The Right to be Different:

Film, French Identity, and the National Space of French North Africans

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Introduction

In October of 2005 in major cities across France, hundreds of riots between youth and the police occurred. In three weeks of violence more than 10,000 cars were set ablaze and 300 buildings firebombed. The riots were conducted predominantly by teens of North African descent from impoverished public housing developments found on the outskirts of many major French cities, known as *banlieues*. Discontent over inequalities between these areas and the rest of France had been simmering for some time, but the riots were touched off when two boys from the suburb of Clichy-Sous-Bois outside of Paris were electrocuted while trying to hide from the police in an electric sub-station. Zyed Benna and Bouna Traore were of North African and West African descent respectively, and the police chasing them were white. For many of the rioters it was just one more piece of evidence that the French state considered their lives to be worth less than that of majority whites.[1]

When the riots began, like many other students I was shocked at the level of rage being released. Given that France is one of the most prosperous countries in the world and one that is ostensibly dedicated to the values of liberty, egalitarianism, and brotherhood (*liberté, egalité, fraternité* is the motto of the nation), the presence of conditions that would lead to this level of discontent in such a wide swathe of the population seemed counterintuitive. Many commentators used the riots as evidence that the predominantly Muslim participants were engaging in a small scale "clash of civilizations"[2] but discussions about the situation in my classes served to pique my interest even more, and I began to research the events on my own. In

[1] Astier, H. "French Police Probed in Riot Case " *BBC News Online* http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6343227.stm (accessed 12/4/2007)

[2] 'Clash of civilizations' was a term coined by Samuel Huntington in his influential essay "The Clash of Civilizations," first published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993. He argued in this essay that the structure of post-Cold War conflict would be based around cultural divides rather than ideological or economic differences. In particular, he argued that that a clash between the civilizations of the "West" and "Islam" would become particularly strong due to fundamental cultural differences such as the place of secularism, and a longstanding history of conflict from the Crusades on.

particular, a professor recommended that I watch the famous film *La Haine* to gain a more personalized sense of the long-running frustrations within the *banlieues. La Haine* was made in 1995 in response to the murder of a black *banlieue* youth while in police custody, and is considered to be one of the most brutal portrayals of the types of social problems in those areas, particularly for the minority populations that lived there.

La Haine provided a powerful illustration of the issues I had been reading about in journals, and it became apparent to me that many of the young Muslim men engaging in the riots were not engaging in some grassroots religious war, but were reacting to the fact that they were not considered French 'citizens' in the truest sense of the word. Two days before the boys' deaths, then interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy described residents of the *banlieues* as "gangrene" and "rabble" and stated that poor and crime-ridden neighborhoods should be "cleaned with a power hose."[3] *Banlieue* residents, rioters and non-participants alike, expressed the sentiment that these riots were not the result of intrinsic lawlessness but a response to poor treatment by the French state, particularly as it manifested through policing.[4] This anger and frustration is still occurring today, as is shown by the fact that in November of 2007 similar riots broke out in response to the accidental deaths of two boys of North African descent in a motorcycle crash with a police car (in which a full investigation is still pending).

There are few studies in France that provide hard details on discrimination because of a reluctance to collect data that reveals national or ethnic origin.[5] However, public polls, first hand accounts, and the success of groups like the National Front consistently reveal that even as the North African community as a whole becomes made up less of immigrants and more of those

[3] BBC News Online "Timeline: French Riots." http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4413964.stm (accessed 12/4/2007)
[4] Astier, H. "France's city policy in tatters" *BBC News Online* http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4415018.stm (accessed 12/4/2007)
[5] J. Freedman *Immigration and Insecurity in France.* (Burlington, Vt: Ashgate Publishing Corporation, 2004), 147

born and rooted in France, they continue to face prejudice to a higher extent than any other minority group. This poses a direct contradiction to the principles of the French nation and the rhetoric of the state and has lead me to ask the question, **why do French North Africans continue to face high levels of prejudice and social marginalization even as they attempt to fulfill all the requirements of Republican French identity? Furthermore, how do filmic portrayals of North Africans provide an explanation for such issues of marginalization?**

I seek to examine these issues using film as my primary source because the impact *La Haine* and other films like it have illustrated that film narratives can provide a neatly encapsulated world for examination which allows the viewer a more subjective understanding of social phenomena that can both enhance and contrast with sociological theory. In particular, I will argue that cinematic portrayals of French North Africans examine their current paradoxical position by weaving it into a narrative form that is considered representative of reality, and which often actively seeks to counter popular stereotypes. I will select four films that span a two-decade period from 1985 to today which focus on the marginalization of French North Africans, or deal with it as part of their larger story. While each of these films has a slightly different take on the position of French North Africans in society, there are enough similarities to point towards several common perceptions.

I will argue that the problem of continued prejudice against North Africans is not the result of their inability to integrate with the values of France. The belief system of French Republicanism underlies France's conception of national identity, and one of its key tenets is that anyone can become a French citizen as long as they profess the desire to do so, and abide by all of Republicanism's ideals. The vast majority of French North Africans fully adheres to those ideals, and has striven to find a way for non-indigenous French cultural beliefs to co-exist with

them. Despite this, many white French continue to practice racial discrimination against North Africans. Racism against North Africans has been acknowledged by post-colonial scholars as a legacy of the colonial period, but the causes of contemporary prejudice both include and go beyond that legacy.

Those who engage in both unconscious and overt racism towards North Africans are echoing a fundamental pattern in the expression of Republican identity that emerged during the colonial period. During this era, the process by which the state first began to ostensibly enact the ideals of French identity and incorporate them further into the psyche of the nation also removed that identity from the access of certain groups, an act that invalidated many of the Republican ideals. This contradiction between rhetoric and action was one of the main causes of the Algerian War of Independence. While scholars have studied the war and its causes, it has never found a sustained and coherent place within France's collective memory. The anger, confusion, and fear associated with Algeria as a source of discord within the French nation are projected onto all French North Africans today, regardless of true origin. I argue that this is a subtle and pervasive phenomena that all people may not be consciously aware of when justifying discrimination against French North Africans, but that the films' treatment of hostile interactions within white and North African characters which explicitly brings up the memory of Algeria illustrates that this legacy is still present.

I will also argue that issues of socioeconomic marginalization play a role in ongoing prejudice against North Africans. In a sense, the periphery of French society has shifted from the North African colonies to the contemporary *banlieue*. *Banlieues* are isolated both physically on the outskirts of major French cities, and from the resources and rule of law the rest of the nation takes for granted. While the *banlieues* are ethnically diverse, there is a high population of

immigrants and the descendents of immigrants who live there. North Africans as both a symbol of the *banlieue* population and as a symbol of the colonial period bear the brunt of such social isolation. In a vicious cycle, race and memory create further obstacles to the already difficult task of surviving in the French underclass of the *banlieues.*

The foundation of my argument lies in the four main sections of my literature review. In the first section, entitled *French Republicanism*, I will start with a discussion of the elements that constitute French identity, and will suggest that they are grounded in the French Republican ideals of nationhood upon which the modern state is based. The subsequent section entitled *The Algerian War and its Memory* will describe my use of scholarly work on collective memory, and the impact that collective memory of the war has had in shaping the current manifestations of French identity. *The Formation of* French *North Africans* will describe the growth of the French North African population in France and its demands for recognition, as well as the way those claims have been received. I will also explain in greater detail the reasons behind French North Africans' association with *banlieues* within the French psyche. Finally, my *Methodology* section will explain my use of the medium of film as a way to understand the issues discussed in my literature review, and will explain what I am looking for in my analysis of the selected films.

French Republicanism

An Overview

In order to understand just why French North Africans are being rejected as full members of the French nation, we first need to lay out the exact parameters used by the French to delineate national identity. Deuchesne defines national identity as "a complex pattern of meanings and values related to the group whose borders are defined by the state's capacity to intervene."[6] In

[6] Deuchesne, S. "Identities, nationalism, citizenship and republican ideology" in *Developments in French politics 3rd edition*. Eds. J. Levy, A.Cole, and P. Le Galès. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 23

France, those meanings and values are demarcated at the most basic level by the Enlightenment concepts of universalism, secularism, individual assimilation into the French nation in which individuals acknowledge being "French" as their primary identity, and by neutrality of the public sphere in which signs of ethnic difference are put aside.[7] The collection of these values is known as French Republicanism. At different time periods the exact definition of "Republicanism" has varied depending on the goals of the regime in power, but these core values have been held constant.[8] As in any country, the values of the French nation are often mere rhetoric, which glosses over internal inequalities. But while bearing this in mind, I will approach my analysis from the viewpoint that they are strong enough to have impacted state policies and social behaviors, and thus must be examined when discussing French national identity.

The model of Republicanism in the contemporary French state by Levy et al. elaborates further on Silverman's basic description. The model draws from the Enlightenment values of the French Revolution, the goals of national unity of the Third Republic, and the philosophy of Charles de Gaulle. Three of the model's main elements have implications for my argument. The first element is the necessity that the state be 'interventionist' in order to implement national values over the will of interest groups and individuals. Its primary duty is to promote a functioning economy, and incorporate all members of society, including immigrants, into the nation through public education. This leads into the second element, the belief that education in secular public schools is the primary way to assimilate future citizens into the Republic by instilling French values in them.[9] As such, school curricula and rules are heavily debated in order to determine the best way to transmit Republican values.

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[7] Silverman, M. *Facing Postmodernity: Contemporary French thought on culture and society.* (London: Routledge, 1999), 58

[8] Levy et al. 3-4

[9] Levy et al. 4-5

These two characteristics are clearly reflected in the 2004 ban on all "conspicuous" religious symbols in French public schools. Schools are supposed to be free of any religious influence or symbol because of the belief that it would introduce divisiveness into the formation of the nation.[10] Although the ban applies to all religious paraphernalia, many people saw it as targeting Muslims because debate over the necessity of such a law began in response to several Muslim schoolgirls wearing hijabs to school.[11] This ban is one of the most ubiquitous examples of the power that Republican values have over French society today, and is also one of the arenas in which debates over the compatibility of French citizenship and French North Africans are occurring. What is interesting about the furor of the debate leading up to the ban is that while there were many predictions of mass expulsions of girls who would refuse to follow the ban, in reality only forty-eight girls were expelled in 2004, and only twelve in 2005.[12] Clearly, the majority of Muslim North Africans had the ability to adhere to the implementation of this particular Republican value even if they disagreed with its method, which in part allays the claim that Islam is incompatible with French culture.

The final element of Levy's model that I will use is the belief in the special duty France has to the world to uphold and spread French Republican principles.[13] This idea of French duty is supported by the concept of universalism, which argues that Republican values are the most viable for creating a cohesive society anywhere in the world. Manifested during the colonial period as the idea of the 'civilizing mission,' this duty was one of the key justifications for imperialism, and it still has ramifications for French society today. Oscherwitz notes that France's contemporary assimilationist approach to integrating immigrants has strong

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[10] Laurence, J. *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2006), 168
[11] Laurence, 170
[12] Laurence, 171
[13] Levy et al. 4-5

commonalities with the civilizing mission in that both espouse the power of a unified and transmissible French culture.[14] While the assimilationist model of integration emphasizes transmitting French culture to those who will join metropolitan France, the civilizing mission emphasized spreading it beyond those boundaries. Despite some of the distasteful connotations of the civilizing mission, there are obvious similarities between the two concepts today, which in part are due to the fact that colonial history itself played a large role in the consolidation of what would become contemporary French Republicanism.

Colonialism as support for Republicanism

The Algerian colony meshed with the Third Republic's larger goals of national unification and functioned as an integral part of the consolidation of the French republican nation. The Third Republic was founded in 1870 in the wake of the Franco-Prussian war, and in an effort to reunify the country it actively tried to promote the ideals of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. France had had a presence in Algeria since 1830, and the Third Republic sought to compensate for the loss of Alsac-Lorraine in the war by incorporating the Algerian colony further into the French nation.[15] France held protectorates in Tunisia and Morocco, but Algeria was legally an extension of metropolitan France, and Algerians who moved to France were legally not considered to be true immigrants.[16]

Silverstein discusses how the Third Republic wanted to use colonial Algeria as a way to prove that its national unification policies were valid. The Algerian colony was used as a site of experimentation for the same "forms of modernity," and methods of control, that the French state

[14] Oscherwitz, D. "The Algerian war revisited." *In Memory, empire, and Post-colonialism : Legacies of French Colonialism.* ed. A. G. Hargreaves (Lanham, Lexington Books, 2005), 192
[15] Silverman, 3
[16] Kepel, G. "Self and Other: The Heart of the Franco-Arab Paradox." In *Franco-Arab Encounters: Studies in Memory of David C. Gordon,* Edited by L. Clark Brown and Matthew S. Gordon (Beirut: American University in Beirut, 1996), 309

would later use at home. For example, villages destroyed in the 1871 French military campaigns were relocated and rebuilt according to new European social organization and surveillance techniques, as a way to maintain control and integrate peasants into the colonial economy.[17] In addition, methods of public education and urban planning were often perfected in the colonies before being applied in metropolitan France.[18] Silverstein asserts that in this sense, colonialism in the context of Algeria concerned not only its indigenous populations, but also the peripheral populations of metropolitan France who were still undergoing the process of being integrated into the new nation.[19] This sense of 'colonizing' the urban periphery has influenced the approach of current state treatment of the *banlieues*. Control of those areas rather than effective integration into the hearts of major French cities is still one of the main goals directing state policy. This phenomenon will be discussed in more detail in my section on contemporary treatment of the *banlieues.*

While Republican principles were used to unite the French on the basis of promises of equality, they were also used as the basis for racist ideologies that began to take root in the colonial period. These racist ideologies were used to emphasize to the French what they *were* in opposition to and what they *were not*. Scholars were sent to Algeria by the government to document and specify cultural differences between the French and the indigenous population, thus 'producing' stereotypical ethnicities even as France promoted the Republican ideology which was supposed to ignore ethnicity within the nation.[20] Common perceptions of Algerians which the colonial lobby promoted along those lines were always posited in opposition to French ideals. Algerians were superstitious; the French were rational. Algerians were Muslim fanatics

[17] Silgerstein, P.A. *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 44
[18] Silverstein 40
[19] Silverstein, 40, 58
[20] Silverstein 40

who mixed together religions and politics; the French, though good Christians, carefully maintained a secular public sphere.[21] Even as the pure ideals of Republicanism were espoused, their implementation was built on the subjugation of those same groups who were supposed to benefit from them. It wasn't until the Algerian War of Independence in 1952 that a confrontation over this paradox began, and its memory has had as big of an impact on contemporary French identity as the colonial process itself.

The Algerian War and its Memory

The War

When the war began over one million European French lived in Algeria, colloquially referred to as the "*pied-noirs*." As discussed above Algeria was considered a part of the French state, and was thus organized into three French departments. The war began on November 1, 1954 with a series of coordinated attacks against military and police targets by the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), and ended with a ceasefire and the signing of the Evian Accords on March 19, 1962.[22] While the government viewed the actions by the FLN and similar attacks by other groups as the attempts of a French territory to secede, in contrast, the majority of the Algerian population considered themselves to be French citizens in name only. Since 1947 they had voted in a separate electoral college, and most saw independence from France as the only way to gain freedom to choose their own leaders and control the policies that directly affected their lives.[23]

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[21] Addi, L. *"Colonial Mythologies: Algeria in the French Imagination." Franco-Arab Encounters: Studies in Memory of David C. Gordon*. Edited by L. Clark Brown and Matthew S. Gordon (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1996), 100

[22] Stora, B. "A Brief History of Algeria 1830-2000." *Selections.* Edited and translated by Jane Marie Todd (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 34

[23] Stora 35

. The war was extremely destructive for both sides, but especially for Algeria in terms of blunt numbers of deaths and socioeconomic damage. According to a compilation of plausible estimates, over 500,000 people died in the war, most of them Algerians, and millions of Algerian civilians were displaced. Military estimates of the number of French dead put the number at 9,000 *pied-noirs*, mostly from terrorist attacks, and 1,200 soldiers.[24] Between 1955 and 1962, two million French soldiers were sent to fight in Algeria- nearly all young men born from 1932 to 1943 who were eligible were called to the front, an entire generation.[25] A 1962 study by the newspaper *Le Monde* Estimated that 27 to 50 billion francs had been spent during the war's duration, about 10-18% of the GDP in 1962.[26] In terms of the actual conduct of the war, it is widely agreed that there were severe instances of human rights violations committed by both sides. Terrorist attacks characterized much of the FLN's tactics, and torture by French forces against suspected members of the Algerian resistance was extremely common, and deeply divided public opinion in France.[27]

How did French society react to the war? Simply by examining the numbers it is apparent that the war was much more devastating to the average Algerian civilian or *pied-noir* than it was to the average metropolitan French civilian. Stora argues that polls taken between 1955 and 1962 show that the French, at least those who were not *pied-noirs*, had a "passive acquiescence" to decolonization, but only a small minority towards the end of the war became vocally in favor of it.[28] Stora states that the reason for this lack of sentiment was despite the fact that almost every family in France knew a man who was fighting in Algeria, "society refused to live in a state of war…the majority of French people took refuge behind the moral certainty that their

[24] Stora 109-110
[25] Stora 29
[26] Stora 108
[27] Stora 51
[28] Stora 88

country, fresh from fighting for its own liberation in 1944, would not be in the position of oppressing and torturing."[29] The fact that even during France's heaviest involvement in the war people refused to acknowledge it foreshadowed how it would be treated within the nation's collective memory.

Collective Memory- An Overview

In order to understand how the Algerian war has impacted the contemporary treatment of French North Africans, we first need to develop a conceptualization of how the war has been processed in the French psyche. James Wertsch's work on collective memory in particular illustrates how the war's legacy has influenced the treatment of North Africans. He argues that collective memory can be categorized as either an accurate representation of the past, or as a "usable past." The "usable past" function refers to using collective memory as a way of creating a subjective understanding of a past collective experience, which can be put to some use in the present. It is an "effort after meaning," or a way to make sense of the present by explaining the historical events that led up to it. The "usable past" can be used to create group identity by laying claim to a common past.[30] By its nature, the "usable past" assumes itself to reflect the unchanging essence of a group. It thus justifies collective identity being structured around a set criterion of historical events or cultural traditions, even if there is no physical or current proof of the commonalities that members of a group share.[31]

Memory is an important part of national identity, and the collective memories of the nation are some of the things a new citizen is supposed to assume upon integration. Pierre Nora's work *Les Lieux de Mémoire,* or *The Realms of Memory,* is considered to be one of the definitive

[29] Stora 89
[30] J. Wertsch *Voices of Collective Remembering.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 31-32
[31] Wertsch 45

works on French national memory, and he is one of the main proponents of the idea that there is a fundamental connection between memory and the French nation. He argues that the French state and institutions such as schools, the Church, and the family are responsible for the active transfer of collective memory, and thus French identity.[32] Other French scholars who have argued similar variations on this theme include Ernest Renan, the 19th century historian whose work *'Qu'est-ce que une nation?'* or, *What is a nation?* is considered one of the most famous tracts which describes the ideals of the French nation, and emphasizes the importance of a common remembrance of the past in order to unify a diverse group of people within the nation.[33] Through the arguments of such authors we can see that the way an event as pivotal as the war is processed within collective memory has a huge effect on the construction of French national identity.

Memory of the War

French memory of the war has been surprisingly subdued given the impact of the conflict. After the war, there was no commemoration of the soldiers who fought in it, and a series of amnesties were given to those who committed atrocities both within the military and as members of rebel groups. These amnesties allowed people to 'conceal' the brutality and death of the war, and through that people were able to avoid coming to terms with the war in a national setting.[34] Stora argues vividly that although not completely forgotten, "memory of the Algerian war became encysted, as if within an invisible fortress…[in order] to be dissimulated like the unbearable face of the Gorgon."[35] Derderian also notes that until 1999, there was been little official recognition of the war. For decades politicians avoided even using the term 'war,' to

[32] Oscherwitz 190
[33] Oscherwitz 192
[34] Stora 30, 93
[35] Stora 113

describe the conflict, referring to it alternatively as 'police operations,' 'events in Algeria,' or 'operations to maintain order.' Knowledge of the war was not incorporated into high school baccalaureate exams until the mid 1980s, and even this has only occurred in a few regions.[36]

Anne Donadey has argued that this lack of recognition for the war has resulted in a type of "Algeria Syndrome" which embodies the Freudian concept of interrupted mourning and repressed memory. She argues that the French have repressed memory of the Algerian war both because of shame of the torture methods used by the French which were similar to Nazi tactics used during the Vichy period, and also because the end of France's imperial power signified to many a loss of French national identity.[37] As a result, unresolved feelings of grief about the war have heavily influenced society's reaction to immigration. Violent hate crimes against French North Africans are a "return of the repressed" in which anger and sorrow erupt as racially motivated violence. In fact, Donadey refers to the expansion of such attacks the 1980s and 1990s as "the continuation of the repressed colonial war."[38]

In contrast, Derderian argues expressly against the Freudian notion of repressed memory, citing instead Benjamin Stora's collected works on the concept of a "cloistered" memory. This approach to collective memory argues that while a measure of forgetting has been characteristic of the memory of the war, there have also been highly specific types of remembrance. 'Cloistered' memories are narrow and fragmentary, and consist of idealistic versions of a truth most suited to the goals and history of the group doing the remembering.[39] Stora has noted that in reality, there has been a great deal of scholarship on the war. Between the end of fighting and

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[36] R.L. Derderian *North Africans in Contemporary France: Becoming Visible*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 160
[37] A. Donadey "'Un Certaine Idée de la France': The Algeria Syndrome and Struggles over "French" Identity." *Identity Papers: Contested Nationhood in Twentieth-Century France*, eds. Steven Ungar and Tom Conley. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 218
[38] Donadey 221
[39] Derderian 158

the mid 1980s, several hundred works were published on the war, and from1962 to 1982, thirty short and feature length films were produced on the subject. In these works the Algerian war has been perpetually portrayed as a site of 're-discovery' because many works on the war cast themselves as the first of their kind to examine it, implying that it is a topic still in the midst of being explored and documented.[40] Because there is no cohesive memory or even collection of memories, but rather a series of groups who each want to see their own version put forward, each work sees itself as standing alone in representing the truth. This allows society to avoid the complexities of what happened in Algeria,[41] and the troubling implications for the effectiveness of Republicanism model.

My analysis will adhere to the viewpoints espoused by both Derderian and Stora, and Donadey. General societal acknowledgment of the war has been repressed, while the 'cloistered' characteristics of specific memories about the war have contributed to the "usable past" function of memory being splintered. The nation as a whole does not have a full understanding of the factors that fed into the war and why there was such a high degree of brutality involved in it. Instead of using the memory of the war to understand the vulnerabilities of the French nation, for many groups the memory of the war has only served to function as justification for the exclusion of North Africans from French identity, a process which had already begun to grow in the colonial period. As Stora argues, during the production of memory "what was being born under the thick mask of indifference was hostility toward the man living in or coming from the south. That mysterious "other" had resisted, had wanted to obtain a nationality of his own… with the Algerian war, colonial racism began its crossing of the Mediterranean." [42] Rather than collective memory creating a cohesive record of all of the factors that led into the war and thus a full

[40] Derderian 157
[41] Derderian 2005, 158, 159
[42] Stora 93

understanding of the nation that arose from it, collective memory is splintered into many usable pasts which may overlap, but are also used by different groups in France to promote their own beliefs about how the war was conducted, and what its lasting legacy has been. For many, the usable past only includes those aspects of the war which does not remind people of the flaws in the manifestation of national identity which contributed to the conflict.

The Formation of *French* North Africans

As asserted in my Introduction, in the past two decades the French descendants of North African immigrants have attempted to integrate themselves fully into the nation. The reasons for this are succinct- they have spent their entire lives in France. Many have stated in polls since the 1980s that they feel closer to a French way of life than the traditional values of the first generation of immigrants. [43] Yet despite fulfilling many of the Republican requirements of belonging to the French nation, there are significant inequalities between French North Africans and native white French. In this section I will examine in detail the forms that claims of belonging by French North Africans have taken, how they have been received, and contemporary issues of inequality.

Before beginning this discussion, it is necessary to describe how group-based data iskept in France. Because of attempts to continue adhering to the Republican value of individual assimilation and secularism, it is illegal to keep census data on French citizens on the basis of ethnicity, race, or religion.[44] This norm was ingrained with particular force after the mass deportations of Jews under the Vichy government, which used documentation of ethnicity in order to target people. As a result, in this section I will be using primarily non-governmental,

[43] Tlatli, S. "French Nationalism and the Issue of North African Immigration". Franco-*Arab Encounters: Studies in Memory of David C. Gordon*. Edited by L. Clark Brown and Matthew S. Gordon (Beirut: American University in Beirut, 1996), 411

[44] Laurence 175

secondary sources to provide sociological data, from authors who have performed direct studies via first person interviews, or from summaries of polls and surveys.

Immigration and the beginnings of marginalization

The current place of French North Africans in society began to take shape along with the growth of immigration from North Africa, which rose and fell in the 20th century in accordance with France's economic needs. Immigration began to rise in the interwar years in response to France's need for labor to help rebuild after WWI, and as a result immigrants consisted primarily of able men. After 1945, immigration from the region surged even more, and North African men were recruited into fields such as industry, mining, and agriculture. In the late 50s and 60s, more women and children began to migrate to France as well, particularly those from Algeria who were either trying to escape the war or to be with men who were finding it increasingly difficult to return home. Immigration began to taper off somewhat after the economic recession beginning in 1974, when border controls on immigrants seeking work were tightened.[45]

It was with the growth of immigration that the seeds for the future association of French North Africans and the *banlieues* were planted within the national psyche. Derderian describes how little was done by the French government to integrate the first wave of male laborers. This lack of support was partially because these laborers were expected to eventually return home, and partially because of a basic lack of interest in investment in their human capital. These men were often put up in factory dormitories or shantytowns called *bidonvilles* on the outskirts of economic centers, which were without electricity or other basic services.[46] In the 1970s, these shantytowns were finally torn down and replaced with "temporary and transitional" housing called '*cités de transit'* when it became apparent that families who had been arriving to join

[45] Silverstein 91
[46] Derderian, 8

husbands and fathers would not be returning home. The goal of these *cités* was to allow families to be introduced to French culture before moving into more integrated neighborhoods. There was also a boom in public housing built for former French settlers and Algerians who had fought for France during the Algerian War.[47] Unfortunately, the *cités de transit* ultimately had no infrastructure resources, and while people were meant to live in them for only several years before moving on, many families ended up staying indefinitely.[48] The *cités* have gradually merged with other public housing developments targeted towards the French working class to become the contemporary *banlieues*, and today the two words are often used interchangeably.

Anti-immigration forces in the interwar period also created special surveillance groups such as SAINA, (Service de Surveillance, Protection et Assistance des Indigenes Nord Africains) which were supposed to act as 'policemen' for immigrant communities. These groups did not only target criminals, but also political activists, and often disrupted political meetings. During the Algerian war, similar covert groups were formed to counteract Algerian nationalists living in France.[49] As discussed earlier, the peripheries of French cities had already experienced a high degree of observation by the state but it was during the growth of immigration that focus from the police began to increase specifically in regards to Algerian and other North African communities, and this reached new heights with the Algerian war. This history of a much higher degree of scrutiny surrounding the urban periphery and North Africans in particular has continued to carry over into contemporary policies towards the *banlieues*.

[47] Silverstein, 94
[48] Ibid
[49] Derderian, 6

Initial demands for recognition

In the early 1980s, the first major demands for the recognition and protection of the rights of North Africans as French citizens began. The state's faith in public institutions like schools to operate as vehicles of civic and cultural education meant that it had no explicit integration policy for the second generation.[50] The gap between expectations of social mobility for the descendents of immigrants and the prejudice and discrimination they encountered was the impetus for new forms of collective action. In terms of cultural integration, it could be argued that political protests themselves were a result of the assimilation of French values which dictated that citizens had a right to demand equal treatment from their government.[51] These actions took on high levels of urgency because they developed in response to increasingly violent racism against French North Africans. From 1980 to 1993, 78% of officially-recorded racial hate crimes had North Africans as their victims.[52] The crimes were especially disturbing because they were frequently conducted by the police, and the phenomena of officers wounding or killing youth while on the job became so common that an incident of that type had a specific title, that of *bauvre*, or "blunder." Often the attackers, especially those who were police officers, had a high degree of impunity.[53]

Grassroots organizations dedicated to fighting systemic problems began to form in response. One of the most well known demonstrations put on by such a group was the 1983 March for Equality and Against Racism planned by the Lyon-based group SOS Avenir Minguettes, in which 100,000 people participated. To make their demands even more pointed, the 1983 marchers began at Canal Saint Martin in Paris, where on October 17, 1961 the French

[50] Laurence 175
[51] Derderian, 25
[52] Derderian, 11
[53] Silverstein, 160

police massacred roughly 200 peaceful Algerian immigrants who were protesting in favor of independence.[54] This strategy was to place the attacks in an ongoing pattern of violence and emphasize the structural factors which contributed to it. As the 1980s progressed, hundreds of French North African activist organizations formed, dedicated to everything from urban development to the fight against racism (Silverstein 2004, 161). The rise of the Front Nationale (FN) and the infamous Jean-Marie Le Pen after winning a series of municipal elections in 1983 also spurred a growing level of political activism. The FN is well known for its anti-immigration rhetoric and emphasis on the right of native French to "defend" their identity. The dangers that the FN thinks it needs to defend against are focused specifically on the Muslim community, and the FN has frequently argued that Muslims are 'opposed' to assimilation in France.[55]

At the same time political activism was growing, new forms of cultural self expression within the French North African community began. Hargreaves describes how in the 1970s and 1980s, creative works by young French North Africans, primarily in the form of music, novels, and theatre began to appear. One of the main focuses of these works was to demonstrate "the legitimacy of the [French North Africans'] presence in France." Authors often did this by trying to distinguish themselves and the characters in their works from the 1st generation of immigrants, most members of whom had arrived in France to work for what they thought would be a finite amount of time and had been reluctant to internalize French identity. In addition, these works often directly dealt with and expressed challenges to issues of marginalization, particularly within the *banlieues.* These novels, songs, and plays have generally been referred to as '*beur*

[54] Silverstein 161
[55] Freedman, 145

literature' or '*beur* music.'[56] The word *beur* itself was an inversion of the word *arabe* and a play on French street slang known as *verlan,* another way youth used language to assert their unique mode of belonging to France.

These collective shifts within both the arts and politics together became known as the Beur Movement. One of the key demands of the movement both explicitly and through implication was to obtain *la droit a la difference,* or the "right to be different" in France, to be both French with all the rights that this entailed, and to still retain facets of their parents' culture. The movement in a sense sought a departure from France's previous approach to immigrants, which dictated that they must completely assimilate, by arguing that it was possible to retain cultural traditions as long as they did not interfere with the expression of Republican identity.[57]

Initially, the French government responded to the demands for recognition of the Beur Movement, and the socialist party in particular seemed to support the concept of the "right to difference." Promises were made to crack down on racial violence, and the government underwrote the costs of many of the new *beur* organizations, including one of the biggest, SOS Racisme, which sought to spread awareness of the damages caused by racism.[58] State support for the Beur Movement had limits though. The heavy involvement of the government in many of the more powerful *beur* organizations has been described by former activists as in effect 'purchasing' *beurs* in order to control the development of collective action. As one argued, acceptance of the 'right to be different' extended only to superficial things such as taste in food and music, but not to how to organize collective struggle, religious expression, and social life.[59]

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[56] A.G. Hargreaves "The contribution of north and sub-Saharan African immigrant minorities to the redefinition of contemporary French culture." *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A critical introduction,* Edited by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 148-149

[57] Silverstein, 164-166

[58] Silverstein, 163

[59] Silverstein, 164

SOS Racisme in particular was perceived by many who had been previously active in the movement as only superficially dealing with the particular problems facing North Africans, while espousing general platitudes of tolerance.[60] However, today it is still one of the biggest anti-racism organizations in France.

There were also rejections of the Beur Movement's assertions of cultural belonging. In the present day, '*beur* literature' is still classified within universities and other institutions as Francophone literature, which is French-language rather than French itself. Thus the works of French North Africans have been marked as separate from other works of French literature, although they grew out of experiences unique to France.[61] The rejection of French North African self-expression as 'French' sends a strong message about the degree of acceptance that French North Africans have in society, even though this message does not necessarily resort to the xenophobic claims found in the rhetoric of the National Front. Because this rejection is often found within schools' curricula, which as I've discussed earlier is considered to be one of the fundamental institutions for transmitting French values and history, this particular form of rejection can be seen as a way of removing Franco- North Africans from the center of French identity.

The Beur Movement also grew during a time of increasing debate over the requirements of legal citizenship in France, which have undergone several reforms in the past few decades. The child of one or two French citizens is automatically French, and prior to 1993, the requirements of French citizenship were that a child born in France was also an automatic citizen citizen even if its parents were foreign. In 1993 a more conservative government was elected, and it amended the laws of citizenship to say that the child of foreign parents born in France

[60] Derderian, 33
[61] Hargreaves, 148-149

would have to "manifest the wish" to be French and file for citizenship between ages 16 and 21 after proving residency for five years. These reforms followed the recommendations of the National Commission on Nationality made in 1988, and reflected the growing belief that because so many immigrants had varying levels of commitment to their home nation, they should consciously decide to be French.[62] While the Beur Movement itself did not spur these reforms, Derderian has suggested that they show that the French state had some doubt as to whether the new waves of immigrants, which were mostly from former colonial states, would be as easily integrated into the nation as prior waves of predominantly European immigrants, and indeed there was criticism of the law from those who felt it unfairly targeted North Africns.[63] In 1997 a Socialist government was re-elected, and they promised to repeal the 1993 reforms to "reaffirm the Republican tradition" of citizenship, which had faith that the institutions of France, especially public schools, would automatically instill in children the values of and desire to be French without forcing them to articulate that desire as well. However, instead of completely repealing the laws they changed them so that the child of foreign parents would automatically become a French citizen at age 18 unless they requested not to be, a reform which further emphasized the importance of conscious citizenship in the new century.[64]

Today many of those from the generations of French North Africans who came of age in the late 1990s and early 21st century have distanced themselves from the Beur Movement and the efforts of the its members. To distinguish themselves, many have inverted the word "*beur*" even further and started referring to themselves as *rebeus,* particularly since the word "*beur*" has

[62] M. Feldblum, *Reconstructing Citizenship: The Politics of Nationality Reform and Immigration in Contemporary France* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 148-149.
[63] Derderian, 12
[64] Feldblum, 151

become much more mainstream and in some contexts almost a caricature.[65] The reason for this distancing is in large part the result of disenchantment with the efforts of collective organization, which was not seen as effective in achieving many of the early goals of the Beur movement.[66] Indeed, many indicators show that the demands for equality of the Beur movement have not been as effective as was hoped.

While in terms of demographic characteristics such as fertility, mortality, household size, academic achievement (when holding class constant), and occupational distribution of French North Africans are becoming closer to that of the white French population, discrimination in employment has not diminished, and comparative levels of unemployment are still high while income rates tend to be lower. [67] A 2004 opinion poll found that 74% of respondents said that some people were slowed in their careers because of origin or skin color. [68] An SOS Racisme report in 2004 on discrimination in hiring found that discrimination against North Africans was thought to be mostly in retail sales and commerce, which require regular contact with clients. The justification of many employers who said they would not hire North Africans is that they made many people uncomfortable.[69] Outside of everyday society, xenophobia is still a major problem that is also found on the political stage. The FN has consistently garnered 10-15 percent of vote in past two decades, and Le Pen even made it to second and final round of the presidential election in 2002.[70] Freedman notes that the success of Front Nationale must be viewed in a societal broader context because it does not produce racism, but rather profits from "institutionalized and ambient racism" that is already present in society.[71] Eighty eight to ninety

[65] Silverstein, 173
[66] Ibid
[67] Waquant, 194
[68] Laurence 62
[69] Ibid
[70] Derderian 11
[71] Freedman 143

percent of the French population believes that North Africans, and Muslims in particular, are the primary targets of racism, above any other minorities.[72] In a 2003 poll by the Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Hommes, of the people who answered yes to the question of whether the number of Muslims in France was too high, 29% backed up their answer by saying that Muslims posed a threat to French identity, 28% referenced unemployment, 22% referenced insecurity, and 22% referenced "threats to social cohesion."[73] Finally, the continuing problems of the *banlieues* have only worsened as time has gone on, while the association of North Africans with them has increased.

Banlieues and French North Africans

As I've described in previous sections, large portions of the North African population began to be placed in the physical periphery of French cities through the movement of immigrants into *bidonvillles*, and later *cités de transit*. In discussions of the potential threats of increasing ethnic diversity to the secularism and neutrality of the public sphere, the 'new immigrants' (a euphemism for North Africans) are frequently brought up in discourse jointly with the 'problems of the suburbs.'[74] As a result, collective movements for recognition like the Beur Movement have often focused many of their demands on the *banlieue*.

In the 1980s while many North African youth in the *banlieues* found outlets for their anger in the form of social protests, others found it in less productive means. Silverstein writes that the inability of communities to take individual perpetrators of hate crimes to justice resulted in large-scale backlash against those who were perceived as protecting them, usually the police forces. The first riots in the *banlieues* began in the early 1980s, and have been seen by many

[72] Laurence 59
[73] Laurence 60
[74] Silverman 58

social scholars as an attempt, albeit misplaced, for youth to wrest control over their lives from the police and demand respect for themselves and their families.[75] Similar incidents throughout France in the 1980s and early 1990s resulted in a media frenzy. Derderian describes how multitudes of articles and news shows frequently discussed the concept of *'la galère'* or frustration, felt by *banlieue* residents towards authority. The media generally implied in these discussions that *'la galère'* was always on the verge of becoming *'la rage,'* which could mean a riot or an attack on a policeman. To this end, minor incidents between youth and police were often treated as front-page news.[76]

These associations of violence with the *banlieues* took on a new significance with the advent of radical Islam in France. In the mid 1980s the number of Muslim organizations in the *banlieues* began to increase after the repeal of laws banning immigrant associations, which stemmed from the time of heightened observation of those communities during the Algerian war. Although these organizations varied widely in terms of their activities, origins, and the number of people involved in them, they were collectively seen by many in France as dangerous signs of the increasing distance between the *banlieues* and the rest of society.[77] In 1995 after several high profile events in which North African youth were involved with violent acts by Muslim extremist groups, including two bombings in Paris and Lyon, the association between the *banlieues* and Muslim extremism increased dramatically in the public mind. Media discourse contributed to a formulaic construction of the poor youth lured and exploited by terrorist networks operating in North Africa, particularly those in the Algerian civil war of the 1990s, a construction that was invoked often in coverage of the *banlieues*.[78]

[75] Silverstein, 162
[76] Derderian, 148
[77] Silverstein, 133
[78] Silverstein, 134

Loïc Waquant argues that the idea of the *banlieues* as not just a site of violence, but also as a North African "ethnic ghetto" was a construction that began in the 1990s, around the time as the association between *banlieues* and radical Islam was growing. This construction fed off of societal fears of deterioration in housing, a growing concentration of immigrants in some urban peripheries, geographic isolation, and a decline in the strength of the working class. Like Derderian, Waquant primarily attributes the formulation of the French "ghetto" to the French media, particularly weekly magazines and daily newspapers with alarmist stories that combined and expanded on collective anxieties. Politicians and civil servants began to add to the discourse and further legitimized it, and even social scientist began to warn that France was in danger of developing massive, violent "American style" ghettos like the predominantly black inner-cities of major US metropolises.[79]

The construction of *banlieue*-based violence has continued into the present with the post 9/11 War on Terror, which has contributed to fears about Muslim extremism already present in France. After the November riots of 2005, a poll taken by the National Advisory Commission on Human Rights in France showed that people willing to declare themselves racist had gone up to 33% from 25% in the same month of the previous year.[80] However, this discourse on the perils of ethnic ghettoes glosses over the fact that *banlieues* do not fit the classic definition of a "ghetto," which is purposeful racial confinement of a stigmatized group. Waquant goes so far as to call the idea of a French ghetto a "sociological absurdity." The *banlieues* (as we will see reflected in their film portrayals) are far from homogenous, with families from a variety of different ethnicities. Riots are often fed not only by specific incidents of abuse, but are just as much the result of youth anger against continual marginalization in employment which often

[79] L. Waquant Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advancced Marginality. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 139-140

[80] Laurence, 56

crosses racial boundaries. Waquant argues that the high concentration of immigrants and their descendants in the *banlieues* is the result of overrepresentation in the lowest sectors of the working class,[81] an overrepresentation one would assume is exacerbated by continuing issues of discrimination in employment.

However this association of violence, North African youth, and radical Islam became one of the guides for policies towards the *banlieues.* After the bombings in Lyon and Paris, the government began engaging in strategies that they believed would stop the rise of radical Islam in France. In addition to increased surveillance of neighborhoods with a high population of immigrants, the government began revitalization projects for the *banlieues*, creating youth centers and sports facilities, the goal of which was to create state control within the *banlieues* which extended beyond that of the police, for which many had a distrust of. Residents were highly aware of the connection between these programs and efforts for the state to control; riots have often targeted sports facilities in addition to schools and police stations.[82]

Steps taken by the government to address the marginalization of *banlieue* residents have continued to focus on urban reform and urban control. In the late 1990s, the government initiated projects such as the '50 Great City Projects,' and '30 Urban Renewal Operations" dedicated to urban rebuilding. Since 2002, the government has continued this approach by heavily investing in new buildings while demolishing old ones. But the results of such actions have been seen by many *banlieue* residents and officials to be negligible in terms of addressing the underlying issues contributing to the isolation of the *banlieues*. One of the biggest criticisms of such reforms is that they do not address structural problems like poor education and youth

[81] Waquant, 154-155
[82] Silverstein, 136

unemployment.[83] A series of interviews after the riots of 2005 conducted by the BBC with youth and other residents of Clichy-sous-Bois and Seine-Sainte-Denis near Paris, found that there were many complaints about the conditions there. Unemployment, job insecurity, discrimination, and a lack of community facilities were all cited as facts of life. The mayor of Clichy-sous-Bois also cited run-down housing, poor transportation, bad schools, and rampant crime as additional problems.[84] These descriptors mesh well with the statistics that unemployment in the *banlieues* is twice as high as the national average of 8.1%, and reaches up to 40% in some of them estates.[85] The tensions surrounding these systemic problems are exacerbated by interactions with the police, who are seen as racist and abusive and were cited as major issues in those interviews. In 2002 then-Interior Minister Sarkozy abandoned community policing in favor of a law and order approach- beat officers were replaced with strong-arm "anti crime brigades," who tended to have no prior contact or history working with *banlieue* communities. Local officials and youth workers believe this has greatly exacerbated existing tensions.[86]

Notably, despite these reforms, transportation between the *banlieues* and the city centers they surround remains difficult. In 1992 there was a plan to improve transportation between Paris and the outlying *banlieues* surrounding it, but it has been continually pushed back. One of the reasons cited has been fears that transport systems could be targets of terrorism and particularly vulnerable from the *banlieue* end of the train system because of security problems. There continues to be a lack of regular train service in many of the *banlieues.*[87] Given the associations

[83] Astier 12/4/2007 "France's city policy in tatters"
[84] Ibid.
[85] The Economist Newspaper Online "On the Streets Again." http://www.economist.com/world/europe/displaystory.cfm?story_id=10204344 (Accessed 12/4/2007).
[86] Ibid
[87] Silverstein, 110-111

of violence with the *banlieues*, obstacles to *banlieue* residents crossing over into the major cities could be seen as an unconscious attempt to keep the violence associated with them from "infecting" city centers, contributing to their isolation.

Methodology

When analyzing the films, I will be looking for general patterns in their presentation of ideas and treatment of culturally significant icons, rather than specific symbols. These films each represent a highly individualized approach to similar material; however, they do draw from and respond to the same discourses. The first section of my *Methodology* called *French Film as a site of Memory and Contemporary Identity* will lay out how I will examine similarities in the narratives and the imagery used to support it to reach larger conclusions on the films' commentary on society. The second section *French Film Movements and Society* explains further the validity of film as a coherent source for studying sociological phenomena in France. The final section *Rise of Cinéma beur and Cinéma de banlieue* explains the smaller sub-genres from which these four films have emerged, and details how my analysis adds to previous scholarship.

French Film as a site of Memory and Contemporary Identity

In order to set up my approach to the analysis of these films, it is necessary to refer back to my discussion of collective memory and the "usable past." In my section *Collective Memory*, I discussed how Wertsch argued that the usable past function of collective memory justifies collective identity being structured around historical events and cultural traditions, even if there is no physical or current proof of the commonalities that members of a group share. Wertsch argues that the act of remembering these things requires both active agents and the use of socio-cultural tools which agents use to help themselves recall events and customs. These tools are not

independently created by an individual for that purpose, but rather are drawn from a "cultural tool kit" which is based on a specific socio-cultural setting.[88] Tools can be as physically amorphous as language, literacy, and established discourses, or as physically specific as documentaries and museum exhibits.[89]

Narrative is one of the most prevalent cultural tools used to retain collective memory, and is one of the tools that can be embodied in film. It is particularly useful for the usable past function because it can represent specific actors, settings, and an overall sweep of events. Narrative tools that we use come from a 'stock of stories' which is determined by a particular cultural, historical, and institutional setting.[90] "Schematic narrative templates" refer to these underlying patterns within character and plot types which can be found within a collection of narratives on a given subject.[91] These patterns are drawn on to create new narratives about historical events, and of ongoing events which could have their basis in the past or which simply contain commonalities with it. This process is reinforced through the 'dialogic function' of narrative, meaning that a narrative about the present is in fact a response to previous narratives, and in turn anticipates subsequent ones.[92] The larger discourse which narratives are a part of create a general body of belief and knowledge which group members can draw on, and a set of templates thus form 'uniquely national modes of explanation' for various events.[93]

Berenz discusses how certain film narratives have special abilities in representing these 'modes of explanation.' He argues that films which fit into the category of "political cinema of contestation" engage the world from the perspective that they can address viewers as citizens

[88] Wertsch, 13
[89] Wertsch, 52-53
[90] Wertsch, 57
[91] Wertsch, 61
[92] Wertsch, 60
[93] Wertsch, 62, 53

capable of action, and influence them to change the outcome of ongoing social struggles.[94] Such cinema uses its unique ability to create visual imagery to get a specific message across through style and form in addition to the actual storyline.[95] These films can be some of the more powerful forms of narrative, because they can convey a message not only through what is explicitly said by its characters, but just as much by what is not said but rather seen or felt. The films I will be using in my analysis could all be seen as belonging to "cinema of contestation," and I will examine not just the meanings found in the overt twists in plot and dialogue, but also those conveyed by imagery. In order to understand how these films can both contest and draw from French narrative templates and the discourse of belonging, I will first discuss the benefits of using film to understand French society.

French Film Movements and Society

Hayward's ongoing work on French national cinema can begin to show us how French film narratives uniquely reflect society. She echoes some of Wertsch's arguments about narratives emerging from a 'stock of stories' when she argues that film narratives draw on the same discourses and myths that the nation uses to reflect and make sense of itself.[96] Hayward sums up the usefulness of film as means for understanding national identity succinctly when she says that "film functions as a cultural articulation of a nation."[97] Thus representations of certain groups within film could be seen as an articulation of their place within the nation. Hayward

[94] Berenz, N. "Representations : Parisian images and national transformations." *The French cinema book*. Eds. Michael Temple and Michael Witt (London: BFI Publishers, 2004)23
[95] Ibid
[96] Hayward, S. *French Natinoal Cinema, 2nd ed.* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 9, 15
[97] Hawyard, S. *French National Cinema, 1st ed*. (New York: Routledge, 1993), x

notes this is the case even if the film in question is trying to 'subvert' national conceptions of identity, because it still addresses that identity, even if in a negative or contradictory way.[98]

Hayward expands on this notion by explaining that there is no single cinema type that is *the* definitive national cinema, but rather that there are several. Based on whether film narratives emerge from the center or the periphery of society, they represent national myths and discourses in different ways.[99] The cinema of the center tends to be homogenous and rely on long established myths and discourses, while the cinema of the periphery challenges this complacency. These differing national cinemas interact dynamically, and continually influence each other[100] because the cinema of the periphery must still take its cues for subject matter from the cinema of the center, which in turn co-opts new ideas which emerge from the periphery.

The films I will be using in my analysis are approaching their subjects from the point of view of subverting the nation's view of itself as a cohesive and Republican whole by pointing out the many locations, mostly centered on the *banlieues*, where that view breaks down in regards to French North Africans. Narratives change as the needs of the nation change, and filmic narratives can reflect nation's ongoing social transforms and the questioning that leads up to it almost in tandem with the occurrence of these changes. In a sense, these films are challenging long-running narrative templates based around Republicanism by experimenting with them, or exposing alternative and less positive ways of viewing them.

Even outside of film scholarship, the concept that film can be a unique representation of society is widespread. The relationship between France and film as cultural articulation can be seen most clearly in the French genre of the 'heritage' film. The heritage film is generally either a film adaptation of a French literary classic, or a historical epic dealing with well known periods

[98] Ibid
[99] Hayward 2005 ,15
[100] Hayward 2005, 14

of the French national past. The film *Germinal* (1993) based on the novel by Emile Zola and starring Gerard Depredieu is often cited by scholars as one of the most prominent examples of a heritage film. These films often receive advance subsidies from the Centre National de la Cinématographie, which is funded by the government.[101] GATT negotiations between the US and France even ruled that these subsidies did not constitute unlawful government protection because they were essential to safeguard the production of French cinema from a flood of Hollywood films, and thereby to protect a facet of French culture.[102] French filmmakers, even those that operate on the periphery and do not receive these competitive subsidies, thus work in an environment that actively encourages cinema to be received not only as entertainment, but as cultural articulation and commentary, and this awareness is implicitly reflected in their work.

When we examine some of the movements in French film in the past few decades, we can see clearly how film has reflected society. Beginning in the 1990s, debates over *la fracture sociale* (the growing difference between the wealthy and the poor), immigration, multiculturalism and equality have been at the fore of socio-political debates in France. This is not just in regards to ethnic minorities, but also gender equality and the rights of LGBT individuals. What these debates all have had in common is that they concern the place of 'difference' in a society which had traditionally viewed acknowledgement of it as sowing discord, and in this changing social context more and more filmmakers began to focus on such issues in their work.[103] In the early 1990s, a film movement began called *la jeune cinéma*, or 'New Realism' which harkened back to a similar focus on social issues by the original Realist

[101] Higbee, W. "Screening the other Paris: Cinematic representations of the French Urban Periphery in *Ma 6-T Va Cracker* and *La Haine"* *Modern and Contemporary France* 9, no. 2 (2001), 303
[102] M. Konstantarakos "Which Mapping of the City? *La Haine* and the *cinéma de banlieue*." *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference*. Phil Powrie. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 40
[103] Higbee, 293-297

filmmakers in the 1970s. The larger movement consisted of a diverse group of filmmakers who focused on marginalized social groups, racism, unemployment, and *la fracture sociale*.

These filmmakers did not have a specific and united political agenda, but rather had in common the goal of engaging with social issues and making their audiences more aware of them.[104] O'Shaughnessey notes that one way of viewing the role of cinema in general is to assume that there are two levels to reality- one is the readily obvious reality in which the social order is clearly established and visible, and the other is the normally unseen reality which is not visible but can still be felt, and it is cinema's role to bring this second level of 'hidden power dynamics of relationships' to visibility. New Realist films in particular sought to expose the audience to this second reality.[105] Berenz's argument that cinema of contestation often relies on imagery is born out by the fact that scholars have noted New Realist films tend to have a naturalistic *mise-en-scene* which combines a documentary-style approach, intimate cameras shots, and/or untrained actors and extras, which creates a more raw and empathetic experience for the audience.[106]

Different kinds of political struggle within the nation draw from and produce different narratives, and this is in part what contributed to the lack of a unified message in New Realism. Film scholars have identified four general typologies of narrative which emerged from this movement. These are narratives which describe social exclusion; narratives which describe the violence that stems from such exclusion; narratives which reaffirm the importance of class and labor struggles of the past; and narratives of mobility in which characters beak out of fixed identities. Two of the films I will be analyzing, Dridi's *Bye-Bye* and Kassovitz's *La Haine* are

[104] Higbee, 309-310
[105] O'Shaugnessey, M. "Post 1995 French Cinema: Return of the Social, Return of the Political?" *Modern and Contemporary France* 11, no. 2 (2001), 194
[106] Higbee, 309-310

considered by film scholars to be examples of the narratives of shifting identities and social violence respectively.[107]

As previously mentioned, the films I will be viewing were created to pose a challenge to societal perceptions of both the *banlieue,* and/or of North Africans specifically. The *cinéma beur* and *cinéma de banlieue* genres grew in the context of the New Realist movement, and as a whole they are exemplary of what many filmmakers within the movement was trying to accomplish. However it was not just the New Realist film context that led to their growth, but also a longer history of cinema which did not have room for the voices of marginalized members of society, and actively tried to repress them. In the next section, I will discuss the specific factors leading to the growth of these two genres, and their characteristics.

Rise of Cinéma beur and Cinéma de banlieue

North African figures were first seen in French films in the context of colonialism. French cinema during the imperial period of the 20th century, like other forms of mass culture, promoted the idea that the French were superior to those it had colonized. Feature films were infused with common beliefs about racial superiority, and by presenting their narratives and characterizations as reality reinforced 'cultural hegemony and underlying politics of privilege.'[108] Mainstream French cinema continued to favor voices from the dominant white majority, refusing to acknowledge the colonial past or its legacy in the form of immigration. Popular films up until the 1980s followed a slightly adjusted colonial formula in their portrayals of the *banlieue,* and in particular their French North African residents. Rather than a casting the colonial territories as sites of the uncivilized, the *banlieue* became cast as a hotbed of

[107] O'Shaughnessey, 196-198
[108] Slavin, D. *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France, 1919-1939.* 2001, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press 3

delinquency or religious extremism, and was often used as site of introduction of North African characters, who were portrayed as deviants or as outsiders.[109]

It was in response to these stereotypical portrayals of both the *banlieues* and of French North Africans that the two overlapping genres of *cinéma beur* and *cinéma de banlieue* arose. The titles for the two genres are often used interchangeably, and indeed there is a lot of overlap between the two genres- films within each of them tend to be independently released, and Tarr states that both are "concerned with the place and identity of the marginal and excluded in France."[110] However, there are also important differences. These genres often have varying definitions when used by different scholars, but Tarr's descriptions are the most concise.

Tarr defines *cinéma beur* as films by and about second generation immigrants of North African descent. Films within this genre are often based on the personal experience of director, and focus on a lack of belonging in French society.[111] Higbee expands on this definition by describing *cinéma beur* as the result of French of North African descent trying to negotiate a sense of identity in relation to both North African origins and French norms. [112] In the1980s the *beur* movement, discussed in my *Formation of French North Africans* section, took off, and such films and documentaries began to be released outside of formal distribution and production circuits. The first breakthrough to mainstream was achieved in 1985 by the film *Le Thé au harem d'Archiméde*, directed by Mehdi Charef.[113] Tarr defines *Cinéma de banlieue* on the other hand, as films which focus on the *"la fracture sociale"* or social divide between classes in addition to tensions between ethnic minorities as their subjects, and tend to have multi-ethnic

[109] *Tarr, C. Reframing difference: beur and banlieue filmmaking in France*. (New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), 3, 9
[110] Tarr 2005, 3
[111] Tarr 2005, 15
[112] Higbee, 321
[113] Tarr 2005, 10

groups of primary characters. Directors of films within this category have been of both North African and white descent. Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine,* is probably one of the most well known examples of a work within this genre.[114]

It is important to note however that while the creation of these genres was initially seen as a form of liberation in that they brought attention to previously unacknowledged groups within France, today many people within the film industry whose work could be considered to fall into those categories have begun to rebel against the terminology of *cinéma beur* and *cinéma de banlieue*, seeing it as a form of ghettoization. This is particularly the case since the names of these genres have been coined by outside critics rather than those who were active in creating the movement. In subsequent writings I will borrow Tarr's terms of *banlieue* and *beur filmmaking,* which emphasizes filmmaking as a set of changing practices that accepts that these are genres whose characteristics are constantly in flux.[115]

Scholarship on these two genres has remained somewhat superficial. While the publication of Tarr's book on *banlieue* and *beur* filmmaking is the beginning of a reversal of that trend, she herself has stated that French film culture does not really have the "vocabulary for addressing identity politics." French film theorists have tended to ignore the larger questions raised by these new films, and have not incorporated issues of race and national identity into a theoretical analysis of French film.[116] While they acknowledge that there is an ongoing trend of films dealing with such subjects, they have failed to delve deeper.

My own survey of the literature has borne out Tarr's statements- most of the articles I have read which discuss films from these overlapping genres have focused solely on *La Haine,* the most successful film to emerge from them, and one directed by a white Frenchman. The

[114] Tarr 2005, 19
[115] Tarr 2005, 1-3
[116] Tarr 2005, 26

implications they draw from this film and sometimes others (generally mentioned in passing) tend to be merely that these films are another arena in which ongoing debates over *la fracture sociale* and multiculturalism are occurring. As a result, scholars have tended to gloss over many of the new subjectivities surrounding French North Africans that the films create, and the broader implications such subjectivities have when compared to one another. While I agree that these films are an arena for such debates, I will show that they also have unique insights on larger issues of French identity.

Analysis of the Films

Film Overview

In my introduction I posed the questions, why do French North Africans continue to face high levels of prejudice and social marginalization even as they attempt to fulfill all the requirements of Republican French identity? How do filmic portrayals of North Africans provide an explanation for such issues of marginalization? To answer these questions**,** I have selected four films which represent some of the most successful to have emerged from these *beur* and *banlieue* filmaking in the past two decades, as measured by critical laudations. They represent a range of approaches in subject matter and structure. I will give a brief synopsis of each before introducing my analysis, but longer explanations of plot can be found in the Appendices along with a list of awards.

Le Thé au Harem d'Archimede (1985) focuses on Madjid, a youth with Algerian parents who has grown up in France, and his friendship with Pat, a white teen. The two live in the Cité

des Fleurs just outside of Paris. This film is based on the semi-autobiographical book by Medhi Charef, who also directed, called *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (1983). Rather than a linear narrative flow it uses an episodic format of narrative, or cutting from one storyline to another again and again to create several interweaving narratives, none of which predominate. The main focus is the duo's friendship, but the film also contains vignettes about life on the estates including examinations of the duo's descent into criminality, and their interactions with friends and family.

Bye-Bye (1995) follows twenty-something Isma and his 14-year-old brother Mouloud as they move in with their uncle's family in Marseilles prior to Mouloud being sent to join their parents in Tunisia. Isma begins working at the docks with his uncle where he is befriended by Jacky, a young white Frenchmen with a North African girlfriend, Yasemine. Meanwhile Mouloud and their cousin Rhida get caught up in dealing drugs, and also earn the ire of a local group of racists, including Jacky's older brother Ludo. Isma begins an affair with Yasemine, and this ruins his friendship with Jacky. At the end of the movie, on the run from the racists and Isma's shame over his betrayal of Jacky, the two brothers leave together for a new life, not in Tunisia but somewhere else in France

La Haine (1995) is probably the most well-known example of *banlieue* filmaking and its sheer influence necessitates that it be discussed here. The film follows three young residents of a Paris suburb; Saïd, who is of North African descent: Hubert, who is of West African origin; and Vinz, who is Jewish. After their friend Abdel is put on life support by a police beating, Vinz vows to shoot a policeman if he dies. This film also uses an episodic narrative structure as it follows the three as they wander through the *banlieue* and into central Paris waiting for news, while the suspense builds as to what will happen in the end when they discover whether their

friend has survived. Ultimately Abdel does die, and while Vinz nearly shoots a skinhead in Paris he finds that he is not capable of random revenge. The tragedy is that when the trio returns to the *banlieue,* Vinz is accidentally killed by a policeman's negligence as Saïd and Hubert can only watch.

L'Esquive (2003) follows the exploits of Krimo, a young French North African who has recently fallen for his white friend Lydia. Lydia is the lead in a local high school play, and Krimo convinces his friend Rachid to give up his own leading role so Krimo can spend time at rehearsals with Lydia and attempt to ask her out. The plan backfires when Krimo turns out to be a terrible actor, Lydia refuses to answer his question right away, and his ex-girlriend Magali tries to get his best friend Fathi to convince Krimo to return to her. Fathi harasses Lydia's friends Frida and Nanou until she agrees to meet with Krimo, but just as they are beginning to discuss their relationship police bust the entire group. By the end of the film, Rachid is back in the play, and it is not clear to the viewer whether Krimo and Lydia will ever end up together.

Introduction to the Analysis

Although each of these films has a slightly different take on the place of French North Africans in society, there are similarities that point towards a common perception of their position. The most obvious of these is that the films all assert in various ways that being French is the primary facet of young North Africans' identity. The films convey this through characters that either actively ignore their ethnic heritage, or confine its expression to the private realm. Despite differences in how ethnic expression is handled, the films taken as a whole clearly provide a rebuttal of the stereotype of the French descendants of North African immigrants as being incompatible with French culture, but rather show that they can adapt to it and internalize it in a variety of different ways. In the first section, *Ethnicity as a Part of Identity,* I will

introduce this concept and show how each of the movies portrays the younger generations of French North Africans as feeling disconnected from the old traditions of their families, and how they do not consider ethnicity as a fundamental part of their individual identities.

Rather, it is often white French who are shown as being out of step with the ideals of Republicanism by continuing to hold prejudice against individuals who have clearly fulfilled the ideal of relinquishing other loyalties. This inability to live up to the ideals of Republicanism occurs not just for individuals, but for the state as well. In my discussion of contemporary Republicanism, I noted that a fundamental part of that model was a mandate for an interventionist state that made sure that all parts of the nation were fully consolidated under those Republican ideals. The ongoing conflict between *banlieue* members and the police illustrates that the state has been unable to do this even when its representatives are interacting directly with youth. The second section of my analysis *Perceptions by Others* discusses how these films reveal which segments of the white population continue to hold prejudice against North Africans, and which treats them as equals. Socioeconomic differences and membership in a larger *banlieue* community, which values loyalty to class over loyalty to race, are the major factors in acceptance or rejection.

Finally my last section, *Sites of Memory in the Films*, will discuss how the films imply that collective memory impacts both of these larger themes. Several of the films imply that a powerful tool used to aid in absorbing French identity is gaining control over collective sites of memory which act as anchors of French culture. By asserting their right to access these sites, French North Africans also assert that culturally they belong in France. Several of the films also imply that memory of the colonial period and the Algerian war negatively impacts white French treatment of North Africans by continually recasting them as dangerous and foreign, particularly

from white French who are old enough to have been able to draw from a first person recollection of the war.

France's weakness in incorporating French North Africans into the nation hinges not just on memories from the colonial period, which exacerbate contemporary racism, but on how memories of the colonial period and racism interact with larger socioeconomic issues and discrepancies in the conceptualization of Republican identity to create complex forms of marginalization which have no quick fix. While the films all emphasize the commonalities that all ethnic groups share in regards to economic pressures and social marginalization, they all also included incidents of racism, which clearly worsened these typical pressures and made them harder to surmount. As a result, French North African attempts at social mobility in the films are often blocked or not even considered.

Ethnicity as a part of Identity

In each of these films, none of the primary French-North African characters count religion or strong ties to the culture of their families' country of origin as major influences on identity or behavior. Scenes of the primary characters attending a mosque or cultural center are absent in all the films, and so are most organized displays of any kind of ethnic solidarity.[117] The one exception to this takes place in the film *Le Thé* when Madjid and Pat go to visit a friend who is putting on a play about violence against North Africans, but Madjid shows little interest in its content despite its relevance to his daily life. Instead, the ethnicity of primary characters is illustrated through indirect means. I found that the most common symbol used to that end was that of the family home, because the only cultural and religious symbols found in these films generally appeared there rather than being displayed by the primary characters' themselves. In

[117] It is important to note that in each of these movies, Islam is implied as a fundamental part of that ethnic heritage even though in reality there is a sizable minority of French North Africans who are Jewish or Christian.

this context, 'home' refers both to imagery of the physical family dwelling, and also how family members of primary characters are used in the films' narratives.

This association between the family and ethnic heritage can be seen most clearly in *Bye-Bye* and *Le Thé* because the families of the main characters have prominent roles in the narrative. In *Le Thé,* Madjid's mother Malika, a first generation immigrant and the head of the household, is the clear link between her family and their origins in Algeria. She prays regularly, and alternates in speaking to her children in both French and Arabic. In one prominent scene, as Malika watches a French dance act on TV the music from the show melds with the sound of drumming and chanting in Arabic as the camera zooms in on her face, and the viewer is led to assume that memories of her life Algeria are still prominent. This leads her to plan to send Madjid back to Algeria to join the military, and "make him a man." In *Bye-Bye* as well, the links to the country of origin, in this case Tunisia, are strong. Isma's aunt and uncle (referred to only as Tante and Oncle) talk repeatedly of how traditional Tunisian family values are better than those in France, and blame the unruliness of their teenage son Rhida on the permissive environment of Marseilles. They congratulate Mouloud on being called back to Tunisiaby his parents as if he has won the lottery, and discuss the merits of sending Rhida back as well for a year to curb his behavior.

In *Bye-Bye* and *Le Thé*, since the family acts as a symbol of ethnic heritage, conflict with parents is used to illustrate the disconnect youth feel from it as a meaningful influence on their lives. In *Le Thé*, when Malika attempts to speak to Madjid in Arabic he tells her that he does not understand, but his evasive body language implies that he is simply refusing to speak to her in that language. Mother and son also have differing opinions on how to deal with Madjid's legal status- when Madjid informs her that to be eligible for job training he must "be French" (the

implication is that while Madjid was raised in France, he was not born there and is thus ineligible for automatic citizenship under the laws at this time), she becomes upset, and tries to order him to return to Algeria. In *Bye-Bye*, when Tante and Oncle discuss returning with the family to Tunisia, Rhida responds with contempt to the idea, while his younger sisters, aged 8 and 10, find the idea so ludicrous that they laugh when their mother brings it up, angering their parents. In both of these films North African children and teens show no interest either in learning about the culture of their parents, or in maintaining connections with their country of origin. Their focus is firmly placed on France, even though in Madjid's case he is not legally a citizen yet.

In contrast to *Le Thé* and *Bye-Bye, La Haine* never physically enters the home of Saïd, although it does enter those of Vinz and Hubert. In the first part of the movie, the film enters Vinz's apartment and there is a lingering, wide-angle shot of his family eating breakfast in the living room, in which there are prominently placed two menorahs. The film also visits Hubert's home, and in the background of every scene there is a traditional West African kente cloth hanging on one of the walls for decoration. Though subtle, the film is informing the viewer that both the white and black characters in the film have their own ethnic heritage, which adds another layer of complexity to their place in relation to *la fracture sociale*. Despite this ostensible attention to detail, the film does not visit Saïd's home at all. The film uses the home to accent Vinz and Hubert's ethnic characteristics, even as it downplays Saïd's. As noted in my section *Banlieues and French North Africans*, prior to the release of *La Haine* there had been several notable incidents in which North African youth had gotten involved with Muslim extremists. The differential treatment of ethnic symbolism for the three characters has the effect of glossing over the fact that North Africans had frequently been perceived as the minority population in France that was not only the most "different" from the majority white population,

but also one that was dangerous because of it. The film is trying to reassure viewers by distancing Saïd from anything that could symbolize fundamentalism, and instead it encourages them to focus on how Saïd is similar to his friends.

It is Saïd's individual behavior towards his family outside of the home that anchors his approach to issues of ethnicity. At several points of the film, when Saïd's sister is mentioned in jokes by teasing friends, he orders them "don't bring my sister into this!" When he sees his sister hanging out with her friends in a courtyard where other youth are break-dancing, he begins to argue with her and tries to get her to go home. His behavior could initially be seen as mirroring the stereotype of the Arab male who tries to represses the freedom of women in the name of honor (one of the arguments used by proponents of the headscarf ban was that it freed Muslim women from having to wear the veil due to threats from male relatives). However, Saïd's behavior is portrayed more as posturing than as legitimate concern. When he tells a friend not to discuss his sister the sharp retort is to "stop acting the pseudo-Arab!" and his sister herself laughs off his attempts to get her to leave the courtyard.

It has been noted by several scholars on *La Haine* that the film portrays the *banlieue* as a violent, hyper-masculine environment through its gritty *mise-en-scene*, choice of costume design (leather jackets and camouflage cargo pants), and lack of female characters. In a sense, masculinity is the only source of pride and power that main characters have, given the relentless pressures of daily life.[118] This broader context coupled with Saïd's behavior implies that for him, complex cultural values surrounding conceptions of family honor have been reduced to caricatures that are only drawn on in a weak attempt to increase the appearance of male power in front of his friends. Cultural identity, rather than manifesting only in stiff and pre-determined

[118] Tarr, Carrie. "Ethnicity and Identity in the cinéma de banlieue." In *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference*, edited by Phil Powrie. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 204

ways which a main character must follow, is shown as being fluid and adaptable depending of the needs of the person employing it. This in turn implies that it is not a powerful determinant of behavior, and could be hidden away or displayed with equal ease in accordance with Republican values.

Confining expressions of ethnicity to the private home and family meshes well with the schematic narrative template of French Republicanism. Republicanism dictates that the only appropriate forum for the expression of ethnic/religious sentiment is in the private sphere, because doing so in the public arena creates divisiveness between groups and detracts from loyalty to the nation. Each of the three movies I have just discussed upholds that belief by primarily displaying indicators of ethnicity within the boundaries of the home and family. By doing so with North African characters, these films are sending the implicit message that regardless of ethnic background North Africans born and raised in France can and do adhere to an important facet of Republicanism. *La Haine* also emphasizes that ethnic heritage is not necessarily a powerful part of identity by showing how easily Saïd can manipulate it even within those boundaries. *Bye-Bye* and *Le Thé* even go a step further by illustrating active indifference or rejection of signifiers of ethnicity by their main characters. The three films are graphically asserting that North African youth have the ability, and often the active desire, to divest from non-French loyalties.

L'Esquive approaches its North African characters' treatment of various aspects of their ethnic heritage in a different way than the other films. While the home is still a site of ethnic heritage, (albeit a more subtle one- when Krimo enters his apartment, the only clue to any non-French origins is that his mother is listening to pop music in Arabic), rather than such symbols only arising within the specific boundaries of the home and family they are spread throughout

the film to the extent that their prevalence makes them unremarkable, and less significant. When Krimo is giving Rachid snacks in exchange for letting him have his part in the play, Rachid double-checks to make sure they are *halal* as a matter of course before packing them away. All of the North African teenagers in this film pepper French slang with colloquial sayings in Arabic. For example everyone uses the term "inch'Allah" or "God willing" when discussing a fervent desire, and to punctuate a point a character might say, "I swear on the Koran!" In contrast to the other films, the characters of *L'Esquive* do not ignore or actively reject ethnic heritage, or attempt to utilize it only when they find it convenient for another purpose. Rather, facets of the culture of their families' country of origin are intrinsically mixed with the culture of the contemporary France they live in, to the detriment of neither.

Taken as a whole, all four of these films all of these films could be seen as helping to construct a new narrative template around the place of ethnicity and religion in a typical French North African's life, one which draws on and expands the traditional template of Republicanism. This new narrative template is not focused on irreconcilable cultural and religious differences but rather on a sense of compromise between different facets of French North African identity. *Le Thé*, *Bye-Bye*, and *La Haine* are films specifically focused on the rejection or manipulation of ethnic heritage as a means of accentuating the French aspect of North Africans' identities. Thus they adhere to the Republican requirement of relinquishing adherence to non-French communities and ideals, but by not only moving the expression of difference to a private sphere but by individually distancing themselves from it or changing its significance.

*L'Esquiv*e helps to construct a slightly different template than that of the previous three films by illustrating how identity tension can be less about conflict between contemporary French culture and traditional culture, and more about actively creating a hybrid of the two in a

way that still follows Republicanism. Differences are allowed to meld seamlessly into the background of the lives of characters, where they are accepted but not worthy of comment. Symbols of difference have expanded outside of the home, but they are still in the private sphere because they occur only in the context of personal friends, and therefore a non-public forum, and because none of these symbols occur in way that could be considered controversial. For example, while it is clear that all of the North African characters consider themselves Muslim, none of the female characters wear headscarves, which have been seen by many white French as an especially divisive symbol of difference. What is displayed publicly instead is the passion and skill of the students in performing Marivaux's play, symbolizing that their focus is on French culture rather than that of their ancestors (an important point that will be discussed in more detail in my section on collective memory). Thus characters adhere to the Republican ideals, but in a way that does not require rejection of other traditions, just a balancing of where and how they are expressed. A compromise between facets of identity are still present, but it is portrayed in a much more positive, and less stressful light; while "Frenchness" can predominate, it does not obliterate, and characters have more control over when and where they can express the different facets of identity.

Perceptions of North Africans by others

Generally within these four films, the peer groups of French North African characters are shown as being indifferent to ethnic or racial differences. Friendships between a white character and a North African character are the principle symbols of this "color blindness." Characters can use jokes to establish that while they acknowledge differences, they do not particularly care about them, but that is the extent of such issues arising directly between two friends. Instead, these films emphasize how other factors such as the poverty, victimization by the state (usually

symbolized by police brutality), or simply common teenage experiences, are far more important to other youth. This openness disappears when North African characters begin to interact with older white individuals who live on the estates, native French who live outside the estates or control access to social mobility, and the police. While these films display progress in terms of acceptance of difference, they also show the extent to which some demographics in France still hold prejudice against North Africans.

In *Le Thé* the main focus of the film is a cross-racial friendship between Madjid and Pat. This friendship ignores ethnic lines in favor of solidarity in the face of severe socioeconomic pressures. It provides the two with mutual support that they cannot find anywhere else. Much of the film follows their exploits as they try to find ways of making money, since neither of them can find a decent job, and emphasizes that their unemployment is due to societal issues rather than personal shortcomings. Madjid has extra difficulty in finding a job because although raised in France he is not a legal French citizen, and Pat also faces extra problems because he is functionally illiterate due to the poor schooling on the estates. So instead the boys work with each other to engage in various criminal pursuits such as mugging, burglary, and even soliciting customers for a local prostitute.

However, the movie makes the point that they are not mindless delinquents, and actually act as pillars for their multiethnic group of friends who are facing the same pressures but are not dealing with them as well. For example, in a scene near the beginning of the movie the two beat up a drug dealer who has been selling crack to their friend Raustin, and order him not to come near their part of the estate anymore. The strength of the broader youth community on the estates is also illustrated by that fact that they are united against abusive authority, both in the form of local adults and the police. When Madjid and Pat flee into a movie theatre after

vandalizing the cars of some older men who have been harassing them, the police and the victims follow them. Rather than turning them in, a rival, completely white clique also in the theatre distract the police and the men until they leave, giving Madjid and Pat time to hide. The sequence illustrates how a combination of youth and *banlieue* solidarity are the foundation of group loyalty that takes precedence over both race and petty quarrels. At the end of the film, Pat turns himself into the police after Madjid is arrested, poignantly illustrating the extent of the boys' mutual support system.

The strength of this friendship, and ostensibly of all of those which make up their multiethnic clique, is proven even more by the fact that Madjid and Pat are not oblivious to racism, but rather are highly aware of it. In fact, they are so aware of its nuances that many of the crimes they commit they take advantage of it- for example, when they steal a man's wallet on the metro, the man automatically suspects Madjid is the thief because of his race and forcibly searches him, while in reality Pat was the one who physically lifted the wallet. Thus the two avoid being caught and split the profits. Yet within their personal relationship these prejudices do not arise all- they both seem to take for granted that Madjid should have the same degree of input and power in the relationship as Pat. Although Madjid can move through the space of his peer group without fear of encountering prejudice, this changes when he ventures outside of it.

Problems with racism in *Le Thé* emerge from older people on the estate who do not share the same close-knit experiences as marginalized youth, or with representatives of the state such as the police or a job counselor who control social and physical mobility in the *banlieues*. For example, in response to his mother's prodding, Madjid finally goes to an employment agency to look for a job. The job counselor regretfully informs him that although he is a viable candidate, a notice of "poor eyesight" in his school records means he is not eligible for the truck driving

training to which he had applied. Madjid expresses surprise at this since he had not been aware he had a problem, but leaves the job agency. As soon as he is gone, the counselor invites a young white man with thick glasses in and congratulates him on getting into the same training program. The implication is clearly that this job counselor is racially screening applicants. Throughout the film there are other, briefer indicators of racism still being a major issue in Madjid's life. An older neighbor of Madjid's sets his dog on him when he sees him for no reason other than to be cruel, and yet another neighbor calls Malika a racial slur when she tries to intervene in a domestic dispute. Abuse of North Africans from law enforcement also seems taken for granted. When Pat is sitting in a café, two plainclothes cops come in and single him out for identification. Pat disdainfully replies, "take me for an Arab?" From previous portrayals of Pat interacting with Madjid and their other North African friends, it is clear that he has no personal issues with prejudice against Arabs. However his casual expectation that as a white man he should be exempt from the same scrutiny as his friends implies that in this film, discrimination against North Africans by the police is highly ingrained, to the point that it is rarely challenged directly.

One of the most prevalent symbols of the ideal of friendship overriding race in *beur* and *banlieue* filmmaking is the trope of the *black-blanc-beur* trio, an expansion of the concept of the white/North African friendship. The film *La Haine* was one of the first (if not the first) to utilize it, and afterwards it became a fairly well known fixture in *beur* and *banlieue* filmmaking. These trios are used to convey the growing physical diversity of France, and beyond that to act as proof of the pervasiveness of Republican values because of the egalitarian relationship between all three friends. It is such a well-known symbol that it has emerged even in comedies, such as *Ciel, Les Oiseaux… et ta Mère!* (1999). In *La Haine*, the first two thirds of the movie, which take place in the *banlieue*, the film emphasizes how much the shared history of growing up together

on the estates have contributed towards cementing the trio's friendship. Their friendly interactions with a broader multiethnic group of friends and acquaintances at youth hangouts like a rooftop barbecue and a break-dancing session serve to highlight the unimportance of ethnicity among the youths in the *banlieue.* While there are parts of the narrative where Saïd is singled out from Vinz and Hubert (which will be discussed in more detail later), the primary focus of the film is on socioeconomic marginalization, which affects all of the young men.

The film uses Abdel's beating and the ensuing riots to act as a catalyst for exploring the trio's conflicted feelings about those ongoing experiences. Much of the action in the *banlieue* takes place as the trio wanders around the estate to seemingly ordinary places- a playground, a courtyard, a friend's house- but the construction of the *mise-en-scene* gives it all a sense of tension. The film is done completely in black and white, providing an added starkness to the wide-angle shots of burned or dilapidated public areas, and even though it is the middle of the day no one is at work or school. It is obvious from the stacks of TVs in the apartment of a friend they visit and the surreptitious money exchanges in several scenes, that both the trio and their friends are involved in criminal activity. This is clearly related to a lack of viable employment, and is painfully illustrated through a scene of Hubert talking with his mother about the family's need for more money, which then cuts to a scene of him slicing a block of processed hashish and wrapping it for sale. As the trio walks through the estates the boys offer commentary to each other on what they see, voicing frustration and anger at the absolute boredom of the estates, or the lack of jobs. The trio's only financial success story, Hubert, had worked for two years to obtain a grant to build a gym, only to see it burn down in the riots.

Their bond of friendship is cemented by their shared anger towards the police. In a sense *La Haine* picks up where *Le The* left off by illustrating not only the economic pressures of life in

the *banlieue* but the institutionalized violence that can come along with marginalization. The police are often spoken of in terms of "us" versus "them," and are perceived as an invading force. Although Abdel is not a close friend of the boys, his beating is seen as an attack on the entire *banlieue.* Each of the larger youth community's subsequent interactions with the police take on this tone of two opposing sides, and this overarching conflict is the main driver of narrative action. Initially the conflict manifests in light harassment, as when the police break up a peaceful rooftop barbecue for no apparent reason, but altercations quickly escalate. In the middle of the film the trio is standing with a larger group of young men when Abdel's brother attempts to shoot a cop in retaliation for his brother's beating. When the police arrest the brother the youth surround the officers, jeering and threatening violence, and then are chased into an abandoned building by police reinforcements. The trio escapes, but their subsequent need to lay low for a few hours sends them to Paris. In the final moments of the film, just after the trio arrives back in the *banlieue* from Paris, a policeman who recognizes Vinz from earlier apprehends him and begins to mock him while waving his gun at him- the gun goes off, and Vinz is killed. The last shot is of Hubert facing off against the officer with Vinz's gun, in a sense taking a last stand for his friend.

This final scene brutally caps the growth of tension throughout the film that has been carefully built up through every scene of altercation or conflict between *banlieue* youth and the police. Taken as a whole, these incidents imply that one of the reasons that youth are able to put aside racial and ethnic differences is because of the threat created by the police, which touches them all. While a fully united front is not seen in *La Haine* (all actions against the police are random and violent), the film implies that the pressure placed on the community by the police at least results in the unconscious decision not to create more conflict between one another.

Because the police are the only representatives of the state that are present in the film, the collective rage felt towards them is symbolic of anger and discontent being the primary emotions associated with it. While it is the state's duty to provide the means for egalitarianism and equal opportunity for all French citizens, in *La Haine* the state is clearly failing in that duty by allowing police to abuse the specific demographic of *banlieue* residents.

La Haine emphasizes the unimportance of race and ethnicity within the *banlieue,* but as soon as the trio ventures outside of it into the center of Paris this changes, and both Saïd and Hubert face increased abuse because of their race. When the trio arrive in Paris they try to find a man who owes Saïd money, they go directly to his apartment building. Saïd, aware of the perceptions of North Africans and blacks within the major cities, orders Vinz to call the video intercom to find out which apartment their contact is in. However, their presence still makes the manager of the complex suspicious enough to call the police while they are in the apartment. Hubert and Saïd are arrested as they exit the building, and at the station, they are physically abused and called racial slurs before being released; for a single shot that lasts three minutes, the viewer watches as the two are choked and hit by two officers explaining to a rookie cop in clinical terms how to "have fun" with prisoners.

Vinz manages to escape being taken into custody by pretending not to know Said and Hubert, which the two also back up when questioned by the police. Vinz's escape ploy is only possible because his race gives the officers a second's pause and allows him to sprint away. The fact that it is racism that allows Vinz to escape the police emphasizes its pervasiveness, and the added burden that minorities face in dealing with the state. In a sense, race is a wildcard- while initially Paris is seen as a place of safety for the trio because it brings them away from the generalized climate of violence of the *banlieue,* it is because of racism there that they are singled

out and targeted, and thus Paris is transformed into a place of peril. Notably, when Saïd and Hubert are released and re-unite with Vinz in a train station, the two are initially cool towards him but before long they are laughing and sharing a joint. Their quick reunification once again emphasizes the importance of solidarity in the face of the police, even if that means accepting that an individual must sometimes abandon friends to escape the police, because there are few other options.

While this sequence implies that both North Africans and black Africans face abuse, Saïd is also singled out in one notable incident. When the three go to the hospital to visit Abdel, they are not allowed access to his room because police have been dispatched to guard him in the wake of the riots. While Hubert and Saïd accept this with a little grumbling, Vinz begins to curse out the officer guarding the door. When backup arrives, it is only Saïd they take into custody. He is quickly released thanks to the auspices of a North African police officer who knows his brother, and Saïd expresses a sort of grim relief as they walk away, saying, "the only Arab in a police station is a dead Arab." The officer notably does not deny this statement, but instead just looks away, implying that he himself has had to wrestle with issues of racial prejudice or violence while on the force. While socioeconomic marginalization is portrayed as the major determinant of the direction of Saïd's life, racism is clearly still a complicating factor embodied by the police as representatives of the state and society beyond the *banlieues.*

L'Esquive is the only one of these four films to have a trans-ethnic romance, between Krimo and Lydia, rather than a platonic friendship as its focal point. As discussed above, ethnic differences have become so subtly pervasive in this film that they are no longer worthy of comment by the characters. *L'Esquive* is placed in an unspecified *banlieue*, but unlike *Le Thé* and *La Haine* it does not foreground economic problems and violence, although these themes are

still present. Rather, the film's focus rests intensely on the personal relationships within the main group of friends, several members of whom are involved in the class's play production. The film as a whole is mostly made up of 5-10 minute scenes which each cover just one conversation between 2-3 people. This structure serves to emphasize the importance that these relationships play in everyone's lives, relationships which the film implies simply do not have time for issues of racism because they are preoccupied with normal teenage of concerns; everyone's focus is on the play, and trying to figure out if Lydia and Krimo will ultimately go out.

Evidence of marginalization seems to lie dormant until the end of the film, when it erupts at a critical moment. Fathi has just driven Krimo to meet with Lydia to discuss their potential relationship, and they sit in the car talking while Fathi, Nanou, and Frida wait nearby. Suddenly, four policemen, one black man and two white men, and a white woman, drive up. Fathi's car turns out to be of dubious legal origin, and the teens have also been seen smoking a joint. The cops beckon over Fathi, Nanou, and Frida, and pull Krimo out of the car to search them. They seem not to see Lydia, and focus only on frisking the North African characters- they only pull Lydia from the car after Fathi tries to explain that Krimo had just been talking to "the blonde," and points her out. When Frida and Lydia protest, things begin to escalate, and the cops resort to hitting the teens and threatening to beat them, bringing them to tears. The scene is filmed with a handheld camera and zooms in on shots of the police shouting and the girls crying, creating a jarring interruption to the previous scenes of intimate conversation, and emphasizes the police as instigators of violence. The scene cuts abruptly to the day of the play performance, leaving the viewer wondering what ultimately happened. A clue lies in the fact that while none of the actors appear to have been incarcerated, Rachid is back to playing opposite Lydia, while Krimo is

nowhere to be seen. The film implies that the police interrupted the moment of truth in Lydia and Krimo's relationship, potentially halted the formation of a trans-ethnic relationship. If trans-ethnic friendships are often used to symbolize diversity and acceptance, a romantic relationship could be seen as the ultimate manifestation of equality. The film's treatment of this interruption creates a potent symbol of state power acting to counteract integration and the true triumph of Republicanism.

In *Bye-Bye*, a trans-ethnic friendship between two young men is transplanted from the *banlieue* to a multiethnic working class district in Marseilles. *Bye-Bye* represents a variation of the friendship theme in *banlieue* and *beur* filmmaking discussed earlier in which mutual support helps friends to survive. Here there are far fewer economic pressures than on the estates to create a crucible for the friendship, but shared resistance against larger social forces is still present. When Isma begins to work at the docks with his uncle, he faces some harassment from a vocal racist named Ludo. In contrast, Ludo's younger brother Jacky seems to embody the ideals of Republican color-blindness: his girlfriend Yasemine is North African (although their relationship is not the central focus of the film and ultimately disintigrates), and he defends both Isma and another Arab worker from Ludo's malicious teasing. Jacky's friendship with Isma begins because of the protection that Jacky can provide by hanging out with him at work, but the friendship deepens and moves beyond the confines of work because both boys are the same age, and share the same interests, a point made by the fact that many of the sequences following them together are of fairly banal activities such as riding a motorcycle around the city, drinking in a bar, or going to an outdoor concert and dancing.

It is the difference between the two brothers Jacky and Ludo, the primary white French characters in the film, that enables this film to most clearly symbolize a France divided in its

opinions on how to treat French North Africans. In contrast to Jacky as a symbol of "openness," Ludo could be seen as a symbol of the "closed" France that refuses to accept increasing diversity. He belongs to a group of friends who see their duty as protecting France from Arabs and the social problems they think they bring. He consistently tries to make trouble with Isma, and even mocks Yasemine in front of Jacky. In the middle of the film it emerges that Ludo was actually a member of the French Legion during the Algerian War, and the film strongly implies that this is the basis for his negative feelings towards North Africans (something that will be discussed in more detail in my next section on collective memory).

A particular sequence at the end of *Bye-Bye* encompasses this difference between the two brothers that has been emphasized throughout the film. One of the dockworkers, a black man, gets married to a white woman and the entire neighborhood attends the event. As discussed before, a biracial relationship (and particularly the binding union of a marriage) could be seen as a symbol of the ideal of French integration, and the power of this symbol is emphasized even more in *Bye-Bye* because the guests at the reception come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Jacky, Yasemine, and Isma are all present and engaging in the festivities, but Ludo and his gang crash the wedding ostensibly for no other reason than to make trouble. They insult the bride and make fun of the guests, and when Jacky tries to intervene they ask him, "why won't you hang out with your own kind?" This sentiment contrasts with the portrayal of Jacky which implies that to him, the wedding guests *are* his own kind, regardless of ethnicity. Jacky's participation in the wedding party as the symbol of the open France suggests that parts of society do try to work towards integration with immigrant minorities, even when it calls for standing against others. However Ludo's attempts to disrupt the wedding, and his assumption that as a white man Jacky should not interact with non-whites, represents a deep level of resistance to such efforts. The

conflict of belief between the two brothers is symbolic of the conflict of belief within France as a whole, and implies that rather than a consensus being reached on how French identity should begin to adapt to increasing levels of diversity, there are several opinions as to who exactly has a right to be French. While those like Jacky accept the presence of North Africans and other minorities, those like Ludo persist in the idea of French identity only truly belonging to white French.

Taken together, these four films provide new insight into the complex relationship between North Africans and white French, which cannot be considered as wholly based on rejection or acceptance, but rather shifts in relation to several different factors. In the context of the *banlieues*, it is clear that shared experiences with socioeconomic marginalization take precedence over race in forming the basis of friendships. White French who live there are likely to have more in common with French North Africans than with other white French who live outside of the *banlieues.* This is reflected in their joint stance against the police, the enforcement arm of the state. The ability to ignore ethnic or racial differences is especially easy for *banlieue* youth because as I discussed in the previous section, North African youth generally do not bring expressions of their ethnic heritage or differences in beliefs outside of the home anyways, whereas the evidence of shared marginalization is immediate.

The films instead make it clear that racism or poor treatment towards North Africans generally comes from white French who do not share the same degree of powerlessness or proximity as *banlieue* youth. This allows them to focus on the differences between themselves and North Africans, and build up the notion that French identity and the attendant rights that come with it is something that only native white French have a right to. Even the state in its Republican interventionist mode seeks to control through policing rather than to understand or

help members of the *banlieue*, with a particular focus on North Africans because they ostensibly represent the most visible threat to the stability of the nation. The drastically different approaches that white French have to French North Africans is symbolic of a France that is still divided in its approach to North Africans, and beyond that to the idea of how Republicanism and French identity should be applied in general. As I will explain next, collective memory also plays a role in determining these conflicting approaches.

Sites of Memory in the Films

In my earlier introduction to the concept of collective memory, I discussed how its usable past function supports collective identity by allowing all members of a group access to a common belief or historic event. This "usable past" function of collective memory employs cultural tools to facilitate that process. Such tools are similar to the concept French historian Pierre Nora developed called *lieux de memoire* or sites of memory. Nora argues that *lieux de memoire* arise because there is no such thing as spontaneous collective memory. For example archives and monuments in particular all act as anchors of memory, and therefore of the identity which this memory helps to fashion. This concept can be extrapolated to cultural icons that harken back to a greater French past such as the tricolors, the Eiffel Tower, and even songs or literary texts.[119] By examining the portrayals of French North Africans in the context of film *mise-en-scene* that contains such sites of memory, I will gain insight into the degree of access or ownership that they are imagined having regarding French identity. Access in this context is defined as their ability to assert control over such sites or over their own lives when near them in the same fashion as white French.

[119] Nora, 7

In *La Haine*, 'sites of memory' are subtly worked into the *mise-en-scene* throughout the film as a way of illustrating how disconnected both North African youth and others in the *banlieues* are from the center of French identity. In one of the longest shots of the movie, an aerial view of a playground filled with loitering youth, the background music is a remix of French icon Edith Piaf's song *Je ne regrette rien* or "No Regrets" with the contemporary rap song *Niqué la Police* or "Screw the Police" by the French musical group Suprême NTM, whose lyrics critically focus on issues of race and class in France. The use of Piaf's song is especially notable because she dedicated it to the French Foreign Legion during the Algerian War, and it was famously sung by the prestigious 1st REP (Regiment Étranger Parachutiste) on April 27, 1961 after they were disbanded for participating in a coup against the army in Algiers which was spearheaded by army leaders who were furious with de Gaulle for deciding to withdraw from Algeria. As they were marched out of their barracks, the 1st REP sang the song in front of journalists as a mark of defiance of de Gaulle's decision.[120] In contrast, "*Niqué la Police*" is a violent and somewhat nihilistic expression of anger against the police.

Given such highly potent sentiments behind these songs, the shot takes on several layers of new meaning. On the one hand, the use of the remix with its two associations of defiance could simply be taken as an emphasis of the feelings *banlieue* members have against marginalization. However, the use of *Je ne regrette rien* evokes a deeper memory in the light of the French state's failures to incorporate Algeria under the rhetoric of Republicanism, and then to control Algeria when the war began. The combination with *Niqué la Police* also reminds the viewer of the contemporary failures of the French state to do the same in the *banlieues*, and thus

[120] Porch, Douglass. *The Fench Foreign Legion: A complete history of the legendary fighting force.* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 609-6011

the seemingly innocuous shot of the playground takes on a new symbolism as a site of the ongoing failures of Republicanism.

Other symbols throughout the film serve to underscore a sense of mutual isolation between broader French society and the *banlieue* that crosses ethnic lines. In several of the sprawling shots of the *banlieue*, the viewer sees murals of French writers Hugo and Baudelaire[121] painted as an attempt to brighten the surroundings. They are included in the background as if to emphasize how disconnected the revered and mainstream aspects of French culture are from the problems facing *banlieue* youth- the biggest incident of violence in the film, the death of Vinz, happens under one of these murals.

Finally, a sequence surrounding the Eiffel Tower provides some of the most powerful symbols of the disconnect between *banlieue* youth and the rest of French society, and occurs just after the trio have reunited in a Paris train station. To understand its larger significance, one needs to know a little more about the Eiffel Tower. Roland Barthes wrote in his essay "La Tour Eiffel" in 1964 that while it was inevitable that the Eiffel Tower would be a universal symbol of Paris and France in general, it was also "a total monument" because it is not a monument to a specific event or person, and is recognized around the world. As a result anyone can attach personal significance to it, and beyond the traditional association with Paris it is "symbolically accessible" to all.[122] However the tower originally was conceived as the artistic embodiment Republican social ideal. Construction on it was completed in 1889 for the centennial of the French Revolution and the World Exposition in Paris. Third Republic officials promoted the project as a one that would use the expanding industrialization fields of science and technology

[121] Vincendeau, G. "Designs on the *banlieue*: Mathieu Kassovitz's La Haine." *French film: texts and contexts* eds. Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau. (New York : Routledge, 2000), 319

[122] Thompson, W. "The Symbol of Paris: Writing the Eiffel Tower." *The French Review* 73, No. 6, (2000): 1137-1138

to create a new industrialization icon to act as a Republican symbol in the imagination of the public.[123] The very design of the tower was seen as imbuing the following sentiment: "the multitude of small parts, each clearly articulated and composed of the same material, each reduced to its most efficient form and interlocked with the others to form an integrated controlled, dynamic system, was a paradigm of a liberal democratic society."[124]

The first scene in the sequence of three is a close-up of Vinz's hands fumbling to light a joint, with the Eiffel tower pictured prominently in the background. As the trio smoke on the roof of an abandoned building looking out towards the tower, they mock the national motto of "*liberté, egalité, fraternité*" with Hubert saying sarcastically, "I only save that one for special occasions." The use of this motto places the total monument of the Eiffel Tower firmly in the film as its creators originally intended, as a symbol of the French nation and its Republican ideals, rather than its general usage as a romantic icon. When the boys get up to leave, Saïd tries an old trick found in classic movies, that of snapping his fingers just before the Eiffel tower is scheduled to turn off to make it appear as if he as flicked the switch. In the old films, this action is generally a symbol of a confident individual who is in control of his life and on top of the world,[125] but when Saïd does it nothing happens. The tower slowly blinks out a few minutes after the trio walks away cursing its uncooperativeness. The fact that Saïd cannot get the tower to symbolically bend to his own will like that of white characters in other French films implies that he cannot utilize the Republican ideals for his own use and assert his place in the French nation.

By contrast *l'Esquive* has a much more positive portrayal of interactions between North Africans and cultural sites of memory. Here the primary 'site of memory' is a classic 18th-

[123] Levin, M.R. "The Eiffel Tower Revisited" The French Review 62, No. 6 (1989): 1057-1058
[124] Levin 1058
[125] Konstantakaros 157

century French play by Marivaux called *Le jeu de l'amour et de l'hazard* (Games of Love and Chance) that the local high-school is producing, and much of the narrative action in the film takes place during play rehearsals. Half of the students performing in the play are of North African descent, and by mastering the play they are shown as symbolically asserting their own right as citizens to access a French site of memory, and through that access cultural citizenship in addition to legal status. They assert this right on their own terms by approaching the play not with reverence for its place in the canon of French literature, but with their own ideas of interpretation. The students argue among themselves as to the best way to portray each scene, and commit themselves fully to their own understanding of the play, with the help of their drama teacher.

The content of the play itself speaks to larger issues of social boundaries within the film. It follows the exploits of two 18th century nobles who switch places with their servants. When the drama teacher is discussing the play with the students, she emphasizes how the ultimate message of the play is that "we are prisoners of our social condition" because although both nobles and servants have disguised themselves, their "self-expression" is the same and so they know others of their own class instantly. The title of the play is meant to be ironic because there is in reality no chance to find "pure" love- the characters of the play all fall for members who share their social status. This message of imprisonment is echoed later in the film when the students butt up against invisible ceilings that demarcate social hierarchies. As discussed previously, the students are targeted by the police when they venture to the outskirts of the *banlieue.* As they are roughed up the camera zooms in on a dog-eared copy of the play that has fallen out of Frida's pocket, linking the earlier discussion of class to an ongoing incident that would be highly unlikely to happen outside of the *banlieue*. Ultimately, linking the police

brutality and the play in this scene underlines the fact that the students' have a low and regimented place in the social hierarchy.

La Haine emphasizes the impossible distance between the *banlieues* and the rest of French society that is the result of a long history of the failure of the state to integrate those on the peripheries of the nation in terms of both race and class. *L'Esquive* hints at similar issues, but in a much more indirect manner by linking Marivaux's play and the incident with the police. And in contrast to *La Haine's* message of hopelessness, it also emphasizes the ability of North Africans to assert control over sites of memory through effort and spirit. Although they still face challenges from pre-established hierarchies, their mastery of the play in spite of these could be viewed as a necessary step to fully overthrowing or altering the status quo. Given that *L'Esquive* was released 8 years after *La Haine*, this could be seen as an evolution among *beur* and *banlieue* filmmakers. The director Abdel Kechiche has said about his film that he was tired of seeing imagery both in films and in the media of "the gang rapes, drugs, girls wearing veils and arranged marriages" and wanted to focus instead on "love and theater."[126]

I have discussed previously how narrative itself acts as a cultural tool of remembering. Schematic narrative templates, or the underlying patterns of a set of narratives on a given topic, draw on previous templates to construct new ones and contribute to a larger discourse of belief. Thus in addition to examining specific *mise-en-scene* sites of memory, I will examine how the films transform narrative events into impromptu sites of memory as well by symbolizing or drawing directly on important historical events in the French past. This is particularly useful in examining the lingering impact of the Algerian War and the colonial period, and the role collective memory has in white French acceptance or rejection of French North Africans. The

[126] Grey, T. "Outside influences: Franco-Arab lensers bring new points of view to the big screen.") *Variety* section A, May 9, 2005

'cloistered' characteristics of specific memories about the war have contributed to the "usable past" function of memory being splintered. As a result, many in France have associations of fear or anger projected onto all French North Africans without a clear understanding of the source of these feelings. This allows some groups in France justify the exclusion of North Africans from French identity by accessing only specific events of the war to support negative stereotypes which had their roots in the colonial period. The films show a high level of awareness of this phenomenon, which they portray in different ways.

The clearest example of the transformation of a narrative event into a site of memory occurs in *Bye-Bye*. The pivotal scene occurs on the outdoor patio of a café, and introduces the animosity between Isma's cousin Rhida, Ludo, and his white coworkers who will later be responsible for Isma and Mouloud leaving Marseille. Ludo and his friends are eating dinner when they see Rhida approach the café with a backpack. They seem to know that he has been dealing drugs, and warn him to stay away from the café. When he continues to enter, one of the men grabs him while Ludo points to the patio of the café and say, "this is France- That way (gesturing back towards the direction of Rhida's house) that is Algeria. Go back to Algeria!" With the rest of the men shouting in agreement, they begin to hit him until he runs away. All of these men work with Rhida's father and probably know that he is Tunisian, which makes the overwhelming presence of Algeria in their comments all the more significant. After Rhida leaves, the men discuss amongst themselves the state of the neighborhood, referring to "Arab drug dealers" and how they believe the neighborhood's social fabric is deteriorating as a result. They bring up the fact that Ludo was in the Foreign Legion, and state that while he was 'over there' things began to get worse 'here.'

This scene illustrates how memory of the Algerian war plays a part in continuing xenophobia against French North Africans, and also provides a scenario explaining the reasons behind much of the support the Front Nationale enjoys. First, it overtly links memory of the war to current treatment of North Africans by showing how Ludo and his friends explicitly bring up Algeria and Ludo's military history there when discussing Rhida to justify their animosity. The sense the viewer gets is that the source of their anger is that they perceive that the same demographic of people they were fighting are now living in their own neighborhoods, a perception that exists regardless of these neighbors' own origins, political affiliations, or actions during the war. The film expands on this notion by drawing on older narrative templates of the war as a fight to defend the French nation from those who wanted to divide it. As I discussed in my section *Colonialism as a support for Republicanism*, control of Algeria was used to justify universalism and the many strategies of the interventionist state. The film is trying to show the consequences of those templates being extrapolated to the present day where they are played out against fellow French citizens. To Ludo and his friends, the café has been transformed into a site of France writ small, which the men are trying to defend. In this context, Rhida is not perceived merely as a juvenile delinquent, but rather as something much more threatening. When one considers that many of the staff and supporters of the FN are veterans or *pied noirs* this transformation of the café takes on a larger significance. Stora notes that Le Pen (like Ludo) is himself a veteran of the war, and "deploys rhetoric that taps into memories of the Algerian past" when discussing French North Africans.[127] Veterans and *pied noirs* are people who may have particularly negative or conflicted memories about the war because the sacrifices they made trying to retain Algeria for France ultimately did not accomplish that aim. As mentioned above, this failure even resulted in a military coup near the end of the war when it became clear that

[127] Derderian 39

France would be withdrawing. As a result, Le Pen and others not only have highly subjective negative memories about the war, but they also strive to protect France from those whose beliefs they perceive helped to instigate it in the first place.

Another narrative site of memory occurs in the second half of *Le Thé*, when Madjid and Pat's multiethnic group of friends all go to the basement of an abandoned building to drink a cache of stolen wine. They are lounging around when they are suddenly attacked by a group of five men. Ominously, all but two of the men are wearing old gas masks, and there is no dialogue to explain the attack as the scene progresses. The only clues are that one of the men that the viewer can easily identify is the racist neighbor who has been harassing Madjid by trying to get his dog to maul him, and another is the estranged father of one of the white group members. The men have somehow managed to find a canister of tear gas, and the reason for the gas masks becomes clear when they attempt to 'smoke' the gang out. They methodically shoot the gas down the empty hallways and physically assault anyone they can corner. The gang fights back, and eventually the five men leave after giving several of the teens minor injuries. The next scene after the gang has recovered is of three cars burning in a parking lot on the estate while several of the teens look on in satisfaction, leading the viewer to understand that they torched the cars of the men in retaliation.

While this attack could have been structured as a straightforward beating to portray intergenerational or racial fighting, its nature instead is eerily reminiscent of a war raid or the methods used by police to dispel a riot. This type of force, which has been associated with other clashes between whites and North Africans, pointedly implies that the men feel they are involved in a larger conflict. The clear identification of two characters to which the viewer has previously been introduced as a violent racist and a domineering father implies that the men are attempting

to “punish” the gang both for overstepping their racial lines, and for refusing to submit to adult authority. Just as *Bye-Bye* drew on the narrative template of the Algerian war in the scene of the French café to explain how Ludo and his friends feel they are defending France, *Le Thé* does the same but instead expands on the notion to show how memory can manifest in violence as a form of punishment not only towards North Africans for being present in France, but also against white French who have integrated with them as friends. These teens are seen as “fraternizing with the enemy” and betraying the French identity (an idea further supported by Ludo’s reaction to his brothers’ presence at the mixed race marriage in Bye-Bye.) The men who attack them believe a French identity is only deserved by white French, and that the Algerian war was fought to defend that right.

In *Bye-Bye*, the film illustrates how the memory of the war in Algeria and the assumption that Rhida creates a special threat to the neighborhood because he is North African makes his approach to the men’s personal hangout seem like a symbol of a foreign invasion. Thus the men respond as if they were defending France, and react with violence. In *Le Thé* the impetus for the men’s attack is implied as being revenge both for the disrespect that the gang has shown to these men in the past, and the perception that the white members of the group have betrayed the French ideal by befriending North Africans. The attack, which is almost militaristic in nature, casts the attackers as defenders of a status quo in which North Africans are kept both separate from and subservient to the ideological (and white) center of France. In both of these films, the narrative template that the directors draw on and contribute to is one in which North African characters must continually interact with the legacy of the Algerian war and the colonial period, which manifests itself in hostile rejection by some segments of white French society.

Conclusion to the Analysis

The answer to the question of why French North Africans continue to face social marginalization is a complex one, but one to which I have argued that these films offer interlocking observations. They establish that French North Africans have the ability to adhere to Republican values concerning the expression of ethnic identity in several different ways, thus countering the often-touted stereotype of cultural incompatibility. In contrast, it is often white French or the state which is shown as being unable to fully live up to Republican ideals and accept French North Africans who have proven that they are "French." Residual xenophobia stemming from the colonial legacy and unresolved memories about the Algerian war often compounds problems of socioeconomic marginalization, which the films convey is just as devastating as the colonial legacy on the lives of many French North Africans. Even in *Bye-Bye* in which the main North African character did not face the same sorts of economic pressures as those in the other films, racism was one of the factors that helped to destroy a tenuous stability. At the same time, there are many white French who do accept French North Africans on the basis of shared experiences and struggles, and this split in the nation's treatment of them points towards a larger weakness of French national identity to operate on its self-professed values.

In the context of a longer timeline of French cinema, these films have a message of hope as well as a more sobering one about the continued presence of prejudice. Portrayals of North Africans during the colonial period presented them as a savage "other," and even after the Algerian war until the start of the Beur Movement many French films cast North Africans as delinquents and social outcasts. These four films represent a transition towards a more sympathetic portrayal of North Africans, and also show that that it is fully possible for French North Africans and white French to live side by side under the edicts of Republicanism.

Notably, within these films there is little evidence of characters engaging in direct resistance to marginalization in the form of protests such as took place during the Beur Movement; rather, emphasis is placed on resistance through subversion, in which characters engage in crimes or illicit pleasures which allow them to circumvent repression to survive, or at least find a measure of relief. However, the films still provide a more complex and nuanced look at the society in which they are produced. The presence of such social critiques in any form is necessary to help maintain France's larger ideals and aid in the process of national transformation.

Conclusion and Implications

The riots in France several years ago were the accumulation of anger against the failure of Republican French identity. France has attempted to live up to the goals of Republicanism through government policy, public schooling, and the promotion of national culture, but there are still many demographics in France who are still not seen as a full part of the nation, and are disproportionately isolated from the rights and opportunities that are supposed to attend access to the ideological center. Previous scholarship on *beur* and *banlieue* filmmaking has focused on the commentary films from such genres can provide on shifting perceptions of identity due to growing diversity and *la fracture sociale*, but as Carrie Tarr has noted these examinations have not delved deeper into 'identity politics" and provided an understanding of how films can also portray the larger forces which can lead to expressions of discontent such as the riots. However, the implicit purpose of films within the context of New Realist movement was to act as a mirror to society, and upon closer analysis these films do have more to offer in the way of commentary on 'identity politics.'

This thesis has tried to address the lack of focus on identity in such film scholarship by examining portrayals of new and individualized hybrid identities, and also portrayals on a larger

scale of French national identity. I have argued that filmic observations reveal that the continued marginalization of French North Africans is conducted on both an individual human level and by the state, and is not the result of cultural incompatibility. The primacy of identity as French citizens is clearly established within each of the North African characters in these films, and rather the films suggest that their denial from full recognition as French citizens stems from broader discrepancies in French society's enforcement of national identity, and its inability to examine and correct those inconsistencies on a meaningful level. While the films cannot necessarily explain these discrepancies, they can reveal how they play out in society and what factors contribute to them, and by doing so provide fictional "scenarios" which can expand on the same findings as broader sociological research.

The films illustrate how one of the factors contributing to discrepancies in French identity can be found in the structure of French collective memory. The films broadly comment on how understanding and control of collective memory is an important base of Republicanism by using French North African characters' control over cultural sites of memory symbolize their ability to access French identity. At the same time, collective memory can also be used as the basis for rejection of a certain group. By referencing the Algerian war in the context of hostile behavior of white French towards French North Africans, the films clearly lay down a narrative connection between the colonial past and the present. Due to the splintered nature of the usable past regarding the war, the films show how collective memory can be used to justify the rejection of a certain group as much as their acceptance.

Another factor that these films reveal is that the two larger issues of *la fracture sociale* and diversity influence each other to contribute towards the rejection of certain groups from French identity. Scholars on French nationalism and identity have noted that debates over how

Republicanism should be enacted have risen in volume since the early 1990s both because of internal economic shifts and an increasing level of diversity from immigration. The films reveal through illustrating how race exacerbates issues of socioeconomic marginalization and vice versa that the interaction between these two forces extremely relevant, and this is borne out by the works of other scholars. For example, as discussed in my section *Position of North Africans in France*, Waquant argues construction of the idea of ethnic "ghettoization" as a threat to French society did not rely only on fears of immigrant "others." Rather, those fears combined with anxieties about economically depressed areas that had become more isolated during economic shifts in the early 1990s to create the idea of hostile communities divided along racial lines. [128]

Fictional accounts such as films are not necessarily the first to be thought of as acting as a barometer of social phenomena. However, their ability to portray both contemporary issues and link them back to historical events and longstanding cultural patterns makes them invaluable as a way to encapsulate such phenomena. Analysis of the four films I have selected in particular show that the two larger issues of *la fracture sociale* and the role of collective memory in identity creation need to be considered in conjunction with the pressures of growing diversity in order to fully understand all of the debates over Republican identity.

[128] Freedman, 144

Appendices

Awards listed here are either from French or European critical groups, and exclude awards given to individual actors

Appendix A :

Plot summary of *Le Thé au harem d'Archimedes*, or *Tea in the Harem of Archimede*
Written and directed by Mehdi Charef, 1985.
Awards: Cannes Film Festival- Award of the Youth
Jean Prix Vigo- Best Feature Film
Cesar Awards- Best First Work

This film is based on the semi-autobiographical book by Charef called *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (1983). The film focuses on Majid, a second generation North African youth living in the estate outside Paris called *Cité des Fleurs*, and also his relationship with Pat, his white counterpart. Rather than a linear narrative flow it uses an episodic format of narrative, or cutting from one storyline to another again and again to create several interweaving narratives, none of which predominate. The main focus is the duo's friendship, but the film also contains vignettes about life on the estates. Some of the most notable story lines include the conflict between Madjid and his mother Malika, who wants him to return to Algeria; Madjid's crush on Chantal, Pat's sister; Madjid's struggles with racism from older members of the estate and those who live outside of it; Pat and Madjid's steady descent into increasing levels of criminality, starting with picking pockets and elevating to mugging, burglary, and soliciting customers for a local prostitute; Madjid's family's relationship with a single mother on the estate, Josette; and Pat and Madjid's gang of friends' ongoing adventures.

Rather than casting the boys just as delinquents, the film highlights the sheer desperation of their surroundings as driving them to criminality, and also focuses on their loyalty to their friends as a positive counterpoint. The film covers about half a year in their lives after they have left secondary school (although it is not clear whether they have graduated or dropped out). The movie has a slow and steady pace that rapidly picks up speed and culminates after the boys have robbed a tennis club, and are cruising the streets of Paris, looking for prostitutes. Madjid approaches one, who he then discovers is actually Chantal, who he thought had been commuting to the city every day because she had a job as a secretary. The shock puts him in a near catatonic state. In an attempt to cheer him up Pat, who is unaware of Madjid's discovery, drives with him

and the rest of the gang to the beach in a stolen car. When the police track them down several hours later, Madjid is still so upset that makes no effort to escape with the rest of the gang and is arrested. The last shot is of Pat standing in the road and waving the police car down, so that he can also be arrested and join his friend.

Appendix B:

Plot summary of *Bye-Bye*
Written and Directed by Karim Dridi, 1995
Awards: Cannes Film Festival- Award of the Youth

This film follows twenty-something Isma and his little brother Mouloud, 14, as they move in with their uncle's family in Marseilles prior to Mouloud being sent to join their parents in Tunisia. The impetus for the move is a recent tragedy in which a third brother, Nouredine, died in a house fire that Isma may have accidentally been responsible for. The film follows Isma as he wrestles with his guilt and begins to work with his uncle at the shipyards, where he is befriended by a young Frenchman named Jacky, who is dating a North African woman named Yasemine and defends him against harassment from his brother Ludo, also a worker at the docks. Mouloud gets involved with a North African drug dealer he meets through cousin Rhida, and the two earn the ire of a group of local racists, including Ludo and several other workers at the docks. Mouloud runs away half way through the film to escape Isma's efforts to attempt to discipline him, and in the wake of this stress and in order to temporarily escape his feelings of guilt Isma begins an affair with Yasemine. Ludo discovers Isma and Yasemine's affair, and publicly reveals it to Jacky at the wedding reception of another dockworker in an effort to make trouble. Isma's betrayal combined with Mouloud's increasing peril from both the drug dealer and Ludo force the brothers to reunite and flee Marseilles. Isma decides that rather than send Mouloud back to Tunisia, he will stay in France, and the movie ends with the two brothers striking out on their own.

Appendix C:

Plot summary of *La Haine*, or *Hate*
Written and directed by Mathieu Kassovitz, 1996
Awards: Cesar Awards- Best Editing, Best Film, Best Producer
Cannes Film Festival- Best Director
European Film Awards- Best Young Film
Lumiere Awards, France- Best Director and Best Film

The film follows three young residents of a Paris suburb, one of whom is of North African descent (Saïd), the other West African (Hubert), and the third Jewish (Vinz). After their friend Abdel is put on life support by a police beating, riots occur on the estate and it is in this aftermath that we meet the teens. The first part of the movie takes place on the estates, and begins with the three youths meeting up in the morning. Early in the film as we are introduced to the teens we are also introduced to the families of Hubert and Vinz; Hubert is supporting his mother, sister, and two brothers alone, while Vinz lives with his grandmother and sister.

As the movie progresses, the trio wanders through the estate, first visiting the burned out shell of a boxing gym that Hubert had set up, and then attending a rooftop barbecue with other young men which is broken up by the cops and sets the tone for the barely contained violence

between the community of the estates and the police. After the boys are chased off the roof, Vinz shows his friends something that will change the course of the narrative- in the melée of the riots a police officer lost his gun, and Vinz found it. Vinz vows in front of his friends to shoot a policeman if Abdel dies. The tension this creates builds throughout the rest of the film, and is prominently showcased in a series of philosophical arguments between Hubert and Vinz in the second half of the movie over the use of violence to change society- Vinz thinks revenge is necessary, while Hubert argues that hate breeds hate.

After Vinz makes his vow, the trio decides to visit Abdel in the hospital. A well meaning young officer at the door tells them that only his family is allowed to see Abdel. Vinz loses his temper and begins to scream, but it is Saïd that several officers arrest for making a scene. Saïd is released an hour later thanks to the auspices of a local cop who is also of North African descent and knows his brother. At this point the trio have reunited and are visiting a breakdancing performance. They see Abdel's brother and some friends pull up in a car and attempt to shoot the cop who just released Saïd from prison. The miss, and when reinforcements arrive seconds later they are arrested. The trio and the other men they were with can barely contain themselves from attacking the police in retaliation, and are chased into an abandoned building, where Hubert stops Vinz from drawing his gun on an officer.

The trio decides to go to Paris to lay low for a while and to find a man who owes Saïd money. When they arrive at the man's apartment the landlady calls the police, and after exiting the building they are arrested. Vinz escapes by pretending not to know Hubert or Saïd, while the other two are abused while in custody. They are released after a few hours and wander through the city, stopping at an open art show and to smoke a joint before entering the train station. While killing time, they see on the news that Abdel is dead. Soon thereafter they run into a gang of skinheads- because of Vinz's gun they scare them off, but Vinz is so distraught over Abdel's death that he nearly shoots one of them. Ultimately he decides that he is not capable of revenge, and gives the gun to Hubert's safekeeping when they arrive home at the estate. However a policeman from earlier spies the trio and begins to mock Vinz- his gun goes off and Vinz is killed, and Hubert is preparing to shoot the policeman in retaliation when the film ends.

Appendix D:

Plot Summary of *L'Esquive*, or *Games of Love and Chance*
Written by Abdel Kechiche and Ghalia Lacroix, directed by Abdel Kechiche, 2004
Awards: Cesar Film Awards- Best Writing, Best Director, Best Film
Lumiere Awards, France- Best Screenplay
Entrevues Film Festival- Best French Film

This film follows the lives of a group of friends as they attempt to put on an 18th century play by Marivaux at their high school in an estate outside Paris. This movie unlike the others focuses on internal issues- much of the tension in the movie come from intimate scenes of dialogue between two or three people that last up to ten minutes. The main character is Krimo, a sixteen year old boy of North African descent who at the start of the movie is breaking up with his off and on girlfriend Magalie. We discover the reason is that he has fallen in love with his childhood friend Lydia, who is white. Lydia is one of the leads in the play- the others are Frida and Rachid, both of North African descent as well. Krimo is besotted with Lydia but is too afraid to tell her, so he convinces Rachid to give him his part so that he can spend time with her in rehearsals. During a private rehearsal with Lydia confesses his feelings to her, and asks if she will be his girlfriend. She responds that she has to think about it because she had no idea that he

liked her. The following day in general rehearsals in front of the class, Krimo tries is his best to keep up with play, but because of his shyness and poor acting skills ultimately ends up making a fool of himself, and he runs out of the room.

Meanwhile, Magalie asks Krimo's best friend Fathi to find out why Krimo left her. Fathi discovers that it is because Krimo likes Lydia, and also that she has not yet responded to his question. Fathi becomes enraged with Lydia for what he perceives as playing with his friend's heart, and to convince her to talk to Krimo he assaults her friend Frida and steals her cellphone, telling her to get Lydia to speak to Krimo if she wants it back. Frida promptly goes off to yell at Lydia for getting her involved, and brings along their mutual friend Nanou to support her. Lydia agrees to finally speak to Krimo, and all five of the teens meet by the side of the roadway. Just as Lydia and Krimo are finally beginning to discuss their relationship, four police officers show up. They suspect that Fathi stole the car that he and Krimo arrived in, and they begin to search the youths with unnecessary contempt and force, driving Frida and Lydia to tears. The scene abruptly halts, and we are left unsure of whether anyone was arrested or the extent of the police violence. The next scene is of the performance day. Notably, Rachid is back in his original role, and Krimo is no where to be scene. The play goes off without a hitch, and in the last scene as Lydia is walking home we se her calling up to Krimo's apartment. The viewer sees that Krimo recognizes her voice, but he does not answer back, and Lydia walks off. After everything, the status of their relationship is ambivalent.

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