La Haine:
Framing the 'Urban Outcasts'

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Abstract

The Parisian banlieues, long absent from the dominant French imaginary, have materialized as spatialized, racialized markers of political-economic crisis, social fragmentation, crime and violence. In this paper I consider how the film *La Haine* (1995) confronts this contemporary spatialized and historicized anxiety by critiquing assumptions behind such dominant representations. I begin by situating *La Haine* alongside other 'banlieue films' that have challenged hegemonic conceptions of France's imagined geographic identity. I then outline some of the key historical moments that transformed the banlieues from 'terra incognita' into the 'fractures at the end of the 20th century'. I go on to examine *La Haine's* combined narrative style and cinematic form to argue that the film's attention to spatiality – or the social relations shaping the boundaries between the 'urban' and 'suburban' – explicitly confronts the hidden foundations of neo-racism in France. The film, through both content and form, exposes historical and emergent forces framing banlieues and youth, offering a critical reflection on the many levels of mediation between the film itself and the material conditions which gave rise to its production.

"*We don't exist, nobody sees us*" A youth from a banlieue outside of Paris

– Laperyronnie, 1992; quoted in Wacquant, 1993, 377

Since the 1990's the spaces of the French banlieues – once beyond the boundaries of the dominant geographic imaginary – now emanate images of deviance, violence, and disorder (Hargreaves, 1996); part and parcel of an increasingly globalized image regime. In the wake of uprisings in these suburban regions, most recently in the fall of 2005, youth from the banlieues have been branded as a 'symptom' – projected through a prism of structural risks (such as globalization and advanced capitalism) and cultural fears (such as immigration and national identity) – of a nation in crisis.[2] It was in the midst of this moment – marked by a rising tide of reactionary nationalism – that 'banlieue films' emerged in France. The most critically acclaimed and commercially successful film of this period was Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995), a story which captures one day in the life of three young 'outcasts' from a Parisian banlieue. In this paper I examine how the film's narrative style and cinematic form confront this spatialized and historicized anxiety, interrogating assumptions behind dominant representations of banlieues and youth. The film not only renders visible people and places hitherto denied the right to represent themselves – it does so without harbouring any illusions concerning the ideological nature of representing the so-called 'underclass' and its habitat. In other words, it is not sufficient to read *La Haine* as an exposé of the alienated everyday life of the 'underclass' in the banlieue: much of its artistic and political value comes from critical reflections on the many levels of mediation between the film itself and the material conditions which gave rise to its production.

Many reviewers have noted (and sometimes faulted) the film for centering its problematic not on ethnic differences, but rather on the socio-spatial inequities between Paris and its suburbs. Indeed, space plays a central role in determining the aesthetic of the film, and is profoundly constitutive of the protagonists' subject formations. But it is precisely because the film devotes such attention to this spatiality – without resorting to a 'remapping' of the social – that makes it of particular interest to critical geographers of the city. As Jameson (1992, 2) notes, the totality of forces contributing to "urban dissolution and reghettoization" cannot simply be socially 'mapped' (be it spatial, cognitive, cinematic, or otherwise),

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[2] An anxiety confined not only to the French nation: In 2005, a concentrated rise in violent activity among racialized youth in Toronto's inner suburbs prompted France's Canadian Ambassador Daniel Jouanneau to offer Torontonians some 'Lessons from the Violence in Paris' (see Jouanneau, 2005).

because it inevitably only provides a caricature of the globalized structure of relations producing the spaces our lived experience. What is key is how such tools render visible the mediated relationship between ideology, representational practices, and the spaces of everyday life, evoking a sense of how such relations are materially grounded and historically produced (Goonewardena, 2005). The film speaks to both the suburbanization of poverty and racialization of the suburbs in France through a postmodern fragmentary aesthetic to 'shock' as Walter Benjamin ([1936] 2005) might say, its viewers into insight. The juxtaposition of images, sounds, and camera angles, alongside the narrative itself evince veiled relations between space and time, prodding its audience to question received attitudes and perceptions, or the various levels of mediation that have enabled the words 'banlieue youth' to become synonymous with crime, poverty and arrested social development.

Critiquing the film for a lack of attention to 'ethnicity' threatens to ignore how the film explicitly confronts shifting social relations shaping the boundaries between the centre and periphery – a central part of what Balibar calls part of a "spectrum of ideological formations" defining an emergent neo-racism in France (2001, 480). The youth have become 'symptoms' of a nation in crisis, not only out of the forces of racialization, but also because of their 'cultural otherness': marginalized as residents of a Parisian banlieue. Past exclusions rooted in a colonial mentality have been reconfigured into the present (Balibar, 1991, 9), fashioned in such a way that – migration, and 'the immigrant' in general, are transformed into both a 'cause and effect' of an insecurity (1991, 226), which finds its 'natural' spatial fix in France's multi-ethnic banlieues.

It was François Maspero's novel, *Les Passagers du Roissy-Express,* published in 1990, that perhaps first anticipated the latent anxiety stemming from the intense socio-spatial segregation between Paris and the banlieues. The novel represented a "new and different type of urban literature, one that include[d] the periphery rather than delegitimating it" (Wilson cited in Jones 2004, 127). The novel centres on a group of Parisians who embark on a 'journey' to the banlieues of Paris – a place "many Parisians saw…as a shapeless muddle, a desert containing ten million inhabitants, a series of indistinct grey buildings: a circular purgatory, with Paris as paradise in the middle. The suburbs were something 'all around'. A wasteland. A land for wasting souls" ([1990] 1994, 16). If Maspero's novel began to reconfigure the boundaries of France's imagined geographical identity, the so-called *cinéma de banlieue* that emerged in the mid-nineties gave this movement concrete cultural form. Film critic Bernice Reynaud notes that French cinema has long neglected the banlieue,[3] which has had the effect of keeping the (largely)

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[3] Neglected, but not ignored. See especially Godard's *Une femme mariée* (1964)*, Deux ou trios choses que je sais d'elle* (1967) and *Numero deux* (1975); Pialat's *Loulou* (1979)*;*   and

immigrant working class and their histories cut off from the dominant French cultural imaginary (1996). But the multiethnic Parisian banlieues have increasingly become a space from which French cinema has consciously challenged hegemonic representations of 'Frenchness' (understood as white, metropolitan, and middle class) (Tarr, 1997), and *La Haine* became only one of many films emerging from the banlieues, giving cultural expression to a side of France not readily visible. This genre is exemplified in such films as Thomas Gilou's *Raï* (1995), Jean-François Richet's *État des lieux* (1995), Chibane's *Douce France* (1995), and Karim Dridi's *Bye Bye* (1996). What these films share is a desire to interrogate existing and historical social relations between periphery and centre.[4] What separates them from other genres of French cinema is their attention to the lingering effects of French colonialism, something which the majority of mainstream French films have been "notoriously reluctant" to do[5] (Tarr, 1997). Most 'banlieue' films share a common theme of a 'journey' between the banlieue and the city – often plagued with difficulty and dwelling on an acute socio-spatial divide, by way of plot lines and other cinematic techniques. They also attempt to interrogate universalist notions of citizenship, showing how this concept on which the French Republic was constructed, has for many of the 'urban outcasts', become little more than an empty signifier. But if these films have become an allegory for the postcolonial present, they also emphasize the possibility of subversion and transgression, as their narratives oscillate between spaces of state-regulated, highly controlled landscapes to abandoned warehouses and vast rooftops where the protagonists – at least momentarily – are able transgress the boundaries of state surveillance to cultivate spaces of their own accord (see Fielder, 2001).

The banlieues: from 'terra incognita' to the 'fractures at the end of the 20th century'

> The twentieth-century suburbs of Paris have often remained beyond the boundaries of popular imagination. In few of the world's great cities is the contrast between urb and suburb so dramatic as in Paris; as soon as one crosses the péréphirique, the outer belt that is the real boundary of the city, one abruptly leaves the elegant row houses of the capital behind to enter a world of architectural disarray. Even though the Paris suburbs have grown enormously since 1900 and are

Rohmer's *Les Nuits de la pleine lune* (1984). For a more comprehensive discussion of French cinema and the *banlieue*, see Tarr (2005).

[4] What they also share is a stereotyped portrayal of women as the object of sexual desire and agent provocateurs. As Carrie Tarr (1997) ironically notes, Kassovitz 'solves' the issue of female representations by erasing them almost entirely from the script of *La Haine*.

[5] Michael Haneke's haunting film Caché (2006) provides a recent exception.

> now home to one out of every nine people in France, they are
> nonetheless terra incognita to most (Stovall, 1990, 1)

Conventional assumptions of the banlieue as a stigmatized space can be traced as far back as the thirteenth century, where banlieues marked the peripheral space one league from the centre of the city and the term *au ban* meant to be excluded from a group by proclamation (Viellard-Baron, 1996). The 19th century Hausmannian projects inaugurated under Napoleon III led to a massive dispersal of the urban poor, contributing to the formation of the historic working-class Red Belt bordering Paris by early the next century. After the Second World War, another wave of expulsions began, fuelled by a massive economic boom in Paris that provoked an acute housing shortage as people from both the countryside and the colonies migrated to the city for employment. Branded as *Les Trente Glorieuses*, this period extended from 1945 to 1974, and was marked by extraordinary growth in the banlieues*,* as the so-called *bidonvilles* on the outskirts of the city were demolished to produce clean, modern homes (Ross, 1996;Merlin 1998). Many of these were council properties (*logements sociaux*) or *grands ensembles* – high-rise modernist estates on the outside of Paris whose names, such as *Les Quatre Mille,* (built in 1964), boasted the number of suites they contained.

As Kristin Ross notes, in her fascinating account of the modernization of France, twenty four percent of Paris' built environment was demolished and rebuilt under the pretext of hygiene and security.

And while the numbers of working class living in Paris during this period declined by 44 percent, the number of *'cadres supérieurs'* increased by an astonishing 51 percent. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century this rapidly modernizing city adopted an increasingly racialized urban form:

> French modernization, and the new capital city that crowned it, was
> built largely on the backs of Africans – Africans who found
> themselves progressively cordoned off in new forms of urban
> segregation as a result of this process … By 1969, one in six
> inhabitants of the greater Paris region lived in a *grand ensemble*.
> Paris *intramuros,* peopled by the mostly white upper class and
> middle classes, became in those years what we now know it to be: a
> power site at the centre of an archipelago of *banlieues* inhabited
> mostly by working class people, a large percentage of them
> immigrants (Ross, 1999, 151-152).

By the late 1970s many low-skilled factory workers in the banlieue who had been steadily migrating for work since the 1950s from the French colonies of Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco were increasingly finding themselves laid off or permanently unemployed. Between 1975 and 1990 France lost 1.3 million industrial jobs and most of the public housing estates were concentrated in the areas severely affected by this deindustrialization (Body-Gendrot, 2000). Alarmed by the dire social

effects of the ongoing crisis of deindustrialisation, leaders from across the political spectrum began to formulate struggles against the effects of such uneven development by articulating plans rooted in the notion of 'equality' and a nationalist discourse of a 'collective French identity' (Balibar, 1991). Take for instance, *Banlieues 89,* an ambitious urban revitalization 'movement', organized under Mitterrand's socialist government, designed to address the problems plaguing France's suburban regions.[6] For the leftist organisers of *Banlieue 89*, the number '89' was chosen to encapsulate the notion of 'equality' rooted in the birth of French Republic in 1789. What is crucially missing from such representational strategizing is of course, the story of French colonization, which in the late 18th century, was on the cusp of its most expansionary, violent phase. Thus, a program that was designed to overcome the stigmatization associated with banlieue life valorizes a historicized 'French' identity, while silencing a side of history integral to the very problem its architects aimed to address.

If *Banlieue 89*'s cultural aspirations were distorted, so were its more functional ambitions. In 1991, after being interrupted by the election of a conservative government and plagued by internal bureaucracy, the program officially ended. Even though over 100 projects were realized (Roberts, 2000), an emphasis on aesthetics and fragmented policy changes did little to tackle structural unemployment nor systemic racism, and the numbers of those without work in the banlieues continued to escalate, approaching 50-80% in some regions. Little has changed on these estates, or *les cités* as they came to be called. Stigmatized and segregated from the metropolitan centres they surround, they remain disconnected from neighbouring commercial centres. A study by France's *Institut d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme* revealed that in 82 neighbourhoods surrounding Greater Paris, residents had to travel between one and two miles, usually crossing railway tracks or highways, just to reach a shopping complex or movie theatre (Body-Gendrot, 2000). Viellard-Baron, who has written extensively on the social apartheid of France's banlieues notes that Chanteloup-de-Vignes (the cité where *La Haine* was filmed) was designed with no direct access to the neighbouring village of La Noë – it was, quite simply, surrounded by a sea of empty fields. It was three years before a rail station was built – which, on opening day, was promptly set ablaze (1987).

The fractures at the end of the 20th century

In the summer of 1991, during the so-called *été chaud*, violent confrontations between youths and police spread through the peripheral regions of Lyon, Paris and Marseilles, thrusting the banlieues and youth into the spotlight; a

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[6] See Roberts (2000) for an extensive discussion of this program of urban and architectural renewal.

focus of widespread anxiety that fuelled fears of mass urban disorder (Dubet and Lapeyronnie, 1992; Wacquant, 1993b). Consequently, the youth living in these areas emerged as the target of spreading unease. Indeed, as Loïc Wacquant observed at the beginning of the early 1990's, much of the antagonism has not been directed at particular immigrant groups, but toward youth themselves, who then are projected as unified social subject. 'Youth' are publicly held responsible for the decaying physical and social state of the banlieues – the singular cause of insecurity (1993a). More recently, Jocelyne Cesari noted that

> the symbolic ghettoization of these neighborhoods – particularly in regard to the younger generation – has only grown stronger in both political discourse and the media. On a regular basis, suburban youth are referred to as a threat: a dangerous social class made up of people who do little but steal and engage in all sorts of illegal activity. In the past five years, the teenagers of the suburbs have been portrayed as budding terrorists, as rapists (with the gang-rape controversies of the past ten years), and, after the debates over the headscarf, as their sisters' oppressors (2005).

In 1995 the newly elected President Jacques Chirac branded the banlieues as the "fractures at the end of the twentieth century" (Reader, 1995, 12), announcing a "national plan for integration", based on his own "Marshall plan for the banlieue" (Vincendeau, 2005,19). What emerged rather, was a renewed form of colonial governance, inspired by the 1994 translation of Wilson and Kelling's (1982) 'broken windows' theory of crime. As such, the Interior Minister took a profound interest in the state's management of public housing projects, successfully implementing changes to the penal code to allow prison sentences for public order violations such as loitering in their entrance ways and stairwells – policies which targeted the most visible of infractions to aid in successful prosecution. Such intensive policing, or what Silverstein and Tetreault (2006) have called the "defacto militarization of housing projects", has resulted in spikes in certain juvenile offences that French legislators then use to justify funnelling more resources and repressive tactics into the criminal justice system (Ossman and Terrio, 2006).

It was the perverse rationale behind such changes to France's approach to social welfare that banlieue films aimed to confront head on. *La Haine* was the most widely viewed and highly acclaimed of these films;[7] shortly after its release, Bernice Reynaud argued that *La Haine's* success

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[7] Kassovitz took the award for Best Director at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival. The film was also re-released as a 'Special 10th Anniversary Edition' with a new updated English translation.

wasn't so surprising after all. The ethnic melting pot of the banlieues has become an infernal brew, and the bubbles that have appeared now and then…are the symptoms of a long overdue volcanic explosion. When a majority of French voters recently elected a right-wing government, it was with the frightened hope of containing that explosion. [*La Haine*] hit home because it articulated the narrative possibility of what everybody fears – or hopes; yes, the banlieues will burn (1996, 54).

La Haine: Burnin' all illusions…

La Haine charts a tense duration of nearly 24 hours, after a night of rioting in a Parisian banlieue. The intersection between time and space plays an essential role through both narrative and style, traversing the realm of the future, and historicizing the sphere of the present. Ironically, this attention to time would lend a predictive element to the film, as its release coincided with uprisings in the Parisian banlieues in July of 1995, and foreshadowed the massive rebellion outside the capital in the fall of 2005. The film opens with an image of the earth as a voice-over tells the story of a man falling from a 50 story building, chanting: '*so far, so good; so far, so good*' when suddenly, a Molotov cocktail hurls toward the earth, and it explodes in flames. The screen quickly dissolves into a montage of documentary images relaying scenes of a riot incited by a police beating of a young *beur*[8] named Abdel. Finally, this montage is itself transformed into a televised screen image, and subsequently 'switched off'. This is a powerful opening, and with Bob Marley's prophetic song of insurrection *Burnin' and lootin'* forming the soundtrack, the scene works, as Sharma and Sharma have noted, "to connect these acts of resistance and rebellion to wider post-colonial struggles against racist state terror and social injustice" (2000, 104). But these images also recall the student protests of May '68: as the youth of 1968 were rendered impotent by the emerging 'bureaucratic society of controlled consumption' and colonization of everyday life by the commodity form, the youth protesting today, even though the majority are French citizens, are reacting against the emptiness of this category, as they are socially racialized, spatially marginalized and politically immobilized. The protagonists – all members of the so-called 'underclass' – are unemployed and unwanted by a Republic that prefers to deny or, at best, contain their existence (Figure 1).

The three main characters of the film are Saïd, of Arab decent, Hubert, of African decent, and Vinz, a Jew (Figure 2). The multi-ethnic image of these youth projects the reality of the 'new' France, cleverly subverting bleu-blanc-rouge, (the

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[8] *Beur*, a popular slang term for a person of Arab origin, comes from *Verlan* –a vernacular dialect popular in the 1970s and recently revitalized by *banlieue* youth especially in hip-hop culture.

Figure 1 *Police occupation in the cité the morning after the riot*

national colours of France), for black-blanc-beur (black-white-Arab). Black-blanc-beur is an essential part of the film's imagery disrupting the ideology of 'solidarité' – an ideology vital to the formation of French nationalism. The multicultural image of 'black-blanc-beur' for example, was popularized in the wake of France's World Cup victory in 1998, where the term was harnessed to project the notion of unification of the French nation (Vincendeau, 2000).

Figure 2 *Vinz, Hubert and Saïd.*

La Haine not only ruptures the metaphor of *solidarité* but also brings the banlieue, the youth, and 'the immigrant' together into a historicized space and spatialized time to reveal 'neo-racism' as an emergent social category onto itself. The Maghrebian, African and Jew are not explicit targets of racial stigmatization

due to their biological 'otherness', but rather their cultural 'otherness' as residents of the banlieue – transformed into spatialized, racialized markers of political-economic crisis, social fragmentation, crime and violence. When Vinz remarks, for example, that he doesn't want to be the next Arab killed in a police station, Saïd jokes about Vinz's honourary Arab status. What this suggests is that all poor youth from the cité are likely targets of police brutality, recalibrating conventional notions of racism from a 'legitimately' biological platform, to a 'legitimately' cultural one, where a particular 'style of life' or 'way of being' becomes crucial to French identity (see Balibar, 1991). Allusions to conventional acts of racialization are re-configured in new socio-spatial terms: onto the banlieues and youth. This recalibration is part of a necessary logic of the 'new racism' as Howard Winnant suggests when he argues, that neo-racism in France and Britain:

> has [had] the effect of displacing the hostile, competitive and anxiety-ridden themes which figured race as 'otherness', but which had been stigmatized in the post-World War period-and especially in the 1960's. These tropes could hardly be eliminated or uprooted, for they signified the most fundamental social structure, both global and local: the North-South divide, the international division of labour, the ongoing legacies of colonialism…Yet officially they could hardly be reaffirmed either. Any explicitly racist discourse, or officially racist policy…would have been immediately discredited. In short, concepts of racial differences had to be reinterpreted or rearticulated in at least ostensibly non-racial ways (2001, 273).

As this film demonstrates, at the scale of the urban this neo-racism is grounded on the cultural superiority of the bourgeois urbanite's style of life over the young *banlieusards.* The protagonists are paradoxically only a train ride away, but a world apart from the cosmopolitan culture of late capitalist urban space. This message is driven home in the film when the youth, having been held up by an extended and unwarranted police interrogation, miss their last train home, and are left stranded in Paris till dawn. Destined to wander the streets, they eventually find their way to a vernissage. Yet once inside, a series of humorous, yet aggravated attempts made by the youth to 'fit in' – first by trying to engage with the artwork, and when that fails, trying to stir conversation with some women – proves futile, and is punctuated with their dramatic expulsion from the gallery (Figure 3). With the youth gone, the gallery owner turns to his visibly shaken guests and remarks "Off the estates".

If the film works to show how conventional notions of racism in France have been recalibrated into the contemporary moment, critical historical and geographical referents, from working class France to American pop culture, historicize and humanize the film's cinematic landscape. Such techniques challenges conceptual categories that rely on 'identity' as the organizing principle

of analysis so as not to reify such differences – but rather to show how such representations arise out of range of social situations that are themselves both situation specific *and* structured by broader historical and globalizing forces.

Figure 3 *The gallery owner informing his unwanted guests they must leave.*

For example when the camera takes aim on a resident DJ in the cité, he turns his speaker out his open bedroom window to spin a mix of KRS-One's *Sounds of da police*, Supreme N.T.M/ Cut Killer's *Nique la police* and Edith Piaf's *Je ne regrette rien,* as the camera embarks on an extended flight over the cité (Figure 4). This interlocking of musical referents as the camera takes 'flight' over the cité, forges the struggles of the youth with the popular music of the historical working class and the contemporary critical politics embedded in French and American hip-hop music.

The influence of popular culture extends beyond the musical sphere and is noteworthy particularly in how American film and television are incorporated into the lives of the banlieue youth. As one reviewer notes: "[i]ts as if these characters learned how to be ghetto dwellers by watching American movies" (Klawans, 1996). But while the film demonstrates just how such culture works to "frame, form and deform" the everyday lives of the youth (Elstob, 1997-8, 44), rather than just smoothly integrating the 'inevitable descent' of American culture into the protagonists' gestures, the film dwells on the awkwardness, or incapacity, of their varied attempts to do just that. These wanting 'performances' show how such globalized culture forces are not simply determinate of subject formation, but are

Figure 4 *A musical flight over the cite*

actively interpreted, and even open to acts of subversion. Such practices of performativity come, for example where Vinz impersonates Robert De Niro's character, Bickle, in *Taxi Driver,* by standing in the mirror with a (not so) threatening look, hand poised as a gun, yelling "You talkin' to me?!" (Figure 5); and again when the protagonists attempt (and fail) to hotwire a car by trying to recall how MacGyver 'does it'.

Figure 5 *Vinz performing the character of Bickle in Scorsese's Taxi Driver.*

In another scene contemplating the relationship between media, violence and youth, Hubert, Saïd and Vinz observe a wall of multiple television screens projecting the war in Bosnia. This montage of war images is interrupted by a news broadcast announcing the death of Abdel, the *beur* who was beaten by police in the riots the night before. This is a climatic moment because Vinz, throughout the film, has promised to 'kill a cop' to get revenge for Abdel if he were to die. Ultimately

though, even with weapon in hand, war on his mind, and an afforded opportunity, he is only able to fantasize about this act of vengeance.

This type of disruptive expressionism operates both in content and form. It is not only the social, but geographic space that Kassovitz works to dislocate. While the film is concerned with life in the banlieue, nearly half of it is set in Paris. The division – both in narrative and style – between Paris and the cité is vast, and notable because it inverts conventional imaginary associated with each space. Most of the scenes in Paris take place at night. This is also where most of the physical violence occurs, and where short takes and long camera lenses help to foster an anxious, alienating environment. Conversely, in the cité Kassovitz uses short lenses and long takes (some as long as 3 minutes), which fix the protagonists in their setting, integrating them into the landscape. If the film works to subvert the prevailing imagery of urban Paris, it is in the cité where the film does its best to enact a different way of seeing, juxtaposing sensational images of the banlieues with banality to illustrate just how these images are produced as a consumptive form of voyeuristic entertainment (for what has now become a global audience). For example, as Hubert sits at the kitchen table with his mother, the television projects images of the cité in flames from the previous night of rioting (Figure 6). As he laments about his hardships in life, his mother reminds him of his daily chores, highlighting how everyday life in the banlieues has been reduced to 'spectacle' fit for consumption.

Figure 6 *Footage from the previous night's riots in the cité is projected back into the home of its residents.*

In another scene a journalist and cameraman hover over the three protagonists hanging out in the park in an attempt garner an interview the morning after the riots. This one brief scene demonstrates how the film – rather than offering a reflection of the social reality of everyday life in the banlieues – is a mediation on just *how* this reality is produced: we observe the youths' hostile interactions with the crew; their relative position to them in a playground below ground level; their projected image, which oscillates between the view of the

cinematographer and the cameraman; and ultimately how the youth themselves are acutely aware of their 'safari-like' appearance. (Figure 7)

Figure 7 *A journalist approaches the youth the morning after the riots.*

Journalist: Excuse me gentlemen; we are from the television station. Did you take part in the riots? Did you break anything? Can we talk to you?

 Saïd: Do we look like thugs to you?

 Journalist: I didn't mean that...

Hubert: Why don't you get out of your car? This isn't Thoiry!

Journalist: Because ... Because we are late. We have a lot of work to do.

Vinz: Like what? To stir some shit? To get a good scoop? Who do you think you are coming to my hood? No cameras! What are you filming you son of a bitch?? Get the hell out of here you filthy bastards! This isn't Thoiry!

Journalist: Okay! Okay! [The journalists drive away]

Saïd: What's up with those bastards?!

Vinz: What's Thoiry?

Hubert: It's a drive-through safari park.

Vinz: This ain't a zoo!!

But it would be foolish to conclude, positioning the film in the way that I have, without first addressing the political economy of its own colonial architecture: Kassovitz, a member of the Parisian bourgeoisie, takes a story of the 'underclass' and inserts this image onto the big screen of globalized cultural commodity production. His tactical use of images, sounds and gestures extracted from historical and emergent referents can undoubtedly be understood as its own form of aesthetic colonization (see Jameson, 1991). To be sure, most of the early filmmakers of the *cinema de banlieue* movement, including Kassovitz himself, eventually migrated into mainstream filmmaking. And as much as *La Haine* has become a cult classic, Chanteloup-les-Vignes itself has become an integral part of the spectacle: the confrontational scene between the journalist and youth has been transformed into an ironic feedback loop, as not only the press, but politicians, academics and fans focus their gaze onto the residents and spaces of the cité. These critiques have prompted counter arguments in order to emphasize the director and crew's high level of engagement with the residents of the cité (he and his crew lived there for 6 months), the casting of relatively 'unknown' leads and of local residents as extras in the actual production, and the special advanced screening of the film for the residents of the cité on site. While only part of a debate much larger than these pages allow, Kassovitz's attention to such details throughout the film's production suggests that he was not only concerned with making his art, but was equally reflexive of his role as a producer in this process. Furthermore Kassovitz, because of his own contradictory identity (as a member of both the left and the cosmopolitan bourgeoisie) is, in a parallel way, aligned with the characters in the film who are 'French' yet excluded from dominant French society, and thus was positioned to bring many of the paradoxes of his own existence to life in *La Haine.* Kassovitz's authorial interventions throughout the film reinforce this point: the most politicized of these is when he makes a cameo appearance playing the role of the skinhead Vinz is charged with shooting in a random act of revenge for the death of Abdel (Figure 8).

This explosive performance interrogates the 'reality' the film projects, suggesting how this reality trans/deformed – and masked – through representational practices.

Conclusion

> "We want to say we exist, not burn cars. For once the cinema gives
> us this opportunity" A banlieue youth, after a screening of La Haine,
> quoted in Vincendeau, 2005, 82)

If *La Haine,* along with other banlieue films that emerged in the mid-nineties rendered visible a side of France that for too long dwelt in the shadows of a dominant geographic imaginary, the political response to this rendering has been

framed with an overtly colonial logic,[9] that – with the recent victory by Nicolas Sarkozy in France's Presidential election – shows no sign of abatement. While over ten years old, *La Haine* can still provide a critical intervention into the cultural

Figure 8 *Kassovitz's cameo as a skinhead.*

politics framing the contemporary application of colonial-style governance, interlocking spatial and historical referents that have been central to the ideological construction of the French banlieues. Such cinematic representations – through both narrative and form – expose the socio-spatial logic of an emerging 'neo-racism' in France, interrogating the mounting anxieties behind increasingly militarized measures of social control. By exploiting the cinematic power of illusion over reality, the film disrupts dominant social and geographic imaginaries, to reveal the aestheticized, politicized nature of its subject matter. Rather than a 'remapping' of the social, the film appropriates working class history, colonial imagery, contemporary pop culture, and nationalist metaphors to expose the social relations shaping the centre and periphery and the multifarious levels of mediation between them.

Acknowledgements

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[9] The most striking example was Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin's declaration of a 'State of Emergency' immediately following the uprisings in the banlieues in November 2005. This law, designed to suppress the rights of citizens in both public and private spaces, and first conceived in 1955 in an effort by the state to quell support for the emerging Algerian liberation movement, has been applied 4 times previously – all in colonial contexts (see Silverstein and Tetreault 2006, for a more thorough discussion of current forms of colonial governance in France).

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