

**Stony Brook University
The Graduate School**

Doctoral Defense Announcement

Abstract

Cruel Paris: Transnational Feminist Approaches to *Banlieue* Cinema

By

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This dissertation explores films that represent the Parisian *banlieue* (suburban ‘ghettos’) as a transnational space in two distinct periods: the early 1960s, when U.S. popular culture and French colonialism in North Africa acutely affected the *banlieue*; and the post-9/11 period, in which Islamophobic discourses and policies proliferated in the West, rendering the *banlieue* an increasingly stigmatized space. “Cruel Paris” investigates how films invoke intertexts and re-inscribe genres to narrate the *banlieue* as a site of transnational negotiation, telling local stories that impel the spectator to envision France as a (post)colonial, transcultural community. Far from a utopian representation, this depiction critiques the exclusionary ideology of French Republican universalism—the imperative to value the citizen’s ‘abstract’ individualism and national identity over religious, ethnic, and gender identities in the public sphere. I argue that films of both time periods reveal the *banlieue* as a carceral space that contains and controls bodies that have been socially constructed as non-universal, i.e. marked as non-white, non-Catholic, or otherwise inadequate for universalization.

While scholars have used postcolonial theories to illustrate how *banlieue* films reflect the multi-ethnic reality of contemporary France, this lens does not necessarily include the analytical category of gender. In contrast, “Cruel Paris” employs transnational feminist theories to examine *interrelations* among (anti)racist, (anti)colonial, and (anti)feminist representations in an extended study of *banlieue* films. Precisely because of its postcolonial theoretical inheritance, transnational feminism warns against using ‘women’s rights’ discourses for racist ends; it maintains that sexism is prevalent in all cultures, yet manifests in different ways; and it acknowledges that the meanings and experiences of intersectional identities and oppressions shift according to context. I closely analyze key films—*The Wasteland* (1960), *Octobre à Paris* (1962), *L’Esquive* (2004), *Caché* (2005), and *Skirt Day* (2009)—to uncover the structural racism, Islamophobia, and sexism that the spatial marginalization of the Parisian *banlieue* reifies. In representing the *banlieue* as causally linked to the interlocking histories of French settler colonialism in Algeria and U.S. cultural imperialism, these films expose integration as a cruel promise by demonstrating that *assimilation* is necessary—yet often impossible—for the mobility of non-universal French citizens.

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