

A. N. Essayist

Professor

Course

Date

Postcolonial Culture Clash in French Cinema: *La Haine* (Kassovitz) (MLA Style)

Writing before the decolonization of Algeria, Fanon centers on the colonized world the (former) colonies. For example, he writes of how, in the colonized world, the forces representing capitalist dominance – the police and the military – are much more visible to the colonized subject than they are in the colonizing “capitalist” countries, where “a multitude of sermonizers, counselors and ‘confusion-mongers’ intervene between the exploited and the authorities” (4).

La Haine shows us the colonized subjects as immigrants in the *banlieues* of the colonizing countries, where the nuances of dispersed authority that Fanon describes are not present as the immigrants come into contact with the brute force of the state on a daily basis. Here, multicultural tolerance is a rarity. There is no veneer of acceptance. They are ghettoized in council estates where they have no work and are viewed with suspicion by the local population. But the immigrants have the additional misfortune of being young. Jocelyne Cesari writes of “the symbolic ghettoization of these neighborhoods [which] has [...] grown stronger in both political discourse and the media [...] suburban youth are referred to as a threat: a dangerous social class made up of people who do little but steal and engage in all sorts of illegal activity” (qtd. in Siciliano 217) .

Fanon described the geographical “compartmentalized” configuration of the colonial world as the key to its social organization (3). Here too, in the metropolis, geographical space defines social space. At the beginning of the film we find immigrant youths on the roof of a building where they have their own social rules but the metropolis imposes itself upon them

in the form of police intervention to get them off the roof, even though they are apparently doing no one any harm. Siciliano points out how the action switches from “spaces of state-



Fig. 1. Immigrant POV on roof.

regulated, highly controlled landscapes to abandoned warehouses and vast rooftops” as the youths attempt to “cultivate spaces of their own accord” (214). We do not follow the action as independent observers as the camera moves with the protagonists on the roof and gives us the point of view of one of the immigrants (fig. 1). Similarly, in a different scene, the three protagonists feel that their space is being invaded when two “Parisian” reporters turn up and



Fig. 2. Space invasion (left). Thoiry zoological park (right).

want to ask them about the riots Hubert tells the female reporter: “Get out of the car! This

ain't Thoiry" (01:20:21–01:20:47) – a reference to the Château de Thoiry, an attraction known for its zoological park best visited by car – thereby implying that the reporters have come to see the animals (fig. 2).

But the most interesting scenes which highlight the barriers between social spaces come when the three protagonists find themselves in the urban center of Paris, away from their “turf”. As they look for Asterix’s building, a policeman gives them directions, prompting Sayid’s outburst – “The pigs are fuckin’ polite around here!” (01:56:47– 01:57:03) – an opinion which he will soon change. When the three youths ring the bells on an apartment



Fig. 3. Paris resident POV via security camera.

building and ask for Asterix, they are observed by the occupants via the security camera, and are frustrated to discover that the occupants are not helpful. In fact, the concierge ends up calling the police. The tension in the scene is increased as we get extreme close-up shots from the POVs of Paris residents via the security cameras that distort the faces of the *banlieue* boys (fig. 3), thereby making them seem more threatening (01:57:37–01:58:15). Here they are the outsiders – they are feared as a threat to life in the center.

In another scene of interest we see that, in Paris, the youths are clearly out of their

depth. This is not a world they know or can handle. Quite apart from not being able to cope with the violent racism of the police, they are not even able to handle a “civilized” conversation with a couple of girls at an art exhibition without hurling insults (fig. 4). As



Fig. 4. Social confrontation.

usual, the camera mingles with the guests at the exhibition making us just another guest. So here we see both sides – the girls who, initially, are willing to chat, and the *banlieue* boys who, immediately, go on the defensive. The side view of the two distinct social groupings emphasizes the confrontational aspect of the encounter. Here we are independent observers looking at the two groups: we can choose whose side to take. Even when people are trying to be nice to them they do not know how to react because the *banlieue* has taught them only how to survive in a hostile environment.

Another scene worth commenting on is that of the long shot of the worker descending on the Metro escalator. A voiceover follows the camera as it tilts up to find the worker descending towards us. The escalator movement symbolizes the fact that he too is pulled along by the capitalist system. As he approaches, we realize that the “voiceover” is really Hubert’s voice and Sayid and Hubert are standing there waiting for him to pass between

them. They are not in the least bit worried about the fact that he can hear and see them clearly (fig.5). For them, the worker is not a similarly oppressed worker in a capitalist system: he is socially superior to them because he is white and he belongs to the colonizing power. That is



Fig. 5. A cog in the machine.

what Fanon meant when he wrote about the limits of Marxist analysis: “You are rich because you are white; you are white because you are rich” (5). There is no empathy between the worker and the immigrant.

According to Siciliano, even though some attempts were made towards the social integration of the immigrant population in the late 1980s and early 1990s, by 1995, when this film was made, Jacques Chirac had labeled the *banlieues* “fractures at the end of the twentieth century” (qtd. in Siciliano 2017). *La Haine* gives us a street view of what it must have been like for the immigrant communities to live in the Parisian suburbs at that particular time.

Works Cited

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