals to a much greater extent than their parents, and consequently their desire to make their own decisions can clash with the parents' desire to maintain the type of family hierarchy familiar to them from their own youth. "The young, and especially the girls, do not appreciate their ambitions being limited by the priority given to a rigorous and to them outdated conception of the patrilinear family."²⁵⁵ In fact, in terms of the differences between gender roles in the two cultures in question, "the daughters of Maghrebi immigrants in France almost unanimously reject the position of women in Maghrebi societies."²⁵⁶ Daughters of Maghrebi immigrants in France are also frequently in a position of double domination relative to the gender and generation hierarchies of the country of origin. Mothers and daughters are "the most oppressed people in the family",²⁵⁷ although this holds less true for mothers, as according to the generation hierarchy, they are in a slightly more privileged position than their daughters. This can sometimes lead to a revolt on their part, such as running away, which in turn can exacerbate matters, if they then struggle to lead an independent life, as outlined above. Although it does not always come to this, crises can occasionally occur over:

... what the children believe to be abuses of paternal power such as fathers' threats to stop their daughters' education, to send them back to the extended family in the Maghreb or to force them into a marriage that they do not want. On other occasions both daughters and sons may jointly rebel at excessively violent behaviour from their father, violence of which their mother is often the victim. This type of behaviour is not specific to Maghrebi families but is often a result of underprivileged social conditions, for example when the father is unemployed or of a very low socio-cultural standing.²⁵⁸

254 Lacoste-Dujardin, "Maghrebi Families," 66.

255 Ibid., 61.

256 Ibid. Lacoste-Dujardin here references: Lacoste-Dujardin, *Filles de parents maghrébains*.

257 Lacoste-Dujardin, "Maghrebi Families," 66.

258 Ibid.

Fathers' attempts to interfere with their daughters' education are alluded to, albeit indirectly, in *La petite Malika*. The Christmas incident, referred to in section 3.3, provides an illuminating example. Malika had requested a telescope for Christmas but receives a doll instead, as Mouloud, her mother's boyfriend at the time does not want her to "finir en gouine intello qui récite de la poésie".²⁵⁹ Fortunately, she manages to swap the doll with Mégane who received a telescope from her family. When Mouloud discovers this, he takes the telescope and exchanges it for a Darth Maul light sabre for Sofiane, "Fallait comprendre, j'étais une fille. Pendant que mon frère ce héros avait la tête dans la guerre des étoiles, j'avais les pieds dans la merde."²⁶⁰ Malika and her brother were not close as children, and he does not feature prominently in the text, but he does provide an example of a sub-category mentioned by Begag in *Ethnicity and Equality*. Late in the text, Sofiane returns from Canada, where he has been living and co-owns a grocery shop, and announces that he is getting married to his business partner, Naïma. Sofiane is doing well in Canada, and could be described as fitting Begag's category of *dérouilleur*, or even a *très grand dérouilleur*:

In the hoods tales of *très grands dérouilleurs* [megamovers] have become legendary in recent years. Those grand voyagers are young ethnics who traveled great distances to work, study, see other countries, follow a spouse, or simply breathe fresh air.²⁶¹

Examples of the type of violence and paternal domination mentioned above have been a feature of texts emerging from the *banlieue* from the beginning: the neighbours of the principal character, Madjid, in *Le thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, have an abusive father, who frequently gets drunk and violent with his wife, causing his children to run next door in search of Madjid's mother to defuse the situation. Situations such as this also appear in some of the primary texts: Samir from *Le poids d'une âme* provides an example of this, as following the departure of the oldest son, he spent some time in a psychiatric hospital. When the next oldest son was subsequently imprisoned, he could no longer tolerate the frustration of life in France, and begins to act aggressively towards his family:

259 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 30.

260 Ibid., 32.

261 Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, 127.

À quoi bon se tuer à petit feu pour ce désastre-là ? La violence a insidieusement pris le relais des ambitions déçues. À chaque coup assené, Samir se déteste davantage et cette haine le pousse à expédier dix autres raclées. L'engrenage inextricable l'enfonce dans un isolement qu'il comble à la mosquée, forçant l'admiration de ses condisciples quand il cherche l'amour de sa famille."²⁶²

This brutality, particularly towards his wife, inspires the hatred of his children. Fatima, on the other hand, accepts his violent behaviour, and takes umbrage when she hears one of her sons threaten that he will not allow Samir to touch her again: "Fatima, le regard froid, lui rappelle qu'un bon musulman doit obéir à son père. La soumission est la pierre angulaire de son éducation."²⁶³ The violent manner in which Samir treats his family is perhaps intended to underline the emasculating feelings that their displacement and marginalisation – both economic and social – inspired. His kneejerk and highly macho response is an attempt to overcompensate for this. When the crisis of Lounès' trial reaches its peak, each family member is given a task to aid in freeing him, and Samir is assigned the job of praying at the mosque. When Lounès is subsequently freed, and fails in his attempted suicide as a result of a faulty rope, "Samir Amri voit dans le miracle la réponse à ses prières. En remerciement, il ne battra plus sa famille."²⁶⁴ By showing that Samir's violence has ended at the close of the novel, Rachedi is perhaps alluding to a sense of Samir's healing. His feelings of isolation from his family have been somewhat overcome, in part as a result of the justice system working in Lounès' favour. This symbolic victory for Samir is significant, and its inclusion in the text shows how the marginalised *banlieue* population can overcome the difficulties that they confront, but only if afforded dignity and respect by the majority population and the representatives of the French state.

In *Kiffer sa race*, Sabrina's best friend, Nedjma, has an exceptionally disturbing relationship with her father, although this is not often referenced in the narrative. During the novel, Nedjma withdraws from her friends and begins to get into trouble in school. In fact, she does not spend any time with her best friend Sabrina for the majority of the novel. At the end, Sabrina realises, just in time, that her friend is experiencing suicidal ideation and manages to prevent this tragedy. Nedjma reveals that she is worried that her father may molest her, that although he has done nothing specific, he makes allusions when they are alone and she feels, at times, that there is something sinister in the air

262 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 66-7.

263 Ibid., 46.

264 Ibid., 214.

between them. This has been the cause of her anxiety, dramatic weight loss and problems at school. However, Sabrina's family agrees to accept Nedjma into their home, as she is almost a member of the family already (Mohamed refers to her as his third daughter). This is an extreme example of paternal violence, yet its inclusion in the text is an example of a trait common to each of these authors under investigation. None of these authors:

... disguise the harsh realities associated with living in underprivileged communities in France. On the contrary, an equilibrium is achieved between an engagement with social realities and an insistence upon the quotidian aspect of family living, along with the various trials and tribulations, joys and disappointments associated with this life.²⁶⁵

Although Thomas was referring to Guène's work in this statement, it applies equally to Rachedi and Mahany's work, as evidenced by their privileging of day-to-day aspects of life on the periphery and its ups and downs, while still including difficult situations that engage with social realities – such as Nedjma's story, outlined above, or that of Abdou in *Le petit Malik*.

On the other hand, the father figure frequently appears at the opposite end of the spectrum in *banlieue* literature too – as absent, permanently injured or weak. This type of father figure has been common throughout the life-span of this literature, beginning with *Le thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* and it continues to occur in the books in the corpus. As mentioned previously, *Kiffe kiffe demain* features a father who has abandoned his family and returned to the *bled*. Neither Malik's nor Malika's father is present in their lives, although Malika's mother has a series of live-in boyfriends throughout the young girl's early childhood. Abdelkader suffers from a stroke early in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, and dies in the closing chapters. As outlined in section 3.2, *Les gens du Balto*'s Jacques has been rendered weak by a combination of chronic unemployment and an overbearing wife. Taniël and Jacques consider her to be vulgar – both in dress sense and in her manner of speech, and Taniël states that: "J'aimerais mieux qu'elle ressemble à la mère d'Ali, ça, c'est une vraie mère."²⁶⁶ The irony is that, when challenged on her dress sense, Yéva invokes feminism and claims that she is free to dress as she chooses and, according to her oldest son: "Franchement, je suis d'accord avec elle, mais y a bien des femmes libres qui s'habillent normalement ?"²⁶⁷ For the majority of the book, Taniël

265 Thomas, "New Writing for New Times," 44.

266 Guène, *Les gens du Balto*, 16.

267 Ibid., 15.

considers his father weak, but this changes towards the end, as the plot draws them closer together. When Jacques decides that he is unhappy with his life, and is going to make some big changes – including divorcing his wife – Taniël gains a lot of respect for him and begins to confide in him in return. At the end of the novel, the reader is left with the impression that Jacques and Taniël will maintain a mutually beneficial and understanding relationship, which will provide a supportive framework for both of them in attempting to reach their goals. Only Sabrina's father in *Kiffer sa race* is a strong and positive male influence on her life, although he too is hospitalised twice during the course of the narrative. This hospitalisation gives Adam a further opportunity to assert his authority in the household. Although Mohamed is a loving, responsible man, Adam does not view him as typically masculine and is indifferent to their father for the most part, figuratively killing the father. This is particularly interesting given the absent, weak or otherwise incapacitated fathers in the other novels. In this case, the father is present and able-bodied and, despite his hospitalisation for a work-related illness, is only rendered weak or incapacitated through his son's eyes.

Ahlème's situation in *Du rêve pour les oufs* is more complicated. Not only is Ahlème the sole earner in her family, she is also the sole care-giver to her father and brother.²⁶⁸ When she first arrived in France, she struggled to adjust to the change and adopted a masculine mode of dress and behaviour: "Je suis passée sans escale d'un univers exclusivement féminin au monde des hommes."²⁶⁹ It took several years and the guidance of Tantie Mariatou before the young girl accepted her femininity. Ahlème's brother is fifteen for the duration of the novel, and owing to his accident, her father is incapacitated and unable to look after his family. The accident, which mirrors that of Madjid's father in *Le thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, occurred almost three years before the beginning of the novel, although Ahlème still struggles to see him "dans cet état, en train de dire des phrases qui n'ont pas de sens, assis toute la journée dans son fauteuil, en pyjama"²⁷⁰, and his whole life is now regulated by the television schedule: "*Télé Matin*, c'est l'heure du café, les infos, c'est l'heure du déjeuner, *Derrick*, c'est l'heure de la sieste, et le générique final du film du soir, c'est le moment où il va se coucher."²⁷¹ He was not wearing a hard hat at the time

268 Although she does have a mother-figure, Tantie Mariatou, upon whom she can rely for advice, comfort and friendship.

269 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 44.

270 Ibid., 27.

271 Ibid.

of the accident, having loaned it to a co-worker who had forgotten his, as *le Patron* was working on the top of the building and believed there was little risk of anything falling on his head. After his accident, he continues to attempt to work, as outlined by Ahlème:

Dans les premiers mois qui ont suivi l'accident, il y a eu des matins où Papa se réveillait à 4 heures, en pleine semaine, comme d'habitude, faisait ses ablutions, priait, préparait sa gamelle et s'apprêtait à sortir ... Lorsque je me rendais compte qu'il était debout, je devais me lever et lui expliquer qu'il n'allait pas travailler et ça me faisait mal au cœur parce qu'il me répondait, confus : « Oui, c'est vrai, tu as raison, j'avais oublié, on est dimanche. »²⁷²

Following the accident, the company who had employed him attempted to shirk their responsibility to pay compensation to their injured worker. "Alors, il y a eu d'abord le syndicat des ouvriers et puis la justice, l'avocat, le procès."²⁷³ Fortunately they won the case and he now receives a pension. The struggle is indicative of how those on the margins of society must continuously strive to eke out a living.²⁷⁴ As mentioned above, the absence, whether physical or mental, of the father figure is a recurring theme in the literature that has emerged from the *banlieue*, since its beginnings in *beur* literature in the early 1980s. It is possible that the frequency with which the archetype of the weak or absent father figure appears is intended to symbolically represent the emasculating and disempowering experience of social and economic exclusion that life on the periphery entails, particularly in the case of a migrant worker who has come to France from North Africa. Desplanques has noted that in novels where the father is thus portrayed:

... l'usure des pères est totale : elle est tout à la fois physique, morale et symbolique. Prisonniers de la loi qu'ils incarnent, ils oscillent entre la violence et l'absence ; tout se passe comme s'ils étaient implicitement tenus pour responsables de l'échec économique et, plus profondément, du déracinement.²⁷⁵

This emasculation is all the more striking when viewed in the context of the sense of gratitude that many among this first generation experienced when they arrived in France, gratitude that Ahlème herself finds baffling:

272 Ibid., 28-9.

273 Ibid., 28.

274 A similar issue with compensation arises in Habiba Mahany's *Kiffer sa race*, when Sabrina's father is repeatedly hospitalised as a result of exposure to asbestos at work. His employers attempt to force him to sign a liability waiver, fortunately his daughter's quick thinking in alerting the medical staff prevents this.

275 Desplanques, "Les beurs," 49.

Ça m'a toujours étonnée cette drôle de gratitude que le Patron et d'autres messieurs de son âge ont pour le pays d'accueil. On rase les murs, on paie son loyer à l'heure, casier judiciaire vierge, pas cinq minutes de chômage en quarante ans de boulot, et après ça, on ôte le chapeau, on sourit et on dit : « Merci la France ! »

Je me suis souvent demandé comment un homme comme le Patron, qui considère la fierté comme un organe vital, a pu baisser la tête toutes ces années avant de la perdre complètement.²⁷⁶

This unconditional gratitude and deference in the face of hardship and racism is difficult for Ahlème to understand. In her view, if one has devoted one's life to working hard and paying taxes in a country and, in the process, sacrificed one's health and ability to work, then the host country is owed nothing more. This position may be explained by Ahlème's role of responsibility, unusual for someone of her age, as she must support her family and ensure that her brother Foued attends school and keeps out of trouble.

This discussion of violent Maghrebi men and repressed women does not mean to suggest, however, that the women of immigrant origin are:

...helpless victims who are unable to defend themselves against these oppressions. One important manifestation of women's agency and of their desire to fight the discriminations of which they are victims is the formation of women's associations to provide solidarity and self-help for women of immigrant origin.²⁷⁷

Some of these organisations include *Ni putes ni soumises*,²⁷⁸ mentioned by Ali Chacal in *Les gens du Balto, Voix d'Elles Rebelles*,²⁷⁹ and the *Réseau pour l'autonomie des femmes immigrées et réfugiées*.²⁸⁰ *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* features such an association. Dounia, who embarks on a political career following her departure from the family home, works closely with an organisation which defends women's rights and liberties. The association, *Fières et pas connes*, is a thinly-veiled reference to *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* and makes newspaper headlines on a regular basis. The organisation has its detractors as well as its supporters, and according to Mourad: "Sur internet, l'un des plus fervents détracteurs de l'association, qu'elles traînaient régulièrement en justice pour diffamation, a titré

276 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 66.

277 Freedman, "Women and Immigration," 25.

278 *Ni putes, ni soumises* was established to fight against the rising violence directed towards young women in the *banlieue* regions.

279 Previously known as the *Nanas Beurs*, and sometimes referred to as the *Meufs Rebeus*.

280 Known as RAJFIRE, this is a campaigning network set up to defend and campaign for the rights of women of immigrant origin.

son blog : « Pour toutes les femmes, fermez vos gueules ! »²⁸¹ The title of the blog is a reference to a campaign slogan: "Pour toutes les femmes, on ne se taira plus."²⁸² Later, Dounia begins to make regular television appearances in anticipation of running for a higher office, for a conservative right-wing party. Her online detractors consequently claim that she is: "Corrompue, vendue, Arabe de service."²⁸³ The inclusion of Dounia's association reflects the real-world necessity for such associations, and thus is an element of realism, in particular because Dounia must endure criticism as a result, something from which no public figure is exempt. Although much has been achieved by these real-world organisations since their inception, according to Jane Freedman:

It seems that until the problems of women of immigrant origin in regard to nationality and citizenship are considered specifically and apart from general issues relating to these subjects, women will continue to be the victims of particular exclusions. Despite the efforts of women of immigrant origin to organize and struggle against these exclusions, there is still a long way to go before they overcome their double source of oppression and achieve equal citizenship status in France.²⁸⁴

A strange phenomenon can be noted in relation to *Le petit Malik*, in that it predominantly features male characters. As the structure of the novel means that it follows Malik through twenty years of his life, it is surprising that the only female characters of note are Malik's mother, who features in the early part of the book, and his girlfriend Mélinda, who is the subject of two of the later chapters.²⁸⁵ Aside from these characters, female characters are only referred to in the episodes from Malik's late teenage years and as such have more to do with an adolescent male's preoccupation with the female form than a desire on the author's part to engage with issues concerning gender. Thus for the duration of the chapter when Malik is seventeen, the thoughts of the protagonist and narrator are primarily concerned with girls, both real and fictional. Malik describes two girls from school, and his teenage love of Christina Aguilera as well as several other famous singers and actresses. The representation of women in the text is otherwise remarkable for its absence. Malik's group of friends is bereft of females and, as stated above, other than his mother and girlfriend, Malik seems to have little or no interaction with women. Perhaps this was an intentional choice by the author,

281 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 81.

282 Ibid.

283 Ibid., 83.

284 Freedman, "Women and Immigration," 26.

285 Mélinda was discussed in Chapter Two.

to mirror the hyper-masculine space of the *banlieue* as it exists for Malik and his peers. Hargreaves has noted that "in many public spaces in the *banlieues*, women tend to be less visible than men",²⁸⁶ adding weight to this theory. Given that female characters are prominent throughout *La petite Malika*, co-written by Rachedi and his sister, it is also possible that Rachedi felt unqualified to develop complete and credible female characters.²⁸⁷ The episodic nature of the novel means that many of the incidents are brief moments in the young man's life, thus the absence of females from these snapshots does not necessarily mean that there were no women in his life apart from these moments. Yet the relative absence of women is a striking feature of the novel, and one which is pertinent to a discussion of gender in the texts.

On the other hand, although there is a somewhat more even gender representation in *Kiffer sa race*, *Le poids d'une âme*, *La petite Malika*, *Les gens du Balto* and *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, Guène's first two novels, *Kiffe kiffe demain* and *Du rêve pour les oufs*, feature a majority of women. In *Kiffe kiffe demain*, Doria is surrounded by women: her mother; Tante Zohra; her psychologist, Mme Burlaud; the various social workers assisting the family; Lila, the woman for whom she babysits, and her daughter, Sarah. Patricia Geesey claims that this preponderance of women "populate this novel and give it its tone of hope in overcoming the numerous difficulties of life in the *cit *."²⁸⁸ Geesey believes that while the French media "often portray the *cit * as the site of male-authored violence,"²⁸⁹ Doria's belief that "love and the recognition of mutual humanity ... will provide a way out of despair for some residents of the *cit s*"²⁹⁰ is lent credence by her predominantly female supporting cast. *Du r ve pour les oufs*, similarly, features a majority of female characters. Ahl me's father and brother are the only exceptions but, as mentioned above, her father is mentally absent throughout and her brother features mainly as a result of her desire to protect him from the potential pitfalls for a young man growing up in the *banlieue*. In an interview with *L'Humanit *, Gu ne claimed that the abundance of female characters was something she incorporated consciously: "C'est un choix. J'ai la conviction que le changement passera par les femmes. Elles ont les  paules solides et en m me temps elles sont fragiles comme une brindille qui tombe sur un simple coup de vent."²⁹¹

286 Hargreaves, "Banlieue blues," 223.

287 Although his most recent novel, *Tous les hommes sont des causes perdues*, published in 2015, gives equal weight to the perspective of two protagonists, one male and one female.

288 Patricia Geesey, "Global Pop Culture in Fa za Gu ne's *Kiffe kiffe demain*," *Expressions Maghr bines* 7, no. 1 (2008): 65.

289 Ibid.

290 Ibid.

291 Mina Kaci, "Fa za Gu ne ou l' crivaine de la cit  des Courtili res," *L'Humanit *, March 8 2006. Accessed: October 15 2014, <http://www.humanite.fr/node/346089>.

The fact that gender-related issues feature in the majority of the primary texts is significant, and reflects a desire on the part of the authors to highlight the role of women in the *banlieues*. As demonstrated, gender dynamics play a pivotal role in most of the novels in the corpus. Guène and Mahany, in particular, use these issues as a means of countering prevalent stereotypes related to families of North African origin in France, while also attempting to add a more universalising element, by showing that some stereotypes are not confined to those of a North African background. These authors do not shy away from acknowledging that problems do exist for women of immigrant origin, yet they refuse to situate these problems centrally in their narratives. In this way, they do not exaggerate their importance for women in the *banlieue*. The veracity of Guène's words, cited above, that the future *passera par les femmes* can be seen in the manner in which women are portrayed and represented in the texts, which can thus aid in the creation of a more positive representation of gender dynamics in the *banlieues* in the eyes of the majority population.

3.5 Conclusion

Some members of the North African community in the *banlieues* face significant difficulties in the French education system, in particular as entry into this system can mark a point of rupture with their home life – particularly if French was not the language spoken in the home. This is frequently rendered even more difficult, as levels of unemployment are significantly higher in these areas, and young members of this population can encounter many obstacles when seeking employment. For the population of immigrant origin, issues related to their ethnicity and religion can add a further dimension to their struggles, in particular as a result of differing gender relations in French and North African cultures. These differences can, at times, cause conflict. Although Guène, Rachedi and Mahany do not shirk discussion and acknowledgement of such problems in their texts, they present their readers with a more realistic, and therefore more positive, image of life on the periphery. Treating these issues in an honest and forthright fashion, yet showing their characters overcoming adversity and experiencing a sense of optimism and positivity at the end of the narratives is an important facet of these novels because, as discussed in Chapter One, seeing their culture presented positively in literature can contribute to the empowerment of young *banlieue* residents.

Chapter 4: “Notre génération va tout casser”¹: Changing the Representation of the *Banlieues*

Many and varied factors lead to the French public’s impression of the *banlieues* and their residents as profoundly “other.” Some of these factors contribute to the misrepresentation of these regions, and therefore need to be dismantled and replaced with more positive and realistic representations. These include the sometimes conflicted relationship between *banlieue* youth and police which occasionally spills over into violence; media representations of the *banlieues* and the biases that may exist when presenting *banlieue*-related news stories; the way in which politicians speak about and deal with the *banlieues* in the course of their work; and in some cases, racism that is a result of insufficient knowledge of the way of life of France’s immigrant population generally, but in particular those from North Africa, and those from a Muslim background. This chapter will examine each of these issues, and the manner in which they are portrayed in the primary texts will be explored. It will outline the ways in which the authors attempt to dismantle these prevalent misrepresentations and portray the *banlieues* in a more realistic light. In so-doing they can create more positive and optimistic representations of these zones.

4.1 Violence, Police and the Justice System

The problems faced by the *banlieue* population, living on the periphery in circumstances that are both economically and culturally difficult, as described in the previous chapters, can on occasion lead to violence and conflict. Predominantly young, male residents of these zones, frustrated by the lack of opportunity afforded them and angry at what they perceive as a lack of respect on the part of the majority population, occasionally demonstrate their feelings of anguish and helplessness by way of violent protest and ritual car burning. The highly mediated nature of these events means that this unrest and disorder is the predominant impression that the majority population hold of the *banlieues*, and so continues a cycle of mutual misunderstanding and fear. Hacène Belmessous claims that news reports on events that happen periodically in the *banlieues* are taken as proof of this “dégénérescence,”² that the police, justice system and elected officials support this belief and that:

1 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 249.

2 Belmessous, *L’avenir commence en banlieue*, 5.

Ils estiment tout d'abord qu'elle [la banlieue] créerait le chaos à l'école: ses enfants ne sauraient ni lire ni écrire, sortes de monstres qui se livreraient quotidiennement à des disputes claniques. Ils affirment ensuite qu'elle vivrait au crochet de la société qui travaille: ses habitants s'entasseraient dans les salles d'attente des services sociaux, des bouches pâteuses enivrées par des overdoses de RMI. Plus grave, enfin, ils jurent qu'elle prouverait la mort: celui qui a le malheur d'y résider risquerait la disqualification, puis la relégation et pour finir, l'extinction.³

Several of these stereotypes have been discussed in the previous chapter, and thus this section will address the occasional violent eruptions, and the complex nature of the relationship between the *banlieues* and the police and judicial system. Much has been made in media reports and in various sociological studies⁴ about the fear that many French people feel toward the *banlieue* regions, fear that is increased each time these regions appear on the news, in newspapers and magazines. They are frequently portrayed in a negative light, which highlights the violence, riots and social problems in existence there. In a collection of essays about the infamous events of November 2005, entitled *Quand les banlieues brûlent...*, Laurent Ott describes France as "une société qui traite sa jeunesse comme hostile et étrangère et qui vit dans la hantise de sa désagrégation."⁵

The violence that sporadically erupts in the *banlieues* has its roots in the early 1980s. Azouz Begag has referred to the year 1980 as marking a "turning point in worsening relations between immigrant youths and police."⁶ It was during the summer of 1981, with the advent of serious riots in Les Minguettes, a *cité* in the Vénissieux region, south of Lyon, that riots as they are known today came to the attention of the public, due to comprehensive media coverage. This marked the first widely reported instance of large-scale car burnings – which actually started in earnest in 1976 – which have come to characterise the *émeutes* in the *banlieues* for the majority of the French population. Indeed whenever there are, admittedly infrequent, news reports outside of France about these regions, it is usually because of altercations between youths and police and so images of burning cars now also have a strong association with the *banlieues* on the international stage. Riots such as this have occurred sporadically in the years since 1981, usually sparked by an incident

3 Ibid.

4 See for example: Sylvie Tissot, "Les sociologues et la banlieue : construction savante du problème des « quartiers sensibles »,» *Genèses* 60, no. 3 (2005); Henri Rey, *La peur des banlieues* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1996).

5 Laurent Ott, "Pourquoi ont-ils brûlé les écoles?," in *Quand les banlieues brûlent... Retour sur les émeutes de novembre 2005*, ed. Laurent Mucchielli and Véronique Le Goaziou (Paris: La Découverte, 2007), 144.

6 Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, 15.

between local youths and police in the peripheral zones of major French cities. There are a few particularly notable instances, however. For instance the events in Vaulx-en-Velin in October 1990, which followed the death of Thomas Claudio, a young man with special needs, who was a passenger in a car that was involved in a police chase. In *Urban Outcasts*, Loïc Wacquant uses the events in Vaulx-en-Velin as an example of how, in the last two decades of the twentieth century, the self-image of the First World was "shattered by spectacular outbursts of public unrest, rising ethnic tensions and mounting destitution and distress at the heart of large cities."⁷ Owing largely to extensive media build-up, there is a common belief that France's "declining working-class *cités* are swimming in anomie and on the brink of constant rioting due to an unprecedented combination of geographic isolation, physical deterioration of the housing stock and concentration of immigrants".⁸ Doria references the violence in the *banlieues*, and her desire to counter it, in *Kiffe kiffe demain*, which was published in 2004. The closing paragraph sees Doria express her desire to begin a peaceful revolution which would lead to change for the residents of these regions:

Moi, je mènerai la révolte de la cité du Paradis. Les journaux titreront « Doria enflamme la cité » ou encore « La passionaria des banlieues met le feu aux poudres ». Mais ce sera pas une révolte violente comme dans le film *La Haine* où ça se finit pas hyper bien. Ce sera une révolte intelligente, sans aucune violence, où on se soulèvera pour être reconnus, tous.⁹

This demonstrates Guène's desire to effect change in the marginalised zones, yet not by merely attracting short-term media and political attention through violent protests. She wishes rather to inculcate change via intelligent means, by engaging *banlieue* residents in politics and encouraging them to work together to improve their situation.

The phenomenon of violence in the French *banlieues* undoubtedly reached a pinnacle with the events of November 2005, certainly in terms of the scale of media attention and discussion among politicians, researchers, and the French (and indeed, international) population. These riots have been described as "la plus importante vague d'émeutes de son histoire contemporaine."¹⁰ In the introduction to *Quand les banlieues brûlent*, Laurent Mucchielli claims that what was both unprecedented and unforeseeable was:

7 Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts*, 18.

8 Ibid., 139.

9 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 189.

10 Marwan Mohammed and Laurent Mucchielli, "La police dans les « quartiers sensibles » : un profond malaise," in *Quand les banlieues brûlent: Retour sur les émeutes de novembre 2005*, ed. Laurent Mucchielli and Véronique Le Goaziou (Paris: La Découverte, 2007), 125.

...le processus d'identification collective qui s'est enclenché en novembre 2005 et qui a fait que, pour la première fois dans notre histoire contemporaine, l'émeute a perdu son caractère local pour prendre une extension géographique nationale.¹¹

Following the accidental deaths of two local youths who were hiding from police in an electrical substation in Clichy-sous-Bois on October 27th, protests and riots began locally and were initially confined to the Paris region. Over the next few days and weeks, however, trouble spread, first throughout the Île-de-France region and then to other urban areas in France, eventually affecting all fifteen of the French *aires urbaines*. In an attempt to put an end to this riot and prevent others from occurring, the government declared a state of emergency which lasted from November 8th 2005 until January 4th 2006, well after the riots had ended. These "emergency powers were invoked under a 1955 law dating from the Algerian war of independence ... [and] this was the first time the law had been applied on mainland France."¹² According to figures released by the Social Science Research Council, over the course of the riots:

The rioters ... caused over €200 million in damage as they torched nearly 9000 cars and dozens of buildings, daycare centers, and schools. The French police arrested close to 2900 rioters; 126 police and firefighters were injured, and there was one fatality – a bystander who died after being struck by a hooded youth.¹³

Véronique Le Goaziou noted that politicians from both the left and the right spoke of the violence, the perpetrators, and the manner in which the situation was handled by police, yet little was said about the root causes underlying the events. Although there have been eruptions of violence and conflict in the *banlieues* in the intervening years,¹⁴ a lot has been written about the phenomenon of November 2005, both academically and journalistically. Dominique Duprez claims that the "strong feelings aroused by the events meant that journalists and the public discovered youth unemployment, racism and discrimination and the existence of urban ghettos."¹⁵ He also claims that "the soil in

11 Laurent Mucchielli, "Introduction," in *Quand les banlieues brûlent: Retour sur les émeutes de novembre 2005*, ed. Laurent Mucchielli and Véronique Le Goaziou (Paris: La Découverte, 2007), 5.

12 Matthew Moran, "Opposing Exclusion: The Political Significance of the Riots in French Suburbs (2005-2007)," *Modern and Contemporary France* 19, no. 3 (2011): 311.

13 Peter Sahlins, "Civil Unrest in the French Suburbs, November 2005," *Social Science Research Council*, October 24, 2006, Accessed: October 16 2014, <http://riotsfrance.ssrc.org/>.

14 Notably in Villiers-en-Bel in 2007, a much more localised and short-lived occurrence, but significant in the similarity of the riots themselves as well as the similar triggering circumstances.

15 Duprez, "Urban Rioting," 758.

which the seeds of the urban riots were sown was the experience of unemployment and discrimination."¹⁶ *Du rêve pour les oufs* was published in 2006, in the wake of the riots. Ahlème does not mention the riots overtly, but she does make an oblique reference to them, while placing an emphasis on the sense of futility felt in the wake of the events, particularly as it seems that little has changed in the aftermath:

Les événements qu'il y a eu par chez nous ces dernières semaines ont agité la presse du monde entier et après quelques affrontements jeunes-police, tout s'est calmé à nouveau. Mais qu'est-ce que nos trois carcasses de caisses calcinées peuvent changer quand une armée de forcenés cherchent à nous faire taire ?¹⁷

This is the only time that the riots, or indeed violence of any kind between the *banlieue* youth and the police are mentioned in the text, and yet it highlights the feelings of displacement and abandonment felt by those on the periphery. Rachedi's *Le poids d'une âme* was also published in 2006, although it had been accepted for publication in advance of the events of November 2005. In personal correspondence, Rachedi explained that his editor had initially been reluctant to publish a manuscript which mentioned rioting overtly, believing it to be outmoded:

Mabrouck présentait le manuscrit à Lattès environ deux ou trois semaines avant les émeutes de novembre 2005. L'éditrice le trouvait très bien, sauf l'image de la banlieue qu'il renvoyait, avec des émeutes. Elle pensait que tout ça était fini, que cela renvoyait à une imagerie surannée de films comme « La Haine » tandis que Mabrouck essayait de la convaincre que c'était toujours d'actualité. Quelques jours après cet entretien, il y a eu les émeutes et l'éditrice a appelé Mabrouck en présentant ses excuses.¹⁸

This reluctance on the part of his editor demonstrates a lack of understanding outside of the *banlieues* regarding the situation within these zones. While the novel does not dwell overly on riots, two notable instances occur during the narrative, in response to police actions.¹⁹ Rachedi's insistence that his novel reflected the situation facing *banlieue* residents, and therefore was relevant and pertinent, proved to be justified, and the inclusion of these events in the narrative is an aspect of the realism inherent in the novels of the corpus.

16 Ibid.

17 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 30.

18 See Appendix 3.

19 These events will be discussed further below.

Commentators and researchers familiar with the situation in the *banlieues* claim that the fault lies with the various failings of the French government to protect its multi-ethnic population. For instance, Alec Hargreaves claims that November 2005 showed that "the fabric of national unity in France was threatened ... by government failures to provide effective remedies to long-standing problems of socio-economic inequality and racial discrimination."²⁰ In his introduction to Begag's *Ethnicity and Equality*, he goes even further, stating that the events of this time were a consequence of:

...entrenched socioeconomic inequalities compounded by widespread ethnic discrimination and decades of political neglect [that] had bred a subgroup of disaffected youths whose resentment was such that they were ready to erupt into violence at the slightest provocation.²¹

He goes on to clarify that "The violence to which this disaffection gave rise was, thus, a consequence, not of communautarisme, but of the Republic's failure to live up to its own principles."²² Indeed, the vast numbers of unemployed *banlieue* youth, discussed in Chapter Three, are considered by some to have been a "Beau réservoir d'émeutiers potentiels."²³ It is worth mentioning that although the majority of the *banlieue* population – including the parents and families of those involved, and their neighbours as well as the non-rioting youth – did not necessarily support the actions of the rioters, they did empathise with the sentiments of frustration, anger and helplessness underlying the complaints being articulated by these youths. According to Éric Marlière, who conducted extensive interviews with members of these population groups: "... ces habitants croient comprendre et sont largement solidaires des motivations sociales et surtout symboliques des émeutiers."²⁴

Robert Castel, in *La discrimination négative*, terms the events of 2005 "une révolte du désespoir: ces réactions évoquent les jacqueries émeutes ... qui ont jalonné l'histoire des sociétés préindustrielles."²⁵ According to Castel, one noteworthy aspect of the movement,

20 Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 164.

21 Hargreaves, "Translator's Introduction," viii.

22 Ibid., xx.

23 Laurent Mucchielli and Abderrahim Aït-Omar, "Les émeutes de novembre 2005: les raisons de la colère," in *Quand les banlieues brûlent... Retour sur les émeutes de novembre 2005*, ed. Laurent Mucchielli and Véronique Le Goaziou (Paris: La Découverte, 2007), 34.

24 Éric Marlière, "Les habitants des quartiers : adversaires ou solidaires des émeutiers ?," in *Quand les banlieues brûlent... Retour sur les émeutes de novembre 2005*, ed. Laurent Mucchielli and Véronique Le Goaziou (Paris: La Découverte, 2007), 92.

25 Castel, *La discrimination négative*, 15.

however, was the "absence de leaders reconnus et d'organisations structurées ou des objectifs ou revendications."²⁶ This clearly demonstrates the spontaneity of the actions as well as the lack of political savvy amongst the perpetrators, who almost invariably directed their anger towards the destruction of symbolically meaningful amenities (such as schools, shops and community centres) in their own localities. Guène spoke, in an interview with her English-language translator, of her frustration with this lack of demands, and how she realised the significance of her ability to speak out:

Guène refused to comment during last autumn's riots, reasoning that while she was sympathetic to some of the causes, "there was no political discourse, it was all just inflamed reaction". Nearly two years on from arriving in the public eye, she does, however, accept that she has responsibilities. "I realised something important, which is that not many people from my background, with my social and cultural origins, are represented in the media or have a voice. I got this opportunity, and now I realise I don't have the right to pass it up. It's rare for someone to speak out, especially in a field that's not normally reserved for us"²⁷

It is interesting to note that the interpretation of events taken by government officials and the police force differs substantially from the above claims of misdirected political demands and focuses instead on what Matthew Moran terms a "security-oriented interpretation of the violence".²⁸ There is a tendency amongst the political elite to claim that the rioting youth are merely *racaille*, "experienced delinquents expressing a hate for French society and the Republic."²⁹ The comments made by former president Nicolas Sarkozy in the wake of both the 2005 and the 2007 riots are revealing. In response to the trouble in 2005, he claimed that:

La première cause du chômage, de la désespérance, de la violence dans les banlieues, ce ne sont pas les discriminations, ce n'est pas l'échec de l'école. La première cause du désespoir dans les quartiers, c'est le trafic de drogue, la loi des bandes, la dictature de la peur et la démission de la République.³⁰

26 Ibid.

27 Sarah Adams, "Voice of the people," *The Guardian*, May 10 2006. Accessed: November 10 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2006/may/10/books.socialexclusion>.

28 Moran, "Opposing Exclusion," 299.

29 Ibid., 300.

30 Ibid., 301. The article to which Moran here refers can be found here: Philippe Ridet, "M. Sarkozy durcit son discours sur les banlieues," *Le Monde*, November 21 2005. http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2005/11/21/m-sarkozy-durcit-son-discours-sur-les-banlieues_712425_3224.html.

Similarly in 2007, when violence flared up in the wake of the deaths of two youths who collided with a police car, he stated that:

... ce qui se passe à Villiers-en-Bel n'a rien à voir avec une crise sociale, ça va tout à voir avec la voyoucratie ... Je réfute toute forme d'angélisme qui vise à trouver en chaque délinquant une victime de la société, en chaque émeute un problème social.³¹

The reasons behind the phenomenon of car burning have been addressed by Begag in his essay *L'Intégration*, where he claims that the message sent by these actions is: "On habite loin, mais on est là quand même"³² and that the defiance behind them lies in "passer jusqu'au bout le symbole de la désintégration et le transformer en logique stratégique d'insularité."³³ Similarly, Loïc Wacquant describes the actions of "local youths [who] incinerate the instrument of geographic and social mobility which is denied to them."³⁴ He also states that "urban violence and collective unrest have come to be closely linked, if not equated, in the public mind with ethnoracial division and/or immigration",³⁵ and that, for the disadvantaged youth of the *banlieue* regions (and areas of a similar socio-economic composition elsewhere) violence is the most effective weapon they have at their disposal. Begag concurs when he claims that the violence perpetrated in the *banlieues* is a means of "paying back society with the violence it has inflicted on them."³⁶ A striking example of a car burning which occurs as an indirect result of police harassment is evident in *Le petit Malik*. Malik and his friends are on their way to a *Wu-Tang Clan* concert in Paris and since none of them can drive, or afford metro tickets, they must devise schemes for avoiding the *contrôleurs* at the metro stations. On the train, others regard them suspiciously as a result of the manner in which they are slouched in their seats, with loud music blaring from speakers. Ironically, the boys would not take issue with being asked to reduce the volume of their music, as Malik explains: "Ils auraient dû s'exprimer, s'ils voulaient qu'on les entende."³⁷ He relates how one day an elderly lady asked them to be considerate of

31 Moran, "Opposing Exclusion," 301. The article to which Moran here refers can be found here: Liberation.fr and Agence France-Press, "Villiers-le-Bel: Sarkozy dénonce une «voyoucratie»," *Libération*, November 29 2007. http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/2007/11/29/villiers-le-bel-sarkozy-denonce-une-voyoucratie_8241.

32 Begag, *L'Intégration*, 72.

33 Ibid.

34 Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts*, 209.

35 Ibid., 22.

36 Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, 42.

37 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 133.

others on the train: "La seule qui osait nous parler, c'était la plus chétive d'entre tous. Et vous savez quoi? On l'a écoutée. Elle, elle nous parlait au moins."³⁸ When they arrive at *Gare de Lyon*, they must pass some *contrôleurs* on the way out of the station. Knowing that they will be stopped, but pressed for time before the concert, they resign themselves to a confrontation and a fine "Et alors ? De toute façon, l'amende, on la paierait pas."³⁹ However, when they are forced to undergo a search, one of the security guards finds that Boris, one of Malik's friends, is carrying a small sachet of white powder. Although informed that it is merely sugar, the police – and even Malik – find this difficult to believe and, angered because they think the boys are mocking them, they bring the group to the police station. After a lengthy process, it transpires that the sachet did indeed contain sugar, as Boris suffers from chronic hypoglycaemia. Mirroring an incident from *La Haine*, they leave the station immediately after the last train for their *banlieue* has departed, having already missed the concert, and so must either find a way home, or wait ten hours at the station for the first train in the morning. The irony of the end of the night is not lost on Malik:

Abdou a croché une voiture.
Sans permis, il nous a conduits jusqu'à la cité.
Puis on a brûlé la caisse, histoire de pas laisser d'empreintes.
Trois délits alors qu'on voulait juste écouter de la musique.
Tout ça pour du sucre.
Tout ça pour du beurre.⁴⁰

The attitude of the police, and that of their fellow passengers, when faced with a group of youths from the *banlieue* is to immediately suspect them of criminality. This is a common issue faced by those in the urban periphery. This example, in which the boys were innocent of any crime before they were detained, and forced to miss their train, illustrates the relationship between those from the *banlieues*, in particular young males, and those from without, in particular the police. It also demonstrates how this relationship can be a vicious cycle in which mutual mistrust and anger can in fact create problems that may not otherwise have existed.

Robert Castel states that violence is sometimes the only means of representation that is available to young residents of the *banlieue*, and that although racism is present in French society at large, it is magnified in these zones. He sums this up using a subversion

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., 135.

40 Ibid., 137.

of the much touted French motto, instituted by the Third Republic: "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, mais pas dans les cités."⁴¹ As Begag points out, although there are obviously social problems in the French *banlieues* "ce qui se déroule dans les quartiers sensibles de France n'est pas radicalement différent de ce qui se joue dans d'autres quartiers défavorisés d'autres pays."⁴² This is a theory supported by numerous researchers in the field, notably Loïc Wacquant, who claims that "researchers who have investigated up close the tensions simmering in the housing projects [...find the situation...] strikingly at odds with the vision that has come to dominate the media and political debate."⁴³ The novels in the corpus reflect this reality, as there is very little mention of violence throughout. Apart from the examples cited above, where the protagonists mention violence in the *banlieues* or the November 2005 riots, there are few references to violence and conflict. This is an aspect of the realism inherent in the texts, whereby the authors present a more positive and realistic vision of life in the *banlieues*, which is counter to the usual public representations of these zones. This is empowering for YA readers from the *banlieue* and provides a more realistic context on the *banlieues* for readers from outside these regions.

The novels focus much more on the conflict and antagonism that exists between *banlieue* youth and police. These problems have been discussed in depth in many academic studies⁴⁴ and many in France have heard stories of ethnic profiling being carried out by police, who frequently treat young ethnics with contempt, subjecting them to frequent *contrôles d'identité* and harassment.⁴⁵ With developments within the European Union in the last number of decades, and the consequent loosening of the external border controls of the countries involved, Laurent Dubois has argued that as "the more solid territorial border posts and checkpoints are abandoned, a thousand shifting borders are set up within the national territory of France."⁴⁶ As an example, he references the regularity with which there is a police presence and identity checks on board the RER trains in Paris, which serve the outlying areas of the city, including the *banlieues*, and which Dubois deems to be among the most heavily policed areas in Paris. Other examples proffered are

41 Castel, *La discrimination négative*, 41.

42 Begag, *L'Intégration*, 45.

43 Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts*, 189.

44 See for example: The chapter entitled "Fear of the Police" in Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*; Mohamed and Mucchielli, "La police dans les « quartiers sensibles »"; Moran, "Opposing Exclusion."

45 Azouz Begag speaks of his personal experience of this – and in particular one noteworthy incident in a train station shortly after being awarded the Legion of Honour – in his introduction to *Ethnicity and Equality*.

46 Dubois, "La République métissée," 16.

the "extensive identity checks against those who 'look' foreign, concentrated in sites of transit which those who live in the *banlieue* must pass through every day on their way to work."⁴⁷ He likens this phenomenon to a "structural reassertion of the economic exclusion of those who live in the *banlieue*"⁴⁸ and one which only further adds to the feeling of displacement experienced by this population. This treatment has led to the development of a simmering tension between young ethnics and the police, tension which lies at the heart of frequent clashes between youth and police in the *banlieues*. Albert Memmi refers to this when he claims:

[L]a police n'entre qu'avec appréhension parce que sa seule vue suscite la colère des « jeunes » [...et...] les forces de l'ordre, il est vrai, exaspérées par l'incessante difficulté de leur tâche et la remise en question de leur autorité, n'apportent pas toujours le doigté dont elles font preuve dans les beaux quartiers.⁴⁹

Matthew Moran, who worked with young people from the Paris *banlieue*, claims that "it is through the relationship between police and public that the problems facing the suburbs take concrete form"⁵⁰ and that for many among the young residents of "*quartiers sensibles* ... the police represent a physical manifestation of the symbolic violence that dominates in the suburbs."⁵¹ He even states that, for many of the young people concerned, any delinquent behaviour is not considered to be delinquent, "having gained legitimacy as a means of responding to the injustice imposed by the police institution."⁵² This sense of legitimacy is significant, as it can allow these young people to justify extreme behaviour, in the belief that it is merely a response to the treatment they receive from the police.

Reflecting the conflict between *banlieue* residents and police discussed above, several examples of police officers behaving badly and treating *banlieue* residents in an unfair and discriminatory manner are evident in the texts in the corpus. Kevin, Malika's classmate, was a victim of one of the more unfortunate side effects of police discrimination. Kevin was falsely accused of armed robbery and arrested by police (although he attracted their attention as a result of running from a checkpoint). When the security footage is reviewed, it proved "que le vrai braqueur était un grand blond dont la seule ressemblance

47 Ibid., 16-7.

48 Ibid., 30.

49 Memmi, *Portrait du décolonisé*, 141.

50 Moran, "Opposing Exclusion," 305.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., 307.

avec Kevin résidait dans l'appartenance aux mammifères bipèdes constituant le genre humain."⁵³ Although it transpired that Kevin has been conducting a secret relationship with a neighbour, who happens to be the daughter of the local police chief, "qui ne supporterait pas que sa fille fréquente un Toubab"⁵⁴ and thus his arrest may have been partially a result of a personal vendetta, the incident nevertheless shows how the police may be guilty of profiling members of the *banlieue* population. Some members of the police force in these novels seem to delight in provoking locals into causing trouble. On the other hand, the residents of these areas are portrayed as having a deep-seated mistrust of the police, which sometimes results in conflict incited by them. Both sides of this conflict are evident from the beginning of *Le poids d'une âme*. After his suspension, Lounès attends a soccer match in a nearby neighbourhood and a fight breaks out on the pitch. When the police are called, the crowd immediately disperses, as "De témoin, on est vite accusé de non-assistance à personne en danger."⁵⁵ Further, upon Lounès' return to Évry, many *CRS*⁵⁶ are in the area, which has resulted in an impromptu gathering: "Une centaine de personnes sont réunies pour protéger leur territoire."⁵⁷ *Banlieue* residents are not portrayed as blameless, however, as boys as young as twelve are hurling insults and stones at the police. Lounès wonders why the *CRS* might be there, but "Rien ne paraît justifier le déploiement à part la provocation."⁵⁸ Although this clash with police failed to escalate in Évry, trouble occurs in the locality anyway. In a strange celebratory ritual at having "conquered" the police at this juncture, the locals begin to set cars alight and vandalise buildings and a full-blown riot erupts, including the burning of a bus. Further protests occur later, in reaction to Lounès' arrest and treatment, many ending in violence, despite Tarik's pleas to some of the protestors: "Mon frère est en prison, si vous voulez qu'il y reste, frappez ces gars, mais bordel, quelle utilité?"⁵⁹ Towards the end of the novel, the police display a disproportionately violent response to the peaceful protest taking place outside the *Palais de Justice*, where they began hitting some of the protestors "à

53 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 118.

54 Ibid., 119.

55 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 37.

56 *Compagnies républicaines de sécurité*, the French police division responsible for responding to riots.

57 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 48.

58 Ibid. On this occasion the police retreat, instead of engaging in the conflict that Lounès is expecting, but only because they realise they are compromising an undercover operation by one of their detectives, Georges Hirout.

59 Ibid., 110.

l'aveugle".⁶⁰ The inclusion of negative aspects from both sides of the social divide adds an element of realism which is important in terms of adding credibility to Rachedi's point regarding discrimination of the *banlieue* populations at the hands of the forces of justice.

In *Le petit Malik*, Rachedi uses an individual police officer to demonstrate the attitude of young, male residents of the *banlieues* towards authority figures. When Malik is nine years old, he and his friends are caught stealing from the corner shop. This encounter is rendered even worse because, as a direct result, Malik discovers that his mother's boyfriend is a police officer. Previously, Boualem was a god-like figure for all the young boys in Malik's group, and all of those with single mothers wanted him for a step-father. Malik even feigned difficulties with his schoolwork so that Boualem would call over and assist him. Eventually Boualem and Malik's mother start dating, which makes Malik very happy and renders all of the other boys exceedingly jealous. This changes, however, when they discover that Boualem is a *flic*, and Malik's friends taunt him mercilessly. Upon arriving home, Malik explains the situation to his mother:

J'ai décrit à ma mère la scène de l'épicerie, omettant avec soin mon rôle dans l'histoire.
Elle avait les yeux rouges.
Cloîtrée à la maison, elle n'a plus jamais demandé de coup de main à Boualem.
On a bousillé la boîte aux lettres du pédé de flic.
Puis les pneus de sa voiture.
Il ne m'a jamais balancé à ma maman.
Et un jour, il a disparu.⁶¹

Boualem later appears in *La petite Malika*, and although initially reticent about his profession he is treated with much more respect by Malika's family than by Malik's. This attitude towards police officers, which causes Malik and his friends to instantly lose all respect for their former hero and, perhaps more shockingly, causes Malik's mother to cut all ties with her partner, is excessively negative, but fits with the discussion on the relationship between youths and police.

In recent years, there is a belief amongst the French population that there exists, in the *banlieue* regions *des zones de non-droit*, where the police are afraid to venture.⁶² In a clever subversion of this concept, Sabrina outlines the struggles local residents experience

60 Ibid., 202.

61 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 57.

62 Evidence of this belief can be seen in the widespread use of this term among journalists and politicians. See for example: Patrice De Méritens, "Dans les zones de non-droit, la situation se durcit," *Le Figaro*, July 23 2010. Accessed: September 12 2014, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2010/07/24/01016->

when trying to get the police or the *mairie* to assist them in making the neighbourhood a safer place. For instance, several of her neighbours spend many months complaining to the police about a dangerous dog who belongs to a neighbour, Frédéric: "Ça me fout les boules que ni la mairie ni les flics aient levé le petit doigt depuis six mois qu'on signale un animal dangereux sans muselière."⁶³ This inaction on the part of the police and local authorities eventually ends in tragedy, when the dog attacks a local resident, Madame Martinez. When her husband discovers this, he gets his gun and goes in search of Frédéric. Instead of injuring his intended victim, however, he inadvertently kills Rachid, a local homeless man who sleeps in the stairwell in Sabrina's building. Sabrina, who had endeavoured to assist Rachid in the past and is one of the few to attend his funeral, is outraged that inaction on the part of the police led to his death, but is even more incensed by the coverage the incident receives in the press:

La grande hypocrisie a pris le relais de la tragédie. Ce fait divers lamentable est devenu un drame de la vie quotidienne dans les journaux. Tour à tour, Frédéric a été présenté comme une pauvre victime agressée par un forcené puis comme un dresseur de pitbulls psychopathe. Martinez, de forcené est devenu un innocent en légitime défense.

Et Rachid, tout le monde s'en est foutu. Après tout, c'était un toxico, un SDF et un assisté de moins, limite si le Martinez il avait pas fait œuvre sociale en le dézinguant.⁶⁴

Local residents also face difficulty in relation to the maintenance and upkeep of the area and the buildings, leaving the community feeling isolated and increasingly marginalised and under threat:

De toute façon, notre tour, c'est une zone de non-droit comme ils serinent à la télé. C'est pas qu'ils auraient pas les moyens de s'occuper de Frédéric et son pit, c'est qu'ils s'en foutent. *Ils*, c'est les flics. *Ils*, c'est la mairie. *Ils*, c'est la puissance publique. *Ils*, c'est les autres. Comme ils sont contre nous, alors nous, obligé, on est contre eux.⁶⁵

20100724ARTFIG00097-dans-les-zones-de-non-droit-la-situation-se-durcit.php; Nouvelobs.com and Associated Press, "Villepin affiche sa fermeté," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, October 27 2006. Accessed: September 12 2014, <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/societe/20061026.OBS7056/villepin-affiche-sa-fermete.html>; Lefigaro.fr and Agence France-Press, "Le FN "s'est professionnalisé" (Le Pen)," *Le Figaro*, September 13 2013. Accessed: September 12 2014, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2013/09/13/97001-20130913FILWWW00251-le-fn-s-est-professionnalise-le-pen.php>; Nouvelobs.com, "Dans un Etat républicain, il n'y a pas de zones de non-droit," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, May 3 2010. Accessed: September 12 2014, <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/societe/20100503.OBS3370/dans-un-etat-republicain-il-n-y-a-pas-de-zones-de-non-droit.html>.

63 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 10.

64 Ibid., 149.

65 Ibid., 59.

Sabrina here marks a divide that exists between the residents of the *banlieues* and the authorities, with no reference to ethnicity or background, demonstrating solidarity between *banlieue* residents, and that the marginalisation faced by those on the periphery is more as a result of class division than ethnic issues. This class-based marginalisation runs contrary to commonly held perceptions and thus its inclusion in the text is important. Yet Mahany makes a deeper point here, as she claims that the local population is aware that they receive attention from the local authorities and politicians only when the *banlieues* are making headlines in the national media: "Entre abandon et urgence, nous, les habitants, on réclame le juste milieu, être traités décemment."⁶⁶ For Sabrina, the *banlieues* are *zones de non-droit* not because the police are afraid of violence and conflict and thus dare not enter these areas, but because they do not care enough about the peripheral zones to do their jobs correctly. She despairs that the residents of the *cités* are left to their own devices, and that the police and local authorities only intervene when the residents are making headlines, as a result of incidents such as the shooting described above. Additionally, the three characters involved in this story each fulfil a separate *banlieue* stereotype – Rachid, the homeless drug-addicted squatter; M. Martinez, the gun-owning resident who accidentally shoots Rachid; and Frédéric, the pit bull owner who keeps his dog hungry and encourages her to be aggressive in order to intimidate fellow residents. In this way, Mahany is able to reflect the reality of life in the *banlieues* by including archetypes that are in existence, but by using them to demonstrate other points and not allowing the clichéd aspects of their characters to dominate, she reduces the power of these stereotypes.

According to a statement by a senior police official, quoted at length in *L'avenir commence en banlieue*, police frequently exaggerate crime levels in the *banlieue* and, consequently, statistics available on the subject should not be taken at face value:

Les statistiques ne sont rien d'autre qu'une équation à une inconnue : que veut-on en faire ? Vous voulez plus de moyens de la part de l'État ? Dans ce cas, si vos statistiques baissent, on vous dira, bravo, continuez, mais vous n'aurez pas de moyens supplémentaires. Or, comme j'ai besoin de moyens supplémentaires, j'ai donc intérêt à relever mes chiffres. Tous les policiers le savent, le gonflement des chiffres est aujourd'hui la réponse la plus appropriée aux problèmes d'effectifs.⁶⁷

66 Ibid., 152.

67 Belmessous, *L'avenir commence en banlieue*, 85.

Rachedi highlights cynicism such as that described above in *Le poids d'une âme*. In addition to the casually violent and provocative manner in which the police treat the *banlieue* residents, they treat the incarcerated Lounès in a shameful fashion. Initially arrested on suspicion of drug trafficking, he is immediately presumed guilty as a result of his family connection to Hafid Amri, serving a drug-related prison sentence. He is subjected to a rigorous interrogation, during which they attempt to force him to confess to crimes he did not commit, and he is also denied contact with his family. *L'inspecteur* Letranchant, a senior police officer who was fast-tracked to promotion as a result of his involvement in Hafid's case, and who wishes to capitalise on the potential media attention Lounès' case could garner, becomes convinced that Lounès is the ring-leader of a network of Islamist terrorists as: "Un simple trafic de drogue ne garantit pas la Une des journaux. Letranchant le sait, alors il creuse la piste Al-Qaeda, peu importe la vérité pourvu que la presse colporte la rumeur."⁶⁸ Yet Rachedi does not dismiss all police officers as corrupt and self-serving. Another officer, Georges Hirout, becomes suspicious of his superior's motives, as he has been undercover in Évry for several months, and has not heard of Lounès. Hirout proves a very valuable exception to the manner in which police are presented in the novel. The juxtaposition between inspector Letranchant's cynical and manipulative attempts to further his own career at the expense of an innocent teenager, and Hirout's tireless and risky work to prevent this from happening, creates an interesting dichotomy. The manner in which Letranchant is willing to condemn Lounès to a severe and undeserved punishment highlights the negative aspects of the police force in France, and the discriminatory fashion in which the police can sometimes treat marginalised *banlieue* populations. Hirout's inclusion and his efforts to ensure that the values of the justice system are upheld prove that Rachedi does not believe that all members of the forces of order are similarly prejudiced against the peripheral zones. Letranchant and police commissioner Vergnes quickly realise that the press interest in the story is potentially damaging and set out to find "une stratégie de sortie de crise."⁶⁹ Mistakenly believing that Lounès' residency papers are not up-to-date, they immediately put deportation procedures in place. The narrow window by which Lounès avoids deportation, saved only by work conducted by Hirout, in conjunction with Michel Millinaire – a reporter who will be discussed in section 4.2 – and several other interconnected characters, highlights the precarious situation of some *banlieue* residents and the potential for cynical manipulation on the part of the forces of order.

68 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 72.

69 Ibid., 138.

Rachedi's indictment of the French judicial system does not end here, however, as he also elaborates on the treatment Lounès receives while awaiting trial. While Lounès is incarcerated, he and his fellow prisoners are treated very harshly by several prison officers. While in prison, he becomes ill and is taken to the prison hospital where he meets the doctor, Séverine Leroux. Séverine is a compassionate woman who accepted the job in the prison system for humanitarian reasons but has become frustrated with prison conditions, which according to her are "surpeuplées, vétustes, condamnées par les institutions internationales,"⁷⁰ and she now feels as if she alone cares about the welfare of the prisoners. A positive note that arises from the Amri case is that Leroux is able to capitalise on the media attention to highlight the plight of prisoners: "Sur une estrade de fortune, Séverine raconte les conditions de vie à La Santé, l'urgence de changer le système carcéral."⁷¹ At his hearing, Lounès, burdened with an incompetent defence lawyer, speaks on his own behalf to the judge. This monologue, which comprises the majority of one of the final chapters, sums up feelings shared by many in the immigrant community in France, including those who face less dramatic circumstances, and also emphasises the condemnation of the justice system that preoccupies much of the novel:

Depuis quinze ans, je vis en France, je suis scolarisé en France, je parle français, j'ai des amis français. Si mes papiers sont algériens, je suis français de cœur. J'ai choisi la nationalité algérienne par respect pour mes racines, mais mon avenir, mes aspirations sont en France. Dans un mois, je passe mon bac, je m'inscrirai dans une université française, pourquoi est-ce que je fais si peur ? On m'a accusé de trafic de drogue, de terrorisme et maintenant on veut m'expulser. Quelle est la logique sinon l'acharnement d'un système incapable de reconnaître ses erreurs ? Mon casier judiciaire est vierge mais mon nom restera entaché du sceau de l'infamie. Mes conditions de détention, les interrogatoires policiers, et maintenant le marathon judiciaire : la pression permanent m'épuise. Depuis trois jours, on me ballote d'un endroit à un autre sans aucune explication, je n'ai aucune nouvelle de ma famille, mon avocat reste muet : c'est ça, la justice ? J'ai failli être violé par mon codétenu, j'ai été victime d'une crise d'épilepsie, je suis vidé, à bout de forces. Expulsez-moi en Algérie, pays que je ne connais pas, et vous me tuez...⁷²

This monologue, which comes at a key emotional moment, reflects a lack of faith in the justice system, and in particular in the police and also highlights the harsh treatment sometimes meted out to residents of the *banlieues* in their dealings with the state. Yet the positive outcome for Lounès is not only a victory for those who have campaigned on

70 Ibid., 140.

71 Ibid., 197.

72 Ibid., 198-9.

his behalf throughout the novel, but also demonstrates Rachedi's desire to show that the potential for a more positive relationship exists. In addition, the inclusion of characters such as Georges Hirout and Séverine Leroux demonstrates the author's belief that not all of the agents of the police and justice system are fighting against the residents of the *banlieues*. The positive message at the novel's close thus points to hope for a better and more cooperative future.

The situation in the *banlieues* is a lot more complex than the image of dangerousness usually portrayed. Undoubtedly, amongst a certain demographic there are problems, and the violence that occasionally erupts is a testament to this. Yet violence is the expression of something much deeper. Matthew Moran views the sporadic rioting and problems amongst the *banlieue* populations as "a plea for inclusion"⁷³ from young people who "regard themselves as members of French society"⁷⁴, yet who have been subjected to displacement, and pushed to the margins. Similarly, sociologist Robert Castel claims of the November 2005 riots:

... si, dans leur forme, les émeutes semblent en deçà du politique, elles ne portent pas moins une signification clairement politique en imposant dans l'espace public un problème crucial. De ce point de vue, des actions apparemment insensées ... peuvent délivrer un message politique qui peut être lu comme un appel désespéré à l'attention.⁷⁵

As long as France continues to ignore this cry for attention, and view those from her periphery "as the causes, rather than as the victims, of urban problems",⁷⁶ it seems unlikely that this situation will change in the foreseeable future. The authors, in acknowledging the violence that does occur in the *banlieues*, are incorporating an element of realism in the texts, yet they never accord a central role to this violence in their narratives and thus contribute to painting a more realistic picture of *banlieue* life. In discussing the conflict between the police and the residents of these regions and, for Rachedi in particular, the discrimination that this population can receive at the hands of the forces of order, the authors highlight these issues. This acknowledgement will allow readers from the *banlieue* to feel a sense of solidarity with the characters in the texts. In so doing, these novels contribute

73 Moran, "Opposing Exclusion," 299.

74 Ibid., 304.

75 Robert Castel, "La discrimination négative. Le déficit de citoyenneté des jeunes de banlieue," *Annales HSS*, no. 4 (2006): 800.

76 Alec G. Hargreaves, "A deviant construction: the French media and the 'Banlieues'," *New Community* 22, no. 4 (1996): 617.

to the empowerment of the young people in the *banlieue*, as they recognise themselves portrayed positively in literature. The texts simultaneously educate readers from outside of these zones who may previously have been unaware of these problems, which may encourage them to gain a new insight and understanding of the *banlieue* regions, counter to the negative images predominantly portrayed in media representations of these zones.

4.2 Media and Misrepresentation

The effect that the sensationalist media have on perceptions of the *banlieues* in France as a whole should not be underestimated. Coverage of these regions largely focuses on the problems usually associated with them – violence, crime, fear – and as a consequence the prevalence of these phenomena is perceived to be much greater than it is in reality.⁷⁷ Violent incidents and crime are not in fact statistically typical in the *banlieues*, yet the media contribute to the construction of a violent and dangerous image that is counter to reality. According to Stanley Cohen:

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or...resorted to... Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten ... at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way the society conceives itself.⁷⁸

When Cohen wrote this in 1972 it was in reference to the Mods and Rockers⁷⁹ phenomenon that had caused a stir in the United Kingdom in the early 1960s, and which whipped the British media into such a frenzy that, when writing about the media and social

77 For deeper discussion of this, see: Jean Rivière, Sylvie Tissot, and Oliver Waine, "The media construction of the suburbs in France: looking back on the 2007 presidential campaign," *Metropolitiques*, May 23, 2012, Accessed: December 19 2014, <http://www.metropolitiques.eu/The-media-construction-of-the.html>.

78 Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of Mods and Rockers*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 9.

79 The Mods and Rockers phenomenon refers to the national hysteria that accompanied the frequent and violent stand-offs between two opposing subcultures in 1960s Britain. The Mods were clean cut, wore suits and smart clothes, rode scooters and listened to ska and RnB as well as British groups such as The Kinks. The rockers were scruffy and wore leather, rode motorcycles and listened to rock and roll artists such as Elvis. There were frequent outbreaks of violence when the two groups encountered one another.

reaction to these events, Cohen used the term 'moral panic' in order to describe the effect achieved through the hyperbolic portrayal of events. He claims that media strategies can define and bring into prominence problems which they claim to be objectively reporting:

The media have long operated as agents of moral indignation ... their very reporting of certain 'facts' can be sufficient to generate concern, anxiety, indignation or panic. When such feelings coincide with a perception that particular values need to be protected, the pre-conditions for new rule creation or social problem definition are present.⁸⁰

Part of the reason why the media have the power to do this is that "[a]ny item of news thrust into the individual's consciousness has the effect of increasing his awareness of items of a similar nature which he may otherwise have ignored."⁸¹ Cohen names three tools frequently used by the media when reporting on events: exaggeration and distortion; prediction;⁸² and symbolization.⁸³ Throughout the study, he refers to the way the media use the concepts of "youth" and "deviance," the fact that information is frequently "processed in such a form that the action or actors concerned are pictured in a highly stereotypical way"⁸⁴ and the "deviant or group of deviants is segregated or isolated and this operates to alienate them from conventional society."⁸⁵ Cohen claimed that this process is rendered much easier by manipulating appropriate symbols, and states that "the process which sustains moral campaigns, panics and crusades ... is made much easier when the object of attack is both highly visible and structurally weak."⁸⁶ Cohen's work on the media reaction to the Mods and Rockers can be applied to the manner in which the French media report on the *banlieues*. In reference to media coverage of sensational stories in *Le poids d'une âme*, such as that of the riots in Grand Borne, Rachedi sarcastically declares: "Les journalistes débarquent. Ils évoqueront le deuxième jour de la rébellion absurde d'une cité en proie à des pulsions autodestructrices. Prenez un fait, filmez-le, il devient divers."⁸⁷ The transportation of Lounès from prison to the *Palais de Justice* is referred to

80 Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 16.

81 Ibid., 77.

82 In his use of the term "prediction", Cohen is referring to the "The implicit assumption, present in virtually every report, that what had happened was inevitably going to happen again." [ibid., 38.]

83 By "symbolization", he means the symbolic power of words, images and labels which can "eventually acquire their own descriptive and explanatory potential" [ibid., 41.]

84 Ibid., 18.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid., 198.

87 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 119.

as a “production cinématographique...calibrée pour la télévision”⁸⁸, in reference to the collection of cameras and journalists clamouring for footage of the event. In particular, his entrance into the courthouse is precisely calculated:

Les dix secondes ... seront recyclées dans tous les médias: respiration, les battants s'ouvrent, une couverture sur la tête de Lounès, qui n'a rien réclamé et, au pas de course, les quelques mètres jusque la grille sont dévalés. Opportunément, le camouflage a glissé au milieu du sprint, le scénario s'est déroulé comme prévu.⁸⁹

An exception to the flock of journalists running from scene to scene in order to get identical footage is Michel Millinaire, who continually endeavours to find a unique angle from which to cover his stories. (His previous article, before the outbreak of rioting, had been titled “*Banlieue, le nouvel Eldorado*”, reflecting his willingness to portray an alternative viewpoint, although this leaves him open to mocking from colleagues). Michel likes to find a unique perspective as “Quand toutes les caméras sont braquées dans le même sens, lui tourne l'objectif de quelques degrés. L'afflux d'images, identiques, dans l'affaire Amri le tracasse. À quoi bon cent caméras pour obtenir un plan?”⁹⁰ Consequently, Michel gradually assembles a group of key witnesses to the events surrounding Lounès' arrest. These witnesses have all been on the fringes of events, but their stories, when combined, give Michel the angle he has been seeking. The group he gathers includes Christophe and Yazid, responsible for Lounès's ambush; Tarik Amri, his younger brother who had saved a bus driver from getting burned alive during one of the riots in the area; Jean-Marc, the bus driver in question; one of the firefighters that had attended the scene of the riots; and Georges Hirout, the undercover policeman who believes that Lounès is innocent. Michel works hard to exonerate Lounès, and his work eventually culminates in Lounès' acquittal. Michel's unique approach to his job means that the Amri family has a channel through which to voice their complaints about this case in particular, and the justice system in general. In this case, Michel also provides an outlet for others who wish to confront injustice in French society – he enables Georges Hirout to challenge the hitherto unquestioned authority of his superior officer, and the prison doctor Séverine Leroux to publicly criticise the living and sanitary conditions that prisoners must endure. Towards the end of the text, both sides of the media dichotomy presented by Rachedi conspire to

88 Ibid., 115.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid., 103.

aid Lounès. En route to the *Palais de Justice*, where Lounès awaits deportation following an accelerated trial, Millinaire calls all the other news outlets and informs them that the trial is taking place. For once, the identical reporting of all these other outlets will work to his advantage, as they all arrive at the *Palais de Justice*, and consequently: "Lounès ne sera pas expulsé dans le secret d'une chambre de tribunal."⁹¹ The media play a large role in Lounès' acquittal, as his brother Tarik is able to ensure almost universal awareness of the case – which the authorities were attempting to handle discreetly – through a series of television and print interviews organised by Michel Millinaire. This heightened awareness encourages more people to attend the protest, which adds to the pressure brought to bear on the authorities.

Hargreaves claims that the French *banlieues* have become a "byword for ethnic alterity, deviance and disadvantage. The mass media have played a central role in this reconstruction ... [and] have disseminated and reinforced stereotypical ideas of people of immigrant origin as fundamentally menacing to the established social order."⁹² As a result of this mediatisation of urban problems, the term *banlieue* has become what Hargreaves calls "a one-word journalistic tag,"⁹³ which instantly evokes particular images in the minds of viewers and/or readers. Begag has discussed this issue previously, and claims that the news media's privileging of the sensational has led to these images and that it is the nature of news media to highlight these types of stories, as:

...l'idée du conflit sert à justifier dans les médias ou les discours politiques l'impossible assimilation des immigrés, au point que leur réussite sociale, facteur de banalisation, n'est jamais traitée comme une information en soi, destinée au grand public. Ce traitement inégal est dû au fonctionnement même du marché de l'information qui privilégie les registres fantasmatiques et sensationnels de l'intégration.⁹⁴

This is reflected in the portrayal of media in *Le poids d'une âme* which is, for the most part, very negative, with journalists described as "avides de sensationnel."⁹⁵ When small-scale riots erupt in the *banlieues*, journalists descend *en masse*, looking for a scoop. To highlight the sensational version of events portrayed by journalists, those who arrive late actually encourage the rioters to stage more riots, so that they do not miss out on the dramatic footage filmed by rival networks. This leads to the strange situation whereby:

91 Ibid., 197.

92 Hargreaves, "A deviant construction," 607.

93 Ibid., 613.

94 Begag, *L'Intégration*, 39.

95 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 29.

Les journalistes retardataires ont demandé aux casseurs de rejouer les émeutes. Pris dans son rôle, Mahmadou, montagne de muscles de deux mètres, a pulvérisé sa vieille 205 ! Sauvage plein de hargne sur TF1, le géant, prostré après avoir réalisé sa méprise, est devenu une victime de la barbarie sur France 2.⁹⁶

The causal role played by the media in this scene reflects the ambiguity of the real-life relationship between both parties. In this instance, the media goad and cajole local residents into repeating their actions for the benefit of their cameras. Yet they then report on these actions with tones of horror and outrage, and claim to be dismayed at the disintegration of French society, which seems to be coming apart at the margins. This type of coverage can lead to problems for many in the immigrant community, especially since, as stated by Hargreaves, the negative images:

... associated with immigrants in general and with certain ethnicized groups in particular owe more to second-hand information and impressions than to direct personal experience. The mass media play a central role in this process. Research on the representation of minority ethnic groups on French television has shown that they are mainly visible as 'problems' in news and current affairs broadcasts. It is in the nature of journalism to highlight conflicts and difficulties rather than ordinary or benign occurrences.⁹⁷

He claims that the mass media in France have thus played a crucial role in the reconstruction, since the 1990s, of *banlieues* as a negative space of alterity, deviance and disadvantage, and that in the course of this reconstruction "they have disseminated and reinforced stereotypical ideas of people of immigrant origin as fundamentally menacing to the established social order."⁹⁸ He further claims that the media have created a "journalistic fusion" between crime, race, poverty and housing and employ circular logic when it comes to *banlieue* residents:

In lieu of explanation and analysis, the media offer 'descriptive' conglomerations in which, through repetition and contiguity, each component comes to signify the others in an endlessly circular process. Thus people of immigrant origin live in run-down areas because they are poor; because they are poor, they commit crimes; because people of immigrant origin commit crimes, normal, law-abiding citizens do not want to live near them; because of this, the *banlieues* are ethnically alien places which are fundamentally menacing to the social order, etc., etc.⁹⁹

96 Ibid., 65.

97 Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 147.

98 Hargreaves, "A deviant construction," 607.

99 Ibid., 609.

Several of the characters in *Les gens du Balto* refer directly to the media. Joël begins the narration of the first chapter by introducing himself and saying that he will tell his story himself, because for thirty years "je vis au milieu des journaux alors on me la fait pas. Je vois très bien comment ils déforment la réalité."¹⁰⁰ This open acknowledgement of the sensationalist agenda pursued by the media in relation to events in the *banlieues* shows an understanding, on Guène's part, of the way the media operates. Joël's opinion is supported, if not extended, by Magalie's testimony regarding the ban her parent's placed on her from entering *la grande cité*. She believes that: "Ils ont peut-être la trouille que je me fasse serrer dans une tournante, qu'on me rackette ou d'autres trucs qu'ils ont vus à la télé".¹⁰¹ Nadia Chacal, speaking to the police about Joël's murder, criticizes the excessive coverage given to crime in the *banlieues* by saying: "Ça change de voir un fait divers sans rapport avec la banlieue ou l'immigration".¹⁰² Her surprise that the media is concerned with a crime that is unrelated to the *banlieues* or to France's population of immigrant origin highlights her feelings regarding the perception of the *banlieues* portrayed by the French media.

Part of the problem is that members of the media actually wield tremendous, if not always conscious, influence over public discourse and can also contribute to determining which issues attract public and political attention. According to Gérard Noiriel:

...[what] scholars once referred to as "the social question", that is, inquiry into the sources of social conflict, is rapidly becoming a vast process of administrative management of "social problems" that are only being recognized as such if the media becomes interested in them.¹⁰³

Writing in Bourdieu's *Weight of the World*, Patrick Champagne is inclined to agree with this point, as he claims that "Social malaises only have a visible existence when the media talk about them... when they are recognized as such by journalists...[who] may even think, not unreasonably, that they contribute to making them known and getting them...into 'public debate.'"¹⁰⁴ Yet, "Far from helping the residents of these suburbs, the

100 Guène, *Les gens du Balto*, 7.

101 Ibid., 24.

102 Ibid., 100.

103 Gérard Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot: Immigration, Citizenship, and National Identity*, trans. Geoffrey da Laforcade (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), xxiv.

104 Patrick Champagne, "The View from the Media," in *Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 46.

media paradoxically contribute to their stigmatization"¹⁰⁵ which, in turn, can potentially trigger more incidents. Champagne also claims that when covering sensational news stories the media:

...act on the spur of the moment and collectively fabricate a social representation that, even when it is rather distant from reality, persists despite subsequent denials or later corrections because, quite often, it merely reinforces spontaneous interpretations and hence mobilizes prejudices and thereby magnifies them.¹⁰⁶

The manner in which the media is treated in *La petite Malika* provides an example of this type of journalistic behaviour, one which would have heightened prejudices and stereotypes against the Muslim population in France, were it not averted. The incident in question was mentioned in Chapter Three: the day that Malika's mother persuaded her to wear a balaclava to school by giving her a "magic" heirloom scarf to wear under it. At the time, Malika is just beginning to pay attention to what she hears around her, both in her daily life and on the news: "À la télé, j'entendais souvent parler d'intégration, d'intégration et d'intégration."¹⁰⁷ Malika is genuinely convinced that the scarf has magic properties, and so is both delighted and proud to wear this "relique séculaire"¹⁰⁸ to school. When she gets there, she mistakes the shocked reactions of her friends and teachers for jealousy. When she is sent to the principal's office, and he asks her if she understands how serious the situation is, she initially fears that he believes she has stolen the magic scarf from the Louvre. The principal calls her mother and the local media. Owing to public transport delays, the journalists arrive before her mother does and are excited at the prospect of covering the story. Malika overhears one of them saying that if parental consent is provided, she will be on the front page of the next day's editions. Still innocently believing that the scarf is magic, Malika wonders why her mother did not give it to her sooner. She is very confused by the various references to the scarf, and says "Je voulais leur dire qu'on ne dit pas foulard islamique mais foulard magique mais ils ne m'ont jamais demandé mon avis."¹⁰⁹ The principal is delighted with the publicity that he personally, and the school, is receiving and happily answers any questions posed by the journalists. These questions are very leading, some of them include:

105 Ibid., 55.

106 Ibid., 47.

107 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 57.

108 Ibid., 58.

109 Ibid., 60.

Que pensez-vous de cette intrusion d'une gamine de 10 ans avec un signe ostentatoire d'appartenance religieuse?

Pourquoi endoctriner une fillette de 10 ans?¹¹⁰

Eventually, Patrick Pepper¹¹¹ arrives at the school, at which point Malika begins to really feel like a star, although he proceeds to have a one-sided conversation with the principal as if she were invisible. Pepper begins to sensationalise the incident before his interview even begins. Referring to the scarf as a burqa, because that will create a sensational headline, he immediately decides that Malika's mother must have political motivation for making her daughter wear this scarf, and he seems to already have written the story he wants to tell before he speaks to any of the participants. The story he sees is one which fits into the narrative on integration and religious identity in France, and has links with the belief that Muslims are incapable of integrating with French culture, in particular when it comes to accepting *laïcité*. Eventually Malika's mother arrives at the school and explains what has happened, that she merely told her ten-year-old daughter an innocent lie about a magic scarf so that she would wear her balaclava. At this news, the journalists are deflated, as they had worked themselves up into a frenzy of excitement. Malika feels that everyone is annoyed with her over the event: Patrick Pepper, for the loss of his scoop; the principal, for wasting Pepper's time; her mother, for shaming her (she corrected her mother's pronunciation publicly). What they do not realise however, is that: "Moi aussi je leur en voulais. Après ce pataquès, plus jamais je ne croirais à la magie."¹¹² This incident demonstrates how determined the media in general, and certain journalists in particular, can be to present stories that fit a pre-conceived narrative. It also demonstrates how the rabid pursuit of stories like this can lead to the disillusionment of a young girl, who innocently believed that the scarf was magic, before learning of the politicised nature of the controversy by overhearing adult conversations. Had Pepper been afforded the opportunity to print his version of the story, including his prejudicial assumption that the scarf was politically motivated, rather than a result of the cold weather, it would have perpetuated stereotypical beliefs about the Muslim population in France. In relation to negative stereotypes, Mireille Rosello claims:

110 Ibid., 61.

111 A barely disguised Patrick Poivre D'Arvor, well-known French broadcaster and news reader.

112 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 64.

One of the ways in which to fight back is to operate a reversal that is also a form of overbidding: rather than rejecting the image, some texts either fight the way in which it is to be constructed or steal the negative image and put it to a different use.¹¹³

The inclusion of this element in the novel demonstrates that some journalists will behave in a deplorable manner in order to boost sales. In curtailing Patrick Pepper's plans, Rachedi and Mahany highlight the prejudice and, in this instance, the truth – that Malika's mother invented a magic scarf as a result of her daughter's refusal to wear sufficiently warm clothing – subverts a potentially harmful stereotype. The authors thus steal this particular negative image and put it to a better, and much wittier, use.

Alec Hargreaves has outlined how, although a minority of the *banlieue* population is involved in violent instances, "the media effectively construct an image of these areas which is diametrically opposed to the experience of most of their inhabitants."¹¹⁴ In *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France*, Sylvie Durmelat claims that in works of fiction emerging from the *banlieues*, "narrators and protagonists struggle to reconcile their everyday experience in their place of residence with the predominantly negative media representations that are also part and parcel of daily life in their neighbourhood."¹¹⁵ Misleading headlines, evocative imagery and generalisations are rife in the journalism being written about the *banlieues*. Susan Ireland and Patrice Proulx believe that part of the reason for this type of coverage is because "representation of immigrants in the mainstream press remains strongly influenced by the old hierarchical relationship between colonizer and colonized,"¹¹⁶ which they describe as being the old "colonial relationships relived and rewritten this time on France's home territory."¹¹⁷

Residents of the *banlieues* can, at times, feel anger towards journalists who frequently appear and try to interview them. Belmessous claims that the divorce between *banlieue* residents and journalists is a result of bad experiences between the two groups (and from both sides) over the years: "la presse se plaint du climat malsain de certains quartiers et des

113 Mireille Rosello, *Declining the Stereotype: Ethnicity and Representation in French Cultures* (Hanover and London: UP of New England, 1998), 4.

114 Hargreaves, "A deviant construction," 609.

115 Sylvie Durmelat, "On Natives and Narratives from the Banlieues," in *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France*, ed. Susan Ireland and Patrice J. Proulx (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), 119.

116 Susan Ireland and Patrice J. Proulx, eds., *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), 2.

117 Ibid.

difficultés à y effectuer des travaux d'investigation, les habitants déplorent les mauvaises manières des journalistes."¹¹⁸ These *mauvaises manières* can be quite aggravating for residents of the *banlieues*, in particular when they are aware that journalists:

...vont sur le terrain pour confirmer l'exactitude de leurs appréciations sur la banlieue, guettant ici des graffitis, là des débris de voitures calcinées, demandant aux uns le nombre de drogués vivant dans leur quartier et aux autres le nombre de fusils cachés dans les faux plafonds des immeubles.¹¹⁹

In *Kiffe kiffe demain*, Doria references this claiming that, in lieu of the camera-wielding tourists that crowd around the Eiffel Tower, where she lives, "les seuls qui s'intéressent, c'est les journalistes mythos avec leurs reportages dégueulasses sur la violence en banlieue."¹²⁰ Doria's bitterness regarding the influx of journalists to the *banlieue*, in search of sensationalist stories is clear, particularly as she places it in juxtaposition with the tourist-filled centre of Paris. Patricia Geesey believes that this reference to journalists haunting the *cités*

...in search of stories about violence echoes a well-known scene in Mathieu Kassovitz's 1995 film *La Haine*, as well as the "émeutes" of November 2005, and the one year anniversary in 2006, when vans of journalists were ordered away from certain neighborhoods for fear they would encourage violence.¹²¹

Mireille Rosello has made some interesting comments on how *banlieue* residents and immigrant populations more generally are represented in the media. She claims that when "Confronted by the cases that 'sell newspapers,' the public is neither monolithic nor incapable of reading between the lines."¹²² Nevertheless, it is almost universally accepted that media portrayals of the *banlieues* only represent a portion – a dramatized portion – of what life in the urban periphery entails for its residents, their mode of life, and the coping strategies that they have developed.

Media treatment in the novels in the corpus highlights both positive and negative attitudes displayed by journalists in their dealings with injustice and sensitive subjects. The negative aspect – journalists scrambling after a sensational story without investigating the underlying causes and flocking to the *banlieues* in search of sensationalist stories,

118 Belmessous, *L'avenir commence en banlieue*, 74.

119 Ibid., 86.

120 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 125.

121 Geesey, "Global Pop Culture," 64.

122 Rosello, "The "Beur Nation"," 17.

often with a pre-determined stance (as in the case of Patrick Pepper) reflects an opinion frequently held by *banlieue* residents, as outlined by Belmessous above. Yet Rachedi's introduction of Michel Millinaire, and his tireless work on behalf of Lounès Amri and his family reflects a more positive role that journalists can play. By looking for his own scoop, and a version of events that is alternative to the majority of his peers, Michel uncovers the truth, and consequently the perpetrators of the injustice experienced by Lounès are punished and Lounès himself is vindicated. The positive influence displayed by Millinaire reflects a potential, and much more hopeful, relationship between the media and *banlieue* residents.

4.3 Politics and Misrepresentation

Politicians from both sides of the left-right divide hold strong opinions on the subject of immigration, social problems in the urban periphery and the strategies that they would put in place, if elected, to counter these problems. This is one of the reasons why there are so many associations, organisations and policies in place to counter the *banlieue* problem, as each politician seems to have a personal agenda when it comes to urban issues.¹²³ Various insulting comments made by high-ranking politicians (such as Nicolas Sarkozy and Jacques Chirac) form part of this dynamic whereby elected officials and the media both contribute to the continued demonization of the *banlieues* and their residents in contemporary French society. Chirac made his comments in 1991, when he was mayor of Paris, as part of a speech in which he justified feelings of anger held by the French population towards the 'overdose' of immigrants of North African origin. The speech included a now infamous reference to "le bruit et l'odeur"¹²⁴ of the immigrant families residing in the *HLM* or rent-controlled council housing estates on the outskirts of French cities. In June 2005, Nicolas Sarkozy visited Les 4000, a *cité* located to the north of Paris, in the aftermath of the accidental, fatal shooting of an 11-year-old boy who was cleaning his father's car when a confrontation broke out between rival gangs. During this visit he

123 These policies were discussed in Chapter Two. And yet, in interview with Loïc Wacquant "a high-ranking state manager from the local Préfecture confessed: "There's no glory in being appointed to Seine-Saint-Denis: for a civil servant, to be sent there is like *punishment*, it's like you're being cast aside." [Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts*, 216.]

124 Régis Guyotat, "Le débat sur l'immigration Le maire de Paris : "Il y a overdose"," *Le Monde*, June 21 1991. Accessed: May 11 2012, http://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1991/06/21/le-debat-sur-l-immigration-le-maire-de-paris-il-y-a-overdose_4004470_1819218.html?xtmc=le-bruit_et_l_odeur&xtcr=572.

gave a speech in which he claimed he would “nettoyer au Kärcher la cité.”¹²⁵ Later that same year, he visited Argenteuil, another *banlieue* region to the north of Paris. In response to a question from a local resident, Sarkozy, who was the interior minister at the time, responded: “Vous en avez assez, hein ! Vous avez assez de cette bande de racailles ! Bien on va vous en débarrasser. [...] On est là pour éradiquer la gangrène.”¹²⁶ Some of these comments are referenced in *Du rêve pour les oufs*. Ahlème, who narrates her story with palpable irony, makes a biting sarcastic reference to Chirac’s *le bruit et l’odeur* comment, when she claims: “Je suis entourée par tous ces immeubles aux aspects loufoques qui renferment nos bruits et nos odeurs, notre vie d’ici.”¹²⁷ Guène also includes an overt, if brief, reference to the unpopularity of Nicolas Sarkozy among the *banlieue* population in *Du rêve pour les oufs*, when Ahlème mentions, in passing, a particular graffiti tag she sees: “Fuck Sarko”.¹²⁸ Mahany refers to politicians in *Kiffer sa race*, both directly and indirectly. The novel opens with Sabrina making her way up the stairs of her tower to the apartment that she shares with her family. On the way she introduces the reader to the various characters and families inhabiting each floor. When she mentions the Koné family, from Sub-Saharan Africa, and states: “Au septième étage, on reconnaît les Koné aux bruits et à l’odeur. Pas ce bruit et cette odeur que vilipendait Chirac en se bouchant presque le pif de dégoût, mais le doux parfum de l’Afrique noire...”¹²⁹ Other politicians are criticised by the gifted protagonist, albeit in a less direct manner. For instance, when outlining her New Year’s resolutions, Sabrina quips: “1. Travailler plus pour gagner plus... (ouais, je sais, ça le fait moyen le slogan pseudo-sarkozyste).”¹³⁰ Later, when describing their neighbour, Yvonne, who Sabrina believes to be racist, Sabrina repeatedly and ironically invokes the name of Jean-Marie Le Pen. She describes Yvonne as “une lépeniste convaincue qui s’en cache pas”¹³¹ and refers to her attendance at the annual meeting of the local branch of

125 Christophe Barbier and Eric Mandonnet, “Sarkozy a-t-il “pété les plombs”?”, *L’Express*, June 27 2005. Accessed: May 11 2012, http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/sarkozy-a-t-il-pete-les-plombs_485371.html. Kärcher is a German company, known for the manufacture of high-pressure cleaning equipment.

126 Nasser Demiaty, “Nicolas Sarkozy, ministre de l’Intérieur et pompier-pyromane,” in *Quand les banlieues brûlent... Retour sur les émeutes de novembre 2005*, ed. Laurent Mucchielli and Véronique Le Goaziou (Paris: La Découverte, 2007), 67. Demiaty here provides the following footnote explanation: Extrait du journal de 20 heures sur France 2, le 26 octobre.

127 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 29.

128 Ibid., 104.

129 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 9.

130 Ibid., 88.

131 Ibid., 130.

the *Front national*. With characteristic humour, Sabrina describes her brother's arrival during Yvonne's annual visit to their home (Yvonne visits the family once a year for Eid al-Fitr, when Sabrina's mother prepares traditional North African cakes) as follows: "Je comprends le regard empli de dégoût que jette Adam quand il entre à la casbah. Yvonne lui renvoie le même regard, puissance deux, y a trop d'Arabes dans la pièce, on devrait les expulser, nom de Jean-Marie!"¹³² Mahany's inclusion of these subtle references to politicians who are known for their derogatory remarks about the marginalised *banlieue* populations brings an element of humour to the text while allowing the author to criticise the statements, but not the politicians themselves, as well as demonstrating that she is not bitter or disillusioned.

In *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, on the other hand, Mourad's sister is a politician.¹³³ Dounia runs for election during the course of the novel, a source of disappointment for her brother Mourad, who had long imagined the exotic and exciting things she may have done following her departure from home, such as working as a UNESCO ambassador or fighting for just and worthwhile causes in India, Brazil or Peru:

Non. Rien de tout ça. En fait, elle ne vit qu'à quelques kilomètres de chez nous, et au nom de la « diversité » qu'elle est supposée représenter, elle est en position 8 sur la liste pour faire réélire ce vieil alcoolique d'Yves Peplinski à la mairie, pour un deux cent cinquantième mandat.¹³⁴

Dounia also published a book entitled *Le Prix de la liberté*, describing her struggle growing up and her rupture from her family. Mourad is astonished at her hyperbolic choice of title, believing it to be "indecent":

Ça fait récit post-libération d'otage. On croirait que Dounia a passé quatre ans dans une grotte en Afghanistan ou chez les FARC dans la jungle colombienne. Et encore, même Ingrid Betancourt a choisi un titre plus sobre et plus modeste pour son bouquin.¹³⁵

132 Ibid., 131.

133 Dounia bears striking similarity to French MEP Rachida Dati, who formerly served in Nicolas Sarkozy's government. Her involvement with the women's rights advocacy group *Fières et pas connes*, was discussed in Chapter Three.

134 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 55-6.

135 Ibid., 138. Ingrid Betancourt is a Colombian politician who spent six years in captivity when she was kidnapped by FARC rebels, before being rescued. Her case earned substantial publicity in France, as Betancourt held French citizenship as a result of a previous marriage to a French diplomat.

Mourad found out, years later, that Dounia's departure was a result of her parents' attempt to arrange a marriage for her, yet he still feels that she made an error that had grave and lasting consequences for the entire family. He finds her book facile and redundant, as it plays on stereotypes of an autocratic father and a mother who tried to smother her daughter's feelings and desire for an education with food. These themes are the ones that journalists isolate when interviewing Dounia about her book. Mourad realises that, far from being the strong female she portrays herself to be, Dounia is in fact a weak person, who hides behind her image as the rebel politician while toeing the party line and advancing her own career. She engages in numerous televised debates during the novel, and is the rising star of her – unnamed, right-wing – political party. In fact, she is on TV so often that, although he finds her very well spoken and articulate, Mourad sarcastically claims that "elle pourrait s'entraîner en cumulant les miles sur Air France avec tous les allers-retours Paris-Nice qu'elle se farcissait."¹³⁶ Her success makes Mourad wonder why people like her, and his conclusion is that:

Dounia plaît parce qu'elle symbolise ce que le République fabrique de mieux : une réussite accidentelle. On adore ce genre de modèle d'excellence, grâce auquel on peut dire : « Vous voyez que c'est possible si on veut bien s'en donner les moyens ! » Fastoche.¹³⁷

He sarcastically ruminates on the unlikely situation whereby someone is offered an exciting career and replies: "Une carrière épanouissante? Heu... non merci. J'aime mieux passer mes journées à jouer au Rapido avec mes potes au PMU du coin."¹³⁸ Dounia is also dating a highly prominent politician, Bernard Tartois.¹³⁹ Dounia is not opposed to using her background and origins in order to increase her political profile, and uses the situation with her family as fodder to increase sales of her book.

Hacène Belmessous discusses political manipulation of the *banlieue* situation, and outlines in great detail the case of *FACE*.¹⁴⁰ He claims that the former *ministre de l'Emploi, de Solidarité et des Affaires Sociales*, Martine Aubry, used this organisation "dans la fabrication d'une carrière politique."¹⁴¹ Launched in 1993, the aim of the organisation was to assist youths from *quartiers difficiles* to integrate into French society, but "Outre

136 Ibid., 82.

137 Ibid.

138 Ibid.

139 Tartois will be discussed in depth in section 4.4

140 *Fondation Agir Contre l'Exclusion*.

141 Belmessous, *L'avenir commence en banlieue*, 59.

des actions d'insertion par l'économie, cette association conduit également des actions culturelles, éducatives et sportives dans une dizaine de villes en crise."¹⁴² The *opération emblématique* of *FACE* was a sketch show called *Quartier libre*, written and performed by youths from Vaulx-en-Velin, in conjunction with comedian Guy Bedos, who had been employed by Aubry. The premiere of the show turned into a mere photo opportunity for Aubry and Bedos, to the extent that the director of the show itself, who had spent months working with the youths to put the show together, was side-lined in favour of the others, whose names carried more weight. "Initialement pensé comme une béquille sociale pour une population fragile, Quartier libre a donc fini par servir de tremplin médiatique à Martine Aubry et Guy Bedos."¹⁴³ Many, including a former supervisor of *FACE*, believe that Aubry used the cause of youth unemployment in the *banlieues* to change her public image, eventually ending up as Minister for Solidarity and Employment, a particularly important ministerial position. Belmessous claims, however, that the people she was putatively helping by creating *FACE* saw no long-term benefits. In 2001 he wrote: "Six ans après Quartier libre, une grande partie de la troupe vaudoise continue de ramer."¹⁴⁴ Examples of politicians taking advantage of the immigrant and *banlieue* populations for their own personal and career-motivated reasons appear in the texts. *Le petit Malik* contains a running joke that comprises a light-hearted look at French bureaucracy and the ability to use *associations* for personal gain. François, a local rap producer, frequently capitalises on government funding available to support the foundation of such associations. His first venture is called "l'Association pour le développement durable dans les quartiers défavorisés"¹⁴⁵ and, initially at least, he appears genuine in his efforts despite having chosen a theme that was "choux à la mode de chez nous."¹⁴⁶ However, it quickly becomes apparent that François has another agenda:

On s'était précipité à l'antenne locale de l'assoce qui avait de beaux et vastes locaux avec du matériel informatique rutilant. Pour le personnel. Nous, on a végété trois mois avant de s'apercevoir que rien ne sortirait de ce bijou inutile.¹⁴⁷

142 Ibid.

143 Ibid., 61.

144 Ibid., 62.

145 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 73.

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.

François mastered the art of founding an association to gain municipal funds, before disbanding it and establishing a newer version. For the remainder of the novel, the reader is periodically treated to passing references to François and his latest association, each one reflecting the more immediate concerns of the day. The various associations include: *Égalité pour tous*, *Musique pour les sans voix des banlieues*, *Sports en banlieues* (established to coincide with Sam's football success) and *Amour sur terre*. This recurring joke provides some light relief, particularly as the events of the novel begin to get darker in tone as Malik gets older. More seriously, however, they demonstrate how the well-intentioned actions of local municipalities can potentially be manipulated for personal gain, rather than for the communal good of the localities for which they were intended.

Mahany and Rachedi go much further in their co-authored book, *La petite Malika*. Malika herself is a highly intelligent and motivated student, who develops a strong interest in politics, and in particular favours Hakim « Cœur Halal » Formi, a politician who advocates "diversity" issues. She supports him because he "épousait mon aspiration à l'engagement ... et le combat pour une plus juste représentativité."¹⁴⁸ She is therefore delighted when he plans to give a speech at her local branch of his association *La France, c'est nous*. Yet Malika, an ardent supporter prior to the meeting, quickly realises that "Cœur Halal" is simply a politician promoting his own self-serving agenda and attempting to capitalise on the popularity of issues surrounding integration and diversity in France. When she poses a question regarding his promise to promote diversity, he recites a prepared speech: "le remake mot pour mot, intonation pour intonation, du discours de la veille, à la télé. Une partition récitée par cœur mais sans cœur."¹⁴⁹ She realises that his words lack conviction and that his goals for the evening are more about charming the attendees into making campaign donations than actually engaging in a discourse with the demographic he claims to represent. She grows increasingly disillusioned as the evening progresses, especially when the talk turns to what actions the association must take. It culminates with her declaration that "« Cœur Halal » s'est remis en pilote automatique sur la diversité machin bidule chouette. L'action, c'était le blabla."¹⁵⁰ Later, when studying at *l'ÉNA*, she undertakes a *stage* in politics. She is given responsibility for the diversity portfolio ("Vaccinée par l'expérience « Cœur Halal » et sa clique, je détestais d'avance

148 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 144.

149 Ibid., 151.

150 Ibid., 153.

mon domaine de compétences.”¹⁵¹) for the senator to whom she is assigned, despite the fact that one of the other *stagiaires* had written a dissertation on the subject, and her own speciality lay with the interior dossier. When she requests that their respective portfolios be changed, a telling encounter with the senator’s chief of staff takes place:

- Il me semble que vous êtes mieux placée pour parler de ce sujet que Laurent.
 - Il a écrit un mémoire dessus, moi, je me spécialise sur les questions d’aménagement du territoire et d’économie.
 - Vous voyez très bien ce que je veux dire, madame Touil.
 - Non, je ne vois pas.
- Devant ma fausse naïveté, la pupille du dircab a vrillé pendant une demi-seconde puis il a repris contenance. Sans un mot, il a tourné les talons vers le bureau, me laissant seule à mes dossiers estampillés « diversité ».¹⁵²

The incident with “Cœur Halal” Formi highlights the potential for politicians to manipulate and use the situation of the *banlieue* residents in order to further their own careers, reflecting real-life incidents such as that outlined above. Additionally, the situation with the senator for whom Malika is working demonstrates that those of North African descent can be pigeon-holed into certain positions, solely as a result of their origins. Malika later impresses the senator with her candour and her forthright manner and he allows her to swap portfolios, showing that the authors do not believe that all politicians are capable of cynical manipulation such as that described. Malika is very successful when charged with the interior portfolio, to the extent that when she completes her degree the senator invites her back to work for him, which demonstrates that the authors are attempting to move beyond the usual stereotypes and prejudices that previously characterised much discourse on the subject in France.

As discussed by Patrick Champagne, media and politicians can frequently work together – although in all likelihood not consciously – to contribute to negative imagery surrounding the *banlieues*. As outlined in the previous section, news reports and articles invariably show only the dramatic, sensational aspects of life in the *banlieues*, which creates a “media-oriented vision of reality that contributes to creating the reality it claims to describe.”¹⁵³ This is clearly not very positive, however its implications are a lot more far-reaching and sinister than it would at first appear, because the:

151 Ibid., 181.

152 Ibid., 182-3.

153 Champagne, “The View from the Media,” 56.

...logic of the relations that have been instituted between political actors, journalists and 'public opinion' experts has become such that politically it is very difficult to act outside the media or, even more so, against them. This is why the press has never met with indifference from those at the center of political power.¹⁵⁴

This phenomenon can, however, have positive consequences too. In *A Deviant Construction*, Alec Hargreaves cites Body-Gendrot to the effect that:

...the politicisation of manifestations of civil violence is effected via the media, which are used as a means of exerting pressure on the authorities. Media support is indispensable as a means of stirring up controversy, gaining a political hearing for the grievances and frustrations of small groups engaged in violence."¹⁵⁵

Hargreaves does, however, add a note of caution by claiming that, for the marginalised populations of the *banlieues* "the agenda can sometimes be established by sections of society which are traditionally disempowered, their underrepresentation in the reporting press nevertheless makes it very difficult for them to define the terms in which the public debate is pursued."¹⁵⁶ The potential of the media to collaborate in helping a campaign to achieve its goals was seen in the 2006 mass student protests, which are referenced obliquely in *Du rêve pour les oufs* and which stand in sharp contrast to the riots the previous November, in terms of the protestors having control over the manner in which the story was presented. Students were protesting against the proposed introduction of changes to existing employment laws, the *contrat première embauche*, which aimed to stabilise employment opportunities for young graduates by rendering it less difficult to dismiss employees within a certain timeframe. The proposed amendment was wildly unpopular and led to mass protests across France, mostly by young students. In many cases, it resulted in students barricading themselves into universities and effectively halting the operation of the institutions for a number of weeks and, in some cases, months. The manner in which these protests were viewed in French society and their portrayal in the media, relative to the riots the previous November was striking. That the protesters had a clear and specific objective, as well as a designated leadership partially contributed to this, but the different demographics of the two movements also certainly had an influence. The

154 Ibid.

155 Hargreaves, "A deviant construction," 616. Hargreaves here references: Sophie Body-Gendrot, *Ville et violence: l'irruption de nouveaux acteurs* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), 14.

156 Hargreaves, "A deviant construction," 616-7.

CPE demonstrations were successful in having the amendment rescinded, which added to the sense of marginalisation felt by those on the periphery, even those who, like Guène, played no part in the riots themselves. This is reflected in the brief reference Ahlème makes to the protests, which also gives an indication of the level of disconnection many in the *banlieues* felt from the *CPE* protestors, whose concerns were deemed by many in the peripheral regions to be a world apart from their own: "Le Patron fait la sieste, moi, je rêve à une vie meilleure et les étudiants manifestent dans les rues de Paris."¹⁵⁷ This sense of disconnection from the student protests was reflected in Guène's comments in a 2006 interview with her English-language translator, Sarah Adams, which coincided with a general strike called in solidarity with the *CPE* protestors:

Urban communities across France are threatening to go up in smoke, but on this day the suburbs are playing refreshingly against type. I ask Guène if her day has been knocked out of kilter. She laughs. "There's nothing in [the suburb of] Pantin, so how would I notice if there was a strike on?"¹⁵⁸

That the reference to the protests is presented in a manner which makes clear their lack of relevance for Ahlème, and that Guène herself stated her indifference, reflects the lack of impact that these protests had in the peripheral zones.

Each of the authors, however, includes references to political events that are of significance to the population of North African origin in France. The decolonization process, or what Todd Shepard has termed "the invention of decolonization,"¹⁵⁹ enabled the French to forget the long and intertwined history that had existed between France and Algeria. Shepard claims that the history between France and Algeria was rewritten when Algeria gained independence and that "there emerged the fiction that the 'Algerian experience' had been an unfortunate colonial detour, from which the French Republic had now escaped."¹⁶⁰ This rewriting had long-term consequences for the way French people view their country, as well as themselves and the immigrant populations. In fact, Philip Dine claimed in 2006 that the "multiple consequences of the French state's long silence regarding the war are still being worked through today, half a century after the first rebel fighters took up arms against the ... colonial presence in Algeria."¹⁶¹ Thus it is significant

157 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 66.

158 Adams, "Voice of the people."

159 Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, 2.

160 *Ibid.*, 11.

161 Philip Dine, "Deception as Demystification in the French Literature of the Algerian War: The Case of Vladimir Volkoff," in *Artful Deceptions: Verbal and Visual Trickery in French Culture*, ed. Catherine Emerson and Maria C. Scott (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006), 177.

that most of the novels in the corpus include references to the decolonisation process and its effects. *Kiffe kiffe demain's* Doria is not overly interested in politics or political issues, although she does mention some events of political significance, such as the plaque which was erected on the Pont Saint-Michel to commemorate the events of October 17th 1961.¹⁶² The plaque, which was inaugurated on the fortieth anniversary by the mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, marked a significant and positive gesture towards France's Algerian population and thus its acknowledgment in the text constitutes the inclusion of a significant aspect of French-Algerian cultural memory. According to Hargreaves, "In voicing memories habitually repressed by the former colonial power, textual representations of these events constitute an act of resistance to the discourses of (neo-) colonialism."¹⁶³ However, as if to emphasize her own French-ness and disconnection from the events of the war, Doria frames the reference in relation to her mother, Yasmina's, love life:

Tiens, à propos de mariage, j'ai grillé ma mère. Elle est amoureuse du maire de Paris. Elle kiffe Bertrand Delanoë depuis qu'elle l'a vu à la télé poser la plaque de commémoration à Saint-Michel. C'était en souvenir des Algériens balancés dans la Seine pendant la manifestation du 17 octobre 1961. J'ai emprunté des bouquins sur ça à la bibliothèque de Livry-Gargan.¹⁶⁴

Mahany also refers to France's colonial past, which her own family experienced in Algeria, but also the other wars of decolonisation. These references are used to demonstrate the commonality of experiences shared by those whose background lies in a former French colony, yet also that the various populations can sometimes dwell on their own experiences and not consider those of others. The author demonstrates this via her protagonist's friendship with her Vietnamese neighbour Jacqueline Koné. Sabrina had previously been unable to understand why Jacqueline and her family are so withdrawn, until Jacqueline explains her country's traumatic past experiences:

162 This refers to the 1961 massacre of Algerians who were participating in a peaceful protest in Paris, towards the end of the Algerian war of decolonization. The number of protesters killed on October 17th is unknown and although the official police report at the time put the death toll at two, estimates of the actual number killed range from between thirty two and two hundred. These events went unacknowledged by the French government and population for decades. It is an event that the Algerian community in France at the time, in particular those who were involved in the demonstration, rarely discuss, even with their children who in many cases may be completely unaware of their parent's connection to the massacre. Some Franco-Algerian (and, to a lesser extent, French) authors have however referenced the events of that night in literature. See for example: Mehdi Lallaoui, *Les beurs de Seine* (Paris: Arcanteres, 1986); Didier Daeninckx, *Meurtres pour mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). Kettane, *Le sourire de Brahim*; Leïla Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge : Paris, octobre 1961* (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 2003).

163 Hargreaves, "Resistance at the Margins," 233.

164 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 163-4.

Le traumatisme des réfugiés qui ont parcouru deux mille kilomètres pour fuir une lutte fratricide. La souffrance d'un peuple soumis à des régimes fous. Moi, j'ai repensé à la guerre d'Algérie. Les émigrés du bled, ils ont eu qu'une mer à franchir et pourtant ils étaient déracinés. J'ai repensé à une guerre de huit ans qui a laissé des traces indélébiles alors j'imagine un conflit beaucoup, beaucoup plus long. J'ai repensé à la mémoire bafouée des Algériens à cause d'une guerre qu'on a longtemps appelée des événements. Et la guerre d'Indochine, qui en parle maintenant ?¹⁶⁵

These poignant words are an important aspect of Sabrina's personal development, as she becomes aware that racism is not confined to the French, but is manifest in many forms and with many targets. She also learns that the roots of racism frequently lie in ignorance and misconceptions.

The significance of the intertwined histories of France and Algeria, and its potential impact on the Franco-Algerian population is also underlined by the Chacal twins. While Nadia is holding forth on issues of racism and immigration in contemporary France, her twin brother Ali interrupts:

Franchement, colonel, désolé, je vais m'exprimer à mon tour parce que là, c'est le souk ce qu'elle dit. Moi, je parle sans rancœur. Nadia, elle vit trop avec le bagage de la vie des parents. Mais putain, ce cartable-là, il pèse sept cent kilos. Moi, je m'en suis débarrassé.¹⁶⁶

This is particularly significant, as there is a relatively recent tendency in the cultural productions of the children of immigrants to highlight the hardship that their parents experienced and the sacrifices that they made in order to provide their children with a better life.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, Mourad's parents spent time as refugees in Morocco during the Algerian war, and his maternal grandfather is described as having been: "un révolutionnaire qui a fait la guerre pour libérer son pays."¹⁶⁸ *Du rêve pour les oufs*, on the other hand, is largely concerned with the Algerian civil war, rather than the decolonisation process itself. Like Guène, Ahlème is Algerian, and there are

165 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 136.

166 Guène, *Les gens du Balto*, 100.

167 This tendency is particularly evident in films produced by this demographic. The first wave of films produced by the French-born or reared children of immigrants tended to highlight the disintegration and displacement faced by this young generation, but a more recent wave emphasizes the difficulties experienced by their parents as they attempted to carve out a life for their family in France. In his 2000 article in the journal *Sites*, Hargreaves termed this phenomenon 'resuscitating the father'. [Alec G. Hargreaves, "Resuscitating the father: New cinematic representations of the Maghrebi minority in France," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 4, no. 2 (2000).]

168 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 17.

several references to the events of the colonial past and the Algerian Civil War in the text. The Algerian village where Ahlème and her family originate is depicted in a bittersweet light; although she has many happy childhood memories, the events which led to their departure for France were very traumatic. Ahlème's mother and most of the villagers, including children, were brutally slaughtered while attending a wedding, a consequence of the civil war. Ahlème and her younger brother Foued, who was a baby at the time and remembers none of the events, then came to France to join their father who was working in Paris. Acknowledging events such as the turbulence and violence of the Algerian civil war, which are of huge significance to the North African population in France, and yet are rarely acknowledged in French culture, is an important element of cultural awareness and respect that the younger generations must experience, and its inclusion in this text is similar to the reference to October 17th 1961 in *Kiffe kiffe demain*, in that "textual representations of these events constitute an act of resistance"¹⁶⁹ to post-colonial narratives, by referencing happenings that are not frequently discussed in France. This is an important element of the realism inherent in Guène's texts, which also contributes to voicing the cultural memories of France's North African population. The circumstances surrounding her mother's death have become inextricably linked with her *bled*. Ahlème had begged her mother to be allowed to attend the wedding:

J'aurais fait n'importe quoi pour assister à la fête, j'en avais tellement envie ! Je n'avais que onze ans et j'ai supplié Maman de m'y emmener. Mais elle a refusé, avec impossibilité de négocier ... ce qui l'inquiétait davantage, c'était ce long trajet pour aller au village. «Par les temps qui courent, les routes ne sont plus sûres, tout le pays est infesté de faux barrages, je n'ai pas envie qu'il t'arrive quelque chose.»¹⁷⁰

Ahlème explains that despite her tender years, she had been aware that the situation was tense in her homeland before the massacre. They listened to music quietly if at all, and they certainly never played love songs, there were certain words that were not used outside the house, and people were so afraid that in most houses metal bars were put up in place of curtains. Despite all these precautions:

169 Hargreaves, "Resistance at the Margins," 233.

170 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 64.

La date de la fête est arrivée et la mort a frappé, sauvagement. Elle est venue en équipe, a jeté son dévolu sur ce tout petit village, dans lequel, au moins pour un soir, avait régné la joie ... Ils ont assassiné tout le monde, même les enfants, des bébés aussi minuscules que Foued ... Alors on ne célébra plus tellement de mariages, les gens étant traumatisés par ces images de corps mutilés et de biberons ensanglantés.¹⁷¹

That a young child was so acutely aware of the social problems of her country is a testament to the prevalence of the tensions and disruptions of this time. The depiction of these events in the text serves as a powerful reminder of the ghosts of the Franco-Algerian colonial past. Further, for these events to be treated so graphically in a novel that is widely read by teenagers is a reflection of the respect which Guène affords her readers. She does not shy away from discussing difficult issues and never patronises her YA readers, which is an important factor contributing to their empowerment as, according to Al-Hazza and Bucher, "When authors incorporate themes such as justice, survival, conflict resolution, and friendship into their books, readers can begin to make connections across cultures."¹⁷² This cross-cultural connection, if established between *banlieue* residents and those from outside these regions, would be an important step towards creating mutual understanding between these two groups. As outlined in Chapter One, it is the combination of strong cultural identity and self-esteem with acceptance by the majority cultural community that leads to the empowerment of young people from minority cultural backgrounds.¹⁷³

A final issue of concern to members of France's immigrant population, referenced in the texts, is that of clandestine immigrants. Those who are residing in France under legally ambiguous circumstances were discussed in Chapter Three, but *Kiffer sa race* introduces the issue of political refugees. Towards the end of the narrative, Sabrina learns that her new friend Alphonse, and his family, are clandestine immigrants, refugees from Haiti. This is a potentially sensitive issue, and its inclusion seeks to highlight the predicament from the point of view of those who are attempting to stay in France rather than face dangers back home. Alphonse explains to Sabrina the difficulties faced by his family in Haiti, and how they fled, first to Guadeloupe, then to France, rather than face persecution at the hands of government forces. Alphonse's recounting of the experiences of his family, both in Haiti and on their journey to France, affords Sabrina some perspective on life in

171 Ibid.

172 Al-Hazza and Bucher, "Building Arab Americans' Cultural Identity." Al-Hazza and Bucher here reference: María Luisa Gonzalez, Ana Huerta-Macias, and Josefina Villamil Tinajero, eds., *Educating Latino students: A guide to successful practice* (Lancaster, PA: Technomic Publishing, 1998).

173 Al-Hazza and Bucher, "Building Arab Americans' Cultural Identity," 210-11.

the *banlieue* and the trials that the residents of the peripheral zones face: "il connaît la vraie souffrance. Pas celle du gars prétendument du ghetto qui vit sous un toit. Celle du vrai damné."¹⁷⁴ Unfortunately for the Mercier family: "La France refuse de reconnaître sa douleur, ça avive sa souffrance. La France dénie son intégration réussie, parfois, ça le désespère."¹⁷⁵ The family originally lived in Essonne, but moved to Argenteuil after being reported to the authorities. Fortunately, they were warned in time to escape. Alphonse gets into a fight at school, and his parents are ready to move again as a result of the unwanted attention. Sabrina, determined to put an end to their fleeing and determined also that Alphonse take his place on the *Sciences Po* preparatory course, informs their head teacher Landru of the situation. He promises to help as much as is possible, to prevent the fight from being brought to the attention of the police, and that Alphonse will be able to take his *Sciences Po* preparatory course the following year, as planned. This is an almost overly idealistic outcome for Alphonse, yet it provides an element of hope at the end of the story. By highlighting this issue, Mahany does not over-dramatize the situation and emphasises Alphonse's positivity in the face of hardship. This is an important element in de-dramatizing the situation in the *banlieues* as a whole, an important goal of the authors under investigation in this thesis.

Elsewhere, Guène derives humour from the French system of residency papers in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, when Mourad spends time at a party speaking to a man who has a unique theory about his ability to guess the political status of their fellow guests based on their behaviour at the party:

Observe-les bien. Je remarque que moins ils sont en règle, plus ils s'agitent. Les sans-papiers sont déchaînés, ils picolent beaucoup, dansent et se marrent la bouche grande ouverte. Les visas étudiants et les courts-séjours, eux, décompressent, ils rigolent doucement. Mais les plus détendus, ce sont les cartes de résidence de dix ans. Regarde-les ! Dix ans ! Relax ! Ils fument, ils sont assis, ils refont le monde parce qu'ils ont l'impression d'y appartenir.¹⁷⁶

When Mourad wonders what his status would be based on his behaviour, the man replies "Toi, tu tournes en rond. Tu changes de pièce. Tu pars, tu reviens. Tu cherches ta place et tu ne t'amuses pas. Je pense que tu es né ici."¹⁷⁷ This prompts Mourad to dub him

174 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 223.

175 Ibid., 225.

176 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 199.

177 Ibid.

"Le Freud de la soirée".¹⁷⁸ This episode, although light-hearted, nevertheless addresses the importance of political status for immigrants in France, and thus is of significance to many of the immigrant community. It also renders visible the plight of the *sans-papiers* in the novel. By doing so in a light-hearted manner, Guène draws attention to their plight, yet refrains from making any overt commentary.

Politicians in France, as elsewhere, appear to be most concerned with winning and subsequently retaining public support. As a consequence, some of their policies, initiatives, and statements, and certainly those to do with the social problems of the *banlieues*, can be very reactionary and short-term oriented, usually sparked by a period of intense media – and therefore public – scrutiny of a particular issue or event, deemed pressing at the time. This does not seem to be the most effective way of dealing with problems, and can also mean that politicians can change sides on some topics in response to their interpretation of public feeling of the time. Alternative and more long-term methods and strategies are required to effectively allow a space for the displaced *banlieue* population in French society as a whole. The novels in the corpus engage with politics to varying degrees. From brief mentions in *Le petit Malik* and *Le poids d'une âme*, to strong engagement with political themes in *La petite Malika*, *Du rêve pour les oufs* and *Kiffer sa race*, issues of post-colonial conflict, civil war and political manipulation operate to greater and lesser degrees. More common, however, are references to politicians and, in particular to specific politicians known to be hostile to the *banlieue* populations. These references serve to increase the textual realism, grounding the texts in a specific political context, yet at no point do they dwell in negativity and bitterness and, more often than not, they derive humour from these situations as a means to counter the negative perceptions that abound in political discourse. In personal correspondence, Mahany spoke about her use of humour in order to counter negative stereotypes and statements by politicians: "C'est une arme efficace dans la mesure où c'est un langage universel et immédiat qui parle spontanément aux gens."¹⁷⁹ This highlights this author's desire to soften the blow of difficult situations through the use of humour and Rachedi and Guène use similar tactics in their novels. This will become particularly apparent in the following section, which deals with racism and integration.

178 Ibid.

179 See Appendix 3.

4.4 Racism and Integration

It would be unfair to say that all, or even the majority of, French people discriminate against the post-colonial populations in France. However, the fact remains that a proportion of the French population takes issue with immigrants and their children.¹⁸⁰ The reasons explored above – misinformation on the side of the media and political manipulation of public opinion – go some way towards providing an explanation for this discrimination. But, as will now be shown, racism certainly plays a part. Tahar Ben Jelloun claims that at “chaque crise économique grave, des voix se sont levées pour désigner l'étranger comme responsable; ombre menaçante, corps non regardé parce que non reconnu, et pourtant corps présent et coupable par avance.”¹⁸¹ He explains that economic hardship “met l'individu dans une position défensive, et provoque chez lui des sentiments de rejet quasi instinctif de l'étranger.”¹⁸² Although the purpose of his discussion is not to justify racist behaviour simply because it was brought about or increased by economic hardship resulting in difficult living conditions, he does appear to have some empathy for perpetrators of racism against North Africans in France: “Nous avons donc affaire à un racisme sauvage qui reflète beaucoup plus une déroute personnelle, une misère de la vie et une haine de soi qu'une philosophie ou des hypothèses psychologiques qui seraient la base théorique d'un mouvement politique et idéologique.”¹⁸³ He also speaks of an additional explanation that was offered for the hostility directed towards the Maghrebi community in modern France – sociologists' claims that there is a “*seuil de tolérance* : à partir d'un certain pourcentage (10 à 11 %) d'étrangers dans un espace habité, les risques de non-tolérance de l'Autre sont réels et peuvent aboutir à des drames.”¹⁸⁴ However, Jelloun himself does not subscribe to this theory, and as evidence he uses the much fairer treatment received by immigrants of European origin, who do not look as different to the French as do those

180 For in-depth discussion of this, see: Dominic Thomas, *Africa and France: Postcolonial Cultures, Migration, and Racism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013); James Cohen, “Postcolonial Immigrants in France and Their Descendants: The Meanings of France's 'Postcolonial Moment',” in *Postcolonial Migrants and Identity Politics: Europe, Russia, Japan and the United States in Comparison*, ed. Ulbe Bosma, Jan Lucassen, and Gert Oostindie (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012); Jane Freedman, *Immigration and Insecurity in France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Maxim Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, racism and citizenship in modern France* (London: Routledge, 1992).

181 Ben Jelloun, *Hospitalité française*, 58.

182 Ibid.

183 Ibid., 81.

184 Ibid., 131.

of North African descent. "Le seuil de tolérance n'est au fond qu'une formule dont on se sert avec bonne conscience pour justifier, avec l'alibi scientifique, l'impossible coexistence des cultures et des hommes."¹⁸⁵

There are many examples of politicians behaving in a manner that can only be described as racist, something which is not a recent occurrence. In 1996, Alec Hargreaves discussed an article from *Libération* of July 6th 1983 which:

...spoke of the seeming intractability of 'the crisis in the banlieues', the wish of local councils on both the right and the left of the political spectrum to 'be rid of immigrants', the existence of de facto ethnic segregation, the difficulty of distinguishing 'between a ghetto and an ethnic community', and the urgent need to 'stem the rising tide of racism, criminality and urban decay in the outer areas of our cities'.¹⁸⁶

The French public is not innocent of putting pressure on politicians when it comes to issues of immigration. Belmessous discusses an incident which occurred when the Gaysot-Besson law on urban renewal was announced. Nicolas Sarkozy was mayor of the Paris district of Neuilly-sur-Seine at the time. The law, which attempted to combat ethnic segregation, required:

...les villes abritant peu (ou pas) de logements sociaux à rattraper leur retard, sous peine de fortes amendes. Une association de Neuilly-sur-Seine avait demandé à son maire, Nicolas Sarkozy, de payer l'amende plutôt que d'accueillir des populations indésirables dans la ville."¹⁸⁷

Mayors of other districts also repudiated the law, and some of the comments made were extremely hostile towards the *banlieue* populations. One mayor, Estelle Debaecker of Val-de-Marne, claimed:

Pourquoi croyez-vous que les gens veulent habiter Nogent-sur-Marne ... Parce qu'ils y trouvent une certaine qualité de vie et qu'ils n'ont pas envie de se faire agresser à chaque carrefour. C'est aussi simple que cela. Cette loi ... aurait pour conséquence de créer dans notre commune les mêmes phénomènes que dans les banlieues difficiles.¹⁸⁸

185 Ibid.

186 Hargreaves, "A deviant construction," 613.

187 Belmessous, *L'avenir commence en banlieue*, 6.

188 Ibid.

Reflecting this real-life racism, there are many examples of racism directed towards the protagonists of the primary texts with which this thesis is concerned. In Faïza Guène's *Les gens du Balto*, the owner of the Balto bar referenced in the title is openly racist. In fact, Joël behaves unpleasantly to everyone, but is particularly vicious when dealing with a local North African family. When they arrive at the scene of his murder and see the police investigating the crime scene, Joël is still narrating the scene, and comments:

Tiens, il y a aussi la famille arabe de Marseillais qui vient de se joindre à l'équipe ... Eux dans cinq minutes, ils sont partis. Quand c'est Ben Laden et compagnie, ça les regarde, mais dès qu'il s'agit du voisin blanc qui paie ses impôts, ils s'en foutent.¹⁸⁹

In fact, prior to Joël's death, Nadia's and Ali's father had been boycotting his café as a result of the unacceptable treatment he received from Joël. According to Nadia:

Chaque fois que papa va prendre son journal, le mec du bar, le chauve, là, il lui balance, limite il lui jette à la gueule. À croire que notre argent à nous, il est sale. Et quand il lui sert son café, il fait exprès de le faire déborder ce chien. C'est papa qui nous raconte. J'invente pas.¹⁹⁰

Ali does not share his twin sister's negative outlook on life, but during the police interview, he does admit that: "...Joël, on le connaissait pas depuis très longtemps mais c'est vrai qu'il était raciste sur les bords."¹⁹¹ This prompts Nadia to respond: "Sur les bords... Cette expression me fait trop rire. Sur les bords ? Pourquoi seulement sur les bords ? En vérité, il était raciste sur les bords, à l'intérieur, en dehors, en dessous... Ce type-là, il transpirait le racisme, il se parfumait avec."¹⁹² Although the twins are dismissive of racist behaviour, and in particular that displayed by Joël, they nevertheless appear to have been deeply marked by their personal experiences, and those of their father. At several points in the text they defend their right to be in France. This is evidenced from their first appearance. After a couple of lines in which they squabble characteristically, Nadia begins by saying:

– Déjà, je voulais dire que ça me fatigue ce que les gens racontent sur notre famille, les rumeurs et tout. J'ai envie de dire la vérité c'te fois-ci.

189 Guène, *Les gens du Balto*, 65.

190 Ibid., 50.

191 Ibid., 100.

192 Ibid.

« D'abord ouais, notre père travaille au marché. Il est pas au noir. Il a une licence comme n'importe quel commerçant. Il se lève tôt. Il vend des légumes. Les légumes, c'est important pour la santé.¹⁹³

Nadia's defence of their father and his status as a legal immigrant in France is interesting, in that it indicates the level of hostility they have experienced. Tellingly, she continues to defend the family from the common stereotypes that they encounter: "Ensuite, on n'est pas dix frères et sœurs mais cinq. Et c'est pas la même chose. Au lycée, les réflexions sur les allocations familiales, je commence à en avoir marre."¹⁹⁴ She proceeds to describe the reasons why she is explaining this to the reader: "Si je raconte ça, c'est pour qu'on comprenne bien qui on est chez nous. Je trouve quand même qu'il y a pas mal de cons dans c'te ville."¹⁹⁵ It is clear from the way in which Nadia speaks that she has heard a lot of abuse directed at her family, all based on negative stereotypes. It has rendered her defensive and protective of her family, and it is for these reasons that she is so outspoken in their defence.

The first time *Kiffer sa race's* Sabrina felt the sting of other people's negative preconceptions towards those who share her background occurs in school. Although she no longer remembers the context of the conversation, she was nevertheless disgusted when her teacher exclaimed, "comme si c'était une découverte, *ainsi les Maghrébins aiment leurs enfants*."¹⁹⁶ Sabrina wished to respond: "ben ouais connasse, tu crois quoi, que nos géniteurs nous mettent au monde comme ça, sur un coup de tête, puis qu'ils nous livrent aux loups, comme Mowgli ?"¹⁹⁷ Over the years, she has come to realise that sentiments such as these are widespread, yet she is still upset by that initial realisation, particularly from a teacher, whom she had previously considered as a maternal figure: "C'est la première fois que ça blesse vraiment, les autres, ceux qui m'ont assené ce cliché à deux balles, ils ont fait qu'enterrer mes dernières illusions."¹⁹⁸ Years later, when her father is hospitalised and his room is filled with a constant stream of visitors who bring food and play dominos with Mohamed, Sabrina feels that the staff do not understand their cultural practices: "Je crois que cette spontanéité, les Européens la prennent pour de la sauvagerie, comme si la

193 Ibid., 47.

194 Ibid., 48.

195 Ibid.

196 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 109.

197 Ibid.

198 Ibid., 110.

civilisation excluait l'élan."¹⁹⁹ Perhaps the most significant detailing of racist behaviour happens via Sabrina's neighbour, mentioned in the previous section. Although she visits the family once a year when they celebrate the feast of Eid al-Fitr, the end of Ramadan, Sabrina believes that Yvonne is a confirmed racist who deigns to visit because she likes the traditional cakes and food that the family prepare to mark the occasion: "Le grand taquin de Destin fait que Mme Yvonne Prunier se souvient qu'elle a des voisins le jour où ça sent la friture, les gâteaux et tous ces arômes appétissants."²⁰⁰ Sabrina compares Yvonne's visit to Tintin visiting North Africa, drawing a link to the 2007 *Tintin in the Congo* controversy.²⁰¹ Sabrina also despairs that each year they must explain to Yvonne the difference between Eid al-Adha (when sheep were traditionally sacrificed) and Eid al-Fitr. The family, and in particular Sabrina and her sister, resent that: "*on est obligés de jouer aux bons Arabes des champs ? Le côté zoo, ça nous branche pas trop, mais la daronne, elle dit qu'il faut rester poli avec les gens.*"²⁰² As mentioned previously, Sabrina calls Yvonne a *lépeniste*, as "Elle crache sur les Arabes, l'Islam et le Coran dans un même élan de haine."²⁰³ Yet Sabrina does not harbour bitterness towards Yvonne, merely dismisses her and her beliefs, allowing Mahany to undermine the power that her hatred and racism might otherwise hold.

Mahany also makes occasional use of humour in her treatment of racism in the novel, and in doing so demonstrates that sometimes racism can be perceived where none in fact exists. She does this through the character of Lamine, one of Sabrina's classmates. Lamine frequently and mistakenly accuses their teacher, Landru, of being a *cistera* (*raciste* in verlan) and repeatedly storms out of the classroom to report this perceived racism to the principal. These incidents are frequently quite humorous as the reader is aware of Lamine's various misunderstandings. For instance, when Landru is explaining the differences between agnosticism, atheism and religion he states that "les croyants vénèrent Dieu"²⁰⁴, and Lamine, not knowing the verb, believes it to be the *verlan* for *énerver*, and

199 Ibid., 134.

200 Ibid., 128.

201 This refers to the controversy that erupted in 2007 following a complaint made to the Commission for Racial Equality in the UK by David Enright. Enright's complaint derided the text, which had only recently been made available in English, for being racist as it depicted the African characters as having simian qualities and bowing to Tintin and his dog. For more on the controversy, as well as a discussion of its implications for children's literature, see: Vaclavik, "Damaging Goods?."

202 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 129.

203 Ibid., 130.

204 Ibid., 51.

leaves to complain. In another instance, when the class are studying *De l'esprit des lois*, the language used in Montesquieu's text causes offence to some of Sabrina's classmates. By including these episodes, Mahany attempts to show that racism can be perceived where none exists. By doing so in a humorous and entertaining fashion, she removes the power of this perceived racism and adds a light-hearted element to her treatment of it in the novel. In personal correspondence, Mahany claimed that she strongly believes that humour can be an effective weapon in the fight against racism, but she adds a caution:

On se retrouve tous dans le rire, c'est un espace de communion. Il permet aussi de dédramatiser s'agissant de sujets aussi lourds. Le but est de dire des choses en étant léger, tout en n'oubliant pas que la finalité est de dire des choses. C'est un exercice périlleux et fragile : trop d'humour rend la situation de racisme anecdotique.²⁰⁵

In *Kiffe kiffe demain*, Doria's neighbour Lila is a single mother who has had harsh experience of racism in the past. Lila informs Doria of the difficulties she encountered when she married her ex-husband. Lila's background is Algerian, and her husband's family were Breton. Both sides were opposed to the marriage, as Lila's family were eager to keep their Algerian customs and heritage intact. The husband's family, however, "ont du mal avec le bronzage"²⁰⁶ and were openly rude to Lila throughout their marriage, beginning with the wedding:

Une ambiance de mort, presque aucun invité de son côté, et comme par hasard, beaucoup de porc au repas préparé par le beau-père. Limite s'il en aurait pas mis dans la pièce montée juste pour déconner. Ça le faisait mourir de rire ces blagues lourdes sur la religion. À tous les repas de famille – enfin ceux où elle était invitée – il fallait qu'il sorte la blague athée de huit heures moins le quart. Déjà que Lila elle se sentait pas à sa place.²⁰⁷

Lila eventually decides to divorce her husband and raise their daughter alone. Her experiences with her husband's family suggest that not everyone in France welcomes the North African population, even those who are born in France. This accurately reflects Guène's personal experiences, and thus represents an element of her realistic depiction of the *banlieues*. Guène has spoken in interviews of her experiences when trying to find accommodation through an agency. She wished to rent with her husband, who is black

205 See Appendix 3.

206 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 128.

207 Ibid.

and from the Ivory Coast. Despite being a very successful author by this time, a bestseller in France, with books translated into several languages, her Arabic name and appearance made it difficult to even obtain a viewing of an apartment:

She found herself telling her husband to stay at home while she went alone - being north African and having slightly lighter skintone would be "less bad", she reasoned. When she made bookings to see flats over the phone, the name Mademoiselle Guène didn't sound "too north African". But when she arrived at appointments and they saw her, she was not allowed to see the flats. Seven months later, they still had no home.²⁰⁸

None of the above, however, should be taken as an indication that racism and racist violence are new to French society. Each significant wave of immigration has sparked controversy of one kind or another, including violent attacks, before the newly arrived immigrants were accepted into French society. Laurence and Vaisse outlined the "process" that characterises successive waves of immigration to France. They claim that these phases include initially a strong and violent resistance from the native population; this is followed by accusations of cultural and sociological incompatibility with French culture; and finally, after these two phases have run their course, successful integration.²⁰⁹ They refer to the "layers of negative stereotypes"²¹⁰ that frequently greet these waves of immigration, and in particular reference the anti-Italian sentiment that was prevalent in France in the late nineteenth century. There were several anti-Italian riots at this time, the most famous of which "was the Aigues-Mortes massacre of 1893. Singing the 'Marseillaise' and marching behind red flags, French workers hunted down Italians, leaving an undetermined number dead and scores injured."²¹¹ Begag has discussed this and other anti-Italian riots and demonstrations, as well as showing that relations between the French and the Belgians have not always been smooth either: "À la frontière franco-belge, avant la guerre de 14-18 et jusqu'aux années trente, rixes et chasses à l'homme ponctuent les relations entre mineurs français et belges, grévistes français et briseurs de grève belges, dans le bassin houiller du Pas-de-Calais,"²¹² and he is inclined to attribute that to factors beyond the control of the

208 Chrisafis, "High riser."

209 Laurence and Vaisse, *Integrating Islam*, 49.

210 Ibid.

211 Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's many diasporas* (Oxon: Routledge, 2000), 112.

212 Begag, *L'Intégration*, 54.

minority populations, given the similarity in conditions of economic hardship each time a wave of xenophobia occurs: "bref, quand la volonté d'exclure est là, les arguments ne sont jamais difficiles à trouver."²¹³

Guène and Mahany both carefully avoid creating a racist/victim dichotomy with the French as the perpetrators and the immigrant community of the *banlieues* as the victims. They both include examples of racist behaviour perpetrated by African characters and with various different ethnic groups as the targets. One of the few instances of racist behaviour in *Du rêve pour les oufs* provides an example of this and occurs as a result of Ahlème's interaction with a neighbouring family with whom she is close. On one of her visits with Tantie Mariatou, Papa Demba arrives home and is in very strange humour:

Il a foncé sur la bibliothèque du salon, s'est jeté sur le dictionnaire, puis s'est mis à tourner les pages comme un fêlé ... Il maltraitait les pages du dico de son doigt qu'il humectait de salive, les sourcils froncés, comme si sa vie dépendait de la définition qu'il était en train de chercher.²¹⁴

When his actions are questioned, he informs them that he is seeking the definition of the word *gibbon*, as he was stopped and questioned by the police on his way home and they had referred to him as such. In keeping with the realism generally employed by Guène in her novels, it was important that she acknowledge the racism experienced by some members of France's African population. Yet, in an interesting twist on this theme, Guène shows her readers that racism can work the other way also. Tantie Mariatou, attempting to soothe her husband's consternation in the wake of this incident, claims: "...ce n'est pas digne de toi d'accorder de l'importance à un mot que t'enseigne le visage rose à casquette bleue ! Ne les écoute pas, *kou yinkaranto* !" ²¹⁵ The fact that Ahlème's beloved friend and mentor Mariatou displays casual racism towards the police officers who insulted her husband, referencing their "pink" skin colour and using a derogatory term, allows Guène to illustrate that racism has the potential to propagate racism in others. In *Les gens du Balto*, Tanièl and his group of friends engage in casual racism directed at each other, but there is no malice intended. His friends refer to Tanièl as *Quetur*, verlan for *Turc*. This is a joke based on Tanièl's appearance, although he is actually of Armenian descent. Tanièl is aware that his mother hates Turkish people, and he reveals that "...quand elle veut pas

213 Ibid.

214 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 81.

215 Ibid., 83. *kou yinkaranto* is a Soninke expression, meaning "those idiots".

faire un truc, elle dit « Plutôt coucher avec un Turc », alors là c'est sûr qu'elle le fera pas parce que pour elle, ça a l'air d'être pire que crever."²¹⁶ Significantly, however, he is unaware as to why this is the case, as "on m'a jamais expliqué pourquoi."²¹⁷ Tanièl's mother Yéva is superficially proud of her Armenian heritage; although both of her children bear Armenian names, at no point in the text does she engage in Armenian cultural practices, nor does she appear to speak the language. Unhappy with the direction her life has taken, she has romanticised Armenian culture, and claims, unrealistically: "Si j'avais écouté mon vieux père – paix à son âme – j'aurais épousé un Arménien avec une moustache bien fournie, il m'aurait construit une maison en briques et je me serais tirée depuis longtemps."²¹⁸

Of all the novels in the corpus, however, *Kiffer sa race* shows that racism can cross many boundaries and take multiple forms, and Sabrina must come to terms with some difficult facts about her own family. At the beginning of the novel, when Sabrina is introducing the reader to the various people who live in her tower, she explains that despite having lived in the same building for many years, her family barely knows their neighbours from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Koné family, and Sabrina is obliged to conceal her friendship with Fatoumata Koné from her parents and younger brother: "C'est marrant comme les communautés s'agglomèrent plus facilement par origine ethnique que par proximité géographique... Les Noirs avec les Noirs, les Arabes avec les Arabes."²¹⁹ Sabrina initially has difficulty accepting her family's position, and makes excuses for her mother in particular, claiming: "Moi, je laisse glisser, après tout, c'est yema, je la connais, elle est pas raciste, juste, elle sait pas."²²⁰ Sabrina also encounters resistance from her family when she begins to develop a friendship with Jacqueline Tran, who is of Vietnamese origin, and when she grows close to Alphonse, who she eventually begins dating. Her brother Adam, in particular, displays animosity towards her new friends: "C'est le genre de mec à préférer les monochromes. Une Arabe, une Noire africaine et une Asiatique ensemble, c'est trop de couleurs."²²¹ Despite the fact that many of his friends are coloured, he believes it is different for a man, and he takes pleasure in telling their mother that his sister has coloured friends. Safia does not like this either, particularly when Adam informs her that his sister is dating a *carlouche*, a pejorative Arabic term for black people. Her mother screams at

216 Guène, *Les gens du Balto*, 13-4.

217 Ibid., 13.

218 Ibid., 33.

219 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 46.

220 Ibid., 155.

221 Ibid.

Sabrina and sends her to her room, where Sabrina comes to a painful realisation: "je m'aperçois d'une évidence que j'ai trop longtemps niée : ma famille est raciste."²²² This realisation comes as a shock to Sabrina, who must then admit that she had previously ignored the signs of her family's racist attitudes: "Yema, je l'aime, je la respecte, c'est dur de la voir tomber de son piédestal. Aussi raciste que ceux qui nous assènent leurs sous-entendus... La même racine d'un même mal, orienté vers une autre cible."²²³ Her family even begin to discuss sending Sabrina to Algeria for the summer. When Sabrina learns that Jacqueline's parents are deeply unhappy that she is seeing a North African, she despairs of their parents' generation, but displays an element of racism herself when she claims that: "j'avais toujours cru que c'étaient les Français les racistes."²²⁴

In other instances, Sabrina shows that she is also capable of racist attitudes, as when she claims not to have known the difference between a Chinese person and other Asians, until Jacqueline informs her racism has its origins in such attitudes. Sabrina thus resolves that things will be different in the future: "avec la nouvelle génération, c'est plus la même. Demain, la France sera métissée."²²⁵ This is a theme to which she returns in the novel's closing paragraph, when she reaffirms her determination that her generation will efface cultural differences and become a more accepting society: "Notre génération va tout casser... je kiffe ma race, *notre* race, la seule, l'unique sur cette terre par-delà les barrières dans nos têtes : la race humaine."²²⁶ This resolve, which incorporates the title of the book into its closing sentence, shows Mahany's eagerness that Sabrina's dream be realised by the next generation of French citizens and her desire to direct her YA readers towards embracing this attitude in their own lives. This hopeful and positive note at the end of a novel which highlighted the racist attitudes of people from many different cultures and backgrounds is important. This ending is particularly pertinent for Mahany's YA readers, especially given the belief of Botelho and Rudman, outlined in Chapter One, that literature can offer young readers a new perspective on society and create "a space where children can meet people across different lines of social difference ... providing vantage points from which readers can view multiple lives."²²⁷ It also recalls the findings by Koss and Teale that positive and hopeful endings predominate in children's literature.

222 Ibid., 189.

223 Ibid., 192.

224 Ibid., 223.

225 Ibid.

226 Ibid., 249.

227 Botelho and Rudman, *Critical Multicultural Analysis*, 17.

Guène occasionally provides some contextualising information regarding racist behaviour in the texts. If this does not serve to excuse the behaviour in question, it at least provides an explanation so that the reader can gain some insight, as well as an understanding that issues are rarely black and white. In *Kiffe kiffe demain*, Doria mentions, in passing, that the security guard for her building spent time in Algeria during the war of independence. Hamoudi tells her that he is racist, and she herself thinks perhaps this is why:

...il n'a pas de lobes d'oreilles et qu'il lui manque un pouce à la main gauche. Pour lui, la guerre elle doit pas être encore tout à fait terminée, et je crois que c'est aussi le cas de plein d'autres gens dans ce pays...²²⁸

In her attitude towards the security guard, Doria displays deep understanding of the complex aftermath of war, and while not excusing the security guard's racist attitude, at least demonstrates an attempt to understand the reasons behind it. In one of the chapters narrated by Joël, the reader is afforded some insight into the possible reasons for his racist demeanour. On some level he is aware that he is perceived as an unpleasant man even if he does not necessarily agree:

Il paraît que je suis un homme antipathique. Je dirais plutôt que j'ai reçu moins d'amour et de compassion que ce que je méritais. On me fait de faux procès. Je ne suis pas raciste. J'ai des valeurs et visiblement, ça dérange.²²⁹

He explains that two of his ex-girlfriends left him for other men, one for a "gitan" and the other for a "noir". This has compounded his sense of bitterness and frustration and potentially hardened his opinions against these ethnic groups. At the same time it appears, from the passages that he narrates, that he has a warped and disturbed view of society and his place in it, and using his abandonment in favour of these other men is merely an attempt to excuse his own abhorrent behaviour. Providing some context for racist behaviour allows Guène to demonstrate an understanding of the complex nature of these issues and although she does not excuse the behaviour, the inclusion of these explanations allows her to add depth to characters that would otherwise be villainous caricatures.

228 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 37.

229 Guène, *Les gens du Balto*, 7.

Robert Castel has drawn links between the treatment received by postcolonial minorities in France today, and that experienced by "vagabonds" in pre-industrial society as well as that endured by the proletariat at the beginning of industrialisation, which he deemed "un véritable racismisme anti-ouvrier qui fixait sur la condition prolétarienne."²³⁰ He makes his feelings on this link explicit when he claims that only the terminology has changed, and that the situation – and the discrimination – remains the same: "« Insectes voraces », « tourbe de nomades » ou « nouveaux barbares » autrefois, « racaille », « caïds » ou « voyous » aujourd'hui."²³¹ The treatment received by these previous waves of "unintegrated" minorities shares some similarities with that of the peripheralised residents of the *banlieue* today. In keeping with the desire of these authors to present a realistic, yet more positive, view of their localities to YA readers, the novels contain a relatively small number of racist events and characters, aside from the examples discussed above. The texts are, on the whole, much more preoccupied with integration and its implications for the *banlieue* population. All of the authors are of Algerian descent, and thus the complicated history between France and Algeria plays a role. As the last of the French colonies, and the one with which there had been the closest links, not to mention the one that they had fought hardest to retain, the advent of Algerian independence, according to Todd Shepard, ultimately meant that the "ways the French institutionalized Algerian independence sundered them one from each other."²³² This complete turnaround in the way the people of France thought about Algeria – and by extension the rest of the former colonial possessions – meant there were inevitably going to be problems in attempting to integrate large numbers of former colonial subjects into French society, all the more so in accepting them as French citizens. The consequences of this for the Maghrebi population in France are outlined by Hargreaves and McKinney:

In their everyday dealings with the majority population, Maghrebis as a whole ... cannot escape the generally unstated and often unconscious but nonetheless potent legacy of the colonial era, which continues to color majority perceptions of minority groups. These (mis-) perceptions frequently elide national and ethnic differences, and construct other, racialized barriers.²³³

230 Castel, *La discrimination négative*, 68.

231 Ibid., 71.

232 Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, 272.

233 Alec Hargreaves and Mark McKinney, eds., *Post-Colonial Cultures in France* (London: Routledge, 1997), 18.

The old dichotomies that existed in the colonies (European/Arab, Christian/Muslim, French/Native, and Citizen/Subject) have not been effaced as thoroughly as they could have been and are still in evidence in the treatment received by the Maghrebi population in France. Azouz Begag highlights what he sees as a requirement to move beyond the "integration" debate, towards more inclusive terminology:

There is now an entire generation for whom the word *integration* evokes ambiguity, trickery, and disillusionment. The word now crackles provocatively and aggressively in the ears of young ethnics. *Integrated?* They already are! They are part of French society. They were born into it! They are French *by birth* but *not recognised* as such.²³⁴

Begag claims that the word integration:

...has wilted and lost its power... For an entire generation the rhetoric of integration has de facto held them on a horizontal plane. The time has come to move to a vertical plane... The word *mobility* best corresponds to the new outlook that France needs if it is to save what is left of 1789.²³⁵

Nevertheless, integration still remains a cause for concern for those on the periphery, who can struggle in the face of discrimination, even if they consider themselves French, having been born and reared in France. Matthew Moran quotes a 20 year old resident of Villiers-en-Bel:

Moi, je comprends pas ce qu'ils veulent dire par intégration. Ça je comprends pas. C'est quoi de l'intégration? C'est d'être né en France, d'avoir grandi en France? C'est ça l'intégration? ... parce que là je suis intégré alors. Je suis né en France, j'ai grandi en France... je suis intégré! C'est quoi alors?²³⁶

The novels under investigation highlight integration in differing ways, emphasising the problems that can be confronted by those on the margins of society. Yet they never present the problem of integration as insurmountable or as something that causes bitterness.

In *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* the issue of integration is almost entirely focalised through Dounia. Since early adolescence, Dounia harboured a strong desire to be more French, something which Mourad humorously termed her "Christinisation" – her desire

234 Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality*, 91.

235 Ibid., 91-2.

236 Moran, "Opposing Exclusion," 304.

to be called Christine rather than Dounia. This desire leads to conflict with her parents, as she wishes for more freedom to emulate her friends, with boyfriends, parties and the opportunity to work, smoke and drink alcohol among some of the issues that are the most contentious. This eventually culminates in a definitive rupture between Mourad's family and his oldest sister, and she severs contact with her family for ten years. In fact, it is only when she begins to appear in the media after embarking on her career in politics that her family discover what she has been doing since she left home. When Mourad eventually reconnects with his sister, because their father has had a stroke, they meet for lunch and he discovers that his sister's *Christinisation* is complete and that "Maintenant, Dounia a une vie de déj' et de psy."²³⁷ He is surprised when she orders a steak tartare, prompting him to claim:

Parce qu'apprendre la langue, respecter les institutions de l'État, épouser la culture du pays en chérissant ses grands auteurs, marcher pour la gloire de la nation, tout ça n'est rien comparé à l'engloutissement de viande hachée crue qu'on écrabouille avec un jaune d'œuf et des condiments.²³⁸

As a result of this conflict with her family, Dounia appears to have developed a bias against her own cultural background. This becomes apparent during her conversation over lunch with Mourad. When Mourad informs her that their other sister, Mina, married a man who is also of North African descent and has three young children, she claims:

Je sais pas, moi, ça m'angoisse, ces parcours tracés d'avance. Pourquoi mener une vie monolithique, marcher dans les pas de maman ? Travailler à la maison de retraite, épouser un blédard... J'espère que c'est pas un hystérique qui va la coincer à la maison, la forcer à porter la voile, macho et compagnie.²³⁹

Mourad is deeply dismayed at this attitude, even more so when she goes on to claim that she feels she could not be with someone with whom she shares a background, as they would be too similar and thus "ça prive de beaucoup d'enrichissement."²⁴⁰ Later, Dounia invites Mourad to a dinner at the Swedish ambassador's house, so that she can

237 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 139.

238 Ibid., 169.

239 Ibid., 170.

240 Ibid., 171.

introduce him to her boyfriend, former interior minister Bernard Tartois. Over dinner, Tartois speaks at length about his views on assimilation and integration. Responding to a question posed by the visiting Swedish Integration Minister, he claims:

« Vous voulez que je vous dise, nous vivons une crise identitaire sans précédent ! »
Ensuite, il a fait le tour de l'actu de ces cinq dernières années en quinze minutes. Il a parlé de « difficultés d'acculturation » pour certaines populations, des musulmans qui prient dans la rue, de la pauvreté du langage des banlieues, du voile à l'école, du repli communautaire.²⁴¹

Mourad argues with this, claiming that Tartois' thesis demonstrates that he has "un problème avec l'Islam".²⁴² Despite protestations from Tartois and Dounia, Mourad remains convinced that Tartois is using tired clichés, even going so far as to hold up Dounia as an example of successful integration, yet still highlighting her North African origins while trying to prove his point that they are unimportant, prompting Mourad to claim:

Bah non... Pas *peu importe*, puisque vous venez de les souligner là, devant tout le monde, nos origines en l'occurrence... Je veux dire, pour être français à part entière, il faudrait pouvoir nier une partie de son héritage, de son identité, de son histoire, ses croyances, et même en admettant qu'on y arrive, on est sans cesse ramené à ses origines...²⁴³

Mourad ends the debate, and ceases trying to persuade Tartois of his opinion, as he believes he will not succeed: "Ce qui me gêne chez les types comme Tartois, c'est leur bienveillance louche, leur racisme non assumé, leurs certitudes enrobées dans un vocabulaire choisi avec soin, et ces confusions volontaires qu'ils passent leur temps à semer."²⁴⁴ Guène's inclusion of this debate between Mourad and Tartois is significant as it allowed her to voice the frustrations felt by the immigrant community in France. Framing these frustrations via a debate with the Interior Minister allows Guène to present the reader with both the official government position as well as the views of someone who has lived through the situation. This juxtaposition of arguments highlights both the inadequacies of the government position and the frustration of those who live on the margins.

241 Ibid., 282.

242 Ibid., 283.

243 Ibid., 285-6.

244 Ibid., 292.

Elsewhere, Malik's friend Sam, not known for his football skills during his youth (indeed, he copied his style from Malik) entered a professional football academy upon leaving school, and went on to become a famous footballer for *Paris Saint-Germain*. In fact he became the most successful striker in the *Ligue 1*, the French domestic league. This is difficult for Malik, as he is both jealous of Sam's success, and resentful at the knowledge that he too could have had this life if he had not always been striving to be average and unremarkable. There is an important message here for Rachedi's YA readers, regardless of their social circumstances, as it demonstrates that talent alone will not suffice and that success requires hard work and dedication. Upon Sam's return to the *cit * after signing to *PSG*, there is a celebration of his success in the locality. The mayor makes a speech in which he praises Sam:

Sam est notre fiert , il est la preuve qu'avec de la volont  et du talent, on peut toujours s'en sortir. Nous sommes heureux de donner les cl s de la commune au plus bel exemple d'int gration et de r ussite de notre ville.²⁴⁵

No doubt partly as a result of his anger and bitterness, Malik is incensed by the speech: "Et blablabla. *Exemple, int gration, r ussite, s'en sortir*, le maire, il enfilait les lieux communs dans un discours d mago-type. Certes, les terrains en stabilis  qui germaient dans la cit  avaient produit *une* r ussite ; pour combien d' checs ?"²⁴⁶ This point has echoes in two of Fa za Gu ne's novels, *Kiffe kiffe demain* and *Du r ve pour les oufs*, where the characters frequently hold opinions regarding the various means that can be used to "escape" from the *banlieue*. As discussed in Chapter Two, *Kiffe kiffe demain*'s Doria learns from Hamoudi that "il n'y a pas que le rap et le foot. L'amour c'est aussi une fa on de s'en sortir".²⁴⁷ This reveals the teenager's idealism and naivet , but nevertheless echoes the belief of some *banlieue* residents that rap and football are the sole means to a better life. On the other hand *Du r ve pour les oufs* highlights the negative side of this perception, as Foued's career guidance teacher attempts to dissuade him from a career as a professional football player. Although Ahl me is angry about this, the position taken by the teacher appears, in this instance, needlessly harsh, although it is somewhat understandable. This career guidance counsellor had probably heard the same thing repeatedly from other students, most of whom failed in their attempt at such a lucrative career. Perhaps the most salient point

245 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 141.

246 Ibid., 142.

247 Gu ne, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 153.

about the episode in *Le petit Malik*, however, is Malik's question regarding how many failures there were for Sam's success story. This highlights the need to not allow the success of a few to be taken to indicate successful integration for a whole community. Rachedi makes this point a central concern of a chapter of *Le petit Malik*, when Malik laments the fact that a lawyer who is defending one of his friends in court is:

...le genre de personnes qu'on ne voit jamais à la télé pour représenter une intégration réussie. Y avait aussi Bachir le comptable, Madjid l'informaticien, Abdel le propriétaire de la boulangerie, Ramzy le chercheur au CNRS ... Pourtant moi, à dix piges, des gars comme eux, ça m'aurait servi d'exemples.²⁴⁸

This statement reveals much about the author's own attitude to integration. Rachedi, who formerly worked in finance before becoming an author, was never invited to participate in a debate or a radio broadcast dealing with such issues from his position as a worker in the financial sector, but as an author he frequently receives invitations to such events. With Malik's words, he makes the point, albeit gently, that it might be far more productive if successful local people, with their own businesses and steady jobs, were highlighted as the success stories of integration, rather than just those who attain glittering careers in the public eye – an option that is not available to everyone.

Malik learns a difficult lesson when he begins his job at Creditis, mentioned in Chapter Two:

Un jour, on m'a expliqué qu'il valait mieux que je m'appelle Marc. Marc, Malik, c'était le même prénom à une syllabe près, non ? J'étais téléopérateur chez Creditis, un établissement de crédit à la consommation. Le principe était simple, on prêtait une somme à un pauvre type et on le plumait en intérêts. Sur les gros coups, on récupérait deux fois plus qu'on avançait. Du racket ? Non, le fonctionnement normal de la société capitaliste. Et le capitalisme, ça passe mieux quand on s'appelle Marc plutôt que Malik.²⁴⁹

This story mirrors an event that occurred during Rachedi's schooldays,²⁵⁰ when a teacher professed to him that she had difficulty with the name Mabrouck, and so would call him Marc in her classes. This story, both in the author's real life and in its fictional retelling, is a harsh indictment of closed-minded attitudes regarding immigrants and their descendants, and raises questions about who is really to blame for the perceived lack of integration

248 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 180.

249 Ibid., 155.

250 As outlined in his blog.

on the part of this demographic. In *Creditis*, there are two others who must also use a pseudonym: Redouane was called Édouard, and Mahmadou became Malo. Ironically, despite this imposed name-change, Malik actually feels "integrated" as a result of having employment and thus being integrated into society, although he informs the reader of this in his usual self-effacing manner and with not a little irony: "C'est vrai qu'avec mes costards bouffants à quat'sous, mes cravates en polyester chiffonnées, j'avais l'air d'un clown. Je m'intégrais."²⁵¹ These examples demonstrate that integration, or lack thereof, remains a significant issue for the *banlieue* population. Yet, at no point do these authors dwell in negativity or bitterness about this. In fact, they frequently use humour to deride these issues and deprive them of power, and some, including Mourad, use intelligent argument in order to demonstrate the hypocrisy of those who speak of integration while still placing emphasis on the ethnic origins of France's minority groups.

Not all of the problems faced by minority groups in France can be explained by mitigating circumstances, some are based on mere discrimination and intolerance. That is not to say that all French people harbour anti-immigration feelings, but it cannot be denied that there will always be a certain percentage of the population – not just in France, but worldwide – who have prejudices against those who are different. In terms of the situation under discussion, this racist faction of the population must accept that the presence of this minority demographic in France is unlikely to change. In the words of Tahar Ben Jelloun, "Le Tiers-Monde est là, à deux pas du centre parisien. Le Maghreb est sur Seine. Il suffit de vouloir le regarder."²⁵² The authors under investigation present a realistic image of racism, without according it too central a role in the texts. They also highlight the multicultural nature of the peripheral zones, and underscore the divisions in existence between many cultures. Tensions exist between many national cultures and are not confined to those commonly linked with the *banlieues* in the French imagination. This reinforces the message that subjugated and oppressed populations can frequently harbour feelings of deep resentment, and thus in order to attain a truly equal society, in which there is no further need for discourses of integration, both sides of cultural divides must work towards this goal. As authors of North African descent living in the *banlieues*, it is important that their texts acknowledge that racism exists. The dismissive manner in which racists are treated, however, with humorous derision, helps to temper the negative impact of their behaviour. Cyrille François claims that: "L'humour permet

251 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 156.

252 Ben Jelloun, *Hospitalité française*, 192.

de déconstruire efficacement les images du discours central tout en témoignant d'un plaisir d'écriture manifeste ... par le biais de l'écriture d'un regard à la fois naïf, enfantin mais grave, il déshabille les clichés et discours dominants."²⁵³ In conjunction with the hopeful note with which the novels end, this humour serves to undermine the power of these issues and they, *Kiffer sa race* in particular, may provide a signpost to a brighter and more equal future for YA readers.

4.5 Conclusion

Several factors contribute to the misrepresentation of the *banlieues* in French society, including: conflicts with police and the justice system which sometimes lead to violence; the manner in which the media misrepresent the *banlieues*; political manipulation of the situation of the *banlieues* and the racism that members of these communities can endure. These interconnected factors combine and, in conjunction with the factors outlined in Chapter Three, create difficulties for the already marginalised residents of the peripheral zones. Yet the manner in which these issues are treated in the texts helps to undermine the power that they hold over the lives of the *banlieue* residents. A mixture of humour and derision and, in some cases, explicit condemnation allows the authors to highlight that although these problems exist, they do not require a central role in the narratives. By extension, it is not necessary that they be accorded a central role in the real-world *banlieues*. The positive and hopeful note used by the authors reassures their YA readers that the future can be brighter, without being overly simplistic and sentimental, and thus may empower young readers to aspire to more. Additionally, the potential of humour in combatting stereotypes and racist attitudes, and its ability to undermine these negative representations, was highlighted. Cyrille François describes how:

Dans les écritures de la banlieue ... cet humour se manifeste par des situations incongrues, par les jeux de mots et les jeux sur les références intertextuelles. Le langage use de l'ironie, de l'incongruité des images, de l'hybridation des niveaux de langue ou encore des références. C'est une façon d'investir les représentations, de prendre distance et position vis-à-vis d'elles.²⁵⁴

253 François, "Des littératures de l'immigration," 151.

254 Ibid.

These strategies are used by the authors to demonstrate to their YA readers that they need not be defined by commonly held stereotypes, nor should they accord undue importance to negative representations, but they can instead act to change these representations. This is highly important for the empowerment of these young people and, by combatting and undermining such negative perceptions, these authors may encourage them to strive for a more inclusive society.

Chapter 5. “C’est comme le scénario d’un film dont on est les acteurs”¹: Stylistic Techniques in the Texts

Stylistic choices affect the manner in which a work is received, and can determine whether authors achieve the impact they desire. David Lodge considers that the point of view from which a story is told is “arguably the most important single decision that the novelist has to make, for it fundamentally affects the way readers will respond, emotionally and morally, to the fictional characters and their actions.”² Stylistic choices thus have the ability to increase reader engagement and identification with the protagonists. This increased engagement can encourage greater reflection on the themes and the message of the text which, in the case of the optimistic message these authors employ, is significant. This chapter will examine the stylistic devices used by Guène, Rachedi and Mahany in order to empower their YA audience. It will examine the following authorial techniques: the narrative voice of the novels; the focalising and characterising techniques that the authors use; the organisation of the novels; the element of fantasy present in many of the texts; and the intertextual references that also appear.

5.1 Narrative Voice

Gérard Genette described the *voice* of a narrative as elements “dealing with the way in which the narrating itself is implicated in the narrative ... and along with that its two protagonists: the narrator and his audience, real or implied.”³ Narrative voice in literature affects the manner in which readers respond to and identify, or not, with the characters and their stories, as “the distances between character, author, and reader are established through the narrator.”⁴ This becomes even more important when writing for children and young adults, particularly socially engaged writing which aims to encourage readers to consider ideas and social issues from new perspectives. As will be shown, the most common form of narration in literature for YA readers is first-person narration, or what

1 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 19.

2 David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (London: Penguin, 1992), 26.

3 Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 31.

4 Mary Ellen Doyle, *The Sympathetic Response: George Elliot’s Fictional Rhetoric* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981), 12.

Genette termed "homodiegetic" narration,⁵ and indeed this is the case for the majority of the novels in the corpus. Andrea Schwenke Wyle, whose research focuses on first-person narration in children's literature claims:

Children's and young adult first-person narratives in which events are narrated roughly within a year after they have taken place are particularly engaging because of their immediacy. This kind of immediacy, sustained throughout an entire novel, appears to be one distinguishing feature of children's literature.⁶

First-person narration is prevalent in YA literature as it enables young readers to identify with the protagonist, enter their world and see the events that are being narrated from the perspective of that character. First-person narration is not unproblematic, however, as "Reliability is difficult to measure, primarily because of the immediacy of the narration and because of the lack of other voices and information; these are the hallmarks of immediate-engaging-first-person narration."⁷ Unreliable narrators are those who the reader does not fully trust, or believe. The point of unreliable narration is, according to Lodge, "to reveal in an interesting way the gap between appearance and reality, and to show how human beings distort or conceal the latter."⁸ Despite concerns over reliability, viewing the narrated events through the eyes of a single protagonist allows readers to be "drawn closer to those people – we identify, sympathize, perhaps empathize, and even agonize as we experience the events through their eyes."⁹ Thus first-person narration can be a very useful way for socially engaged authors of novels for young adults to make their point with maximum effect on their readers. Most of the novels in the corpus are written in the first-person, with *Le poids d'une âme* the only novel making use of third-person narration, what Genette terms "heterodiegetic" narration.¹⁰

5 A narrative style "with the narrator present as a character in the story he tells." Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 245. Although Genette deemed the terms "first-person" and "third-person" narration wholly inadequate and unfit, their widespread use in children's and YA criticism renders them appropriate for the purposes of this thesis. His five "functions of the narrator" will, however, be explored throughout this discussion. Of his first such function, *narrative function*, he claims: "no narrator can turn away from [it] without at the same time losing his status as narrator", [ibid., 255.] and thus this will be assumed to be a function of all of the narrators of the corpus without further examination.

6 Wyle, "First-Person Narration," 185.

7 Ibid., 187.

8 Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*, 155. This will be particularly significant in relation to *Les gens du Balto*, as will be shown below.

9 Candida Gillis, "Multiple Voices, Multiple Genres: Fiction for Young Adults," *The English Journal* 92, no. 2 (2002): 52.

10 A narrative style "with the narrator absent from the story he tells." [Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 244-5.]

Wyile differentiates between different types of first-person narration, which are productive in understanding the narrative choices made by the authors under investigation in this thesis. The main types of first-person narration she distinguishes are immediate-engaging-first-person narration and distant-engaging-first-person narration. Wyile claims: "One of the main differences between distant- and immediate-engaging narration is the narrator's overt acknowledgment of the time that has passed between the events being narrated and their telling."¹¹ She claims that this distinction is necessary because, while a time lapse between events and their telling "does not preclude an engaging narrative"¹², it does alter the manner in which the story is told, as the time lapse provides space for the narrator to reflect upon the events and the effect that they have had, both on the narrator themselves, as well as on other characters. *Kiffe kiffe demain*, *Du rêve pour les oufs* and *Kiffer sa race* are all written in a confessional, almost stream of consciousness style, using immediate-engaging first-person narration. Each of these narrators – Doria, Ahlème and Sabrina – draws the reader into her story, which is happening as it is being narrated, for the most part in the present tense. Only occasionally, as in the case of Ahlème's recounting of her mother's death in the Algerian civil war, or when Doria talks about her father leaving, do these narrators discuss events that have happened in the past. They occasionally fulfil Genette's *testimonial function*, "the one accounting for the part the narrator as such takes in the story he tells ... as when the narrator indicates the source of his information, or the degree of precision of his own memories, or the feelings which one or another episode awakens in him."¹³ Examples of this occur when Doria is discussing the events of October 17th 1961, and informs the reader: "J'ai emprunté des bouquins sur ça à la bibliothèque de Livry-Gargan",¹⁴ or when Ahlème, telling of her mother's death and her subsequent departure from Algeria, claims: "Je n'ai plus remis les pieds en Algérie, je ne sais pas si c'est à cause de la peur ou d'autre chose. J'espère que j'aurais la force d'y retourner un jour ... et oublier l'odeur de sang."¹⁵ These narrators bring the reader into their daily lives, which is an important factor in demonstrating the normal, almost mundane, nature of life in the *banlieues* to readers from outside of these zones. Yet there are some differences in the ways in which these narrators operate. Doria

11 Wyile, "First-Person Narration," 189.

12 Ibid.

13 Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 256.

14 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 164.

15 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 65.

speaks to the reader almost as if she was writing in a diary, whereas Ahlème and Sabrina are slightly less direct, as if they were relating a long story, albeit still in a confessional style. Sabrina occasionally addresses the reader directly, as in the example discussed in Chapter Three, when she lists off numerous stereotypes about her family before abruptly exclaiming: "...je vous menais en bateau. Sérieusement, vous croyez que ma vie, c'est ce ramassis de clichés?"¹⁶ This has long been a feature of an engaging narratorial style, as outlined by Robyn Warhol in 1986: "Whereas a distancing narrator ... often refers to 'the Reader' or 'my reader,' an engaging narrator, very much like an evangelical preacher, more frequently speaks to 'you.'"¹⁷ Sabrina's use of this type of direct address is thus a common example of an engaging narrative technique. Additionally, it is in line with Genette's *communication function*, which "concerns the narrator's orientation toward the narratee – his care in establishing or maintaining with the narratee a contact, indeed a dialogue."¹⁸ Ahlème is somewhat more mature than either of the other two narrators, although this is possibly explained by her greater age – Ahlème is twenty-four whereas Sabrina and Doria are only fifteen. In *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, Mourad is also an immediate-engaging narrator, but his narrative style is slightly more formal than that of Doria, Sabrina or Ahlème. The narrative also contains a much greater degree of reflection than any of the others, perhaps because Mourad is undergoing a transformative period of his life and this affords him greater opportunity to reflect on the events of his childhood, as he narrates his present for the reader. The narrative style employed by the protagonists thus engages the reader, and the confessional manner in which they are written encourages empathy with these characters and their lives.

Wyle explains that the difference in first-person narration in books for young adults, as opposed to books for adults is:

Young adult literature is preoccupied with self-development. The narrator in first-person young adult literature is not always cognizant of this development to the extent adult narrators have taught us (adult readers) to expect. In much adult literature, older, wiser narrators reflect back on their past and narrate the events that have brought them to their present vantage point.¹⁹

16 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 17.

17 Robyn R. Warhol, "Toward a Theory of the Engaging Narrator: Earnest Interventions in Gaskell, Stowe, and Eliot," *PMLA* 101, no. 5 (1986): 813.

18 Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 255.

19 Wyle, "First-Person Narration," 186.

In this sense, distant-engaging first-person narration exists somewhere between these two poles, in that the narrator has had some time to reflect, but has not yet had the opportunity to do this with the maturity associated with adulthood. As outlined in earlier chapters, *Le petit Malik* and *La petite Malika* are structurally identical, with each chapter comprising a single episode from a particular year in the protagonists' lives, from the age of five until they are twenty-one. Although the highly innovative narrative structure of these novels covers such a long time-span in the protagonists' lives, the episodic nature of the narration means that they remain, for the most part, immediate-engaging in their narrative style. Yet there are elements of distant-engaging narration present also, as when, at the end of an early chapter of *Le petit Malik*, Malik claims: "Plus personne ne m'a emmerdé pendant le reste de ma scolarité."²⁰ Another example occurs in *La petite Malika* when fourteen-year-old Malika recounts a story that does not take place during the course of the narrative: "Quelques années plus tard, j'ai croisé Mohamed main dans la main avec un autre homme au Marais. Son air épanoui contrastait avec sa moue fermée de l'époque. En s'assumant, il était devenu d'une beauté inouïe."²¹ There is no indication of when, exactly, the events are being told, although the earlier chapters are narrated in a child-like manner, reflecting the younger age of the narrators. As the novels progress, however, the narration becomes more mature and reflective, as both narrators experience profound revelations about themselves and their nature. This innovative narrative style allows readers to feel a deep sense of connection to the characters: by the end of the novels, they have shared in twenty two significant events in the characters' lives and watched their growth and development over the course of many years. This may also render YA readers from outside the *banlieues* more inclined to form their own opinions on social issues, in particular as regards the peripheral zones, as they witness the profound effect that the events of the novels have on the protagonists and their outlook. There are some minor differences between the narrative styles of the two protagonists. Probably owing to the exceptional levels of intelligence of this character, Malika's narrative is sprinkled with many more intertextual and philosophical references,²² and she is much more introspective than Malik, whereas Malik is more preoccupied with telling the stories of others – as in the chapter where he discusses a local rapper, for instance.²³

20 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 29.

21 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 109.

22 This will be discussed in Section 5.5.

23 This will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Roderick McGillis sees engaging narration as one of the principal distinctions between literature for adults and literature for children and young adults, claiming that the voice of the narrator in books for children will seek to "embrace" the reader, drawing them into the narrative:

If anything differentiates narratives for adults from those of children, then I suggest this difference resides in aspects of the telling: tone or mood. The narrative voice, whether that be the voice of the narrator or the voice of an implied author behind the narrator, will embrace us in a children's book. This does not mean that such books cannot be complex in theme or structure or image, only that the voice that tells us the story is warm and reliable. And by reliable, I mean reliable in the sense that we trust the narrator not consciously to lead us astray...²⁴

Thus an engaging narrator can be said to be a defining feature of young adult literature, as it draws the young reader into the narrative, encouraging them to view the events being recounted from the point of view of the narrator, which is a crucial element of socially engaged literature, which needs to draw readers into the narrative, because when a reader is engaged by a text, he:

... submits to the book before him, abandoning his worldly existence to assume a vicarious one while he reads. He lives the problem which he himself helps to create, placing himself in a most sympathetic position with relation to what the writer wishes to say.²⁵

Les gens du Balto and *Le poids d'une âme* are completely different in narrative style to the other texts under investigation. *Les gens du Balto* is a choral novel,²⁶ with eight different narrators appearing throughout the novel, two of whom – twins, Nadia and Ali Chacal – appear together in each instance. Most of the narration takes the form of interviews with the police, following the murder of one of the narrators, who nevertheless continues to narrate after his death. The inclusion of Joël as a narrator is reminiscent of

24 Roderick McGillis, "The embrace: Narrative voice and children's books," *Canadian Children's Literature* 63 (1991): 38.

25 Charles W. Whiting, "The Case for "Engaged" Literature," *Yale French Studies* 1, no. 1 (1948): 88.

26 For in-depth discussion on choral and collective novels, see: Antonio Bibbò, "Characters as Social Document in Modernist Collective Novels: the case of Manhattan Transfer," in *Literature and the notion of "Document"*. *Hybrid and Visual Paths in Western Literature of the 1930s*, ed. C. Van den Bergh, S. Bonciarelli, and A. Reverseau (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, forthcoming); Stacy Lavin and Wesley Beal, "Theorizing Connectivity," Special Issue, *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (2011).

Alice Sebold's 2002 novel, *The Lovely Bones*,²⁷ which the brutally raped and murdered Susie Salmon narrates posthumously, describing the time she spends watching over her family and friends and her attempts to come to terms with her premature death. Sebold's narrative technique was described in the *London Review of Books* as "fictional innovation",²⁸ and the inclusion of Joël as a narrator in *Les gens du Balto* can be seen as similarly innovative. Each of the narrators provides a continuous stream of dialogue, and the reader must infer from the text that the characters – with the exception of the victim – are all speaking in response to questions from police officers. The multiple voices of the various narrators enable the reader to slowly form a clear picture of what happened, by combining the different stories. In relation to her choice of narrative style in this novel, Guène claimed in interview:

Je n'ai pas réellement l'impression d'avoir pris un virage mais plutôt d'être allée au bout d'une envie. La construction d'un personnage, mon appropriation de sa vie, son langage, l'animer, c'est ce que je préfère dans le processus d'écriture, alors j'avais vraiment envie de confronter plusieurs points de vue, de faire vivre des personnages très différents les uns des autres et de tisser une sorte de toile d'araignées.²⁹

Each of her narrators is immediate-engaging in style, and although they are addressing police officers, the voices of the latter are omitted, so it seems as if the reader is the addressee. All of the narrators in this text are unreliable, as they all view things from a personal perspective and all invariably mislead the police throughout the course of the novel, omitting things in earlier passages that they are later forced to recall. Each of them also discusses their relationships and interactions with the other narrators in the novel. According to Candida Gillis, with this type of narration:

Our loyalties are not to one but to the whole. And while we become aware of how each character sees and responds to events, we are also aware of how the events affect the characters' relationships. We acquire a kind of intimate omniscience by viewing the world through multiple lenses. We are able to map the territory in a way no one single traveller can.³⁰

27 Sebold, *Lovely Bones*.

28 Rebecca Mead, "Immortally Cute," *London Review of Books* 24, no. 20 (2002): 18.

29 Hubert Artus, "Faïza Guène : « Je n'insulte en rien la noblesse de la littérature »,» *Cabinet de lecture (blog)*, 2008, Accessed: October 19 2014, <http://blogs.rue89.nouvelobs.com/cabinet-de-lecture/faiza-guene-je-ninsulte-en-rien-la-noblesse-de-la-litterature>.

30 Gillis, "Multiple Voices, Multiple Genres," 52.

This is only partially the case with *Les gens du Balto*. The reader does acquire an intimate omniscience by seeing the events of the previous few days through the eyes of multiple characters, and thus maps the territory in a way that would otherwise be impossible, as suggested by Gillis. I would argue, however, that in this case, the readers' loyalty is not to all of the characters, but to none. This is because all of the characters are unlikable or unsympathetic in some way, and deliberately mislead the reader. Nevertheless, the narration is effective, in that it draws the reader in, encouraging them to view events from the perspective of the particular character narrating at any given time. Furthermore, in encouraging her YA readers to interpret the novel and its many perspectives to arrive at the truth, Guène simultaneously enables them to reflect on the relativity of contemporary views about the *banlieues* – each perspective presented in this novel is so flawed and subjective that it may encourage readers to realise that the views of outsiders, and members of the media in particular, are at times based just as much on incomplete and subjective opinions as are the various narratives presented in *Les gens du Balto*.

Finally, *Le poids d'une âme* is mostly narrated in the third person by an omniscient³¹ narrator. The events concern Lounès Amri, as the main protagonist, but the narrator also informs the reader of the actions of several people in his immediate circle – family, friends, teachers – as well as several people who will touch his life over the course of the events being narrated, such as a local reporter and the police inspector. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator usually tells the reader about one character per chapter, but as the story progresses, and the interconnected role each plays is woven more tightly, several characters appear per chapter. This innovative narrative technique highlights the connection between content and form: the increasingly interconnected nature of the plot is here mirrored in the novel's structure. The action – and this novel, more than any of the others, is action-packed – is narrated in an engaging style and it seems that little time has passed between the events occurring and their re-telling by the narrator. The narrator draws us into the action, feeding the reader snippets of information about each interconnected character at a time, as the outcome of the action is slowly revealed. Some of this information seems irrelevant at the time – and in particular, the story of the rope-maker and his family that is woven throughout the third section of the novel – yet

31 One of two main types of third-person narrator (the other being third-person limited), a third-person omniscient narrator is not a character in the story, but reports the actions of multiple characters and has extensive knowledge about the events that unfold. For further discussion of omniscient narration, as well as an elaboration of research arguing against the existence of such omniscience in narration, see: Jonathan Culler, "Omniscience," *Narrative* 12 (2004).

most of it turns out to be pertinent at the *dénouement*. Towards the end of the novel, there is a significant change in the narration of the text. Previous to this, as stated above, all of the events have been narrated in the third person. The last chapter before the epilogue, however, marks a departure as it is a first-person narration from Lounès' point of view. This narrative technique brings the reader into greater proximity to Lounès and his turbulent emotions at this time, as he believes he is about to be deported and attempts to hang himself. The shift in narrative perspective reflects Rachedi's desire to draw the reader closer to Lounès and thus empathise with this young man trapped by a series of escalating circumstances which he is powerless to control. Giving Lounès his own voice for the final chapter is a means of empowering him, and by addressing the reader directly he is able to express his feelings about the events in a clear and forthright manner. The reader feels the palpable despair expressed by Lounès in what he believes to be his final moments. It is thus a great relief, although unsurprising (the reader is aware that the rope Lounès is using in his suicide attempt is defective), when the rope snaps and he fails in his attempt to take his life. The change in narrative style allows the reader to be directly involved in the action at the novel's emotional climax, and is thus an important technique allowing a closer understanding, and greater identification with the character and the events he has endured.

Guène, Rachedi and Mahany thus use differing narrative techniques throughout their various novels in order to meet their goals, allowing the authors to progress the action of the novels at their desired pace and encourage their readers to identify with their protagonists and empathise with their stories. In this way, they are able to highlight the situation facing *banlieue* residents, without emphasising the problems or dwelling in negativity, affording readers an insight into the realities of *banlieue* life through the eyes of characters they come to know intimately. The manner in which the stories are told will contribute to the empowerment of their YA readers, as they internalise the empowering message of the texts. This fulfils a final narratorial function outlined by Genette, the *ideological function*, whereby "the narrator's interventions, direct or indirect, with regard to the story can also take the more didactic form of an authorized commentary on the action."³² These narrators use indirect means in order to perform this didactic or ideological function and, in so-doing, may aid in the empowerment of young people from the *banlieues*.

32 Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 256.

5.2 Focalisation and Characterisation

Authors use specific techniques of focalisation and characterisation to provide readers with information, and allow them to discover and learn about the characters' personalities, as well as understand the viewpoint from which the story is being told. Focalisation is the perspective through which the story is told, regardless of who is narrating, whereas characterisation is the means through which an author – directly and indirectly – describes and provides information about the characters in the text. It is through these devices that the information the reader receives is filtered, and these tactics are used to encourage and persuade readers to adopt a particular point of view. This section will discuss each of these concepts in turn, as well as analysing the manner in which they are used in the primary texts.

5.2.1 Focalisation

John Stephens states that "Identification with focalizers is one of the chief methods by which a text socializes its readers, as they efface their own selfhood and internalize the perceptions and attitudes of the focalizer and are thus reconstituted as subjects within the text."³³ Gérard Genette first introduced the term focalisation in 1972, defining it as "a restriction imposed on the information provided by a narrator about his characters."³⁴ Since then the concept has been significantly developed by others working in the field of narratology. Many of these developments and refinements, and in particular, those of Mieke Bal – with whom Genette himself strongly disagrees – are highly complex and involve the use of equations in order to establish various levels and depths of focalisation in a particular text. This section aims only to give an outline of the focalisation strategies used by the authors in the corpus, and thus will adhere to the three-fold distinction between the levels of focalisation, as initially proposed by Genette: zero focalisation, internal focalisation and external focalisation. For Genette:

A nonfocalized text, or zero focalization, means that the narrator is unlimited spatially and unrestricted in psychological access to the characters. In internal focalization, the narrator is limited spatially but has access to the mind of the focal character. External focalization also involves a spatial limitation, but this time the narrator has no psychological privilege and is limited to the role of witness.³⁵

33 John Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (London: Longman, 1992), 81.

34 William F. Edmiston, "Focalization and the First-Person Narrator: A Revision of the Theory," *Poetics Today* 10, no. 4 (1989): 729.

35 *Ibid.*, 730.

Thus, at first glance, it would appear that texts narrated in the first-person can be considered to have internal focalisation, whereas third-person narration can have either zero or external focalisation. William F. Edmiston claims that there is some inconsistency within the conflation of internal focalisation and first-person narration, as "Genette has defined internal focalization as a situation in which the narrator says only what the character knows, and an FPN [first-person narrator] usually says *more* than his younger self knew at the moment of event."³⁶ So, for Edmiston, the first-person narrator cannot always be regarded as internally focalised although, as will be shown, the first-person narrators in the novels under investigation tend towards internal focalisation.

Genette makes a further distinction in internal focalisation, whereby it is broken down into sub-categories, and can be either fixed, variable or multiple. In fixed internal focalisation, the reader views the events from the viewpoint of only one character, whereas in multiple and variable focalisation, there are several different focalisers throughout a text, the difference being that in variable focalisation, there is still only one focaliser at a given time, whereas with multiple focalisation, events may be presented from several different perspectives within a single scene. According to Wylie, "In immediate-engaging-first-person narration the narrating agent and the focalizer are the same 'person.' Thus, first-person narration can be an intimately engaging and insightful form because the focalizer is restricted."³⁷ As outlined in the section on narrative voice, the majority of texts in the corpus have an immediate-engaging first-person narrative style, because events are being narrated as they unfold or within a very short time period afterward. For the most part then, this renders moot Edmiston's concern that the narrator knows more than the subject of narration – i.e. that the time between the event and its narration has been of sufficient length to enable the narrator to learn more about the event, whether through discussion with other characters, or introspective reflection.

The focalisation strategies used by the authors enable their protagonists to present the reader with their world view in an uninterrupted manner. This renders it easy for the authors to comment on the reality of life in the *banlieues*, without being overly didactic or moralistic as the, predominantly young, protagonists merely narrate the happenings of their daily lives, interspersed with stories from their past. This method enables easier access to the novels for young people from the *banlieue* as, according to Rachedi and Mahany: "ils y ont vu une langue, des descriptions, des univers, qui pouvaient ressembler

36 Ibid.

37 Wylie, "First-Person Narration," 189.

aux leurs"³⁸, allowing them to identify with protagonists who share similar circumstances. For readers from outside the *banlieues*, on the other hand, seeing the reality of *banlieue* life presented in an unmediated manner through the eyes of a young resident will help in countering the negative images of these regions so commonly portrayed in the media.

Kiffe kiffe demain, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, *Kiffer sa race*, *Le petit Malik*, *La petite Malika* and, for the most part, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* all have a fixed internal focalisation. The protagonist-narrator presents the events which occur from their own perspective and the reader is never privy to the thoughts or feelings of the other characters, apart from what information the narrators ascertain from observation or through conversation. This means that, for the duration of their narratives, the reader perceives the events that occur, as interpreted by the protagonist themselves, which can call the reliability of the narrator into question. This brings to mind Wylie's statement, discussed above, on the difficulty of measuring reliability due to a lack of other voices or information. Wylie further claims that when the narrator and the focaliser are the same person, as in immediate-engaging first-person narration, "there is less awareness of limitation because the narrator is not measured against a more experienced self."³⁹ In fact, she continues, explaining that "Although the perspective of an 'I' might be considered even more 'limiting' in fiction narrated by a youth, the purpose of first-person narration is to stick to the narrator's, and in this case the youth's, perspective."⁴⁰

As was the case with the narrative style of the novels, *Les gens du Balto* and *Le poids d'une âme* represent a radical stylistic departure in comparison to the others. While *Les gens du Balto* still has internal focalisation, it is variable internal rather than fixed internal focalisation. This is, naturally enough, a result of the choral nature of the novel; everything is focalised through the character narrating that chapter, allowing them to present their views on the crime that has been committed, the victim, and the other characters in the novel, without anything interrupting their dialogue and perception of events. Although variable internal focalisation operates in a similar manner to fixed internal focalisation, the reader is subject to a number of different, and in some instances contradictory and conflictual, points of view. The change of focalisation from chapter to chapter allows the reader to be drawn into the story, and simultaneously kept in the dark regarding the outcome of the investigation until the end of the book.

38 See Appendix 3.

39 Wylie, "First-Person Narration," 188.

40 Ibid., 189.

Le poids d'une âme, then, is somewhat of an anomaly when compared to the other books in the corpus. It is the only text which has a third-person narrator, as discussed in the section on narrative voice above. The narrator is omniscient and is capable of being in several different places at once meaning, following Genette, that the text has zero focalisation, as the narrator is unrestricted in terms of psychological and spatial access to the characters.⁴¹ Yet the narrator sometimes uses internal focalisation, focusing on the point of view of a particular character. Thus this text employs a combination of multiple and variable internal focalisation. The narrator demonstrates his omniscience by beginning several consecutive chapters, at two different points in the narrative, with the words "Il est 8 heures du matin"⁴², suggesting that the narrator has knowledge of several different simultaneous activities. This narrating of simultaneous events in differing locations is reminiscent of scenes from the 2001 film *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*,⁴³ whereby the narrator opens and closes the film by narrating several simultaneous, yet unrelated, events. Although not a children's film, *Amélie* has a child-like quality, as a result of the protagonist's innocence and naivety, which affords comparison with Rachedi's novel. This shared innovative style allows narrators to demonstrate their omniscience, but also to show the interconnected nature of seemingly separate events. At other points in *Le poids d'une âme*, the narrator informs the reader of the same event from two or more different perspectives. For instance, an incident when an angry crowd of *banlieue* residents attack a bus is seen variously from the point of view of the rioting mob, the bus driver and Tarik Amri, a passenger on the bus at the time.

Stephens claims that early children's literature predominantly relied on focalisation through the narrator, and thus character-focalisers were relatively rare. Since the mid-twentieth century, however:

... sustained character focalisation has become the norm in third-person narration ... Most novels which are third-person narrations now include at least one focalising character, and this has important implications for the kind of language used, because in the vast majority of books written for children there is only one such focaliser, who is a child. Further, as with first-person narrators, readers will tend to align themselves with that focalising character's point of view.⁴⁴

41 Edmiston, "Focalization and the First-Person Narrator," 730.

42 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*.

43 Jean-Pierre Jeunet, *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*, Film, 20th Century Fox, 2001.

44 John Stephens, "Analysing texts: Linguistics and stylistics," in *Understanding Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 1999), 80.

This is the case with *Le poids d'une âme*, as although the text is focalised through various characters at different points, the audience views the action primarily from Lounès' perspective. In particular, the chapter that is narrated in the first-person by Lounès, is naturally the most strongly internally focalised section of the text, as the reader experiences the young man's despair and anguish as he awaits his sentence. This switch in narrative voice and focalisation at the novel's emotional climax is significant, and heightens tension and the reader's emotional involvement in Lounès' fate. This combination of both types of focalisation allows the reader to follow the various threads of the story, gradually learning information about the characters that becomes pertinent at the novel's end. The narrator's omniscience allows him to give a full picture of the circumstances and events as they occur. This overarching perspective works in combination with the internal focalisation that allows the reader to discover the perspective and emotions of the major characters, providing a sense of connection and identification that draws the reader into the narrative.

5.2.2 Characterisation

According to Janet Burroway: "there are five basic *methods of character presentation*"⁴⁵; these different methods are divided into indirect characterisation – or authorial interpretation – and four methods of direct characterisation: appearance, action, speech and thought. Characterisation generally "requires that readers go beyond the information provided in the text; use clues from the text to hypothesize about a character's feelings, actions, beliefs, or values; and use background knowledge gained from other experiences."⁴⁶ The reader must seek information in the text that will enable them to infer character traits, based on information provided by the author or narrator. Readers base these inferences on several different criteria: what the character says and thinks, how they act, what they look like and how others react to them. These various criteria can tell the reader everything they need to know in order to infer what personality traits to ascribe to a particular character or characters. In first-person narration, the reader relies predominantly on the character's own thoughts, words and actions; the reactions of other people, as well as any physical description, is necessarily mediated through the protagonist themselves, and is

45 Janet Burroway, *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*, 5th ed. (New York: Longman, 2000), 102.

46 Donna E. Norton, "Engaging Children in Literature: Modeling inferencing of characterization," *The Reading Teacher* 46, no. 1 (1992): 64.

therefore subject to bias. Wylie claims, however, that in immediate-engaging first-person narration "characterization of the narrators is substantial because everything they say about themselves and others reflects on them in some way."⁴⁷ This is the case for seven out of the eight texts in the corpus, the exception being *Le poids d'une âme*. The entirety of these novels is one long process of characterisation because, as outlined by Wylie, everything these first-person narrators say and do is revealing of their personality. Some episodes reveal more than others, particularly episodes in which the protagonists seem unaware of the significance of their words and actions. For instance, Doria's attitude towards others – in particular her comments on the social workers who work with them, and her psychologist, Mme Burlaud – show her to be, at times, hostile, a result of her pain and confusion in the wake of her father's departure. Yet her increased social conscience and engagement at the end of the novel reflect the fact that this has been a year of change and growth. In *La petite Malika*, Malika's actions towards her friends, Mégane and Sarah, on one of her visits home from Strasbourg, when she acts condescendingly towards them because they do not purchase anything while shopping, reveal a lot about her sense of disconnection from her past. Malika herself is unaware of this until much later in the narrative, but the reader can sense from her actions that she has forgotten her roots. Her gradual withdrawal from her wealthy boyfriend Manuel, later in the novel, shows that this break with her past is not permanent, and that she wishes to reclaim it. Malik, on the other hand, in believing that he can still win a soccer match against *Sam le nullard*, although the latter has since become a professional football player for *PSG*, displays a stubborn streak of which he himself is unaware. Episodes such as these provide young readers with clues and signposts so as to better understand the characters, and come to know their personalities. As a result of this knowledge and understanding, the reader will have increased empathy for the characteristics and attitudes that the protagonists display as well as a greater comprehension of the contribution their underprivileged and marginal status has had on the development of their personalities.

There are also some instances where the actions of others towards the characters reveal something of their personality. This occurs when, for example, in the episode from *La petite Malika* mentioned just above, the reactions of her friends are as revealing as Malika's actions in the first place. In *Kiffe kiffe demain*, the reader learns through the words of others that, as a result of their poverty, Doria is frequently badly dressed. For

47 Wylie, "First-Person Narration," 187.

instance, when a neighbour suggests her for a babysitting job so that she can earn some money, this seemingly kind gesture is followed by the claim: "Comme ça tu pourras t'habiller comme les autres jeunes de ton âge, hein ?"⁴⁸ Or, later in the novel, when out with her mother and she overhears another girl say "Téma la fille, habillée encore plus mal que sa daronne..."⁴⁹ Comments such as these, and the actions of others, can assist in building up a complete picture of a character's traits and attributes, especially when in conjunction with their own thoughts and words.

Le poids d'une âme, once again proving to be an exception, uses a mixture of direct and indirect characterisation throughout the text. In some instances, characters are described by the narrator, and both physical descriptions and information about their personalities are provided. For example, when Lounès meets his friend Hocine, the latter is described by the narrator as follows: "Lunettes fumées, Nike Requin aux pieds, casquette de travers, pantalon large, l'archétype de banlieue."⁵⁰ This humorous description of a *banlieue* stereotype immediately tells the reader a lot about this character, and in particular the image of himself he wishes to portray. In other instances, he sprinkles physical descriptions throughout the text, as when he mentions Fatima Amri's "longs cheveux ébène"⁵¹ or when he describes Lounès as "un grand échalas au visage sec."⁵² Not just limited to physical description, however, he directly describes personality traits and characteristics, such as his claim about Tarik: "Le sens du devoir est une seconde nature chez Tarik"⁵³.

In other instances, however, as in the other texts, the narrator leaves the task of inferring character to the reader, who must decipher their words and actions to reach a conclusion about their personality and attributes. For example, in the midst of a serious discussion that affects the course of the novel, the narrator describes the reaction of each person present to the reader, revealing a lot about their respective personalities: "Demagne pointe Jean-Marc du doigt. Stupéfaction. Tarik s'empourpre, Georges fronce les sourcils, Jean-Marc reste sans réaction, Michel perd son stylo, Christophe et Yazid, indifférents, admirent leurs muscles."⁵⁴ The mixture works to great effect, in particular as the number of characters is much higher in this novel than in the others, and the nature of their

48 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 59.

49 Ibid., 111.

50 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 28.

51 Ibid., 38.

52 Ibid., 17.

53 Ibid., 40.

54 Ibid., 145.

relationships is not as straightforward or clear-cut. The reader thus requires some level of direct characterisation from the author, as the task of characterisation would otherwise be daunting in its scale. Thus, different authors have different strategies for characterisation, and each can be effective, if cleverly and correctly constructed.

5.3 Organisation of the Novels

This section will deal with the various structural elements that make up the stylistic aspect of the novels. It will examine the manner in which the novels are organised, as well as the time frame involved in the narratives, as both of these choices reveal much about the way in which an author desires to reveal information to the reader. This section will also examine the varying approaches regarding headings and chapter structure. These approaches to structure and temporal arc, and whether or not there are illustrations, operate in different ways to draw the reader into the novels, and the narrator's lives, to differing degrees of intimacy and engagement, and with differing results. All of these authorial choices contribute to the impact of the novels.

5.3.1 Novel Format

Kiffe kiffe demain is divided into chapters without headings, and therefore they serve solely to separate the various incidents, stories and reflections that preoccupy the narrator's mind. Chapters are relatively short, allowing the narrator time to discuss the various happenings in her life, while still demonstrating her development over the course of the novel in a relatively speedy manner. The actual plot or action is composed of the day-to-day events of Doria's life, and the conversations she has with others, notably Mme Burlaud and Hamoudi. The novel also includes the occasional recounting of episodes from earlier in her life, and this time for reflection and development is therefore crucial for gaining and retaining the reader's attention and/or identification, and for meeting the aims of the author to demonstrate living in a marginalised place without many resources does not preclude retaining (or regaining) a sense of optimism and a will to work in order to improve one's own situation.

The chapters in *Kiffer sa race* are also quite short, adding a sense of action and movement to the plot, which is once again centred on the protagonist's daily-life. In contrast to Guène's novels, Sabrina does not tell the reader very many stories from her

past, but rather privileges her relationships with other characters in her life. *Kiffer sa race* is the only book in the corpus to contain numbered chapter headings. Similar to Doria, the year that is being narrated is a significant one for Sabrina. All of her major relationships are in transition, and she is preparing to finish school. She is thus quite philosophical in tone, and prone to reflection. She learns a lot, both about herself and her family, during the course of the novel, as she grows up and begins to see her parents as real people. Here again, short chapters allow YA readers to quickly and easily devour the plot, while still allowing time for Sabrina's realisations and observations about the various lives she sees around her, and the situation in the *banlieue* generally.

There are many similarities between *Du rêve pour les oufs* and Guène's first novel, in that the second book also centres on the protagonist's day to day life, looking after her father and brother, trying to get a job and keep the family together and in France. *Du rêve pour les oufs* contains more reflection than *Kiffe kiffe demain*, however, perhaps because Ahlème is nine years older than Doria, and is thus more inclined to self-reflection. In particular, Ahlème frequently refers to her former life in Algeria, her mother's death and the circumstances surrounding the Algerian War, as well as reminiscing on life before her father's accident. Chapters are relatively short here also, the longest one is fifteen pages, although each chapter is titled, and this is the only novel in the corpus to contain a table of contents. Chapter titles are a mix of literal and figurative references to the contents of each chapter. For instance, the chapter in which Ahlème discusses the various minimum-wage jobs that she has held is entitled "Le chat à neuf vies"⁵⁵, the one in which she goes down to the *caves* to speak with the gang members for whom Foued works is called "L'histoire d'en bas"⁵⁶, while the opening chapter is titled simply "Le froid de la grande ville."⁵⁷ The fact that the chapters are titled gives the reader some guidance on what to expect as the overarching theme of the chapter. Similarly to *Kiffe kiffe demain*, the shorter chapter length allows the story to progress swiftly, while still providing sufficient time for Ahlème to reflect on events, both those occurring in the novel and those that took place before the novel's opening. This has the effect of drawing readers in, and they follow the events of the plot, and also bear witness to Ahlème's acceptance that she belongs in France, and that her life is not as bad as she had previously thought. The prevalence of short chapters across these three novels may be as a result of the YA audience. There is no set rule regarding

55 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 34.

56 Ibid., 102.

57 Ibid., 7.

chapter length for YA novels, yet the authors of *Essentials of Young Adult Literature* claim that "For many readers chapter length is important. Shorter chapters appeal to students who read more slowly or whose attention spans are shorter."⁵⁸ Such widespread use of short chapters in these texts may thus simply be as a result of their desire not to alienate YA readers with long chapters.

Un homme, ça ne pleure pas also has chapter titles, although without a table of contents in this instance. Chapter headings, again, give readers an idea of what to expect in terms of theme or content. Short, Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown claim that "Chapter titles can provoke interest, as well as provide the reader with clues to predict story events."⁵⁹ And indeed, in this novel, chapter titles provide a simple indication of what will be discussed in each particular section. For example, two of the early chapters are called simply "Dounia"⁶⁰ and "Mina et moi."⁶¹ Similarly, the one in which Mourad's father suffers from a stroke is titled "Le diagnostic,"⁶² his meeting with Mehdi Mazouani's father occurs in a chapter called "Le fruit qui tombe de l'arbre"⁶³ and the final chapter, comprising the funeral of Mourad's father is called "L'ultime destination."⁶⁴ In contrast to the novels discussed above, some of the chapters are long, meaning that they are much more dense in terms of reflection and introspection, and Mourad relates many stories from the past, in particular about his two sisters. This is perhaps partly as a result of Guène's greater maturity as an author, but also partly because the protagonist in this instance is a self-acknowledged introverted bookworm, with few friends, who spends most of his time in solitude, thinking and reading. This means that the reader shares in Mourad's ponderings, gaining much insight into his character, values and beliefs.

In *Les gens du Balto*, on the other hand, the reader merely gets a glimpse at each of the characters, as the choral nature of the novel means that they each get a relatively short time to speak. The reader does, however, get a sense of their personality, in particular as most of the protagonists are exaggerated in their personality traits in order to account for the short time that we spend with each of them. Chapters are varied in length, with

58 Kathy G. Short, Carl M. Tomlinson, and Carol Lynch-Brown, *Essentials of Young Adult Literature*, 3rd ed. (London: Pearson, 2014), 31.

59 Ibid., 32.

60 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 15.

61 Ibid., 31.

62 Ibid., 57.

63 Ibid., 293.

64 Ibid., 311.

some of their interviews substantially longer than others, and each chapter is headed by the characters' names, as well as several nicknames that others have for them. *Les gens du Balto* also includes media extracts which function primarily as a linking device to progress the story in a neutral and unbiased way, as the perspectives of the various protagonists are often subjective and one-sided. These media reports delineate the three sections of the book, after each narrator has taken a turn speaking. These reports are variously from local newspaper, television and radio reports on the murder and the on-going investigation by the police, and they treat the murder in a manner that contradicts the testimonies given by the protagonists, and thus act as a means of providing a more objective view of the plot. These excerpts may also function to add yet another voice to the polyphonic confusion that comprises a choral novel, and their inclusion represents a somewhat official voice of middle-class France that stands in contrast to the various voices from the periphery that make up the rest of the novel.

Chapter headings in *Le petit Malik* and *La petite Malika* merely state the age of the protagonist at the time that the event comprising that particular chapter occurred, starting at *5 ans* and continuing until *26 ans*. Chapters are, for the most part, quite short, although they do get longer as the characters grow older and become more prone to self-reflection. The episodic nature of the stories allows readers to gradually learn about the characters, and also allows the authors to show the changing face of the *banlieues*, as well as the other characters, as their lives change and develop over time. This is a very effective technique as it allows our authors to show the effects, both positive and negative, that life on the periphery can have in a manner that would otherwise be difficult. Showing the attitude and behavioural changes of these characters, over the course of 21 years of their lives, allows the authors to highlight the long-term effect that such behaviours can have. For example, Salomon's success and Abdou's untimely and tragic death in *Le petit Malik* have antecedents in earlier chapters, and the consequences of the differing life-choices and mentalities of both characters are thus demonstrated with maximum impact.

Finally, *Le poids d'une âme* is the only novel in the corpus to be divided into three parts. It contains the shortest chapters of any of the novels, sometimes as short as one or two pages. This is likely because the plot is the most action-packed of the corpus, and short chapters, uninterrupted by title headings, allow the author to progress the plot while also building a feeling of suspense for the reader. The first two out of the three sections follow a series of people – Lounès' family and schoolmates, but also some strangers that are loosely connected to him by the events that occur – as their lives become entwined

with Lounès' drama. A seemingly unconnected story, about the family of an artisanal rope-maker in Grenoble in the early- to mid-twentieth century, is interwoven through the third section. The head of the family, Gilles, is an artisanal rope maker, who received a commission from a group of four men attempting to climb the Annapurna peak of the Himalayas. On the day that the order is due to be collected, his wife and daughter attempt suicide (his wife succeeds, but his daughter is saved), and he is distracted by his crippling grief when making the last rope. The mountaineers depart for Nepal and "l'expédition Herzog possédait huit cordes, dont une défectueuse. Son impact de force, 298 déca Newton et son allongement, 5,1%, loin des standards, condamneraient à coup sûr son utilisateur."⁶⁵ The narrative traces the path of the defective rope – fortunately unused by the mountaineering expedition – for several decades until it ends up at the *Palais de Justice* on the day of Lounès' hearing. Convinced that the judge will rule against him, and that he will be deported, as well as disheartened by his experiences over the previous days and the treatment he has received in the justice system, Lounès begins to panic: "J'ai peur, ils vont me renvoyer en Algérie, je ne parle pas arabe, je n'y ai aucune relation, je suis un mort en sursis. Je suis tellement mal ! J'ai envie de pleurer..."⁶⁶ Finding the rope, he views it as "un message divin"⁶⁷ and he attempts to hang himself. He regrets his hasty decision when it is too late:

...j'ai le cou en feu ! Il faut que je me dégage, mais je suis coincé ! Mes jambes remuent toutes seules, c'est un cauchemar ! Impossible de crier ! Où sont les flics qui me collent depuis trois jours ? Jamais là quand on a besoin d'eux !⁶⁸

Just as Lounès begins to lose consciousness, Tourlier's defective rope snaps, and he is saved. The interspersed story of Gilles Tourlier, who had no way of knowing that he had manufactured a faulty rope, much less one that would foil an attempted suicide decades later, adds another layer to Lounès' story. It also adds to the already interwoven nature of the narrative, and shows the impact that an unknown connection between the Tourlier family and Lounès had at a crucial point in that young man's life. This stylistic device allows Rachedi to show the influence that the actions of others can have on people's lives, albeit at times indirectly and without the knowledge of either party. As discussed above,

65 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 189.

66 Ibid., 205.

67 Ibid., 207.

68 Ibid., 208.

Rachedi opens many of the chapters towards the start of the first and third sections identically, in order to better demonstrate the interconnected nature of the characters' lives at this time. *Le poids d'une âme*⁶⁹ is also the only novel to contain an epigraph and an epilogue. In fact it has two epigraphs, the first a quote by Marel Achard ("C'est toujours par hasard qu'on accomplit son destin"⁷⁰), and an old Chinese proverb by Lao Tzu. In combination, these epigraphs encourage the reader to view the events of the novel in a somewhat optimistic light. The epilogue serves to summarize the situation of each of the characters in turn in the aftermath of the events of the novel, and is the most optimistic section of the text, serving as relief after the sometimes dark nature of the events that occur over the course of the story. Kenneth Olsson describes the epilogue as "le lieu du renversement de la direction de l'action jusqu'à ce point-là..."⁷¹ The novel proper ended with Lounès attempt to hang himself, and it is not until the epilogue that the reader learns what happened next:

Lounès Amri a raté son suicide, à cause d'une corde présentant un vice de fabrication depuis cinquante-six ans. Les lourdes charges, l'usure du temps et, enfin, les soixante-dix kilos de Lounès ont vaincu sa résistance.⁷²

The reader also learns that the fate of the Amri family is much improved, that Tarik and Khadija have been given new opportunities despite not finishing school, that the corrupt police inspector has been demoted and relocated from Paris, that Christophe, Yazid and Hocine have returned to their previous form, and that Samir Amri no longer mistreats his family. The epilogue thus allows Rachedi an opportunity to give his readers a sense of hope and optimism at the novel's denouement, yet without claiming that the events of the previous few days have changed everything for the better. Epilogues, and particularly epigraphs, are somewhat unusual in YA fiction, and their inclusion probably results from the fact that Rachedi did not intentionally write this first novel for a YA audience, and was unaware that he would receive a wide youth readership.

69 The title of this novel, *Le poids d'une âme*, can be seen as having several connotations. The faulty rope, which was hurriedly made, was missing its soul, "la partie qui assure l'élasticité et absorbe l'énergie du choc en cas de chute," according to the narrator [ibid., 188.] It was Lounès' weight which finally revealed the fault in the rope, decades after its fabrication. The philosophical nature of the title, reflecting "twenty-one grams" theory, could be considered as a metaphysical comment on Lounès' potential death, foiled only by the defective rope. Finally, it could also refer to the metaphorical weight of the various problems and difficulties experienced by the characters throughout the course of the book.

70 Ibid., epigraph.

71 Olsson, "Le discours beur", 89.

72 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 214.

5.3.1.1 Illustrations

Le petit Malik is the only novel of the corpus to contain illustrations. These illustrations are simple pencil drawings which appear at the start of every second chapter and which depict a key scene or theme. Characters appear in a caricaturised manner, and as Malik and his friends grow older, not only their appearance but their activities change – from queuing for ice-cream at Bruno's kiosk aged five and playing football at seven to loitering and smoking and ogling girls aged fifteen and seventeen respectively. Illustrations in novels serve to "expand, explain, interpret, or decorate a written text."⁷³ In the case of *Le petit Malik*, the simple lines of the illustrations add a somewhat child-like element to the texts, while the content – frequently featuring the tower blocks and a distinctively urban style of dress – contribute to the urban atmosphere of the text. In many cases, the illustrations introduce the theme of each chapter, presenting the reader with a visual representation of the coming episode, and in so-doing serves as a form of reinforcement for the author's message. According to Rachedi, he had no intention of including illustrations and that it was a suggestion by his editor upon noticing the *rapprochement* between Rachedi's text and *Le petit Nicolas*. The author claimed in interview:

J'avais été moins séduit par l'idée des illustrations mais, à la réflexion, j'ai trouvé l'idée brillante à condition qu'elles soient réalisées par quelqu'un de talentueux connaissant très bien l'environnement urbain. J'ai associé immédiatement associé [sic] ces deux qualités à Eldiablo, le créateur/dessinateur des « Lascars » que j'avais eu la chance de côtoyer à Respect Magazine où nous collaborons tous les deux. Aussitôt qu'il a lu le livre, il a dit oui et a apporté son regard à la fois intelligent, drôle et caustique.⁷⁴

Thus, in addition to highlighting thematic elements from the chapters in which they feature, illustrations serve two additional purposes. Rachedi's desire that his illustrator be familiar with the urban environment in France demonstrates that the urban feel and mood of the drawings, mentioned above, was consciously evoked. Additionally, the use of simple, black and white pencil drawings, in a style that is a modern, gritty version of those found in Goscinny's text strengthens the link that the publisher wished to draw between the two texts, as discussed in Chapter One. The use of illustrations in this text

73 Zhihui Fang, "Illustrations, Text, and the Child Reader: What are Pictures in Children's Storybooks for?," *Reading Horizons* 37, no. 2 (1996): 131. Fang here references: G.R. Bodmer, "Approaching the Illustrated Text," in *Teaching Children's Literature: Issues, Pedagogy, Resources*, ed. G.E. Sadler, *Approaching the Illustrated Text* (New York: Language Association of America, 1992), 72.

74 Gangoueus, "Interview de Mabrouck Rachedi."

incorporates valuable visual representations of the author's points, and that they do so in a manner that at once inserts *Le petit Malik* into an established tradition of children's literature in France, while still remaining true to the style of the text, contributes to the author's goal of portraying a realistic vision of the *banlieues* as flawed and problematic, certainly, but also as places where average people live regular lives; there is no drama in the illustrations, merely depictions of daily life in a somewhat oppressive urban environment.

5.3.2 Temporal Arcs

The temporal arc in *Kiffe kiffe demain* is unspecified, but the action takes place over the course of about a year, beginning about six months after the departure of Doria's father, and continuing over the remainder of the academic year, the summer holidays and the beginning of her hairdressing course the following academic year. This time span allows the reader to accompany Doria through a crucial point in her life, as she comes to terms with her new family situation, supports her mother in her endeavours to become literate, finishes school, begins a relationship and develops a growing political consciousness. Over the course of the novel, she comes to some realisations about herself and her attitude shifts from a defeatist to a more optimistic outlook. The time frame involved, helped by her weekly visits to her school-appointed psychologist, which are a recurring feature of the novel, thus provides Doria with ample time to reflect and develop as a result of these life-changing events. *Kiffer sa race* also spans an academic year in the protagonist, Sabrina's, life. The novel opens as she returns to school having spent the summer working in her aunt's illegal clothing business, and finishes at the end of the school year, as Sabrina is about to undertake summer classes in anticipation of attending a preparatory course for the *Sciences Po* entrance exam that has been established at their school.

While the time-frame of *Du rêve pour les oufs* is also unspecified, it is more difficult to establish than in the case of *Kiffe kiffe demain*, as Ahlème is no longer in school and thus there is no easily discernible marker of the passage of time. It seems to cover a number of months, however, given that, over the course of the novel, Ahlème has several temping jobs, has time to plan and arrange a trip to Algeria for the family, and make at least two visits to the immigration office to renew her stay in France. Guène's fourth novel, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, follows a similar format, in that it covers a period of time that is unspecified. The temporal arc is easier to infer in this case, however, as the protagonist,

Mourad, has just finished his *CAPES* exams at the novel's outset and is awaiting his results, and the novel continues until his return to Nice at the end of his first academic term as a teacher.

Les gens du Balto, *Le poids d'une âme*, *Le petit Malik* and *La petite Malika* differ from the other texts in the corpus in terms of temporal arc. *Les gens du Balto* spans a time-frame of a couple of days following the murder of a local *bar-tabac* owner. The short time-span and dialogue-filled nature of the chapters, and the fact that the reader is kept in the dark regarding the perpetrator of the crime until the novel's close, means that the reader's attention is held until the end, allowing the various narrators the opportunity to make several points that, while tangential to the novel's plot, nevertheless reveal the author's intentions in terms of highlighting the true nature of *banlieue* life. The time-span of *Le poids d'une âme* is also just a few days, as the protagonist, Lounès, becomes implicated in a series of events that are mostly out of his control. So much action happens over the course of these few days which means that the reader is gripped by the novel from the start.

Le petit Malik and *La petite Malika*, on the other hand, are identical, both in structure and time frame, as they comprise snapshots of single episodes in the protagonists' lives over the course of twenty-one years. The episodic nature of the books means that the reader spends many years with the protagonists, and thus observes their growth – we witness them develop from children through to adulthood and to a greater understanding of themselves and of the context in which they grew up. This allows the authors to raise some critical points about life on the periphery, through the guise of personal realisation on the part of the protagonists.

5.4 Fantasy

Many of the novels in the corpus feature a fantastic element, incorporated into the otherwise realist texts. This takes different forms, and includes such strategies as dream sequences, daydreams and fantasies, or writing as a means of escape. Rosemary Jackson, who has written extensively on the subject of fantasy literature, claims that "a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context. Though it might struggle against the limits of this context, often being articulated upon that very struggle, it cannot be understood in isolation from it."⁷⁵ As will be shown, the fantastic elements

75 Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1981), 3.

of these novels indeed demonstrate a struggle against the social context of the *banlieues*. Frequently, the fantastic episodes serve to highlight a deeper desire, or fear, on the part of the protagonists – desire for escape from the harsh realities of life, fear that things will not improve in the future. This is in line with Jackson's thoughts on fantasy, as she believes that "fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss."⁷⁶ The authors use innovative strategies in order to incorporate fantastic elements and thus highlight these fears and desires. In so doing, they make their points more subtly and effectively than would otherwise have been possible.

In two of his novels – *Le poids d'une âme* and *Le petit Malik* – Rachedi uses the juxtaposition of dreams and reality to great effect. The first occasion occurs when Lounès decides to pass some time, before he can go home after his suspension, by smoking a joint. He begins to hallucinate and his imaginings during this event are revealing. Initially having a pleasant hallucination, he imagines all sorts of good things happening to his family and the *banlieue* community at large:

...repeindre Évry aux couleurs de la vie, rendre le sourire à sa mère, apaiser la fureur du père, libérer Hafid de prison, acheter de nouvelles chaussettes à Ahmed, une belle robe de mariage à Khadija, écartier les murs de l'appartement, abolir les frontières de la banlieue ... Pourquoi la vie n'est pas aussi simple qu'un rêve ?⁷⁷

It is interesting to see that he wishes to obliterate the borders of the *banlieue*. Despite the physical distance that exists between the Paris *centre ville* and the *banlieues*, no actual borders are present,⁷⁸ and thus Lounès' desire to abolish the borders represents a longing to remove the social divisions and inequalities that exist between the *banlieue* population and the population of France generally. However, Lounès also faces up to the negative aspects of his life as part of his hallucination, as well as showing astonishing prescience regarding the experiences that are about to befall him. The events of earlier that day, his mother's sadness, his father's violence and the fact that his brother Tarik spends all of his time looking after everyone else torment him, in conjunction with the bleak prospects a future in the marginalised *banlieue* affords him:

76 Ibid.

77 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 42.

78 Although dystopian visions of a future-Paris in which the *banlieues* have been contained by a border which is policed have been presented in films such as *Banlieue 13*. [Pierre Morel, *Banlieue 13*, Film, EuropaCorp, 2004.]

La vieille Lespinasse et Vermeulen courent après lui, sa mère pleure, son père le frappe avec sa ceinture ... le lycée brûle, il se sauve mais le bus ne l'attend pas, courir, souffler et encore courir, se lever chaque jour avec une fissure au mur, les pieds d'Ahmed qui puent, Hafid emmuré vivant, Mustapha parti pour toujours, Tarik simultanément à la mairie, à l'ANPE, chez EDF, au consulat, à Carrefour, une vie entière dans la cité, agent de sécurité, comptable, flic, serveur au Mac Do, le costume ou l'uniforme, le conformisme. Son existence, l'avenir, l'angoisse.⁷⁹

This dark turn in his musings is a negative reflection of the positive stream of consciousness that he was experiencing moments before. The awareness he shows regarding the lack of fulfilling employment prospects reflects the sense of hopelessness shared by many on the margins of society. Yet the fact that Lounès expresses this in a fit of drug-induced paranoia provides an insight into Rachedi's reluctance to convey the frequent stereotypes held in France towards minority *banlieue* populations. This is one of only two incidences in which Lounès descends into despair in relation to his life – the other occurs when he believes that he will be deported to Algeria – instead he normally expresses boredom at the banality of everyday life in the *cité*. Rachedi's juxtaposition of Lounès' hopes of effecting change with the bleak and despairing views expressed moments later, highlights that both of these positions are extremes and underscores even further the mundanity of everyday life in the *banlieues*, which demystifies these zones and renders them more accessible and comprehensible to readers from outside.

Bearing striking similarity to the previous episode, *Le petit Malik* also contains a chapter which reflects the desire of many from the urban periphery to escape to a better life. This occurs when Malik is ten years old and watching television one evening after school. Unknown to the reader, he falls asleep, and the remainder of the chapter is his dream. Significantly, Malik dreams of nothing grandiose or unattainable, just a peaceful and carefree version of his own reality: the dream begins with Malik postponing his homework in order to pick a random location from his world-map (in this case Belgium) and learning about it in his atlas. He then finishes his homework quickly and efficiently, secure in the knowledge that it will earn the approval of both classmates and teacher. He goes out to meet his friends, and on the way helps an elderly neighbour carry her bags of groceries, which earns him enough money to buy a can of cola. While playing football with his friends, "on a tapoté dans le ballon sans s'insulter, juste par amour du

79 Rachedi, *Le poids d'une âme*, 42-3.

beau geste."⁸⁰ The boys all excel on the football pitch that day and enjoy a well-earned hot shower afterwards, before returning home. His mother makes pancakes, before bringing him to the cinema because she believes "Fallait que je me cultive en m'ouvrant à d'autres univers que des émissions télé débiles".⁸¹ After the film, they get ice-cream and, as they are walking along "Des policiers nous ont salués d'une inclinaison de tête, qu'on leur a rendue,"⁸² and his mother tells him all about his father. His mother's voice eventually wakes him:

Sa voix me berçait quand je m'enfonçais sur le siège en cuir de notre break.
Je me suis réveillé.
Maman gueulait qu'il fallait que j'aïlle aux courses.
En fond sonore, une émission de jeu.
Je n'avais ni ordinateur ni mappemonde.
Et je n'avais pas fait mes devoirs.⁸³

Jackson claims that fantasy does not entail "inventing another non-human world: it is not transcendental. It has to do with inverting elements of this world, re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and apparently 'new', absolutely 'other' and different."⁸⁴ Malik's fantasy, his "absolute other" is so simple, and the sharp contrast with his reality is revealing. It shows that it would not take much to attain a better life, even while remaining on the urban margins. Cooperation with peers and neighbours, respect from those in authority and the ability to live life in a harmonious way would, Rachedi claims, lead to a better life for many on the periphery. The simplistic manner in which he delivers this other, through the innocent dreams of a young child, heightens the efficacy of his point by demonstrating clearly how easily achievable it could be.

Both dream sequences enable Rachedi to deal with some of the major issues affecting the *banlieue* population in a manner that is not overly pessimistic, and that does not dwell too much on the negative aspects. The author's use of this simple device allows him to make salient points in a manner that is much more effective than merely discussing the issues in the narrative would have been. It gives Rachedi the opportunity to acknowledge

80 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 62.

81 Ibid., 63.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid., 63-4.

84 Jackson, *Fantasy*, 8.

that these negative aspects of life on the periphery do exist, while also demonstrating that the negative view – that seen most often by the mainstream population, through sensationalised media coverage – is not the only facet of life in the *banlieues*. His use of simple juxtaposition is particularly effective in subtly highlighting the positive aspects of *banlieue* life. His co-written novel with his sister, Habiba Mahany, on the other hand, does not feature any such dream sequences. The gifted protagonist of this novel does, however, use other means to “escape” daily realities. Malika does this by immersing herself in her philosophical learning, discovered during a prolonged period of hospitalisation during her childhood. Upon realising her sharp intellect, her doctor provides her with some philosophical texts, in order to relieve her boredom. This discovery of a passion for philosophy contributes in large part to her eventual recovery, and ignites a lifelong love of philosophy, which provides the young girl with a means to escape, initially from her illness, and later, a literal escape, when she moves to Strasbourg to attend the *École Nationale d'Administration*. Malika also finds another means to escape the stark surroundings of her *cit * during her childhood, by cultivating a garden at the foot of her tower block. This project occupies the young girl, and creates beauty in the midst of the imposing tower blocks, and inadvertently creates a sense of community spirit among the other residents, who allow her to use their plots in addition to her own, buy her gardening equipment and seeds when shopping, and help her with heavier tasks. In this way, Malika is able to escape from the harsh architecture that surrounds her, and make the beautiful space she envisions in her head a reality.

Fa za Gu ne also includes some fantastic elements and also utilises dream sequences. *Kiffe kiffe demain's* Doria is a dreamer by nature, and an avid viewer of television, and she frequently entertains herself with little daydreams, for instance, that she is part of the Ingalls family in *Little House on the Prairie*, or that her mother is remarried – variously, to the local shopkeeper Aziz, to Doria's own older friend Hamoudi and, most bizarrely, to former mayor of Paris Bertrand Delano . Aside from daydreams such as these, however, she tells her psychologist Mme Burlaud about a recurring dream that she has been having:

J'ouvrais la fen tre et j'avais le soleil qui me tapait fort dans le visage. J'arrivais m me plus   ouvrir les yeux. J'ai pass  mes jambes par-dessus la fen tre jusqu'  me retrouver assise sur le rebord, puis, d'un  lan, je me suis envol e. J'allais de plus en plus haut, je voyais les HLM qui s' loignaient et devenaient de plus en plus petits. Je battais des

ailles, enfin des bras, et puis à force de les secouer pour continuer à monter, je me suis réellement cognée au mur à ma droite et ça m'a fait un énorme bleu. C'est ce qui m'a réveillée et je dois dire que c'était plutôt dur de revenir à la réalité de cette façon.⁸⁵

Unlike the more abstract dreams that Rachedi's characters experienced, Doria's dream about defenestrating herself was quite literally a dream about escaping from her life, and leaving it all behind, and the palpable sense of disappointment she feels upon waking is indicative of her real desire to leave Livry-Gargan. When she recounts this to Mme Burlaud, the latter claims that it bears similarity to what she terms "l'épisode de l'atlas..."⁸⁶ Although Doria is unsure of why she told Mme Burlaud about this, and disparagingly claims "Ah bon. Elle appelle carrément ça un épisode"⁸⁷, she explains the incident to which the older woman is referring. Doria had previously taken her atlas and, because she was bored: "j'ai tracé un itinéraire sur la carte pour partir. C'était le chemin que j'allais faire plus tard, en passant par les endroits les plus beaux du monde."⁸⁸ She believes this "episode" to be entirely unimportant, especially as she knows that she cannot go as there are people – her mother, and the family for whom she babysits – who need her, which, she claims "fait du bien."⁸⁹ Yet, in conjunction with her dream, it demonstrates a clear and real desire on Doria's part to escape her life, even if only temporarily. This is a significant choice on Guène's part, as, by showing an unhappy teenager who wishes to escape, she is affording her young readers, no matter their origins or social circumstances, insight into Doria's frustration and unhappiness. Yet, by virtue of the fact that Doria does not leave, and that, by the novel's close, she has achieved a more optimistic outlook on life and indeed wishes to remain and fight to make life better for her and for all those who live on the margins, she is demonstrating, both to readers from within and outside the *banlieue*, that this is nothing more than adolescent fantasy, something that is not exclusive to those who have grown up in marginalised and underprivileged circumstances.

By contrast, Guène's only male protagonist to date, Mourad, does not recount a dream to the reader, rather a nightmare. On several occasions, he describes his figurative worst nightmare, in which he ends up as a sad, obese old man with salt-and-pepper hair who still lives with his parents. In this vision, his mother still washes his underpants

85 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 71.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid., 72.

88 Ibid., 72-3.

89 Ibid., 73.

and cuts his toenails, as he has become too large to do it himself and he spends all of his time re-reading the same books because it has become too difficult for such an obese man to get to the library. The image haunts him, until he learns that he succeeded in his *CAPES* exams. Later on, however, in what is the novel's shortest chapter, Mourad tells of the worst nightmare that he has ever had, "celui d'un tsunami de fin des temps."⁹⁰ In this nightmare, he is walking alone along a beautiful and deserted beach, thinking about nothing except that his mother will be angry if he tracks sand into the house, when he suddenly sees a figure in the distance, waving at him. As he gets closer, he realises that it is his father, in a wheelchair, gesturing and calling to him for help, as his chair has become stuck in the sand. Mourad tries and tries to free the chair, but is unable to move it even by a millimetre, and begins to cry. His father, upon seeing this, yells at him "Non !!! Non !!! Ne pleure pas ! Ne fais pas ça ! Un homme, ça ne pleure pas !"⁹¹, a recurring refrain of Abdelkader throughout the novel. Finally, he hears:

...une rumeur sourde, un bruit horrible, celui de la terre affamée qui ouvre son ventre,
prête à tout engloutir. Je me tourne et je vois la vague haute, tellement haute et
rapide.
Mon père hurle.
Il hurle et je pleure, les roues du fauteuil sont enfoncées dans le sable, la vague arrive
droit sur nous.⁹²

These nightmares, both the figurative worst-case-scenario vision of his future, and the actual nightmare he experiences about the tsunami, are both revealing of Mourad's character. He fears being stuck, trapped in a life that he does not wish to lead. And yet, his attachment to his family and his roots is such that, unlike his older sister Dounia, he cannot just abandon them.

On two occasions, Mourad includes excerpts from imagined film scripts as part of the narrative. These instances sandwich the narrative to some extent, occurring as they do towards either end of the text, and perform different functions. The first occurs following the visit of a young school friend, the only such incident that Mourad can recall during his childhood. The young boy is terrified of Mourad's mother, who forces him to return home and, unsurprisingly, he does not revisit their house, instead: "il me regardait

90 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 223.

91 Ibid., 224.

92 Ibid.

avec pitié, mais ne m'adressait plus la parole."⁹³ Mourad imagines that his friend must have had nightmares about his mother after this incident, "Sur le mode film d'horreur. *Séquence I – Intérieur nuit – Silence de mort. Sur fond de fleurs en plastique, une femme en surpoids hystérique entre dans la chambre...*"⁹⁴ The second instance plays a much more significant role in the text, as Mourad imagines that his life is actually a film, directed by someone other than himself. It occurs during Mehdi Mazouani's first class upon his return from the *bled*, when Mourad's first interaction with him does not go according to plan. Mourad then informs the reader that he would have loved if a talented director intervened at that point:

Coupeepez ! Cou-peez ! On va la refaire, hein ! Ça va pas du tout, les enfants, on la refait ! Mourad, mon lapin, tu m'as absolument pas convaincu ! Sois plus ferme, plus autoritaire. On doit sentir que tu gardes ton sang-froid, là c'était trop fragile, mon bichon... Allez, on y retourne et cette fois, montre-toi plus dur... Mehdi, mon chou, t'as été parfait, change rien, ce côté brut, p'tit dur sans scrupules... c'est génial ! Refais-moi exactement la même chose, j'adore ton émotion !⁹⁵

This interlude in the text is telling, as it shows Mourad wishing against all odds that his life were a film, that he could just re-shoot the scene and conduct himself better on his first introduction to the most challenging student in the school. His desire to escape that moment is palpable, yet impossible. And his futile re-telling of his imagined director's instructions serves to highlight this in an innovative and unique fashion.

Finally, *Du rêve pour les oufs*' Ahlème, while not experiencing dreams at any point – apart from daydreaming that she is a famous rapper called onstage to perform with Diam's – instead uses writing as a means of escaping the difficulties in her life. In a meta-textual nod to the author herself, Ahlème wants to be a writer and is constantly scribbling her thoughts in a notebook. This form of escapism is important for a young woman burdened with much responsibility, as evidenced by her interactions with Josiane, a waitress at the aptly named *Café des Histoires*, with whom she becomes acquainted during the course of the novel. Josiane asks what she is writing in her notebook and in responding Ahlème invents an entirely new persona for herself: "...je me suis inventé toute une vie, je me suis imaginé être quelqu'un d'important, pour voir ce que ça faisait dans les yeux d'une

93 Ibid., 42-3.

94 Ibid., 43.

95 Ibid., 248.

personne que je ne connaissais pas."⁹⁶ In her desire to be viewed differently than usual, she informs Josiane that she is a writer working for a popular weekly magazine. She tells her that her real name is Stéphanie Jacquet, but that she writes using the pseudonym Jacqueline Stéphanet, to preserve her anonymity. It is interesting that Ahlème chooses a French-sounding name as her pseudonym, although given that she wished to provoke a completely different reaction upon meeting a stranger, perhaps it was just because the French consonance stands in contrast to her own, Arabic name. Her choice of profession for Stéphanie goes much deeper than this, however, and in fact poses questions about the legitimacy of *Beur* writing itself. As outlined by Kenneth Olsson:

En assumant une identité d'écrivain, Ahlème revêt les attributs de ce personnage fictif. Elle le fait non seulement pour lui-même mais pour le destinataire aussi bien du côté des « siens », ses semblables de la banlieue ou ses enfants futurs, que pour celui que représente cet Autre, juste « pour voir » l'effet. La question qu'elle pose, c'est : une Beure, peut-elle être écrivain ? Ou bien, faut-il qu'elle change d'identité pour assumer ce rôle, en s'éloignant de la banlieue et en prenant un nom de plume franco-français ?⁹⁷

Olsson then reduces these questions into one succinct question: "est-ce de la littérature si l'auteur est une Beure ? Ou que « des histoires » ?"⁹⁸ In adopting this assumed identity, this French persona, Guène, through Ahlème, is asking if members of the minority population living in the *banlieue* have the right to speak, to write literary works solely for artistic merit, and not just testimonials on life in the *banlieues*. Yet, situating this episode in the *Café des Histoires* allows Guène to do this indirectly, rendering the idea of a young Maghrebi female writer, according to Olsson, "inoffensive."⁹⁹ The inclusion of this episode is nevertheless significant, as it allows Guène to subtly situate the figure of the female *banlieue* author from an immigrant background as a "réalité sociale potentielle."¹⁰⁰

Ahlème also informs the waitress that she writes "Des histoires de gens qui galèrent parfois parce que la société ne leur a pas donné le choix, qui essaient de s'en sortir et de connaître un peu le bonheur."¹⁰¹ This resembles the themes of Guène's own novels so closely that it must be an intentional reference to her own subject matter. Showing characteristic

96 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 84.

97 Olsson, "Le discours beur", 52.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid., 53.

101 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 85.

humour, Guène displays surprise at her own success when Josiane asks: "Et ça intéresse les gens, ça ?"¹⁰² Ahlème then reflects: "Bonne question, Josiane. Je l'espère, au fond, mais j'aurais quand même dû te raconter que j'écrivais des histoires d'amour, d'osmose et de trahisons. Ça, c'est sûr que ça intéresse les gens."¹⁰³ This humorous exchange between the two women in which Guène, through Ahlème, is charmingly self-deprecating, betrays the author's surprise that the reading public in France is so gripped by these themes in her fiction, and indeed the fiction of other "banlieue writers" in the wake of the 2005 riots, when in reality the populations in question remain marginalised and little has changed. On a later visit to the *Café des Histoires* she reveals that she also writes down all of the stories her father tells her in the notebook, an important element reflecting the attempts by the so-called second generation to preserve the memories of their forebears, as evidenced by the existence of such groups as the association *Génériques*.¹⁰⁴ Thus Ahlème uses writing in two different ways: firstly, as a means of escaping her life into a different persona; and secondly, to preserve her father's memories, which she cherishes all the more because he is not always lucid since his accident. This is significant, as it provides release from the reality of her life, and a sense of connection to her roots. By having Ahlème say that she writes about *banlieue* life, Guène highlights the multi-layered significance that writing can hold for the marginalised residents of the *banlieue*, as it empowers them by giving them a voice and an opportunity to represent their own reality.

These authors have all, in innovative ways, inserted fantastic elements into their generally realistic socially engaged texts. Some of the fantastic elements are escapist in nature, and illustrate the protagonists' desire to escape the difficulties of life on the periphery. Others are negative, and serve as metaphors for the hardships of *banlieue* life and fears for the future; the inclusion of these negative images in the form of dreams and nightmares allows the authors to discuss them without rendering them central to the text, or portraying the *banlieues* in a stereotypically negative fashion. In all cases, the inclusion of these elements is related to the authors' intention to create a more positive and realistic vision of the *banlieues* that is counter to prevalent media images in France. Several of these fantastic elements – such as Mourad's desire for directorial intervention

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

104 An association that works to "préservé, sauvegarder et valoriser l'histoire de l'immigration en France et en Europe" and which aims to "encourager les travaux sur l'histoire de l'immigration et à sensibiliser le grand public sur l'apport des populations étrangères à l'histoire nationale et européenne." "Présentation," *Generiques.org*, Accessed: January 11 2013, <http://www.generiques.org/presentation/>.

and an opportunity to do re-takes on certain parts of his life – are highly innovative literary strategies. The use of such strategies allows the authors to highlight their point, without resorting to bleak miserabilism or didactic writing styles and as such, forms an important part of the authors' aims, and can contribute to the empowerment of their YA readers, who may identify with some of the authors' fantasies and fears and thus better identify with and internalise the message.

5.5 Intertextuality

The novels of all three authors are littered with references to cultural works, both literary works and popular culture – films, television shows, and musicians, including the cultural productions of other cultures, in particular Anglophone cultures. While there are very few allusions of this kind in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, Mourad does not ignore Anglophone cultural productions entirely. In one instance, he mentions the Stevie Wonder song, *I Just Called To Say I Love You*, and at another point, at the end of a chapter entitled *Stand By Me*, he quotes a verse from the Ben E. King song of the same name. *Kiffer sa race*, by comparison, mentions several US television shows, several of which Sabrina watches. Sabrina's favourite shows include the crime dramas *NCIS* and *Numb3rs*, but she refers to many other television programmes and films throughout the course of the novel, from across a range of different decades, such as *Laurel and Hardy*, *Dallas*, *Legends of the Fall*, *Sister Act*, *Meet Joe Black*, *Prison Break*, *Rambo*, *300*, *Little House on the Prairie* and *Saw*. This list is by no means exhaustive, but gives an idea of the level of influence that Anglophone culture has on this young girl. A love of television shows and films, in particular films featuring handsome actors such as Brad Pitt, is not unusual for teenage girls throughout the western world, and is not confined to Anglophone countries. Additionally, many young people worldwide have an interest in American filmic and televisual output. Mahany also refers to popular French cultural outputs, especially those of significance to people with a North African background, such as Jamel Debbouze and his *Jamel Comedy Club*. Mahany's inclusion of so many references is an attempt to show that Sabrina, despite her marginalised position, shares similar preoccupations and interests to other teenage girls everywhere. It also demonstrates this to readers from different cultural backgrounds. In this way, Mahany attempts to render meaningless the perception that many in France hold about the irreconcilable differences between French and North African cultures.

Similarly, *Kiffe kiffe demain*'s Doria also frequently refers to popular culture: TV shows, actors, game shows and movies and pop bands, often Anglophone in nature, with a particular emphasis on US culture. On the other hand, Ahlème in *Du rêve pour les oufs* does not place the same emphasis on television shows and films that Sabrina and Doria do, aside from when she details that, since his accident, her father has regulated his days based on what show is on television. For instance he knows that the news means it is time for lunch whereas the evening film means that it is bedtime. This relative lack of importance of television shows and films is most likely a result of Ahlème's greater responsibilities, as she simply does not have as much time as the two younger girls to indulge in watching television. She does occasionally discuss French rappers, such as IAM and Diam's. In one instance, however, she uses an urban update of Paul Eluard's poem *Liberté*. When recounting how, when returning her brother's bicycle to the basement of the tower block one night, she almost interrupted two of his friends who were masturbating to pirated pornography, she adds: "Ô puberté j'écris ton nom. Sur le Béton, j'écris ton nom."¹⁰⁵ This reference to a celebrated poem, modernised to include the concrete of the *banlieue*, is clever and displays Ahlème's sense of humour in the face of a potentially awkward situation. The modern remix of the poem could be perceived as comparing the oppressed situation of the *banlieue* residents to that of the residents of Nazi-occupied France, but as it is quickly passed over and Ahlème finishes the story about the two adolescent boys, it is unlikely that it was intended as anything other than a witty commentary on the situation. According to John Stephens, intertextuality in literature "frequently takes the specific form of parody or travesty of a pre-text,"¹⁰⁶ and the parodic aspect of this reference will not be lost on any reader familiar with the original text.

La petite Malika also refers frequently to "Western" culture, in particular U.S. pop culture. Given Malika's exceptionally high levels of intelligence, it is unsurprising that the influence of such cultural production is less visible than for some of the other characters, notably Malika's classmates. An example of this influence was outlined in Chapter Three, occurring when the children are playing *un deux trois soleil* in the schoolyard. While some children choose their country of origin, many of the girls choose the place of origin of their cultural icons, such as Miley Cyrus and Demi Lovato. In addition, other US actors and programmes, such as Britney Spears, *High School Musical* and David Caruso are mentioned at various points in the text, as well as US political references such as the 1960

105 Guène, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, 31.

106 Stephens, *Language and Ideology*, 116.

presidential debate between Nixon and Kennedy. More important than pop culture in this novel, however, are mentions of great works of literature and philosophy, which are sprinkled throughout this text. This stands in contrast to the novels previously discussed, and is intended to reflect Malika's high intelligence. Such literary references include Molière, Shakespeare, Gargantua and Baudelaire, among others. Most of these are just passing references, or expressions scattered through her narration, but one particularly significant series of quotes shows the authors' use of intertextual reference in order to make a point. While working for a senator as part of her politics internship, the senator returns from a televised debate with an opponent and asks his administrative staff how they found his performance. Malika, who had been unconvinced by the senator's answers and appearance during the debate, is somewhat disgusted to hear the sycophantic manner in which her colleagues reply, telling the senator how brilliantly he handled the questions and how much better than his competitor he was. At each answer, she metaphorically rolls her eyes, and brings Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*¹⁰⁷ to mind, thinking to herself: "D'amour mourir me font, belle marquise, vos beaux yeux"¹⁰⁸; "Vos beaux yeux me font, belle marquise, mourir"¹⁰⁹; "Mourir vos beaux yeux, belle marquise, d'amour me font."¹¹⁰ Thus, Malika gently mocks her colleagues for their sycophancy, in a witty manner that highlights her intelligence. Stephens suggests that intertextuality, "by making relationships between different cultures and different periods, can act as a critique of current social values"¹¹¹ and this is exactly what Malika achieves through her commentary. Malika's love of philosophy is also highlighted, as the text features sporadic references to great philosophers, such as Nietzsche, Plato, Socrates, Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, Sartre, and Kant, among many others.

Le petit Malik contains a greater number of references to Anglophone – and particularly American – culture, both cultural productions and significant events, across several different eras. These are varied, from Will Smith in the *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*; Mel Gibson's *L'arme fatale*; *Menace II Society*; *New Jack City* and *Boyz in the Hood*; through *Sam, je suis Sam*; *Starsky and Hutch*; John Wayne; the *Wu-Tang Clan* and *Nip/Tuck*; to Public Enemy, Ice T; NWA; Carmen Electra; Pamela Anderson as well as many other

107 Act 2, Scene 4.

108 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 184.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 Stephens, *Language and Ideology*, 116.

beautiful female celebrities. Although the novel contains few mentions of significant events, those that are discussed were events of huge political significance in the US. There are, however, some inconsistencies with regard to the timing of these events. Rodney King and the LA riots of 1992 are mentioned within a few years of Osama Bin Laden and the events of September 11th 2001, both of which are presented as having happened during Malik's childhood (although aged twenty-one he loses his job as a result of the recession which began in the late 2000s). Temporal inconsistency aside, the number of references to US culture is indicative of the influence that the US wields on a global scale and the inclusion of these affords the reader an understanding of this. There is one episode that emphasises the esteem in which the young people in the *banlieue* hold their American counterparts, which takes place when Malik is eleven years old, and François, the rap producer organises an exchange with an LA-based rap artist. Malik and his friends are very excited by this visit as, in the wake of the LA riots they idolised "l'image d'une Amérique à feu et à sang, prête à s'embraser pour défendre son honneur"¹¹², and viewed Americans (in particular rap artists such as Public Enemy and NWA as "De vrais hommes, quoi."¹¹³) Consequently, many of the younger boys adopted a style and an attitude that mirrored how they viewed these artists, as outlined by Malik:

Du jour au lendemain, on est tous devenus des caïds genre on se regardait en chiens de faïence, on portait la casquette en travers, on se donnait du négro à qui mieux mieux et on se tapait le poing sur le cœur en guise de salut. L'attitude était notre nouveau credo, représenter notre verbe passe-partout.¹¹⁴

This large number of references in the book to American pop culture, and in particular rap culture reinforces the importance of this for the young people of the *banlieue*, as highlighted in the discussion of linguistic issues which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Stephens claims that intertextuality:

...has the effect of drawing readers' attention to the reading process itself, and thence to such issues of representation, narration, and art-life relationships as the impact of language and convention on subjectivity, and the impact that society and its changing circumstances have on significance.¹¹⁵

112 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 67.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.

115 Stephens, *Language and Ideology*, 116.

This allows the authors to use their intertextual references to make larger points about French society, drawing on established texts that many readers will already be aware of, in order to wittily make comparisons and inferences that would otherwise be difficult. The large number of cultural references – both to great works of literature, as well as popular television, film and music – further allows the authors to demonstrate the universality of their protagonists' experiences, helping to normalise the derided neighbourhoods in which they grew up and, for the most part, continue to live, as young people from outside these zones can see that they share similar tastes and cultural knowledge with these characters. In addition, these references may also aid in drawing young readers into the texts, as they recognise names of musicians and films from their own lives. This recognition could further contribute to enabling YA readers to identify with the characters and understand that, despite potentially differing social circumstances, there are nevertheless similarities between their lives and the lives of the protagonists.

5.5.1 Internal Intertextuality

There are a number of character crossovers between the novels of Mabrouck Rachedi and Habiba Mahany. These mostly take the form of minor cameos from characters that have previously had a major role in other texts, and provide an element of continuity and familiarity for readers who have read all of the books by these authors. One of the major character crossovers occurs when Tarik Amri, brother of Lounès in Rachedi's *Le poids d'une âme*, also appears in *Le petit Malik*. He features in the penultimate chapter, which takes place when Malik is twenty-five years old. Malik mentions a strange acquaintance of theirs, who thinks in odd, dream-like ways and who is different to the rest of the boys, and consequently is often the target of their mockery and scorn. Tarik frequently sits by the banks of the Seine to think, and one evening Malik joins him. Tarik had been on his way home from grocery shopping which is, according to Malik "son fardeau quotidien,"¹¹⁶ a fact with which readers of the earlier book will already be familiar. The episode seems to be a device on the author's part to allow the protagonist to reflect on the events of his life up to that point, in preparation for the final chapter, and emotional climax, of the novel, both young men are silent as they sit by the river, each engaged in their separate, private musings. Yet it is interesting that Rachedi chose a character he had already developed to

116 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 191.

enable this. Perhaps it is merely a nod to loyal readers who have already read the previous text, and are familiar with Tarik. Interestingly, however, this device appears again, and with much greater frequency, in *La petite Malika*.

Sabrina and Nedjma from *Kiffer sa race* are mentioned as residents of Malika's *cité*, where Malika mentions their tendency to spend time on the roof of the tower block. Both Juliana *la voyante*, who previously appeared in *Kiffer sa race*, and *Le poids d'une âme*'s Mme Lespinasse are mentioned as residents of Malika's neighbourhood, and both assist her when she is cultivating her garden during her childhood. In addition Boualem and Bruno from *Le petit Malik* both appear in *La petite Malika*. Boualem previously appeared in *Le petit Malik*, as the boyfriend of Malik's mother and was discussed in Chapter Four. Malik was so ashamed to discover that Boualem is a police officer that he persuaded his mother to end their relationship. When Boualem appears in Soraya's life, he is initially secretive about his profession, which makes people wonder about what his career may actually be:

Quand je lui avais fait jurer qu'il ne pratiquait pas une activité illégale, il s'est décidé à m'avouer qu'il était flic. Et alors ? Il paraît que ça lui avait posé des problèmes dans son quartier d'avant...mais il aurait fallu être idiot pour ne pas voir que le bonheur de maman passait par cet homme-là.¹¹⁷

This reference to his previous encounter with Malik in the earlier novel is so discreet that only a reader who had previously read the earlier text would understand the significance of his appearance. Bruno, on the other hand, appears at the end of the novel, and the reader who remembers him from *Le petit Malik* is delighted to learn that he has been released from prison and is now working in a restaurant that employs only staff with special needs, and that Malik and Salomon regularly eat there in order to support him and spend time with him. In fact, in the final chapter of *La petite Malika*, Malika and her new colleagues are eating in this restaurant, when Malik enters. He and Malika begin to converse, and subsequently leave the restaurant together, going for a long walk and getting to know each other. The reader discovers that Malik is still training the football team that he began working with at the end of the earlier book, but that he is also doing a distance-learning degree in astrophysics. Malika, upon meeting her almost-namesake, promptly forgets about her boyfriend Manuel, from whom she had been growing estranged for a number of months in any case, and realises that she is in love with Malik. The novel thus ends on a note of hope:

117 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 162.

Je ne pensais plus à Manuel, à l'école, à maman, à la maladie ni à tous les problèmes qui resurgiraient bien assez tôt. C'est ainsi que tout a commencé avec Malik ; de notre histoire, on pourrait écrire tout un livre.¹¹⁸

These crossovers are a nice way of underlining the fact that the novel is co-authored by two siblings and enables them to link together the communities they have created in their previous texts. As mentioned above, this adds a sense of continuity, as well as giving young readers a sense of satisfaction as they recognise and identify characters that they have previously encountered. This intertextuality may aid in engaging readers with the plot, as once they realise that they have already encountered some of the characters (assuming that they have already read the earlier texts) then they may read more actively as they look out for other crossover characters that may appear. This innovative technique of including interconnected characters between three otherwise separate novels is one that can also be seen in some English-language YA-fiction, notably *Skellig*¹¹⁹ and *My Name is Mina*¹²⁰ by David Almond. The latter novel is in fact a prequel to the first, and features first-person narration from a character who played a significant role in *Skellig*, the time-span covers a number of months leading up to the moment when Mina introduces herself to Michael, the narrator of the earlier novel. Strategies of interconnectedness between novels may encourage readers to read deeper, as they feel a sense of connection to characters already encountered, and the thrill of recognition when they figure out the links between the characters of the various texts.

5.6 Conclusion

David Lodge claims that the "structure of a narrative is like the framework of girders that holds up a modern high-rise building: you can't see it, but it determines the edifice's shape and character."¹²¹ Authorial stylistic choices have a major impact on the manner in which a text will be received by a reader. Such choices affect every facet of a text, from narrative voice, focalisation and characterisation to the organisation of the novels (including structure, temporal arc and the presence of illustrations), to the use of such

118 Ibid., 237.

119 David Almond, *Skellig* (London: Hodder Children's Books, 1998).

120 David Almond, *My Name is Mina* (London: Hodder Children's Books, 2010).

121 Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*, 216.

techniques as fantasy and intertextuality. The desire of these authors to portray a more realistic and positive vision of the *banlieues* than that commonly seen in France is aided by their stylistic choices, as the strategies that they use encourage greater identification with the protagonists. Increased identification renders it more likely that the YA readers from the *banlieue* will internalise the message of optimism conveyed by the texts, rather than the overtly negative representation to which they are so frequently exposed. The authors achieve this through the use of first-person narration (in the majority of the texts), a mixture of internal and external focalisation, and both direct and indirect characterisation. In combination with the use of fantasy and intertextuality to encourage deeper engagement with the texts, such strategies can lead to the empowerment of their YA *banlieue* readers, who may feel a sense of connection to the characters and thus adopt the optimistic note that the novels foreground.

Chapter 6. “Allez expliquer le langage des jeunes à des vieux”¹: Linguistic Issues in the Corpus

One of the most important elements of the texts in this corpus is the way in which language is treated. All of the texts employ a language that accurately reflects that spoken by young residents of the peripheral zones. The novels are written in a predominantly oral style, including many elements usually only encountered in dialogue, and the manner and tempo of the writing reflects the speech patterns, inflections and informality of contemporary urban street slang. The language used by this demographic is both vibrant and subversive, combining a mix of old working-class argot, *verlan* and borrowings from English, Arabic and various minority languages, as well as rap culture. Language acts as a means for the marginalized youth population to unite under a common identity, and its use in the texts is an important aspect of the empowerment of this demographic through literature. This chapter, which will first provide some contextualising information on the use of language in books for younger readers, will then discuss two of the major elements of *le français contemporain des cités* which feature prominently in the novels of the corpus: firstly, the widespread use of *verlan*, and secondly, the large number of borrowings from other languages. There are also several, more minor, linguistic issues that will be discussed, including the influence of American rap culture on the language used by *banlieue* youth, the use of truncations, the oral style in which the novels are written and the use of “text speak” in the novels, which will be examined in turn, before moving on to a discussion of the importance of this sociolect for the *banlieue* youth, and the authors’ awareness of the wider sociological implications of the use of such linguistic traits.

6.1 *Le français contemporain des cités*

According to Meredith Doran, who has carried out extensive research on the language used by the *banlieue* youth in Paris, this sociolect is akin to a “linguistic *bricolage* marked by the multilingualism and multiculturalism present in the communities in which it is spoken”.² Sociolinguist Jean-Pierre Goudaillier – who uses the term *le français contemporain des cités* (FCC) to describe the sociolect used by this demographic – believes the language behaviours of the residents of the *banlieue* to be:

1 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 185.

2 Meredith Doran, “Alternative French, Alternative Identities: Situating Language in *La Banlieue*,” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 11, no. 4 (2007): 497.

...so many manifestations of the rejection by some young – and not so young – people of the suburban low income housing projects and inner-city working class neighborhoods of France towards the language given legitimacy by French schools and society. In this sense they are a way of reacting to the social violence directed at them.³

These quotes outline the parameters of the following discussion, which, drawing on the work of Doran, Goudaillier and other linguists and sociologists working in this area, will first outline the various elements that make up the patchwork language (or *linguistic bricolage*, to borrow Doran's expression) that can be found in the texts, as well as the ways in which these elements are managed by the authors, before examining the ways in which this form of language can function as a cultural marker for the *banlieue* youth, affording them a means of expression that is separate to that of the majority population, and which can thus play an important role in affording young readers – particularly, but not exclusively, those from the *banlieue* – access to these novels.

Peter Hunt claims that authors of books for children tend to "adapt their language to the capacities of the child-reader(s) that they have constructed, and there is a long tradition of assumptions about what such readers can understand."⁴ There is little consensus in the field of children's literature as to the necessity of tailoring the language used to the perceived level of ability held by young readers. According to Hunt:

It may be correct to assume that child-readers will not bring to the text a complete or sophisticated system of codes, but is this any reason to deny them access to texts with a potential of rich codes? Equally, the argument that the child-reader does not understand complex indeterminacy would be more convincing if what is commonly substituted for it could be 'simple'; but 'simplicity' is often equated with unoriginal phrasing and a tendency to summarize thought or action.⁵

He regrets that, all too often, books written for children are reductive and resort to clichés and the use of unoriginal spoken idiom and simplicity. He finds this unnecessary, and even claims that "Indifferent writing, working on the assumption that children cannot distinguish one kind of writing from another ... demonstrates a patronizing attitude, and suggests that, too often, adult readers of children's books are themselves unable or

3 Jean-Pierre Goudaillier, "Contemporary French in Low-Income Neighborhoods : Language in the Mirror, Language of Refusal," *Adolescence* 5 HS, no. 1 (2011): 188.

4 Editor's Introduction. Stephens, "Analysing texts," 71.

5 Hunt, *Criticism*, 101.

unwilling to make fundamental distinctions.”⁶ Hunt believes that this type of writing marks an attempt to “control” the manner in which a young reader interprets the text, allowing little room for their own observations or associations, that truly innovative and gripping writing for young readers should not exert such control, and that in fact such texts actually end up being “anti-child”. Citing several works for children which he believes to represent both positive and negative examples of the use of language and register in this sense, he outlines his belief that “Language is a remarkably accurate betrayer of less-than-thoughtful writing.”⁷ John Stephens, who has undertaken several studies on multicultural children’s literature, believes that language can be an effective – and potentially dangerous – tool in the promotion of particular ideologies and viewpoints. He posits that:

...attention to the language of children’s fiction has an important implication for evaluation, adding another dimension to the practices of judging books according to their entertainment value as stories or according to their socio-political correctness. It can be an important tool in distinguishing between ‘restrictive texts’ which allow little scope for active reader judgements and texts which enable critical and thoughtful responses.⁸

Therefore, according to these critics, books for children and young adults that make use of a reductive and uninspiring language actually undermine their young readers. They believe it is better to be complex and authentic when writing, rather than patronise children by striving to write a text that may end up feeling contrived and stilted. The authors under investigation in this thesis use a language that is true to themselves, and that does not patronise their young readers. When asked if the knowledge that they have a wide readership among young people had changed their style of writing, Rachedi and Mahany responded that they do not really believe in “la notion de devoir en littérature ... Toute écriture est une forme d’engagement. L’engagement que nous avons à travers des livres nous est propre, lié à notre histoire, notre envie, mais nous ne l’imposons à personne.”⁹

All three authors use language in diverse ways, but there are common elements that appear, to varying degrees, in all of the texts. These linguistic issues will now be discussed, as well as the manner in which the authors use them in their texts.

6 Ibid., 109-10.

7 Ibid., 108.

8 Stephens, “Analysing texts,” 84. Stephens here references: Hunt, *Criticism*, 119.

9 See Appendix 3.

6.2 Verlan

One of the most interesting features of the language in the texts is the frequency with which *verlan* words appear. This well-known and much discussed style of backslang has been described as a "véritable phénomène sociolinguistique"¹⁰ created by inverting syllables to form new words, which can sometimes, though not always, have a different meaning to the original. The name itself, as is widely known, is an example of its usage, as the word *verlan* is an inversion of the term *à l'envers*. It is well-known that this form of slang is not a new phenomenon created by the residents of the *banlieues*, and that it actually dates to much earlier.¹¹ Nacer Kettane, an Algerian-born novelist, co-founder and CEO of *Beur FM* and former managing director of *Beur TV*, traces the use of *verlan* "back to World War Two, when French prisoners employed the technique in order to communicate with each other without being understood by their Nazi captors."¹² It was later adopted by French working-class youths "in order to demarcate a zone of communication impermeable to the police"¹³ and as such, it "constitutes an act of resistance to alien forms of authority."¹⁴ According to Goudaillier:

In traditional forms of slang (occupational slang, which is distinguished from contemporary sociological slang), *verlan* exists as a linguistic procedure for coding, for formal transformation, but only involves a very limited numbers of units . . . , nothing compared to the thousands of verlan words of FCC.¹⁵

Although it has its roots in earlier forms of linguistic word games, the concept of *verlan* as it applies to FCC can be considered as a separate phenomenon. Hargreaves claims that "One of the great attractions of verlan is that it enables language users to position themselves outside the standard categories of social identification."¹⁶ According to Black and Sloutsky, for those who speak this sociolect, it acts as "un moyen d'exprimer leur

10 Catherine Black and Larissa Sloutsky, "Évolution du verlan, marqueur social et identitaire, comme vu dans les films : *La Haine* (1995) et *L'Esquive* (2004)," *Synergies Canada*, no. 2 (2010): 1.

11 And in fact, could be compared to the "costermonger" slang of nineteenth-century London. For more on this, see Henry Mayhew's nineteenth century text: Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2008).

12 Hargreaves, "Resistance and Identity," 93. Hargreaves here references: Nacer Kettane, *Droit de réponse à la démocratie française* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1986), 20-23.

13 Hargreaves, "Resistance and Identity," 93.

14 Ibid.

15 Goudaillier, "Contemporary French in Low-Income Neighborhoods," 185.

16 Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 91.

marginalité, leur sentiment de rejet par la société, leur différence mais aussi l'attachement à une identité française,"¹⁷ and that as such it "permet à ses usagers de se situer entre la culture de leurs parents qu'ils ne possèdent plus et la culture française à laquelle ils n'ont pas vraiment accès."¹⁸ Jean-Pierre Goudaillier has noted that, for those who speak FCC it acts as:

...a sign of a refusal of the society they experience as oppressive. *Verlan* is not only a code (*cryptic function*) permitting the excluded to exclude those who exclude them; it is also a way of clearly marking one's identity in relation to those who are outside of the slum peer network. To take the Other's language, transform it into something unrecognizable, then send it back « inside-out » translates into a rejection of that Other.¹⁹

For many of the *banlieue* youth, feelings of identity rupture are common and they must therefore find a means of expressing their sense of self. Thus there are two main reasons why the (predominantly young) residents of the *banlieue* express themselves in this manner: on the one hand, they need a feeling of belonging and identity,²⁰ which they can find through membership of the peer group, of which speech is an important mark; and on the other hand, as a result of their sociocultural exclusion and isolation, "alors la fracture linguistique est née de la fracture sociale."²¹

Many words that have been 'verlanised' take on a harsher vowel sound and harder consonants than those usually heard in standard French. Such pronunciation differences create a greater distance between this type of slang and 'normal' French, and renders speech more difficult for the uninitiated to comprehend, particularly as this type of wordplay evolves extremely quickly with words rapidly coming into and falling out of favour, particularly as a result of the fact that *verlan* words are sometimes appropriated by the mainstream population. Natalie Lefkowitz, who taught at the prestigious *Lycée Henri IV* in Paris, claims that this speech form:

17 Black and Sloutsky, "Évolution du verlan," 2.

18 Ibid.

19 Goudaillier, "Contemporary French in Low-Income Neighborhoods," 186. Goudaillier here references: Pierre Bourdieu, "Vous avez dit « populaire »?," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 46, no. L'usage de la parole (1983).

20 Black and Sloutsky, "Évolution du verlan," 8.

21 Ibid.

...has gained popularity in elite French society as a status language reflecting initiation and awareness. This occurrence suggests an affirmation of the immigrant presence in France. *Verlan* distinguishes itself from other codes of this sort in its ability to cross class barriers and withstand the test of time.²²

Because of this, many words that enter into majority usage tend to be quickly discarded by the *banlieue* community and re-transformed. Some of the many examples of *verlan* that can be seen in the texts include:

vènère – énerver (KSR, 41), chelou – louche (KKD, 39), keuf – flic (LPM, 57), ouf – fou (LAPMA, 67), relou – lourd (KKD, 40), pécho – chopé (LAPMA, 67), meuf – femme (LAPMA, 69), keum – mec (KSR, 31), cistera – raciste (KSR, 51), zarbi – bizarre (KSR, 134), cheum – moche (KSR, 121), rebeu – beur (UHCNPP, 213), re-noi – noir (LPM, 43), tass-pé – pétasse (LPM, 73), feuj – juif (LPM, 86), Quetur – Turque (LGDB, 13), teubé – bête (LGDB, 87), téma – mate (KKD, 111), noich – chinois (KKD, 160), tèj – jeté (LGDB, 136), scrède – discret (DRPLO, 139), scarla – lascar (KSR, 81)

Additionally, in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, one of the protagonist's students uses *verlan* in almost every sentence, as is evident in these utterances:

T'es qui, toi? J'm'en fous d'ta iv, t'es pas mon père, v'zy parle pas avec oim steuplaît!²³

Tu vas faire quoi? Il est sérieux, lui, là? Tu crois j'ai reup de toi ou quoi? Allez saluuuuut! V'zy, rends pas ouf.²⁴

As mentioned above, *verlan* words often fall out of favour among the *banlieue* youths once these terms become accepted by members of the majority population. It is therefore interesting to note Marc Sourdout's observation, in his article on language use in Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain*. In relation to the *verlan* words used in Guène's first novel, Sourdout claims "Il est à noter que, mis à part « chelou », toutes ces unités sont indexés dans le *Petit Robert*."²⁵ Indeed, several words in *verlan* entered into the 2005 edition of *Le Petit Robert*, including beurs, keuf, meuf and keum. These are now commonly used in mainstream French by young people living outside of the *banlieue*, and are less common in FCC as a result, generally having been replaced by re-verlanisations, such as re-beu for beur

22 Natalie J. Lefkowitz, "Verlan: Talking Backwards in French," *The French Review* 63, no. 2 (1989): 313.

23 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 247.

24 Ibid.

25 Sourdout, "Mots d'ados," 499.

and feu-meuf for meuf. These new words, in conjunction with the harder syllables and harsher vowel sounds, mentioned above, add another dimension to the cryptic function, in that they shift the emphasis to the first syllable of the word, which places them in opposition to usual French pronunciation rules. Goudaillier believes that this "supports the hypothesis that FCC has a « mirroring » function,"²⁶ whereby it becomes more difficult for the uninitiated to comprehend, and which will be discussed in greater detail below.

All of the authors under investigation use *verlan* frequently, although different strategies are employed in order to deal with such terms. Most of the novels, including all of Rachedi's and three of Guène's four novels, do not highlight *verlan*, the words are integrated seamlessly into the text. In Guène's *Les gens du Balto*, only the young, male characters use this speech form, while the older characters never use contemporary slang, and the young female characters speak other forms of slang but never *verlan*. In her previous two novels, the young female narrators pepper their narratives with *verlan*, but while Doria occasionally explains the terms in the text, some of the terms, including *cheum* from *moche*, and *scrède* from *discret* are explained in footnotes, none of the other words are explained in this manner, presumably because Guène assumed her readers would already be familiar with these terms – in particular because, as outlined by Marc Sourdout above, some of them had become so common by 2005 that they were included in *Le Petit Robert*. Mahany, meanwhile, uses footnotes to translate all of the *verlan* terms that she uses in *Kiffer sa race*. It is interesting to note that *verlan* appears with much greater frequency in the novels of Guène and Mahany than it does in those of Rachedi. While there are many examples of *verlan* words appearing in the narratives of all of Guène's novels, and Mahany's solo effort, as well as the co-written *La petite Malika*, there are very few examples in *Le petit Malik*, all of which appear in dialogue, and almost none in *Le poids d'une âme*. This can be partially explained by the fact that *Le poids d'une âme* is the only novel of the eight to feature third-person narration, and that as such it was perhaps more difficult to incorporate this type of language into the narrative. Another possible reason is that the author wished to distance himself from the *banlieue* stereotype, by refusing the type of language most commonly associated with these zones. If this is indeed the case, it is noteworthy that Rachedi incorporates more of this type of wordplay in his subsequent

26 Goudaillier, "Contemporary French in Low-Income Neighborhoods," 187.

novels. The language of the *banlieue* is most frequently associated with male members of the population, which will be outlined in the discussion of the implications of this sociolect, below, rendering strange its greater use in the novels written by female authors.

Verlan is an important element of FCC, and this is reflected in its usage in most of these novels. It plays an important role in contributing to the authenticity of the characters' speech in the texts. It has been written about Guène's writing that "The author's use of Verlan throughout each of the novels is integral to the characters and their environment."²⁷ It also contributes to the oral and informal style in which the majority of the novels are written. This will enable easier access to the novels for young readers, as well as an increased ability to identify with the protagonists on the part of others who use these speech forms. Yet the novels are not so laden with terms in *verlan* that they would be jarring or off-putting to those who are unfamiliar with it, and most of the terms are easy to decipher, as long as one has a basic familiarity with the processes involved. Thus, the authors in question strike a balance between realistic levels of informality and slang, and yet retain the ability to draw in outsiders to the texts.

6.3 Borrowings

Another notable feature of the language found, both in the texts in question but also in FCC more generally, is the prevalence of words borrowed from other languages. This is a highly significant element of the language used in the texts, as it reflects the prevalence with which words from other languages appear in the everyday speech of those who reside in the *banlieue* regions. In fact, Goudaillier claimed in 1997 that, as regards FCC: "La différence essentielle par rapport à l'argot traditionnel réside surtout dans l'intensification des emprunts, et leur origine."²⁸ Goudaillier's sociolinguistic research was carried out in various different *cités*, and not all of these languages can be found in the texts in question. Nevertheless, examples of borrowings from many languages feature throughout the texts, predominantly Arabic and English. Some examples of borrowings from Arabic include the following:

27 Fatimah Kelleher, "An Interview with Faïza Guène," *Wasafiri* 28, no. 4 (2013): 6.

28 Françoise Gadet, "« Français populaire » : Un concept douteux pour un objet évanescant," *Ville-Ecole-Intégration Enjeux*, no. 130 (2002): 47. Gadet here references: Jean-Pierre Goudaillier, *Comment tu tchaches. Dictionnaire du français contemporain des cités* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1997).

Arabic: *mektoub* – fate (KKD, 20), *miskinel miskina* – the poor thing (DRPLO, 13), ***ché-tane* – devil** (KSR, 39), ***jnoun* – spirit** (LGDB, 157), *nif* – honour (LGDB, 156), *aâmi* – uncle (DRPLO, 140), *habs* – prison (DRPLO, 99), *châab* – people (DRPLO, 126), *hanout* – shop (DRPLO, 147), *beslama* – goodbye (KKD, 158), *hchouma* – disgrace/modesty/taboo (KKD, 109), ***Insh'Allah* – God willing** (DRPLO, 127), ***hamdoullab* – thanks be to God** (UHCNPP, 131), *ain* – casting the evil eye (KSR, 32), *bakchich* – bribe (DRPLO, 138), ***baraka* – blessing/good luck** (UHCNPP, 37), *belâani* – a show (DRPLO, 114), *boleta* – football, Algerian dialect (DRPLO, 141), *djellaba* (KSR, 22), *gandoura* (KSR, 22), *hayek* (DRPLO, 150), *babouches* (KKD, 18) – traditional North African garments/shoes, *istiqlal* – independence (DRPLO, 143), *khoyya* – my brother (DRPLO, 140), *marabout* – witch doctor (KKD, 56), *wesh* – informal greeting (UHCNPP, 250), ***Sadaqa* – offering** (DRPLO, 152), *walou* – nothing (KKD, 158), *habibi* – friend/loved (KSR, 108), *hétiste* – waster (KSR, 158), *hmar* – donkey (KSR, 192), *chahada* – Islamic creed (KSR, 9), *hlam* – sin (KSR, 9), *zina* – beautiful (KSR, 22), *aziz* – pet (KSR, 94), *ffour* – meal (KSR, 110), *bézeff* – lots (KSR, 158), *chibani* – elder (UHCNPP, 123), *el kebda* – liver (UHCNPP, 101)

In particular, the large number of religious terms is noteworthy, as highlighted above. This most likely reflects the fact that young people, whose parents immigrated from North Africa, and other Arabic-speaking regions, predominantly hear Arabic in the home. Their parents' attachment to North African culture and customs, which was developed in Chapter Three, means that they use many religious terms in their daily life. Thus, even those who do not speak much Arabic themselves, will be familiar with, and likely to use, terms such as the ones highlighted above. This attachment the older generation feels towards their home country stands in contrast to feelings often held by their French-born children, who often harbour a deep attachment to the country of their birth. This is evidenced by Doria's remark, to the reader, upon learning that her mother will be taking literacy classes, organised by their social worker: "On va lui apprendre à lire et à écrire la langue de **mon pays**."²⁹ This detachment from the language of their parents is perhaps part of the reason why the majority of the Arabic terms in the texts are religious terms and other words that the parents' generation would routinely have used.

After Arabic, English is the language from which the next greatest amount of borrowings are taken, but there are also some examples of borrowings from minority languages to be found. As can be seen from the following examples, borrowings from English contain some grammatically incorrect terms, as highlighted below:

29 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 80. Emphasis mine.

English: die (LGBD, 23), whatever (LGBD, 24), life (LGDB, 106), my mother (LGDB, 106), time (LGDB, 109), easy (LGDB, 109), funny (LGDB, 112), cash (LGDB, 113), style (LGDB, 115), shame (LGDB, 142), french touch (DRPLO, 46), cup of tea (LAPMA, 18), loose (LGDB, 108), add (LGDB, 109), smileys (LGDB, 112), down (LGDB, 144), lose (KSR, 19), high potential (LAPMA, 157), made in Tlemcen (KSR, 22), hold-up (LAPMA, 31), ready made (LAPMA, 49), cost-killing (LAPMA, 203), old school (KSR, 20), enough (KSR, 55), "**Argenteuil, we have a trouble**" (KSR, 208), bad boy (LPM, 76), no future (LPDA, 57), working girl (UHCNPP, 172), no thank you (UHCNPP, 280), out of fashion (LAPMA, 67), please (LAPMA, 70), sweet dreams (KKD, 74), sexy bomb (LGDB, 142), laughing out loud (LAPMA, 71), smartphone (UHCNPP, 144), prime time (UHCNPP, 122), king size (UHCNPP, 127), jet lag (LPM, 75)

Some examples of borrowings from minority languages seen in the texts include:

Romani: *gadjo* – outsider (LGDB, 52)

Wolof: *toubab* – white person (KKD, 131)

Soninke: *kou syinkaranto* – those idiots (DRPLO, 83)

Finally, there are many terms that have been recycled from older forms of working-class slang. In the majority of cases, these retain their original meanings and are common across the novels, including terms such as: "*tomber*, au sens de « être condamné », *daronne* au sens de « mère », *tirer* au sens de « voler », *balance* au sens de « mouchard », *blaze* au sens de « nom »,³⁰ all of which appear in *Kiffé kiffé demain* but which can also be found in the other novels. In addition, the masculine and plural forms of *daronne*, (*le daron* and *les darons*) appear in almost all of the novels. Some other terms taken from *argot traditionnel*, however, have changed meanings from the original. These include: *cramer*, meaning "to inform on", *flamber*, to mean "to show off", *tailler*, meaning "to slander", and *calculer quelqu'un* meaning "to be interested in someone."³¹

The reasons for the large number of borrowings from other languages and from earlier forms of French *argot* are, according to Doran "meaningful and motivated."³² They are also relatively easy to discern. For instance, the use of borrowings from the country of their parents "represents an obvious assertion of youths' connections to multiple cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the face of a homogenizing cultural discourse."³³ This

30 Sourdou, "Mots d'ados," 501-2.

31 Ibid., 502.

32 Doran, "Alternative French, Alternative Identities," 501.

33 Ibid.

connection to the country of origin is understandable and natural, and using words and terms of a language with which they are familiar in their everyday conversation is an easy way to maintain a feeling of connection, even if they feel that they themselves are French. Borrowings from Wolof and Soninke featuring in the texts represent the fact that, regardless that all of the authors are from an Algerian background, the *banlieues* are by no means ethnically (or linguistically) homogenous regions, and thus words from other languages have made their way into the sociolect spoken in these regions. Finally, borrowings from Romani, as well as the number of words "resuscitated" from *argot traditionnel*, according to Doran "suggest a symbolic alignment with other marginalized and working-class social groups within l'Hexagone."³⁴ This "symbolic alignment" with other working-class and marginalised groups is also evident in the elements of FCC taken from American rap culture, which will be discussed in section 6.4.2. Thus, there are different motivations behind the various types of borrowings that, when combined, form FCC, and each is imbued with a symbolic value indicative of the speakers' sense of identity.

The novels under investigation deal with the use of borrowings in different ways, and have various different methods for marking – or not – the non-French terms that are used. Even within the texts themselves, there is, on occasion, a lack of consistency in how borrowings are dealt with. In *Kiffe kiffe demain*, for instance, Guène sometimes places the Arabic word after the French version of the word as a form of emphasis by repetition and in other instances, borrowings are *entre guillemets* and are subsequently translated or explained in French. *Du rêve pour les oufs*, on the other hand, makes liberal use of footnotes to translate the borrowings from Arabic, as well as the one borrowing from Soninke, all of which appear in italics in the body of the text. Interestingly, however, the Arabic expression *Inchallah* is not translated or explained, most likely because Guène presumed that the majority, if not all, of her readers would already be familiar with this term. Habiba Mahany also uses footnotes to translate borrowings in *Kiffer sa race*, and although there is some inconsistency in her use of italics, for the most part, words from other languages are not highlighted. Guène had yet another strategy for dealing with borrowings in *Les gens du Balto*, in which no footnotes appear. Borrowings from English appear in italics, whereas borrowings from Arabic – spoken predominantly by the Chacal twins, the only characters from a North African background – do not, while the borrowings in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, the vast majority of which appear in dialogue, are for

34 Ibid.

the most part, though not always, in italics. Relative to Guène and Mahany, Rachedi makes little use of borrowings. There are very few examples of borrowings in *Le poids d'une âme*, yet in the few instances when Arabic words appear, they are italicised and not translated or explained. *La petite Malika* is sprinkled with many italicised borrowings from English, and some un-italicised borrowings from Arabic. The various strategies used by these authors, in particular the tendency toward highlighting the English borrowings while normalising those from Arabic, perhaps indicates a desire to demonstrate that the protagonists are more familiar and comfortable with Arabic, considering it part of everyday speech, while they are conscious of employing words from a foreign tongue when using English terms and phrases.

Le Petit Malik features an incident whereby one of Malik's friends is brought to court as a result of his use of language, after he had insulted a local police officer "d'un banal « nique ta mère »."³⁵ Malik explains that Halim peppers his conversations with this phrase, almost as if it was a punctuation mark, and thus had not intended any insult towards the police officer in question. His lawyer, a local man of North African origin, conducted research and found that the expression had its origins in the Maghreb:

En arabe, on insulte sur le père, *baba* en VO. Par un de ces mystérieux méandres linguistiques, les immigrés, ils ont remplacé *baba* par race. Par exemple, « Maudite soit la religion de ton père » est devenu « Maudite soit la religion de ta race », qui contracté est devenu « ta race »!³⁶

In explaining this to the court, Areski convinces the judge that "Nique sa mère" is merely "une simple expression vidée de son contenu",³⁷ and his client is merely required to apologise to the police officer in question. This incident highlights the linguistic manipulations that can occur through borrowings, and also demonstrates the differing attitudes that can be held towards an expression, depending on perspective. It prompts Malik to remark: "Mais allez expliquer le langage de rue à une cour. Allez expliquer le langage des jeunes à des vieux. Nique sa mère."³⁸

35 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 179.

36 Ibid., 181.

37 Ibid., 185.

38 Ibid.

Goudaillier has referred to FCC as an *interlangue* "entre le français véhiculaire dominant, la langue circulante, et l'ensemble des vernaculaires qui compose la mosaïque linguistique des cités: arabe maghrébin, berbère, diverses langues africaines et asiatiques, langues de type tsigane, créoles antillais...pour ne citer que ces langues."³⁹ Although not all of these languages feature in the novels, there are sufficient examples to provide a representative example. In addition, Goudaillier's research, unlike this thesis, was not confined to the Paris *banlieues*, and the subjects of his linguistic studies were of diverse ethnic backgrounds. He observed in 2002 that those who use such linguistic forms are in fact appropriating the dominant language, which then becomes their own. But they are also affording themselves a means of expression that can be differentiated from the language that their families speak. This observation, in conjunction with the symbolic values attached to the use of some of these languages, helps to explain the patchwork mix of languages that can be found in the youth speech of the *banlieues*, and which are reflected in the texts in the corpus of this thesis. This linguistic mosaic adds to the multicultural nature of the text, and the incorporation of these elements adds an authentic and realistic reflection of the language used by this demographic.

6.4 Other linguistic issues

There are several other features of FCC evident in the novels, which will now be elaborated. Although not as significant as the widespread use of *verlan* and borrowings, they are nevertheless important, and lead to the formation of a patchwork language that reflects that spoken by young people in the *banlieue*. Their use in the novels can assist young readers from the *banlieue* in identifying with the protagonists, and allow easier access to the books, as they are written in a style of French with which they are familiar. In this way, they may contribute to the empowerment of these young people as they recognise themselves in literature. Conversely, by normalising this style of language, which is sometimes disparaged in other quarters, it can allow readers from outside of the *banlieues* unbiased access to a sociolect that they normally only see presented negatively.

39 Jean-Pierre Goudaillier, "De l'argot traditionnel au français contemporain des cités," *La linguistique* 38, no. 1 (2002): 10.

6.4.1 Oral Style

The novels are characterised by a particularly oral style of writing. Examples of this include the omission of the first part of negative concord, whereby characters frequently use constructions such as "c'est pas" and "il a pas", reflecting informal oral usage. Use of adjectives which function as adverbs is another common feature of this type of informal language, and many of the novels feature the presence of short sentences which sometimes lack verbs, adding to the feeling of informality. Informal narration is a feature of many novels for young adult readers, as it helps to encourage identification with the narrator, and therefore fosters a sense of empathy, allowing young readers to consider these issues from the narrator's perspective. This has long been a feature of writing for children, as outlined by Jean Guttery in 1941:

Many authors, for instance, adapt their style to the young reader by using a very informal and intimate approach. The author puts himself on the level of the child and speaks to him on personal, friendly terms as if they had shared secrets many times before. There is nothing sentimental about this style; it is just an occasional twist of a phrase that seems to establish understanding between the author and the reader. A conversational tone or an unexpected use of the second person can make the young reader at home with the author and give him the feeling that he and the author know just a bit more about the world than anyone else.⁴⁰

The oral language employed in the novels is an element of this conversational, informal style, long acknowledged as important for younger readers. The three authors under investigation all make use of this informal oral style in their texts. Faïza Guène's first two novels, *Kiffe kiffe demain* in particular, are addressed directly to the reader in an informal, almost confessional manner, as is *Kiffer sa race*, in which Mahany sometimes interrupts her narrative to address the reader, as discussed in Chapter Five. This removes the barriers between author and reader, and encourages closer identification with the protagonist and the text. The remaining novels, with the exception of *Le poids d'une âme*, also make use of a predominantly informal and oral style of address.

Youth speech in France has also, in recent years, been characterized by a more rapid-fire style, as well as, according to Meredith Doran, "an increasingly conspicuous glottal fricativization ... that Méla and others have attributed to the influence of Arabic phonology".⁴¹ Doran also discusses the fact that speech among the *banlieue* youth often

40 Jean Guttery, "Style in Children's Literature," *The Elementary English Review* 18, no. 6 (1941): 208.

41 Doran, "Alternative French, Alternative Identities," 501. Doran here references: Vivienne Méla,

features atypical intonation patterns in which the boundaries between words become blurred. This is partially the result of the hard consonants and harsh vowel sounds that are created by the use of *verlan*, but in combination with the rapid speaking style and glottal fricativization, "these marked sound features can be viewed as a refusal of the measured, careful pronunciation of normative French, the language of a cultural elite by whom minority youths feel negatively judged."⁴² This rapid-fire manner of speaking, and atypical intonation patterns are, naturally, quite difficult to convey in text, although the speech of some of the characters is marked by a combination of omissions and apostrophes in an attempt to convey rapid speech and syllables that have been swallowed, adding to the informal and oral nature of the texts.

These omissions and apostrophes also appear in some of the characters' speech although this is, for the most part, reserved for those from an immigrant background. In particular the speech of the protagonists' parents and their generation is usually marked to highlight that they speak heavily accented French. In *Kiffer sa race*, Sabrina's parents speak of *intigration* (KSR, 18), for example, and Sabrina describes her father Mohamed's accent as "son accent de blédard".⁴³ Similarly, the local shopkeeper in *Kiffe kiffe demain* tells Doria "Si vous prounez cridit sur cridit, on est toujours pas sourtis de la berge."⁴⁴ Even the speech of Medhi Mazouani, Mourad's troublesome student in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, is heavily marked – to show his North African origins, but also to demonstrate his poor level of literacy. His constant refrain is "Je m'en bats les yeuks,"⁴⁵ which is a mispronounced version of the expression *s'en battre l'œil*. Interestingly, this treatment is not reserved solely for North African characters, but is also used elsewhere, to mock received pronunciation. Sabrina's form teacher, M. Landru, speaks with an exaggeratedly correct French accent, which is transcribed as: "bonjourrrr, je suis rrrrrravi de vous rrrrrvoirrrr cette année",⁴⁶ prompting Sabrina to compare him to Maître Capello, the French linguist and television presenter. It serves as a means of rendering the North African and French characters equal in the eyes of the reader and adds to the oral style of the novels: the reader can almost hear the voices aloud when they are written in this manner.

"Verlan 2000," *Langue française*, no. 114 (1997).

42 Doran, "Alternative French, Alternative Identities," 501.

43 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 39.

44 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 77.

45 Guène, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, 247.

46 Mahany, *Kiffer sa race*, 27.

6.4.1.1 Dialogue

Speech can be presented in varying ways in literature, depending on the effect that the author wishes to create. As outlined by Janet Burroway, speech can be summarized in the narrative, presented indirectly by the narrator "so that it carries, without actual quotation, the feel of the exchange"⁴⁷, or it can be presented directly and in quotation marks, usually "when the exchange contains the possibility of discovery or decision and therefore of dramatic action."⁴⁸ Peter Hunt elaborates further on these concepts, claiming:

Very broadly, a distinction is made between 'tagged', 'free', 'direct; and 'indirect' representation. 'Tagged' refers to speech or thought presented in inverted commas, usually with a 'tag' (or reporting clause, or inquit) – for example, 'she said'. 'Free' representation does not have a tag. The distinction between 'direct' and 'indirect' is the traditional one between 'showing' and 'telling'.⁴⁹

There is very little consistency in the manner in which dialogue is treated in the novels. In *Kiffe kiffe demain*, conversations are most often reported and discussed indirectly, rather than quoted directly. Doria reserves the use of tagged speech mainly for conversations that take place between other people. This adds to the confessional style of the novel, allowing the reader to feel as if Doria was addressing them personally. In contrast to this, there is much more dialogue in *Kiffer sa race*, and almost all of the conversations are tagged. *Du rêve pour les oufs* features a lot more directly quoted and tagged dialogue than Guène's first novel, although still not as much as *Kiffer sa race*, allowing it to tread a middle ground between the almost *journal intime* feel of the former novel and the quicker pace of the latter. *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* features the greatest amount of tagged dialogue of all of the novels in the corpus, although there is some inconsistency in the manner in which the dialogue is marked, as Guène uses both *guillemets* and em dashes to mark the speech of the characters at various points. In terms of the dialogue in the *Les gens du Balto*, for most characters, their stream of dialogue is untagged, as it is continuous. In the case of Nadia and Ali Chacal, however, who appear together in every instance, the switches between their respective dialogues are marked by em dashes. Very occasionally, there is dialogue from other characters embedded in the main stream of narrated dialogue, as when Magalie reports things her parents have said, and this is tagged *entre guillemets*.

47 Burroway, *Writing Fiction*, 128.

48 Ibid.

49 Hunt, *Criticism*, 110.

There is a lot of tagged dialogue throughout both *Le petit Malik* and *La petite Malika*, reflecting the need to impart information about plot and characters in the brief episodes which we spend with these characters. In these novels, the dialogue is usually tagged by em dashes, and some chapters – particularly in *La petite Malika* – are comprised almost entirely of dialogue. In one instance in this later novel, when Malika has just returned from a holiday in the mountains and her teacher asks her to speak to the class about her experience, this “interview” is reported almost as a play, with each speaker’s name appearing before their utterance. *Le poids d’une âme* features a moderate amount of tagged dialogue sprinkled throughout the novel, but much less than any of the other novels by either of these authors. This is perhaps as a result of the short chapters that comprise this novel as well as the fact that the reader primarily encounters one character at a time throughout the narrative. The various different types of dialogue found throughout these texts serve different purposes and each was a conscious choice on the part of the authors to achieve the desired effect on the reader.

6.4.2 Rap Culture

Not only does the sociolect employed by this demographic contain many borrowings from English, Arabic and minority languages as outlined above, many words and references from American rap culture also occur, reflecting the importance of this culture for peripheralised youths in France. Meredith Doran claimed that the influence of American rap culture on the language and culture of the *banlieue* youth reflects the links between the artistic expression of economically marginalised and minority cultures both within and outside France. Marginalised youth in France identify with and have empathy with the angry minority youth population in America, among whom rap was first begun as, according to Doran, they feel they are “sharing a similar daily reality of economic and social marginality,”⁵⁰ and who thus have provided the *banlieue* youth with “otherwise-absent models for thinking and speaking about issues of minority self-definition, emancipation and sociocultural analysis.”⁵¹ The influence of American rap has spawned a French form of rap and hip-hop, now hugely popular in its own right, although the English-language version still remains popular. French rap is often politically motivated, and many artists of North African origin are engaged in a struggle against their marginalised status and

50 Doran, “Alternative French, Alternative Identities,” 501.

51 Ibid.

the racist treatment to which they are often subjected. In her study of *Beur* and *banlieue* hip-hop, *raï* and filmmaking cultures, Valérie Orlando claims that these forms of cultural expression are engaged in a process of "Creating a new vernacular through which to fight the status quo."⁵² There are not very many of these references in the texts, although they do appear from time to time, as when swear words appear with phonetic spellings mirroring the way they are pronounced in rap songs – such as *biatch* (UHCNPP, 259) and *niggaz* (LPM, 69). Rap culture is also referenced in several of the novels, with particular groups and musicians, both French, (Diam's, IAM) and American (Ice T, Public Enemy, NWA) name checked in several of the novels. Notably, in *Le petit Malik*, there is a clever depiction of a young *banlieue* man who capitalises on the growing popularity of rap culture, and the consequent media attention, by launching a career as a rap artist and playing up to all the stereotypes about the *banlieues* prevalent in French society. Moussa is guilty of exploiting the usual stereotypes of the *banlieues* for personal gain, playing up to the image of tough *banlieue* gangsters and drug dealers, and his stage name, DJ Masta Basta Fucking Bâtard Killer,⁵³ causes much amusement for Malik and his friends, as do the titles and lyrics of his songs. They are particularly scathing regarding his subject matter:

On se marrait bien en écoutant Moussa, il racontait des fictions super marrantes sur le quartier où une voiture brûlait tous les deux mètres, où une bagarre de rue éclatait chaque minute, où chaque habitant était un terroriste en puissance et où il serait le chef d'un gang de psychopathes.⁵⁴

This point is salient, as it demonstrates Rachedi's desire to combat these "fictions", yet in an oblique manner. Their gentle mockery of Moussa would have continued were it not for the events of November 2005: "Personne le prenait au sérieux jusqu'au jour où des émeutes ont embrasé les cités françaises. Moussa l'anonyme a gagné ses galons de pape de l'underground et a tout de suite été récupéré par la plus grande maison de disques."⁵⁵ From that point on, Moussa becomes a spokesperson for the *banlieues* and, with the help of his producer and sidekick François, capitalises on this sudden public interest,

52 Valérie Orlando, "From rap to Raï in the mixing bowl: Beur hip-hop culture and banlieue cinema in urban France.," *Journal of Popular Culture* 36, no. 3 (2003): 40.

53 Interestingly, Nicolas Sarkozy's oldest son Pierre, a producer of rap music, has a stage name of his own, Mosey, in order to carry out "his business as anonymously as possible, knowing that in *la banlieue* his real name meets with rage." Milne, "The Singular Banlieue," 53. Milne here references: "Pendant ce temps, Pierre Sarkozy fait du rap," *Le Monde*, October 21 2009.

54 Rachedi, *Le petit Malik*, 68.

55 Ibid., 69.

releasing several albums and frequently rebranding himself by changing his name – each more ridiculous than the last. Some examples of his more cumbersome stage names are MRG or “MC (à prononcer Messie) de la rue qui gueule”⁵⁶ and L’AMOUR, “L’Artiste Maudit des Oubliés Universels.”⁵⁷ Despite the fact that Moussa, upon attaining success and status, moved to Versailles, he nevertheless remains the chosen media spokesperson for the *quartiers défavorisés*, and his lyrics continue to bemoan the plight of the *banlieues*, although he no longer has day-to-day experience of life there, which leads to some wry commentary from Malik:

Vu les paroles de plus en plus apocalyptiques de l’exilé, on s’inquiétait tous des pauvres petits hommes riches et ça nous mettait du baume au cœur quand on galérait. Y avait pire que nous puisque les paroles de MC MRG le racontait.⁵⁸

Moussa sometimes visits his former home, journalists in tow and according to Malik: “lui qui ne nous avait jamais calculés, il nous checkait en demandant comment ses niggaz allaient,”⁵⁹ but as soon as the photographers leave, he departs immediately. This desire to capitalise on the plight of others for personal gain is one that is shared by François, whose numerous associations, inaugurated merely to attract funding, were discussed in Chapter Four. In Moussa’s case, releasing a rap album at an opportune time allowed him to become a spokesperson for a culture he does not truly represent. Yet his desire to project this image of himself, and the fact that he dressed and spoke in the stereotypical manner of a rapper before he gained notoriety (“On se tenait tous les côtes de rire quand on le voyait chalouper en balançant des yos par-ci, des niggaz par-là en revenant de la crèche avec ses deux mômes.”⁶⁰) demonstrates the attraction of US culture, and in particular its minority rap culture, for the marginalised *banlieue* youths. This becomes even more obvious as the boys themselves all express admiration for American rap artists and gangster movies, claiming that men such as these: “prolongeaient le rêve américain peuplé de gangsters qui niquaient le système. De vrais hommes, quoi.”⁶¹ The references and linguistic borrowings from rap culture are an important part of the linguistic expression of this community, reflecting the importance of this culture for many among the youth population of the

56 Ibid., 70.

57 Ibid., 72.

58 Ibid., 71-2.

59 Ibid., 72.

60 Ibid., 69.

61 Ibid., 67.

banlieue and thus their inclusion in the novels comprises a representation of a significant aspect of *banlieue* culture – one that is likely to aid YA readers from these regions to recognise themselves in the novels and to increase any possible identification they may feel with the characters.

6.4.3 Truncations

Another common feature of FCC is the widespread presence of truncations. These take two main forms, apheresis and apocope. Apocope, in which the end of the word is dropped, is more common in standard French than apheresis, whereby the beginning of the word is clipped. Some examples of apocope can be seen in the texts, such as *parano* from *paranoïaque* (KKD, 121) and *mytho* from *mythomane* (KKD, 18). The words which have been clipped can sometimes acquire a suffix, often an “o” sound, and examples of these can also be found, such as *intello* from *intellectuel* (LGDB, 15), and *coïnços* from *coïncé* (KSR, 99). Less commonly, other suffixes occur, as in *tendax* from *tendu* (KSR, 79). More frequently, however, the informal language of the *banlieues* makes use of apheresis, which is uncommon even in traditional forms of argot. Goudaillier cites two examples of earlier slang words that have undergone this form of truncation: *pitaine*, from *capitaine* in military slang and *bourgnat*, from *charbonnier* or coalman, and claims these to be unusual and isolated cases. He believes that the extent to which apheresis is used in FCC “is an indicator of the speakers’ desire to go backwards from the linguistic norm.”⁶² Some examples which appear in the texts include *leurleur* from *contrôleur* (LPM, 133), *zic* from *musique* (KSR, 99), and *zonzon* from *prison* (KKD, 171). According to Goudaillier, truncations such as this are all “examples of a « mirroring » function which helps to bring about the creation of a large number of lexemes which are hard for the uninitiated, those excluded from the free market, to understand,”⁶³ which adds to the cryptic function, as mentioned in the discussion of *verlan* above. This feature of language adds an additional level of difficulty for outsiders to understand, effectively excluding the dominant group,⁶⁴ and thus their inclusion in the texts, even if – as for the rap culture references – in a minor sense, is a significant aspect of the authors’ attempts to portray a realistic language reflecting that spoken by young people of the marginalised zones.

62 Goudaillier, “Contemporary French in Low-Income Neighborhoods,” 187.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid., 183. Goudaillier here references: Bourdieu, “Vous avez dit «populaire?»,” 103.

6.4.4 "Text Speak"

Finally, several of the novels, in particular those dealing with younger protagonists, feature "text speak", albeit as a relatively minor linguistic feature. Although not a feature of FCC, this form of speech has grown in popularity among young people everywhere – not just in France – as a result of the growth of internet and technology based forms of communication. In the texts in the corpus, use of this speech form is generally confined to particular characters. For instance, Magalie Fournier, one of the many protagonists from Guène's choral novel, *Les gens du Balto*, speaks almost exclusively in this manner – using terms such as *lol* (LGDB, 23), *mdr* (LGDB, 111), *ptdr* (LGDB, 111) and *dsl* (LGDB, 23) in her conversation. There is a particularly insightful chapter in Rachedi and Mahany's *La petite Malika* in which the protagonist tries to understand the complexities of what is, to the gifted young student, a strange and alien form of language. This episode takes place when Malika is eleven, and her classmates suddenly begin speaking a new language which is incomprehensible to her, including words in *verlan* and words from *argot*, discussed in the previous sections. When they tell her that she is "trop *out of fashion*",⁶⁵ she cannot understand why they would want to "pratiquer un français dévoyé quand une vie ne suffirait pas à déflorer les subtilités de la grammaire."⁶⁶ Mégane and Sarah, two of Malika's friends, attempt to teach her how to properly speak and send texts in this manner – as they believe that she speaks "comme une Française"⁶⁷ while the rest of her classmates make liberal use of very informal French, leading Malika to remark, not without irony:

Les discussions relevaient du sabir mêlant arabe, argot, anglais, verlan et un peu de français. Le langage de la cour de récréation était très loin du français de cour. Pour m'intégrer au collège, il fallait que je me mette à l'arabe.⁶⁸

She is struck by the fact that Sarah, in particular, is *fortiche* in English, everywhere except in English class; to her, the borrowed terms that she is using – such as *out of fashion* and *please* – are merely expressions from French slang, and she has no awareness that she is actually using terms from another language. The self-aware discussion of language continues, as Malika struggles to comprehend the process of *verlanisation*:

65 Rachedi and Mahany, *La petite Malika*, 67.

66 Ibid., 68.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., 69.

Femme donnait meuf, transformation assez basique que je connaissais. Oui mais voilà, on utilisait aussi feu-meuf, le verlan de meuf qui n'était pas femme. Autrement dit, le verlan du verlan d'un mot n'était pas le mot lui-même soit en langage logique si l'inverse de A est égal à B alors l'inverse de B n'est pas forcément égal à A. Avec ça, normal que la moitié de la classe soit paumée en maths.⁶⁹

Malika is aware of the irony of her friends' linguistic competences: "Lors de la première interro de français, les premières en langage SMS furent les dernières,"⁷⁰ and she knows that her friends fill their test papers with abbreviations and "text speak", such as "« 1 » au lieu de « un », de « k » au lieu de « qu », de « stp » au lieu de « s'il te plaît »."⁷¹ She attempts to teach them about different registers, but is rather unsuccessful, as Mégane and Sarah become very frustrated with her, answering: "Ben ouais, on sait ce que c'est un registre, c'est un carnet. Et tu sais ce que je vais mettre dans mon carnet ? Que t'es plus ma copine !"⁷² After this, she abandons her efforts, but she imagines what they might write in their diaries about her: "Je me sui faché av Malika ké pa genti vu kel é pa com nou tro c pa drol lé coincos com el :(((((((.⁷³ Although not a part of FCC, and not particular to the *banlieues*, or even to France, this informal manner of speaking is prevalent among young people, and thus the inclusion of characters who speak this way adds to the realistic representation of language in these novels. Malika's struggle, not just with "text speak" but with the various elements of FCC that she finds so confusing, adds a comic and self-aware element to the use of language in that text.

6.5 FCC as a Tool of Empowerment

There is a marked difference in the ways in which FCC is spoken by male and female members of the *banlieue* population. In research, more focus has been placed on the use of this sociolect by male members of the *banlieue* population. According to Claudine Moïse:

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., 71.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., 72.

Quand on regarde les corpus utilisés pour décrire le parler des banlieues, que ce soit d'ailleurs d'un point de vue purement systémique, lexical, prosodique ou morphosyntaxique, ou davantage pragmatique, on se rend bien compte que les occurrences présentées sont à grande majorité des productions verbales émises par les jeunes garçons, préadolescents.⁷⁴

It would seem that FCC is associated with masculinity and that the studies carried out reflect that. Moïse hypothesises that the focus on male speech in the *banlieue* communities is because gender studies is a much more established field in Anglophone scholarship and that thus it is almost ignored in this area, "Comme si l'absence de tradition empêchait une telle approche, pourtant indispensable et nécessaire."⁷⁵ It is therefore interesting to note that both Guène and Mahany use this style of language in their novels more than Rachedi does in his. As mentioned above, this is perhaps because Rachedi has a greater desire to distance himself from stereotypes that are usually held about *banlieue* males. Moïse notes that while linguistic disparity between men and women is generally less marked for members of more disadvantaged communities,

Le parler des cités est masculin... Si les filles peuvent en user pour jouer de l'égalité contre les garçons, leur adoption d'un parler plus normé ou plus prestigieux est le moyen d'échapper à toute forme d'enferment familial, traditionnel, culturel voire social, hors de toute soumission masculine.⁷⁶

In an attempt to explain the reasons for this gender discrepancy, Moïse hypothesises the reason for this: "les règles de communication développées chez les filles et chez les garçons rendaient compte d'univers et de codes sociaux différenciés. Les filles seraient dans un mode d'échange coopératif et les garçons dans un mode compétitif."⁷⁷ She continues, explaining that "La langue des banlieues ... est liée ... à la vie en banlieue, l'absence de travail, la galère, l'ennui, qui touchent plus les garçons que les filles, les filles plus étroitement surveillées par leur père et mieux intégrées à l'école."⁷⁸ These explanations go some way towards explaining the more prevalent use of this sociolect among men than women, particularly when one considers that many linguists have noted that women in disadvantaged groups can sometimes act as "gardiennes d'une langue idéale, normée,

74 Claudine Moïse, "Pratiques langagières des banlieues : Où sont les femmes ?," *Ville-Ecole-Intégration Enjeux*, no. 128 (2002): 48.

75 Ibid., 47.

76 Ibid., 46.

77 Ibid., 50.

78 Ibid., 52.

valorisée⁷⁹ by adhering to a version of the language that is a closer approximation of that used by the dominant societal group. Yet this is generally the case for older members of the marginalised populations, and thus the difference between the genders may not apply to teenage members of the population, reflecting its high usage among the authors and the, predominantly female, teenage protagonists of the novels in question. Given that FCC continues to be perceived as a predominantly male sociolect, linked with unemployment and *la galère*, there is, for some at least, a link between FCC and underachievement, a link compounded by the fact, outlined by Bachmann & Basier,⁸⁰ that those adolescents who speak *verlan* the best, are the most deviant as regards social norms in general and academic norms in particular. Yet David Lepoutre, who spent several years teaching in a ZEP school, would prefer to view the situation differently, claiming that: "il est plus juste de parler en termes d'adhésion à des valeurs positives et de dire ainsi que les meilleurs locuteurs de verlan sont généralement les adolescents les plus intégrés au groupe des pairs et à sa culture."⁸¹ It is not necessary, therefore, to view the use of this language in a negative manner, as it does have some benefits and positive effects for its users.

Azouz Begag believes that widespread use of FCC can place its speakers at a disadvantage relative to those who have the ability to employ different registers in different contexts. He claims that:

... la langue des banlieues, parfois identifiée comme un indice d'inventivité, de libération, constitue plutôt pour moi un phénomène circonstancié, territorialement et socialement. Il me semble que pour les jeunes des quartiers défavorisés, la reconnaissance sociale requiert l'acquisition des règles standard de l'interaction sociale, dont la langue est la plus précieuse.⁸²

Begag is completely opposed to the use of this sociolect to the detriment of other, more formal registers as he believes its use will hinder the already-marginalised *banlieue* youth in advancing any further. He is not alone in these beliefs. In particular, linguist Alain Bentolila has written extensively on what he believes to be the "poverty" of the *banlieue*

79 Ibid., 55.

80 Christian Bachmann and Luc Basier, "Le verlan : Argot d'école ou langue des Keums ?," *Mots* 8, Special issue (1984): 178.

81 David Lepoutre, *Cœur de banlieue: Codes, rites et langages* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1997), 154.

82 Azouz Begag, "L'enfermement linguistique ou la langue des banlieues comme facteur d'assignation sociale," in *Black, Blanc, Beur: Youth Language and Identity*, ed. Farid Aïtisselmi (Bradford: University of Bradford, 2000), 8.

sociolect. Bentolila believes that this linguistic poverty stems from the fact that the young people of the *banlieue* mostly need to communicate among themselves and thus have little motivation to learn to master multiple registers:

Cantonnés à une communication de proximité, prisonniers d'une situation d'extrême connivence, ils [les jeunes de ces quartiers-ghettos] n'ont jamais eu besoin de mots justes et nombreux pour communiquer ensemble. En bref, n'ayant à s'adresser qu'à des individus qui vivent comme eux, qui croient en le même Dieu qu'eux, qui ont les mêmes soucis et la même absence de perspectives sociales, tout "va sans dire". Ils n'ont pas besoin de mettre en mots précis et soigneusement organisés leur pensée parce que, partageant tellement de choses, subissant tellement de contraintes et de frustrations identiques, l'imprécision est devenue la règle d'un jeu linguistique socialement pervers. Les mots qu'ils utilisent sont toujours porteurs d'un sens exagérément élargi et par conséquent d'une information d'autant plus imprécise. Tant que le nombre de choses à dire est réduit, tant que le nombre de gens à qui ils s'adressent est faible, l'approximation n'empêche certes pas la communication. Mais lorsqu'ils doivent s'adresser à des gens qu'ils ne connaissent pas, lorsque ces gens ne savent pas à l'avance ce qu'ils vont leur dire, cela devient alors un tout autre défi. Un vocabulaire exsangue et une organisation approximative des phrases ne leur donnent pas la moindre chance de le relever. Ces mots de la communion plutôt que de la communication condamnent ceux dont ils constituent l'essentiel du vocabulaire à renoncer à imposer leur propre pensée à l'intelligence des autres.⁸³

As outlined by Jo Arditty and Philippe Blanchet, a journalist for *Le Monde*, Frédéric Potet claimed in 2005 that the inhabitants of the *banlieues* have a vocabulary comprising merely four hundred words.⁸⁴ To counter these claims, Arditty and Blanchet state that it is "absolument évident pour tout linguiste ou pour tout acquisitionniste"⁸⁵ that, except in pathological cases, and no matter what their native tongue, children as young as three possess a vocabulary of at least a thousand words. To further discredit Potet's claim, they cited research by two linguists⁸⁶ that revealed that the presidential discourse of Nicolas Sarkozy consisted of a lexicon of around four hundred words, the exact number that Potet disparagingly attributed to *banlieue* residents. In light of this finding, Arditty and Blanchet claim that criticisms of the *banlieue* sociolect are based on the poverty of its lexicon ,

83 Alain Bentolila, "Contre les ghettos linguistiques," *Le Monde*, December 20 2007. Accessed: June 20 2014, http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2007/12/20/contre-les-ghettos-linguistiques-par-alain-bentolila_991902_3232.html.

84 Frédéric Potet, "Vivre avec 400 mots," *Le Monde*, March 19 2005. Accessed: June 20 2014, http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2005/03/18/vivre-avec-400-mots_628664_3224.html.

85 Jo Arditty and Philippe Blanchet, "La « mauvaise langue » des « ghettos linguistiques » : la glottophobie française, une xénophobie qui s'ignore," *REVUE Asylon(s)*, 4(2008), <http://www.reseau-terra.eu/article748.html>.

86 Louis-Jean Calvet and Jean Véronis, *Les mots de Nicolas Sarkozy* (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

and that: "Là encore, l'argumentation fallacieuse induit une altérophobie manipulée."⁸⁷ It is clear that criticisms and critics of FCC abound, and that these criticisms range from serious sociological concerns, as outlined by Begag, that this sociolect is damaging to the future prospects of its speakers, to criticisms of the language in and of itself, not always based on factual accuracy and amounting to what Arditty and Blanchet have termed "la glottophobie française, une xénophobie qui s'ignore."⁸⁸

Yet, having their own sociolect can be a means for the marginalised youth population to express their sense of shared identity. Goudaillier stated in 2011 that:

When young – and not so young – adolescents express themselves in ... FCC..., they reinforce the construction of their identity. Indeed this register of language acts in an identifying way in communication among peers. Then the FCC plays an interstitial role between the mainstream French language, which has social legitimacy, and a certain number of nonlegitimized vernaculars...⁸⁹

This interstitial role is particularly important, as it provides a means for a marginalised population to claim a space and an identity for themselves that is in opposition to French culture, yet also in opposition to the culture of their parents. Given that the young people in this population often feel discriminated against by the majority population of the country they call home, this sense of empowerment through shared identity takes on great importance. The inclusion of elements of their parents' linguistic culture and background enables them to acknowledge their dual heritage through the language that they speak. In this way, using a non-standard vernacular can assist young residents of the *banlieue* in creating a new and more positive identity than that portrayed by the media and politicians in France. Meredith Doran, who uses the term "*Verlan*" as shorthand for FCC generally, agrees with Goudaillier's claims that these young people are forging a sense of shared identity through their use of a non-standard vernacular, claiming: "Refusing the official language in intimate peer interaction, then, was a rejection of a particular bourgeois Frenchness... Speaking *Verlan*, on the other hand, served as a means of displaying one's class allegiance and adherence to the local value system."⁹⁰ Using language as a means of

87 Arditty and Blanchet, "La « mauvaise langue » des « ghettos linguistiques »."

88 Ibid.

89 Goudaillier, "Contemporary French in Low-Income Neighborhoods," 184.

90 Meredith Doran, "Negotiating Between Bourge and Racaille: 'Verlan' as Youth Identity Practice in Suburban Paris," in *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts*, ed. Aneta Pavlenko and Adrian Blackledge (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2004), 115.

displaying loyalty to the local peer group enables these young people to feel a common bond and sense of identity. Furthermore, the majority of these young people are aware of a need to employ different registers in different contexts, depending on the context in which they are speaking, and with whom, as acknowledged by Doran, who worked with young people in the Les Salières region to the south of Paris:

In contrast to media portrayals of Verlan as a contestatory language used by rebellious youths, young people in Les Salières emphasized that Verlan was above all a language meant to be used *entre potes* ... in peer social situations ... and not one to be used with adults or in more formal situations.⁹¹

In contrast to claims made by some linguists, such as Bentolila, and also by journalists, those who speak FCC frequently when among friends and in informal settings in the *banlieue*, retain the ability to use a more formal register when the need arises. Thus FCC is not used by default, for lack of any other linguistic options, and is thus a valid linguistic choice, adding credence to claims that it functions as an identity marker *entre potes* in order to display allegiance to the peer group. Additionally, it is important to consider that many of these young people grow out of using this style of language as they grow into adulthood and leave school, as outlined by Lepoutre who argued that, for the majority, a rejection of street culture occurs in the late teens and early twenties, when young people begin to prepare for a potential working future and therefore move towards a more standard variety of language. The move toward a more standard form of French operates in terms of the language and vocabulary used, whereby:

Le verlan argotique et le « bas langage » disparaissent au profit d'une langue « à l'endroit », plus châtiée et syntaxiquement plus correcte. On observe même, à l'occasion, des formes typiques d'hypercorrection langagière (par exemple, l'emploi systématique du « ne » de négation), qui ne laissent pas de surprendre l'auditeur qui a connu les locuteurs quelques années auparavant.⁹²

According to Lepoutre, changes occur in pronunciation too, which softens and becomes more clear and controlled. Lepoutre is careful to point out, however, that this does not rule out "la pratique occasionnelle, entre soi et au second degré, des formes argotiques, de certaines formes de verlan, et aussi, bien entendu, des charres, et ce jusqu'à l'âge adulte."⁹³

91 Ibid., 104.

92 Lepoutre, *Cœur de banlieue*, 424-5.

93 Ibid., 425.

These observations go some way towards alleviating Begag's concerns, outlined above, regarding the potentially devastating negative impact that using this form of language can have, particularly as Lepoutre highlighted the ironic tone with which these forms of language are used in adulthood.

The authors examined in this thesis are aware of the necessity for *banlieue* youth to employ other registers than FCC in different contexts. Although they all employ various aspects of it in their texts, this seems to be used as a device to enable young people easier access to the novels by presenting them with texts written in their own sociolect. These authors frequently visit school groups and facilitate *ateliers* for young students. Rachedi in particular has recounted episodes in which students have approached him at these events and stated that they never thought someone like them could become an author, or informed him that his was the first book they ever read from beginning to end. In personal correspondence, Rachedi and Mahany claimed: "D'après certains échos, certains élèves ont même changé radicalement de comportement après certaines de nos interventions. Des élèves un peu dissipés sont devenus plus attentifs. C'est une grande fierté pour nous."⁹⁴ Although Rachedi uses FCC less frequently than Guène or Mahany, he nevertheless believes that his use of language in the novels contributes in large part to this. Yet he ensures that his workshops include a focus on the use of different registers, and discusses synonyms and more polite and professional forms of address with the students. In this way, he hopes to use this style of language to engage young people with literature, and then use that engagement as a basis for them to learn to employ other registers, and to expand their reading repertoire beyond school requirements. Similarly, Azouz Begag has also facilitated workshops of this kind, in which he talks to young students about improving their use of formal registers. He claims that seeing him standing at the top of the classroom, in a position of authority and respect, has a profound impact on these young people:

Dans les regards des élèves qui me dévorent des yeux et qui écoutent cet écrivain d'origine maghrébine, qui parle comme eux, qui dit parfois des mots en arabe, qui a vécu les mêmes conditions sociales qu'eux et dont on a étudié le livre en classe. On voit briller des lumières, de magie, d'émerveillement, d'existence retrouvée.⁹⁵

94 See Appendix 3.

95 Begag, "Écritures marginales," 74.

This demonstrates the empowering nature of literature and that, despite the negative views Begag holds towards FCC, it can be important in terms of enabling young adults to identify with an author, or their protagonist. It is significant, therefore, that Doria chooses to express her new-found empowerment at the end of *Kiffe kiffe demain* in this register of language. At the start of that novel, she felt that everything was *kif-kif demain*. She has changed her attitude slightly by the end, however. For her things are no longer *kif-kif*, an expression of Arabic origin which means 'more of the same', but *kiffe kiffe* from the verb *kiffer*, also of Arabic origin, which means 'to like'. In so doing she throws a more positive slant on her earlier cynicism, as a result of her growth throughout the novel – in other words, her empowerment:

C'est ce que je disais tout le temps quand j'allais pas bien et que Maman et moi on se retrouvait toutes seules: kif-kif demain. Maintenant, kif-kif demain je l'écrirais différemment. Ça serait kiffe kiffe demain, du verbe kiffer.⁹⁶

6.6 Conclusion

This informal language, prevalent among the youth of the *banlieue*, is not highly regarded in France, with some claiming that it challenges "traditional republican conceptions of what it means to speak, and to be, French."⁹⁷ However, although it is "treated as a form of 'bad language' that is both a cause and an effect of the youths' marginal societal status"⁹⁸ to those who speak it, it is one of the few available "means for expressing their sense of self apart from the assimilationist rhetoric of the republic."⁹⁹ The decision to write novels in this oral, informal and urban style so prevalent among the youth, yet so disparaged in other quarters, is one of the factors that render this type of literature so vibrant and relevant, not only for young people of the *banlieue* but for young French people generally; the informality, in particular, affording them easier identification with the characters and their lives. Despite the concerns outlined above regarding the potential of this sociolect to further marginalise its speakers, for most young people, there are in fact strong cultural codes governing the use of the language, and this form of language therefore functions as a cultural marker that has ties with the sense of identity rupture experienced by the *banlieue*

96 Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, 187-8.

97 Doran, "Alternative French, Alternative Identities," 498.

98 Ibid., 499.

99 Ibid.

youth as a result of their displacement and peripheralisation. These codes, which dictate the situations in which this slang can be spoken and, more importantly, with whom it is acceptable to speak it, exist because young people understand that "parler uniquement verlan et argot ne peut guère favoriser un mouvement échappatoire vers l'extérieur des ghettos linguistiques et sociaux."¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, it serves as an important cultural marker and seeing their own sociolect, and culture, presented in a positive light is a major aspect of the empowerment of this demographic through literature, one which enables them to easily enter these texts and – more importantly in terms of empowerment – identify with the characters, and one which may serve as an important point of access to French literature more generally.

100 Black and Sloutsky, "Évolution du verlan," 4.

Conclusion

A new wave of authors from the Parisian *banlieues* have, in recent years, departed from emphasising negative and difficult aspects of life on the periphery, toward representing a more realistic version of these maligned regions. The many social issues facing the populations of these areas – high levels of unemployment, discrimination and an increasing sense of disconnection and isolation from the French state and the majority population – present a mounting challenge, in particular to the youth population. This is exacerbated by the sporadic violence that erupts among the youth population of these zones, a manifestation of the frustration and impotence felt by this demographic. Both media and political misrepresentations of the problems facing this population have increased their sense of disconnection and led to a widespread, albeit understandable, belief among the majority French population that the *banlieues* are crime-riven enclaves, mired in difficulty and unsafe places to venture.¹ In order to effect social change, the population of these maligned and marginalised areas and, in particular, the youth population, need to be empowered to see beyond the negative representation of their homes and lifestyle. The “*banlieue* mentality”, discussed in Chapter Two, is a consequence of the internalisation of this negative imagery and leads to negativity and despair becoming entrenched. Previous research on children’s and young adult literature led me to the conclusion that this would be a particularly conducive medium for encouraging the empowerment of these young people.

The aim of the thesis was thus to examine YA literature emerging from the Parisian *banlieues* in order to establish strategies used by authors who sought to create a new identity for the youth population, and thus empower them and, as outlined in the Introduction, lead to the development “d’une conscience critique et d’un pouvoir d’action des individus et des groupes sociaux, dans une perspective de transformation sociale et d’amélioration de la qualité de vie des communautés en jeu.”² If young people of the peripheralised *banlieues* were empowered to strive for social change, then this could pave the way for a new understanding between this population and the majority French population. As has

1 Discovering, by chance, Faïza Guène’s first novel, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, provided me with a different perspective on the *banlieues*, sparked my interest in researching this area, and encouraged my engagement with other authors emerging from the peripheral areas of Paris. As outlined in the introduction, the opportunity to spend time in the Parisian *banlieues* in the summer of 2013 later confirmed my belief that although these areas undoubtedly have problems and difficulties, the perception of danger is greatly exaggerated.

2 Girault, Auzou, and Fortin-Debart, “De la lecture critique,” 184. The authors here reference: Villémagne, “Le milieu de vie.”

been shown, the books read by young people are important for their empowerment, and can encourage deeper political and social engagement. As presented in the Introduction, this is why Kimberley Reynolds believes that children's and young adult literature is "replete with radical potential."³ As evidence of this radical potential, Reynolds discusses claims by Julia Mickenberg that children's books in the 1950s, which encouraged young readers to strive for social change, contributed in large part to the student activism and radicalism of 1960s America.⁴ Additional research on the empowering potential of YA literature,⁵ outlined in Chapter One, provided further evidence that this research was both timely and necessary for the development of a new understanding of the *banlieues* in France. Adolescence is a time of growth, change and development, rendering the literary and cultural experiences of this age group crucial. If literature can encourage young people to approach the issues facing them from new perspectives, it may indeed pave the way for social change.⁶ Thus the literature for young adults produced by authors from the *banlieues*, who have successfully negotiated their place in French society, and who can serve as real-world role-models for the young population of the *banlieues* as well as providing them, through their novels, with "the mental furniture and tools necessary for thinking about themselves and the world they inhabit"⁷ can empower these young people to strive for more. This was backed up by the claims of Rachedi and Mahany, outlined in Chapter Six, that they received reports of radically changed behaviour among certain students after they had spoken to school groups, whereby "Des élèves un peu dissipés sont devenus plus attentifs."⁸ This adds weight to the claim that the novels of these authors can empower young people to strive to achieve more in their school work, at the very least, and thus have had a positive impact on their young lives.

Although there had been ample research conducted into the literature, cinema and other artistic and cultural outputs from the *banlieues*,⁹ very little research has been undertaken on YA literature from these regions which, given the potentially transformative nature of this literature, seemed an oversight. An examination of existing research on

3 Reynolds, *Radical Children's Literature*, 1.

4 Mickenberg, *Learning from the Left*, 26.

5 Notably: Botelho and Rudman, *Critical Multicultural Analysis*; Cai, *Multicultural Literature*; Al-Hazza and Bucher, "Building Arab Americans' Cultural Identity.;" Zipes, "Second Thoughts."

6 Reynolds, *Radical Children's Literature*, 1.

7 Ibid.

8 See Appendix 3.

9 An overview of this research was provided in Chapter One.

children's literature – both YA and literature for younger children – from the peripheries of Paris proved that there was a gap in research on the empowering potential of this literature, and the strategies used by authors in order to achieve this empowerment. A comprehensive study of these strategies in the novels of three authors – Faïza Guène, Mabrouck Rachedi and Habiba Mahany – who have written books for a YA audience¹⁰ was thus deemed pertinent. The Algerian background of these authors added a shared historical and ethnic dimension to the study. This is particularly significant, as although the marginalising effect of life on the periphery is not exclusive to those from an ethnic minority background, there are some difficulties faced by this demographic alone, such as dual identity, integration, religion and racism. The colonial history between France and Algeria added further complexity to the texts. Limiting the corpus to those born to Algerian parents and raised in the Parisian *banlieues* thus allowed the thesis to examine all of these issues and how they are treated in the novels.

By demonstrating both the need for a new sense of identity and empowerment on the part of young *banlieue* residents and the radical potential of children's books, and providing working definitions of the terms *banlieue* literature and YA literature, Chapter One set out the parameters on which the thesis would be based and explored the possibilities for the empowerment of young people, in particular those from minority cultures, through literature. A methodological and theoretical framework which incorporated elements of sociological and sociolinguistic analysis, literary theory and narratology, and postcolonial theory was also furnished. This chapter thus presented the position that the thesis would take, and the methodological framework upon which the research would be based.

Chapter Two provided contextualising information on the development of the Parisian *banlieues* from their beginnings as sites of recreation and agriculture through several transformations, leading to their contemporary position in French society. This chapter also traced the history of displacement to the periphery faced by the poorest residents of Parisian society, before beginning an examination of the primary texts. The historical and background information provided invaluable context for an understanding of the current perception of the *banlieues*, both that of the residents, as well as that of the general French population. It also afforded an interesting perspective on the manner in which the authors portray the *banlieues* in their novels – both in terms of the physical portrayals of the *banlieue* space and the effect these spaces have on their inhabitants. Of

10 Justification of these novels as YA was provided in Chapter One.

particular concern in this regard was the “*banlieue* mentality,” and the manner in which the authors illustrate this mentality and demonstrate, via their characters, that it is not an inevitable consequence of life on the periphery but can be overcome by a change in attitude and behaviour.

A thematic analysis of the novels was undertaken in Chapters Three and Four, which examined themes of major importance in the texts. Chapter Three examined topics that contribute to the perception of the *banlieues* in France – education, employment, ethnicity and religion, and gender. Following a discussion of how these topics relate to the *banlieue* population, particularly the youth, it showed how the authors treated them in the novels. This chapter demonstrated that the authors attempted to empower YA readers, by treating these issues in an honest, open and forthright manner. They acknowledge the difficulties faced by the disadvantaged *banlieue* population in relation to these important aspects of life, and show a wide range of characters dealing with these challenges in a variety of ways. Yet, the majority of the protagonists, even those mired in negativity early in the texts, are shown to have a new positivity by the close of the novels. Although they may not experience an unrealistic “happily ever after” ending, they display a renewed sense of confidence, optimism and hope for the future. The more mature outlook that these characters hold towards the end of the narratives is an important element of the empowering nature of these texts: having faced trials and tribulations, they are not defeated by bitterness and negativity and, in fact, many of them also resolve to strive towards a better future, for themselves and others.

Chapter Four explored problems that contribute to the misrepresentation of the *banlieues* – violence and conflict with police and agents of authority, media and political misrepresentations of these regions and their inhabitants, and the racism and discrimination which may be experienced by residents of these zones. This chapter comprised a series of discussions on how members of the *banlieue* population are affected by these concerns, in particular the stereotypes and prejudices that can be established as a result, and the damage that they can potentially cause to this demographic. This chapter also elaborated on the strategies used by the authors to subvert these dominant perceptions, and in so-doing, to strip them of their power to define the youth population of these areas. This involved open and honest acknowledgement of these problems and their relation to the periphery. But the authors do not dwell in negativity, nor do they allow these issues to take a central place in their narratives. In fact, they often treat them in a light-hearted manner, using them as sources of humour in the texts or subverting them in order to “steal the negative

image and put it to a different use,”¹¹ as outlined by Mireille Rosello. By acknowledging these issues and their existence, yet denying them a central role or undue importance, the authors relegate them to a marginal position in the lives of their characters and, by extension, the lives of their YA readers. In combination, Chapters Three and Four dissected the major thematic elements of the novels and outlined the strategies used by the authors in order to empower their young readers and demonstrate that they need not internalise commonly held stereotypes, but can act to change their attitude and strive to achieve a better and more inclusive society.

Chapter Five marked a departure from the thematic analysis and provided an assessment of the stylistic techniques used by the authors, and the manner in which these techniques function in conjunction with the content of the texts to encourage identification on the part of the young reader. This chapter outlined the differing approaches to narrative voice, focalisation and characterisation taken by the authors, and this analysis drew on work by Gérard Genette, Andrea Schwenke Wylie, Janet Burroway and Roderick McGillis. The majority of the novels utilised first-person narration – *Le poids d'une âme*, the only novel with a third-person narrator, switches to first-person narration at the novel's emotional climax – internal focalisation and a mixture of direct and indirect characterisation. This combination facilitates greater identification with the protagonists, allowing the authors to use further stylistic devices in order to encourage greater reflection and an internalisation of their more positive message, rather than the negative imagery commonly seen in portrayals of the *banlieues*. These devices included the use of fantasy and intertextuality to foster a deeper engagement with the texts. In this way, the authors utilise the style and structure of the texts to increase the efficacy of their message and encourage the empowerment of YA readers.

Chapter Six comprised a linguistic analysis, and provided an exploration of *le français contemporain des cités*, the sociolect commonly used by the youth population of the *banlieues*, investigating two of the major elements of this language: widespread use of *verlan* and a large volume of borrowings from other languages; and providing an in-depth analysis, informed primarily by Jean-Pierre Goudaillier, Meredith Doran and David Lepoutre, of how these linguistic features are treated in the primary texts. This chapter also examined relatively minor linguistic elements present in the corpus – terms and expressions from American rap culture, truncations, a largely oral style and the use of

11 Rosello, *Declining the Stereotype*, 4.

“text speak.” Following from this analysis, the chapter argued that, despite concerns from some quarters,¹² FCC comprises a significant aspect of the empowerment of the *banlieue* population, as it allows the youth of these areas to express a sense of playful linguistic creativity; maintain, through borrowings, a sense of connection to the country of their ancestors as well as to other marginalised and minority populations; and forge a sense of shared identity within their own locality. Evidence from several linguists¹³ argued that the youth population of the *banlieues* may achieve empowerment through FCC. This chapter thus demonstrated that the use of language in the novels of the corpus can help to legitimise this maligned sociolect and in so-doing can empower YA readers from the *banlieues*.

Over the course of these six chapters, then, the thesis investigated the novels of Guène, Rachedi and Mahany using a three-pronged analysis – thematic, stylistic and linguistic. This three-fold approach allowed me to first present the central concerns of the authors, and the manner in which they highlight them in the texts. Following an in-depth examination of these themes, I then provided an analysis of the manner in which the authors presented their concerns – the stylistic and linguistic devices utilised in order to complement their perspectives and encourage YA readers to internalise their message of positivity. Analysing the texts under these three headings provides a comprehensive examination of the most crucial elements of the novels and affords a complete picture of the many and varied strategies used by the authors in their attempts to empower young *banlieue* residents. Although it is possible that these strategies are unintentional, they nevertheless serve as a by-product of their writing and, as detailed in Chapter One, the authors are aware of the potential of their writing to influence people, in particular young people. Whether intentional or not, if these strategies are successful, then the future could be a little brighter for the youth population of these peripheral zones.

This research is situated at the cutting edge of a changing political and sociological problem in France. As the situation facing the residents of the *banlieues* continues to evolve as a result of changing circumstances and recent events, such as the *Charlie Hebdo* assassinations, the importance of such research will continue to increase. There are many opportunities for future research in this area, which would expand the scope of investigation into YA *banlieue* literature. These opportunities include an expansion of the corpus to include other YA authors from the Parisian *banlieues*, to establish whether the strategies

12 See for example, criticisms of this sociolect by Azouz Begag and Alain Bentolila presented in Chapter Six.

13 Notably Jean-Pierre Goudaillier and Meredith Doran.

demonstrated in this thesis are present elsewhere; the corpus could also be expanded to include authors from other ethnic backgrounds, to establish what commonalities and differences exist as a result of differing ethnic experiences. Research could also incorporate YA literature from other metropolitan areas of France, affording comparisons between authors from similar yet distinct sociocultural backgrounds. There is also potential for conducting comparative research on an international scale. The latter could take several forms: the present corpus could be compared with the YA literature produced by discriminated minority groups in other countries, such as the United States or countries in South America; the primary texts could be examined in translation to see if the translated versions reproduce the empowering message for a different YA audience. Additionally, the contemporary nature of this literature opens up several potentially innovative lines of enquiry, as events in the *banlieues* unfold. Research could examine individual themes and topics discussed in this thesis – such as the treatment, in YA novels, of ethnicity and religion, or violence and conflict with police – in light of events such as the aforementioned *Charlie Hebdo* assassinations. Further, future initiatives, such as the forthcoming *Métropole du Grand Paris* project,¹⁴ will continue to have an impact on life in the *banlieues* and will thus warrant examination on several levels, including the reflection of such changes and developments in YA literature emerging from these regions. This thesis provided a comprehensive and detailed examination of the potentially transformative nature of YA *banlieue* literature, its ability to create a new and more positive identity for young residents of these areas, and the specific strategies used by Guène, Rachedi and Mahany in order to empower YA readers from the *banlieues*. It is my hope that future research will continue to examine these highly pertinent issues as the circumstances and context from which this literature is produced continues to evolve.

14 This initiative was mentioned in Chapter Two, in the discussion of political initiatives designed to ameliorate the difficult situation facing *banlieue* residents.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Author Biographies

1.1 Faïza Guène

Je voudrais vous parler de ma cité sous son vrai jour. Pas comme les médias nous la montrent ou comme les différents clichés qui circulent. Il n'y a pas que du rap, des pitbulls, de la violence et des voyous. Bien sûr, je ne dis pas du tout qu'il n'y en a pas, je vous mentirais. Je crois que les gens voient tout de suite les côtés négatifs et ne s'attardent pas à observer les effets positifs. J'ai l'impression qu'ils ne préfèrent pas le faire.¹

These words were written by Faïza Guène, when she was fourteen years old. At the time, she met a journalist, Marie Gauthier, who was impressed by the young girl's outlook and intelligence and undertook to write a short text in collaboration with Guène. Gauthier spent two months interviewing Guène, by phone and email and during the course of long walks through Guène's neighbourhood. The resulting text, which features Guène's own written words, interspersed with Gauthier's reflections on Guène's attitude and thoughts features forerunners of Guène's later published work:

Faïza refuse la vision noire de la banlieue que certains médias – notamment audiovisuels – aiment à conjuguer, du vandalisme au crime, en passant par tous les trafics. La jeune fille m'a décrit son quotidien dans un texte où elle marie avec pudeur facétie, autodérision, gravité et volonté de ne pas baisser les bras.²

Guène was born in Bobigny, a *banlieue* region to the North East of Paris. Her parents are Algerian, from Oran, but later emigrated to Paris. Her family – mother, father, older sister and younger brother – lived in Pantin throughout her childhood. Initially they lived in an old building, which was later demolished as part of the urban renewal process, at which point the family were rehoused in a *cité*. Guène has always considered herself lucky that her parents were very understanding and granted her more freedom than some of her peers in the *banlieue*: “Ils me font confiance, je peux aller et venir. Ils savent que je respecte les règles, que je ne m'éloigne pas trop et ne fais pas de bêtises.”³

1 Marie Gauthier, *Petit traité topographique du Pantin d'une collégienne* (Paris: Inventaire/Invention, 2002), 7-8.

2 Ibid., 10.

3 Ibid., 12.

She also appreciates that they are very loving and caring: “Il y a plein de parents qui s’en vont au bled pendant quelques semaines en laissant leurs enfants seuls. Jamais les nôtres ne nous abandonneraient ainsi.”⁴ Despite the fact that, during her childhood, she did not visit the *bled* annually (at the time that Gauthier’s book was published, she had not visited for five years), she maintained constant contact with her cousins over there, and described herself as Algerian. In fact, she confessed to Gauthier that, although her father believed that “...c’est mieux pour les études de rester ici [in France]. Moi j’aimerais mieux vivre là-bas, c’est plus gai.”⁵

Among the brightest in her class at school, she despaired at the lack of ambition of her peers: “Même dans ma classe de troisième où sont réunis les meilleurs élèves, il y en a qui ne visent pas loin. Dès qu’ils ont la moyenne, ils sont contents”.⁶ Her class was composed mostly of girls (there were only four boys in the class of twenty-four). Gauthier claimed that this was because: “Les filles sont généralement plus mûres, certes. Mais l’argent gagné par quelques caïds, grace à des trafics de tout acabit, n’incite pas les petits frères à l’étude, tandis que, pour elles, l’indépendance voire l’aisance sont liées à une bonne profession.”⁷ As a good student, she occasionally felt like the only way to get attention from teachers would be to cause trouble in class.

Even as a youngster Faïza was very creative, something her parents encouraged (her mother even acted in one of her early short films, *R.T.T.*) At the age of fourteen, Guène wrote and directed her first short film, *La Zonzonnière*, which told the story of a young girl of North African descent, frequently beaten by her father and brother, and locked up in their apartment.⁸ The filming of this project coincided with her interviews with Gauthier. As demonstrated by the opening quote, from an early age Guène had an interest in proffering an honest and realistic view of where she grew up, in order to counteract the negative and stereotyped views normally seen in media reports and films. On the subject of a TF1 documentary that was shown at the time, she claimed that “Les journalistes ont demandé aux jeunes de leur dire des gros mots en argot des banlieues. C’était du n’importe quoi.”⁹

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., 14.

6 Ibid., 24.

7 Ibid.

8 This story later resurfaced as one of the secondary narratives in Guène’s first novel, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, where she named the girl Samra.

9 Gauthier, *Petit traité topographique*, 10.

A few years later, while attending a writing workshop for local teenagers, where she received great encouragement, Guène showed her writing to the organiser. Unbeknownst to her, the organiser's sister was a publisher at Hachette, to whom he passed the manuscript. The publisher was interested, and the manuscript was eventually published under the title *Kiffe kiffe demain*. Guène's first book went on to become a bestseller, both in France and internationally, and it has been translated into twenty-two languages. Guène capitalised on the novel's success by making several short films, as film was the creative outlet which had first grasped her attention. Notably, her film work is thematically consistent with her written output. *Rien que des mots*, released in 2005, is the story of a young girl who hides everything – her love for the theatre, mediocre school results and the fact that she has a boyfriend – from her parents. Aside from the previously mentioned *La Zonzonnière*, in 2002 Guène produced another short, titled *Mémoire du 17 octobre 1961*, which deals with the massacre of Algerians during a peaceful protest at the end of the Algerian war of decolonisation.

Guène's second novel, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, was published in 2006. It benefitted from the increased attention given to authors from the *banlieues* in the wake of the November 2005 riots.¹⁰ This second novel was just as commercially successful as her first, and it too has been translated into several languages. Her third novel, *Les gens du Balto* is a choral novel and was published in 2008. Although less commercially successful than the previous two, it nevertheless marked a departure for Guène in terms of narrative style. Her most recent novel, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, was published in January 2014 and is a return to a first-person narrative style. All of the novels bear the characteristic traces of “facétie, autodérision, gravité et volonté de ne pas baisser les bras” noted by Gauthier in 1999.

Significantly, in the epilogue to her text on Guène, Gauthier is extremely prescient as she sums up the young girl's character and potential:

Petite, elle rêvait d'être présidente de la République. Adolescente, elle est plus attirée par le journalisme audiovisuel ou la peinture. Du haut de ses quatorze ans idéalistes, elle aimerait devenir célèbre, pour elle-même et sa famille, mais aussi pour redorer le blason des Courtillières et y insuffler un peu d'espoir. Sans avoir bougé de Pantin, Faïza est déjà une « passeuse » entre la « zone urbaine sensible » et l'autre monde.¹¹

10 Whether or not this upsurge in interest was a direct consequence of the riots, or just a matter of timing, is a subject that is receiving some scholarly attention. See for example: Serena Cello, “Au-delà du roman beur : la littérature de « banlieue »,” *Quaderni Di Palazzo Serra* 21 (2011).

11 Gauthier, *Petit traité topographique*, 34.

1.2 Mabrouck Rachedi and Habiba Mahany

Siblings Mabrouck Rachedi and Habiba Mahany are also of Algerian descent, their parents are from Petite Kabylie. Their father moved to Paris shortly before the Algerian war of independence in 1954, and their mother joined him in 1962. There are eleven children in their family, which was based in the Essonne, and Mabrouck and Habiba are the tenth and eleventh respectively. They did not visit Algeria very often during their childhood, owing to a lack of resources. Their parents stayed in close contact with their families back home, however, and some of their Algerian family members occasionally visited them in Paris. They have visited Algeria several times as adults and have had the opportunity to discover their country of origin, something which they appreciate:

Plus seulement notre petit village perché en haut de sa montagne mais aussi un peu partout dans le pays : Alger, Tlemcen, Ghardaïa, Oran, Tizi-Ouzou, Sidi Bel Abbès, etc. Nos séjours dans notre petit bled nous donnaient une image incomplète de l'Algérie, rurale et presque hors du temps. Ces voyages nous ont permis de mieux appréhender cet immense pays, aux paysages, aux cultures, aux populations très divers.¹²

They consider themselves to be both French and Algerian, claiming: “Nos deux identités, algériennes et françaises, se renforcent l’une l’autre. Nous ne nous sentons pas le devoir de choisir malgré les débats actuels en France où il y a une remise en cause du principe de la double nationalité.” Like many of their parents’ generation who immigrated to France, their parents initially intended to return to Algeria at some point, but they very quickly realised that this would not be possible:

... ils ont fondé une famille nombreuse scolarisée en France dont l’avenir était tracé au Nord de la Méditerranée. Ils sont symboliques de ces familles issues de l’immigration qui ont abandonné le « mythe du retour » : leurs racines étaient algériennes mais les branches de l’arbre généalogique poussaient en France.

There were some major advantages to being the youngest two children in such a large family, particularly when it came to their experience in school which, they claim, was “globalement positive.” Because their parents never had the opportunity to attend school, they pushed their children to be the best they could be and to work hard at their studies. They put this pressure on the older children first, then Mabrouck and Habiba in turn, which meant that the younger children had been accustomed to a studious and stimulating

12 For this and all further quotes from Rachedi and Mahany, see Appendix 3.

home environment during their early childhoods. In addition, the positive influence of their older brothers and sisters extended even into the classroom, as: “Etre une Rachedi était bien vu des professeurs, qui nous imaginaient bons élèves avant même que nous ayons fait nos preuves.”

This positive experience in school meant that their education extended beyond the classroom, and both were voracious readers during their childhood, and claim that their path to literature was almost identical: “Nous passions beaucoup de temps à la bibliothèque municipale où nous étions impressionnés par cette somme de savoirs et de découvertes qui s’offraient à nous. Lire, c’était aussi notre façon de voyager, nous qui n’avions pas beaucoup de moyens.” Both started reading *bande dessinées* at a young age, before “Le passage à la littérature s’est fait assez naturellement.” They were introduced to the classics of French literature at school, before developing their own tastes, with Habiba leaning towards the works of realist American authors and playwrights such as John Steinbeck, Tennessee Williams and Horace McCoy, while Mabrouck preferred the crime novels of Agatha Christie, Maurice Leblanc and Gaston Leroux. These early reading experiences encouraged and inspired them both in different ways. For Habiba “c’est l’observation de la réalité qui a servi de déclencheur à l’envie d’écrire. Des petites chroniques de la vie quotidienne consignées dans un journal personnel ont été ses premières expériences d’écriture.” Habiba’s diary – made up of her personal experiences, as well as her observations and thoughts on the people and environment she saw around her – would later prove crucial to her career as a writer, with these early diaries providing valuable insights when creating the character of Sabrina for *Kiffer sa race*: “C’est de cette façon qu’elle a pu plus facilement se plonger dans la psychologie d’une adolescente, en plus de ses propres souvenirs et de sa créativité.” Mabrouck, on the other hand, took his early inspiration from the “choc littéraire” he experienced upon reading Balzac’s *Le Père Goriot*: the joy he experienced upon this discovery gave him the impetus to begin writing fiction, and one of the first stories he wrote as a teenager would eventually be developed and published as *Le poids d’une âme*.

Upon finishing school, and having an established and successful career as a financial analyst, Mabrouck made the decision to give up his job and pursue this long-held passion for writing. This was not an easy process, rendered more difficult because he knew nothing about the publishing industry and had very few contacts in this business, and it took a number of years before he had any success with his manuscript. During these years, he experienced many setbacks, on a number of occasions carrying out extensive work on his

manuscript in conjunction with an editor, yet still not gaining a contract. Eventually, he gained a contract at Lattès. In personal correspondence, he related an anecdote relating to this contract:

Mabrouck présentait le manuscrit à Lattès environ deux ou trois semaines avant les émeutes de novembre 2005. L'éditrice le trouvait très bien, sauf l'image de la banlieue qu'il renvoyait, avec des émeutes. Elle pensait que tout ça était fini, que cela renvoyait à une imagerie surannée de films comme « La Haine » tandis que Mabrouck essayait de la convaincre que c'était toujours d'actualité. Quelques jours après cet entretien, il y a eu les émeutes et l'éditrice a appelé Mabrouck en présentant ses excuses.

For Habiba, it was a much easier path to publication. Strongly encouraged by Mabrouck, she nevertheless hesitated, lacking confidence in her abilities as an author. After the publication of *Le poids d'une âme*, when her brother persisted in his encouragements, she eventually wrote the first ten pages of what would become *Kiffer sa race* and sent it to five publishers. All five expressed an interest in the novel but, after meeting with several others, she also eventually decided to go with Lattès.

In relation to their novels, both authors claim that, rather than setting out to deliberately write overtly optimistic novels about the *banlieue*, they made a choice to present the world, and life in the *banlieue*, as they see it, and as they experienced it growing up:

C'est un choix qui ressemble à nos vies, où les situations ont été beaucoup plus contrastées et moins uniformément négatives que les journaux le relatent quand ils parlent de banlieue. Nos livres ne sont pas non plus exagérément optimistes : ils se veulent réalistes, même s'ils portent en eux les germes de l'espoir qui est un de nos traits de caractère communs, sachant que cet espoir n'est pas béat et teinté malgré tout de lucidité sur les difficultés de la vie.

Yet they are aware of the profound affect that their books can, and do, have on their young readers from the *banlieues*. They have experienced first-hand this impact when facilitating workshops and *ateliers* with school groups. They believe that part of the reason that these young people may identify so much with their writing is that the environment and language are familiar:

... nous avons puisé notre inspiration autant dans notre imagination que dans notre vécu, ce qui a été un gros plus étant donné l'environnement urbain de nos romans respectifs. C'est pourquoi les jeunes de banlieue, en particulier, ont bien reçu nos livres : ils y ont vu une langue, des descriptions, des univers, qui pouvaient ressembler aux leurs.

Despite this, they also know, from meeting with fans and readers at the various events in which they participate, that the universality of some of their themes means that their readership is not confined to those who have shared similar circumstances, but that it extends far beyond the *banlieues* and to people of all ages and all social backgrounds “qui ont été touchés par ce que nos livres relèvent d’universel (la jeunesse, la confrontation des mondes, les errements inhérents à la condition humaine...) plus que par le particularisme de banlieue.”

The knowledge that they can help those from a disadvantaged background, and empower them through literature is something of which they are extraordinarily proud. Inspired by their older siblings, and conscious that not everyone growing up on the margins has access to such a large number of positive influences, they believe that their novels can help in the empowerment of the young *banlieue* residents:

Grâce au parcours de nos aînés, nous avons moins souffert que d’autres de la dévalorisation de nos images dans notre jeunesse. Le livre a cette formidable particularité de pouvoir toucher un grand public et donc de porter cet esprit positif et réaliste auprès de jeunes qui manquent cruellement de confiance en eux, qui sont en déficit de repères.

Appendix 2: Summaries of the Novels of the Corpus

2.1 Kiffe kiffe demain

Faïza Guène's first novel, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, tells the story of a young girl growing up in the Paradis estate on the outskirts of Paris. Doria was born in France, to Moroccan parents, she is fifteen at the outset of the novel and her father has just abandoned her and her mother to return home to Morocco to marry a younger woman who might bear him the son he longs for. Doria and her mother are struggling with this abrupt change in their lives. Doria's illiterate mother has had to take a job cleaning rooms in a motel where the boss treats his staff badly. Doria, meanwhile, struggles at school and her teachers, noticing that she seems withdrawn, have sent her to a psychologist, whom she sees every Monday. The family frequently receive visits from a social worker, who provides financial help and support in the absence of the father. Although Doria often complains about the social workers and her psychologist, because she finds them condescending at times, she and her mother benefit greatly from the assistance provided by the state. Doria provides the reader with a day-to-day account of her life – her conversations with her friend Hamoudi, a local man who has struggled in the past and who finds it hard to keep a job, as a result of racial discrimination; babysitting job for a local woman, Lila, and her daughter Sarah; the various activities of the neighbours; her predominantly negative outlook on life. Over the course of the novel, Doria's attitude changes, however. Owing to the social workers – who have helped improve her mother's situation by providing assistance in attending adult literacy classes – and her budding relationship with politically engaged Nabil, her attitude and outlook at the end is significantly more positive and engaged than at the beginning, and she is even interested in a career in politics, so as to try and make a difference in the community.

2.2 Du rêve pour les oufs

Du rêve pour les oufs tells the story of Ahlème, a twenty four year old girl living in Paris with her father and brother. Ahlème and her brother were born in Algeria, and came to France to join their father, who was working in Paris, after the death of their mother, when Ahlème was eleven and Foued was only a baby. Ahlème is the sole earner in the family,

as Foued is still in school, and their father has been left incapacitated following a work accident, which occurred three years before the novel begins. Ahlème narrates the story of her struggles with life in Paris: the cold weather to which she still has not acclimatised; her difficulties in finding a job; trying to keep her brother in school and out of trouble. She carries a lot of responsibilities for someone her age, and occasionally desponds, but has a mother figure in the form of a neighbour, Tantie Mariatou, and she spends a significant amount of time with her family. Towards the end of the novel, Ahlème decides that a visit *au bled* would be good for the family, as they have not been back since her mother died, and Foued has no memories of his time there. The situation of the family has not changed by the end of the novel, but the visit to family in Algeria has provided some clarity and perspective, and Ahlème is hopeful for the future as a result.

2.3 Les gens du Balto

Les gens du Balto marks a departure for Guène in terms of narrative style, as it is a choral novel, with different chapters narrated by several different protagonists. The story is set in a fictional *banlieue*, Joigny-les-deux-bouts, situated at the end of the RER line. It is centred around the police investigation of the murder of a local *bar-tabac* owner, with each character providing information about themselves, their lives, their relationship with the victim, and their whereabouts on the night of the murder. As each of the characters undergo several police interviews – they each had motive and opportunity to commit the crime – the reader learns a lot about their lives, and comes to sympathise with some characters more than others. The mystery and suspense continues until the end of the novel, when the truth is finally revealed. Over the course of the novel, Guène also manages to include a significant amount of social commentary, framed through the viewpoint of the characters, living life on the periphery.

2.4 Un homme, ça ne pleure pas

Guène's most recent novel features a slightly older protagonist who is male, a first for Guène. Mourad has just finished his *CAPES* exams and is awaiting his results and his posting (he eventually gets posted to a school in a ZEP in Saint-Denis), and his greatest fear is of being old and obese, with salt and pepper hair, still living with his mother. The

novel is preoccupied with the themes of family and roots. Mourad's two sisters are polar opposites of each other: Mina, the younger sister, married young, had three children and took a job in the local retirement home where she had volunteered as a teenager. Dounia, on the other hand, had always desired the freedom she saw her French classmates enjoy, and at the novel's outset had not spoken with her family in over ten years, after a major rupture when Dounia ran away with an older Frenchman. She has since scaled the heights of her law career, works with an association to help oppressed women in underprivileged areas, has embarked on a career in politics, and is in the process of having a book published. Mourad takes the middle path between those of his sisters. He feels a lot of guilt after he moves for Paris, especially as his father had suffered a stroke prior to his departure. In Paris, however, he reconnects with his older sister, prompting them both to reflect on their life choices and values, and eventually prompting Dounia to see her family for the first time since the rupture years previously.

2.5 Le poids d'une âme

Mabrouck Rachedi's *Le poids d'une âme* follows the misadventures of Lounès Amri over the course of several tumultuous days. At the novel's opening Lounès receives a suspension from school and, owing to a series of events beyond his control, finds himself arrested, suspected as the leader of a drugs ring. Realising there is little evidence to back up his claims, an overzealous police inspector, seeking promotion and thus encouraging the monolithic media interest in the case, tries desperately to inflate the story, and Lounès is suddenly in danger of being prosecuted as a terrorist and facing deportation. The novel follows the events surrounding his arrest and detention, as well as the frantic efforts on the part of his family, schoolmates, some of his teachers, as well as an honest policeman who has been working undercover in the area, and an ethical journalist who senses that all is not well in the case. Interwoven throughout the third section of the novel, is the unrelated story of the family of a rural rope-maker, whose story inadvertently ends up having a major impact on Lounès' fate. Through the various characters and narrative threads that make up the story, Rachedi condemns injustices in the French justice system, as well as the way in which those from an immigrant background are discriminated against in France.

2.6 Kiffer sa race

Habiba Mahany's *Kiffer sa race* features Sabrina, a fifteen year old girl born to Algerian parents, as narrator. The novel follows Sabrina's life over the course of one academic year, and the year in question is one filled with major changes in her life. Her sister has been acting strangely ever since a visit back to the *bled* with their parents over the summer; her brother Adam has become controlling and manipulative and will not allow Sabrina out of his sights; her best friend, Nedjma, has become increasingly withdrawn; her beloved father has developed an illness; and her previously uncontested place as the best student in her class is in jeopardy, as a result of the highly motivated and intelligent new student, Alphonse Mercier. This year of change is difficult for Sabrina to handle, and she experiences much soul-searching as a result. She comes to several painful realisations about French society, her family, and even her own values and beliefs. Yet the novel remains resolutely positive, and although not all of her difficulties have been resolved by its end, the reader is left with hope for a potentially more positive future.

2.7 Le petit Malik

Rachedi's second novel follows the course of the eponymous Malik's life from the age of five to the age of twenty six. Each chapter is a snapshot of an episode from each year of Malik's life. He lives alone with his mother, who has sacrificed a lot to raise her son without a father. The two most important secondary figures in the novel are his childhood best friends, Abdou and Salomon, who represent the opposite extremes of the spectrum. Abdou struggles in school, leaves early to enter a life of crime, and ends up dying of a drug overdose at an early age. Salomon, on the other hand, studies hard, leaves for college and becomes extremely successful at his chosen career. As for Malik, he chooses the middle path, and purposefully strives to be average. Through Malik, and the various other characters that make up the patchwork of his life at various points, Rachedi denounces many aspects of French society. Yet he does not lay all of the blame on external factors and he also shows, mainly through the character of Salomon, that *l'esprit du ghetto* has a large part to play.

2.8 La petite Malika

Rachedi and Mahany's co-authored text, *La petite Malika*, follows a similar structure to *Le petit Malik*: each chapter is a single incident in the young girl's life from the age of five to twenty-six. Malika is a very different character to Malik however. She lives with her mother and older brother, and their life is punctuated by a series of her mother's lovers who move in with them. Malika is extremely gifted, from a very young age, and her teachers eventually convince her mother to allow her to skip a class. Despite suffering from a serious illness, her trajectory from there is spectacular, and she ends up studying at the *École Nationale d'Administration*, and dating a wealthy Spanish heir, but in the process she ends up forgetting her roots. In the end, a chance encounter with an old colleague of her grandfather's reminds her of where she has come from, and leads her to re-assess her life. Throughout the course of the novel, Rachedi and Mahany include much social commentary in their narrative, without seeming over-bearing or condescending. As a result of Malika's change of heart, and her conviction to make a difference in the lives of the young people of the *banlieue*, the reader is left with a sense of hope at the novel's end.

Appendix 3: Interview with Mabrouck Rachedi and Habiba Mahany

Pouvez-vous me donner un peu d'information sur votre famille : Quand vos parents sont-ils arrivés en France ? Combien de frères et sœurs avez-vous ?

Nos parents sont originaires de petite Kabylie, en Algérie. Notre père a émigré vers la France peu avant la guerre d'Algérie, en 1954 et ma mère l'a rejoint en 1962. Ils ont eu onze enfants. Mabrouck est le dixième de la fratrie, Habiba est la onzième.

Avez-vous passé beaucoup de temps au bled pendant votre jeunesse ? Si non, avez-vous gardé le contact avec votre famille là-bas ? Et maintenant ?

Notre père était ouvrier, ma mère femme au foyer. Comme nous étions onze et qu'ils n'avaient pas beaucoup de moyens, nous ne pouvions pas retourner au bled tous les ans. Mais nos parents ont gardé le contact avec leurs familles restées là-bas et, parfois, une partie de notre famille algérienne venait nous rendre visite en France.

Nous sommes retournés en Algérie plusieurs fois adultes. Plus seulement notre petit village perché en haut de sa montagne mais aussi un peu partout dans le pays : Alger, Tlemcen, Ghardaïa, Oran, Tizi-Ouzou, Sidi Bel Abbès, etc. Nos séjours dans notre petit bled nous donnaient une image incomplète de l'Algérie, rurale et presque hors du temps. Ces voyages nous ont permis de mieux appréhender cet immense pays, aux paysages, aux cultures, aux populations très divers.

Vous vous considérez Algériens ? Ou bien Français ? Un mélange ? Et est-ce que vous pouvez m'expliquer les raisons ?

Nous nous sentons les deux. Nos deux identités, algériennes et françaises, se renforcent l'une l'autre. Nous ne nous sentons pas le devoir de choisir malgré les débats actuels en France où il y a une remise en cause du principe de la double nationalité. C'est très difficile d'expliquer pourquoi. Nous avons grandi dans les deux cultures. Choisir entre la France et l'Algérie, ce serait comme choisir entre notre père et notre mère

Et vos parents, ils ont gardé un désir d'y retourner ?

Nos parents ont peut-être nourri l'ambition d'y retourner quand ils en sont partis mais ils ont su très tôt qu'ils ne pourraient pas : ils ont fondé une famille nombreuse scolarisée en France dont l'avenir était tracé au Nord de la Méditerranée. Ils sont symboliques de ces familles issues de l'immigration qui ont abandonné le « mythe du retour » : leurs racines étaient algériennes mais les branches de l'arbre généalogique poussaient en France.

Vous pouvez me parler un peu de vos expériences à l'école ? Avez-vous eu des expériences positives ? Négatives ?

L'expérience scolaire a été globalement positive. Nos parents, qui n'avaient pas eu la chance d'aller à l'école, nous ont poussés à être les meilleurs possibles. Pour eux, notre salut passerait par-là, c'est pour ça qu'ils ont mis la pression très tôt à nos aînés, puis à nous-mêmes. Cela a été plus facile pour nous, qui avons déjà un environnement stimulant grâce aux parcours de nos grands frères et sœurs. Etre une Rachedi était bien vu des professeurs, qui nous imaginaient bons élèves avant même que nous ayons fait nos preuves. Nous n'avons pas été confrontés à la dévalorisation de l'image dont se plaignent les jeunes aujourd'hui en banlieue.

Lisez-vous beaucoup pendant votre jeunesse ? Quel genre de littérature ? Quels sont les facteurs qui influencent votre écriture ?

Nous avons à peu près le même parcours de lecteur. Nous passions beaucoup de temps à la bibliothèque municipale où nous étions impressionnés par cette somme de savoirs et de découvertes qui s'offraient à nous. Lire, c'était aussi notre façon de voyager, nous qui n'avions pas beaucoup de moyens.

Nous avons commencé comme beaucoup de gamins à lire des BD, avec un goût très prononcé pour les Comics pour Mabrouck. Habiba était plus généraliste. Le passage à la littérature s'est fait assez naturellement. Nous avons été imbibés des classiques de la littérature française d'abord, à travers l'école, puis nous avons développé nos propres goûts. Habiba était très attachée au roman/théâtre réaliste américain (Steinbeck, Tennessee Williams, Horace McCoy...) et Mabrouck au roman policier (Agatha Christie, Maurice Leblanc, Gaston Leroux...)

Pour Habiba, c'est l'observation de la réalité qui a servi de déclencheur à l'envie d'écrire. Des petites chroniques de la vie quotidienne consignées dans un journal personnel ont été ses premières expériences d'écriture.

Pour Mabrouck, le choc littéraire a été « Le Père Goriot » de Balzac, un ravissement qui lui a donné envie d'écrire ses premières histoires de fiction dont l'une des toutes premières a été la trame du « Poids d'une âme ».

Est-ce que vous étiez créatifs pendant votre jeunesse ? Avez-vous écrit ? Ou avez-vous des autres débouchés créatifs ?

Habiba écrivait des textes autobiographiques dans son journal personnel, agrémenté de pensées sur les événements, les gens, l'environnement... Ce sont ces impressions de jeunesse qui serviront de substrat à « Kiffer sa race ». C'est de cette façon qu'elle a pu plus facilement se plonger dans la psychologie d'une adolescente, en plus de ses propres souvenirs et de sa créativité.

Mabrouck a écrit des petites histoires de fiction, des plans de romans, etc. Il aimait aussi participer à des débats en envoyant des lettres à des courriers de lecteurs (toujours sous pseudonyme). C'était sa façon de s'engager tout en conservant son anonymat.

Quand et comment avez-vous trouvé l'opportunité d'écrire et d'être publié ? Est-ce qu'il y avait un catalyseur particulier ?

Le chemin a été long et difficile pour Mabrouck. Il a décidé d'arrêter sa carrière d'analyste financier pour vivre de sa passionnée l'écriture. Il ne connaissait rien ni personne dans l'édition. Il a écrit son manuscrit qu'il portait en lui depuis plus d'une dizaine d'années. Ecrire a été beaucoup plus facile que de trouver un éditeur. Il a fallu plusieurs années, de nombreux refus, parfois ponctués d'encouragements ou de travaux avec des éditeurs qui n'ont pas abouti à un contrat. Plusieurs fois, il a failli abandonner mais à chacun de ces points de rupture, un éditeur le contactait pour retravailler sur son manuscrit. Puis il y a eu cette rencontre avec Lattès et l'aventure a pu commencer. Une anecdote à ce sujet. Mabrouck présentait le manuscrit à Lattès environ deux ou trois semaines avant les émeutes de novembre 2005. L'éditrice le trouvait très bien, sauf l'image de la banlieue qu'il renvoyait, avec des émeutes. Elle pensait que tout ça était fini, que cela renvoyait à une imagerie surannée de films comme « La Haine » tandis que Mabrouck essayait de la convaincre que c'était toujours d'actualité. Quelques jours après cet entretien, il y a eu les émeutes et l'éditrice a appelé Mabrouck en présentant ses excuses.

Pour Habiba, ça a été plus facile. Elle manquait beaucoup de confiance en elle et en sa capacité d'écrivaine. Mabrouck l'encourageait mais c'était difficile pour elle de faire la part des choses entre les encouragements polis d'un grand frère et la véritable foi en son

talent. Puis Mabrouck a été publié et il a encore insisté. Habiba a écrit les dix premières pages de « Kiffer sa race » et les a envoyées à cinq éditeurs. Les cinq ont donné suite. Elle a eu un contrat d'écriture pour son premier roman, il y a eu quelques soubresauts et des changements d'éditeurs en cours de route (d'abord Robert Laffont puis Gallimard puis finalement Lattès) mais tout s'est enchaîné très vite.

Vos livres reflètent une image plus positive et plus réaliste de la vie en banlieue. Est-ce un choix conscient? Et si oui, était-ce toujours le cas?

C'est un choix qui ressemble à nos vies, où les situations ont été beaucoup plus contrastées et moins uniformément négatives que les journaux le relatent quand ils parlent de banlieue. Nos livres ne sont pas non plus exagérément optimistes : ils se veulent réalistes, même s'ils portent en eux les germes de l'espoir qui est un de nos traits de caractère communs, sachant que cet espoir n'est pas béat et teinté malgré tout de lucidité sur les difficultés de la vie. Nous ne nous vouons pas à porter une vision positive et certains de nos textes sont plus noirs. Nous espérons que le public les découvrira bientôt.

Écrivez-vous pour un public particulier ?

Non, pas vraiment. Et ça a été la grande surprise liée à la réception de nos livres. A travers les courriers de lecteurs, les salons du livre que nous avons pu sillonner, nous avons rencontré plusieurs types de public, de tous âges, de tous milieux sociaux, qui ont été touchés par ce que nos livres relèvent d'universel (la jeunesse, la confrontation des mondes, les errements inhérents à la condition humaine...) plus que par le particularisme de banlieue.

Avez-vous reproduit des histoires et anecdotes personnelles dans vos textes ?

Oui, nous avons puisé notre inspiration autant dans notre imagination que dans notre vécu, ce qui a été un gros plus étant donné l'environnement urbain de nos romans respectifs. C'est pourquoi les jeunes de banlieue, en particulier, ont bien reçu nos livres : ils y ont vu une langue, des descriptions, des univers, qui pouvaient ressembler aux leurs.

Dans quel genre situeriez-vous vos livres ?

C'est très difficile de s'auto-étiqueter. C'est comme une psychanalyse, mieux vaut la laisser faire par d'autres, en particulier les brillants universitaires.

Qu'est-ce que vous pensez de l'étiquette « littérature de banlieue » ?

Cela a été une chance et une malchance. Une chance alors qu'il y a eu un vif intérêt pour les banlieues après les émeutes de 2005. Les éditeurs, les médias ont pensé à juste titre qu'il y avait un phénomène social sous-représenté dans la littérature française, c'est pourquoi en 2006, il y a plus de livres que d'ordinaire à ce sujet. La chance a donc été que la curiosité s'est portée sur nos romans. La malchance a été que, à part quelques exceptions notables, l'aspect social a parfois pris le pas sur l'aspect littéraire. Nous nous retrouvons une nouvelle fois dans une périphérie, cette fois-ci culturelle.

Vos livres traitent de la politique et de la religion, vous en avez fait un choix conscient?

C'est un choix très conscient, ainsi que d'aborder certaines questions sociales. Ce n'est pas le centre de nos livres mais des éléments déterminants. Cela ressemble à la vie en France, et en particulier en banlieue.

Beaucoup de jeunes lisent vos livres, est-ce que vous en êtes conscient pendant l'écriture ?

Pensez-vous que les écrivains de jeunesse, ou ceux dont les livres ont un grand nombre de jeunes lecteurs, doivent-ils être engagés ?

Lors de nos premiers livres, nous étions complètement inconscients. C'est après nos rencontres avec notre public que nous avons réalisé l'impact que nos personnages pouvaient avoir sur les gens, en particulier les jeunes. Maintenant, nous le savons mais nous ne croyons pas que cela change fondamentalement les choses dans nos façons d'écrire. Ecrire pour quelqu'un d'autre que soi-même est toujours un pari périlleux, sachant que nous pensons par ailleurs que chacun porte un part de nous en eux et que nous portons un par de chacun en nous-mêmes.

Nous croyons peu à la notion de devoir en littérature et nous nous gardons de donner des leçons d'écriture aux autres. Toute écriture est une forme d'engagement. L'engagement que nous avons à travers des livres nous est propre, lié à notre histoire, notre envie, mais nous ne l'imposons à personne.

Pensez-vous que l'humour puisse être une arme efficace contre le racisme et l'intolérance ?

Habiba : C'est une arme efficace dans la mesure où c'est un langage universel et immédiat qui parle spontanément aux gens. On se retrouve tous dans le rire, c'est un espace de communion. Il permet aussi de dédramatiser s'agissant de sujets aussi lourds. Le but est de dire des choses en étant léger, tout en n'oubliant pas que la finalité est de dire des choses. C'est un exercice périlleux et fragile : trop d'humour rend la situation de racisme anecdotique.

Vous faites des ateliers avec les jeunes, n'est-ce pas ? Vous pouvez me parler un peu de ces interventions, et la réaction de vos jeunes lecteurs ?

C'est surtout Mabrouck qui intervient beaucoup dans des ateliers d'écriture. Habiba intervient auprès de classe pour parler de ses livres. Il y a eu beaucoup d'interventions séparément ou ensemble, c'est difficile d'en faire une description-type, d'autant qu'il nous arrive de nous adresser à des publics très différents. Dans les écoles, on peut dire qu'il y a un phénomène d'identification immédiat qui nous facilite les choses. Quand ils pensent littérature, les jeunes pensent à des auteurs morts, ou très vieux, ou qui ont des noms « français » comme Martin Durand. Quand ils voient qu'une Habiba ou un Mabrouck qui ont des parcours qui ressemblent aux leurs, ont écrit des livres et qu'ils sont reçus dans des écoles, ils sont surpris et intéressés. D'après certains échos, certains élèves ont même changé radicalement de comportement après certaines de nos interventions. Des élèves un peu dissipés sont devenus plus attentifs. C'est une grande fierté pour nous.

Je crois que vos livres peuvent aider les jeunes de banlieue, en les valorisant quelque peu, partagez-vous cette opinion ?

Nous le croyons aussi. Grâce au parcours de nos aînés, nous avons moins souffert que d'autres de la dévalorisation de nos images dans notre jeunesse. Le livre a cette formidable particularité de pouvoir toucher un grand public et donc de porter cet esprit positif et réaliste auprès de jeunes qui manquent cruellement de confiance en eux, qui sont en déficit de repères.

Enfin, en parlant de vos livres vous utilisez une expression qui m'intéresse beaucoup, soit « armes à transmissions massives ». Pouvez-vous expliquer un peu cette expression ?

Mabrouck : Plus jeune, j'ai souffert que ma voix soit peu entendue. Je me disais que quel que soit mon message, aussi intéressant pourrait-il être (et à l'adolescence, je croyais très immodestement que ce que j'avais à dire était intéressant !), il ne pourrait pas être entendu. J'ai pu m'évader à travers la lecture. L'écriture a été un moyen d'avoir l'illusion du contrôle, au moins sur les personnages, et du partage, quand je faisais lire certains textes aux autres. Aujourd'hui, j'ai cette chance de pouvoir publier des romans, des nouvelles, des scénarios, des tribunes dans les journaux... Une façon de m'exprimer positivement (contrairement aux armes de destruction massive dont la formule est un détournement) et massivement.