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# Culture as a Tool of Exclusion: An Analysis of Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine*

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**CULTURE AS A TOOL OF EXCLUSION: AN ANALYSIS OF  
MATHIEU KASSOVITZ'S *LA HAINE***

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL  
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## **Abstract:**

Using the film *La Haine* (1995), directed by Mathieu Kassovitz, as an object of analysis, this paper explores culture as a tool of exclusion in France through sociological, architectural, and political contexts. It investigates *La Haine* as one of the first representations of the *banlieue* to mainstream French audiences, as well as the ways in which the film reveals how immigrants and children of immigrants struggle to find personal, cultural, and national identity in France.

**Keywords:** France, Banlieue, La Haine, Assimilation Citizenship, Nationality, Culture, Identity, Film, Mathieu Kassovitz

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*Verlan:*

Nom masculin

(inversion de *l'envers* )

- Argot codé qui procède par inversion des syllabes à l'intérieur du mot (par exemple *zarbi*, bizarre) ; *A coded form of slang formed by the inversion of syllables of a word* ("Définitions : Verlan").
- The inversion of the word *l'envers*, meaning "backwards" in French
- Refers to a specific type of *argot*, or French slang, frequently associated with *banlieue* youth

“The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept – in the modern world everyone can, should, will ‘have’ a nationality, as he or she ‘has’ a gender – vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations, such that, by definition, ‘Greek’ nationality is *sui generis*” (Anderson 48 – 49).

“Culture as the medium through which we live our lives, as an essential strand in the fabric of our experience and an expression of our situatedness as social beings, which locates us and helps us feel ‘at home’ in the world. In so far as our culture receives, no public recognition, rendering us either invisible or abnormal, and cultural differences disadvantage us, so we are made to feel marginal and alienated; we are perceived as ‘difficult’ or ‘a problem’ within the dominant culture” (Haddock 33)

“Just by the way they [police] look at you they give you the feeling that you are a second-class citizen, even if you were born here. Children are stopped for inspection five times, just on the way from their home to the metro! And I’m talking of a walking distance of less than 10 minutes... Today in France the police logic is simple... Here, if you’re black or Arab, it doesn’t matter if you have money or a good job, you’ll remain black or Arab your whole life” – Monsieur R, French political rap artist (Schneider, *Police Power and Race Riots* 4).

A Jew, a Muslim Arab, and a Black African are born into a traditionally European, White, and Catholic community; such is the premise of *La Haine* (“Hate”), a film by French actor, producer, screenwriter and director Mathieu Kassovitz. The film tells the story of three young men in the suburbs – *en banlieue* – of Paris who must navigate personal and national identity in a country known for its cultural exclusivity. This narrative is a harsh reality for thousands of immigrants and children of immigrants in France today. Unlike the English word “suburb,” *banlieue* does not signify wealthy, safe neighborhoods surrounding major metropolitan areas, but rather refers to housing projects that were constructed at the end of World War II, when France saw an influx of immigrants from its former colonies. France’s relationship with the former *France d’Outremer* (Outremer directly translating to “overseas,” but usually referring to former colonies) had always been complicated; now tensions were exacerbated when people from the former colonies began to inhabit the space of the oppressor. For a long time, French media ignored the *banlieue*. While the public was aware that these housing projects exist and that

life within them is arduous, this “dumping ground for the working poor” was made purposefully invisible, as politics and real estate “conspired to exclude the workers and their neighborhoods from representation” (“La Banlieue: Ses Films Et Son Hybridité”). The release of *La Haine* in 1995 divulged the existence of these communities to a larger public, and for many was the first visual representation of such places.

In France, national identity is directly tied to cultural identity. The country promotes a model of diversity known as “assimilationist citizenship,” which advocates political, socioeconomic and civil rights, while “considering the safeguarding of cultural rights as an obstacle to the equal rights of other domains” (Sabatier 186). In other words, if immigrants wish to fully assimilate in France, they are, in a way, expected to “abandon who they are” (Gest). For immigrants from other European countries – particularly for the second generation and beyond – integration into French society and culture was relatively seamless. For non-white immigrants, however, such fusion with the greater French population is more complicated. North African immigrants are in a particularly troublesome position in France, as they not only confront economic and racial biases against immigrants, but also face serious religious hatred, as their Islamic cultural backgrounds are believed to obstruct integration (Laachir 101). Such discrimination has manifested itself in government policies, especially the ban on “ostentatious symbols” – what became known as “the veil ban” – in 2004, the burqa ban in 2011, and the most recent prohibition of religious swimwear (known as the burkini) on certain French beaches in 2016. These restrictions exhibit concrete obstruction of Muslim integration into French culture, and likely uphold the already hegemonic assumptions of many French citizens.

Given the persistence of the *banlieue* and a sustained culture that questions diversity versus national unity, integration versus assimilation, and minorities versus authority, some

filmmakers have used their medium as a way of depicting and expressing their opinions on such tensions in France, one of the first being Mathieu Kassovitz. Kassovitz began writing the script for *La Haine* on April 6, 1993, the day 17-year-old Makomé M'Bowole, originally from Zaire (since 1997, the Democratic Republic of the Congo) was shot by police at point-blank range while in custody in the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris, the quarter where the Château Rouge neighborhood – sometimes referred to as a “petite Afrique” in Paris – is situated. Kassovitz grappled with the notion of someone waking up one morning as usual, and dying tragically and unexpectedly hours later (Vincendeau, “La Haine and After”). The director’s unease with life’s uncertainty in a space so socio-politically precarious is demonstrated through the temporality of the film, which depicts roughly 19 hours – essentially one day – in the lives of three characters whose story is triggered by their friend Abdel’s run-in with the police. Abdel is arrested and beaten unconscious, and a riot ensues not long after. During the commotion, a police officer loses his .357 Magnum revolver, which is later found by one of the young men, Vinz. Vinz toys with the idea of using it to kill a member of law enforcement, deciding to carry out this fantasy if Abdel dies.

The framing of the scenes in *La Haine* is intimate; the viewer feels physically close to the cast, and dolly shots make us feel as if we are walking among Vinz, Hubert, and Saïd. *La Haine* is relentless in that it does not alleviate bleak realities of the *banlieue*. The three protagonists – “anti-heroes” of sorts, though it’s much more complicated than that – are not simply presented as misunderstood urban youth who act out because a system of culture and government has forsaken them; we are not expected to forgive all of their actions. *La Haine* is honest and objective, and after spending a morning, an afternoon, and a night with the three in their homes, around the *banlieue*, and on the streets of Paris, Kassovitz has intimately transported his viewers



into a sphere previously concealed. The film's ending is fiercely jarring and unexpected while at the same time completely real and believable. We hear the news of Abdel's death, but Vinz himself is killed before ever managing to seek his vengeance, all in the span of less than a day. Neither Vinz's death nor the film at large is a call-to-action or a cry for help, but simply a depiction of reality that was unknown to many.

Though *La Haine* was produced in the 1990s, the film represents the present just as well as it does the past (Soules), as racial and ethnic tensions persist, and the government has yet to resolve violence and poverty within the *banlieue*. France has also seen a rise in Islamophobia, particularly after multiple terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2016. *La Haine*, then, remains an important object in French media and culture, which is why it is both interesting and important to investigate today. Through cultural, social, and political analysis, in this paper I make three arguments: firstly, *La Haine* made visible a population in France that was once largely obscured and still today stigmatized. The film, through narrative and cinematographic elements and its depictions of instances of daily life, demonstrates the exclusivity of France both spatially and anthropologically. Secondly, the film reveals how the children of immigrants – that is, second-generation French – grapple with personal and national identity in a society that expects them to abandon their origins while stigmatizing their differences at the same time. Lastly, I will touch on the film as both a revealing and relevant object in the context of recent and current events, and as a remarkable feat of cinema. This duality – the fact that the film is both politically bold and beautifully produced – is what makes *La Haine* so influential. Viewers, regardless of their involvement with French culture and politics, can appreciate the film's composition, simultaneously gaining exposure to a topic mostly uncharted.

Before delving in to my analysis of *La Haine*, I will first briefly outline post-colonial immigration in France, the history of the *banlieue* and benchmark conflicts that occurred within them, as well as details concerning production, Kassovitz's inspiration, and the film's reception.

### Historical Background – Arrival of immigrants after WWII

In the thirty years, or one generation, following the Second World War, the population of foreigners in France doubled from 1.7 million in 1946 to 3.4 million in 1975. This was largely in response to industrial needs, as enterprises sought out cheap labor during this period of rapid economic expansion. French politicians wanted to select mostly “culturally compatible” immigrants from Northern and Southern Europe, but similar demands from other European nations, as well as the already-existing links to former colonies, made this not entirely possible. Almost 1.5 million foreigners, mostly from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, moved to France, accounting for 45 percent of the total foreign population. The French initially expected that these foreigners would remain in France for short amounts of time and eventually return to and resettle in the Maghreb (Hargreaves and McKinney 41). This projection proved false; immigrants remained in France and *banlieues* surrounding major French cities expanded. As populations grew and new generations were born, problems within *banlieues* remained far from resolved and the relationship between minority groups and the majority population became more complex, as immigrants and their children attempted to find their place in a country struggling to make space for them.

In 1961, approximately two hundred people were killed by French police in response to demonstrations by pro-independence Algerians, an event France did not recognize until forty years later during some of the worst race-related violence the country had ever seen (Packer). In

October of 2005, during a time that has become known as the French Intifada (the Arabic word for “tremor,” “shiver,” or “shudder), a clip of Nicolas Sarkozy – then the Minister of the Interior and later the President of France – was circulated. Sarkozy, who had traveled to the Parisian suburb of Argenteuil to address numerous inner-city riots that were sweeping the country, can be seen asking those around him if they had “had enough” of the violence and the manifestations, then saying “*on va vous débarrasser de la racaille*,” meaning “we are going to clear the *banlieue* of its scum.” In referring to protestors and rioters as “scum,” Sarkozy not only alludes that he values these people less than others in France, but also ignores the greater problems that prompted such discord.

Later that month, another incident of police dereliction occurred, triggering even more unrest. Two boys in Clichy-sous-Bois just North of Paris – one Arab one Black – died from electrocution, hiding from police in a substation. In “Police Power and Race Riots in Paris,” Cathy Lisa Schneider writes:

A simple call to the electric power company would have saved the children’s lives, but instead the police abandoned them to almost certain death. It would take eighteen months before police were indicted for this crime (“Police Power and Race Riots in Paris” 135).

The riots that followed weeks after were gruesome. When two officers were prevented from entering a mosque, “one of them launched a tear gas canister inside, asphyxiating hundreds of families attending sermon.” Nine thousand vehicles were torched, hundreds of buildings – commercial, public, and residential – were destroyed, 4,000 rioters arrested, and 125 police officers were wounded (Schneider, “Police Power and Race Riots in Paris” 136). Though devastating nonetheless, these are just two examples of violence within the *banlieue*. In the eleven years since the Sarkozy clip was broadcasted, situations within these areas and the

relationship between law enforcement and residents of the *banlieue* have remained stagnant, if not worsened.

### Historical Background – Architecture of the *banlieue*

The planning of the *banlieue*, also called a *cit * or a *zone* (short for *zone sensible*, or “sensitive area”), was inspired by Swiss totalitarian architect Le Corbusier, who believed that the home is “a machine for living in” and that “areas of cities should be entirely separated from one another by their function, and that the straight line and the right angle held the key to wisdom, virtue, beauty and efficiency” (Dalrymple). In this way, the architecture of the *banlieue* is as violent as the acts that occur within. The oppressive nature of these housing projects can be explained by the fact that they were mostly built in the mid 1900s to house people that were in France solely to work. In *Architecture and Disjunction*, Bernard Tschumi writes that intrusion – often the intrusion of a body into a space – is inherent to the idea of architecture, and that this relationship between an individual and the surrounding space is one of violence (Tschumi 122 – 123). In the *banlieue*, this relationship is particularly clear, as police presence instills a constant sense of paranoia within residents. Tschumi also writes that this argument of individual/spatial violence is not a matter of style, claiming that modern architecture is “neither more or less violent than classical architecture, or than that of fascist, socialist, or vernacular variations,” and “architecture’s violence is fundamental and unavoidable, for architecture is linked to events in the same way that the guard is linked to the prisoner.” Finally, he claims that actions qualify spaces as much as spaces qualify actions, and that space and action are inseparable. (Tschumi 122 – 123). While I understand Tschumi’s argument that the ways in which architecture mediates space and the lives of beings is inherently violent, in the context France and the

*banlieue* I find this relationship is a bit more complicated. Le Corbusier's idea of architecture and space as representations of functionality is radically different from the classical style of Paris. Largely designed by Baron Haussmann, who prided himself on tradition and beauty, the mansard roofs and stone-cut façades of the city present much more than functionality; they also serve as artistic statements.

The differences between Haussmannian architecture in Paris and the totalitarian design of the *banlieue* likely never entered the consciousness of most residents in France. *Les zones sensibles* were concealed by government officials and geographically far enough away from metropolitan areas that, without a reason to visit, one living in the city center would not venture to the suburbs. Contrariwise, this lack of awareness regarding extraneous places is also relevant. Many of those born and raised in a Parisian *banlieue*, for example, may never have set foot in the city of Paris despite being just a train ride away. This is the case of the three protagonists in *La Haine*. I will analyze this notion of separation between the *banlieue* and the city later in this paper, in my discussion of the trio's first encounters in Paris.

Pertaining to Paris, Theodore Dalrymple, Fellow at the Manhattan Institute and a contributing editor of *City Journal*, writes:

The *cités* are thus social marginalization made concrete: bureaucratically planned from their windows to their roofs, with no history of their own or organic connection to anything that previously existed on their sites, they convey the impression that, in the event of serious trouble, they could be cut off from the rest of the world by switching off the trains and by blockading with a tank or two the highways that pass through them, (usually with a concrete wall on either side), from the rest of France to the better parts of Paris (Dalrymple).

Here, we gain insight into the exclusivity of space in France, and how minority groups are not just separated by race, religion, or economic standing, but also by physical location. Highways, trains, and other means of transportation are mediums through which spaces and people may be linked. Conversely, the lack of these infrastructures or the directions in which they are built may also fabricate exclusivity or bifurcate municipalities. As Dalrymple construes, given the geography of many *banlieues*, they could be easily cut-off from other parts of France if authority ever so wishes. Additionally, he mentions how *banlieue* architecture lacks tradition and history. Thus, minority groups are denied traditional architecture so quintessential to French culture. This is especially so in Paris. Paris as we know it today is the result of renovations commissioned by Napoléon III and designed by Baron Haussmann between 1853 and 1870. This architecture is paradigmatic to the city and therefore valued and extremely preserved. While the *banlieue* areas were built with the intention that they would be temporary, still, it is interesting to note how Paris and other French cities are protected in comparison to the lack of aesthetic care in the architecture of the *banlieue*. Rather, these spatial and architectural differences are in a way representative of the lack of diversity and inclusivity of Paris and other French cities.

### *Devoiler: to unveil (Example: Voilà) – Making visible the invisible through cinema*

In an interview in *La Haine Ultimate Edition DVD*, Kassovitz notes that French cinema is decidedly personal, which is why very few directors tackle social problems in their works. While one may think *La Haine* was shot in gritty black and white as an artistic statement – an homage to Martin Scorsese or a metaphor for race relations – the real reason for this aesthetic choice was much simpler: money. In order to compete with foreign production companies – particularly those in Britain and the United States – the French government often helps fund French-

produced films. The *Centre National du Cinéma et de L'Image Animée* (CNC), under the authority of the Ministry of Culture and Communication, allowed interest-free loans for film projects about to go into pre-production a maximum of two installments of up to ECU (European Currency Unit, the currency used while countries in the Euro Zone were transitioning from using unique currencies to the Euro) 76,000 (Finney 102). Due to the film's content, however, it was almost impossible for *La Haine* to receive any sort of grant. Still, Kassovitz and his crew proceeded to create a film that belied their small budget (Papamichael). Just days before the film's premier at Cannes in 1995, *La Haine* was moved from the *Un certain regard* category, where new or unusual films are generally placed, to the official selection. Media exploded after the film's triumphant screening. While the audience at Cannes was receptive, giving the film a standing ovation, others showed contempt. Uniformed police who were supposed to form a double ceremonial parade outside after the evening gala instead turned their backs to the film crew (Vincendeau, *La Haine* 80-81). However, not all officials in France showed aversion to the film. President Jacques Chirac sent an appreciative letter to Kassovitz, and Prime Minister Alain Juppé organized a private screening of the film for his entire cabinet (Vincendeau, *La Haine* 84). These responses to the film – much more amenable than those of politicians on the far right, such as Jean-Marie Le Pen, who wanted Kassovitz and his team to be sent to jail – demonstrate how little the French public knew about the *banlieue*, as even most major officials were naïve. Further, for major French and world leaders to praise and promote *La Haine* further justifies that the film accurately depicts conflicts of post-colonialism, race, and white European exclusivity in France (Hussey).

Kassovitz's documentary-like visuals, when combined with a narrative that appeals to the audience's pathos, added to the film's success not only as a work of art, but also as a revelation

of life in the *banlieue* for the greater French public. Kassovitz demonstrates his characters' alienation from society through their aggressive responses to realities of daily life (Elstob 45 – 46). It is through these occurrences, four of which I closely read in the following section of this thesis, that the audience learns about and empathizes with the characters.

*À Carouf (Carrefour, a French Supermarket chain whose name directly translates to “crossroads”)*

In the first scene I have chosen to analyze, when Vinz and Saïd are shopping for groceries, Kassovitz situates viewers in a recognizable setting, though with people who are perhaps unfamiliar. A grocery store is an intermediary between the home and the public sphere, a place where people from a multitude of backgrounds must frequent to survive. In the supermarket scene, which occurs about a third of the way through *La Haine*, we see Vinz become increasingly aggressive as he does his shopping. The clientele is ethnically diverse: the man behind the register is Asian, the origins of the other patrons are varied. The scene begins focusing on Saïd, who is perusing the aisles. In the background we hear Vinz spewing at the cashier that his grandmother is a regular at the store, and that he is only a few francs short. The cashier replies, “You are not your grandmother.” This rebuttal, though not particularly memorable in the grand scheme of *La Haine*, is significant. Immigrants from other European countries such as Poland, Italy, and Belgium are said to have “successfully integrated into French culture.” In contrast, immigrants from ex-colonies are considered “un-assimilable” to French culture in nature (Laachir 101). Children of first-generation, non-white immigrants, though French by birth, are often stigmatized in the same way as their parents. North African



immigrants are particularly marginalized, as their Islamic cultural backgrounds are believed to obstruct integration (Laachir 101). Such bias dates back to France's expansion into Africa and Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was justified "on the grounds of *mission civilisatrice* ('civilizing mission'), which was aimed at educating less civilized people in the far reaches of the world," a rhetoric that "appealed to national pride, the glory of French civilization, and the superiority of Christianity over Islam" (Ware 189). Vinz, of Jewish and therefore likely of Eastern-European descent, and clearly white, is separated from his grandmother who likely immigrated herself to France. In other words, his ethnic identity – at least that which is presented by his physical appearance – allows him some individuality that others, such as Saïd and Hubert, are denied. We then see Vinz turn to the woman behind him and say, "Stop muttering and give me a franc, you old dinosaur!" This proclamation is ironic, as the woman he is addressing is a small and elderly, reminiscent of his own grandmother for whom he is shopping. Vinz, though towering over the counter, evokes the behavior of a child throwing a tantrum. He lashes, "Fine, just give me the red pepper!" As he walks out of the store, he turns to Saïd and says, "My grandmother is going to kill me; she hates red peppers." This statement is ironic after his aggression towards the woman behind him in line, but also gives his actions melancholy reason. At this point, Vinz's behavior in the grocery store is almost forgivable, as one begins to consider the small luxuries, such as getting the groceries one desires, of which he and his grandmother are deprived.

Regarding cinematographic technique, like many other scenes in *La Haine*, the audience members feel as if they are tagging along with Vinz and Saïd in this scene. The empathy produced by such close and authentic representations of the characters aides the viewer to relate to people otherwise dissimilar, an important device when asserting to a variety of people.

*Le tromé (metro), la teuf (fête), and la gnolba (bagnole, meaning car): Vinz, Saïd and Hubert in Paris*

After situating the first half of the film – the morning and afternoon – in the *banlieue*, Kassovitz juxtaposes the suburb with the city by having the trio venture to Paris in the early evening. Though only a train ride away, the trip Vinz, Saïd and Hubert take to Paris is one of their firsts; their reckless and flippant behavior makes it clear they have not spent much time, if any, in the city proper. Through a multitude of experiences – a ride on the metro, a visit to an art gallery, a screening at the cinema, a bizarre encounter drug dealer, and another with plain-clothed police officers, followed by a trip to the police station, to name just a few – we directly see how these marginalized youths are excluded from physical spaces and how they navigate difficult scenarios and unfamiliar grounds. When they do interact with Parisians, the characters have trouble remaining composed and cordial. Though the characters themselves are having new experiences, it is the audience that learns the most from this part of the film, as they are given the opportunity to see the characters interact with people other than their friends and police. Throughout *La Haine*, each new action follows a similar pattern of escalation, which I further analyze in the following portions of this paper. This arrangement of events produces both frustration and understanding, and thus enhances the film’s underlying messages.

Le tromé

The trio’s journey to Paris begins on the metro, a quintessential Parisian space and, like a grocery store, a space a multitude of people utilize. The first sound we hear is the warning of the doors closing: a familiar sound to anyone who has taken the metro, which is largely synonymous with anyone who has been to or lived in Paris. With this first shot, Kassovitz has already begun

to depict an authentic Paris through sensory elements. Fairly close up, in this shot the audience is face to face with a woman who begins a classic monologue asking for money. We watch her waddle through the rocky train car, a sight that is presented in such a way that we feel like passengers ourselves. She approaches Saïd, who replies rather impolitely, “What do you want?” He continues, “Me too, my dad is in prison, my mother is in prison, my brother is in prison, my sister is in prison... *Vas-y*, get a job like everybody else!” While the woman’s poverty is of course tragic, the irony of her asking Saïd, who is in no place to give, is humorous. The woman, to start, is white and appears to be around thirty years old. Saïd, on the other hand, is clearly of Arab origin and much younger. While the woman is asking whoever is in her proximity, we still question why she would bother asking someone like Saïd to help her. Adding to the comedic aspect of this scene is Saïd’s response. He does not say, “My whole family is in prison,” but rather, in a manner that is almost inappropriately blasé, lists his mother, his father, his brother, and his sister, his tone aggrieved, almost apathetic, rather than sad. Knowing only bits and pieces of Saïd’s home life (of the three, he is the only character whose maternal figure we do not meet and whose home we do not enter), the audience does not actually know if all of Saïd’s family is in prison or if he is just embellishing. In any case, it is clear his situation is far from comfortable or ideal, which makes the truth negligible. The woman turns away, and Saïd turns to his friends, “Is the carnival in town or something, *wesh!*” The woman who begged so endearingly then flips him off and walks away, though Saïd’s back is to her at this point. In parallel form, we hear a man begin another monologue almost identical to that of the woman. Again, this gesture appeals to the audience because it is at the same time dismal, droll, and authentic.

In the next scene, on the streets of Paris, Saïd asks a police officer for directions. The officer, in full uniform, points “it’s just over down the street,” and says “have a good evening.”

Saïd runs to his friends, exclaiming “*ils sont polis les keufs ici! Carrément, il m'a dit vous et tout!*” translated to “the police are polite here! He even called me sir!” Though simple, this dialogue worth examining, as unpacking the original French reveals more than subtitles on a screen. While this use of language as a form of rejection a dominant social and political model is seen throughout the entire film, I feel it is appropriate to address it in this particular part of the film, as it is when Vinz, Hubert, and Saïd enter the sphere of such power and influence. The words I find most intriguing in this part of the dialogue are *vous* and *keuf*.

The reasons why I find *vous* significant are perhaps evident, particularly to other Francophones, yet I still feel it important to acknowledge the word, as Saïd made a point that he was touched by its usage in the film. In French, the worlds *tu* and *vous* both mean “you.” The former is more casual, and always singular, whereas the latter is more formal or refers to more than one person. The dichotomy of *tu* and *vous*, however, can also be one of superiority complex. For example, one always uses *tu* when referring to a child or to an animal. While the Parisian police officer in *La Haine* likely used *vous* by default, not even thinking twice, Saïd is probably sparingly *vouvoyé*-d in the *banlieue*, perhaps even more rarely by a figure of authority. Whether or not the characters continue to find this true, this interaction with the officer also sets up the city of Paris as an environment with more equality or opportunity than the *banlieue*.

Unlike *vous*, the word *keuf* is more complicated to deconstruct; the word is loaded with social, cultural, and political implications. To start my analysis, *keuf* does not really have an English equivalent, as it is the word *flic* – slang for police officer – in *verlan*. In the English subtitles, *keuf* is translated as “pig,” though this is not entirely accurate, as the word *poule* meaning chicken is perhaps closer in meaning. Before further addressing the word *keuf*, it is important to explain the history of *verlan* and its sociopolitical implications. As I noted in the

beginning of this paper, *verlan* is the inversion of syllables of a word in French (the word *verlan* itself is the inversion of *l'envers*, meaning backwards). *Verlan* today is recognized as a type of slang that originated in the French *banlieue* as a means of communication – a code of sorts – to confuse or conceal meaning from authority figures. But when *La Haine* premiered over twenty years ago, even French members of the audience said that they needed the English subtitles to understand the film's dialogue. Furthermore, some scenes had to be post-synchronized because the extensive use of *verlan* in the original script was too hard for audiences to understand (Mével 51). This confusion regarding language highlights the difference between the Cannes audience watching *La Haine* and the people the film is depicting. Finally, it is in part because of *banlieue* films, *La Haine* included, as well as the rise of street culture, that today *verlan* has entered the mainstream and adorns the vocabularies of most French millennials to varying degrees.

In “The Translation of Identity: Subtitling the Vernacular of the French *cit *,” Pierre-Alexis M vel writes that *banlieue* French allows French young people to play with the dominant language (M vel 51), a consequential affirmation when considering the importance of language and its preservation in French culture. In her article exploring The Toubon Law, which mandates the use of French language in official government publications, American attorney Christine Vanston writes:

France's love affair with its language spans the centuries. Once characterized as a woman so ‘beautiful, proud [and] voluptuous... that one loves her with all one's being, the French language has intimately insinuated itself into France's national identity; it is an integral element of the collective French consciousness (Vanston 175)

The last claim of this citation – that the French language is an indispensable part of “the collective French conscious” – is an incredible affirmation to make and especially provocative,

as it insinuates that one must grow up speaking French, or learn a great deal of the language (and not just any French, but a particular, ‘correct’ form of French) in order to take part in French culture and comradeship. In *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization*, Richard F. Kuisel writes that France’s aversion towards, or even fear of other cultures “stems from the belief that the French culture is a ‘high culture,’ more advanced and developed than that of other nations” (Kuisel, 119, 127). While Kuisel writes this in the context of the impact media from the United States has on France, the ideology that French culture and language, and therefore the French, is superior to those of other nations is especially partisan towards immigrants from Africa, especially the Maghreb, as many countries in this area are former colonies. Former minister of culture Jacques Toubon has described the French language as the country’s “primary capital, the symbol of their dignity, the passageway to integration” (Pells 270). This assertion that the French language is the way by which foreigners assimilate to French society exemplifies the interwoven nature of culture and nation in France, and alludes that a certain level of education and thus perhaps is necessary in order to fully engage in French citizenship and community. Lastly, it is worth noting that having a designated Minister of Culture is indicative itself of the role culture plays in politics, government, and society in France.

In the article “Language: divisions and debates” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern French Culture*, Rodney Ball writes:

By the early twentieth century grammarians had come to see their task as one of maintaining the standardized language in its allegedly pristine state and protecting it from misuse and decadence. The ‘prescriptivist’ or ‘normative’ defense of the language essentially involves imposing (prescribing) and, as far as possible, justifying the established norms while warning against deviations from it. If taken to extremes, the

result is the ‘purist’ view that language change is synonymous with deterioration and must always be resisted (Ball 127-128).

In France, tampering with the language whether it be by way of *anglicismes* (words from the English language that have infiltrated contemporary French vocabularies, such as *un e-mail* or *le week-end*) or slang – especially terms coming from Arabic and *verlan*, which originated in the *banlieue* and therefore is used predominantly by immigrants – is analogous with decline and degradation of the French nationality and the country in general. Such unease and xenophobia is related to, and perhaps even stems from, an elite group’s – white, Catholic men, in the case of France and many other nations – fear of losing power. In other words, modifying or contriving the French language is equal to civil decline, and therefore immigrant populations must be excluded from the greater French population for France to subsist. Such omission and disdain for alterations to the French language is even apparent in media. In “Alternative French, Alternative Identities: Situating Language in la Banlieue,” Meredith Doran writes:

The larger recognition of multiple ‘minority’ cultures and languages within *cité* communities is either absent from media reports, or, if mentioned, is treated as a source of tension and conflict. Such a devaluing of diversity is consistent with long-standing republican ideology of assimilation which views plurality as a source of balkanizing conflict and therefore as an unwelcome threat to national unity (Doran 499).

This assertion further reinforces the notion of language as a means of unity and therefore community. In maintaining certain standards and rules while simultaneously ignoring other dialects or usages of the French language, media sources participate in a culture of privilege and segregation.

In addition to being unfamiliar code to authority figures, *verlan* (and other forms of slang) is a means by which minority groups in France create new identities consisting of French nationality (the language) and their origins (for example, Arabic or the language of their peers). From a linguistics perspective, one can contemplate personal identity as emerging from interactions and processes of negotiation between interlocutors. In this case, *verlan* could be considered a social practice; as people pick up slang from their peers, they create a new community (Pavlenko and Blackledge 101). Finally, *verlan* is a way marginalized groups may play with dominant culture, and thus rebel against intolerance and exclusivity.

### La teuf

Like most of the crew's encounters in *La Haine*, the scene in which Vinz, Saïd, and Hubert attend an opening and cocktail hour at a small gallery starts soberly and ends in calamity. Unlike other scenes, it is here that the trio most intimately interacts with people outside of the *banlieue*. Due to the pacing of the scene, at first the audience is perhaps optimistic that the characters will attend this event without causing commotion, and even that others will overlook them as "other." However, as the evening continues, the differences between them and the other patrons become clear, and interactions quickly become inflammatory.

The first shot we see of the gallery is from the dark street outside. The windows of the building are a glowing, fluorescent white, the contrast with the street made starker by the film's black and white. The image is a metaphor: the delinquents of the street infiltrating a space of luxe and culture. Before the boys enter the gallery, Saïd says ironically, "Shall we, gentlemen?" signifying that the band knows this is an event at which they will be out of place. The first shot inside the gallery is a close-up shot of Saïd's face, mouth is agape, his expression perplexed.



Behind him is Vinz, who is looking at the same artwork. Even deeper into the shot is Hubert, who is examining a piece comprised of large plastic water bottles spray painted white, cut in half, and mounted to the wall. The art is exaggeratedly bad. Even before the dialogue begins, Kassovitz has ironically portrayed a bourgeois gallery scene in Paris. “It’s frightening. Frightening, frightening, frightening,” proclaims Saïd, who continues to look dumbfounded. He steps out of the frame and Vinz, looking similarly perplexed, approaches. Vinz summons Hubert, asking him if “the guy that made this is famous.” The scene cuts and we finally see what they are looking at: a porcelain dog of sorts, equally as absurd as the bottles. Through the ridiculous artwork, Kassovitz complicates both the portrayal and the perception of these *banlieue* youth. The setting, an art gallery, is already an atmosphere of refinement and culture that excludes those who are ethnically different or of lower socioeconomic class status. We can assume that the trio has had little to no exposure to art, especially since they have likely never been to Paris until this day. I mention the trio’s lack of exposure to this metropolitan area because, as I discussed prior regarding Parisian architecture, the city is a place overflowing with craftsmanship in its streets alone, and thus even just living or growing up in such a place would charge acknowledgement or curiosity regarding art. Despite their lack of education, it seems Vinz, Saïd, and Hubert, ironically, are the only people in the space who discern the fatuity of the art around them. Had Kassovitz decided to include art traditionally deemed “good” instead of absurd pieces in this scene, with all else equal, his message would have been much different. Rather, the audience would have likely felt pity for the characters instead of accordance. Although it ends less than graciously, this scene is perhaps Kassovitz’s way of showing that one does not need to be of a certain background to appreciate or criticize art at an ideological or even academic level. For

Vinz, Saïd, and Hubert, it is not their judgment of the pieces that falls short, but rather their interactions with other attendees as we see later during their confrontation with three women.

After passing judgment on the items mounted on the wall, the trio raids the refreshments table. In a less-than-elegant manner, the boys devour peanuts and other refreshments, and rudely mock a server who offers them glasses of champagne. Though brief, this part of the scene is revealing; we understand that the crew is thrilled to be served in such a lavish way, and their entertainment emanates through disrespect to those serving them. From across the room, Saïd and Hubert spot two women they find attractive and decide to strike up a conversation. Saïd claims he is too shy, so Hubert approaches them first. The exchange begins well; Hubert is polite and charming, and one of the women even jokes, “haven’t we met before somewhere?” Noticing Hubert’s chatty success, Saïd approaches, introduces himself, then almost immediately asks for one of the women’s number. She is offended, telling him “you’re all the same.” Saïd becomes defensive and tension quickly escalates. The other woman, defending her friend, proceeds to sum up almost all of the crew’s interactions and experiences in the film, saying “you’re jerks. We would have had liked to have a conversation with you, but right away, you get all aggressive. How can we respect you?” As if the situation could not deteriorate further, Vinz then comes in to the picture, spewing, “Who are you? The chicks in the Wonderbra ads?” The same woman to confront Saïd responds, rather respectfully, “I wasn’t talking to you.” The boys are approached by the gallery host, who tells them to calm down. They proceed to insult him, but he is not provoked. Though he motions for the boys to leave, especially after Hubert knocks over a piece of furniture, he never once tells them they are kicked out. After Vinz, Saïd and Hubert depart, the manager shrugs, “the malaise of the ghetto.” Though he shows pity, by asserting that the boys are simply a sad product of the ghetto, the gallery manager also makes a sweeping sociological

judgment. Had he directly addressed Vinz, Saïd, and Hubert's rudeness, he would have recognized them as rude patrons rather than desperate issues of their environment.

### La gnolba

The last two scenes I will closely read are: 1. the one in which the boys attempt to steal a car to return home and 2. the one in which they arrive back at the *banlieue*, where they say their goodbyes until what they think will be following day before Vinz is unexpectedly killed. I have chosen these two scenes rather than just the latter because it is during the attempted car robbery that we feel the trio might finally get caught or face repercussions for their illicit activity. When they return to the *banlieue*, it is a sigh of relief for the spectators; we feel they are "home safe and sound." The shock produced when Vinz is shot alters our perceptions of the film at large, and produces new emotions regarding the reality of the *banlieue*. Rather, the impact of our final moments with the characters represents how, after the day and night we have spent with this trio, any hope for them to escape the conditions of the *banlieue* has been lost, as the boys' experiences in Paris proved just as bleak.

After missing the last train out of Paris, then being refused by a taxi driver for trying to pay with a stolen credit card, Vinz, Saïd, and Hubert decide to steal a car to take them home, again escalating the situation in which they find themselves. At first, all the audience sees is a dark, blurry street lined with parked cars. The image is so still it could be a photograph, the only indicator that it is a moving picture the dialogue coming from inside a one of the cars, which shakes as the boys try and start the engine. The camera zooms in down the street, closer to the car, and the alarm starts. One after the other, the crew frantically jumps out of the vehicle and runs down the block, though in an anticlimactic fashion, the alarm stops just seconds later. The

trio halts in the middle of the street, then decides to give the robbery a second shot. Though they are still moving frenziedly, ducking below the windows as to remain concealed, the boys' second attempt seems more promising. The windshield wipers start swiping, the alarm remains quiet, and we think they might just get away with the robbery. Suddenly, we hear footsteps, and a figure enters the shot, walking right across the lens of the camera. For a few seconds, nothing happens, and we think perhaps the figure is just a passer-by. At once, a face appears in the driver's window of the car, peering in. The three boys are jarred, gasping, and the audience shares their anxiety. One could think that this is where the film ends. Having infiltrated a space of exclusivity, one in which they are particularly othered, it would feel appropriate that the crew's time in Paris would end in collapse, as all their endeavors have up to this point. Part of *La Haine*'s brilliance is that it is both genuine and unexpected. The face in the window is not a police officer or a pedestrian with plans to rat the boys out, but rather just a kooky older man who, in fact, ends up protecting the boys from law enforcement later that night. After realizing the man is an annoyance and not a threat, the trio is even more eager to leave Paris; they have no desire to wait around for their arrest. As they struggle to connect the wires of the car so that they may drive off, the man, still at the window, gives them instructions that eventually start the engine. Until this point, Vinz, Saïd and Hubert continue to bicker with one another, a depiction of their eagerness, irritation, and finally, comfort with one another. When the engine does start, oddly, the bizarre stranger who helped them with the wires is as elated as the boys are. After celebrating their success, however, is a moment of grave disappointment. Vinz, Saïd and Hubert come to realize that none of them know how to drive. The man proclaims, "I know how to drive!" to which the boys reply, "*ta gueule*," meaning "shut the fuck up." After all of their endeavors in Paris, the fact that the crew successfully hijacks a car but then cannot drive away in

it is both ironic and dismal, and symbolizes how difficult, even impossible, it would be for them to break out of their current socioeconomic statuses.

As the trio is quarreling over their lack of driver's education, the stranger informs them after apologizing for interrupting that there is a police car approaching them on the street. Like when the car alarm was triggered, again we feel that this may be where the boys get caught and thus where the evening ends. Hubert, ever so calmly, announces that on the count of three, the boys are going to scam. They jump out of the car and begin sprinting down the street. Sirens begin to roar, and we see the lights of a police car barreling down the street. Almost mystically, the kooky man jumps in front of the police car, dancing, chanting, and making his way on to the hood of the vehicle, a distraction that allows the three protagonists to flee from the scene. The good omen that is this strange man is, in a way, a suggestion that anything is possible in Paris and signifies that the boys' fate is not necessarily all tainted. The frame that transitions the car robbery debacle to the next scene, in which the boys are talking and smoking on top of a quintessential Parisian rooftop, is one of the most exquisite images of the film. On the left side of the screen is Vinz's hand rolling a joint, his gold monogrammed four-finger ring catching the light. On the right side, in the background, there is the Eiffel tower, glimmering against the dark sky. This depiction juxtaposes the *banlieue* with Paris, and therefore a marginalized group with an elite. The black and white nature of the film is particularly supportive of this imagery, as everything but Vinz's hands and the Eiffel Tower is blurry and dark. Though Kassovitz's choice to film in black and white was largely financial, it can now be interpreted as a statement on race, particularly policies in France frequently neglect race, or in other words, are "color blind," which I briefly discuss in the conclusion of this paper.

After all the protagonists have been through in Paris, at 6 AM we find them on the metro again, returning home to the *banlieue*. The next scene, they are in a familiar square. Saïd says, “*bon, à demain,*” – see you tomorrow – and for the first time in a long time, we feel we can breathe easy. Vinz hands the gun he found at the riot, that he has carried with him throughout the entirety of the film, to Hubert. Having almost used it to kill a skinhead not long before getting on the metro home, this is his way of retiring his violent urge. His voice is soft and tired, further symbolizing his resignation. Vinz and Saïd walk off together, Saïd telling a funny, trivial story, as he frequently did at the beginning of the film; it feels that things have returned to the way they were only hours prior the previous day. With only about two minutes left, the film escalates one last time. The shot is focused on Hubert, who we see in a close-up. Behind him, in the distance, Saïd and Vinz are still walking together. A car pulls up to the two, and it is the police officers from the day before who approached them at a rooftop party, ordering them to shut the function down. Hubert, with a strong, determined look on his face, slowly walks towards his friends and the police, who are arguing. Then, he is running urgently, thus building up the scene. The police are aggressively grabbing Vinz, pushing him against their car. Arms flailing, he is struggling and trying to fight back. Before he was aggressed, Vinz, for once, was doing nothing wrong; he was simply on his way home. After all the illegal, insolent, and menacing situations he provoked throughout the film, it is ironic, devastating, and sorrowful that Vinz should be pinned down at a moment of guiltlessness. Suddenly, the cop – plain-clothed, wearing the same jacket from the day before – is taunting Vinz with a gun. He spews, “What’s wrong, asshole? Scared without your pals?” He is laughing demonically, so entertained by his own insults and force, he seems to forget he is holding a loaded weapon. In a matter of seconds, he accidentally pulls the trigger, the

gun so close to Vinz's face that it sounds like a minor explosion. At such a close range, there is no question that Vinz is dead.

The film does not end here. The camera pauses on Hubert and the officer for another brief moment: a stand-off between the two. The screen goes black and we hear a gunshot, though we do not know for certain which character pulled the trigger. Apart from further demonstrating Kassovitz's captivation with abruptness, *La Haine's* ending also represents a greater lack of resolution. Vinz, Saïd and Hubert never come close to integrating with the larger French population. We are left saddened by Vinz's death and without hope that Saïd and Hubert will find more prosperity in the future, especially since now two of their friends – Vinz and Abdel – are deceased.

*Se battre*: to wrestle, to fight; *se battre avec*: to grapple with – Personal and national identity for later generations

Some of the most pivotal insights provided by *La Haine* are those into the anxieties and frustrations of its characters, emotions that are for the most part rooted in race and the ways in which the boys are marginalized. Though Vinz, Saïd, and Hubert are fictional, together they represent a larger group of real people. In France, people of color are frequently perceived as and referred to as immigrants or foreigners regardless of nationality or cultural integration; a framework that defines “French” as white (Bruce-Jones 433). For adolescents born in a country to which their parents immigrated, a central question is “their capacity to surf between two cultures and negotiate their own identity in such a way that they maintain their links with their family and achieve full citizenship” (Sabatier 186). As I mentioned previously, the French

assimilationist model of integration requires that one abandon other origins in order to integrate entirely. This archetype creates a dead-end for people who are part of ethnic and religious groups (such as Islam) considered incapable of assimilation by default, further complicating the place of minorities in France. In this section, I underline some of the challenges the children of immigrants in France face with regard to balancing a French nationality with the origins and culture of their parents. I focus on this topic with two optics: firstly, the way in which they are perceived in French society as foreign the context of policy and in general; secondly, by giving a few examples of specific individuals.

Conflicts of difference regarding ethnic background in France are not seen as problems of race but rather as problems of immigration, a perspective that supports the ideology that all people of color, even those whose grandparents were born in France, are foreigners. In “Race, Space, and the Nation-State,” Eddie Bruce-Jones describes race as a consequential circumstance in the inclusion and exclusion of people in Europe, writing:

One should also allow room for regarding race as a significant factor in assessing existing lines of inclusion and exclusion that circumscribe European national identities.

As discussed, Europe is not free from racialized space or racial violence. This link between protecting racialized space and national identity can be viewed as a constitutive part of Europe’s collective psyche, demarcating the role that the legacy of European colonialism plays in maintaining European identity (Bruce-Jones 435 – 435).

Bruce-Jones’s recognition of race as a central player in the discriminatory ideologies and policies of Europe is particularly interesting in regards to France, as the country does not officially recognize racial and ethnic categories; even the French census does not disaggregate data based on race or ethnicity (Ware 186). Yet, some of the country’s policies are clearly discriminatory.



For example, as of 1993, the children of immigrants in France do not automatically become citizens upon reaching the age of majority. Instead, they must formally request citizenship (Ware 199). This requirement is in and of itself representative of how people of color are less privileged or even less desired in France than people of European origin, as the majority of non-European immigrants are from North and sub-Saharan Africa.

In 1991, the mayor of Paris, Jacques Chirac (who, as President, would praise Kassovitz for the success of *La Haine*) gave an infamous speech, what has become known as “Le Bruit et l’odeur” – meaning “The noise and the smell” – in which he describes how French workers, without being racist, are bound to “go crazy” as immigrant populations take jobs away from them. He said:

*Notre problème, ce n'est pas les étrangers, c'est qu'il y a overdose. C'est peut-être vrai qu'il n'y a pas plus d'étrangers qu'avant la guerre, mais ce n'est pas les mêmes et ça fait une différence. Il est certain que d'avoir des Espagnols, des Polonais et des Portugais travaillant chez nous, ça pose moins de problèmes que d'avoir des musulmans et des Noirs [...] Comment voulez-vous que le travailleur français qui travaille avec sa femme et qui, ensemble, gagnent environ 15 000 francs, et qui voit sur le palier à côté de son HLM, entassée, une famille avec un père de famille, trois ou quatre épouses, et une vingtaine de gosses, et qui gagne 50 000 francs de prestations sociales, sans naturellement travailler !*

“Our problem is not foreigners; it is that there is an overdose. It is perhaps true that there are not more immigrants than before the war, but it is not the same and it makes a difference. It is certain that the Spanish, Polish and Portuguese working in France create fewer problems than to have Muslims and blacks [...] If you were a French worker, who

worked along with your wife and together earned 15,000 francs and you lived in public housing next to a man with three or four wives, twenty children, who took home 50,000 francs a month from welfare, without working. And if in addition, you had to deal with the noise and the smell, well the French worker goes crazy”

In his analysis of this citation in “Color-blind Racism in France,” Leland Ware writes that Chirac’s contemptuous comments reflect the sentiments of a large portion of the French population. A majority of French citizens have shown resentment towards the presence of minority immigrants in France. With respect to employment, Ware writes, “since the mid-1970s, France has attempted to stem the tide of immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa. This change in policy was adopted after the 1973 oil crisis and the end of the ‘trente glorieuses,’ in an economic recession that dampened the need for foreign labor. This resulted in high levels of unemployment.” In a 2013 survey 70 percent of the French population reported that they believed too many foreigners reside in the country (Ware 197). One can question how these respondents defined the word “foreigner,” as all people of color in France are often perceived as immigrants. Rather, it is possible that some of the “foreigners” respondents encounter are in fact French-born citizens.

For individuals, aggressions and racism manifest themselves in ordinary daily activities and necessary affairs, such as interactions with people at school or work, or buying a home. In “But Madame, We Are French Also,” Jean Beaman provides interviews with adult children of immigrants in France, who offer examples their experiences navigating the worlds of home, work and school. Beaman writes that, in the latter two spheres I have just mentioned, ethnic origins are rarely, if ever, acknowledged or appreciated (Beaman 48). 30-year-old Sabri, born in the North of France to Tunisian parents, and currently residing in a *banlieue* in the Saint-Seine

Denis *département* North of Paris, remembers realizing he was different at an early age, when he was 8 or 9. He says, “The other children recognized [that I was different], meaning they would tell us, ‘you’re Arab, return to where you came from, you’re not from here.’” His parents could do nothing for him; they faced the same discrimination, just at a different level (Beaman 48-49). Coming from children of such a young age, this hostility and bullying comes from prejudice of parents and prevailing cultural norms. While it is normal for children to point out difference, it is up to adults – teachers, in particular – to normalize and embrace diversity.

Safia, a 32-year-old with dual Tunisian and French citizenship, discusses her trouble apartment hunting. She says, “our application file was never taken seriously by landlords, even though my husband works in finance and I work also. We make enough money. I remember they were asking for someone with a salary of three times the rent, and even with only my salary we had enough money.” One landlord initially accepted her offer, then turned her down. A French couple had looked at the apartment shortly after Safia and her family, and the landlord found “it was just easier” letting them move in. Safia replied, “Madame, we are French, also” (Beaman 47). Even though she was born in France, and her children too, Safia’s “Frenchness” is still frequently questioned by others. This suspicion and mistrust is something she resents. When she is out with her children, people ask the origins of her children, or where she is from. “That drives me crazy,” she says. “Because my children were born in France to French parents. I was born here, my children were born here, and they still ask me that. It is so annoying to have to continually justify myself based on the color of my skin or the color of my children’s skin” (Beaman 47).

### *Aujourd'hui et le turfu (le futur): Today and the future*

In striving to protect its culture, France has created and sustained a tradition of exclusivity that upholds a standard that is white and Catholic, in turn sustaining racial, ethnic, religious and political tensions between immigrants and the majority population. In both the context of history and in that of current events, *La Haine* is a relevant object that intensely and accurately depicts the experiences of conflict for minority groups on an individual and societal level. Moreover, as a feat of cinema, *La Haine's* production is just as impressive as its message, and the timelessness of Paris as a cityscape, especially when shown in black and white, makes the film particularly enduring. The film's duality – that it is both politically bold and beautifully produced – contributes to its success and influence. Viewers, regardless of their involvement with French culture and politics, can appreciate the film's composition while simultaneously gain exposure to a topic uncharted by many. In closing, I frame *La Haine* in the context of present-day France and some of the country's current events, as well as by noting that, despite the film's grave context, Kassovitz subtly provides inspiration and hope for the future throughout the film.

Perhaps the most crucial symbol in *La Haine* is Abdel himself, a character whom we do not know much about aside that he was close to Vinz, Saïd, and Hubert, and that he had a cruel and abhorrent run-in with law authority. Yet, he and his experiences are the catalyst for many of the crew's actions. Based off Makomé M'Bowole, the character Abdel is an emblem for real people. Though the character Abdel dies in the mid 1990s, his story is still being retold today, as violence and tensions between law enforcement and minority groups prevail. To give just one example, in July 2016, unrest erupted in Beaumont-sur-Oise, a *banlieue* north of Paris, after 24-year-old Adama Traore died in police custody. Though Traore's autopsy revealed he was also

suffering from an infection – a likely cause of death – at the time of his arrest, *banlieue* residents were skeptical and riots ensued. Cars were set on ablaze, public buildings were damaged, and protesters even tried to set a fire to the mayor’s office and a preschool (“Violent Clashes Break Out in Paris Suburbs Over Death of Man in Custody”). This occurrence demonstrates a pattern that has been repeated since the construction of *banlieues* more than 60 years ago, and thus demonstrates a lack of and need for progress.

Perceptions of immigrants, especially those who are Muslim and/or of North African decent, have become even more tarnished in the past two years due to recent terrorist attacks throughout Europe. Those that took place in France and Belgium in 2015 and 2016 are particularly concerning, as many of them conspirators were European citizens of North African origin. To give one example, the attack most covered by media both in Europe and internationally was the November 13, 2015 attacks in Paris and the suburb of Saint-Denis. The events that occurred that Friday were the deadliest on France since World War II. Three suicide bombers struck outside the Stade de France in Saint-Denis during a soccer game while gunmen held hostages and committed a mass shooting at the Bataclan theatre as well as surrounding restaurants and cafés. 130 people were killed and another 368 were left injured (Marcus). The false stereotype of the “Muslim terrorist” has become a familiar trope. Events such as the Paris attacks and the ways in which they are presented by media do not aid in diminishing such hegemonic ideology. Therefore, educating people about Islam may be more important than ever, and a civics/tolerance teaching in school curriculum non-negotiable.

Though neither the portrayals in *La Haine* nor the actual present climate provide much optimism with regard to race and nationality in France, Kassovitz subtly includes symbols of determination throughout the film. Twenty-four minutes in to the film, the boys are talking to

some kids outside of what appears to be a parking garage or storage units. They are sitting on cement structures, and the graffiti on the walls behind them reads, “*L’avenir c’est nous*” (“the future is us”) and “*La ville c’est nous tous*” (“the city is all of us”), insinuating that the future of France lies in diversity. Like Safia, who proclaimed that she is still French though she is not white, this graffiti represents a “new” France, one in which citizens come from different backgrounds. About fifty minutes through the film, the boys are on a train. Out the window, a billboard reads, “*le monde est à vous*” (“the world is yours”). Towards the end of the film, between 1:27 and 1:28, we see the same advertisement in Paris. Saïd takes a can of spray paint, scratching out the *v* in *vous* and painting on an *n* instead. The phrase then reads, “*le monde est à nous*” meaning “the world is ours.” Again, this is Kassovitz’s way of portraying that to continue, France must find a more acceptance and a more inclusive model of assimilation. In May 2015, Andrew Hussey, a journalist for *The Guardian*, visited Chanteloup-les-Vignes, the *banlieue* in which *La Haine* was filmed twenty years before. Everyone he spoke to, he found, was proud of *La Haine*, that it was filmed in their *banlieue* and “that they could claim some link with French history” (Hussey). Although many living within French *banlieues* show contempt for authority figures, this does not indicate they are not proud of their country or nationality. A man of about 40 years old Hussey encountered shared, “For us, *La Haine* was like speaking out for the first time, letting the rest of France know that we exist.” When he was asked if he had taken part in the original riots in the early 1990s, those which had inspired the film, he replied. “Of course I did. We all did” (Hussey). Both politically and culturally, and as one of the earliest films to enter the canon of *banlieue* filmmaking, *La Haine* continues to be relevant and worthy of examination today. Artists today continue to produce representations of this space and of marginalized

groups, demonstrating a drive and a need to represent and disclose a more authentic France, and to argue that *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* should and will encompass all French.

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