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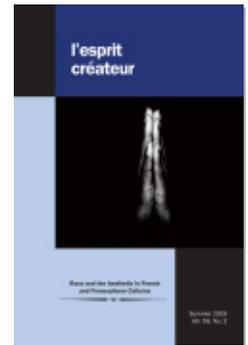
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Seeing Through Race in Contemporary French Cinema

Lia Brozgal

NEARLY ALL CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP on French cinema hails the diversification of the silver screen as a major evolution within the national film industry. Although the representation of postcolonial ethnicities on the big screen has its origins in *beur* and *banlieue* cinema of the 1980s and 1990s, those early productions—of which Mehdi Charef's *Un thé au harem d'Archimède* (1985) and Malik Chibane's *Hexagone* (1994) may be emblematic—remained marginal in terms of distribution, critical attention, and popular interest. Indeed, what has changed since the turn of the millennium is the mainstreaming of cinema featuring minority actors. Films like *Indigènes* (2006), *Intouchables* (2011), and *Bande de filles* (2014) have benefitted from significant financial backing, production teams with industry standing, and savvy media campaigns.¹

A more ethnically diverse cinema, however, does not appear to have engendered a spirited national conversation about race or racism, nor about cinema's particular capacity to depict or speculate on the lived experience of difference. A lack of attention to such questions may be unsurprising in the French context, where universalism places loyalty to the nation above ethnic or religious identification, and where race itself is a taboo subject.² Most French critical and popular commentary on films featuring minority actors avoids engaging with the politics or aesthetics of race, performing the very same colorblind discourse that is at the heart of French political ideals and public policy. While scholarship on contemporary French cinema has taken note of the film industry's unprecedented attention to postcolonial ethnicities, its engagement with questions of race and racism has tended to focus on casting practices rather than representation or film form.³

This article is committed to reading race back into the picture by exploring the formal and narrative construction of ideas about race and racial difference in two box-office hits: Laurent Cantet's school film *Entre les murs* (2008) and Olivier Nakache and Eric Toledano's "bromance" *Intouchables* (2011). Through analysis of plot, form, and paratexts, I argue that these films produce a discourse that is at once colorblind *and* race-conscious, and that thinking through this fundamental ambivalence in the representation of race in cinema provides a blueprint for thinking about race in France more generally. This article is also designed to set the stage for a longer conversation about what it

means “to race” French cinema, that is, to attend to the hermeneutics of race in cinematic production from France.⁴ I thus begin with a reflection on the portability of theory and the translation of visual signifiers in language (particularly the term *colorblind*, which is often used as a metaphor for race-neutral attitudes and policies), and how both interact with our transnational considerations of race in film.

Study abroad? critical race theory in translation

For a scholar interested in “race-ing” French film, Critical Race Theory (CRT) should provide an obvious intellectual toolkit. Conceived in the early 1980s by scholars and activists in U.S. law schools, CRT is committed to “studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power.”⁵ Yet, to deploy these principles in service of film analysis and to translate CRT into another vernacular is to confront challenges both methodological and cultural. The former emerge from the disciplinary limitations of a praxis conceived by and within a legal studies framework; the latter emanate from CRT’s embeddedness in the U.S.—both its jurisprudence and its particular history of racism.

CRT’s transdisciplinary appeal and intellectual portability is demonstrated by the fact that its methods have been taken up by scholars working in a wide variety of fields.⁶ Film studies, however, has been somewhat less enthusiastic in its embrace of CRT, a puzzling phenomenon given the deeply intertwined histories of film and race.⁷ American film scholar Alessandra Raengo has suggested that the relationship between film studies and CRT is best understood as one of mutual indifference, arguing that film studies is “like most critical theory: white by default and illusorily self-contained,” with CRT only “cautiously adopted” by scholars in the field, if at all; CRT, on the other hand, despite its declared attention to culture and narrative, has only “occasionally and tangentially” addressed aesthetic questions and has had “a very limited engagement with film.”⁸

Raengo’s scholarship attempts to end this disciplinary standoff by reading CRT through visual culture studies, a field that proposes to understand race neither as an objective reality nor as content, but rather as a medium, or an “intervening substance [...] something we might see through [...] rather than something we look at.”⁹ This construction of race, coupled with visual studies’ attention to “the visual construction of the social sphere,” allows film scholars to make law-based scholarship perform heuristic work in the realm of the aesthetic. Raengo offers a compelling case in point, observing that filtering CRT through visual studies trains our focus on the frequency of visual signifiers and metaphors in U.S. legal discourse about race, from “Jim Crow”

(which functions as “a visual regime of segregation” by “sanctioning skin color as the natural signifier of racial difference”) to the concept of the color line and the notion of colorblindness. Race, as it is troped in U.S. jurisprudence and other discourses, thus emerges as an inherently *visual* phenomenon (Raengo 21).

Beyond the disciplinary question, it behooves us to consider the transnational portability of Critical Race Theory, that is, its capacity to function as a “travelling theory.”¹⁰ If CRT undoubtedly carries the baggage of its origins, the challenges of cultural determinism nonetheless cut both ways. After all, one of the pillars of French universalism is the refusal to consider racial or ethnic groups as “legitimate social or political categories or as targets for policy.”¹¹ It is thus impossible to imagine that CRT’s basic principle—that “racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society”¹²—could ever be written in French; its very assumptions are anathema in French society, where the abstract individual is the representative of the nation.

But the cultural challenge of importing CRT into France is also conditioned by language. In French, race is rarely discussed in figurative language or troped as a visual problem— notions such as the color line or colorblindness carry no weight as signifiers. (One of the few exceptions is the fraught notion of *le contrôle au faciès*, an identity check based on a person’s physical appearance, commonly known in English as racial profiling.) The metaphor of colorblindness is a helpful shorthand in discussions of race-neutral politics and ideology in France, yet it is used almost exclusively by Anglophone scholars in English-language venues.¹³ While the figure is both efficient and evocative—one needn’t understand the mechanics of the eye to understand how colorblind comes to mean “race neutral”—it has no literal counterpart in French: the term for the same ocular dysfunction, *le daltonisme*, is not linguistically linked to the difficulty of seeing or distinguishing color, and thus cannot be made to function as an analogous trope.¹⁴ It is worth observing, then, that if discourse about race in the U.S. features strong visual imagery, the language used to discuss race or race neutrality in France resides, conceptually and linguistically, in notions like *universalisme*, *les valeurs républicaines*, even *laïcité*, that is, in expressions that elide the term race and are not readily rendered in visual tropes.

Thus, to talk about race in French cinema is not only to navigate the methodological gap between CRT and film studies, it is to contend with the particular place and visibility of race in France, its historical legacy, and its legal, political, and cultural discourses.¹⁵ As historian Ann Laura Stoler has observed, France is “one of the global heartlands of critical social theory and

the philosophies of difference,” yet it has “rarely turned its acute analytic tools to the deep structural coordinates of race” within its own borders.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the eminently visual qualities of cinema, coupled with its popular appeal, make it a unique proving ground for speculation situated at the intersection of race, representation, politics, and the aesthetic, notwithstanding the particularities of any given cultural matrix and its theoretical predispositions. In what follows, then, I suggest that a practice of “seeing through race” in French cinema can be a salutary endeavor, one that mobilizes the silver screen as mirror in which the complexities and ambivalences of French universalism’s colorblindness are reflected and can be contemplated.

Visible and invisible discourses on race in *Intouchables*

Loosely based on a true story, *Intouchables* reimagines the genesis of an improbable friendship between Philippe Pozzo di Borgo, a wealthy, white Parisian man confined to a wheelchair (played by François Cluzet), and his unlikely caretaker Driss, a black man of significantly humbler origins (interpreted by Omar Sy). To say that the film traffics in cliché and stereotype would be an understatement: with its predictable dramatic arc (exposition-problem-reconciliation), *Intouchables* is a Hollywood-style feel-good film that plays on the tired theme of “opposites attract.” It was nonetheless an immediate box-office sensation, its success undoubtedly owing to a combination of slick production values, inspired performances, keen comedic editing, and a storyline that flirts with, but does not give in to, bathos. At its best moments, *Intouchables* proffers a critique of the establishment elite and a send-up of high culture.

It is certainly possible to read *Intouchables* as producing and embracing a colorblind or race-neutral discourse. Notwithstanding its deliberate juxtaposition of two phenotypically different leading actors, the film narratively and formally emphasizes class difference while subordinating racial difference. Driss has just gotten out of jail, he steals an expensive art object from Philippe’s villa, and he interviews for the job of caregiver only so that he can fulfill the requirements for unemployment benefits. The editing further underscores class difference by encoding it visually. Rhyming sequences that take the viewer back and forth between Philippe’s opulent villa in central Paris and Driss’s bleak HLM in the *banlieue* obtain their significance through mise-en-scène and camera angles: the glossy wooden doors and *pierre de taille* grand entry of Philippe’s villa are squarely framed and filmed with a level camera, while a high-angle camera looks down on the asphalt of Driss’s grim housing project, catching only fragments of the built space in its frame and thus

metaphorizing the social fragmentation of the “zone.” A scene of Driss bathing in a tub too small for him (in the dingy bathroom of an institutional, overcrowded apartment with no privacy) looks vaguely comic at first, yet it turns out to foreshadow and foil the large, luxurious marble bathroom made available to Driss at Philippe’s villa, the first glimpse of which is accompanied by the chorus from Schubert’s “Ave Maria.”

Elements of cinematography are also deployed to focus the viewer’s attention on class rather than race. Within the chronology of the narrative, the spectator first encounters Driss as he waits, alongside a dozen other hopefuls, to be interviewed by Philippe for the job of caregiver. Driss emerges in this sequence through a series of reveals: a low-level horizontal tracking shot skims along pairs of well-shod feet resting on a glossy parquet floor. The camera is clearly establishing a *topos*—these shoes belong to people whose presence in this context is visually logical and who are unified by virtue of a lateral, mobile framing that, in film grammar, federates the objects in its field. This statement of sameness is punctuated when the camera comes to rest on a visual difference: a pair of sneakers, worn by someone in baggy jeans rather than slacks. The anomaly is both material and symbolic: wearing sneakers and jeans to an interview may not necessarily imply a lower economic situation, but it certainly suggests either a lack of knowledge of social codes or a deliberate flaunting of them. Regardless, the camera has enough information to signal that these shoes do not belong—they come from outside, they are worrisome exceptions in the *mise-en-scène*—and it is from this still shot that the camera now tracks upward, revealing the odd man out to be black, a difference only further confirmed when the camera cuts abruptly to a wide shot of all the men.

Although this sequence ends with a kind of group portrait in which Driss is remarkable for both his attire *and* the fact that he is the only black man in a lineup of white men, it is important to remember that the succession of shots that produced this emblem situates race as a secondary concern, made visible only *after* other forms of alterity are exposed. Moreover, the formal subordination of race in this early sequence is reinforced narratively throughout the film: Driss’s race is never directly mentioned and only occasionally implied. A well-meaning friend, for example, tries to protect Philippe from Driss by emphasizing the latter’s criminal record and his rough background in the projects (“ces mecs de la banlieue sont sans pitié”), scrupulously avoiding references to Driss’s skin color or origins. In a scene where Driss dons formal attire for an event, a co-worker observes that he looks good in a suit—“on dirait Barack Obama,” says the red-headed vixen Driss has pursued relentlessly.

Notwithstanding its potential essentialism (namely, that all well-dressed black men look alike), the line's implications are too evident for it to be dismissed as racist—Driss looks nothing like Obama and the redhead is clearly poking fun. At the same time, the reference to the first black president of the U.S. makes for an ambiguous foil: the comparison might be aspirational—Obama as the model of the successful black man—but it also subtly invokes colorblindness by reminding us of the president whose apparent ability to transcend racial categories made him the symbol of a post-racial moment.

The above-mentioned elements combine to produce a film that appears, as many critics and reviewers have agreed, to be about something other than race, or in which racial difference is incidental rather than fundamental. But within the French context, we might also give this an allegorical spin: the film's discourse about race, like that of the nation, looks distinctly colorblind. In other words, the film's aesthetic project props up a politics that is in line with universalist republican values, whereby individuals make no demands based on difference and the state sees "men and citizens," not ethnic, religious or racial difference.

One American critic, however, took issue with *Intouchables* and in particular with the representation of Driss. Calling the film "offensive," *Variety* reviewer Jay Weisberg accused the directors of "flinging about Uncle Tom racism" and treating Sy's character as a "performing monkey" relegated to a role "barely removed from the slave house of yore."¹⁷ Although I disagree with Weisberg's rationale, which is grounded in a distinctly American view of the politics of race representation, I do, however, think that there is a "race-conscious" discourse hiding in plain sight in the film, one that complicates the notion of *Intouchables* as colorblind. The key lies in the directors' decision to replot the racial coordinates of the 'true story' by changing the ethnicity of the caregiver: the 'real-life' Driss is Algerian, not Senegalese. This adaptation is certainly not a mere cosmetic change, nor can it be dismissed as something as simple as the directors' desire to work with Sy (who has become a 'fetish actor' for the duo), even if that is undoubtedly true.¹⁸ Rather, the choice of Sy for the role of Driss has the effect of at once *highlighting* and *hiding* racial issues in France. In other words, the choice embodies the very complexity and ambivalence of colorblind politics.

Nakache and Toledano certainly could have cast an actor of Algerian or North African origin to play the role of Driss, as several of France's most bankable and beloved actors hail from the Maghreb. But the optics of a romance between a Frenchman and an Algerian remain fraught and perhaps less palatable in France, even a half-century after Algerian independence. Thus,

the directors' choice to make the caregiver Senegalese steers the film out of potentially turbulent waters by charting a course around France's long and bitter history with Algeria, and with the large population of Algerians and their descendants who now call France home.¹⁹ This point is illustrated by a 1996 poll in which thirty-five percent of French people surveyed professed their antipathy toward North Africans and their descendants, while only eight percent reported negative feelings toward blacks.²⁰ In 2016, several years after *Intouchables* made its mark, the same polling organization observed the staying power of this sentiment: "la hiérarchie des rejets demeure stable: les juifs, les noirs et les Asiatiques restent les minorités les mieux acceptées, les musulmans les moins acceptés."²¹ Whereas Weisberg sees in Driss a "dancing monkey," the directors and the French public see in Driss a palatable form of alterity, one that permits them to buy into and enjoy the fiction of an interracial bromance that resolutely refuses to problematize race.

Diversity as allegory in *Entre les murs*

Like *Intouchables*, Laurent Cantet's *Entre les murs* appears reluctant to comment on its own investments in the representation of difference. The film rides an ambiguous, blurry line between reality and fiction, between the work of documentary and the work of imagination. The action takes place over the course of a school year but is confined to the space of the school *intra muros* (as the French title suggests and the English title, *The Class*, glosses over). A great number of elements participate in what we might call the film's "reality effect": the multi-ethnic cast is portrayed by actual students rather than actors; the teacher, François Marin, is portrayed by François Bégaudeau, a former middle-school teacher whose eponymous memoir provided the basis for the story; and the film was made on-site at an actual school.²²

The film's docu-drama hybridity is undoubtedly what made it so compelling to viewers and critics, propelling it to the status of an event in French society and creating an opportunity to open a metadialogue about school and politics in a country where school is explicitly conceived as the crucible in which citizens are forged and republican values are inculcated. Notwithstanding the film's channeling of the aesthetics and techniques of *cinéma direct*—or perhaps because of it—it is crucial to remember that *Entre les murs* is a tightly scripted and highly constructed work of fiction, a representation of reality, not an indexical record of it.²³

Critical commentary concerning *Entre les murs*, particularly in regard to the film's representation of racial diversity, was similar in tenor to that produced by the reception of *Intouchables*. Across the board, reactions to the film

could be qualified as colorblind, that is, as not seeing race as an essential component. *Entre les murs* was lauded by the Minister of Education at the time, who called it “un bel hommage à tous les enseignants de France,” and the film received a great deal of media attention when it won the *Palme d’or* at Cannes.²⁴ The success and perceived realism of *Entre les murs* were such that it has become a pedagogical object in and of itself, and numerous online resources have been created and made available to teachers interested in using the film in their classrooms. One pedagogical website sums up the film as depicting “le quotidien d’enseignants et d’élèves dans un collège parisien difficile durant un an [...] Filmé sous la forme d’un documentaire (mais il s’agit bien d’une fiction!), la caméra suit plus spécifiquement un professeur de français, François Marin et sa classe de 4ème. Enseigner de nos jours n’est pas toujours simple... Réalité ou fiction?”²⁵ In another online pedagogical dossier, *Entre les murs* is broken down into keywords (teaching, education, expulsion, authority, France, middle school) and themes (ethics, education, society, manners).²⁶ None of these teaching materials suggest that the ethnic diversity of the class is worth mentioning; the list of keywords and themes seems to sum it up: “race” is neither of these.

This colorblind treatment of a film that seems to produce a colorblind discourse runs parallel with our narrative about *Intouchables*; it is also the case that at least one significant voice emerged to offer a counter reading. Abdoulaye Gueye’s essay, “The Color of Unworthiness,” is a thoroughgoing Fanonian critique that deconstructs the film’s reality effects by exposing the implied race politics of *Entre les murs*.²⁷ While Gueye concedes that the film responds to the dearth of black images in the French media landscape by featuring an ethnically diverse cast with a high proportion of blacks, he claims that its bid to make minorities visible fails because *Entre les murs* reifies stereotypes about blacks in France and thus “validates” a certain vision of a particular group (Gueye 170).

While Gueye’s critique offers a necessary counterpoint to the race-neutral readings generated by the film, there are more complex workings afoot in *Entre les murs* than his analysis might allow for. Both colorblind readings and Gueye’s indictment neglect the ways in which the students themselves are represented as wrestling with and attempting to sort through complex feelings and situations that revolve around race. However partial or elliptical they may be, the questions that emerge from these moments offer the best opportunities to see through race in *Entre les murs*.

In a scene that takes place in the courtyard of the school, for example, the boys play a pickup game of soccer, filmed by a high-level camera that allows

the viewer to see all the players at once and produces a surveillance or carceral effect. Racial and national epithets begin to fly: a Chinese student is dubbed “Jackie Chan”; a black student is simply called “le Malien.” But when a player is tripped and tension builds, this mixed group of boys resorts to baldly racist language: the jeer “sale pédé d’Antillais” is directed at Carl (who is from Martinique); the label “Malien” is now laced with a scornful tone; and in the end they all hurl around the insult “nique ta race.”²⁸ Nothing bad happens here, or does it? The bell rings and the kids go back to class, having performed the ways in which they have internalized and naturalized everyday racism.

The soccer sequence is nearly perfectly bookended by twin scenes in the classroom in which individual students proffer commentary that points, implicitly or explicitly, to their awareness of race and racism. After the pick-up match, Nessim, a student of Moroccan heritage, is called upon to present an exercise in argumentation to the class. On the surface, his comments seem to be about soccer: Nessim announces with pride that the Moroccan team has qualified for the Africa Cup, and when he feigns disappointment that the team from Mali did not (having been eliminated by Morocco), the teacher accuses him of antagonizing the Malian students. But Nessim is actually making a point about the vagaries of pan-African unity: “Dès que le Mali ne joue pas, tous les noirs ici, je veux dire, tous les Africains, on dirait que c’est plus des Africains.” His comment in fact contains a tacit yet profound engagement with national identity and belonging, not to mention that it mobilizes the idea of a shared colonial history while at the same time pointing up the possibility of dual allegiances.

Just prior to the soccer game in the courtyard, Carl, a new student who identifies as Martiniquais, presents his own self-portrait. The sophistication of this self-representation lies in its utter simplicity, its juxtaposition of simple, grammatically identical phrases: “J’aime mes potes, j’aime faire des nuits blanches [...] j’aime manger au restau et me taper des délires.” It is the sameness of his syntax that renders his words more weighty, and so when he places his dislike of racists in a series of three that contains both math and Materazzi—“j’aime pas les maths, les racistes, et j’aime pas Materazzi”—we are jarred first by the juxtaposition between the banality of the phrase’s structure and the implications of its content, and second, by what this construction symbolizes: perhaps, for Carl, racism is just another item on a long list of things that bug him, as regular an event in his life as math homework or watching Materazzi play soccer.

Ultimately, whether referred to in obvious terms or in implicit commentary, race and ethnic difference are clearly active categories for the students of the film. But if we take a step back from the diegesis, it is also possible to read

Entre les murs as an allegory for the place and role of diversity (or alterity) within the French nation. Just as the students call into question the imperfect subjunctive tense and the various exercises they are compelled to perform in the classroom, the presence of difference in France calls into question the existing status quo and the rhetoric that props it up. Just as the students question their teacher and, by extension, the authority of the school, the existence of difference in France questions authority and existing republican institutions. In other words, the film is not colorblind at all, but displays an awareness—albeit perhaps on a subconscious level—of ethnic and racial difference as a powerful signifier capable of producing a subtle ideological critique without tipping into dogma.

Cantet's cinematography not only supports an allegorical reading of *Entre les murs*, it also can be construed as a visual emblem of the very operations I have been suggesting throughout this article. On the one hand, the intense sense of claustrophobia in *Entre les murs* is heightened by Cantet's predilection for the close-up. For example, the tight framing of Marin that opens the film not only posits him as the central character (and perhaps as the one with whom the spectator is to identify), it also serves as a harbinger of an aesthetic to come, one that observes its subjects up close and ponders their comportment and reactions, while promising to reveal something of what lies beneath.

Furthermore, Cantet uses CinemaScope, a process that reduces the depth of field and the height of the images; changing the aspect ratio produces a wide-screen effect, intensifying the claustrophobic nature of the space.²⁹ This technique is best adapted to depicting landscapes, wide swathes of relatively uncluttered territory. When used to film the natural world it appropriately captures extension and expansiveness. When used indoors, however, the technique has the effect of collapsing space and producing frames in which one character is in focus and the figures next to her are slightly blurred. In the context of the classroom, this technique also allows any given frame to offer the viewer a greater amount of visual information: the camera is able to focus on one student while at the same time capturing a wide range of actions and reactions around her. Cantet has taken a technique meant to be used to capture a large entity such as a landscape, but we might also say a country, and trained it on a microcosm of that entity, thus producing a cinematic synecdoche. With a technique designed to capture something as broad as a nation, Cantet represents a diverse body of teenagers: what better way to suggest that we “see through” race when we look at the nation?

In the summer of 2018, the French National Assembly voted unanimously to remove the word race from the first and founding article of the constitu-

tion.³⁰ Whereas, in its 1946 revision, the constitution promised “equality before the law for all citizens, without distinction of origin, race or religion,” the newest iteration ensures equality “without distinction of sex, origin or religion.” Polemics around this modification have crystallized, not unsurprisingly, into the same ideological camps that have come to typify attitudes toward colorblind policy in France. Those who approve the removal of the word argue that because modern science has debunked any biological basis for racial categories, race is not a fact but rather a concept or a social construction, and therefore to continue to use the word is tantamount to a form of racism. Advocates of maintaining the word argue that it offers an important critical vocabulary, and that demonizing the term does nothing to protect people from racism. To the contrary, they argue, erasing the word has the effect of hiding the problem. In the words of writer and activist Rokhaya Diallo, who favors maintaining “race” in the constitution, “there is nothing more dangerous than a country that refuses to see its most obvious issues.”³¹

Critical Race Theory’s tenets may be grounded in the particularities of the U.S. context, but its concerns are not unlike those articulated on *both* sides of the colorblind question in France. CRT is committed to the “social construction” thesis; indeed, its point of departure holds that races are not “objective, inherent or fixed,” that they do not correspond to biological or genetic reality, but are categories that societies “invent, manipulate, and retire when convenient” (Delgado and Stefancic 9). Yet for CRT’s founding scholars, it is the very existence of race and racial categories as a social construct that merits our attention: “That society frequently chooses to ignore scientific truths, creates races, and endows them with pseudo-permanent characteristics is of great interest to critical race theory” (Delgado and Stefancic 9). In other words, it should be possible to recognize “race” (the word and the concept) without condoning the nefarious uses to which it has been put, and to do so is to look at, rather than away from, a country’s “most obvious issues.”

Cinema provides society with a unique practice space for ‘seeing issues,’ be they obvious or hidden; it is a place of speculation—of looking at, of thinking through, and of conjecture. The recent diversification of French film is thus an important opportunity to acknowledge and “see through” race: at a moment when debates about French universalism are increasingly complex and instrumentalized, cinema may be understood as *performing* these complexities and ambivalences, offering us the chance to rehearse our reactions to them. Ultimately, paying attention to ways race is figured and mobilized in *Intouchables* and *Entre les murs* allows us to understand these films as staging the complicated, on-going negotiations between the realities of contemporary

France and the nation's attachment to "a certain idea" of itself, in other words, between republican realities and republican values.

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Notes

1. For a thoroughgoing study of *beur* and *banlieue* film, see Carrie Tarr, *Framing Difference: Beur and Banlieue Filmmaking in France* (Manchester: Manchester U P, 2005).
2. The corpus of scholarship on French universalism is, of course, vast. For readings related to the themes of difference and race, see Naomi Schor, "The Crisis of French Universalism," *Yale French Studies*, 100 (2001): 43–64; Joan Wallach Scott, *Parité! Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2005); and Maurice Samuels, *The Right to Difference: French Universalism and the Jews* (Chicago, U Chicago P, 2016).
3. For studies on the "ethnic turn" in French cinema and the representation of minorities, see Ginette Vincendeau, "From the Margins to the Center: French Stardom and Ethnicity," in *A Companion to Contemporary French Cinema*, Alistair Fox, et al., eds. (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2014), 547–69; Will Higbee, "Diasporic and Postcolonial Cinema in France from the 1990s to the Present," in *A Companion to Contemporary French Cinema*, 136–54; Alec Hargreaves, "La représentation cinématographique de l'éthnicité en France: Stigmatisation, reconnaissance et banalisation," *Questions de communication*, 4 (2003): 127–39.
4. The term "to race" (a field, a cultural production, an entity) is used as a kind of critical shorthand for race-conscious interpretation. Examples include Kymberly Pinder, *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History* (New York: Routledge, 2002); A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., ed., *Race-ing Justice, En-Gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Pantheon, 1982); and Jennifer Erikson, "Race-ing Fargo," *Cultural Anthropology*, <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/1185-race-ing-fargo>.
5. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: New York U P, 2017), 3.
6. Including education, ethnic studies, women's studies, American studies, philosophy, and Latino Studies. Delgado and Stefancic, 7–8.
7. In the American context, we might think of early twentieth-century "uplift film," in which cinema's modernity was leveraged to depict black Americans as modern and civically engaged. See Allyson Field, *Uplift Cinema: The Emergence of African-American Film and the Possibility of Black Modernity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2015). In the French context, the example of Raphael Padilla, aka "Chocolat," is illustrative: the nation's first black performer was also one of the first individuals captured on camera by the Lumière brothers. The archival images of Chocolat's slapstick acts are evidence of the early relationship between moving image technology and the representation of race. Chocolat's story was adapted for the screen in Roshdy Zem's eponymous biopic (2016), starring Omar Sy.
8. Alessandra Raengo, *Critical Race Theory and Bamboozled* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 5, 8.
9. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Seeing Through Race* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 2012), xii, 4.
10. Edward Said, "Traveling Theory," *The Word, The Text, and The Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1983), 226–47.
11. Erik Bleich, "Anti-Racism Without Races? Politics and Policy in a 'Color-Blind' State," in *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference*, Herrick Chapman and Laura L. Frader, eds. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 165.
12. "What is Critical Race Theory?" UCLA School of Public Affairs, Critical Race Studies program, <https://z.umn.edu/43rp>.

13. French thinkers who engage the question of colorblindness in this context often use the English term accompanied by a French translation (“aveugle à la race”). Eric Fassin, “Qui parle des races aujourd’hui?” interview with Sophie Courval in *Regards*, <https://z.umn.edu/43rq>.
14. *Le daltonisme* took its name from John Dalton, the late eighteenth-century English scientist who suffered from a particular form of colorblindness.
15. For a remarkable transhistorical synthesis and deconstruction of the shifting national narrative of race in France, see Bleich, 162–88. For a comparison with U.S. colorblindness, see Robert C. Liberman, “A Tale of Two Countries: The Politics of Colorblindness in France and the United States,” *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 19:3 (Fall 2001): 32–59.
16. Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France,” *Public Cultures*, 23:1 (2010): 128–29. It is worth noting, however, that CRT is philosophically indebted to French post-structuralist theory, notably Lyotard’s notion of *le différend* (Delgado and Stefancic, 50) and concepts articulated by Derrida and Foucault (5).
17. Jay Weisberg, “Untouchable,” *Variety*, September 29, 2001, <http://variety.com/2011/film/reviews/untouchable-1117946269/>.
18. Charlie Michael, “Interpreting *Intouchables*: Competing Transnationalisms in Contemporary French Cinema,” *SubStance* 43:1 (2014): 132.
19. For background on the political and affective afterlives of the Algerian War, see James Le Sueur, “History and Franco-Muslim Reconciliation: French Colonialism in Algeria,” *Uncivil War: French Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria* (Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 2001), 15–27, and Paul Silverstein, *Algerians in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 2004).
20. La Commission nationale consultative des droits de l’homme. 1996, *La lutte contre le racisme et la xénophobie*. Cited in Bleich, 179.
21. La Commission nationale consultative des droits de l’homme. *La lutte contre le racisme, l’antisémitisme et la xénophobie, année 2016*. See conclusion, “L’état du racisme,” 141.
22. In the film and in fact, the students attend *le collège* Françoise Dolto; the filming, however, took place at *le lycée professionnel* Jean Jaurès in Paris’s nineteenth *arrondissement*.
23. Cantet’s style owes a debt to *cinéma direct*, a documentary form that originated in Canada in the 1960s. Made possible, in part, by evolutions in technology, direct cinema was devoted to capturing life as it unfolded, unmediated by a director or an interviewer and featuring a ‘cast’ (of real people) not made self-conscious by the presence of a large technical crew. For a comprehensive history, see Dave Saunders, *Direct Cinema: Observational Documentary and the Politics of the Sixties* (London: Wallflower, 2007).
24. Minister of Education Xavier Darcos, in a press communiqué reported in *Le Figaro*, May 26, 2008, <https://z.umn.edu/43ss>. For a summary of media attention, see Olivier De Bruyn, “Entre les murs: Une palme d’or, et après ?”, *L’Obs*, June 11, 2008, <https://z.umn.edu/43st>.
25. <http://www.cinemafrancais-fle.com/Films/entrelesmurs.php>.
26. <http://www.grignoux.be/dossiers-pedagogiques-252>.
27. Abdoulaye Gueye, “The Color of Unworthiness: Understanding Blacks in France and the French Visual Media Through Laurent Cantet’s *The Class*,” *Transition*, 102 (2009): 158–71.
28. “Nique ta race” is one of a small group of argot insults built on the word “race” (such as “enculé de ta race” and “tu flippes ta race”). Associated with youth and banlieue culture, they have been linked by some linguists to Moroccan Arabic curses such as “maudite soit la religion de ta race.” See Dominique Caubet, “Du *baba* (papa) à la mère, des emplois parallèles en arabe marocain et dans les parures jeunes en France,” *Cahiers d’études africaines* 163–164 (2001). Online since November 2013, <https://z.umn.edu/43su>.
29. James S. Williams, *Space and Being in Contemporary French Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester U P, 2013), 166, and Martin O’Shaughnessy, *Laurent Cantet* (Manchester: Manchester U P, 2015), 134–35.
30. The word “race” was removed from French legislation in 2013.
31. Rokaya Diallo, “France’s dangerous decision to remove race from its constitution,” *Washington Post*, July 13, 2018, <https://z.umn.edu/43sv>.