

It's official.

Les Misérables represents France at the Oscars.

Ladj Ly and the Kourtrajmé school represent France at the Oscars.

The suburb of Montfermeil represents France at the Oscars.

The entire city of Grove stands for France at the Oscars.

The press joyfully chants these metonymic variations for a film already the Cannes Film Festival Jury Prize. Metonymic variations that are timely. The synecdoche is proud. It was expected. And what part for the whole we are talking about!

It is the space synecdoche of boiling misery and muted tension. Ladj Ly, who still lives in the cité des Bosquets today, places building towers at the center of the story. They are filmed and magnified by the use of the drone that Buzz the kid plays with. They are in flames when the children's fury is unleashed at the end of the film. They are especially witnesses to the devaluation over time of this cooperative built in 1965. The deterioration is mainly explained by the conditions of production, marketing and management of the project in the decades that follow.

Les Bosquets is the classic story of the 1960s utopia whose fate ends up not being very lucky. That of suburban co-properties in difficulty born thanks to the real estate boom of "Logécos loans" distributed from 1953 to 1962 by Crédit foncier, very quickly undermined by the speculative bubble and the crisis of overproduction linked to an impressive pace of construction. The boom is due to the lower cost price than ordinary housing in 1950, reduced surface area standards, and the systematic use of industrialized construction systems according to the standard plans of the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urbanism.

If "Logécos loans" make it possible to build more than a million homes in a decade, in Les Bosquets, almost a third of the 1,500 homes built remain unsold after delivery. This results in a vicious cycle of deterioration due to the accumulation of unpaid debts, maintenance problems and fluctuating load volumes for each of the building bars.

It is also the synecdoche-fruit of systemic violence, ordinary racism and a genealogy of public policies which have produced the assignment to territory and identity. The fruit of the isolation of the residential peripheries, the failures of the construction of large co-properties and large complexes - weaknesses of the city policy. Hugo's botanical quote thus closes the film, half punch, half cheesy (let's face it): "My friends, remember this. There are no weeds and no bad men. There are only bad cultivators."  
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Be careful, the police are not the only ones to be accused, it is not just a question of throwing blaming the cops, the keufs, the condés, the chickens, the Schmitt, the cowboys. It is also a matter of bringing to the dock all the bad cultivators, the said designers, managers, administrators and other technocrats, who did not manage to find a solution for Les Bosquets.

Those who, in June 1994, signed the demolition of "barre 2", the first tower targeted by the State on the credits of the city ministry, amounting to 40 million francs. Those who signed a city contract for 220 million francs the same year and did not keep their promises. Those who enter politics in territories that hold the record for city policy subsidies intended to improve living conditions, and who do not always make much of it. Those who systematize the successive operations of urban renewal after 2003, causing the demolition of two thirds of the housing in the city - the waltz of demolitions obscuring the other components necessary for the renewal of the district. The blaze of building towers, as filmed by Ladj Ly's camera, has long been prepared by bad cultivators.

The film revives old memories, fourteen years after the death of Zyed and Bouna, in October 2005. Fourteen years after the riots that started in Clichy-sous-Bois, a neighboring commune of Montfermeil, following the deaths of the two teenagers unfairly prosecuted by the police. Fourteen years after these riots in Seine-Saint-Denis spread to communities all over France, engulfing the country and reminding almost everyone of the urgency of the situation. The narrative intensity culminates in the waiting and wandering of the three police officers, just before the spark. Police brutality is at the heart of what is wrong, but historically, bad cultivators are just as much the designers, managers, administrators and other technocrats of these neighborhoods.

So yes, Les Misérables represents France at the Oscars. Yes, the metonymic variations are timely. And yes, the synecdoche must be proud. But above all, the part for the whole must imperatively recall the role of all the bad cultivators in this conflagration, in order to fix the situation. Ladj Ly plans to continue this momentum and is already preparing a film on the political journey of the former mayor of Clichy-sous-Bois, Claude Dilain.

It is up to us to echo this by rethinking the implementation of public policies in the neighborhoods that mirror the fate of Les Bosquets. It is up to us to dust off, to give way to promising initiatives carried by the very active associative fabric of Seine-Saint-Denis. It is up to us to ensure that urban renewal projects in these territories do the job of thinking about social justice, access to employment and economic development, not just renovation and rehabilitation of buildings. It is up to us to make

the extension of the T4 tram - discussed since 1998, promised since 2004, launched in 2019 - rhyme with a real opening up of the neighborhood. It is up to us to remain vigilant, to make the next municipal elections the opportunity for a real metropolitan citizen debate on these questions.

Yes, Les Misérables at the Oscars, if that can put the bad cultivators in the neighborhoods in the dock.

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