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Rifat Mursalin July 31, 2016

Exploring Violence in the Parisian *Banlieues*: Societies on the Margin

by

Rifat Mursalin

Subha Xavier

Adviser

Department of French and Italian Studies

Subha Xavier

Adviser

Sam Cherribi

Committee Member

Catherine Dana

Committee Member

Valérie Loichot

Committee Member

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Abstract

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Although technically the French word *banlieue* means "suburb," it is an extremely loaded term in its contemporary socio-cultural context. The term evokes images of run-down *cités* (working-class housing projects) located on the peripheries of larger French cities dominated by violence, unemployment, criminality, and social exclusion. This thesis will serve as a starting point of inquiry into violence in the Parisian *banlieues*, by exploring *banlieue* identity – and what that might mean – through several key aspects such as language, discourse, fictional representations, and social exclusion. The presence of violence in *banlieue* French cannot be reified into a reflection or representation of malice or animosity alone, it is simply a response by the inhabitants of the *banlieues* to the place and status they are ascribed in modern French society, that is at its utmost margins.

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Introduction

The *Collins French to English Dictionary*, published by HarperCollins Publishers LLC, one of the world's largest publishing companies, translates the French word *banlieue* to simply "suburb" in English. At a first glance, it seems quite candid, but any reader can quickly find the complication replete in this word and its connotations. Although technically the French word *banlieue* means "suburbs," it is an extremely loaded term in its contemporary socio-cultural context. The term evokes images of run-down *cités* (working-class housing projects) located on the peripheries of larger French cities dominated by violence, unemployment, criminality, social exclusion and populated by alienated male youth-particularly of (North African) immigrant origin (Higbee 41). Indeed, the *Collins French to English Dictionary* includes six example sentences for the word *banlieue*. Three of those sentences, 50% of them, use the words "violence", "suspects", "arrest", and "shock".

Beth Epstein in her 2012 presentation on *Multiculturalism and the French Banlieue* refers to the "long-simmering problem of the country's troubled *banlieue*" (Epstein 2012). She discusses the challenging issues of contemporary Paris, focusing on the heavily minority-populated and disadvantaged suburbs fostering so many of the problems. Epstein maintains that these difficulties relate to long-term unemployment, police harassment, youth disaffection, and rising extremisms. In the French *banlieues*, the economic transformations of the past forty years have created a class dispossessed that the post-War language of social mobility - implicit to the suburbs' construction - can no longer contain (Epstein 2012). The efforts in France to create a collective social fabric have led to the neighborhoods disconnected from the hope of upward mobility that instigated their formation.

At their inception, the French suburban projects were built in order to increase social mobility for the inhabitants. In the suburbs, often an hour away on the train from central Paris, projects called HLMs (*Habitations à Loyers Modérés*) were built starting in the late 1940s to provide housing for those left homeless after the Second World War, and by the 1970s, these housing projects were increasingly populated by working-class immigrants (Dubois 17). The *banlieues*, therefore, are not a product of intended segregation, but rather they are a reflection of integration with unintended consequences. Erected quickly during the boom years of the 1950s and '60s, they were to help speed the social integration and mobility of millions of people living in substandard conditions after World War II (Epstein 2012). In contemporary times, the banlieues have become a contentious topic of debate in the French public life.

The youths of these neighborhoods, many of whom are children of immigrants, have become an 'issue' through which problems of economic exclusion, cultural difference and national identity are discussed (Dubois 21). The social context of the *banlieues* is marred by the prevalence of social and economic marginalization and disenfranchisement. *Banlieues*, a term that previously served to denote peripheral parts of urban areas, have recently become a byword for ethnic alterity, deviance, and disadvantage; the mass media have played a central role in this reconstruction (Hargreaves 609). The resultant social problems associated with economic stress – delinquency, dependency, poor educational achievement, broken homes – are of course those that now define the dominant image of the fractious *banlieue* (Epstein 2012). Since the early 1980s, in particular, the term *banlieue* has been used with a strong social connotation of 'social-problem area' or *quartier défavorisé*, *quartier en difficulté*, or *zone urbaine sensible* (Pooley 341). As Epstein put it, discourses of race and difference, especially in places as ethnically mixed

as the French *banlieue*, need to be considered not as end-points but as the starting point for inquiry.

This thesis will serve as a starting point of inquiry into violence in the Parisian *banlieues*, by exploring *banlieue* identity – and what that might mean – through several key aspects such as language, discourse, fictional representations, and social exclusion. The aim of this thesis is to delineate the Parisian *banlieues* and thoroughly analyze the socioeconomic marginalization of their residents. Tim Pooley, in researching the urban youth vernacular in French cities, states "The banlieues have a reputation for both physical and verbal violence" (Pooley 344). Using the 2005 Paris riots and the clash with the police force as an example of serious incidents of physical violence, he characterizes verbal violence in part by the concepts which feature strongly in the lexical elements and the discursive codes of the youth slang.

The first chapter of this thesis "*Banlieue* Violence: Reality of Riots" discusses physical violence from the angle of collective violence, as it relates to riots. It considers the roots and purposes of the riots in *banlieues*, in particular, the riots of 2005, with an emphasis on the collective physical violence that accompanied the riots. It probes into issues such as: Is violence – and specifically collective violence – a necessary mode of expression in the *banlieue*? The first chapter also examines the French political and economic landscape, through careful analyses of economic data such as unemployment and rates of poverty in the *banlieues* and the performance of French politicians in the electoral structure following the 2005 riots. The second chapter "*Banlieue* Violence: Fictional Representation" explores the fictional representation of violence in the *banlieue* in cultural productions, using Pierre Morel's action film *Banlieue 13* (2004), released a year before the 2005 riots. This chapter uses the apocalyptic angle of the 2004 film to produce insights on violence in the *banlieues.*

The third chapter, "*Banlieue* Violence: Language of the *Banlieue*" treats the topic of violence in the language of the *banlieue* with an analysis of 'verbal violence' and its implications. It addresses questions such as: Does the language of the *banlieue* have a particular affinity towards violence? If so, can this language thrive without it? Languages can provide an immense amount of insights into societies; the language of the *banlieue* is a language colored by the prevailing socioeconomic situations of marginalization, seclusion, and alterity. This chapter studies how violence manifests itself in the language of the *banlieue*, and what this violence signifies about the *banlieue* identity and experience. "Verbal violence is generally construed as symptomatic of a lack of acceptance of mainstream republican civic values, including one of the key instruments of integration, the education system" (Pooley 347). Although Pooley characterizes verbal violence as the "lack of acceptance" of mainstream education and its linguistic norms, his definition can be furthered by defining verbal violence as the "deliberate and definite denial" of mainstream republican civic values, including the education system and the French that it systematically and automatically presents. With this extended definition, this chapter scrutinizes instances of verbal violence in fictional portrayals of the *banlieues* by using Abdellatif Kechiche's César Award winning film *L'Esquive* (2003).

This thesis focuses on a subset of the *banlieue* population: its youth. In exploring violence in the *banlieues*, the youth appear to be of particular importance. It is evident that in creating and reconstructing the *banlieue* identity, youth in the banlieue must face widespread isolation and exclusion as a part of their quotidian struggle in French society. Understanding the process, purposes, and products of the violence in the French *banlieues* can help address the social and economic marginalization and disenfranchisement of the *banlieues*.

Chapter 1

Banlieue Violence: Reality of Riots

More than 10,000 cars disappeared in flames, 250 public buildings were destroyed and damage totaled some 200 million euros - these were some of the more tangible consequences of the 2005 riots in France (Jobard 235). A series of riots occurred in the *banlieues* of Paris and other French cities in October and November of 2005. These riots, continuing for an unparalleled 20-day period, were the result of the deaths of two *banlieue* youths from electrocution during a police chase. The youths pursued by the police were of African origin, and lived in Clichy-sous-Bois, a banlieue in the east of Paris. Although unprecedented in their duration, these riots were far from the first and only ones of their kind.[1] When exploring physical violence in the *banlieues*, one cannot ignore the recurring riots in the *banlieues* of Paris over the last decade.

This chapter discusses violence from the angle of collective violence, as it relates to riots. It considers the roots and purposes of the riots in *banlieues*, in particular, the riots of 2005, with an emphasis on the collective physical violence that accompanied them. Is violence – and specifically collective violence – a necessary mode of expression in the *banlieue*? What is the social reality of violence in the *banlieue*?

Collective violence was the approach that the *banlieue* youth pursued in 2005 in attempts to express and convey their dissatisfaction, frustration, and angst with contemporary French society. The youth were galvanized to revolt because of the death of two *banlieue* teenagers, Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna. One commonality between some of the largest riots in the

[1] Jobard discusses frequent unrests involving Algerian migrants in North Paris after the Second World War and during the independence war in their country of origin. There have also been numerous riots in France since the beginning of the 1980s. Such events have typically consisted of "street battles with riot police in deprived urban areas, namely the *banlieues*, mostly following the death of a civilian (or rumour of such a death) during an encounter with the police".

banlieues is that they were catalyzed by the deaths of young people from the *banlieue*. It is evident that death, especially when combined with police brutality, serves as an extraordinary stimulus for uproar and violence in the *banlieues*.[2] Two more instances of riots following the 2005 riots merit our consideration - one in 2007 in Villiers-le-Bel (a banlieue in the north of Paris) and one in 2009 in Montreuil (a banlieue in the east of Paris). The 2007 riots were instigated by the deaths of Mouhsin Cehhouli and Lakami Samoura - aged 15 and 16, respectively - two youths of African origin in the banlieues after a motorbike crash with a police vehicle.

More than 75 police officers were hit by live ammunition rounds (Jobard 235) during the 2005 riots in the *banlieue*. In the 2009 riots in Montreuil, ironically on Bastille Day, the Banlieue youth burned 317 cars and injured 13 police officers (Samuel 2009). The youth rioters were provoked by the death of a young Algerian man in police custody. In fact, riots on Bastille day are a frequent occurrence in France as the disaffected protest high unemployment rates and failed integration policies for minorities (Samuel 2009). The violence caused by the *banlieue* youth in the 2005 riots were results of decades of neglect by the authority and oppression by the police.

The academic study of riots is frequently relegated to two categories, race or ethnic riots.[3] Scholars have linked riots to political incentives and motivations on local and national levels. Using data from the Hindu-Muslim riots in India, Steven Wilkinson asserts that politicians take strategic approaches when confronted with riots, in order to expand their electoral votes. "Politicians from Ireland, Malaysia, and Romania who are from the dominant ethnic group have

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[2] A great example of this can be found in Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995); a friend of the protagonists - Abdel Ichaha - has been brutally beaten by the police before the riot and is in a coma. Vinz finds a revolver on the street and pledges to murder a police officer if Abdel dies from the injuries caused by the police. This is representative of the reality in the *banlieues* as many of the riots and much violence is caused by the youth once one of them is brutalized by the police force.

[3] Prominent examples of this include the 1992 Los Angeles riots, involving African-Americans and Korean-Americans, following the police brutality against Rodney King. Other global examples are the 2002 Hindu-Muslim riots in India, the 2009 Uyghur riots in China, and the 2014 Ferguson unrest.

raised divisive symbolic issues and used violence - or allowed it to take place - in order to solidify their own support. In all three countries, as in India, the key to whether large-scale violence develops from these polarizing events is the attitude of the level of government that controls the police and the army (Wilkinson 232). Politicians have the unique ability and power to navigate and manipulate the network of riots in order to secure votes or gain popularity in times of conflict.

It is worth our consideration to deliberately scrutinize the performance of French political leaders in the electoral landscape following the 2005 riots. "The riots were part of an electoral cycle that started with Jacques Chirac's victory in 2002,[4] in a presidential election marked by the presence in the second ballot of the Far Right leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, and finished with the presidential election of 2007, in which Nicolas Sarkozy's participation was salient (Jobard 241). It would be too farfetched of an assertion to claim that Sarkozy strategized and devised a plan to gain popularity with his mainstream French voters. What would be reasonable, however, is to note that Sarkozy certainly had intentions of alienating the already marginalized inhabitants of the *banlieues* in his rhetoric. Sarkozy, then the Interior Minister, considered that the revolt was merely a criminal manifestation imputable to a minority of 'hooligans' (Jobard 238). As the Interior Minister, he was evidently far removed and detached from his constituents from the *banlieues*. The rationality and the purpose of the French banlieue riots cannot be overemphasized.

[4] Further discussion on Chirac and his 1991 speech "Le Bruit et l'odeur" can be found in the third chapter of this thesis.

Social and Economic Causes of *Banlieue* Riots

The roots of the riots and other collective violence in the *banlieues* emerge from the social and economic marginalization of these communities. A similar phenomenon occurred in Los Angeles in 1992, after which Jesse Jackson noted that "the riots in Los Angeles [referring to the 1992 riots] and elsewhere remind us just how incalculable the costs of neglect are" (Abelmann, Lie, and Abelmann 5). Former President Bill Clinton echoed Jackson in saying the roots of such riots were in years of denial and neglect by the administrations. Congruently, the French riots were the byproduct of decades of exclusion and isolation of the *banlieues*.

Naturally, questions regarding the demographics of the rioters could potentially arise when considering the 2005 riots. "Selon le sociologue Hugues Lagrange, les émeutiers sont essentiellement des jeunes d'origine africaine, issus des dernières vagues d'immigration en provenance de l'Algérie, du Maroc, de la Tunisie, du Mali, du Sénégal, du Cameroun, du Congo, de Côte d'Ivoire et de la Guinée (Gabizon 2007). There is no administrative data on race or ethnicity in France because under the French republican ethos of *égalité*, all citizens are the same and must not be grouped into ethnic categories. Although undeniably multiethnic and multiracial, France refuses to collect any data on race, ethnicity, or religion in its censuses.[5] Because of the lack of such data, it is problematic to consider the 2005 riots simply as race or ethnic riots. In addition, the rioters or their supporters "never purported to be speaking on behalf of any racial group" (Jobard 237). They used "us" to indicate the *banlieue* identity, a complex identity constituted with cultural, social, economic, and spatial characteristics.

Nevertheless, certain inferences can be captured from the attributes of the riots and the rioters. For example, the geographical locations of the riots, primarily the *banlieues*, are places

[5] The CNRS, however, does produce various data on race, religion, and ethnicity as a part of their sociological studies of French society.

where there exist major settlements of descendants of North African and sub-Saharan African origin. In fact, Jobard maintains that "rioting is a form of protest primarily engaged in by children of migrants who have grown up in the urban outskirts of French cities" (237). More detailed analysis of these 'urban outskirts' or *banlieues,* can yield valuable insights into the roots and purposes of the violence in the *banlieues*. Similar images materialize when observing the socioeconomic attributes of the locations where the rioting occurred in 2005.

> Firstly, 85% of the riots took place in sensitive urban zones (ZUSs) – that is urban zones that had been the focal points of government budgetary aid programmes since the early 1990s. Riots were more likely to occur, in fact, in the poorer ZUSs where unemployment was higher than in the corresponding city centre. Equally, the risk of riots occurring seems to have been correlated with the degree to which urban populations are socially segregated from the wider population
>
> (Jobard 238).

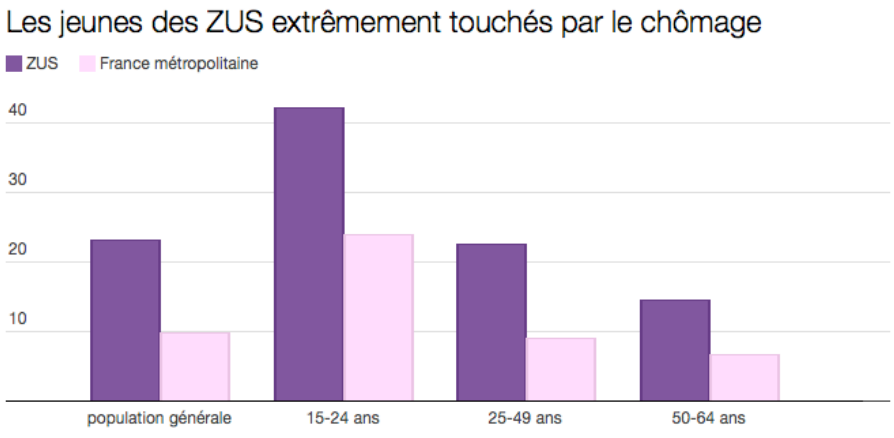
The youth of these ZUSs have encountered an insurmountable amount of social and economic exclusion from mainstream French society.[6] It is an understatement to call the unemployment in the ZUSs merely higher than that of the city center; ZUSs have astonishingly higher unemployment rates, especially for youth.

"Dans les "zones urbaines sensibles" en France, plus d'un actif sur cinq est au chômage contre un sur dix pour l'ensemble du territoire" (ONZUS 2014). INSEE, *Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques,* defines *les zones urbaines sensibles* (ZUS) as territories targeted by the government as a high priority. "Des problèmes proéminents dans ces territoires sont un haut pourcentage de logement à loyer modéré, avec peu de la propriété du logement, un

[6] Jobard discusses whether urban renovation measures taken by the Chirac government in 2004 had a destabilizing effect on the families - and especially the youth - concerned.

taux de chômage très élevé, et un bas pourcentage de bacheliers" (INSEE). Highlighting the grave issue of poverty in the *zones urbaines sensibles*, ONZUS reports, "En 2012, la part des personnes vivant sous le seuil de pauvreté (987 euros mensuels) y est de 38,4%, un taux 3,1 fois plus élevé que dans le reste du territoire (12,2%)". These statistics go on to show the enormous economic disparity between the ZUS and the rest of the nation.

"En 2009, le taux de chômage a atteint 18,6 % en ZUS contre 9,5 % pour l'ensemble du territoire (France y compris DOM)" (ONZUS). An article regarding the banlieue on *The Economist* states, "Sevran is one of France's poorest places, north-east of the Paris périphérique. The jobless rate is 18% and over 40% among the young" and produces the tagline "young, diverse, and unemployed" while referring to the youths of the banlieue. "En particulier, le chômage des jeunes est la catégorie la plus touchée. Dans les banlieues, le taux de chômage pour les 15-24 ans dépasse le 42%" (ONZUS). These rates highlight the widespread inequity present in the employment rate of the city and of the *banlieues*, signaling the inhabitants of the *banlieues* are largely absent in the mainstream economic landscape of France.



Taux de chômage en 2013

Source: Onzus Récupérez les données

The sources of the violence in the banlieues can be traced to the social and economic marginalization of the *banlieues* and the neglect of the *banlieue* youth by the French administration. The three weeks of riots caused the first state of emergency in more than 20 years.[7] "Ces violences urbaines tranchent, par leur longueur, leur extension à toute la France, l'ampleur des destructions et la médiatisation politique au niveau national et même mondial" (Cazelles 20). The riots and other violence in the *banlieues* can perhaps be traced to the lack of integration in contemporary French society. For instance, a factor that disproportionately affects *banlieue* residents is lack of employment. The rioters in the 2005 riots were allegedly children of immigrants from countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Mali, Senegal, Cameroon, Congo, Ivory Coast, and Guinea (Gabizon 2007). It is crucial to note that each country on this list is a former French colony. France's complicated colonial past in Africa has bred resentment for generations toward France's government and its questionable policies. Moreover, the youth, most of whom were born and raised in France, feels overlooked and discriminated against because of their cultural, ethnic, and religious background. *Banlieues* serve as a contemporary testament to France's problematic history concerning its former colonies. Such resentment felt by many in the *banlieues* can be a source of the ongoing violence.

Gary Marx describes the tendency among scholars to reduce the meaning and purpose of riots to mere demonstrations of criminal nature. Marx offers some historical and theoretical context for riots in his 1970 publication "Issueless Riots". Historically, social theorists held a view that "crowds represented opportunism and destruction," and they were "dangerous, irrational, and fickle" (Marx 22). He conveys his contentment in social analysts who have dismantled this partial perception of riotous crowds. "Much of man's action, whether collective

[7] An article on the BBC in 2015 details the judicial procedure for Sebastien Gaillemin and Stephanie Klein, the two police officers chasing Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna, the two youths from Clichy-sous-Bois who were electrocuted in October 2005. ("French Police Trial over 2005 Zyed and Bouna Deaths." *BBC News*.)

or in a more institutionalized setting, can be seen as goal-directed and purposive, involving a response to the exigencies of social life…" (Marx 22). He adds that collective outbursts of expression represent the patterning and structure of ordinary social life, as viewed by the group of individuals.

For the 2005 riots in France, it is important to understand that the rioters were not mere criminals partaking in delinquent activities, but instead were *banlieue* youth who saw a vital need to express their dismay for French authority. In addressing whether the rioters should be considered delinquent, French sociologist Laurent Mucchielli writes, "Lire l'émeute en termes de délinquance constitue donc une trahison de la réalité" (Le Goaziou and Mucchielli 5). This *trahison* - or betrayal - of the reality refers to complete apathy toward the socioeconomic marginalization of the *banlieue* youth. "En affirmant au début du mois de décembre 2005 que '75 % à 80 %' des émeutiers étaient des délinquants notoires, le ministre de l'Intérieur, Nicolas Sarkozy, espérait alors criminaliser les émeutes, justifier leur traitement purement répressif, éviter tout débat sur le rôle de la police" (Le Goaziou and Mucchielli 5). Sarkozy's claims were rebuked by judges, one of his own services *les Renseignements généraux*, and based on research available today. Sarkozy's response embodies the neglect of the *banlieue* youth by the French Republic; the youth resorted to violence to garner attention of their frustration, and the Interior Minister dismisses their concerns, rejects the validity of their marginalized experiences, and regards the *banlieue* youth as delinquents.

The rioters saw the need for violence as their only path to get attention as "the spectacular burning of automobiles indicated that the rioters themselves saw no exit from their social condition of social invisibility other than the spontaneous possibility of spectacle" (Bloom 232). The violence in the film, similar to the violence in reality, are both results of the sociopolitical

and socioeconomic marginalization and exclusion of the *banlieue* by the French government. It is "within this narrative of containment, being cornered by the forces of order for imputed wrongdoing," (Bloom 232) that the two youths from Clichy-sous-Bois were electrocuted while they were trapped.

In exploring violence in the *banlieues*, the youth emerges as the principal agent and actor in reality and in fictional representations.[8] In such places [*banlieues*], violent clashes between police and the local youth have become heavily ritualised (Jobard 243). The youth serves as the key demographic who suffer from the socioeconomic marginalization. The proportion of large families and youth aged under 20 years living in such ZUSs is very significant in that they make up more than a third of the local population. (Jobard 238). For all the aforementioned reasons, it is particularly important to emphasize the condition of the youth when studying the *banlieues*.

The inhabitants of the banlieues have resorted to and adopted riots and collective violence as a mode of expression for several complex reasons. This is a way for them to garner attention and bring awareness of the injustice done to the marginalized youth. They feel completely and constantly excluded, so they want to end this exclusion and find their appropriate place in contemporary French society, culture, and economy. The problems in the suburbs have been forcefully thwarted instead of having their roots addressed by the government. "The state took a security approach, rather than a social or education response. If you couple that with the ongoing lack of equal rights in school and employment, you find France just doesn't have a project for a society where people live together" (Chrisafis 2015). The repetition of collective violence since the early 1980s is an indication of the extent to which the State has succeeded in

[8] The majority of riots in the *banlieues* were caused because of deaths of youths. Numerous fictional works also emphasize the youth in illuminating the *banlieue* - some examples are Mehdi Charef's *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (1983), Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995), Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* (2003), and Faïza Guène's *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* (2004), .

superficially maintaining law and order and containing outbreaks of violence by exercising a purely paramilitary model of police management in these disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Jobard 243). The collective violence serves as a socio-political vehicle to raise concerns that would otherwise go unaddressed; the banlieue landscape, therefore, is the incarnation of violence.

Chapter 2

Banlieue Violence: Fictional Representation

Banlieue 13 opens with the text on a black screen "Devant la montée incontournable de la criminalité dans certaines banlieues, le gouvernement autorise la construction d'un mur d'isolement autour des cités classéees à haut risque," and the accompanying visual element is a panning of a wall with a barbed wire. This connotation of 'criminality' of the inhabitants of the *banlieues* is a key characteristic associated with the Parisian *banlieues*. The opening text offers a glimpse into the French government's reluctance to address the underlying causes and the source of the issues in the *banlieues*, and it depicts the administration's haphazard attempt at covering the challenges with a wall that separates the banlieues from the city center. The representation of the wall, called "un mur d'isolement", amplifies the existing exclusion of the banlieues from the mainstream society and economy. It augments the social and cultural separation of the banlieues into a physical and concrete manifestation. In discussing the representation of *banlieue* in fiction, this chapter analyzes *Banlieue 13* (2004), a French action film by Pierre Morel, and released approximately a year before the 2005 riots.

Pierre Morel's 2004 film is a suspenseful illustration of the *banlieue*, which is portrayed as the concentrated center of a violent dystopia. In the opening scenes, the film gives its audience a glimpse of the streets and underground tunnels, replete with graffiti and trash. The streets are alive with numerous people, which would not be a surprising sight for Paris, if it were not for the myriad of weapons in the hands of the people. The camera travels through the *cité*, pausing momentarily to focus on the decaying infrastructure, before speeding up again into the high-rise concrete buildings, *l'habitation à loyer modéré*, and the youth inside, mostly of African origins,

drinking and smoking. The audience catches a plethora of signs and symbols of physical violence with heavy firearm and physical assault, including murder, from the beginning of the film. Within the first few minutes of the film, we are already showered with innumerable and inordinate bloodshed - such as the killing of two guards by one of the antagonists, K2 and the killing of three of his henchmen by the primary villain, the drug lord Taha Ben Mahmoud.

The film depicts, in a hyperbolic form, the physical isolation of a Parisian *banlieue* rife with social maligns of violence, drugs, and crimes. The *banlieue* is under the control of the ruthless crime lord Taha, and a young man from the *banlieue,* Leïto, is on a mission to solitarily restore order in his birthplace. *Banlieue 13* narrates the intertwining of two stories: one of Leïto's mission to rescue his sister, Lola, from Taha and another of an undercover police officer named Damien, who is on an assignment to recover a bomb from Taha in *Banlieue 13.* The story, written by Luc Besson and Bibi Naceri, who coincidentally plays Taha in the film, continues with the two men having no choice but to cooperate with each other and both discovering the previously unrealized depth and complexity of their missions.

Films are not the first form of media representations to associate *banlieues* with images of violence and conflict. Since the late 1970s, French comics began to focus on multiethnic France, including *banlieues,* containing depictions of sex, violence, and drugs (McKinney 2004). Numerous scholars have studied representations of *banlieues,* particularly with regards to the appearance of violence, clash, chaos, and conflict. The *banlieue* is often a "violent breeding ground" (McKinney 2004) in French media representations because the *banlieues* are confined and marginalized to a space of social and economic isolation and alterity. The social realist tendencies of "*banlieue* films" focused on the progressively deteriorating and demoralized

topography of these neighborhoods, and projected them as sites of cyclical violence, aggression, and senseless crime (Blatt 520).

In a dystopian tale of violence, exclusion, and politics, *Banlieue 13* offers an ominous and rather inconceivable image of the Parisian *banlieue*. The film, particularly in its delivery of violence, creates an imaginary landscape of chaos, disorder, and bloodshed. The depiction of the *banlieue* has been compared to hell by Rosemary Wakeman who writes: "One of the latest commercial statements on the Paris *banlieue* comes from film producer Luc Besson, whose action packed *Banlieue 13* films, set in the near future, are a portrait of hell. The suburbs are so dangerous they have to be walled off" (85). He asserts this physical isolation through the installation of a wall is not "particularly newsworthy imagery" because the suburbs have already been secluded by fortifications and by highways. Although she has a point in saying that the *banlieues* are already physically excluded by design and by architecture, the imagery presented by Morel is nevertheless striking because of the sheer audacity of it. The audience is astonished to see the barbed wire infested wall and the monitoring checkpoint at the entrance, designed to entirely sequester the inhabitants of the *banlieues* from entering the city. Although the film undoubtedly strives to provoke suspense and excitement, it simultaneously offers an ominous yet prudent and provocative social message regarding the *banlieues.*

In the year 2010, *Banlieue* 13 has a population of two million people, all contained within a wall erected by the French government. The French authority, unable and unwilling to restore order and security in the *banlieue*, quarantine the area without providing necessary resources and infrastructure. In the city of Paris, Damien receives an urgent mission to recover a bomb from *banlieue* 13. After much violence and bloodshed, Damien and Leïto, the two heroes of the film, realize that the government has concocted a plan to get them to detonate the bomb in the center

of the *banlieue* instead of deactivating it, with the goal of annihilating the *banlieue*, along with its two million residents.

Leïto, a lone vigilante, fights the crimes in his *banlieue* because the police force is indifferent and incompetent, and it is seen as being vastly understaffed before it is completely removed from the *banlieue*. After capturing Taha at gunpoint and bringing him to the police station, Leïto tells the police chief, "C'est votre rôle de faire quelque chose pour l'arrêter!" to which Taha responds, "T'as pas encore compris, tête de piaf? Les murs et les barbelés, ça te rappelle rien?" This particular scene highlights the incapability of the police force when it comes to protecting the residents of the *banlieue*. Leïto, therefore, takes it upon himself to fight crime, and in the process, he kills the police officer because he allowed Taha to take Lola, Leïto's younger sister.

While working at a store as a cashier, Lola is seen to be forcefully and violently abducted by Taha's gang members. One of the gang members, K2, walks up to her and asks her to come with him. When she refuses, he grabs her and drags her out of the store by her hair. While the rest of the gang is standing by, the camera follows them with a tracking shot at eye-level as K2 drags and throws Lola into the car. She is yelling throughout the scene, to no avail. During this scene of Lola's kidnapping, a scene with evident physical violence, onlookers pretend as if nothing is happening. The shopper, an older man, sees the abduction and lets out an inaudible sigh, signaling to the audience that this is an ordinary occurrence in the *banlieue*. Two policemen stand outside the store and watch the men forcefully take Lola away [Figure 1], without taking any actions to protect her. A few shots later, while Leïto holds a knife to Taha's throat, K2 strangles Lola and holds a gun to her head [Figure 2]. In a close-up shot, Lola struggles to break

free of K2's violent hold. These instances of aggression against Lola signify a particular form of normalized violence against women in the film.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Multiple scenes in the film show violence directed at the police force. Damien, a police officer who happened to be handcuffed by Leïto to the steering wheels in a police vehicle and stuck within the *banlieues*, is a target of constant gunshots. While trying to escape into safety and find Leïto, his vehicle is completely ravaged with bullets, some of them ricocheting in the air. The camera quickly pans the barrage of gunfire as Damien is being shot at in his vehicle. The camera then takes a low-angle shot to show the people who are shooting. The car is shown to be penetrated with bullets while Damien tries to escape [Figure 3]. This implies not only resentment toward the police force by the residents of the *banlieues*, but a depiction of the police as the number one enemy of the banlieusards.

Figure 3

Although *Banlieue 13* is an exaggerated and hyperbolic representation of the violence in the *banlieues*, it is nevertheless a crucial film to consider when attempting to understand the causes and implications of violence in the social reality of the *banlieues*. These spaces have been described as "overdone, over- imagined, over-cinematized" (Wakeman 84). However, the fictional representation of violence in *Banlieue 13* provides a telling glimpse, no matter how inflated, into the social reality of the violence. In addition to its portrayal of the *banlieue* identity of exclusion and neglect felt by the residents, the film comments on the historic violence done to the *banlieue* and shows a way of responding to this oppression.

Banlieue 13 uses the cinematic medium to enact a powerful commentary on the sociopolitical context and climate of contemporary France. The *banlieue* is a space of social and economic marginalization and seclusion. Despite Morel's portrayal of the *banlieue* from an apocalyptic angle that is quite unrealistic, the social reality of the *banlieue* is nevertheless marred by an amalgamation of factors such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and lack of integration.

> "While other countries have segregated areas and ghettos with even poorer living conditions, the French suburbs are all the more spatially isolated, because the universalising ideology of the French Republic cannot aim at specific ethnic

> populations, or even recognise them, but can only focus on certain 'zones'. For this reason, French urban policy can be seen as honing in on spaces that contain 'problematic' populations. After high-profile riots or revolts, certain suburbs or 'zones' have become the object of almost 40 years of intensive governmental urban policies.
>
> (Guss 75)

The dialogues between Damien and Leïto are extremely insightful as they highlight two distinct perspectives on the social issues of the *banlieues*. One can perhaps hypothesize that either of them has never conversed with anyone of the opposite background previously - due to the complete sequestering of the *banlieue*. After Damien breaks free from the prison vehicle, the police captain in Paris says, "Il est plus facile de sortir de prison que rentrer dans la *banlieue* 13." While Damien is so oblivious to the underlying roots of the problems in the *banlieue* as someone living outside, Leïto tries to assert his sentiment, "Je suis né dans cette banlieue. Elle était déjà pourrie à ma naissance. Pour mes 18 ans, on a construit un mur tout autour. J'ai fait quelque chose de mal pour être puni comme ça? Non. J'ai respecté toutes tes putains de lois!" Leïto "a marginal" (Marshall 192) has the perspective of someone who continues to feel frustration and fury, as a result of living in the *banlieue*. For Leïto, the violence that occurs in the *banlieue* is simply a response to the myriad of oppressive actions that the residents encounter. Some of the repressive elements highlighted in the two films discussed in this thesis, *Banlieue 13* and *L'Esquive* include widespread incarceration, violent treatment from law enforcement, disregard and disdain from the political authority, and school closings.

The conversations between Leïto and Damien act as a vehicle for addressing the causes of violence in the *banlieue*. Leïto exclaims, "Quand on vient de la rue, on a un truc en plus...la

haine.[9] Ça fait 20 ans qu'ils arrivent pas à résoudre le problème! Alors ils ont fait un mur autour! Maintenant, ils vont nettoyer. Il n'y a plus de postes, plus d'écoles. Et ils ont fermé le dernier commissariat." He is distrustful and skeptical of the French authority, deducing the scheme of the French authority slowly, "Une bonne petite bombe dans un quartier chaud, quand on est sûr que tout le monde est là. On se débarrasse de toute la merde en une seule fois." It is beyond Damien's comprehension that his government would do something as reprehensible as try to destroy an entire area of two million people. This only signals his naïveness, and perhaps that of others living outside of the *banlieues*, who do not realize what it is like to live on the margins. "Ouvre les yeux, Damien! Ils en ont rien à foutre de cette banlieue!" Leïto says to Damien. He reminds Damien of a historical memory of the Holocaust during "one of the film's not-infrequent 'political' discussions between the two men ('six million have already been killed on the grounds they weren't blond with blue eyes')" (Marshall 192). The reference to the Holocaust reminds the audience that although the story is exaggerated, it may not be absolutely inconceivable that it should happen again. Leïto references the Holocaust to propose a rationale for his distrust of the French government and authority. This comparison of the oppression of the *banlieue* to the Holocaust is a significant one that can be lost in the film's exaggerated image. Morel reminds the audience of a time when the government knowingly allowed a violent extermination of a population in order to invoke the potential for another such instance occurring.

When confronted by Damien and Leïto near the final scene, the French government agent in Paris defends the atrocious scheme to eradicate the *banlieue*:

> "La banlieue 13 est incontrôlable. Ça coûte une fortune à l'État, les contribuables ont peur. Peur et marre de payer pour cette racaille!"

[9] *La Haine* (1995) is another film that represents fictionalized violence in the *banlieue* with realistic implications. Widely noted for its unflinching representations and its artistic qualities, it became a highly influential portrayal of the problems of the French *banlieue* (Austin 81).

> "Alors on nettoie? À la bombe, c'est ça?"
>
> "Oui, pas très démocratique mais ça résout beaucoup de problèmes."
>
> (*Banlieue 13*, 2004)

The fictional representation of violence in the *banlieues* can offer important insights into the social reality of violence where governmental policies are concerned. As one of the inhabitants of the *banlieue* later tells Damien, "Ici, c'est pas Monaco, c'est Bagdad!," signifying the lawless condition within the boundaries of the *banlieue*. The comparison of the *banlieues* to Baghdad, a war-torn city in the Middle East, is especially telling because of the similarities the residents feel between their home and Baghdad. In addition to explicitly depicting the authority's indifference toward the *banlieue*, this statement subtly hints at the role played by Western governments in creating social and political turmoil in areas with a Muslim majority population.

The movie introduces the plotting of a physical elimination of the urban district because the exclusion was not enough for the authorities, they want to make the *banlieue* completely disappear. The phrase *cette racaille* is exceptionally interesting to notice because this fictionalized utterance by a French government official in *Banlieue 13* manifests a year later in the mouth of France's then Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy.

> *"Banlieue 13* is exceptionally prescient: it shows the high ranking French government official referring to the inhabitants of the suburb as *racaille* (scum), just after he attempted to genocidally bomb them, and while the slur now sounds quite familiar, the film was released in 2004, one year before then-Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy spoke (25 October 2005) of ridding the *banlieue* of its, again, *racaille*. Sarkozy's words did a great deal to (literally) inflame an explosive situation in Clichy-sous-Bois, the suburb of Paris where two days after Sarkozy

> spoke, two youths died, electrocuted as they fled the police, and the suburbs began to burn"
>
> (Austin 89).

In the context of the film, the phrase was used in the middle of a heated ideological confrontation in which the two heroes claimed "laws must be applied to all" (Pratt 65). Films such as *Banlieue 13* create a violence that is fictionalized but serves as a metaphor for the real and practical forms of violence and exclusion. Violence in the *banlieue* becomes surreal when fictionalized. *Banlieue 13* "predicts that the French *banlieue* culture recedes into a lost hetereotopia of the postcolony" (Bloom 227). This is a powerful statement that raises the possibility of a dire and extreme scenario. The conditions of *Banlieue* society regressing into a "heterotopia" of the postcolony is foreboding. A heterotopia is a space where societal rules and laws can be suspended; what can be done in a heterotopia is not allowed in the conventional landscape. Colonies are generally seen as a form of heterotopia – places where existing laws and regulations are not necessarily applied. In the context of the *banlieue*, this is truly ominous because Bloom suggests the French *banlieues* will relapse back to a lost "colony" of the French republic, evidently marking a stark divide between the *banlieues* and the rest of the country.

In the film, another form of exclusion is notable - geographic or physical isolation. Bloom notes a shift in the representation of the *beur* and black community in France as increasingly detached from the possibility for social mediation, and increasingly inserted into an aesthetics of violence as media spectacle (Bloom 235). An example of exclusion in the film is the erection of the wall of isolation, meant to separate the residents of the *banlieues* and others. Other forms of exclusion can be inferred from the inaccessibility of entering the *banlieue* 13, when the police captain says, "Il est plus facile de sortir de prison que rentrer dans la *banlieue*

13." Beyond the inclusion of unrealistic violence and bloodshed, the 2004 film addresses the absence of the French government and its resources in the banlieues.

The tone of *Banlieue 13* is an eclectic mixture of despondency, calamity, and optimism. The film is "radically dystopian at the film's beginning, and radically Utopian at film's end" (Austin 89). The story creates an imaginary landscape, firstly a government created genocide of the *banlieue* residents and then two unlikely heroes who defend the essence of the French Republic: democracy, equality, and justice. Irrespective of the wave of optimism in the very final scene of this fiction, one can sense the urgency and importance of the possibility of the *banlieues* being regarded and treated in France as a colony, where all laws and rules are suspended. This is an interesting claim, given that the population of the *banlieues* are somewhat reflective of the population of France's former colonies in Africa.

Chapter 3

Banlieue Violence: Language of the *Banlieue*

Responding to the exclusion discussed in the previous chapter, the residents of the *banlieues* encounter a quotidien challenge to shape their own identities. An indispensable part of this identity as they create and reconstruct it on a daily basis is the language of the banlieue that is generally used by the younger French-born generations. Faced with ongoing marginalization, explains scholar Frederic Conrod, "the *banlieue* reacts by creating its own language, its own codes, its own defense mechanisms" (Conrod 12). Although frequently regarded as inferior to standard French, the language of the *banlieue* is an innovative means to communicate in the *banlieues.* Considered to be the main object of an identity within a particular underprivileged social context (Blattner 71), this language is commonly associated with immigrants and particularly the youth living in the suburban areas of Paris and other major cities of France.

This chapter first describes the defining features of the *banlieue* language, including how the language is used to negotiate multiple identities in the face of oppression. Then, it treats the topic of violence in the language of *banlieues* with an analysis of "verbal violence". Using Abdellatif Kechiche's 2003 film *L'Esquive,*[10] this chapter looks at the role of language of the *banlieue,* as it relates to violence, specifically verbal violence.

Language is of particular importance and stature in French culture, with the French language undergoing several periods of significant linguistic changes. The *Académie française,* created in 1635, was created to maintain a *bon usage* of the French language. Since the French

[10] Movie scripts of "*banlieue* films" are considered to offer concrete representation of spoken French. Although a screenplay cannot sufficiently provide the spontaneity and arbitrariness of spoken language, "it is assumed that screenwriters attempt to make their characters speak in a natural way that resemble as much as possible current authentic discursive trends" (Blattner 75). Therefore, film scripts are useful tools for analyzing language.

Revolution of 1789, French has been considered to be the cement of national unity and equality as well as the pillar of an all-inclusive state (Judge 39). The residents of the *banlieues* are expected to adhere to the rules of standard French as a manner of proving their abilities to integrate into French society. "French is not a question of genetics but cultural allegiance (Posner 48). The French language therefore is inherently tied to French cultural identity. Although many French speakers still favor the use of Standard French as they recognize the power of language as a way of shaping their identity (Blattner 73), more and more French speakers outside of the *banlieues* include aspects of the *banlieue* language in their daily interactions.

Banlieues contribute a kind of *fracture sociale* (Doran 497) because it serves as a haven for immigrants, Muslims, impoverished - the excluded population who serves as a stark contrast to the wealthy, white, French. A commonly regarded manifestation of this so-called social fracture is the distinctive language used by youth in the banlieues, a language variety variously called *le langage des jeunes de banlieue*, *la tchatche de banlieue*, *le langage téci*, or simply *le verlan* (Doran 497). The innovation of *banlieue* adolescents in modifying conventional French with their own added flair has led to them being regarded as "movers and shakers of language change in French (Fagyal 91).

The language of the *banlieues* presents interesting alterations of standard French in many ways that is important for linguists and sociologists to assess. "The differences of this vernacular, often influenced by the multilingualism and multiculturalism of its speakers, can be observed at the phonological, lexical, morphological and syntactical levels; even though the lexicon appears to undergo the most modifications" (Blattner 71). Although notably distinct in its characteristics, certain aspects of the language are understood and often used by French speakers who do not belong to this *banlieue* identity.

Defining Characteristics of the *Banlieue* Language

Among the integral characteristics of the *banlieues* is the distinct nature of the language, shaped by complex cultural identities. A particular language exists in the *banlieues* because of the residents' need to create and negotiate their identities in response to their marginalization by French society. The defining aspects of the language of the *banlieues* are: inversion of syllables in words, borrowing from specific foreign languages, infusion of religious expressions, and a tone of aggression, marked by excessive vulgarity.

The inversion, *verlan*, signifies the reversing of syllables in a word, and the usage of *verlan* is distinctly tied to the language and identity of the *banlieues.* The term *verlan* itself, for instance, is the 'verlanized' version of *l'envers* - the inverse (Hassa 50). *Verlanized* words are common in the *banlieue* youth lexicon (Doran 505) because the youth uses this tool to exclude others. "Often, the aim of the usage of verlan is to exclude" (Hassa 59) others from the conversation. For a group of people who is constantly on the margin of society and invariably excluded, language is one of the very few ways in which they can in turn exclude others. It is their way of claiming something of their own - something they can create, unlike employment, for example.

As a result of the prevalence of immigrants in the *banlieues,* the language is permeated with borrowings from other languages, particularly Arabic, Wolof, and English. In a study of the language using a corpus from the dictionary *Tchatche de banlieue* (1998), imported words included 0.5% from African languages, 2.5% from American English, 3.5% from Arabic, and 3.5% from Romani languages (Blattner 78). Similar to the borrowings of words from foreign origins, the language of the *banlieues* is also infused with religious expressions, particularly from Islamic traditions. In the vernacular of the *banlieues,* Islamic expressions are frequently used by

Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Although France prides in its secular practices, a significant part of the population uses a language that includes speech stemming from religious traditions.

Owing to the harsh realities in the *banlieues* such as poverty, violence, and incarceration, the language incorporates a tone of aggression and vulgarity. In discussing the language of the *banlieue*, Zouhour Messili and Hmaid Ben Aziza observes "la violence symbolique de certaines pratiques langagières, usage d'un vocabulaire à forte connotation sexuelle ou scatologique, réflexions impertinentes ou injurieuses" (26). The language of the *banlieue* includes an entanglement of violence and aggression. "De nombreuses expressions imagées à connotation violente habillent le langage des banlieues" (Messili and Hmaid Ben Aziza 26). The corpus of this chapter - *L'Esquive* - highlights these distinct attributes of the language of *banlieues.*

Discussion on Verbal Violence

In accurately defining verbal violence, there are multiple challenges and complications because of the subjective and sensitive nature of how violence is defined. Dr. Timothy Jay, psychologist and expert in swearing, cites studies (O'Leary, 1999; Vissing, Strauss, Gelles, & Haroop, 1991) that signal that the problem with verbal abuse research stems from a difficulty in defining the phenomenon (Jay 85).[11] Across disciplines, a myriad of explanations exists for the term "verbal violence".[12] This chapter considers verbal violence as any instances of

[11] A key limitation of analyzing verbal violence is the lack of its clear definition. Psychologist Daniel O'Leary acknowledges that lack of a specific definition limits its research (Mezey, Lori, and Maxwell 125).

[12] In the world of diplomacy, verbal violence is defined as coerciveness of action that can be taken to a verbal or rhetorical level (Mustonen 10). Mustonen defines it as actions causing or designed to cause harm to oneself, or to another person, either physically or psychologically, including implicit threats, nonverbal behavior, and outbursts of anger directed towards animals, and inanimate objects. Experts (Steinmetz 1986) define violence as 'an act carried out with the intention, or perceived as having the intention, of physically hurting another person' (Rippon 2000). Jay considers verbal aggression as any of the following instances: scolding, yelling, swearing, blaming, insulting, threatening, demeaning, ridiculing, criticizing, and belittling (Jay 2009). As Stein and Friedrich (1975), and Williams et al., (1982) have pointed out, verbal abuse, aggressive humor, and other modes of psychological violence salient should also be included in the analysis of violence in fiction.

intimidating, insulting, or threatening behavior, with accompanying physical violence or otherwise.

In contemporary society, "violence" has gradually replaced "aggression". This substitution of terms has taken place because "aggression" no longer engenders strong emotions (Rippon 456). This chapter uses "verbal violence" instead of "verbal aggression" or "verbal abuse". The definition of violence is elusive and recognising its essential contestedness is fruitful for research (Body-Gendrot 4). Violence has a nuanced meaning and interpretation, which is important for this thesis to consider because we must weight the complexity of violence without oversimplifying it.

Critic Sophie Body-Gendrot wonders if violence becomes less elusive when it becomes associated with urban life. In exploring youth violence in French cities, she says "it is doubtful since the city has become a useful metaphor to address a cocktail of fears and tensions, the origins of which escape the very representations conveyed by urban violence" (4). In the analysis of violence in the language of the *banlieues* in this chapter, verbal violence is defined as acts of intimidation, insults, threats, with both the presence and absence of physical violence.[13] Verbal violence has the potential of transcending the boundaries of rhetoric and entering the physical realm. This is of particular importance as violence in the physical realm has far-reaching, and often destructive consequences for a society and its people. A thorough exploration of verbal violence in the language of the *banlieue* is necessary to understand its sources. The following section explores how violence plays a role in the language of the *banlieue* and how that can manifest itself in physical forms.

[13] "Physical violence" has been defined by scholars as encompassing various actions, such as whether it results in an injury (Straus 557); as acts of physical or sexual assault, use of weapons, and verbal or physical threats of assault (Mezey, Lori, and Maxwell 128); as being grabbed, shoved, kicked, punched, hit with a hand, or hit with an object (Khoury-Kassabri, Shalhevet 2013). Physical violence, in this chapter, is considered as any actions wherein the perpetrator physically attacks or assaults someone, with the intention of intimidating or harming them.

Banlieue* Language in *L'Esquive

Tunisian-French film director Abdellatif Kechiche's multiple César Award winning film *L'Esquive* (2003) commences with the portrayal of a heated conversation between a group of male adolescents, all ethnic minorities - including Maghrebins, Africans, and Asians. *L'Esquive* narrates the story of a group of youth in the *banlieue* of Paris as they stage an 18th-century play by French playwright Marivaux. It was shot in the Franc-Moisins housing estate within the working-class suburbs of Saint-Denis, north of Paris (Higbee 2013). The film embodies some of the widespread issues in the *banlieues* through its characters, particularly that of the principal protagonist, Abdelkrim. Krimo, nickname of Abdelkrim, is an adolescent of North African descent living in the *cités*.

The youth in *L'Esquive* create and express the unique attributes that they design and only they possess - an alternate identity. This is an identity they can take ownership of, unlike the one given to them by French society. According to linguist Meredith Doran, the alternative French spoken by a population that is both physically and socially excluded from the dominant society allows for an expression of an alternative identity (Strand 263). During much of the film, the adolescents communicate with one another in an aggressive discourse that mixes *verlan*, a French version of back-slang, with borrowings from languages other than French (Arabic, Wolof, English), a generous sprinkling of profanity, and staged brinksmanship (Strand 263).

The setting of *L'Esquive* is in the banlieues, and the film uses the bleak suburban space of the housing projects (Strand 265) to portray the lifestyle of these adolescents. Most of the interactions, and instances with violence in the language, take place outside in the open. Hargreaves and McKinney write *Cités* 'housing projects' and *banlieues* 'suburbs' are some of the bywords that proverbially represent 'disadvantaged peripheral areas of French cities

containing relatively dense concentrations of minority ethnic groups' (Fagyal 95). The filming location, Seine-Saint-Denis, had the residents with the lowest annual income of all departments in France, according to 1990 census data (Fagyal 95). More than a decade later, the social reality of the *banlieues* has not seen improvements. In 2014, Seine-Saint-Denis had a poverty rate of 34%, which was 20% higher than the poverty rate of Paris (Maurin and Mazery 2014). The exclusion of the inhabitants of the banlieues and the division between them and the city-dwellers could explain one of the causes of the linguistic changes in the language of the banlieues.

The linguistic alterity is highlighted in *L'Esquive* and constitutes the cornerstone of the character depiction and development in the film. While watching the film, our attention is drawn to language less as a tool of communication and more as a social marker: one which is loaded with emotional, cultural baggage that extends far beyond the lexical content of the words (Strand 267). Kechiche instills the idea that the language of the *banlieues* is an indispensable part of the *banlieue* identity because faced with oppressing factors, the youth negotiate their multiple identities, both those that are imposed on them and those they create themselves, through the use of language.

The aforementioned features of the language of the *banlieues* - *verlan*, borrowing of foreign words, religious terms, and a tone of aggression - are all prevalent throughout *L'Esquive*. Examples of simple *verlan* include *fou - ouf* or *merci - cimer*. Krimo is shown to thank his mother with the word *cimer* (merci), and she smiles back at him, "illustrating her understanding of this popular verlanized word" (Blattner 82). These verlanized forms, although key to the *banlieues*, are not limited to their residents; they are used by those who do not belong to the *banlieues* also. Kechiche uses a play on word with the title of the film. "*L'Esquive*" (dodge), symbolizes the link between the types of French variation used in the script" (Blattner 77). The

title of the film itself is *verlanized* when Lydia says to her friend, "j'ai vesqui et voilà, c'est tout'. *Verlan* is actively used in the *banlieues* as a way of excluding others from the conversation. However, because many *verlan* words have infiltrated Standard spoken French (Blattner 83) and therefore lost their restrictive status, these words are inversed an additional time. Such words are termed not *verlan*, but *veul*. An example of this is femme - *meuf* - *feumeu*. The rationale behind such *re-vernalization* is to ensure the exclusionary status of this linguistic feature of the *banlieue* language.

Also highlighted in Kechiche's film is the borrowing and widespread usage of loanwords, specifically from Arabic. A word commonly heard in *L'Esquive* is *kiffer*, a verb with Arabic origin. *Kif* is an Arabic word used to describe the sensation and bliss experienced following the intake of hashish which traces its origin to the word *kef* meaning bag, referring to the bag needed to transform cannabis leaves in hashish (Blattner 79). We hear conversations about Krimo and Lydia *kiffing* as *kiffer* in French indicates an affinity or attraction of any person or objects. The usage of *kiffer*, as opposed to using traditional French verbs *aimer* or others, to denote the potential romantic interest indicates the youth's refusal to relinquish their multifaceted identities and use French words only. Other examples of words heard in the film borrowed from Arabic are *la shouma* and *bsahtek*. A heated argument between two of the central female characters, Lydia and Frida, incorporates an Arabic word *zehef* multiple times. *Zehef* translates to French as *énervé*, and the closest English meaning is irritated or annoyed. In an altercation while rehearsing the play, Lydia asks, "T'es zehef?" to which Frida angrily retorts, "Bien sur que je me zehef". The use of Arabic *kiffer* in discussing pleasure or *zehef* in explaining irritation suggests the youth entrusts Arabic words with conveying their emotions appropriately.

Inshallah, wallah, bismillah - these are some of the Islamic terms heard throughout the film, most frequently uttered by Lydia, a white female character who is certainly not Muslim. *InshAllah*, "meaning 'if Allah wills' and referring to any action or state in the future" (Özdemir and Frank 47) is a commonly heard phrase throughout the film. Initially, it is quite shocking to hear such Islamic expressions from the mouth of a non-Muslim, French character. Blattner asserts that this is understandable because Lydia, a resident of the *banlieue,* is using these words to establish herself in the community (78). Although it can be seen as a tool of establishing herself in a community where Islamic phrases are typically used in the language, I would argue it is more nuanced than a simple act of confirming her allegiance to the *banlieue*. Lydia, presumably someone who grew up in the *banlieue,* is so deeply ingrained in the *banlieue* culture that she does not actively or consciously use these Islamic expressions. Lydia appropriates the Islamic words and uses them nonchalantly, in an almost secular way sans any serious religious implications; the words are displaced from their original religious meanings. Lydia uses *inshallah* as any Muslim would use it, in denoting future actions. She says, "une autre fois, inshallah" and "inshallah, ça va bien marcher". Her use of the word, albeit still carrying the religious undertone, is normalized as a part of her everyday speech, which she learned from the banlieue vernacular. Her usage of the other words *wallah* in "mais wallah, c'est une paranoïaque*"* and *bismillah* before she starts to act the play is also telling of her awareness on how to appropriately use such words, but not necessarily with significant religious meaning. *Wallah* is an Arabic expression meaning "I promise by Allah" used to make a promise or express credibility, and *bismillah* means "in the name of Allah".

The distinct and specific nature of the language of the *banlieue* shapes a distinct *banlieue* identity. Kechiche offers a realistic view of the language used in the *banlieue*. "The main

character Abdelkrim (aka: Krimo) and his classmates illustrate the colorful use of this informal way of speaking, which ultimately dissociates them from typical French speakers" (Blattner 72). Although people outside of the *banlieue* certainly use aspects of the *banlieue* language, they cannot necessarily claim the *banlieue* identity as they are not susceptible to the socioeconomic exclusion aimed at the mostly immigrant communities in the *banlieues.* They speak the language of the *banlieue* by deliberate choice, not by nature. The youth "purposely avoid [good French] when negotiating their identity that has clear linguistic foundations" (Blattner 72). While affirming and shaping their identity through language, the youth are keenly aware of the marginalization they face.

Violence in the Language of *Banlieues*

The prevalence of violence in the language of the *banlieues*, especially as portrayed in cultural productions, is remarkable. Does the language of the *banlieue* have a particular association with violence? Why does this association exist in the first place? The *banlieues* have a reputation for both physical and verbal violence (Pooley 320) that appear in the cultural productions on the *banlieues*.[14] "Dans les banlieues, les quartiers dits «sensibles », on a de plus en plus tendance à classer dans le registre de la violence une série de conduites juvéniles" (Peralva 50). It is important to address the reality of violence in the *banlieues* when considering the instances of violence within the cultural productions.

[14] Numerous films have represented the *banlieues* in a harsh and negative viewpoint. Blatt notes Marcel Carne's *Terrain vague* (1960) and Jean-Luc Godard's *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (1967), to Bertrand Blier's *Les Valseuses* (1973) and William Klein's *Le Couple temoin* (1975) as examples of films which "mythologize the banlieue as a cold, inhuman place - the antithesis to the charming *centre ville*" (Blatt 520).

In exploring violence, the youth is of particular interest to scholars as they are often the principal instigators and agents in both the reality and fiction of the *banlieues*.[15] "The biggest unresolved problem is the relationship between youth and police," said a leading youth worker in the *banlieue* (Chrisafis 2015). Towards the end of *L'Esquive*, the audience sees the police force assaulting and brutalizing Krimo and his friends. The clear violence toward the *banlieue* youth from the police force in this scene suggests one of the causes of the resentment and anger felt by the youth toward the police. In addition, the youth of the *banlieues* feel economically marginalized and socially excluded despite their French citizenship, as opposed to many of their parents who were not French citizens. Most young people in the *banlieue*, the majority of whom possess French citizenship, are allowed unlimited political participation due to *jus soli* (citizenship based on place of birth) (Loch 2). However, it is imperative to note that this legal equality is often subverted through the social realities of the *banlieues*.

Although it is possible to see the usage of profanity as verbal violence, in reality, it is more nuanced. Uttering swear words conversationally, not abusively, is never measured or isolated from its insulting counterpart in verbal abuse research, implying that all forms of swearing are abusive (Jay 86). It is imperative to note, however, that swearing (usages of "putain", for example in French) does not necessarily indicate violence. "When a person curses, he or she normally conveys his or her malicious wishes upon another person, a person thus abuses and disdains another person through vulgar language. However, sometimes people curse without having another person in mind, for instance, if they experienced a failure or something unpleasant" (Čekuolytė 6). It is, therefore, crucial to distinguish between swearing as a form of intimidation and threat versus swearing merely as a form of expression or emphasis, without the

[15] The topic of the banlieue youth is a major and common subject for contemporary French fiction works. Examples of this range from texts such as *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (1983), *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* (2004), and *La Seine était rouge* (2003) to films such as *La Haine* (1995) and *Tête de turc* (2010).

intention of inflicting harm on anyone. In *L'Esquive*, "there are numerous additional scenes in which foul language is also used to express anger or fear, clearly establishing that it is the norm in langage de la banlieue" (Blattner 81). This norm of constant swearing and using vulgar language is important to note because it signals the existing widespread anger, fear, and frustration felt within the youth of the *banlieues.*

Is it plausible that the presence of violence in the lexicon of the *banlieue* is not necessarily reflective or representative of malice or animosity, but it is simply a reaction of the inhabitants of the *banlieues* to the place they are ascribed in modern French society, at the margins? Young people in the *banlieues* "consciously rely upon their common language to help them negotiate their identity on terms other than those prescribed by the 'traditional Republican conception of what it means to speak, and to be, French'" (Doran 498). This innate and effortless presence is perhaps the effect of the immense alterity and alienation of the *banlieues*, compared to the rest of France. The residents of the *banlieues*, particularly the youth, feel that they do not belong to France. Issues relating to exclusion and discrimination have long frustrated inhabitants of France's banlieues (Ervine 207). These sentiments have the potential of materializing into various forms of violence.

A critical albeit subtle manner in which the audience can sense the marginalization - one which perhaps relates to violence - is the incarceration of males in the banlieues. "We are told that many of them, including Krimo's father and Fathi's brother, are in prison" (Swamy 66). The shockingly high rates of unemployment, discussed in the previous chapter, have a destabilizing effect on families and communities in the *banlieues*. "As a result of the alienation and desperation stemming from such socio- economic handicaps, persons of Muslim origin constitute a majority of the French prison population. According to Farhad Khosrokhavar, they make up as

much as 70 to 80 percent of inmates in prisons located on urban peripheries, even though they usually constitute just 15 percent of urban populations" (Laurence and Vaisse 2007). This highlights the importance of considering incarceration of males from the *banlieues* as a significant source of socioeconomic marginalization.

The language of the *banlieue* does have an association with violence, as it relates to the landscape of the *banlieue* identity. The youth in the *banlieues* of Paris, and of France, have growing sentiments of a lack of belonging within the framework of mainstream society. The *banlieues* are labeled as spaces "where tension and violence prevail as modes of collective expression" (Thapan 11). As a consequence of the widespread systematic social and economic marginalization and exclusion, the inhabitants of the *banlieues* have become discouraged, frustrated, and resentful in their approaches to French society. Languages are crucial forms of expressive outlets. Therefore, it is expected that the language of a segment of a population that has been historically deprived and disenfranchised has the potential of incorporating violence. The presence of violence in the *banlieue* language is not necessarily reflective or representative of malice or animosity, but it is simply a reaction of the inhabitants of the *banlieues* to the place they are ascribed in modern French society, at the margins.

Verbal Violence in the Language of *L'Esquive*

Although compared to other *banlieue* films such as Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995) or Morel's *Banlieue 13* (2004), Kechiche's *L'Esquive* does not create a film that revolves solely around violence. Violence is not an overwhelmingly central or conspicuous theme in *L'Esquive.* However, instances of violence, in particular, verbal violence, permeates throughout the the film. Throughout much of the dialogues in *L'Esquive*, instances and implications of violence emerge in the exchanges between the characters, regardless of the gender of both the speaker and the

listener. Although *L'Esquive* has been studied by several scholars[16] - particularly with emphases on identity, contemporary culture, otherness, and sociocultural framework - most have largely neglected to analyze violence in the language itself.

At a first glance, the audience might not recognize violence as an integral part of the film. In fact, one film critic has noted that "*L'Esquive* is not a tale of drugs, violence, or the veil - issues which have become synonymous with the *banlieues"* ("Marivaux in the Hood"). It is important however to recognize the significance of violence in the film which unfolds in closer scrutiny of the script. The violence portrayed in the film is quite subtle, yet pervasive, particularly revealing itself in the language of the film. This sort of subtlety presented by Kechiche leaves the audience wondering and pondering the actual existence of violence in the *banlieues*. The film does not portray inescapable and ruthless violence; instead, its depiction of violence is more sophisticated and nuanced because it appears only in the tone that accompanies languages.

The opening scene of Kechiche's film is most revelatory of how violence pervades the social context of the film; the menacing and aggressive exchange during the first two minutes of *L'Esquive* establishes the tone for much of the 117-minutes long film. The language used in the opening dialogue, combined with the tone and attitudes of the young characters, serve as a cue to the audience of the copious examples of violence that will ensue.

In this scene, we see a group of young males planning a retaliatory attack on a pair of unnamed teenagers. The framing of the shots are focused on the faces of these adolescents with a series of close-up and over-the-shoulder shots, alternating between the characters. These close-

[16] Dana Strand analyzes *L'Esquive* through the lenses of the formation of a national identity and the role French schools play in that formation; she asks what it means *'to speak, and to be, French'*. Ari Blatt discusses the film from a sociopolitical angle, combining concepts of otherness. Vinay Swamy explores cultural integration within the *banlieue*, with a focus on socio-political and ideological factors.

up shots are used in this scene, complemented by a few shots of the towering HLMs above, to convey the urgency, anger, and outrage of the youth. The language used in this exchange is replete with violence. One of the youths yells, “on leur met des coups de massue” while another yells “on lui casse les genoux”. These violent declarations open the film suggesting imminent onscreen physical violence as the young boys seem to be planning a retaliation. . However, that promise of violence will never come instead these threats set the tone for a film that is very much about the menacing language of violence than anything else. They are examples of verbal violence because their purpose is to cause fear not instigate harm. In fact, the audience has the impression that each teenager is trying to outdo the other’s promise of violence. One of the boys says, “je vais les tuer,” pushing the boundaries of violence, with escalating threats.

One of the characters asks repeatedly “T’es chaud?”, which is not used in its literal meaning, but rather to ask if his friend is up for a fight. Language undoubtedly includes facial expressions and gestures as well, and these too are readily apparent in the opening scene. The expressions on the faces of the youth are furious and determined, indicating their anger and frustration. The volume of the conversation is indicative of the urgency of the issue, as they are all yelling one over the other, so much so that it is hard to understand them at times. What results is a cacophony of threatening words and gestures delivered in a tone of aggression that sets the stage for the way characters express themselves and play out their relationships with each other as we will soon see.

This opening tirade of threats is also enacted solely between young adolescent boys, who play on their gender privilege by using language that especially targets women : “eh je vais niquer leurs mères,” “fils de pute, on va les prendre, sur la tête de ma mère ils vont voir” and “le premier qu'on voit, la vie de ma mère qu'on va le baiser sa mère”. Every threat makes an explicit

attack on or reference to a woman, and specifically to a mother. Mothers are threatened of rape, debased as whores, and used as curse words. The teenagers refer to their enemies as *fils de putes*, suggesting that they are illegitimate trash, since their mothers' lack all moral adroitness. What is even more disconcerting is that the female characters in the film also use this language that relies on gender violence. One of the female teenagers, Magali, is portrayed as hostile and belligerent. In one instance Magali becomes verbally aggressive with Lydia whom she accuses of stealing her boyfriend Krimo. At another time, Magali tells Krimo in an aggressive tone: "tu viens comme ça, tu crois que j'suis ta pute?" and hurls obscenities at him, "sale connard, va! Enculé, va!" using the same language of sexual violence that women are subject to and returning it right back. It could be argued that at the core of this female appropriation of violent sexualized gender-based language lies a female desire to mock and disempower this imposed language of violent masculinity and thus respond to their own gendered linguistic abjection.

One of the most egregious incidents of violence in *L'Esquive* occurs between Fathi, a young teenage boy, and Frida, a young adolescent girl - both of Maghrebian origin. The scene begins with a conversation that quickly escalates into an altercation between Fathi and Frida. The conversation devolves into a vomiting of insults and threats, by both characters. The verbal violence quickly turns into physical violence as Fathi slaps Frida, forcefully grabs her arm, and pushes her to the ground. Extending for 3 minutes and 16 seconds, this scene of male on female brutality is painstakingly shot in medium close-up as Fathi comes onto the scene and snatches Frida's phone from her while she is mid-conversation; he begins hurling insults at her friend Lydia by saying, "ta copine, l'autre pute, Lydia, là". This obviously irritates Frida as she has nothing to do with Lydia and Krimo, but Fathi continues to intimidate Frida and tells her to ask Lydia to steer clear of Krimo. Kechiche's use of the close-up then shows the facial expressions

of both a threatening Fathi and a screaming Frida, with the HLMs set behind them. The expressions on Frida's face turn from anger and frustration to fear and pain; while Fathi's remain implacable and hostile. Because Fathi neither leaves her alone nor returns her phone, Frida gets increasingly vexed and yells, "mon grand frère va te niquer ta race, espèce de bouffon. mon grand frère va te démolir, il va te mettre par terre, tu vas rien comprendre". In her efforts to get Fathi to leave her alone, she intimidates him by responding to his threats with yet another threat, surmising that her brother will attack and beat him in turn. Unlike Magali, when faced with real physical violence, the female character is unable to conjure any real threats of her own, as she appeals to the presence of yet another man. Her language is full of violence, however and phrases such as "mon grand frère va te démolir" suggests her way of exerting power and strength over him is by calling up an older bigger male character. Fathi, upon hearing this, is furious and his facial expression changes into fury - he assaults Frida physically by slapping her and pushing her down. He reinforces his power over her by saying, "toi et tes copines là, je vais tous vous niquer, votre race, si vous continuez". Frida is visibly frightened and in pain while Fathi grips her arm with force. Fathi's violent language is replete with threats of rape and impending collective sexual assault. This scene of violence from a young man and directed toward a group of females indicates the precarious gender imbalance within the communities that the language of the banlieue exposes for us.

Kechiche, as scholars have pointed out, offers an unadorned view into the social interactions of the youth in the *banlieues*. Critic Vinay Swamy argues that "*L'Esquive* is not predicated on explicit violence, unlike some other *banlieue* films" (Swamy 67). And yet the pervasiveness of verbal violence is disarming. Following the attack on her, Frida yells as Fathi is walking away with her phone, "Vas te faire foutre! Vas te faire enculé, putain de pédé fils de

pute!" Her speech is full of insulting slurs - including homophobic slurs as she calls him "putain de pédé". Ari Blatt claims that Kechiche included the scene of Fathi violently threatening to beat Frida only to avoid charges of naive utopian posturing" (Blatt 521). However, Kechiche, I would argue, includes this scene because he is offering what he thinks is the most realistic image of the *banlieue*, and not because he wants to avoid making the *banlieue* seem like a Utopia. Kechiche does not see the *banlieue* as being a place of inescapable violence, as he conveys it to be a much more nuanced place with his film, which is essentially a tale of success. However, the meaning of success for *L'Esquive* and in the larger context of the *banlieues* is not always definitive. Although the film was about the successful integration of deviant youth, it still shows how violence is an integral part of the social fabric of *banlieue* youth, inescapable, dangerous, and ultimately disarming.

Conclusion

Violence in the *banlieues* remain a contentious topic of discussion because of its complex and sensitive nature. This thesis delved into representations of violence as it occurs in the *banlieue*. Since the 1990s, the image of the French *banlieues* have been commonly equated with violence, danger, alterity, and a complete rejection of the French way of life (Levasseur 2008). The media purports the *banlieue* to be an area infested with high crime rates. However, it is crucial to examine violence from another angle, that is discursive violence toward the *banlieue* and its residents.

Discourses of violence against the residents of the *banlieue* in media and political rhetoric are rampant in contemporary French society. Moreover, with the recent rise in terrorism and jihadism, political discourse in France has targeted immigrants, and especially Muslim ones.[17] The vitriol toward the *banlieue* residents, particularly Muslim immigrants, has thus informed a powerful response in the form of rap music through an incorporation of violence into lyrics and in general rap culture in France.[18]

Discursive violence can refer to words, gestures, tones, images, presentations, and omissions (Yep 23) that propagate violence, no matter how subtle, toward a particular person or group of people. It is particularly important, in the context of the *banlieue*, to recognize the power of this type of violence which can be used to marginalize an already disenfranchised group even further. Discourse has the capacity to become violent toward the already marginalized groups in societies as it "justifies force and violence toward some groups (labeled

[17] An article on *L'Express*, a French weekly magazine, claims "La construction médiatique d'un "problème musulman" va en s'intensifiant, notamment depuis la séquence politique sur l'identité nationale." The notion of Islam as being incompatible with French values is propagated in the media.

[18] Some popular French rappers who are actively responding to the discursive violence through music are Suprême NTM, Iron Sy, and Sniper.

as enemies, the undeserving, welfare cheats, criminals, murderers, the homeless), but obviates the violence done to those who support the current order (Manning and Singh 347). One can see the widespread prevalence in the exploitation of this in the rhetoric of the media and politicians - both in France and in the United States. With the impending 2016 American and French presidential elections, violence has taken the form of incendiary political speeches by Marine Le Pen[19] and Donald Trump[20], and yet this is not something new to the political discourse of either country.

In France, former president Jacques Chirac, alluded to the noise and smell of immigrants as the mayor of Paris in 1991, when he described how "ça pose moins de problèmes que d'avoir des musulmans et des Noirs" and "si vous ajoutez à cela le bruit et l'odeur, eh bien le travailleur français sur le palier devient fou. (Keaton, Sharpley-Whiting, and Stovall 94). This sort of statement forcefully pushes the immigrants, many of whom are *banlieue* residents, to the margin while ensuring the French republic's alienation of them. After Chirac former president Nicolas Sarkozy as Minister of the Interior, initially promising new and inventive models for solving issues of integration, spoke of purging the *banlieue* of its *racaille* during the 2005 riots.. Sarkozy's rhetoric remained derisive and contemptuous toward immigrants, many of whom live in the *banlieues* while he stated,"Quand on habite en France, on respecte ses règles : on n'est pas polygame, on ne pratique pas l'excision sur ses filles, on n'égorge pas le mouton dans son appartement" (Keaton, Sharpley-Whiting, and Stovall 115). What has ensued after the recent attacks in Paris and Nice, is a renewed form of this type of violence in spoken discourse that has

[19] French newspaper *Le Figaro* featured a quote from Marine Le Pen, «les prières de rue des musulmans à une forme d'occupation, sans blindés ni soldats, mais d'occupation tout de même». Le Pen frequently connects terrorism to immigration, especially immigration by Muslims.

[20] Donald Trump has claimed to CNN's Anderson Cooper, "I think Islam hates us. There's a tremendous hatred, there's an unbelievable hatred of us." In addition, he's repeatedly called for a temporary ban on Muslims entering the U.S. Additionally, he's proposed building a wall on the U.S. - Mexico border to keep immigrants out.

now escalated to unprecedented levels. In fact, François Hollande's Minister of Justice Christiane Taubira resigned from her position in opposition to the French government statements about the need for racial profiling.

A member of a French rap group once said, for many politicians, "Everything bad - rap, crime, AIDS - comes from Algeria or Islam (Aidi 2014). Media sources and politicians continuously created and recreate an image of the *banlieue* as violent and out of control that has heightened since recent attacks like the Charlie Hebdo massacre that was perpetrated by two young immigrants from the *banlieue.*

Discursive violence is furthermore intertwined with the history of French rap music as it relates specifically to the Parisian *banlieues.* French rap music emerged in the early 1980s (Durand 1), with the arrival of the rap influence from the United States. Since its creation, the musical genre has evolved to become both wildly popular and highly controversial (Chennault 1). Rap music, both in America and in France, is considered to be the music of a marginalized population. French rappers take pride in humble beginnings and *banlieue* root (Huq 43). "American rap is said to be the voice of the inner cities' African-American population, whereas French rap has evolved to become the voice of the *Banlieusard*, an inhabitant of France's poverty-stricken suburbs or '*la Banlieue*'" (Chennault 2). The majority of French rappers are second generation immigrants (Chennault 3) who feel excluded and marginalized from French society and culture. French rap is inevitably linked to political criticism (Chennault 3), and is known for its socially conscious lyrics.

Exploring French rappers' roles as representatives and reporters of the *banlieue*, Schyler Chennault analyzes French rap lyrics to determine rappers' perception of *banlieue* violence. "It [French rap music] has been the subject of legal debate because of its violent content, and

accused of encouraging violent behavior" (Chennault 1). Rap has become an integral part of the culture and identity of the *banlieue* in contemporary times, with France now producing more rap music than any other country, after the United States (Chennault 2). The inhabitants of the banlieues are continually confronted with social and economic seclusion, which produces a sense of neglect and forgetfulness within the structure of mainstream French society. The media, in its representations of the banlieue as a "violent breeding ground" exacerbates the separation between the *banlieues* and mainstream French society.

The socioeconomic and political marginalization of the *banlieue* is reinforced by the lack of transparency in the media and political sphere. It is as if for the French society, "violence can only be seen through a telescope whose field of vision is focused on one site and cannot be turned nor expanded to reveal a larger picture" (McLaren et. al. 145). "Discursive violence places blame on the victims of systematic violence while mystifying the role of the privileged in perpetuating that same system" (McLaren et. al. 139). For residents of the *banlieues*, this "systematic" violence - never reported by the media - includes high incarceration rates and police brutality, something we see in Kechiche's *L'Esquive*.

IAM, a French rapper, discusses how violence in the *banlieue* is essentially the sole act that seems to merit attention on the news (Chennault 44), while the roots of that violence in the *banlieue* – adverse conditions such as poverty, police brutality, and the State's lack of concern – go unnoticed altogether. "Symbolic violence functions at its veiled best in the absence of overt oppression. Violence is normalized until sighted through discursive strategies which expose its clandestine existence. Discursive violence is often the subtle maintenance of more overt forms of violence" (McLaren et. al. 142). It can be argued that the French republic is actively upholding

the level of violence in the *banlieue* by imposing discursive violence and neglecting the sources of oppression in the *banlieue.*

Contemporary French rappers are responding to this marginalization through music however; a number of rappers have "reconfigured the artistic and societal image of the *banlieue* space," and claimed other racial and religious groups as also French (Dotson-Renta 354). The *banlieue* is the ideal place to examine French rap music and discourse in response to marginalization because it is the site at which "the fractures and discontinuities in French national identity are most visible. The *banlieue* is a place of exclusion that is nevertheless an imbricated part of French society" (Dotson-Renta 354). The violence in rap music then is just a reflection, a mirroring, of the violence that already exists in the *banlieues* as a result of social and economic marginalization.

The youth, most affected by unemployment and incarceration, were the principal perpetrators of the violent riots in 2005. Often, the media and scholars reduce the purpose of riots and protests to simply criminal acts. However, it is important to recognize the underlying issues that caused the eruptions of riots in the *banlieues* rather than continuing to neglect these societal and structural problems. The youth of the *banlieues* use riots as a mode of expression because it is an approach to gain momentum and garner attention. The youth feel completely isolated, even as French citizens, and they want to overturn the structural marginalization.

It is insufficient to examine the *banlieue* in a vacuum, without analyzing the space that it truly is, a space of social and economic marginalization and seclusion. The film discussed in chapter 2, *Banlieue 13*, depicts the *banlieue* with an apocalyptic touch, but it nevertheless conveys the social reality, one which is a process of an amalgamation of factors such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and lack of integration. If Pierre Morel's *Banlieue 13* is a climactic

and apocalyptic look into the banlieues, Abdellatif Kechiche's *L'Esquive* is an unadorned image of the cité. In the analysis of violence in the *banlieues*, these two films - released only a year apart - are on completely separate ends of the spectrum. *Banlieue 13* represents physical violence in a steadfast and intense manner. *L'Esquive*, on the contrary, ends on an ambiguous note - signaling the uncertainty of the *banlieue* without being overly positive or overly negative.

Among the integral characteristics of the *banlieues* is the distinct nature of its language, shaped by complex cultural identities. Banlieue French arises from the residents' need to create and negotiate their identities in response to their oppression by French society. The defining aspects of the language of the *banlieues* are: inversion of syllables in words, borrowing from specific foreign languages, infusion of religious expressions, and a tone of aggression, marked by excessive vulgarity. The language of the *banlieue* does have an association with violence, as it relates to the landscape of *banlieue* identity. The youth in the *banlieues* of Paris, and of France, experience a lack of belonging to mainstream society. As a consequence of the widespread systematic socioeconomic marginalization and exclusion, the inhabitants of the *banlieues* have become discouraged, frustrated, and resentful toward French society. Languages are thus crucial forms of expression in giving voice to those who are otherwise spoken for by media and political discursive outlets alone. The presence of violence in *banlieue* French cannot be reified into a reflection or representation of malice or animosity alone, it is simply a response by the inhabitants of the *banlieues* to the place and status they are ascribed in modern French society, that is at its utmost margins.

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