French by Association: the Role of Associations in a Parisian *Banlieue*

Anthropology Dphil Thesis

Yacine Korid

University of Sussex

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<u>Abstract</u>

There are over a million associations in France dealing with a large variety of issues such as leisure, sports, health, social solidarity or education. Legally defined by the 1901 law, associations are complex structures that require financing and management. They can also be described as promoting 'cultural expression' and 'social integration'. Associations are particularly present in the French 'banlieues' (suburbs) around town and city centers as these areas are often seen as epitomising social fragmentation.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork amongst two associations in the Quartiers Nord area of Asnières, a town on the edges of Paris known for its diverse associative life, I explore the positioning, mechanisms and strategies adopted by associations in order to reduce the effects of socio-economic inequalities along territorial lines. My fieldwork mainly consisted of teaching French to newly-arrived migrant children and teenagers as well as helping others with their homework. This allowed me to gain access to a large variety of perspectives, from that of associative leaders and members of the local administration to the views of families living in the Quartiers Nord. To make sense of these multiple angles of approach, I rely strongly on Gerd Baumann's (1996) distinction between dominant and demotic discourses as it underlines the dynamic and contextual nature of interactions between residents and the local and national frameworks in which they evolve.

I aim to uncover the processes through which some associations have become intermediate spaces (or interstices) of mediation between local or national administrations and the residents of given neighborhoods labeled as 'difficult', in other words between center and periphery. By doing so, I add to the debate on the integration of banlieue inhabitants to discourses of French Republicanism.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The first ground level associative activity in the Quartiers Nord of Asnières I took part in (November 2011) left me with mixed feelings[1]. I was put in charge (as a volunteer worker) of a group of four eleven-year olds for a two-hour after school homework support group at the Club des Chardons association. As soon as I entered the small room in which they were sat, the agitation and noise I could hear before opening the door stopped instantly as they rushed to sit down. After a few seconds of them staring at me, they went back to arguing loudly among themselves. I stood there in front of them, unsure of what I should do and pretending to be looking at administrative documents I was holding. Although this situation was new and awkward for me, it gave me an initial chance to observe the children and their group dynamics before actually introducing myself and my role.

I eventually gathered my senses and began with a concise self introduction: "Hello, my name is Yacine and I will be helping you with your homework this year". Their answer to this was a whispered exchange between them punctuated by laughs, at the end of which one of them defiantly said: "You look like La Fouine", a French rapper whose texts usually describe his childhood and adolescence growing up in the Parisian suburbs and are very popular among most of the children and teenagers I worked with in the past year. This occurrence having already been pointed out to me on a few occasions, I agreed to this statement. They seemed surprised by my reaction and began to list all the rappers they knew and asking me whether I had heard of them and appreciated their music. Seeing that I did know most of them, their attitude towards me

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[1] I will be defining the role and positioning of associations in France and at the local level (the Quartiers Nord of Asnières) throughout this thesis. I will therefore only briefly define them here as conventions between two or more people who bring their knowledge and competences together for non-lucrative purposes (as defined in the 1901 law).

changed and they asked me a few questions about myself, such as my age and ethnic origin.

It so happens that this particular group of children is also under my supervision this academic year and that our relationship has evolved greatly over the period of time following this initial conversation. My status in the association has also evolved as I am now a salaried part-time worker there (as well as in the other association I work for). Although the four children mentioned here have sometimes expressed their disapproval of me as a 'teacher', mainly as a reaction to the disciplinary dimension of my role, we have also had numerous conversations about their friendships and feuds at school or in their neighbourhood. It is not rare either for me to run into one of them in the street and for them to come and have a friendly chat with me, their attitude towards me varying greatly depending on the context of interaction. They may be reticent to speak to me if their parents are around, especially if they have been misbehaving during our homework sessions, or more eager to communicate which usually occurs when they are with their neighbourhood friends or alone. There have also been various other informal occasions for us to interact, such as outings organised by the association or end-of-term parties. Each time, I discovered a new aspect of their personalities and views.

This was for instance the case when we took them and other children to visit the administrative centre (préfecture in French) of the district in which the suburban town of Asnières is located. It was the fortieth anniversary of the building and the district representatives, including members of the police, made various presentations and organised interactive activities in order to introduce the role of the préfecture[2]. Moreover, many of these activities had a common discursive undercurrent, as the children were told about road safety regulations, the dangers of drugs, or the necessity of behaving in a 'civil' manner.

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[2] France is administratively divided in regions which are in turn divided in districts (départements). These départements are identified by a name and number, Asnières being located in the Hauts-de-Seine district (92). There is a *préfecture* in each district. It is run by the préfet who is under the direct authority of the Prime Minister. Each national ministry is represented at the level of the district in the préfecture which also serves as a central police building. Like many of the districts around Paris, the Hauts-de-Seine is a relatively recent département (1964). This information was taken from the préfet's presentation at the beginning of the visit.

On the bus back to the association, the four children (and others) started imitating the speeches they had spent the afternoon listening to and making fun of them. They had found the recurring emphasis put on what one should or should not do to be ludicrous, especially when presented by a policeman in uniform. They then explained to me that the police are just there to oppress them and their families, that they are racist and more violent than the criminals they are supposed to be protecting them from. The fact that it was those very people who were trying to teach them about civility seemed absurd to them, each one of them having an anecdote on how they or someone close to them had been the victim of this type of injustice (to use their own term). They also complained that the entire outing was aimed at turning them into 'wimps' (they used the French slang word 'tapette' which is a derogatory slang term originally used to describe effeminate men), one of them even using the word 'traitor' when the issue of police collaboration arose.

That group of children demonstrated the ambivalence and contradictions in the lives and identities of many of the estate children and youths of the Quartiers Nord of Asnières, the area on the outskirts of this suburban town where my fieldwork took place. The overlapping levels of social and cultural influence emerging from both inside and outside of their neighbourhood environment all impact on the way these children construct their group and individual identities. Their relationships and interactions with members of the local and national communities cannot be solely represented as isolated binaries, their nature being complex and at times haphazard, especially when one considers that they are at an age when one experiments with relative social positioning.

Some of these children had hardly ever set foot outside of their neighbourhood. They reacted both negatively and positively to their various encounters with elements of the 'outside' world. In this thesis, I will detail what I understand their perception of the local and national to be, incorporating their notions of 'insiders' and 'outsiders', territoriality and context-dependent value systems and behavioural patterns to the discussion. Indeed, the children of the Quartiers Nord are constantly attempting to decipher and integrate various levels of identity and representation which may at times be incompatible or at least

partially conflicting due to the different settings in which they are validated. The fact that many of the life situations they encounter require a subtle balancing act between those varying positions and spheres of influence has been a recurrent theme during my fieldwork as I observed the changes in their attitudes in given circumstances. This was made easier by the variety of activities my associative work has allowed me to participate in, thus widening the range of situations I witnessed.

In that group of four children, certain behavioural patterns became apparent to me as I got to know each child better with time. One of them, Karim, was born and raised in Asnières from Moroccan parents who immigrated to France in the early 1980s[3]. He was one of the children who was doing reasonably well in school despite his blatant lack of effort, at least when it came to doing his homework at the association. He was a friendly if slightly rebellious eleven year old boy, who worried simultaneously about his local 'street' reputation and the opinion of his parents. Initially, he was the child in the group who manifested the most enthusiasm when I arrived, spontaneously sitting next to me for a chat and eventually to do his homework, but he went through phases of being sullen or disruptive. Often, he would complain about how his parents forced him to do more homework once home, making fun of them because they had to look up the answers to his exercises. His competitive side was sometimes expressed through play fighting with his peers and acting tough, but also by bragging about his relatively good grades in school.

Karim's best friend, Saïd, had more difficulties in school and ended up not being allowed to get into the next grade, having to do that school year again. He was known in his school as a trouble maker, recurrently being expelled for determined periods of time (from a day to a week). His reputation among neighbourhood parents was bad and many of them would mention his name every time an incident such as the appearance of new graffiti or a theft would occur. Contrastingly, Saïd had, like many of the children I encountered, a lot of

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[3] All the names of local residents, whether they be children or adults that I will use in this thesis are pseudonyms. However, I use the real names of places, associative workers and official town hall representatives, as well as any other 'professionals' who have consented to being interviewed unless specifically mentioned.

responsibility for his younger siblings. Although he was initially reticent to communicate with me and I constantly had to be authoritarian in our interactions, he eventually warmed up to me, that is long after the other three children of the group. In the end, he became one of my privileged interlocutors and introduced me to other neighbourhood children and teenagers who would have been inaccessible to me as they did not take part in associative activities. However, this was only really possible once he was no longer under my direct supervision, that is once he stopped seeing me as someone who was there exclusively to tell him how to behave and make sure he did his homework.

The children's changing and conditional relationships with different spheres and elements of their identity introduced above raised difficult questions. Which aspects of Karim's and Saïd's personalities were put forward by them in given circumstances? Were they resisting what they deemed to be external influences or applying rules of behaviour predominant in their age group and neighbourhood? Are these local codes incompatible with nationally established ones? If so, how are these incompatibilities settled by the children and what role do associations play in this process?

In a parallel manner, my own positioning within this context, and more importantly that of the associations I 'represented', is at the core of the present study. Indeed, I believe associations play a central part in the social and cultural framework of the Quartiers Nord, impacting on the daily lives of a vast proportion of local residents. They are present at most levels of community life, offering services based on the needs of the population as determined by local and national policy makers who finance most of these initiatives. The question of whether these services are in practice adapted to the context of the suburban estate is primordial here, as well as the ground level implications of such actions.

Themes

This thesis is about the way in which children and teenagers from Asnières' Quartier Nord react to both mainstream views on an individual's position and required social behaviour, and their equivalent at the level of the

neighbourhood. In other words, it is about how they contingently apply national and local discourses on what is appropriate in everyday life situations. This means we will need to look at the reproduction of societies through the socialisation of children and the tensions inherent between such reproduction and social change. As my description of Karim and Saïd above illustrates, processes and tensions are mediated by children often through seemingly contradictory attitudes and practices. I will investigate this phenomenon of ambivalence as it characterises the experiences of estate children in suburban areas in France and is key to understanding processes of social segmentation and integration.

The second main theme of this thesis relates to the negotiating or balancing role played by associations in their efforts to facilitate the lives of residents of the Quartiers Nord and therefore favour their integration to the larger national community. My hypothesis here is that associations act as connectors between the civic and the vernacular in outlying Paris estate areas. In that sense, they can be seen as accompanying the local children's mediating efforts by attempting to bridge the gap between them and mainstream society from both ends.

Moreover, this is one of the first academic works that provides detailed ethnographic and historical insights on the suburban town of Asnières – an area that has undergone several transformations in recent years as we will see in the third chapter of this thesis. The nature of such changes indicates patterns to do with migration, ethnicity, civil life and the increase in the quantity of the area's lifelines, especially those linking it to the urban centre that is Paris (such as the extension of the underground line 13 which now reaches the middle of the Quartiers Nord). In that sense, Asnières is a *banlieue* under transition, both inside and outside of the dominant imaginaries of Paris.

I will now engage in a more detailed individual introduction to the two main themes of this thesis. In order to do this, I will rely on existing literature on these topics and related ones that are relevant to the present study.

Dominant discourses, demotic discourses, and territoriality.

The example of our visit to the préfecture has brought forward the issue of the potential incompatibility between the societal values preached by state representatives and the daily experiences and perceptions of the children of the Quartiers Nord. Throughout my fieldwork, I have discussed issues of morality and 'suitable' behaviour with the children on numerous occasions, often to justify what they perceived as an injustice. This was usually the case when they had received some form of punishment from their school teacher for misbehaving in class or not doing their homework repeatedly. I then had to engage in a conversation on the fact that their teacher had taken such measures with their (the children) interest in mind, the conversation then usually turning into a debate on the role of the school in general.

In that context, I found myself justifying the benefits of having a thorough work ethic and self-discipline. Moreover, I had to insist on the necessity not to be disruptive in class. I asked them what kind of profession they wished for in the future and linked their answer to a particular topic they studied in school, indicating to them what level of education was needed to reach their aim. When they asked me for more information about their future potential careers, a recurring theme was that of income. A lot of them aimed at high status jobs for this very reason, but were visibly (if momentarily) discouraged when told how much studying lay ahead of them in order to reach their goals. During one of these informal debates, Saïd pointed at a fancy car parked in front of the classroom and said something which struck me as a valid illustration of the difficulties of applying mainstream perceptions of socio-economic success in the estate realm:

> *You see this car, it's Hakim's car. He's the toughest guy in the neighbourhood and no one messes with him. He never finished school but he's rich. He lives the life. My parents warn me against him and his friends but they're cool guys. Most of them went to jail and they're fine. My parents just want me to work in school but what do they have to show for it?*

I found myself unable to give Saïd a clear answer. I felt it would be hypocritical of me to predict a gloom future to Hakim as I had no certainty of what his activities really were in spite of the general local consensus that he was a drug dealer. At this very point I thought of my own background and upbringing, how it had never even crossed my mind that a life of 'crime' would be an option competing with that of legitimate studying and work. Like Saïd, I listened to French rap songs and enjoyed the image of toughness and street credibility emerging from them. Nevertheless, I never truly identified with their lyrics in a straightforward manner, as if I could be a protagonist in them. I then realised Saïd and many of his friends saw rappers as fellow estate members who had succeeded in life by following the codes of the neighbourhood. Their potential influence on those children was in a way greater than that of the police officers who had exposed the dangers of drugs in a very theoretical and detached manner to them.

In his study of discourses on identity in Southall, a district in the London borough of Ealing, Gerd Baumann (1996) gives a critique on community studies that focus on one ethnic group, arguing that these studies often treat culture as an isolated phenomenon which often confirms holistic and essentialist notions of culture – or in other words, culturalism. He recognises the problems of concepts like 'community' and 'culture', and consequently studies their emic use in discourses rather than using them as analytical tools[4]. Baumann presents Southall as a deprived area in which lower classes with different cultural backgrounds live together and where the discourse on the neighbourhood by its residents is often negative, moving out of Southall being used as a synonym for moving up the social order.

Baumann argues that within the neighbourhood, two main contradictory discourses can be identified: the dominant discourse and the demotic discourse. While the dominant discourse reifies culture, the demotic discourse treats culture

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[4] The emic-etic dichotomy was introduced into anthropology by Marvin Harris (1964, 1979), but it was first developed by the linguist Kenneth Pike. In anthropology, the 'native's point of view' is emic, whereas the analytical perspective of the anthropologist is etic.

as a process. The former becomes apparent in the political fight for resources between the five major 'ethnic' groups (Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Afro-Caribbean and Whites) who tactically use the dominant discourse for that purpose. This conception of community as it is used in the dominant discourse is dependent on the idea that ethnicity is connected to culture. In that sense, the reification of culture in this dominant discourse should be seen as part of Southall's culture according to Baumann.

Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Southall can actually contest culture. An example of this demotic discourse is the Asian youth who are creating their new Asian culture, which becomes apparent in their use of language which is a combination of Punjabi, Urdu, and Hindi. Another example is the adoption of the identity term 'black' by some South Asians in which the political commonality between different non-white communities is underlined and the separate South Asian culture 'minimised'. Similarly, religious ideals are questioned and some people combine different religions in interfaith communities. Moreover, the representation of the community by its leaders is challenged by groups who do not feel represented by them, such as feminists. These examples show that 'culture' is contested in the demotic discourse (Baumann, 1996).

One of the strengths of this study is that it demonstrates how people engage in several types of (sometimes contradictory) discourses. Identity politics has become an important tactic for minority groups to change their position in society, but in order to do so they have to engage with the dominant discourse. At the same time we can see that culture is constantly changing and that youth in particular are creating dynamic forms of new cultures.

The focus on discursive patterns is very useful in order to understand how language and concepts are used at the emic level. Baumann's focus on the micro level leaves out some macro level phenomenon, such as the creation of the dominant discourse in politics and the media. I believe that discourse analysis in particular offers the possibility for anthropologists to look at the connection between macro processes and the situated and particular. The discourses of identity politics are strongly connected to the political climate in which they were created. This is why the present study will focus primordially on ground-

level phenomena, but will also take wider overarching contexts and their influence into account.

While Baumann's research in Southall relied strongly on ethnic considerations, my own research focuses mainly on socio-cultural trends along territorial lines. I nonetheless intend to use his distinction between dominant and demotic discourses to interpret and describe the way in which the territorialisation of social relationships occurs. By doing so, I wish to clarify and underline the causal links between the local production of value systems in the Quartiers Nord and the wider national context which it is often a reaction to.

When I first arrived in the Quartiers Nord, my first impression was that the area fitted the stereotypical view I had in my mind of suburban estate neighbourhoods, from the seemingly unending lines of tower blocks to the variety of languages (with a dominance of the Arab language) I could hear in the streets and coming out of windows. The area looked and felt nothing like the centre of Asnières, let alone Paris. I quickly realized that my instinctive interpretation of what I was seeing was strongly influenced by the dominant discourse on the area, whether it be that of local politicians from all allegiances for whom the expression 'difficult neighbourhood' defined the Quartiers Nord best, or social and associative workers justifying their presence and activity.

However, after having spent time there and getting to know local residents better, I realised that the local demotic discourse on the Quartiers Nord differed from that of 'outsiders' in some ways, but also converged at times. Indeed, although I have heard local inhabitants regularly complain about their situation (bad quality of housing, drug dealing in hallways, interpersonal tension and so forth), I have also witnessed moments of true conviviality among them. Moreover, children recurrently expressed their pride of coming from the Quartiers Nord when interacting with other children, outsiders such as myself, or simply 'representing' their estate in a rap. The main common feature present in both discourses on the area is therefore its representation as a distinct physical and social space, separate from the centre. For me, here lies the primary cause for the territorialisation of identities and its reproduction by local children. I will discuss this issue in detail in the fourth chapter by introducing the co-dependent

notions of centre and periphery to the debate, as well as in the fifth chapter when dealing with processes of identity formation.

The process of territorialisation of social identities which leads to this discursive distinction between given geographical areas can be seen as emerging from nationally established urban policies. Mustafa Dikeç (2007), develops the idea that urban policies create their own space for intervention. For him, governmental regulations generate and standardise a specific spatial organisation while simultaneously being determined by it. He demonstrates that, in its effort to avoid 'communautarisme' (the prevalence of ethnic or religious factors in community building which would contradict the Republican model) and reduce inequalities between territories, the French State intervenes along spatially determined lines to impact on the most vulnerable sections of the national population. In practical terms, this results in the elaboration of urban, social and economic policies targeting neighbourhoods labelled as 'difficult'. This is in my view one the ways in which the dominant discourse on 'difficult neighbourhoods' such as the Quartiers Nord is (re)produced.

For Dikeç, such neighbourhoods have gone from being seen as symptomatic of social problems to being portrayed as their root (Dikeç, 2007, 101). By explicitly selecting territories for support, these become separate from the core of French society, thus perpetuating the exclusion of their inhabitants from mainstream society. At the origin of these urban policies is the superposition of the maps of unemployment, stigmatisation, exclusion and expressions of tensions such as rioting. Nowadays, the geographic distribution of urban policies coincides with that of neighbourhoods accumulating the negative characteristics mentioned above. However, since the inauguration of these policies, very few neighbourhoods to which this administrative labelling has been applied have been able to 'redeem' it. Dikeç consequently criticises urban policies for identifying problems and potential solutions within the same restricted and delimited space (Dikeç, 2007, pp. 156-157).

The administrative and political representation of these spatial territories as 'difficult' has consequences at the local level. My fieldwork enabled me to witness some of them and I will expose them throughout this thesis. This study, like Baumann's narrative of life in Southall, is about 'communities' in

connection, about the national (or mainstream) and the local. It is about a small group of children and their families living in the Quartiers Nord who draw upon influences from a variety of sources. However, it is also about how these different influences interact to form the processual and shifting identities of estate children. Consequently, one must take into account the way in which physical and social spaces become congruent thus contributing to the formulation and reproduction of fluctuating identities. The children and teenagers of the Quartiers Nord are constantly modelling their individual and group identities by (re)interpreting dominant and demotic discourses on their role, duties and possibilities as social beings, as members of the national and local communities. As we will see throughout this thesis, the various elements of the identities formulated in this manner are impacted simultaneously by both types of discourse, which is why estate children can be seen as continuously mediating the two whilst also fashioning new interstitial forms of identities.

Cindi Katz (2004) deals with some of these issues in her ethnographic study of the village of Howa in Sudan. She analyses the tension between the reproduction of societies and social change. She emphasises children's learning and interpretations as agents of social change as they mediate and interpret the value systems they are receiving. Similarly to Katz, I have identified three principal arenas of socialisation for children: the household, school, and peer group (Katz, 2004, 13). The influence of each of these settings will be taken into account and critically analysed. However, this study will also place a particular emphasis on a fourth complementary arena present in the Quartiers Nord and which is connected to the three others: associations. The second part of this thematic overview will be dedicated to introducing their role in areas identified by policy makers as prone to the reproduction of social fragmentation.

The position and role of associations in France and the Quartiers Nord.

As we have seen, the visit to the préfecture and the children's reaction to it illustrates the clash between the dominant discourse on how a French citizen (or anyone living on the French territory) should behave and the children's everyday reality, or at least their demotic perception of it. The outing was

organised by the association who brought the children to the préfecture after receiving invitations to the event. Furthermore, members of the association including myself responded to the children's reaction to the outing by discussing it with them later on, insisting particularly on issues relevant to that particular age group (ten to thirteen years old) such as the importance of behaving in a polite and non-aggressive manner, using examples taken from their own behaviour when under our supervision.

In that sense, the association contributed to their interpretation of the political and police discourses by applying and readjusting them to the daily lives of the children, an effort facilitated by their trust in the members of the association and the personal rapport established between them. As such, the association served as a connector or translator in its attempt to adapt and legitimise the dominant discourse on adequate social behaviour to the children's local context. I believe this connecting role to be an essential part of associative work in suburban estate areas. Consequently, the second aim of this thesis is to investigate this particular aspect of associative life in the Quartiers Nord.

In her ethnographic exploration of the town of Dreux and some of its 'difficult neighbourhoods', Michèle Tribalat (1999) insists on the importance of local initiatives led by local residents in the rehabilitation of such areas. She encourages policy makers to adequately valorise and support these local initiatives which benefit social cohesion by generating new links between them and the population they represent. For Tribalat, this is a necessity as she has observed a strong desire in these neighbourhoods for more frequent and meaningful contact between residents and their administrators (Tribalat, 1999, 246). My fieldwork among associations in the Quartiers Nord of Asnières has allowed me to witness the impact of such locally led initiatives on residents and on their relationship to the institutions that compose their local and national civic environments.

The repercussions of the work of local social actors are exposed in Manuel Boucher's work (2003). Boucher describes how, in the context of changing urban policies and the rise of the feeling of 'insécurité' (a notion we will explain further on in this chapter), there is no disengagement from socially excluded neighbourhoods on the part of the State and alternative structures

dealing with solidarity. On the contrary, during his fieldwork in the Rouen area, he has witnessed the diversification of modes of intervention and the consequent reorganisation of social regulation. For me, the principle value of Boucher's work lies in his exposition of the paradoxical positioning of certain organisations (such as associations), with some of them clearly promoting social control and others encouraging individual and collective emancipation in order to facilitate processes of local identification. This depiction of a lively and at times discordant environment has been confirmed by my own experience in the field.

In my view, one of the reasons for this 'organised chaos', especially when it comes to local associations, lies in the numerous dimensions that need to be taken into account when running such structures. Indeed, although associations are not commercial companies with the aim of making financial profit, they still need to find funding and to be economically stable. Consequently, they are often dependent on the commune that hosts them. Moreover, they evolve within closely regimented legal and administrative frameworks which will be exposed further on in this chapter. The role each association ends up taking on also depends on the constraints and opportunities available (and needed) at a local level and within the overarching legal and political systems. There is a need for associations to be effective both economically and in the undertaking of their respective projects (Jeantet, 2006).

Joël Roman (2008) deals with the topic of the financing of associations in his case study of the debate around the intention of the Minister for Immigration of the time (Brice Hortefeux) to reduce the influence of the C.I.M.A.D.E., a nationwide association that makes sure illegal immigrants are treated correctly in retention centres. He had suggested the organisation of a call for tender in order to find a replacement to the association's activities, thus reinforcing the State's control over this particular sector of associative life. This procedure usually occurs in the context of commercial enterprises when a product is on offer and there is competition for it. Although Hortefeux's suggestion was never put in practice, it raises the issue, according to Roman, of the limits of the current way in which associations are financed. The author insists on the need for a clear distinction between trading or market mentalities and what constitutes a necessary aspect of public services (Roman, 2008).

The modes of financing of associative action discussed above remind us of the necessity for regular exchanges between associations and local administrators. This growing need can be linked to processes of decentralisation of social intervention mentioned by both Jeantet and Roman in their articles. Moreover, it is an aspect of associative life which I have already encountered in the field, especially when interviewing officials from the town hall and the leaders of certain 'large-scale' associations. Most of them pointed towards the changing relationship between the French State and associations, bringing forward the complexity of this bond and the diversity of the exchanges that compose it, mainly due to the variety of activities taken on by associations and the specificities of individual local policies on that matter. I must however say that most town hall officials I have met with insisted on the fact that the associative sphere should remain under the supervision of the political one.

Nonetheless, if local and national authorities remain vigilant in terms of the economic viability and Republican conformity of associations, they also rely on their capacity to mobilise the trust, commitment and energy of residents. Furthermore, it is often the case that associative leaders themselves become integrated into municipal or institutional networks of political and social intervention. François Dubet and Didier Lapeyronnie (1992) underline this phenomenon, stating that in communes with 'social problems', these spontaneous representatives of the local population have for the large part been incorporated into the various municipal initiatives. This means they have gone from being financed by the town hall to being employed by it. Asnières is no exception to this trend, with the current mayor (Sébastien Pietrasanta, from the socialist party which is currently in power at the national level) having started his local career in the associative realm, creating and running two associations in the Quartiers Nord where he grew up.

However, there is still a degree of reciprocal mistrust between the local residents of such neighbourhoods and their political representatives. Sonia Fayman (1995) emphasises the fact that authorities usually attempt to take control over, or at least keep an eye on spontaneous initiatives aiming at consolidating the participation of residents to the organisation of their neighbourhoods. For her, this is due to the rigidity of the local political realm

and of the social institutions that compose it as their very *raison d'être* lies in the assistance of relegated populations. If the inhabitants who are the main beneficiaries of such mechanisms undertake this particular role, they might end up making these different structures obsolete, thus reducing the influence of local authorities in the areas where participation to neighbourhood organisation is the most developed.

As already mentioned above, this lack of trust and communication is reciprocal. Throughout my fieldwork in the Quartiers Nord of Asnières, I have engaged in numerous informal conversations with local residents in which they conveyed their disillusionment towards the national and local political realms, often openly expressing their doubts that their interest and that of other inhabitants of neighbourhoods classified as 'difficult' are truly taken into account by policy makers.

By way of illustration, early on in my research the mayor of Asnières and his team took part in the inauguration of a large mural fresco painted by children of an estate neighbourhood (les Grésillons, closer to the town centre than the Quartiers Nord, as one can see on the map of Asnières in Appendix 2) during the summer. It represented the entire history of Asnières and was meant to embellish a particularly visually sinister road. It was financed by the electrical company that owns the wall which separates the estate from a large (and gloomy) electrical facility. The project was run by the Centre Yannick Noah, one of Asnières' largest associations, based in the Grésillons neighbourhood. The mayor made a speech in which he emphasised the importance of getting local residents to participate in the rehabilitation of their neighbourhood. He mentioned a recent incident (a fire that burned down a couple of apartments in the adjacent building) which caused a woman from the audience to strongly intervene. She spent about five minutes screaming at the mayor in front of everyone and accusing him of not doing anything about her situation (she lived with her family in one the flats that had burnt down). She eventually walked off yelling more abuse in his direction. Overall, this incident confirmed my impression that the event had been planned with a lot of enthusiasm by some political and associative leaders but was met with a bit of scepticism by local residents (apart from the children who had done the painting) who, from what I

gathered by talking to them, did not believe this would change their daily lives much.

Half of the people attending the event belonged to the electrical company in question or worked for the town hall. Throughout the inauguration, I could not help but notice that the crowd was clearly separated in two groups: local residents on one side of the street and company people / town administrators on the other. Among both groups, the five members of the Centre Yannick Noah present that day were going back and forth in an attempt to facilitate communication between both parties and possibly bring them (if only physically) closer together. The angry intervention from the woman who had lost her flat to the fire however instantly dampened the mood. Still, by the end of the celebration the atmosphere became more relaxed once only local residents and associative workers (who for the most live in the area) were left in the street. The children then showed their parents and neighbours which bit of the fresco they had painted.

This example shows us that associative intervention, although it is often financed by local authorities and companies, is clearly seen by the inhabitants of the areas in which it is based as emerging from the neighbourhood itself. Its effects on the quality of life might be questioned as it is the case here, but it nonetheless establishes an albeit fragile link between administrators and the segments of the local population involved in associative activities. Indeed, it is harder for local residents to criticise the initiatives of the neighbours who share their everyday environment. One can therefore say that associations gain local legitimacy through their geographic and social positioning within the neighbourhoods from which they emerge due to the fact that many of their members and founders are perceived as part of the local community. This is at least true of locally embedded, small-scale associations.

The need for such local initiatives and for a stronger bond between institutional authorities and residents becomes particularly apparent when dealing with the topic of 'insécurité', the idea that one is not safe in everyday life situations (especially in and around 'difficult neighbourhoods'). This notion became an important theme in the previous presidential campaign (2007) which saw Nicolas Sarkozy elected as President based on his aggressive stance towards

criminal behaviours emerging from some 'dangerous *banlieues*'. He had already adopted this position as Interior Minister in 2005 when publicly saying that he was going to clean up the *banlieues* with a 'kärcher'*,* an industrial strength surface cleaning tool, after a police van had been shot at in the suburban estate of La Courneuve, northeast of Paris. Since then, the concept of l'insécurité has entered the mainstream political debate, especially in the right-wing rhetoric on the *banlieues*.

For Michèle Tribablat (1999), if a policy is to reduce l'insécurité it should go beyond the rationalisation of police work and the harshening of legal sanctions. The fight against delinquency cannot take place at the expense of other forms of intervention. Given the poor image of the police among youths (and adults) living in suburban estates, one must attempt to change attitudes at both ends of the spectrum. Nonetheless, Tribalat also insists on the need to maintain a clear separation between the roles of associative workers and the police in order to maintain the credibility of social actors among the local population (Tribalat, 1999, 256-257).

The reduction of l'insécurité is in my opinion dependent on an initial effort to improve social cohesion in order to gradually incorporate a level of social control (or regulation) in neighbourhoods deemed as problematic in that respect by local and national policy makers [5]. Nevertheless, I do not believe in leaving the treatment of social difficulties entirely in the hands of self-managing local actors, but rather in accompanying local policies as decided by the municipal team and State through the revitalisation of internal (to the neighbourhood) social connections. Accordingly, this reinforcement of social ties relies on a combination of local and national discourses on the community, with the aim of achieving the right balance between dominant and demotic spheres of influence while minimising contradictions between the two. I will join Bruno Voisin (1999) here in his belief that dialogue and therefore exchange is the key to reversing the negative effects of the manifestation of socio-economic fragmentations along territorial lines.

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[5] The issue of social control and regulation will be dealt with in detail in chapter seven.

For Francie Mégevand (1999), a certain number of conditions have to be met if local residents are to fully take part in the social organisation of their neighbourhoods. Firstly, the will to participate on the part of inhabitants of areas prone to social exclusion to take part in community projects is mandatory. Secondly, the need for motivated decision makers and professionals who want to listen to what local residents have to say before they take part in such initiatives, or at least finance them. And thirdly, the presence of connecting elements between the two parties in order to facilitate and regulate the debate while contributing to its transparency is required (Mégevand, 1999). It is my intention to demonstrate throughout this thesis that associations vindicate the latter point of performing the mediating role between local residents and their administrators in the Quartiers Nord of Asnières. Moreover, I intend to investigate the connecting role of associations in an ethnographic and complete sense, that is to say I will also discuss their intermediate positioning between dominant and demotic discourses on social value systems.

The question at the centre of my concern is "What kind of gap do associations fill?". From my experience in the field working for associations in the Quartiers Nord, I would say their role begins where the potential for administrative action ends. However, they are also awkwardly positioned as they strongly depend on public policies in terms of funding and range of action. This is probably due to the fact that associations do not have the same electoral constraints as politicians do and that they are usually the product of the initiatives of residents themselves. To me, it is this particular point which is of interest as it exemplifies the connecting role and intermediate positioning of the associative realm.

Background

The 2005 riots in Clichy-sous-Bois received media attention across the world as the international press and television channels showed images of

burning cars and angry youths throwing stones at riot policemen[6]. As the riots spread around some of the country's suburban estates, the sense that this was not an isolated or spontaneous incident grew within French society. Once again (after riots already took place in the 1980s and 1990s), French citizens were made aware of the growing sense of unease emerging from these neighbourhoods situated at the physical extremities of urban poles. The congruence of social and physical boundaries became more obvious and the notion of social exclusion could now be applied to entire areas and not just individuals. Consequently, academics (among others) and social scientists in particular took on the duty of attempting to understand the issues at stake in their exposition of the societal problems shaking French society.

In the following section, I focus on the works of these academics which are of relevance to the present study, whether they be of a theoretical or ethnographic nature. By introducing the theoretical background on the theme of the French *banlieues*, I intend to set up an adequate conceptual framework to this discussion of the connecting role of associations in the Quartiers Nord of Asnières. Correspondingly, I will begin this section by covering some of the existing works on the *banlieues*. I will then discuss the notion of 'integration' as this term is a recurrent one throughout this thesis. Indeed, the concept of integration relates to the negotiation of nationally dominant discourses and policies on identity and society. Finally, I will turn my attention to the organisational and historical aspects of the associative realm in France.

The banlieues in the social sciences.

Claude Boyer (2000) sheds light on the issue of urban transformations across time and space. His approach is that of a geographer interested in the spatial expansion of cities and its consequences, that is the creation of a

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[6] CNN, among other news channels, covered the incidents daily. The cover story of Time Magazine (November 21, 2005) entitled "The other face of France" focused on the link between the riots and feelings of injustice resulting from the state's unequal treatment of the nation's population. As for the monthly Searchlight magazine, it simply entitled its December 2005 issue "France burns".

diversified network of suburbs. This interdisciplinary perspective includes a sociological angle on the Parisian suburbs as the author considers their study to have initiated the *banlieue* debate in France. His definition of the *banlieues* is therefore twofold, with the term referring to areas outside of cities on the one hand, and to 'difficult' neighbourhoods on the other. This separation is visible in the book's structure, with the first chapters dealing with historical considerations about urban planning and demographic descriptions, whereas the later chapters demonstrate the impact of local and national policies on the population in economic and social terms.

Although Boyer's vision of the *banlieues* interestingly points towards the link between spatial and social segregation and can therefore be seen as a legitimate starting point for anyone wishing to know more about the phenomenon, it is uncritical of the hegemonic view prevalent in the nation. Indeed, by focusing exclusively on policy making and urban planning, Boyer has removed people and communities' experiences from the discussion. Despite the fact that he insists on the diversity of suburban backgrounds, both historically and physically, he neglects the diversity of people and situations within this framework. The latter are only visible when a researcher interacts with his or her interlocutors on a personal level or consults someone who has. Boyer studies places and institutions without evaluating their impact on the daily lives of individuals. The correlation he establishes between spatial and social organisation is valid and useful (as we will see in chapter 5), but it lacks the ethnographic depth that time in the field allows for. In the end, Boyer goes over some of the key components that any study of the *banlieues* should possess without questioning the mainstream perspective that they emerge from. The balance here is the opposite of the one this thesis aims to reach. Boyer's work can be located inside the national discourse and outside of the *banlieue* experience, whereas I wish to explore the manner in which associations connect the two, therefore positioning my work at the intersection of dominant and demotic perceptions of the *banlieues*.

This will to extend the use of knowledge acquired through the study of a particular site to discussions of wider domains requires that we define our research subject rigorously. Hervé Vieillard-Baron's work on the *banlieues*

serves this purpose adequately as he succeeds in approaching the topic from four distinct yet complementary angles (2001). Like Boyer, whose interest for both sociology and geography he shares, Vieillard-Baron begins with a historical overview. However, unlike Boyer, he goes beyond the chronological account of urban developments since the Middle Ages. Indeed, he also considers the evolution of opinion on the matter in France since that time. This allows him to be more critical of contemporary media and political discourse on the *banlieues* by understanding the circumstances in which they have developed. The third section of his study emphasises the great diversity that is hidden behind the stigmatising labels of *banlieue* and quartier, thus confirming his efforts to deconstruct the current nationally dominant discourse on such areas.

Vieillard-Baron (2001) has produced a solid overview of some of the intrinsic themes of the *banlieue* debate as presented above. His work is essentially theoretical, which is surprising given that he himself lived and taught in a Parisian *banlieue*. This can probably be explained by his academic background as a specialist on urbanism. Although the ideas developed in the present thesis owe a great deal to his work and that of other writers who do not specialise in the study of social movements and/or cultural trends, the latter are of great importance to the argument presented here. Indeed, I envisage the emergence of the *banlieue* phenomenon as the direct consequence of such occurrences. If the present description of associative work in the Quartiers Nord of Asnières is to be of any relevance to discussions of French society as a whole, it needs to consider a rounded view of life in the *banlieues* which incorporates internal and external perspectives. This is why this thesis deals with a large set of issues, from the application of the dominant system of rules at ground level, to patterns of territorialisation and their effects on the lives of local residents.

For Agnès Villechaise-Dupont, inhabitants of suburban estates suffer from the negative image of their neighbourhoods, from racism in the wider society and from the condescending attitude of political authorities. Her research for her ethnographic account (2000) took place in and around the city of Bordeaux. She demonstrates the harmful effects of a bad reputation, not at the individual level, but for entire local communities. By comparing the unofficial statuses attributed to two economically deprived neighbourhoods, one situated

within the city limits and the other outside of them, Villechaise-Dupont reveals the differences in perception and representation that emerge from this unequal treatment. Her main aim is to go past the degrading prejudice that usually goes with the reputation ascribed to most estates through her repeated interactions with the population. She invites the political and associative actors to integrate not only the frustrations and desires of the inhabitants of the grands ensembles (groups of building blocks usually composed of social housing and which share a common architectural design) to their democratic project, but also their resources and initiatives. By doing so, she provides some suggestions for the successful integration of such areas for a more harmonious notion of society.

Michel Kokoreff's approach (2003) is very similar to that of Villechaise-Dupont. Kokoreff also goes against the mainstream representation of the *banlieues* and grands ensembles as anonymous places under the influence or domination of violent youths. Based on ten years of fieldwork in Asnières, his research uncovers the complex and vibrant social organisation of some of the poorest neighbourhoods in the area. The social bonds established between members of these local communities serve as a reference in their individual processes of identity formation in the absence, or at least due to the weakening of, more traditional parameters such as the positioning of each and everyone on the labour market. Kokoreff challenges the idea that the category of 'youth' is a homogenous one and identifies distinct profiles within this population: the 'scholars' who have pursued their studies beyond the BAC (finishing high school diploma), the 'precarious' who alternate work and unemployment, and the 'galériens' which cannot be satisfactorily translated other than 'experiencing la galère', a combination of negative factors affecting their everyday lives and socio-economic potential.

Moreover, the main advantage of incorporating Kokoreff's work to the present study lies in his investigation of the political dimension of the '*banlieue*' which is visible at many levels, from post-September 11 discussions[7] to the role

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[7] After the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York, a fear of similar attacks happening on French territory led to debates on the development of extremist tendencies or views among certain Muslim residents of the *banlieues*.

of local representatives and associations. He therefore reminds us that the general image of the *banlieue,* whether it be from the inside or the outside, is a social and political construct. By showing the various resources available in some neighbourhoods classified as 'difficult' he also underlines the numerous obstacles preventing us from seeing that side of them. His positive gaze thus paradoxically forbids naïve optimism. The present study adopts a similar tone to that suggested by Kokoreff, taking both the national/political and local/ground level backgrounds and perspectives into consideration.

As I wish to explore aspects of life in the Quartiers Nord and draw wide-ranging conclusions from them, more conceptual tools and categories are required. Some of them can be found in the works of social scientists who have specialised in or at least developed a particular interest for the *banlieues*. François Dubet (1987) described the struggles of local youths and their attempt to exist, or rather survive, in a hostile suburban environment from the 1980s. Dubet's work marks the beginning in France of a wave of academic interest in this situation. One of the first to break with the existing trends in the French sociology of delinquency which usually presented *banlieue* youths as immoral crime perpetrators, Dubet portrays them as victims of their surroundings and of the chronic lack of options which characterises their daily lives. Similarly to Dubet, I wish to describe aspects of the daily lives of the children and teenagers of the Quartiers Nord of Asnières where my fieldwork took place. However, I wish to incorporate their own perceptions and standards to my study so I can then discuss them in the local and national socio-cultural contexts and avoid the pessimistic tone prevailing in Dubet's work (in my opinion).

As the thesis concentrates on young people, it is also pertinent to consider the relevant literature on this theme. For anthropologists, the study of childhood is a divided and contested field. Some accounts describe it as neglected (Hirschfeld, 2002), whereas others point to the many anthropological studies concerned with this age group (Lancy, 2008). As David Lancy's (2008) review of anthropological literature on childhood shows, most studies have focused on geographically distant communities in places such as Papua New Guinea (Lancy and Strathern, 1981) and Samoa (Mead, 1962) but less so in Europe or the United States. Sociologists such as Alison James (1993) have

however focused on childhoods in 'Western' societies. James' (1993) work in particular has influenced the present study through her description of the social construction of childhood and its relation to children's everyday lives. Indeed, this point is highly compatible with my own about the effects of local and national discourses on identity and the way in which they influence attitudes and relationships in the Quartiers Nord.

Among the various works dedicated to the 'youth' age group in French suburban estates, David Lepoutre's *Coeur de Banlieue* (1997) is the one which in my opinion possesses the most ethnographic qualities. Indeed, in the same vein as the Chicago school monographs, Lepoutre describes the micro-universe of groups of young adolescents in the heart of the '4000' estate in La Courneuve, a suburb North of Paris. He himself becomes a part of the narrative due to the personal dimension of his account and to his ongoing interactions with the people among which his research takes place. This includes most prominently his relations with Samir, a member of a local 'gang' and one of the pupils in the school where Lepoutre teaches history. The vivid nature of Lepoutre's anthropological account contrasts with the image I myself got from walking amongst some of La Courneuve's colossal and grey tower blocks. Due to the precedent that he has set in his precise descriptions of identity formation in territorial terms (a theme which will be explored in chapter 6), I have been able to fully grasp the symbolic nature of some of these places where local values and conceptions are formulated.

Lepoutre's work goes beyond descriptions of spaces and people. It also comprises an extensive section on the codes and rites that play an essential role in human interaction in the Cité des 4000. This side of his research ranges from the use of 'verlan' (a type of slang where the syllables of words are inverted) to verbal battles and insults. Furthermore, this linguistic analysis is complemented by a situational reflection on conflict-based exchanges (from group brawls to 'friendly' fights) in which the notions of 'respect', 'honour' and 'reputation' play a crucial part. It is this semi-insider's presentation of vernacular street culture which makes *Coeur de Banlieue* an undeniably useful source of inspiration for this study.

Nevertheless, one must keep in mind that divisions between insider and outsider, between emic and etic perspectives, are provisional and merely heuristic. Furthermore, there may be overlaps and ambiguities, as is the case when a researcher who originates from a certain area returns as a social scientist with a perhaps more objectivist approach[8]. Although I am not from the Quartiers Nord of Asnières, I was born and raised in France. In that sense, I am an insider when it comes to the French national context, but could be perceived as an outsider in the area where my fieldwork was located. However, my knowledge and perception of the French context is not universally shared by my compatriots and I have had time over the past year in the field to become familiar with and play a role in my locus of study. I therefore consider myself neither an insider nor an outsider at any level of identification. I believe this undefined or interstitial positioning to be fitting for a researcher wishing to describe the changing relationship between dominant and demotic perceptions of a given area and of the role associations play within it.

'Integration' and associated concepts

The notion of integration historically holds a central position in France's social and political organisation. In this particular national context, the term refers to the mainstream discourse on governmental concerns for social cohesion. However, the view some *banlieue* residents have of the very idea of 'integration' may differ from this perspective as we will see in later chapters. Consequently, the following section will serve as an introduction to the concept and to the ways in which it will be discussed further on in this thesis. In order to do this, an investigation of some of the existing literature on the topic is necessary.

Before we enter the debate on integration itself, let us first clarify the context in which it takes place. Like in other countries, the consolidation and expansion of the suburban network took place in France as a response to the

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[8] See the *Anthropology at Home* (1987) A.S.A. volume for further discussions of the positioning of anthropologists in familiar areas.

quick growth in population of the middle of the twentieth century, especially in and around cities. The latter occurred following massive waves of immigration at the request of French authorities in their attempt to rebuild the country after the Second World War and answer the resulting demand for labour. It is therefore not surprising that many of those migrants and their descendants now live in the *banlieues*. Consequently, most of the writers concerned with integration in France and elsewhere have had to initially focus their attention on particular trends in migration with reference to specific communities.

For Alec Hargreaves, "the use of the word 'immigration' to encompass what are in many respects post-migratory processes is itself symptomatic of the difficulties experienced by the French in coming to terms - both literally and ontologically - with the settlement of people of immigrant origin." (Hargreaves, 1995, 1). Hargreaves indirectly points towards the fact that the French mainstream discourse on the matter avoids the use of terms such as 'ethnicity', 'race' or 'minority' when referring to the contemporary national context. This might be a by-product of political liberalism which posits that everyone is human and thereby equal. The notion of 'integration' has therefore become the functional counterpart of the concepts that predominate the British and US vocabulary on issues to do with areas composed of multiracial urban populations[9]. When the latter imply the recognition of permanently distinct groups, the term 'integration' relies on the assumption that one should aim for a reduction of social differentiation rather than encourage it (Weil and Crowley, 1994, 113-120). Weil and Crowley's observation is valid but needs to be put in the context of the French preference for terminology such as 'integration' and 'assimilation'. The Republican tradition explains in part why policy-makers in France refuse to formally acknowledge the ethnic and racial dimensions of integration, a topic that is explored in more detail in chapter 6 when dealing with the issue of identity.

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[9] For recent perspectives on the matter, see Tariq Modood and Nasar Meer's article (2012) on the replacement of the term 'multiculturalism' by 'interculturalism' in discussions of cultural diversity. Both notions can be seen as incompatible with the French tradition of assimilation which emphasises cultural homogeneity rather than encouraging difference or mixity when it comes to the integration of immigrant populations.

Although this thesis is not strictly speaking about migration, a phenomenon which has had such a great impact on France's social structure cannot be ignored. In order to view the local and national settings under a new light which may allow for their reinterpretation, the use of concepts and understandings derived from non-French academic traditions seems appropriate. Nonetheless, the fact that 'integration' dominates French discourse on society while 'ethnicity' is characterised by its relative absence from them makes their theoretical cohabitation an uneasy one.

Moreover, the fact that France's mode of integration differs from that of Britain or the US does not necessarily imply the instant disqualification of the terminology adopted to describe related phenomena in these countries when we are referring to the French situation. The need to consider other types of integration and social organisations could actually be necessary if one is to fully grasp the uniqueness that characterises integration in the French context, especially as the latter is interpreted differently within the country depending on which side of the discourse one is (integrator or integrated). After all, comparison has always been a good way of underlining singularities. Along these lines, I wish to envisage the notion of 'multiculturalism' and its application in the study of Anglophone countries.

Gerd Baumann (1999) serves as a good starting point to this discussion as his understanding of multiculturalism covers three of the domains (civil, ethnic and religious) on which I intend to base my study of integration. The 'multicultural riddle' that Baumann attempts to solve may be summarised in one question: how can multiculturalism be achieved in the face of calls for national cultural unity, when a state's population is composed of individuals whose identities are built around diverse ethnic backgrounds, some of them religious in character? Baumann asks fellow anthropologists to rethink each of the key terms in this riddle: the nation-state, ethnicity, identity and religious-based culture.

As an anthropologist, Baumann is concerned with theory as long as it is complemented with ethnographic enquiry. Using his own investigations in the mixed ethnic enclaves of London and Amsterdam, he warns us against the dangers of failing to recognise that all cultural boundaries are permeable and dependent on people's agencies. For Baumann, civil, ethnic and religious rights

have their separate logics and are mutually exclusive. Although I believe this a valid justification of the difficulties experienced by states in terms of national integration, the actual problem lies in the very nature of nation-building and integration. Indeed, such collective projects require a significant degree of shared identity to begin with.

According to Baumann, multiculturalism is about the simultaneous existence of cultural difference within a larger cultural entity. The question that we should therefore ask ourselves in this light relates to the nature of this larger cultural entity. If cultural boundaries are, as he argues, dependent on people's agencies, then surely the emphasis will be put on either of Baumann's three 'ingredients' depending on the individual and on the situation they are confronted to. Not all people or groups of people will put their national identity at the forefront of their self-representation. Some will see themselves as children of God or Allah before anything else, in the same way that others will privilege their ethnic backgrounds over their nationality. This will mostly depend on the circumstances in which the issue is raised. And what are we to make of regional, sexual or economic factors in identification that are not reducible to any of Baumann's three categories?

So, Baumann teaches us that debates over multiculturalism are context-dependent, both theoretically and empirically. One of the contexts in which this particular discussion takes place is that of the nation-state. It thus becomes crucial to clarify what we mean by national identity, especially as the other relevant components of individual identity (ethnicity, religion, or class for instance) will be dealt with individually and in more detail throughout the thesis. At this point, I believe Anthony Smith's understanding of national identity allows us to take account of both temporal and geographic variables. For him:

"national identity involves some sort of political community, however tenuous. A political community in turn implies at least some common institutions and a single code of rights and duties for all the members of the community. It also suggests a definite social space, a fairly well demarcated and bounded territory, with which the members identify and to which they feel they belong." (Smith, 1991, 9).

Looking at the various aspects of Smith's definition, one might argue that in the French case, all these parameters are validated. However, the growing multi-levelled segregation described in this study might strongly challenge the relative unity implied by Smith as entire sections of French society feel they are excluded from the national project, or at least that they must struggle between incompatible viewpoints and cultural values in the development of their individual identities.

A similar phenomenon is observed by Tariq Modood in his *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity, and Muslims in Britain* (2005). The book's main purpose is to critique the British perception, which the author labels a "black-white dualism" (Modood, 2005, 5), and the resultant ignorance surrounding the voices of Asians and other minorities. Modood argues that the black-white division is complicated by cultural racism, Islamo-phobia, and a challenge to secular modernity. The author's arguments shed light on how British Asians are empirically subjected to a 'double racism' due to their religious background. He acknowledges that this complex situation has to be considered along with such other variables as "class, gender, geography, and the social arena" (Modood, 2005, 7). However, Modood does not further develop his suggestions.

Elsewhere, his reflection on the fact that 'inherentism' (or biological determinism) is a distinctive feature of racism which leads to the classification of second-and third-generation British Muslims as the 'other' is of particular interest to me as it resonates with the French assimilationist context. Indeed, although assimilation does not foreground the relevance of race, it reproduces the notion of the 'inherentism' of cultural traits, and therefore reinforces the idea of 'otherness'. In spite of the fact that Modood's starting point lies in ethnic and religious considerations when the angle I have adopted is oriented by social and urban concerns, our approaches converge in the sense that we are both being critical of what we consider 'mainstream national perspectives'.

The ethnographic work of other researchers such as Claire Alexander (2000) complements Modood's distinct political viewpoint. Although her work focuses on a particular age group, religion and ethnicity are still at the centre of her theoretical and ethnographic preoccupations. She explores some of the

negative, reductive stereotypes that surround Asian youths. Her focus for the project is an all-male youth group in South East London who describe themselves as Bengali and Muslim in origin although not necessarily as practicing members of Islam. Alexander charts how these young men engage with the representations that impact upon their identity, and their struggle with the imposition of labels that they feel are inadequate.

Similar to the media and political portrayal of French *banlieue* youths as prone to violence and crime, the perception of young men roaming around estates as gang members is one of the negative characterisations mentioned above. The author examines how this group of young men were cast as a 'gang' through a series of interviews with them and her own observations. She does not assert that the youths in question are blameless or innocent, she simply examines how their outside image and self-representation have been developed. In that sense, the inspirational value of Alexander's study to my own is twofold: in a thematic way as it deals with differences between internal and external representations of a particular section of the population, and in a comparative sense because it takes place in the UK where ethnic and religious dimensions can be explored in a more demonstrable manner than in France due to the national discourses of Republicanism and egalitarianism.

Although multiculturalism and corresponding religious and ethnic considerations are not an official part of French state policies in terms of integration, one cannot deny the fact that they are all part of the country's vernacular realities, mostly due to its extensive tradition of immigration which has made it an ethnically and religiously plural nation. This discrepancy between official discourse and vernacular narratives constitutes one of the phenomena that the present study attempts to identify and describe. It is a good illustration of Baumann's distinction between dominant and demotic discourses when it comes to the representation and production of identities.

Max Silverman (1992) examines these issues of diversity from a post-modern perspective in which the ultimate aim is to unveil the assumptions and allegories supporting French national identity. He treats terms like 'assimilation' and 'difference' as constructs that require the 'other' for meaning within the framework of the national discourse on a unitary, sovereign France. Silverman's

analysis relies heavily on the work of Etienne Balibar, Abdelmalek Sayad or Pierre-André Taguieff among others. He establishes a link between French citizenship and integration, thus taking the discussion beyond notions of race and culture. By adopting this angle, one can focus on the relation between institutional frameworks and the citizens who interact among them.

Along these lines, I wish to mention Adrian Favell's *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain* (1998) which is an openly comparative study from the vantage point of political sociology. Favell does not settle in favour of either of these national philosophies and practices. Instead, he argues that they have both entered a stage of crisis exemplified by a growing disjunction between their respective official discourse and social reality. In both countries, Favell argues, there is a growing gap between declared political ideals – in France republican *égalité*, in Britain antiracism and policies of racial equality – and the increase of social exclusion with hints of racial and ethnic discrimination. He sees them as gradually more caught in the negative path dependence of their elaborate institutional frameworks and corresponding ideologies. In that sense, ideals may not match observations made at ground level.

So, given such complexities, what do we mean when we use the term 'integration'? The emphasis in this study is put on 'social integration', a term which first came into use in the work of sociologist Emile Durkheim. He wanted to understand why rates of suicide were higher in some social classes than others. Durkheim believed that society exerted a powerful force on individuals. He concluded that a people's beliefs, values, and norms make up a collective consciousness, a shared way of understanding each other and the world (Durkheim, 1997). Here, what we are talking about is the social integration of individuals and communities (or neighbourhoods) to an overarching national society and its value systems. However, we will also deal with the cultural implications of such processes of social integration, especially when we consider the situation of families newly arrived in France and of second-generation children of immigrants. Moreover, we will also uncover some cultural trends of representation within and around the Quartiers Nord of Asnières. These, as part of the demotic discourses on the area and its inhabitants, both influence and are

influenced by dominant discourses on integration and exclusion prevalent at the national level.

Consequently, our understanding of the concept of 'integration' in France should be based on the dominant Republican model as applied though policy making and administration. It will then be possible to reflect upon the validity and applicability of such notions at ground level when discussing local or individual (demotic) perspectives. In that manner, points of congruence and divergence between dominant and demotic discourses on integration will become apparent.

The definition of 'integration' I will therefore adopt is that of the French Haut Conseil à l'Intégration (High Council for Integration) (1993) : *"L'intégration consiste à susciter la participation active à la société tout entière de l'ensemble des femmes et des hommes appelés à vivre durablement sur notre sol en acceptant sans arrière-pensée que subsistent des spécificités notamment culturelles, mais en mettant l'accent sur les ressemblances et les convergences dans l'égalité des droits et des devoirs, afin d'assurer la cohésion de notre tissu social."*[10]. I have chosen this definition as it is representative of the Republican ideals behind policies of integration in France. Furthermore, it leaves space for variations in the idea of 'Frenchness' while insisting on the need to conform to a common set of rules. In this light, integration becomes a dynamic exchange between individuals or groups of individuals and the national community, its institutions and the codes of conduct established within it.

The French associative realm across time.

In France, associative organisation has a dual purpose. As a locus for socialisation, it allows for the building and reinforcing of social ties, integrating changes in the lifestyles, positioning and roles of individuals and communities.

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[10]Accessed on 22/02/2014 at http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/var/storage/rapports-publics/954126500/0000.pdf . Translation: Integration consists of generating the active participation of all men and women living over a long period of time on French soil to society as a whole. Cultural specificities should remain, however there should be an emphasis on similitudes and convergences in terms of equality of rights and duties in order to insure the cohesion of our social fabric.

The 'volunteer' dimension of associations also places them on the side of social and political influence (Rioux, 1985, 29). In that sense, associations can be seen as a directing and innovating ground level manifestation of mainstream or dominant perspectives on society.

In the past, private initiatives (congregations, philanthropists, companies…) often preceded public intervention in terms of charity, assistance and solidarity movements. They were at the origin of the first modern organisations of this sort, even before associations were legally defined. It is the 'loi du 1er juillet 1901'[11] which first made the Republic's approval of associations and their regulation official. In it, associations are defined as follows:

> *L'association est la convention par laquelle deux ou plusieurs personnes mettent en commun, d'une façon permanente, leurs connaissances ou leur activité dans un but autre que de partager des bénéfices.*[12]

This law instigated a new liberal setting for associations, far from the secular tradition of mistrusting any coalition outside of public authorities. However, it is not until much later that freedom of association was recognised by the constitutional council as a fundamental liberty and added to the Constitution (16 July 1971), or that similar rights were given to foreigners on the French territory (9 October 1981).

Until 1960, two ideologies formed the basis for the creation of most new associations: social Christianity and secular Republicanism. The associations formed in this way could be divided into two groups – those taking part in medical and solidarity based activities on the one hand, and those concerned with 'popular education', youth and sports on the other. Moreover, political and administrative authorities contributed to the establishment of a degree of compatibility between public policies and associative action from 1945 onwards.

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[11] Law from the 1st July 1901.
[12] Translation: An association is the agreement by which two or several people join forces in a permanent way in order to share their knowledge and activities with an aim other than profit.

At that point, many groups which had been created by private initiatives began working with the State (Worms, 2005).

In the 1960s, the growth of an associative ideology accompanying social movements of the time shook the relationship between private and public. The associative space was built more and more around the notion of collective interest and the criticism of the market mentality (judged as cynical) and the public (or state-run) system and its heavy bureaucracy. Between the State and the market, associations stood as the voice of civil society, contesting the monopoly of public policies over social action (Chevallier, 1981). This intermediate positioning of associations has been maintained through the years and, in more recent times, the ambivalent nature of their links to both the private and public sectors has become more apparent.

For Martine Barthélemy (2007), a portion of the associative world is becoming more and more autonomous, adapting to new forms of action in the public sphere. Drawing from local-level bonds and solidarities, these 'new' associations follow a logic whereby internal political action is brought to the forefront and encouraged. However, most associations are still dependent on public funding, not because their members wish for things to be that way, but because the very need for associations comes from the lack of public resources in given areas or on particular themes. Barthélemy (2007) insists on the paradoxical nature of the relationship between the State and associations, as the latter represent and defend a new approach to community support and democratically legitimated action, while at the same time often heavily depend on their access to State resources (Barthélemy, 2007, pp. 8-9).

Both associations in which I did my fieldwork[13] relied mostly on funding from the Asnières town hall, representing at least eighty percent of their financial resources, the rest coming from collaborations with private companies on given projects. This was for instance the case when one of the associations

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[13] Namely, the Maison des Femmes where I taught French language and culture to recently arrived immigrant children and teenagers, and the Club des Chardons where I participated in schoolwork support activities.

that deals with French literacy and language acquisition partnered with EDF[14]. A workshop was set up to teach local residents, and especially newly arrived migrants, how to read their electric meters and understand their billing as well as other related documents. The company financed the entire initiative as a representative of the company told me when visiting the association. When I asked the director of the association how it had benefited from this action, she told me that a lot of the work of the mediators consisted of interpreting or translating these types of documents for people. In that sense, they had gained both in effectiveness and visibility by accessing a larger portion of the local population at once while following their public relations agenda. This is particularly important for town hall financed associations as their budget for the next year depends greatly on the number of residents taking part in their programs.

Moreover, associations have started to regroup and exchanges between them have become more and more frequent. In the 1990s, federations of associations organised along thematic lines joined the ranks of existing unions such as the Union Nationale des Associactions de Tourisme[15]. From 1992, the Conférence Permanente des Coordinations Associatives (CPCA) was instigated in order to facilitate communication between associations, especially in the coordination of common large-scale projects. The exchanges between public authorities and associative leaders during the Assises Nationales de la Vie Associative (ANVA) which were held in February 1999 led to the signing of a 'contract' between both parties on July 1st 2001[16]. Though this contract can not be legally held against either party, it establishes the basis of a new relationship between the two realms, confirming the legitimacy of the CPCA to represent the associative movement in its negotiations with the State. For Jean-Claude Dumoulin (2006), Director General of the Union des Foyers des Jeunes

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[14] EDF is the world's largest producer and provider of electricity. It is a semi-public company, partially depending on funding from the French state. It partners with a lot of associations in Asnières, financing for example the fresco mentioned earlier in this chapter.

[15] National union of tourism-related associations, one of the oldest grouping of associations, formed in 1920.

[16] The *Charte d'engagements réciproque entre l'Etat et les associations* which set up a structure for future exchanges between the State and associations.

Travailleurs[17] (which makes him an important associative actor at the national level), this formal agreement serves both as an organisational tool and a cultural necessity, both sides having to integrate the culture (or logic) of the other (Dumoulin, 2006, 120). This effort to establish a comprehensive relationship between ground level associative work and the State is of particular relevance to this study due to its portrayal of associations as establishing a link between the dominant and the demotic, between the street and the institutional.

Defining the place of associations in this 'civil dialogue' remains of primordial importance given their growing influence in France. As Pierre Sadran (2006) explains, this dialogue takes place between the representatives of the State and territorial (or local) authorities on the one hand, and the associative realm as representing the organised side of civil society on the other. In that sense, the civil dialogue defined by Sadran stands as a condition to and expression of the contribution of associations to political decision making. However, Sadran also finds that the associative realm is not given the weight it should have during the policy-determining process compared to the important role it plays in French society. For him, this is due to the heterogeneity of its activity range and subgroups, as well as a degree of mistrust on the part of local and national administrations (Sadran, 2006).

Thesis outline

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. After this introduction, there is a chapter on methodology (chapter 2) which presents the way in which my fieldwork was set up. I evaluate my own positioning regarding my fieldwork site and subjects. I then discuss the methods I used during that time and some of the ethical considerations that arose.

The third chapter is dedicated to the actual 'field' in which I have applied the methods described in the previous chapter, including a historical presentation of the suburban town of Asnières, with an emphasis on the *Quartiers Nord*. I

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[17] The largest national associative union of young workers.

also dedicate a large section of this chapter to the local associative realm and the various elements that compose it.

In chapter 4, I describe some of my initial points of contact with various relevant people and places in Asnières. Keeping this ethnographic tone, I then go on to review my work with the two main associations from which this study was born, emphasising their positioning within the Quartiers Nord (especially at the educational level) and their activities with local children, teenagers and their families. This is primarily due to the fact that both of the associations through which most of my fieldwork took place can be categorised as educational and family support associations.

After setting the methodological, local and ethnographic backgrounds for this study in chapters 2, 3 and 4, I develop my analysis by adding the related concepts of centre and periphery to the discussion in chapter 5. The use of this theoretical tool allows me to uncover the nature of the interactions between associations, local residents and political institutions, thus initiating my investigation of the role of associations within the Quartiers Nord. Moreover, this chapter introduces the key idea that associations position themselves in the interstices between core and periphery, this notion constituting one of the basic building blocks of my understanding of the connecting/interpreting role of associations.

In chapter 6, I explore the nature and formulation of local identities as well as the role played by associations in encouraging or fighting their development. Moreover, I draw significantly from ideas developed in the previous chapter when considering the impact of processes of territorialisation. I also focus on the ethnic and religious dimensions of identity and on their complex evolution within the Republican context, a theme that is not usually present in French academic debates on the *banlieues*.

In the seventh chapter, I bring the related concepts of social regulation and social control into the discussion of the role of associations in the Quartiers Nord and of their positioning between residents and institutional powers. I emphasise the significance of age in this chapter as youth is the principle target of dominant discourses on 'difficult neighbourhoods' that accompanies measures of social regulation and control. I then go back to the theme of

associations with respect to the topic of the chapter by discussing their mediating work as well some of their other activities which can be seen as forms of social regulation.

Finally, I conclude this thesis in the eighth chapter by returning to the connecting role of associations in the Quartiers Nord and the way in which they attempt to make dominant and demotic perceptions of the area compatible. I also explore the limits of their work within the local community.

Chapter 2

Methodology.

       This chapter will introduce the methods I have used during my fieldwork in Asnières. It will therefore serve as a basis for the ethnographic description and analysis to follow in later chapters. I will go over some of the practical issues I encountered during my time in the field and explain how I dealt with them.

       The first part of this chapter focuses on my initial period in the field, identifying the main sites and key moments that have shaped the rest of my fieldwork and theoretical considerations. I will then introduce the actual methods I used in order to gather information about associations and the people involved in their work, whether they benefit from it or contribute to it. These methods comprise participant observation and interviews. Moreover, this methodological chapter will allow me to reflect upon my dual positioning in the field, as a researcher and associative worker. Indeed, it is this positioning which has determined the content and tone of this thesis. In the last section, I will conclude by going over the ethical issues that arose during this study.

Entry into the Asnières field and archival work

       Having already lived ten months in Asnières between 2007 and 2008, I knew that my knowledge of the area and of some of its residents would be a strong advantage when choosing a geographic area for my fieldwork to take place. When I returned to the field in 2012, I spent a week roaming the streets of Asnières, its cafés, its sports centres and some of its estates, conversing with as many local people as I could and visiting some of my old neighbours whom I had not seen for over a year. I spent on average five to eight hours a day in Asnières with three aims in mind: firstly to reacquaint myself with the town after a long time away from it; secondly to identify a main angle or topic from which I can develop a theoretical proposition following a period of participant

observation; and thirdly to gather further contacts and information on the town itself.

Going through some of my previous notes on the initial period I spent in Asnières, I realised that a term appeared recurrently throughout the pages: the word "association". With this in mind, my meandering experience through the streets of the suburban town quickly became less random as I begun to identify a thematic pattern. I realised that most of the public informative posters and boards I came across were linked directly or indirectly to the work of local associations, whether it be based on sporting activities, cultural events or calls for social solidarity. By the end of a first week back in the field marked by its lack of precise issue-targeting, I was able to identify a topic which I believed was relevant both at the empirical and theoretical levels. Concretely, I decided to study the evolution of the role of associations in Asnières and the effect they have on the local population. This decision has been motivated by the strong potential for participant observation and crucial impact on the daily lives of a large proportion of Asnières residents that the realm of associations offers.

After this 'warming-up' phase, I set off to find more sources of information in and on Asnières and particularly on its associative life. During that week, I continued to wander around town keeping my eyes and ears open, talking mainly to shopkeepers as well as with a couple of youths I had met before. It was however from another source that I gathered the most relevant information. I went to the mairie (town hall) which lies in the gentrified (middle-class) area of town, about a fifteen-minute walk away from the Gabriel Péri metro station. After a bit of negotiation with the receptionist, she let me speak to one of the two people responsible for the town hall archives. There, I had access to varied documents on Asnières, including previous theses or historical documents on associations and urban development, as well as local papers (*Le Journal Municipal* and *Le Parisien*) and a large photographic database from which some of the pictures present in this document have been copied.

Moreover, I acquired (or confirmed) some valuable knowledge on Asnières through my discussion with the city hall archive staff who seemed passionate about the topic. They insisted on the wide social spectrum that can be encountered in this dense (85000 inhabitants) suburban town. There is a

significant difference (both visually and economically) between the middle class areas around the town hall and the various estate neighbourhoods further out, accessible by bus from the town centre or by getting off at the Agnettes and Courtilles metro stations. They also told me about the changes in the nature of the political administration of the town, with a socialist mayor (Jean Huet) between 1946 and 1958 who was then followed by fifty years of right wing (RPR / UMP) administration[18]. Since 2008, a left-wing and centre coalition has been in charge with a socialist mayor. Finally, I was informed of the "rich associative activity" in Asnières and the first association to be created there, La Régénératrice, which provided various sporting activities to local youths and was a 'patronage laïque' (secular and privately funded organisation).

I spent the first two days of this second week in the field in the town hall archives. I consulted historical documents on the town, on the variations in its physical and administrative boundaries, and on its associations. I then spent my time for the rest of the week hanging around the Quartiers Nord, which did not prove to be very fruitful as a large part of the local population was at work or in school during the daytime.

Many solidarity-based associations are located in the Quatiers Nord. The first thing I saw when getting out of the metro was a derelict tower block which was about to be demolished. I returned the next week for the occasion in order to witness the reactions of local residents. Most of them (they had gathered around to watch the scene) seemed relieved that this testimonial of a certain tradition of urban planning and architectural design was being brought down. As the building had been uninhabited for a few months there was no tension between those who had been living there and local authorities as it is sometimes the case.

The following weeks I decided to focus my attention on the Courtilles estate which is a part of the Quartiers Nord[19] with the intent of getting to know the area better (it is two metro stops away from Asnières town centre). I started by simply walking around the Courtilles estate in order to get a feel for its

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[18] The R.P.R. party which was later renamed the U.M.P. party has been the main centre/right wing political party in the past fourty years. I has counted in its ranks politicians such as Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy.
[19] A detailed geographic explanation will follow in chapter 3.

atmosphere. I ended up visiting the sports centre as it constitutes the main non-residential building in the estate (apart from a bakery and supermarket, I didn't come across any shops there). I spoke with the caretaker who was very friendly to me and introduced me to the local volleyball team (professionals who play in the second division). Overall, I was quite impressed with the quality of the facilities. As the caretaker told me: "this is one of the only sources of entertainment kids have around here, so the least we can do is to take good care of it".

Although this first real conversation with a local resident was circumstantial and not particularly focused, it benefited my research by making me realise I needed to maintain a relaxed attitude during this type of informal exchange. As I found out later on, my calm and friendly behaviour as well as my openness regarding my lack of knowledge of the area (showing I was an outsider) proved an adequate tone for interaction with most inhabitants of the Quartiers Nord on first encounter.

What I found during my first visits to the Quartiers Nord strongly challenged my perception of the area prior to 'exploring' it. Although the architectural design of the area did resemble other estate neighbourhoods I had visited before, with its high-rise tower blocks and long horizontal concrete buildings, my various informal exchanges with members of the local community did not necessarily confirm the image I had in my mind before going there: a rather stereotypical view based on discourses on 'difficult neighbourhoods'[20]. Most people were friendly and happy to help when I asked for directions, although some of them had difficulties when speaking and understanding the French language. Far from a quiet and grim environment, the Quartiers Nord appeared full of life to me, with a variety of languages emerging from the open windows in courtyards and groups of children running around playing loudly. I could feel I was in an area very different from Asnières town centre with its individual houses and fancy shops, but I did not feel I was in a place of misery or social isolation, at least with regards to the general atmosphere.

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[20] I will discuss the dominant discourse on 'difficult neighbourhoods' in chapter 3.

In retrospect, I realise that this warming up phase only allowed me to access the visible side of the neighbourhood but not the families and individuals that compose its population. These early moments were nonetheless key in discovering the official or mainstream perspectives on the local environment and on its associative component (from speaking to town hall representatives and town centre residents) and to compare it with my impressions and, later, my 'internal' knowledge of the area.

I shall now go over some of the methods I used to gather information as they have had a direct influence on the theories that will be formulated further.

Methods

This study remains a product of my own interpretation of what I observed in the field and is therefore still a subjective one. Such methods nevertheless allowed me to focus on lived experiences when quantitative ones lend themselves to identifying causal relationships between variables rather than processes or meanings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, 13). If the use of quantitative data such as regional statistics can offer an insight of certain discrepancies along territorial or economic lines, the present study relies in part on the interpretation of such figures in a social and therefore fluctuating context.

Clifford Geertz's (1973) concept of the 'thick description' defines his vision of ethnography as going beyond straight-forward descriptions of events and into an investigation of the meaning of these events. In that sense, ethnography is an attempt to understand why social actions take place in given cultural contexts. However, Geertz points out that the interpretation of such phenomena remains an expression of the researcher and informants' subjectivity: "…what we call our data are really constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to…" (Geertz, 1973, 9). To some extent, this subjectivity is a sign that the researcher is at least partially achieving the goal of reaching the insider's perspective.

Furthermore, carrying out qualitative research within small groups of subjects allows researchers to be more open and involved with the participants (or subjects) of the study. Consequently, methods can be adapted to potential

fluctuations in the research topic as it is the latter that should influence the former and not the other way around (Flick, von Kardoff, Steinke and Jenner, 2004, 5-15).

Participant observation

My main source of qualitative information came from the practice of participant observation. Participant observation refers to the informal field methods, which form the basis for most anthropological fieldwork, whether or not it is supplemented with other techniques (Eriksen, 1995, 15). It is "a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002, 1). The aim of using this method is to enter as deeply as possible into the social and cultural field one researches. As Evans Pritchard remarks (1983 [1937], 243), the researcher becomes a 'doubly marginal' person, suspended between one's own society and the society under investigation. In my case, the situation was slightly different as my study took place in France, the country I was born and raised in, but in the Quartiers Nord of Asnières, an area different (at least with regards to its geographic and demographic characteristics) from the one I grew up in. On top of that, my knowledge of the associative realm with which this research is concerned was limited prior to my entry in the field.

As a Parisian of North-African descent, my positioning has strongly facilitated the relative ease of entry into the multiracial context of the Quartiers Nord. Conversely, my background as an inner-city person with a higher economic and academic status implies that certain codes of behaviour or social perceptions were only accessible to me through reflection rather than instinct. This means that most of the time I was accepted as a 'safe' person to talk to but not quite as a member of the inner circle. I found myself wondering in the manner of Marilyn Strathern (1987) whether I was practicing anthropology at 'home', that is if I shared the same premises about social life as the communities

I was investigating[21]. It soon became apparent that this was not the case. Although, I shared common traits with some of my interlocutors (the latter ranging from age and ethnic background to interests), the differences in the everyday life situations we had to face before mutually entering each other's lives were too large for me to consider that we came from similar environments. Nonetheless, the fact that I also grew up in France from non-French parents implied that it was easier for me to surpass linguistic and cultural barriers and that at some level I had common experiences with my informants.

In essence, my fieldwork was spent doing participant observation in the context of associations, whether it be networking to get to know the various actors of the local associative scene or actively taking part in their work. As a volunteer at the Club des Chardons I helped groups of three to six children with their homework and, as time went by and we established a relationship of mutual trust and understanding, we had extended conversations about each other's lives and aspirations. My personal background was often a source of curiosity on the part of the children as they recurrently asked me why I was fluent in English, if I was of North African origin, whether I was a Muslim or if I was a 'bourgeois' due to the manner in which I expressed myself in French. I was happy to discuss such matters with them as it was a way for me to get to know them through their questions, giving me an indication of their main concerns in terms of identity. Moreover, their responses during those exchanges deepened my insight.

Although I believe the children still saw me as a figure of authority (at least in the work space dedicated to associative activities), our relationship was significantly friendlier than the ones tying them to some of the other volunteers who were usually retired and with whom the generational gap was far greater. The fact that I understood most of their slang vernacular definitely helped. I was however not as close to them as another young educator of the Club des Chardons, Mina Abdenour, a 23 year old girl of Moroccan origin who lived in the Quartiers Nord and was a full time worker at the association. She lived in the

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[21] On this topic see also Kirsten Hastrup's article *The Ethnographic Present: A Reinvention* (1990) which deals with issues of presence and representation, fieldwork, and cultural translation.

same building as some of the children and saw most of them and their families on a daily basis.

At the Maison des Femmes, I started as a volunteer teacher's assistant and had varying degrees of interaction with children. On some occasions I was active in helping them with activities, supervising small groups of children and teenagers for project work. However, the educator I was assisting left the association two months after I joined it and I found myself in charge of the French language and culture teaching programme (every Wednesday). Consequently, I had to choose and prepare each activity as well as monthly outings. This strongly enhanced my relationship with the children and teenagers as my 'authority' over the two groups was strengthened, allowing me to dictate the tone of our interactions and the themes to be brought up during our weekly sessions. Most of the time, I consulted with the groups (especially the teenagers) over the choice of activities for the following weeks. If I had learned anything from my observation of the work of my predecessor, it was that the children were more likely to engage fully in activities that they had themselves chosen. Moreover, the teenagers reacted positively to the fact that they were actively taking part in the decision process.

As time went on, my relationships with the children, their families and members of the two associations deepened and became more 'natural'. Our communication became less formal as we got to know each other better. Some of my colleagues became my friends and the children and teenagers manifested their sympathy towards me (or their anxieties) on a regular basis, sometimes asking for advice on matters beyond the spectre of our usual interactions. This is one of the aims of participant observation as an extended contact period allows 'natural' interactions to be observed and participated in (Ostberg, 2003, 33). Such a level of trust was only accessible through the partial and gradual dissipation of the boundary between insider and outsider, between researcher and subject. Furthermore, the children were not the only ones to grant me their confidence as the two associations I joined decided to financially reward me for my work, with an increase in my level of responsibility and potential for initiative among them as illustrated by the fact I was regularly encouraged to attend internal meetings. I will discuss the consequences on my research of this

shift in my position in the associations further on in this chapter when discussing the issue of my dual role as a researcher and associative worker.

Interviews

Participant observation is not the only methodological tool available to gather qualitative data. My fieldwork also consisted of two forms of interviews. Firstly, I carried out structured interviews with members of the local administration, associative workers, or school teachers for example[22]. For these interviews, I prepared targeted questions which varied according to the area of specialisation of my interlocutors. Nevertheless, the two main themes of the Quartiers Nord and the work of associations were common two all of these interviews. In that manner, I was able to access valuable first-hand information on the way policies are carried out by the town hall and other local public institutions such as schools, and how this affects the work of associations and of the people who benefit from it.

The second type of interviews consisted of one on one semi-structured interviews. These allowed me to get further information from particular individuals, whether they were children or adults, once I had identified a number of relevant themes through participant observation and established trusting relations with people. Moreover, they constituted a change from usual contexts of interaction which sometimes led to a consequent shift in the general attitude of the subject and their interaction with the researcher. In that sense, some children took more time to think about their answers to my questions as they did when in a group situation. This could be explained by the fact that they were less

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[22] List of structured interviews (in alphabetical order): Mina Aderdour (educator at the Club des Chardons); Nora Aknine (volunteer treasurer at the Club des Chardons); Marie-Béatrice Ballot (president of Handisport Plus); François-Xavier Chaix (in charge of Asnières town hall archives); Zakia Couderc (director of the Maison des Femmes); Geneviève Ducéré (volunteer president of the Club des Chardons); Marie-Christine Faubert (mediator at the Club des Chardons and coordinator of the 'Educational Success Programme'); Matérim Fofana (director of the Conseil des Familles Freycinet); Julien Gomis (coordinator and educator at the Club des Chardons); Michel Lasserre De Rozel (deputy mayor in charge of associations); Magalie Le Quinquis (coordinator of the deputy mayor's office); Laëtitia Narces (teacher of the C.L.A. class at the André Malraux school); Michel Pelé (president of the Centre Yannick Noah); Djamila Zaoui (mediator at the Maison des Femmes).

inclined to 'perform' in order to maintain their 'street credibility' as they did in front of their friends.

Eder and Fingerson (2001) advocate the use of a variety of interviewing techniques with children. For them, interviews do not have to be formal or static but can be set in the context of other activities in order for them to flow more naturally. They use the example of walk or travelling conversations (also known as 'transect interviews') as well as that of role-play and telling stories (Eder and Fingerson, 2001, 181-184). Although I would not personally describe such conversations as interviews, I have nonetheless accessed a significant amount of information in that manner. We organised monthly outings with the children and teenagers of the Maison des Femmes which were usually linked to the theme of French culture. It was a great opportunity for me to discuss related issues with them in a casual manner that often led to straightforward and heartfelt answers on their behalf. This was also the case at the Club des Chardons when studying particular topics such as civic education or French history that brought up a certain amount of personal comments from the children about their own views and background.

A large part of the direct quotes in this thesis originate from such conversations. I have to admit that keeping a precise record of what had been said on these occasions was a challenge at first, but became easier with experience as I was able to prepare for such circumstances. I carried a notepad around with me on which I regularly took notes. It soon became a familiar sight for the children who quickly stopped asking me why I was taking notes all the time (a question I was happy to answer). Moreover, taking notes was facilitated by the children doing most of the talking as I kept my interventions to a minimum.

I conducted structured recorded interviews with the children although that proved more complicated than with adults and especially professionals who were always willing to speak about their work and the environment in which it takes place. The busy and usually noisy context of my daily interactions with the children made it difficult for me to find opportunities for confidential and specifically targeted conversations. Most of the time, outside influences such as the presence of other children, educators or parents compromised the validity (in

terms of sincerity or authenticity) of the answers that the children gave to my questions. I therefore looked into the possibility of one on one interviews. The latter took place with some of the children under my supervision during periods of break or at the end of our activities. Both the parents of the children and my co-workers gave their agreement for the interviews and their recordings to take place. This process was made easier by the regularity of our interactions, both during our scheduled weekly activities and during social events such as outings, which some parents attended, or celebrations such as post-wedding neighbourhood parties and end of the year gatherings.

One on one recorded interviews brought about their share of dilemmas. I often found myself wondering whether my questions were too precise and therefore not leaving enough space for the children to express themselves or choose which topics are relevant to them. Consequently, I tried to initiate particular thematic conversations without pushing them in one direction or the other and to be accepting of their answers. There were however certain 'starting' questions I asked to all children and teenagers: "What do you like or dislike about where you live now?"; "What do you do when you are with your friends?"; "What do you do when you are with your family?"; "Do you like school? Why?"; "What do you think we are doing in this association?".

Unless I was asked by the children to clarify my question or statement, I would deliberately maintain a level of vagueness in my inquiries and responses. I would for instance not refer specifically to the place the children lived in by name to let them choose their own level of identification according to the theme we were discussing. Some of them mentioned France as their point of reference, others Asnières, the Courtilles estate or even a particular neighbourhood in the estate. Moreover, the same child might use all of these levels of spatial location during the interview, depending on the topic we were discussing. This was especially the case with the recently arrived children of the Maison des Femmes as they had a more transnational view of things[23].

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[23] For more on the anthropology of transnationalism see Ralph Grillo's article (2007) on the trajectories and projects of transmigrants. Grillo goes over the different ways in which transnationalism affects people.

Although I suspect that not all of the children actually read the information sheet I gave them and their parents on what my study is about, I made sure they were nevertheless aware of the various themes that we may deal with during the interviews by going over them before we started. I insisted on the fact that if they were uncomfortable discussing any of those topics they could just tell me so.

Interviews with the children of recently arrived migrants (from the Maison des Femmes) were more problematic than those with the children of the Club des Chardons. Indeed, there were obvious differences in the aptitudes of the children when it came to expressing themselves in the French language. To some extent, this meant that certain interviews were more 'framed' than others as I found myself having to do more of the talking in such cases. I got around these difficulties by making those interviews 'ongoing' ones. I would interrupt the interview when I felt the subject was lacking motivation or tired of speaking in French. I would then suggest at various later moments (sometimes a month afterwards) to get back to it when I felt they were in a more talkative and enthusiastic mood. Moreover, I had the possibility of running some of these interviews in English. This was the case with children coming from countries where it is a commonly spoken language such as Egypt or Sri Lanka.

Overall, my experience of gathering data in the Quartiers Nord has confirmed Kathleen and Billie DeWalt's view that fieldwork involves "active looking, improving memory, informal interviewing, writing detailed field notes, and perhaps most importantly, patience" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002, p.vii). I have nonetheless been able to access ground level information that would otherwise have been out of reach. Moreover, my ongoing exchanges with informants have strongly benefitted the subsequent analysis of such information.

Positioning as researcher and associative worker

The trusting relationships that I have mentioned above and from which much of the qualitative data gathered in this study stems have been made possible by my positioning in the field both as a researcher and an associative worker. Indeed, I would not have been able to develop such a level of emotional

proximity if I had not been a part of the children's daily (or weekly) lives. However, a certain amount of distance is also required in the interpretation of such data as well as a reflection on the manner in which it has been gathered. Consequently, I have found myself at times questioning whether I was more concerned with my responsibilities towards the children as an educator than with conducting my research. In this section, I explore the dilemmas I encountered when researching about the population of the Quartiers Nord of Asnières and the positioning of local associations as an insider researcher who was simultaneously employed as an educator in the host institutions.

I felt that it was important that research did not undermine my work and authority, and reciprocally, I was aware of the risk of losing focus when it came to the gathering of relevant information. This affected my position regarding the children and teenagers, as well as my relationship with other members of the associations. In the first couple of months of my taking part in associative activities (with the Club des Chardons and Maison des Femmes), my role and positioning were unclear and I was still trying to situate myself. I eventually settled in an intermediate role, representing adult authority but also leaving group decision making to the professional in charge of each activity. This was facilitated by the fact I was 'just' a volunteer worker with no contractual obligations during my first six months at the associations. I was thus able to just 'stay in the background' at times and observe, focusing on my role as a researcher and later setting up interviews.

My appointment as an 'assistant' allowed me to blend in with the children and associations' staff in a gradual manner and without much 'pressure' to fit in. All parties (including myself) grew comfortable with my position after a short period of experimentation and boundary testing in terms of authority, especially from the children. Correspondingly, the main difficulty that arose from this period of my fieldwork was the constant negotiation of my role during the different types of interaction I had with the children. Indeed, I often had to remind them during research interviews that there were no right or wrong answers like there could be during our workshops. At the beginning of each interview, I insisted on the fact that I just wanted their opinion, not what they thought I wanted to hear.

As a volunteer it was impossible for me to take groups on my own, but I helped the experienced and professional educators throughout the various stages of their work. I booked tickets and buses when we took the children out for special events (such as the circus or theatre plays), prepared their snacks, took charge of small work groups during workshops when the pupils were divided in that manner, or helped them individually with manual or intellectual activities.

This situation changed when I became a salaried part-time worker in both associations. My level of legal and practical responsibility significantly increased as I became the person in charge of all the children present in a classroom at once, leading me to adopt a more authoritative and disciplinary stance. This was particularly the case at the Club des Chardons, where I was put in charge of several age groups simultaneously, overlooking the work (in terms of disciplinary problems mainly) of volunteers with each age group while also focusing on the three or four children composing my own group and helping them with their schoolwork.

The transition at the Maison des Femmes happened more smoothly, as the educator I was assisting left the association and was replaced by one of the teachers of the adult classes. She and I were given the same level of authority, accountability and decision making power as I became a salaried worker. This decision was motivated by the fact that, with fifteen children or teenagers in each group, there was a need for two 'real' educators. Although my colleague was more experienced in terms of teaching the French language to foreigners than I was, I had more experience in dealing with that age group (four to sixteen years old) as I was employed as a schoolwork support teacher in a private company at the time and had already become a salaried educator at the Club des Chardons.

Furthermore, an increase in responsibility also meant I had to take part in course and syllabus structuring. This had the benefit of allowing me to witness the internal workings of the social and educational policies through which these programs are funded and organised as I had to follow their guidelines. Moreover, I was in a position to discuss the 'official' motivation and ideology behind such initiatives with their administrators and coordinators, therefore

widening the range of perspectives accessible to me, especially in terms of what constitutes the 'top to bottom' discourse in place on the role of associations.

As time went by and I had collected what I judged to be enough data through interviews and participant observation (at the beginning of the writing up phase which coincided with the end of the school year), I gradually became more prone to acting mostly as an educator, just keeping my ears and eyes open in case any potentially useful information to my research emerged[24]. This change of attitude on my part manifested itself through an increase in my involvement in disciplinary issues, from ensuring children passed on information to their parents to sanctioning their behaviour when the latter was disruptive or inappropriate. It also allowed me to see the children and teenagers under a different light (and reciprocally), exposing different aspects of their personalities and views, sometimes as a reaction to my own and my disciplinary role. In that sense, I found myself actively taking part in promoting the dominant discourse on adequate group behaviour at a local and personal level as we will see in chapter seven. However, I believe that I did so taking the children's demotic interpretations of it into account by integrating what I knew about their backgrounds and values to our exchanges, thus contributing to the associations' connecting role described throughout this thesis.

As I have explained, I gradually felt more confident both within the general context of the Quartiers Nord and in my role as an associative worker. I began adhering to the work and ideals of the Maison des Femmes and Club des Chardons but still kept a critical mind. Accordingly, I revealed some of my personal views to some of my research participants and sometimes in the writing up of my research. The main benefit of adopting this open positioning is that it is more representative of the associative insider's perspective. However, it also strongly impacts on the general tone of this thesis as the point of view presented is dual, that of a researcher and educator.

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[24] My fieldwork started in the fall of 2011. I began volunteering for associations in January 2012 and became a salaried worker at the Club des Chardons and the Maison des Femmes in the fall of 2012. By then, I had completed all the interviews I deemed necessary.

Consequently, I wish to mention one last issue regarding this dual positioning in the field and throughout my analysis: the conflict of interest that might arise from writing about the people who employ you. To some extent, I avoided this problem by not interviewing any of the members of the associations I worked for after being hired by them. This was made easier by the fact I had already interviewed all the people I wanted to by that time. Moreover, I did not physically work with the directors and managing staff of the associations who paid me and only saw them on festive occasions or during assembly meetings. I also stopped mentioning my research altogether to my co-workers once my volunteering period ended and I became a salaried employee. By then, both the children and my colleagues had 'forgotten' I was doing research and just interacted with me as they did with other educators, only asking me once in a while how things were going in that respect. I did nevertheless keep asking them each time they mentioned something I could use in this study whether or not I could do so.

Ethics

When considering the ethical issues that arose during my fieldwork, the main themes are that of child protection, consent and trust between myself and the people who contributed to this thesis by accepting to give me their views once informed of the purpose of this study and of my positioning among them. Moreover, it is from this simultaneous positioning as an associative worker and a researcher that I gained access to the information presented further on in this study. However, maintaining this sometimes awkward balance has also constituted one of the biggest challenges for me, both throughout my time in Asnières and during my analysis of the data gathered there.

Indeed, the nature and intensity of my relationships with the participants or subjects of this study mean that I am not in a position to be completely objective, if that is ever possible. It is nevertheless my duty as a researcher in anthropology to maintain a certain equilibrium between the insider's perspective I wish to focus on and the 'as neutral as possible' analysis I make of it. One of the ways in which I have addressed this issue is by engaging in thorough

descriptions of the social contexts in which my interactions with the various participants took place as well as the overarching cultural, political and administrative frameworks of Asnières and some of its neighbourhoods in particular.

However, getting to the level of trust and acceptance mentioned above took time and effort. In the various neighbourhoods that compose the Quartiers Nord, everyone appears to know everyone and the attitude of newcomers is often scrutinised, especially when they are asking a lot of questions. This may lead to a degree of caution and defiance from some local residents. Nevertheless, my activities with children implied that I met their relatives and friends on a few occasions, thus gradually becoming a familiar neighbourhood face. By that point, I had already joined in a variety of social events such as wedding parties or local carnivals. Choosing my questions adequately and adapting to situations was easier once I became aware of and familiar with local unwritten codes and interpersonal relationships between residents. I also discussed my research with many of them and I know they have discussed it among themselves as a lot of the people I have been introduced to seemed to already know who I was and what I did. Overall, my informants (who for some have become my friends) and I were not taking more risks than any other local residents.

This level of trust was harder to achieve with the newly arrived immigrants as some of them had to leave their home countries to escape difficult circumstances and did not want to be identified or asked any questions about their past. This was not the case for all of them and we were sometimes able to build a strong enough bond for them to be happy to help me with my research and take interest in it. I always spoke with parents before speaking to their children about the interviews. As I have mentioned above when introducing my methodology, the parents gave their consent before I interviewed their children as I made it clear, verbally and in the consent form, that every aspect of the final

report and of the data gathered would be anonymous, with no mention of their names[25].

Furthermore, I had to make sure that the children (and of course their parents) understood the aims and consequences of my research. They could have become confused and stressed and consequently their relationship with the associations and me could have been negatively affected. In order to avoid this situation, I only interviewed people under 18 that I already personally knew through my work with associations. I also made sure that I only interviewed the children that were motivated and old/mature enough to grasp what was at stake. The age range of the children and teenagers I interviewed (eight of them in extended interviews) went from ten to seventeen years old and was one of the only ways for me to gather their opinions about precise topics outside of those we discussed during workshops, these being set in an educational context. I went through the information sheet with them and their parents; answering any questions they asked as honestly as possible.

I adopted the same attitude in my relationship with associative leaders, workers and volunteers. I ensured that I did not go against any of the associations' internal rules or nationally established codes of conduct that regulate interactions between associations and the beneficiaries of their work. These regulations are there to protect all participants in the French associative realm. I carefully studied the national legislation on the matter and in particular the *Loi de 1901* which articulates the rights and duties of associations in France. I did the same with the internal codes of conduct of the two associations I worked with. Moreover, my role as a researcher required that I kept more 'academic' behavioural rules in mind, such as the ethical guidelines established by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth[26]. None of the methods or objectives I have set for this study contradict any of the guidelines mentioned here. I have avoided damaging my relationship with the members of associations and the trust local residents have

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[25] I have used pseudonyms for participants that attended the associations but have kept names of public figures from whom I received consent for interviews, permission for citations and whose statements do not pertain to their private lives.
[26] www.theasa.org/ethics/Ethical_guidelines.pdf

in me. I benefited from the resulting trust as some members of the associations I worked with even suggested to help me in meeting and gathering potential participants to this research.

Other ethical issues arose when considering my representation of these participants in the ensuing thesis. It is not my intention for the people in this study to be portrayed in a way that they do not wish to be or for information about them to be revealed that they do not want me to mention. I was able to go past this problem by applying a principle brought forward by Allison James (2001) when she discussed the role of ethnography when studying childhood: the frequent use of quotes from interview transcripts of audio recordings of research subjects in the text. In that manner, the potential for interpretation is reduced as participants' voices are directly transcribed. One must keep in mind however that these quotes remain selected and put in context by the researcher and part of their argument (James, 2001, 32-33).

I also discussed my findings with the people who had led to them. These exchanges allowed me to build on previously gathered data and to consolidate the accuracy of my representation of their views. This process was made more difficult by the fact that this thesis is in the English language when a vast majority of my interactions and interviews with participants took place in French. My subsequent efforts to translate these exchanges may be seen as a form of interpretation or editing. The only solution I found to this problem is to verbally 'retranslate' the quotes I have used to the people I quoted. This exercise allowed me to once again confirm some of the participants' perspectives and to make any further adjustments that they identified.

Conclusions

The aim of using participant observation and interviews is to produce an ethnographic account of the associative realm in the suburban town of Asnières. Moreover, ethnography may prove particularly useful when children are involved in a study. Indeed, ethnography as a research methodology has enabled children to be recognised as people who can be studied in their own right within the social sciences. It permits children to become active participants rather than

simple objects of study (James, 2001, 246). I have myself paid a great attention to the voices of the children I worked with and see it as a challenge to incorporate them as an integral part of this ethnographic account. The extensive period of time I have spent with them and the nature of our interactions have allowed me to understand their subjectivities and to get closer to their insiders' perspective. By complementing this view with that of associative and political actors as well as other local voices, I hope to reach a balanced interpretation of the specific role of associations in the suburban town of Asnières.

Before dealing with the ethnographic data gathered using the methods discussed above in chapter 4, I will describe the suburban town of Asnières and its associative realm in the next chapter as they serve as a physical background to the present study.

Chapter 3

The Asnières setting.

In the previous chapter I described the methodology that enabled me to gain access to the qualitative data needed for this study. In this chapter I will introduce the actual 'field' in which I applied these methods, including a general presentation of the suburban town of Asnières and of the different areas that compose it. I will also dedicate a large section of this chapter to the local associative dimension with which this research is concerned.

This chapter is the first part of my introduction to the idea of an intermediate positioning of associations with regards to the Quartiers Nord of the Asnières commune and the variety of residents that occupy the different territories that compose it. Here I will present a historical account of the role of associations, a role which has grown with the changing needs of the local population. These needs have indeed been altered by urbanising trends and ensuing transformations in everyday social and cultural practices. Later chapters will explore the consequences of processes of territorialisation in terms of the relationship between distinct areas of the suburban town (chapter 5) and the ways in which their inhabitants formulate their identities (chapter 6). The present chapter will lay the foundation for these discussions.

Accordingly, I will begin with a description of Asnières and its evolution across time. I will then discuss the various elements that compose the dominant discourse identifying the Quartiers Nord as a 'difficult neighbourhood' in order to compare them with demotic representations of the area and its residents throughout this thesis. Finally, a discussion of the town's associative realm will conclude this account of the historical, physical and discursive framework in which this study takes place.

Asnières, a French *banlieue* over time

The name 'Asnières' comes from the Latin *Asinariae* meaning 'herd of donkeys'. The oldest written record of the place dates from 1158 but the village existed long before that as a five-ton 'menhir' (standing stone) and the remains of an ancient covered passage were discovered on the site. Already, in the eighteenth century, the ruins of a Gallo-roman cemetery had been unearthed. A large portion of the village's already scarce population was decimated during the Hundred Years' War[27]. By 1460, Asnières was composed of only five houses comprising 25 residents overall. The following century brought its own share of disasters to the village, which found itself in the midst of various religious wars (Poisson, 1958, 4-5).

Under the rule of Louis XIV, a rural agglomeration was developed around the Sainte-Geneviève church, and the abbot Antoine Lemoyne took on the role of lord of Asnières. In 1801, there were 326 residents[28] in this commune with mediocre land mainly suited for arable agriculture. This population was mainly composed of indigenous families as the river Seine constituted a serious obstacle for whoever wished to reach Asnières. Indeed, the commune lies in a 'loop' of the river and is therefore nearly entirely surrounded by it. Consequently, in 1826, a first bridge over the Seine and leading to Asnières was built, with the effect of doubling its population within ten years. This phenomenon was later enhanced by the inauguration of a train route (Paris-Le Pecq) in 1837, under the reign of Louis-Philippe (Dulaure, Johanne and Labedolière, 1992, 27-35). As one of the historians of the Asnières town hall archives told me, it is this particular event that initiated the local shift from rural to urban lifestyles.

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[27]This refers to the war between England and France (1337-1453) which resulted in a French victory and the House of Valois being maintained on the throne of France, with England losing most of its continental territories.
[28] EHESS figures accessed on the following website on 10th April 2012 :
cassini.ehess.fr/cassini/fr/html

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Asnières became a place for Parisians to entertain themselves. The Asnières castle was turned into a fashionable restaurant and festivities took place in its surroundings. There were also numerous regattas organised on the nearby river. Various artists chose to reside in Asnières in search of inspiration, some of them famous such as Van Gogh, Emile Bernard or Paul Signac (Martin and Toulet, 1996, 32). This growing popularity had direct repercussions in demographic terms with the local population reaching 19,575 residents by 1891[29]. Most of these new inhabitants contributed to the development of the old village around the train station area.

The northern section of the town, where the various estates and neighbourhoods in which the present study takes place now stand, was not included in this initial geographic expansion. It was occupied by rag-and-bone men (chiffoniers), who were still present in the early 1970s as one of my colleagues, the social mediator of the Club des Chardons, who has lived in the north of Asnières for over forty years pointed out when describing the evolution of the Courtilles estate in the Quartiers Nord. The town hall historian I interviewed described the long-term evolution of this particular area as going from the original fields that were cultivated when Asnières was a mere village to a peripheral shanty town during its early urbanisation in the nineteenth century, the latter finally being replaced by the estates that were built in the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

By the late 1890s, agricultural exploitation only represented ten acres of the town's total surface area (less than three percent). Moreover, various industrial and commercial enterprises were locally initiated in the second half of the nineteenth century, thus increasing the pace of this transformation process. Among these one can mention the original workshops of the now famous travel accessory designer and manufacturer Louis Vuitton which were founded in 1860. This industrial growth led to the arrival of new workers and their families. As the town historian pointed out, the industries were situated in the centre of

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[29] EHESS figures accessed on the following website on 10th April 2012 :
cassini.ehess.fr/cassini/fr/html

Asnières which brought about a broad socio-geographic diversity as workers lived near their workplace. It is only in the middle of the twentieth century that a separation between neighbourhoods in terms of social and economic statuses became apparent, the price and type of available accommodation beginning to differ greatly between areas. The shift away from rural life is also exemplified by the tramway lines that ran all over the town as well as the construction of the Hôtel de Ville (town hall) which began in 1897, the inauguration taking place in 1899 (Dulaure, Johanne and Labedolière, 1992, 72-83). In 1901, the population of Asnières was an estimated 31,336 inhabitants and by 1911 it had reached 42,583[30].

With this steady increase in population came the necessary development of adapted statutory provisions. This was the case in terms of education, with the building of a kindergarten (1900) and primary school (1905). In 1931, they were replaced by the Jules Ferry school which brought together children during their entire schooling experience. This school still exists nowadays and others have since been created such as the Descartes (1965) and André Malraux (1974) schools, both situated in the Quartiers Nord, the northern area of Asnières in which my fieldwork took place[31].

Among the other notable developments of the first part of the twentieth century one can mention the market (1922) and post office (1930) of the Quatre Routes (literally: Four Roads) intersection. This intersection now lies at the centre of the various estate neighbourhoods that compose the Quartiers Nord. Another sector which benefited from these expansion projects is that of sporting activities with the construction of the Léo Lagrange stadium (1945), Courtilles swimming pool (1964) and Courtilles ice rink (1970) among others (Dulaure, Joanne and Labedollière, 1992).

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[30] EHESS figures accessed on the following website in April 2012 :
cassini.ehess.fr/cassini/fr/html
[31] Information accessed on the ministry for education's website in April 2012 at:
www.education.gouv.fr/pid24302/annuaire-resultat-recherche.html?ecole=1&lycee_name=&localisation=1&ville_name=Asni%E8res-sur-Seine&page=1

As for public transportation, the tramway line Madeleine – Place des Bourguignons had already been extended to the 4 Routes intersection in 1896 and complemented the busy train line between Paris (Gare Saint-Lazare) and Asnières' train station. It was only in the 1980s that further developments were achieved (on top of the few bus lines that had been implemented since) with the inauguration of the Gabriel Péri metro (underground) station (1980) on line 13 and the Grésillons R.E.R. station on line C (1988)[32]. Finally, the underground line 13 was extended to the north of Asnières with the addition of two new stations in 2008: Les Agnettes and Les Courtilles (see map of public transportation in Asnières and the neighbouring commune of Gennevilliers in appendix 3). I have questioned many residents of the Quartiers Nord on the subject and they have been unanimous in their praise of the initiative as it entails that the centre of Paris is now only half an hour away from them. This has greatly contributed to the fact that local residents feel far less isolated and perceive their neighbourhood as less of an enclave. It has nonetheless not yet deeply affected the core-periphery relations between the Quartiers Nord and the Asnières town centre as we will see in the fifth chapter.

The expansion of suburban housing projects in France

I will now concentrate on the evolution of the housing projects elaborated in the second half of the twentieth century to deal with the steady increase in the local population in France. I will deal with the Quartiers Nord of Asnières more specifically in the next subsection once the national context is exposed in this one. If one is to fully grasp the importance of such transformations, it is crucial that we not only take into account the local dimension of this phenomenon, but that we also place this discussion within the context of wider national tendencies in terms of housing and demographic distribution. Consequently, one must

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[32] The R.E.R. is a vast train network that links inner-city Paris to its suburbs, covering various *départements* or 'districts'. Metro line 13 goes from the suburban towns of Châtillon and Montrouge (*département* 92) in the South to Asnières (92) and Saint-Denis (93) in the North of Paris. It is one of the longest and most crowded lines as it expands quite far into densely populated suburban zones. It is also linked to wider transportation networks through the St. Lazare and Montparnasse train stations.

consider the most defining national trend in that respect: the growth of French *banlieues* (suburbs)*.

Indeed, the *banlieues* are an integral part of the expansion process which has affected French cities in different ways across time. Their emergence coincides with the sudden growth of urban poles in the 19th Century. This took place in an unsupervised and uncoordinated manner at first but the spontaneous development of suburban space was gradually replaced by elaborate urbanisation plans within the context of state policies. Today's *banlieues* are the product of successive phases of economic, technical, social and political change which are responsible for the architectural heterogeneity found in French suburbs.

For Hervé Vieillard-Baron, an urban geographer, one can identify three main periods of suburban expansion in France. Firstly, between 1840 and 1935, an initial increase in the density of the urban population took place. This phenomenon was caused primarily by the industrial revolution and the improvement of transportation structures which drastically changed production and exchange conditions, and in particular the localisation of industries. A sharp decrease in mortality rates led to a surplus in the rural population of regions where the need for labour was scarce. This in turn generated an emigrational flow towards mining areas and industrial towns. Moreover, a second factor can be seen as relevant here: the transformation of town and city centres in order to make place for growing activities such as banking, administration or commerce and emerging social groups; urban renovation pushing the working class towards the outskirts of cities (Vieillard-Baron, 1996, 32-37). The growth of the service sector in a post industrial economy described by Vieillard-Baron implies the populating of suburban space in France by two sections of the nation's inhabitants: rural people who were attracted to the city life but stopped at the periphery due to cheaper accommodation and the proximity of industrial labour opportunities[33], and city people themselves who were also looking for cheaper accommodation without having to move too far from the city centre where most of them worked.

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[33] This demographic shift strongly resembles the contemporary rural-to-urban migration patterns described by Doug Saunders in his *Arrival City* (2012).

In addition, immigration has played a significant role in the successive demographic changes that impacted on France's demographic distribution. Most migration flows into the country during the nineteenth century involved migrants from neighbouring countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal and Belgium who were attracted by the opportunities in manufacturing, construction work and agriculture. In the immediate post-war years French politicians and planners aimed at meeting the nation's new need for labour by encouraging 'culturally compatible' immigrants (i.e. white Europeans) to settle in preference to those from the 'Third World'. However, growing levels of prosperity in Europe meant that far fewer of them were attracted to France. The resulting shortfall was met instead by migrants from France's colonies or former colonies in North and Sub-Saharan Africa (Hargreaves, 1995, 4-14).

Before the Second World War, when most of these countries were under colonial rule, migratory flows to France were limited. Unlike European migrants who for the most settled permanently with their families, a majority of North Africans came to France alone to work for a few years before returning to their countries of origin. After the war, the French government encouraged family immigration from Italy and other European countries (Weil, 1991, 63). The same policy was applied to Portuguese families who arrived during the 1960s and 1970s (Amar and Milza, 1990, 263). However, this was not the case for immigrants from Africa and Asia.

In 1956, faced with large numbers of Algerian immigrants living in very poor housing, a State-run agency was created to provide them with hostel accommodation. This type of housing was nevertheless ill-fitted for entire families, thus discouraging the wives and children of Algerian workers from joining them in France (Weil, 1991, 60). When Algeria became independent, an agreement was reached between both countries to discourage permanent family settlement as it reduced the flow of remittances sent home from expatriate workers. Similar agreements took place with other 'Third World' countries (Weil, 1991, 70-71). Family settlement was much slower among North Africans. It was not until the mid 1960s that a trend towards the reunification of Algerian families in France really increased. This has however become the norm among North African migrants (Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian) since the 1970s,

with a gender ratio (just under fifty percent) now approaching that of 'white Europeans', immigrants included (Hargreaves, 1995, 17).

The second period of suburban expansion mentioned by Vieillard-Baron (1996) started after World War II. At that point, the housing of workers became a priority for the French State. The latter embarked on an extensive campaign to build a large number of low cost, cheaply rented accommodation known under the acronym H.L.M. (Habitations à Loyer Modéré - low rent accommodation) – an expression still very much in use in the political, administrative and media vernaculars. These buildings were based on the work of Le Corbusier and his disciples. Their architectural school of thought emerged from a sharp criticism of the 'lotissements pavillionnaires', groups of individual houses that were popular in the initial period of suburban growth[34]. They strongly supported the idea of collective housing and vertical constructions. This vision proved easy to promote as a consensus was reached, based simultaneously on the need for immediate effectiveness and the hope for a facilitation of political and social control (Vieillard-Baron, 1996, 37-40).

Furthermore, the notion of H.L.M. is not the only conceptual addition made to fit these new trends in public housing efforts. The less official category of 'grand ensemble' (great ensemble) was used for the first time in 1935 by Maurice Rotival in an article for the periodical *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* (Today's Architecture). At the time, this set phrase described the earliest examples of large groupings of buildings able to provide large, usually round, numbers of flats to fit the growing demand. The Gratte-Ciel of Villeurbanne near Lyon (1934), an assembly of six towers built to house up to 1500 families, and the Cité de la Muette in Drancy near Paris (1935) are both considered as the original grands ensembles, only copied in the late 1950s with the emergence of another form of categorisation, this time generated by state policy. The Z.U.P.

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[34] Le Corbusier's work was part of a world wide architectural movement called the International Style and which lasted throughout most of the twentieth Century. It was based on characteristics common to Modernism and its stylistic aspects. A number of architects developed new solutions to integrate traditional precedents with new social demands and technological possibilities. Among these schools and individual architects, one can mention the Bauhaus in Germany, Antoni Gaudi in Barcelona or Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright in Chicago (cf. Hitchcock & Johnson, 1997).

(Zones à Urbaniser par Priorité - Priority Zones for Urbanisation) were geographical spots designated to host the second movement of urban development. The aim was to reduce financial speculation and facilitate the mobilisation of available territory (Merlin, 1998). From what one can observe today, the vertical model of architecture was perpetuated within these zones which sometimes host more of the local population than the city or commune they are affiliated to. It is also quite common to have a Z.U.P. extend beyond the boundaries of particular administrative units, like the Massy-Anthony Z.U.P., which includes the suburban (and administratively distinct) communes of Massy and Anthony.

Finally, the third era of urban development identified by Vieillard-Baron begins in the 1970s. Early on in the decade, the rate of construction of the grands ensembles slowed down and their size was limited to 2000 flats. Though collective edifices are still being erected nowadays, an emphasis is put on architectural diversity. These buildings can now be found in all sections of the urban territory with the aim of reducing geographical segregation based on social criteria. This original conception of the city, often referred to as 'villes nouvelles' (new towns), is accompanied by a shift in mentality in terms of property acquisition. Legal and political changes have been made to facilitate the ownership of individual houses and thus decrease the need for new H.L.M., especially outside of the boundaries of the city centre (Vieillard-Baron, 1996, 44-47). In other words, there has been a shift in public policy from State welfare to encouraging neo-liberal and private ventures.

The expansion of suburban housing projects in Asnières

Asnières is a good example of the trends described by Vieillard-Baron, its history in terms of urban development fitting the three distinct eras identified by him. Between 1952 and 1954, a hundred housing units including an eleven storey tower were built by the Société d'H.L.M. de la Région Parisienne (H.L.M. company of the Paris region) with the help of the commune and under the supervision of the minister for reconstruction and urbanism. In 1958, over a thousand housing units belonging to the H.L.M. category were erected in the

northern section of the town in a similar manner (Poisson, 1958). However, this was just the beginning of the renovation of the area which would become the Quartiers Nord (see map in appendix 2 which represents the seven current administratively delimitated areas of Asnières, including the Quartiers Nord).

When they were elected in 1959, the new mayor of Asnières Michel Maurice Bokanowski and his team decided to begin the complete renewal of this derelict neighbourhood. At that point it was a place of convergence for shanty towns, scrap and waste storage, and a harbour for immigrant workers as well as people wanting to take advantage of their housing problems (the 'marchands de sommeil' or 'sleep sellers' who rented out insalubrious accommodation with no respect of the legislation, a practice which still exists today). Moreover, the extent of the housing shortage was such that 2,300 families were registered as 'mal-logés' (inadequately housed). This number rose to 2,800 by 1962 as the overall population of Asnières reached 82,201[35].

The municipal council acquired over 200.000 m² of land in 1960 and the SEMERA Company was created to take care of the renovation. This acronym stands for 'société mixte d'équipement et de rénovation d'Asnières' (semi-private company in charge of the facilities and renovation of Asnières), a company mainly owned by a public organisation (the municipal council that holds 51% of the company in this case, the remaining 49% being shared by not-for-profit construction companies) dedicated to the renovation and equipment of Asnières. In 1961, the urban planning project was officially approved by the prefecture after a public enquiry (Dulaure, Joanne and Labedolière, 1992).

From 1963 onwards, the shantytowns of the Quartiers Nord started to disappear as the combined operation of the Seine Prefecture, the national police, the R.A.T.P. (Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens[36], public company in charge of the metro and bus) and the SEMERA began. Deputy mayor Robert Lavergne was put in charge of supervising the evacuation of the shantytowns with the help of the local police and fire departments. The residents were taken

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[35] EHESS figures accessed on the following website in April 2012 :
cassini.ehess.fr/cassini/fr/html
[36] State owned autonomous company in charge of Paris public transportation.

by bus to various designated communal homes as their former homes were bulldozed. This harsh reality was not accepted by all and two social workers from the prefecture were killed during their work by belligerent residents. The prefecture provided housing for single people but in the case of families, it was down to the SEMERA to take care of their situation. Most of them were relocated to a building comprising 130 housing units on the Argenteuil avenue. Muslim families were temporarily housed in a transit estate built by the SONACOTRAL, a construction company for Algerian workers (Chaix, 2006).

By 1965, most of the people who had been identified in 1959 as priorities in terms of housing were living in one of the 1,000 H.L.M. flats that were built during those six years. In 1970, an official inauguration was held with the participation of Prime Minister Jacques Chaban-Delmas[37]. Numerous Asnières residents gathered on the market square on rue Henri-Poincarré before attending some fireworks at the Léo Lagrange stadium. A year later, 4,159 housing units had been provided, including 2,000 in the Quartiers Nord. Overall, 550 families found permanent housing (Chaix, 2006). The two 'grands ensembles' created in that manner now form the two main neighbourhoods of the Courtilles estate: Mourinoux and Freycinet, divided by the Avenue de la Redoute (see appendix 1 for aerial photographs from the 1970s, and appendix 4 for 2013 pictures of the latest urban renovation projects in the area).

In 1976, the SEMERA took on the next stage of the operation with the creation of the Emile Zola Z.A.C. (zone d'aménagement concerté - urban development zone, which replaced the Z.U.P. in 1967, mainly a change of terminology). It lies at the southern edge of the Quartiers Nord and links these areas to the town centre. By 1982, the overall population of Asnières had decreased to 71,220[38] but the Quartiers Nord represented a much larger proportion (nearly twenty percent) of the demographic distribution than it had in the past. Another Z.A.C. was created in 2009 on the banks of the River Seine

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[37] Chaban-Delmas was a member of the R.P.R. party, led by Jacques Chirac at the time. He was forced to quit his position as Prime Minister by President Georges Pompidou who disapproved of his 'new society' project which he deemed too favourable to social and economic reforms.
[38] INSEE figures accessed on 12th April 2012 on the following website : www.insee.fr/fr/base-de-donnees/esl/comparateur.asp?codegeo=COM-92004

(South of town this time) and has been designed to generate 800 new housing units of a higher standard as the overall population of Asnières had risen again to reach 83,300 in 2012[39].

The Quartiers Nord: a changing environment.

The social mediator of the Club des Chardons described the evolution of the neighbourhood she had lived in for 42 years (Freycinet) during an interview. Because of this local longevity, she strongly identifies with the Courtilles estate and its residents. When she arrived in 1971, the estate had existed for five or six years. There was only a small school built in temporary material, an issue on which the improvement today is undeniable with the numerous kindergartens and two large schools present in the area. Moreover, she witnessed the last 'chiffoniers' of the 1970s and argued that the historically bad reputation of the area may come from that period, at least in the rest of Asnières. In other words, there lies the origin of the discursive and territorial boundaries established between the city centre and the Quartiers Nord. Indeed, in those days the other inhabitants of the area were middle class professionals and the population of immigrant origin only constituted a small minority. At the time, the metro line had not yet reached Asnières and the town centre was maybe more bourgeois (to use her own words) than it is now. Her use of the term here is the same as that of the local youths, that is an amalgamating category incorporating economic, social and behavioural factors.

Nonetheless, things had changed by the 1980s according to my colleague (the social mediator). The H.L.M. built in the previous decades had become too expensive for the national and local administrations to maintain as a housing policy for people who did not necessarily need it. As a consequence, the residents of the time who were positioned higher on the economic ladder were encouraged to move away and given good loans for them to buy elsewhere. They were replaced by a new wave of immigrants workers, mainly from North

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[39] Figures from the official Asnières website accessed on 12th April 2012 at: www.asnieres -sur-seine.fr/Tourisme-international/Histoire

Africa. Eventually, some of them moved on and were replaced by a second wave of immigrant workers in the 1990s and 2000s, this time from Central and West Africa.

After describing these changes in the local population, she went on to describe material or physical changes in the Courtilles estate. She had been living in a H.L.M. since she was nine years old and a that time (post–World War II) estates were seen as exemplifying progress and modernity along with other contemporary additions such as supermarkets. She explained that the Courtilles, which she moved to later on, was an improvement for herself and her family. The area already benefited from the presence of a school, sporting infrastructures, public transports and shops. According to her, all of these aspects (with the exception of public transports) have since disappeared (shops) or seriously declined in quantity and quality. For her, the proliferation of drug trafficking in the last decade was made even more visible by the fact that it took place out in the open and was no longer restricted to sellers and building[40].

As a social mediator who lives where she works, she takes care of people who are sometimes her own neighbours. She is a well-known and respected figure in the Freycinet neighbourhood of the Courtilles estate who people easily confide in and trust to solve (at least partially) their social and administrative problems. She is therefore in a good position to witness the evolution of living conditions in the area. For her, they are worsening and the level of general happiness is dropping. She justifies that perception by putting forward the fact that she has to deal with more and more health related issues in her work, that the individual level of the pupils attending the Club des Chardons has strongly decreased (she also helps with the homework support), and that the proportion of single parents has greatly increased. She concluded the interview[41] by saying that, even though the living standards in the neighbourhood have dropped significantly in the past decades, the Courtilles estate is far less isolated than it

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[40] This view was confirmed by recurrent comments from administrators, police representatives, associative workers and local residents I gathered throughout my fieldwork. I have however not found any official statistics to demonstrate whether or not drug trafficking had increased during this period in Asnières or the Quartiers Nord.

[41] This interview took place on 27th of May 2012.

used to be. This is mainly due to the improvement of public transport in the area, with numerous bus lines going through it and, above all, the Courtilles Metro Station. However, from what I have seen when going on outings with the children under my supervision, they hardly ever take the metro, and when they do it is not to go and enjoy inner city Paris. This was particularly flagrant when we took the 'bateaux mouches' (boats that cover the touristy sections of Paris on the sides of the river Seine) and they behaved exactly like foreign tourists, marvelling at any detail that an inner city Parisian such as myself takes for granted. They actually enjoyed discovering some metro stations more than seeing the Louvre Museum from the river. However, this surprising choice of focus can be explained by the fact that many of the children on this particular outing were too young to take the metro on their own and would therefore have to depend on their parents to take them, which for most was not often the case.

Nonetheless, this improvement in terms of transportation was followed by other important transformations in the local landscape. Indeed, the various urban plans which are discussed here and in chapter 5 have been put in place for the 're-renovation' of the area. This might not however be good news for the present inhabitants of the Courtilles as they might have to move further away as this new project unfolds. Unlike their predecessors, it will not be because they can afford to, but this time because they cannot afford not to as prices go up due to gentrification.

Indeed, although the renovation of the Quartiers Nord has given a much-needed boost to the organisation and distribution of housing throughout the commune's territory, it has also widened the breach between the town centre of Asnières and these more recent neighbourhoods. If the urbanisation of areas on the commune's edges has enabled local authorities to resolve some of the town's housing-related problems, socio-economic disparities have been made more visible as a consequence. The poorer families and individuals remain in the Quartiers Nord whereas those with a higher potential for social mobility either choose to live in the town centre or simply to move within the limits of Paris itself. The estates that compose the Quartiers Nord and that once constituted a solution to housing difficulties and an improvement on prior precarious living conditions are now seen as an unfavourable starting point, benefiting from none

of the advantages intrinsic to living in Asnières town centre or Paris. This perspective is however contestable in the light of other demotic experiences of the Quartiers Nord, as we will see throughout this thesis. Let us first consider the dominant perspectives of the Quartiers Nord.

Dominant perspectives of the Quartiers Nord and their impact on demotic representations

This thesis is about the comparison of various perspectives of Asnières' Quartiers Nord and of the role associations play within it. In the introductory chapter, I have discussed the distinction established by Gerd Baumann (1996, 1997) between dominant discourses which establish boundaries and demotic discourses which more often than not transgress these boundaries. This distinction allows us to expose the opposition between these two types of discourse in the context of our discussion of the Quartiers Nord. The dominant discourse reifies culture and community as 'essences'. Boundaries are defined and accepted through differences in religion, ethnicity, geographic positioning and so forth. Contrastingly, the demotic discourse encompasses the fact that culture is affected by social interactions and the consequent 'fusion' of identities. It therefore goes beyond previously established divisions. In the demotic discourse, alliances are negotiated in the 'reconstruction' of culture, notably through leisure activities and interests. Processes of identification often rely on this type of trans-cultural alliances taking place on a daily basis. This creates a dialectic tension with the monological discourse of the nation-state.

In this section, I will expose what I believe to be the three main elements of the dominant discourse on territorial and social segmentation (as well as some of their repercussions at the local level): policy labelling, socio-urban boundaries, and the media. By doing so, I aim to establish the discursive framework and lay the foundations for further discussions on territoriality, identity and social regulation.

From the policy labelling of 'difficult neighbourhoods' to the formation territorial identities.

Once a particular neighbourhood of the urban periphery has been classified by the local and national administration as 'difficult', it will be delimitated geographically, or territorialized. The French name attributed to these areas is 'territoires politiques de la ville', that is 'policy territories of the town or city'. This labelling confirms the role of urban policies in the establishment of socio-urban boundaries. The way in which such procedures take place generates the idea that the effects of the economic 'crisis' are limited to these territories. The prejudice against the inhabitants of certain neighbourhoods is therefore legitimated by the State. Consequently, the political discourse on the degradation of living standards in the *banlieues* becomes more extreme. The latter are perceived not as a consequence of the 'crisis' in question but as the places from which it emanates.

Mustafa Dikeç (2007) explains how this shift happened. In the 1980s, municipal and district authorities played an initiating role when a given neighbourhood became included in such urban policies, an inclusion which was deemed temporary. The aim was to help entire areas escape their unfavourable situation. Throughout the years, urban policy became more and more institutionalised and codified, as exemplified by the Pacte de Relance pour la Ville (Alliance for Urban Revival) of 1996 and its denominating labels: Zones Urbaines Sensibles (Sensitive Urban Zones), Zones de Redynamisation Urbaine (Zones for Urban Re-energising), Zones Franches Urbaines (Urban Buffer Zones) (Dikeç, 2007, 48-60).

During this institutionalising process, urban policy in France changed in two crucial and related ways. Firstly, it became more vertical. Policy makers from the political and administrative realms made more decisions with less involvement from and consultation of the local population. Secondly, the selection of given neighbourhoods to be incorporated in urban policy became more 'technical' and less political due to the integration of statistical criteria. In that sense, the labelling of neighbourhoods as selected for a particular urban

policy became the recognition of its difficult situation rather than an expression of the political will to act upon it (Dikeç, 2007, 60-68).

This trend is exemplified by the shift in urban policy that occurred in the early 2000s. In 2002, Jean-Louis Borloo was appointed Minister for the City and outlined his vision for urban policy, which he referred to as a 'new battle for France'. For him, the Republic had to ensure the safety of the residents of urban policy neighbourhoods through its 'forces of order' (*Le Monde*, 28 May 2002, 12). At the forefront of Borloo's urban policy lay the project of 'breaking up the ghettos' (Délégation Interministérielle à la Ville, 2004, 24). On this rare occasion, a Minister for the city explicitly referred to urban policy neighbourhoods as ghettos 'at the margins of national territory' (*Le Monde,* 19 June 2003, 8). The priorities defined by Borloo were applied in the 'Borloo law', passed in August 2003. For Philippe Estèbe (2004), it reduced the spaces of urban policy to an ensemble of housing estates. It changed the focus from inhabitantsto the locus of intervention, the latter being portrayed as a problem in itself (Estèbe, 2004, 255).

Along those lines, Dikeç demonstrates that, in its effort to follow Republican ideals and reduce inequalities between territories, the French State intervenes along spatially determined lines to impact on the most vulnerable sections of the national population (Dikeç, 2007, 28-34). The French Republican model of integration is based on the notion of equality between citizens and the principle of assimilation, the latter aiming at erasing ethnic, cultural and religious differences from the public realm. This Republican heritage may be seen as the foundation of the dominant discourse in France. However, one could argue, as Christian Rinaudo (1999) does, that there is a crisis in the Republican political and ideological tradition in France combined with another crisis in the interpretational paradigm which posits the complete unity of society under the control of the state (Rinaudo, 1999, 189). In that sense, the legitimacy of the dominant discourse on the urban periphery and on integration in France is being challenged by the people whose situation it is meant to consider. The Republican model can therefore be criticised for not taking into account the differences in identity that are meaningful to each individual.

This paradox is expressed in the sometimes incongruous application of the dominant discourse in the *banlieues*. Indeed, neighbourhoods, which are deemed to be problematic such as certain estates and *grands ensembles*, are administered and portrayed differently than other areas of the French urban territory as we will see in the next chapter when considering official views on urban planning and demographic distribution. However, their inhabitants are expected to go beyond this differential in the way they are treated in order to be integrated to the nation. This is illustrated by the debate on *banlieue* schools. Indeed, banlieue schools are expected to participate in the national integration of the children of immigrants and the working class following the unifying project of the Republic and to produce equal citizens who will contribute to national cohesion. Yet, as Bernard Charlot argues, divisions in the 'educational landscape' lead to social and pedagogical divisions (1994, 85-97). The academic context in which banlieue children evolve is often of a lesser quality than that of their inner-city counterparts. Furthermore, *banlieue* school advisors seem more inclined to recommend training for manual labour rather than the mainstream BAC to most of their pupils as we will see in chapter four when discussing education-related issues in the Quartiers Nord.

Furthermore, the 'culturally homogenising' intentions of French Republicanism which are in this case directed towards *banlieue* inhabitants may hide social problems that the dominant discourse on integration does not address. Here, discrepancies with the demotic discourse on group and individual identity emerging from the *banlieues* become apparent. The people who are blamed for the affirmation of their ethnic or community-based identities often adopt this particular form of social positioning and self-representation in reaction to stigmatising discourses (Gallisot, 1994, 25).

Similarly, estate youths who are blamed for l'insécurité and therefore portrayed as delinquents in the dominant discourse may be the ones who suffer the most from criminal activities perpetrated in their own neighbourhoods. They often are direct victims of crime or affected by the reputation of their estate, neighbourhood or area code when entering the job market and in their interactions with the police as we will see in chapter seven when dealing with issues of social regulation.

On 20th April 2010, President Nicolas Sarkozy visited the Parisian suburb of Tremblay after several public buses had been attacked and vandalised by a group of youths. When he addressed his audience and the media, the theme of l'insécurité was the main focus of his speech, Sarkozy insisting on the need to increase police presence as a response to this incident. Moreover, this angle was combined with the use of territorial references: "Aucune commune, aucun quartier, aucun hall d'immeuble de Seine-Saint-Denis n'échappera à l'autorité de la loi"[42]. By insisting on the fact that events took place in the district with one of the worst reputations in France and a high percentage of estate-type neighbourhoods, Sarkozy (as President of the Republic) contributes to the discourse which stigmatises entire areas (and particular spaces within them such as tower halls) as not only being prone to l'insécurité, but as generating it.

This dominant political discourse legitimising heavier police presence and activity in neighbourhoods identified as 'dangerous' contrasts with the perceptions and experiences of many of the young residents of the Quartiers Nord with whom I discussed such issues. When I interviewed one of the teenagers of the Club des Chardons, Mahmoud a fifteen year old[43], he seemed particularly agitated and angry. I asked him what had happened:

M.: It's nothing. Just got an I.D. check from the police and they were really annoying.

Y.: Were you doing anything wrong?

M.: No, just walking down the street…

Y.: You know, it has happened to me too.

M.: Of course. This isn't the first time for me either. I should be used to it. But it's been getting more frequent since Samy's death[44]. They (the

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[42] Direct quote from the speech accessed on 22/02/2014 at
http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/societe/20100420.OBS2729/nicolas-sarkozy-ressort-son-grand-discours-sur-la-securite-en-seine-saint-denis.html
Translation: "No commune, no neighbourhood, no building hall of the Seine-Saint-Denis district will escape the authority of the law."

[43] The interview took place on 27/01/2012.

[44] Samy was a fifteen year old resident of the Quartiers Nord who was fatally stabbed there in a street fight between local youths and others from a rival estate a couple of months before my

police officers) even mentioned him. It's not like they know anything about him. It just makes me angry.

Y.: What did they say?

M.: Well, when I asked them why they picked me, they just answered that they did this routinely and randomly, that the youths of the neighbourhood needed to see that the police are present in order to avoid another tragedy.

Y.: How did you respond to that?

M.: I didn't. Better keep your mouth shut with those people. They think we're all criminals anyway, nothing will change that as long as I live here. I can't wait to get rich and live in a place where there isn't police everywhere.

Y.: Don't you like it here?

M.: Of course I do. All my friends and family live here. This is my home. I could never live with those annoying posh people anyway. I'm just sick of people getting the wrong idea about us based on one incident.

As we can see from this exchange, stigmatising processes contribute to the elaboration of a demotic discourse on the *banlieue* which is linked to personal and group identity formation. It emerges in response to the negative image generated by the dominant discourse. Although a portion of the youth chooses to adopt the codes of the 'gangster' so popular in the hip-hop sub-culture, most of them simply take pride in the fact that they are from a particular neighbourhood and take advantage of the street credibility it earns them. However, some of them also want to escape this environment and become a part

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fieldwork started (2011); there have been 'historical' tensions between youths from Asnières estates and youths from estates in the neighbouring commune of Gennevilliers.
Moreover, numerous local messages of sympathy for Samy are visible on the walls and streets of the Courtilles estate. Over a year after the incident, one could still see graffiti in his memory on the walls of various buildings of the Quartiers Nord. Flowers are also regularly placed where he died. Other forms of homage such as this song and video of various Asnières rappers can also be found: www.youtube.com/watch?v=9I1diRISJPo . Furthermore, this video is a good example of demotic representations of the Quartiers Nord where the emphasis is put on friendship, family and solidarity among members of th elocal community.

of mainstream society by climbing the social ladder and moving out of the suburbs.

In that sense, the demotic discourse on difficult neighbourhoods is ambivalent. This ambivalence is manifested in the attitude residents of these areas adopt with respect to their neighbourhoods, oscillating between rejection and defence. They reject those who contribute to the bad reputation of the estate, or at least who behave in a manner they personally disapprove of, yet they also refute the fact that these people are representative of their living environment. In a way, most estate residents complain about their neighbourhoods because their reputation leads to them being stigmatised rather than because they do not want to live there. The discrepancies between dominant and demotic discourses on difficult neighbourhoods and their integration/exclusion from the mainstream may actually constitute the most significant boundary separating their inhabitants from their inner-city counterparts.

The wide range of levels of personal and group identification in the Quartiers Nord influence social and spatial organisation across the Asnières commune. The principles of differentiation at the centre of stigmatising and rehabilitating mechanisms also contribute to the formulation of socio-urban boundaries. Therefore, the criteria along which categories of people are established become central to individual processes of identity formation and self-representation as well as the territorial repartition of the population, thus reinforcing the separation between the self and the other, between 'us' and 'them'.

As we have seen, stigmatising trends are not exclusively formulated outside of the neighbourhoods they apply to. They are also the result of processes of identification within them (Avenel, 2004, 43). Stigmatisation is the product of social interactions between residents as well as an ideological instrument for the media and politicians. The prejudice against certain neighbourhoods is sometimes propagated by their own inhabitants. This collective stigma therefore affects most relationships both inside and outside of the *banlieue*, altering perceptions and representations of the self and the community. In that sense, mainstream representations of particular areas have an effect within them. However, this does not mean to say that the residents of such

territories have not created their own techniques and strategies for negotiating these contradictory discourses (de Certeau, 1990) as we will see in chapter 6 when considering the effects of processes of territorialisation on identity formation in the Quartiers Nord.

These dividing notions are developed in diverse circumstances, both inside and outside of estates and grands ensembles such as the Quartiers Nord of Asnières. The frequency of national and communal level insecurity-based discourses on the difficult neighbourhoods is combined with cultural, religious, generational and overall reductive representations of the urban periphery and its inhabitants. This is illustrated by the recurrent link established in the media, political and academic realms between the *banlieue* and immigration which reinforces the fragmentation of the working class and of the urban space which has become synonymous with it (Donzelot and Jaillet, 1999).

Socio-urban boundaries

In her *La Ville et ses Frontières* (*The City and Its Borders*), Brigitte Moulin (2001) uncovers processes of social segregation and the 'ethnicisation' of social relationships in various suburbs around Paris (in the Hauts-de-Seine and Seine Saint-Denis districts). She focuses on what she terms 'socio-urban borders', going beyond strictly geographic and administrative maps of the suburban territory, demonstrating how these boundaries lead to the segregation of given social groups along generational, ethnic and spatial lines (Moulin, 2001, 13). In this section, I wish to draw from this idea of socio-urban boundaries as part of both dominant and demotic representations of territorial identities, whether they be individual or collective, in order to explain how the local level segmentation of the population occurs.

The socio-urban boundaries I witnessed throughout my time in the field (and that will be discussed in detail in chapter 5 with regards to notions of centre and periphery) function at a variety of levels. They express divisions between categories of people along lines of identification which are unevenly valued. The symbolic potential of these collectively established boundaries depends on their individual application and on their degree of social and institutional legitimacy.

In that manner, they can become physical lines of demarcation. Their production, whether it be internal, external or both, stems from social instincts of protection against a threatening environment (Moulin, 2001, 224-229). These boundaries delimitate zones of cultural exchange between protagonists on each side of them.

Socio-urban boundaries are permeable and tend to fluctuate. This is partly due to the fact that they are often not recognised institutionally. Their development in cities and their periphery is linked to generational, geographic (in terms of the region of origin of local residents) or urban concerns (Moulin, 2001). However, I believe that they really only compose a single social boundary emerging from class differentiation. As I mentioned in chapter two, one of the first questions the children whom I helped with their homework asked me after hearing the way I expressed myself was whether I am a 'bourgeois'. When I asked them what they considered bourgeois, they answered that it is someone who does not live in a 'cité' (estate). When I told them that I grew up in the Paris city centre they all agreed on the fact that I am indeed a *bourgeois*. In their own way, they were establishing a link between social, economic and spatial segmentation.

For Moulin, it is this kind of representation which is in turn propagated or confirmed through processes of territorialisation resulting from private and public policies in terms of housing, access to employment, education and religious affiliation. Moreover, these 'boundaries within the social boundary' are created in the framework of the massive pauperisation of urban populations due to the recent instability and fragility of the labour market and the spatial or territorial approach to social discrepancies that policy makers have adopted (Moulin, 2001, 154-181).

These divisions result from strategies of dissociation among urban populations. They become divided into social groups (based on varying criteria such as class, territory, or ethnicity) with different agendas and that coexist, sometimes with difficulty, within the physical and conceptual space of the *banlieue*. This phenomenon may be understood as a reaction to the strong feeling of rejection attached to the recurrent stigmatising of certain neighbourhoods. Furthermore, the social fragmentation mentioned above can

generate conflict and exclusion as the communities in question find themselves at the margin of the nationally dominant socio-cultural model. They are only partially in touch with it, thus reinforcing existing boundaries and even generating new ones as a means of resistance. This occurs on a daily basis and in a spontaneous manner.

At the end of the last homework session I was supervising before a school holiday, I allowed three of my 11 year old pupils to recite rap lyrics that they had been working on all term. A vast majority of its content revolved around the themes of money, violence and above all representing their neighbourhood as is often the case in contemporary French rap. The latter topic was always dealt with in terms of opposition, the Courtilles estate being compared to the rivalling Luth estate in Gennevilliers[45], and the 92 *département* (or district) to the neighbouring 93 département. There was correspondingly a lot of disapproving statements about the rest of Asnières, and especially the richer central neighbourhoods which were portrayed as the home of the reigning class which uses the police as a militia to oppress the poorer population. Here is a translated sample of their rap:

> *Welcome to the Courtilles, where the rascals live and the rich die poor. Up in the towers we lurk, waiting for the right prey. Looking far ahead, watching them from a distance. Let the town's people and their police dogs live in fear. (...) Ready to make a move, on the other side of the motorway people get prepared to pay. We're the top of the Hauts-de-Seine[46], laying everyone else down at the bottom of the river. Prepare in the South to face the cold wind from the North.*

Although this rap represents a romanticised and fictional piece of oral expression, it exemplifies a certain type of representation of 'difficult neighbourhoods' which emerges from within them as a reaction to certain

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[45] Gennevilliers is one of the neighbouring communes to Asnières. It is also composed of various socio-economic areas. The 'equivalent' of the Courtilles estate in Gennevilliers would be the Luth estate. The two are separated by a motorway.
[46] In French there is a play on the word 'haut' which means 'top' or 'high'.

tangible disadvantages and to what some local residents (especially children and teenagers) see as mainstream representations of them.

Consequently, the multiplication of social and spatial boundaries becomes more apparent as they emerge from a sense of conflict or at least opposition. These boundaries are physically marked on the local territory and materialise in the shape of collective facilities ranging from public benches to sporting grounds and neighbourhood schools. When tensions between groups reach their paroxysm, these places become a locus for the expression of such tensions, sometimes in their most violent forms (riots or fights for example). These outbursts of rage and aggression are then attributed to the neighbourhoods in question and impact upon their reputation. The fight that cost the life of a child before my arrival in the Courtilles was for example presented to me both by my co-workers and the children themselves as the result of a feud between local youths and that of the Luth estate in Gennevilliers.

Interventions from state representatives, whether it be the police or local administration, are partially determined by these physical manifestations of unease. The boundaries of territories where intervention is required are therefore established in that manner. As a result, these local territories will paradoxically become enclaves within the national territory and their inhabitants will suffer even more from feelings of exclusion. Moreover, the relegation of entire areas of the urban periphery and of their residents is confirmed by the distinct manner in which they are administrated, far from the policies that apply to the rest of the national landscape.

Interestingly, some of the views expressed by the children in their rap were confirmed by the town hall historian during our conversation. He explained that many of the town centres of the 92 *département* or district (Hauts-de-Seine*)* are populated mainly by the middle class. This means that these suburban towns are less stigmatised in comparison to those of the 93 *département* at the national and regional levels. Indeed, the 93 area code has become commonly associated with estate life in the shared imagery promoted in rap songs, and this ever since the emergence of numerous French rap bands such as NTM since the late 1980s. However, this also means that the socio-economic disparities between town centres and peripheral estates within the 92 *département* is greater and more

visible. He also explained that the Quartiers Nord of Asnières have always had the reputation of housing people on the margins of the local 'mainstream' or 'central' society, illustrating his argument by the fact that both left-wing and right-wing administrations had agreed on the fact that the controversial first mosque of the commune should be built there.

One of the main attributes of my time in the field has been to allow me to recognise and observe differences in representations of the Quartiers Nord. I was able to contrast the image generated by such official discourses and policies on the matter to that of local residents. I was consequently capable of identifying another significant boundary between centre and periphery, between mainstream and local representations of difficult neighbourhoods that mutually influence each other. The latter could be described as a discursive boundary with ground-level repercussions.

Young residents and the media representation of the neighbourhood

As we will discuss the effects of the dominant discourse on estate youths in France and the Quartiers Nord in relation to social regulation in chapter seven, it is important to grasp the methodology of some of the media promoting it. Furthermore, this will allow us to identify some of the reasons why journalists are often mistrusted by the inhabitants of the *banlieues* as exemplified by the initially aggressive reactions I have witnessed from children and teenagers towards them when they came to interview the mediator of the Club des Chardons during a homework session. The general idea among the youths was that they were in some way spying on them for the police and that if they were not, they were going to misrepresent them as thugs.

As I helped a group of thirteen year olds with their schoolwork, I overheard one of them saying to the other: "She (the journalist) doesn't care about us. She just wants to write her paper about how everyone here is a criminal and go.". I later asked this teenager what he thought the role of the journalist should be, to which he answered:

- They should just tell the truth.
- Why? Do you have examples of them lying about the neighbourhood or its residents?
- No… but they always ask questions and talk about the same things. It's always about Samy and other fights.
- But those things do or did happen.
- Yes, but they should write about other stuff too.
- Such as?
- I don't know. Sports or rappers or something.
- I see. The stuff you are interested in.
- Yes. Not just me though. We all are. And it's more important to us than fighting.

A sense of misrepresentation emerges from this conversation. This teenager blamed the journalists for describing his neighbourhood based on incidents that do not reflect his daily life and interests or that of other residents in his view. His point can actually be validated in the light of some of the press articles that can be found on the Quartiers Nord. For example, an article from the *Parisien*[47] newspaper on the activities of Club des Chardons which was written not long after Samy's death in fact mainly focuses on the tense setting of the neighbourhood and the degradation of living standards there, as well as on the feud between estates[48]. The theme of educational support and of the association's work only appears in the final section of the article.

Moreover, this article was complemented about a month later (27/04/2011) in the same newspaper by another one, this time focused exclusively on the tensions between the two biggest estates of Asnières and Gennevilliers (Courtilles and Luth), each positioned on one side of the boulevard where the Courtilles metro station lies. This article described the various fights

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[47] *Le Parisien* is part of the national daily newspaper *Aujourd'hui en France*, which varies from region to region.
[48] The article "*Les gamins des Chardons prennent goût à l'école*" (the kids of the Chardons develop a liking for school) was published on 23/03/2011 and is available online at www.leparisien.fr/gennevilliers-92230/les-gamins-des-chardons-prennent-gout-a-l-ecole-23-03-2011-1372372.php

that occurred between the young residents of the two estates and the police's repressive reaction to them[49]. It was simply entitled "Les bandes des Courtilles rouvrent les hostilities" which translates as "the Courtilles youth groups re-ignite hostilities". Furthermore, the *Parisien* was not the only newspaper to cover this topic as illustrated by the very similar one published in one of France's three main information newspapers *Le Figaro* on 18/03/2011[50]. This article entitled "Guerre absurde entre les cités d'Asnières et de Gennevilliers" (Absurd war between estates of Asnières and Gennvilliers) deals with the same theme in a similar manner, adding the testimony of an anonymous 'retired' drug dealer from the area explaining that this rivalry has existed for as long as he can remember. The photograph accompanying the article showed a group of riot police in formation by the Courtilles metro station.

These articles concerning the Courtilles estate and its young population in particular only appeared once a child had died and mainly focused on tensions and other (infrequent) negative elements of local life. Considering their timing and content, it is not surprising that some of the young residents get the impression that journalists only appear in the neighbourhood when tragic incidents occur and blame them for their opportunistic behaviour.

This view is also present in a scene from Mathieu Kassovitz's film *La Haine* (1995) where the three main protagonists (youths from a *banlieue* estate) react to journalists' questions about recent riots by indicating that "this is not the way to the zoo", implying that they look at them like caged animals, before throwing stones at their car. The relevance of this discussion also lies in the fact that the social role of journalists, their methods and the technical difficulties they may encounter are all determinants in the choice of topics investigated and exposed. Patrick Champagne, a sociologist who specialised in the analysis of social domination, insists on this point, emphasising the role of the media in terms of shedding light over certain social realities: "*Les malaises sociaux n'ont*

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[49] Article consulted online on 17/06/2011 at www.leparisien.fr/hauts-de-seine-92/les-bandes-des-courtilles-rouvrent-les-hostilites-27-04-2011-1424310.php
[50] Article consulted online on 17/06/2011 at www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2011/03/17/01016-20110317ARTFIG00799-guerre-absurde-entre-les-cites-d-asnieres-et-de-gennevilliers.php

une existence visible que lorsque les médias en parlent, c'est à dire lorsqu'ils sont reconnus comme tels par les journalistes"[51] (Champagne, 1993, 61).

Inevitably, mainstream journalists are on the lookout for commercially viable news on top of their social duty to inform people and incorporate issues in the public sphere of discussion. Among these lucrative themes are confrontational incidents, often dramatically moving, which demonstrate the existence of social unease. As a consequence, such events have been relentlessly depicted since the early 1980s, especially when they take place in the *banlieues*. The perpetuation of violence, police reaction (usually also of a violent nature) and general agitation in suburbs and estates around France have been broadly exposed and discussed, thus enhancing the idea of the '*banlieues* à problèmes' (problematic suburbs)[52].

Reciprocally, as social unease sells media productions and the *banlieues* constitute a good place to find images of the latter, young local inhabitants get the feeling journalists no longer bother with observation, coming to estates looking for examples to fit their pre-established narratives. It is therefore easy to imagine how the description and illustration of a social climate may lead to an exaggeration of the social relevance of certain street-level incidents within the national debate on exclusion and insecurity. This is mainly due to the media's capacity to mobilise and influence their public's opinion on a given issue. Champagne confirms this view and recognises the testimonial power of television footage:

> "*les images exercent un effet d'évidence très puissant: plus sans doute que le discours, elles semblent designer une réalité indiscutable bien*

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[51] Translation : Social unease only becomes visible when the media talk about it, that is when it is recognised as such by journalists.

[52] Examples of such media representations at the national level are recurrent across the years and include (among others) articles in *Le Point*: "Violences en banlieue" (Violence in the banlieue, 19/08/2012), *Le Monde*: "Banlieues: le noyau dur de la violence" (Banlieues: the root of violence, 01/11/2006), or *Le Figaro*: "Montée des violences dans les banlieues des villes moyennes" (Growth of violence in the suburbs of medium-sized towns, 01/11/2006).

qu'elles soient également le produit d'un travail plus ou moins explicite
de sélection et de construction "[53] (Champagne, 1993, 63).

Furthermore, the media representation of the *banlieue* may transcend national borders. Similar to the French press and television influencing civil society's selection and perception of social problems worthy of debate, the international media also converge in their coverage whilst they introduce them to the global community. After the riots of 2005, *Time* magazine dedicated one of its cover articles for the month of November to "the other face of France" (*Time*, 21 November 2005), describing the growing gap between the *banlieues* and the rest of the country in terms of lifestyles and opportunities. Despite the fact this article does not place the blame on the inhabitants of French suburbs and estates but rather on the unfair socio-economic system they are a part of, it nonetheless portrays a bleak and violent situation thus contributing to the reproduction of the poor image of the *banlieues* youths, even to observers outside of France.

The reputation of the Quartiers Nord and of the various subdivisions that compose the area (Courtilles estate and Mourinoux and Freycinet neighbourhoods or 'grands ensembles' that compose it, Emile Zola Z.A.C.) is comparable to that of other suburban areas portrayed as difficult all over the French territory. When the intertwined notions of integration and exclusion are discussed at the level of the Asnières commune, whether it be in the attribution of specific urban planning labels or when discussing the work of local associations, the Quartiers Nord are always identified as the zone which epitomises urban and social difficulties. This means that the general understanding of local processes of exclusion takes place at a territorial level with a spatial approach to social problems.

Although the themes of urban segregation and of the isolation of the working-class periphery are not new to the national (mainstream) debate, the idea that this periphery is itself segmented internally is. The use of criteria such

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[53] Translation : images serve as powerful evidence : probably more than discourse, they seem to designate an unquestionable reality despite the fact that they are also the product of a more or less explicit process of selection and construction.

as ethnicity, religion, age or gender as modes of negotiating social interaction apply in the *banlieue*s just as anywhere else in France. Furthermore, this phenomenon is enhanced by processes of territorialisation which appear to be more significant in the context of the *banlieue* than within the limits of French cities. However, media representations of certain suburban estates as 'difficult neighbourhoods' combined with the policy labelling of these areas confirm a dominant discourse based on differences rather than similarities with what can be termed 'mainstream France'. In that sense, this dominant discourse enhances the socio-urban boundaries between centre and periphery. Now that we have introduced various dominant perceptions of life in the Quartiers Nord of Asnières, let us turn our attention to the area's associations.

The local associative realm

After having described the historical evolution of Asnières as a whole and of the Quartiers Nord in particular, it is now time for us to turn our attention to the associations that are present on the local territory. Asnières is known in the 92 *département* for having a rich associative network as illustrated by the creation of over 50 new associations between 2010 and 2011, and by the growing number of adherents and volunteers[54]. Access to a variety of activities and services contribute to the fight against social and territorial inequalities. The solidarity and education based associations that take part in this effort are numerous and depend largely on local funding. Although they do not establish a direct link between residents and their administrators, they nevertheless aim at consolidating mobilisation through cultural and educational activities.

At the political level, the mayor of Asnières since 2008 and Hauts-de-Seine deputy since 2012, the socialist Sébastien Pietrasanta, has been adopting a position of proximity with the population of the Quartiers Nord. He is himself from the Freycinet neighbourhood of the Courtilles estate and continues to live there. Unlike other politicians who only set foot in the Quartiers Nord during

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[54] This information is taken from the official town guide of associations, 2011-2012.

periods of election in order to shake as many hands as possible (they suddenly appeared on the market place the Saturday morning before the legislative elections of June 2012), I saw him on various occasions actively taking part as an official to neighbourhood initiatives. He comes from the associative realm and has initiated various projects of solidarity and social cohesion ever since his high-school days (he is in his mid-thirties now)[55]. I gathered this information about him through various conversations with association members who have known him since he was a child. For him, a good way of involving estate inhabitants in the rehabilitation of their neighbourhoods can be found in the growing role of associations (this is taken from his closing speech at the Forum des Associations on 11/09/2011).

For Brigitte Moulin, the portion of French citizens who desire a more participative democracy may find it in this form of local political culture. Local political culture[56] is composed of multiple associations concerned with civil rights, cultural manifestations and the defence of communities among other themes. Moulin describes these associations as 'écoles de la citoyenneté' (citizenship schools) where people may acquire knowledge on the different ways in which they can take part in the running of their living environment (Moulin, 2001, 109-110). Asnières has over 540 associations[57] which participate in the effort to improve the lives of residents and cover a wide range of themes. I will describe these further down when discussing the activities of associations I have been in close contact with and that are the most relevant to my general argument about the role they play in terms of social cohesion.

Local authorities have put in place different structures to facilitate the development of associative initiatives as well as providing a platform for exchanges between associative leaders and town hall officials. In conformity with the national legislation, the town of Asnières can financially support associations. This type of funding is subject to the vote of the municipal council.

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[55] He for instance founded the Cité d'Idées association in 1997 which aimed at regrouping the efforts of the various local associations on particular themes thus improving the collaboration between them. It ceased to exist in 2006.

[56] Here, the term 'political' refers to influence within the public sphere.

[57] This number was given to me by the deputy mayor in charge of associations and can be found in the official town guide of associations, 2011-2012.

The latter attributes funds after consulting the administratively processed applications of associations that have been submitted to the town hall service in charge of that (Service Vie Associative). These applications have to be handed in between the months of May and September of the year preceding the vote. As the administrators of the Club des Chardons and the Maison des Femmes have explained to me, this process is a demanding one in terms of workload. It is also very stressful as the associations' budget for the following year nearly exclusively depends on the outcome of the application.

The main point of contact between associations and the town hall remains the Service Vie Associative (Associative Life Department, the town hall's departments dealing with local associations) and its extension, the Maison des Associations (house of associations) which I visited when meeting with the people of France Bénévolat at the beginning of my fieldwork. These two complementary structures inform and accompany associations in their administrative applications and the running of their activities (finding locations and infrastructures). They also support any form of municipal events that are related to associations and the reinforcement of their bond with the local residents and volunteers.

Another occasion on which I visited the Maison des Associations was to meet with the deputy mayor in charge of associations, Michel Lasserre de Rozelle. He detailed for me the various workings of his department and its role in the associative ecosystem of Asnières. He leads a network of people and structures dedicated to supporting associative leaders in their initiatives. In that respect, his role and that of his team is a generalist one as he told me, with the aim of maintaining cohesion among associations and generating new initiatives that would complement rather than compete with existing projects.

His office coordinates concrete ground level operations (such as jointly organised events that include several associations) and provide much needed logistical support. Various types of municipally-owned locations (from conference rooms to small scale teaching spaces) are made available for activities around the year, including meetings and stage shows. In order to benefit from them, one has to apply with the deputy mayor who then waits for the results of an enquiry made by the Service Vie Associative before making a

decision. Still, these locations are not free of charge and their price depends on their size and on the nature of the activities put in place. Moreover, the municipality offers other types of material support such as renting out chairs, tables, publicity/informative billboards or audio-visual equipment. Again, these applications are subject to the approval of the Service Vie Associative of the town hall after it has evaluated the yearly amount of indirect subsidies received by each association. The latter information should be included in the running budget that associations provide the town hall with when they apply for funding each year.

The Service Vie Associative organises 'global' events in order to federate associations, salute their work and reinforce their visibility. Along those lines, the Garden Party (an English expression which has entered the French language) that takes place between May and June every year allows associative leaders to meet in a relaxed environment and exchange ideas. The Fête de la Ville occurs at the end of May and consists of a giant procession around the entire town in which associations take part and are clearly identified in public speeches and on banners or other advertising accessories. One also has to mention the Forum des Associations (about 200 associations have a stand to promote their work and attract new adherents) in which I took part and which will be described in more detail in the next chapter.

The different types of associations on the Asnières territory

To conclude this presentation of Asnières' associative realm, I will now briefly depict the various types of associations present in Asnières, with an emphasis on the ones most relevant to this study, aside from the two I actually worked in, that are discussed in detail throughout this thesis. In the town's guide to associations, they are divided in eight categories with a certain level of congruence between them as they nearly all include a 'multi-activity' subsection. These categories are: culture, education, childhood, family, leisure, health, social solidarity and sports.

The 'culture' category includes associations with activities linked to local history (Les Amis du Vieux Asnières, 'friends of the old Asnières'), painting

(Motif d'Art, Créative Handicap…), music (Crescendo, Nour Universal…), dance (Jazz Dance et Companie, Les Baladines…)or the circus (Cri-o-lane Circus, Pop lit thé) among other themes. Many of the associations in the cultural section of the guide are linked to specific migrant communities, such as the Association Franco-Portugaise (French-Portuguese association), the Nataraja Institut de danses Indiennes (Nataraja institute of Indian dances) or Couleur des Tropiques (tropical colours).

The education category is composed of parents' associations that exist in every school and of homework support associations. The Club des Chardons can be classified as a part of the latter, although it has various parts which go beyond this particular activity. Other associations dealing with homework support include l'A.F.E.V.[58] which is run by university students, and associations specifically attached to each individual school in Asnières.

The 'childhood' and 'family' categories can be theoretically assimilated as they basically cover together the different generations of Asnières residents, from children (boyscouts, Fédération des Jeunes d'Asnières which translates as 'federation of Asnières young residents'…) and their parents (the Maison des Femmes for women, Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial which translates as 'the French movement for family planning'…), to the elderly (Association Franco-Marocaine d'Aide aux Personnes Agées which translates as 'French-Moroccan association for the support of the elderly', Club des Bruyères…). The range of activities offered by these associations is wide as they relate to leisure, administrative support and education.

I will also describe the 'leisure' and 'sports' categories in an amalgamated manner as their aims (as stated in the town's official association guide) of fighting boredom and providing a good basis for mental and physical health, are congruent. Various activities are on offer in Asnières, from manual ones (Fées Mains which offers clothes designing activities, Etincelle Ateliers covering various creative small-scale building activities), game oriented ones

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[58] A.F.E.V. (Association de la Fondation Etudiante pour la Ville, association of the student foundation for the urban life) was founded in 1991 and is present all over the French urban territory. It functions on the basis of one student tutoring one pupil at a time so as to provide a thorough individualised support and establish a strong bond between the two.

(Chess or Go associations for example), to excursions and trips (Club Essor 85, Selandi…). I have to mention the fact that Asnières is a very sports-oriented town, with numerous and diverse sporting associations and clubs. Nearly all of the children I encountered in my work took part in at least one of them. Young adults however seem to be less inclined to participate in such activities, at least in this organised way. The football grounds and basketball courts around the Courtilles estate are filled with these 'older' residents involved in casual games when the weather allows it.

The 'health' category includes associations concerned with the personal/daily support of people who are victims of particular illnesses or conditions and are usually the local branch of a national or regional association: Association Française de Sclérose en Plaques (multiple sclerosis), Association France Alzheimer Hauts-de-Seine et Maladies Apparentées (Alzheimer's, at the level of the entire district). There are also various independent healthcare centres such as the Centre Médico Psycho Pédagogique Gaston Berger.

Last but not least, associations dealing with social solidarity complement the work of national and local official initiatives. Consequently, they take part in the integration of marginalized residents: Association d'Aide aux Démarches Humaines Administratives et Sociales, Nouvelles Voies (associations helping people with administrative documents). The larger associations are also involved in humanitarian and civil rights struggles (Amnesty International Groupe 144 des Hauts-de-Seine, Les Restaurant du Coeur…) and international solidarity, with each of them having their geographic area of intervention (Association Culturelle de Soutien Franco-Haïtiens which is a support network for newly arrived Haitian immigrants, Associations des Ressortissants Bambela en France which does the same thing for immigrants from this region of Mali [59]…). The theme of international solidarity is particularly strong in Asnières' associative realm due to the great diversity of ethnic communities present in the Quartiers Nord.

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[59] Both these associations set up programs to support communities both in Asnières and in the region of origin. This is why they are classified under the 'international solidarity' category.

The associations mentioned above are only a few among numerous others. Their diversity and abundance is representative of the cornucopia of associations present in Asnières. They compose the dense network at the core of the commune's associative realm under the supervision of the town hall and its deputy mayor in charge of associative life. Given its richness, this network occupies a strong position in local public domain, impacting upon the lives of a large part of Asnières' residents.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have described the historical evolution of Asnières and the Quartiers Nord, between (sometimes simultaneous) processes of pauperisation and gentrification. I have also discussed the way in which dominant or mainstream discourses on 'difficult neighbourhoods' have been elaborated and how they apply to the area, as well as some of their ground-level repercussions. Finally, I have introduced the local associative realm and the variety of occupational categories within it. Overall, I have presented the historical, material and discursive framework in which this study takes place, both at the national and local levels.

As we have seen, urban policy in France has intervened in a changing manner across the years, with a gradual shift in focus from the population to the territory. For Mustafa Dikeç (2007), this policy has "consolidated itself mainly in and through the social housing neighbourhoods of *banlieues*, constituting the *banlieues* increasingly as 'badlands' that do not quite fit in the 'republican' imagery" (Dikeç, 2007, 126). In that sense, urban policy creates its own object of intervention in the shape of a delimitated territory which is identified as problematic. The dominant discourse on urban policy neighbourhoods is then expressed through political rhetoric and media representation, often portraying suburban estate areas as 'exceptional' cases within the Republican project of social cohesion. This discourse legitimises the idea that such neighbourhoods should be administrated in a different manner from the rest of the national territory.

Moreover, the articulation of suburban estate areas as 'badlands' or 'difficult neighbourhoods' is reinterpreted at the local level within demotic perceptions and representations. These views may alternatively contest or confirm the dominant discourse, depending on the context of their formulation and on the individual they emanate from. When children rap about the virtues of the neighbourhood they live in, they promote it in what they deem to be a positive manner. However, they also single it out as separate from (if not against) the rest of the Asnières commune by using territorial and defensive references. This point illustrates the fact that dominant and demotic discourses mutually influence each other, as I will demostrate throughout the present study.

The next four chapters will build upon the framework that has been set here and will constitute the ethnographic core of this thesis. They cover the themes outlined in the introduction, starting with a discussion of the role of associations in chapter four. Indeed, I will discuss the associative activities I took part in at the Maison des Femmes and the Club des Chardons and initiate my analysis of the intermediate positioning and connecting role of associations in the Quartiers Nord.

Chapter 4

<u>Setting the scene for an ethnographic account of associative life.</u>

After having discussed methodological issues and processes in chapter two and the local framework of Asnières in chapter three, I will now expose what I actually did during my fieldwork in Asnières' associative realm. In order to do so, I engage in an ethnographic account of my work with associations in the Quartiers Nord, focusing specifically on the two I worked for. The aim here is to introduce my perspective on their positioning within the Quartiers Nord of Asnières through this narrative.

The first and more descriptive part of this chapter focuses on my initial contacts with Asnières' associative actors. I will then describe my work with the two associations I chose to volunteer in and later work for (the Maison des Femmes and Club des Chardons), emphasising their educational role with local children and teenagers as this is the part of their activities to which I contributed the most (as well as being their primordial focus). Moreover, I opted for those associations because of their educational dimension as it is a straightforward application of dominant value systems at the local level. My aim in this chapter is to provide a complete overview of their work and initiate my discussion of their intermediate positioning. I will do so by underlining the facilitating role of associations in the negotiation of cultural, religious and educational differences.

Entry into the local associative realm

Early on in my fieldwork (the second week), I visited the Maison des Associations. Situated in one of the poorer sections of town, this building brings together all administrative activities having to do with Asnières' associative life. Before I had even entered an office, I came across a poster for France Bénévolat,

an association with a national remit which serves as a link between potential volunteers and associations[60]. The Asnières branch was organising an open meeting the following week which I signed up for. I then spoke to the receptionist who told me that the 'adjoint au maire chargé des associations' (deputy mayor in charge of associations), Michel Lasserre de Rozel, had an office in the building. At the end of the week, I finally managed to get in touch with his secretary who organised a meeting with him for me. The latter actually only took place the following month as we will see further on.

Later that month, I met the two people in charge of the Asnières branch of France Bénévolat. They are both retired women who have volunteered for this function. They are partly subsidised by the city council and therefore work closely with its representatives. Their main activity consists of meeting with those in charge of associations, identifying their needs, and putting them in touch with volunteers who could fit into their project. When I told them about my study, they recommended that I speak to Magalie Le Quinquis who once worked in activity centres for youths in Asnières and for the Direction des Affaires Culturelles in Aulnay-sous-Bois.

Her past experience did indeed shed a new light on the role of associations in Asnières as well as other local initiatives. She works as a link between associations and the town hall team in charge of supervising and coordinating associative projects, as well as funding most of them. For her, associations are 'ground level manifestations of citizenship and local political organisation'. This view has guided some of my own perspectives on the topic, especially in terms of the intermediate positioning of associations between policy makers and residents.

After talking with the three France Bénévolat representatives about which association I could take part in (I had identified a few, from cultural ones such as the 'Franco-Arab arts and culture association' to youth centres organising sporting activities), it soon became obvious to me that I might benefit more from working with/for France Bénévolat itself than for one of the

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[60] www.francebenevolat.org

associations, at least to begin with. Indeed, it would give me a clear idea of the 'big picture' as I would get to meet (and interview) the people in charge of associations and the people who finance them. I suggested that to them and they responded very positively. They were starting their preparation for the Forum des Associations which was taking place in Asnières on September 10 and 11 (2011) and I participated in this effort until the end of the forum.

In June 2011, I met for the second time with the volunteers of the Asnières branch of France Bénévolat. The point of this meeting was for me to get to know more about the local associative 'ecosystem' and to start preparing the annual Forum des Associations. The discussion begun with an overview of France Bénévolat's recent activities, notably their tour of local high-schools with the dual objective of finding out their needs and of recruiting young volunteers by exposing the social value of solidarity. As I found out later on, most associations are looking for young volunteers and workers to take on roles that the (mainly retired) existing staff might not be comfortable with. Moreover, many associations are in danger of disappearing in the long run because of this generation gap.

We then went on to discuss the various types of associations that France Bénévolat works with. In that matter, we distinguished three different groups of associations: those dealing with leisure and entertainment, those based on social solidarity (including educational ones such as the Maison des Femmes and Club des Chardons), and sporting associations. They admitted to having very little contact with the latter as sporting associations function independently with hardly any outside influence or support. They are self-financed as their adherents pay a fee and they usually employ paid labour. Still, I decided to contact a couple of them to find out their point of view on the local associative realm and what they perceive to be their social role. However, I begun by investigating the other two types of associations as the part they play in the local environment is more directly connected to the themes I wish to explore, that is the connecting role of solidarity and education centred associations.

I therefore came out of this meeting with a list of about ten associations that collaborate with France Bénévolat and that I could easily have access to. Many responded positively to my emails and calls. I consequently stayed in

touch with them and visited them on various occasions. I also met with their administrators and staff during the many events that bring together associations to help them share their expertise or simply praise their work.

In that manner, I developed contact with three associations based in the Courtilles estate. The first one I encountered is the Club des Chardons. I set up a meeting with their treasurer (Nora Aknine, a volunteer) and we met in a courtyard between various tower blocks in a 'grand ensemble' (group of residential tower buildings sharing the same design, usually organised around a central courtyard) called 'le Freycinet' where their office and classrooms are. Due to her particular role in the association, she was in a position to tell me about the financial difficulties in running such a project. For her, the great number of associations in Asnières is linked to the important budget allocated to this sector by the commune. However, the fact that this number is constantly growing makes it more and more difficult to apply for public funding as it is significantly reduced in its individual amounts. Moreover, she pointed out that it was difficult for them to keep their qualified staff as salaries in the associative world are not competitive compared to that of other professional sectors. Due to these difficulties, establishing a budget from one year to the next is not an easy task. As we will see throughout this thesis, the theme of financial dependency and restrictions (and therefore the ongoing quest for funding) is a common one among Asnières associations.

As far as the activities of the Club des Chardons are concerned, Nora Aknine explained that they are mainly involved in educational support (helping children with their homework) but they also assist parents administratively (understanding official documents, telling them what the next steps are or who to contact). They organise one-day outings for both parents and children three times a year, working in collaboration with two neighbourhood schools. Nora Aknine then suggested that I contact Julien Gomis, the association's administrator, and Geneviève Ducéré, the president. I actually got to meet the two of them a few seconds later but our conversation was interrupted by the sound of children and percussion. A neighbourhood party procession organised by the Club des Chardons and another association (le Conseil des Familles Freycinet) entered the square in which we were sat. The mayor of Asnières

(Sébastien Pietrasanta) was present for the occasion although I was unable to talk to him properly and just got to shake his hand and introduce myself. I did learn however that he grew up in this very neighbourhood and still lived there. I also briefly spoke to Julien Gomis who was busy at the time but promised that we would meet early in September.

Other associative leaders happened to be present that day and available for a more structured interview. It was the case of Mr Fofana, founding member of the Conseil des Familles Freycinet. His association is funded both by the Asnières commune and the *92 département* (or district, an administrative subdivision of the region). Its aim is to improve the daily lives of Freycinet families by reinforcing ties between them. To do this, they have adopted a wide range of strategies, from what they call 'multicultural meals and celebrations' (such as this particular procession which had a South American theme) to providing linguistic classes (French for recent immigrants and Arabic for those seeking to improve their language of heritage). According to Mr Fofana, the work of his association combined with that of others has resulted in a concrete improvement of living conditions in this neighbourhood as the growing solidarity between residents has empowered them to reclaim an area which had for long been under the control of drug dealers. Here, the connecting role of this particular association is internal to the neighbourhood space, establishing or reinforcing bonds between residents by involving them in locally run projects. Mr Fofana nevertheless expressed, like Nora Aknine, concerns about surviving the financial crisis which has led to a significant reduction in their budget.

This particular interview took place in a 'work space' allocated to local associations and that is put to a particular use each Saturday. The aim of this weekly event is to allow for women of North African origin to have a meeting place as they do not usually go to cafés and other public leisure areas. It is an initiative of the Conseil des Familles Freycinet and depends on town hall funding. Gradually, the room filled with women and girls of various ages who took turns in serving mint tea and North African cakes that had been previously prepared by them. As the party outside came to an end, associative leaders and members of the town hall joined us to enjoy good food and conversation. This was a chance for me to establish further contacts.

Among these new acquaintances was the president of the Centre Yannick Noah, Michel Pelé. This association has existed for thirteen years and is one of the largest in Asnières. It is a socio-cultural centre, located in the Grésillons neighbourhood (see administrative map of the Asnières commune in Appendix 2) which also has a bad reputation. Although the size (and consequent potential for action) of the Centre Yannick Noah association is greater than that of other associations I had encountered at that point, its aim seems to be more or less the same: to generate or strengthen social bonds at the local level. It is funded by the commune and employs nine paid workers who focus on establishing cross-generational and cross-cultural bonds in this multicultural (with a Moroccan prevalence) area. They often serve as a first contact for recent immigrants who find them less daunting than official authorities. They also work in collaboration with the C.A.F., the nationwide organism that deals with the distribution and control of various benefits (from unemployment to family-related compensations). This time, the connection established is between local residents and their administrators.

I have presented here the associations I encountered that deal with the reinforcement of social ties by emphasising the notion of solidarity and by providing leisure activities as well as administrative support. I have nevertheless encountered other types of associations. Among these, I can mention Handisport Plus which organises swimming (and sometimes competitive) sessions for people with a physical handicap from the entire *92 département*. The president, Marie-Béatrice Ballot is a recognised figure in the local associative realm who is involved with numerous projects simultaneously. She was kind enough to welcome me into her home despite her very busy schedule and give me an extensive interview.

After hearing from local associative leaders I wanted to get the point of view of official political leaders. I therefore set up a meeting with the deputy mayor in charge of associative life with his secretary. My discussion with Michel Laserre de Rozel lasted nearly two hours and covered many topics relating to the realm of associations in Asnières.

He stated that there are 540 associations in Asnières covering a ground that cannot be dealt with single-handedly by the town-hall. For him, they are

more adapted to the experience of social life than any official policies will ever be. In that sense, they are efficient because they are the product of the creativity of local people and therefore constitute a major resource for them. The deputy mayor sees his own role as that of a facilitator in charge of maintaining and improving the support network behind these projects. Again, this is not made easy by financial constraints, the Asnières commune having contracted a debt of 171 million euros.

Nevertheless, new initiatives are taken every year to keep up the general climate of enthusiasm and make the associative realm as coherent as possible. In order to generate new projects and give a voice to local residents, a public consultation is held twice a year where the Asnières inhabitants can express their needs and suggestions. This effort is complemented by the work of the deputy mayor and his team who are in constant contact with the associations they fund and always on the lookout for new ideas. 2011 was actually dedicated to the theme of young volunteers and 'junior' associative leaders, the numbers of which are growing.

Michel Laserre de Rozel insisted on the importance of his own neutrality and on the fact that he served as a link between the administration and the associations, therefore making sure he remained at an equal distance from both. The rest of his team (and especially Magalie Le Quinquis) are much closer to ground level perspectives and spend their days in the company of associative leaders, setting up various projects.

Associative events and gatherings: *an induction into their realm.*

On September 10th and 11th 2011, the yearly Forum des Associations was held in Asnières. From what I gathered by speaking to people from large associations who work beyond the limits of Asnières, other communes in the 92 *département* were holding similar events (in Nanterre, Colombes, Genneveliers*).* This is the occasion all associations had been preparing for the past few months. It is where they get the chance to present their actions to a wide audience and sometimes recruit new volunteers or adherents.

The core of the large public attending the event consisted of families signing up their children for sporting activities. Nonetheless, other types of associations also benefited from this consequent influx of potential members. Moreover, everything was planned in order to get the attention of passers-by and keep them on the premises for as long as possible. Various associations organise performances on a stage in front of the forum, from musical concerts and choreographed dancing to sport demonstrations along with plentiful supplies of inexpensive food and drinks.

I was in charge of the France Bénévolat stand on the Saturday and also helped out on Sunday but with fewer responsibilities. This gave me more time to focus on my own research and to speak to the representatives of associations relevant to it, that is educational and social solidarity based ones which play a role in the daily lives of local residents. On Saturday I spent most of the day exposing the benefits of working with France Bénévolat to the associative leaders present at the forum (having access to new volunteers and a greater visibility due to France Bénévolat's national reputation) as well as going around the place locating and establishing an initial contact with those that were of a greater interest to me. I then spent Sunday discussing their activities with them, presenting my own work, and setting up further meetings with them.

On Saturday evening, a celebration cocktail party took place with the mayor of Asnières, the deputy mayor in charge of associations and their representative at ground level: Magalie Le Quinquis. I was able to get an invitation for this occasion through France Bénévolat. The aim of this official gathering is to celebrate the work of Asnières associations throughout the past year and to reward some of them with honorary prizes.

By actively participating in the Forum des Associations, I significantly increased my visibility in the local associative scene and most of the people I have been in contact with for the occasion ended up knowing who I am and what I do. I have also been able to communicate with various local residents on a relaxed basis. Having an association's badge and running around the forum allowed me to talk to cleaners, security, and various types of people in the position of an insider, and a pro-active one. Not being able to achieve this had been a major concern for me as I had not lived in Asnières for a while. However,

I realise that this positioning as a researcher within the associative realm implies that my experience and analysis are influenced by the role I play. I must therefore keep in mind that I am in some way representing the associative perspective in this study, even more so now that I am a part-time salaried worker in two associations.

Throughout the first day of the forum, a parallel event took place in the conference rooms of the centre: 'les Assises des Jeunes Bénévoles', an ongoing presentation and debate on the place of young volunteers and emerging associative leaders. Although many of the people from the associations present at the forum complained of this 'double booking', I was still able to attend the meeting for a couple of hours when other volunteers helped me in the running of the stand.

The discussion mainly focused on the various initiatives taken to promote new associative projects brought forward by young people as well as ways to encourage local youths to participate in volunteer work. The common theme among the speeches I was able to witness resided in the idea that one should help (or 'accompany' to use their term) the youths throughout their projects without doing everything for them. In that manner, they can gradually become autonomous without being discouraged at the early stages of their motivation. This is illustrated by the creation a year ago of the Conseil Municipal des Jeunes (Youths' Municipal Council) which is run by the youths themselves and closely connected to the official (grown up) Municipal Council. That way, the participants can actively take part in their commune's political life.

During the presentation, a short film was shown exposing the work of a few Asnières associations recently created by local youths. Among these, one in particular grabbed my attention (maybe because they had a stand next to ours and were very loud): A.D.J. 92. A group of children between the ages of 11 and 16 have gathered under the supervision of another association (the previously mentioned Conseil des Familles Freycinet) with the aim of increasing solidarity between members of their neighbourhood. The association was actually given an award for their work during the post-forum celebrations. Although I did not get a chance to properly discuss their activities with them at that point in time, the physical proximity of our stands allowed me to get to know them, and establish

an initial contact. One of the children even asked me if I could help him with his English homework someday.

A few months later, on December 9th 2011, an award ceremony was held for young volunteers from the Département des Hauts-de-Seine (92) for the year 2011 which was the European Year of Volunteering. It took place in the same building as the Forum des Associations. The atmosphere was official but relaxed, with French rap music playing from the speakers as the participants and audience gathered into the hall. Many familiar associative leaders and town hall representatives were present for the occasion which was only taking place for the second time since its inauguration the previous year. On top of the various awards that were evenly distributed to associations from the various communes of the 92 *département*, a number of presentations took place to initiate a reflection on the way to integrate youths to associative projects, with a focus on the fact that volunteering may serve as a first step towards understanding the responsibilities of citizenship[61] and offer a valid professional experience. Along those lines, internships with local companies were among the prizes awarded to the laureates.

First contact with the Maison des Femmes and Club des Chardons.

In September 2011, I visited the Maison des Femmes, an association which helps the women of immigrant families (usually recently arrived) to settle in the local and national communities. They offer French language classes as well as administrative and legal support. According to Zakia Mzili-Couderc who runs the association and whom I interviewed, they attempt to deal with individual problems and issues in a global manner by impacting on these women's lives at various levels. Indeed, they are trying to reach the entire family

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[61] The French definition of citizenship has always remained close to its post-revolutionary roots. It has nonetheless evolved to fit successive historical circumstances and its relationship to nationality has been challenged by academics such as Catherine Withol de Wenden (1991) who argues that this bond was only generated in the century following the Revolution. Although today the boundary between the terms 'citizenship' and 'nationality' has become blurred in many different national contexts, these two concepts were not always linked in France for Withol de Wenden.

through the mother by covering a large range of themes from socio-cultural workshops about France and Asnières to more mundane lessons on everyday activities such as food shopping or neighbourhood interactions. By doing so, they hope to reduce the distance between these women and their children who are growing up in this 'French environment'. I offered to do some volunteer work for them and they seemed quite receptive to the idea. This later became one of the two associations for which I work and am involved with the most; the other being the Club des Chardons.

Later that month, I met with Julien Gomis from the Club des Chardons who I had been trying to get in touch with for a while. This association has various activities, but their main one remains helping children with their schoolwork, this action being complemented by the association's leisure centre which takes over on Wednesdays and school holidays. They also aim to make the Freycinet neighbourhood (in which they are located) an eco-friendly area. They set up a compost heap at the bottom of one of the tower blocks which residents are actually using and taking care of, and they are also working on changing unused sections of the courtyards between buildings into vegetable and flower gardens. They often collaborate with the Conseil des Familles Freycinet, another local association I established contact with (they organised the street party I attended the previous month). This collaboration has led to the organisation of various events such as the yearly 'multicultural meal' where families are encouraged to bring dishes from their country of origin to share with others.

About a month after meeting with Zakia Mzili-Couderc and Julien Gomis, I began working for both their associations as a volunteer and, a few months later, as a part-time employee. My activities with the Club des Chardons and the Maison des Femmes were the core of my fieldwork, especially in terms of participant observation. The next section of this ethnographic chapter will therefore focus on this particular period in my fieldwork.

First steps at the Club des Chardons and Maison des Femmes.

Early in November 2011, I went to the Club des Chardons in the Freycinet neighbourhood to discuss my volunteering schedule and activities. I would be helping children with their homework on Thursdays and Fridays after school. On Thursdays I would be taking care of primary school pupils between the ages of seven and ten years old (between the CE2 and CM2 classes[62]), and on Fridays I would be with pupils between the ages of eleven and sixteen years old (the French Collège, between the 6ème and 3ème grades[63]).

The Club des Chardons is one of the oldest associations in the area that comprises various estates in the North of Asnières (Hauts d'Asnières, the administrative name of the *Quartiers Nord*, which has been classified as a CUCS territory: Contrat Urbain de Cohésion Sociale[64]). In a neighbourhood where the difficult economic context and the weight of certain social stigma (to quote their yearly activity report) have led to a higher rate of schooling failures (failure to pass national exams and diplomas, or even to stay in school long enough to be in a position to take them) than in other areas of the commune, the members of the Club des Chardons attempt to provide adequate opportunities for local children and families to go beyond these social boundaries. In order to do this, the association relies on three related sets of activities: schoolwork support (for which I enrolled), a leisure centre, and a social support / mediation structure for the entire family. The focal point of these three dimensions of the Club des Chardons is the child as he or she is the only one to interact directly with all of them.

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[62] The three final years of elementary schools.

[63] The four years that compose secondary school (before high school).

[64] The 'Urban Contract for Social Cohesion' was set up in 2007 and supposed to last three years. The initiative has nevertheless been extended to 2014. It is a contract between the national government and towns or communes which desire to take part in it. It ties the two parties with the aim of eventually replacing existing spatial categories such as the ZUP and ZEP (priority zoning focusing on neighbourhoods labelled as difficult, or in a difficult situation regarding a particular issue). As the contract concerns large areas which bring together those labels to do with education, security, healthcare or general urban development rather than specific neighbourhoods, it is meant to be less discriminatory and segregating than previous urban policies. The yearly national budget for this project is of around 500 million euros. (source: www.ressources-territoires.com/politique-de-la-ville/le-champ/documents/Fiche-CUCS.pdf).

By joining the Club des Chardons, I joined a group of over thirty other volunteers who participate in the association's various activities, some of them even taking part its administration. In spite of joining the France Bénévolat network in 2008 (which has provided them with five new volunteers since then), the association is always on the lookout for new volunteers. Indeed, the demand for extra help is high as they have about a hundred children on the waiting list each year for their schoolwork support activity.

Later that same week, I had an introductory meeting with the Maison des Femmes. It was decided that I would participate in their Wednesday activities with recently arrived immigrant children. The core of this activity is to teach them the French language and, to some extent, French culture. However, the aim here is to do so in a more 'fun' way than it is done in their respective schools where the vast majority of these children attend special adaptation classes (CLA, I will detail the nature of these classes further when discussing my work at the Maison des Femmes). On Wednesday mornings, I would be working with children between the ages of four and ten years old, and with teenagers up to the age of 16 years old in the afternoons. I would be assisting the main educator in her work.

As with the Club des Chardons, the aim and perspective of the association were explained to me in a detailed manner. Since its creation in 1994, the Maison des Femmes has been located in the Quartiers Nord area with their two main offices/work spaces situated in the Courtilles estate and the Agnettes neighbourhood, respectively the last and penultimate stops of the number 13 metro line. Their aim is threefold according to their activity report: helping women (mainly from recent immigrant backgrounds) and their families to integrate themselves socially and professionally, to fight against discriminations, and to allow people to acquire the necessary skills required for an autonomous life as parents, workers and citizens.

Here, the association's actions are divided in three sub-groups. The education/training dimension of their work comprises various educational possibilities, from language or computer classes (which includes a preparation for official diplomas and certificates) to the acquisition of basic knowledge on safety and health. In a parallel manner, the mediation pole focuses on the

reception of new people, on listening to them before accompanying them through their various encounters with the French legislation and through other aspects of their everyday lives which their position of recent migrant might render difficult. Finally, the association takes part in a transversal effort at the level of the entire commune to coordinate the linguistic efforts of the various associations that specialise in that domain. This means they usually organise or at least take part in shared projects such as Asnières' annual Literacy Day.

There are common grounds between the activities of both the associations I had decided to join, such as their focus on education and the family. However, if the Club des Chardons' main practical angle is to work with children before reaching to the rest of the family, the initial contacts or point of entry of the Maison des Femmes with the beneficiaries of its work are women. I have therefore gained a privileged access to two associations that deal with issues of social solidarity and education, but from different perspectives.

The task of accompanying children through their journey in the French educational system can be hard to accomplish on their own for some parents in the Quartiers Nord. The problems they may encounter in that respect are varied and may require an intervention from outside of the family/school binary[65]. This is when educational associations come into action, that is if they are asked to. From the statistics of both associations I work with, it is usually the parents who personally initiate this kind of contact (nearly eighty percent at the Club des Chardons, sixty at the Maison des Femmes). However, it is not rare that these initiatives are suggested to them by school teachers and counsellors who are accustomed to working with local associations in the Quartiers Nord.

The fact that some schools in the area are classified under the Z.E.P.[66] label implies an enhanced collaboration with various social and political

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[65] Parents are often eager to justify why they cannot assist their children with their schoolwork and require the help of associations. This often happens the first time they drop off their children at the workshops and introduce themselves to me. The three recurring reasons that I have been given are: a poor knowledge of the French language, parents working at night or in the evening as well as during weekends, and the fact that they haven't been to school themselves or at least not for a long time.

[66] The instigation of Z.E.P. (*Zone d'Education Prioritaire,*) areas in 1981 aims to contribute to the correction of inequalities through the selective reinforcement of educational structures in geographic zones where academic failure is the most recurrent (Morel, 2002, 36).

institutions, including the town hall. The director of the Collège André Malraux regularly works hand in hand with the local police and with other representatives of the municipal legal system such as members of the Tribunal d'Instance (magistrates' court) which is located in the middle of the Courtilles estate. This partnership manifests itself in the shape of yearly interventions within the secondary school on precise topics such as bullying, general safety or debates on the rights and duties of French citizens and their application in the daily lives of local youths. Furthermore, neighbourhood mediators (or 'grands frères') are present at the doors of the Collège André Malraux on a daily basis (see chapter seven).

On top of these 'official' partnerships, local schools can also count on the support of the local associative network on a more informal basis. Both the Club des Chardons and the Maison des Femmes are in regular contact with the schools that their children attend. I participated in a number of meetings between members of the associations and the staff from the neighbourhood's schools, from teachers to directors. The main issue raised in those meetings is that of learning potential, performance and difficulties of our common pupils. They are in other words based essentially on precise educational topics. The aim here is not to determine a local-scale course of action but to discuss specific cases whilst exchanging views on the children and teenagers. Furthermore, the content of these meetings is later discussed between parents and the staff of the Club des Chardons and Maison des Femmes, in this case acting as communication facilitators between families and the schooling system.

Both of these associations reacted very positively and quickly to my spontaneous candidature to be a volunteer worker for them. This confirms the view I got from working with France Bénévolat that there is always a great demand for volunteers in the associative world. This initial positioning offered a variety of advantages to me as a researcher without the added pressure of being a salaried worker. These range from becoming visible in the Quartiers Nord's network of associations to accessing first-hand information through participant observation. I will complement this brief description of my first steps in the associative realm in the next two sections by describing the evolution of my

work within the Club des Chardons and the Maison des Femmes in terms of their educational mission.

Work at the Club des Chardons

The Club des Chardons and formal education.

A month after the beginning of the school year, the team of the Club des Chardons was invited to a meeting with all the teachers of the Descartes B elementary school. Two of the children I worked with on a weekly basis for schoolwork support were in that school so I took part in the meeting. Although the association is in contact with all the schools in the area, it was the first time in a few years that this kind of gathering was organised with Descartes B. Consequently, the first part of the meeting was dedicated to introducing the work of the Club des Chardons to the teachers (many of them only knew about the leisure centre on Wednesdays but not about the homework related activities) who in turn told us about the school's own schoolwork support workshop. It takes place during school hours, with each teacher running it for an hour a week. However, the attendance at these sessions is limited by the fact that they go on between four and five o'clock each afternoon, a time when most of the pupils are still in class. Indeed, the average day of secondary school ends between those times. Correspondingly, the schoolwork support workshops of the Club des Chardons take place between five and seven in the evening (and only a five-minute walk away from Descartes B).

The dual aim of this meeting was the coordination of our efforts as well as the instigation of a more developed and lasting collaboration between school teachers and associative workers or volunteers in charge of each child for the year. I exchanged email addresses with the teacher of the two children I work with and we settled into a routine of monthly updates. At that point of the year, I had only met the pupils twice and it was particularly interesting for me to find out how they behaved and performed in school. Their teacher told me it was actually the second year in a row that they were in her class as they both had to repeat this final year of secondary school, a frequent occurrence among children

of the Club des Chardons whose parents often sign them up for homework support after they fail to pass a school year. Nonetheless, there are also a few children and teenagers who simply come to the association to have a quiet place to do their homework and do not really need any help with it.

Overall, meetings held between the Club des Chardons and local schools constitute a chance for both parties to exchange views on the children under their responsibility. In these exchanges, authority definitely lies with the teachers who are institutionally recognised professionals and spend much more time with the children than members of the association do. Nevertheless, they are also very happy to hear that some of these children benefit from an appropriate environment to study outside of the school and from the support of people with a sufficient knowledge base to academically assist them if necessary. It is indeed not the case for many of the neighbourhood's children as we will see further down.

The role of educational associations in their relationship with the local schooling system is that of a complementary structure. They follow the syllabus instigated by the national Ministry for Education and primarily applied at ground level by teachers. Contrarily to school teachers whose authority partly relies on the primordial positioning of the school in French society as a pre-requisite for socio-economic success and on the principle of compulsory education up until the age of sixteen years old, associations only come into action if requested. In that sense, there is no risk of competition between the two or of creating confusion in the minds of children as to the function of each structure. Educational associations constitute the only alternative for children who do not benefit from an adequate educational support and positive learning environment outside of school. They are therefore indispensable in certain cases, and more specifically in areas such as the Quartiers Nord of Asnières.

Let us now consider the situation of certain families of the Quartiers Nord in order for us to identify some of the problems they may encounter when it comes to the formal education of their children. Due to the particular demographic circumstances exposed throughout this study, parents of the Quartier Nord experience certain difficulties that are not necessarily the same as those of families with higher socio-economic backgrounds. I will therefore now

focus on the identification of such particularities and on the positioning of the Club des Chardons regarding those issues.

Firstly, one must envisage the level and type of formal education that parents have themselves received in their youth. In 2011, only 64.8 percent of the over fourteen year old population of the Quartiers Nord had successfully passed a school diploma or examination (B.A.C., B.E.P., C.A.P.[67] or a foreign equivalent)[68]. Interestingly, these figures are more or less constant whether one focuses on women or foreigners but remain significantly lower than the national average which reaches 80 percent. According to an INSEE census, the total population of the Quartiers Nord reached 16.028 in 2011, with 8.501 women and 3.494 foreigners. Of the 12.534 French nationals, 4.807 were 'immigrants' (not born in France)[69]. This means that about half of local residents were not raised in France and therefore have a limited experience of the French educational system. This greatly limits their potential to support their children (should they have any) in their academic journey.

The educational background of the parents of the children who attend the activities of the Club des Chardons is quite homogenous from what I have seen by talking to them. On average, the fathers have at least finished high school in their home countries or undergone training in a particular profession. The mothers however, are in most cases unemployed and have a low level of formal education, with a minority of them being unable to read or write in any language. Overall, many of these parents have had to start working at a young age, whether at home or in the professional world. In these circumstances, the mothers, who are the ones spending the most time with their children, are not usually in a position to assist them with their homework. Some of them even experience difficulties when interacting in the French language, which makes it difficult for them to deal with administrative issues or follow the

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[67] The B.A.C. is the French equivalent of the English A-levels or American S.A.T.s. However, pupils attending professional high-schools (shorter schooling system, parallel to the mainstream one, aimed at the acquisition of technical skills)obtain a BEP or CAP instead of the traditional BAC if they are successful.
[68] Figures taken from the local *Pôle Emploi* (national employment structure) and a 2006 INSEE report (revised in 2011) accessed on 21/07/2012 at www.insee.fr/fr/ppp/bases-de-donnees/donnees-detaillees/duicq/pdf/em/em_Z_1115010.pdf .
[69] Ibid.

recommendations of teachers and social workers. The activities of the Maison des Femmes (apart from the children and teenagers' classes I participate in) are actually directed towards that very section of the local population.

Now that I have discussed the education-based work of the Club des Chardons, I will turn to the rest of the association's activities I took part in. During the schoolwork support workshops, my main focus has been that of an educator and associative worker. These workshops have however allowed me to interact with the children on a daily basis and to build a trusting relationship with them which has benefited my research. In that sense, I have been a privileged witness as they expressed some of their views and opinions. Nonetheless, my position as a researcher also means that I have been concerned with reaching all aspects of the association's work and of its role in the Quartiers Nord of Asnières, and especially the Courtilles estate as all the children attending its workshops live there. In order to do so, I have made sure I took part in most of the events organised by the Club des Chardons. Correspondingly, I will now go over some of these activities outside of the workshops, starting with the various meetings I attended.

Meetings

Each term, the Club des Chardons holds an assembly with all of its volunteer workers, staff, and members of its directing board. Such meetings have been a good occasion for me to listen to everyone's views on the role of the association and to ask questions as a researcher. The range of themes covered during these meetings is wide, from disciplinary problems to future orientations in terms of the structuring and running of the association. It is a chance for everyone to voice their concerns, wishes and opinions about the way in which the association functions.

These regular meetings always start in the same way, with each educator talking about their pupils individually and as a group. They identify particular needs, usually in terms of which parts of the school syllabus need to be worked on more by a student. They then receive feedback from the mediator and the coordinator of the Club des Chardons who are aware of the overall situation of

the child or teenager. Indeed, they are in regular contact with the children's school teachers and social workers (should their family be in a situation where social workers are involved). This was the case for instance when one of the volunteers expressed doubts about a boy's reading abilities before being told that the boy had just been diagnosed with dyslexia and begun seeing a speech therapist.

Nevertheless, other themes (not relating to schoolwork) emerged from those discussions of pupils. Some of them have been of particular relevance to this study. In a mid-year meeting, the mediator told us about one of the children's mother, a Muslim woman, who had strongly expressed her disagreement when she came to pick up her six year old daughter at the end of a session and found her colouring a drawing of Father Christmas. The mediator, who happened to be in charge of that particular session and knows that woman quite well from living in the same building, explained to her that Father Christmas had nothing to do with Christianity. Although the woman calmed down, she still walked away telling her daughter (in Arabic) that what she had done was *haram*, meaning 'sinful'.

Following this incident, educators were advised to make sure that the colouring drawings they gave to the youngest children had potentially nothing to do with any religion. I must say however, that when this decision was taken during the meeting, most of the volunteers and workers insisted on the necessity of applying secular principles to the association and that no religious views or feelings should be allowed to interfere with their mission. The fact that this was an isolated incident and did not require any significant change from anyone made it easier to negotiate. In that sense, the members of the association found themselves in an intermediate position between the dominant Republican discourse on secularism ('laïcité', which will be discussed in chapter six) and the fact that many of the families they work with have strong religious values. The consensus was that religions would stay out of our workshops and discussions with the pupils and that the same would be required of parents in their interactions with members of the association. Since then, a letter mentioning this decision has been sent to all families and workers/volunteers and no other incident of this type has been brought to my attention.

As this example shows, there are some occasions when parents and educators do not agree or share given values. Associative meetings have allowed me to gather the perspectives of educators and find out more about family situations. In some cases, parents are praised by the team of the Club des Chardons for their energy and dedication when it comes to encouraging and supporting their children in their efforts to do well in school. However, it is not rare for workers of the association to complain about what they see as a lack of motivation from other parents who they feel are relying on the association to deal with issues that should be their responsibility. In other words, they accuse them of leaving everything to others (in this case to the educators and mediators of the Club des Chardons) when it comes to the formal education of their children and their relationship to the institution of the school. This rather subjective view is however applicable only to a few cases, especially when parents fail to interact with members of the association (by not responding to letters and phone calls or failing to regularly bring their children to the workshops after signing them up).

In France, the public debate on the requirements of 'adequate' parenting and whether these are applied by all is ongoing. Within this debate, a particular discourse has been steadily growing in popularity since the end of the 1990s. The idea of 'démission parentale' (parent resignation) insinuates some parents have abdicated their educational responsibilities, thus placing the blame on them for the 'inappropriate' behavior of certain children and youths (Giovannoni, 2008). This expression spread in the national media in 1998 after the Minister of the Interior, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, used it during a press conference in which he explained his plan to fight urban violence. This came after the death of a seventeen year old in Evry, a Parisian suburb, shot during a brawl between youths from two rival estates. The theme of 'démission parentale' has since reappeared in public debates on juvenile delinquency, with a peak after the 'riots' of November 2005 (Giovannoni, 2008).

Based on this rhetoric establishing a link between underage crime and the lack of parental discipline, Nicolas Sarkozy (then Minister of the Interior) instated the 'contrat de responsabilité parental' (contract for parental accountability) as part of the 5 March 2007 law for the prevention of

delinquency. This initiative concerns the parents of pupils with disciplinary problems in school or a high rate of absenteeism. Should they refuse to sign the contract or fail to meet the terms of the agreement, they might see their family allowances suspended[70].

For Agnès Van Zanten (2001), the notion of 'démission parentale' is partially built on assessments made by ground level actors, and in particular members of the Education Nationale (national educational system). However, their point of view is founded on their observations of the children and teenagers they are in contact with in school, not their parents. Van Zanten insists that this evaluation is made based on two criteria which, in actual fact, do not refer directly to the educational strategies of parents. The first is the performance of the children as pupils. Grades are seen by teachers as the result of schoolwork done at home. If these are unsatisfactory, the studying conditions set up by parents for their children are portrayed as unsuitable. The second criterion is behaviour in the classroom which is seen as an extension of primary socialisation, and therefore corresponds, for teachers, to the educational duty of parents (Van Zanten, 2001, 155). In this light, the idea 'démission parentale' is not representative of the relationship parents may have with their children when it comes to their education, but rather a manifestation of their lack of representation in the public institutional sphere. It is a collective construction which has entered the dominant discourse on adequate parenting, especially around the issues of schooling performance and anti-social behaviour in urban policy territories.

Although I have witnessed associative workers occasionally getting frustrated with what they described as a lack of involvement from some parents, their relative proximity to them (compared to members of the educational system) allows them to maintain a certain quality and regularity of exchange with them. Both parties are therefore able to express their expectations and perspectives, especially when a social mediator is part of the association's staff, as is the case at the Club des Chardons. As we will see in chapter seven, this is

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[70] Information accessed on 09/02/2014 at http://www.vie-publique.fr/actualite/panorama/texte-vote/loi-du-5-mars-2007-relative-prevention-delinquance.html

crucial if the members of an association are to adapt to the individual circumstances of each family.

The need for parents to be implicated or at least show interest in the work of the Club des Chardons has been expressed at all levels of the association. This was the case during the end of first term meeting set up by the mediator between educators and parents. Although letters had been sent a long time in advance and many parents had verbally confirmed their presence at the event, only nine of them, all women, actually showed up. From what my experienced colleagues told me, this was not unusual and this yearly meeting had never been a crowded one. We nonetheless discussed the year ahead with parents, answering their questions (mainly practical ones about scheduling), and recognising their efforts.

If one was to base our opinion on the attendance level of this meeting, we would get the impression that the Club des Chardons is just located in the Quartiers Nord but not an integrated part of it. However, the fact that most of its workers live in the area and know a large section of the local population on a non-professional basis leads to a different picture of the association's positioning in the neighbourhood. As we will see next, less formal events such as end-of-term parties give out a very different impression. Work-based meetings have been a good way for me to witness the 'official' positioning of the Club des Chardons and the views of its members, allowing me to compare these perceptions to their tangible application during workshops and in interactions with parents. Nevertheless, more relaxed events have been especially useful to me when gathering first hand perspectives from the various members of local families.

Social gatherings

Early on after joining the Club des Chardons, I was invited to celebrate the weddings of three of the association's workers. The party took place in a vast room prepared for the occasion by both workers and children. Most of the families of the Freycinet neighbourhood (in which the Club des Chardons is located) were present at some point in the day, bringing home-made cakes with them. The atmosphere was relaxed and one could not tell members of the

association apart from the local population. They acted as a group of residents, which they actually were as Julien Gomis and I were the only people attending who did not live in the area.

This gathering gave me a chance to socialise with numerous inhabitants of the Quartiers Nord as my colleagues and the children introduced me to their friends and families. This initial contact has served as a basis for future exchanges between myself and Freycinet residents taking part or benefiting from the activities of the Club des Chardons. From this day onward, I became an identifiable individual in the neighbourhood, not only for the children I work with, but for their parents and siblings as well. It was also a chance for me to witness the strong bonds existing in the area as most families interacted freely, as one does with people one knows and feels comfortable with. Having grown up as an inner city Parisian, that is not really getting to know most of my neighbours, this atmosphere felt more like that of a village than a town.

This 'party' had little to do with the association itself, it was organised more as a neighbourhood event. Nevertheless, there have also been a number of social or celebratory gatherings set up by members of the association to mark the end of given school periods. An example of this are the end of term and year parties that take place in the largest classroom available. Although the attendance level is far from that of the wedding party described above, those events are more crowded than the official meetings family members are invited to. All the children and teenagers are present as the gatherings take place during usual workshop times. Moreover, as they take place in the evening, the parent attendance is also quite high. It is a chance for parents and educators to discuss the evolution of the pupils' schooling and general behaviour.

In that sense, both sides can receive feedback from the other in the presence of the child or teenager in question. I was particularly (and positively) affected by the mother of one of my pupils who, when telling me how her daughter's grades had finally improved, started hugging me with tears in her eyes. This may sound like an over-reaction, but she was one of the parents present at every meeting set up by the Club des Chardons and picking up her daughter at the end of each workshop, constantly asking me if she had behaved and worked well. At the end of the school year, both her and her husband visited

the association to bring a box of chocolates for each volunteer and employee of the Club des Chardons. On that occasion, they explained to me that they felt very dependent on the association as they had both stopped attending school at a very young age in their country of origin (Morocco) and that each of their four children had attended the schoolwork support sessions.

These social gatherings have many functions on top of being pleasant events. In my view, they strengthen neighbourhood ties and promote social cohesion at the local level. They are a chance for residents to meet or catch up in a relaxed atmosphere. Moreover, they ground the Club des Chardons into the neighbourhood, confirming it's relevance in the daily lives of residents. For associative workers such as myself who do not live in the area, they offer a chance to be integrated into the local setting as we gradually become a part of it. Reciprocally, social gatherings are also a way of including families as a whole to the associative project. In that sense, they bring people closer together by facilitating exchange processes between them.

Overall, my work at the Club des Chardons has allowed me to become visible and identifiable within the Quartiers Nord, and especially the Freycinet neighbourhood. I have benefited from taking part in the association's activities, both as a researcher and as an associative worker. I have gained access to many of my ground level informants through the Club des Chardons, getting access to elements of the residents' daily lives that would have otherwise been out of reach for me. Moreover, the intermediate positioning of the association, between the institution of the school and the family and neighbourhood environments, has put me in a privileged position to witness the manner in which dominant and demotic discourses on education and social requirements are negotiated in both those settings, and sometimes with the intervention of associations as facilitators. My work at the Maison des Femmes has also greatly contributed to the elaboration of a perspective on the role of associations in the Quartiers Nord as we will see in the next section.

Work at the Maison des Femmes

My work at the Maison des Femmes can be divided into two separate yet complementary activities: the literacy workshops for children and teenagers, and the various thematic outings organised throughout the year. I will begin by discussing the workshops and the link between this activity and the distinct structure of the French educational system designed to eventually integrate newly arrived migrant children to the regular curriculum. With the large numbers of newly arrived migrants in the Quartiers Nord (21.8 percent of the population of Quartiers Nord being foreigners[71]) there is high demand for this kind of class in the area. There are actually three 'adaptation' classes (C.L.A.) in the whole of the Asnières commune and they are unsurprisingly full every year.

The C.L.A. class regroups children and teenagers from the ages of eleven to sixteen years old. For children under eleven, a similar structure named C.L.I.N. also exists. With the aim of integrating non French-speaking pupils to the regular French educational system as quickly as possible, they are also assigned to an ordinary class that corresponds to their age group. In that sense, the C.L.A. and C.L.I.N. can be seen as a course rather than an actual class (at least in pedagogical terms) where French is taught as a second language. The scheduling balance between these and regular classes depends on the linguistic level of each pupil. Correspondingly, at the beginning of the school year, the C.L.A. pupils attend physical education, art and music classes with the rest of the school's population, these activities being perceived as prone to socialisation and therefore language acquisition. Then, as pupils start to master the French language during the year, they will attend a greater percentage of courses with their assigned 'regular' class, starting with maths.

The level of schooling of the pupils in their home country is an important factor in the evolution of their education in France; focusing only on French language acquisition for months and therefore leaving out other topics might not be fitting in some cases. Consequently, other classes are seen as a chance to

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[71] Data accessed on 21/07/2012 at www.insee.fr/fr/ppp/bases-de-donnees-donnees-detaillees/duicq/pdf/em/em_Z_1115010.pdf

improve some of the 'more advanced' children's French skills. However, it can be the case that a child has immigrated to France without having regularly (if at all) been schooled prior to their arrival. Their situation subsequently requires a different form of pedagogical attention. Indeed, they may have specific difficulties when reading, writing or simply getting used to the attitude and discipline that school life requires. For these children and teenagers, a special C.L.A. class is available (there is one in Asnières) called the N.S.A. (*non-scolarisé antérieurement*, not previously schooled) with a variety of specialist teachers to support them.

The C.L.A. and C.L.I.N. are designed as one year programs. This means that the pupils only have one year to fully integrate the 'regular' educational system. In order for that to be possible, they will require the full attention of their specialised teacher. Accordingly, the number of pupils per class is restricted to twenty. They tend to be incorporated into the class throughout the school year as they do not all arrive in France or Asnières at the same time.

Moreover, the pupils attending those classes are encouraged to pass a formal exam at the end of the year which represents their competence in French as a second language, the D.E.L.F.. The latter is also passed by the women of the Maison des Femmes and is comprised of three distinct assessments (A1, A2, B1), each representing a level of proficiency. However, this task is more difficult to achieve, and so is integration to regular French education, for those who start attending the school half-way through the year. Nonetheless, they can pass the examination when they wish (and when their teacher approves of it) and always benefit from at least a full year in the C.L.A. or C.L.I.N., whenever they join the class.

The teacher of that C.L.A. at the Collège André Malraux regularly met with workers from the Maison des Femmes (including me) and decided which pupils from her class she would recommend to us. Each time there was a free spot at the literacy workshop, the association consulted her as she had a 'waiting list' of students who would benefit from its activities. The number of available spots was however limited to fifteen children or teenagers per workshop and each pupil attended them for an average of a year to two years. This means that

the turnover was rather slow and that many of them kept on attending the workshops after integrating regular classes in school.

Overall, the Maison des Femmes provides a relaxed and fun setting for the children (on Wednesday morning) and teenagers (on Wednesday afternoon) to pursue their French language training which is the association's *raison d'être*. A wide range of activities is provided, from computer training (with the acquisition of the corresponding vocabulary) to thematic outings (museums, historical neighbourhoods…) around Asnières and Paris. An emphasis is also put on written and spoken exercises such as the writing and interpretation of short theatre scenes derived from the pupils' life experience and practical situations such as going to the doctor's or the market. The aim here being the facilitation of recurrent, if not daily, interactions in this new environment. Moreover, it is a good example of the type of work that the Maison des Femmes has done to bridge gaps between peripheral (or marginalised) communities and mainstream French society.

This makes the activities of the Maison des Femmes complementary with that of the school. Indeed, the C.L.A. teacher and the associative team work hand in hand, elaborating a programme at the beginning of every term to insure that a large range of topics are covered and that they are dealt with in a parallel manner, that is at the same point in the year and without too much repetition in the way they are approached in class and at the workshop. As Mme Narcesse told me, there is not enough time in school for her to focus in detail on French or local culture and society as the programme is already extremely dense for a year's work. She sees the literacy workshop of the Maison des Femmes as a chance to enhance her pupils' capacity for cultural integration.

Accordingly, the yearly thematic programme of the workshops is established by the educators in charge of carrying them out, following the guidelines of the P.R.E. programme and after consulting with C.L.A. teachers. I have been a part of that process for the academic year 2012/2013. It began with a meeting with the local P.R.E. coordinator (for the district) who explained that there were two broad themes to cover: the national environment (French society and culture) and the local setting (Asnières and its resources). We then set up a syllabus for the year covering both themes as well as adding other, more

'entertaining' ones such as storytelling and famous fairy tales (with the aim of having the pupils write and present orally their own fairy tale in French). The fact that the yearly programme is based on guidelines established at a national level confirms the idea that the activities of the Maison des Femmes are ground level applications of 'large scale' socio-cultural and educational policies.

The first term of the workshop at the Maison des Femmes was dedicated to the discovery of the local setting of the town of Asnières. The objective was to allow the teenagers, and the children to a lesser extent, to evolve freely in their new local context. For this, we worked on the town's internet site with them, assigning them missions such as finding information relating to health services (times, locations, specialisations…), bus and tram routes, or cultural and community events. We also organised visits to local landmarks such as the Asnières pet cemetery, the first of its kind in France, the history of which was explained to the group by a member of the history and tourism department of the town hall. Moreover, the group of teenagers were encouraged to develop a network of local administrative resources. Along those lines, we took them to Asnières's Bureau d'Information Jeunesse (B.I.J.), a support structure run by the town hall and designed to assist youths in their search for internships and future employment. This was particularly useful to them as they were required to find a two-week professional internship by their school.

For the younger children, we set up regular visits to the 'médiathèque', a library with a computer room located in front of the Collège André Malraux. We also took some of their parents who were available so that they could register there and borrow books for their children. These types of initiatives encourage the children, but also the rest of their families, to discover the local resources available to them and therefore reinforce their integration to the neighbourhood. Furthermore, easy access to the internet is another benefit of the médiathèque as many of these families do not have access to it at home.

The theme of the French national context was dealt with in a more theoretical manner. For the children, we mainly exposed the physical representations of the nation, such as the flag, national anthem and monuments. Moreover, they each were asked to make a poster representing their vision of France and present it to the group verbally. Although we ended up with many

posters of the Eiffel Tower on a blue, white and red background, the aim here was simply to let the children get used to the idea of this new country (for them) and present it to them in a 'fun' way. Various outings were also organised for both groups in order to visit a few of the historical monuments in Paris and explain their significance (Arc de Triomphe, Eiffel Tower, Place de la Bastille…).

With the teenagers, we were able to develop each of these activities further. After briefly going over the Constitution and key elements in France's history since the Revolution, we organised a debate among them after dividing them into groups which each had to talk about one of the concepts in France's national motto 'Liberté, égalité, fraternité' (freedom, equality, brotherhood). They were free to discuss those themes as they wished, most of them choosing to compare their understanding of each term to their daily reality, the theme of freedom leading to the most animated discussion. For all of these themes, comparisons were made between France and their countries of origin. Seeing this, we decided to make each one of them present these countries in a later workshop, allowing them to research information on the internet and mixing it with their own life experiences in order to produce a personalised poster. They were particularly enthusiastic about this activity as most of them were nostalgic of their home countries.

We could not however ask of these children and teenagers to only focus on the topics France or Asnières for the entire year. We therefore found more 'entertaining' activities to while maintaining their practice of the French language. As I have mentioned above, the theme of storytelling and fairy tales became our prime focus in the third term. We got a professional story teller to visit us during a couple of workshops and help the children and teenagers to compose their own stories after 'reciting' a few herself. Similarly, a theatre teacher visited the association on a few occasions and made the pupils enact a few improvised scenes. Again, these were for the most based on daily life situations in order to enhance their capacity to interact with the people who compose their French-speaking surroundings. Furthermore, various fun-based (and less pedagogical) outings were set up throughout the year. Along those lines, we spent a few springtime afternoons in local parks, engaging in various

outdoor activities (football, walks, picnics…) and at a theme park ('Parc Asterix'). Other outings more suited to the wintertime also took place, such as theatre plays adapted to a young audience or going to the movies.

The mission of linguistic and cultural integration is undertaken successfully by the association when it comes to deciphering the codes of French society, however, this endeavour can be restricted in terms of local-scale integration. Correspondingly, I wish to mention some of the limits of the association's actions in practical terms. Indeed, the integrating role of the Maison des Femmes at the local level is hindered by 'internal' perceptions, behaviours and circumstances. For instance, the literacy workshops are exclusively composed of newly arrived migrant children and teenagers for logical reasons, although some of them have just immigrated to France when others have already been part of the group for over a year. As a result, the workshop, in spite of the great cultural diversity of its members, does not constitute an adequate terrain for the development of bonds between them and other children from more established families of the neighbourhood.

As the C.L.A. teacher and the children under my supervision (from both the Maison des Femmes and Club des Chardons) who attend the Collège André Malraux have described to me, the separation between the two groups of children and teenagers is expressed physically in the school's courtyard. The C.L.A. pupils have their own delimitated section of the courtyard. This is not due to any restrictions on the children's movements or to the paint markings on the ground as there is no internal rule forbidding anyone to cross those lines. It seems they do not mix much with each other (I realise this is a common stereotype of migrant people), and this is the case even for those who have fully integrated a 'regular' French class. During breaks, they go back to their C.L.A. friends.

I asked the group of teenagers of the Maison des Femmes why they did not mix with their 'French' counterparts. Their answer was straightforward: they find them on average violent, loud and generally aggressive. I later asked Mme Narcesse if she felt her class was different to a regular one in terms of discipline. She confirmed that view, saying that the teenagers from the C.L.A. are a bit more vulnerable as they do not have enough time to fully adapt to the

neighbourhoods behavioural codes. For her, this makes them less prone to take part in provocative agitation and more prone to suffer from it. Moreover, she mentioned that she had never had any real troublemakers in the C.L.A. like there can be in other classes.

So how can the Maison des Femmes help in the local integration of newly arrived migrant children? Djamila, the mediator of the association, has a very extended network of Asnières associations and town hall structures that she regularly collaborates with. Some of them like the M.L.C. Centre Socio-Culturel (association) or the Maisons de Quartiers (town hall structure) focus on providing leisure activities (including sports, film viewings or musical instrument training) to neighbourhood youths and have no particular selective criteria apart from the place of residence. Djamila therefore serves as a link between the teenagers of the literacy workshop and those associations. She is made aware when spots are available for particular activities in those leisure associations and advertises them during the workshop. I once took the group to the nearest Maison de Quartier so that they could meet the other teenagers and the staff. Since then, four of them have signed up for at least one of the activities on offer. From what they have told me, they have made new friends and thoroughly enjoyed their time there.

There is however another limit to the integrating role of the Maisons des Femmes for newly arrived migrant children and teenagers. Indeed, the association nearly exclusively relies on its collaboration with C.L.A. and C.L.I.N. teachers to identify those who need it's specialised support the most. Due to the limited spaces in the workshops, the latter are full very quickly after being announced. This means that families who arrive in the Quartiers Nord in the middle of the school year have very little chances of attending the literacy classes until the beginning of the next, that is if they find out about the association. Furthermore, some children and teenagers from isolated families (and therefore those who would benefit the most from such activities) and who do not attend a C.L.A. or C.L.I.N. are more difficult to locate and enrol. The initiative has to come from parents but, being new migrants themselves, they are unlikely to have the resources to find out about the Maison des Femmes on their own. At best, social workers might recommend the association to them.

Along those lines, the Quartiers Nord benefit from the work of what is termed an 'équipe pluridisciplinaire' (cross-profession team), a team of professionals who regularly intervene in the educational policy and practice of the neighbourhood. It is the role of the members of the 'équipe pluridisciplinaire' to guide children and teenagers (and their families) towards the structure that they, as professionals, deem the most appropriate for the needs of each of them. This team is composed of teachers, administrators from the town hall, school directors, health workers, social workers and associative mediators. During their meetings, they discuss the situation of children and families but also local needs in structural terms. In other words they identify and attempt to find solutions to problems that arise at the individual and community or territorial levels, the two being closely linked. Such meetings allow for the exchange of information across the different institutions represented there and therefore in the coordination of efforts to improve the educational context of the Quartiers Nord.

Conclusions

Both the school support workshop of the Club des Chardons and the literacy classes for children and teenagers of the Maison des Femmes aim at supporting families experiencing the difficulties exposed above. They provide a physical and theoretical platform or space designed to facilitate knowledge acquisition. The two associations focus on a distinct aspect of the latter, however the roles they adopt in their exchanges with families converge. They stand as facilitators in the complex relationship these families have with the French educational system.

They do so in two ways. Firstly, in a straightforward manner by helping children to perform better in school than they would otherwise. Secondly, by assisting parents in situations where they have to decipher the codes and language dominating their exchanges with school representatives. This is the role of the associations' mediators who are the only ones to follow the family as a whole as we will see when dealing with their 'mediating' work in chapter 7. They are regularly interpreting and explaining the mechanics of the French and

local educational systems to both parents and children. As I share offices with the mediators of both associations, I witness the constant and daily flow of people who come to them because they are uncertain of the meaning or consequences of a particular mail they received from the school. They are in touch with each of the neighbourhood schools' assigned social worker ('assistante sociale') which allows them to be aware of specific evolutions in the families' relationship with the schools.

Moreover, school management teams are constantly trying to improve the quality of their services and to adapt them to the local environment. Correspondingly, certain school directors might themselves apply for their schools to be integrated to the Z.E.P. territory. Indeed, they can obtain more funding in that manner and reduce the number of pupils per class due to the Z.E.P. policy. However, and as the director of the André Malraux secondary school explained to me, the Z.E.P. label (which is for me an integral part of the dominant discourse of the 'difficult neighbourhood', this time in terms of education policies) also has a certain deterring effect on some parents who prefer to place their children in 'regular' or private schools if they can.

If the aim of the ZEP programme is to balance out territorial and educational inequities by making extra funding and resources available to schools in areas where the educational needs of the local population might differ from the national average, they also contribute to the typecasting of such neighbourhoods as 'difficult'. The ground-level application of these State policies can prove to be poorly adapted to the lives of certain members of the community, whether they come from established families or from recently arrived immigrant ones.

Accordingly, associations attempt to compensate for educational and social disparities that such policies may generate or at least not deal with in practice. They can thus be perceived as a partial answer to educational inequities at the level of the Asnières commune and the Quartiers Nord. Moreover, such associations provide a support platform for both families and schools in their integrating and knowledge acquisition efforts. They enhance the quality of exchanges between the two, especially when language is an issue and may seriously jeopardise mutual comprehension. In that sense, educational

associations contribute to the reduction of local-level social fragmentation and in some cases exclusion for children and teenagers of the Quartiers Nord.

Furthermore, I believe that both the Club des Chardons and the Maison des Femmes are able to apply the nationally dominant discourse on education (based on Republican principles such as secularism) at the local level thanks to their members' access to and understanding of demotic codes of behaviour. In that sense, they contribute to the reduction of the separation between certain residents of the Quartiers Nord and the mainstream French context. Correspondingly, I will develop this last point further in the next chapter as I focus specifically on the issue of social and territorial segregation by bringing the notions of centre and periphery into the discussion.

Chapter 5

Associations and the space between centre and periphery.

The previous chapter has laid the foundation for this ethnographic study of the positioning of associations in the Quartiers Nord of the Asnières commune. Here, I develop the discussion further by adding the related concepts of centre and periphery to the debate. Moreover, the first section of this chapter will clarify our understanding of the notion of 'culture' as the term will appear regularly in the following discussion. This theoretical framework will allow us to uncover the nature of the interactions between associations, local residents and political institutions such as the town hall administration, thus contributing to our investigation of the role of associations within the Quartiers Nord. My argumentation will rely on an examination of the perception among young people in the Quartiers Nord that 'French culture' is something alien from 'their culture'. In turn, we will understand how associations are located in the interstices between core and periphery, serving as a bridge or buffer zone where various kinds of cultural, political and other types of exchanges are facilitated.

The binary of centre and periphery can be used to describe the opposition between the two basic types of places in a spatial system, one which is commanding and benefiting from this position (the centre), and those which are subjected to the order in place (the periphery). This conceptual pair may be used at smaller levels of the geographic scale, to describe the relative positioning of elements of a village, city, region and so forth, but it has registered a particular success at the global level as an equivalent of the "developed world/ underdeveloped world" pair. Centre and periphery appear in the works of authors from diverse academic disciplines[72]. This means the terms 'centre' and

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[72] They include theoreticians of imperialism such as Rosa Luxemburg (1904) and Nikolaï Boukharine , economists such as Samir Anin (1973), geographers such as Alain Reynaud (1981), and sociologists such as Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) who developed the idea of a semi-

'periphery' have been used quite differently by various analysts in the history of the binary concept.

For example, Barrington Moore's (1966) analysis of the transformation of agrarian societies to industrial ones can be considered as part of the centre-periphery academic tradition. Moore defines a society's centre in terms of the alliances which are necessary for the establishment of a central regime. The periphery, in this model, consists of those actors left out of the 'nation-building alliance'. In contrast, Edward Shils (1975) defines the centre of a society as its 'ultimate' or 'sacred' symbols, values and beliefs and the institutions in which they are embodied. The periphery is composed of recipients of the symbols and commands emitted from the centre. In this thesis, our understanding of centre and periphery draws much more from Shil's conception than that of Moore as it best suits the representation of contemporary French urban centre-periphery dynamics.

In the intellectual history of the concept, the centre-periphery relationship has not only been articulated in a geographical/physical sense but also in a sociological manner. As Paul Claval points out it is an "expressive image" rather than a "coherent theory" (1980, 64). I see the related notions of centre and periphery as belonging to both domains, as an explanatory model for differentiation which allows for the identification of reciprocal processes. The periphery is subjected because the centre is dominating. Consequently, this perspective allows us to reflect on interactions between places and on links of co-dependency where inequalities are made visible, if not produced altogether. This pattern is transposable to the urban mapping of Paris and its suburbs. It is illustrated by the various levels of core and periphery identifiable in this study, Asnières being a peripheral space with Paris as its core but simultaneously representing a core itself for its own periphery: the Quartiers Nord.

Moreover, one could present the periphery as a space of negotiation as Abdoumaliq Simone explains: "the periphery is implicitly conceded as a space available to a certain 'métissage' (mixing), where more direct forms of

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periphery which lies in between the core and the periphery at the level of nation-states and the world system.

confrontation among entities − cities, regions, nations and so forth − are dispersed through a space that is positioned to absorb the tensions inherent in any intersection of distinct 'regimes'." (2007, 463). In that sense, the periphery should be envisaged as a locus of creation and innovation, a transitional zone between spaces. However, in the case of the French urban periphery, it seems that this generative role is often portrayed in a negative manner in mainstream discourse (as explored in chapter three), with the *banlieues* (and especially the most difficult areas within them) representing an extremity of the French socio-cultural landscape rather than a middle ground. The second section of this chapter will consequently deal with the positioning of the Quartiers Nord with respect to the centre/periphery debate.

While the changing contours of the periphery may simply reflect administrative plans, they may also serve as a means of absorbing the movement of given populations (usually those who cannot afford to live in the city centre or wish to leave rural areas), tying down inputs for the urban economy, or generating other needed resources for the city as a whole. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Quartiers Nord fit this description as their development and renovation coincides with demographic growth in the Asnières commune partly implemented by migratory flows of workers from within and outside of France to Paris.

My involvement with local associations in the area has allowed me to observe the vernacular implications of such urban policies which have led to the segmentation of the local territory along occupational and socio-economic lines. These activities and the interactions that resulted from them have led me to reflect upon the positioning of associations in the Asnières commune and to articulate the present study around this particular theme. Accordingly, the third section of this chapter will introduce the idea that associations serve as connectors between centre and periphery, increasing the potential agency of local residents in their interactions with the core.

The 'culture' concept

As social beings, humans learn through both formal and informal education to behave in ways that are seen as conventional and that are mostly fixed by tradition or habit. This view, inherited from Franz Boas' cultural anthropology and further developed by his students (Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead in particular), has been dominant in the social sciences, particularly in the early part of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, new perspectives have emerged which are more adapted to the way contemporary societies have evolved.

These more recent theories of culture have for the most participated in the continuous re-evaluation of the concept with diverse theoretical and empirical perspectives. Raymond Williams developed an approach which he termed 'cultural materialism' in a series of influential works. In his 1958 essay entitled "Culture is Ordinary", Williams emphasises the fact that cultural production, like other sectors of human activity, relies on material foundations (as would argue other Marxists). Culture must therefore be understood both in its own terms and as a part of society. In this light, culture cannot be seen as separate from politics due to its influence on the social processes addressed by political analysis. Williams has presented culture as a "way of life", essential to the construction and maintenance of any human society and of its political organisation (Williams, 1958). His interpretation of culture as a process rather than a product is of particular value to the present study as it situates culture within discussions of the everyday lives of individuals. This implies that it can and must be observed both from the inside and from a wider contextual angle – a dual perspective I intend to apply to the present study.

It is hard to enter this debate on culture without mentioning the work of Clifford Geertz. He views culture as a collection of symbols and signs. With reference to these socially established representations, people shape the patterns of their behaviours and give meaning to their experiences. This is metaphorically expressed by his famous line: "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs." (1973, 5). This view confirms what Williams already tells us about the position a social

scientist should adopt when interpreting cultural trends, that is that they should be observed within the context that generated them.

Bearing in mind problems in Geertz's holistic understanding of cultures, our task is to figure out symbols in cultures and to recognise their particular significance. Such a method requires us to read meaning not only as natives or insiders do, but also beyond that level. The symbolic needs to be related to the materialist and the ethnographer's position also needs to be critically evaluated in terms of his/her relation with the subjects of study. Along those lines, Vincent Crapanzano (2003) postulates that in ethnographies, there is an unconscious tendency to write to persuade, which causes the ethnographer's personal preference and viewpoints to be included. Furthermore, the ethnographer's informants and people under study may be used as means to validate their work: "aside from the devices the ethnographer uses to constitute his authority, he uses others to establish the validity of his ethnographic descriptions directly" (Crapanzano, 2003, 500). This study is no exception as it relies strongly on my interpretation of informants' views.

As Adam Kuper points out, Geertz himself sees the redefinition of culture as one of his most persistent interests as an anthropologist (Kuper, 1999, 97-98). However, Kuper is also very critical of Geertz's views. For him, they are idealistic and vulnerable to the same criticisms made of ideological theories of history. Overall, Kuper regrets the lack of social context in Geertz's understanding of culture (1999, 118-120). Moreover, Kuper criticises other conceptions of culture and their application. He condemns multiculturalism in the US for its potentially conservative stance on ethnicity and identity. In fact, Kuper argues that the term culture, when viewed through the lens of multiculturalism, is becoming a politically correct euphemism for race (Kuper, 1999, 235-249).

Nevertheless, I have difficulties with Kuper's overall rejection of culture as a valid analytical tool. Similarly to the contested notion of ethnicity in the French context, the complexity of the concept of culture may cause problems in given areas of research. However, this does not justify Kuper's extreme position as culture, I believe, is intricately and contingently related to social structure even if this is not in a coherent manner. Moreover, Kuper's argument is centred

exclusively on the work of American social scientists and is therefore only legitimate within a restricted theoretical background due to the emphasis put on cultural anthropology in America. Again, if the concept of ethnicity is ideally not relevant according to Republican values in France at the dominant level, its empirical application in the *banlieue* cannot be denied. It ought to be possible to integrate ethnic considerations to studies of French society. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the culture concept, however complex it may be, deserves the same treatment as long as it does not entail reified characteristics to groups of people.

Kuper is not the only academic to adopt this position. Lila Abu-Lughod, in her article Writing Against Culture (1991), is openly critical of the concept she believes "operates in anthropological discourse to enforce separations that inevitably carry a sense of hierarchy" (Abu-Lughod, 1991, 138). She nonetheless hints towards a way to go beyond the problems she has identified with the concept of culture:

> *By focusing closely on particular individuals and their changing relationships, one would necessarily subvert the most problematic connotations of culture: homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness* (Abu-Lughod, 1991, 154).

In the present study, I have aimed to follow the logic suggested by Abu-Lughod. Indeed, I have focused on a small group of individuals and observed their interactions with different elements of their local and national contexts. Moreover, the year I have spent in the field among them has allowed me to witness changes in their perspectives and behaviours which I never considered as static.

Many contemporary anthropologists (Clifford, 1988; Marcus, 1986; Appadurai, 1996) have rejected earlier practices of ethnography wherein it was claimed that local cultures are isolated. These social scientists still concern themselves with the distinct ways local populations perceive their lives, but they also argue that one cannot understand these ways of life exclusively from a local perspective. Instead, they aim to combine the local viewpoint with an effort to

grasp larger economic, political and cultural frameworks that have an influence on everyday realities. Consequently, it is important that we locate ourselves in relation to the culture we are studying, since culture is context-specific. According to James Clifford, one must also keep in mind that local cultures are often established in opposition to mainstream culture defined by those with significant access to the media (Clifford, 1988). Clifford's description of the (often conflicting) relationship between local and mainstream cultures is compatible with Baumann's (1996) theory of dominant and demotic discourses and strongly representative of the connection/separation between cultural representations *in* and *of* the Quartiers Nord I will describe below.

Moreover, the link between the mainstream and the local with respect to individuals who have to evolve and interpret situations at both of these levels is made clearer by Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus. The latter can be defined as a system of dispositions or, in Bourdieu's own words: "The habitus – embodied history, internalised as second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product." (Bourdieu, 1990, 56). In this way, Bourdieu conceptualises the transposition of objective social structures into the subjective experience of agents. As in Williams' analysis, culture is portrayed as a mundane often taken for granted process rather than a distinct product. Habitus can therefore be seen as essential to social reproduction as it is central to generating and regulating the practices that constitute human interaction.

To conclude this discussion on the concept of 'culture', I aim to explore the way different cultures interact, baring in mind the reservations outlined below on holistic understandings of it. Edward Hall (1976) presents a popular cultural framework in which he states that all cultures are situated in relation to one another through the styles in which they communicate. He identifies high-context and low-context cultures, where the high and low context notions are primarily concerned with the way information is transmitted and where context dictates the type of knowledge necessary for effective communication. Low-context exchanges occur predominantly through explicit statements which contain most of the information as it is not available from the context itself. In these societies or groups, cultural behaviour and beliefs may need to be made

obvious so that those coming into this environment know how to behave and interpret codes. High-context transactions are the opposite. This context involves implying a message by strategically playing on the pre-contained information found in the receiver and the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message. Here, people have close connections over a long period of time, entailing that several aspects of cultural behaviour are not made explicit because most members know what to do and what to think from a prolonged interaction with each other (Hall, 1976). In this view, meaning and environment are closely connected.

I would develop the argument further by saying that the nature of the context (high or low) depends on the relationship between communicators. As an inner-city Parisian, my knowledge of estate codes of behaviour and expression were restricted to representations of the *banlieues* emerging from my own environment and therefore part of the dominant discourse on the matter. These sometimes proved inaccurate or inadequate as I found myself engaged in conversations where the meaning intended by my interlocutors was out my reach. Only after working there for a few months did I realise what was really going on. In that sense, high and low contexts may also refer to the relative positioning of a researcher with regards to their 'object' or area of study. The perspective from which one evaluates a situation depends on whether we are adopting a demotic or dominant point of view (although the two may overlap). Our perception and interpretation of local cultural codes depends on our knowledge of the context in which we observe them.

The Quartiers Nord: a peripheral space?

Statistics, impressions and boundaries

I remember first visiting Asnières as a teenager in 1997. I was going to a friend's birthday party in the centre of the town. I had never been all the way to this end of metro line 13 and it felt like an adventure. However, when I got off at the Gabriel Péri metro station, which at the time was the last stop in that direction, I found myself in a very different setting from what I had expected.

Indeed, my first impression when coming out of the station and walking through the Asnières town centre was no different from that of a stroll through the more quiet and residential neighbourhoods of Paris. The only difference lay in the large proportion of individual houses with gardens present in the area.

My second visit to Asnières came nine years later as I visited potential areas for fieldwork. I walked from the same station but this time headed towards the northern area of the town for about half an hour (the Agnettes and Courtilles metro stations were not completed yet). I followed the Emile Zola street on which the Agnettes metro station is now located and quite suddenly found myself in what I perceived to be a very different environment. The *pavillons* (individual houses) were replaced by (mostly) derelict three or four story buildings which in turn gave way to high-reaching tower blocks and barres (the horizontal equivalent) around the avenue de la Redoute where the Courtilles metro station now lies (see photographs in Appendix 1). The fancy shops and cafés of the area by the train station and town hall gradually disappeared. Here and there I could see an international call centre, a halal butcher's shop, or a kebab fast food restaurant. During the course of fieldwork, they have all become familiar places to me and, for some of them, the locus of numerous conversations as I confirmed their importance as spaces of social interaction among local residents.

This change in the nature and frequency of shopping facilities is accompanied by a linguistic shift. Although French remains the prevalent language of exchange among people, the range of foreign accents and languages in the Quartiers Nord is wider than in the town centre. This diversity is also noticeable visually with a larger proportion of African and North African Muslim women in the streets wearing veils. Although these are merely my first impressions, they are confirmed by official numbers.

Indeed, according to I.N.S.E.E.[73] figures for the Quartier Nord Z.U.S. (Zone Urbaine Sensible), out of the 16028 inhabitants of the area in 2011, 3494 are foreigners and 4807 fall into the 'immigrant' category (French nationals who

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[73] Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies).

were not born French)[74]. Overall, the percentage of people of foreign origin in the Quartiers Nord is therefore around 50%. This proportion is far superior to departmental, regional and national averages. In comparison, the population of the Hauts-de-Seine *département* (district[75]) in 2009 (the date of the last census) reached an overall number of 1 561 745 and comprised 129 711 immigrants and 179 578 foreigners which constitutes a percentage of about 20%. This percentage is approximately the same as the regional one (Ile-de-France region) but drops back to a bit over 10% for France as a whole[76].

Table: Foreign born and immigrant populations across administrative territories

Area	Foreign Born and Immigrants	
	Number	Percentage
Paris (75)	812,054	39 %
Hauts-de-Seine (92)	309,289	20 %
Quartiers Nord Z.U.S.	8,301	52 %

The statistics and impressions presented above give us a first indication of some of the differences one can observe between Asnières' town centre and the Quartiers Nord. The latter encompass various levels of discussion such as changes in architecture or fluctuations in the demographic distribution. These elements contribute to the consolidation of boundaries separating, at least cognitively, the various estates and neighbourhoods that constitute the Quartiers Nord from the rest of the Asnières commune as well as Paris itself.

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[74] Data accessed on 03/08/2012 at www.insee..fr/fr/ppp/bases-de-donnees/donnees-detaillees/duicq/pdf/em_Z_1115010.pdf

[75] There are eight départements in the Ile-de-France region: Paris and the seven districts surrounding it. France is divided into 101 départements, five of which being overseas.

[76] Data accessed on 03/08/2012 at www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=poptc02501

The idea of symbolic and physical boundaries is applicable to most geographic scales, including that of the neighbourhood or street. They become visible through observation and reflection. Nonetheless, once they have been identified, one still has to measure the balance of parameters that affect the elaboration and consolidation of such boundaries. These range from socio-cultural practices and processes of identification among local residents (as we will see in the next chapter) to strategies of urban planning.

Consequently, uncovering the nature of such boundaries allows us to assess the effects of territorialisation from two perspectives: - firstly from the centre or mainstream, as exemplified by the official representations of the Quartiers Nord such as the various labels attributed to them (Z.A.C., Z.U.P., Z.U.S....[77]) - secondly from the residents of these areas with the reinforcement of local identities, the creation of new cultural codes and strategies of adaptation or denial among other characteristics. These two dimensions of territorial labelling and corresponding identity formation can be interpreted as both sides of Gerd Baumann's (1997) distinction between dominant and demotic discourse whereby the dominant discourse reifies culture and community as 'essences', boundaries being defined and accepted through differences in religion, ethnicity, geographic positioning and so forth; and the demotic discourse encompasses the fact that culture is affected by social interactions and the consequent 'fusion' of identities. It must be noted that these two perspectives mutually influence each other (thus confirming Baumann's understanding of them), as is the case of all centres and their relative peripheries, and that neither of them are uniform as illustrated by the diversity of political opinions found in Asnières and the differing (if not opposing) views of inhabitants on their own neighbourhoods, both of which will be exposed throughout this thesis.

In spite of these differences in the perception and representation of the Quartiers Nord, a common ground emerged from my various conversations on the topic with local residents, inhabitants of the Asnières town centre, and policy

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[77] Z.A.C.: *Zone d'Aménagement Concerté* (Urban Development Zone)
Z.U.P.: *Zone à Urbaniser en Priorité* (Priority Zone for Urbanisation)
Z.U.S.: *Zone Urbaine Sensible* (Sensitive Urban Zone or Urban Regeneration Area)

makers: they all identified the Quartiers Nord as an individual territorial unit. They all knew what specific area I referred to when using this name and did not question the existence of such an entity although their views on it may differ. In that sense, the Quartiers Nord are considered as simultaneously separate from and connected to Asnières' town centre, the level of relatedness between the two depending on the topic of discussion and on the identity of my interlocutor. The answer to the question of whether one constitutes a 'centre' and the other a 'periphery' therefore hinges on the same parameters.

When I interviewed a local police officer and our conversation turned to the topic of 'security', he immediately made a distinction between what he just termed 'Asnières' and the 'Quartiers Nord'. I nearly got the impression that these two locations, or 'territories' to use his own words, are not geographically or administratively connected. He insisted on the fact that the work of the police differs greatly from one area to the other. He also mentioned that riot police are more inclined to intervene in the Quartiers Nord than in any other area of the commune. For him, "although we (the police) divide our time and attention equally between the two zones, we are more likely to encounter the victims and perpetrators of petty crimes or violence in the Quartiers Nord". He then added: "I believe this is probably the case in most communes with large estate networks", a view which strongly echoes national media and political representations of *banlieues* estates presented in chapter 3, in other words mainstream or dominant discourses on 'difficult neighbourhoods'.

This clear distinction made by the police officer between Asnières' town centre and its geographic periphery in terms of the recurrent 'security' debate is shared by many of the officials I encountered. When a member of town hall team working with associations discussed such issues with me, he asked where I had lived in Asnières. His question came after I explained that I never felt 'unsafe' when I lived in Asnières. I answered that my single room was located at the end of the 'rue du Révérend Père Christian Gilbert', a long street that goes from the town centre to the edge of the Quartiers Nord. After I told him that, he smiled and said that my perception might have been different had I lived in the Courtilles estate. He nonetheless insisted on his use of the word 'perception',

arguing that 'l'insécurité' relies mainly on a general feeling rather than facts, the former being fuelled by local reputations and media stereotyping.

In both the police officer and deputy mayor's views, one gets the idea that the town's geographic centre and periphery are separate spaces with different characteristics. Nonetheless, these 'official' interpretations of the Quartiers Nord as distinct from Asnières' town centre do not give us the full picture. As we will see when uncovering the various levels of territorial identification among children and youths in the next chapter, they consider the commune of Asnières as part of their extended local environment. Although they clearly distinguish between the two areas, Asnières as a whole represents one of their levels of identity building, especially in opposition to other (sometimes rival) territories such as the neighbouring Luth estate in the Gennevilliers commune.

This is illustrated by an impromptu discussion that occurred between myself and a few of the children from the Freycinet neighbourhood shortly after I started helping with homework support at the Club des Chardons. One of the children who I will name Karim (ten years old) was being agitated and refusing to study[78]. Seeing that I was getting irritated, one of the more experienced volunteers explained to Karim that I was there to help him and that I had come a long way to do so. This conversation followed the incident[79]:

> K.: I thought you were from Asnières. Where do you live?
>
> Y.: I live in Paris with my parents.
>
> K.: What, like Place de Clichy? [an area of North-West of Paris and therefore reasonably close to Asnières]
>
> Y.: No, near metro Plaisance, in the south. On the other side of line 13.
>
> K.: Wow, that's like the other side of the world!
>
> Y.: Well it's just an hour away really…
>
> K.: So what's your estate like? Is it better than here?

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[78] This is a pseudonym. This will be the case for all the children mentioned in this study.

[79] Y.: me   K.: Karim   S.: Sophia

Y.: I don't live in an estate, just in a building. Not everyone lives in an estate you know.

At that point, Karim kept silent and frowned for a few seconds, looking like I had just said something incoherent. Sophia, a girl who was sat in front of him doing her homework, looked up and laughed.

S.: I don't live in an estate.

K.: Where do you live then? In the street?

S.: No, in a house.

K.: Why are you here if you don't live in Asnières then?

S.: I live in Asnières too! I used to live here in the Freycinet but my mum moved downtown.

K.: So you're rich now!

S.: I'm not rich.

K.: So what do you prefer then? Here or there?

S.: I don't know. All my friends are here. But I prefer my house there.

K.: You have no friends.

The conversation then turned into banter between children so I made them get back to their homework.

Many children and teenagers from the Quartiers Nord and Courtilles estate in particular have strong links to neighbourhood networks. They are more familiar and comfortable with friends and acquaintances they grew up with. This exchange is representative of the multi-levelled notion of space and the meaning attributed to each area that I have noticed among local children. For Karim, the neighbourhoods of Asnières that are not adjacent to his own (Freycinet, in the Courtilles estate) are 'rich' territories. This judgement is nevertheless not based on administrative delimitations or knowledge of demographic statistics. He saw Sophia as a fellow local but with a different socio-economic status. I was however an outsider to him, coming from a space so far away that he could not really relate to it, whether it be in a positive or a negative manner.

What is original about Karim's perception compared to that of other children is that he believes estates to be the only kind of neighbourhood set-up. Indeed, the other pupils present in the room at the time of the discussion laughed

at his reaction. He was using the word 'estate*' ('cité' in French) in a loose manner, maybe meaning neighbourhood or block. Nevertheless, his unusual view underlines the fact that the Courtilles estate has a very different feel to it than the town centre. As I have described above, the two areas are architectural opposites, one full of empty spaces between its tower blocks and 'barres*', and the other thriving with shops and parks among the small sized buildings and individual houses with their front gardens.

However, the separation between the Quartiers Nord and the town centre is not as clear in the minds of adult residents. Many indispensable facilities such as the town hall or medical centres are located in the middle of town. This means that residents of the Quartiers Nord have to regularly go there in order to benefit from their services. One can also add that some of them work in that area as it is where most of the commune's office spaces and shops are found. This 'internal mobility' within the commune ties the neighbourhoods of Asnières Nord and Asnières Sud (as they are often labelled in official and associative documents) together. In this light, the Quartiers Nord can be seen as fitting our understanding of the notion of periphery with respect to Asnières' town centre. They are clearly perceived as distinct socio-economic spaces but are linked geographically and administratively.

The Quartiers Nord can also be envisaged as part of a vast conceptual network of estates around Paris which share a common bad reputation as well as certain codes of behaviour (especially among the younger section of the population). This could be termed the 'cultural periphery'. Although considering that 'difficult neighbourhoods' in France have their own distinct culture may be a stereotypical view which increases the gap between such territories and 'mainstream' France, one has to acknowledge the fact that certain cultural elements have emerged nearly exclusively from there. In this situation, demotic representations can be seen as influencing the dominant discourse on the periphery. This is for instance the case of French rap music. If it would be wrong to describe all suburban towns and estates as a uniform entity, one can nonetheless identify various regular patterns in the role they play within the national and local schemas before correlating those observations with what has been witnessed in the field. With this in mind, let us now turn to what these

values and behaviours actually are when it comes to the Quartiers Nord, whether they be perceived from a researcher's point of view, or simply enacted by local residents.

Different perspectives from within the Quartiers Nord

Here, I wish to distinguish between newly arrived migrants and their families and other residents of the Quartiers Nord who have lived in France over a much longer period of time. Although ethnic criteria are not the only components of an individual's cultural referential (Kuper, 1999), they play a role in processes of identification and interactions, especially among some of the children I worked with. However, I noticed important differences in perception and representation between the children I helped with their homework and those to whom I taught French.

I witnessed inconsistencies early on in my fieldwork in the varying reactions I got to my name and appearance during my introduction and in the following days. The children of the Club des Chardons (homework support) were inquisitive about who I was and where I came from. Some of the teenagers called me cousin and tried to speak to me in Arabic (a language I do not master). In that sense, I was treated as someone who would grasp the meaning of this high-context interaction. In spite of my recent arrival in the area, I still knew enough to interpret this greeting as a reflection on my perceived ethnicity. This made me a bit less of an outsider in their eyes, although they seemed slightly confused by what they later described as 'my bourgeois accent'.

My initial interactions with the newly arrived children of the Maison des Femmes was in a way much more straightforward. There was no question for them that I was French (even for the ones from North Africa) as the aim of our gathering was for me to share my knowledge of the French language and mainstream culture with them. As a matter of fact, I would say that for those who had just been in France for a few weeks, the only clear separation they could make was between themselves and 'the French'. This is confirmed by the fact that, when I asked them to introduce themselves and the countries they came

from, they did so in comparison to France ('Chechnya is more Muslim than France', 'Egypt is more crowded' and so forth).

They also identified many of the new situations they encountered in the Quartiers Nord as national characteristics. One of my roles was to discuss such issues with them and to present them with what one could call the mainstream (usually Republican) perspective. Moreover, I often found myself debating some of their views with them in order to avoid generalisations. This was for instance the case when Sandra, a fourteen years old Bolivian who had been living in Asnières for nearly a year and been in school (in an 'adaptation' class as did all the students in that workshop) for nearly as long said she did not like France. I asked her to develop her argument and she said that the main reason for her feelings was the fact that 'there are Arabs and Muslims everywhere here'. This comment came as a surprise given that she was sitting next to her best friend Nora who happens to be Egyptian and a Muslim. This conversation followed:

N.: She's just saying that because of a group of girls in our school who give her trouble.

Y.: And they don't give you trouble?

N.: No, because I yell at them in Arabic. I think they're just jealous of Sandra because one of the boys likes her.

Y.: I see, so this is really about boys then.

S.: (blushing) No! No! They hate me because I can't speak French or Arabic. They're mean.

Y.: Do any of you have friends from your school outside of your classmates?

N.: No, the French kids are too rough. They're always fighting inside or outside of the school. All of them, the Africans, the Arabs…

Y.: So there is a difference between the Arabs here and in Egypt?

N.: Yes, they're not really Arabs here, they're French.

At this point, Ramzen, a sixteen year old from Chechnya who had been carefully listening to the conversation intervened briskly:

R.: And there are not that many Muslims here. They're not even real Muslims for the most. There is only one mosque here.

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Y.: Compared to where?

R.: To home.

N.: Same with Egypt.

As I got to know the children better, it became easier to understand their perspectives. Sandra and her older sister who is also in the group come from a small village in Bolivia. They had never seen a Muslim person before coming to France and lived among their relatives. They have to adapt to various changes in their environment with their parents being separated, the move from one country to another and from a rural area to an urban one. Sandra's generalising statement is based on a couple of incidents only, one of them occurring a few hours before the conversation we had and triggering her anger and prejudice. Her reaction and that of Nora are also representative of some of the difficulties (especially for children and teenagers) in adapting to the rough and competitive environment of certain Z.E.P. (Zone d'Education Prioritaire) schools[80]. All the pupils in that particular workshop regularly pick up on differences between their original local environment and their new local environment, often resulting in vague generalising rants about France as a whole. Moreover, the school teacher who is in charge of their adaptation class (C.L.A.)[81] told me that they are seen by the other pupils as 'different and weird'. Apparently, it is extremely rare for any of them to have friends from another class before they are actually integrated into the regular French educational system.

The fact that the children of newly arrived migrants notice and criticise what they see as ethnic and religious behaviours or patterns is not surprising. One could think that this marks a great divide between themselves and the rest of the population of the Quartiers Nord. However, these criteria are also relevant in the views of most of the other local residents, whatever their age group or ethnic and religious background.

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[80] Priority Education Zone

[81] The state school programme that allows for children and teenagers to gradually adapt to the French educational system over an initial period of up to two years.

One thing I noticed in the Quartiers Nord is that, contrarily to what I witnessed in the rest of Asnières, in my own area of Paris, or in the media and political discourses in general, local residents have no problem using ethnicity in their self-portrayal or in the interpretation of their exchanges with others. This is even the case of most of the 'white' adult residents of the neighbourhood that I have met. Although a few of the comments made are clearly filled with prejudice and aggression, the majority of them come out in a neutral and spontaneous manner (e.g.: "Hey! It's the Senegal crew!"). This relaxed approach to ethnic differences contrasts with what can be observed outside of the Quartiers Nord, in what one could call the mainstream ideological framework based on Republican values.

Indeed, by the 1980s, old discourses based on racial hierarchy had weakened in influence and were replaced by a new form of racism in France (Barker 1981, Taguieff, 1988). The main change operating in this transformation was a shift from certain values inherited through the now condemned era of colonialism to a set of ideas rooted in cultural essentialism. These contemporary modes of discrimination operate on an implicit level and play on subtle prejudices. As Etienne Balibar described, they are a form of 'racism without races' (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1988, 32-33). In other words, Balibar argues that there has been a shift from racism to culturalism. With the notion of race transposed from the physical to the cultural plane, one can find here further traces of the distinct lack of ethnic considerations (and of ethnicity as a relevant concept) within the contemporary French official discourse on the nation and its boundaries. This phenomenon can be traced all the way back to the post-revolutionary era and the Code de la Nationalité of 1851, an early part of the French nationality law by which children born in France of foreign parents can be granted French nationality when they legally become adults if they ask for it. Needless to say, there is a conflict between the universalistic view on equality which is mirrored in the dominant discourse about Republican values and the particularistic idea of racial, ethnic or cultural difference which is played out at the demotic level.

In France, the question of ethnicity is debated in a very particular manner. While policy-makers refuse to take the existence of ethnic groups into

account, they are sometimes forced to practically recognise them in order to respond to specific problems such as racism. Although the idea of the ethnic minority community or 'communautarisme' is often rejected, the State participates in the funding of civic associations based on ethnic criteria such as the celebration of particular events from different countries of origin. However, the consistent rise of populist rhetoric in the national political discourse and the subsequent growth in the popularity of far-right ideologies prove that racism, although it is no longer based on biological theories, has survived the fact that its two major theoretical components have been deemed inappropriate for French public debate[82]. The question of culture is of enormous importance in France and tends to mask the more structural dimension of racial discrimination, as exemplified by the inequalities that are slowly becoming visible in terms of housing or employment.

Moreover, it could be argued as Max Silverman has done that the whole discourse on 'immigration', 'the problems of the suburbs' and 'national identity' is symptomatic of the discursive shift away from biological racism described above (Silverman, 1992). In that sense, a new context has been set in which notions of the self and otherness depend greatly on the fluctuations of urban lifestyles, migratory changes and political infrastructures. Here lie the essential criteria around which inclusion and exclusion are determined. However, simply accepting this transformation as a cultural one may lead us to overlook some of its wider implications.

Indeed, these new discriminatory factors should also be envisaged as expressions of an overarching ideology. Michel Wievorka (1991) argues that the contemporary racism of cultural difference acquires its true meaning in the context of the crisis of universalism and the decline of the strong social relations established in industrial society[83]. The inability of the Republican project to integrate people around the common goals of equality and solidarity has opened

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[82] The *Front National* far-right party reached a surprising 14.38 percent of voters for its first presidential election in 1988. This number increased to 17.90 percent in the last 2012 presidential elections. Source (accessed on 24/11/2012): www.france-politique.fr/elections-presidentielles.htm

[83] See also Tariq Modood's work on Muslims in Britain (2005) where he describes a form of cultural racism based on language, religion, family structures, dress and cuisine.

up a gap for cultural identities to enter the public debate on national citizenship. The former hierarchical class structure of the industrial age has collapsed and been replaced by a more individualistic model based on consumption and generating even stronger segregating forces than its predecessor (though other forms of collective identities such as ethnicity or identities based on place have persisted). It has also produced a certain degree of urban degradation, clearly visible when considering social and spatial exclusion (Wievorka, 1991).

This spatial segmentation has entered the fabric of French society in such a way that it may be seen as a major determinant in an individual's identity formation and cultural traits as we will see in the next chapter. The 'social fracture' denounced by both Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy in their respective successful presidential campaigns has not disappeared[84]. The expression 'social fracture' addresses the division between rich and poor, the high rate of unemployment, particularly among the young, and persistent exclusion from society of entire segments of the population based on economic and political criteria. These underprivileged demographic groups form their own specific sets of behaviours to fit their socio-economic conditions and in that sense start to move away from the mainstream model of social relations dictated by mainstream society.

Expressions *in* and *of* the estate-type areas such as the Quartiers Nord are as diversified as the perspectives they emerge from. The most productive way of describing the local culture is therefore to consider both high and low context understandings of it as we have done (Hall, 1976). If one takes the administrative, political and general outsiders' perspectives as our main form of approach, the representation of the French urban periphery that emerges is rather bleak and inaccurately generalising. The fact that these areas are often mentioned in the public debate in a stigmatising manner contributes to the consolidation of their poor image. This affects the local population's self-image and expressions of identity. In that sense, high and low contexts of

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[84] This expression was first used by Jacques Chirac in his first speech during the 1995 presidential campaign (17 February 1995). From that point onwards, it has entered the political vocabulary and has since been mentioned by Nicolas Sarkozy in both his Presidential campaigns in 2007 and 2012.

representation of the '*banlieue* culture' influence each other. High and low contexts are therefore interdependent.

This co-dependency brings a form of agency to young estate residents as they are in a position to rewrite the terms of the debate. Many of the children and teenagers I interact with at the Club des Chardons (homework support) take pride in the fact that they live in an estate. They see it as a badge of honour which gives them street credibility and the respect of their peers. In that sense, there is a congruence between dominant and demotic discourses on the Quartiers Nord and estates in general as they are presented in both perspectives as separate environments with different rules and codes to that of 'core' urban territories. This phenomenon can be compared to that which has been observed by Philippe Bourgois (1996) in his ethnographic account of East Harlem's crack economy and street culture. For him, "street culture offers an alternative forum for autonomous personal dignity" (Bourgois, 1996, 8). In this particular case and for some of the children of the Quartiers Nord, respect can be earned through street credibility as the latter offers an alternative (and apparently accessible) path to a higher social positioning, at least at the local level.

But is this vision a sign that there is indeed a cultural ghetto in France and that the latter is situated in the urban periphery? If we adopt Raymond Williams' interpretation of culture as a way of life, there is such a thing as a cultural ghetto in France in the sense that there is a culture of the *banlieue* and that processes of spatial exclusion are a prominent part of it. In other words, the culture of the *banlieue* is based on its positioning at the extremities from the centre or mainstream. However, the population residing within the French urban periphery is characterised by its ethnic heterogeneity as opposed to the strictly enforced ethnic homogeneity of the American ghetto[85]. Furthermore, in the estates and grands ensembles, residents have regular contact with and depend on (through employment and consumption practices) people from other neighbourhoods and the central city. This recurrent contact may emphasise

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[85] See Loïc Wacquant's comparative study of urban marginality in France, the US and South America (2008) or David Wilson's investigation of black ghettos in the US (2007).

discrepancies, but it also contributes to the alignment of cultural frameworks (mainstream and peripheral) to ensure their compatibility.

The culture of the Quartiers Nord is the product of a local environment with its own codes and mannerisms. As much as estate youths create their self image with relation to the national and global contexts, the cultural webs they spin (to borrow Geertz's expression) are the result of their everyday 'local' experiences. In order to evolve within the setting of the estate, one has to obtain a knowledge base consisting of cultural traits that can only be acquired in context[86]. This context is both high and low, explicit and implicit, relying on distorted and dominant representations of particular territories while contesting these very notions.

In this section, I have presented the Quartiers Nord in two ways: the view from the centre and the view from the periphery. However, I am not sure that the children and teenagers I work with would consider themselves to be at the margins of mainstream society. For them, the 'centre' is where they are, where the rules of behaviour and knowledge they are acquiring are constructed and validated. They are nonetheless aware of the local and national discourses that define the Quartiers Nord as distinct from the rest of Asnières and more generally the *banlieues* and estates from the centre of town and city centres. This affects their own positioning (and that of all residents of the area) within the local setting and with regards to the overarching national framework.

Nevertheless, interactions between these two environments are constant and necessary in terms of social cohesion and administrative implementation. The differences described throughout this section may render such interactions more complex to the point of being counter-productive. In order to facilitate exchanges between centre and periphery, complementary structures are needed to occupy the space between them. I believe this is exactly the role played by associations in the Quartiers Nord.

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[86] Geertz's perspective is criticised by Vincent Crapanzo (1986) who claims that he underestimates the impact of the anthropologist on the people he or she studies and on the reader.

Associations as an intersection.

As the Quartiers Nord may indeed be perceived as a peripheral space with respect to Asnières' town centre, inner-city Paris and some elements of the mainstream Republican discourse, interactions between its inhabitants and the institutions that compose the 'centre' can, in given circumstances, be awkward and complex. The local associative network is partly designed to facilitate these exchanges by providing services to either complement and facilitate the activities of existing structures or simply to fill a potential void identified by residents, social workers and the administration.

Along those lines, the Maison des Femmes acts as a social and cultural mediator in order to smooth the progress of intercultural communication. In order to achieve this, the association is divided in two sections: mediation and 'formation' (training/skill development). Based on the great cultural diversity of the Quartiers Nord the mediation pole ultimately aims for the improvement of local living conditions through the strengthening of neighbourhood ties as well as the reinforcement (and sometimes creation) of links between residents, socio-economic agents, and institutions in the area.

When I initially joined the Maison des Femmes, the director Zachia Mzili-Couderc detailed for me the range of activities of the association, and especially that of the mediation pole as I would be working within this department. She identified several objectives specific to it[87]: (i) the promotion of new forms of social intervention based on the needs of local residents and institutions; (ii) contributing to the development of local initiatives and projects; facilitating access to civic rights including health and education; (iii) fighting against all forms of discrimination; (iv) promoting social and cultural activities that favour the well-being of women in particular; (v) facilitating the acquisition of linguistic knowledge and transmitting French cultural codes and notions of citizenship; (vi) becoming a space of exchange within the neighbourhood.

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[87] These objectives are also detailed in the association's yearly activity report.

The great variety of objectives listed above entails a consequent diversity in the activities of the 'pôle médiation' (mediation division) of the association as well as in its audience. The pôle is actually located by the Agnettes metro station in a different building to the house that hosts the rest of the association (administration and formation pôle) and that is closer to the Courtilles metro station. It is a relatively small space composed of a classroom (in which I gave my classes) and a back office where Djamila and Meriem, respectively in charge of the coordination of social mediation and health issues, spend most of their work days. Due to the fact that they directly contribute to the realisation of the objectives of the mediation pôle at ground level, they know most of the families of the Quartiers Nord. They have become 'local celebrities' and it is impossible to walk the streets in their company without being stopped every minute by someone needing help with a particular issue, wanting to thank them for a problem they have solved or simply to engage in a friendly chat.

Moreover, the office hosts two professionals on a regular basis for them to provide specific advice and support. One is a lawyer who is present once a month and specialises in family rights. She guides people and takes charge of their legal cases, sometimes going as far as representing them in court. In 2011, 41 residents of the Quartiers Nord benefited from her help through the mediation pole of the Maison des Femmes. The other specialist is a public writer who drops by every Friday mornings. His role is to assist people in the production of official documents such as tax declarations, reclamations or any other administrative correspondences. In 2011, 131 asked for his help and 144 documents were subsequently written.

Due to the wide range of services on offer at the mediation pole of the Maison des Femmes, there is no typical profile for the people who benefit from the work of its members. In other words, its public is very diversified. Although people between the ages of 26 and 65 constitute two thirds of it, teenagers and children are also a big part of the activities. They are the ones who are physically present on a regular basis, mainly because of their participation in the weekly alphabetisation (or literacy) workshop (which is the only workshop to take place in the classroom of the mediation pole) and associated outings, as well as the occasional homework support sessions that are set up at their request. Among

the adult public, a third are employed, a third unemployed, and the other third are either retired or benefit from a specific pension. The vast majority of them are from the Quartiers Nord, with a few coming all the way from the other (smaller) area in the south-east of Asnières labelled as a 'difficult' neighbourhood.

The formation pôle on the other hand is organised around five subject areas: the coordination of linguistic initiatives in the Asnières and Colombes communes, its own language classes, specific professional training workshops (financed by local companies and the 'pôle emploi'[88]), communication and information technology workshops, and leisure based activities such as 'worldwide cooking' or gymnastics classes. Although the mediation pôle is concerned with local families in their entirety by helping them with their administrative demands or providing French classes to newly arrived migrant children (the workshop I took part in), the formation pôle is focused exclusively on the situation of women. Indeed, the latter constitute the base of the association's public. It is through these original members that the Maison des Femmes has been able to gain access to and the trust of entire families.

Among the women attending the classes and workshops described above, 61% are unemployed, with 46% of them being homemakers. Only 14% of them have a salaried job. One of the main reasons for this situation lies in the fact that most of these women spend their time taking care of their children and that most of their local network is composed of other immigrant women. In that sense, gender, like ethnicity, can be seen as an element or layer of the peripheral status of some of the female residents of the Quartiers Nord. Their interactions with French society as a whole and local institutions is therefore limited to brief and often uneasy interactions. Consequently, it becomes difficult for them to improve their knowledge of the French language and cultural codes. Their integration to the French national project and especially the job market therefore becomes compromised. They find themselves at the periphery of a dominant system without the tools to reach its core and become a part of it. As stated in

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[88] The state-run structure in charge of unemployment.

the associations yearly report, it is the role of the Maison des Femmes to provide them with those tools and help these women build a bridge between themselves and the rest of French society.

Although I was not often in direct contact with the women of the formation pôle, I was able to speak to them and listen to their opinions on a few occasions. One of these took place at the Château d'Asnières for the end of (academic) year diploma awarding ceremony. I could see from the attitudes of most of them that this was an emotional day which filled them with pride. I believe the 'grandiose' setting and the presence of the mayor and his team enhanced that feeling. Indeed, as the mayor mentioned in his speech, such diplomas mark the commune's recognition of these women's efforts to integrate and participate further in Asnières' life. His speech was followed by theirs in which the emphasis was put on the new possibilities open to them, especially in terms of exchanges with local structures such as their children's school and more mundane activities such as watching French television or shopping.

There were also testimonies from two women who, after going through the various stages of the language training, had found jobs in the Paris area. They explained how their time at the association had helped them settle in their new country and neighbourhood. According to them, this is due to the language skills they acquired, but also to the fact that they were taken out of their state of isolation. One of them (a middle-aged woman from Yemen) described her first year in France insisting on her lack of contact with the outside world, not because she wanted it or was forced to remain with her children at home, but because she had no idea how to interact with her new neighbours or to interpret interactions in this new setting. This was terrifying to her. At that point, the Maison des Femmes represented a first step towards an understanding of national and local cultural mechanisms. By sharing activities and experiences with other women in the same situation, she felt less isolated. Moreover, she gradually got used to the idea that she could eventually find her in place in this society.

In that sense, the association plays the role of a bridge between a marginalized section (whether it be along gender, ethnic or linguistic lines) of the population in this peripheral space through the reduction of the gap between

them and a mainstream society (and to some extent the local environment) which is characterised by its requirements and benefits. In terms of positioning, this situates the Maison des Femmes at the intersection of the centre and periphery, with the dual role of cultural translator and initial integrating agent. This task is all the more difficult in the case of women in their forties or over with families. Indeed, as their individual interactions with the outside world are often reduced to the minimum due to their low potential for adaptation compared to that of their children who get socialised through the educational system and neighbourhood connections which are more easily established at a young age.

I was in a position to witness the evolution of such newly arrived children and teenagers over the year we spent together in the alphabetisation class of the mediation pôle. This class is part of the Programme pour la Réussite Educative (P.R.E., a nationwide programme for educational success). The latter was put in place on 18th January 2005 following the 'loi de cohesion sociale' (social cohesion law). It aims at the practical realisation of equal chances for children from 'difficult neighbourhoods', to use an expression from the dominant discourse on the matter. There are actually two multidisciplinary teams in Asnières running the P.R.E., one in the Quartiers Nord and the other in the South East area of the commune. The mediators and educators from the various associations involved in the programme take part in monthly meetings in order to coordinate the project and homogenise their practices.

In this way, the partnership between local associations and the schools, social workers, 'Caisse d'Allocation Familiale' (C.A.F., state organisation dealing with the benefits and rights of families) and other institutions[89] is strengthened. Both associations I am involved with take part in the P.R.E. but they are not the only ones in Asnières, with notably the largest association (in terms of budget, members and structures), the M.L.C. Centre Socioculturel (socio-cultural centre), providing language classes and hosting half of the monthly meetings.

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[89] C.V.S. : *Circonscription de la Vie Sociale*
P.M.I. : *Protection Maternelle et Infantile*
P.J.J.: *Protection Judiciaire de la Jeunesse*
S.S.P.M.: Service Santé Prévention Municipal

In order to achieve the common aims of social cohesion and equal chances across the Asnières territory, each association provides individually adapted support to children and teenagers experiencing difficulties, whether it be in terms of formal education or social life. This implies that they take a variety of parameters into account, from linguistic to sanitary and family conditions. Moreover, there are three clearly defined objectives to the programme as exposed on the website of the national ministry for education[90]:

- linguistic: help the children master the French language through their immersion in activities that they enjoy and make sense to them.
- socio-cultural: facilitate the children's exchanges with his or her peers by exposing and encouraging them to take part in the local collective environment.
- transversal: maintain the children's motivation in their discovery of this new environment by helping them interpret some of the situations they encounter within it. This requires a certain amount of time as one needs to know their needs, skills and personal background first.

Overall, this threefold methodology serves as a complement to the children's learning and adapting efforts. It draws from and reinforces their enthusiasm by placing their personal implication in a less formal context than that of the school. Nonetheless, this means that most of the associations' work depends on their public's motivation.

As I have mentioned before, the workshop of the Maison des Femmes where I taught French to newly arrived migrants was divided into two groups: one with about fifteen children aged 4 to 11 and the other with the same number of teenagers aged 12 to 16. The attendance of the children depended on their parents. However, the teenagers had no real obligation to be present, apart from the fact that we could remove them from the programme if they never turned up. This proved unnecessary as they showed their enthusiasm for this gathering from

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[90] Information accessed on 15/06/2012 at
www.education.gouv.fr/bo/2007/2/MENE0603257C.htm

the very first day. They all arrived early for our classes, sometimes just to 'hang around' after school. A behaviour which was slightly altered when the weather got sunnier and they could all be outside together.

I was so surprised by this unusual amount of dedication coming from teenagers that I asked them after a few months where that motivation came from. They were very clear in their unanimous answer: "this is fun and it is the only activity that allows us to be together in an entertaining way on Wednesday afternoons". Although we encouraged them to interact with each other in French (many of them sharing other languages), we also provided them with entertainment, from the pedagogical board games to the outings that followed the completion of each theoretical theme we covered. Furthermore, we never relinquished adapting our weekly programme to their moods with an often democratic approach that incorporated them to the decision-making process. The more we got to know them and they got to know Asnières and French culture, the more potential there was for their own initiatives to be developed and encouraged within our group.

The framework and dynamics of my work at the Club des Chardons was somewhat different. Although some of the children there were also part of the P.R.E., it was not the case of all of them. There is also a leisure centre at the association, but the core of their project lies in schoolwork support. I wish to introduce here the association's objectives in order to clarify some of the differences between my work there and at the Maison des Femmes. Indeed, the two associations' methods vary as they do not address the same needs of a population which is sometimes the same.

The Quartiers Nord have a much lower success rate in the neighbourhood's schools than the national average. Up to fifteen percent of the pupils (school in France is compulsory up to the age of 16) in those schools end up dropping out of the educational system before validating any national exams or diplomas. With the aim of decreasing this percentage, the Club des Chardons takes part in local efforts to fight the negative factors at the root of this situation. In order to achieve this objective, the association has a four-point methodology which it has applied since 1973.

- provide a working space for children of the area as well as homework support.

- promote the practical application of the concept of mutual respect.

- assist the children in the realisation of their personal projects, whether they belong to the realm of leisure or work.

- support parents by listening to their problems and providing advice (a similar role to the mediators of the Maison des Femmes) as well as orienting them towards other associations if needed. The aim is to facilitate their exchanges with the local and national environment, from administrative requests to their relationship with their children's teachers.

These aims and methods are similar in many ways to that of the Maison des Femmes. In both cases, a main theme for action is identified which gradually affects all of the associations' activities as well as distinct elements in the lives of the people who benefit from those actions. A child who has been taught about fractions during schoolwork support will use that knowledge at the leisure centre when learning about baking and dosing ingredients. Similarly, studying prehistory will lead to a visit to a natural history museum followed by painting workshops and games.

However, the Club des Chardons differs from the Maison des Femmes in the nature of the main link between the association and the families. Here it is the child who constitutes that initial connection, not the mother. Once at the Club des Chardons, the child becomes the centre of focus. All decisions are based on his or her needs. The activities put in place aim at the child's emancipation, at the fulfilment of their potential within the framework of the association and with the support of their family which becomes a privileged interlocutor.

Parents are consequently brought into the process, often through the 'parent support' branch of the association. The latter is under the responsibility of the social mediator of the Club des Chardons, Marie-Christine, who has lived in the neighbourhood for decades (she is the one who gave me most of the information on the evolution of the area) and seems to know every single

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resident of the Freycinet neighbourhood in the Courtilles estate. As she explained to me, her objective is to reinforce the parents' position as prime responsible educators. Her role is quite diverse as she has to adapt to the demands of the each family. She might need to clarify the mechanisms of the French schooling system to parents who are recent migrants or have not been to a French school in their youth. She regularly details (in meetings or workshops) what constitutes a positive environment for children to develop physically, psychologically and cognitively, thus leading to their educational success. This advice covers a wide range of topics, from nutrition to discipline and the need for a quiet space to work in. Finally, Marie-Christine often has to encourage tolerance and mutual respect among residents of the neighbourhood as tensions can easily flare up in this dense and diversified setting.

Although the Club des Chardons is initially a schooling support structure, it also serves as cultural interpreter in a similar manner to the Maison des Femmes. However, it acts on a different element of the centre/periphery binary. This time, the interpretation takes place between local (estate) and mainstream cultures through the facilitation of mechanisms of social integration while the Maison des Femmes tends to focus on the differences between foreign and national cultures. In that sense, both associations lie at an intersection between centre and periphery, partially connecting the two. One could even consider them as connecting different centres and their peripheries – the local one between the Quartiers Nord and the rest of Asnières, and the international one between France and developing countries.

Furthermore, there are numerous associations other than the two I worked with in Asnières and the Quartiers Nord in particular. They aim at smoothing the process of socio-cultural adaptation for residents of the area. The main common ingredient in the work of these associations is their effort to bridge the gap between centre and periphery by the reduction of various factors contributing to the isolation of entire families, from linguistic to ethnic or gender-based boundaries. This requires them to maintain regular contact with all the members of such families, with an emphasis usually put on one of them. This initial angle is then developed in order to solidify the relationship between associations and their adherents.

Conclusions

As we have seen in this chapter, the integrating dimension of associative action is perceived by those taking part in it as (re)building social ties between members of the local and national communities. For Brigitte Moulin (2001), associations act as enzymes, allowing the rest of society to function as an organism (Moulin, 2001, 119). To do so, associations occupy the transitional space between centre and periphery by acting as mediators as well as cultural and administrative interpreters. They take part in the 'métissage' which Abdoumaliq Simone (2007) identifies as a defining element of the periphery. Correspondingly, associations dealing with solidarity and related social issues take over the role of interstice to absorb the tensions inherent in any intersection of distinct 'regimes' described by Simone.

The associations I have observed in the Quartiers Nord aim at the transformation of relationships between ethnic groups, social categories, institutions and citizens. They represent open spaces where social ties are established and confirmed, where cultural differences can be deciphered and in some cases negotiated. The specific needs of local residents are addressed without the stigmatisation that may come with institutional encounters. In that sense, associations participate in the fight against discrimination and against the discursive boundaries which restrict individuals to a particular position or status within society. Accordingly, the next chapter of this thesis will uncover the processes of identity formation at the root of such differentiating patterns.

Chapter 6

The 'us' and the 'them': processes of identity formation in the Quartiers Nord.

Chapter five has revealed the complex and multi-levelled relationship between the Quartiers Nord and the rest of the Asnières commune based on the theoretical binary of centre and periphery. Although this notion is not usually formulated in such a clear-cut manner in the field, it is nonetheless present in local residents' self representation and portrayal of their neighbourhood. In other words, the peripheral status of the Quartiers Nord influences various levels of identity formation among its individual members. This occurrence is the result of stigmatising trends from outside this space as well as bonds and notions of relatedness formulated within it. Such phenomena lead to the establishment of boundaries between groups of people through processes of identification, generating and strengthening the context-dependent notions of 'us' and 'them'. This chapter will consequently explore the nature of these identities as well as the role played by associations in encouraging or resisting their development.

In order to do so, I have chosen to focus on what I consider to be the three main trends of identification I encountered during my work in the Quartiers Nord. This chapter is planned out accordingly, with the first section relating directly to the previous chapter as it underlines the effects of the territorialisation of social relations on the identity of local residents. The second section will focus on the ethnic dimension of identity and on its complex evolution within the Republican context. As for the third section, it will deal with religious identities and their development in spite of the French secular tradition. However, before I can engage in these discussions, I must clarify my use of the central term in this chapter: 'identity'.

In his theory of role enactment in social interaction ([1959] 1990), Erving Goffman considers "the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others" (1990, 9). This is a fundamental feature of an individual, as Goffman believes that information about people

involved in this interaction is both presented and absorbed. When an individual interacts with others, there are according to Goffman two impressions given; the first being the one the individual 'gives', and the one they 'give off'. An impression is given through speaking, and this is information which the individual intends to give. An impression which is 'given off' however is through non-verbal communication, and Goffman argues that this is used by the individual to make the participants accept a desired projection of identity (1990, 13-16).

The idea of performance which emerges from Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor (comparing social interaction to a theatrical representation) fits my own encounters with local youths and children of the Quartiers Nord. The impression each one of them gave off strongly varied, depending on the conditions of our exchange. Such differences were particularly apparent when comparing their attitudes in groups and on their own. By Goffman portraying the self as something which can be influenced by society, it means that the self is adaptable to society and therefore not a fixed, determined entity. This chapter will aim at underlining the role of associations in this ongoing development among residents of the Quartiers Nord.

However, Goffman's theory has been criticised for being negative towards the nature of humans and society (Williams, 1986, 356). Indeed, he dedicates pages to talking about the different types of misrepresentations in performances (Goffman, 1990, 65-73). Johnson Williams argues that this has made Goffman unpopular with other sociologists because he focuses on the negative in society and yet makes no recommendations on how to correct them. (Goffman, 1986, 356). Peter Manning comes to Goffman's defence by stating that "unlike the traditional anthropologist who broadens our horizons by expanding our knowledge of societies, Goffman shows us the complexity of our own" (Goffman, 1992, 6). In a way, I find myself in a similar position to that of Goffman as described by Manning. I am attempting to expose the complexity of a situation which is often over-simplified by media and political discourses in France, but which in reality relies on a convoluted local context and its relation to the wider national framework.

Here, the key element is the way in which people represent themselves to others in the way they wish to be perceived and in order to achieve certain goals. Some might wish to be seen as generous, intelligent or friendly for example, but it may also be otherwise. This is often verified when it comes to street credibility where being good in school or a hard worker may not be seen as a positive thing. Once again, this depends on a variety of factors. Teenagers may aim for more anti-conformist representations of themselves which may give them a higher status among their peers. This was the case of many young teenagers in my homework support group. I often saw both boys and girls coming back from school bragging to their friends about how they had defied a teacher's authority[91]. From what I witnessed, a teenager's behaviour and self representation may drastically change depending on the presence of their parents or their friends.

When two of my twelve year old pupils, Hakim and Salma, left the workshop one evening, I overheard this conversation between them (they were discussing the events that followed Salma getting into a fight with another girl in the courtyard):

H.: I can't believe you punched her.

S.: She had it coming, she had been making fun of me all day.

H.: What I really can't believe is how you resisted the teachers when they separated the two of you. I think you actually kicked one of them. That was so cool.

S.: I don't know, I was angry. I am not sure what happened.

H.: You are crazy you know.

S.: No, I would have been crazy if I let her treat me like that without giving her a lesson.

H.: But the teachers were not happy.

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[91] This situation is also particularly well described by David Lepoutre (1997). Indeed, his time in the field is characterised by his position as an estate school teacher, his main informant being one of his own pupils with whom Lepoutre develops a strong relationship despite the young boy's ongoing taunts.

S.: What do they know anyway? They just showed up at the end of the fight and did not see what really happened. They have no idea, as usual…

H.: But now you've been expelled for a week. What are you going to tell your parents?

Salma then stopped in her tracks and her expression changed.

S.: I don't know, I'm in real trouble now. It's not fair, I should be allowed to respond to someone being aggressive. My dad is going to kill me. Stupid teachers, they have no clue.

In this exchange, one can clearly see that Salma is defiant of the teachers' authority. She is also playing on the fact that she is gaining street credibility in her relationship with Hakim who looks up to her in this case. Furthermore, she seems less fearful of decisions taken at the level of the school and the repercussions they may have on her school record than of her parents' reactions to them. This conversation illustrates how one event can be perceived and experienced at different levels by the same individual.

The self is constructed through a person's relationship with their environment and others. Among the various social groups and individual can be a part of, one can identify various levels of influence. Firstly, primary groups of identification such as family, close professional relationships or friends. Secondly, cultural, religious or political institutions. And finally, a significant part of identity formation takes place within the social and political structure of the nation-state (Eriksen, 1995, 65-66). In that sense, social groups may be considered as the main catalysts when it comes to the elaboration of individual identity. They may however also allow the differentiation of individuals within them, thus permitting reciprocal influence to occur. A person may have a changing impact on any given social group they belong to by distancing themselves from some of its features.

Moreover, individual identity does not merely consist in the juxtaposition of social roles and loyalties. It should be perceived as a dynamic entity composed of various interactive elements, at times complementary, conflicting at others (Hall, 1997). As a result, strategies are needed through which a person ensures their existence, social visibility, and integration in the community. These

strategies are underlined by Carmel Camilleri and Geneviève Vinsonneau (2004) in their study of migrant intercultural behaviours. According to them, the construction of immigrant identity consists of a constant balancing act between their individual values and that of the society they have settled in. This may generate a certain amount of contradictions dealt with in different ways by the migrants themselves. Some choose to fully adopt the culture of their new environment while others attempt to find a synthetic balance with their original beliefs and behaviours (Camilleri & Vinsonneau, 2004, 85-90). However, this view of culture and identity is limited as it does not take into account the fact that neither groups of immigrants nor host societies have coherent or homogenous cultures and values.

Moreover, individuals elaborate their own notions of what they deem to be appropriate or adequate in given circumstances. Anthony Cohen (1994) examines the treatment of the self and the individual in anthropology as micro-versions of larger social entities, arguing that this practice has led to a misconception of social aggregates because the individual has been overlooked as a constituent element. Consequently, Cohen acknowledges the individual's self awareness as author of their own social conduct and of the social patterns in which they participate, rather than being passively modelled by them. In that sense, the social behaviours I have observed among some of the residents of the Quartiers Nord should not be perceived as the products of national and local cultures, but as individual reactions to these.

Now that I have clarified my theoretical understanding of processes of identity formation, I will focus on the context of the Quartiers Nord, with an emphasis on the particular role of associations in that respect. Let us now turn to the first theme I wish discuss: territorial identity.

Territorial identity

Urban boundaries are born from more than just administrative delimitations. I witnessed more differences between the centre of Asnières and the Quartiers Nord than between the former and inner-city Paris. This is the case all over France's urban landscape as different socio-economic categories of the

country's urban population can be precisely identified as living in particular neighbourhoods. In that sense, symbolic boundaries can coincide with physical ones. Here, I will focus on this convergence which translates spatially in territorial lines of demarcation between given areas and culturally by the consolidation of elements of individual identity based on such lines. These spatial delimitations with a symbolic meaning exist under various shapes present in the setting of the Quartiers Nord, from the architecture of certain groups of buildings to the layout and general feel of street networks.

There are large streets and avenues within the Quartiers Nord that clearly separate some of its areas from each other such as the Avenue de la Redoute which lies between the Freycinet and Mourinoux neighbourhoods (or grands ensembles) as visible on the photographs of the area in appendix 1. However, it is a relatively easy street to cross with a few zebra crossings and traffic lights. This is not the case of the road (a 'départementale' or district road with four lanes) separating the Courtilles estate as a whole (which both neighbourhoods are a part of) and the adjacent Luth estate in the Gennevilliers commune. The dual carriageway follows the metro line 13 and the only direct passage way from one commune to the other (by foot) lies at the level of the Gabriel Péri metro station which is close to Asnières' town centre. Its full name is actually Gabriel Péri, Asnières-Gennevillers and the passengers getting off at this station have a choice between four exits, two in each commune, one at each corner of this giant intersection which also serves as the main point of departure/arrival for numerous buses that go further to other banlieues.

Anthropologists have in the past focused their attention on the particular role of roads and their impact on local and national populations[92]. In his study of a highway located in South Albania linking the city of Gjirokaster with the main checkpoint on the Albanian-Greek border, Dimitris Dalakoglou (2010) describes the congruence between the spatial dimension of the road and the various meanings and functions attributed to it:

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[92] This has been the case of E. E. Evans-Pritchard in his study of the Azande (1932, 1960) which, although not based on a central reflection on roads themselves, mentioned the awkward perception the Azande had of them, considering them as "something to be passively accepted or to be circumvented or ignored" (Evans-Pritchard, 1960, 311).

not only does it encapsulate social significance and is it integrated in the entire ongoing sociocultural transformation but it also emerges as the ideal place where an anthropologist can perceive, study, and even touch the various dynamic transnational and fluid sociocultural formations (Dalakoglou, 2010, 146).

The motorway between Asnières and Gennevilliers has no transnational dimension and acts as a separating border rather than a passageway from one territory to another. However, like the highway in South Albania, it may be interpreted as holding a particular social significance which is closely linked to its physical location and attributes.

Motorways may contribute to the division of the urban fabric by acting as boundaries or borders between territories that are not necessarily opposites in terms of landscape and social structure. Consequently, they enhance the feeling of isolation among local residents and the idea of a separate outside world (Moulin, 2001, 60). Whilst the underground railway which lies under the road represents connectivity for local residents, the motorway on top acts as a divider, especially for people who do not own a car. Indeed, the D19 road separating Asnières and Gennevilliers is more than an obvious physical boundary between two distinct administrative territories. Depending on which side of it one lives, the networks and institutions an individual interacts with on a regular basis are different. One could argue that whichever side of the road a person lives on, they will attend a French school, buy their bread in a 'boulangerie' (bakery), argue with their neighbours about garbage disposal and depend on a local administration based in a town hall. This is true to some extent, but the identity of the people with whom those interactions take place is nonetheless different. These exchanges around which an individual partially constructs their perception of the self and of the other mainly occur at the local level and are based on regular activities. The fact that the D19 road can only be crossed at few and far apart intersections (bridges and underpasses) reduces such interactions to a minimum, their rarity consolidating the idea of 'us and them' among both local communities.

This is particularly true of youths from the Courtilles and Luth estates for who the territorial dimension of identity is strong or at least apparent. The latter can be described as a series of concentric circles, each representing a geographic level of identification. Along those lines, the smallest circle (and closest to the centre) would be a particular building or block, the second would be a neighbourhood, the third an estate, the fourth the Quartiers Nord, and the fifth Asnières. This is of course a simplified and generalising model which for instance does not apply to the newly arrived migrant children I worked with. However, it is particularly valid when representing the views of some youths and children who were born and raised in the Quartiers Nord, as illustrated by the children's rap presented in chapter three. The phrase "ready to make a move, on the other side of the motorway people get prepared to pay" shows both a clear antagonism towards Gennevilliers residents and a certain degree of vagueness due to lack of contact and therefore knowledge about them.

During homework support sessions at the Club des Chardons, regular rumours about youths from the Luth estate coming to look for trouble spread among the children. They usually mention a particular group of youths (often the local troublemakers) who would be 'at war' with their counterparts on the other side of the D19. The children identify the Courtilles youths by their first names (as well as their relatedness such as the fact that they are a friend's older brother for example) and sometimes mention an anecdote concerning them (e.g.: Farad was walking around with a bag of sweets and giving them out to everyone, or Karim is in love with Farah but she does not care about him…). However, the youths from the Luth estate remain nameless, like the anonymous elements that compose a horde. In that sense, lack of contact due to physical boundaries has led to the establishment of symbolic boundaries which in turn reinforce territorial identities based on the rejection of outsiders. Both the 'us' and the 'them' are constructed at various levels and the strength of each level of identification is determined by the amount of exchanges and consequent mutual knowledge between groups and individuals.

I do not believe that the everyday lives of the residents of the Courtilles and Luth estates differ immensely (I have been to Gennevilliers on a number of occasions and it is spatially organised in a similar manner to the Asnières

commune, except its estate network lies at the south of the town centre). However, interactions between individuals of the two local communities seem to be reduced to brief encounters at the shared metro stations ('Gabriel Péri Asnières-Gennevilliers', which has two exits in the Asnières commune and two exits in the Gennevilliers commune, and the 'Courtilles' metro, tram, and bus terminal). There are commercial and administrative exchanges between the two communes, mainly due to their proximity and the fact that they are both a part of the Hauts-de-Seine département (district), but they do not seem to impact on residents' day to day proximity. In this case, bureaucratic boundaries do not tally with lived spaces or territories, thus illustrating the potential for differences in dominant and demotic mappings.

Michel Lasserre de Rozelle, the deputy mayor of Asnières in charge of associations, explained that both communes work hand in hand on a number of issues, notably the setting up of educational programmes such as the P.R.E. (Programme de Réussite Educative[93]) which is subsidised by the district (Hauts de Seine) and region (Ile de France). At ground level on the other hand, the exchanges between the teams applying the programme in the two communes are minimal. Both the Club des Chardons and the Maison des Femmes take part in it which has allowed me to sit in on coordination meetings. The latter included various social and educational professionals from the commune as well as administrators from the district and region, but at no point was there any mention of the running of the same programme in the neighbouring commune of Gennevilliers. In that sense, the dominant mappings mirror the pattern described above too.

This trend is reflected in the running of the educational workshops where children and youths from various schools in each commune are gathered. In the alphabetisation initiative of the Maison des Femmes, a prerequisite for any participant is to reside in the Asnières commune[94]. Moreover, the section of the association's activities designed for adults (F.L.E.) only covers the Courtilles

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[93] Programme for educational success.
[94] The workshop for children and teenagers in which I participate is part of the P.R.E.. That is not the case of its equivalent for adults: the F.L.E. ('Français Langue Etrangère': French as a foreign language).

estate as other associations have similar programmes across the Quartiers Nord. The P.R.E. alphabetisation workshop of the Maison des Femmes (with the children of newly arrived migrants) is however open to children and teenagers from the entire commune as it is the only one of its kind. This means that they come from different schools and different neighbourhoods and that some of them had never met before joining the group.

Whether it be in this literacy workshop or in the homework support sessions of the Club des Chardons, I have been able to observe a clear trend among children and teenagers from the Quartiers Nord: they tend to stick with others from the same school as them, even if they are not particularly friends. If the first question a child will usually ask another when first meeting them is 'Which neighbourhood are you from?', the second will nearly always be 'Which school do you attend?'. This is usually done in a competitive manner, with each child defending the 'honour' of their school and, by doing so, adding to existing views about each institution based on their reputation ('this school has better results', 'this school has tougher kids'…). In that sense, school identity is similar to neighbourhood identity as it represents a certain form of territorial identification where the idea of the 'us' and the 'them' is promoted among children and youths.

After having considered the effects of the clear physical boundary between the Asnières and Gennevilliers that is the D19 dual carriageway, we are now dealing with a different type of territorial distinction affecting processes of individual and group identification. This time, the separation is less clear in material or physical terms but its influence on the daily lives of the inhabitants of the Quartiers Nord is undeniable. The type of boundary in question is internal to the Asnières commune and multi-layered. It ranges from divisions between the Quartiers Nord as a whole and the centre of Asnières which play on the centre/periphery binary to distinctions made among the various areas of the former. These are delineated by streets, buildings, courtyards or sports grounds for example and are the main components of the various levels of territorial identity described earlier in this section.

Some urban boundaries separate neighbourhoods with different social structures and collective identities. These identities manifest themselves through

sets of behavioural codes which are often visually noticeable. Early on in my fieldwork, I decided to sit on different benches around the Asnières commune for half an hour each time. On every occasion, I began observing at six o'clock in the evening. I chose this time as it is a busy moment of the day with a wide variety of people in the streets. It is also the time when a majority of school and high school pupils walk back home, with or without their parents. I noticed a difference between the Quartiers Nord and Asnières' town centre in the way youths (and some adults) greeted each other. In the town centre, a handshake or kiss on each cheek seems to be the norm, with a few exceptions. Contrastingly, a different kind of greeting or handshake prevails in the Quartiers Nord. Whether they be white French, of North African, African, Eastern European or West Indian origin, youths shake hands and put their hands on their hearts.

The multicultural nature of this exchange shows that, for these youths, identity is not solely based on their ethnic origins. A strong element of their social identity is based on their common belonging to the estate realm. I asked a few of my pupils who shook hands in that manner whether it was a Muslim custom as the only adults I had seen doing that were of North African origin. Their answer was straightforward: "no, it's just a sign of respect between us because we all grew up together". Correspondingly, one could see it as a form of 'embodied' identity – when the performances become so normalised that they become automatic. This view is inspired by Judith Butler's understanding of the concept of performativity which she defines as "that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler, 1993, 2). By placing emphasis on the way in which identity is passed on through discourse, Butler underlines the importance of the repetition of performative acts in this process. Here, a particular handshake constitutes such a recurring performative act drawing upon a discourse of shared identity based on 'growing up together' in a particular territory.

This manifestation of a shared identity does not necessarily imply hostility towards the 'other' or a rejection of stigmatising views. I believe it is simply another building block of the physical and symbolic boundary separating the residents of the Quartiers Nord from their Asnières town-centre counterparts. In that sense, territorial identity does not only manifest itself physically in the

shape of material entities such as roads or apartment blocks. It can also be expressed through daily interactions and coded practices.

The Quartiers Nord and Courtilles estate are themselves segmented in various territories, at least in the minds of their residents. One evening, the parents of an eleven year old girl from the Club des Chardons workshop were late to pick her up. I asked her where she lived so that I could walk her home. She answered that she lived in the Mourinoux neighbourhood, not far from where we were. Two boys who overheard the conversation while playing in the central courtyard in front of the classroom started shouting insults and laughing, telling her to "go back to the Mourinoux" and that she had no reason to be there. She ignored them, telling me that they were in the same class in school and that they always made fun of her. I asked if there were any rivalries between the two neighbourhoods to which she replied: "No, not at all. Those boys just find any reason to provoke me".

The Courtilles estate is composed of various neighbourhoods which are in fact different *grands ensembles* (groups of buildings with a uniform architectural design). They are institutionally recognised in the sense that they each have a name (Mourinoux, Freycinet…) and that the latter is used in various situations, whether it be by local residents wanting to indicate precisely where they live or by associations and town hall administrators when trying to restrict a particular project or programme to a specific area. This is for instance the case of the Club des Chardons which is based in the Freycinet neighbourhood and only deals with children and families from those two adjacent *grands ensembles* (Freycinet and Mourinoux). The latter are only composed of a few tower blocks and 'barres' as well as the courtyards and playgrounds in between them.

All associations have to initially delimitate the geographic range of their actions. This might be a neighbourhood, a commune, a region or an entire country, depending on the objectives and size of each associations. Consequently, associations also contribute to the reinforcement of existing territorial identities by adapting their scale or scope to pre-established perimeters. More often than not, these restricted zones of associative activity are drawn from official administrative territories such as the Z.E.P. (Zone d'Education Prioritaire) or Z.A.C. (Zone d'Aménagement Concerté). This is

mostly due to the public subsidies that come with such labels and that are assigned to specific territories. If an association is part of a project for which it receives money from the town hall or regional council, it must follow certain rules regarding the geographical affiliation of the people benefiting from its initiatives. The services of the Maison des Femmes are for example only available to residents of the Hauts d'Asnières (the administrative name of the Quartiers Nord), a relatively large territory classified as part of the C.U.C.S. (Contrat Urbain de Cohesion Sociale[95]).

The congruence of and differences between administrative, associative and physical boundaries described above has a direct influence on the formulation of territorial identities. This mix of symbolic and material landmarks determines the contours and lines of an unofficial map of the urban landscape which often corresponds, at least geographically, to the official version. However, this map is not devised through geometric and demographic calculations but through social interactions. Correspondingly, the boundaries generated in that manner impact on the different levels that compose our conceptual notion (concentric circles) of territorial identity.

Although the aim of solidarity-based associations is in part to fight against stigmatisation and to improve the lives of those who reside in the areas they cover, their structural dependence on pre-established territorial 'grids' reinforces the conception that these territories are experiencing specific difficulties and are therefore envisaged as separate from more central locations. In that sense, urban policies can be criticised for targeting such neighbourhoods and identifying them as places of exclusion. The risk here is that they may be reinforcing oppositions, or at least differences, between these areas and those around them, leading to the confirmation of the notion of 'us and them' among local residents.

This view confirms Pierre Bourdieu's suggestion (1999) that social space is structurally influenced by physical space. For him, "social space is inscribed

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[95] Translation : Urban Contract for Social Cohesion. A contract between the State and local administrations aiming at ensuring the participation and collaboration of both protagonists in efforts to better the lives of residents of areas with high rates of unemployment, violence and substandard housing conditions. Information accessed at sig.ville.gouv.fr/page/45 on 22/08/2012.

at one in spatial structures and in the mental structures that are partly produced by the incorporation of these structures" (Bourdieu, 1999, 126). In this manner, the built environment becomes part of processes of territorial categorisation and identification by functioning as a "spontaneous symbolisation of social space" (Bourdieu, 1999, 124). Correspondingly, one can consider that the congruence of physical and social boundaries leads to their reinforcement and subsequently to that of social segregation along territorial lines.

As we have seen in this first section, territorial identities are developed and maintained by local residents as well as the official labelling and delimitation of 'difficult' neighbourhoods. This in turn leads to the reinforcement of the stigmatisation in and of such areas. Urban policies, through the attribution of specific budgets, play a role in this process. Indeed, these policies are directed towards populations judged as problematic or somehow excluded. Subsequently, any funding requests from local administrators or associative leaders include data concerning unemployment rates or percentages of foreign residents in particular communes or neighbourhoods (Moulin, 2001, 154). These parameters, when combined with the territorial segmentation described above, influence the angle of approach that social workers adopt at ground level. One of the consequences of this phenomenon is an increase in the importance of ethnic criteria in local initiatives and social interactions among residents.

Ethnic identities

Some leading anthropologists such as Fredrik Barth (1969) posit that ethnicity is most significant in contexts where groups are culturally close and contact occurs on a regular basis. Paradoxically, it seems the more similar people become, the more inclined they are to distinguish themselves from the other in terms of ethnic identity. One may therefore suggest similarly to Barth that the members of different ethnic groups need common grounds for interaction in addition to being different (Barth, 1969). Barth emphasises the social processes in his model of ethnicity, thus describing interethnic relationships as dynamic and flexible. For an ethnic identity to be perpetuated, it

must be a part of at least some of the social situations an individual engages in. My experience in the Quartiers Nord has tended to confirm this view, with a majority of residents of foreign decent integrating both their French and 'original' cultures to their identity. I was able to observe this phenomenon through numerous interpersonal and group interactions which I will detail further down.

Gerd Baumann's (1999) understanding of processes of ethnic identity formation focuses on the manner in which people formulate such identities, between dominant and demotic discourses. Rather than study a particular group's reified culture, he examines the interplay of various discourses about culture and community. For him, the dominant discourse provides the framework within and against which several other identities are asserted (Baumann, 1999, 195). This view provides a good starting point for our investigation of the situational role of ethnicity in discourses from and about residents of the Quartiers Nord as it underlines the mutual influence of mainstream and local representations of individuals and communities.

Ethnicity and integration / assimilation in France

Contrary to other Western based discourses in the social sciences that strongly depend on the analysis of ethnic relations, French research on urban segregation has for a long time appeared disconnected from such interests. Ethnic considerations have indeed only entered French discussions on the topic in the past couple of decades (Rinaudo, 1999; Guenif Souilamas, 2000 & 2004). In the absence of an academic tradition on this matter, the theme of immigration and its consequences was introduced instead through the medium of political debate, going gradually from a demographic and economic reflection on the value of labour migrations to the elaboration of a discourse on the French national identity (De Rudder, 1996, 17-44). This phenomenon was obviously exploited by Front National (far-right party) representatives who took the opportunity to set the tone of the debate as their rivals struggled to structure their universalistic thoughts in order to build a coherent position on this issue (Withol de Wenden, 1990, 23-29).

Correspondingly, a new form of ethnic terminology was brought in and diffused at all levels of social life. In addition to the original 'immigré' (immigrant), such terms as 'maghrébins' (North African), 'blacks' or 'français de souche' (white French) appeared in the everyday vocabulary in the 1980s and 1990s. Another implementation to the lexical field of immigration is the set phrase 'fracture ethnique' (ethnic fracture). It refers to the growing ethnic segmentation of French society and has mainly been used by the media and some politicians as illustrated by the title of a Le Monde article on President (at the time) Chirac's visit to a suburb of Lyon, Vaulx-en-Velin, often taken as an example by the media to illustrate the 'problème des banlieues' (*banlieue* problem) : "*M. Chirac face aux fractures sociales et ethniques dans les banlieues*"[96] (Le Monde, 14/10/1995).

In a way, this formulation underlines the processes of exclusion which go against the very foundations of French citizenship. The debate on immigration consequently becomes an ideological one with, on one side, those who think this phenomenon should be interpreted as a dissolving agent of the Republican model and, on the other, those who believe it is a way of recycling the existing model in order to find new solutions in terms of integration (Roman, 1993). In that order, issues of immigration and ethnic relations can be thought of as central to debates on the contemporary nature of the French nation and its citizenship. Indeed, as Françoise Lorcerie explains, the boundary between social and national identities have become blurred (Lorcerie, 1994).

In the last two centuries, France has received a large number of immigrants. Here, I will join Alec Hargreaves (1995) in choosing the demographers' definition of the term "immigrant": people born abroad without the nationality of the country in which they live. I have opted for this definition as it is a practical, unambiguous one in the French historical context. However, this past year in the field has proved to me that it doesn't necessarily fit people's perspectives. If the rejection of the concept of race is central to the French model

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[96] Translation : Mr. Chirac faces social and ethnic rupture in the *banlieues.*

of integration, racial issues are still very much latent within the French debate on the topic.

One may envisage ethnicity as a situational feature of personal identity, empirically fluctuant and relative. In that manner, the terms 'ethnic' or 'race' can be used to refer to processes of social construction rather than reified states. At this point, I wish to clarify the distinction I make between 'ethnicity' and 'race'. They may be seen as overlapping terms, but the former has been seen to relate more to cultural criteria such as language or history, whereas the latter, whilst having its roots in problematic ideas about biology, has in recent times been forwarded as a politically charged means of identification (Banton, 2007, 20). As my focus is on the multifaceted nature of identification where race is but a dimension, I will continue to use the term 'ethnicity'.

There have been different stages of immigration to France, from the workers who were brought in to compensate for labour shortages in the 19th Century to the family settlements of the second half of the 20th century which increased the percentage of female migrants. In most cases, those immigrants came from former French colonies in West and North Africa. French political and legal authorities have adapted to those changes with various sets of laws and policies. For Gérard Moreau (1994), director of the "Population and Migration" department at the Ministry for Social Affairs at the time he wrote the article, French state policies in terms of immigration are set in order to achieve two goals: to control new entries and migratory flows, and to subsequently integrate the people permitted to stay on the French territory (Moreau, 1994, p. 57). The former relies on the system of working permit accreditation which conditions access to the labour market and thus also depends on the efficiency of the fight against clandestine workers. As for policies of integration, they first appeared in the 1970s in reaction to the need to decrease foreign labour immigration. According to Moreau (1994, p. 59), they are based on four basic principles themselves derived from Republican ideas of the nation:

- The integration of immigrants conforms with state secularism. As state policy, it respects religions, philosophies or beliefs but does not favour any.

- Individuals are integrated, not groups. Integration should not lead to the establishment of structured communities.
- Integration implies rights and duties; an immigrant should abide by French laws the way they are.
- Immigrants and French "natives" should be treated equally, without there being any feelings of favouritism on either side.

Unsurprisingly, those principles have proved hard to apply. Nevertheless, they reflect the universalistic visions of the Revolution and constitute the basic elements of France's assimilatory stance on integration. Somehow, modern French national identity shares many common features with early Republican citizenship.

Roger Brubaker (1992) argues along these lines that: "Debates about citizenship in France (…) are debates about what it means to belong to the nation-state. The politics of citizenship today is first and foremost a politics of nationhood." (Brubaker, 1992, 182). If citizenship is defined in terms of nation and integration then this has extremely important implications for contemporary France, which is culturally very diverse owing to immigration. It is interesting to consider Jean Leca's (1991) claim that French citizenship is formulated in such a way that it cannot accommodate the public assertion of cultural difference. One could argue that the conjugation of nationality as a prerequisite for citizenship means that citizenship in France has become an instrument of social exclusion. This can be seen as an important contradiction as there is a disjuncture between the post-Revolution theory of universalistic citizenship for all and the reality whereby citizenship is exercised in a rather particularistic manner.

Should one attempt to divide the issue of integration in two distinct perspectives, the most obvious ones would be that of the nation-state as a political and economic unit, and that of people experiencing everyday life as a part of it. I shall deal with both angles here, beginning with a discussion of the concept of assimilation as it constitutes the state's chosen position and the framework to any policy regarding integration.

Among other countries of immigration, France has always stood out due to its assimilation-based policies as opposed to the more popular multiculturalism-oriented model. It has always been a French ambition to

assimilate, to encourage similitude as long as the outsider was made to be like the French and not the other way around (Colin, 1984, 25). Assimilation is defined by Anthony Giddens as the process by which "immigrants abandon their original customs and practices, moulding their behaviour to the values and norms of the majority" (Giddens, 2006, 524). The consequences of applying this modus operandi to processes of integration are multiple and diverse, ranging from a clear separation between private and public spheres of behaviour to the rise of political movements at both edges of the political scale[97].

However, such repercussions mainly affect mainstream representations of the French nation and ensuing laws and policies. In spite of the French State's historical efforts to apply and promote the idea of the preponderance of national identity over ethnic origins, the latter are far from having disappeared from the streets, schools or homes of the country. Assimilation is indeed not systematically applicable in the various suburban spaces where ethnicity is still a very strong element of individual identities. By comparing what I have witnessed in the Quartiers Nord to the aims established in terms of public policy on the matter, I hope to clarify the causal links between the mainstream discourse and the local context. Again, this endeavour theoretically relies Baumann's (1996, 1997) distinction between dominant and demotic discourse which sometimes overlap but in most cases present differing perspectives where one is reified and the other is more contingent and processual.

Rituals linked to memory, culture and beliefs play a crucial role in socialisation and therefore identification. The acquisition of cultural identities which traditionally resulted from the homogeneity of communities is now more open. This is partially due to the growing influence of the media and a generational shift towards diversity. However, cultural identity is also influenced

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[97] For Jurgen Habermas (1992), the public sphere in the political realm has become the organisational principle of the liberal state under the 'republican constitution' (Habermas, 1992, 106). This view is however contested in the context of studies of the South Asian public sphere which has evolved differently than it has in the West. When considering Indian polity after Independence, Sudipta Kaviraj observes that Western political theories prove rather inadequate (2001, 316) in that matter. He believes, as does Partha Chatterjee (2000), that the state and politics in India are still vital sources of change. Chatterjee goes even further by asserting that Habermas' conception of the political public sphere and of civil society are "built around a secularised version of Western Christianity' (2000, 40).

by the schooling system which aspires to shape it in a uniform manner and, in France, is compulsory for everyone whatever community they may be a part of. In a way, it is the nation-state that delineates the foundations of shared memories such as national history, as well as defining legitimate culture (literature, humanities, science…)[98]. This mainstream trend has nevertheless been contested in the last few decades by communal processes taking place at the level of ethnic, religious and political communities (Bhabha, 1994).

Ethnic communities and individual identities in the Quartiers Nord

As I have mentioned before, in the Quartiers Nord, the first reaction I got from both adults and children (especially those who were also of North African descent) when introducing myself was usually to ask which North African country I come from; sometimes even in Arabic, a language I do not speak. This was especially true of the Arabic speaking parents of the children I tought French to at the Maison des Femmes, most of them having a limited knowledge of the French language. The two other people who shared the workspace of the 'Pôle Médiation' with me on Wednesdays, Djamila (the social mediator who works with families) and Meriem (in charge of health issues), both speak Arabic although they usually tried to communicate in French as much as possible. In their own words, the main reason for that is the fact that they do not wish "to give the impression that this is an association exclusively dedicated to North African families".

Asnières, like an overwhelming majority of suburban towns around Paris, benefits from a large network of associations representing particular ethnicities. In the official associative guide of the municipality, they are placed under the 'culture' category. They all specialise in a particular region of the world representative of the origins of different sections of the local community. In the commune, one can find for example the Association Franco-Portugaise (Portuguese), Village Parijevsk (Russian), Neg'a (French speaking West Indies)

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[98] See Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) and Ernest Gellner *Nation and Nationalism* (1983).

or Association pour le Développement Franco-Laotien (Franco-Laotian development) among the ranks of 'ethnic associations'. Many of them combine this element with another activity such as music and dance. This is the case of Gankokwe (West Africa), Mora Mora (Madagascar) or Nour Universal (Morocco). Sports are also added to the mix with the Association Sportive et Culturelle Latino-Américaine (Latin American sports and culture) as well as food with the Association pour la Promotion de la Culture et Cuisine Réunionnaise (promotion of culture and cuisine from Réunion).

With all these ethnically focused associations in the area mirroring the local use of ethnicity as an organising concept, it is not surprising that the workers of the Maison des Femmes do not wish for their association to be misinterpreted as one of them, especially as its overall aim is to integrate people through the teaching of French language and culture. However, some of the group behaviours among the women who participate in the French classes for adults at the association prove that it is impossible to fully prevent communitarian identities from being expressed.

Indeed, one of the French teachers of the association once pointed out to me that the women tend to instinctively bond in small clusters from the same geographic areas and with similar cultural features. In the workshop context, this element of group formation is even more important than previously established neighbouring connections. The teacher described the following situation:

> *Three of the women from China in my class have spent the entire year sat together and often keeping to themselves in spite of the fact that women who live in the same building block but are from a different region of the world are attending the same class.*

The same occurrence was confirmed by the volunteers in charge of the cooking and sewing workshops at the Maison des Femmes. I asked one of the Chinese women why they did not mix during the workshops. She answered that she saw these 'practical' classes as a way of putting forward skills that she had acquired in China and that she had more techniques in common with other Chinese women than with an African lady for instance. When I asked her if she felt the

same way in the context of the language classes, she also replied affirmatively, saying that this time it was a question of "common starting language".

This personal need to emphasise given elements of one's ethnic identity is visibly present among the children and teenagers of the Maison des Femmes. All of the pupils in the alphabetisation class I was in charge of showed an increased interest when a particular task required them to speak or right about their lives before they arrived in France. The most popular activity (apart from outings) among the group of teenagers consisted of individual presentations with detailed posters of their home countries. Emotions ran high and some of the more sensitive ones even shed a tear. Moreover, both children and teenagers of the alphabetisation classes use comparisons between their home countries and France in order to grasp the meaning of given elements of French culture and social organisation. It is an instinctive reaction to explain or comprehend any new issue when relating to past references.

During an individual interview I set up with one of the teenagers from Sri Lanka (who I will call Prashan here), I asked him what he liked the most about his new life in France. The conversation quickly turned around as he listed what he missed the most about Sri Lanka[99]:

P.: In my village, I lived with all my family. Here, there are only my parents and sisters. I miss my uncles, aunts and cousins.

Y.: But here you have made new friends haven't you?.

P.: Yes, sure. But I don't know them as well. I only see them in school and here on Wednesday afternoons.

Y.: Why is that?

P.: My dad works all the time so I have to help my mum with my sisters.

Y.: Wasn't it the same in Sri Lanka?

P.: In a way, but all the children stayed together so I could spend time with my cousins who are my age. We were outside all the time, playing in the sun. On special Hindu festivals, the whole family would gather and celebrate.

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[99] Prashan is fourteen years old and has arrived in France eight months before this interview took place.

Y.: There are other Tamil children from the North of Sri Lanka in your class and in this group. Do your families know each other?

P.: Yes, but we are not as close as we would have been in Sri Lanka. There is less time or space here to get together; not that many things that we can do…

Y.: What kind of space do you mean?

P.: Before, I used to play in the fields behind the family house. That's where all the children met. Here my parents won't let me stay out in the streets for too long. They say it's not safe. There is no temple either for everyone to gather at. My family is Hindu. There is a mosque here, but no temple for us.

This conversation illustrates the longing most of the newly arrived children and teenagers experience in their first year in Asnières. Common elements recurrently appear throughout the numerous exchanges I have on the topic with them. The themes of separation with the extended family is by far the most frequently brought up by them, followed by cultural specificities such as food or differences in notions of politeness. The latter is usually mentioned when discussing the general atmosphere of the Quartiers Nord where the harshness of interactions, especially among youths, shock these children who are for the most from rural areas (only nine of the thirty pupils of the literacy workshop of the Maison des Femmes came from cities or suburban spaces around them, many of them coming from rural environments). Religious practices (or rather the lack of them) also play an important part in their comparisons between life in France and their home countries. We will deal with this particular issue in the following section of this chapter.

To some extent, the ethnic-based associations mentioned above allow for the members of given ethnic communities to meet and express the culture of their region of origin in a context which, as Prashan highlighted, leaves little space for such manifestations. Furthermore, the aim of these associations is not only that of gathering local members of ethnic communities but to share their culture with other residents of the area, or at least its most festive aspects. It is therefore not rare to come across parades or street-corner parties in Asnières organised by ethnic associations where anyone is welcome to join. They usually take place on special days of celebration that hold a meaning in the represented

culture such as the anniversary of Toussaint L'Overture (a national hero who took part in the Haitian Revolution) on May 20th for Haitians or the Khmer New Year which takes place mid-April and is celebrated by people of Cambodian origin.

Contrastingly, one of the aspects of the French discourse on integration which is derived from the four "pillars" of assimilation is the fear of what is termed in the local political vernacular 'le communautarisme', or, to adopt the language American social sciences: the creation of cultural ghettos (Wacquant, 1992). This position is rooted in a mainstream desire for a homogenous society and therefore part of the dominant discourse on community identity and integration to the French nation.

The fear of 'communautarisme' is exemplified by the political campaign of the UMP party (led at the time by Nicolas Sarkozy) during the 2012 presidential elections. Its secretary general, Jean-François Copé, strongly opposed the socialist party's candidate's (François Hollande) proposition of allowing foreign residents to vote and be candidates in local elections. Copé compared the 'foreign vote' to a 'communautariste vote' as had done Claude Guéant, another member of the UMP party, a few days before. Guéant explicitly described the foreign vote as a threat to Republican values with the risk of "seeing halal meat served in French public schools" if non-French residents were elected in municipal councils (*Le Monde*, 2 March 2012).

As Sylvie Tissot (2013) points out, the political discourse on 'communautarisme' in France does not vary in the segments of the population it targets: foreigners and immigrants, usually residing in the banlieues (Tissot, 2013). Tissot's view is echoes Michel Pinçon and Monique Pinçon-Charlot (2007) underlining of the fact that other social groups with a similar tendency to follow given codes of behaviour based on a common community culture, such as the bourgeoisie, are not criticised for it (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot, 2007). Similarly to other terms of the dominant discourse on integration such as 'l'insécurité', the fear of 'communautarisme' has become what Pierre Tevanian calls 'a metaphor of respectable racism', a way to designate a particular group based on ethnic criteria but without naming it (Tavenian, 2007).

Nevertheless, the ideological foundations behind 'anti-communautariste' discourses should not discredit the idea of community-based studies in France. The very notion of communities within the national community, whether they be ethnic, social or territorial, is a valuable addition to any discussion of contemporary French society. Correspondingly, the relevance of ethnic identities at the demotic and individual levels cannot be contested in the Quartier Nord. I do not mean in the sense that people become separated and form groups along ethnic lines, but rather that they sometimes express their personal identity by putting ethnic criteria forward.

Although it is not an ethnic association, the Maison des Femmes offers children and adults a chance to freely express their feelings and thoughts on their culture of origin. It is considered a space where ethnicity can be expressed freely – as illustrated by the fact each new pupil in the teenagers' workshop is asked to make a short presentation of their country of origin – and questions about the codes and rituals of French society can be deciphered. However, the pedagogical context is always that of learning about French culture. Indeed, one of the two main non-linguistic objectives of the workshop as defined by the P.R.E. ('Programme de Réussite Educative', Programme for Educational Success) guidelines is the discovery of the national environment, the other being getting to know, evolve in and use the resources of the local environment of Asnières. In that way, participants are encouraged to experience other aspects of their new lives in France as well as the economic or political rationale that brought them there in the first place. Moreover, it allows them to transcend their social positioning as new arrivals in an urban peripheral space where categorisation plays a crucial role in interpersonal relations. The association not only serves as a cultural translator, but also as a facilitator of integration by showing the 'fun' side of life in France through the numerous outings and leisure-based activities that are set up.

Nonetheless, for the children and teenagers of the Maison des Femmes who are all newly arrived migrants, the notion of 'us and them' is clearly defined as illustrated by Prashan's reactions. The very restricted 'us' is the family and home country, the 'them' being everyone else in the Quariers Nord, in Asnières, or in France as a whole. This is not the case of the youths from the Club des

Chardons. Although most of them are of foreign descent, a vast majority were born and raised in France. Moreover, they all know each other from growing up in the area and attending the same schools. They are therefore less isolated and more integrated, at least at the level of the neighbourhood.

In one of my groups of pupils for schoolwork support, I was struck by the will of the children to categorise me. Similarly, they seemed surprised by the fact that I did not strictly fit into their classification, a typology inherited from their local environment and family; in other words from their peers and kin. Here is a typical example of the kind of conversation I had with the children during one on one interviews. In this case, a twelve year old who I will call Mohamed and whose parents are of Algerian origin:

M.: Your name is Yacine. Where are you from?

Y.: Well I was born and raised in Paris.

M.: Yes, but what's your nationality?

Y.: I'm French, aren't you?

M.: Look at me! And my name is Mohamed! I'm Algerian.

Y.: But you have a French identity card don't you?

M.: Yes. But I'm not French.

Y.: Well you have French nationality, but your parents are from Algeria. There is no problem with that is there?

M.: I guess not, it's the same for all the others here. And what about you?

Y.: My dad is from Algeria but is a French national and my mum is from England and Sweden. She doesn't have French nationality.

M.: Wow, that's complicated. So you're not French either. Your name's Yacine, it's a Muslim name and you look like an Arab anyway.

Y.: I'm not a Muslim. But you know you can be French and a Muslim, like you can be French and be black for example. Being French tells you about nationality, that's all.

M.: So it's just an official thing.

Y.: It's a bit more complicated than that.

Compared to Prashan's view of France and Asnières where the teenager positioned himself as fully separate from these entities both socially and culturally, Mohamed's understanding of the French nation and of his place within it is more convoluted. Although he also defines himself as an outsider to it, especially in terms of ethnicity and religion, he does not fully adhere to the Algerian culture either as illustrated by another conversation I had with him before the summer holidays:

Y.: What are you going to do during the holidays Mohamed?

M.: I'm going to Algeria after the Ramadan.

Y.: I notice a lot of you are going after the Ramadan. Why is that?

M.: My parents say its too difficult to not eat or drink when its so hot[100].

Y.: I understand. And how long are you going to stay there?

M.: Three weeks. But it's already too long.

Y.: What do you mean?

M.: I like it there, and I get to see some of my cousins. But there is nothing to do. No TV, no Playstation, nothing… they're all peasants[101]. And here I'm with my friends, we have more fun.

Although Mohamed does not consider himself French, he does not identify with his Algerian family either. If to him the 'français de souche' (white French) are a part of the 'them' category, so are the inhabitants of the village his parents come from. He sees them as his far away kin having very little in common with him, or at least less than his neighbourhood friends. Correspondingly, Mohamed has, like many of the children of the neighbourhood with similar backgrounds, developed a foreign view of his parents' country of origin. It may sometimes appear romanticised and nostalgic as it is inherited

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[100] Mohamed's older sister (she is in her early twenties) also admitted that the rules of Ramadan are more strict in their village than what the family is now used to.

[101] He used the word 'paysan' in French which has the same derogatory implications as in English (primitive, lower class, poor etc). When I asked him what he meant by 'peasants', I realised that he just could not find any other word describing a type of agricultural life.

from his parents and the way they talk about it, and at other times sceptical or at least distant.

At the core of this ambivalent perception is the notion of 'le bled', a word with slightly different meanings depending on who uses it. It comes from the Arabic 'balad' which means 'country', but for the urban population of North Africa, it also means 'countryside'. It is used in France by long-established immigrants and their children to refer to the country or village of origin, and this whether they come from North Africa or not. The word has become a very common word in the areas of the French urban periphery with large populations of foreign origin and a concept understood by most members of French society. I believe that this idea of the 'bled' confirms the view that these populations are at varying degrees integrated to French society as they are generating their own concepts to describe their situation within it, these concepts eventually entering the mainstream discourse on identity. This is not surprising as the children of migrants attend French schools, watch French television and speak French with their friends even though their parents may possess slightly diverging cultural values.

Overall, the main difference in terms of ethnic identity I have observed between the children and teenagers I encountered at the Club des Chardons and the Maison des Femmes stems from the fact that they belong to separate generations in terms of migrant arrival. Some are members of the second or third generation and are an integral part of the local and national environment they were born and raised in France whereas others actually constitute the first generation as they have to adapt to a new life at the same time as their parents. I believe that in this variation lies the main reason for the basic distinctions established in this study between newly arrived and established migrants.

Although there is a political will to avoid 'communautarisme' and encourage assimilation as opposed to multiculturalism in France, demotic discourses on ethnicity are present in local processes of identity formation in the Quartiers Nord. This contrast between policy and ground level realities illustrates the gap between dominant and demotic discourses on identity and integration. Such differences can also be observed when it comes to religion as we will see in the next section of this chapter.

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Religious identities: Islam and the secularist tradition

Similarly to ethnic identities, religious beliefs and traditions are prone to debate in France. As we have seen in the previous section of this chapter with Moreau's identification of the four basic principles of French integration, secularism holds an important place in the Republican conception of the nation. Consequently, I shall begin by discussing issues emerging from the application of this particular doctrine. I will also focus exclusively on Islam as it is the religion that has been at the centre of most discussions on the topic in France in the past thirty years. Moreover, it is by far the most common faith among the residents of the Quartiers Nord I have been in contact with.

The principal characteristic of assimilation is the up-rooting of cultural differences resulting in the disappearance of many aspects belonging to the culture of origin. Religion, here, can be seen as one of these aspects. However it would be ridiculous and impossible for the French state to ban religion altogether for obvious historical and practical reasons. So how is secularism actually applied in France? It relies on one basic rule of French society: the clear distinction between private and public codes of behaviour. In other words, people are allowed to express their religious beliefs in set contexts: religious institutions such as churches, mosques and synagogues, home, and basically anywhere that is not related to a national institution. This means the educational system is religion-free and so are political institutions.

This all sounds logical in theory considering the Republican heritage. However, in a country with such a large contingent of people of immigrant descent, secularist policies are not always popular or easily put into practice. The consecutive "headscarf affairs"[102] which occurred over the last three decades

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[102] In the fall of 1989, media and political attention turned to a piece of clothing which has since then become socially visible and symbolically meaningful, in the French background that is. Naturally, this occurrence cannot be mentioned outside of the local and international contexts of the time, with the children of Muslim immigrants underlining the place of Islam in their identity and political leaders in other countries openly proclaiming the guiding role of the religion in their decision making. This generated a general climate of fear, only enhanced by the civil war in Algeria and the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001 later on. Consequently, many in

have led to a questioning of the limits of the secularist model in legal terms and new laws are continuously being put together in order to adjust to the current situation. This example substantiates the French inclination to restrict expressions of religious belief and cultural origins to the private realm.

When confronted with the practice of Islam, this tendency takes on a very intensive or vehement nature. In France, mosques are sometimes portrayed by politicians (members of the far right Front National party especially[103]) as symbols of an invading religion. Islam is perceived as central in the North-African educational model and thus as a hindrance to the mechanisms of integration. This argument is strongly rejected by Ahmed Rouadjia (2004) on the grounds that it does not take the cultural difference between parents and their children into account. He also questions the presumed "incompatibility" of French identity and Islam when all the other religions coexist with secularism. For him, this is partly based on a general misconception of the codes of

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France saw Islam as a new and important threat, a view that coincides with the rise in popularity of the Front National since the late 1980s.

It is no surprise then that the appearance of three girls wearing Islamic dress in their school in Creil near Paris did not go unnoticed, although they and other girls had been attending school wearing headscarves for years. After a series of unsuccessful attempts at negotiation between the school administration, the parents and local associations, the local argument on whether the girls should be allowed to return to school and in which attire became a national incident. Divisions among political parties and social scientists soon became apparent as various public figures (Alain Touraine, Danielle Mitterrand and Lionel Jospin among others) brought forward their conception of *laïcité* and how it should be applied. In the end, two of the three girls were readmitted in school after accepting to remove their headscarves, the third one refused to do so and was never let back in the institution.

In the years that followed, the 'headscarf phenomenon' continued to be at the centre of public attention and, by 1993, new developments occurred which confirmed the complex and ongoing nature of this political and societal puzzle. The growing number of cases that were taken to the State Council in this timeframe (49 between 1992 and 1994) illustrate the extent to which the dilemma had become a recurrent feature of life in and around French schools. As a result, the Council developed a consistent attitude to deal with the issue: it allowed schools to expel girls in particular cases such as when class attendance on their part was low or if their case led to protests, but not purely on the basis that they wore scarves (*Le Monde,* May 9, 2003). Nevertheless, tensions around headscarves did not disappear and new concerns about Islam both domestically and abroad only made matters worse. The tensions in Algeria reached France with bombs exploding in Paris and Lyon in the mid-1990s and public reporting on headscarves began to heat up again following 9/11.

[103] See for instance the *Le Monde* article (15/09/2011) on Marine Le Pen's disapproval of the building of a mosque to prevent 'street praying' in Paris and Marseille. Accessed on 12/07/2012 at www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2011/09/15/marine-le-pen-denonce-l-ouverture-de-la-mosquee-destinee-a-empecher-les-prieres-de-rue_1573016_3224.html

behaviour of people of Arabic descent which leads to an exaggeration of certain features such as patriarchal domination (Rouadjia, 2004, pp. 209-262).

Overall, the emergence of Islam in the French public space has raised a number of questions and fears, some of them legitimate, others unjustified and out of proportion. The contemporary tensions around the place of France's second religion (in numerical terms) are leading to a critical re-evaluation of the nation's modes of integration, at least among social scientists. It seems that the demands of democracy and secularism are not incompatible with the ongoing search for innovative solutions, particularly at a time when economic globalisation and community fragmentation are growing exponentially. The difficulty here lies in finding a compromise that balances out the needs for equality and cultural difference.

Nonetheless, the Muslim residents of the Quartiers Nord seem to have no or few problems practicing their faith while simultaneously following the national rules of behaviour in the public space inherited from Republican values. They are able to purchase 'halal' products from various shops in Asnières such as one of the many butcher's and convenient stores. Moreover, there is a mosque in the Courtilles estate (which is taking a long time to be completed although it is already being attended) where a large portion of the Muslim population gathers, at least on Fridays and special occasions. By positioning the mosque at the centre of the area where a majority of Asnières' Muslims live, local policymakers have ensured that it is easily accessible to the local Muslim community and minimised its polemical potential as it is far from the town centre. However, this can also be interpreted as an acknowledgement that the practice of Islam is somehow conflicting with mainstream French values and social organisation, and therefore a hindrance to processes of integration (assimilation in this case). Along those lines, the fact that the mosque is located in the Quartiers Nord confirms the area's status as differing from dominant representations of French mainstream society.

The only complaint I have heard on the practice of Islam in Asnières came from a Muslim sixteen year old boy from Chechnya. He was one of the pupils of the Maison des Femmes and was experiencing great difficulties adapting to his new environment. When I asked him what he missed the most

about his homeland, he mentioned two things: wrestling, which he trained in every day but was not able to do so in Asnières, and the fact that everybody in his home town near Grozny is a Muslim. Although he admitted that there are a lot of Muslims in the Quartier Nord, he regretted the lack of folkloric elements from Chechnya, especially celebrations and corresponding holiday periods. In other words, he missed living in a country where a certain form of Islam is part of the national culture and society. Moreover, he mentioned the fact that Islam was practiced differently in Asnières than it was in his hometown, before adding: "the Muslims here are mostly Arabs, I don't really fit in".

This particular interaction between us stays in my mind as the first moment where he was really talkative. His enthusiasm surprised me as he is an extremely quiet person. After this exchange, he gradually opened up to me and the rest of the teenagers. I believe he understood that his time at the Maison des Femmes could be an occasion to freely speak his mind and express some feelings he might deem inadequate outside of the private realm. As he said himself, he arrived in France in the middle of national debates on the burqa and felt instantly that France was not a 'Muslim-friendly country' despite the fact that women in Chechnya don't wear this particular piece of clothing[104]. On this

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[104] During preparations for the French regional elections of March 2010, a fierce public discussion on national identity took place with yet another piece of Islamic clothing at its centre: the so-called burqa. When the media and politicians referred to the burqa, they did not mean the Afghan outfit, with a cloth grille over the eyes, which is not found in France; they meant the niqab, the full-body covering that leaves a narrow slit open for eyes and originates from the Gulf region. Only a few years ago, this garment was virtually unknown in France as the majority of French Muslims come from North Africa. Intelligence reports communicated in the media evaluated the number of women wearing the niqab in France to a little under 2000, which is a very small number if compared to that of Muslim women in France.

Yet, with such a small proportion of Muslim women wearing the niqab, a plan to ban it from public spaces stoked further controversy, this time even beyond discussions of secularism. Then-President Sarkozy considered the 'burqa' to be more than just a religious sign, for him it represented the subservience of women. A cross-party parliamentary inquiry held hearings on the topic, with the participation of French Muslim figures such as Dalil Boubakeur (who was the first president of the French Muslim Council between 2003 and 2008 and is the current rector of the Great Mosque of Paris). From what has transpired of this initiative, it seems most of the 'experts' consulted described the niqab as an invasion of salafism, the ultra-puritan branch of radical Islam, and did not perceive it as a prescription of the religion. In the end, the niqab was banned in France and a few women have since been given a fine for wearing it.

occasion, the association has played the role of a space of free expression, between the private and the public realms. My position as a researcher and the subsequent interest I had in such issues may have also facilitated this conversation. Furthermore, the ongoing discussions we had on the topic combined with his growing experience and subsequent knowledge of his surroundings had made him more confident in expressing his faith within the boundaries of the French national framework. Something I believe he was already doing anyway but had no certainties about.

Contrastingly, the Muslim children who attend the Club des Chardons seem very far away from such considerations. They made their religious affiliation clear to me very early on as illustrated by my conversation with Mohamed. This may be due to the large portion of the Quartier Nord population of Muslim faith. Indeed, if many of the bank holidays in France are linked to Christianity, celebrations of certain 'special' days of the Muslim lunar calendar take place at the level of the neighbourhood and are particularly anticipated. This phenomenon legitimates shared religious practices (especially ones belonging to Islam) among residents of the Quartiers Nord, even those who do not belong to the faith in question.

This is the case for instance for 'Eid al-Adha' (the Greater Eid), four symbolic days celebrating the willingness of the prophet Abraham to sacrifice his first-born son Ishmael as an act of submission to God's command, the latter intervening to provide Abraham with a ram to sacrifice instead. Accordingly, men, women and children are expected to dress in their finest clothing to perform 'Eid' prayer in a large congregation and sacrifice their best 'halal' domestic animal. In North Africa this animal is usually a goat. Although the streets of the Quartiers Nord are not filled with goats' blood on the first day of Eid as it can be the case in many regions of Africa and North Africa, the incessant activity of butchers' delivery vans from the early hours of the morning gives an idea of the local importance of these celebrations.

I remember being surprised at the relative silence of the Freycinet central courtyard in the evening compared to the noise and activity of the day although I had been warned in advance by most of the pupils from the Friday evening schoolwork support session that they would not be attending the association's

activities on the first day of 'Eid al-Adha'. In the end, three out of eighteen pupils showed up to the workshop on the day. One of them, a ten year old girl, was a Muslim. I asked her if her family was celebrating 'Eid'. She said they were and that, like many of her friends, she had not gone to school that day. She had been to the mosque with her parents in the afternoon and they were now busy preparing the dinner for friends and family. Her mother had insisted that she came to the Club des Chardons at least for two hours in order to start her holiday homework (a two-week long holiday was starting on the Saturday) and catch up on the day of school she had just missed.

The association asks of its volunteers and workers to keep track of the presence of pupils in order to maintain good levels of attendance and discipline. Furthermore, if a pupil is absent more than three times in the year with no explanation provided by the parents, he or she is banned permanently. This may seem harsh but there is a very high demand to take part in the activities of the Club des Chardons and a subsequent will to privilege motivated and assiduous families. Nonetheless, this 'rigidity' in terms of regularity is not applied to specific situations which can emerge from complex family backgrounds (which the association's mediator is usually aware of) or socio-cultural events such as religious celebrations.

The associative realm is not part of the State-run institutional network (although they may be dependent on its funding) and can therefore adapt to the needs and desires of the population it is in contact with. Moreover, associations have no legal obligation to follow a specific calendar. That means that they can continue their activities during official holiday periods and interrupt them or reorganise their schedule to fit local demands. In a way, this positions them in the interstice between two types of public domain – that of the nation and that of the neighbourhood.

Although it has triggered an ideologically charged discussion in the country, the role of French Islam is not merely to allow for its followers to maintain their faith within the Republican framework, but to guide individuals in the elaboration of their personal identities. For Leïla Babès (1997), this can be done without generating processes of ethnic or community-based segregation. She posits an understanding of Islam as a cultural element rather than a

dominant and overwhelming religion in terms of identity construction. Although Babès concedes the structuring role played by the religion at the personal level, she refutes the assumption that Islam possesses an ethnic component, basing her argument on the geographic diversity of its historical roots and on the evolution of its practice on French soil (Babès, 1997, 154). As for the idea of a 'Muslim community', Babès firmly rejects it on the grounds that it attributes to French Muslims a form of antagonism directed towards the Republican doctrine as well as implying the existence of a shared project with the aim of constituting a Muslim entity relatively autonomous from the rest of French society. She believes that they, on the most part, rely on the notion that they are both Muslim and French without necessarily having to privilege one element of their identity over the other (Babès, 1997, 163). In other words, there is no desire from French Muslims to separate themselves from their fellow citizens on religious grounds.

The formulation of individual identities cannot be reduced to a citizenship/Islam dichotomy. Although religion has an impact on a person's perception of and interaction with the rest of their environment, it does not necessarily lead to the rejection of other components of identity or parallel memberships. If one follows Babès' argumentation, Islam should conversely be seen as going beyond ethnic and communal loyalties. Indeed, it is not incompatible with the idea of cultural and religious pluralism and even contributes to it in France with the instigation of an ongoing dialogue through which its adaptation to the national structure occurs. This mediating process is essential both to the survival of Islam in France and to that of the Republican system itself, the latter being fully dependent on the notion that all people can be integrated as long as they accept to play by the rules.

Conclusions

As we have seen in this chapter and the previous one, the associative realm stands as an intermediate space where identities can be reinterpreted. In a similar manner that they facilitate the transition between local and mainstream perceptions for the residents of the Quartiers Nord, associations contribute to the adaptation of cultural identities to the wider French society. In order to do so,

they draw from both national and personal backgrounds and attempt to bring them together. This means they incorporate elements of people's identity which may at first be deemed inappropriate (sometimes by the individuals themselves in the case of newly arrived migrants) in the Republican value system. Correspondingly, associations can be seen as participating in the necessary dialectic between individual and collective identities.

By taking into account and reinterpreting territorial, ethnic or religious identities[105], associations attempt to reduce the distance between the 'us' and the 'them' which is at the origin of feelings of social exclusion. Indeed, these three criteria serve as the building blocks for the establishment of symbolic boundaries between the residents of the Quartier Nord and the rest of the local and national communities. Consequently, one could represent the associative space as an intercultural one where the local, national and international become momentarily compatible, or at least debatable.

Along those lines, the key functions of the Club des Chardons and the Maison des Femmes in the area can be summed up in four points: (i) providing a safe space for discussion of identities; (ii) organising (fun) activities that promote social and ethnic solidarity within and between groups; (iii) help youth understand France and French cultural and values; (iv) help youth succeed in school. In that sense, the two associations generate cultural and social capital as identified by Pierre Bourdieu (1986)[106].

However, there are limits to what associations can accomplish in those circumstances. Stigmatising life experiences and the ensuing social pressure may reduce the effects of their mediating work. Any notion that has been reinterpreted and contextually adapted can be re-evaluated under a different light. It is indeed easy for a youth to conclude that there is no place for them in

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[105] These are only three aspects of multi-perspectival elements of individual and group identities. There are other factors that can be considered such as gender and age which I do not have space to explore here.

[106] Bourdieu (1983) defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986, 249). He identifies three forms of cultural capital: first, in the embodied state incorporated in mind and body; second, in the institutionalised state (such as educational qualifications); and third, in the objectified state, existing as cultural goods (such as books or paintings) (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 252-253).

mainstream French society after being the victim or witness of prejudice based on territorial, ethnic or religious identification. This is true regardless of associative efforts of appeasement.

Moreover, the work of associations can be seen as reinforcing the local potential for such prejudice. By taking elements of the Quartiers Nord inhabitants' self-representation (which is formulated with respect to the dominant discourse and other elements of their life histories) into account when establishing their agendas and delimiting their administrative range of action, associations enhance the relevance of these notions in the minds of policy makers and residents themselves. The difficulty here lies in finding the right balance between national and individual identities in order to reduce the stigmatising and mutually excluding effects of incompatibilities between the two.

Chapter 7

Associations and social regulation.

The theory of social regulation was developed in France by the sociologist Jean-Daniel Reynaud (1997). It places negotiation and the establishment of rules at the centre of social interactions. The main objective of the theory of social regulation is to understand how rules can allow a social group to structurally function and elaborate collective action. This means one has to expose the manner in which those rules are created, maintained and transformed in order to uncover their significance and effect. Moreover, they are not distinct, independent rules, but form a system which is itself dependent on the social mechanisms at its origin (Reynaud, 1997).

One of the 'innovations' brought about by Reynaud in this field is the idea that, although actors may elaborate their own system of rules through negotiation and act collectively as a result, they do so within the framework of other external systems of rules generated by a 'wider' encompassing environment (de Terssac, 2003). There is however no strict determinism in this as one needs to distinguish between vertical or hierarchical regulation and more autonomous forms of regulation emanating from the group itself. A conflict may therefore exist between external and internal rules emanating from dominant and demotic discourses on social behaviour, thus generating competition and an ensuing need for mediation.

The social regulation which is discussed in this chapter is supported at ground level by associations and institutions. As we will see, they promote a hybrid form of regulation born simultaneously from dominant and demotic discourses and the sets of rules emerging from them. By witnessing and participating in the work of associations in the Quartiers Nord, I have been able to get past mainstream representations of the area and to access a demotic angle, the 'native' point of view, on situational patterns and the resultant codes of conduct that are validated there. This has allowed me to access first hand

information about processes of social regulation on a site where public policies on the topic are applied both in a procedural manner and in more informal ways.

This chapter is inspired by the work of Manuel Boucher (2003) on social regulation in the Rouen agglomeration. In his critical account of the logic behind the actions of social workers, he exposes changes in the field of social regulation and questions the meaning of this shift. Is it a democratising process? The breaking down of boundaries allowing for the deconstruction of existing mechanisms of social reproduction? Or contrastingly the reinforcement of hierarchical control? His central hypothesis is that we are not so much witnessing the birth of new forms of 'management' of the working class ('classes populaires') with less state involvement in problematic areas, but rather the diversification of modes of intervention favouring innovative interpretations of social regulation and control (Boucher, 2003, 18). Throughout this chapter, I will describe a number of associative initiatives confirming Boucher's observations on the role of social actors on regulation and control, and, in this case, clarify the part played by associations in these processes. I wish however to clearly distinguish the two terms before engaging in such discussions.

Accordingly, I will rely on Reynaud's distinction between social control and social regulation and his definition of these phenomena. Following the functionalist school of thought, he links formal and informal social control to the maintaining of a given social order against deviant actions. Social regulation on the other hand is a paradigm describing processes of rule production, the latter evolving with social practices. It allows for a balance to be reached within a system (Reynaud, 1997). Distinguishing between social control and social regulation is important at this point of our study as we are trying to describe the role of associations as well as the various interpretations of it. Along those lines, social control and social regulation can be seen as two sides of the same coin, one based on a dominant discourse of 'difficult neighbourhoods' and the other on a demotic discourse of contextual social behaviour influencing associative action at ground level.

As it has often been the case in this study, I will focus specifically on the 'youth' category and on the relationship some of its members have with certain codes of conduct and systems of rules. The reason for this particular focus is

dual. Firstly, it is practical as children and teenagers constitute my research participants in Asnières. Secondly, it is theoretical as the 'youth' category is the principle target of dominant discourses on 'difficult neighbourhoods' as we will see here. Consequently, the first section of this chapter will be a discussion of how local children and teenagers relate to processes of social regulation in the Quartiers Nord.

In the second section we will turn our attention to a particular aspect of associative action which I believe to be the main 'regulating' activity local associations are involved in: mediation. The role of the two mediators of the Club des Chardons and the Maison des Femmes is probably the most complex one to decipher due to the wide range of responsibilities they take on. They are however a central piece of associative and neighbourhood mechanisms, acting as connectors and communication facilitators in the transmission of information.

The third and final section of this chapter will cover other forms of associative and public action in terms of social regulation. I will consider initiatives from various kinds of associations and corresponding state and municipal policies, confirming Boucher's argument that a diversification of modes of social regulation is taking place.

The 'youth' category and social regulation in the Quartiers Nord

A couple of months into the school year, I had an interesting exchange with one of the twelve year old boys of my homework support group at the Club des Chardons. Like most of the children there, Hakim was born and raised in the Freycinet neighbourhood and lives a few meters away from the classroom in which the activity takes place. He had finished his homework and was in a talkative mood so we engaged in a conversation which started on the topic of my meeting with his school teacher.

> Y.: Your teacher told me that you lack concentration and want to do everything too fast.
> H.: She doesn't like me.

Y.: I would tend to think like her. Why do you think she doesn't like you?

H.: It's because she always blames me for disrupting the class.

Y.: Is she sometimes right though?

H.: … sometimes, but not always! Today, when she was writing on the blackboard, one of my friends threw an eraser at me. It landed next to me so I picked it up just as the teacher was turning around to face us. She said: "Hackim and friends, I will see you all after class". So we had to spend recess in the classroom until one of us admitted to throwing the eraser. At first, none of us talked, because we're not like that, you can't rat people out. But then the teacher said we would all be punished for that so in the end my friend admitted it was him.

Y.: What happened to him?

H.: He is temporarily expelled from school, for a week, he was already on a warning.

Y.: Are you or your other friends also on a warning?

H.: I've already been expelled a week this year. *He said that smiling proudly*, *at least before I frowned and asked him what his parents thought of this.*

H.: I thought my dad was either going to kill me or die of a heart attack from yelling.

Y.: What did you do to get expelled?

H.: I punched a guy in the courtyard.

Y.: Any particular reason?

H.: Every time I walked passed him that week, he would say something stupid about me and laugh. I told him to stop many times before punching him.

Y.: What was he saying?

H.: He was mispronouncing my name on purpose to make it sound like 'ass'.

Y.: So, why do you care?

H.: I can't let the others think I'm a coward.

Y.: So your friends will think that you are tough, but your teacher and parents will think you are a trouble maker…

H.: I've got to be tough, like my favourite rapper, cause he also grew up in a tough place like me. You know him?

Y.: No I don't.

H.: Were you a trouble maker in school?

Y.: I can't say that.

H.: I'm sure you were. Have you ever been told you're going to end up in prison when you grow up?

Y.: No. Why? Have you?

H.: Yes, by my neighbour. He hates me, but he says that to all the kids in the tower. My favourite line from this rapper is when he says his teacher told him that he was going to end up in jail but now he is a famous rapper.

Y.: So famous I have never heard of him…[107]

So you want to be like him?

H.: No, I don't rap. But I'm also a victim of people judging me too quickly.

Y.: Don't you think it is right for people to judge you on your actions?

H.: Yes, maybe. But they never know the full story, like with that annoying boy.

Y.: Who do you mean by 'they'?

H.: My parents, the teachers…

Y.: I would say they are people who want you to do well. No?

H.: I know. But they are dumb. They don't understand how things work around here. You have to be tough if you are going to get respect. If you are not, you are a victim.

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[107] I often used this type of accessible sarcasm with the children and teenagers whose attention was the hardest to get. It worked well, usually leading to them realising that I placed myself as an adult 'above' them but also as someone who they could joke with at the same time, that is within limits that I established throughout the year.

This conversation was not part of a recorded interview but had a similar feeling to it. It started in a relaxed manner as an end of workshop one-on-one discussion but my position as a researcher interested in social regulation strongly influenced my reactions to Hakim's statements. However, my role as an educator and promoter of the dominant discourse on adequate social behaviour (manifested in the shape of school regulations) also impacted upon my relative stance towards Hakim, his teacher and his parents.

Most of the arguments presented in this chapter have been drawn from this conversation which was my first piece of ethnographic data on the topic of social regulation. It confirmed my view that there are three main arenas from which children and youths of the Quartiers Nord receive 'instructions' or sets of rules on a daily basis: the school, the family, and the street. Let us first define the 'youth' category and what it represents before dealing with the different systems of rules represented in this exchange and which constitute the basic components of social regulation for children and teenagers in the Quartiers Nord.

The 'youth' category and the young residents of the Quartiers Nord

The concepts of childhood and youth are better viewed "in a socio-cultural context, not just (as) a particular age range" (Lowicki, 2000, 10). Terms like 'adolescent', 'teenager', 'youth' and 'young person' are used interchangeably. These words can be linked to various professions and social groupings. Psychologists and psychiatrists have tended to use the term 'adolescent' since G. Stanley Hall's (1904) path-breaking work. Politicians, policy analysts and sociologists orient towards 'youth', and people involved in youth work indicate a client relationship by employing 'young person' (Jeff and Smith, 1999).

Both childhood and adulthood are socially constructed and are defined within institutional frameworks. As Rex Stainton Rogers warns us in his *Social Construction of Childhood* (1989): "Don't forget that social constructions are not just ideas. They are also what we make and do" (Stainton Rogers, 1989, 25). These notions of childhood – what it looks like, when it ends, its social role – each shape the behaviours of young people and the influence they may carry in

larger systems. One could argue that a particular European construct – one that portrays youth as dependent, immature, and incapable of assuming responsibility, properly confined to the protection of home and school (Thomas, 2000) – has been "universalised in such a way that youngsters who do not follow this path are considered either to be at risk or to pose a risk to society" (De Boeck and Honwana, 2005, 3). There are, of course, important ground-level repercussions to such widespread stigmatising trends.

Accordingly, this chapter is about the contextual reinterpretation and enactment by young residents of the Quartiers Nord of systems of rules born from the dominant and demotic discourses on social interaction. Similarly, Anoop Nayak (2003) demonstrates how young people in Northeast England perform 'localist', 'survivalist' and 'globalist' responses to ongoing changes in their environment. Nayak illustrates how contemporary generations can undo existing identity markers such as 'whiteness' and replace them by new transnational ethnicities. Although this chapter is not about ethnicity, it does however emphasise the adaptability of young members of the community in terms of negotiating influences emerging from a changing environment.

Studies made in the context of the *banlieues* and estates often include a particular emphasis on a certain age group, that of teenagers and young adults (Santelli, 2004; Robin, 2007; Clair, 2005). In France, they are usually considered as part of the same category: 'les jeunes' (youths). In dominant discourses on the matter, these 'jeunes' are not perceived as 'ordinary' people or the products of their generation but as outsiders whose conduct may threaten the social order[108]. Nonetheless, this age category should not be seen in such a simplistic and reductive manner but as a social construction sometimes built on fear, rejection and underlying conflicts between sub-groups that operate within French society.

From the local statistics available through national surveys of the population (INSEE), one can see that demographic distribution in terms of age varies greatly from city centres to the estates around them. In the Quartiers Nord

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[108] See for instance Robert Castel's article in the *Nouvel Observateur* magazine (11/10/2007) where he criticises the use of the term 'jeunes' in its use by policy makers and mainstream media for being generalising and derogatory as often placed in the context of discussions on 'l'insécurité' and delinquency.

Z.U.S., figures clearly show an under-representation of the older age groups. Only 12.7% of the residents are over sixty years old when 31.5% are under twenty. The gap is less prominent if one considers the entire commune of Asnières, with respectively 14.4% and 25.7%. This division suggests a separation of the population into two clearly defined groups: parents and children. Together, they constitute nearly eighty-five percent of the population of the Quartiers Nord[109].

Table: The demographic distribution in Asnières along age lines.

	Asnières	Quartiers Nord	Courtilles Estate
Under 20 years old	25.7%	31.5%	35.2%
Over 60 years old	14.4%	12.7%	11.9%

Source: INSEE

The first indication these statistics give us is that generational contrasts contribute to the greater visibility of younger residents, those under twenty representing a third of the local population. These disparities appear to be enhanced when collective housing units such as tower blocks are incorporated into existing urban zones situated close to a zone pavillionnaire (neighbourhoods composed of individual houses) (Moulin, 2001, 98). This is illustrated by the Courtilles estate (the main estate in the Quartiers Nord, the Mourinoux and Freycinet neighbourhoods are a part of it) which borders both a zone pavillionnaire and the Asnières town centre. This proximity somehow affects the demographic impression one may get when going from one neighbourhood to the other. In the Courtilles, those under twenty represent 35.2% of the overall population, for 25.7% in the entire Asnières commune. Although there is only a ten percent difference, a quick discussion I had with some locals in a café clearly

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[109] Statistics gathered on 25/06/2012 at www.insee.fr/fr/ppp/bases-de-donnees/donnees-detaillees/duicq/pdf/ftd//ftd_z_1115010.pdf .

indicated that they viewed most of the 'visible' youths as coming from the Courtilles estate. At this point, it became apparent to me that 'les jeunes' are more than a demographic age group, but an integral part of the (sometimes inaccurate) social representation of their geographic distribution.

Therefore, the growing importance of youths as a socially relevant category is not simply the result of their demographic weight in terms of numbers. My experience in the field confirms the idea that dominant discourses impact upon demotic representations, and therefore that the reputation of some estate youths at a local and national level may affect the image of a whole area. It becomes classified as 'difficult' in its entirety, which also affects the image local inhabitants have of the youngest members of their community, as illustrated by Hakim's description of his neighbour's constant negative commentaries towards him and the other children of his tower block . In that sense, demographic statistics can never fully explain the influence of a given age category on its social environment.

Systems of rules for children and young residents of the Quartiers Nord

There are three systems of rules represented in the conversation between Hakim and myself presented above. The first one is that of the school where rules are dictated by the established dominant discourse on social behaviour, thus preparing pupils for the rules in place in mainstream society and contributing to their integration to it. The second system of rules transpiring from this exchange is elaborated at the level of the family and is amalgamated with that of the school. The real opposition one can observe is between these two systems and what we will call 'street' or 'estate' rules which mainly apply to the youth category.

Emile Durkheim (1968) argues that the strict enforcement of school rules and subsequent punishment for infringement would highlight the damage that could be done to society through the lack of collective cooperation. By respecting those rules in school, the child would learn to respect the rules of adult social life. Underlying this is the assumption that there exist universal values which order the structure of society and also a belief in the necessity to

instil a sense of duty within individuals within that society. Moreover, Durkheim explains how, in industrialised society, education provides the opportunity to learn skills that will place the individual in an advantageous position for future, specialised labour (Durkheim, 1968).

However, certain circumstances have to be taken into account when considering the relationship between individuals and the educational system. Children and teenagers with what school psychologists have termed 'socio-geographic risk factors', such as ethnic minority status, low maternal education or low family income have been identified by many of these psychologists specialising in education and childhood as more prone to suffer poor academic and developmental outcomes (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta and Howes, 2002; McLoyd, 1998). Although I do not believe this view applies to all children, I have witnessed some of these difficulties during the various workshops I ran, especially in terms of the application of behavioural (or disciplinary) rules. In this chapter, we take a look at the mechanisms by which these rules can be mediated by the children and teenagers themselves in a context-dependent manner, as well as by associative educators and mediators in a more vertical way.

In terms of the social regulation of young people, the dominant discourse on adequate social behaviour is promoted extensively by teachers and in school premises. For Manuel Boucher (2003), schoolteachers are representatives of the State. They teach children respect for others and adults in particular, the value of effort, and develop their thirst for knowledge. They are educational agents with a mission of providing points of reference based on Republican values, these being necessary in order to be individually successful in French society (Boucher, 2003, 67). In that sense, the Republican rhetoric of uniform egalitarianism suggests the symbolic unity of the three basic components of the French state: its population, its sovereignty and its territory. Accordingly, considerations regarding local, domestic or ethnic backgrounds have been voluntarily ignored during the elaboration of the state and its educational system. This has resulted in a highly centralised and 'vertical' schooling institution. The history of teaching in France demonstrates the nation's strive for the realisation of the ideal of equality in terms of education with the aim of generating an

egalitarian society. From the 'Etat éducateur' (educating State) of the third Republic to the 'Etat développeur' (developing State) of the mid-twentieth century, the French educational system has progressively changed from the political values of its foundation to a logic based on economic principles (Charlot, 1987).

When I asked the director of one of the secondary schools of the Quartiers Nord if he felt that it was more difficult to achieve these objectives in the area rather than in the town centre, he simply answered that you have trouble makers in every school, and that the same goes with well behaved children. He did say however that many of the teachers under his supervision who had taught in more central schools complained about the agitation and rudeness of some of the pupils. I then asked him if he thought that the rules in school were adapted to those children. His answer was a straightforward one:

The rules that apply here are the same as those of the professional realm and the adult world in general. Violence, whether it be verbal or physical, is forbidden and sanctioned. Respect for others, whoever they are, is strongly encouraged. We the staff also try to show respect for the pupils and their families. The aim is to provide the best possible learning environment for the children, and for this a certain amount of discipline is necessary.

From the school principal's views, one can distinguish two main reasons for the application of strict disciplinary rules in school. Firstly, the need to show the children the manner in which they will be expected to behave as adults in their social and professional environments (as underlined by Durkheim). Secondly, to allow for the smooth running of classes and therefore facilitate the pupils' knowledge acquisition.

Furthermore, such rules of behaviour and the potential repercussions of not following them also apply to the realm of associations with children and teenagers. Both the Maison des Femmes and the Club des Chardons use an internally formulated set of rules of conduct which is given to the pupils at the beginning of each year and sent to their parents. These rules strongly resemble

that of the school, with an emphasis on adequate vocabulary and attitude (no swearing, insults or fighting), as well as attendance and punctuality (which is directed more towards the parents). I have seen such regulations in all the educational and leisure associations I have visited in the Quartiers Nord, often in the shape of a notice pinned to the doors and walls of classrooms or at the entrance.

The description above might give the impression that the disciplinary role of adults in the Quartier Nord solely lies in the hands of schools and associations. However, it is crucial not to underestimate the normative influence of the family environment. Although I have heard on many occasions people of the Quartiers Nord accusing local parents of 'giving up on their children's education' or 'leaving them in the streets and courtyards without supervision', I have also witnessed numerous cases where children and teenagers are greatly influenced by their parents' authority and the rules they put in place. This is exemplified in the fear expressed by the pupils of the Club des Chardons when their parents are contacted by the association because of behavioural problems they may have. In my workshops, the simple mention of parents usually was enough to calm down the most belligerent pupils.

Moreover, the family environment is synonymous with a certain amount of responsibility or accountability for the eldest of these children, who are regularly called on to help parents with daily tasks. It was not rare for me to come across my pupils alone on their way back from the market carrying bags of shopping, or others as young as nine or ten years old picking up their siblings from school and walking them home. Although these moments took place in the street environment, they clearly emanate from the children following a familial system of rules. This important aspect of the daily lives of young residents of the Quartiers Nord is unfortunately ignored in reductive interpretations of the life they lead.

When crossing the central courtyard of the Freycinet neighbourhood to access the three different classrooms of the Club des Chardons, I regularly engaged in short verbal exchanges with local residents, especially the younger members of the community who knew me through my work with the two associations. They were usually playing loudly in groups based on age and

sometimes family. I have observed on numerous occasions that senior members of the neighbourhood (retired people usually not related to the children) looked either afraid or annoyed at the groups of young people, expressing their frustration verbally and, at times, rather loudly. They did not however always say anything out loud, sometimes just walking by, giving disapproving looks, and going straight back to their flats. This led to the youths feeling even more rejected and angry and often expressing that feeling loudly as well, with a fair share of verbal jousts between members of these two age groups in the Quartiers Nord. This tense social climate, which is not permanent, has two linked consequences: it increases the visibility of this age group in a negative manner, and it affects the youths' self-perception in a similar way.

The perception young residents have of their own situation is not simply the result of these daily interactions with their apprehensive or confrontational neighbours. Indeed, the episodes described above tend to take place in the evening, at a time when teenagers and children come out of school. Their numerical weight becomes more apparent at that point, especially as their parents are not usually back from work and they enjoy a bit of spare time. The 'youth' or 'street' system of rules of conduct therefore becomes predominant in the neighbourhood in the late afternoon and evening. Hakim's explanation of the importance of looking tough in order to gain respect sounds like a 'street' rule inherited from his and his friends' demotic view of social regulation in the Freycinet neighbourhood. This view strongly contrasts with the dominant discourse on youths from 'difficult neighbourhoods' by legitimating certain behaviours that are rejected by the 'mainstream' system of rules for social conduct.

In this light, we can reinterpret Hakim's testimony as part of the local demotic discourse which establishes and confirms 'street' level regulation among children and teenagers of the Quartiers Nord. However, he also acknowledged the relevance of school and a family rules and abided by them most of the time although he didn't believe them to fit his daily street or neighbourhood interactions. One may consequently wonder at which particular moment the influence of the school and family becomes less potent than that of the street. At which point does the parents' authority break down to be replaced

by other kinds of authority? The answer to this question is not straightforward. Indeed, this process is a gradual one as both public and private forms of identification remain relevant across time. The emphasis is just put on one or the other at various moments, depending on an individual's self-representation in a given social context. Most young residents will adapt the image they convey to the family and street settings alternately. This is a good illustration of Erving Goffman's notion of performed identities, as exposed in the previous chapter.

Accordingly, it is reasonable to envisage the complementary roles of these distinct systems of rules which can alternatively be applied by children and teenagers of the Quartiers Nord depending on the setting they evolve in, whether it be that of the school, family or street. However, although these systems are complementary, some of the rules that compose them may also be conflicting as there is no strict delimitation between the various settings in which they are validated. Indeed, one can describe the school and street environments as converging since they are usually composed of the same individuals: young residents attending neighbourhood schools. This means that interpersonal exchanges that occur in one setting may have ramifications in the other. It is in this kind of situation that the individual has to choose which set of rules are applicable. Hakim's decision to punch someone in the school courtyard after tensions had built up both inside and outside of it can be interpreted as him privileging 'street' rules over 'school' ones, this even though he was physically in the school at that given time.

From Hakim's description of this event, one can deduce his own perception of these systems of rules. For him, rules established by his parents and the school environment are strict regulations imposed hierarchically by people with a degree of authority over him. In that sense, they stem from the application of vertical social control whereby his actions have been deemed as deviant or reprehensible and therefore threatening to the social order in place. Contrastingly, 'street' rules are portrayed as more fitting to the local context of the Quartiers Nord, especially for the youth category, thus constituting an internal form of social regulation. Here, the former set of rules is affiliated to dominant discourses on social behaviour and the latter to demotic perspectives on the matter.

This analysis of Hakim's comments must be complemented by a reflection on my own positioning in this exchange. As a researcher, I am an interpreter of his views which I have presented here in the context of a theoretical discussion of social regulation. As an associative worker and in this conversation in particular, I am a promoter of the wider national rules of conduct (which are here applied in the context of the school) with the aim of facilitating Hakim's future integration to mainstream society. It has been possible for me to maintain this role without being perceived as an agent of social control by playing on my intermediate position between insider and outsider. As I have said, I owe this advantage to the fact I worked in the Quartiers Nord and was therefore present or at least visible on a close-to-daily basis, but didn't live in the area.

In many ways, the relationship between estate youths and mainstream society, or at least their perception of it, can be reduced to a relationship between a dominant majority group and a dominated minority group among which those who find themselves furthest from the boundary are also the ones who suffer the most from exclusion. Accordingly, education, work and general normative adequacy allow a change from one group to the other through a transition towards adulthood. It is only by making such patterns widespread in the Quartiers Nord that local youths may one day escape the stigma attached to the segment of the population they are always brought back to: les jeunes.

For this to happen, they must recognise the prevalence of vertical systems of rules dictated by dominant discourses regulating social interactions over street level codes of behaviour. In other words, they have to accept a greater degree of social control in order ensure their integration to mainstream society. The psychological process in question is a complex and unsure one, requiring a certain amount of negotiation (Reynaud, 1997, 156). This negotiation dear to Reynaud takes place at the individual and group levels, but is facilitated and reinforced by local associations. The next section of this chapter will therefore focus on how these associations achieve this task: through mediation.

Mediation and the negotiation of social regulation

In the previous section, we have seen how children and teenagers from the Quartiers Nord apply rules from three main systems (school, family and street) depending on the context of their interactions. This adapting trend can be observed among all members of the local community (the systems in question might vary from one person to the next), and in the case of this study, those who require the help of either of the associations I work with. Aside from setting up and taking part in educational support activities in the area, both the Maison des Femmes and the Club des Chardons offer a different kind of service: mediation. Under this label are a number of formal and informal activities with the aim of facilitating the integration of entire families in the Quartiers Nord.

Most of the information that will follow comes from interviewing Djamila and Marie-Christine, respectively the mediators of the Maison des Femmes and the Club des Chardons. The two know each other very well as they have both lived in the area for over twenty years (one in the Mourinoux neighbourhood, the other in the Freycinet) and regularly meet professionally. Some families of the Quartiers Nord benefit from the work of the two and they often have to discuss common cases during meetings of the 'équipe pluridisciplinaire' (the team of professionals who try to provide educational solutions for local children and teenagers discussed in chapter four). The only real difference between their actions lies in their typical audience, reasonably established families for Marie-Christine, and more recent arrivals for Djamila. This is however just an average estimation and they both have to deal with a variety of situations.

Demographically, the Quartiers Nord can be characterised by a concentration of social housing and a population with low income. As we have seen in the third and fifth chapters, this territory constitutes a physical and social periphery with regards to the centre of Asnières and Paris. The mediating initiatives of associations in the Quartiers Nord attempt to provide concrete solutions to the multiple difficulties encountered by a part of the local population. By doing so, they wish to contribute to the reinforcement of social cohesion in the area. Moreover, the demand for this kind of service is growing,

with an average 25 percent increase in attendance during the last three years (since 2009) for the mediation actions of the Maison des Femmes and the Club des Chardons[110].

This can be explained by the diversity of migratory circumstances and complexity of family contexts present in the Quartiers Nord. Most of the people concerned demonstrate their will to integrate and actively take part in the neighbourhood's life. However, their participation remains problematic due to a number of factors – their sometimes limited knowledge of the French language and of their rights and duties, financial and housing difficulties, violence, isolation, and health problems constitute as many limiting parameters in their potential for integration. One of the consequences of this phenomenon is the tendency some families have of living within a closed environment with very little local exchanges outside of their inner circle.

This evaluation is made with great concern by institutions such as the Education Nationale (Department of Education) or the Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration (French Office for Immigration and Integration), public services such as the Caisse d'Allocations Familiales (Child Benefit Office) or the Caisse d'Assurance Maladie (Health Insurance Fund), and local structures among which the town hall and associations[111]. They all regret the great difficulties they experience when establishing and maintaining contact with those families, partly because of a lack of mutual comprehension, of processes of stigmatisation and a general need for better communication.

The assessment made by the C.U.C.S. of Asnières (Urban Contract for Social Cohesion, a nation-wide urban policy system, which was initiated in 2007) between 2007 and 2009 emphasises the positive impact of social and cultural mediation in the Quartiers Nord[112]. In their report, they point out the many benefits of this kind of ground level action. These range from the facilitation of access to and knowledge of individual rights and health services,

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[110] Data taken from the 2011 activity reports of both associations.

[111] This second-hand information was given to me by the mediators of the associations who work hand in hand with representatives of these structures and institutions on a regular basis.

[112] For the full C.U.C.S. reports, visit the following governmental website: sig.ville.gouv.fr/Documants/CS1204 (first visited on 12/01/2012).

the anticipation and prevention of conflict, and most importantly, a support platform enhancing processes of social autonomy and therefore the promotion of social cohesion.

Let us now define the term 'mediation' so as to clarify our use of it. For this I will use the definition around which the official positions of Djamila and Marie-Christine have been designed, that of the Union Professionnelle Indépendante des Médiateurs (the Professional and Independent Mediator's Union). According to it, social and cultural mediation is a construction or fixing process with the aim of reinforcing social bonds and resolving daily conflicts. It relies on the free will of its actors and beneficiaries. The neutral setting it provides and the fact it is a confidential activity encourages expression, thus bringing about new perspectives and the possibility for mutual comprehension. Mediation covers a wide range of circumstances where communication is a problem, anticipating the needs of protagonists in terms of reaching an understanding (Lascoux, 2007, 43). The great spectrum of people and situations for which mediation may be part of a solution coincides with the work I have seen associative mediators do in the Quartiers Nord. However, each association has its own agenda and target crowd. This means their mediators have as well, specialising in the support of specific sections of the population.

Associative mediation

The Maison des Femmes offers social mediation with an emphasis on the facilitation of intercultural communication. This action is a response to the ethnic and cultural diversity of the local territory. Newly arrived families usually come to the association for its alphabetisation (French literacy) programs, whether it be for mothers or their children, and end up relying on Djamila to solve administrative problems. As families settle in the neighbourhood, Djamila's role evolves and she becomes an advisor in interpersonal relationships. It is not rare to see individual members of these families come to her for advice on a particular social situation. She describes neighbourhood logics and rules to them and interprets the behaviour of others for them. In that sense, she acts (like I did with Hakim) as a promoter of dominant discourses on

integration and the system of rules that comes with them. Nevertheless, she is also a resident of the Quartiers Nord who raised three children there and as such she understands and deciphers internal, demotic rules of social behaviour.

Marie-Christine's mediating work at the Club des Chardons is in essence the same as that of Djamila. However, the circumstances of her actions differ slightly at times. She considers herself a 'strictly social' mediator as the families she works with have been established in the neighbourhood for at least a generation. Her focus is on administrative issues, helping parents with their bills, taxes, applications and so on. She also greatly contributes to social cohesion at the level of the Freycinet neighbourhood as she knows everyone there and often smoothes out tensions between families or individuals. She does that by either sitting both parties down and arbitrating their exchanges, or if that is not possible, speaking to them separately and trying to make them understand each other's perspective. The fact that she is well known and respected in the area earns her the trust of local residents and confirms her authority. Like Djamila, she acts as an agent and a negotiator of social regulation. These two mediators feel that it is their duty to help their audience identify the rules and limits of local social interactions in order to become familiar with them. In that sense, their action is a normative one resulting in the homogenisation of modes of interpersonal and group communication in the Quartiers Nord.

Moreover, the supporting roles played by associative mediators in processes of social cohesion and administrative issues are connected and complementary. The growing responsibilities taken on by mediators can be explained by the relative absence within public services of support structures when it comes to the formulation or completion of administrative documents. The option of doing things online (such as updates, official statements or renewals) is also excluding for entire sections of the local population who do not have access to new technologies and may be further handicapped by their lack of knowledge of the French language. Consequently, associative mediators have taken on this administrative role as they are in the best position to adapt to the particular and diverse needs of these people, while having access to them in the first place.

This support consists of technical assistance for this section of the local population. Concretely, this means mediators may have to read and interpret official documents or generate and maintain particular files and records. Among these, there are a few recurrent themes that need to be dealt with on a monthly or quarterly basis: keeping the employment office (Pôle Emploi) updated, R.S.A. (unemployment benefit) declarations of income, taxes, bills, housing and transportation service. Nonetheless, mediators go beyond this administrative role and accompany each family requesting their help in their integrating and compliance efforts. They possess a wide array of professional skills to sustain this generalist approach. Indeed, their knowledge of the local territory and of the structures within it is extensive, allowing them to elaborate and carry out actions that fit given local and individual circumstances. By doing so, they can unlock certain situations for which other forms of exchange have not been effective.

Here, their mediating role turns them into agents of rule negotiation, serving as a link between the various elements of local mechanisms of social regulation, from individuals to institutions. By helping residents of the Quartiers Nord to actively participate in the life of the neighbourhood and acting as agents of socialisation, associative mediators promote the dominant discourse on integration and the vertically established system of rules that emerges from it. Indeed, the residents who benefit from their work are encouraged to conform to those rules, or at least to the mediators' representation of them. In that sense, mediators participate in social control by ensuring that residents enter and maintain their presence in the administrative and legal domains on top of negotiating social cohesion at the local level. One can therefore say that mediators are teaching people about the 'rules of the game', to use Pierre Bourdieu's expression (1993), and how to negotiate them.

Alternative forms of mediation

Nevertheless, associative mediators are not the only ones present in the Quartiers Nord. As we have seen in the previous chapter when the describing the atmosphere in and around the Collège André Malraux, street mediators are also present in the area. They are often referred to as grands frères (older brothers)

both in the local and national vernacular. As they explained to me, their role is to be present and visible, available for dialogue with the children and teenagers. Their working hours coincide with the moments of the day when the younger section of the local population constitutes a numerical majority in the streets of the Quartiers Nord. This means they are present at lunchtime and in the late afternoons during the week, on Wednesday afternoons and during the weekend.

They use similar techniques to that of associative mediators in the anticipation and resolution of conflict, acting as impartial referees. Their aim is the pacification of interpersonal and group exchanges and as such, they also contribute to social cohesion. Moreover, they are all young men in their twenties and thirties who live in the Quartiers Nord and grew up there. They know most of the youths in the area by their first names and are easily identifiable by them. In that sense, their position is similar to that of associative mediators, except they have a privileged access to the younger members of the community. If associative mediators interpret and negotiate the rules between local families (that is mainly parents) and institutions, street mediators do the same between youths and their daily environment, that is the street and school. They therefore find themselves applying both social control and social regulation as they promote demotic street rules that are compatible with the dominant discourse on adequate social conduct.

This type of hybrid role can also be taken on by people who are not officially mediators. In other words, mediation can take on various shapes outside of its professional field. An example of this lies in the work of associative 'educators' who often deal with issues away from their initial job description. As the different transcriptions of interactions I have had with my pupils show, those exchanges went far beyond the realm of homework support or teaching the French language. This is partly due to the fact I have to ensure their application of the system of rules during the workshops. These rules are the same as school regulations and are therefore derived from the vertical system dominant in mainstream society. Again, my intermediate positioning allows for a relatively smooth negotiation process in which my authoritative status is nevertheless undeniable (if at times contested).

From this description, one can address the profile of the ideal non-professional youth mediator in the Quartier Nord. He or she is young and grew up in the neighbourhood. They have been successful in their studies and employment. In other words, they are fully integrated both at the local neighbourhood level and at the national mainstream level. I happen to have worked with a young volunteer at the Club des Chardons who fitted this description. He assisted me in the homework support workshop on Friday evenings with children aged ten to fourteen. He still lived in the Freycinet neighbourhood where he was raised and went to the same schools as the pupils did. He even had some teachers in common with them.

Working as a computer programmer for the Haut-de-Seine (92) district administration, he decided to contribute to the work of the association that helped him and his brother with their schoolwork a decade before. Not only was he qualified and competent in terms of academic support, he was also able to interact with the pupils on an even basis. He knew all their codes of behaviour and was instinctively aware of potentially conflicting positions. For me, he was the one most suited to interpret and negotiate social rules of conduct belonging to the different systems that apply to life in the Quartiers Nord as he had himself experienced what some local youths are experiencing. This empirical knowledge was complemented by his understanding and practice of the dominant discourse on acceptable social conduct. In that sense, his personal background provided him with the tools and competence to adequately negotiate local and national systems of rules.

There are numerous associative initiatives in the French banlieues concerned with 'mediation' and promoting a mode of intervention in social relations based on dialogue and negotiation. They demonstrate the potential for social regulation outside of institutional frameworks. If mediation becomes an alternative mode of conflict settling, its function takes on a particular form through what is called 'social mediation'. Indeed, the type of mediation I have witnessed in the associations of the Quartiers Nord takes local diversity and individual particularities into account. This means issues relevant at the demotic level to do with culture, ethnicity, gender or age are not ignored in the mediating process.

Now that we have uncovered the role of mediation in the negotiation of social regulation, let us turn our attention to other forms of social regulation and social control which have been put in place in the Quartier Nord.

Other forms of social regulation and social control in the Quartiers Nord

According to deputy mayor Michel Lasserre de Rozel, the Mayor of Asnières and his team have developed and encouraged a number of initiatives aiming at social regulation. They have played a coordinating role in the development of such projects and financed various types of associative and public programs. In regular contact with most of the social workers and associations of Asnières, political actors have acted as agents of conciliation, animation and support. They have launched public structures (some of them with the 'association' status) to complement the work of existing private and public associations. The various 'maisons de quartier' (literally: neighbourhood house) where sporting and leisure activities are available to children and teenagers from particular neighbourhoods are a good example of such structures, contributing to the reinforcement of social bonds among the younger members of the local population through the sharing of common activities. Those who attend them pay for activities during weekends, Wednesday afternoons and school holiday periods, this fee being calculated based on family income. There are two maisons de quartier in the Quartier Nord, one at the southern extremity of it, and the other in the north.

Moreover, these public structures have become a bond between the different associations present in the Quartiers Nord and local political representatives. The strength of this bond depends on the degree of involvement of each association in the unifying project of social cohesion. If the elaboration of social regulation is not a straightforward task because of the socio-economic environment in which it takes place and existing tensions between some associative members and public authorities, the fact that most associations depend on funding from the town hall guarantees a minimum level of productivity and coordination. Consequently, associations stand as an extension

of the political realm, promoting and carrying out policies at ground level. They can thus be portrayed as agents of social control among sections of the population that are deemed the most likely to encounter problems in their relationship with the social order in place.

The largest association in the Quartiers Nord, the M.L.C. Centre Socioculturel, is dedicated to improving the quality of life in general and social relations in particular. It lies at the centre of the Mourinoux neighbourhood, in front of the municipal police station. The basic logic behind the M.L.C.'s actions is, according to the volunteer members of its directing team (which Djamila, the mediator of the Maison des Femmes, is a part of), "the establishment of a pleasant and integrating social setting in the Quartiers Nord". They rely on what they call their 'neutral' positioning, based on secular Republican principles, to offer a welcoming context for constructive and friendly social ties to be established among members of the local community. For them, secularism does not necessarily imply that behaviours and inclinations stemming from religious beliefs are not taken into account, it just means that they will not focus their attention on particularistic elements of the people who attend their varied activities. These range from educative to leisure based workshops and are destined for children, teenagers, adults and seniors. Correspondingly, one can classify the M.L.C. as a secular semi-public association with universalistic designs.

Moreover, the staff of the M.L.C. do not wish for the association to be labelled as a solidarity-based one. Indeed, they see their work as promoting social cohesion at the local level. For this, they rely on two logics for action: one of integration through the socialisation of children and their families, and another of mediation by the generation of links between residents, the associative realm and public institutions. This last point is the reason why they are significantly subsidised by the Asnières town hall. In practice, the members of the M.L.C. wish to participate in the development of innovative individual and group perceptions of the neighbourhood. They want local residents to find and enjoy a satisfactory social positioning through the application of convivial rules of conduct.

This logic of appealing to the subjectivity of each individual to improve their self-perception and therefore reinforce their positioning within the local society is illustrated by a one-day initiative hosted by the M.L.C. in November 2012. In collaboration with another local association (Unis-Cité, which translates as 'united estate' and is a play on words meaning 'uniqueness'), U.N.I.C.E.F. and a Swiss private company, the M.L.C. organised several workshops in which children from the Quartiers Nord made dolls and gave them a name and personality. The dolls were bought by the company in question at the end of the day, the money then being given to U.N.I.C.E.F.. The children of the alphabetisation group at the Maison des Femmes took part in this initiative so I spent the day with them at the M.L.C. and helped with the doll making.

The day started with a presentation of U.N.I.C.E.F.'s work worldwide and an introduction to this particular programme: 'Les Petits Citoyens' (the little citizens). A debate involving the children and members of the associations then took place on the theme of children's rights, including notions of identity, parenting, food, health and housing. The children were very talkative on the topic (considering they were between the ages of four and twelve), most of them having already discussed those issues with associative educators or in school. We then made the dolls during the day which involved a fair amount of filling, sowing and gluing. At the end of the day, each child was allowed to keep the doll they had produced and were congratulated for their work during the closing ceremony. This came as a good surprise for them and I know many of these children kept their dolls at home. For the organisers, the main purpose of this whole initiative was to put those children in the role of the giver, offering assistance to others in need of it instead of receiving it. It reversed their usual positioning with regards to the associations they attend while contributing to their 'positive' self-image. Correspondingly, the general aim of the M.L.C. is to establish a humane relationship with the local population in order for its members to actively take part in individual and collective projects, thus promoting the construction of subjectivities.

This demotic form of social regulation can be contrasted with the strictly dominant prevention and social control carried out at street level by the national and municipal police. The municipal police intervenes more regularly than the

national one in the Quartiers Nord as their station is at the centre of the Mourinoux *grand ensemble*, one of the two main *grands ensembles* of the Courtilles estate with the Freycinet. When I interviewed one of their agents, he was quite explicit about his role and that of his colleagues in the neighbourhood. For him, the police are present on the local territory to ensure that the laws of the Republic are respected. It is an essential element of judiciary power and must therefore carry out its mission to control, inform and repress if necessary. However, police methods are not necessarily coercive ones and they have also developed mediating competences.

Although the municipal police agents know the territory they cover very well, they are experiencing real difficulties when it comes to building relationships with local residents. In the Quartiers Nord, they have a bad reputation among a large portion of the population and cooperating with the police is not seen as a good thing, especially for youths. Even the associative leaders and street mediators who also play a role in social cohesion have very little contact with them. In this tense context, the only real partnership the police have is with the town hall. They collaborate with the common aim of limiting individual and collective manifestations that threaten the public order. Correspondingly, they are not perceived by local residents as agents of social regulation, but rather as agents of social control.

Here, the municipal police act as representatives of the town hall and of its application of Republican laws and values. However, this dominant discourse on social cohesion must also be counter-balanced at the local level by the demotic views on the topic emerging from the neighbourhood. For Mustafa Dikeç (2007), democracy requires for two political dimensions or forces to be present at the same time in the same place: on one side what he terms the 'police', which refers to public institutions where policies are produced and applied; and on the other the power of the people to question and potentially contest the 'police'. When these two forces are not evenly represented, domination and revolt coexist. This distinction has allowed Dikeç to demonstrate how, over the years, the 'police' dimension or perspective has become dominant (Dikeç, 2007).

The image of the Quartiers Nord emerging from this discussion is that of space in which social actors belonging to various structures and institutions develop a variety of logics or techniques to shape a controlled social environment, leaving little space for the development of residents' agency. However, this territory is not under the influence of a 'totalitarian authority' in terms of social regulation. Indeed, among the various negotiating logics exposed in this chapter, most require an active participation of members of the local population as well as their initial desire to take part such processes of social regulation within their neighbourhood. They can do so as long as these processes take place at a demotic level of rule production.

Conclusions

As we have seen throughout this chapter, associations play a role both in social regulation and social control in the Quartiers Nord. They rely on a variety of techniques to promote social cohesion, all dependent on the context and purpose of their relationship with local residents. Associations also play on demotic and dominant representations when negotiating rules of conduct in given circumstances. This allows them to act as connectors between residents and institutions, between the local and the mainstream.

For Manuel Boucher (2007), urban policy neighbourhoods are experiencing a redeployment of institutional resources and modes of intervention. The combination of various types of mediation unveils two dimensions of social regulation which require constant balancing: the maintenance of order in society and what Boucher terms 'democratic emancipation' (Boucher, 2007). In spite of the diversification of local structures involved in social regulation at the local level, most of these will claim to act for the good of the community by applying republican principles while meeting the individual needs of residents.

Correspondingly, associations are functioning as service operators providing assistance to people in a number of ways from skill development to entertainment. They have become omnipresent across the French banlieues to such an extent that Jean Faber, who was for long in charge of integration policies

(for immigrants) in a populated suburban commune near Paris, argues that there are no particular administrative mechanisms put in place in terms of integration, whether it be at the local or national level. For him, associations are the only structures concretely taking on this role (Faber, 2000, 75). This view illustrates the predominance of associations in social regulation within urban policy neighbourhoods, though I believe it underestimates the strength of the ties linking associations to the public institutions that finance them. Indeed, this reliance on State and town-hall funding means that most associations must follow a number of rules and procedures set by these institutions. Moreover, local policy makers may choose to privilege a certain type of action over another, thus directly influencing the type of association present on the territory they administrate.

When combined together, the various strategies of social regulation allow for the reduction social tensions in peripheral territories. However, when a particular system of rules gains primacy over the others, the 'balance' of a neighbourhood can be threatened at a given time. It is for example difficult to maintain social cohesion when discrimination or violence produced by a dominant discourse against the residents of an area labelled as sensitive become regularised (Boucher, 2003, 527). In this situation, social control takes over from social regulation with the effect of underlining social inequities, spatial segregation and stigmatisation. This might jeopardise, at least momentarily, the mediating work of associations.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

In this concluding chapter, I will summarise the different themes explored in this study. As we have seen, the children and teenagers of the Quartiers Nord are influenced by several overlapping discourses. These can be related to their spatial and social positioning, constituting the building blocks of their personal and group identities. They move between those value systems and adjust their behaviour contextually. By doing so, they are able to adapt to varying situations that arise throughout their socialisation, whether it takes place at the level of the family, the 'street' or the school. Moreover, children elaborate their own opinions and responses to the locations, people and practices that compose their everyday setting based on their experiences and perceptions.

Through the chapters of this thesis I have described the various intertwined social and cultural influences emerging from both inside and outside of the environment of the Quartiers Nord which determine the way local children construct their group and individual identities. I have detailed what I understand their perception of the local and national to be, incorporating their notions of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (chapter 6), territoriality (chapter 5) and context-dependent value systems and behavioural patterns (chapter 7) to the discussion. Moreover, I have included mainstream representations of these young people and their neighbourhood to my reflection in order to identify points of compatibility and contrast between the various perspectives under consideration.

The first aim of this study has been to determine how these discursive elements are integrated (or rejected), combined and reinterpreted by the children and teenagers of the area in their daily lives. In order to do so, I have relied on the distinction made by Gerd Baumann (1996) between dominant and demotic discourses. It has allowed for the identification of the connection between national scale processes and local level phenomena as discourses of identity are strongly influenced by the political context from which they emerge. Moreover,

the use of Baumann's binary concept has enabled me to interpret and describe the way in which the territorialisation of social relationships occurs and to emphasise the causal links between the demotic production of value systems in the Quartiers Nord and the dominant discourses on adequate social behaviour and duties prevalent in French society. Correspondingly, the point of this account of the various influences on the social positioning of young residents of the Quartiers Nord has been to show that they are in fact interrelated and that individual and group identities are negotiated at the local, national and in some case international levels.

It is during this negotiation process that associations come in as facilitating and mediating structures. For this to be possible, associative workers occupy the intermediate space between centre and periphery, between residents and institutions, between the dominant and the demotic. They are able to do so because they are perceived by local residents as emerging from the neighbourhood itself, with many of the workers and volunteers living there, thus gaining some legitimacy and proximity. Moreover, they can also be considered as an extension of the administrative and political realms due to their strong reliance on town hall, district, and regional funding (which to some extent depends on national budgets), as well as their recurrent collaboration with their representatives. In that sense, they are privileged and sought after interlocutors both for politicians wishing to access the local population and to members of the latter in their interactions with political and administrative institutions. Henceforth, investigating the role played by associations in the local mediation of dominant and demotic perspectives on social positioning and behaviour constitutes the second aim of this study.

In the first section of this conclusion, I will focus on the mainstream and local perspectives which impact on the social organisation of the Quartiers Nord as well as their implications on the lives of residents, that is the first theme of the thesis as identified in the introductory chapter. The second section will be dedicated to the function and positioning of associations in this context and their subsequent part in processes of integration. In the third and final section of this chapter, I will envisage the various limitations of associative action.

Demotic and dominant discourses in and of the Quartier Nord

As we have seen in the introduction to this thesis, Baumann (1996) describes in his ethnographic account of life in Southall a dominant discourse, mainly reproduced in the public sphere, and which tends to associate ethnicity with culture and community. The demotic discourse on the other hand is more adaptable as it encompasses the situational and complex nature of individual and group identification. It therefore may contradict some of the assumptions and beliefs on which the dominant discourse relies, especially when it comes to the formulation of local identities and behavioural rules.

In the present study, ethnic considerations (though also discussed) are replaced by territorial ones. Indeed, this thesis is about the way in which an entire neighbourhood is categorised as 'difficult' and the ground level implications of this territorial labelling. Moreover, I have shown that both the dominant and demotic discourses on the Quartiers Nord define it as a distinct part of the Asnières commune where everyday life situations and social, cultural and economic circumstances may differ from that of the town centre. As a result, physical and social space have become congruent thus contributing to the formulation and reproduction of identities with a strong territorial element, especially among young residents. In that sense, one could represent the inhabitants of the Quartiers Nord as a separate 'community' defined through its differences with more central populations.

In the third chapter, I described how urban policy labelling plays an important role in the establishment of socio-urban boundaries. One can therefore consider certain stigmatising trends against the inhabitants of the Quartiers Nord as originating from this administrative component of the dominant discourse on French *banlieues* and estates. Residents become amalgamated with the area in which they live, and should the latter have a negative reputation, it will affect their perception of the local community and of their own positioning within French society as a whole. By identifying given urban areas as the locus where societal problems are generated, the dominant discourse on 'difficult' neighbourhoods enhances their separation from what is deemed as adequate or

mainstream, confirming the idea that they (or rather their residents) have the potential to threaten Republican values.

There is however resistance to this territorial stigmatisation emerging from the Quartiers Nord. Many of my interlocutors were very happy to live there. This was for instance the case of most of the retired volunteer workers of the Club des Chardons. One of them once told me that although she only moved to the Quartiers Nord after retiring, she enjoyed the fact that there was a real sense of 'community' (to use her own wording), that neighbours knew each other on a first name basis which wasn't the case when she lived in the Asnières town centre. Although her representation of neighbourhood life emphasised what she deemed to be the good side of living in the Quartiers Nord, it also confirmed the idea that social behaviours are different there than in the rest of Asnières and therefore that the area has its own codes of social interaction.

This particular view was however also contested from within. In many of the meetings and discussions I had with Djamila, the mediator of the Maison des Femmes, she expressed a strong disapproval each time someone described the neighbourhood as a fixed and separate entity influencing the lives of all its residents in a uniform manner. She often insisted that it is not a homogenous unit but just as diversified, if not more, than other areas of the commune. She moreover disputed the idea that the territorial distribution of the population may have an impact on the behaviours of the local population, expressing this view on numerous occasions whenever a town official or an Asnières resident (including those of the Quartiers Nord) would blame the 'atmosphere' in the neighbourhood for a particular incident. Djamila nevertheless admitted that it is an area where her mediating work is particularly needed, especially due to the large number of residents who do not master the French language and administrative mechanisms. When I asked her whether her opinion was based on her position as a mediator and associative worker, she simply stated that this was "the view of a mother who raised two boys in the Quartiers Nord, two boys who still live there and are respectable citizens".

The legitimacy of the dominant discourse on the urban periphery in France (and in this case the Asnières commune specifically) is being challenged by the people whose situation it is meant to represent. The Republican societal

model and the political institutions that compose it can therefore be criticised for not taking into account the differences in identity that are meaningful to each individual as well as the diversity in local residents' perceptions of the area they live in.

This generalising trend is less present in the demotic discourses on identity emerging from the Quartiers Nord and described in this thesis. As they are formulated by the residents themselves, they take into account individual differences between them as well the social positioning of each of these people within the neighbourhood. Moreover, such discourses incorporate the behavioural codes and practices of the people who contribute to their reproduction, thus ensuring their adaptability to variations in contexts of interaction. This is illustrated by young residents' capacity to adjust their behaviours to the various situations they encounter, especially outside of the realm of the family. This view from the inside which is part of the demotic influence discourse on identity is less relevant for adults whose socialisation may take place beyond the limits of the Quartiers Nord, especially if they work outside of it. This phenomenon can furthermore be explained by the fact that territorial considerations are less present in their self-representation than it is for their children for whom being from the Quartiers Nord is often a badge of honour.

So how should one describe the Quartiers Nord given the variety of representations exposed in this thesis? As shown in chapter three, the area is at this point in time simultaneously experiencing processes of gentrification and pauperisation. One could therefore say it is both a transitional space and a space in transition for two reasons: because of its peripheral status (mainly in terms of its administrative and spatial positioning) and because it is in the early stages of a period of change as illustrated by the numerous housing and infrastructure projects initiated within it (see the posters photographed in appendix four).

Furthermore, the account of life in the Quartiers Nord presented in this study has relied equally on dominant and demotic discourses in and of the area. Consequently, the picture emerging from this dual perspective is a multidimensional one, taking into account the varying economic, social and cultural circumstances affecting the lives of the neighbourhood's inhabitants, as

well as the representation made of these living conditions in the public (and especially political) domain. Although differences between these two perspectives have been observed and analysed here, I have also described the various ways in which they mutually influence each other, as illustrated by the label of 'difficult neighbourhood' prevalent in the dominant discourse on the Quartiers Nord affecting demotic elements of identity formation, especially when these are related to territorial factors as is often the case among local children and teenagers. This leads to a form of paradox, where the stigmatising of an entire area at the level of the Asnières commune is a point of view that is entirely the opposite of the representation that young residents of the area make of it.

This paradox has created a sense among outsiders that the population of the Quartiers Nord is more excluded and different from mainstream society than it really is, leading to a misunderstanding of the forms of policy that are required there. As Doug Saunders points out when considering the needs of many migrant-based arrival cities around the world:

> *Rather than getting the tools of ownership, education, security, business creation, and connection to the wider economy, they are too often treated as destitute places that need non-solutions, such as social workers, public-housing blocks, and urban planned redevelopments* (Saunders, 2010, 83).

Yet, it is clear to me after spending time in the Quartiers Nord that the neighbourhood is not on a downward spiral but rather becoming a platform for transition between generations. It should thus be considered as an initial setting for the integration of individuals to the wider national framework. However, stigmatising trends are born from the idea that it is the entire Quartiers Nord that needs to be integrated. In that sense, the dominant discourse describes the necessity for the integration of neighbourhoods or communities rather than focusing on individual and particular needs of the individuals that compose them and which become visible at the demotic level. I believe that this is where

associations come in by connecting these two interrelated understandings of the needs of the local population.

The role and positioning of associations in the Quartiers Nord

The issue at the centre of this study is that of the nature and function of the associative realm in the Quartiers Nord of Asnières. From my experience working at the Club des Chardons and the Maison des Femmes, associations appear as complementary structures to local and national institutions (such as the educational system or town hall) in the exercise of administrating the population of a delimitated territory. Their work takes place in the interstices between these institutions and the residents of the Quartiers Nord. They often depend on public policies for funding and are therefore strongly influenced by these in terms of the type of activities and services they provide as we will see in the third section of this chapter. However, they are also the product of the initiatives of residents themselves which means they are tailored to fit everyday local realities. Subsequently, this thesis has focused on the connecting role and intermediate positioning of the associative realm.

In chapter five, I have shown how both of the associations in which my fieldwork took place established a link between various centres and peripheries, at the local level between the Quartiers Nord and the Asnières and Paris town centres, and the international one between France and the countries from which immigrants have come. Some of the associations present in the Quartiers Nord aim at smoothing the process of socio-cultural adaptation for residents of the area. They do so by the reducing the excluding factors responsible for the relative isolation of certain members of local community, dealing with a large range of issues from cultural differences to language acquisition. Correspondingly, associations occupy the transitional space between centre and periphery by acting as mediators as well as cultural and administrative interpreters.

In chapter six, I confirmed the fact that associations act as connecting nodes allowing for residents of the Quartiers Nord to reinterpret their own identities in the context of nationally dominant discourses on the topic. This is

particularly true of associations that work with children in an educational framework. Similarly to the way associative workers assist the transition between local and mainstream perceptions, they contribute to the adaptation of cultural identities to the wider French society and to Republican principles. For this to be possible, they draw from both dominant and demotic discourses on identity by emphasising the compatibilities between the two. Associations should thus be envisaged as cultural translators reinforcing the links between individuals and the various levels of identification available (and necessary) to them, whether they apply to the local or national contexts.

Chapter seven focused on the idea that associations contribute to social cohesion by taking part in processes of social regulation and social control in the Quartiers Nord, where one corresponds to the demotic interpretation of local codes of behaviour and the other to the dominant perspective on them. Both of these discourses on adequate social behaviour are reproduced and reinterpreted, especially by younger residents throughout their socialisation. In that chapter, the emphasis was put on the mediating work of associations, hence confirming their connecting role, this time in terms of the combination of sometimes conflicting or incompatible value systems (in spite of the fact that they may influence one another), resulting most of the time in the formulation of context-dependent systems of rules adapted to varying circumstances.

From these three distinct yet related angles on the role and positioning of associations in the Quartiers Nord, their integrating role becomes apparent. The associative actors I have met all have in common the belief that they are strengthening social ties and therefore improving the lives of residents. The Club des Chardons and the Maison des Femmes transform the relationships between individuals and communities (that is both the national and local communities) along educational, cultural, social and administrative lines. Moreover, they do so by taking the individual needs and opinions of the people they deal with into account, therefore narrowing the gap between the dominant discourse on their social positioning and the demotic elements of their identities. In that sense, associations serve as facilitators of the social mechanisms of integration.

As we have seen, associations contribute to the application of democratic principles by offering a space for exchanges between citizens and local public

authorities. Reciprocally, associations are manifestations of the will of local populations to actively take part in this dialogue. Indeed, local associations are created and run by them. Consequently, associations are places where citizenship is expressed through active participation in the improvement of neighbourhoods by the residents themselves. This strongly increases their agency as they concretely impact upon the lives of their neighbours. Accordingly, the people benefiting from the activities of associations are invited to take part in their yearly general assemblies and to vote on various issues relating to the future orientation of each association. They are also encouraged to bring forward any potential improvement that they may have identified and that could be implemented the next year. I have seen this happen on numerous occasions during the general assembly of the Club des Chardons, some of the suggestions being taken up after being voted. One could therefore argue as Brigitte Moulin (2001) does, that associations constitute veritable 'citizenship schools' (Moulin, 2001, 124).

The limits of associative action

Associative action aims at the reinforcement of social ties within the national and local communities. However, for this to be possible, it must rely most of the time on public funding. This means that associative workers and management have to follow the guidelines established by their financers in the running of their activities which are part of municipal, district or regional projects. This is less true of private funding as financing companies usually just provide a yearly fixed sum to the associations they sponsor without much follow up, their interest here being the promotion of their 'active' role in helping local residents thus demonstrating a degree of implication in social matters (Chauvière, 2007, 26-27).

Public funding on the other hand comes with a high degree of accountability and compromise on the part of associations. Indeed, meetings with financers and the elaboration of funding applications and subsequent assessment documents (both qualitative and quantitative) take up a large portion of the time and energy of associative leaders. (Chauvière, 2007, 29-30). Both at

the Club des Chardons and the Maison des Femmes, salaried workers spent nearly as many hours working on such documents as preparing or running the associations' activities. It seems reasonable however that they should provide evidence for the work that has been accomplished to the people financing their action.

The problem here lies in the fact that these associations end up having to offer a wider range of activities in order to extend their public funding. This means they are constantly competing for the public funding that comes with taking part in municipal initiatives and projects, in a similar manner to private companies in a market economy. Moreover, some of these initiatives differ in their content or angle of approach from the original objectives of associations which may lead to transformations in their local positioning as well as in the perception residents have of their purpose within the neighbourhood community.

The constant race for funding has consequences on the internal mechanisms of associations. Indeed, the fact that they are in most cases struggling to reach budgetary viability implies that their human resources are restricted. I would not have been able to work with the Club des Chardons or the Maison des Femmes had I not started as a volunteer. As I have said before, associations are extremely dependent on their volunteer workers. There are other ways for them to recruit, but they all come at a financial cost. The Service Civique for example is a State-run program establishing a link between associations and young (between 16 and 25 years old) unemployed members of the community[113]. The aim of this initiative is to provide work experience and a (low) salary to these people by taking on a large part of their wages. However, associations benefiting from it also have to pay a percentage of that wage. Although these individual sums are far from the wages of salaried staff (about two hundred euros per worker and per month), they nonetheless constitute an insurmountable obstacle for local-scale associations. When the director of the Club des Chardons asked me if I knew of anyone wishing to volunteer for the association, I recommended that she looked into the Service Civique. She

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[113] Information on the Service Civique is available on the program's website at www.service-civique.gouv.fr .

responded by saying that the budget for the year was already fixed and that there was no possibility for further spending.

The associative dependency on public funding has other ramifications. Indeed, it leads to forms of political interference. For Brigitte Moulin (2001), social and cultural activities are crucial to political actors as they provide them with a much needed visibility. Some municipalities exploit the possibilities of urban policies with this in mind, generating town hall services in charge of orienting and coordinating the integrating role of associations. In that manner, politicians can be associated with efforts of social cohesion in the eyes of their electorate as well as keeping a degree of control over the ideological intentions behind associative initiatives. This leads to an increase in the political pressure that associative leaders have to endure when it comes establishing a line of action (Moulin, 2001, 121).

Correspondingly, associations are often expected to go beyond their initial function and to become supporting structures for the town hall. Many of the associative actors I have met and worked with have a strictly defined position within their association such as 'mediator', 'coordinator' or 'educator'. However, their concrete work usually goes beyond their job description as they gradually take on the role of 'social workers' compensating for lack of public provision. This was the case for instance of the mediators of the Club des Chardons and the Maison des Femmes who were perceived by the residents requiring their help as the first people to contact, whatever the nature of their problem.

Furthermore, this not only affects the day-to-day activities of individual associative workers, it also impacts upon the nature and representation of entire associations. The director of a homework support association in the Quartiers Nord (which I will not name here as this is the expression of a personal view) made the following statement during an interview: "The role of a local association is not to solve unemployment related problems or other large-scale issues emerging from wider contexts than that of the neighbourhood. This should be the task of public policy makers.".

In this testimony lies a degree of frustration generated by the unclear delimitation of the positioning of associations with respect to the people and

institutions that finance them. In that sense, the role of associations in the establishment and confirmation of processes of participative democracy at the local level is a potential source of tensions. Their connecting task, between the public and the state, dominant and demotic discourses, and between the core and periphery is the reason for their strengths and effectiveness. However, it also leads to ambivalence and the danger of a loss of their intermediate position should they be 'captured' by the interests of one 'side' or another. Their position in the middle is therefore vulnerable but essential to their role.

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Appendix 1:

These two photographs were taken by an anonymous resident of Asnières in the 1970s. I have copied them from the originals in the Asnières' town hall archives. Both photographs show the Courtilles estate. On the left side of the central (diagonal) road (Avenue de la Redoute) lies the Mourinoux neighbourhood (or 'grand ensemble'), and on the right side the Freycinet neighbourhood.
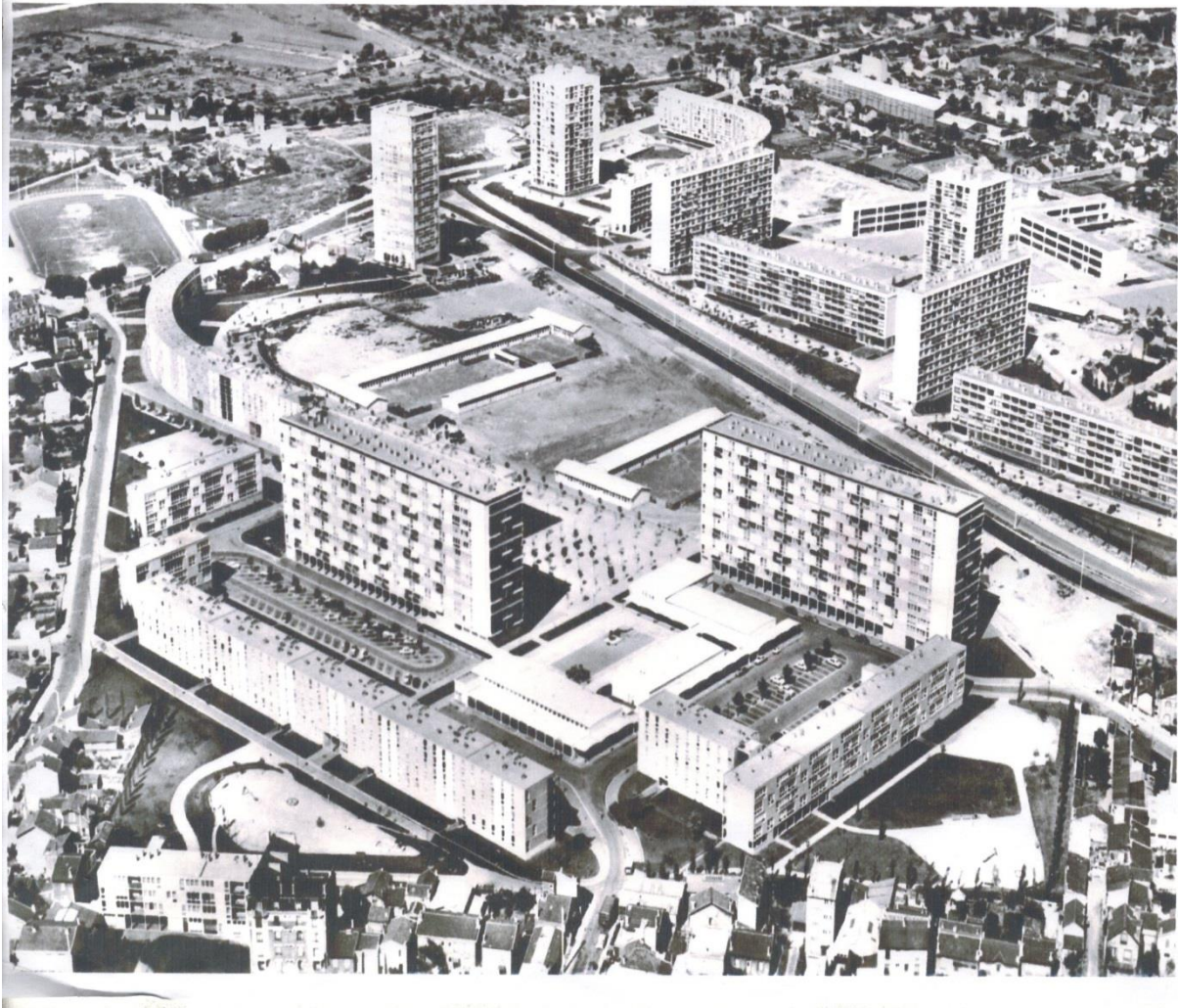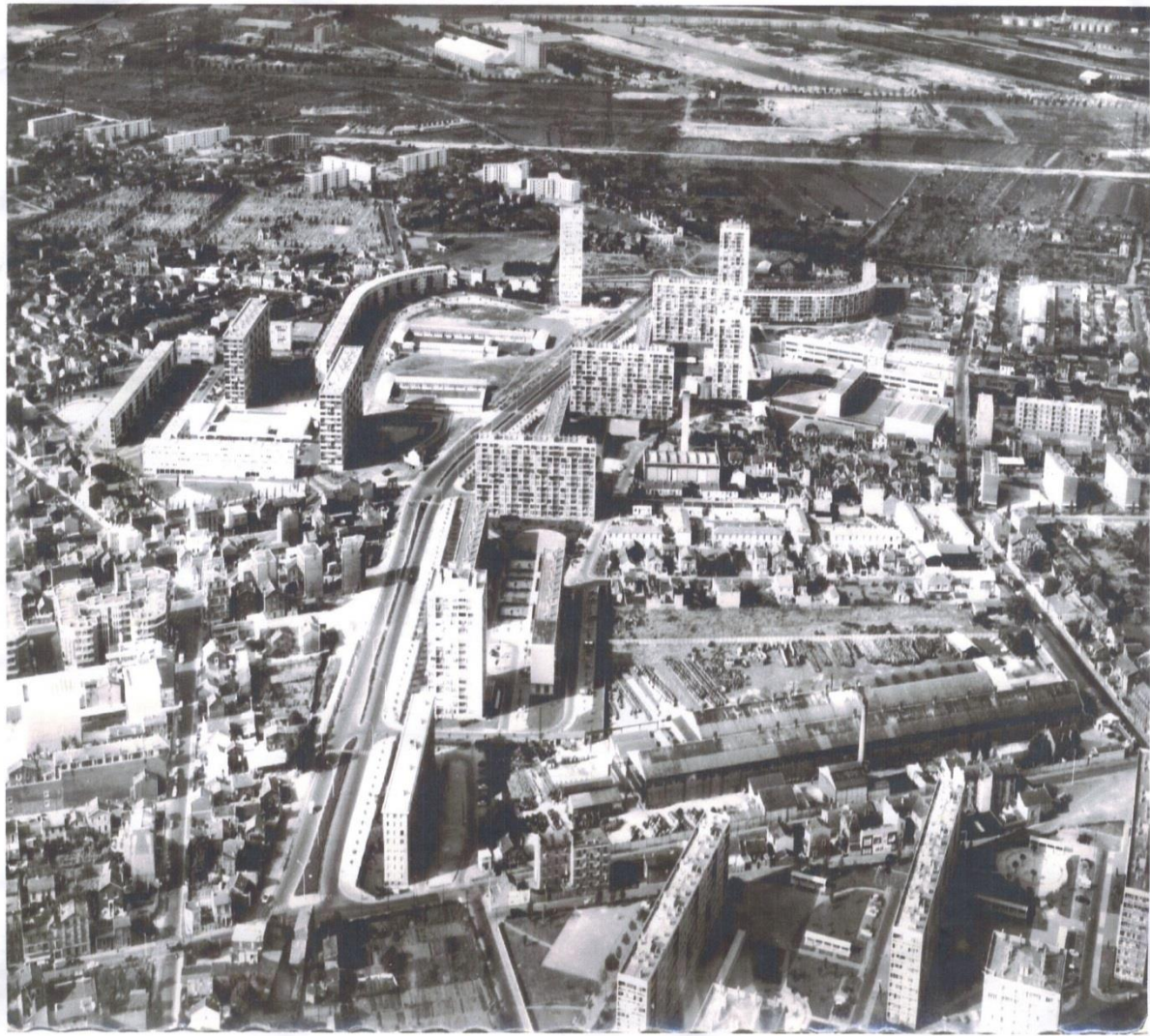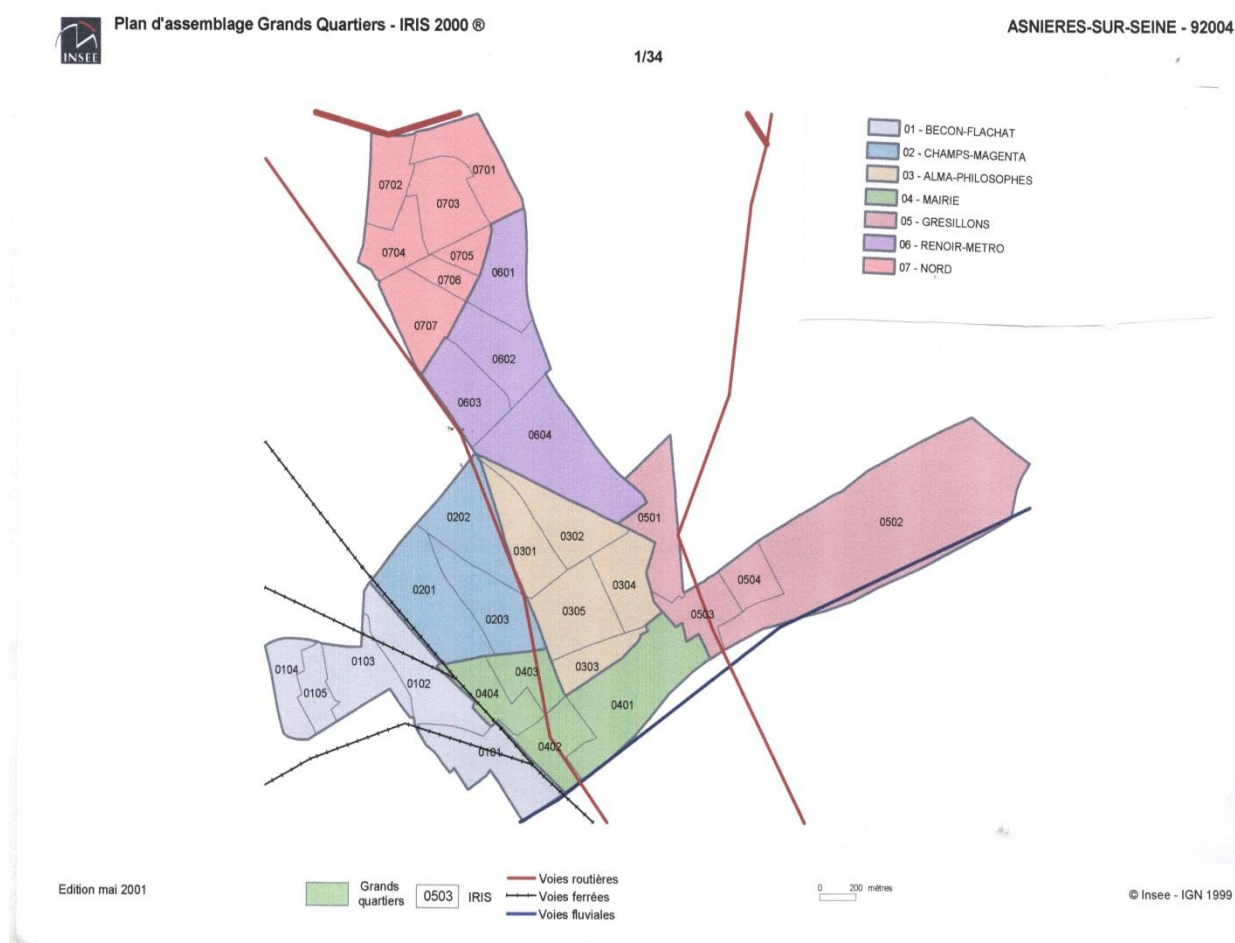
Appendix 2:

Map of Asnières as administratively divided in seven territories. In pink, the Quartiers Nord (area number seven). Source: INSEE website accessed on 24/01/2013

http://www.insee.fr/fr/methodes/zonages/iris/cartes/carte_iris_92004.pdf

Appendix 3:

This map shows all the public transportation available in the north of the Asnières and Gennevilliers communes, where the Quartiers Nord and Luth estate are located respectively. One can see the Asnières-Gennevilliers Gabriel Péri, Les Agnettes and Les Courtilles metro stations on line 13, as well as the various tram and bus lines that go through the area, linking it to other suburban communes and to the Paris town center. It is taken from the town of Gennevilliers' official website.

Source: http://www.ville-gennevilliers.fr/economie/plan-acces-et-transports/le-reseau-de-transport-en-commun/ accessed on 24/01/2013.

Appendix 4:

I have taken the following three photographs on 22/03/2013 next to the Courtilles metro station, on the avenue de la Redoute which separates the Freycinet and Mourinoux neighbourhoods. The posters show the renovation projects for the area situated behind them, where the Léo Lagrange stadium and the Gentiannes H.L.M. 'barre' (long horizontal housing building) once stood.