

Araştırma Makalesi– Gönderim Tarihi: 10 Eylül 2019 - Kabul Tarihi: 3 Aralık 2019

## Filmde Heteroglossia, Filmin Heteroglossia'sı: La Haine

Ayça TUNÇ COX<sup>1</sup>  
Oumâima JAÏDANE<sup>2</sup>

### Öz

Bu makale Mathieu Kassovitz'ın yönetmenliğini üstlendiği *La Haine* (1995) adlı filmi Bakhitin'in "heteroglossia" kavramı özelinde analiz etmektedir. Heteroglossia kavramıyla "dil, belirli ideolojik inanç sistemlerinin temsil edildiği bir sosyal söylemler alanı olarak" (Morris, 2003: p. 73) tanımlanmaktadır. Avrupa'yı sarsmaya devam eden mülteci krizinin, yükselen İslamofobinin ve yabancı düşmanlığının gölgesinde film güncellliğini, dolayısıyla sosyal ve politik önemini korumaktadır. Film, teması ve merkezi karakterleri itibarıyle, "diyasporik sinema", "beur sinema", "banliyö sineması" ve "Fransız sineması" gibi çeşitli tanımlayıcı kategoriler içinde değerlendirilebilmektedir. Fakat çalışma kapsamında, Fransız sineması ve banliyö sineması bağlamı içinde, çok sesli, çok dilli bir anlatı olarak özellikle filmsel metnin kendisine odaklanılmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, filmdeki karakterlerin ifadeleri ve bu ifadelerin sosyal ve kültürel yananımları/çağrışımları baz alınarak, sanayi sonrası ve sömürgecilik sonrası Fransa'da bu karakterlerin nasıl birer "öteki" olarak çerçevelendiği analiz edilmektedir. Yapılan detaylı metin analizi, bu görsel işitsel anlatının çok katmanlı yapısını vurgulayacak şekilde farklı "heteroglossia" kullanımlarının varlığını göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Heteroglossia, Fransız sineması, banliyö sineması, beur sinema, azınlık sineması, *La Haine*

Atif: Tunç Cox, A. ve Jaïdane O. (2019). "Filmde Heteroglossia, Filmin Heteroglossia'sı: La Haine". Akdeniz Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Dergisi, (AKİL) Aralık (32), s. 38-53

1 Dr. Öğretim Üyesi İzmir Yüksek Teknoloji Enstitüsü Mimarlık Fakültesi Endüstriyel Tasarım Bölümü ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1758-4076 aycatunc@iyte.edu.tr

2 Mimarlık Bölümü İzmir Yüksek Teknoloji Enstitüsü Mimarlık Fakültesi oumaima.jaidane.y@gmail.com ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8367-964X

## Heteroglossia in and of Film: *La Haine*

### Abstract

This article evaluates the film *La Haine* (1995) directed by Mathieu Kassovitz with specific reference to the Bakhtinian concept of "heteroglossia". The term addresses "language [as] perceived [and] stratified through and through into multiple social discourses each representing a specific ideological belief system" (Morris, 2003: p. 73). The film is still socially and politically significant and relevant especially in relation to the refugee crisis, the increasing xenophobia and islamophobia that continue burdening Europe today. The film can be considered under the rubrics of diasporic cinema, beur cinema, banlieue cinema and French cinema based on its thematic concerns and its central characters. This article, however, particularly focuses on the work itself as a heteroglot, polyglot utterance in the contexts of French film and banlieue film. Secondly, it analyses the framing of the characters as Others in the context of post-industrial, post-colonial France by focusing on their utterances and the social and cultural connotations of these utterances throughout the film. The close textual analysis reveals that there are several registers of heteroglossia detectable in this audio-visual narrative, underlying its multilayered character.

**Keywords:** Heteroglossia, French cinema, banlieue cinema, beur cinema, cinema of minorities, *La Haine*

### Introduction

"Heteroglossia" (*raznorechie*) is a term introduced by Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin to designate "language [as] perceived [and] stratified through and through into multiple social discourses each representing a specific ideological belief system, a way of seeing the world" (Morris, 2003: p. 73). This designation applies both to the author's register of speech and to that of the characters s/he creates. This multiplicity is a matter of social status, background of interlocutors as much as that of the words and registers used, hierarchical relation between the speakers, and the immediate context of enunciation. Bakhtin describes it as "something that is historically real, a process of heteroglot development ... depending on their degree of social scope and on the ideological area in which they are employed" (1983: pp. 259-422). In other words, "what is distinctive about heteroglossia is not its reference to different kinds of linguistic signs and forms, but rather its focus on social tensions inherent in language... making [the language] alive with social meanings" (Bailey, 2012: p. 499). By extension, the term has been used in cinema to analyze film narratives. As Fukunaga succinctly puts it; "no other theory seems more appropriate to analyze language in film than [Bakhtin's] because film inherently consists of dialogue" (2017: p. 64).

In a context where diasporic cinema and framing of minorities and urban outcasts had not still made the mainstream, commercial or popular film circuit, *La Haine* generated an instant polemic regarding the director's "biased" stance against policemen's alleged "legitimate violence". Controversial as it might be, the film managed to inscribe itself as one of the most prominent landmarks in the landscape of beur and banlieue cinema

genres as much as in that of the French cinema (Nettleback 2009). The director won the prize for the Best Director at the Cannes Film Festival in 1995 with the film. In brief, it was not only critically acclaimed, but also, was commercially very successful in France and across the world.

As it is as much a metonymy for banlieue and *beur* French cinema as its protagonists are for marginalized, stigmatized neighborhoods, *La Haine* pictures a *blanc*, *black*, *beur*<sup>3</sup> trio's desperate search/longing for a place in the land of *Liberté*, *Fraternité*, *Egalité*<sup>4</sup> triad. Despite their ethnic and religious differences, the three second-generation immigrant characters fall under the same category of "racaille"<sup>5</sup> in the eyes of the media (Kassovitz and Sarkozy, 2007), of those in power and of the French population from which they are spatially and culturally excluded, and yet, whereby they are heavily watched. The trio's continuous mobility in the space where they feel they belong, doubled by the raw violence to which they are subject, renders them inescapably Others at home.

This article takes into consideration the socio-political and economic context of the film's release period as well as the director's cinematic and political influences when evaluating the film first as a multi-layered entity in the French cinema and banlieue cinema genres, and second, the film's aesthetics, more particularly, its *mise-en-scène*. "For Bakhtin, art is incontrovertibly social, not because it represents the real but because it constitutes a historically situated utterance" (Shohat ve Stam, 1994: p. 180). Accordingly, within a conceptual framework of Bakhtinian literary theory, the aim is first to trace the heteroglot facets of the film itself by considering it as an utterance in the French film lexicon with specific focus on its cinematic framing, and second, to trace the heteroglot facets of the three protagonists as essentially Others by focusing on their utterances. To this end, based on the two major elements of the Bakhtinian conception of the novel (and by extension here of the film in question), author/narrator and hero, the cinematic influences of the author with reference to the context of the film's release will be discussed in the first part of the article. The second part will explore how the heroes are formed as Others by especially evaluating the dialogues.

## 1. Heteroglossia of the Narrator/Author

When analyzing a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural film such as *La Haine*, one has to avoid essentialist understandings and conceptualizations of nation, society and culture. Instead, dialogue, communication and interaction should be emphasized. Such an approach ties in very well with Bakhtin's dialogism, celebrating multiplicities. Bakhtin pays particular attention to the enriching potential of interaction between different cultures so much so that it actually becomes a "must" from a Bakhtinian perspec-

<sup>3</sup> Meaning white, black, Arab. The term was popularized by the multi-ethnicity of the French team winning the football world cup in 1998. Arab is used metonymically for Maghrebis although most of them are of Berber origin. This is because the official language of the Maghreb, literally the occident, is Arabic. Any translation from French or reference to Arabic languages and Maghrebi culture throughout the article is the authors' unless stated otherwise.

<sup>4</sup> Liberty, Brotherhood, Equality; the principles of the French Republic.

<sup>5</sup> Meaning ragtag. The term was used by the then Minister of Interior Affairs, Nicolas Sarkozy, to designate the urban outcasts in 2005.

tive. "... in dialogue a person not only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time that which he is... To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends everything ends" (Bakhtin, 1983: p. 252). He further argues that "... a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched" (Akt. Demenchonok, 2014: p. 97). The encounter between two cultures begins with two people, whereby the self transforms or even happens through or by means of the Other. Such realization of the self via a journey through Other(s) is what Bakhtin investigates particularly in literary works. For the specific purposes of this article, we focus on the relation between the author/director and his/her characters.

In *Mikhail Bakhtin and the Epistemology of Discourse*, Clive Thomson states that:

... the categories of "author" and "hero" are "generating concepts" for Bakhtin's ideas. A central place is given to the notion that the author has a certain surplus of vision and knowledge in relation to the hero. The author sees and knows more than the hero, and this ... is possible as long as the author's position is outside of the hero and as long as the author preserves an ultimate distance in relation to the hero. [This] ... allows the author to collect the whole hero and to complete and justify the whole hero. The author-hero interrelation ... serves as a main criterion when [Bakhtin] attempts to develop a typology of heroes and of literary forms and when he traces literary origins and genres. (1990: pp. 69-74)

Considering the literary, and by extension cinematographic, work as a reported speech of the author about the events of the narrative, about the diegetic universe, Bakhtin identifies two styles of speech that the author adopts when reporting. In the first, it is the event itself as element of the narrative that is put forward. In the latter, the context and manner of happening of the events are given more importance. As Pam Morris argues:

[Bakhtin] terms the first linear style; this focuses upon the content of the reported speech and maintains a strict boundary between authorial reporting speech and the speech reported. The second direction is towards the pictorial style which focuses upon the individualized qualities and style of the reported speech. Instead of maintaining strict boundaries, this form finds ways of infiltrating the reported speech with authorial retort and response to it, or alternatively, the reported speech may begin to infiltrate the authorial context. (2003b: p. 61)

One of the particularities of *La Haine* is that it can be read both as a work of banlieue cinema and as one that is essentially French. In the context of banlieue cinema genre, Kassovitz offers a view that mainly focuses on the events of the narrative. In the context of French cinema, he is the authoritative stylistic orchestrator of all events. This undeniably deems the film double-voiced, reinforcing its dialogic character.

## 2. Banlieue Cinema - *La Haine* as Narrative Work

"Banlieue cinema" is a term used to describe films that take place in the margins of the city, especially those that focus on working-class neighborhoods. [...] Films included

in this category often focus on issues of racism, exclusion, and unemployment. The term is sometimes used interchangeably with the term “beur cinema” because many, although not all, of the directors who have made such films have come from this background (Oscherwitz and Higgins, 2007). As underlined by James Austin, “*La Haine* remains ... widely noted for its unflinching representations and its artistic qualities, it became a highly influential portrayal of the problems of the French banlieue” (2009: p. 80). When handled as a work of banlieue cinema, the film almost reduces its author to the position of narrator with an abundance of realistic features that anchor it in the socio-spatial and temporal context of its release period. With *La Haine* read as such, Kassovitz appears to have refrained from interfering with the diegetic world, and instead, have deliberately chosen only to transmit what seems to be a mundane day in *la Cité*; his voice is as if muted, dissolved into that of the characters, ultimately giving the impression that they exist in real life along with –or in spite of– Kassovitz. From this point of view, the filmed context seems “originally totally independent, complete in its construction, and lying outside the given context” (Vološinov, 2003: p. 63). That is, the characters and their imagined world appear to have grown beyond Kassovitz’ intervention, giving them the character of a reported speech. It, therefore, has all the major features of a true story.

*La Haine* was filmed on a low budget with very few special effects, of which the quasi-absence suggests a credible situation. It is characterized by a documentary-like dimension palpable first through its shooting on a real life location, *La Cité de Chanteloup les Vignes*; an estate which had in the past been the arena of conflicts between the police and the urban outcasts.<sup>6</sup> These concrete HLMs<sup>7</sup> were erected to house the families of workers coming to France in the 1960s and 1970s under the industrialization policies of France after World War II. They are generically located on the outskirts of big cities, next to industrial zones.

Furthermore, the three main characters hold the names of the actors that incarnate them; Hubert (Hubert Koundé), Saïd (Saïd Taghmaoui), Vinz (Vincent Cassel). The names are enunciated visually in their introduction scenes. They impersonate the second generation immigrants from multiple races, ethnicities and religious beliefs. The characters’ parents were “imported” to France from its former colonies. Of Maghrebi<sup>8</sup> or sub-Saharan descent, born in France, they are framed as recluse, spatially segregated and unemployed, which is also true for the diaspora in de-industrialized France of the 1990s.<sup>9</sup>

Enhancing the film’s claim to realism, gastronomic, sociological and religious references to the cultures of the protagonists are frequently scattered throughout the film. For instance, in the rooftop barbecue party, they gather to eat *Merguez*; a spicy Maghrebi sausage, rather than the French *Andouillettes*. Later in the same scene, Saïd refuses

6 See for instance Vincendeau, 2000 for the details.

7 Abbreviation of Habitation à Loyer Modéré (Low-cost Housing).

8 Those who are from the Maghreb: Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania. In this context, more specifically Tunisians, Algerians or Moroccans.

9 See Barwick and Beaman, 2019 for an account of the social conditions the second generation diasporic urban youth live in.

to listen to the policeman telling him to leave but obeys his elder brother Nordine when he tells him to do the same thing. In a later scene, the same character gets angry with his sister spending time outside with her friends and warns her against talking to his male friend, Vinz. In another scene, Vinz' grandmother tells him that *if he starts by no longer going to school, he will end up no longer going to the synagogue.*

Another aspect that reinforces the film's documentary dimension is the inspiration the plot draws from real life events related to police violence.<sup>10</sup> The opening scene is a grainy video of violent protests that transmits unfiltered brutality. One of the slogans reads *Que justice soit faite pour Mako*.<sup>11</sup> It is followed by a TV reporter commenting on riots in the banlieue a day after the shooting and injury of a Maghrebi youngster, Abdel Ichaha, by the police. Kassovitz is said to have started writing the script on April 6th, 1993 (Vincendeau, 2012), the date that witnessed the death of seventeen year-old Zairian Makomo M'Bowole, who was "accidentally" shot in the head by a policeman while under detention for tobacco store robbery ("AI News", 1996). Both the opening scene and the final one contain overt references to the assassination of M'Bowole. In *La Haine*, the policeman, Notre Dame (Marc Duret), also "accidentally" shoots a young outcast in the head while initially trying to frighten him. This is to say that *La Haine* as narrative work makes use of the vocabulary of banlieue genre, where content is privileged over style and where it is easy to make a correlation between the events of the film and those of real life. French government officials are even said to have watched the movie in order to "understand" the people of the estates (Vincendeau, 2005). Its handling of inconvenient social issues is probably the reason why it generated such a polemic and is considered as *phénomène de société* (societal phenomenon) (Vincendeau, 2012), stretching beyond its cinematic value and elevating Kassovitz to the position of spokesperson of the urban outcasts. A position that he assumed fully when clashing the then right-wing Minister of Interior Affairs Nicolas Sarkozy on his blog in favor of the people of the estates.<sup>12</sup> This was in 2005, following the riots in *La Cité de Clichy-sous-Bois*. The riots caused the deaths of two teenagers. If one considers Kassovitz' said positioning as an indication, it is that Kassovitz is not a mere narrator of events but rather an author of which the banlieue syntax is only a facet. *La Haine* is no less a work of French cinema than it is one of banlieue genre where:

[i]t might seem that the independence of a character contradicts the fact that he exists, entirely and solely, as an aspect of a work of art, and consequently is wholly created from beginning to end by the author. In fact, there is no such contradiction. The character's freedom we speak of here exists within the limits of the artistic design, and in that sense is just as much a created thing as is the unfreedom of the objectivized hero. (Bakhtin, 2003: p. 94)

In the following part, aspects of the work as one of French cinema and of Kassovitz as an author will be discussed.

10 See Schneider, 2008 and Jobard, 2009 for various accounts of the events.

11 Let justice be done for Mako.

12 For details, please see Nettelbeck 2009.

### 3. French Cinema - *La Haine* as Author Work

Susan Hayward questions the “national” of the national cinema and she suggests that one could evaluate national cinema in terms of typologies or in terms of “a cartography of the national” to adopt Dick Hebdige’s concept (Hayward, 2005: p. 8). To this end, she identifies seven main typologies: “1) Narratives; 2) genres, 3) codes and conventions; 4) gesturality and morphology; 5) the star as sign; 6) cinema of the center and cinema of the periphery; and 7) cinema as the mobiliser of the nation’s myths and of the myth of the nation” (Hayward, 2005: p. 8-9). Such an approach underlines the fact that there is in fact no single cinema that is the national cinema, but several. As Ulf Hedetoft further discusses, “national cinema in the context of globalization reappears as a changeable and non-permanent notion, as a transboundary process rather than a set of fixed attributes” (2000: p. 282). If there are several cinemas included in national cinemas, then *beur* or diasporic films can and should be considered as part of any given national cinema. Thus, in particular with the French context, films like *La Haine*, dealing with the second generation diasporic subjects can readily be subsumed under the rubric of French film. Furthermore, as argued by Will Higbee, “the increasing variety of positionings offered to the Maghrebi-French subjects of such films means that the cinematic representation of France’s largest non-European immigrant minority is not limited to the helpless victims, *truands* [bandits, gangsters] or marginalized male *Beur* youth of the 1980s cinema” (2005: p. 318).

In this context, one of the main characteristics of *La Haine* is its multi-layeredness that offers a multitude of possible readings. It is undeniable that the film has a documentary dimension that makes its events relatable to real life. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam rightfully claim, “films which represent marginalized cultures in a realistic mode, even when they do not claim to represent specific historical incidents, still implicitly make factual claims” (1994: p. 179). This claim to reality/documentary style also implies a double-layered vision of Kassovitz as the director/author. This induces that:

[W]henever we have within the author's context the direct speech of, say, a certain character, we have within the limits of a single context two speech centers and two speech unities: the unity of the author's utterance and the unity of the character's utterance. But the second unity is not self-sufficient; it is subordinated to the first and incorporated into it as one of its components. The stylistic treatment of the two utterances differs. The hero's discourse is treated precisely as someone else's discourse, as discourse belonging to some specific characterological profile or type; that is, it is treated as an object of authorial understanding, and not from the point of view of its own referential intention. The author's discourse, on the contrary, is treated stylistically as discourse directed towards its own straightforward referential meaning. (Bakhtin, 2003: p. 105)

It is precisely this stylistic treatment towards a meaning that makes *La Haine* an essentially French work as much as it is *banlieue* or *beur*.

When revisiting the opening scenes, it is important to notice that the protestor, standing alone against an army of policemen was filmed from the back. This scene emphasizes that from the very beginning Kassovitz’ stance is made obvious; he “has the back” of the people of the *banlieue*. Accordingly, the very title of the film is suggestive of the author’s bias. The term *La Haine* meaning Hatred was favored over the grammatically

correct *hair* (to hate). In the slang of the banlieues, *hair* is altered for *Avoir la haine* (having the hatred), a grammatically incorrect version. The director willingly appropriates the “accented” language of the diasporic subjects of the banlieues.<sup>13</sup>

A politically charged text is a prominent feature of the French film culture in general, notably of the Nouvelle Vague. Such political audacity is also noticeable in the works of Nouvelle Vague vanguard Jean-Luc Godard, against which Kassovitz is known for his strong stance and of whom he reproaches for the “pseudo-intellectualism” (“It is Hard”, 2001).<sup>14</sup> This does not preclude that one other plausible interpretation of the film’s title can also be a reference to Godard’s 1962 film *Le Mépris* (Contempt); a term often used interchangeably with *La Haine*. One reason to think so is the title Kassovitz chose for his first short film, *Fierrot Le Pou* (*Fierrot The Lice*) which in content has no reference to Godard’s *Pierrot Le Fou* (*Pierrot The Mad*) but of which it is clearly a spoonerism.

The double reading of the title brings forward another feature of French cinema; polyphony. “[I]t is often ironic and mocking intonation which reveals the presence of double-voiced discourse, the presence of two differently oriented speech acts inhabiting the same words” (Morris, 2003: p. 13). This polyphonic feature can also be traced in the DJ scene, where Edith Piaf’s *Je ne regrette rien* (I regret nothing) is mashed up over a song saying *Nique la police* (Fuck the police). The original song, *Je ne regrette rien*, was composed in the 1960s and sung instead of *La Marseillaise*, the French national anthem, when French troupes were leaving Algiers in 1962, leaving a 132 years-long history of colonization atrocities behind. Its mashing up over a song saying “to fuck the police” speculatively asks if the people of the banlieue, mostly coming from former French colonies, should regret their acts, should they ever respond to violence with violence (Petterson, 2016: p. 41).

The polyphonic character of *La Haine* also implies that French film register is, as any language, a construct, therefore inevitably a continuation of whatever has been said before it. As Morris explains, “in effect, every utterance is about other utterances” (2003b: p. 61). Or if we would like to express it within the specific context of creativity and art, “the artwork extends its roots into the distant past, great [...] works are prepared for by centuries” (Morris, 2003a: p. 19). David Petterson argues that the film also features characteristics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century poetic realism genre. He sees this in the portrayal of working class heroes whether the context is one of industrialization or de-industrialization, in its handling of social problems, in the omnipresence of a hopeless dimension that leads to the death of one of the characters in the film and in its stressing on feeling and affects that allows him to treat social problems obliquely, implying the moral of the story rather than enunciating directly (Petterson, 2016: pp. 32-41). In *La Haine*, this can be seen first through the loop Saïd’s opening and closing eyes scene creates, constantly paving the way for Vinz’ shooting scene, and second in Hubert’s fable, repeated throughout the movie, a subtle warning of the urgency of the situation, *Jusqu'ici, tout va bien. Jusqu'ici, tout va bien. Mais l'important ce n'est pas la chute, c'est l'atterrissement* (So far so good, so far so good. But the important thing is

13 Please refer to Naficy, 2001 for a detailed explanation of the concept of “accented cinema”.

14 See for instance Williams, 2016 for a detailed analysis of Godard’s style, aesthetics and political orientation.

not the fall, it is the landing.)

Perceived from a slightly different perspective, the entire film can be understood as a fable as Prédal argues (2002: p. 116). Unlike Prédal, Vincendeau underlines the unique ability of the director and the film for their bridging position, genuinely interested in the characters they portrait and in their socio-cultural environment (2005: p. 23). Kassovitz, on the other hand, has stated that he conceived the characters as allegorical, belonging to a triad of religions, races and ethnicities (La Bella, n.d.). Such a triad of friendships implies a message of tolerance but would be hard to find in real life. Furthermore, Hubert, Saïd and Vinz are conceived as characters in the full sense of the term. Once their initial portraits are hatched in the introduction scenes, the three perpetuate the idea we conceive of them from the very beginning.

Saïd is playful and talkative. The first trait is noticed in the first scene where, introduced through a medium shot, he is expected to keep standing still in his initial spot but surprisingly found behind the police car tagging it. The second trait is emphasized every time the camera zooms out of him while he is still talking. Throughout the film, he is portrayed as somewhere in between his two friends, trying to reconcile between them but eventually failing. In the last scene, he is again between Hubert and Notre Dame, but again helpless against a violence he did not contribute to.

Vinz is off-beat, idiosyncratic and reckless. He is the only character introduced with an oblique framing, through a close shot, drooling in his sleep. His second characteristic is furthermore emphasized in the mirror scene where he suddenly stops talking to check his muscles, and in the gallery scene, where in a close-up, he perplexedly tries to understand the work of art. Throughout the film, he constantly threatens to kill a policeman to avenge his friend and takes pride in holding a gun. According to Yosefa Loshitzky, who argues Vinz in fact is the protagonist in the film, "he accepts his symbolic role as the Jewish Jesus who renounces hatred, revenge and violence" (2005: p. 142). His behavior, like his end, evolves suddenly. "Despite his fantasies of violence, real violence makes Vinz sick. The diasporic post-Holocaust Jew ... in the final scene returns to his normal, natural place: that of the victim" (Loshitzky, 2005: p. 142).

Hubert is a more resolved, dark and secretive character. He is introduced through a long shot with a high contrast lighting scheme, which distances the audience from him emotionally and gives insight into his relationship to his friends. This also translates his self-distancing to the overall frame of violence the film draws. Throughout the film, he remains relatively calm and prefers walking away from arguments and solving things peacefully. The fact that we do not see whether it was him that shot the policeman or if he is the one who gets shot supports the mysterious secretive characteristic Kassovitz attributes to him.

Read as a text, it would be a shallow interpretation to deem Kassovitz as a mere reporter of banlieue events and to address *La Haine* as exclusively a work of banlieue cinema. Yet, the alternative reading of the film as solely an artefact of French cinema would be equally superficial. As mentioned earlier, one of the particularities of this work is its multi-layeredness and the multitude of possible readings it offers. When its style and content are taken into account, his author is as heteroglot and polyphonic as the

characters he frames. The contribution of the documentary dimension to the multilinguality of the film is undeniable. A third implication of this dimension, next to realistic credibility and affirming the presence of the author, is the distance *La Haine* creates from the very beginning between the audience and the subjects framed through a double lens. This double-layered vision renders the trio inescapably Others for the audience as much as for Kassovitz. In what follows, the portrayal of Hubert, Saïd and Vinz as essentially Others will be discussed through their dialogues.

#### 4. Heteroglossia of the Heroes

The title of the film, *La Haine*, when interpreted as a reference to the expression *Avoir la haine*, automatically presupposes that the film's subject is related to the notion of Other. In fact, it is the gist of the entire register the main protagonists employ in their dialogues in the film. Hubert, Saïd and Vinz' register of speech certainly has its roots in the image they identify to and that Kassovitz transmits.

Once we have learned to decipher it, [it] ... provides us with information not about accidental and mercurial subjective psychological processes in the "soul" of the recipient, but about steadfast social tendencies in an active reception of other speakers' speech, tendencies that have crystallized into language forms. The mechanism of this process is located, not in the individual soul, but in society. It is the function of society to select and to make grammatical (adapt to the grammatical structure of its language) just those factors in the active and evaluative reception of utterances that are socially vital and constant and, hence, that are grounded in the economic existence of the particular community of speakers. (Vološinov, 2003: p. 63)

It is not only the structure or the grammar of the language but also the "expressive intonation" which gives meaning to words. As Vološinov argues, "the most obvious ... social value judgement incorporated in the word is that which is conveyed with the help of expressive intonation ... In living speech, intonation often does have a meaning quite independent of the semantic composition of the speech" (2003: p. 36). That is to say, how a language is applied, how it is pronounced also has an impact on the received meaning. This implies that the language the trio speaks is an indicator of their belonging to an economic class that distinguishes them and distances them from the rest. It is the fact that they speak a different tongue that determines their identities. "Words are also the dialogic site of class interaction. Since different classes within a nation use the same language, words become the arena of class struggle as different classes seek to re-accentuate a word with their meaning" (Morris, 2003: p. 12). This is not to say that they speak a completely foreign language. The film, when translated, is still categorized as a French film. Only, French in this instance is heteroglot, reinforcing the idea that "any attempt to impose one unitary monologic discourse as the Truth is relativized by its dialogic contact with another social discourse, another view of the world" (Morris, 2003c: p. 73).

The three friends belong to a socio-economic background of second generation immigrants. This implicates that French is likely to be their mother tongue. It also implicates that their ethnic and/or racial roots and religious beliefs when compared to the French majority, places them in the position of strangers/outsiders. They themselves identify

to this category of strangers through different rhetoric of their speech. Such rhetoric is what renders them satellites to the overall sphere of the French society. Throughout the film they make use of a special slang that is characteristic of their entire dialogues. These characteristics can be sorted into two: 1) use of *verlan* (backslang); and 2) use of a creole French. In the next sub-chapters, a few examples will be given for each.

### 5. Heteroglossia of Verlan Registers

Meredith Doran describes *verlan* as “context dependent sociolect” based on a “syllabic inversion” that evolved as a response to a “monocultural, monolingual, monoethnic” ideology powered by the French State. This code is used between minority youths with “hybrid identities” in order to create a “third space” within the sphere of French language.<sup>15</sup> A space “in which the fixed identities of the traditional societal order do not hold sway and hybrid identities can be performed and affirmed. Such a space is constituted temporally through the re-appropriation of cultural symbols, including language, which are made to mean in new ways” (Doran, 2004: pp. 94-103). This temporary haven is created by the characters whenever they choose to employ *verlan* in lieu of conventional French. The word *verlan* itself is a backslang for à *l'envers*, meaning upside-down in French. The appellation “beur cinema” too makes a reference to this slang, *Beur* being the phonetic inversion of *Arabe* (Arab).

In the film the protagonists usually refer to the estates they live in as *Téci*, which is *Cité* (estate) backwards. This way of speaking a distorted language adds a degree of belonging to the social class and milieu they identify with. It can readily be regarded as a way of resistance. By speaking in *verlan*, they intentionally exclude anyone who is not a member of their social closed circle by generating a certain perplexity that keeps him/her from understanding what they are saying.

*Verlan* is also a sign of rebellion against the ideal French intrusion to the estates despite its clear alienation of it. This for instance is the reason why *Beur* transformed again to become *Rebeu*, back slanged twice to signify again Arab. In this sense, one “word has the capacity to register all the transitory, delicate, momentary phases of social change” (Vološinov, 2003: p. 54).

It is interesting to notice that with the use of such a figure of speech, which is an attribute to foreigners and Others, the notion of Other, also, is turned upside-down. It is that who does not understand it that is alienated from a certain circle once the spatial frame shifts from shiny Paris to the peripheries. *Verlan* is, we would though argue, only one feature of an overall more complex system of expression that the trio as metonymy for the estates adopts to mark their position of outsidedness to the French society.

### 6. Heteroglot Creole French of the Estates:

Robert A. Hall describes a language as “pidgin” when people try to communicate “using a language in a variety whose grammar and vocabulary [as well as its pronunciation] are very much reduced in extent and which is native to neither side” (1966: pp.

<sup>15</sup> Please refer to Homi K. Bhabha, 1994 for a detailed discussion of the concept of “third space”.

xii-25). Creole, originally emanated as pidgin, used in a context where two or more colonized societies co-habited the same spatial frame of which they did not speak the tongue. In order to communicate, the language they began speaking was a mixture of both their native languages and that of the colonizer and they spoke it between each other (Stafford, 2012: p. 17). The pidgin evolved into a creole which takes its structures and rhetoric from both the language of the colonizer and that of the colonized. It was the lingua franca of the colonized. Simply put, creole is defined as "a language that has developed from a mixture of different languages and has become the main language in a particular place" ("Definition of", n.d.). What is essential to understand the concept of creole profoundly is its sociolinguistic aspect: "Creole languages cannot be defined, nor can their genesis and development be understood, without taking into account the social factors that shaped them" (Holm, 2000, p. 68). In other words, "creole refers to any combination of European and native... The colonized took the language of power and transformed it into something else, a new language which showed its roots but now belonged to a different group" (Stafford, 2012: p. 17). If *verlan* is only a component of the special utterances of the characters, then creole is the overall frame that determines its structure.

By extension of the term's definition, the same can be said of the French that the estates speak. It is used by people who initially belong to different ethnicities and who do not speak each other's language. This constructed language also implies a rebellion to the authority of the "official" French imposed on immigrants. Since it is the second generation diasporic subjects that are represented, it is not the question of phonetic mispronunciation but of insertion of words coming from a different language into an utterance spoken in French. For instance, to express what they like, the protagonists do not say '*J'aime bien* (I like) but rather *J'kiffe*. While the pronoun *Je* (I) is French, the verb *kiffer* does not officially exist in the French language although conjugated as if it were. It draws its roots in Maghrebi culture, where in Arabic *kif* means pleasure. In this example, a word that is originally a noun is verbalized with its passage from Arabic to French in a way that does not obey the grammatical rules of either one.

At other times, the grammatical rule is obeyed but the word used, although in French, disobeys its semantics. One example of this is Saïd saying *Ma mère va m'égorger* (My mother is going to slaughter me) instead of what a French would put as *Ma mère va me tuer* (My mother is going to kill me). In this example it is an implicit meaning of the words that is borrowed directly. This direct borrowing is also true for expressions. When Saïd tries to prove to his friends he is telling the truth he declares *Sur la tête de ma mère* (meaning on my mother's head). This makes no sense for someone who only speaks the standard France, but the expression is used in Arabic to testify of the honesty of the speaker. It would be more or less the equivalent of "I swear on my mum's life" in English.

Another feature is the entire absence of the pronoun *Vous* (You, in plural) to address a single person or to show respect. The protagonists always address each other and others using *Tu* (You, singular form). One reason for this is that they see themselves as the same in being equally strangers in Paris. Another plausible interpretation for this is the absence of such a use of the pronoun "You" when addressing a single person

in Arabic too. When in Paris Saïd even expresses his surprise to the police man who talked to him starting his sentence by *Vous*.

When considering the protagonists as Others in this film, it is also interesting to reflect on their use of words in English, which come from neither of their languages. For instance, the policemen are referred to metonymically as *Keuf*. The word is drawn directly from English, cuffs. The use of such words belonging neither to their parents' languages nor to the country they now inhabit is a sign of complete alienation from both. Alternatively, it can be regarded as an occurrence of the productive "third space", to adopt Bhabha's conceptualization. "It is that Third Space ... which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha, 1994: p. 37). They, through encounter and dialogue with each other as well as with the host society, create their own peculiar existence, culture and habitual rituals.

### Conclusion

There is a vast literature focusing on the film *La Haine* as an unexpectedly popular representative of banlieue and beur cinemas, mainly on the basis of its portrayal of the urban central-periphery conflict and of the representation of its striking minority characters. Such scholarly interest notwithstanding, not much has been said or debated about its heteroglossia. In this respect, our article appears to be the first of its kind because it analyzes the film via a critical engagement with Bakhtin's work. Accordingly, we have put particular emphasis on the usage of language, both of the characters and also of the film as an utterance in relation to previous and/or contemporary utterances.

As our detailed analysis in light of Bakhtin's conceptualization of heteroglossia has revealed, *La Haine* is a multi-layered heteroglot text that can be read from a variety of angles. It offers both a perspective of the urgent situations of the estates and its inhabitants, and an introspective of the author's polyphony and richness of vocabulary. Thus, it offers a dialogic narrative, allowing differences to co-exist in the same socio-spatial as well as narrative environment. Moreover, its dialogism is not limited to a synchronic dialogism which would only be derived from the film as an individual structure, but it also achieves a diachronic dialogism since the film manages to locate itself within a larger discursive realm that is formed by films in various national cinemas, transnational cinemas as well as in more defined categories such as banlieue and beur cinema. It maintains communication with films that precede and succeed itself. This is at the same time what makes this film still relevant, not only aesthetically but also socially and politically.

It is true that Kassovitz succeeded in framing the minorities, however, it would have been interesting to see other faces since the characters he portrayed in *La Haine* are only the majority of the minorities in France. For instance, those who are Indian or Pakistani origins do not get any mentioning even though they actually inhabit the same socio-cultural and spatial frame. Likewise, it is heavily gendered for the story revolves around male characters alone. As addressed by Amy Siciliano, the film provides "a

stereotyped portrayal of women as the object of sexual desire and agent provocateurs" (2007: p. 214). Similarly, Carrie Tarr underlines the fact that Kassovitz prefers excluding female characters from the film so that he would not need to deal with the issue of female representation in the first place (1997: p. 77). This is of course fundamentally due to its genre conventions. Still, portraying female diasporic subjects would add to the claims of diversity and heterogeneity in the given context.

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