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"JE VIS, DONC JE VOIS, DONC JE DIS."
BANLIEUE VIOLENCE IN FRENCH RAP

by
Schyler Chennault

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MA in French Studies

Department of French and Italian
Brigham Young University
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ABSTRACT

"JE VIS, DONC JE VOIS, DONC JE DIS."
BANLIEUE VIOLENCE IN FRENCH RAP

Schyler Chennault
Department of French and Italian
Master's

Since its creation over two decades ago, French rap music has evolved to become both wildly popular and highly controversial. It has been the subject of legal debate because of its violent content, and accused of encouraging violent behavior. This thesis explores the French M.C.'s role as representative and reporter of the France's suburbs, *la Banlieue*, and contains analyses of French rap lyrics to determine the rappers' perception of *Banlieue* violence. Using the song lyrics, this work examines the conditions and causes of that violence as seen by the *Banlieusard*, and answers the critics' accusations that French rap is a call to violence.

**"JE VIS, DONC JE VOIS, DONC JE DIS."
BANLIEUE VIOLENCE IN FRENCH RAP**

A thesis by Schyler Chennault

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INTRODUCTION

French Hip-Hop

Ever since the 1980s, rap music has inspired both interest and outrage. This music quickly transitioned from the fun, but realist, styles of the late 70s and early 80s (Sugar Hill Gang, Kurtis Blow, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five) into the hardcore and politically-aware sounds of the mid 80s (N.W.A.¹, B.D.P.², and Public Enemy). Meanwhile, slightly tamer groups such as Beastie Boys and Run D.M.C. were responsible for bringing Hip-Hop music to the general public. The 90s were marked by the solo careers of N.W.A.'s members (Dr. Dre in particular, who went on to discover and produce other rap legends, such as Snoop Doggy Dogg), and by other successful artists, such as 2pac, The Notorious B.I.G., and the highly marketed Wu-Tang Clan. Today, the world of American rap is populated by artists such as Eminem, Kanye West, Jay-Z, by those pioneers of rap's beginnings who are still in the business, and by an astoundingly large and talented underground scene, headed by groups like Hieroglyphics and Atmosphere. Despite controversies over violent or sexual content (2 Live Crew, Ice T, N.W.A., Eminem) and critics' predictions of its inevitable demise as a fad, Hip-Hop music has not only survived the last two decades, but it has become one of America's most popular music genres of this generation.

However, the US does not have the monopoly over rap music. During the 80s, unbeknownst to most Americans, the French began their own rap movement. In 1982, Fab Five Freddy released a 12" record containing a rap song in French entitled, "*Change de Beat*" by female rapper B-Side. That same year, Chagrin d'Amour released an album

¹ **N.W.A.** "Niggaz With Attitude," composed of Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, M.C. Ren, Eazy-E, and DJ Yella.

² **B.D.P.** "Boogie Down Productions," headed by rapper, KRS-One.

which is generally considered "the first example of French rap on a long-playing record" (Prévos 714). Like in the US, other types of music utilized rap techniques in their music. But it was former New York gang member, Afrika Bambaataa who brought the Zulu Nation's culture of rapping, scratching, break-dancing, and graffiti art to Parisian suburbs in the early 80's. The rap interest peaked in France and several groups and soloists joined the movement. "Rapattitudes," a Hip-Hop compilation album featuring French rap pioneers like Assassin, A.L.A.R.M.E. and Dee Nasty, was released in the early 90s. According to Dr. André Prévos, this record was "the spark which started the rap explosion in France" (Prévos 716). Soon thereafter, French rap, which had until then been in what Prévos calls an "adopting" (Prévos 713) stage—borrowing American themes and styles and creating rap music in French based on those models—transitioned into a state of adaptation and creation. French rap music has extremely developed sound, production, lyrics, and composition and, France now produces more rap music than any country in the world, after the United States.

To this day, French rap remains in this creative state, being anything but American music transposed into the French language. While both American and French rap are considered to be the music of a marginalized population, the population being represented in the two kinds of music differs greatly. American rap is said to be the voice of the inner cities' African-American population³, whereas French rap has evolved to become the voice of the *Banlieusard*, an inhabitant of France's poverty-stricken suburbs or "*la Banlieue*." In the US, white rappers are generally perceived as a musical anomaly, with a few exceptions, notably the ephemeral Vanilla Ice, the shocking Eminem, and the

³ This generalization persists, in spite of the fact that since rap's creation in the US, it has expanded into numerous sub-categories, some of which nullify this perception and defy all stereotypes.

perseverant Beastie Boys. However, in France, The typical rapper is Arab, black, or white. The presence of white rappers in France does not raise an eyebrow, for many French M.C.s, including some French rap's pioneers (NTM's Kool Shen and Assassin's Rockin Squat), are white. Some examples on today's scene include Fonky Family's Don Choa, IAM's Akhenaton, and Diam's. However, the majority of French rap artists are second-generation immigrants, often from North African countries such as Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Senegal, whose fathers were welcomed to France, but who now are seen by many French as intruders within their own country's borders. Like the music of some American artists, such as Chuck D. and Ice Cube, French rap seems inevitably linked to political criticism, and allusions to the Republic's policies or leaders are rarely absent from an album's contents.

Another particularity of French rap is its unique language. In the south of France, southern slang words, such as "*gazier*"⁴ and "*dégun*"⁵ are mixed into the vernacular. In the North of France, "*le verlan*"—a way of speaking in which syllables and phonetic sounds are rearranged and sometimes omitted to form new words ("*matez*" becomes "*té-ma*," "*femme*" becomes "*meuf*", and by some amazing linguistic gymnastics, "*flic*" becomes "*keuf*")—dominates the language of the *Banlieusard*. Rap in both the North and South of France is riddled with slang both traditional in French and unique to the region or *cité* (a group of sub-par, partially government-subsidized housing units) from which it originates. Arabic words are also common in French rap, since many rappers are children of North African immigrants. Thus, expressions such as "*inch'Allah*" ("God willing") can be found in a large number of French Hip-Hop songs.

⁴ **gazier, gazière** *Marseillais* for guy, girl.
⁵ **dégun** *Marseillais* for nobody.

However, despite French rap music's uniqueness, French Hip-Hop does not set itself up as a separatist movement, but rather, as part of the worldwide Hip-Hop community. Many French rappers are avid listeners of U.S. rap and can not help but be influenced by it. French rap songs often contain samples from songs by their American contemporaries or predecessors. For example, Mafia Trece's "Je plaide pour la rue" samples Snoop Doggy Dogg's "Murder Was the Case." Akhenaton's "Hirondelles" and IAM's "Petit frère" both contain samples from Wu-Tang Clan's classic, "C.R.E.A.M." Sniper's introductory track on *Trait pour trait* features a scratch solo using the sample of Beastie Boys' Ad Rock on "The New Style." Since it creates an association between the new song and the old, the sampling of another Hip-Hop song is a homage to the artist or group who created it

Furthermore, there are a number of cross-continent collaborations between French rappers and American M.C.'s. French group, Assassin, and Guinness Book record-holder for the longest freestyle (9 hours), Supernatural, teamed up for the track, "Undaground Connection." Gangstarr's Guru and French veteran, M.C. Solaar, joined forces for "Le Bien, le Mal." Marseille's IAM has recorded a song with Redman and Method Man ("Noble Art") and with Wu-conglomerates, Dreddy Krueger and Timbo King of Sunz of Man ("La Saga"). The infamous Parisian group, N.T.M., was even featured on the Firm's (Nas, A-Z, and Foxy Brown, Dr. Dre) International Remix of "Affirmative Action." So, although French Hip-Hop is now its own entity, unique in sound, concepts and lyrical techniques, it is still a member of the international Hip-Hop movement and the French rapper pays homage, through sampling and allusions, to the pioneers who originated the music that has come to mean so much to him.

A note to the reader about usage of the term "Hip-Hop"

Some scholars define the term “Hip-Hop” as the culture promoted by the Zulu Nation (MCing, DJing, graf'-writing, and breaking) while the American media grossly overuses the term in reference to any form of “black-sounding” music with a heavy beat: Rap, R&B, Soul, and even some of today's Pop. However, when rappers, or "M.C.s,"⁶ use the term “Hip-Hop,” they almost always refer exclusively to rap music. For example, Cypress Hill’s song “Strictly Hip-Hop” clearly draws a line between rap and R&B, the former being called Hip-Hop and the latter being a watered down version of the former with similar beats and singing instead of rapping. B-Real declares:

I never rapped on an R&B record and I never will (Cypress Hill).

Similarly, in “You Can’t Tell Me Sh**” by Tha Alkaholiks, J-Ro describes R&B as being completely exterior to the realm of Hip-Hop:

They’re sampling the fresh Hip-Hop breaks just to make a hit

That’s why to me R&B really ain’t sh**. (Tha Alkaholiks, "You Can't...")

Touching on the same topic, Defari declares:

H-I-P H-O-P: no singing. (Baka Boyz, Defari, Tash, Xzibit)

One reason for the confusing of other genres with Hip-Hop is the fact that non-Hip-Hop artists often reuse and sing over Hip-Hop beats. For, example, J-Lo’s “Jenny from the Block” recycles The Beatnuts' instrumental for “Watch Out Now.” The music for Joe’s “Stutter” was taken from Pharcyde’s classic, “Passin’ Me By.” Jessica Simpson also borrowed the beat from “I got 5 On It” by Luniz for one of her songs.

⁶ **M.C.** Rap artist ("Master of Ceremonies").

Another reason for the confusion of genres stems from cross-genre collaborations between Hip-Hop and non Hip-Hop groups and artists. This occurs most commonly when a rapper appears on an R&B song, such as cameos on 112's "Only You" by The Notorious B.I.G. and Mase or Ol' Dirty Bastard's vocals on Mariah Carey's "Daydream." In the song, "Off the Wall," L.A. M.C., Catastrophe comments:

The R&B niggaz try to swipe

That's why they call M.C.s to make their remixes hype. (Tha Alkaholiks, "Off The Wall")

These rappers not only wish to draw the line between Hip-Hop and other genres, but they also very clearly demonstrate that when they say "Hip-Hop," they are talking about Rap. Hip-Hop abounds with further examples of rappers using the term "Hip-Hop" to concretely designate rap music, the two being synonymous. For example, Eazy-E, who was not associated with break-dancing or Graffiti, and certainly not with R&B music, was also known as "The Hip-Hop Thugsta'."

Thus, to honor the Hip-Hop artist's definition of "Hip-Hop," the terms "Hip-Hop" and "Rap" will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

French rap music under fire

Despite its popularity among France's youth, French rap music has grown extremely unpopular among many politicians, right extremists, and law-enforcers. In a TV5 *Envyé Spécial* entitled "Les enfant du rap," Catholic fundamentalist Bernard Anthony gives his opinion on the violent and "*vulgaire*" contents of French Hip-Hop. After quoting some objectionable song lyrics, he declares, "*Pour moi, monsieur, ça ce n'est pas de l'art: c'est de l'abomination*" (Les enfants du rap). Others share his

sentiments, such as François Grosdidier, a U.M.P. deputy who is preparing a legal case against seven rap artists and groups he believes to be responsible for the Parisian riots of October, 2005. In the same *Envoyé Spécial* documentary, he told cameras,

Bien-sûr, c'est pas le seul facteur, mais c'est l'un des facteurs. Et quand les paroles de ces rappeurs légitiment les actes de violence contre des individus parce qu'ils sont blancs ou parce qu'ils sont français, il faut pas s'étonner ensuite que des gens passent à l'acte. ("Les enfants du rap")

French Hip-Hop is commonly interpreted as anti-French, anti-police, and pro-violence by critics. Even Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy spear-headed the prosecution of Sniper, a rap group he understood to be calling the listener to violence against France's police and government, for their song "La France."

Many academic explorations of French rap have been conducted since the 1990s: Valérie Orlando examined the Banlieusard's ambivalent identity—French and foreign—as portrayed in Rap, Rai, and movies in her article, "From Rap to Rai in the mixing bowl: *Beur* Hip-Hop Culture and *Banlieue* Cinema in Urban France." Dominique Bluher also examined France's Hip-Hop Culture in Films. And the late French rap specialist, Dr. André Prévos, wrote on various aspects of French rap from its origin and development to its economic power in the world of business. However, this thesis will focus on *Banlieue* violence as described in French rap, especially in songs singled-out for their violent content. One of the main roles of the French rap artists is that of reporter. The title of this thesis contains a quotation from one of France's most revered groups, IAM. Their response to Descartes' statement, "*Je pense, donc je suis*" describes the purpose of the French M.C.:

Scrutant le quotidien, je vis, donc je vois, donc je dis. (IAM, "La Stratégie...")

Whereas Descartes' ability to generate thought affirmed his existence, the French rapper's existence requires him to share his thoughts. It is his calling to describe the world through the eyes of France's marginalized *Banlieue* population. French Hip-Hop music is accused of inciting violence, but upon examining French rap lyrics, we find that the rapper is against his community's ubiquitous violence, neither glorifying, nor promoting it. Rather, he describes the violence that surrounds him as a harsh reality that necessitates change. He identifies the causes of that violence—the State, the police, and the conditions of the *Banlieue*—and calls for reform. Using the strong language of his people, he paints the picture of *Banlieue* suffering and denounces the injustice that permits its continuation.

THE FRENCH RAPPER'S ROLE

"C'est plus vrai que les infos."

-Menzo of Fonky Family

"Marginal Musique" by Fonky Family

For the French rapper, Hip-Hop is more than a hobby or career: it a way to tell the story of his town, his *quartier*⁷, and his people. He is a reporter who presents the images of suffering in France's marginalized population to the rest of the country. He represents his fellow *Banlieusard*, by both speaking for them and to them. The only individual qualified to accomplish these functions, he has an obligation to tell the truth about what he observes in his broken community. In Fonky Family's hit, "Marginale musique," from their album by that same name, Fonky Family lays out the roles of French rap and of the French rapper.



⁷ **quartier**

A portion of the city.

LYRICS⁸

Artist: Fonky Family
Title: "Marginale musique"
Album: *Marginale musique*
Year: 2006

Marginale musique
Marginale musique
Marginale, marginale, marginale musique

Le Rat Luciano:

(Ah le rap c'est toute une histoire)
Le rap c'est mon passé, mon présent, *inch'Allah* mon avenir
C'est ma prison et seule la mort peut m'en faire sortir
Inséparable de moi, comme la lune de la nuit ou le regard de l'oeil
Tu captés, le rap c'est ma vie, c'est mon métier mon chantier ma partie de poker
Mon moyen d'oublier le monde entier
Mon moyen d'avoir le sourire aux lèvres comme Marvin
Mon moyen d'écrire mon histoire et celle de ma ville, à fond au volant d' ma vie
Le rap c'est comme la rue trop sérieux, ça a ses lois
Si tu déconnes, on te banni, on te respecte si t'es droit
C'est comme dans la rue, tout le monde veut la place de l'autre
Le blé de l'autre, baiser le monde et se payer la femme de l'autre
C'est des petits, des grands, des petites, des grandes
Le rap, c'est un refuge pour ceux que la vie étrangle
C'est des kilomètres de notes, une passion, du biz, des euros
Le rap c'est l'existence de nous autres

{ Refrain: }

Sat: Personne nous représente alors on l'fait nous-mêmes pour ce qu'on n'entend jamais

Tous: Envoie d'la marginale musique

Sat: Par amour du gang, par appât du gain, pour l'honneur des tiens

Tous: Envoie d'la marginale musique

Don Choa: Personne nous représentes alors on l'fait nous-mêmes pour ce qu'on n'entend jamais

Tous: Envoie d'la marginale musique

Le Rat Luciano: Si tu veux qu'on se lève qu'on aille sur la piste tu sais ce qu'il nous faut

Tous: Envoie d'la marginale musique

⁸ The lyrics for the songs analyzed in this thesis are found on "www.lavi2rue.com," a web site where rap fans post lyrics of their favorite songs, which they often transcribe themselves.

Sat:

Mets-moi des bâtons dans les roues, je continuerai sur les jantes
Vise ma tête et mon rap rentrera peut-être dans la légende
J'ai plus rien à perdre, le temps c'est du rap
Le rap c'est du blé, le blé c'est du lait pour les biberons de mon bébé
J'peux plus laisser quiconque m'ôter le pain de la bouche
Si je me laisse mettre sur la touche qui lui paiera ses couches ?
Le rap c'est ma drogue, mon sport c'est là que j'ai mis tous mes espoirs
J'veux qu'ils mentionnent nos noms quand ils raconteront son histoire
C'est trois place sur le podium, c'est qu'un trône, une seule couronne
Autant de frères dans l'ombre qui veulent y poser leur coronnes
C'est des vrais, c'est des traîtres, c'est des M.C.s qui devraient prendre leur retraite
Mais aucun d'eux ne me fera battre en retraite
C'est tout un art, après la famille c'est tout ce qu'on a
C'est des jours des nuits à écrire, mais quand on aime on compte pas
C'est un moyen de remplir les caisses, c'est la voix du peuple
Je fais savoir tout ce qu'il rate aux aveugles

{ au Refrain }

Don Choa:

C'est des guerres et des combats, c'est des chèques et des contrats
Pleins veulent y être mais n'y sont pas, ça et le reste on le racontera
C'est des textes et des constats, la parole de ceux qui l'ont pas
Si tu pèses pas tu comptes pas, tu te relèves ou tu tombes bas
Nous on persiste, c'est qu'on aime ça, et le mic aime sentir nos mains sales
Tous s'agitent sur un son infâme, c'est la course sur un sol instable
Saoulés d'être toujours au même stade, tous veulent du *cash* et des belles femmes
Rouler en Benz et BM Cab mais on va finir dans les mêmes flammes
Toujours pas décédé, j'ai toujours qu'un CDD dans le rap
Quand tu veux peser, fais PDG ou des millions de CD
Je m'en tape de ton opinion ou de tes critiques, mais reste mignon pédé
On rappe en souvenir du bon vieux temps et de tout ce qu'on serrait
Comeback, ils se battent pour être à la page
Fais comme Zizou, t'en vas pas tout à l'arrache, si t'as pas la rage
Tout s'écroule et tu tombe à plat, écoute on raconte pas de blabla
On résiste, on reste on squatte là
Joue-nous du vrai son, envoie d'la...

Tous: Marginale musique

{ au Refrain }

Menzo:

Envoie le son qui nous ressemble, le son qui nous rassemble
Envoie le son avant qu'on mette tout à feu à sang

Envoie le son qui frappe, le son qui fait trembler les baffles
Parle sur mon rap, mais rappelle-toi que tu pourrais prendre des baffes
Le son t'assomme, c'est pas une musique comme les autres
C'est le son de la zone, c'est contre ceux qui donnent les ordres
Le son qui tue, le son des bandits, le son qui met le *fire*
C'est le son qui dit ce que tu n'entendras pas ailleurs
C'est plus vrai que les infos
C'est le son qu'ils méprisent
Le son qui attise les flammes
Le son d'la crise, les drames, la bande, son d'histoires tristes
Mais aussi, le son qui plaît aux femmes
Le son qui t'envoie sur la piste
Trop de M.C.s veulent me clash mais ce sont des lâches
Je parle *cash*, j'ai attendu après personne pour que ça marche
Personne me représente alors je l'fait moi-même
Parce qu'on est jamais mieux servi qu'par soi-même

{ au Refrain }

{ Scratch solo: }

It ain't nutin' like Hip-Hop music

Hip-Hop Music

Real Hip-Hop

It ain't nutin' like Hip-Hop music

The real Hip-Hop

Real Hip-Hop

ANALYSIS OF LYRICS

Touching on the first role of the French rapper, Le Rat Luciano begins the song with the lyrics:

Ah, le rap c'est toute une histoire

Le rap c'est mon passé, mon présent, inch'Allah mon avenir.

Although he is likely referring to what rap music means to him personally, these lines contain a message concerning the universality of this music, for the French rap artist's role is that of reporter of the *Banlieue*—he tells the story of his people. His words describe the conditions of his life and that of fellow *Banlieusards*. Le Rat continues:

Tu captes, le rap c'est ma vie, c'est mon métier mon chantier ma partie de poker...

This bar demonstrates what Hip-Hop music means to this population and, more particularly, to the rapper himself. Le Rat calls this music his "*chantier*," a word that evokes the previous generation of immigrants, many of whom made their living by working manual labor jobs, such as



construction. For Fonky Family and other M.C.s of this generation, rap is their worksite, a zone where they construct their identity and that of their fellow *Banlieusard*. Referring to rap as his "*partie de poker*," he also hints at the improvisational aspects of Hip-Hop, among which are the "freestyle," a oral practice in which an M.C. "comes off the top," meaning that each rhyme is invented without premeditation.

In pronouncing the words, "*le rap c'est ma vie*," Le Rat reveals how Hip-Hop is the account of life in a marginalized society. The last two metaphors, "...*mon chantier*" and "*ma partie de poker*" can, in and of themselves, also be interpreted as reports on the conditions of the *Banlieue*. In this context, the word "*chantier*" (slang for "mess") suggests the utter social chaos in which he lives, while the phrase "*partie de poker*" alludes to the unpredictability of his precarious environment. Even while listing the functions of rap, the M.C. finds himself filling the functions of the rapper, one of which is to report on life in the *Banlieue*. He calls rap:

Mon moyen d'écrire mon histoire et celle de ma ville, à fond au volant de ma vie.

As we will see in the next chapter, the French rapper views the French news media as a biased source which generally depicts the *Banlieusard* in a negative light. Since news reporters do not give an accurate impression of his people, the rapper must assume the role of reporter. He not only describes his own experiences, but those of his companions. He reports on the violence in their community:

C'est des guerres et des combats,

the hardships of *Banlieue* life:

Le son d'la crise, les drames, la bande, son d'histoires tristes,

and the uncertainty of life in these "*quartiers sensibles*:"

C'est la course sur un sol instable.

In the third verse, Sat describes this role:

Je fais savoir tout ce qu'il rate aux aveugles,

which suggests that the rapper's account must be an accurate depiction of this experience, for he must deliver it, not only to his fellow *Banlieusard*, but to the "*aveugles*" outside of the

Banlieue who do not see first-hand the conditions in which he lives. This ideal of accuracy is upheld by fellow crew member, Don Choa:

C'est des textes et des constats.

The rapper, then, has the duty to state the facts as he observes them. In "Hip-Hop marseillais" featured on Kheop's compilation, "Sad Hill," M.C. Def Bond mentions this necessary loyalty to the factuality:



Tout ce que je fais est voulu

A choisir qu'on porte un avis critique et objectif dessus. (Def Bond, Faf

Larage)

Like a news reporter, the rapper's role is to relate through his lyrics what he and his people experience on the margins of society. Yet, this does not inhibit the rapper's right or ability to give his opinion concerning the things he observes. On the contrary, it is what he witnesses that fuels his criticism of the injustice and violence his people suffer. This music is one of contestation of the established order which permits what he perceives as the *Banlieusard's* oppression, a quality mentioned in Menzo's verse:

C'est le son de la zone, c'est contre ceux qui donnent les ordres.

Paradoxically, while French rap reports the poor conditions of the *Banlieue*, it is at the same time a form of escapism from those very conditions. Luciano refers to it as:

Mon moyen d'oublier le monde entier,

and also says:

C'est des petits, des grands, des petites, des grandes

Le rap, c'est un refuge pour ceux que la vie étrangle,

The *Banlieusard* certainly falls into the category of those "strangled by life." In "Ma cause," KDD depicts Hip-Hop music as way to soar above one's troubles:

Plongé sur mes cahiers, je pensais passer l'éponge

Et planer, fuir à travers mes vers. (KDD)

KDD uses the word "vers," a term typically reserved for poetry, as if to suggest that this music is not merely a low-brow form of expression, but a cultural and literary movement as capable of depth as the more universally respected art of poetry. This image of

forgetting the past is also heard in the chorus of Akhenaton's song from the "Black Album." On the track entitled "Nerf de glace," the chorus begins with the line:

Hip-Hop: l'art d'effacer ses larmes. (Akhenaton, "Nerf de...")

It is as though giving the account of their trials has a therapeutic effect on the storyteller. The slaves in America were known for frequently singing of their sorrows while working. American writer and former slave Frederick Douglass explained, "The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an



aching heart is relieved by its tears (Lawall, Mack 702). Thus, for the *Banlieusard*, rap has the purging effect of exteriorizing an interior malaise. It is also an alternative to drugs as a form of escapism. In "Faut qu'on sorte de là," the Fonky Family states,

Je passe aux aveux, pas devant les stups, devant mes braves

Rendre heureux les gars de ma base. (Sat, Costello)

Amid the omnipresence of drug sales and usage in the *cités*, rap provides another way of temporary refuge for those who dwell there.

In fulfilling his role as the *Banlieue's* reporter, the rapper is required to get the attention of the listener in order to convey his message. To accomplish this, Menzo:

Envoie le son qui frappe, le son qui fait trembler les baffles,

giving a warning to those who listen only passively while engaging in conversation:

Parle sur mon rap, mais rappelle-toi que tu pourrais prendre des baffes.

The impact of the rhyme must be such that it turns listeners into hearers, whether or not they want to be. The lyrics of Le Venin and Mombi's song, "*Je touche du bois*" illustrates this forced auditory experience:

Mes rimes se logent comme une balle, côté gauche

Sur le beat elle ricochent, et pour finir une oreille elle te fauche

Je prends ton attention même si tu me la prêtes pas. (Le Venin, Mombi)

Getting people's attention is definitely one of French rap's strong points. In fact, this art form has received much negative attention from French citizens, extremist groups, and government officials, all outraged by the lyrical content of these songs. This "*son infâme*," as Menzo puts it, has been targeted for legal action because of songs by groups such as N.T.M., Monsieur R., Assassin, Ministère A.M.E.R., and Sniper. These groups criticize France's government, laws, and Police force, giving rap the reputation of a dangerous music. Furthermore, some believe the riots in Paris' *Banlieues* which took place in October of 2005 to have been inspired by French rap lyrics. In "*Marginale Musique*," Menzo makes several references to the alleged guilt of French rap music in causing those riots. He refers to it as:

Le son qui tue, le son des bandits, le son qui met le fire.

The *Banlieusard* is often seen as a criminal or gangster, regardless of his true behavior, hence the description of rap as "*le son des bandits*." The aspect that most characterized the riots was the burning of cars. Menzo's choice of words for describing French Hip-Hop, "*Le son qui met le fire*" et "*Le son qui attise les flammes*," evokes the image of the "*Ville*



Lumière," and other areas in which riots consecutively took place, burning.

Despite the accusations, the French rapper maintains that his role is to report on what he sees. It is the duty of the rapper, a wordsmith endowed with the "gift of gab," to share his observations. Don Choa retorts to rap's critics:

Je m'en tape de ton opinion ou de tes critiques, mais reste mignon pédé⁹.

The rapper must continue his trade regardless of criticism of his art. On his famous duo "Face à la mer" with rock singer Calogero, former Ministère A.M.E.R. member Passi, assumes this charge:

Fils du C.O.N.G.O. cette haine j'ai au

M.I.C.R.O. j'ai l' poids des mots. (Calogero, Passi)

Not only must the M.C. report, but as part of the world he describes, he is the only one who has the right to tell the *Banlieusard's* story, for he bears "*le poids des mots*," the duty to use his gift of lyricism to communicate the plight of his people. "Faut qu'on sorte de là" contains a caution to those who have not experienced their sordid way of life, and are thus unqualified to report on these areas of France.

On se comporte comme en temps de guerre

C'est chacun son clan, son camps, garde tes commentaires

Si t'es pas d'là... (Sat, Costello)

In "Face à la mer," Passi reminds outsiders who claim to understand his plight as a poverty-stricken, second-generation immigrant in France:

T'as pas connu ça toi, l'envie d'empocher les patates. (Calogero, Passi)

⁹ **pédé**

A derogatory term for a homosexual, although in the *Banlieue*, it is often used simply as an insult, having no reference to sexual orientation.

He suggests that a person who has not lived the troubles seen by the *Banlieusard* has no right to tell his story. Don Choa says:

Nous on persiste, c'est qu'on aime ça, et le mic aime sentir nos mains sales,

meaning that "dirty hands" of this allegedly criminal population are a requirement for holding the microphone. The anger originating from the *Banlieusard's* mistreatment is another requirement for this task:

*Fais comme Zizou, t'en vas pas tout à l'arrache, si t'as pas la rage
Tout s'écroule et tu tombes à plat.*

Here, Don Choa invokes the revered name of one of Marseille's greatest sources of pride, Zinedine Zidane. The second-generation Algerian immigrant led France's soccer team to World Cup victory in 1998. However, he was ejected from 2006's World Cup game for head-butting a player from the opposing team who had allegedly lanced one or more racial slurs. Like Zizou's "*coup d'boule*," the strength of the rapper's words must come from rage if the blow is to be sufficiently forceful to carry the message. Otherwise, you "*tombes à plat*," as did Italy's Materazzi.

But the message conveyed can not be an exaggeration or underestimation of reality: the rapper must tell the truth. Luciano explains:

*Le rap c'est comme la rue trop sérieux, ça a ses lois
Si tu déconnes, on te bannit, on te respecte si t'es droit.*

A rapper who falsifies his statements loses the respect of the listeners and the ability to represent his people. He is banished from the rap world. In "Faut qu'on sorte de là" Fonky Family ("F.F.") swears to tell the truth:

Au fait, fier de représenter les jeunes du ciment

Je le jure prêt à laisser ma main à couper si je mens. (Sat, Costello)

According to the Koran, stealing is punishable by cutting off the thief's hand. Assigning this punishment to an M.C. who lies in his music suggests that a theft is taking place.

Indeed the rapper who has not lived the life of the Banlieusard and yet claims to represent this population is stealing their identity and their right to tell their story for his own profit.

Def Bond also talks of the interdiction to twist the truth on a record:

Compte ici que je ne vis pas, c'est exclus. (Def Bond, Faf Larage)

Lying is not only forbidden because of the laws of rap or out of fear of losing credibility, but it is also an act that a true M.C. finds impossible to do. In IAM's "La stratégie d'un pion," the words of the chorus illustrate the obligation the M.C. has to himself to remain truthful:

J'aurais pu mettre plus de string que de sens dans mes écrits

Mais l'coeur commande à la main, à chaque heure mon âme l'écrite

Loin d'ce brouillard, mon regard s'étend jusqu'à l'infini

Scrutant le quotidien je vis donc je vois donc je dis. (IAM, "La stratégie...")

The words must come from his experience and be based what he observes as a *Banlieusard*. Perhaps this is why Menzo says about rap that:

C'est plus vrai que les infos,

for, like the anchorman, the French rapper must remain



factual to ensure credibility. However, the rapper also has the moral obligation to refrain from falsehood, which adds sincerity to his reports.

The M.C.'s task "*consiste à dire la vérité*" (Don Choa, Menzo), even if it is unpleasant. In "Où je vis," a song from his album by the same, Shurik'N makes no apologies for the negativity of the reports he must make:

Je sais, c'est pas gai, mais tout est vrai. (Shurik'N, "Où je...")

And in "Faut qu'on sorte de là," Fonky Family insists on telling their story, even if the truth is unpleasant to the listener:

Je vais pas truquer mes rimes, j'ai pas de trucs gais à dire.

As IAM stated above in the bar reading:

J'aurais pu mettre plus de string que de sens dans mes écrits,

the rapper is also forbidden to modify his lyrical content simply to add appeal to his music in hopes of better sales. In "Jeune de Banlieu," Disiz la Peste asserts that when an important message is being transmitted through song, no embellishment is needed. He prefaces the text of this song by telling the listener,

Pour ce texte franchement je vais pas faire

Des jolies phases ni des jolies phrases

Je veux juste que tu saches. (Disiz la Peste)

The essential function of this music is to report the life of the *Banlieusard*, and no fanfare should distract from that message. Don Choa reiterates this point in "Marginale Musique:"

Ecoute, on raconte pas de blabla

On résiste, on reste, on squatte là

Joue-nous du vrai son, envoie d'la marginale musique.

"*On squatte là*" alludes to rap's inertia despite critics' early claim that it was a fad, as well as to its resilience to the many attacks, both rhetorical and legal, it has withstood. The verb "squat" signifies the illegal inhabitation of a building, an image that immediately calls to mind the often unwelcome presence of the second-generation immigrant population inhabiting France's *Banlieue*. Flattering words ("*blabla*") have no place in this "*vrai son*," a form of expression which consists principally of the raw truth. Its consistency with the *Banlieusard's* reality is one of the main reasons for which



C'est le son qui dit ce que tu n'entendras pas ailleurs.

In this unique music, another key role of the rapper is to represent his people. Sat proclaims, "*C'est la voix du peuple*," which implies that their voice is otherwise unheard, an idea reinforced in the line repeated twice in each repetition of the chorus:

Personne nous représente alors on l'fait nous-mêmes pour c'qu'on

n'entend jamais.

The *Banlieusard* feels devoid of representation on the greater plain of France. Rapper Sefyu, under fire for an apparently anti-white line from his song, "*La vie qui va avec*," which reads:

T'as vu un babtou¹⁰, y'a une ragla¹¹ qui va avec, (Sefyu)

¹⁰ **babtou**

Verlan for *toubab*. A white person.

¹¹ **ragla**

Beating.

explains the *Banlieusard's* lack of representation in France. In "Les enfant du rap," Sefyu tells reporters, "*Pour les jeunes ici, les seuls représentatifs de la France, c'est qui? C'est le petit Français qui est là et qui a de l'argent dans la poche, etcetera. Nous on est là pour retirer tous ces clichés*" (Les enfants du rap). The rapper speaks for the *Banlieusard* who otherwise has no mouthpiece. In the same documentary, La Fouine gives the reasons for which it is so vital that the French rapper speak on behalf of the *Banlieusard*: "*Surtout, j'suis le porte-paroles de tous ces gens, quoi. On a tous grandi dans la merde; on a plein d'choses à dire. C'est moi qui suis devant les caméras, j'dois représenter pour tous*" (Les enfants du rap). Since the rapper has the rest of France's attention, it is essential that he take that opportunity to speak on behalf of his people, telling of their hardships and expressing their rage. Rap is, according to FF's Don Choa, "*la parole de ceux qui l'ont pas.*" In "*Je touche du bois,*" Le Venin declares:

J'écris ma vie et celle des miens au quotidien, (Le Venin, Mombi)

for without the rapper, the rest of France might have no idea of what transpires in this alternate universe within its borders, *la Banlieue*. Thus, in the words of Le Rat,

Le rap c'est l'existence de nous autres.

In addition to speaking *for* the *Banlieue*, the French rapper also speaks *to* the *Banlieue*, uniting the *Banlieusards* of France through the portrayal of their common experience. Menzo describes in a parallel fashion this double-role of representation, saying:

Envoie le son qui nous ressemble, le son qui nous rassemble.

Fonky Family addresses all *Banlieusards* in "Faut qu'on sorte de là," saying:

Ce qui se passe pour les tiens, les miens le vient pareil

Je rappe pour les quartiers et le mien à ce qui paraît

Et ça va durer, (Sat, Costello)

creating a sense of unity in all the quartiers of France, in spite of the mild tension between Parisian and Marseillais rap groups at the time of the song in the late 90s. They are all engaged in the same fight for survival:

Même combat, Paris à Marseille. (Fonky Family, "La foi...")

Town pride also figures into this idea of "representing," especially among Marseille's lyricists, who readily claim their hometown. On the "*version sauvage*" of "Bad Boys de Marseille"—a series of three collaborations between IAM and Fonky Family all by the same title—claiming Marseille is a source of pride. At the end of his verse, Menzo declares,

*Je représente Mars dans tout l'univers. (Akhenaton, Fonky Family,
Shurik'N)*

Similarly, Sat proclaims at the end of his verse:

*FF de Mars ne cesse pas de représenter. (Akhenaton, Fonky Family,
Shurik'N)*

And on "Quand tu allais," Akhenaton finishes his verse with:

Mars, je représente ma ville et mon quartier. (IAM, "Quand tu...")

The importance of this notion of town pride seems best illustrated by the fact that all of the above examples are placed at the end of the rappers' verses, as though it was the element that the M.C.s most wanted their listeners to retain. Where an M.C. resides affects his schema and the content of his songs.



Even many of those who find financial success in the music business refuse to leave their town and their *quartier*, such as La Fouine, who despite his recent success still lives in the *Banlieue*, for to leave the place in which he grew up would be a "*trahison*" (Les enfants du rap). Pride for one's *quartier* is also prevalent throughout the French rap world. FF makes the vow:

Je promets de vanter mon crew et mon quartier, (Sat, Costello)

while Le Venin boasts his cité:

143 en moi, suis-je sur la bonne voie? (Le Venin)

3^e Oeil, from the same *cité*, does likewise:

143, 3^e Oeil, Marseille sans pitié, ouais. (3e Oeil)

The French rapper also unites the Banlieusard by giving:

Gloire à l'art de rue, honneur aux gens durs. (Sat, Costello)

In Sinik's "*Zone interdite*" from his most recent album "*Sang froid*," he honors the *Zonards*¹² with "shout-outs" to those who share his condition:

¹² **zonard**

A person who lives in a *zone*—any area in France, characterized by poverty and delinquency.

J'en place 1 pour la rue

2 pour mon bloc

3 pour mon hall

4-5 pour les ceu-mé¹³ coincés en taule

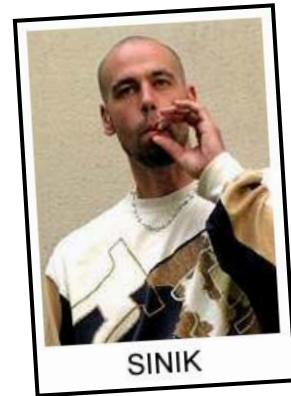
6 pour le bizz¹⁴,

7 pour le set

8 pour les pits¹⁵

9 anti-keufs¹⁶

10 pour les disques. (Sinik, "Zone interdite")



Including his hall in his list, Sinik further demonstrates the trend of *quartier* pride.

But the French rapper does not pretend that his motives are purely altruistic, for rap is also a way to improve his financial standing. Speaking of his "*marginal musique*," Don Choa admits:

C'est des guerres et des combats, c'est des chèques et des contrats.

He warns, however, that, while it is possible, there is no guarantee of excessive wealth in the business of rap:

Toujours pas décédé, j'ai toujours qu'un CDD¹⁷ dans le rap

Quand tu veux peser, fais PDG ou des millions de CD.

His source of income is assured, but only for the duration of his contract. Sat also describes rap music as a means to make money, but does not express a desire for opulence. Rather, to him, it is a way to meet the needs of his family:

¹³ **ceu-mé**

Verlan for mec.

¹⁴ **biz**

Abbreviation for *bizness*.

¹⁵ **pit**

Pitbull.

¹⁶ **keuf**

Verlan (with apocope) for *flic*. Police officer.

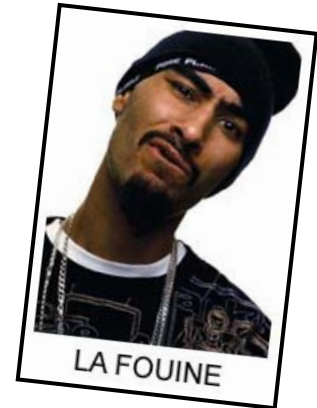
¹⁷ **CDD**

Contrat de travail à durée déterminée.

*J'ai plus rien à perdre, le temps c'est du rap
Le rap c'est du blé¹⁸, le blé c'est du lait pour les biberons de mon bébé
J'peux plus laisser quiconque m'ôter le pain de la bouche
Si je me laisse mettre sur la touche qui lui paiera ses couches ?*

In order to continue to provide for his loved ones, his raps must be of high quality, or he will not be well paid. La Fouine agrees and, in his song, "Il rappe pour le fric," shows how, since he started rapping for money, his music has greatly improved:

*J'rappe pour le fric mais attention pour en faire
Suffit de plus d'une meuf¹⁹ sur le refrain
Et d'un instru²⁰ qui pue la merde
Faut s'prendre la tête
...
J'rappe par amour, par amour du fric
Alors pour en gagner merde
J'suis obligé d'faire de bons disques
J'suis forcé d'mappliquer dans tout c'que j'fais tu vois
Du choix des instrus à mon choix des rimes en prise de voix
...
J'rappe pour le fric et puis tu veux qu'j'te dise
J'ai jamais autant bien rappé
Donc arrêtez toutes vos bêtises. (La Fouine)*



¹⁸ blé
¹⁹ meuf
²⁰ instru

Money.
Verlan for femme.
Instrumental, beat.

Booba, not the least bashful about rapping for money, tells reporters from the interior of this American-imported Hummer, "*C'est tout à fait normal pour moi d'aimer l'argent et de tout faire pour en avoir le plus possible*" (Les enfants du rap). However, although groups like Fonky Family admit that rap is "*un moyen de remplir les caisses,*" they insist that this result of rapping is only secondary to the M.C.'s function as reporter and representative of the *Banlieue*. In "*La foi et la furie*", they proclaim:

On défend le Hip Hop de rue avec furie

On descend les faux et les intrus, c'est une tuerie

Bouges mec, cherche pas ce qui cloche

On représente nos proches

Avant de penser à nos poches, gazier. (Fonky Family, "La foi...")

First and foremost, the French rapper must tell the story of his people and act a mouthpiece to this marginalized population of France.



LA BANLIEUE—ANOTHER WORLD WITHIN FRANCE'S BORDERS

"*Y a un monde entre nous.*"

-Akhenaton of IAM

"Nous" by IAM

IAM's 2003 release, *Revoir un printemps*, contains a key song illustrating the cultural abyss that divides *la Banlieue*

from the rest of France. Telling the story of her trip to a Parisian suburb, Nancy Honicker observes, "The route from Paris to its *Banlieues* remains the passage between two different worlds" (Honicker 32). "*Nous*" discusses the conditions of this "other world" surrounding France's

cities (centers of mainstream French culture), exposing the falsehood of over-generalized statements used to keep the *Banlieue* population separated from the rest of France.



LYRICS

Artist: IAM feat. Kanya Samet
Title: Nous
Album: Revoir un printemps
Year: 2003

Kayna Samet:

Ouais, t'en sais quoi, c'qu'on a dans l'ventre?
Et c'qui ronge à sang nos vies?
Ouais, mec, t'en sais quoi?
Qu'est ce que t'inventes à faire de nous une phobie?
C'est.... Fils d'immigrés, familles nombreuses
Du fin fond des cités dortoirs
Jusqu'à notre dernier souffle, on gard'ra espoir

{Refrain:}

Génération lassée d'être blasée
Regards froids et têtes rasées
Les pieds dans la boue au fond d'la fosse
Mais on grimpe aux barbelés par la force, ouais...
Génération, lassée d'être blasée
Métissés, métèques ou basanés
On marche avec des trous au fond des poches
Mais on grimpe aux barbelés par la force, ouais. ...

Akhenaton:

Regarde nous, a-t-on l'air de français d'souche?
Ou de suspects à l'occasion, disons ce fossé d'sous
C'est la trappe qu'on actionne, et not'sang c'est le soufre, impossible
De dialoguer, entre nos verbes c'est le gouffre, le temps m'essouffle
Nous, otages de Ronald, not' révérend Moon
C'est fou! Qui aurait pu dire qu'on se serait fait niquer un beau jour par un clown
Bombardés d'crack, sous les pas, les doses et les pipes craquent
Bagarres au cutter dont nos corps affichent les stigmates
Nous, dont les caisses font qu'les flics matent
Rien d'beau s'assort à nos gueules, et l'fisc fait sa partie d'maths
Repas d'maman gâchés par une O.D. de Kit Kat
On avance cagoulés, un sale vécu jonché de fric-frac
Nous le sujet tabou dans leur bouche dire qu'on est bien
C'est l'drame, ils rappliquent seulement si ça crame
La vie est courte, ils captent pas qu'on soit si speed
Ils comprennent pas qu'des frères et soeurs disciplinés défient leurs stupides

statistiques

Nous, enfants d'hier, pères aujourd'hui
La mauvaise graine se répand, dur de la faire taire aujourd'hui
Ça à l'air tranquille comme ça, toi, tu subis les fouilles?
Y'a un monde entre nous, c'est vrai, qu'est ce que tu casses les couilles!
Nous, méfiants depuis qu'on est écoliers, vrais
Sincères, entiers, patients, francs du collier
Quand même faut pas déconner car ce sont nos ménages qui consomment
La rage nous consume, quand ça va mal, c'est nous qu'on sonne
Depuis l'enfance, ce sont les mêmes, c'est nous qu'on somme pour y remédier
Un bon cocktail de voyelles et de consonnes
La bombe agricole, Nous

{au Refrain}

Shurik'N:

Nous, enfants des halls gris d'ici et d'ailleurs grains de riz
Dans le rouage, digue où font naufrage leurs exquis
Plein de peur, l'inconnu qui dérange s'extirpant doucement de la fange
Pas prévu au départ, chaque réussite a sa place dans un Strange
Fils du Viêt-nam urbain, des cales plein les mains, fiers en diable
Plus capables que coupables
Ils le cachent car ils savent que même les pieds dans le sable
Leur ciel est touchable comme leurs chaises et leurs billets
Sans se plier ni piller
Nous, l'sang des déracinés au tracé dessiné à l'encre
Magique défiant leur logique beaucoup ont résisté
Mais peu l'ébruitent, seuls les bris de vitres suscitent l'intérêt
De l'oeil vicieux de la télé au sensas attelée
Enfants de mensonges, cent fois séculaires
Fruits des centres de tri où on éloigne les cerfs des hautes sphères
Où seul l'élite passe la barrière pendant que nos pères cassent de la pierre
Parce que personne veut le faire
Et je dis personne pour le con qui clame qu'on vole son salaire
Nous, dont ils savent peu et parlent trop, la hotte accrochée dans le dos
Faut au moins ça pour tout ce qu'on porte comme chapeaux
J'avoue que parfois que c'est de l'intérieur que frappe le couteau
Et les meilleurs tombent servant de repas aux infos
Nous, autodidactes aux salades, préférant l'acte c'est parce qu'on
En est pas qu'on tire la cloche avant la débâcle
Cruel dernier acte éclectique la masse se déplace perçue comme une menace
Nous, le reflet dans leur glace

Kayna Samet:

On pousse, comme la mauvaise herbe, on sait déjà
C'que le sort nous réserve à chaque faux pas

T'inquiète, on a nos réserves de coups d'éclats
Même si toi, tu t'énerves, nous on s'en bat
On pousse, comme la mauvaise herbe, on sait déjà
C'que le sort nous réserve à chaque faux pas
T'inquiète, on a nos réserves de coups d'éclats
Même si toi, tu t'énerves, nous on s'en bat

{ Scratch solo: }
Maintenant le combat se perpétue et se transporte dans la rue

ANALYSIS OF LYRICS

Performed by group member Akhenaton, son of Italian immigrants, the first verse commences poignantly with the question:

Regarde-nous. A-t-on l'air de Français de souche?

The term "*Français de souche*," often used in the discourse of far right organizations such as the *Front National* who oppose the permissiveness of France's current political stance vis-à-vis immigration, opens this song by catching the attention of those organizations. The song is thus, though not exclusively, addressed to those who sympathize with the ideals of such individuals as presidential hopeful, Jean-Marie LePen. In Sinik's song, "Sarkozic," he gives his impressions of the *Front National*:

Comprenez que dans nos têtes c'est le foutoir

Jean-Marie Le Pen est un porc plus dangereux que le port du foulard.

(Sinik, "Sarkozic")

IAM member, Shurik'N, also shares his observations about the precariousness of the Front National in his song, "Où je vis:"

Les fanatiques se lavent dans des bains de sang impur

...

On a eu deux guerres, Hitler

Et y'a encore des gens avec le même genre d'idées. (Shurik'N, "Où je vis")

The allusion to *La Marseillaise* with the words "*sang impur*," demonstrates the F.N.'s assertion that those of foreign origin can not be French. Indeed, Shurik'N suggests that they do not feel French when he refers to *Banlieusards* as "*enfants des hall gris*," instead of "*enfants de la patrie*," yet another ironic allusion to France's national anthem. Instead of being



members of French society, they are confined by ideologies and prejudices to their *cités*. Shurik'N cautions the listener that subscribing to the F.N.'s hateful ideology will inevitably lead to death and destruction. IAM will then address many of the F.N.'s criticisms against the *Banlieue*'s population in an attempt to demystify the myths promulgated by this radical group.

But first IAM impresses upon the listener the reality of a France divided:

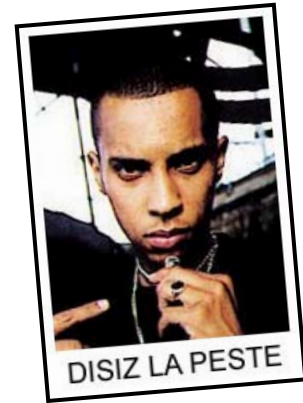
Y'a un monde entre nous, c'est vrai, qu'est ce que tu casses les couilles!

Because of race ancestral origin, the *Banlieusard* feel ostracized from mainstream society. Honicker explains:

There is a deep sense of exclusion, discrimination, and difference: but there is also a strong aspiration to be accepted by the general population as French ... The young people rage on about the lack of opportunity and about the racism and intolerance of the French. (Honicker 34)

The discrimination is such that when rappers use the word "*Français*," they generally refer to the non-*Banlieue* population. Despite their attempts to be integrated, Disiz la Peste reports:

J'étais qu'un jeune de Banlieue
Maintenant je vends des disques et des films
Mais je suis toujours un jeune de Banlieue
A leurs yeux
Tout ceux qui me parlent
Avec condescendance
Qui croient faire des blagues toutes péraves
On n'a pas le même sens
Ni de l'humour ni de l'amour
Et pour la France peu importe ce que je ferais
A jamais dans sa conscience
Je serais qu'un jeune de Banlieue. (Disiz la Peste)



Although successful, he is still not accepted into "French" society because of the great division in the minds of the French. IAM talks about reasons for this social exclusion and the artificial distinction between the *Banlieusard* and the French.

The first of the differences separating the *Banlieue* from the rest of France is its financial state:

Regarde nous a-t-on l'air de français d'souche ?
Ou de suspects à l'occasion, disons ce fossé d'sous

*C'est la trappe qu'on actionne, et not'sang c'est le soufre, impossible
De dialoguer, entre nos verbes c'est le gouffre, le temps m'essouffle.*

Akhenaton alludes to a “*fossé d’sous*,” which connotes the economic division existing between the *Banlieue*’s inhabitants and those who inhabit the cities. One of the most prevalent conditions characterizing the *Banlieue* is its abject poverty. Cluttered with *HLM*²¹s, France’s suburbs are now synonymous with poor living conditions. In the Middle Ages, the cities of France were surrounded by walls as a protection from the barbarians lurking outside and many of the walls remained intact until modernity. Centuries later in 1860, under Napoleon III’s commission, architect Baron Georges-Eugène Haussman redesigned Paris, leveling entire quartiers in order to start from scratch. Consequently, but not accidentally, the lower classes were pushed out of the cities and into the surrounding areas—*la Banlieue*. In the 1940’s, ambitious urban architects such as Jacques-Henri Labourdette, Emile Aillaud, and Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, alias “Le Corbusier,” saw the need to organize the chaotic living conditions of the *Banlieusard* and to provide more housing. Originally conceived to elevate the conditions of the lower working class, spacious *cités* were constructed in France’s *Banlieues*. One of the architects, Adolf Loos proclaimed, “*La cité du XX^e siècle sera éblouissante et nue, comme Sion, la ville sainte, la capitale du ciel*” (Chevalier). However, because of costs, these *grands ensembles* did not follow the original plans and the glass and other materials intended to provide light and beauty were economically replaced by concrete. Consequently, these *cités* “*sont considérés aujourd’hui, avec la politique publique qui les a programmés, comme une vaste erreur collective*” (Fourcaut

²¹ **HLM** *Habitation à loyer modéré*. Poor housing developments made with minimal costs in order to keep rent affordable for those with low income.

198). Thus the *Banlieusard* now inhabits these concrete dwellings, removed geographically and financially from mainstream French society.

Further elaboration of the *Banlieue*'s poverty is found in a line of the chorus:

On marche avec des trous au fond de la poche.

The word "*fossé*" also connotes the grave, an image that, when coupled with the reference to brimstone ("*notre sang c'est le soufre*") gives the listener the impression of the *Banlieue* as a living hell, partly due to its economic deficiency.

In the four bars cited above, the rapper articulates the line between the *Banlieusard* and the French, not only economically, but racially. The French expression, "*Ça sent le soufre*" translates: "Something isn't right here." Thus, if their blood is the *soufre*, then their race is what does not seem to fit into the "French" way of living. The *Banlieue* population, though difficult to define with a blanket statement, is home to countless members of France's vast immigrant population. The word "countless" is used in this case quite literally, as France's laws prohibit the inquiry of a person's race or religion in its censuses. In her article, "On the Outside Looking In: Paris and its *Banlieues*," Nancy Honicker" explains,

...the French Republic is blind by law. Each citizen is considered as an individual, freed from the burdens of race, religion, ethnic origins, and sex; and citizenship is a vocation, where it is each individual's sacred duty to uphold the Republic's ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. For this reason, the French government keeps no official statistics on the race, religion, or ethnic origins of its citizens. What's more, in most instances, it

is against the law for public or private institutions to collect such data"
(Honicker 35).

The second principal of the country's national slogan—*égalité*—holds a meaning that thus differs from the US's definition of equality: it ensures French residents the right to equal anonymity regarding racial, religious, or other affiliations. Regarding the controversial *affaire du foulard*, many Americans perceive France's banning of all religious symbols—crosses, veils, yamakas, and so forth—in the public school system as an infringement of one's religious rights. However, French lawmakers deemed such outward symbols disruptive to the each student's right to an equal educational experience, purely secular in every way possible.

But despite the Republic's official stance on racial equality, the *Banlieue* population represented by its rap artists nevertheless feels that their race *is* a factor in how they are viewed by the rest of France. The fifth and sixth lines of the chorus,

Génération, lassée d'être blasée

Métissés, métèques ou basanés,

give a typical profile of the *Banlieusard*. Generally speaking, France's marginalized population consists of low-income families and immigrants, a great number of which are of North African origin²². This last demographic phenomenon is due to France's former colonies and current protectorates, namely Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Many from black African countries, such as Senegal and the Congo have also been able to find their

²² Although the *Banlieue* houses many North African's, they do not, by any means, constitute the entirety of its inhabitants. Many attempt to categorize the *Banlieue's* population, but, as the *Université de Bordeaux's* Agnès Villechaise points out, "*Tout essai de définition sociologique de ces classes populaires semble voué à l'échec*" (Villechaise 351). The *Banlieue* is also home to those of European-French origin, as well as immigrants from many countries, including China, Portugal, and Germany. However, due to the general perception of the *Banlieusard* as North African or Black (and due to the scarcity of Chinese-French rappers) this thesis focuses on the stereotypical *Zonard* represented in French rap music.

way to France for the same reason. According to the French M.C., skin color plays a capital role in the non-*Banlieue* population's perception of those who dwell in the *cités*. In Sniper's song "Pris pour cible," reggae rapper Black Renega describes others' reaction at his appearance:

Regarde c'est grave, ils nous jugent par notre apparence
Pour eux "jeunes de cité" rime seulement avec "délinquance"
Tout ça pour une couleur, une origine qui ne reflète pas leur France
Ça m'fait flipper quand j'y pense
Alors savoir qu'est-ce qui les poussent à nous mettre tous dans le même
sac?
Pourquoi quand j'croise une vieille, elle s'agrippe à son sac?
Pourquoi quand je cherche un taf je vois les portes se fermer?
Pourquoi on me traite de voleur alors que je n'ai encore rien volé?
(Sniper, "Pris pour...")

The "ils" in question are the French who consider the young *Banlieusard* as non-French. Earlier in the same song, another group member, Aketo recounts ironically,

Nos têtes sont aigries car de l'étranger on se méfie (Sniper, "Pris pour...").

Although much of the Arab *Banlieue* population, especially the generation responsible for the creation of France's rap music, consists of second-generation immigrants, meaning that they were born and raised in France—

On est né sur le sol français contrairement à nos rent-pa,²³ (Sniper, "Pris pour...")

²³ **rent-pa**

Verlan for parent(s).

— their skin color nevertheless categorizes them as foreigners in the eyes of many. In "Brûle," Aketo refers to himself as a:

*Jeune issu de l'immigration, comme ils aiment tant le rappeler
Ca fait 30 ans qu'ils font que parler d'intégration—je me sens pas
français. (Sniper, "Brûle")*

Despite his official French citizenship and having been born on the soil of "*Douce France*" (Trénet), society still does not seem to accept him as French because of his skin color. In response to those who do not consider the *Banlieusard* as part of their society, Disiz la Peste simply states on "*Un jeune de Banlieue*:"

On vit ici avec vous. (Disiz la Peste)

The *Banlieusard* is born in France, he lives in France, and has French citizenship—he feels he deserves the right to be called "French."

The *Banlieusard* is seen not only as a foreigner, but also as a criminal. The mere sight or thought of the "*jeunes de cité*" evokes delinquency in the minds of the French, hence Blacko's rhetorical question:

*Pourquoi quand j'croise une vieille elle s'agrippe à son sac? ,” (Sniper,
"Pris pour...")*

the answer to which is that crime and violence are expected of the *Banlieusard*. He is treated as a thief, "*alors qu'[il] n'a encore rien volé*" (Sniper, *Pris pour cible*). He is identifiable by his race or fashion—baggy jeans with athletic apparel and often shaved head—and to many, his proximity constitutes a threat. After alluding to that which



gives the right extremist the right to inhabit the Hexagon, being “*Français de souche*,” Akhenaton then asks if he and his fellow *Banlieusards* seem more like “*suspects à l’occasion*.” The theme of the *Banlieusard* as a scapegoat for France’s woes recurs throughout the song, beginning with Kayna Samet’s first vocals:

Qu’est-ce que t’inventes à faire de nous une phobie”

The “*nous*” is immediately explained as referring to the

Fils d’immigrés, familles nombreuses du fin fond des cités dortoirs.

According to Shurik’N’s lyrics, this misconception of the *Banlieusard* as inherently delinquent is a product of ignorance, for people fear that which is new or different. In his verse, he describes the general French population as being “*Plein de peur*” because of the “*inconnu qui dérange*” schemas of what it is to be French and part of society.

They are not only seen as criminals, but exaggeratedly as the sole source of France’s crime and violence. Shurik’N observes,

Cruel dernier act, la masse se déplace perçue comme une menace,

again showing how the *Banlieusard’s* mere presence announces potential violence.

Rapper Seyfu comments on this overgeneralization in his song, “*La vie qui va avec*,” saying,

Quand tu parles de técis²⁴, y’a “délinquances” qui va avec. (Sefyu)

However, Shurik’N does not pretend naively that his demographic is completely innocent of the allegations. He concedes that violence is, in fact, a sad reality among his people:

J’avoue que parfois que c’est de l’intérieur que frappe le couteau.

Akhenaton, too, speaks of

Bagarres au cutter dont nos corps affichent les stigmates,

²⁴ técis

Verlan for cités.

not only admitting to the violence in the *Banlieue*, but also of giving us an insight into the type of violence that occurs in the cités. Contrary to the United States ghettos, France's gangs are not as notorious for their firearms and gun-related violence, but rather for the use of other weapons, such as baseball bats, box cutters, knives and the traditional, but effective, fists and feet.

This concept of the intrinsically violent *Banlieusard* also stems from the media's portrayal of the *Banlieue*. AKH uses an interesting lexicon when speaking of fights in the cités. He says,

*Bagarres au cutter **dont nos corps affichent les stigmates*** (bold added).

Aside from simple imagery, this biblical reference unveils a deeper meaning. The allusion to the wounds of Jesus Christ insinuates a connection between this populace and the Christ, namely that of scapegoat. Jesus is said to have suffered innocently for the sins of mankind, being sentenced to death for crimes he did not commit. Similarly, the *Banlieusard*, has become the target of the F.N. and the media. The latter's unique focus on the violent occurrences in the *Banlieue* plays a significant role in negatively swaying the public's opinion concerning France's suburbs and its dwellers. Akhenaton further explains the media's contribution to the exploitation of the *Zonard* as a scapegoat for France's woes:

*La rage nous consume, quand ça va mal, c'est nous qu'on sonne
Depuis l'enfance, ce sont les mêmes, c'est nous qu'on somme pour y
remédier.*

The media sums up this marginalized people and attributes France's violence uniquely to them. He then reproaches the media for its one-sided coverage:

C'est l'drame, ils rappliquent seulement si ça crame.

This is a particularly interesting choice of words when the listener considers the events of October, 2005. “*Cramer*” is precisely what cars in the Parisian suburbs did during the “Paris Riots,” a reaction to the death of two *Banlieusard* adolescents who were electrocuted while fleeing the police. During the two months following those deaths, *Banlieue* streets across France were filled with rioters who, among other illegal forms of protest, burned cars. While rioters maintain that the wrongful death of these youth was the last straw that sent them into a riot, several politicians believed to have traced the riots' true cause back to the lyrics of French rap songs. Seven groups and artists in particular—113, Smala, Ministère A.M.E.R, Lunatic, Fab, Salif, and Monsieur R—were singled out for their offensive lyrics. Deputy Grodidier maintains, “*Le message de violence de ces rappers reçu par des jeunes déracinés, déculturés, peut légitimer chez eux l'incivilité, au pire le terrorisme*” (Kessous). However, it is also arguable that instead of encouraging or threatening violence, these rappers are simply warning the listener of impending tragedy if France makes no effort to ameliorate conditions in the *Banlieue*. Released in 2003, “*Nous*” could be taken as a warning sign about these riots, for it demonstrates the *Banlieusard*'s belief that in order to attract the attention of the media and thus be heard on an issue, something must “burn.” In their song, “La France,” Sniper's lead M.C. El Tunisiano deplores his people's inability to surmount their oppression because of this short-sightedness. He says,

*Car de nos jours, ça sert à rien de gueuler, de parler à des murs
À croire que le seul moyen de s'faire entendre est de brûler des voitures,
(Sniper, "La France")*

again showing us the *Banlieusard*'s tendency toward France's long tradition of car-burning as a means of expression. This song was also released years before the Paris riots and may have served as a caution of what the *Banlieusard* believed necessary in order to bring about a change. French rap abounds with examples of warnings of disaster that these politicians perceive to be threats. On "On dit ce qu'on pense," performed by Don Choa, Menzo, and Sista Micky, we hear:

Toujours les mêmes condamnés

L'état cherche des cobayes

Mais bientôt la roue va tourner

Franchement y'a des batailles, (Don Choa)

a sure sign that a change is likely to happen. In "Les enfants du rap," La Fouine's friend comments:

Si on avait écouté le rap, on aurait pu éviter beaucoup d'choses, (Les enfants du rap)

suggesting that perhaps the rapper, who lives among the *Banlieusard* and completely understands his mentality, generally sharing that same mindstate, is to be taken seriously when making such a prediction. The chorus of "Nous" depicts the *Banlieusard* as part of a

Génération lassée d'être blasée.

They tire of passivity, they want to be heard, and they have the means by which to grab the people's attention:

T'inquiète, on a nos réserves de coups d'éclats.

Further evidence of the media's selective coverage in the *Banlieue* manifests itself in Shurik'N's lament:

Les meilleurs tombent servant de repas aux infos.

According to IAM, violence is essentially the sole act that seems to merit the news' attention, while the sources of that violence—adverse conditions in the *Banlieue*, such as poverty, social exclusion, police violence and the State's negligence toward the *Zonards*—go unnoticed. Also omitted from the news are members of the *Banlieue* community who shatter the *Banlieusard* reputation of delinquency. This omission is identified at multiple occurrences in this song, as is the case in Shurik'N's following four bars:

Nous, l'sang des déracinés au tracé dessiné à l'encre

Magique défiant leur logique beaucoup ont résisté

Mais peu l'ébruitent, seuls les bris de vitres suscitent l'intérêt

De l'oeil vicieux de la télé au sensas attelée.

Countless *Zonards* do not fit the unflattering mold of delinquency rhetorically forged by the Front National. However, this message is not communicated to the rest of France because of the media's indifference toward that which does not promote ratings, a task aptly accomplished by the portrayal of crime and violence. Thus it is because of the media that the French

*...comprennent pas qu'des frères et soeurs disciplinés défient leurs
stupides statistiques,*

for they are virtually never shown anything besides that for which the typical television viewer hungers: sex, drugs, and violence. In his song “Je zappe et je mate,” former Ministère A.M.E.R. member, Passi, agrees:

Trop de drogues, de guerre, de sexe à la télé. (Passi, "Je zappe...")

Shurik'N goes so far as to suggest that a deliberate effort is being made to suppress news of the capabilities and qualities of the cités' inhabitants:

Fils du Viêt-nam urbain, des cales plein les mains, fiers en diable

Plus capables que coupables

Ils [le médias] le cachent car ils savent que même les pieds dans le sable

Leur ciel est touchable comme leurs chaises et leurs billets

Sans se plier ni piller.

The *Banlieusards* discussed in these four bars are those capable of success without compromise of morals or resorting to crime. But, according to Shurik'N, these cases are “hidden” because this population’s potential for greatness is a “*menace*” to the power of extremists who seek the containment of the immigrant population. It is also a threat to the way to the "French" way of life. Shurik'N hints that if the *Banlieusard* was recognized for his qualities and thus able to escape the poverty in which he dwells, the comforts now enjoyed by the non-*Banlieue* population ("*leurs chaises et leurs billets*") could be his. The threat of this "invasion" keeps the French population wary of the *Banlieusard* and may be a reason for its media's unbalanced *Banlieue* coverage.

“AKH” and “Oncle Shu” address yet another myth propagated by anti-immigration groups: immigrants weaken the economy. Akhenaton reminds these groups:

*Quand même, faut pas déconner, car ce sont nos ménages qui
consomment,*

pointing out that as consumers with the same needs as other French citizens, those populating the *grands ensembles* contribute to France's economic well-being. Shurik'N then tackles the economic concern that immigrants take jobs that would otherwise be filled by "French" people.

*Fruits des centres de tri où on éloigne les cerfs des hautes sphères
Où seul l'élite passe la barrière pendant que nos pères cassent de la pierre
Parce que personne veut le faire
Et je dis « personne » pour le con qui clame qu'on vole son salaire.*

The M.C. draws attention to the fact that the occupations often held by the lower class, such as factory worker, are those that people find the least desirable. Thus, no salaries are being "stolen" and the French economy, in reality, benefits from the presence of these immigrants, who are an essential element in the great capitalist machine, a "*digue*" in the "*rouage*," in the words of Shurik'N.

Another aspect distinguishing the *Banlieue* from other parts of France is the police conduct. Whereas within the borders of France's cities, the police are viewed as keepers of the peace, beyond the city limits the police are seen as enemies, an overly brutal force guilty of abusing its power to poison the existence of the *Banlieusard*. With his talent for posing direct questions that make the listener consider his message, Akhenaton asks,

Ça à l'air tranquille comme ça, toi, tu subis les fouilles?

In "On dit ce qu'on pense," Menzo describes this police violence:

Mais les flics les shootent sans hésiter

Coups de matraque à volonté

Mais jusqu'où les hommes iront dans leur perversité? (Don Choa, Menzo)

He also mentions the verbal abuse from these State representatives,

Faut se hisser soi-même au sommet, on glisse entre danger et vice

Insultes de la police, les patrons veulent serrer les vis. (Don Choa,

Menzo)

The Police's role as an enemy instead of an ally creates a feeling of instability in the *Banlieue*, further separating it from the rest of France.

Yet despite the various factors weighing the *Banlieusard* down, he refuses to abandon the hope of changing his conditions. "Nous"'s chorus reveals his determination to better his situation and be heard:

Les pieds dans la boue au fond d'la fosse

On grimpe aux barbelés par la force, ouais.

He will not relent or give into despair, for he sees himself as inherently equal to the rest of France. In "*Bad Boys de Marseille 2*," Akhenaton appeals to the listener's reason in order to assert his equality:

Je peux quand même apprécier un coucher de soleil comme vous.

(Akhenaton, "*Bad Boys de Marseille 2*")

The last line of the Kanya Samet's introductory vocals capture the *Banlieusard*'s resolve to struggle for a better life:

Jusqu'à notre dernier souffle, on gard'ra l'espoir.

Their situation is unjust, but not hopeless.

CAUSES OF *BANLIEUE* VIOLENCE

"Coupable, mais à qui la faute?"

-Awax of Mafia Trece

The French rapper does not deny the existence of violence in his *Banlieue*. But while so many blame the *Banlieusard* or his music for the causing that violence, the M.C. delves into the occurrences in his daily life to identify the violence's true causes. As a result, an exploration of his lyrics enables us to determine what he deems the causal factors contributing to *Banlieue* violence

Cause #1: The French Government

"L'Etat reste le plus grand des voyous."

-Fonky Family

"LA FRANCE" BY SNIPER

Background

In their highly controversial song, "La France," Val d'Oisien group, Sniper, places the causality of the violence in their community on the Republic's apparent indifference—and possibly, its pleasure—



toward the suffering of the *Banlieusard*. In 2005, the song's heavily charged lyrics became the legal target of Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, who sought Sniper's prosecution on the grounds that they had "*incité à blesser et tuer les fonctionnaires de police et représentants de l'Etat en chantant leur tube 'La France'*" (TF1.fr). The song was brought to Minister Sarkozy's attention by an organization of young far-right extremists known as "*Jeunesse identitaire*." The faction was founded by two members of "*Unité radicale*" another extremist group which was disbanded by the government after one of its members, Maxime Brunerie, attempted to assassinate President Jacques Chirac. The National Assembly described their group as follows:

...Considérant que le groupement de fait "Unité radicale" propage, dans ses publications, intitulées Résistance! et Jeune Résistance, ainsi que lors des rassemblements qu'il organise, des idées tendant à encourager la discrimination, la haine et la violence à l'égard de certains groupes de personnes, notamment des étrangers présents sur le territoire français et des Français issus de l'immigration ; qu'il prône également l'antisémitisme ; Considérant que, pour des raisons inhérentes aux nécessités de l'ordre public, il convient de réprimer les manifestations d'une idéologie raciste et discriminatoire...

(francepolitique.free.fr)

According to Sniper's song "Itinéraire d'un polémique" written about the events leading up to their trial, these young radicals spread their propaganda during their shows:

Puis ils se sont mobilisés, même organisés

Appelant leurs militants à militer et à nous mépriser

Nous traitant de frisés, balançant leurs tracts dans nos concerts

Ils disent que notre rap fout le cancer

Ils parlent d'appel au meurtre mais arrêtez vos conneries

Leur réseau est celui de Maxime Brunerie (Sniper, "Itinéraire d'une...")

By figuratively listing "causing cancer" among the allegations made by *Jeunesse Identitaire* about Sniper's lyrics, the rappers demonstrate the absurdity of these accusations, the most serious of which is that their music is a call to arms and to murder. *Jeunesse identitaire* petitioned the banning of "La France" to Sarkozy, who then sought legal action against the group. M.C. Bachir Baccour, alias "Tunisiano," recounts:

On a vu venir nos fans, mais pas vu venir l'ennemi

Cette unité radicale devenue identitaire

En vérité qui aimerait nous ôter nos cartes d'identité

Ce qu'ils scandent est cendré, on fait la guerre à des ékheb

Derrière un clavier, leur propagande est sur le web

Ils parlent de libérer la France de cette islamisation

Appellent à brûler les mosquées et à la mobilisation

Ils ont repris nos textes mais déformé nos propos

Sorti les phases de leur contexte en nous traitant de fachos.

Tunisiano points out the irony of being called « fascists » by an anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic organization :

S'acharnent, ils insistent, mais que dire, que faire,

Nous sommes traités de racistes par les gosses à Hitler,

Futurs nazis, allergique à la couleur

Assis à l'extrême droite, votre discours a fait fureur,

He goes on to allude to the evils of racism, even characterizing the Front National's leader as the devil.

Jeunes crapules, votre leader a des cornes,

Car Jean-Marie vous manipule, vous avez dépassé les bornes,

Vous portez sa haine et sa foi de damné,

Vous vivez dans la peine cachée derrière une croix gammée.

However, Sniper's four members "Tunisiano," "Aketo" (Riad Selmi), "Black Renega" (Karl Appela), and "DJ Boudj" (Boudjema Machouche) were found innocent of the charges. "La France" remains a landmark musical work because of the power of the words used by Sniper to identify the reasons for the *Banlieue*'s violent conditions and to rally their fellow *Banlieusards* to an awareness of the need for change.

Lyrics

| | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| Artist: | Sniper |
| Title: | La France |
| Album: | Du rire aux larmes |
| Year: | 1999 |

Tunisiano:

On est tous solidaire face à la merde à la galère
Sortir la tête de la misère pour que les gens nous considère
En tant que citoyen non en tant que chien
La France nous ronge à un point
de ne plus avoir confiance en son prochain
Législation conçue pour nous descendre
frères derrière les barreaux et maintenant
Ils penseraient que l'on pourrait se rendre
On est pas dupe en plus on est tous chaud
Pour mission exterminer les ministres et les fachos
car de nos jours, ça sert à rien de gueuler, de parler à des murs
À croire que le seul moyen de s'faire entendre est de brûler des voitures
Un putain de système haineux, cramé mais après tout
Ça avance pas et je sais que ça les arrange si on se bouffe entre nous

Soit disante démocratie aux yeux d'un peuple endormi
Les droits de l'homme franchement où ils sont passés
Faut faire en somme que ça change et que des frères cessent
D'être chassés en charter c'est nos frères qui j'artère rapatriement
Et maintenant la haine coule dans nos artères
Nous faire taire franchement ça serait impossible quand on s'aperçoit
Que la plus part du temps c'est nous qu'ils prennent pour cible

{Refrain:}

La France est une garce et on s'est fait trahir
Le système voilà ce qui nous pousse à les haïr
La haine c'est ce qui rend nos propos vulgaires
On nique la France sous une tendance de musique populaire
On est d'accord et on se moque des répressions
On se fou de la république et de la liberté d'expression
Faudrait changer les lois et pouvoir voir
Bientôt à l'Élysée des Arabes et des Noirs au pouvoir

Faut que ça pète! Tu sais que le système nous marche dessus
Nous on baisse pas la tête on est pas prêts de s'avouer vaincus
Des frères béton tous victime de trahison
T'façon si y aurait pas de balance y aurait personne en prison
La délinquance augmente même les plus jeunes s'y mettent
Pètent des bus parlent de braquage et à l'école ils rackettent
Des rondes de flics toujours là pour nous pourrir la vie
Attendent de te serrer tout seul et te font voir du pays
Emeut qui explose ça commence par interpellation
Suivie de coups de bâtons et ça se finit par incarcération
T'façon on se démerde, mec ici on survie
Fume des substances nocives pour apaiser les ennuis
La galère n'arrange rien au contraire elle empire les choses
Si certains prennent des doses c'est pour penser à autre chose
Les frères sont armés jusqu'aux dents, tous prêts à faire la guerre
Ça va du gun jusqu'au fusil à pompe, pitbull et rotweiller
A quoi ça mène? Embrouille de cité, on se tape dessus
Mais tu te mets à chialer lorsque ton pote se fait tirer dessus
Encore un bico ou un négro, les babylons sont fiers
Ça les arrangent ce coup là y aura pas besoin de bavure policière
Frère je lance un appel, on est là pour tout niquer
Leur laisser des traces et des séquelles avant de crever

{ au Refrain }

La France aux Français, tant que j'y serais ce sera impossible
Par mesure du possible je viens cracher des faits inadmissibles
A vrai dire les zincs en perdent le sourire

Obligés de courir certains ont eu le malheur de mourir
Des homicides volontaires j'ai une pensée pour leurs mères
Blessés par un décès, bavures classées en simple faits divers
Contrôle qui part en couilles, des potes s'font serrer par les keufs
J'ai le saïme lorsque je jette des pavés sur les J9
Mes potes je les aiment c'est pour ça que je les laisserais jamais béton
Même s'il y en a qui béton, tu sais on est tous des jeunes du béton
A présent 'y a plus de bluffe on vient dire toute la vérité
Faut leur en faire baver v'la la seule chose qu'ils ont mérités
Ma parole les gars s'il y en a un qui se la joue véner
Si y veut s'la raconter cet enfoiré j'vais lui baiser sa mère
T'façon j'ai plus rien à perdre, j'aimerais les faire pendre
Non c'est pas parce qu'il porte un flingue qui peut penser mettre à l'amende
La vérité est masquée, à savoir ce qui s'est passé
Le mystère des G.A.V. un blème qui ne pourra être démasqué
Je dédis ce texte à toute mes gardes à vue
Ils m'en on fait baver les enculés mais ils ont pas tout vu

{ au Refrain, x2 }

2 ou 3, on reçoit, c'est comme ça qu'ça sé-pa
Contrôle musclé, la BAC passe et demande tes pier-pa
Si j'les ai pas, là ça commence par insulter ta mère, ta soeur, tes frères
Ca dégénère et tu t'fais pé-ta
Tunisiano, la délinquance en moi, la haine en moi
Donc s'il faut insulter leurs mères, pour ça ayez confiance en moi
Dans la rue, règlement de compte entre Cyril et Mamadou
La police est intervenue et a interpellé l'agresseur
Dans la rue, règlement de compte entre Badou et Mamadou
La police a tout vu et est restée en tant que spectateur
Donc est-ce que les gens naissent égaux en droit à l'endroit où ils naissent?
J'crois pas dans l'fond, j'travailles pour ton pays, m'bat pour ton pays
Persécution alors que j'fais gagner d'argent à ton pays
La France est une garce et on s'est fait trahir
Mon seul souhait désormais est de nous voir les envahir
'Y a trop de faits marquants donc j'suis obligé d'les citer
Un flic tue un homme froidement et s'trouve acquitté
Simple banalité? Non, 'y a trop d'inégalités
Justice à deux vitesses, ils assassinent en toute légalité
Ils nous croient débiles mais quand ça pète dans les cités
Ils canalisent la révolte pour éviter la guerre civile
Hé ouais, c'est pour quelle raison qu'on casse tout et qu'on s'défoule
C'est qu'si les larmes coulent, le sang coule

Tunisiano : La France est une garce

Tous : Ouais ! Ouais !

Tunisiano : La France est une garce
 Tous : Ouais ! Ouais !
 Tunisiano : La France est une garce
 Tous : Ouais ! Ouais !
 Tunisiano : La France est une garce
 Tous : Ouais ! Ouais !
 Tunisiano : Jusqu'à Saint-Denis
 Tous : On est tous solidaires !
 Tunisiano : Garges Sarcelles aussi
 Tous : On est tous solidaires !
 On n'est pas prêts d'se taire, lève ton doigt en l'air, l'Etat nique sa mère !
 Tunisiano : Dans toutes les cités
 Tous : On est tous solidaires !
 Tunisiano : Quand ça part en couille
 Tous : On est tous solidaires !
 Tunisiano : Négros et bougnoules
 Tous : On est tous solidaires !
 On n'est pas prêts d'se taire, lève ton doigt en l'air, l'Etat nique sa mère !

Analysis of Lyrics

Teeming with electricity, this song begins by an immediate unification of the *Banlieusard* listener,

On est tous solidaires face à la merde, à la galère.

This song makes a repeated effort to create a sense of unity among this marginalized population, which later serves to call the people to action in order to change the unjust system that permits their lowly conditions. Tunisiano represents a down-trodden people, who want to be heard. Bars 2 and 3 read:

Sortir la tête de la misère pour que les gens nous considèrent

En tant que citoyens non en tant que chiens.

As a great portion of *Banlieusards* are second-generation immigrants, they are often considered as non-French, their skin color clashing with the tint of those with European ancestry. However, Tunisiano's usage of the word "*chiens*" suggests more than the

impression of not belonging to mainstream society. It connotes a perceived sub-human treatment imposed upon the *Banlieusard*, for animals have no legal rights or higher intelligence. Furthermore, dogs are subservient to the members of the human race who are their masters and thus proprietors. The image of the *Banlieusard* as nothing more than an animal is also apparent when Tunisiano talks of his peers being "hunted" by the government:

*Faut faire en somme que ça change et que des frères cessent d'être
chassés.*

Sniper's "*La France*" calls for more than the right to be French: they demand the universal right to be seen as human beings.

Fulfilling his role as reporter of what he sees, Tunisiano is compelled to describe the conditions of the *Banlieue*. He states,

Y a trop de faits marquants donc j'suis obligé d'les citer.

And so he does. He begins by describing the world of crime and violence he inhabits, a world where the people don't live, they survive.

T'façon on se démerde, mec ici on survit.

The youth are caught in a criminal society where they inevitably become involved in delinquent activities, whether by necessity to survive or by imitation.

La délinquance augmente même les plus jeunes s'y mettent

Pètent des bus parlent de braquage et à l'école ils rackettent.

Not only do they turn to violence against others to get by, but they also turn to drugs as a form of escapism from their harsh reality.

Fume des substances nocives pour apaiser les ennuis

La galère n'arrange rien au contraire elle empire les choses

Si certains prennent des doses c'est pour penser à autre chose.

But perhaps the most remarkable aspect described in this text is the ubiquitous hatred in their community.

Et maintenant la haine coule dans nos artères.

The image of hatred flowing through the arteries paints the portrait of a people utterly consumed by it. As the blood is the life force of the body, so too is the hatred the driving force of this song. It is because of this loathing that their words are strong and sometimes offensive.

La haine c'est ce qui rend nos propos vulgaires.

Their rage continues to be heard in the chorus, where the group states "*La France est une garce,*" "*On nique la France,*" and "*On se fout de la République.*" They even seem to wish misery upon France in the last verse: "*Mon seul souhait désormais et de nous voir les envahir.*" It appears that the members of Sniper are nothing more than anti-France, anti-French belligerents who hope for the Republic's demise.



However, when we explore the rest of the lyrics, we clearly find the cause of this hostility:

Le système, voilà ce qui nous pousse à les haïr.

According to this song, the system, referring to the French government and racial elitists, is the source of their woes, and thus the subject of their hatred. The second verse commences with the assertion:

Faut que ça pète! Tu sais que le système nous marche dessus.

They see the government as holding a double-standard concerning the treatment of the *Banlieusard* where the words "*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*" are meaningless. They refer to France as a

Soi-disant démocratie d'un peuple endormi

That does not apply the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme* to all of its citizens. They ask,

Les droits de l'homme, franchement où ils sont passés?

One reason for which they see their government as hypocritical is its permissiveness toward law-enforcement, allowing the latter to abuse its power to mistreat inhabitants of their *quartier*. In their view, the function of the police is to make life unbearable by arbitrary *contrôles d'identité* (a practice in which law-enforcers verify the identity of suspected criminals), brutality, and refraining from intervening when truly needed. In describing daily life, Tunisiano describes the scene as follows:

Des rondes de flics toujours là pour nous pourrir la vie

Attendent de te serrer tout seul et te font voir du pays

Emeute qui explose ça commence par interpellation

Suivie de coups de bâtons et ça se finit par incarcération.

This is a regular occurrence for these youth bullied by those who should protect the rights of French citizens rather than take them away. Another passage from this song lays out the sequence of events during one of these *contrôles* as they spiral out of control:

*Contrôle musclé, la BAC²⁵ passe et demande tes pier-pa
Si j'les ai pas, là ça commence par insulter ta mère, ta soeur, tes frères
Ça dégénère et tu t'fais pé-ta²⁶.*

Because of fear of likely beatings and unjust treatment, they choose to run from the cops.

But this too, can prove to be dangerous:

*A vrai dire les zincs²⁷ en perdent le sourire
Obligés de courir certains ont eu le malheur de mourir.*

These frequent instances of "*contrôle qui part en couilles*²⁸," as Sniper puts it, are coupled with the police's selective intervention in disputes. The rappers give two contrasting reactions by police in two similar situations; their only apparent differentiating factor is the race of the participants:

*Dans la rue, règlement de compte entre Cyril et Mamadou
La police est intervenue et a interpellé l'agresseur
Dans la rue, règlement de compte entre Badou et Mamadou
La police a tout vu et est restée en tant que spectateur.*

In the first conflict between a person of European ancestry and one of African ancestry, the police deemed it necessary to intercede, (presumably on behalf of the light-skinned participant). However, when both parties were of African origin, the police remained unconcerned.

Given the above circumstances and the government's failure to curb police violence in the *Banlieue*, it is not surprising then that these *Zonards* believe that the

²⁵ **BAC** *Brigade anticriminalité*
²⁶ **pé-ta** *Verlan for taper.*
²⁷ **zinc** *Verlan for cousin.*
²⁸ **partir en couilles** *To degenerate, get out of hand.*

government is actually pleased with the violence occurring spontaneously within the *Banlieue* community, independent of police force.

A quoi ça mène, embrouille de cité, on se tape dessus

Mais tu te mets à chialer lorsque ton pote se fait tirer dessus

Encore un bicot²⁹ ou un négro, les babylons³⁰ sont fiers,

Ça les arrange ce coup-là 'y aura pas besoin de bavure policière.

Using the indirect free discourse to quote the government's reaction to violence within the *Banlieue*, "Encore un bicot ou un négro," Sniper gives an insight into what they believe to be the government's mentality. Since the victims are not even "French," no remorse is felt for their death; on the contrary, the politicians are contented, for this diminishing of the *Banlieue*'s population improves the country. Tunisiano reiterates this perceived sadism with the lines:

Un putain de système haineux, cramé mais après tout

Ça avance pas et je sais que ça les arrange si on se bouffe entre nous.

The *système* is seen as not only indifferent to their suffering, but glad of it. Tunisiano calls it a "haineux" system, which suggests a relationship of causality when coupled with the *Banlieusard*'s hatred: it is the system's hatred of the *Banlieusard* that has engendered *Banlieusard* hatred of the system. Fonky Family's proposed solution to this problem is to refrain from *Banlieusard* on *Banlieusard* violence. In their song entitled, "Sans faire couler le sang," they set forth this proposal:

A nous d'leur montrer qu'on est capables

D'avancer soudés

²⁹ **bicot**

Racial slur for person of North African origin. *Arabe*.

³⁰ **babylon**

Police officer, authority, or representative of the state.

Arrêter la violence

Pour qu'on ait plus de chance en France

Je vois des Arabes, des Noirs pleins de haine

Vivre séparés dans les mêmes quartiers

S'entretuer

C'est ce que veut la société

Nous voir nous détruire

C'est ce qui les excite

Triste destinée

Avançons déterminés (Fonky Family, "Sans faire...")

Sniper claims that their hatred of the French government also stems from a double-standard when it comes to justice:

Donc est-ce que les gens naissent égaux en droits

À l'endroit où ils naissent ? J'crois pas.

They maintain this theory by identifying ways in which the Republic's policies handicap the *Banlieusard* population, such as the:

Législation conçue pour nous descendre

Frères derrière les barreaux et maintenant

Ils penseraient que l'on pourrait se rendre

Although they give no explicit example of the "legislation designed to keep them down," it is quite likely from the text of this song that this refers to the laws regarding *contrôles d'identité*, which more or less permit the interpellation of any citizen for any reason (see the following chapter, "Police," for more on *contrôles d'identité*). This inequality is also

seen in the prosecution of murderers. Whereas when a *Banlieusard* that take a life, he finds himself with other criminals "*derrière les barreaux*," when a police officer commits a murder, he is found innocent:

Un flic tue un homme froidement et s'trouve acquitté

Simple banalité? Non, y a trop d'inégalités

Justice à deux vitesses, ils assassinent en toute légalité.

Although it is the police that have committed the crime, it is the State that does not punish them. It is also the State that grants them their power to commit the atrocities in the first place, their silence consenting to the brutality.

However, the deepest resentment originates from what is described as France's betrayal to the immigrants. The first line of the chorus reads:

La France est une garce et on s'est fait trahir.

Though this song contains very little information about this betrayal, we can look to other rap songs for explanation. As stated earlier, an astounding number of the *Banlieusards* are of foreign provenance, especially from North Africa: Senegal, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria. These countries were once French colonies whose citizens were later freely welcomed into France through immigration. In a song entitled "Brûle" from Sniper's 2006 release, *Trait pour trait* Aketo describes the 180-degree turn of the Republic's hospitality.



Parler du rôle positif de la France durant

Les colonies putain c'est quoi ses conneries

Quand nos pères étaient utiles et productifs ils étaient bon pour ce pays

Ok mais quand leur fils crient vengeance

Ils sont bons pour leur pays d'origine...

Although originally welcomed by the government as French citizens, they now find themselves poverty stricken in crime infested *cités*, removed from France's mainstream society.

Rapper Monsieur R, infamous for his controversial song, "FranSSe," which became the target of the lawsuit headed by U.M.P. deputy François Grosdidier, illustrates this feeling of betrayal. Despite his sexual imagery ("*La France est une garce; n'oublie pas de la baiser jusqu'à l'épuiser; comme salope faut la traiter, mec*"), his semi-pornographic video, his mediocre flow, and his plagiarism of metaphors (the line "*La France est une garce*" being first used in Sniper's "*La France*," and the concept of urinating on authority figures ["*Je pisse sur Napoléon et le Général De Gaulle*"] already heard in *NTM*'s classic, "Police," ["*Police, machine matrice... sur laquelle je pisse*"]), Monsieur R nevertheless shares some insightful criticism throughout the course of his diatribe. He describes France as a prostitute who conceived and birthed the immigrant population, but then withdrew her nurturing:

La France est une de ces putes de mères

Qui t'a enfanté

Et qui aujourd'hui

Regrette qu'une chose

C'est de ne pas avoir avorté. (Monsieur R)

Unhappy with its *Banlieue* population, the government has abandoned the children of its immigrants, withholding the rights extended to all European French citizens. The image

of France as a woman brings to mind Eugene Delacroix's famous painting, "*La liberté guidant le peuple*," a depiction of the Revolution in July of 1830, where Liberty is personified as a woman holding a French flag in one hand and a musket in the other. Both of her breasts are exposed, symbolizing that the Republic, which is founded upon liberty, nurtures her children, the French people. In contrast, Monsieur R's image of France is of a woman who denies nurture to many of her children. Although many have immigrant parents, the generation to which belong today's young *Banlieusard* was born on French soil. Monsieur R pursues his metaphor:

La France est une mère indigne

Qui a abandonné ses fils sur le trottoir.

The word "*trottoir*" evokes the image of concrete, the main building material in France's *grands ensembles* which house much of the immigrant population. Sniper characterizes their fellow *Banlieuesards* as:

Des frères béton, tous victime de trahison.

Those who dwell in the *cités* also feel betrayed because of their mistreatment in spite of their contributions to France's economic well-being and patrimonial safety. They work, contributing to the economy, and are members of the military (the requirement for all 18-years-old men to give two years to the military was not lifted until 1998—one year before this song was released). Yet they are still treated as sub-human:

...dans l'fond, j'travaille pour ton pays, m'bat pour ton pays

Persécution alors que j'fais gagner d'argent à ton pays.

The specific use of "*ton pays*" instead of "*mon pays*" or "*notre pays*" appears quite deliberate here. Their "betrayal" is to such a degree as to completely alienate the African

immigrant population from any sense of French-ness. Therefore when Tunisiano says "ton pays," he expresses that cultural displacement. When Sniper says "*La France est une garce*," he is referring to a country that offers its affection only when there is profit to be made from doing so, and then retracts its kindness when it has exploited its partner.

Having described the plight of the *Banlieusard* in their own words, Sniper accomplishes three main objectives. The first is to bring awareness to those outside of these "*quartiers sensibles*" so that they perceive the injustice taking place in their own country. The second is to let the politicians and representatives of the state know that these *Banlieusards* are fed up with their circumstances and that they are not oblivious to the state's contribution to their misery. The third and most significant objective is to rally the *Banlieusards* of France and call them to action. All throughout the song, Sniper not only shows what is wrong with France, but they repeatedly call to the listener's attention the desperate need for change. The very first bar³¹ in the second verse, exclaims:

Faut que ça pète! Tu sais que le système nous marche dessus

Nous on baisse pas la tête on est pas prêts de s'avouer vaincus

In order to change the *Banlieusard's* condition, something drastic must be done—"Faut que ça pète." The populace will not simply admit defeat and give up their struggle. The use of "on" to speak on behalf of all *Banlieusards* produces the effect of unification, as do the many references to the solidarity of the *Zonards*. The first bar of the song:

On est tous solidaires face à la merde à la galère

³¹ **bar** (Rap term) A line of lyrics lasting four beats, the last syllable or syllables of which generally rhyming with those of the previous or next bar.

is repeated an additional eight times at the end of the song, but in chorus so as to create the image of rallied masses of *Banlieusards* armed with their anger and their resolve to change their sort.

Tunisiano : Jusqu'à Saint-Denis

Tous : On est tous solidaire!

Tunisiano : Garges Sarcelles aussi

Tous : On est tous solidaire!

On n'est pas prêts d'se taire, lève ton doigt en l'air, l'Etat nique sa mère!

Tunisiano : Dans toutes les cités

Tous : On est tous solidaire!

Tunisiano : Quand ça part en couille

Tous : On est tous solidaire!

Tunisiano : Négros et bougnoules

Tous : On est tous solidaire!

On n'est pas prêts d'se taire, lève ton doigt en l'air, l'Etat nique sa mère!

The group calls upon the members of *Garges Sarcelles* and *Saint Denis*, two particularly sensitive nearby *quartiers* for support before calling upon all *Banlieusards* of France.

They then call on two races, Black and Arab, for their support. The racial slurs, "*négros*" and "*bougnoules*," serve as reminders of these racial groups' oppression by the rest of France and their exclusion from the appellation of "*Français*."

But for what purpose does Sniper unite its listeners? Tunisiano recites:

Les droits de l'homme franchement où ils sont passés?

Faut faire en somme que ça change et que des frères cessent

D'être chassés.

Clearly they demand change, but by what means? Sniper's critics claim that "*La France*" is nothing more than a call to violence and to murder. A particular line of the song deemed scandalous is:

...Le seul moyen de s'faire entendre est de brûler des voitures.

However, when we examine the rest of the text, we see that in order for this quotation to be interpreted as an encouragement to vandalism, it must be taken from its context. For the statement in its entirety:

Car de nos jours, ça sert à rien de gueuler, de parler à des murs

À croire que le seul moyen de s'faire entendre est de brûler des voitures

reveals that Sniper believes that this traditional French method of protest is ineffective. Another call to action in this song, one quite likely to have peaked the interest and indignation of Minister Sarkozy, is:

On est pas dupe en plus on est tous chauds

Pour mission exterminer les ministres et les fachos.

And the final lines that groups, such as *Jeunesse identitaire*, fed upon are:

Frères je lance un appel, on est là pour tout niquer

Leur laisser des traces et des séquelles avant de crever.

Without proper context, these rhymes quoted independently may give impression that Sniper is preparing its listeners for a literal civil war against mainstream French society.

Yet the two final lines of the chorus clearly define the means by which the necessary change can come about:

Faudrait changer les lois et pouvoir voir

Bientôt à l'Élysée des Arabes et des Noirs au pouvoir.

It is the laws that must be changed, and the only true means of accomplishing this goal in France is for the *Banlieusard's* voice to be heard. He must vote. On another song from the very same album, Tunisiano explains to his fellow *Zonards* the importance of this political responsibility as well as the potential outcome of their involvement:

Tant d'fils d'immigrés, si on s'mettait tous à voter

La France serait désemparée et l'adversaire serait humilié

Campagne électorale, chaque personne a des droits

Regarde la tête qu'il a quand j'lui demande ma carte électorale

La morale, j'incite au vote, 5 minutes c'est quoi?

Et plus particulièrement, j'cause aux galériens

qui votent pas tout comme moi

Notre force la voilà, donc à nous d'le faire

Passer à l'urne afin qu'ils cessent de nous

casser les burnes. (Sniper, "Pris pour...")



It is by voting that they can "*changer les lois*," it is by voting that they can "*laisser des trace et des séquelles*" on the political system, and it is by voting that they can "*exterminer les ministères les fachos*," not by murdering them, but by removing them from power. This message is reinforced in Sniper's 2006 hit, "Brûle"

where Tunisiano laments the vandalism and violence that took place in the Parisian riots of 2005:

*Mais ce qui est malheureux c'est que l'on brûle le peut qu'on a
Alors qu'il suffirait de voter pour incendier ses connards. (Sniper,
"Brûle")*

In "Itinéraire d'une polémique," the chorus, which parallels in form the chorus of "La France" contains "La France"'s central message: the *Banlieue* does not need more violence, it needs help.

*La France est une farce et on s'est fait trahir
Tu sais, ils ont tenté de nous salir
Oui moi j'ai parlé de garce notamment de la France
Ils m'interdisent de dire en face, mais t'inquiète je le pense
Accusé d'inciter à prendre les armes
Mais ce texte n'était qu'un signal d'alarme
Messieurs, comprenez le sens de notre discours
Ne pas confondre un appel au meurtre et un appel au secours.*

Cause #2: The Police

*"Des rondes de flics toujours là pour nous pourrir
la vie."*

-El Tunisiano of Sniper

"POLICE" BY N.T.M.

Background

Another Hip-Hop group known for creating tension is N.T.M. whose initials stand for "*Nique ta mère*" (which M.C. Kool Shen explains is "une expression courante en *Banlieue* qui signifie 'Va t'faire voir!'" rather than a literal call to incest) (Herzber and Inciyan). In July, 1996, the group, composed of Joey Starr (Didier Morville) and Kool Shen



N.T.M.—1993, *j'appuie sur la gachette*

(Bruno Lopes), was removed from the line-up of the Festival de Châteaувallon because their lyrics constituted potential "risques de troubles d'ordre public" (Fretard). Later that year, they were taken to trial after a benefit concert in La-Seyne-sur-mer where they were reported to have told the crowd in between songs:

Nique ta mère, je nique la police... J'encule et je pisse sur la justice. La police, ce sont des fachos. C'est eux qui assassinent. Où sont ces enculés de bleus et la justice qui nous emmerdent toute l'année? Les fascistes ne sont pas qu'à Toulon. Ils sont en général par trois. Ils sont habillés en

*bleu dans des Renault 19. Ils ne sont pas loin derrière vous à l'entrée.
Vous voyez de qui je veux parler. Ces gens-là sont dangereux pour nos
libertés. Nos ennemis, c'est les hommes en bleu. Ils attendent que ça
parte en couille pour nous taper sur la gueule. On leur pisse dessus.*

(Herzber and Inciyan)

They were convicted of expressing "*des propos outrageants tenus à l'égard de policiers en uniforme et en service*" (Herzber and Inciyan) and sentenced to 3 months in prison along with a fine of 50,000 francs, and they were forbidden from exercising their musical profession for 6 months (Herzber and Inciyan). A song used as evidence against them in their conviction is "La Police," found on their album *93...J'appuie sur la gachette* (named after a song about the suicide of a *chômeur*, and not as boast of violent behavior). We will examine the contents of this song, which was interpreted by many as a call to violence against the Police.

Lyrics

| | |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| Artist: | N.T.M. |
| Title: | Police |
| Album: | J'appuie sur la gachette |
| Year: | 1993 |

Kool Shen:

Police ! Vos papiers, contrôle d'identité
Formule devenue classique à laquelle tu dois t'habituer
Seulement dans les quartiers
Les condés de l'abus de pouvoir ont trop abusé
Aussi sachez que l'air est chargé d'électricité
Alors pas de respect, pas de pitié escomptée
Vous aurez des regrets car
Jamais par la répression vous n'obtiendrez la paix
La paix de l'âme, le respect de l'homme
Mais cette notion d'humanité n'existe plus quand ils passent l'uniforme

Préférant au fond la forme, peur du hors norme
Plus encore si dans leur manuel ta couleur n'est pas conforme
Véritable gang organisé, hiérarchisé
Protégé sous la tutelle des hautes autorités
Port d'arme autorisé, malgré les bavures énoncées
Comment peut-on prétendre l'État, quand on est soi même
En état d'ébriété avancée ? Souvent mentalement retardé
Le portrait type, le prototype du pauvre type
Voilà pourquoi dans l'excès de zèle, ils excellent
Voilà pourquoi les insultes fusent quand passent les hirondelles
Pour notre part ce ne sera pas "F___ The Police"
Mais un spécial NIQUE TA MÈRE de la mère patrie du vice

{Refrain:}

Police machine matrice d'écervelés mandatés par la justice
Sur laquelle je pisse

Joey Starr:

Aucunement représentatif de l'entière populace
Que dois-je attendre des lois des flics
Qui pour moi ne sont signe que d'emmerdes?
Regarde je passe à côté d'eux :
Tronche de con devient nerveux
"Oh oh contrôle de police, monsieur"
Systématique est la façon dont l'histoire se complique
Palpant mes poches puis me pressant les balloches
Ne m'accordant aucun reproche à part le fait de passer proche
Portant atteinte à leurs gueules moches.
Traquer les keufs dans les couloirs du métro
Tels sont les rêves que fait la nuit Joey Joe.
Donne-moi des balles pour la police municipale
Donne-moi un flingue...

Kool Shen:

Encore une affaire étouffée, un dossier classé
Rangé au fond d'un tiroir, dans un placard ils vont la ranger
Car l'ordre vient d'en haut
Pourri à tous les niveaux
Ça la fout mal un diplomate qui business la pedo
Alors on enterre, on oublie, faux témoignages à l'appui
Pendant ce temps, des jeunes bet-on pour un bloc de teuchi
Malheureusement j'entends dans l'assistance:
"Écoutez-moi j'ai confiance"
Confiance en qui ? La police, la justice... tous des fils
Corrompus, dans l'abus ils puent
Je préfère faire confiance aux homeboys de ma rue, vu!

Pas de temps à perdre en paroles inutiles
Voilà le deal:
Éduquons les forces de l'ordre pour un peu moins de désordre

{ au Refrain }

Joey Starr:

Du haut du 93, Seine St-Denis, Chicago bis
Port des récidivistes, mère patrie du vice
Je t'envoie la puissance, conservant mon avance
Tout en transcendance, un à un me jouant
De tous les flics de France
Mercenaires, fonctionnaires au sein d'une milice prolétaire
Terriblement dans le vent
Trop terre à terre pour qu'ils tempèrent
Ou même modèrent
L'exubérance héréditaire qui depuis trop
Longtemps prolifère
Contribuant à la montée de tous les préjugés et
Manoeuvrant pour renflouer l'animosité des
Poudrières les plus précaires
Considérées secondaires par les dignitaires
D'un gouvernement trop sédentaire
Et d'une justice dont la bâtisse est trop factice
Pour que s'y hissent oui sans un pli
Nos voix approbatrices
Mais sincèrement, socialement
Quand il était encore temps
Que l'on prenne les devants
Tout ne s'est fait qu'en
Régressant, comment?
Aucun changement de comportement
De la part des suppos des lois
Rois du faux-pas
Ma foi, ce qui prévoit un sale climat
Donc pour la mère patrie du vice
De la part de tous mes complices
Des alentours ou des faubourgs
Avant qu'on ne leur ravisse le jour
NIQUE LA POLICE !

Analysis of lyrics

A police officer has the authority to demand that a citizen "*justifie son identité*" by producing some form of identification. This may include a passport, driver's license, military ID, birth certificate, voting card, or social security card (Servicepublic.fr). These *contrôles*

... peuvent être pratiqués à l'égard des personnes dont un indice laisse penser qu'elles ont commis ou tenté de commettre une infraction, se préparent à commettre un crime ou un délit, sont susceptibles de fournir des renseignements sur un crime ou un délit, font l'objet de recherches ordonnées par une autorité judiciaire (Servicepublic.fr).

Therefore, there are enough legally acceptable reasons for which an officer may justify a *contrôle* on any given individual. Right from the first bar, the rappers of N.T.M. accuse the Police of abusing that authority when Kool Shen says:

*Police! Vos papiers, contrôle d'identité
Formule devenue classique à laquelle tu dois
t'habituer*

Seulement dans les quartiers

Les condés de l'abus de pouvoir ont trop abusé.



He claims that these *contrôles* are commonplace "*seulement dans les quartiers*," attributing discriminatory motives to the police officers. Kool Shen maintains that although the *Banlieusard* can expect a *contrôle* simply because of where he lives, those who are not white must endure even more harassment.

Préférant au fond la forme, peur du hors norme

Plus encore si dans leur manuel ta couleur n'est pas conforme.

Joey Starr's recounts the experience of being subjected to *contrôles* during which the police give no reason whatsoever for the detainment:

Ne m'accordant aucun reproche à part le fait de passer proche

Portant atteinte à leurs gueules moches

The *Banlieusard* perceives the police presence as a constant source of misery and an invasion of personal space.

Vous aurez des regrets car

Jamais par la répression vous n'obtiendrez la paix

La paix de l'âme, le respect de l'homme

Mais cette notion d'humanité n'existe plus quand ils passent l'uniforme.

With the disappearance of humanity, the *Banlieusard* is treated as an animal, who is not even the proprietor of his own body. Joey Starr describes the *contrôles* as an invasion of very personal space:

Palpant mes poches puis me pressant les balloches³².

Again we see this imagery of the Police as an intruder on one's person in a description of the police:

Aucun changement de comportement

De la part des suppos des lois

Rois du faux-pas.

Comparing the police to a suppository, N.T.M. shows the forceful assertion of the law-enforcement, a presence that they view as essentially violating the occupants of the

³² **balloches**

Testicles.

Banlieue. In "Le plus grand des voyous," Fonky Family's song about the State, Le Rat Luciano describes the humiliation the Police inflict upon his people and the condescendence with which the Police treat them.

On naît libres et égaux en droit, mais on le reste pas

Y'a qu'à voir comment leur police nous parle. (Fonky Family, "Le plus...")

According to Joey Starr,

*Voilà pourquoi les insultes fusent quand passent les hirondelles.*³³

And the insults do fly, and not only from the Police. This song is riddled with seemingly childish name-calling:

Comment peut-on prétendre l'État, quand on est soi même

En état d'ébriété avancée? Souvent mentalement retardé

Le portrait type, le prototype du pauvre type,

Voilà pourquoi dans l'excès de zèle, ils excellent.

The accusations of mental retardation are repeated throughout in the chorus:

Police machine matrice d'écervelés mandatés par la justice

Sur laquelle je pisse,

and appear to be merely insults used to shock or offend. However, when considering the context of the song, there is a truth communicated through this insolent discourse. By describing the Police as being mentally challenged, N.T.M. shows the lack of self-control exhibited by these individuals:

Trop terre à terre pour qu'ils tempèrent

Ou même modèrent

³³ **hirondelle**

Police officer.

L'exubérance héréditaire qui depuis trop

Longtemps prolifère.

Here, Joey Starr tells of the Police's overzealousness and utter inability to inhibit their impulses when dealing with suspects, leading to unnecessary violence. Rockin Squat, lead M.C. of one of France's first and most politically charged Hip-Hop groups, *Assassin*, describes this phenomenon in the song "*L'Etat assassine*:"

Pô, pô, pô, voilà comment la police s'exprime. (Assassin)

Whether or not this statement is an exaggeration, the message is nevertheless clear: the Police are violent and impulsive.

In the same song, Rockin Squat touches upon an ironic aspect of law-enforcement—although charged with the protection of French citizens against dangerous individuals and factions, such as gangs, they themselves are seen as gangsters:

Bing, bang, la police est comme un gang. (Assassin)

N.T.M. also calls attention to this paradox, calling the Police a

Véritable gang organisé, hiérarchisé

Protégé sous la tutelle des hautes autorités

Port d'arme autorisé, malgré les bavures énoncées.

Instead of serving all the inhabitants of France, they systematically oppress some based on parentage, skin color, or where they live. They are thus considered the enemy instead of an ally, actually causing problems instead of correcting them.

Aucunement représentatif de l'entière populace,

Que dois-je attendre des lois des flics

Qui pour moi ne sont signe que d'emmerdes?

Knowing that they can not turn to the Police for help, they turn toward their fellow *Banlieusards*:

Malheureusement j'entends dans l'assistance:

"Écoutez-moi j'ai confiance"

Confiance en qui? La police, la justice... tous des fils

Corrompus, dans l'abus ils puent

Je préfère faire confiance aux homeboys de ma rue, vu!

Brought together by their common suffering, the *Banlieusards* find themselves united in their hatred toward their oppressors. N.T.M. also describes them as puppets for the government.

Tout en transcendance, un à un me jouant

De tous les flics de France,

Mercenaires, fonctionnaires au sein d'une milice prolétaire.

The likening of the Police to "mercenaries" in a "proletariat militia", there is the suggestion that there is a war going on in France: one in which the higher class of Bourgeois or Capitalists battles the *Banlieue* population, enlisting the aid of the lower, working class—Police—to do the dirty work of fighting the *Banlieusard*. The word "*milice*" also recalls memories of "*La milice*," organized during the German occupation in France to counter the Resistance, suggesting Fascism in the French government.

The idea of the Police as peace-keepers and maintainers of order is thus absurd to those who have come to view them by their actions as violent instigators. Mafia Trece's "Je plaide pour la rue"—a *mise en scene* of a trial against four of the Mafia's rappers:

Serge'M, Awax, Diam's, and A.Speak, for various offenses—contains a revealing dialogue between the Judge and the young female rapper, Diam's:

Bon, Mademoiselle Diam's, vous êtes accusée d'avoir poussé un gardien de la paix au suicide...

Diam's: Un keuf quoi...

Juge: Comment?

Diam's: Ouais un keuf. (Mafia Trece, "Je plaide...")

To refer to a Police officer as a "*gardien de la paix*," is ludicrous to Diam's when in reality, peace is the very joy that he takes away from the *Banlieusard* by his harassment and brutality. Diam's corrects the Judge, using the word "*keuf*," a charged word which connotes in the *Banlieue* discrimination, violence, and hatred.

Yet their actions are sanctioned by the state, which, according to N.T.M., covers up any inappropriate Police behavior:

*Encore une affaire étouffée, un dossier classé
Rangé au fond d'un tiroir, dans un placard ils
vont la ranger*

Car l'ordre vient d'en haut

Pourri à tous les niveaux

*Ça la fout mal un diplomate qui businessse la
pedo³⁴*

Alors on enterre, on oublie, faux témoignages à l'appui

Pendant ce temps, des jeunes bet-on pour un bloc de teuchi³⁵.



³⁴ **pedo**
³⁵ **teuchi**

Verlan for dope. Drugs.

Verlan for shit, which is slang for Marijuana.

Like Sniper's "La France," N.T.M.'s "Police" accuses the State of not only allowing this Police violence to occur, but it implicates the state of being complicit in the violence by concealing the truth regarding the hateful acts of its civil servants. N.T.M. suggests that this is due to two factors: first, the system is "*pourri à tous les niveaux*." They claim that, since the government mandates the Police, it reflects poorly on the State's public image when officers participate in criminal activity:

Ça la fout mal un diplomate qui businessse la pedo.

To save face, the State must hide the infraction. The second reason N.T.M. suggests for the concealment of the truth is that the Republic considers the *Banlieusard* as a secondary citizen:

Considérées secondaires par les dignitaires

D'un gouvernement trop sédentaire

Et d'une justice dont la bâtisse est trop factice.

The last bar of this citation speaks of the factitiousness of the Judicial system. Again in "L'Etat assassine," Rockin Squat addresses this topic:

La justice juge sur des critères bien définis

80% des prisonniers sont ouvriers, chômeurs ou sans logis

Combien de keufs sont incarcérés? (Assassin)

The common belief seems to be that the Police are armed with a gun, hatred, and a "Get out of jail free" card.

Frightened by the constant threat of harassment and violence, the resentment toward the Police augments, hence the furious attitudes of N.T.M. manifest in lines such as "*Police, machine matrice... sur laquelle je pisse*." These are not merely snide

comments from poorly raised children who lack respect for authority. There is no respect because these authority figures have shown through their actions that they do not merit respect. On behalf of their *quartier*, N.T.M. sends the Police their trademark message:

*Pour notre part ce ne sera pas "F*** The Police"*

Mais un spécial "NIQUE TA MÈRE!" de la mère patrie du vice.

These French rappers allude to American gangsta' rap legends, N.W.A., and their opus, "F*** The Police," a song in which Ice Cube, M.C. Ren, and Eazy-E describe Police's racism and brutality, and talk about killing them because of it. Yet, while paying homage to this Hip-Hop classic, N.T.M. lets the listener know that their message is not merely a mimesis of what N.W.A. has done, but the sincere description of the French *Banlieusard's* reality. Though the two groups share a common enemy—law enforcers—their situations are quite different, thus their perception of the situation and their message will also differ.

Found throughout this song is ominous foreshadowing of a revolt. Kool Shen warns:

Aussi sachez que l'air est chargé d'électricité,

and Joey Starr tells of the potential energy in the quartiers patrolled by these dishonest Policemen.

Contribuant à la montée de tous les préjugés et

Manoeuvrant pour renflouer l'animosité des

Poudrières les plus précaires.

He describes them as *poudrières*, which could explode because of nothing more than a spark. Indeed, regarding the October 2005 riots, Dr. Honicker reports that "those who

participated in riots justify their actions as the ultimate expression of their *ras-le-bol*" (Honicker 34). Joey Starr also predicts doom when talking about their situation:

Ma foi, ce qui prévoit un sale climat.

Although these predictions are vague at best, it is nevertheless evident that there is a widespread premonition of some major revolt against those seen as the oppressors in this community.

Although he is not necessarily advocating violence as the solution, Joey Starr tells of his dreams to kill cops in a vengeful rage.

Traquer les keufs dans les couloirs du métro

Tels sont les rêves que fait la nuit Joey Joe

Donne-moi des balles pour la police municipale

Donne-moi un flingue...

As do all societies who see themselves as downtrodden by another class (the proletariat in the USSR in mid 20th century, the Revolutionaries of France in late 18th century, the slaves in America), this *Banlieusard* dreams of revolution in which those in power are killed. In her defense during the mock trial in "Je plaide pour la rue," Diam's expresses a wish of death upon all crooked Police. Speaking of an officer who committed suicide, she relates:

C'est c'que je souhaitais, mon souhait c'est

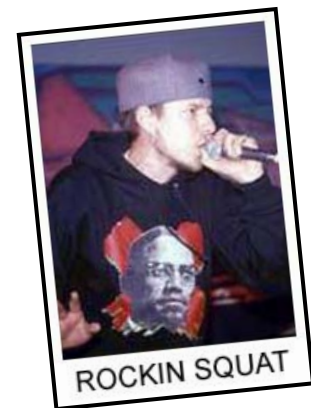
Que tout les acharnés d'la liberté fassent de même

Afin d'bruler l'uniforme non conforme a la norme. (Mafia Trece, "Je plaide...")

What is interesting is that the narration N.T.M. gives of the desired killing stops before the actual act, of which there is no description. It is as though despite their fury and want for revenge, they would not actually resort to murder. Rockin Squat shows this pervading fantasy to kill a Police officer in the following dream sequence:



*Bing, bang, yeah money³⁶, je parle des bavures policières
 Oui mon frère, quand en un instant tout s'arrête
 Quand tu prends une bastos³⁷ en pleine tête
 Par les responsables du maintien de l'ordre public
 De l'ordre public, ou de l'ordre politique?
 Du délire d'un flic, ou l'erreur est humaine?
 Alors, moi aussi, dites-moi, je dégaine?
 Le crime, est-ce un produit du système?
 La haine appelle la haine, si ton esprit se
 referme
 Le doigt sur la gâchette, mon front transpire
 Mon coeur bat plus vite, mes pulsations
 s'excitent
 Le sang coule dans mes yeux, mais je mérite mieux
 Pourquoi le shooter³⁸ lui et pas un autre?
 Si je shoote ce keuf, je devrais shooter les autres*



³⁶ money
³⁷ bastos
³⁸ shooter

Dude. Man. ("What up, money?")
 Bullet.
 To shoot (with a gun).

Mais ce sont des hommes!
Ça y est, ma tête explose
Toutes les valeurs s'entrechoquent
Car la question que je me pose est:
"Doit-on répondre de la même manière aux violences policières?"
Mais je ne changerai pas le cours de l'Histoire, si je shoote un
commissaire
S'il a buté mon frère, ça pourrait me satisfaire
Mais le cul entre quatre murs, il ne me restera que la prière
Oh shit! Ma personne s'excite
Et mes doigts sur le calibre sont moites, tremblent et s'agitent
Les secondes paraissent des heures ...
Et l'odeur de l'acier dans ma main a un goût de rancoeur
Tant pis je shoote, tant pis je shoote
Je n'en ai plus rien à foutre, dans ma tête il n'y a plus de doute!
"Eh, Squat réveille-toi ... (Assassin)"

After his internal struggle, debating the morality of taking an eye for an eye, he finally decides to execute the Police officer. However, he wakes up before the act takes place³⁹. This same fantasy occurs in Ministère AMER's controversial song, "*Sacrifice de poulets*," for which the group was prosecuted. On the soundtrack of the film, "La Haine," this song contains rapper Stomy Bugzy's daydream of taking revenge on a Police officer. He sets

³⁹ The informal use of present tense often is used in place of the near future. Thus, "je shoote," most likely means "je vais shooter."

the stage—an upheaval of citizens fed up with the brutality of law-enforcement gathers to riot.

Cette fois encore la police est l'ennemie

Je zieute⁴⁰ la meute, personne ne pieute, ça sent l'émeute

Ça commence, la foule crie vengeance

Par tous les moyens nécessaires, réparer l'offense. (Ministère AMER)

Quoting Malcolm X's policy of achieving equality "by any means necessary," it is inevitable that violence will follow.

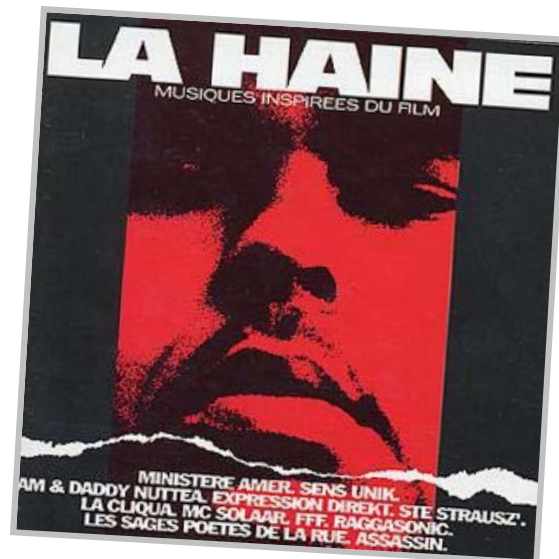
Abdulai nous demande la

plus belle des offrandes

Le message est passé, je

dois sacrifier un poulet.

(Ministère AMER)



La haine—Bande originale

The chorus maintains that violence is the only language the Police understand and that only revenge can create an equilibrium:

Pas de paix sans que Babylone paie, est-ce que tu le sais?

Sacrifions le poulet

Pas de paix sans que le poulet repose en paix est-ce que tu le sais?

Sacrifions le poulet. (Ministère AMER)

Just as N.T.M. does with their reference to "La Milice," Stomy describes his surroundings as France during the German Occupation.

⁴⁰ **zieuter**

To take a look at.

Les fourgons blindés des flics surarmés

Mon putain de quartier ressemble aux Territoires Occupés. (Ministère AMER)

And then arrives the moment where the killing of the Police Officer would take place:

La foule se disperse, personne ne veut partir

Ils veulent le paradis mais ne veulent pas mourir

Trop tôt pour festoyer, trop tard pour reculer

Ce soir la lune est pleine, ce soir je suis en veine

Et tous les coups que j'assène font mal à l'indigène

Et déjà la même scène de Fleury à Rosny Bois d'Arcy et Fresne

Ce soir j'ai la santé... (Ministère AMER)

Following both logic and rhyme scheme, the last bar seems as though it would be completed by "Je vais sacrifier un poulet." Instead, Stomy Bugzy trails off at what would be the song's climax, and the chorus is repeated. Again, the suggestion that the image of murdering the Police is an expression of anger, rather than a realistic proposal to the listener, appears the most likely of explanations of these violent lyrics.



What then, is N.T.M.'s solution to the problem, if not violence? Certainly, they want to put a stop to their abuse, but do not specify a course of action, other than Kool Shen's invitation the listener:

Pas de temps à perdre en paroles inutiles

Voilà le dea :

Éduquons les forces de l'ordre pour un peu moins de désordre.

Upon whom this responsibility is to fall is left to the listener to decide.



Assassin—L'homicide volontaire

Cause #3: The Already Existing *Banlieue* Violence

"Pour survivre le citoyen est devenu malsain."

-Sista Micky

"LE GHETTO FRANÇAIS" BY IDEAL J

However, the French rapper does not pretend naively that *Banlieue* violence is solely inspired by external causes. Ideal J's song, "Le ghetto français" shows how the violent conditions within the *Banlieue* and its population breed more violence. From the Parisian *Banlieues* of Orly, Choisy and Vitry, this group tells the tale of the young Banlieusard's path toward corruption. Kery James provides the vocals for this track.



Ideal J—*Original M.C.'s sur une mission*

Lyrics

Artist: Ideal J
Title: Le ghetto français
Album: *Original M.C.'s sur une mission*
Year: 1996

Si la plupart des jeunes tournent mal
C'est qu'ils ne savent plus la différence entre le bien et le mal
On n'a pas tous eu la chance d'avoir une famille soudée
Toujours à l'écoute, derrière vous prête à vous aider

{Refrain}

Tu marches la tête baissée
Avec la peur de regarder le quartier, le ghetto français

Un jour on pleur' un jour on rit
Certains n'y arrivent plus s'abreuvent de bière et de " tchhh "
Un jour on pleur' un jour on rit
Certains n'y arrivent plus s'abreuvent de bière et de " tchhh "

Vient vivre au milieu d'une cité
viens vivr' au milieu d'un ghetto français
immeubles délabrés ou soi-disant rénovés
Les choses ne changent pas, la tension est toujours là
On modifie la forme, mais dans le fond quels sont les résultats
Les halls sont toujours remplis, de dealers de "teushi"
Les rues de scooters volés et de mauvais esprits la nuit
Si la plupart des jeunes tournent mal
C'est qu'ils ne savent plus la différence entre le bien et le mal
Principale cause s'impose la misère
Suivie de près si non devancé par le poids d'un échec scolaire
On n'a pas tous eu la chance d'avoir une famille soudée
Toujours à l'écoute, derrière vous prête à vous aider
Les mères ne savent plus quoi faire, débordés sont les pères
Un jeune sur deux ici possède un casier judiciaire
Putain de merde, c'est la merde dans mon quartier
Tu veux vérifier, enfoiré, viens vivre au milieu d'une cité
Seulement si tu est prêt à donner ta vie
Et ton sang sans hésiter pour être respecté
Car ici, on ne te fout jamais la paix, si tu ne prouves pas que
Tu as les couilles, et qu'il est dangereux de te tester
Ne jamais lâcher l'affaire lorsqu'on insulte ta mère
Toujours essayer d'aller plus loin que ton adversaire
Telle est la loi, tant pis pour toi si tu n'est pas entouré
Maintenant c'est famille contre famille et cité contre cité
L'esprit loyal du un contre un a depuis longtemps disparu
Car seuls les plus vicieux s'imposent aujourd'hui dans la rue
Certains te braquent, d'autres te balafrent, frappent les premiers
Et les derniers te laissent une trace
Combien de fois m'est-il arrivé
De voir un mec à terre, incapable de se relever
Se faire shooter à coups de pieds, en pleine tête
Le sang gicle, se colle aux baskets, tant pis pour lui mec
La violence est omniprésente, grimpe en flèche et monte
Peut-on encore parler de simple délinquance
Insensé lorsque la majorité sait que dans certains quartiers
On a de quoi faire sauter l'Élysée
On ne vit que de violence et de haine
Étouffés par les murs car en fait prisonniers du système
Je nique la fantaisie, je balance que la réalité
Pour ceux qui croient qu'on se la coule toujours

Douce dans le ghetto français

{Refrain}

Je vis au milieu d'une " téci ", nuit et jour, jour et nuit
Certains m'appellent 'Lixa' et pour d'autres enfoirés c'est "Kery"
J'ai vu le mal s'emparer de certains frères
Je les ai vu perdre la raison, engagés dans une galère
Les familles pleurent, saignent et se déchirent
Ici, les mères ont peur et pour leurs gosses, craignent le pire
Ont elles tort ? Les choses basculent si vite
Une insulte une menace un coup de feu et elles perdent leurs fils
Trop de mes *homies* connaissent la prison
Ignorent le futur et préfèrent vivre l'instant présent.
Malheureusement, l'avenir ne veut plus rien dire
Quand on n'a pas de diplômes, donc de boulot
Ni de talent pour s'en sortir
Alors on squatte le hall, le seul univers sur lequel
On garde encore le contrôle
Et pour survivre, il faut du fric alors on deale
Ils dealent jusqu'à ce qu'interviennent les flics
Les flics, la police, la police c'est le vice
Laisse grossir les petits dealers
Puisque visent souvent la grosse prise.
En attendant ce sont des jeunes qui sacrifient leurs vies
Et où sont ceux qui font venir la came de Colombie?
Les rues de Paris nous sont interdites
On gâche nos nuits, contrôles abusifs en série
Et on sait tous comment on nous traite au commissariat
Si je nique la police, pourquoi?
Demande à Rohff et à Rimka
Les lésions sur leurs visages parlaient d'elles-mêmes
Ils ont frappé mes frères, je m'oppose à jamais au système man
C'est aussi, ça, être un jeune du ghetto français
C'est être prêt à tout pour protéger la peau de ses "paincos"
J'ai des mots pour mes frères du quartier
Avec qui j'ai partagé mes journées parfois mes secrets
Nos galères mais surtout nos délires
Seuls restent pour moi entre ces murs de bons souvenirs
Un jour on pleure un jour on rit
Certains n'y arrivent plus, s'abreuvent de bières et de "tschhh"
On fait du cash en évitant les balances
Le genre de putes qui envoient mes frères derrière les barreaux
Moi j'observe la loi du silence à la vie, à la mort
Non, ce n'est pas un gang, c'est une famille, c'est beaucoup plus fort
Tu veux connaître la pureté d'une amitié, enfoiré

Te gêne pas, viens vivre au milieu d'une cité
Tu marches la tête baissée
Avec la peur de regarder le quartier, le ghetto français

Analysis of Lyrics

Kery James begins the first verse with an invitation for the listener to enter his world and experience the conditions of what he and other French M.C.s refer to as "*Le ghetto*"⁴¹.

Vient vivre au milieu d'une cité

Viens vivre au milieu d'un ghetto français.

Through the parallel verse formation of the first two bars, James blatantly asserts that the *cités*, home to the *Banlieusard*, are nothing more than France's version of the ghetto. The first evidence he gives of this categorization is found in the lines that immediately follow:

Immeubles délabrés ou soi-disant rénovés

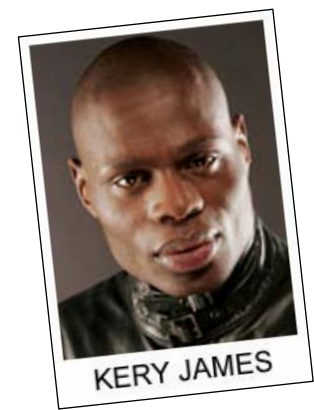
Les choses ne changent pas, la tension est toujours là

On modifie la forme, mais dans le fond quels sont les résultats?

He paints a picture of the dilapidated buildings that house the *Banlieusard*. Sinik also describes these conditions in the song "Sarkozic."

Je n'ai qu'un paysage, le visage refermé

*Des logements qui puent la merde avec une vue sur le RER B. (Sinik,
"Sarkozic")*



⁴¹ Technically, the term "ghetto" refers to a segregated area consisting solely of one religious or racial group, while "slum" refers to a run-down, poverty-stricken town or area. However, in both American and French rap, the word "ghetto" often implies segregation, but always announces poverty. This thesis follows the rapper's definition of "ghetto."

Instead of the home's fragrances and beautiful view we read about in French literature, such as Pagnol's *Le château de ma mère*, we instead find a view of an old transport system and the foul odor of "merde". This is a word that rarely fails to appear in descriptions of the *cités*. Ideal J's song is no exception to this trend:

Putain de merde, c'est la merde dans mon quartier.

Independent of the violence and crime plaguing the *Banlieue*, the run-down physical conditions are horrendous enough to alone earn the appellation of "ghetto."

These sub-par living conditions are situated beneath a looming feeling of despair brought on by various factors, including the lack of stable, closely-knit families.

On n'a pas tous eu la chance d'avoir une famille soudée

Toujours à l'écoute, derrière vous, prête à vous aider.

This is due to the ever-present threat of a loved one's falling victim to the *Banlieue* violence, an occurrence all too common in these areas.

Les familles pleurent, saignent et se déchirent

Ici les mères ont peur et pour leurs gosses, craignent le pire

Ont-elles tort? Les choses basculent si vite

Une insulte, une menace, un coup de feu et elles perdent leurs fils.

When a child leaves the home, the danger of *Banlieue* life is such that there is no guarantee of his safe return later. Another cause of despair is academic failure:

Malheureusement, l'avenir ne veut plus rien dire

Quand on n'a pas de diplômes, donc de boulot

Ni de talent pour s'en sortir.

Without money or the means by which to make it, the *Banlieusard* loses hope for a better future outside of the misery.

The poverty of these quartiers turns the inhabitants to crime in order to meet their basic human needs. Kery James spells it out plainly for the listener:

Principale cause s'impose la misère.

One crime they commit is theft. In Shurik'N's song, "Si j'avais su" featured on D.J. Kheops' Marseille compilation *Sad Hill*, the rapper shares the experience of witnessing this phenomenon:

J'ai vu une femme la quarantaine passée

Pleurer devant une caméra

S'excuser d'avoir volé

Pour manger.

The delinquency is not limited to the youth, for even a mother in her forties needs to eat. On another collaboration of Marseillais rappers, *Chroniques de Mars*, Le Rat Luciano relates the necessity to break the law to obtain one's needs, such as meals:

Si mon frère a faim je fais un braco.

The matter-of-factly manner in which Luciano presents this fact testifies of the frequency of this crime. In "Si j'avais su," Shurik'N reiterates the fact that these "*délinquents*" feel that they have no other choice but to resort to thievery and crime:

Prendre des risques pour survivre,

Tu crois que les mecs font ça pour le plaisir?

Grandir et franchir la ligne par nécessité.

Another crime commonly committed to fulfill elementary needs is the trafficking of drugs. Kery James explains:

*Et pour survivre, il faut du fric alors on deale
Ils dealent jusqu'à ce qu'interviennent les flics.*

Mafia Trece's Yannick allows us to see into the mind state of youth who have chosen this path:

*L'bon gaillard craint de devoir devenir un
mauvais lascar
J'suis fauché j'en ai marre. J'veux qu'argent
rentre dans mes poches et
J'suis prêt à tout à vendre le caillou j'ai plus
l'moral, ni d'morale
Car dans mon existence tout va mal.*



The principles of honesty and honor are worn thin by the need to survive.

In these harsh conditions where principle and practicality have become mutually exclusive, good and evil lose their polarity. Kery James claims:

*Si la plupart des jeunes tournent mal,
C'est qu'ils ne savent plus la différence entre le bien et le mal.*

Despite the laziness of rhyming "mal" with "mal," this statement is central to the message of this song, which is that living in the *Banlieue* orients youth toward crime and violence. Crime appears to be the only solution and is so common that it becomes difficult to see what is wrong with it. He later illustrates how this loss of consciousness is followed by a kind of madness:

J'ai vu le mal s'emparer de certains frères

Je les ai vu perdre la raison, engagés dans une galère.

The idea of the *Banlieue* driving individuals to madness can also be seen in Mafia Trece's

"Le mauvais chemin," where Yannick tells the listener:

Le putain d'tier-quar⁴² me rend gue-din⁴³

Attirant les jeunes les gamins sur le mauvais chemin

Un chemin dont jamais on ne revient

{ Sample: } Born in the ghetto, it's hard to survive (Mafia Trece, "Le mauvais...")

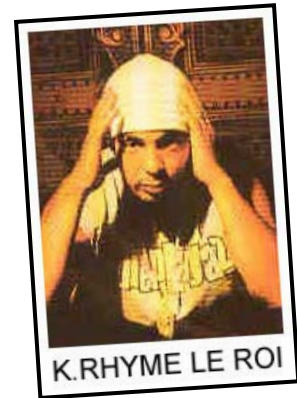
He also proposes for consideration the moral conundrum:

De faire le mal pour des biens ont-ils torts ou

raison?

In "Démon," K.Rhyme le Roi describes the journey of a young man from good to evil, explaining the cause of this transformation:

A force de subir le mal en lui surgit.



In Sinik's words:

On a tous une vie de ouf⁴⁴ qui transforme un pit⁴⁵ en ours.

The life they lead changes the good to bad and the already dangerous to lethal. In this bar, Sinik describes the "*ghetto français*" as being populated by animals. Shurik'N gives similar imagery:

⁴² tier-quar

Verlan for *quartier*.

⁴³ gue-din

Verlan for *dingue*.

⁴⁴ ouf

Verlan for *fou*.

⁴⁵ pit'

Pitbull.

Dans un patelin infesté de requins

Le bien perd du terrain. (Si j'avais su)

By the use of vicious animals to represent the *Banlieusard*, these M.C.s communicate the savage nature of this habitat, an environment of lawlessness that annihilates the weak. Outsiders who question the realism of these statements can find their answer in the chorus of Don Choa, Menzo, and Sista Micky's song, "On dit ce qu'on pense:"

Costard cravate derrière ton bureau, escroc

C'est pas toi qui vis dans le ghetto

La misère est devenue notre quotidien

Pour survivre le citoyen est devenu malsain. (Don Choa, Menzo, Sista Micky)

Because of the drive to preserve one's life in this wild environment, the corruption of the soul and mind is an inevitable step toward survival.

But corruption is not only manifest in the *Banlieusard*. The police have also become twisted in this environment, committing evil deeds to obtain what they need. Kery James gives an example of how they do this:

Les flics, la police, la police c'est le vice

Laisse grossir les petits dealers

Puisque visent souvent la grosse prise

En attendant ce sont des jeunes qui sacrifient leurs vies.

While serving their own purposes, they further poison the existence of the *Banlieusard* by allowing them to destroy themselves instead of correcting them legally as they are

obligated to do. We find then in this text the same attitude of animosity toward the local law-enforcement as seen in N.T.M.'s "Police." Kery recounts:

Les rues de Paris nous sont interdites
On gâche nos nuits, contrôles abusifs en série
Et on sait tous comment on nous traite au commissariat
Si je nique la police, pourquoi?
Demande à Rohff et à Rimka
Les lésions sur leurs visages parlaient d'elles-mêmes
Ils ont frappé mes frères, je m'oppose à jamais au système man.

The physical scars the Police leave on the *Banlieusard* also leave psychological scars, for they know that they can not trust the the "gardiens de la paix."

Who then can they trust? Crime is ubiquitous in their community:

Les halls sont toujours remplis, de dealers de teushi
Les rues de scooters volés et de mauvais esprits la nuit,

and violence is virtually consumes their existence. Ideal J tells us:

La violence est omniprésente, grimpe en flèche et monte.

The *Banlieusard* is surrounded by violence that, instead of diminishing, seems only to augment. Later on, Kery James states that violence all but defines their life:

On ne vit que de violence et de haine.

Their only way of survival is to use that violence to get by. The omnipresence of violence in the *Banlieue* is such that throughout French Hip-Hop, the *Banlieue* is analogously coupled with the image of a war zone. According to Sat, the *Zonard* must adapt a soldier-like mentality if he is to survive:

On se comporte comme en temps de guerre

because

La vie se montre plus hard qu'un porno, qu'un Tarantino. (Sat, Costello)

Sniper's Tunisiano also projects the image of the soldier onto his fellow *Banlieusards*.

Les frères sont armés jusqu'aux dents, tous prêts à faire la guerre

Ça va du gun jusu'au fusil à pompe, pit bull et rotweiller. (Sniper, "La France")

These "*enfants des halls gris*" (IAM, "Nous"), as Shurik'N refers to them, have armed themselves in order to survive the "*Viêt-nam urbain*" (IAM, "Nous") in which they live. The choice of Vietnam is a particularly significant war, as the negative psychological effects it had on its participants are well documented. This hints at a change in mental state that takes place in those who must live in these war-like conditions. These youth are forced to become warriors instead of adolescents and young adults. Sinik comments:



Sinik—*Sang froid*

J'en place une pour les soldats qui ont peur de Dieu mais pas du sautage

Qui boivent des bières mais pas des sodas

Qui mettent des pare-balles qui prônent le partage

Une larme sur le parquet une arme sous le parka

Casseur de vitrines, chasseur de victimes

Mais que veux-tu? C'est plus des jeunes c'est des vikings. (Zone Interdit)

They have become warriors, jaded to the violence in their neighborhoods and ready to do what is necessary to preserve their life.

Yet, unlike wars, there are no rules of conduct in the *Banlieue* scuffles, a phenomenon that manifests itself in the fighting techniques. The concept of a "fair fight" means nothing, for, as stated in D.J. Dee Nasty's Introduction to his first Hip-Hop mix-tape, "*l'union fait la force*" (Dee Nasty). Kery James describes disappearance of man-to-man fights:

Telle est la loi, tant pis pour toi si tu n'est pas entouré

Maintenant c'est famille contre famille et cité contre cité

L'esprit loyal du un contre un a depuis longtemps disparu

Car seuls les plus vicieux s'imposent aujourd'hui dans la rue.

The goal is to win the fight at any cost, regardless of how the battle is fought. This is often accomplished by hopelessly outnumbering the opponent and mercilessly beating him. Kery bears witness of the ruthless tactics used to destroy an opponent.

Certains te braquent, d'autres te balafrent

Frappent les premiers et les derniers te laissent une trace

Combien de fois m'est-il arrivé

De voir un mec à terre, incapable de se relever

Se faire shooter à coups de pied en pleine tête?

Le sang gicle, se colle aux baskets, tant pis pour lui mec.

In "Sans faire couler le sang" from their album "Si Dieu veut," Fonky Family reports the same violence in Marseille's "*quartiers sensibles*":

Les types débarquent en bande

Et sont à trente sur un mec

Le soulèvent comme un ballon

L'enfoncent à coups de talons

Se tachent de sang le bas du pantalon. (Fonky Family, "Sans faire...")

Both accounts describe how the victim's blood stains the apparel of the aggressor, calling to mind the biblical image of the Passover, where the blood of a sacrificed lamb was painted above the doors to ward off the destroying angel. Similarly, the blood of the victim painted on the clothing is a message to ward off others who would attempt to fight him. No form of assault is off limits, for in order to avoid further violence, the *Banlieusard* must show that anyone who attempts to fight with him would regret it.

Et si j'veux éviter la violence

Faut bien que je pense à la

défense

De moi et des miens

Personne doit nous prendre

pour des chiens

Les offenses se paient vis-

versa, je rends la pareille

Œil pour œil, dent pour dent

Coup de tête, morsure à l'oreille. (Fonky Family, "Sans faire...")



Fonky Family – Si Dieu veut

Inspiring respect, or rather fear, in others is the only hope for obtaining any peace, even it is only temporary. Ideal J claims that in order to get that respect, the *Banlieusard* must show that he is a dangerous individual with no limits to how far he is willing to take an insult or a fight:

*Tu veux vérifier, enfoiré, viens vivre au milieu d'une cité
Seulement si tu est prêt à donner ta vie
Et ton sang sans hésiter pour être respecté
Car ici, on ne te fout jamais la paix, si tu ne prouves pas que
Tu as les couilles et qu'il est dangereux de te tester
Ne jamais lâcher l'affaire lorsqu'on insulte ta mère
Toujours essayer d'aller plus loin que ton adversaire.*

Lacking family support and knowing that the police will not help him and that alone, he is vulnerable to attacks, the young *Banlieusard* turns to gangs for strength. But Kery James maintains these groups are more than just "gangs:"

*Non, ce n'est pas un gang, c'est une famille, c'est beaucoup plus fort.
Tu veux connaître la pureté d'une amitié, enfoiré
Te gêne pas, viens vivre au milieu d'une cité.*

The gang replaces the family and becomes the group of people for whom the *Banlieusard* will do anything:

*C'est aussi, ça, être un jeune du ghetto français
C'est être prêt à tout pour protéger la peau de ses paincos⁴⁶.*

Dr. Prévos claims that the *Banlieusard* tends to hyperbolize his condition by calling the *Banlieue* a "ghetto." In his article, "In it for the money: rap and business cultures in

⁴⁶ **paincos**

Verlan for *copains*.

France," he says, " Even though many young *Banlieue* dwellers call their living area a "ghetto," this is an exaggeration and a deformation of the reality they encounter there (Prévos 4). Kery James' answers such criticisms in this song, by his claim to uphold the French rapper's duty to speak the truth about the plight of the *Banlieusard*:

Je nique la fantaisie, je balance que la réalité

and he openly invites any critic from outside of the *Banlieue* to see for himself if these reports are exaggerated:

Tu veux vérifier, enfoiré, viens vivre au milieu d'une cité.

To survive *Banlieue* violence, the *Banlieusard* must himself become violent. K.Rhyme le Roi explains that participation in the violence is the only way to withstand it:

*La rue tue les faibles, les
corrompus sans expérience
Seuls ceux qui mènent la
danse
Tentent la survie et obéissent à
ses propres lois
Cet univers n'a pas de foi
(K.Rhyme Le Roi – Démon)*



Mafia Trece—Cosa Nostra

CONCLUSION

Why is French rap violent?

"Au lieu de changer de vocabulaire, il le dit avec ses mots."

-El Tunisiano of Sniper

In conclusion, there is no denying that French rap is violent. Its critics are correct to say that anti-establishment sentiments are ubiquitous in its lyrics. Because of brutal and discriminatory mistreatment, the French rapper has indeed become anti-Police, wishing at times to exact his revenge with violence or even murder. However, he does not, nor does he encourage his listeners to do so: he merely identifies the problem through his expressions of angst commonly shared by his fellow *Banlieusard*. French rap's critics are also not mistaken in their deeming of French rap "anti-French." France has ostracized the *Banlieusard* from the rest of society, denying him social citizenship. Furthermore, the government and general public have withdrawn their welcome to the immigrant, and now remain unsympathetic to his pleas for acceptance. So while the French rapper may not hate his home country of France, he certainly does hate the government policies that allow the perpetuation of his poverty and exclusion. Yet he does not encourage violence; on the contrary, he hates the violence in his community and blatantly shoves it in the face of his listener to create an understanding of his violent conditions in an attempt to diminish them.

Why then is the French rapper's language so violent? This music comes from France's most sordid locations where violence is omnipresent. He sees the continuing

violence as the product of the State, the police, and the violence that already exists in the *Banlieue*. The *Banlieusard* himself becomes violent to survive the crime and injustice surrounding him. His speech is colored by his way of life, and is thus violent. His rage against the system and his misery cause him to express himself in violent terms.

In their rebuttal to Minister Sarkozy, *Jeunesse identitaire*, and others who denounce their music as an incitation to violence, the group Sniper very clearly explains their usage of strong imagery in their songs as a cry for help:

C'est vrai, nos mots sont durs mais en rien illégaux
Vous, vous les qualifiez d'impurs car il ne flattent pas votre égo
C'est juste un cri de colère d'un jeune au bout du rouleau
Qui en veut à la terre entière car il est mal dans sa peau
Au lieu de changer de vocabulaire, il le dit avec ses mots
Au lieu d'aller foutre la de-mer⁴⁷, il préfère prendre un stylo
Il est choquant mais, il n'a d'autre solution
Il emploie des mots violents afin d'attirer l'attention
Monsieur le ministre, oui, nos paroles vous déplaisent
*Mais que dire de celles de la Marseillaise? (Sniper, La France:
itinéraire...)*

This last question asks the listener to consider the words of France's national anthem, one of the Republic's most violent songs. Like the lyrics of French rap, they contain violent images:

Qu'un sang impur abreuve nos sillons.

Like the anti-police words of Hip-Hop, they announce the evil intentions an enemy force:

⁴⁷ **de-mer**

Verlan for merde.

Entendez-vous dans nos campagnes rugir ces féroces soldats

Ils viennent jusque dans nos bras

Egorger nos fils et nos compagnes?

And, like French rap, they are a call to action:

Aux armes, citoyens!

Formez vos bataillons!

However, the *Banlieusard's* national anthem, Hip-Hop music, is not a call to arms. Yet, it does seem to announce the arrival of a cultural revolution, one in which the injustice of the "*système*" is identified, denounced, and reformed. The usage of violent terms is not a crime: it is a vocalization of how the *Banlieusard* lives and the inner anguish he feels, as well as a way to attract the attention of listeners to his cause. After all, as Fonky Family points out,

Quel est le crime

Si ce n'est de dire ce que l'on vit?

J'évince le faux

Avance et fout le feu

Faut que mon rap de rue crée la surprise

Dans ce putain de pays. (Fonky Family, "La foi...")

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