

Contemporary French Cinema
Lecture 5 – 15 October 2020

Bande de filles



Director: Céline Sciamma, 2014; **screenplay:** Céline Sciamma; **cinematography:** Crystel Fournier; **editing:** Julien Lacheray; **music:** Para One

Leading roles: Karidja Touré (Marieme/Vic), Assa Sylla (Lady), Lindsay Karamoh (Adiatou), Mariétou Touré (Fily), Simina Soumare (Bébé), Idrissa Diabaté (Ismaël), Cyril Mendy (Dkibril)

Awards: Special Jury Prize at the Lumières Awards and at the Philadelphia Film Festival in 2015, nominated for 4 César awards in 2015

Céline Sciamma

Born in 1978 and raised in Cergy-Pontoise, a suburb outside of Paris. *Bande de filles/Girlhood* is her third feature film and the last piece of what she considers her ‘coming-of-age’ trilogy with *Water Lilies* (2007) and *Tomboy* (2011). Sciamma is also a screenwriter and has worked for other directors. She is a founding member of the French branch of the *5050 by 2020* movement, a group of French film industry professionals advocating for gender parity in film by the year 2020.

QUESTIONS

A post-migratory narrative?

‘The French-born descendants of immigrants who are distanced from the nostalgic pull towards the culture and location of the homeland. (...) [B]orn and raised in France, the marginalised position occupied by many of these second- or third-generation “immigrants” is based on both socioeconomic exclusion and discrimination against ethnic minorities. This sense of potentially being caught in a double-bind (marginalised in relation to both France and the diasporic homeland) has been a common and prominent theme in *beur* and *banlieue* film-making since the early 1980s.’ (Tarr, 2005)

‘Black identities exist in dialogue with each other and with the universalist principles of the French Republic.’ (Keaton, Sharpley-Whiting, and Stovall, 2012, p. 3)

‘(...) [I]ssues of class and gender, rather than ethnicity, come to the fore more strongly in the experience and construction of what we might term a most-migratory identity.’ (Higbee, 2018, p. 172)

‘(...) [T]he benefit of the post-migratory is that it evaluates ideas of national belonging through a dynamic and ongoing “double-movement” across the global and the postcolonial that refuses

to prefigure the construction of cultural identity in terms of the “essentialist features of the tribe” (in other words, race and ethnicity).’ (Higbee, p. 173)

→ In what way(s) does *Girlhood* adopt and reject the *film de banlieue*’s codes and conventions?

Régis Dubois has been highly critical of *Bande de filles* and labels the film ‘a failure’ and a ‘missed opportunity’ in terms of the representation of black actors on the French screen (2016, pp. 117-122). → In what ways could the film be seen as a ‘missed opportunity’, in your opinion?

→ Does *Girlhood* reinforce a dominant model of representations for ethnic minorities? Doesn’t the film also subvert this model? If yes, how so?

The history of black actors in French cinema is a cultural manifestation of what has been termed the *fracture coloniale*: the disconnect between the nation’s multiracial, postcolonial present and its colonial past (Bancel, Blanchard, and Lemaire, 2006, pp. 11-15), the resulting refusal of multiculturalism by certain sections of the white French majority and the continued ‘ethnicization of social relations’ of both newly arrived immigrants and French-born descendants of immigrants from former French colonies (Stora and Leclère, 2007, p. 50)

Bibliography

- Will Higbee (2018). ‘Beyond ethnicity or a return to type? Bande de filles/Girlhood and the Politics of Blackness in Contemporary French Cinema’, in: Kathryn Kleppinger and Laura Reeck (eds.), *Post-migratory cultures in postcolonial France*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, pp. 166-182.
- Régis Dubois (2016). *Les Noirs dans le cinéma français : de Joséphine Baker à Omar Sy*, 2016, La Madeleine : LettMotif.
- Carrie Tarr (2005). *Reframing difference: beur and banlieue filmmaking in France*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Trica Danielle Keaton, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, et Tyler Stovall (eds.) (2012). *Black France/France Noire : the history and politics of blackness*, Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, et Sandrine Lemaire (dir.) (2006). *La Fracture coloniale : la société française au prisme de l’héritage colonial*, Paris : La Découverte.
- Benjamin Stora et Thierry Leclère (2007). *La Guerre des mémoires : la France face à son passé colonial*, Paris : Editions de L’Aube.
- Will Higbee (2013). *Post-beur cinema*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ginette Vincendeau (2018). ‘The Parisian *banlieue* on screen: so Close, yet so yar’, in: Alastair Phillips and Ginette Vincendeau (eds.), *Paris in the cinema, beyond the flâneur*, London: British Film Institute, pp. 87-99.
- Emma Wilson (2017). Scenes of hurt and rapture: Céline Sciamma’s *Girlhood*, *Film Quarterly*, 70:3, pp. 10-22.
- Naomi Vogt (2017), Divine girlhoods. Filming young women in France’s *banlieues*, *Cineaste*, Summer, pp. 38-42.
- Ginette Vincendeau (2005). *La Haine*, London: I.B. Tauris.