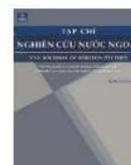




VNU Journal of Foreign Studies

Journal homepage: <https://jfs.ulis.vnu.edu.vn/>

“LA HAINE”: CINEMATIC INSIGHTS INTO PERIPHERY INEQUITY AND FRENCH NATIONAL IDENTITY

Tran Thuy Vi, Hoang Thi Thanh Huyen*

Faculty of Linguistics and Cultures of English-Speaking Countries,

VNU University of Languages and International Studies, No.2 Pham Van Dong, Cau Giay, Hanoi, Vietnam

Received 15 July 2024

Revised 13 August 2024; Accepted 26 August 2024

Abstract: The multicultural suburban areas, known as banlieues, surrounding French cities are marked by social inequalities, systemic discrimination, crime, and violence. Mathieu Kassovitz’s film “La Haine” (1995) is set in one such Paris suburb, capturing the daily lives of a group of multi-ethnic friends amidst escalating tensions between the French police and immigrant residents. The film “La Haine”, which received critical acclaim and won the César Award in 1996, serves as a powerful portrayal of life in the banlieues, capturing the essence of marginal inequality. By focusing on the contrasting experiences of suburban youth and the disparities between Paris and its outskirts, the film highlights societal issues that remain relevant even two decades later. This study uses “La Haine” as a lens to explore whether the challenges depicted in the film persist in contemporary society, demonstrating the enduring impact of marginal inequality. Through this analysis, the film emerges as a significant cultural artifact that challenges national identities in France.

Keywords: France, La Haine, inequality, banlieues, national identity

* Corresponding author.

Email address: hth2712@gmail.com

SỰ BẤT BÌNH ĐẲNG VÀ SỰ THÁCH THỨC BẢN SẮC PHÁP TRONG BỘ PHIM “LA HAINE”

Trần Thúy Vi, Hoàng Thị Thanh Huyền

*Khoa Ngôn ngữ và Văn hóa các nước nói tiếng Anh, Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội,
Số 2 Phạm Văn Đồng, Cầu Giấy, Hà Nội, Việt Nam*

Nhận bài ngày 15 tháng 07 năm 2024

Chỉnh sửa ngày 13 tháng 08 năm 2024; Chấp nhận đăng ngày 26 tháng 08 năm 2024

Tóm tắt: Banlieues là tên gọi của vùng ngoại ô của Pháp, nằm ngoài rìa các thành phố lớn, và thường gắn với dân nhập cư, sự bất bình đẳng xã hội, phân biệt chủng tộc, tội phạm và bạo lực giữa thanh niên và cảnh sát. “La Haine”, một bộ phim được công chiếu năm 1995 của đạo diễn Mathieu Kassovitz, lấy bối cảnh ở banlieues. Bộ phim xoay quanh cuộc sống thường ngày của ba chàng trai nhập cư sống tại vùng ngoại ô này trong một giai đoạn có nhiều bạo lực leo thang giữa cảnh sát và dân nhập cư sinh sống tại ngoại ô Paris. Bộ phim đã thành công khắc họa cuộc sống của dân nhập cư ở banlieues, và đã trở nên nổi tiếng khắp thế giới, đạt giải Cesar năm 1996. Bằng cách tập trung vào trải nghiệm đối lập của người trẻ ở ngoại thành và sự khác biệt Paris và ngoại ô Paris, bộ phim đã khắc họa thành công các vấn đề xã hội vẫn tồn tại 20 năm sau. Nghiên cứu này sử dụng bộ phim “La Haine” như một lăng kính để nghiên cứu những vấn đề bộ phim khắc họa, những vấn đề như sự bất bình đẳng và bạo lực giữa người trẻ và cảnh sát vẫn tồn tại trong xã hội hiện nay. Trong nghiên cứu này, bộ phim cũng nổi lên là tác phẩm văn hóa nổi bật, thách thức bản sắc Pháp.

Từ khóa: Pháp, La Haine, bất bình đẳng, banlieues, bản sắc dân tộc

1. Introduction

On June 29, 2023, protests erupted across France following the police shooting of 17-year-old Nahel in Nanterre, a suburb of Paris. The incident sparked widespread demonstrations, with signs reading “Justice for Nahel” appearing in cities like Marseille, Pau, and Lyon. These protests, documented extensively on social media, sometimes turned violent, leading to looting and clashes with law enforcement. Over 800 individuals were arrested overnight, and many more in the following days, while nearly 250 police officers were injured. The unrest echoed the 2005 riots following the deaths of Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna, highlighting ongoing tensions between police and marginalized communities. These two events, occurring nearly two decades apart, sparked widespread mobilization against injustice, both stemming from extensive police actions directed toward marginalized communities. These incidents created a shared collective experience that piqued our interest in the issues of periphery inequity and France’s national identity, particularly as they are portrayed in visual arts and cinematic narratives.

Central to French national identity is the principle of *laïcité*, emphasizing secularism and inclusivity, as stated by President Emmanuel Macron. However, marginalized residents in the banlieues often face social exclusion and economic disparity, leading to frequent unrest. The contrast between the ideals of the French Republic and the lived experiences of these populations underscores the complexities of national identity.

This paper explores these themes through the lens of the film “La Haine” (1995) by Mathieu Kassovitz, which portrays the daily struggles of multi-ethnic youth in the Parisian

suburbs amidst police conflict. The film's critical acclaim and its relevance to recent events make it a compelling case study. This study centers on the film's portrayal of suburban youth and the stark contrast between Paris and its suburbs, aiming to demonstrate how "La Haine" highlights the persistence of marginal inequality and its profound impact on national identity in France.

Our modes of inquiry are cinematography and *mise-en-scène*. Cinematography as a mode of inquiry refers to the use of visual storytelling techniques, such as camera angles, lighting, framing, and movement, to explore and analyze themes, characters, and social issues within a film. Cinematography is a critical tool for examining how the film "La Haine" visually represents the harsh realities of life in the banlieues and the marginal inequality experienced by its inhabitants. To be more specific, cinematography is used to investigate how specific visual choices—like the use of black and white film, close-up shots of characters, and the portrayal of the urban environment—convey the tension, alienation, and violence that define the lives of the characters. By analyzing these cinematic techniques, the study can reveal how the film not only narrates but also visually constructs the social and political landscape of the banlieues, making the audience feel the impact of marginalization and systemic discrimination. This approach allows the film to be examined not just as a narrative, but as a visual document that captures the essence of the socio-political issues it portrays. *Mise-en-scène* as a mode of inquiry refers to the examination of the visual elements within a film—such as setting, lighting, costume, and the arrangement of actors and objects within the frame—to understand how these elements contribute to the film's overall meaning and thematic exploration. *Mise-en-scène* helps portray how the film's visual composition reflects and amplifies the social realities of life in the banlieues, from the bleak urban landscapes to the cramped, deteriorating housing projects. The use of real locations, the stark contrast between the suburbs and Paris, and the choice of props and costumes all work together to create a sense of isolation, despair, and tension. By focusing on these elements, the study can reveal how the visual design of the film not only depicts but also critiques the socio-political conditions that lead to marginal inequality.

2. The Parisian Banlieues: Periphery of Inequity

The term "periphery of inequity," introduced by Angélil and Siress (2012), describes urban outskirts marked by poverty, unemployment, and social disadvantage. In France, the banlieues epitomize this concept.

The migration of lower-income classes to Paris's outskirts began during the Second Empire under Baron Haussmann, leading to social stratification (Harvey, 2004). The restructuring aimed to expel "dangerous classes" from the city center, relocating them to the eastern and northeastern districts. This process continued post-World War I (WWI), with immigrants from Italy settling in the outskirts. Paris exported various elements, including hospitals, cemeteries, factories, and low-income residents, leading to "uneven geographical development."

After World War II (WWII), significant waves of North African immigrants moved to France to address labor shortages (MNASIALI, 2014). They settled in new housing projects called "habitation à loyer modéré" (HLM), which were supported by the government to stimulate the economy during the "glorious thirty" (1945-1975) (Mulvey, 2011). However, the focus on quantity over quality in these projects led to further social and spatial segregation (Wong & Goldblum, 2016).

Wacquant (2018) describes "advanced marginality" as relegating marginalized

populations to neglected neighborhoods, devaluing and dehumanizing them. This form of exclusion is evident in the banlieues, where poor immigrant families face high unemployment and deteriorating living conditions.

During François Mitterrand's presidency (1981-1995), the Banlieue 89 Program aimed to improve living conditions in these areas through renovations and new housing models (Angélil & Siress, 2012). Despite these efforts, the program primarily focused on aesthetic improvements without adequately addressing unemployment, leaving many suburbs unchanged (Sicilianno, 2007).

HLMs have become emblematic of banlieue spaces, often portrayed negatively in the media as areas of crime and violence (Canteux, 2018). Films like "La Haine" (1995) highlight the decline of these neighborhoods and the struggles of marginalized youth. This perspective continues to shape cinematic depictions, emphasizing themes of criminal violence (Sylvia, 2012).

Urban planning and socio-political factors have significantly contributed to the creation and perpetuation of poverty and social marginalization in the banlieues. Historical policies focused on the city center have failed to address the needs of the marginalized periphery, resulting in ongoing social inequities.

The contrast between Paris and the banlieues

In "La Haine", Kassovitz emphasizes the contrast between the banlieues and Paris through his choices of scenery and shooting locations. Through cinematography, "La Haine" paints Chanteloup-les-Vignes as a concrete landscape dominated by towering public housing complexes, cramped living spaces, and bustling households, exemplified by Vinz and Hubert's cramped apartments. Vinz shared a room with his sister, and there was not much of a dining room due to the small kitchen. Hubert's apartment had a similar layout, with the dining room and kitchen being challenging to maneuver around. These settings underscore the harsh realities of poverty in the banlieue, where vacant lots serve as hubs for illicit activities, graffiti mars decaying buildings, and police presence is ubiquitous. Much like Spike Lee's portrayal of Brooklyn in "Do the Right Thing," the banlieue is portrayed as a perpetual battleground, where inhabitants are constantly exposed to violence. On the other hand, the city center of Paris radiates elegance, culture, and historical significance, marked by the symbolic monument- the Eiffel Tower and grand boulevards. Yet, under this facade, social issues still exist. A scene in the Paris subway further underscores social issues, as Said sarcastically advises a beggar to seek employment, highlighting the existence of poverty amidst the grandeur.

Figure 1

Banlieues and Paris Image in La Haine



Kassovitz skillfully contrasts the banlieues and Paris through deliberate technical and aesthetic choices. In Paris, he employs expansive camera movements and long, sweeping shots that capture the city's grandeur and fluidity. In contrast, scenes set in the banlieues are filmed with close-up, monochromatic shots and a smaller technical crew, creating a more intimate and constrained atmosphere. When filming in Paris, Kassovitz uses deep focus to seamlessly integrate side characters into their surroundings, emphasizing their connection to the city. However, when focusing on the three main characters in Paris, he sharpens the focus on them while deliberately blurring the cityscape behind them, highlighting their sense of disconnection and alienation from the urban environment.

The director's manipulation of camera techniques is particularly effective in conveying the characters' experiences. For example, during tense nighttime scenes in the city, Kassovitz uses shorter shots and a telephoto lens to create a disorienting ambiance. The shorter shots—often close-ups or medium shots—concentrate on the characters or specific objects, minimizing the surrounding environment. Combined with the narrow field of view provided by the telephoto lens, this technique effectively communicates the isolation and estrangement felt by the young protagonists, underscoring their exclusion from the dominant urban space.

Conversely, when filming in the banlieue, Kassovitz extensively uses long shots and wide-angle lenses to capture the full scene, including the environment. These long shots emphasize the characters' familiarity and sense of belonging within their community, while also interweaving themes of exclusion and integration between the banlieue and the city. This contrast in filming techniques not only enhances the visual storytelling but also deepens the thematic exploration of belonging and alienation in "La Haine".

Figure 2

Medium Shots on the Characters and Less Concentration on the Surroundings



Figure 3*Long shots in La Haine*

“La Haine” portrays these stark contrasts with the realism and authenticity of a documentary film, distinguishing itself from other films like “The 400 Blow” (1959) and “Breathless” (1960) in terms of style. For the most realistic images in the film, he chooses not to use film stock with the characteristic grain and smaller contrast ratio of documentary film. Instead, he goes for a black-and-white film tone, which lends a gritty authenticity reminiscent of CCTV footage or documentary style, intensifying the portrayal of the banlieues as a desolate environment.

Andrew (1995) has described the aesthetic of poetic realism as something that connects with societal experiences in an analogous manner, rather than a direct one. He selects Chanteloup-les-Vignes, a real banlieue, as the shooting location—though it remains unnamed in the film—which enhances the authenticity of the banlieue scenes. Through common banlieue symbols in Chanteloup-les-Vignes like HLMs buildings, courtyards, playgrounds, deserted parking lots, police officers loitering everywhere, and cramped apartments with large families, the film allows viewers to see a real banlieue. The exact location of the film is not disclosed to the audience, but this ambiguity allows them to associate the narrative with any banlieue in France and its related societal problems, thereby enhancing the film's universal appeal.

The film’s commitment to realism is further enhanced by the inclusion of seemingly inconsequential dialogue, such as Said's brother's commentary on “Candid Camera”, which reflects the film's ethos of capturing the authenticity of everyday life, even in its mundane or seemingly irrelevant moments.

Figure 4*The Trio Listens to a Young Boy Discuss the French Candid Camera in La Haine*

Despite its commitment to portraying genuine experiences, “La Haine” maintains a distance from documentary realism, as evidenced by scenes like the police chase through narrow alleyways, which metaphorically depict the feeling of entrapment. These scenes, along with other extended shots in the film, possess a lyrical quality, blending realism with cinematic artistry.

The suburban youth - the “Other” in France

In “La Haine”, director Mathieu Kassovitz skillfully portrays the three main characters—Vinz, Hubert, and Saïd—as “others,” existing on the margins of French society through the following themes:

Diverse backgrounds. The banlieues and their characteristics were shaped by countless cultures imported from around the world. The film mirrors this reality by depicting the black-blanc-beur trio—Hubert, of Black descent, Vinz, a White Jew, and Saïd, of Arab origin—as its central characters, representing the “Other” in French society at the time. However, Tarr (2005) argues that La Haine primarily addresses exclusion rather than ethnicity. Higbee (2013) states that the protagonists’ exclusion is emphasized through the spatial disadvantage of the urban periphery rather than ethnic or cultural differences, evident as the film unfolds in the banlieue in its first half and in the predominantly French and white center of Paris in the second half.

Shared struggles. Despite their different backgrounds, the trio faces common struggles—unemployment, limited opportunity, stereotypes and exclusion.

Limited opportunities. The film juxtaposes various locations, contrasting the suburbs with the more traditional and romantic parts of Paris. From abandoned buildings filled with graffiti to prestigious art galleries where the trio feels out of place. The trio’s social interaction context is different from that of people residing in the city. They cannot afford to hang out in traditional venues like coffee shops or dance floors. Nevertheless, the young people in that neighborhood have built their own social hub on roofs or vacant lots that are covered with debris and graffiti. Making the most of the available area, they ingeniously utilize the surroundings, setting up impromptu hot dog stands and engaging in lively conversations. As the main characters line up for food, a strong sense of community is fostered when the seller shakes Hubert’s hand and gives him a discount. Their experiences as outsiders bind them together, creating a sense of camaraderie. Kassovitz’s camera deftly navigates the rooftop, capturing the diverse interactions and transactions taking place. Conversations often revolve around topics like drugs and incarceration. However, their gathering is abruptly disrupted when the police arrive and forcefully disperse them, asserting that they do not belong in the area.

Figure 5

The Roof Where the Youth Hang out



Spending their days wandering around the banlieue, it becomes evident that the trio of young men are unemployed. With most of their time spent idling at home, congregating in vacant lots, or on rooftops, their lack of employment makes life challenging, leading them to engage in increasingly nefarious activities. In fact, France is facing a large youth unemployment rate. In 2018, the nationwide youth unemployment rate stood at 21%, with many suburban areas experiencing a sharp increase to 40%. By 2020, young people under 25 were disproportionately represented in Priority Urban Neighborhoods (QPVs), where the unemployment rate for those under 30 rose to 30.4%. In 2023, the employment center, Pôle emploi, was vandalized and set on fire following the death of young Nahel M., serving as a symbol for communities whose residents often face significant barriers to accessing employment opportunities.

Society's vices. The film portrays drug use and theft as prominent among these hardships. While the attempted car theft in Paris is a memorable scene for many viewers, another less conspicuous moment deserves attention. It unfolds in a grocery store where Said and Vinz are purchasing items for Vinz's grandmother. The focus shifts to Said, who discreetly pilfers cakes from the shelves, slipping them into his pocket without paying. Meanwhile, Vinz attempts to placate the cashier, citing his grandmother's regular patronage and his shortfall in funds. The cashier's skeptical response, "You are not your grandmother," hints at distrust. Then, Vinz's outburst towards an elderly woman behind him: "Stop muttering and give me a franc, you old dinosaur!" This line is ironic since the "old dinosaur" he is talking about is a small and elderly person, reminiscent of his own grandmother. Despite his imposing stature, Vinz's behavior resembles that of a petulant child. He said: "Fine, just give me the red pepper!" As he walked out of the store, he turned to Said and said: "My grandmother is going to kill me; she hates red peppers." Just a minute ago, he was rude and intended to take money from someone the same age as his grandmother. But as soon as he walked out of the store, he was afraid that his grandmother would be angry with him for not buying the right kind of chili. He respects his grandmother but is disrespectful and has bad intentions towards others.

Beyond theft, the involvement of the young men in drugs is also apparent. While Said and Vinz are portrayed as users, Hubert takes on the role of a small-time drug dealer to make ends meet. This is evident in scenes depicting money exchanges on the rooftop and Hubert's interactions with other dealers in Paris, highlighting the extent to which economic hardship drives their involvement in illicit activities.

Figure 6

Said Stole in the Grocery Store

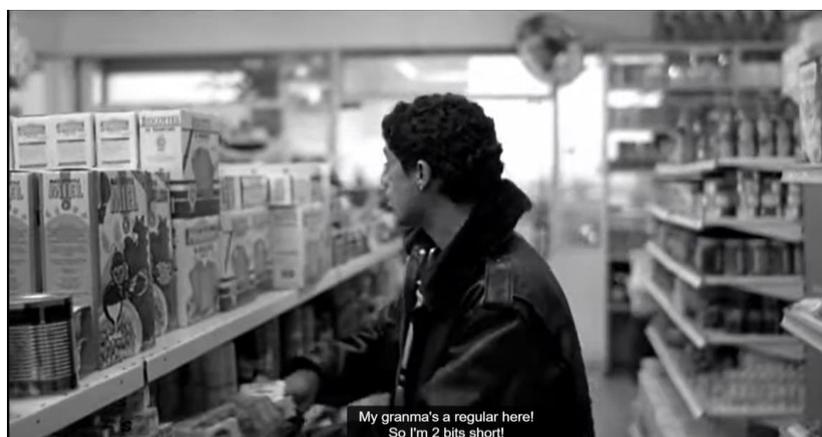


Figure 7*Selling Drug in the Roof*

Stereotyped. According to Champagne (1991) in "The Media Construction of Social Discomfort," media portrayal of the banlieues consistently highlights urban crime, violence, drug issues, and police involvement. Champagne suggests that journalists often sensationalize stories to meet readers' expectations, perpetuating a cycle of biased reporting. Furthermore, he asserts that residents of these areas lack control over their representation in the national media, leaving them voiceless and marginalized. This scenario is reflected in a scene from "La Haine" where a reporter stops their car and questions the main characters about their knowledge of the recent rebellion. Implicitly assuming their involvement, the media's attempt to implicate them in violence reflects racist undertones, stereotyping them based on their suburban residence and immigrant backgrounds. The trio challenges these assumptions, refusing to accept the portrayal of themselves as thugs, particularly rebuffing the questions of a white female journalist. Additionally, the scene featuring a group of reporters standing on a bridge, physically distant from the trio below, symbolizes the power and dominance of mainstream French culture. Another example of banlieue youth being subject to common prejudices is when an older neighbor scolds Said for taking part in the riot at the beginning of the film. This caused the young man to retort "Did you see me there?". Another notable scene is when the television displays images of the city ablaze from the previous night's riots while Hubert sits at the kitchen table with his mother. These scenes appear to validate Moudjaoui's (2018) contention that residents of the banlieues are held responsible for issues beyond their influence, such as their familial origins, educational background, residential location, crime rates in their area, or even their birthplace. Consequently, they face exclusion and limited opportunities.

Figure 8*The News Crew Asks the Trio About the Riot*

It is evident that mainstream media plays a significant role in perpetuating these stereotypes, fueling the animosity of "native" French individuals towards residents of banlieues and immigrants in general. When reporting on the banlieues, these areas are often depicted as isolated districts cut off from the rest of the country, portrayed as strongholds for armed gangs. In her 2018 study "Media Representation of the Banlieues" in France, Fatima Moudjaoui found that 2017-2018 articles about the banlieues consistently portray them negatively, focusing on issues such as illegal activities, a failing education system, territories abandoned by rappers, violence, and despair. In addition to textual narratives, the media also uses imagery to reinforce negative stereotypes of the banlieues, showing scenes of riots, burning cars, and police arrests. A recent example of biased media coverage occurred after the June 2023 riots in the eastern suburbs of Paris in Nanterre, where the BBC's report featured images of burned cars, damaged shops, and a heavy police presence. Such images often shape public perception of the banlieues. The violent acts reported in these articles reflect societal fractures, further exacerbating the experiences of those living in suburban areas, while reinforcing dominant narratives about the Other (Rousset, 2016). The "Other" is often scorned and unable to integrate because the "Us" retains the power to ensure the "Other's" inferiority and creates "a homogeneous French national identity from which immigrants living in the banlieues are excluded" (Costelloe, 2014, p.322).

Figure 9

Image of the banlieues on BBC News Website



Exclusion. Additionally, the characters face exclusion whenever it appears they might integrate into society. They encounter denial of entry on no less than five occasions: at showrooms, trains, rooftops, luxury apartment buildings in Paris, and a club. In particular, the gallery is the context that most clearly shows the social exclusion of the three main characters as well as the banlieue people. The stark contrast between space and clothing style, knowledge about art and the way they interact with others highlights their marginalized status. The gallery, representing a space of culture and sophistication, inherently excludes those who are ethnically diverse or economically disadvantaged. While the other attendees are dressed formally, the main characters stand out in their casual hip-hop attire. Their lack of familiarity with the artworks is evident. The works in the gallery made Said confused and dumbfounded, saying "It's scary." A similarly confused Vinz asked Hubert if "the guy that made this is famous." Their bewilderment is underscored by their reaction to a simple porcelain dog sculpture, suggesting their limited exposure to art and cultural experiences, especially in comparison to the cosmopolitan environment of present-day Paris.

After growing bored of observing the artwork, the trio made their way to the refreshment table. The boys munched on peanuts and other refreshing drinks, while rudely taunting the waiter who handed them glasses of champagne. Across the room, Said and Hubert spotted two

women they found attractive and decided to initiate a conversation. Hubert took the lead as Said admitted to feeling too shy. Initially, the exchange seemed promising, with one of the women even joking "Haven't we met before somewhere?". Observing that the conversation was progressing well, Said approached, introduced himself, and promptly requested one of the women's phone numbers. Regrettably, due to the woman's social class and viewpoint, she responded, "You're all the same," referring to individuals like him as a collective. The situation intensified when the other woman defended her friend, stating, "You're jerks. We would have liked to have a conversation with you, but you immediately became aggressive. How can we respect you?" This remark made Said feel embarrassed and out of place, prompting him to angrily raise his hand in a threatening gesture towards the woman. To make matters worse, Vinz retorted, "Who are you? The girls in the Wonderbra ads?" Amid the heated altercation, the gallery owner stepped in, prompting the main characters to leave the exhibition. As they exited the exhibition in frustration, the gallerist shrugged his shoulders and lamented, "Troubled youth!", expressing sympathy for the boys as mere products of their disadvantaged environments. Connel (2023) has noted that "troubled" is a significant misunderstanding. The poor behavior of the three main characters stems from the fear and alienation they experience in this specific location. At first glance, the three young men appear to be ordinary villains, but the disgusted glances directed at them, the stark contrast in attire (the three main characters wear a more hip-hop and casual style, while the other characters wear more formal suits), and the different use of dialect (e.g., the man refers to the three boys as "gentlemen" and Hubert calls him "pop") contribute to the escalating sense of threat among the three men. The music also plays a role in portraying this feeling among the three of them. At the start of the scene, the music is soft as the three main characters merely glance at the artwork without paying attention to their surroundings. When Said is rejected and feels insulted, the music abruptly intensifies. As a result, viewers can associate these sounds with a threat, related to Said's reaction to the two women's unexpected responses. Finally, as more characters appear and the three main characters are shouting at the rest of the gallery, the music completely stops, highlighting and emphasizing Said's, Hubert's, and Vinz's embarrassing and obnoxious reactions. With the aid of these sound aspects, Kassovitz creates an environment that feels hostile and gloomy.

Figure 10

The Trio Was Asked to Leave the Gallery



Attempt to escape. The sole genuine solution to the myriad issues depicted in the film is to leave the neighborhood, as Hubert shares with his mother. Hubert emerges as the character most driven to break free from confinement, evidenced by his determination to support his family. This aspiration is evident during a conversation when Vinz and Said visit Hubert amidst

the charred remains of his boxing gym, discussing its destruction during the riot:

Hubert: I knew this would eventually happen.

Saïd: Then why did you work your ass off for it?

Vinz: Because he thought it was worth it, d*ck.

Despite anticipating the inevitable, he attempted to open it in a desperate bid to escape. The irony lies in the fact that the very environment he sought to flee ended up thwarting his efforts. The film suggests that the banlieues themselves contribute to the problem, insinuating that the culture within and surrounding these neighborhoods inevitably breeds violence. This culture encompasses not just the minority culture within the banlieues, but also factors such as the economic prospects available, the treatment of the banlieues by law enforcement, the political landscape in France, media portrayal, and more.

The poignant reality is that despite Hubert's longing to break free from it all, the film quickly illustrates why this aspiration is unattainable. His struggles to assist his sister with her homework underscore the limited opportunities for traditional means of upward mobility, such as education. This realization leaves him feeling trapped. As he rides the train and encounters a sign that reads "The world is yours," his gaze meets the camera as he closes his eyes, symbolizing a moment of resignation. While later in the film, Saïd alters the sign to read "The world is ours," the underlying message remains abundantly clear. Indeed, that line encapsulates a central message of the film, challenging stereotypes of banlieue residents as mere delinquents prone to rioting without cause. It portrays these individuals as ordinary people, neither inherently good nor bad.

Figure 11

Saïd Change the Word From "Yours" to "Ours"



The film sheds light on the toxic and confining environment of the banlieues, highlighting how simplistic responses, such as "they shouldn't riot" or "they should study more", fail to grasp the complex reality of their situation. Realistically, the primary question is not what actions the people could have taken to prevent unrest, as their options were limited and the systemic issues they face are deeply entrenched.

3. Persistent Violence

The World Health Organization defines violence as the intentional or threatening use of force against oneself, another individual, or a group, resulting in physical or psychological harm, or even death (Krug et al., 2012). Violence encompasses acts of aggression that cause damage or destruction. According to Riches (1986), violence is an act of harm considered

legitimate by the perpetrator but illegal by some observers.

In France, ethnic minorities often face violence, particularly from the police, who view them as lesser members of society, leading to racial profiling and harassment. Research indicates that high inequality levels correlate with increased violence (Gartner, 1990). Krivo and Peterson (1996) suggest that the link between race and violent crime is largely due to extreme hardship. Inequality and social exclusion sever ties between minority groups and the community, fostering violence among youth against state symbols.

Violence in France typically involves clashes between police and youth, escalating to protests and riots. Castañeda (2022) argues that dismissing the demands of the oppressed provokes youth to target state symbols they perceive as excluding and controlling. Roux (2017) found that banlieue youth have a more negative view of the police than adults, citing harassment and discrimination.

“La Haine” reflects this cycle of violence, encapsulated in the phrase “La Haine attire la haine” (hatred breeds hatred). The film portrays discrimination, police brutality, and riots as fueling a cycle of hostility. The opening scene with a Molotov cocktail and the quote about falling from a skyscraper underscores the ongoing deterioration of French society.

The scene erupts into protests and riots, accompanied by Bob Marley's “Burning and Looting”, creating a visceral atmosphere where the sounds of the city blend seamlessly with the music. Kassovitz said he wanted the sounds of the city to become a part of their music: “a growl, a layer of sound but a natural sound”. The original music featured sporadic siren sounds that broke up the reggae beat. As Marley sang, “Could not recognize the faces standing over me / All dressed in uniforms of brutality,” Molotov cocktails, tear gas, and batons descended from the skies. The lyrics of the song, with mentions of uniforms and violence, further emphasize the connection between the fictional narrative of the film and the real-world political and social turmoil. Only after this intense opening scene are the three main characters introduced: Said, seen defacing a police car; Hubert, seen practicing boxing in a gym that has been destroyed by fire; and Vinz, waking up in bed and concealing a pistol he stole from a police officer. According to Gott (2016), these character introductions set the tone for the rest of the film, illustrating the raw and gritty reality of life in the banlieue and the simmering tensions that underlie their existence. In this opening sequence, the director utilizes detailed news footage of riots, showcasing instances of police violence and resistance. This footage serves as a prelude to the fate of both the riots and the main characters, who ultimately become victims of police brutality at the end of the film.

Figure 12

The Real Images of Riots in the Suburbs



The second half of the film, when the three main characters arrive in Paris, most clearly demonstrates marginalized individuals as targets of both police brutality and racism. A typical scene illustrating the victimization of the banlieue youth by the police and the reinforcement of stereotypes occurs when two of the three characters, Said and Hubert, are apprehended after drawing attention to themselves near a luxury apartment building, prompting bystanders to call the police. Following their arrest, they endure torture at the police station before eventually being released. Additionally, the character Hubert experiences sexual assault at the hands of the police, who make derogatory remarks such as, "You look like a b*tch from behind. A nice b to suck me off!". During this scene, Hubert and Said find themselves subjected to humiliating treatment intended to serve as a lesson for a new rookie police officer (Rossignon, 1995; Vincendeau, 2005). The officers, treating the two young men as mere objects, openly discuss their desire to harm them but restrain themselves. The policemen demonstrate techniques they consider professional and effective for subduing individuals, including forcefully grabbing the head, pinching the ears, and employing a method known as the "Shanghai squeeze". These tactics evoke a troubling history of police brutality, reminiscent of the systemic abuses endured by black men in cities like Chicago and Philadelphia. Such practices have been used for generations, with reports of police using extreme methods such as attaching individuals to car batteries or resorting to physical violence as a means of control and punishment. The scene underscores the disturbing reality that police officers view the lives of these young men as expendable and treat their suffering as a game, perpetuating a cycle of conflict.

Figure 13

Saïd and Hubert get Abused by Racist Police Officers



Teaching new police recruits how to assault young men like that shows that police brutality will not disappear, but will be continued. While the new recruit appears visibly shaken by the abuse he witnesses, he lacks the courage to intervene, reflecting the pervasive culture of complicity within the police force. His reluctance to act suggests a glimmer of conscience, but the toxic environment in which he operates raises doubts about his future trajectory. Despite his initial hesitation, there is no guarantee that he will resist becoming like his abusive superiors, illustrating the insidious nature of institutional corruption within law enforcement.

Following their release from the cell, they rush to the station only to miss the last train home, leaving them stranded in Paris. Subsequently, they are ejected from the art gallery and denied by a taxi, prompting Said to curse, "Nique c'est délire, on est enfermés dehors" (F* it's crazy, we're locked outside). This quote encapsulates the characters' frustration with their marginalized existence in French society. As episodes of exclusion escalate, punctuated by

encounters with skinheads, the cycle of violence is perpetuated by entrenched social and institutional prejudices. Upon their return to the banlieue at 6 a.m., Vinz inexplicably hands the pistol to Hubert. In a tragic turn of events, a police officer arrests and accidentally shoots Vinz, leading to a tense standoff between Hubert and the officer. The film ends with a haunting image of Hubert and the officer aiming guns at each other, followed by a sudden blackout and the sound of gunshots. This ending underscores the tragic irony of Hubert's earlier catchphrase, "So far so good... but what matters is not the fall but the landing." Kassovitz's portrayal suggests a belief in the escalating violence within the banlieue, depicting it as inevitable and cyclical. The symbolic exchange of the gun from Vinz to Hubert signifies the perpetuation of violence, with Hubert poised to avenge his friend's death. The abrupt conclusion leaves viewers in a state of uncertainty and speculation, reflecting the grim reality that regardless of the outcome, riots are bound to erupt again. With such an ambiguous ending, Kassovitz anticipates a never-ending cycle of violence for the people in the banlieue (Rossignon, 1995; Vincendeau, 2005).

Figure 14

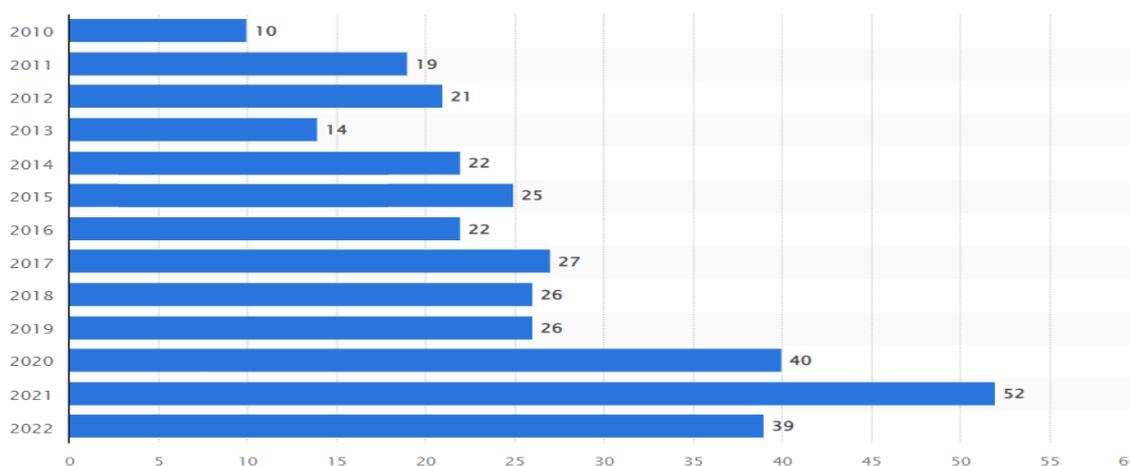
The Ending Scene



A film from over two decades ago remains relevant to today's incidents involving police "slip-ups" and racial discrimination. Police "slip-ups" continue to occur with alarming frequency, and nationwide riots have become a recurring phenomenon in recent years. As per the data in figure 15, there has been a rise in fatalities resulting from police interventions since 2010. The year 2021 marked a peak with a record 52 deaths. Meanwhile, society has become desensitized to violence, with incidents of police brutality routinely captured and circulated on news and social media platforms. It is ironic how organizations that cause violence tell the people they oppress that it's not an option for them. Then, the oppressed cannot stand it anymore and behave the way they were treated. The violence happened again. As Hubert astutely remarks, "Hatred breeds hatred," indicating that these protests are not without cause. The underlying issue lies in the systemic violence perpetrated against marginalized communities by those in positions of authority. However, expecting a solution to emerge from within the same system that perpetuates the problem seems unrealistic.

Figure 15

Annual Number of Deaths Linked to Police Intervention in France Between 2010 and 2022
(Source: Statista Research Department)



“La Haine” also predates the Black Lives Matter movement. Although “La Haine” was created as a political commentary on 1990s France, it would be inaccurate to suggest that its themes have been irrelevant in France and globally in recent years. A nationwide study conducted in 2017 on police misconduct revealed that “40% of young men aged 18 to 24 reported being stopped by police, as did 80% of men aged 18 to 24” who were perceived to be of black or Arab descent. Despite France’s multiracial makeup, studies indicate that racism persists in society despite professed secularism and “color-blindness.” Individuals of black or North African descent, particularly youth, are disproportionately targeted by police, being 20 times more likely to be stopped and asked for identification than their white counterparts (Elzas, 2023). However, official data fails to fully capture the extent of the disadvantages faced by these communities.

4. Challenging the Notion of French National Identity

The disparities faced by immigrants and the banlieue people are powerfully depicted in “La Haine”. Over 20 years since its release, the film’s relevance endures in reflecting contemporary French society. France has grappled with immigration and nationalism, especially during the 2005 and 2016 elections. Despite being a coming-of-age story, “La Haine” explores French identity through its protagonists and the cultural convergence in the banlieues.

France prides itself on being a multicultural nation, shaped by waves of immigration, particularly in the early 20th century. Policies have aimed to foster diversity, such as President Macron’s 2021 initiative to promote social diversity in education. The transformation of France’s national colors to “black-blanc-beur” during the 1998 FIFA World Cup symbolized unity and multiculturalism, emphasizing the ideology of ‘solidarité’.

Despite these efforts, recurring unrest suggests a gap between the ideal and reality. The removal of the word “race” from the constitution in 2018 aimed to combat racism, but systemic issues persist. France’s assimilationist model expects immigrants to abandon their original identities, a challenging expectation for non-white immigrants, especially from the Maghreb and Africa. Policies like the veil ban and recent prohibitions on religious attire in schools underscore the difficulties in balancing secularism and multiculturalism.

“La Haine” reveals the hidden facets of France, focusing on social disparity and police violence. Its characters—Hubert, Saïd, and Vinz—represent a multicultural identity, highlighting the flaws in France’s social solidarity. The film critiques the motto “Liberté, égalité, fraternité” as it fails to extend to banlieue residents, who are categorized as “Other” and face mistreatment due to racial and cultural disparities.

Figure 16

Hubert and Vinz on the rooftop



In the film “La Haine”, discrimination and inequality are shown through racial prejudice and violent clashes between the young characters and the police. The Maghrebian, African, and Jewish characters are not explicitly stigmatized due to their biological 'otherness', but rather their cultural 'otherness' as inhabitants of the banlieue - which becomes a spatialized, racialized symbol of political unrest, societal fragmentation, crime, and violence (Siciliano, 2007, p. 220). When Vinz expresses his fear of becoming the next Arab killed in a police station, Saïd humorously refers to Vinz's honorary Arab status. The film provides the police officers with minimal dialogue, but their actions result in grim tragedies that the trio seeks to avenge through violence. This violence gives these areas a collective territorial expression, making them visible. However, the vocal expression through violence has led to the association of banlieues with it, with images of torched cars, looted shops, and confrontations between police officers and stone-throwing youths.

To conclude, “La Haine” exposes the marginalized and violent experiences of diverse cultural groups in France, particularly the youth of the banlieue and their interactions with the police. The film challenges the French government's portrayal of the nation as an egalitarian society where “liberty, equality, and fraternity” apply to all.

“La Haine” is not alone in exploring these themes. Films such as “Hexagone” (1994), “Ma 6-T va Crack-er” (1997), “Wesh Wesh, qu'est-ce qui se passe?” (2001), “Divines” (2016), and “Les Misérables” (2019) also address inequality and police brutality in the banlieues. Each film offers a unique perspective: “Ma 6-T va Crack-er” focuses solely on the banlieues, while “Les Misérables” shifts the focus to the police, highlighting the ongoing tension and disparity between Parisians and peripheral residents.

These films collectively underscore social injustice and violence in disadvantaged urban areas, challenging the government's constructed national identity. “La Haine” remains a seminal work in this genre, exemplifying the persistent struggles faced by marginalized communities in France.

5. Conclusion

“La Haine” portrays life on the outskirts of France, underscoring the absence of

- Krivo, L. J., & Peterson, R. D. (1996). Extremely disadvantaged neighborhoods and urban crime. *Social Forces*, 75(2), 619-648.
- Krug, E. G., Dahlberg, L. L., Mercy, J. A., Zwi, A. B., Lozano, R., & World Health Organization. (2002). World report on violence and health. World Health Organization.
- Laachir, K. (2007). France's 'ethnic' minorities and the question of exclusion. *Mediterranean Politics*, 12(1), 99-110.
- Keay, L. (2023, June 29). Why are people protesting in France - and why is there a history of rioting? *Sky News*. <https://news.sky.com/story/why-are-people-protesting-in-france-and-why-is-there-a-history-of-rioting-12911541>
- MNasiali, M. (2014). Citizens, squatters, and asocials: The right to housing and the politics of difference in post-liberation France. *The American Historical Review*, 119(2), 434-459.
- Mulvey, M. J. (2011). *Sheltering French families: Parisian suburbia and the politics of housing, 1939–1975* (Doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).
- Niang, M. F. (2019). *Identités françaises: Banlieues, féminités et universalisme*. In *Identités françaises*. Brill.
- Petterson, D. (2016). Echoes of poetic realism in Matthieu Kassovitz's *La Haine*. *Cincinnati Romance Review*, 39, 27-57.
- Rossignon, C. (Producer), & Kassovitz, M. (Director). (1995). *La Haine* [Motion picture]. France: Criterion Collection.
- Rousset, S. (2016). *The marginalization of people living in French banlieues: A co-cultural analysis of media discourse in La Haine and newspapers* (Master's thesis, Southern Illinois University).
- Roux, G. (2017). Expliquer le rejet de la police en banlieue: Discriminations, ciblage des quartiers et racialisation. Un état de l'art. *Droit et Société*, 97(3), 555-568.
- Sciolino, E. (2006, March 30). Violent youths threaten to hijack demonstrations in Paris. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/30/international/europe/30smashers.html>
- Sharma, S., & Sharma, A. (2000). So far so good... *La Haine* and the poetics of the everyday. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 17(3), 103-116.
- Shariff, F. D. (2008). The liminality of culture: Second generation South Asian Canadian identity and the potential for postcolonial texts. *Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 5(2).
- Siciliano, A. (2007). *La Haine: Framing the 'urban outcasts'*. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 6(2), 211-230.
- Silvester, H. (2018). *Translating Banlieue film: An integrated analysis of subtitled non-standard language* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Glasgow).
- Soljour, K. E. (2019). *Beyond the Banlieue: French postcolonial migration & the politics of a sub-Saharan identity* (Doctoral dissertation, Syracuse University).
- Sonnleitner, M. W. (1987). Of logic and liberation: Frantz Fanon on terrorism. *Journal of Black Studies*, 17(3), 287-304.
- Sulzer, A. (2016, September 18). A Fréjus, Marine Le Pen peaufine sa stature "gaullienne." *L'Express*. https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/fn/afrejus-marine-le-pen-peaufine-sa-staturegaullienne_1831832.html
- Tarr, C. (2019). Reframing difference: Beur and banlieue filmmaking in France. In *Reframing difference*. Manchester University Press.
- Truong, F. (2019). The good, the bad and the ugly: Banlieue youth as a figure of speech and as speaking figures. In *The Routledge handbook of French politics and culture* (pp. 145-152). Routledge.
- Vincendeau, G. (2005). *La Haine*. University of Illinois Press.
- Wilson, T. J. (2017). The representation of discrimination in French society in the film *La Haine*.
- Wong, T. C., & Goldblum, C. (2016). Social housing in France: A permanent and multifaceted challenge for public policies. *Land Use Policy*, 54, 95-102.