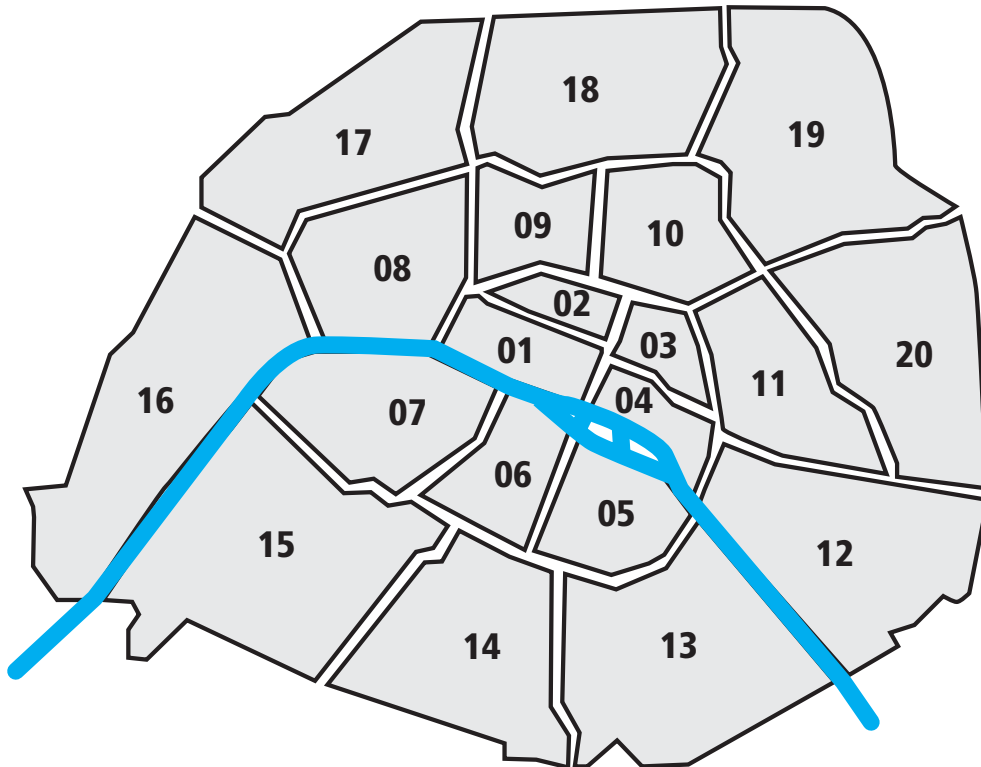


CONTEXT: Paris

The *Rue des Amandiers* (Amandiers Street) neighbourhood in the 20th Arrondissement of Paris (also called the 'Banana', and the '3 Fuchsias' housing estate)

The *Amandiers* neighbourhood lies in the north east of the 20th arrondissement of Paris, in the *Belleville-Ménilmontant* area, a hill overlooking the city.



You can see it in more detail at

http://maps.google.co.uk/maps?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1T4DKUK_enGB307&q=20+arrondissement

and if you look for the street names *Rue des Amandiers*, *Rue de Ménilmontant* and *Rue de Belleville* you can identify the exact area. Switch to satellite view and you can see the tower blocks mentioned later.

In the film *Merveille* the narrator is looking from the Parc de Belleville down towards central Paris; at one point she is under this shelter with a domed roof, recognisable in the satellite view right beside *Rue Piat*.

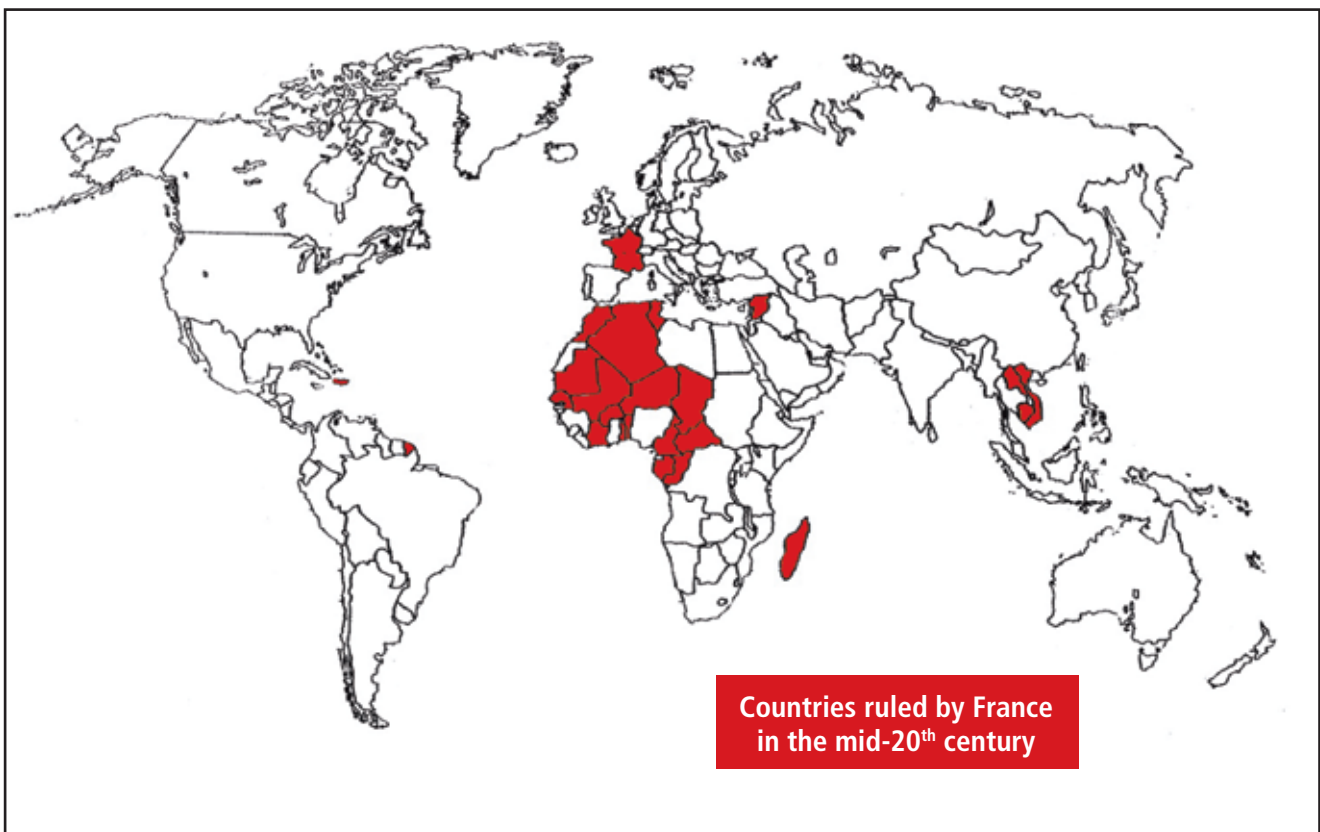


Extra background on the area and a photo of *Rue de Ménilmontant* can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/20th_arrondissement

Since the 1700s the area of Belleville had been a predominantly working class neighbourhood with a distinctive *accent de Belleville*, which had a similar status to Cockney in London. By the beginning of the 1900s it was often the area where **economic migrants** and people fleeing **persecution** first settled. The area is very densely populated, and its periods of highest population – 1936, 1962 and today – are all connected to times when there was a lot of migration around and into Europe.

In the 1920s and 1930s Armenians and Greeks settled in the neighbourhood, escaping persecution in the **Ottoman Empire**. They were followed by the Spanish who fled the Civil War in Spain in the 1930s and by German and Polish Jews before the Second World War. In the early 1960s, Algerian and Tunisian Jews arrived in the area, fleeing conflicts in France's former **colonies** in North Africa. They were followed soon afterwards by Muslim Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians, meeting France's need for workers. A substantial Chinese community settled in the 1980s before, more recently, Africans from south of the Sahara.

The next map shows the locations of most of the countries in what was once the French colonial empire. It's obvious that most of the larger ones were in Africa. The map doesn't show eastern Canada, which was French for a hundred years until the early 1700s, or Louisiana in the USA, which was French until 1803. There are also many islands too small to show on the world map which are, or were, French, some in the Indian Ocean and some in the Caribbean.



Nowadays, *Belleville* is still an area of Paris that many migrants settle in first, hence its great **cultural diversity**. Most families living there are of immigrant background, with roots in North Africa, West Africa and Asia, with a higher number of foreign-born and migrant people than the Paris average. In the *Rue de Belleville* there are Jewish, Arab and Chinese shops trading side by side.

The area could be called socially fragile: job opportunities are few, ways of making a living are precarious and many people are excluded in one way or another from fully participating in French society.

The *Amandiers* neighbourhood illustrates these issues clearly. In the 1960s older buildings were replaced by tower blocks and estates, but despite high **population density**, shops and leisure facilities were not included in the planning and are still not there. It's a 'young' neighbourhood in that the percentage of young people in the area is the second highest in Paris (27% are



under 24 years old compared with the Paris average of 25%), but school success rates are low and this has affected access to decent jobs. Some of the films in the *Belonging* collection are about different generations not communicating or understanding each other – for instance *Sans Prévenir* and *Entre-Deux*. The film in the lift – *Quel Etage* – is also about this according to the maker, though you might think it's about race.



Others are about issues that interest young people everywhere – when to listen to friends (*Influences*); a first cigarette (*Ma Première fois*); flirting (*Quand je vois tes yeux*); defending a friend (*Un Ami Perdu*); hanging out and being bored (*Un jour de plus – Another Day*); the loss of a parent (*Elles sont Deux*). In *Au coin de ma rue*, a group of black boys is hanging about on the street and a woman fears they'll mug her, two young white men assume they have drugs to sell, and the police want to move them on.

Many of those in work have jobs in construction and manufacturing, but the rates of unemployment in the 20th Arrondissement are the highest in Paris (the last census in 1999 found that 22% of 15-24 years olds in the area were unemployed, compared to 14% for all age groups and 12% for Paris as a whole). 40 years of urban 'reconstructions' without consequent improvements in people's lives have led this neighbourhood to 'shut out' other people.

The *Amandiers* has been portrayed as a 'sensitive' neighbourhood by the local authorities and the media. In June 2007 Lamine Dieng, a 25 year old man, died during police intervention in the area. *Le Silence est le Crime* is about this.

Following his death, demonstrations by the local people showed their concern about the way the police behaved. The event and its aftermath underlined the feeling of many young people of migrant descent that they were being kept out of ordinary French life. All the same, the area did not experience the riots that occurred in more suburban areas of Paris in the summer of 2001.

Because of its history, the area has featured in a few films and some crime novels. One short film, the *Red Balloon*, which won an Oscar in 1954, shows the area before the old buildings were demolished. Edith Piaf, perhaps France's most popular singer ever, was born in the area, to a French/Italian father and an Algerian mother. Though she died in 1963, her most famous song *Non, je ne regrette rien* (*No Regrets*) is still well-known – high-street opticians *Specsavers* used it in an advert in 2008 and it was played in an episode of the third season of *Desperate Housewives*. She sang in the distinctive accent of *Belleville*.

One of the films, *Merveille*, is a letter to a friend whose family has continued to migrate, this time to Belgium. They had been evicted from their home in Paris.



GLOSSARY

Arrondissement

Paris is divided into 20 districts – *arrondissements* – starting in the centre and spiralling outwards. Every arrondissement is also divided into four *quartiers*, each with its own police station.

Economic migrants

People who move and live in another part of the country, or a different country, so they can get work.

Persecution

Being treated badly by others, possibly by government or government authorities, often because of belonging to a particular ethnic, racial, religious or political group.

Ottoman Empire

A very powerful Muslim empire that controlled much of the Mediterranean for hundreds of years, until the end of the First World War. Its centre was Istanbul in Turkey.

Colonies

Countries 'owned' or controlled by another richer and more powerful country. A country with many colonies has an empire. France, Portugal and Britain all had empires until their colonies gradually became independent between the 1950s and 1970s.

Cultural diversity

Instead of everyone having the same culture – language, food, religion and traditions – there are different sub-groups.

Population density

The number of people who live in a square mile (or kilometre). It's a way of measuring how crowded an area is.

