



Citizenship and Belonging in Suburban France: The Music of *Zebda*

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Abstract

Drawing on a wide range of Francophone and Anglophone writing by critics such as Bazin (1995), Boucher (1998), Huq (2006) and Mitchell (2001), this article explores how the music of the multi-ethnic French band Zebda examines issues of citizenship and belonging in suburban France. It focuses on local, national and transnational identities as well as issues of difference, discrimination and exclusion. Zebda's music in general will be situated in relation to relevant musical and sociological contexts, before a specific song is analysed in depth. The song in question is *J'y suis j'y reste* ("I'm here I'm staying here"), which exemplifies how Zebda's music has engaged with issues such as discrimination, racism and integration. The article shows how the song's lyrics and music reflect Zebda's hybrid identities and a desire to challenge French Republican concepts of nationhood. It argues that *J'y suis j'y reste* highlights several of the key issues that gave rise to the autumn 2005 unrest in suburban France, and provides a vibrant example of political engagement within contemporary French popular music.

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Introduction

In autumn 2005, the death of two youths being pursued by police in the northern suburbs of Paris led to a period of tension and unrest in suburban areas in much of France. It brought to the surface feelings of anger and frustration at the way in which young people in suburban France see themselves as victims of discrimination and prejudice in several different contexts (e.g., from the police and when applying for jobs). These concerns, and reactions against specific events, can be traced back over a period of several decades and have been evoked in the music of many French singers and groups.

This article focuses on how the group *Zebda* treat such themes and begins by situating the cultural and political context in which *Zebda* produces their music. It will then address several important issues that can be brought together under the general terms of citizenship and belonging. This will initially involve arguing that *Zebda*'s music reflects a variety of local, national and transnational influences, and that the texts of their songs evoke local, national and transnational identities. Next, it will be shown that *Zebda*'s music highlights the importance of issues such as difference, discrimination and exclusion in contemporary French society. Their song *J'y suis j'y reste* ("I'm here I'm staying here") will serve as a case study for exploring these themes. Before concluding, the question of whether *Zebda*'s commercial success is a result of selling out and neglecting their roots will be considered. In conclusion, it will be argued that *Zebda*'s music provides a vibrant and dynamic example of how concepts of identity have been challenged in contemporary French popular music.

Zebda: The Cultural and Political Context

In general terms, Stevenson (2003, 1) argues that the increased importance of popular culture and multiculturalism have contributed to a redefinition of research on citizenship, notably due to the way the cultural sphere plays a part in forming and responding to political disputes (2003, 124-5). Andy Bennett (2001) provides several examples of how music has contributed to such debates. Along with Whiteley and Hawkins, Bennett argues that music plays "an important role in the narrativization of place" (Whiteley *et al.*, 2004, 2), also noting that "during recent decades, urban spaces in different parts of the world have become increasingly contested terrains, the contestation of space being facilitated considerably through musical innovations and practices" (Whiteley *et al.*, 2004, 3). In slightly more specific terms, works by Mitchell (1996; 2001), Bennett (2001) and Huq (2006) illustrate how hip-hop and rap provide a means of intervening in socio-political debates in a range of local and global contexts (see also Bazin 1995; Boucher 1998).

Zebda, whose music mixes a range of styles including rap and hip-hop, provides one of many examples of how this has occurred within a French context.² Zebda's music engages with debates about contested urban and suburban spaces in France and draws heavily on rap and reggae, genres which "make available ... ways of exploring and celebrating cultural margins" (Frith, 2003, 20). Zebda's music is the product of a specific sociologically defined contested space (namely the French *banlieues*), and highlights a way of engaging in political debates concerning such areas.

When analysing Zebda's songs, it is important to understand the prevalent negative representations of suburban France that they react against. In French, *banlieue* designates a suburban area; it is frequently used to link "urban depravation, immigration and social disorder" (Hargreaves, 1996, 611), and thus represents "an ideological construction rather than a spatially defined location" (610). *Banlieues* are often associated with high levels of crime and unemployment, problems the far right in France is quick to blame on immigration. Whilst only a minority of *banlieues* have high levels of crime and violence the French press distorts this situation. They typically report on news stories concerning crime and violence under the heading *banlieue*, and rarely report on positive stories under this heading (Hargreaves, 1996, 610).

This situation means that residents of *banlieues* often feel that the areas they live in are unfairly stigmatized. This situation is often evoked in French rap music (Prévos, 2001, 43-44). However, Prévos's (2001, 43-44) observation that many French rappers characterise the poorer suburbs as ghettos shows that rap music can sometimes perpetuate rather than counteract negative representations of France's *banlieues*. Cannon (1997, 163-4), in contrast, argues that the "expressions of collective identity and resistance" articulated via hip-hop resonate beyond the *banlieues* due to the genre's increasing popularity. The work of Prévos (2001) and Cannon (1997) demonstrates that music (especially rap, hip-hop and reggae) has played an important role in the *banlieues*, becoming a discursive space of resistance in which artists react to many forms of prejudice and discrimination (see also Boucher, 1998; Mitchell 1996; 2001). Oscherwitz (2004, 43) argues that "hip-hop has become the dominant vehicle for urban youth to articulate their vision of the world, to describe the social and material realities of the *banlieue* and to foreground the problems experienced by those in France's urban centres." Zebda's music is part of such a trend, and their song *J'y suis j'y reste* demonstrates a desire to respond to political and media discourses about suburban France.

² As Huq notes, the United States is the only country in the world that produces more rap music than France (2006, 118).

Zebda's origins and subsequent political engagements highlight how the *banlieues* have become a discursive space of resistance. Several of the band members met through projects aimed at encouraging young people from the Toulouse area to take an interest in the arts, and especially music. In 1997, Zebda was involved in the formation of a socio-cultural group called *Tactikollectif* which organises events and initiatives related to themes such as social cohesion, immigration and the legacy of France's colonial past. In 2001, the members Zebda were active participants in *Les Motivé-e-s* (The Motivated), an electoral list of independent candidates that stood in the 2001 local elections in Toulouse. The group accused the mayor of Toulouse, Philippe Douste-Blazy, and other local officials of undemocratic decision-making procedures and failing to listen to local people and community groups. *Les Motivé-e-s* encouraged local people of all ages and backgrounds to register to vote, and sought to give them a greater say in local issues. *Les Motivé-e-s* scored 12.38 percent in the first round of elections and were part of a narrowly defeated left-wing coalition in the second round.

Despite individual band members embarking on solo projects since the release of Zebda's live album in 2003, they all continue to participate in local and national initiatives of the sort described above. Due to their engagement with issues such as exclusion, integration and discrimination through their music and socio-political engagements, Zebda has attracted interest from both the mainstream and the musical press in France. When analysing Zebda, it is important to highlight the interaction of the political and the musical as Zebda's political ideals are not just reflected by their lyrics, but also the range of instruments and musical styles that are evident in their music. The next section of this article explores how the diverse origins of the members of Zebda have influenced their music.

Zebda's Music: A Melting Pot of Influences

All three of Zebda's singers (Magyd Cherfi, Hakim Amokrane and Mustpaha Amokrane) were born in France of Algerian descent, and grew up on housing estates in suburban Toulouse. The four musicians (Pascal Cabero, Rémi Sanchez, Joel Saurin, Vincent Sauvage) are also from the South West of France, and several are of Spanish or Italian descent. This helps to explain the band's multiple influences and identities. They are from Toulouse and French, but also influenced by their cosmopolitan origins. This fusion of identities is reflected by the cover of a live album entitled *La Tawa* (2003).³ In Arabic, a *tawa* is a large cooking pot. The album cover features a cockerel (a typically French symbol) composed of Arabic script, reflecting the melting pot of French and North African

³ To see this album cover, go to: <http://www.europe2tv.fr/musique/album/36357/>.

influences in the band. The script spells out an Arabic proverb that translates as “If the Earth is my home, humanity is my family” (Hache, 2003). This proverb reflects the humanism that underpins both Zebda’s music and socio-political engagement.

Just as a range of multiple identities exists within Zebda, their music involves a variety of styles that includes rock, reggae, ragga, chanson, rap and raï⁴. In French music stores, Zebda’s CDs are generally found in the alternative rock section. However, this categorisation fails to encapsulate the wide range of styles that Zebda incorporates. This is similar to the way key tenets of French Republicanism constitute a difference-denying approach regarding the diverse composition of French society, an important theme I shall explore in the next section. To situate the music of Zebda in relation to the British music scene, one could compare it to that of Asian Dub Foundation. Several members of both bands are descendants of immigrants and both groups’ music engages with issues related to exclusion. Furthermore, both bands produce music that fuses influences from both the country in which their members grew up and those from which the band members’ ancestors originated.

Zebda’s and Asian Dub Foundation’s sampling of other songs and borrowing from many different styles can also be linked to their hybridised identities. As Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000, 3) state, “to examine musical borrowing and appropriation is necessarily to consider the relations between culture, power, ethnicity and class.” Zebda’s music explores such themes, and *J’y suis j’y reste* has a particular focus on issues of space and discrimination.⁵ The phrase *J’y suis j’y reste* was also the name of a 1980s hunger strike to protest against deportations, and the title of a book about the history of immigration in France by Mogniss Abdallah (2000). The song *J’y suis j’y reste* was on Zebda’s 2002 album *Utopie d’occase* (translatable as either 'Utopia of Opportunity' or 'Second Hand Utopia'), which many saw as slightly different from previous albums. Danielle Marx-Scouras describes this album as “clearly less festive and more reflective; more intimate and melancholic” (2004, 57). However, *J’y suis j’y reste* mixes themes such as nostalgia and defiance with the festive tone associated with much of Zebda’s earlier music. The next section of this article will examine how this thematic fusion is accompanied by an evocation of local, national and transnational identities.

⁴ Raï is a genre whose origins stem from a mixture of traditional and modern popular forms of Algerian music mixed with western popular music, and emerged in Oran, Algeria’s second largest city.

⁵ The full text of the lyrics is available at: <http://www.paroles.net/chansons/27147.htm>.

Thinking ‘Glocal’

As Mitchell (2001, 11) observes, Roland Robertson’s coining of the term ‘glocal’ highlights how global and local issues are frequently interrelated and inter-defined. Moreover, Mitchell’s work (especially 1996, 2001) shows that this concept is particularly relevant to how hip-hop and rap music explore questions of identity and resistance in a variety of national and local contexts (see also Bennett *et al.*, 1993; Bennett and Peterson, 2004; Whiteley *et al.*, 2004; Huq, 2006). *J’y suis j’y reste* combines a focus on the local and the multicultural that reflects the pride that Zebda feels about being from Toulouse, and also their mixture of origins and influences. The promotion of a city-based identity as a means of grounding diversity is also evident in the music of other French pop groups, such as IAM (a rap group from Marseille) and Massilia Sound System (a reggae group also from Marseille).

The beginning of *J’y suis j’y reste* is somewhat nostalgic, as Zebda describes things associated with their native Toulouse. This is reflected by the fairly slow tempo, and gentle tones of an accordion and a guitar. Political issues relating to exclusion and acceptance are also evoked. For example, we are told that the aeroplanes Toulouse is famous for constructing are a method of transport only for certain people. This could mean the rich elite, and could also refer to people being deported, especially given the link between the song’s title and 1980s anti-deportation protests. The local focus of the first verse is continued in the second verse, which also describes the multicultural population of the housing estate the song describes. It should be noted that ‘multiculturalism’ is a term rarely used in French political discourse, as its implicit acknowledgement of identifiable groups within society is incompatible with the Republican concept of a single and indivisible nation. The paradoxes and dangers of this failure to acknowledge racial, ethnic and other forms of difference have been highlighted by Silverman (1992) and Lentin (2004). In an article whose title refers to *banlieue* artists articulating “a multiculturalist vision”, Dayna Oscherwitz (2004) argues that music from France’s *banlieues* challenges such perceptions. The lyrics of the second verse of *J’y suis j’y reste* describe people from many different countries living together on the same housing estate. The evocation of this theme is accompanied by the introduction of a more diverse and international range of instruments than in the first verse. In addition to the guitar and the typically French accordion, we now hear instruments such as drums, cymbals and keyboards (often heard in French pop songs) combined with *djembés* (a type of West African drum) and a North African flute.

Difference, Discrimination and Exclusion

Zebda's music evokes both the virtues of multiculturalism, and problems that exist within French society regarding the treatment of immigrants, ethnic minorities and young people from France's *banlieues*. Difference, discrimination and exclusion are themes that feature heavily in *J'y suis j'y reste*. While the second verse is mainly positive, highlighting the multicultural mix on the housing estate, its end provides a more nuanced tone. This involves a comparison between the nostalgia felt by immigrants towards their country of origin and the feelings of their French-born children. This is further illustrated by the words of the chorus: "Ils ont pleuré mais moi je reste / Et je le dis sans conteste / J'y suis j'y reste" ("They cry, but me I'm staying / And I say it without a doubt / I'm here I'm staying here"). The desire of descendants of immigrants to express their sense of belonging to the country to which their ancestors moved is reinforced by the repetition of the line "I'm here I'm staying here" and by the frenetic tone of the chorus. The quick tempo of the accordion music that accompanies the words "I'm here I'm staying here" contrasts with the gentle tones of the flute that accompany the reference to immigrant parents. Just after we hear "I'm here I'm staying here" repeated for the last time, the flute returns as if to reinforce the differences between immigrants and their children. Whilst *J'y suis j'y reste* highlights differing senses of belonging of immigrants and their children, it is important to acknowledge that an identity as *beurs* is important for many French-born descendants of Algerian (and other North African immigrants). *Beur* is an originally self-referential word in *verlan* (urban back-slang) that is formed by inverting the syllables of word *arabe* (Arab) and is used to refer to the descendants of North African immigrants. However, in the eyes of the French state people are simply nationals or non-nationals and there is no room for categories such as *beur* that designate subgroups of either category. In France, French or EU nationality is often necessary in order to be able to access citizenship rights such as the right to vote and to receive certain forms of state support. The way that Zebda's song highlights what could be referred to as glocal identities cuts across the restricting national/non-national dichotomy established by France's Republican political traditions.

The theme of difference, along with those of discrimination and exclusion, is pursued in the third verse. Musically, the third verse is almost identical to the second. However, its focus on social exclusion rather than multiculturalism and integration is reflected by the earlier introduction of the melancholic tones of the accordion. The opening line of the verse roughly translates as "My city has its complaints and its bollards" ("Ma ville a ses plaintes et ses plots"). This reference to grievances and defined boundaries appears to be a comment on well-off city centre residents' desire for segregation and protection from the less well-off inhabitants of the *banlieues*. This vision is reinforced by the comment that the complaints and the bollards create a "little enclosure" ("un petit enclos"), which evokes images of animals in a zoo and reflects the way many *banlieue* residents

feel they are treated by the media.⁶ The second half of the third verse of *J'y suis j'y reste* encapsulates several issues relevant to the autumn 2005 unrest in suburban France, notably via the following lines: “Ils ont l’accent mais ils n’ont pas l’accès / Tout ça, ça vous fait de méchantes poussées / Comme une guerre qui porte son nom / De chaque prénom” (“They have the accent but not the access / All that makes you have a nasty reaction / Like a war that has its name / with each first name”). The phrase “They have the accent but not the access” is particularly relevant to Zebda as the three singers (all of whom are of Algerian descent) have noticeable Toulouse accents. The twang of the Toulouse accent allied with the frequent use of rhymes in Zebda’s songs gives them a certain punchiness. Furthermore, the music of groups such as Zebda, IAM and the Fabulous Trobadors (a Toulouse-based Occitan rap group) reflects Mitchell’s (2001, 32) comments that hip-hop and rap are genres within which “regional dialects and indigenous languages other than English com[e] to the fore as important markers for the vernacular expression and construction of identity.” Having “the accent but not the access” describes how people who are often French citizens can be discriminated against if they are visibly from an ethnic minority. In an earlier song entitled *Je crois que ça va pas être possible* (I don’t think it’s going to be possible), Zebda recounts being refused entry to a Parisian nightclub hosting an event they had been invited to by their record company. In France, young people of African and especially North African descent often complain that bouncers refuse them entry to nightclubs due to ethnicity. French anti-racist groups such as *SOS-Racisme* have carried out tests involving groups of white young people and ethnic minority young people in an attempt to demonstrate how widespread such practices are (see Blier and Julienne 2002, 78-9). Young people of North African descent or from France’s *banlieues* often claim to be the victims of discrimination when applying for jobs because they have an identifiably North African or Arab-sounding name, or an address that identifies them as being from the *banlieues*.

J'y suis j'y reste links discrimination suffered by young ethnic minority residents of France’s *banlieues* to the country’s colonial history. The phrase “la guerre qui porte son nom” (“the war that has its name”) refers to the Algerian War of 1954-62, which brought an end to over 130 years of French colonial rule. The war became known as “la guerre sans nom” (“the war without a name”) because France was very slow to acknowledge that a war took place, only officially doing so in 1999 (see Stora, 1991, 13-24; 2004, 501-514). Talking about “une guerre qui porte son nom / de chaque prénom” (“a war that has its name / with each first

⁶ This is reminiscent of Mathieu Kassovitz’s iconic 1995 film *La Haine* (‘Hate’). Kassovitz’s film is a fictional piece set on a suburban Parisian housing estate. At one point, a group of journalists arrives on the estate after a night of rioting. From the vantage point of a camera van overlooking a play area, one journalist asks a group of youths whether they participated in the riots. The youths react angrily, notably telling the journalist that their estate is not a safari park.

name”) links colonial history to discrimination in contemporary France suffered by those whose name highlights their foreign origins. Rabah Aït-Hamadouche (2004) argues that the transmission of memories of the Algerian War has contributed to anti-Algerian sentiment in France. He notes that the legacy of this bloody struggle is that many young people of Algerian origin in France still feel the need to put right an injustice, and adds that “the French collective imagination maintains the image of an Algerian as being a person who is violent – even bloodthirsty – and who represents the figure of the sworn enemy” (Rabah Aït-Hamadouche, 2004, 48). The French state’s reaction to suburban unrest in autumn 2005 led to discussion of the legacies of France’s colonial past, notably due to the introduction of curfew orders in certain areas that invoked legislation originally introduced during the Algerian War.

The third verse also incorporates references to people crammed into flats in tower blocks, which subtly evokes a 1991 speech by Jacques Chirac where he talked of the noise and the smell (*le bruit et l’odeur*) he claimed was created by African immigrants crammed into such flats. Such comments illustrate the pertinence of Stallybrass and White’s (1986, 191) assertion that bourgeois self-definition often involves “the exclusion of what [is] marked out as ‘low’ – as dirty, repulsive, noisy, contaminating.” In 1995, a year when Jacques Chirac successfully stood in the French presidential elections, Zebda released a single and album entitled *Le Bruit et l’odeur*. This provided a reminder of Chirac’s 1991 speech, and challenged many of the stereotypes about immigration and the *banlieues* that it featured. The fact that people born or brought up in France may be seen as outsiders by those who endorse the sentiments expressed in Chirac’s *le bruit et l’odeur* speech is reflected by the line “Ils sont d’ici mais pas assez” (“They are from here, but not enough”). It should be recalled that even someone who has spent the vast majority of their life in France will often need to become a French citizen in order to gain entitlements such as full voting rights. As Huq illustrates, certain rap and hip-hop artists react angrily to such assimilationist concepts of immigration (2006, 120-1). Zebda’s lead singer Magyd Cherfi makes a related point in a collection of poetic reflections, noting that French society’s acceptance of ethnic minority celebrities in music and sport is very different to its attitude towards Algerians, Arabs or *beurs* in general (Cherfi, 2004, 25-29).

As *J’y suis j’y reste* tells us, frustration at discrimination leads its victims to react. The autumn 2005 unrest in suburban France was a reaction against issues such as perceived police racism, unemployment, discrimination and the lack of state provision to help people in impoverished suburbs: in other words, precisely the sort of subjects *J’y suis j’y reste* evokes. While the song pre-dates the 2005 unrest by several years, it highlights issues relating to exclusion and discrimination that have long frustrated inhabitants of France’s *banlieues*. This helps to show that the events of autumn 2005 were a reaction against a general climate of dissatisfaction, as well as a reaction to a specific event. The unrest followed an

incident in the North Eastern suburbs of Paris on October 27th 2005 when two young people being pursued by police were electrocuted and died after seeking refuge in an electrical substation. Several times over the last few decades, police shootings of young members of ethnic minorities in suburban France have provoked outcry and demonstrations (albeit generally at a more localized level). One such example concerns the police shooting of a seventeen year old of North African descent in Toulouse in December 1998, which led to several days of localized rioting. These events, and the search for justice for the victims of such shootings and discrimination, inspired a 2001 documentary film *Le Bruit, l'odeur et quelques étoiles* (*The Noise, the Smell and a Few Stars*) in which Zebda performed several songs.

Zebda's Commercial Success and Popularity: A Sign of Selling Out?

When discussing political issues relevant to Zebda and their music, it is important to situate such analysis in the context of Zebda's notable commercial success. The third of their four studio albums, *Essence ordinaire* (Ordinary Fuel, 1998), sold 650,000 copies and thus went double platinum. In 2000, Zebda won prizes for best album and best single at France's prestigious *Victoires de la musique* awards (equivalent to the Brits in the UK and the Grammys in the USA). Despite such notable commercial success and popular acclaim, Zebda has continued to participate in community initiatives in their native Toulouse. Although such political engagement reflects a desire to remain in touch with their roots, in certain ways Zebda's music does not entirely reflect their origins. The genre within which Zebda's music is often classified, alternative rock, is associated with "middle-class rebel youth" rather than the more mixed and multicultural audience of rap music (Boucher, 1998, 142). Rap music is popular with many young people in France's *banlieues* and it is one of many influences evident in Zebda's music. However, Zebda adopts a more nuanced approach to issues that relate to France's *banlieues* than many rap artists. This need not be taken to mean that Zebda is thus alienating a group of potential fans or selling out. Their approach arguably constitutes a more thoughtful engagement with issues relevant to France's *banlieues*. One of their singers, Mustapha Amokrane, has questioned the value of simply shouting slogans such as "Nique la police" ("Fuck the police"), which he sees as demonstrating a lack of reflection (quoted in Marx-Scouras, 2005, 96). In other words, he is in favour of expressing critical views in a more intelligent and eloquent manner. As Prévos (1986, 191) notes, many French rappers remain on the periphery of French society, not just because they are the victims of discrimination, but also "because of their own inability to correct the negative image they project." The words of Zebda's *J'y suis j'y reste* and many of their other songs illustrate a desire to avoid the somewhat facile denunciations associated with certain rap artists. In addition, much of the political engagement of

the members of Zebda (both through their music and involvement in community-based projects) aims to promote dialogue around issues of social citizenship.

Nevertheless, by taking a reflective approach to the controversial issue of police behaviour that contrasts with that of many rap groups, and because their music is classified in a genre that traditionally appeals to people from outside the *banlieues*, Zebda could be seen as selling out. As Hargreaves notes, “it is unquestionably difficult to penetrate mainstream markets without adjusting in some degree to the codes and expectations of majority ethnic consumers” (2003, 154). This raises important issues about the production and reception of music by ethnic minority artists. As Huq (1986, 191) suggests, arguing that minority performers should “use their privileged space to communicate issues pertinent to their community” can ultimately “limit an artist’s work to their ethnicity and thereby ghettoise them.” A similar point can be made regarding the use of musical genres associated with a performer’s minority origins. Suggesting that people from France’s *banlieues* should be expected to restrict their musical output to the genres of rap and hip-hop is deeply problematic. Such a form of musical apartheid would continually highlight the otherness of such individuals in relation to those living outside the *banlieues* and consequently reinforce stereotypes. This would also fail to recognise the diversity of the populations of many of France’s *banlieues* and their musical tastes, both of which are reflected by the range of Zebda’s musical influences and the diverse origins of their members. Interestingly, Magyd Cherfi’s 2004 solo album *La Cité des étoiles* (The Starry Estate) musically reflects not just his Algerian heritage but also a range of French musical influences, and especially the musical legacy of iconic chanson artists such as Georges Brassens. The fact that Cherfi’s album shows evidence of influences that are both North African and quintessentially French illustrates how hybrid identities come to be reflected in contemporary French popular music.

Conclusion

The interactions of styles and influences described above contextualize Looseley’s (2003, 181) comments that French popular music is a genre onto which “today’s planners and strategists are trying to map ... notions of cultural democracy, pluralism and difference in order to welcome all tastes into the national community.” However, Zebda has adopted an anti-establishment stance towards the French political class and are quick to criticize what they see as its prejudices and failings. Zebda’s music reflects Wallis and Malm’s (1993, 167) comments that progressive popular culture “must embody an element of opposition to the establishment, provocatively questioning the status quo.” *J’y suis j’y reste* is a song that calls into question the French state’s treatment of ethnic minorities and those living in its *banlieues*, and challenges traditional Republican concepts of nationhood by illustrating how Frenchness interacts with a range of local and

international identities. The music of Zebda can be said to operate in a way which is similar to how hip-hop culture in France creates a means of expression for people who perceive themselves to be victims of exclusion and discrimination. Several documentary films by Jean-Pierre Thorn (*Génération Hip-Hop* (1995), *Faire kifer les anges* (1996), *On n'est pas des marques de vélo* (2002)) have highlighted how the discovery of elements of hip-hop culture, especially break dance, has provided many young people in suburban France with a greater sense of self worth. This highlights the multi-faceted products of involvement in contestatory forms of popular culture. For those involved in it, these can become a source of pride and a means of affirming their identity. In relation to the wider community, Zebda's music projects a message which challenges stereotypes about suburban France and seeks to reconfigure notions of French identity.

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