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Zadi's Series "En Place": Breaking Banlieue Stereotypes

Serial Zadiego „Nasz kandydat". Przełamywanie stereotypów przedmieścia

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Abstract. Since the classic film *La Haine* (1995), the representation of the banlieue has emphasized stereotypes of the peripheries with ills such as unemployment, instability, restive youth, poverty, and marginalization. In this thesis, I demonstrate how Jean-Pascal Zadi's series *En Place* (*Represent*) addresses these clichés while presenting a radically different view of the banlieue by challenging the representation of deprivation, frustration, oppression, and exclusion of French people of color in the banlieue. On the other hand, to the extent that stereotypes ring true, the series ascribes different causes than usual to the experiences of banlieue inhabitants or addresses some of their conceptions with recourse to self-deprecation and self-criticism. The plot revolves around the unlikely presidential campaign of Stéphane Blé, one of the residents of a neighborhood in a banlieue, Bobigny, after a public altercation with the mayor, who is himself running for president in an upcoming election. Through his main character, the series conveys the view that rewriting the political discourse of the banlieue is necessary and that racism, social ills, and gender inequality, which are denounced by the left, should be confronted more consistently and efficiently for everyone's sake.

Keywords: stereotypes; banlieue; politics; *En Place*; breaking; series; marginalization

Abstrakt. Od czasu klasycznego filmu *La Haine* (1995) reprezentacja przedmieścia podkreślała stereotypy peryferii z takimi bolączkami jak: bezrobocie, niestabilność, niepokorna młodzież, ubóstwo, marginalizacja. W artykule pokazuję, w jaki sposób serial *En Place* (*Nasz kandydat*) Jean-Pascala Zadiego odnosi się do tych stereotypów, jednocześnie przedstawiając radykalnie odmienny pogląd na przedmieścia poprzez zakwestionowanie reprezentacji deprywacji, frustracji, ucisku i wykluczenia kolorowych Francuzów w *banlieue*. W zakresie, w jakim stereotypy są prawdziwe, serial przypisuje inne niż zwykle przyczyny doświadczeniom mieszkańców przedmieść lub odnosi się do niektórych ich koncepcji, odwołując się do samooceny i samokrytyki. Fabuła obraca się wokół nieprawdopodobnej kampanii prezydenckiej Stéphane'a Blé, jednego z mieszkańców dzielnicy w *banlieue* – Bobigny, po publicznej sprzeczce z burmistrzem, który sam kandyduje na prezydenta w nadchodzących wyborach. Za pośrednictwem głównego bohatera serial przekazuje pogląd, że konieczne jest przeformułowanie dyskursu politycznego *banlieue* oraz że rasizm, choroby społeczne i nierówność płci, które są potępiane przez lewicę, powinny być konfrontowane bardziej konsekwentnie i skutecznie dla dobra wszystkich.

Słowa kluczowe: stereotypy; przedmieścia; polityka; *En Place*; przełamywanie; serial; marginalizacja

INTRODUCTION

The narrative surrounding the French banlieue often insists on poverty, crime, and social unrest. Simone Antonia Lucia van de Wetering notes that these representations have become a stereotype, a negative or positive belief associated with suburban areas and their residents. These narratives often present the residents as perpetrators of societal vices. They are also considered a highly immigrant population, which leads to frequent discourse in public media about their Frenchness and their role in modern French society. Politically, it is also believed that these people do not draw positive attention to their community, and as a result of this, they are often segregated in the political scene, as well as in various aspects of social life (Wetering 2020: 304). Correspondingly, David Garbin and Gareth Millington (2012: 2068) note that "the banlieue experience lies within the tension between internal self-perception and negative external images attributed to it". It is observable that banlieue stigmatization begins in the territories, that is, it occurs within the periphery and simultaneously follows the residents when they find themselves outside the banlieue or in a place that could be characterized as bourgeois. While public discourse often dwells on the challenges and systemic issues attributed to the banlieue, there is a narrow perspective that obscures a far richer narrative. Under these repetitive portrayals is a vibrant cultural, artistic, and social contribution of the banlieue to a broader French society.

In this article, I discuss responses to these prevailing clichés as Jean-Pascal Zadi recognizes a problem in this stereotypical narrative of the banlieue in his *En Place* (2023), translated in English as *Represent* (2023). Although the second

season of this series is projected for release in 2024, this article focuses on the first season, which was released in 2023 as a Netflix original. The first season of the series offers a lens through which the complexity of discourse regarding the banlieue is explored and highlights issues of systemic racism and social exclusion. This often leads to the criminalization of the banlieue and its inhabitants. For Zadi, the prejudices associated with the banlieue are too general and fail to consider other successful narratives, such as the banlieue as a thriving center of cultural innovation, resilience, and solidarity that challenge and redefine the cultural identity of France itself. In addition, there are successful accounts of the banlieue residents as people with goals, who have jobs, sustain businesses, and develop creative innovations and ideas.

The series is about an election, and the narrative revolves around an idealistic educator from the banlieue thrust into a presidential race by happenstance who unwittingly becomes a leader. The protagonist Stéphane Blé finds himself in a presidential race after a public confrontation with Eric Andréï, mayor of Bobigny and a candidate from the socialist party. His boldness in confronting Andréï's mismanagement is widely shared on social media, which gives him some popularity. A polling company decides to test if such a person were a candidate, and the result shows that Blé has good prospects if he decides to run for president. To fully grasp the richness of Zadi's series, it's essential to delve into the realities of the banlieue and its residents.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMAGE OF THE BANLIEUE

The French banlieues refer to "housing units around Paris and other big cities in France populated with an extremely high concentration of working-class individuals, of which immigrants comprise a substantial percentage and are often mostly residents" (Pégram 2020: 94). In the same manner, Rosello notes that "The Paris banlieue is an interestingly ethnicized and de-essentialist paradigm of a coalition between communities and a reassuringly re-universalized entity of the dominant culture" (quoted after Tarr 2019: 66). Rosello's observation implies that the cultural influences from North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia are particularly prominent in the banlieue. These result in creating a fusion of languages, cuisines, customs, and traditions that are distinctly French yet imbued with a global flair. Over the years, these movements of people resulted in various cultural and language contacts, thereby creating a third space identity and way of life. For example, the creation of *verlan*, a form of French slang characterized by the inversion or reversal of syllables in words, is often described to have originated in these peripheries and is commonly found

in the language of hip-hop and rap in France's urban culture. Zadi's series *En Place* undertakes a counter-narrative that posits that individuals hailing from the banlieue areas possess the capacity to communicate effectively and attain notable accomplishments and positions in society. Like Zadi, Ahonen brings a new perspective regarding the banlieue and the description of its young population. He presents them as a "dynamic population and its cultural diversity as an asset for the French society" (Ahonen 2016: 169). This shows that its young population can move the French cultural and artistic scene forward, thereby positively impacting the French economy. The promotion of this cultural diversity could be a base for France in its leadership role in Europe and the world at large as a country that fosters diversification, acceptance, and cultural and racial tolerance.

This inclusion and tolerance of diversity have been observed in France's sporting activities, such as football. Great sports personalities traceable to the French banlieue have become heroes in football and represented the French colors on the global stage. For example, the 1998 World Cup, hosted and won by France, offers an interesting case of national identities and diversity being interpreted through sports. The emergence of football stars such as Zinédine Zidane (Algeria) Karembu (New Caledonia), and Lama (Guyana), are all traceable to immigrant parents, as reported by Rebecca W. Wines in her work on the discuss of *Sporting Frenchness: Nationality, Race, and Gender at Play* (2010), as a reaction to the success of the French national football team in the 1998 World Cup, we read:

> Many people championed France's victory as proof of its success in assimilating or integrating individuals with various cultural backgrounds into one nation; some saw the win as evidence of France's new multicultural and multiracial identity; some dismissed the team as not being representative of the nation at all. (ibidem: 107)

Similarly, a report in an article published in the "New York Times" by Rory Smith and Elian Peltier on June 7, 2018, after the conclusion of the 2018 World Cup, which France won, saw a French national football team who were regarded as national heroes dominated by young people from Bondy, a banlieue on the Île-de-France. From Kylian Mbappé and Paul Pogba to N'golo Kanté and many others, all traceable to the banlieue, have been able to make a positive impact and change the narratives associated with these peripheries. As well as the perception of many young people of the banlieue. This serves as a positive example that can be emulated in their quest for achieving greatness despite the discouraging odds of stigma, social discrimination, and marginalization that they are often

subjected to. As illustrated in the series, Marion, Blé's wife, shares the same opinion as the "New York Times". Although she points out that despite some minorities' stellar recognition in French society this does not change the lives of most of the banlieue residents, who are still faced with prejudice and societal exclusion. She notes:

> Mais renoi… Tu ne seras jamais président ! On est en France ici, on n'est pas aux États-Unis. Ici on aime les Noirs s'ils font rire, s'ils ramènent la coupe à la maison ou s'ils font du gospel. Point ! [But bro… you'll never be president! This is France, not the United States. Here, we like Black people if they make us laugh, if they bring the trophy home, or if they sing gospel. Period!] (*En Place 1*, Episode 1)

However, we see here that there are still some intolerances associated with this heterogeneity and that the celebrity status of some confines the acceptance of minorities to recognized professions, such as football players, singers, or comedians. The portrayal of the banlieue in Zadi's *En Place* moves beyond the typical narratives of violence, poverty, and alienation that have long defined its depiction in French media. By infusing his series with humor, cultural pride, and political ambition, Zadi offers counter-narratives that challenge entrenched stereotypes. These stories emphasize the creativity, resilience, and diversity of the banlieue life, reframing it not as a symbol of social failure but as a space of dynamic potential. This shift in representation not only humanizes these communities but also calls into question the reductive lens through which they are often viewed.

ZADI'S *EN PLACE* BREAKS AND REDEFINES BANLIEUE STEREOTYPES

As noted, the series revolves around an election and addresses the entire spectrum of the political landscape in France, from the left wing to the far right, from ecofeminism to anti-immigration. The opening episode presents Fred Cognard, a far-right candidate, decrying immigrants as the root of France's economic woes, perpetuating nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric. He considers it an "upsurge" that has resulted in the rise in unemployment in France.

> Mes chers compatriotes. Tout augmente : les prix, le chômage, la pauvreté. Même les températures augmentent ! Donc, il n'y a pas à chercher bien loin. Faut renvoyer les Arabes chez eux. Français, le 10 avril, arrêtez de vous faire marcher sur les pieds. [My dear compatriots. Everything is rising: prices, unemployment, poverty. Even the temperatures are rising! So, there's no need to look far. We need to

> send the Arabs back to their countries. French citizens, on April 10, stop letting yourselves be walked all over.] (*En Place 1*, Episode 1)

Cognard's opinion reflects anti-immigrant bias and portrays Arabs as scapegoats for France's socioeconomic challenges. In the same manner, his view on France and its colonialist exploitation throughout the world shows that he considers one race superior and above others through his justification of colonialism. He constitutes a discriminatory profiling and a stereotype towards the Arabs and the *Beur* community, who have been predominantly associated with the majority race, constituting the banlieue residents. Cognard is ethnocentric and represents a racist political party. He declares on colonialism that:

> Il va falloir arrêter de nous culpabiliser avec la colonisation. La vraie colonisation, c'est celle que les Français subissent tous les jours. Avec le voile dans les écoles, avec les boucheries halal, avec les Fatima, les Mohammed. Cette colonisation-là, avec moi, quand je suis élu, c'est terminé. Tout le monde dans son charter, dans son avion, retour à la Casbah. [We need to stop being guilt-tripped about colonization. The real colonization is what the French endure every day, with veils in schools, halal butcher shops, and all the Fatimas and Mohammeds. That kind of colonization, with me, when I'm elected, it's over. Everyone on a charter flight, on a plane, back to the Casbah.] (*En Place 1*, Episode 4)

Cognard's opinion on colonization reflects a nationalist as well as an anti-immigrant perspective that rejects cultural diversity and instead promotes a homogenous society. Mentioning *Fatima* and *Mohammed* highlights a focus on Arab and Muslim communities in France. Cognard uses highly provocative language that depicts his desire to forcefully repatriate immigrants. He draws a parallel between historical colonialism and the perceived cultural influences of immigrants in France, suggesting that French people are being colonized by the presence of foreigners, mainly in the banlieues. On the other hand, Andréï, another candidate in the election, has an opinion that is close to that of the right wing, though he agrees that some levels of injustice were done during colonization, but notes further that those actions brought some good development to Africa and the colonies in general. This cynical point could appeal to far-right and right-wing voters, which is what Cognard and Andréï hope for as the election builds momentum. Andréï suggests a nuanced view of colonization, acknowledging both its negative aspects and its positive impacts. His view on colonization does not accuse a particular ethnicity or race, like Cognard, but presents a superficial self-criticism towards the French colonizers of the imperialist

era. However, he presents and contests his view by portraying some positive developments that can be traced to colonization in the colonies.

To redefine this narrative, the series *En Place* presents a different view on colonialization and the negative racial and ethnic profiling associated with the banlieue. This discourse has often been featured in the contemporary societal debate on immigration and diasporic activities. The series challenges the stereotypical narrative of the banlieue by illustrating that the suburban space is not only inhabited by the Arabs, as declared by Cognard. And that stigmatizing a particular race or ethnic group who have had a long history with France and consider itself French, may not be a better approach to this issue. In addition, Cognard's approach does not guarantee a reduction in the high unemployment rate that is experienced in France. Instead, systemic discrimination and education disparities, as well as economic marginalization and racial stigmatization are issues that require a combination of targeted policies by French political elites.

In his representation, Zadi presents the banlieue as a multi-ethnic community with different ethnicities and races, just as Mathieu Kassovitz does in *La Haine* (1995) with its representation of *blanc*, *beur*, and black. In *La Haine* (1995), Vinz, Saïd, and Hubert face the complexities of identity, race, and social exclusion in the Parisian suburbs. Through this film, Kassovitz presents the Maghrebian, African, and Jewish populations residing in the banlieue and how they are subjected to stigmatization not primarily based on their biological distinctiveness but rather due to their cultural otherness. They embody spatialized and racialized markers indicative of broader issues such as political-economic and social disintegration, and the prevalence of crime and violence within these communities (Siciliano 2015: 220). Like Kassovitz, Zadi's *En Place* presents a team of dedicated young people actively participating in Blé's electoral campaign. They are a multi-ethnic group, mainly sons and daughters of second and third-generation immigrants who are now French citizens and reside in Bobigny, a Parisian banlieue. Zadi highlights the solidarity within this multicultural community, portraying it as an asset to French society rather than a problem. The series avoids making a sweeping generalization or endorsing any statement that unfairly blames a specific group or race for a complex societal issue, thereby shifting and redefining the stereotypical discourse and representation of the banlieue.

As a self-criticism of the banlieue residents, Zadi's series, however, reckoned with the intolerance of the banlieue residents themselves. Through the exemplification of Maurice, a banlieue youth and a cousin to Blé, who functions as Blé's security officer. Like Cognard and Andréï, Maurice is presented as antisemitic and supports conspiracy theories. In this instance, the stereotypical narrative does not originate from a superior race or people like Cognard and Andréï. It

instead originates within the banlieue and those allegedly being stereotyped. This is a form of self-criticism that Zadi includes in the series to show the balancing of the banlieue discourse in a way that does not just blame others but also evaluates the space within. Maurice state:

> La sécurité, ce n'est pas compliqué. Suffit juste de savoir de qui on se méfié et là, c'est vite vu. Moi, je vois qui veut la peau à Stéphane. Les francs-maçons, l'état, Israël, évidemment. C'est vrai ce que je dis. On ne peut plus rien dire. [Security isn't complicated. You just need to know who to be wary of, and that's easy to see. I know who's after Stéphane Blé. The Freemasons, the state, Israel, obviously. It's true what I am saying. You can't say anything anymore.] (*En Place 1*, Episode 2)

Maurice's claims are based on stereotypes and unfounded prejudices, thereby exhibiting racial intolerance. His opinion on the state of Israel shows discrimination and racist behavior, which represent some tendencies and possibilities of banlieue residents to also be racist. Maurice's position is dangerous and fuels mistrust and division. Like Cognard, Maurice believes that there are too many Arabs in France and that their votes could help Blé win the election if he decides to attract the majority with his campaign policies and promises. He proposes a measure that he believes will capture the Arab's votes: "Mangez halal, ne payez rien" ("Eat halal, pay nothing"). Unfortunately for him, the team will not accept his proposed measure; instead, they will settle for "Manger bio, ne payez rien" ("Eat organic, pay nothing"). Through this measure, Blé believes that addressing social food scarcity and hunger will help reduce the likelihood of criminal behavior and encourage positive societal thought among citizens.

Maurice's intolerance toward white people is also displayed in Corrèze, a remote township in the countryside of France, where Blé visits to appeal to white majority voters as the presidential election draws near. In Corrèze, Maurice describes the whites in the countryside and provinces as dangerous and plans to use his tear gas. He brought it for the protection of the campaign team against anyone who attacks them. He knows that Corrèze is not an ideal place for Blè, being a black person from the banlieue, and his multi-racial campaign team is also from the banlieue. Through the scene in Corrèze, Zadi shows a connection between the stereotypical representation of the banlieue as being neglected in terms of infrastructure. A place that is overlooked and without any basic development plan. In his criticism, Zadi presents a similar situation in other French regions and provinces through the example of Corrèze. Characterized by a decline in resources, the situation in Corrèze can be compared with the other major parts of France, including the banlieue. In his rewriting of the stereotypical image of

the banlieue and its infrastructure, Zadi diverts the attention of the public from the banlieue described as a society in regression and shifts the attention to other communities. The event of this scene presents Blé as the political momentum builds up. Blé visits Corrèze, a town in a region of France, and during his visit, Blé meets the mayor, who informs him of the condition in his village.

> Blé : Sur le chemin, on a vu, c'est pire qu'au quartier ici. C'est abandonné et tout. [On the way, we saw it's worse than the neighborhood here. It's abandoned and everything.]
> The Mayor : Ah oui. La poste a fermé il y a un an, le dernier boulanger, il y a deux mois. Complètement abandonnée, oui. [Oh yes. The post office closed a year ago, and the last baker two months ago. Completely abandoned, yes.] (*En Place 1*, Episode 3)

The mayor of Corrèze points to the various declines they have experienced. He thereby calls for more attention to be given to the French region and province, as it is in the *metropole* (city). Zadi uses Blé, his protagonist, as a tool to criticize the political elites who have overlooked the deplorable condition of society and have focused their attention on stigmatizing and creating stereotypes about the banlieue. On the other hand, they forget that the living conditions and the people in the regions and provinces also need prompt attention from the media, just as the banlieue and its residents also need attention. The series presents characters such as Hervé, who has been affected by the economic downturn in Corrèze, and has caused him a bad farming season. Due to this misfortune and debts, Hervé had his farm seized. Hervé threatens to kill himself and kill anyone who comes close to his house; he refuses any human relations or contact. He becomes a terror in the neighborhood, and he is left in isolation as people are afraid of him for fear of being shot or killed. It takes Blé's visit to intervene and successfully talk him out of his depressed state. Zadi presents the character of Hervé as a symbolic representative of individual downfall in society. Hervé's experience shows desperation, which is widespread in contemporary society and not restricted to the banlieue; it somewhat extends from the suburbs to other communities in France.

Scholars in their representation of the banlieue space have often projected it as a place of religious tension and fundamentalism. Lochard from his analysis of televised representation of the banlieue from 1951 until 1994, observed that not only that the banlieue receive increasing media attention, but it is also increasingly associated with Islamic fundamentalism as well as the un-integrability of certain immigrant groups (quoted after Grewal 2007: 49). The media stereotypic

representation of the banlieue with Islamic and religious fundamentalisms may be due to the dominant discourse that associates its dwellers with northern, sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Asia where Islam is predominantly the religious believe of the people. Blé's visit to Corrèze contrasts with how the suburban area has been represented as a place with religious extremism. For example, Mathieu, an inhabitant of a village in Corrèze, believes that all the political attention is now focused on the banlieue, and it is where all government allocations have been turning to.

> Mathieu : Vu que tout le pognon va aux banlieues, il n'y a plus rien pour les Français. [Since all the money goes to the banlieue, there's nothing left for the French.]
> Blé : Je ne comprends pas. [I don't understand.]
> Lamine : Attends ! Tu sais qu'en banlieue, on est aussi français que toi. [Wait! You know that in the banlieue, we're just as French as you are.]
> Mathieu : Ben, voyons. Avec vous là, c'est plus made in France. C'est Mohammed in France… [Yeah, right. With you, it's no longer made in France. It's Mohammed in France…]
> The Mayor : Mathieu, va faire un tour. S'il te plaît, vraiment. Ne faut pas lui en vouloir. Mon neveu, il… son usine a fermé, il s'est retrouvé au chômage, divorcé… [Mathieu, go take a walk. Please, really. Don't hold it against him. My nephew, he… his factory closed, he ended up unemployed, divorced…] (*En Place 1*, Episode 3)

Mathieu's opinion raised condemnation from Blé and his campaign team, and the intervention of the mayor succeeded in avoiding a dispute and confrontation among them. The mention of *Mohammed*, who is regarded as a prophet of Allah in the Islamic faith, is an attempt by Mathieu to attribute the banlieue to the Islamic religion. In addition, Mathieu's association of *Mohammed* with France shows his rejection of the progressive propagation of the Islamic religion in France and his rejection of those who believe and follow this doctrine. Mathieu's extremism and religious intolerance will cause him to shoot Blé, an occurrence that almost kills Blé and causes him to potentially stop his campaign. Here, the perception that the banlieue is violent is opposed to the fact that violence happens in the province and other regions in France, and can happen anywhere else; this occurrence is not particular to the banlieue as it is often presented. Furthermore, the potential of religious extremists can be found everywhere and not just in the banlieue as depicted in the sequence of the series. This representation also contrasts with the notion that Muslims are allegedly fanatic and prone to violence, especially in the banlieue. Whereas, in this series, Zadi

uses the character of Mathieu to embody this description. Blé's reliance on an ethnically and religiously diverse team of campaigners is not coincidental. This is a realistic image, emphasizing productive collaboration despite differences between the banlieue residents. Zadi's main character, Blé, faces some challenges originating in real or imagined social ills associated with the banlieue. Scholars have investigated the prevalent discourse on banlieue societal ills and its impact on suburban residents and French society. For example, Pégram (2020: 95) points out that "socially and economically, the banlieues are majorly undeveloped, many are crime-ridden, and jobs are few". He argues that the standard of living in the suburban area is low because of its poverty and that there is a crime rate due to the substantial concentration of unemployment in these communities. Without jobs and in their vulnerable economic status, some residents navigate their reality by engaging in social ills such as drug trafficking, illicit acts, and vandalism, among others. This condition makes them move frequently between two often contrasting paradigms: a society that views them suspiciously and a heritage culture that may not reflect their unique needs and daily lives in France. However, it is important to note that despite the challenges faced by many individuals in this society, some demonstrate resilience by leveraging their creativity and entrepreneurial qualities, as well as a strong sense of communal living, which can serve as a source of strength. Zadi presents a nuanced view of these common representations and contests that they are predominant in the banlieue.

Guillaume Roux, Anaïk Purenne, and Julien Talpin (2023) highlight the difficulty experienced by racialized young people in the banlieue, including those with advanced degrees who are without jobs or employment. They note that "There have been experiences of discrimination in the job market, for individuals who are residents of the banlieue. These people, due to their race and ethnic origins, see their first name as a liability and are in turn attributed to negative profiling, especially in the job market (ibidem: 7). Their arguments do not deny the presence of individuals experiencing economic hardship within the suburban areas, but they invite us to recognize the diversity of socio-economic situations that are also present in the banlieues.

Likewise, Zadi's series *En Place* refrains from stereotypically generalizing all residents as uniformly poor and underscores the various economic circumstances prevailing within this location. For example, Blé is presented as an educator at a youth center in Bobigny, supporting and mentoring teenagers like Lamine Touré and his friends who lack parental care. Lamine is often encouraged by Blé to attend internships, as this will help him find a career path and prevent him from associating himself with drug dealings or engaging in illicit acts as an alternative means of livelihood. Lamine's hope is stirred again with Blé's candidacy

and presidential ambition. He plays a vital role in the campaign's success, through which he sees hope and believes that Blé can get to the presidency. Lamine believes that Blé being president of France will give a voice to the voiceless like him and his friends, who are banlieue residents and often victims of societal vices.

However, characters like Désiré in the banlieue exploit the vulnerability of these young people and introduce them to selling drugs in the neighborhood and other communities as a means of survival. Désiré can be regarded as the opposite of Blé and his wife, Marion, who owns and runs a hair salon in the neighborhood. This shows that people in the banlieues own businesses, have employees who work for them, and have clients who patronize their businesses. The series shows that some of these inhabitants of the banlieue desire to live and carry out their day-to-day activities without prejudices. They do not want to be racially profiled or discriminated against by the public and associated with thuggery or drug trafficking. For example, Mucchielli (2022: 25) discusses banlieue thuggery within the context of delinquency and immigration in France. His study shows that factors, such as economic barriers to social integration and anti-institutional sentiments, contribute to the localized over-representation of youth from immigrant backgrounds in criminal activities, including thuggery. This representation increases and leads to frequent identity police checks in the banlieues. As a result, it contributes to a sense of presumption of guilt among youths, leading to negative interactions with authorities and potentially harmful consequences (Truong 2019: 145). However, in redefining these experiences in Zadi's series, when issues of thuggery and drug trafficking are shown, the message is that they are responses to problems that are left unaddressed and that some vulnerable youths engage in them in defiance, while older characters such as Désiré in the series see drug dealings in a parallel entrepreneurial spirit to Marion's socially acceptable activity, one of the few options that is open to them.

The series is about a presidential election, and through this production, Zadi criticizes the political elites and how they capitalize on the vulnerability of the youth from the suburban areas during election periods and use them as weapons to fight their political opponents. For example, Andréï, who is supposed to champion the cause of law and order within his community as mayor from the ruling party, is rather seen as implicated in a collaborative association that leads to the disruption of the election process. This involves Désiré, a thug and a drug trafficker from the banlieue, who also happens to be Blé's cousin. Andréï uses his political powers to protect Désiré, especially in facilitating his drug dealings in the banlieue neighborhood and other communities under his jurisdiction. Andréï allows this practice in exchange for the dirty jobs Désiré performs for him, such as sabotaging the election process and using him to intimidate his

political opponents. Seeing Blé's candidacy as an obstacle, Andréï requests the services of Désiré to help him sabotage Blé's candidacy.

> Désiré : Tu veux que j'aille le voir et que… [You want me to see him (Blé) and…]
> Andréï : Chut ! Je n'ai pas dit je veux, je dis que… Que me proposes-tu ? [Shh! I didn't say I want, I said that… What do you suggest?]
> Désiré : Je l'éteins tranquillement ? [Should I shoot him off quietly?]
> Andréï : Oui, comme ça… Ça nous permettra d'aller plus loin pour les projets de chacun. [Yes, like that… It allows us to go further with each other's projects.] (*En Place 1*, Episode 2)

Andréï developed concerns about Blé's winning potential because he could get enough sponsorship from mayors who were willing to support his candidacy. Securing a major portion of the mayor's support is mandatory for any candidate to proceed or even be approved to contest in an election in France. Frustrated, Andréï plans to destabilize Blé's campaign by targeting his associates and team members and by fighting dirty. He requests that Jérôme, his campaign director, help plan a trap, as it is necessary against Blé. First, he suggests that Jérôme stop him from securing more support from the mayors, and secondly, he plans to make him stop his political campaign. This shows the extent to which some elite politicians are willing to play dirty during elections. Désiré's activities are an indispensable component of Andreï's influence. Désiré will set Ble's campaign headquarters on fire to intimidate him under the directive of Andréï, whose actions comprise the utilization of political authority for personal gain, thereby increasing social tensions and compromising the integrity of democratic processes. Thus, Zadi addresses the stereotypical representation of the banlieue as a place filled with thugs while showing how that perception serves the elites in their crooked dealings and misuse of political power. This does not mean that there are no hoodlums in the banlieue and that they also benefit from this relationship, as we see with Désiré, whose concurrence stems from his anticipation that Andréï's patronage will afford him continued impunity in his illicit undertakings, evading scrutiny from law enforcement agencies. However, in the end, Andréï meets his Waterloo, and he must face corruption charges. He is accused of mismanaging public funds, and as a result, he is forced to withdraw from the presidential race.

As self-criticism and in balancing the often-stereotypical representation of the banlieue, Blé, in the series, explained the reasons why some banlieue youth engage in drug trafficking. He first recognizes having family members who engage in these illicit acts, but also talks about the resilience and positive potential seen in the banlieue youths. He is aware of the issue when confronted

with the question during a nationwide televised presidential debate with Corine Douanier, the Green Party candidate. Blé advocates for the cause of the youth residing in the suburban areas. He endeavors to counteract prevailing stereotypes that depict banlieue youths primarily as individuals involved in drug-related activities; instead, he presents a more nuanced representation of this societal situation. He calls for the attention of the political elites to create more jobs and opportunities for the banlieue youth. When these jobs are available, they will engage the youths, reducing the compelling tendency to look for alternatives and participate in illicit acts. To the banlieue youth, Blé points out that despite the systemic victimization and oppression they face, there is still hope for them if they are ready to take the challenge of positivism.

CONCLUSION

From the beginning of his campaign, Blé makes it known that he is running in the presidential election for the people who do not have a voice, such as those who are from his neighborhood. Blé's trajectory and success in the election inspire young people of the banlieue, hence ascertaining Blé's belief that it is possible to come from below in life and reach the top. Through his main character, Zadi wittingly presents to the French public the possibility of having a black president, considering events in the United States of America with Barack Obama as its 44th president and the first black president in the history of the United States of America. Zadi uses this series to raise a fundamental issue about the political space of France and to rewrite the stereotypes associated with the banlieues. This series brings a new dimension of representation to the banlieue and its dwellers, especially the youth who seem to have little or no hope in their society as they face systemic marginalization and injustice every day. However, despite all the challenges faced as the campaign built up to the final stage and the various opposition from other political candidates such as Andréï, Corinne Douanier, Etienne Dourandou, Fred Cognard, and the sabotage from Désiré, his cousin, Blé, an emblem of the banlieusard, wins the presidential election with 51.8% of votes over Corinne, 48.8% which makes him the first black president of France. Zadi can be seen as a humorist messenger of hope to the banlieue residents and an agent for redefining banlieue stereotypes. Zadi, through his series *En Place*, encourages banlieue youth to keep aspiring for greatness without having to engage in compromises and illicit acts in society and to make their request known to the French government and the politicians without intimidation or fear as the character Blé did in his election victory speech. He speaks loudly as his mother, Simone, affirms at the end of the series:

> Les Français m'ont désigné pour être leur président. Juste ceux qui étaient inscrits sur les listes électorales, d'accord. Même c'est vrai, juste ceux qui ont voté. Quand je dis les Français, j'abuse. Mais ça fait quand même pas mal de monde. Je serai le président de tous les Français, je ne laisserai personne sur le côté, ni dans la ville, ni dans les campagnes, ni dans les DOM-TOM. Je serai le président des Blancs, des Noirs, des Chinois, des Asiatiques. Je serai le président des bobos, des kaïras, des femmes, des femmes voilées, des naines, des rousses. Je serai un président libre. Un président qui ne lâchera rien. Et je mettrai en place ma mesure phare : Mangez bien, payez rien. [The French have chosen me to be their president. Just those who were registered to vote, okay. Well, it's true, only those who actually voted. When I say the French, I'm exaggerating. But still, it is quite a lot of people. I will be the president of all the French; I won't leave anyone behind, neither in the cities nor in the countryside, nor in the overseas territories. I will be the president of whites, blacks, Chinese, and Asians. I will be the president of the bourgeois bohemians, the street kids, women, veiled women, little people, redheads. I will be a free president. A president who won't give up. And I will implement my flagship measure: Eat well, pay nothing.] (*En Place 1*, Episode 5)

This concluding message by Blé signifies freedom, liberty, and inclusiveness. This is what Blé, as a president, desires to focus his attention and administration on. He says he will be president for all French citizens and not segregate against other people. His emergence as France's president was well-received by the youth and the French people, as we see how the final scene presents moments of jubilation, especially from the banlieue youth. The series *En Place* shows Zadi's quest for freedom, and the inclusiveness of all French citizens in the political scene of France, especially those in the banlieue who are often negatively stereotyped and do not draw positive political attention to themselves. He advocates for opportunity without discrimination based on origin and historical background or the prevailing stereotypes associated with the banlieue. In a bid to talk about these ills, he uses comedy as the medium and creates a political movie through which he addresses and makes a representation of difficult political and societal issues. Throughout his work, he advocates for the freedom of those stereotypically associated with discrimination which is also a stereotype. His measure "Eat well, pay nothing" ("Mangez bien et payez rien") addresses societal food scarcity, as he believes that hunger leads to impaired thinking and an increased likelihood of criminal behavior. This suggests that by eliminating hunger, people can become better citizens who consistently do what is right in society. Zadi creates a representation that evaluates the characters and their actions with a focus on their weaknesses, mistakes, qualities, and successes to present a nuanced account

that does not spare any position or representation. For him, circumstances and an amount of discrimination explain this temptation, which is not due to the flaws of characters in the series.

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