Rap, Cinema, Fashion, or the Street:

Youth and the Promises of the Industry of the Street amidst Marseille's Economic Restructuring

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Abstract

This thesis examines the emergence of a creative economy in Marseille since the 1990s, a promise of emancipation for lower-class male youth who are prone to early school dropouts. Their rejection of traditional working-class occupations, coupled with aspirations for success and upward social mobility, is exacerbated by exclusionary and stigmatizing urban and cultural policies. I investigate how, rather than countering stereotypes, my participants strive to mobilize stigma into a profitable enterprise: the "industry of the street." This term reflects the industry's dependence on socio-economic ties to "the street," a physical, symbolic, and social space—one that is both a source of valuation and devaluation. Through this perspective, I analyze branches of the music, cinema, and fashion industries, following a Marxist understanding of value. This approach allows me to illuminate the processes by which stereotypes are fetishized and commodified, as well as how this industry mobilizes (past) colonial hierarchies, forms of dominance, and control in the service of capital. I conclude by suggesting that the reframing of rap, alongside other branches of the creative industry, as "work" is a critical first step towards improving working conditions.

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"It's us, peripheral France, always at the center of the debate."
–Médine, L'4mour (2024)

Chapter 1: Introduction

Dylan Robert grew up between the 13th and the 3rd districts of Marseille. At the age of 16, he was sentenced to 4 months of incarceration for extortion. During his time in prison, he was advised by social workers to participate in a film casting to increase his chances of early release. Among them, Assane recalls that he saw talent in him, as did the film director: Dylan was taken out of his cell and given the leading role in Shéhérazade (2018). The film is a documentary-fiction that depicts a love story between a 17-year-old boy who has just been released from prison and a young prostitute in the city center of Marseille. Shéhérazade was a success, and Dylan was awarded the César for the Most Promising Male Actor at the Cannes Film Festival at the age of 18. This jumpstarted his career, yet soon he was arrested and incarcerated again, first for necklace snatchings and later for complicity in murder. In several interviews, Dylan mentions "I needed money, and the Cannes Film Festival does not pay" to which Assane responded: "Cannes pays very well. The problem is that he wasn't ready, he went from the penitentiary to Cannes via luxury hotel rooms in Paris, he wasn't weaned".

Two aspects of this story are of interest in this thesis. First, the tone Assane used in explaining that Dylan wasn't *weaned*. Second, Dylan's equivocal class position, midway between his prison cell and Cannes' red carpet. In this thesis, I attempt to make sense of Dylan Robert's story within the recent transformation of Marseille's economy. My research focuses on the reshaping of Marseille's working-class following deindustrialization and the subsequent development of the creative industry. I suggest looking at this through the lens of the "industry of the street", joining branches of the music, cinema, and fashion industries often associated with 'success', on the grounds that they all rely on the commodification of 'the street',

understood as a physical, symbolic, and social space, associated with 'stigma'. The significance of the conceptualization of the "industry of the street" should be clear to the reader by the end of this thesis. My analysis centers on the position of the figure of the "jeune de banlieue" within this industry, i.e., racialized, male, lower-class youth associated with 'the street'.

Rap served as an entry point for this research. It is the 'oldest' and thus most established creative industry in Marseille, ever since the late 1980s. In recent years, rappers have increasingly been offered roles in films and sponsored by fashion brands, suggesting that rap boosted the development of the cinema and fashion industries in Marseille, testifying to the idea of an "industry of the street". Rap therefore remains the focus of this thesis, though it will be supplemented by examples and quotes from my interlocutors pertaining to the cinema and fashion industries.

Recent scholarship on French rap has pushed for an understanding of rap as a market economy, however, the question has often been approached from the angle of consumption (Hammou, 2015). In this thesis, I propose an analysis of French rap from the perspective of production. I seek to answer the following questions:

- How has the economy of Marseille been restructured by the development of creative industries, and how has this affected the working class?
    - How is 'the street' commodified by the "industry of the street"?
    - How do the actors of 'the street' deal with simultaneous experiences of 'stigma' and 'success'?
    - What are the continuities and ruptures between traditional working-class conditions and the workings of the "industry of the street"?

1.1 Methodology

Between July and December 2024, I conducted 6 months of fieldwork in Marseille. I chose Marseille as a fieldwork site because of its history as a working-class city, a 'capital of rap', and its rebranding as a 'cultural capital'. All of my interviews were transcribed, sorted, and coded together with my fieldnotes.

1.1.1 Positionality and Virtual Snowball Sampling Method

Being a white, upper-middle-class woman with no experience in the cinema, fashion, and rap industries certainly has affected my relationship with my interlocutors, predominantly non-white, lower-class males. However, the insider-outsider dichotomy is not so sharply cut in practice (Fedyuk & Zentai, 2018, p. 179-182); my passion for rap often facilitated conversations. Moreover, the "industry of the street" relies on connections across different networks, tying together individuals from diverse social backgrounds. These connections are, nevertheless, informed by relations of power, as suggested by Kayden, an emerging actor, who explained that he was recruited for his first cinema role by a woman "like me" who said "his face had potential"; in terms of power dynamics, I was considered more of an outsider than an insider. This was emphasized by the fact that most of my interlocutors insisted on referring to me using the formal 'you'.

This was also made clear to me by Léo, a manager of two emerging artists, whom I met in a local streetwear shop. As we started talking, I realized I had previously messaged him on Instagram regarding my research, to which he never replied. I explained my research in more detail, to which he replied: "This is a great topic! You know that this is the reason I never responded to your message? I thought, 'here we go again, another person who just wants to extract something from us and give nothing in return'". This was further emphasized by my positionality, not only as a researcher but also as a filmmaker. During fieldwork, I was working

on a documentary film related to the topic of my thesis. I attended several video clip shootings with my camera, during which people often asked whether I was filming for a TV news channel. When I responded no, a teenage boy answered "better" with a threatening tone.

This lack of trust was especially striking as I felt that people who accepted talking to me didn't want to take the responsibility for introducing me to further potential interlocutors; the snowball wasn't rolling (Parker et al., 2020). Instead, I opted for a virtual snowball sampling method, centering on Instagram. This methodology allowed me to rely on the network structure of social media for obtaining background information, and identifying and establishing contact with the principal actors (Kaliszewski et al, 2021; Dosek, 2021). As I started subscribing to local rap pages and emerging rappers, the algorithm suggested profiles with friends in common. Over time, these suggestions were increasingly precise, and enabled me to have an overview of an industry that had no initial clear boundaries, i.e., the "industry of the street". During the last video clip shooting I attended, I met Alex, whom I had met at the beginning of my fieldwork. He was surprised by my presence: "What are you doing here, you are so connected!". His reaction confirmed my initial doubts and my successful carrying out of virtual snowball sampling.

1.1.2 Semi-structured and Unstructured Interviews

I used semi-structured and unstructured interviews to make sense of my interlocutor's lived experiences of the "industry of the street" following Spradley's guidelines (2016). Using semi-structured and unstructured interviews enabled me to reach a range of participants tied to a field that is not concentrated in one single space. This methodology also leaves more space for the respondent to introduce discussion topics, enabling me to account for what I had neglected in my conceptualization of the field; I was originally interested in questions of stigma and representation, which my interlocutors showed little interest in, compared to working

conditions. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews offered insights into this question, which is often neglected in mainstream discussions of the industries under scrutiny here. As a result, my research was actively influenced by my participants' insights (Fedyuk & Zentai).

Overall, I talked with 42 people. I conducted 21 semi-structured and unstructured interviews with 7 rappers, 2 producers, 3 actors, 1 film director, 3 photographers, 1 video clip maker, 1 visual artist, and 3 media owners or 'fixers'. I refer to 'fixers' as individuals who function as intermediaries between brands and locals, and arrange access to locations and people for the shooting of advertisement campaigns, for example. I also kept a record of 21 informal conversations with 6 social workers, 6 rappers, 1 producer, 1 manager, 1 film studio owner, 1 videographer, 2 photographers, 1 person who works for a rap media, and 2 streetwear vendors (see Appendix). The names of all my interlocutors were changed to protect their anonymity, except for Marvin, a photographer whose work is analyzed in Chapter 2. He gave consent for his name to be disclosed.

I conducted semi-structured interviews following central themes adapted to their respective 'roles' in the industry: their relative position in the industry and how they came to it, their work and ambitions for the future, the importance of the rap, cinema and fashion industries in Marseille, broader questions on representation and the functioning thereof, and questions on youth and their relation to these industries. In some settings, friends of my interviewees joined the conversation, leading to spontaneous, unstructured interviews, where my interlocutors more largely structured the discussion. Informal conversations occurred in group settings, and during events I attended or was invited to attend. They were also guided by my questions and field of interest.

Interviewees were selected based on their respective roles in the industry. Positions within the "industry of the street" are not sharply cut, as some interlocutors carried different

roles, e.g., rapper and social worker. I categorized them according to their predominant role. My goal was to map the network of social relations that constitutes what I refer to as the "industry of the street". I chose to focus strictly on "entry-level positions", i.e., positions that could be accessed without formal education, micro-level actors, and small-scale enterprises, as opposed to multinational labels or brands.

I differentiate between two categories of rappers. 'Elder rappers' were in their early to late thirties, had more experience and often found alternative sources of income, such as teaching in workshops. 'Emerging rappers' were usually in their late teens and early twenties, at the start of their careers and professionalization. I spoke with 3 elder and 10 emerging rappers.

I also tried talking to a representative sample of people from the "quartiers nords[1]" and the city center. Overall, 15 interlocutors were originally from the quartiers nords (elder interlocutors may have grown up in the quartiers nords but moved later in life), 12 from the city center (predominantly from the working-class city center), and 15 from cities neighboring Marseille or Paris. The latter were included because of their respective ties to the industry in Marseille.

Race, gender, and class were not criteria for selecting my interviews, though the majority of my interlocutors were non-white males from lower-class backgrounds.

1.1.3 Participant Observation

Participant observation enabled me to map the spaces in which the "industry of the street" unfolds, following Spradley's guidelines (2011). I follow Reger's approach that emotions are a crucial part of the research process and should be integrated reflexively (2001).

[1]Literally means 'northern suburbs', informal name for banlieue-like districts erected in the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th districts of Marseille.

"Emotional struggle" (Reger, 2001, p. 612) was part of my daily experience conducting participant observation, especially when attending video clip shootings in the quartiers nords. Before my fieldwork, my parents regularly sent articles about shootings in the suburbs and warned me not to go wandering there on my own. During my first week living in Belsunce[2] (1st district), friends were repeatedly sharing their worries with me: "Is it safe there?", "Are you okay?". I am aware that I am not free of bias. Although my mind profoundly disagrees with the stereotypes these fears arise from, my body had been wired to feel fear and stress when "wandering in the quartiers nords on my own". Reflecting on my emotions consisted of a process of "unlearning" (Okely, 2012), and directed me to put an emphasis on the role of stigma and stereotyping in this thesis.

I visited local streetwear shops, and attended concerts, neighborhood parties, radio broadcastings, campaign shoots, sponsored events, lectures, film screenings, and regular activities held by associations. My access to some events was mediated by my documentary film project, such as for two youths writing and rapping workshops and 9 videoclip shoots. With this film, I hope to contribute to making the content of this thesis accessible to a wider audience (Fedyuk & Zentai, 2018, p. 178). Overall, my fieldwork was also informed by informal observations and interactions I documented throughout the city. Some quotes used to illustrate the prejudice associated with the 'street' are extracted from informal conversations I had during my time off from fieldwork with colleagues and friends, predominantly white and upper-middle class.

1.2 Summary of the Chapters

In Chapte 2, I trace the emergence of the "industry of the street" amid Marseille's ongoing socio-economic crisis, and its ties to the "street", a physical, social, and symbolic

[2]I lived in Belsunce for the duration of my fieldwork (Figure 2.4).

space, source of both valuation and devaluation. This Chapter builds upon the expanding literature on French rap and proposes a re-centering on a Marxist understanding of value. Chapter 3 explores how "the street" is commodified by the "industry of the street". In the first section, I construct "the street" as a space that is subsequently stereotyped, fetishized, and commodified. The second section builds upon Social Reproduction Theory and analyzes the social reproduction of labor power for the "industry of the street" within socio-cultural associations. Chapter 4 explores the "industry of the street" as a field, subjugating and emancipatory at once. Building upon the growing scholarship on racial capitalism, I conceptualize "the street" as a zone of internal colonialism to explore how race informs the extraction of value. In the last section, I account for how my interlocutors sought to negotiate such forms of domination and control.

"Families used to be bigger, you didn't go and do art,
you went and worked in a factory."
–Assane

Chapter 2: "From the Cell to the Castle"[3]

In this Chapter, I trace how levels of poverty and unemployment, and state investments for the rebranding of Marseille, contributed to the emergence of what I refer to as the "industry of the street". I stress the ambivalence of urban and cultural politics in treating "the street" both as a source of both valuation and devaluation. Building upon the existing literature on rap, I conceptualize "the street" as a physical, social, and symbolic space. The Chapter ends with my conceptualization of the "industry of the street", grounded in a Marxist understanding of value.

2.1 Marseille's Economic Restructuring

2.1.1 De-industrializing and Re-industrializing Marseille

Marseille's deindustrialization was preceded by the collapse of its harbor. The city's industrial system was largely dependent on its strategic location as a port city, specifically its ties to colonies in North Africa. Towards the end of the 1950s, the independence of former colonies, coupled with the globalization of production, weakened the local port-industry system which failed to compete with cheaper, imported goods. Factories closed, or were bought and absorbed by export-oriented industrial groups (Daviet et al., 2003). Of 42 percent of the local population employed as factory workers in 1954, only 8.4 percent remained in 2021 (Peraldi et al., 2015, p. 10; Insee, 2025b). In the following decade, three factors mitigated the effects of the deindustrialization crisis: the social housing programme, the emergence of clientelist relations, and the development of Fos-sur-mer's high-tech and oil port, which absorbed some

[3]"De la cellule au château" is the name of the album released by So la Zone in 2024. It exemplifies the ambivalence of the experience of 'the street' I am trying to convey in this chapter.

of the unemployed and provided some tax revenues for the city. I unpack the three factors below.

Heavy migration following the independence of former colonies, culminating with the end of the Algerian war in 1962, put pressure on housing. In Marseille, "over ten thousand people were living in shantytowns by 1965" (Naylor, 2023, p. 71). 75 percent of Marseille's social housing was built between 1965 and 1975 (Peraldi et al., 2015, p. 43), erected, for the most part, in the north of the city, today referred to as the "quartiers nords[4]". Many industrial companies converted their activity to construction work (Peraldi et al., 2015, p. 29), a sector absorbing approximately 10 percent of the population (Daviet et al., 2003, p. 194).

The establishment of clientelist relations under the mayorship of Defferre (1959-1986) further alleviated the effects of the crisis. Often referred to as the 'Defferre system', the mayor consolidated his power through the distribution of public resources ranging from civil servant positions to social housing and subsidies. A new middle class emerged, heavily dependent on politics, serving as the social basis for the mayor's electorate (Naylor, 2023; Peraldi et al., 2015).

Finally, the deindustrialization of Marseille occurred in the midst of a regional economic boom. In 1919, the Étang de Berre was annexed to Marseille's industrial port, where the state and multinational companies started investing in developing oil and high-tech industries. The 1949 Lavéra extension, followed by the 1968 Fos-sur-mer extension, marked the permanent displacement of Marseille's port and its restructuring as a petrochemical cluster (Figure 3.1). In the 1990s, oil represented 90 percent of the new port's activity (Peraldi et al., 2015:32).

[4] Literally means 'northern suburbs', informal name for banlieue-like districts erected in the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th districts of Marseille.

Figure 2.1 The Marseille-Fos Port-industrial Complex
(In red, the area covered by the industry-port complex of Marseille and Fos, and in dark yellow, Marseille's urban area)
Source: https://cm2joliotcuriezip.wordpress.com/zip-fos-marseille/

The social housing construction boom was however temporary, and the state allocation of resources spread unequally, as evidenced by the scepticism to open (municipal) social housing to foreign and ethnic minority families (Naylor, 2023, p. 75). Moreover, the Marseille-Fos port-industrial complex did not attract petrochemical headquarters to Marseille, nor did it fully compensate for the unemployment following the loss of its traditional industries (Daviet et al., 2003). By the 1990s, Marseille was crippled by a succession of crises, affecting the city up to this day. In 2010, 26 percent of the population lived below the poverty line (Peraldi et al., 2015, p. 11), and 18 percent of the working population was employed in the public sector (twice as much as in Paris), suggesting the city's ongoing dependence on the state (Peraldi et al., 2015, p. 19).

As a response, the 1990s marked the development of a new project for the city: the turning of Marseille into an economic and cultural capital, centering on the repurposing of abandoned dock spaces and the reframing of Marseille as a "capital of diversity" (Aziz, 2024, p. 8).

2.1.2 Marseille, Capital of Diversity

The launch of the Euromediterranée urban renewal project in 1995 consolidated the development of this new path for the city. Euromediterranée was first proposed in the late 1980s by Henri Mercier, during his mandate as president of the chamber of commerce and industry, as a strategic plan for the redevelopment of Marseille. In the early 1990s, the project was approved by Robert Vigouroux, at the time mayor of Marseille, and proposed to the central government, which launched the creation of the EPAEM (Établissement Public d'Aménagement EuroMediterranée), an organization in charge of the urban renewal project, funded for 50 percent by the state and 10 percent by the city of Marseille (Peraldi et al., 2015, p. 102; Apothéloz, 2021).

The project aims to transform the city into an attractive and competitive metropolitan center by converting its abandoned industrial spaces into museums, cultural spaces, shopping malls, etc. The "Opération d'Interêt National"label (operation of national interest) justifies expropriations, suggesting that "the city's renovation (is) to be achieved through the eviction of its 'undesirable' populations" (Beschon, 2023, p. 200). Originally covering 310 ha of the city, Beschon's analysis of Euromediterranée as a progressive conquest of territory (under indirect supervision of the state) is exemplified by the 2007 addition of 170 ha, extending the project at least until 2030 (2023). According to Peraldi et al., construction work is performed by foreign companies, and services are operated mostly by the CMA-CGM maritime transport company, whose local workforce represents less than 15% of the total company (2015). If the project does not directly contribute to local employment, indirect effects are more difficult to measure, as suggested by the steady yearly 0.7% population growth since the 2000s (Peraldi et al., 2015, p. 104) – against the loss of 102.000 inhabitants between 1975 and 1999 (Peraldi et al., 2015, p. 9).

EPAEM's progressive conquest of territory under the invisible hand of the state has gradually spread beyond the city's industrial wastelands to its city center. Following the collapse of two buildings, killing 8 people in rue d'Aubagne on the 5th of November 2018 (1st district; Figure 2.4), the SPLA-IN, a 35 percent state-funded organisation (represented by the EPAEM), took over the rehabilitation of the city center in 2019.

A wave of « Arretés de péril » (peril orders) followed the rue d'Aubagne incident, targeting buildings throughout the city center that qualified as « habitat indigne » (indecent housing), justifying their expropriation. The number of evacuations is rising up to this day (Artaud, 2019; Vinzent, 2024; Figures 2.2 and 2.3), targeting buildings primarily located in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd districts, where poverty levels were ranging between 43 and 55 percent in 2010 (Peraldi et al., 2015, p. 13; Figure 2.4). Many accused the local government of deliberate negligence, as Yanis, an emerging rapper, who suggested that buildings which are not granted the peril-order label are left to further decay, until they in turn, qualify for emergency evacuation and expropriation: "The ceiling of the building (in Belsunce) fell in front of the studio door, (...) The state, the deputy commissioner, and the city council came to the studio, saw the state, they said we're going to find a solution. It's been three months and nothing's happening".

Given the overlap between security perimeters and urban renewal project confines, Dorier suggests that the housing crisis is the result of strategic neoliberal choices (2023, pp. 231-235). Artificial devaluation and the acceleration of the "cyclical model of investment in the built environment" (Harvey, 1978, p. 116) provide an unprecedented opportunity to to "revitalize the economic function" of the city center (Leforestier, 2024). In line with Harvey's accumulation by dispossession (2017), the 'emergency' of the situation following the incidents of 2018 has accelerated this process, justifying expropriations and relegating precarious populations to distant neighborhoods, usually in the 3rd or the 15th district (Dorier, 2023, p.

232; Figure 2.4), again suggesting that the city's renewal rests upon a 'renewal' of the population. Despite the mayor's promise of to include a quota of social housing units in the urban renewal project, the SPLA-IN is funded by the city of Marseille for 6 percent against 59 percent by the Metropole Aix-Marseille-Provence (regional governing body) and 35 percent by the state. Again, the municipality has little say in the future of the city.

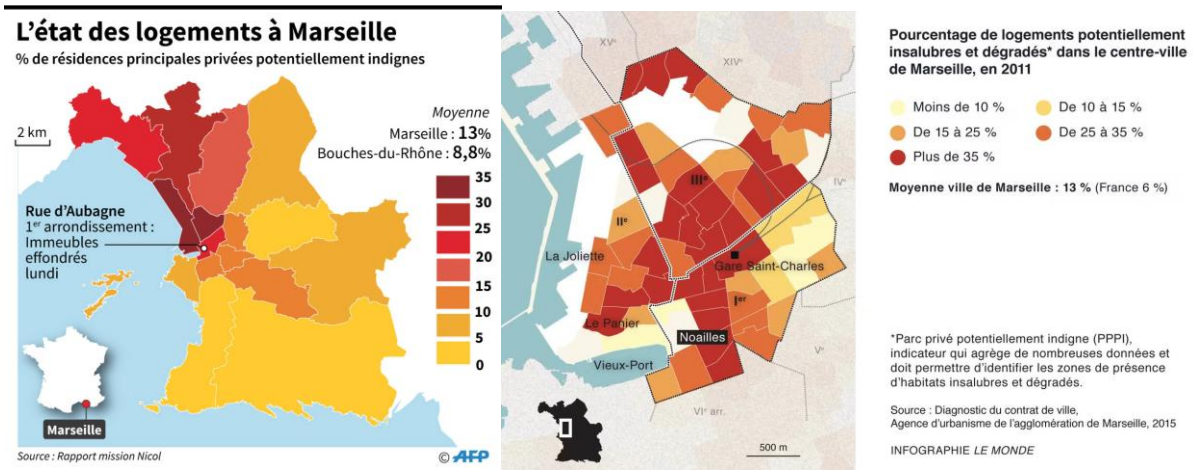


Figure 2.2. The State of Housing in Marseille: Percentage of Principal Private Residences Potentially Unfit for Habitation
Source: Agence France-Presse, 2018

Figure 2.3. Percentage of Potentially Substandard and Degraded Housing in Downtown Marseille in 2011
Source: Le Monde, 2018

2.1.3 Marseille, Capital of Rap

Introduced in the late 1980s, the "politique de la ville" (urban policy) denotes a set of policies to reduce inequalities in so-called banlieues and banlieue-like spaces. Defined as all urban areas bordering large cities, 'banlieue' literally means 'suburb' in French. Originally a geographical term, 'banlieues' have increasingly been associated with violence and criminality, exclusively targeting the social housing blocks erected in the post-war years to deal with the pressure on housing following migration from neighboring countries (guest workers) and former colonies (following independence). The 'quartiers nords' (northern suburbs) is an

informal name referring to such districts erected in the north of Marseille, encompassing the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th districts of the city (Figure 2.4), and housing 28.3 percent of Marseille's population. Following deindustrialization in the 1970s, many inhabitants lost their jobs, with poverty and unemployment rates in the quartiers nords ranging between 25 and 44 percent, and between 17 and 21.4 percent respectively in 2021; the 15th district being the most affected (Insee, 2025a). The targeted territories of the "politique de la ville" were formalized under the ZUS-label in 1996 (zone urbaine sensible; sensitive urban zone), changed to QPV in 2014 (qartier prioritaire de la politique de la ville; priority district). In Marseille, QPVs overlap with the quartiers nords and the working-class districts of the city center (Figures 2.4 and 2.5).

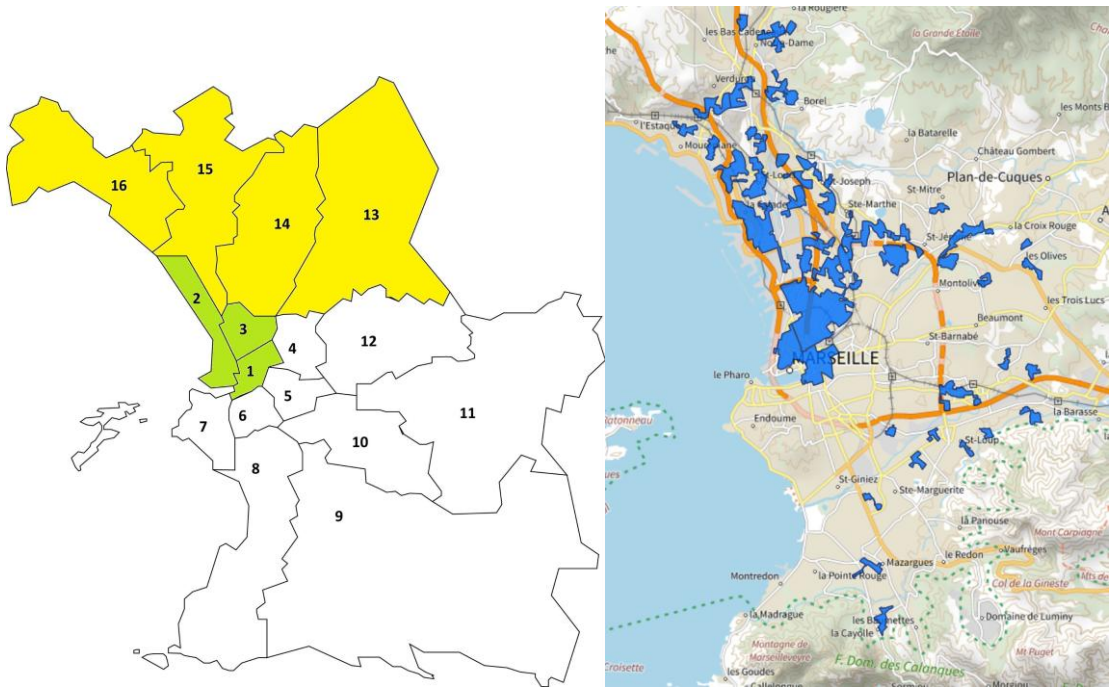


Figure 2.4. Districts of Marseille
(In yellow, the districts of the quartiers nords, and in green, the lower-class neighborhoods of the city center)
Source: Map from the author

Figure 2.5: Priority Neighborhoods: Mapping and Data.
Source: Retrieved from the SIG website (geographic information system for the "politique de la ville" (n.d.)

In 1982, the Defferre laws introduced a series of decentralization policies, transferring power from the central government to local and regional authorities. Responsibility for the "politique de la ville" was allocated to the "collectivités territoriales" (territorial collectivity), i.e., local and regional authorities with some degree of autonomy from the central government. "Urban renewal", "social cohesion", and "economic development" constitute the three pillars of the "politique de la ville" (Le Contrat de Ville, n.d.).

"Urban renewal", which consisted of rehabilitation programs for the improvement of public transport and education in the 1980s, proved costly and were replaced in 2004 with programs targeting the demolition of buildings led by the ANRU (Ronai, 2023). Reveillere's study of the ANRU's urban renewal program in the quartiers nords reveals how repeated delays due to lack of adequate funding keep the neighborhoods in a permanent state of decay, culminating in the death of 4 inhabitants in a fire hazard on the 16th of July 2021 (2025). He points to two factors leading to the tragic event: the Metropole Aix-Marseille-Provence's[5] reluctance to allocate funds to the suburbs, and the allocated funds being invested according to political interests rather than responding to the demands of the inhabitants, e.g., prioritizing surveillance and control. This reluctance is also made visible by the lack of infrastructure in the quartiers nords: the area is only covered by 5 metro stations (out of 25), buses stop after 9 p.m., one public swimming pool is open part-time, and the remaining 4 regularly close without warning (Morenne, 2017). Assane emphasized: "The only things they've (the state) come to build in the suburbs are football fields, music studios, and associations".

"Social cohesion" constitutes another pillar of the "politique de la ville", targeting the funding of associations, social, cultural, and sports facilities. Marseille counts the most socio-cultural facilities per inhabitant in France (Lafargue De Grangeneuve, 2008, p. 41); around

[5]As introduced earlier, the Metropole Aix-Marseille-Provence is a regional governing body, part of the "collectivité territoriale"

20.000 NGOs (Miguet, 2016). Many offer rap writing workshops and open mic sessions to the local youth. Indeed, since the 1990s, hip-hop has emerged both as the 'problem' of the banlieues and its solution. In the hands of social workers of the "politique de la ville", hip-hop could serve as a tool to fight delinquency by keeping 'problematic' youth off 'the street' (Hammou & Sonnette-Manouguian, 2022, p. 194).

The scarcity of resources allocated to the "politique de la ville" led to the emergence of a 'subsidy market' for NGOs (Lafargue De Grangeneuve, 2008, p. 48). Public funding is differentiated between "commandes publiques" (public commissions) allocated to projects targeting a demand formulated by the state, and "subventions" (subsidies) allocated to projects initiated and determined by a third party. Public commissions are prioritized over subsidies, enhancing the state's power over NGOs' decision-making and favoring larger structures, to the detriment of smaller, local organizations (Cottin-Marx et al., 2017, p. 468; Prouteau & Tchernonog, 2018). This was exemplified by Yanis, who claimed that public funding often gets distributed to associations with "sharper, cleaner, more presentable faces".

The "politique de la ville" therefore emerges as set of symbolic actions aimed at reasserting the state's authority, rather than contributing to long-lasting change (Lafargue Lafargue De Grangeneuve, 2008). This is emphasized by the fact that these policies were introduced in response to the first mediatized banlieue riots in Vénissieux and Vaulx-en-Velin in 1981 (banlieues of Lyon). Moreover, the QPV-label, formalized as a temporary state aimed at prioritizing the allocation of funds to reduce inequalities, i.e., in the hope of decreasing the number of QPVs in the long run, has instead seen its number increase over the years (from 1.296 in 2023 to 1.362 from 2024; Insee, 2024). The "politique de la ville" (urban policy) and the "politique de droit commun" (common law policy) should be distinguished. The "politique de droit commun" refers to sectoral policies (health, economic development, education, urban planning, etc.) that apply equally to an entire territory without distinction between

neighborhoods (Institut de la Recherche et de l'Étude de la Ville, n.d.). Instead of an additional source of support, Lafargue De Grangeneuve shows how, in QPVs, the "politique de droit commun" has been substituted by the "politique de la ville" (Lafargue De Grangeneuve, 2008, p. 57), suggesting that this temporary label has been turned into a permanent state of exception. While the "politique de la ville" is used as a tool to keep problematic youths off of the street, the "politique de droit commun" has partly absorbed hip-hop, to fund large hip-hop events, festivals or concert venues such as 'l'Affranchi' in Marseille, transforming stigma into an attractive feature, indirectly contributing to the city's rebranding and economic development (Lafargue De Grangeneuve, 2008).

2.2 The Industry of the Street

Most research on French rap has focused on discursive analyses of lyrics and their political engagement (see Jacono, 2004; Preitschopf, 2022; Puig, 2014; Verbeke, 2017). Hammou (2015) contends that this academic framing of rap relates to the long-standing taken-for-granted assumption that rap and 'banlieues' are two sides of the same coin. Building upon Pecqueux's work, he condemns this 'spectacularization' of French rap, and underlines the importance of treating it instead as a "trivial (...) artistic practice embedded in a market economy" (2007, as cited in Hammou, 2015, p. 11). Far from nonexistent, he posits that the banlieue-rap conflation exists in the imagination of academics, journalists, politicians, French rap audiences, and the artists and cultural industries that reproduce it for profit. Imagination is always grounded in material reality: he traces the construction of French rap as an "othered cultural good" (Huggan, 2001, as cited in Hammou, 2016) from its inception in France in the late 1980s to its institutionalisation and consolidation within the music industry in the late 1990s to early 2000s (Hammou & Becker, 2014; Hammou, 2016; Hammou & Sonnette-Manouguian, 2022). The mainstream commodification of rap culminates in the late 1990s with the adoption

of a strategic "marketing of the margins" (Huggan, 2001, as cited in Hammou, 2016), conflating French rap with "the street" and, by extension, the banlieues.

Hammou & Becker conceptualize "the street" as a polysemic term (2014). Referring to the mythical (physical) birthplace of hip-hop in the United States, it was adopted as a commercial (symbolic) rhetoric in France in the late 1990s, to promote the genre's 'oppositional' character, while keeping it at a distance from leading actors and corporations of the music industry. Rap emerges as a genre at the intersection of conflicting "value regimes" (Appadurai, 1986, as cited in Hammou, 2016), resulting in its ambivalent legitimation, as its conflation with "the street" functions both as a source of valuation and devaluation. This process was intimately tied to racism and the racialization of the banlieues. The rapper came to represent alterity, associated with the figure of the "jeune de banlieue" (banlieue youth), built upon hierarchies of age (youth), class (lower-class), race (non-white), sex (male), and geography (banlieues) (Hammou & Sonnette-Manouguian, 2022, p. 23). It is important to note that, contrary to American ghettos, French banlieues comprise ethnically diverse populations (Wacquant, 2013). In this sense, it is the association with the (racist) imaginary of the banlieues that produces the racialization of the "jeune de banlieue", regardless of their ethnicity. The term 'racialized people' will be used in this thesis to refer to "people whose racialization reduces their effective access to the exercise of rights" (Hammou & Sonnette-Manouguian, 2022, p. 21).

Besides a physical and symbolic space, Hammou and Becker describe "the street" as a social space associated with triviality of economic motives, accessibility, familiarity, informality, determination, and solidarity (2014, p. 230). The figure of the "jeune de banlieue" is not only imagined in stigmatising discourse, but also lived and embodied by those subjected to it, resonating with Foucault's analysis of the production of subjects through discourses (1982; as cited in Hall, 2013, p. 55). Anderson's conceptualization of the "code of the street" as a

raced, classed, and gendered set of informal rules that govern social interactions in Philadelphia's inner-city ghetto in response to alienation from mainstream society expands this understanding (1999, as cited in Kubrin, 2005, and Fader & León, 2024, p. 21).

Researchers I contacted regarding my project claimed that: "In Marseille, there are no banlieues". The term 'banlieue' specifically relates to cities constructed on the model of Paris or Lyon, with such stigmatized, racialized, and lower-class neighborhoods located on the margins of the cities, and falling under a separate municipality. In this geographical and administrative sense, Marseille does not fit the French city model. The 'quartiers nords', though on the outskirts, are included in the city's district system. Moreover, despite attempts at gentrifying the city center, lower classes still populate the city center, specifically the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd districts (Figure 2.4).

Yet, as for the banlieues, the quartiers nords–as the infamous naming suggests–and the city center are both conflations of physical and symbolic spaces. Raphaël recalled a vague story he had been told during his internship in a secondary school in the quartiers nords, about a shooting that took place outside the school. Hearing the sounds of the bullets, the teachers instinctively hid under their tables but the students remained calm and: they were used to this, he told me. My experience living in Belsunce[6] echoes the mythology of the quartiers nords. The street where I was living was a center for drug dealing. Day and night, teenage boys were sitting, waiting for customers. The week I moved in, they were shooting fireworks every evening. Éden told me he suspected the fireworks were used to cover the sound of gunshots. The fact that the 3rd district is sometimes conflated with the quartiers nords further exemplifies the arbitrariness of this naming. In this sense, the 'quartiers nords' represent a symbolic, racialized space, rather than a strictly geographical location.

[6]1st district of Marseille (see Figure 2.4).

The resemblance of the myths of the quartiers nords and Belsunce suggests that the term 'banlieue' indeed does not prove adequate. A more appropriate term to account for the shared characteristics of the city center and the quartiers nords would be 'quartiers populaires' ('lower-class neighborhoods', term used in social sciences), or what people themselves refer to as 'the street' (la rue). 'The street' was used by many of my interlocutors to refer to drug selling, but also more broadly to the informal economy, and the lower class who often find themselves entangled in such networks. This understanding of 'the street' was also tied to specific imaginaries of race and gender (non-white, male, youth, akin to the 'jeune de banlieue'). 'The street', in this sense, refers to a social group with shared experiences of marginalization, summarized by Marvin as a "lack of hope", shared by my interlocutors from both the quartiers nords and the working-class districts of the city center. Soufiane, a social worker accompanying youth in the city center explained: "It's either rap, (...) or it's the street, which means selling drugs. It's like young people don't have a choice anymore". Similarly, during the one-week rap workshop I attended, Kaïs, a 17-years-old teenager from the 15th district expressed that he could have succeeded in football had his father put him on a team early enough. He explained that he had made the wrong choices in life, that it was too late, and that the only option left for him was 'Parcours-stup'. 'Parcours-stup' is a pun on the name 'Parcoursup', the platform for applying to higher education, and 'stup', meaning narcotics.

Despite the similarities, differences within 'the street' should be underlined. The quartiers nords, due to their location and lack of infrastructure, are more isolated than the central districts. *Objectively,* this translates into more difficulty accessing formal work and other infrastructures. However, the *perceived* lack of hope, shared by my interlocutors in both the quartiers nords and the city center, justifies the merging of the two under the concept of 'the street', unifying my interlocutors' lived experiences of age, class, race, and gender in Marseille (Chainais, 2025). I conceptualize 'the street' as a physical (the quartiers nords and the working-

class districts of the city center), symbolic (racialized and stigmatized), and social space (shared experiences of age, class, race, and gender). Although separated for conceptual clarity, these dimensions are interrelated.

Hammou uses the notion of "value regimes" to explain the ambivalence of 'the street' as a source of both valuation and devaluation (Appadurai, 1986, as cited in Hammou, 2016, p. 69). Appadurai coined the term "value regimes" as a critique of Marx: he contends that to understand value, one needs to look at demand rather than production, focusing on "the social life" of commodities. While this approach proves useful in understanding how the conflation of rap with 'the street' contributes to the artistic legitimation and deligitimation of the genre (Hammou, 2016), it, by definition, obscures production and the social relations thereof.

In my analysis, I attempt to look at this industry from the angle of production rather than consumption, recentering on a Marxist approach to value. Although the "politique de la ville" and "politique de droit commun" contribute to the income of some rappers, they remain sparse (Lafargue De Grangeneuve, 2008). The "intermittence du spectacle", guaranteed to artists and cultural actors by the state under a number of yearly working hours, constitutes another possibility. Yet "hip-hop artists are under-represented among musicians benefiting from public support schemes for cultural activities, such as intermittent employment ('intermittence du spectacle')" (Perrenoud, 2007; as cited in Hammou & Sonnette-Manouguian, 2022, p. 113), as Yanis explained, referring to the trajectory of one of his friends:

> He could be paid as an "intermittant du spectacle" while he worked on his music project, which enabled him not to sell drugs and earn money. They said we're not renewing. So by the time he finished his project, he was back on the street.

Because income cannot be secured by the public sector, many rappers seek professionalization through labels or by securing an 'independent[7]' career (Lafargue De Grangeneuve, 2008). While the market can play an emancipatory role against the centralized selectivity of subsidised forms of 'high-culture', it also opens a space for new forms of subsumption that can only be unravelled by looking behind the hidden abode of production (Williams, 1986, pp. 103-104).

Proponents of the 'knowledge economy' suggest that Marx's labor theory of value, i.e., that the value of a commodity is determined by the socially necessary labor time required for its production, no longer applies in contemporary capitalism, as production has moved beyond the factory floor. Immaterial labor, conceived as "labor with no physical substance", is considered immeasurable because its "fundamental component (knowledge) can no longer be reduced to an abstract amount of labor" (Amorim, 2014, p. 92). This idea rests on the confusion between abstract and concrete labor. According to Marx, value is measured on abstract labor, i.e., the average socially necessary time, rather than concrete labor, i.e., individual necessary time. The fact that no formula is available to calculate socially necessary time does not mean that it does not determine value; this applies to material and immaterial labor equally (Amorim, 2014). This is exemplified by the fact that contracts with music labels calculate an advance, i.e., fincancial support of the artist during the realization of a project, reimbursed on the future income generated by it. I therefore argue that the labor theory of value applies to the study of creative industries.

The rebranding of Marseille emerges as a project full of contradictions, resting on the 'inclusive-exclusion' of a segment of its population. It takes pride in calling Marseille a "Capital of Diversity", yet gradually displaces undesirable populations to the outskirts of the city. It advertises Marseille as a "Capital of Rap", yet uses hip-hop as a tool to control 'problematic'

[7]See Chapter 4.2.

youth. Nevertheless, this shift towards culture has opened up new perspectives for employment: in 2018, the creative sector (including, among others, digital production, architecture, marketing and communication, gastronomy, audio-visual production, fashion, music, and live performance, publishing) employed 8% of Marseille's working population (Agam, 2018), against 4% in 2005 (Peraldi et al., 2015, p. 107). In 2021, the central government announced the "Marseille en Grand" project, which, among other goals, aims to invest 22.5 million euros in the development of cinema by building film studios, cinema schools, etc, further raising the question whether Marseille is turning into a "creative city".

My conceptualization of the "Industry of the Street" relies on Amorim's understanding of the capitalist industry as "a type of organisation based on the production of commodities and the exploitation of labour for profit" (Amorim, 2014, p. 101). I join together, under the industry of the street, branches of the music, cinema, and fashion industries in Marseille, on the grounds that they all rely on the commodification of 'the street' as a physical, symbolic, and social space. A commodity is defined by its use-value, upon which exchange value is itself dependent. According to Willis, the specificity of the cultural commodity is its reliance on meaning for use-value (1999). This is contradictory to the commodity fetishism inherent to all commodities, i.e., the social relations of production being obscured by the object, because it relies on the creation of a sense of communality and social connection between producers and consumers. I suggest that the industry of the street relies on its association with 'the street' as a way to valorize its products. This suggests that the industry of the street's preferred labor power is the "jeune de banlieue", i.e., racialized, male, lower-class, youth associated with 'the street'. Women are less likely to be the targets of this industry, as the fetishized imagery is strongly gendered.

"There's work and work, when we say work
we're not talking about going to work for 1200 euros"
–Yanis

Chapter 3: Commodifying the Street

This Chapter explores how 'the street' is commodified in the service of capital. Using the framework of Hall et al., for the social production of news (2019a; 2019b) and his conceptualization of the binary structure of stereotypes (Hall, 2013), the first section introduces 'the street' as a symbolic space that is stereotyped, fetishized, and commodified. Expanding on Social Reproduction Theory, the following section analyzes socio-cultural associations as spaces where labor power is reproduced for the industry of the street, following Willis' three-level framework: the official, the pragmatic, and the cultural (1981).

3.1 The Politics of Representation

3.1.1 Criminalizing the Street: Who Gets to Represent Whom, and How?

In May 2025, CNews reported on a video[8] shot in a suburb of Nîmes (town in the south of France) by a German YouTuber who shares on his channel "the most real ghetto documentaries on YouTube[9]". The TV presenter introduces the video as provocative,

[8]This video was taken down from internet by its author, @LuckyLuke030, after its controversy in French media, because of the risk to be prosecuted, as he explained in a subsequent video (Lucky Luke030, 2025). The YouTuber explains that his video immediately became viral (when it was posted, mid-May 2025), and that he was contacted by several French news media channels for interviews. He accepted one of the interviews, for the French Tv-newschannel France Info (Chatelier et al., 2025). Similarly to CNews, France Info interviewed several actors, considered 'accredited sources', in this case, four inhabitants of the city, one local politician, and the YouTuber himself. The four inhabitants of Nimes are not inhabitants of the suburb in which the video was shot, and all complain about threats to their security, or claim to not feel that this video represents the city well. In the excerpts of the interview with the YouTuber, he explains that it was not his intention to promote drug trafficking, but rather to show a reality many people don't have access to. In the video posted on his channel, the YouTuber also explains: "I have received requests from a lot of talk shows, and TV channels, documentary channels, in France, who basically want to do what I do with me", that is, what he calls "Ghetto Documentaries" or "Ghetto Entertainment". This echoes the experience of, Marius, a photographer, who explained that after his photo series on a suburb of the south of France, many newschannels offered him jobs, or proposed funding his journalism studies. He explained that media were trying to co-opt him, to access photographs, and data that they generally have no access to. This will be elaborated on in Chapter 3, under the section "buying street credibility".

[9]From the description of his channel, @LuckyLuke030

displaying drugs and weapons in the absence of police in “zones that could easily be described as lawless”. The introduction is followed by the intervention of a member of the police forces, who expresses feeling nauseous and disgusted by the video, which he considers was made by a brainless person: “this is not journalism (...) it is the apology of the criminality that kills our youth”. He moves on to enumerate several cases of deaths and injuries caused by drug-trafficking-related gun violence. A discussion follows between the guests on set, including a political analyst, a political scientist, and a lawyer. The debate is rather unanimous, and touches upon the normalization of violence and the absence of the state in such neighborhoods. The political scientist warns: “If we don’t react, this will be the society of tomorrow. Political parties need to answer”. The story concludes by claiming that the state no longer has a monopoly on violence, and that it needs to reaffirm its authority by punishing the YouTuber and tracking the drug traffickers (Figure 3.1). This video sparked such debate that the minister of the interior, Bruno Retailleau, visited the city of Nîmes in the days that followed to discuss questions of ‘security’ (Jullian, 2025).

Figure 3.1. Nîmes: The ‘Ghetto Tour’ of a German YouTuber
Source: CNews (2025, May 14)

Although media contribute to the reproduction of the ideology of the ruling class, this cannot simply be attributed to the fact that they are “in large part capitalist-owned”, i.e., ruling class holding the means of production (Hall et al., 2019b, p. 244). Instead, the ruling-class

ideology is reproduced through routine practices within the bodies of communication structures, such as what is considered newsworthy, bureaucratic organization, and practical time constraints. Specifically, professional demands of objectivity delineate a "hierarchy of credibility", resulting in those in privileged and powerful positions known as "experts", i.e., the ruling class, becoming the primary definers of news. These "accredited sources", due to their position of power and perceived 'objectivity', "establish the initial definition or primary interpretation of the topic in question" (Hall et al., 2019b, p. 245). When opponents are invited to respond, their arguments are therefore constrained by the primary framing of the topic. When they fail to respond within this framing, they run the risk of being labeled "extremists" or "irrational" (Hall et al., 2019a, p. 67). In the case of crime news and reporting on violence, the institutional primary definers, legal bodies and the police, have near-monopoly on the production of stories. That is because 'criminals' do not have the legitimacy to even participate in the discussion (Hall et al., 2019a, pp. 71-72).

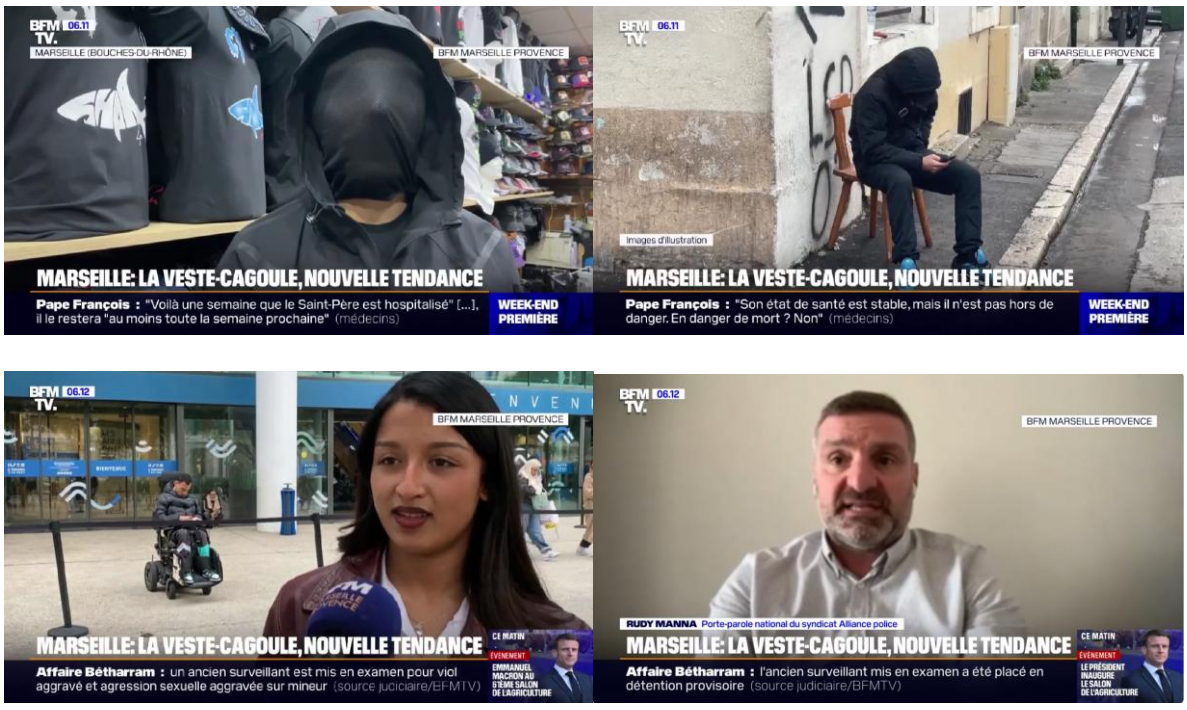
"If you watch CNews[10], tomorrow you won't like Arabs" said Isaac's colleague. Most of my interlocutors described their experience with the media as traumatic. This reluctance relates to the way images are 'constructed', as Jules qualified the lack of communication during the editing process as "dangerous". Editing, i.e., the transformation of stories by intermediate labor, is made invisible such that the illusion of direct transmission is maintained (Williams, 2005, p. 60). This effect of "naturalism" represses the ideological dimension of the image (Hall, 2019b).

BFM-TV's story about the balaclava[11] trend illustrates this well (Figure 3.2). In the released cut, the only quote left of the interview with the owner of the streetwear "Belsunce

[10]BFM-TV and CNews are right-wing and far-right leaning mainstream news channels.
[11]The term "balaclava" is used here as a translation to the French word "cagoule", which refers to all kinds of masks concealing the face.

Shop" in Belsunce[12] is "Of course, we don't incite anyone to do bad things (...) (but) there is more and more demand". A voice-over adds that this trend is inspired by drug traffickers, using balaclavas to remain anonymous, illustrated by an unrelated image. A woman interviewed on the street expresses her worries regarding safety in Marseille. Finally, a state police official is brought in as an 'expert', and explains that masking one's face in public is illegal. The next day, the owner of the shop shared a reaction post on his social media:

> After the broadcast on the BFM channel, our words were distorted and our image tarnished, making us look like "delinquents' dressers"... We'd like to set the record straight. We are a friendly, family-run boutique, where all urban styles come together to the delight of the people of Marseille and beyond... The image that people want to stick to this city so dear to our hearts does not resemble us, nor unite us… For this reason, we have refused the invitations of Europe 1 and RTL, as we are our best advocates.



[12] 1st district of Marseille (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 3.2. Marseille: Jackets with Integrated Balaclavas are Becoming Increasingly Fashionable
Source: BFM-TV (2025, February 22)

The two above-mentioned examples illustrate how media discourses associate the street to criminality, resulting in individuals not having a say in their representation. When they do, as for the case of the Belsunce-shop owner, their words are edited to fit within the framework determined by 'more legitimate' sources.

3.1.2 The Street as Myth-making: Cinema

In 2012, 18 members of the "BAC" police brigade (Anti-Criminality Brigade) were accused of racketeering drug dealers for profit. During the trial in 2021, seven defendants were deemed not guilty and the remaining eleven were sentenced to two to twelve months imprisonment for possession of drugs, theft of contraband cigarette and money, with no mention of the presumed personal enrichment, racketeering, or organized extortion (Normand et al., 2023; Gavazzi, 2021). No civil party was constituted for the trial, except for one person, Karim M., accusing officers of the BAC Nord of having stolen 9.000 euros from the 36.000 euros he had in his car during his arrest in possession of drugs in August 2012. Karim did not attend the trial, nor was he represented by a lawyer, for reasons that were not specified, but suggested in the letter he wrote: "I can already hear the cops expressing indignation that a convicted felon is posing as a victim" (Griessel, 2021; Agence France-Presse, 2021). This case echoes the previous section, in that individuals deemed 'criminals', in this case predominantly drug dealers, are denied the legitimacy to defend their version of the facts.

This is also illustrated by "Bac Nord" (2020), a film inspired by this case. The director, Cédric Jimenez, worked closely with three of the accused for the realization of his film, which was released before the final court decision (Trossero & D'Ancona, 2021). "Bac Nord" therefore depicts a version of the facts inspired by the defendants' narrative: that drugs and

money were stolen to pay informants, under the pressure of their hierarchy for higher conviction rates. My interlocutors contested this version of the facts, and Yanis even suggested that police syndicates had funded the film to better their reputation:

> When I saw the film, I was disgusted because it's an era that we really lived through, we saw our elder brothers get beaten up by the police, and come home bleeding. It was a time when the police were bloody in Marseille. I saw it with my own eyes. When I saw the film, I thought 'the bastards' (...) it's not true, because they're fucking dirty cops, and they took their slice of the cake (money).

"Shéhérazade" (2018), mentioned in the introduction, is another successful film on Marseille conceived as a 'fiction-documentary' film. The story, depicting a love story between a 17-year-old boy who just got released from prison and a young prostitute in the city center of Marseille, was inspired by the director's fieldwork on underage prostitution in the city center of Marseille. The film's claim to authenticity is further emphasized by the director's choice of recruiting non-professional actors such as Dylan Robert for the leading role.

The proclaimed proximity to the truth in both films risks that they be interpreted as unmediated accounts of reality. This likelihood is reinforced by the fact that knowledge about the suburbs is quasi-exclusively mediated by news channels and cinema. Meanings can be decoded according to different interpretative frameworks but the dominant position is likely to remain so because of its familiarity: "ideological concepts embodied in photos and texts (...) do not produce new knowledge about the world. They produce recognitions of the world as we have already learned to appropriate it" (Hall, 2019b, p. 130). Barthes explains that ideology functions at two levels: "On the one hand they (ideological themes) classify out the world in terms of immediate political and moral values (...) Yet, in that very moment, the ideological theme is distanced and universalized: it becomes mythic." (1972; as cited in Hall, 2019b, pp.

130-131). Ideological meanings therefore appeal to both the "world of events" and the "world of myths". The spectacularization and dramatization of 'the street' in both films reflect this duality (Figures 3.3 and 3.4). Inspired by real cases, the cinematographic staging of the scenes appeals to the language of myths, taking the risk to universalise ideas of what 'the street' looks like and naturalize the figure of the "jeune de banlieue".

Figure 3.3. Still from the Film "Bac Nord"
Source: "Bac Nord" (2020)

Figure 3.4. Still from the Film "Shéhérazade"
Source: "Shéhérazade" (2018)

3.1.3 Heroes or villains? The Binary Structure of Stereotypes

> *Louis*–He's from the street, when he goes to the neighborhood people call him brother [imitating some accent]
>
> *Éden*–'Khouya' (brother in Arabic) [laughing]
>
> *Louis–I thought they liked me* there, but I realized it's only because I buy drugs, otherwise, they would throw me out.
>
> *Éden*–dirty 'iencli'
>
> *Louis–I thought it was a compliment*… [laughing] no but seriously, I have no problem with the suburbs, except for their accent (...) it's much more, I don't know, 'spicy'. But at the same time, it's normal, isn't it? I understand why, they've been so closed in on themselves, always living in the same neighborhood..

'Iencli' is the slang word for client or customer. I will come back to the implications of this term in the next section. To start with, this vignette, along with the film stills depicted in Figures 3.3 and 3.4, illustrate the binary structure of stereotypes, combining hate or fear with a form of desire and adoration. Hall refers to this tension as the fetishistic characteristic of stereotyping, split between what is perceived as 'real' and the fantasy lying behind it (2013, p. 263). Fetishizing is a process of disassembling individuals into parts that are turned into objects of desire. The underlying, forbidden object of desire is displaced onto a separated object, allowing the observer to look without looking, satisfying his or her ambivalent desire: "What is declared to be different, hideous, 'primitive', deformed, is at the same time being obsessively enjoyed and lingered over because it is strange, 'different', exotic." (Hall, 2013, p. 268). In this vignette, it is the accent and language. This tension is illustrated by the term 'bandeur de cité', which means 'the one who gets sexually aroused by the suburbs', used by my interlocutors to

refer to people who are not from 'the street', but appropriate the codes thereof, and enjoy 'watching' or consuming it.

Lafargue De Grangeneuve characterizes this contradiction as inherent to the 'politique de la ville', constituted as "a policy of integration through culture" (2008, p. 191). Its target group is formulated as a population that needs to be 'integrated' and 'civilized', denoting a form of 'internal colonialism' (2008, p. 193). Politicians tend to exhibit 'successful' subjects as integration models (2008, p. 195). This is the case of Soso Maness, a Marseillais rapper, as the titles of some news articles suggest: "Soso Maness: street survivor turned activist rapper" (Léger, 2021) or "Soso Maness, Marseille's new rap hero" (Binet, 2020). Soso Maness's exceptionalism stems from the opposition that is made between his youth as a drug dealer in Font Vert (14th district of Marseille; Figure 2.4) and his current status as a *successful* rapper.

One of the counter-strategies used in the struggle for representation is to re-appropriate stereotypes in a celebration of difference (Hall, 2013, p. 274). This is what Marvin is concerned with in his photo series "La Trilogie du Bonheur" (Hapiness in 3 Chapters, 2024; Figure 3.5), documenting everyday life in neighborhoods of the Seine-Saint-Denis, banlieues of Paris:

> I've always used texts and titles because I want to help people understand my photos and not just throw them out and say: "here is an arab on a bike, think of it whatever you want". If I put a title, I'm helping you to understand what I'm presenting. And that's why I call it 'Urban Horse-riding' (Figure 3.5), because I wanted people to understand that this is actually *our* horse-riding. (...) How do you expect families in the suburbs, with three to seven children, where only one parent works, to enrol their child in horse-riding? The kids are 14, 15 years old, they get together and four or five of them buy a bike and you really get the feeling of a horse on a motorbike, you know.

Figure 3.5. Urban Horse-Riding
Source: Marvin Bonheur, (in "Therapie", Chapter 2 of "La Trilogie du Bonheur")

According to Marvin, the "industry of the street" has the potential to re-humanize 'the street', and render visible a segment of the population that was often *in*visibilized. This strategy however remains trapped within the stereotype's binary structure (Hall, 2013, p. 274), as Marvin emphasized the risk that far-right parties could use his images "to confirm their *propaganda*" but he explained: "I can't censor myself, because if I do, I'm giving these people an opportunity to create the images they want anyways, and then you have nothing to counterbalance them.". 'Propaganda' was often used by my interlocutors to refer to the spreading of imagery, not only by political parties but also by media, brands, and collectives in the struggle of representation.

Most of my interlocutors, however, expressed little interest or hope in fighting for more truthful representations of 'the street'. Instead, they directed their attention to financial interests; if the street sells, they ought to be remunerated for it: "what's unhealthy isn't necessarily the use

of images, it's the lack of recognition or funding for these images", said Adam, a visual artist. Since the "industry of the street" arguably stands as a major source of employment in Marseille (and beyond), the possibility of earning an income contributes to manufacturing consent for the industry of the street. Marvin recalls when the TotalEnergies Foundation contacted him for a photoshoot in his banlieue, advertising a campus for training local youth to become industrial workers. Although Marvin strongly disagrees with the company's ethics, he felt obliged to accept: "I regret it a little, but I was paid 17.000 euros for two days of work. That's what I told the guys (who criticized him), 'Brother, you're willing to risk going to prison for less than that'". "I do not bite the hand that fed me", Adam explained.

3.2 Commodifying the Street

The term 'bandeur de cité' is inextricably tied to the term 'iencli', the slang word for customer introduced in the previous vignette. 'Iencli' underlines the commercial aspect of this fetish, referring to the people who consume 'the street' broadly speaking, including drugs, fashion, music, and the industry of the street.

Although brands have always been interested in collaborating with artists for selling their products, social media and the COVID-19 pandemic have facilitated this process. Social media works as a means for brands to quantify returns on investment by calculating engagement rates. During the pandemic, artists were left with no income and developed an increased interest in collaborating with brands for remuneration. That's when La Firme was created, a Marseillais company encouraging brands to invest in established artists, but also in emerging artists, who are 'cheaper'. As Ibrahim, an elder rapper, mentioned: "Today rap has become a real economy, everyone knows there's money to be made". More demand is answered by more supply, as Mehdi, who was 22 at the time of the interview suggested: "when I started rap, we used to pay

15 euros an hour for studio sessions. Now I'm paying 40 euros an hour in the studio, which is a lot of money".

In 2020, the first volume of "13'Organisé", an initiative by the Marseillais rapper Jul to unite local rappers under a shared album, was released. The project is commonly referred to as a turning point in the history of Marseillais rap. According to Paul, a producer, the rapper SCH started emphasizing his Marseillais accent in interviews after the success of 13'Organisé, which shed a light on the local scene. This reflects a shift in Marseille's imagery, from being stigmatized to being fetishized and commodified. Jules attempted to trace the turning of fetish into profit with the example of Asics shoes:

> In the suburbs, the guys you admire are the ones who make money, and the guys who make money in the suburbs are also people who can usually end up in prison. So it (Asics) was the cheap pair that you could send to prison, that you could bring in, it started in prison. Then the guys get out of prison with their pair, and very quickly, within 2 or 3 years there are a lot of people in the neighborhood who wear it, after 4 or 5 years it's guys from downtown, (...) and we're getting to Mr.Ordinary, (...) we're starting from a cheap pair (30 euros) that we could wear, that today cost 200 bucks. (...) It's this market that's taken over their brands. They didn't say "let's tap into that market because it's stylish, they don't have any money, and they don't understand anything". It's not as dirty as that. It's just like: "wow, we're fashionable on the street, and it's guys who don't have any money". And they're guys who don't necessarily know anything about business and all that, so they've raised the prices little by little without shocking too many people, and they know that they've reached a ceiling price that they can't break, otherwise people on the street won't buy anymore.

The exponential rise in price over just 10 years cannot be accounted for by inflation only. Brands have started to use 'the street' to boost profits from selling their products. Ibrahim

emphasized the steady rise in prices, and the ever-higher and more luxurious brands tapping into this 'market'. The recent advertisement campaign of Gertrude, an emerging luxury brand from Marseille (though some interlocutors claimed the brand is from Aix-en-Provence, a bourgeois neighboring city), seems to confirm this. The campaign is entitled 'Black Market' and is divided into 4 'episodes': 'Trafic', 'Copyright', 'Illegal Hawkers', and 'Fake-Culture'. The last episode uses photographs of Gertrude's imitation products sold on the "Marché du Soleil", a market for counterfeit products in Marseille (Figure 3.6). If the street can no longer afford the brand's products, they can buy counterfeits, still functioning as free advertising boards.

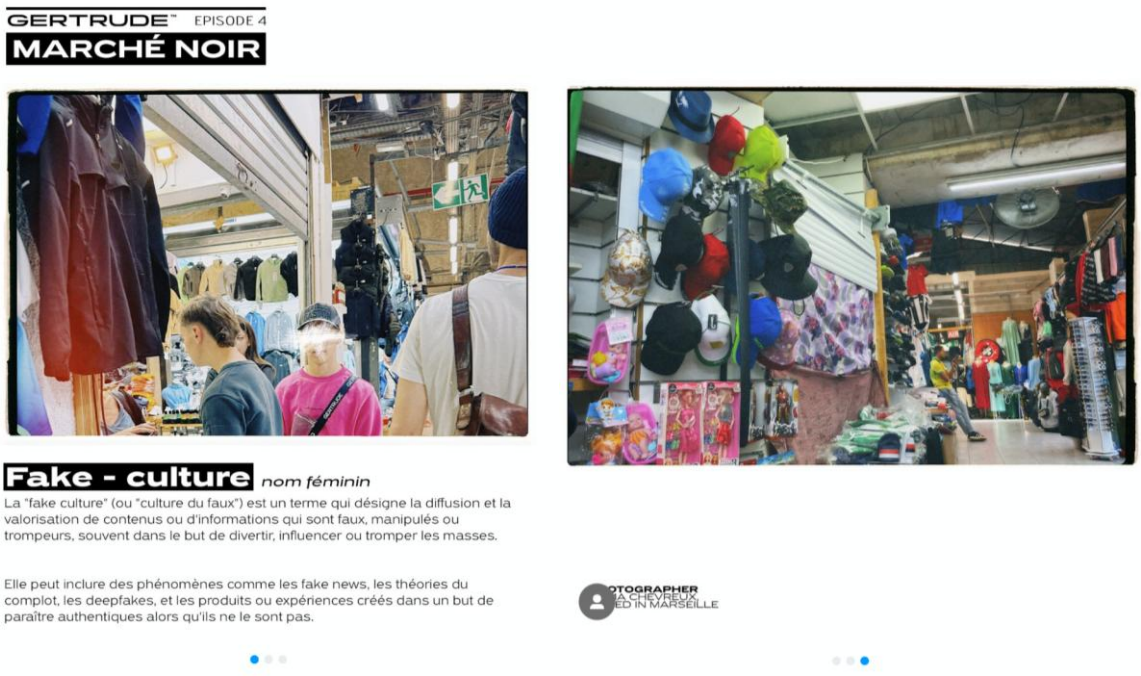


Figure 3.6. Gertrude Campaign, "Episode 4: Fake-Culture"
Source: Retrieved from Instagram, posted on the account of Gertrude on the 21st of November 2024.

Using 'the street' as a tool for increasing profits is also reflected in photoshoots where, according to my interlocutors, brands are trying to access, or re-construct suburban aesthetics.

Jules, the fixer for the Adidas Climacool campaign shot in Marseille (Figure 3.7), explained how street aesthetics were carefully curated:

> I'll take you to the south of the city, (...) it's a tower that's never been filmed, (...) it's got 16 floors, blue sky, I bring you two or three faces from my team, and it looks like we're in the quartiers nords. You see, the Climacool campaign ended up like this. It ended up on the south of the city, in front of a 20-storey block.

Figure 3.7. Adidas Climacool campaign
Source: Photographs retrieved from Instagram, posted on the account of Snipes on the 1st of May 2024 and the 2nd of April 2024

3.3 "Youth is the Raw Material[13]"

Marx defined social reproduction as the "reproduction of the capitalist system as a whole" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 6). Social Reproduction Theory expands this framework, focusing on the necessary conditions for the continued re-emergence of the worker on the labor market. In contemporary capitalism, "productive labor", i.e., waged labor that goes into the production of commodities, is distinguished from "non-productive work", i.e., labor that goes

[13]Quote from Isaac about the industry of the street.

into the reproduction of labor power. Fraser describes the latter as the "background conditions of possibility" for capitalist production, encompassing "both affective and material labor and often performed without pay", historically associated with female, domestic work (Fraser, 2017, pp. 21-22). Social Reproduction Theory goes beyond this dichotomy to understand "the relationship between the market and extramarket relations", under what Fraser refers to as an "expanded understanding of capitalism" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 14; Fraser, 2017, pp. 21-22).

To understand 'the street' as an industry, the social reproduction of labor power should be analyzed. While the school is often considered central to such processes, the rate of early school dropouts in 'the street' suggests that this may not apply in the present context. In the case of Marseille, in 2021, 23.1 percent of the population over 15 years old not registered in a formal education program had no diploma (Insee, 2025b). The highest (positive) deviance from the regional average overlaps with Marseille's QPV neighborhoods (Figure 3.8).

My focus lies in associations seeking to take on the role of the school among lower-class youth prone to early school dropouts. The analysis below focuses on associative settings that center on the transmission of rap, following Willis' three-level conceptualization: the official, the pragmatic, and the cultural (1981, pp. 176-177). The official functions at the level of politics, and denotes the state discourse on the institution. Discrepancies can be observed at the remaining two levels: the pragmatic and the cultural. The former refers to how official discourse is implemented in practice and the resulting interactions, and the latter to the shared meanings, beliefs, and values that shape the behaviors of individuals within such institutions.

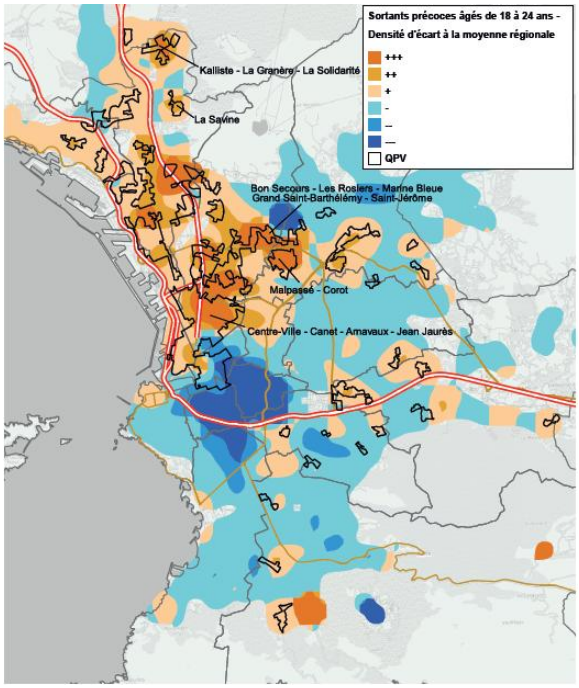


Figure 3.8. Marseille: Early School Dropouts Aged between 18 and 24, Variance Density from the Regional Average. *(highest density in orange, the black lines delineate QPVs)*
Source: Insee (2018)

3.3.1 Pragmatic Level: Passion or Work?

Many 'elder rappers[14]' explained that they developed their interest in rap by being socialized by elder brothers and participating in writing workshops. In turn, they pass this culture down by engaging in the associative world (also contributing to their financial stability). Elder rappers in Marseille are very close to their public, and it is not uncommon for the younger generation to meet them and exchange a few words in the street or during video clip shootings, forming a continuity between the workshop and the street.

As many elder rappers emphasized, transmitting rap and rap 'culture' is not about training the new generation to become professional rappers. Instead, they emphasized rap as a

[14]As explained in the Introduction, I differentiate between two categories of rappers: 'elder' and 'emerging' rappers. This categorisation is informed by age: 'elder rappers' were in their early to late thirties, while 'emerging rappers' were usually in their late teens, and early twenties. This categorization correlates with their different approaches and experiences with the industry: 'elder rappers' had more experience, and had often reached a stage of their lives where they had found alternative sources of income such as teaching in workshops. 'Emerging rappers', on the other hand, were usually at the start of their careers and professionalization.

vector for transmitting language skills and values. Ibrahim gave the example of a young boy who participated in his workshops; he was very shy and had difficulties speaking in public, but thanks to the training, he received an impressive grade in his French Oral Baccalaureate. Values include respect for the elder brothers, preventing youth from engaging in drug trafficking and drug-related violence, and a form of responsibilization as Isaac suggested: "You are responsible for yourself. Don't put the blame on anyone, not even on the slave master. You're the one who agreed to sign". While most elder rappers emphasize the need to perceive rap as a passion, they also warn the youth about the implications of choosing to pursue it as a career, as Ibrahim explained:

> I think what's missing today is a return to passion. (...) just know that if you rap for money, that means you see it as a job and a business, so behave like a worker and a businessman (...) If that's what it is, consider it a job, and a job isn't passionate. (...) If you want to do that, there's a distributor who takes 40%, and a producer who's going to take everything first. If you have an advance, it means a credit, you have to repay your advance before you can earn any money. It's always the same: some people don't know the difference between sales and profit, if you can't make that distinction, you're dead.

Many emerging rappers emphasized the responsibility of the older generation to build long-lasting infrastructures that would facilitate their professional growth. They complained that most associations instead use rap as a tool to entertain youth. They favored associations that offered more long-term support by contributing to accessing a professional position, a stable financial situation, and a range of potential career paths.

Though my younger interlocutors confirmed the importance of values, there is a clear gap between what older and younger generations *value*. While social workers and elder rappers are worried about the increased drug-related violence affecting new generations, trying to 'keep

them off the street', emerging rappers express concern for financial stability, professionalization, and 'success'.

3.3.2 Cultural Level: Aspirations for Success

During my fieldwork, I visited the Vrunk boutique, a brand from Marseille that has rapidly grown to become the most *successful* local streetwear brand. The workers explained that 'Vrunk' is a word they created, meaning 'my friend'. Together with the owner, they decided to launch the brand in 2020:

> Vrunk is a street movement that shows we're not just good at selling drugs. Vrunk is a state of mind; we all want to succeed in life, and we all want to become a 'Vrunkosor'. A Vrunkosor is a senior Vrunk who has succeeded in life.

To most emerging rappers, 'success' is inevitably tied to money and the social upward mobility that comes along with increasing one's financial situation. According to Isaac, an elder rapper, success for young men is about becoming "the savior" of the house by earning enough money to make one's family comfortable. "One has to provide shelter for one's mother[15]" is an expression frequently used in rap lyrics. 'Shelter' is a metaphor for financial comfort, but also literally refers to a place, as many associate success with leaving one's neighborhood, Marseille, or even France. The driving force is a duty of redistribution (this does not preclude individual profit): the goal "to redistribute as much as possible, to break the thing up as much as possible, not to pay one person but to pay 10", as Jules explained. Success is closely tied to masculinity, as Assane explained that pressure to succeed financially is higher on men and young boys. Women are more often expected to contribute to their communities by engaging socially. This

[15]In French: "Il faut mettre la daronne à l'abri".

translates into ambitions to work hard and succeed, as illustrated by the compilation of interlocutors telling me about the success story of the Marseillais rapper Jul:

> It took him 20 years to establish this position, but he never gave up and worked so hard that he *succeeded*. Jul doesn't sleep, he spends his days and nights in his studio. The last album he released was made in just one day. This is impossible; the only comparable equivalent in history is Bach.

During his concert in August 2024, Soso Maness expressed his emotion about playing his song "Mistral" in the Vieux Port, the heart of Marseille (1st district; Figure 2.4): "Guys, this is incredible, after all the hardships, I made it to the Vieux Port, thank you brothers! (...) Believe in your dreams, everything is possible, I am the living proof". Every conversation during my fieldwork inevitably led to the same conclusion: if you believe in your dreams and if you work hard enough, you will 'succeed'. Succeeding in rap is considered more dependent on hard work and discipline than on mere luck or talent, though Ibrahim suggested that luck does account for how long it might take one to succeed. If Jul could make history on a shitty laptop, anyone can. As Evan, an emerging rapper explained: "some of them (the youth) are starting to rap, (...) because seeing that there's someone from here (the street) who can succeed, (...) they're seeing the accessibility where originally there was the impossibility". The growing ambition of the street, cultivated by the media representation of successful rappers, makes success and upward social mobility seem more accessible, and contributes to the glorification of hard work and discipline as suggested by Yanis: "often the most complicated path is the most glorious one". Although developing this media takes up most of his time, Jules always had a job on the side, as he justifies it, for the 'discipline'. During my fieldwork, he worked in a supermarket from 4 a.m. until 10 a.m. From 10 a.m., he would start his day in his office. When addressing 'failed careers' with my interlocutors, most argued that people end up in bad situations because they make 'bad decisions'. Racism or structural inequalities were systematically rejected as

alternative explanations under the grounds that “people are not victims, they are actors of their lives”, Isaac explained.

3.3.3 Official Level: Discrepancies

At the official level, the discourse of the “politique de la ville” regarding socio-cultural associations rests upon an ideal of “cultural democracy”, i.e., “the recognition of all cultures, including those hitherto considered to be specific to underprivileged social groups”, using positive discrimination to reduce territorial and social inequalities in QPVs (Lafargue De Grangeneuve, 2008, p. 11).

The pragmatic and the cultural levels reveal a strong discrepancy: the number of QPVs has been growing rather than decreasing, culture has been used as a tool of social control rather than emancipation, and the QPV-labelling was turned into stigma keeping the target group excluded from the “politique de droit commun” (Lafargue De Grangeneuve, 2008). This tension also suggests that associations take on the responsibility for care-work in ‘the street’, an activity historically perceived as dissociated from productive work and financial remuneration. This both accounts for the low-wages in the associative sector (which is not the object of this thesis, see Muehlebach, 2011), and the fact that youth should be taught “how to be passionate” rather than “how to make money”.

"They come, take your broken face for their film, the good dose of misery they need.
But who do you think broke that face in the first place?"
–Léo

Chapter 4: Behind the Hidden Abode of the Street

Building upon the growing literature on racial capitalism, this Chapter conceptualizes the street as a zone of internal colonialism to explore how race is mobilized in the service of the "industry of the street". Kalb's notion of double devaluation (2023) and Yates's understanding of disposability (2011) shed light on the precarity of the working conditions. In contrast, the second section illuminates how my interlocutors negotiated such conditions through formal contracts, informal contracts, and solidarity networks.

4.1 "Street but not too Street"

4.1.1 The Street as a Zone of Non-being

"We need people who aren't from the street to make us succeed," said Yanis. Isaac pointed out: "*they* have the money, so *they* have power". The owners of the means of production–studio owners, music labels, and whoever else has the money and the power–get to call the shots. Isaac paralleled slavery with the social relations of production within the industry of the street. According to him, youth are positioned as 'slaves', labels as 'slave masters', 'ien-clis[16]' as 'slave buyers', and 'slaves' who have been co-opted by the industry as 'house Negroes[17]':

[16]Slang word referring to the people who consume 'the street' broadly speaking, including drugs, fashion, music, and the industry of the street (see Chapter 2).

[17]"The house Negro usually lived close to his master. He dressed like his master. He wore his master's second-hand clothes. He ate food that his master left on the table. And he lived in his master's house–probably in the basement or the attic–but he still lived in the master's house. So whenever that house Negro identified himself, he always identified himself in the same sense that his master identified himself. When his master said, "We have good food," the house Negro would say, "Yes, we have plenty of good food." "We" have plenty of good food. When the master said that "we have a fine home here," the house Negro said, "Yes, we have a fine home here." When the master would be sick, the house Negro identified himself so much with his master he'd say, "What's the matter boss, we sick?" His master's pain was his pain. And it hurt him more for his master to be sick than for him to be sick himself. When the house started burning down, that type of Negro would fight harder to put the master's house out than the master himself would." (Malcolm X, 1963).

> That's the whole machination of capitalists. (...) It's (slavery) forbidden, it's frowned upon, so we've got to change the system. We're going to set it up so that everyone's a slave, but everyone's going to be happy to be one. We'll give them crumbs, they'll think they've got money, but we'll get it back from them. It's all about beliefs: they'll believe they're free, they'll believe they're stars, but the next day some shit happens to them and we don't give a damn, we throw them in the garbage can and move on.

Whether directly or indirectly, the differentiation of labor within the economy is inextricably linked to politics (Bhattacharyya, 2018, p. 36), and informed by hierarchies of (past) colonial relations (Grosfoguel et al., 2015, p. 641). "Racial capitalism" sheds light on capitalism as a system of differentiation rather than homogenization (Robinson, 2000, p. 26, as cited in Wacquant, 2023, p. 153). In their systematic comparison, Paret & Levenson argue that Robinson's understanding of capitalism as necessarily racial is opposed to Hall's understanding of a plethora of historically specific racisms (2024). My understanding of racial capitalism builds upon the latter, by taking racial capitalism as a way to understand how populations are organized in the service of capital, based on "techniques of othering and exclusion (that) utilise the logics of race, regardless of the targeted population" (Bhattacharyya, 2018, p. x). Following Wacquant's call for historical specificity, my analysis attempts to shed light on the nature of this articulation within contemporary Marseille (2023).

Racialized bodies are classified along a line separating 'superior' from 'inferior' ones, or what Fanon referred to as zones of being and non-being (1967; as cited in Grosfoguel et al., 2015, p. 637). Rules apply differently on both sides of the dividing line: within the zone of being, conflicts tend to be resolved through political negotiation of lawful rights, whereas in the zone of non-being, individuals are dehumanized and managed through overt violence and dispossession (Grosfoguel et al., 2015, p. 639). This division is exemplified by Tchumkam's account of French banlieues as spatio-temporal extensions of French former colonies (2015,

pp. 5-6): despite being French citizens, banlieue inhabitants are often deemed unworthy of 'Frenchness', mistaken for immigrants (2015, pp, 1-2), and subjected to repressive measures such as "double jeopardy, profiling, (the) prohibition of the veil, (or the) creation of anticriminality brigades" (2015, p. 10).

I extend Tchumkam's analysis to my conceptualization of 'the street', proposing 'the street' as a "zone of non-being" (Grosfoguel et al., 2015, p. 638). This section centres on how racialisation contributes to social differentiation between "workers", "almost-workers", and "sometimes-workers" (Battacharyya, 2018, p. 17), reflecting the "multiple ways in which labour power is commodified and subsumed under capital" (Mezzadra, 2011, pp. 157-159). This has been emphasized by the increased blurring of boundaries between work and leisure under post-fordism, enlarging "the segment of the world's population engaged in activity deemed as 'non-work'", and rendering the status of the "free wage-laborer" ever more exclusive (Battacharyya, 2018, p. 169).

As Jules mentioned, the absence of formal *public* educational tracks in the fields of rap, cinema, or fashion in Marseille functions as both an advantage and a disadvantage for the youth. One is not required to have a certain level of education to enter the field, making the industry seem more accessible. The absence of formal training, however, contributes to the lack of regulation of wages, leaving more space for exploitative relations to emerge. Many of my interlocutors working with brands as fixers or photographers explained that it can be hard to set a price because the calculation criteria are very abstract. As Jules explained, this is exacerbated by the tendency of brands to keep their budgets hidden:

> They (brands) come and say, I'd like this, this, and this, how much can you do it for? They have an envelope of 30.000 euros, but they know very well the range you're in. They know very well that they'll give you a maximum of 4.800 euros, but they ask you

> for a quote because they know that your shitty quote will always be under 4.800. They let us think with our poor people's brains.

The entry price sets the price; as soon as someone agrees to work on a project for free or very cheap, they will struggle to negotiate a higher price for subsequent calls. Not only are contracts 'devalued', they are also unstable and unpredictable. Jules' media depends on contracts with brands, which are usually seasonal, since summer is the time Marseille sells the most. Marvin also explained the precarity of being a photographer from the banlieue:

> They think he's not a real photographer because he's a guy from the suburbs, we'll give him half the price and he'll be happy (...) I don't have a fixed contract with you guys, it was a one-time job, you paid me, you used that to legitimize your actions to a community, but in your office on a fixed contract all year round with a stability that will help in the long term, there's no one. (...) They make content about diversity, but when you enter the agency, there are only whites.

I propose using the term "double devaluation" posited by Kalb to refer to this process of devaluation that is at once economic and social, driven by both capital and the state, and informed by processes of racialization (2023, p. 206). The absence of formal education further blurs the distinction between leisure and work. As explored in the previous Chapters, socio-cultural associations tend to integrate rap as a tool for youth control rather than professional emancipation. "It is not the activity, as such, that constitutes 'work' but the social recognition of the activity as work and the role that the respective activity has in the social process of cooperation" (Jaeggi, 2017, p. 170). It could therefore be argued that the transmission of rap as a "passion" rather than a "job" further contributes to the ambivalent position of rap between "work" and "non-work", and to its resulting double devaluation. The same can be applied to the other branches of the industry of the street.

4.1.2 Buying "Street Credibility": The Street as Cultural Commodity

Marc, a film studio owner, recalled the story when a German rapper had come to shoot his video clip in Marseille for 'street credibility'. Similarly, during the rap workshop, Kaïs did not want to participate in the final show because performing with younger kids would be bad for his 'street credibility.' 'Street credibility' seems to be about masculinity, respect, but also business. In line with Willis' conceptualization of the "cultural commodity" (1999), I propose thinking of "street credibility" as a commodity that can be purchased, i.e., the purchasing of the association to the street as a symbolic space.

"Street credibility" is often bought in the form of access to certain places or connections to certain people. Marvin explained that many brands contact him, not for his qualities as a photographer, but for his audience and access to the banlieues of Paris. Similarly, Jules explained that brands contact him to negotiate access to certain spaces in the city and recruit 'local' faces for their photoshoots. Brands tend to be very direct about this: during a meeting with Salomon for their new campaign, the collaborations manager told Gabriel: "I want Salomon to become the new TN". 'TN' being the iconic 'street' pair of shoes, it was clear what the ambitions of the brand were. Rappers can also be sources of 'street credibility', and are often offered sponsorships or ambassadorship contracts with brands. While such contracts can be relatively costly, brands pursue strategies such as "seeding" or "tribal marketing", which rely on gifting products to target communities and word-of-mouth as advertising. Free products are not only offered to rappers or influential figures but also to youth from 'the street'. Naël is a banlieue photographer whose work is very popular on social media. He posted a photograph of young men in Vitry-sur-Seine, a banlieue of Paris, wearing a Gertrude cap. The brand instantly contacted him:

> They gave me 6 pieces so I could take pictures with them in different neighborhoods. I don't get paid, but I don't have to give them back. (...) After that, I will not keep the caps for myself; if I shoot someone with one, I'll give it to them. The suburbs aren't matching the brand's style, but they don't have a choice; these days, it's the suburbs that make fashion. They themselves told me, "we wouldn't go into the suburbs on our own, but if you do it for us"…

This is a striking example of devaluation: in total, Gertrude gifted an equivalent of 354 euros in products. Though we do not have access to the cost of producing one cap, one can easily imagine it to be much lower. Naël picked up the hats in person in the shop in Marseille, reducing shipping costs to zero, and did not receive payment for his photographs. He merely functions as an intermediate, 'seeding' products in the suburbs. Not only does Gertrude hope to receive photographs, but the people who will be gifted the caps are expected to wear them, functioning as free walking advertisement boards in 'the street' and beyond.

During a video shoot for a collaboration between a Jules' media and Asics, the head of the filmmaking crew explained that some excerpts might not make it to the final edit because of the presence of joints and alcohol: "Asics has a new artistic direction, they are gradually shifting their focus to mental health, so substances would not match the new image they seek to create". This suggests that the purchasing of street credibility is not without conditions. As Yanis explained: "you have to be street but not too street, street but docile enough to do what you're told". He went on to talk about "industry plants"; artists created by labels. Because they have the financial support from the industry, they become successful artists overnight. They often build their success on the back of ghostwriters, challenging the idea of 'authenticity' within French rap. They are the goose that lays golden eggs:

> It's very often rappers who are from a higher social class, who don't come from the street. (...) Ziak is very violent, very drill, (...). It's fake, he's a Parisian bobo (...). He's masked, so let's say 30% of listeners know, 70% of listeners aren't tuned in and don't know who he is. When you get to know the character behind it, you know that, in reality, yeah, what he's doing is crap.

Despite the industry of the street creating employment for people from 'the street', it still privileges white upper-class people who co-opt street aesthetics, or "docile" individuals, who Isaac referred to as 'house Negroes'. As Gabriel explained, shootings in the suburbs are still overwhelmingly shot by non-local photographers, even when local, talented photographers are available. Paul also suggested that white rappers, considered more 'accessible' to white consumers, are more likely to be more well-established because the industry pushes them forward. Ismaël, a social worker, explained:

> When there's money to be made, they come to the suburbs. But when there's no money to be made, there's no one. They extract what can benefit them. (...) They have this program called, "educational success program", and they come and take the 'best' kids in the neighborhood to give them tutoring. I talked to them and said, "don't take them, you're giving them tutoring, and when they succeed, you're even robbing them of their victory." We don't need that, we've got people going to Science-Po (prestigious political science school), they represent 2-3% of the population. You come and take the top of the cake. It's a kind of modern colonialism. (...) France came to colonize Algeria for its wealth, today, they're doing the same thing, they've come to seize our cultural wealth.

To understand capitalism's entanglements with racial oppression, Fraser suggests an exploitation–expropriation nexus. While exploitation refers to capital's relations to the 'free wage-laborer', expropriation refers to the ongoing dispossession of those below the color line,

i.e., Fanon's zone of non-being. The latter is distinguished as the "extraeconomic realm", yet functions as a necessary condition for the former. Both categories are not mutually exclusive, and their degree of distinction is historically specific. Under contemporary financial capitalism, the lines have become increasingly blurred with the emergence of a new figure, "formally free, but acutely vulnerable: the expropriated-and-exploited citizen-worker" (Fraser, 2018, p. 13), still disproportionally affecting racialized communities. The industry of the street echoes this ambivalent figure, operating neither on free wage-labor relations nor on overt dispossession, but on debt (e.g., advances paid by labels and reimbursed on future income generated by the album), gig fees (e.g., for showcases), and royalties (e.g., from released songs).

This process of simultaneous expropriation and exploitation is well illustrated by the shooting of "Salem", a film by Jean-Bernard Marlin, released in 2023, which narrates the story of 14-year-old Djibril and his pregnant girlfriend Camilla in the quartiers nords. Djibril is falsely accused of murder and sent to prison. During his time incarcerated, he has visions and believes he is a prophet. Upon his release 15 years later, he attempts to connect with his daughter and transmit to her the power to heal. The film is a syncretism of different religions and beliefs, with the most obvious references to the Evangelical Church and Islam. Ismaël insisted on the blasphematory character of the film, partly set in his neighborhood, a prominently Muslim area:

> We weren't asked our opinion, nor was there any conversation with the locals about the film's potential political message. They came, they shot, the locals were happy to get their cash, 100-200 euros for their walk-on role, and that was that. And the film is disgusting; everyone I talk to about it agrees.

In this case, expropriation is not total and is remunerated, albeit minimally. What this example also suggests is that 'the street' as a symbol can be dissociated from 'the street' as a set of social relations, to be extracted for profit, without or with little consent. This challenges the assumption that 'the street' is the preferred source of labor power for the industry, suggesting

the disposability of the "jeune de banlieue". According to Yates, waste is not merely a result of capitalist consumption, but is inherent to the nature of capitalism as a mode of production (2011). This logic of disposability not only applies to populations rendered surplus, but also to wage-laborers, whose labor power is "used up or wasted at accelerated rates in order to secure the most profit" (Yates, 2011, p. 1680). The commodification of 'the street' implies the reduction of the other to "the status of exchangeable (symbolic) object" (Bhattacharyya, 2018, pp. 158-159). The labor power that fuels the industry of the street is *not* interchangeable because it relies on the production of (racialized) social difference, yet, its reduction to the status of signifier suggests that, at the level of 'the street', labor power is both interchangeable and disposable: it can be discarded when used up, and newly replaced when needed.

Ibrahim, an elder rapper, described rappers as commodities, taking away the (relative) 'freedom' implied by the figure of the 'free-wage laborer': "when you're a product you depend; if your public doesn't love you anymore, (...) you're a product that nobody wants anymore". Isaac gave the example of Koba la D, who, according to him, was "picked, washed, and spat out" by the music industry. He explains that the rapper was offered drugs and luxury, and promised to be *taken* out of his misery. In reality, he was only receiving 5% of his contract, and the rest was gifted to him in the form of clothes, jewelry, cars, etc, but no money. He later accused his former manager of stealing hundreds of thousands of euros. An investigation is still underway to verify the accusations. Koba la D was 17 when his career was taking off. Today, at 25 years old, he is in prison for violence and sequestration of his former manager, and awaiting further court decisions for involuntary manslaughter, and financial support for the flight of Mohamed Amra, a French drug lord. The point is not to assess whether Koba la D is a good person, nor to position him as a victim. However, the resemblance of his life trajectory to

that of Dylan Robert's story recounted in the Introduction should be acknowledged and not regarded as mere coincidence.

4.2 Negotiating Production

4.2.1 Contracts and Legal Rights: The Individual Level

Abdel, an emerging rapper from Marseille, was interested in participating in the documentary I was working on alongside my fieldwork. My excitement was cut short when I received a message from his managers, requesting remuneration for his participation in the film: "it's our job (as managers); we have to ask you for a fee. (...) A collaboration with Jul[18] is planned for 2025, and he's scheduled for several festivals. An artist like that appearing in a documentary like yours, you understand that it's the minimum". I was frustrated by this interaction, which I considered a failure, and our working together was cut short. Only much later did I realize the implications of their demands: the manager, usually a close friend of the rapper, works as the mediator between the rapper and the industry, protecting the artist from being exploited, or worse, expropriated.

Ibrahim expressed that younger generations have a better understanding of the industry and no longer settle for the first contract they are offered: they negotiate. Negotiation depends on the display of one's legal knowledge (or the performance thereof) and includes discussing every contract with a lawyer (or pretending to do so). I insist on 'pretending', not because I believe that my interlocutors lack the knowledge, but because many admitted being self-taught regarding the legal rights and terms used by the industry. Adam referred to this as the ABC-rule (avocat-banquier-comptable; lawyer-banker-accountant). Jérome, a manager, explained:

> Negotiate everything there is to negotiate, ask to reread the contracts, say that you're going to read them with your accountant and your lawyer, even if you don't have any,

[18]Famous Marseillais rapper.

> so that they see that you're not a beginner. If they see that you don't know anything, they take you by the scruff of the neck.

'Pretending' also emphasizes the performativity of signing a contract, as Jules explained: "In 30 seconds, if you've got the right posture, you can earn an extra 5.000 euros". The reversal of the power relation is an essential performative move to restore one's position as a 'negotiator', as he expressed:

> Our objective this year is to concentrate more on stable contracts (...) where it's we who set all the conditions. (...) It's not them who contact us, it's us who go to them and tell them we've got such and such project in Marseille, who call for offers, and then either you take it, or we'll look for another brand.

Reversing power relations and positioning oneself as a 'negotiator' suggests setting a price, as Gabriel explained: "If I'm too expensive, go to someone else. (...) It's a form of self-confidence to give a price (...). You want to negotiate, we can negotiate. But I won't go beyond that. (...) Don't hesitate to ask for twice as much as you imagine.". He emphasized that collaboration managers often profit from the fact that money is taboo. Aware of the risk of double devaluation, he stressed his refusal to work for free or cheap unless to support a trusted friend.

4.2.2 Informal Contracts: Racketeering and Gatekeeping

In August 2024, there was a shooting outside a nightclub in La Grande Motte targeting the Marseillais rapper SCH, killing one member of his team. The DZ-Mafia claimed responsibility for these attacks, asking for 15k euros in exchange for the rapper's safety. SCH is not from Marseille, nor the quartiers nords, but from Aubagne, a city nearby. Following the international success of the first volume of the "13'Organisé" album, the artist emphasized a Marseillais suburban identity in his work. Though he insists that his music is fictional, many

disagree with his approach, as explained by Paul: “when you're a guy who only talks about Marseille and isn't from Marseille, the idea is ‘ah yeah you're making money off of us, well now you owe us so much’”. Though it is the first time such a case has received media attention, many interlocutors explained that rappers in Marseille have always suffered from racketeering by mafia-like groups. It is also important to note that a recent wave of racketeering has plagued Marseille after the shooting, targeting clubs and restaurants throughout the city and beyond.

Many informants explained that access to the suburbs for cinema, advertisement campaigns, video clips, etc, needs to be permitted by higher members of the drug trafficking network in two ways: either the fixer is local or introduced by a local, or an entry fee needs to be paid. Jules explained:

> We can open the doors to the suburbs for you, but there are guys you're going to have to pay. (...) Do you want to film misery with your big 50.000 euro cameras? Get your money out! (...) And then you're safe, there's no problem. (...) You don't go there to take photos. It's not a museum.

This was the case for Travis Scott, who, came to Marseille in May 2023 to shoot the video clip for his song, “K-POP”. Rumor has it that he was robbed upon his arrival in the quartiers nords. Some of my interlocutors explained that the rapper did not reach out to any locals, but expected to use the suburbs as ‘décor’ while working exclusively with his team: “that’s what happens when you are looking for street aesthetics but not willing to work with local people. They want to do something in Marseille without the Marseillais”, explained a friend of Jules. Instead, the video clip was shot in the football stadium in Nice. Nothing was released in the press regarding the event, but everyone I spoke to seemed to be aware of it. Different versions coexisted, some claiming that he was robbed by local inhabitants rather than the drug economy networks.

It should be noted that brands that opt for shootings in the quartiers nords are likely to contribute financially to the drug economy. It is unclear in the case of cinema how access is

granted, though they always work with at least some local actors. Finally, the question remains whether this form of 'gatekeeping' and 'racketeering' benefits the whole community or only the drug-trafficking network. While fees are not directly redistributed, "all this still makes people eat in the suburbs", emphasized Jules.

4.2.3 Independence

The upper middle-class distinction between 'bad' commercial rap made for selling, versus 'good', authentic, and politically engaged rap driven by passion, is problematic. Building a plan for one's career started for most rappers in childhood, as early as 9 years old, not as a dream but a serious aspiration. Building a career in the rap industry is, first and foremost, a *long-term* financial and personal investment. Mehdi expressed that navigating the industry since he was 10 prepared him to take the right steps once he had the means to start his career: "Music's a project, (...) you set yourself A, B, objectives (...) like if I'd opened a Butcher's shop, I'd have said to myself I've got to do this, this, and this". Many interlocutors emphasized the importance of rigor and continuity. Profit is often directly reinvested into the next project. In the long run, rappers are advised to invest their money "wisely".

According to Isaac, Jul[19] was one of the first to promote independence among rappers: "today, the guy (Jul) gets them (labels) to sign exorbitant contracts, he's become the slave master.". 'Independence' in the music industry refers to financial independence. 'Independent artists' usually fund their music and rely on labels for distribution only. As Isaac explained, this entails a larger financial investment but also more profit and freedom for the artist: "today, more and more young people don't sign (contracts) as 'artists' (...). As an 'artist' (contract), it was 10 / 90 percent, now it's 50 / 50 percent ('co-prod' contract), or 80 / 20 percent ('distribution' contract)." By developing knowledge on the roles of a manager or producer,

[19]Famous Marseillais rapper.

independent artists cut intermediaries and maximize profits. Independence was also partly enabled by the development of social media, which gave rappers the tools to spread their music without the direct support of official channels, as Yanis explained: “At the time, the others didn't have the choice of going to Skyrock (radio) for example (...) now we have the choice of refusing a “Planète Rap” (radio)”.

Independence, however, represents a more financially risky path, given the costs of developing a career. Mehdi expressed that it is sometimes “better to get 20 percent of something than 100 percent of nothing”. Moreover, the “industry of the street” becomes profitable only in the long run, as Ibrahim stressed: “I've been rapping for almost 25 years now (...) but for 20 years it's been a bottomless pit. I've never made any money from my music, apart from the last three or four years”. Since public funding is scarce, people who aspire for an independent career have to rely on other sources for subsistence. One possibility is to cumulate jobs, as Ibrahim explained:

> There was a period in my life when, for a year or two, all I did was rap. And I saw how bad my state of mind was, thinking about money (...). If something happens in rap, it affects you more than anything else, whereas when you have balance, it might disturb you for a day, and then you go on with your life.

Younger generations who feel excluded from the formal employment market may find the informal drug economy a more promising source of financial support, either by being directly employed by the network, or through informal contracts, as Assane explained:

> Today, there are two types of rap in Marseille: downtown and suburban rap. Only suburban rap is making a breakthrough in Marseille. Why? Because you've got the local big guys saying: 'Ok, you like rap, I'll fund you, and when you sign with a label, I'll take a percentage'. It's all about money and means!

While such contracts can be highly exploitative and are practically impossible to cancel, they offer financial guarantees, as Yanis explained:

> Before, the casinos were controlled by the mafia, who took a 50 percent share of the profits. Today, the state runs the casinos, taking a 54 percent share, so who do you think are the real thieves? (...) It's very hard to receive government subsidies. I plan to set up my label and if the state doesn't want to fund it, we'll get the dealers to do so.

Yanis's comment speaks to how feelings of abandonment strengthened my informants' reliance on alternative networks. Interest in rap usually develops during youth and adolescence, when the familial home facilitates this practice (Hammou & Becker, 2014). The same holds for acting, modelling, or visual arts. Besides, many interlocutors expressed that they wouldn't have made it without the people who "gave them strength" (donner la force). When asked what "donner la force" entailed, many referred to people pushing them to pursue rap more seriously, giving feedback, offering opportunities, spreading word of mouth, or liking and sharing on social media. It, however, became clear that "donner la force" also entails the necessary financial support to pursue a career. When asked about his label, Mehdi responded, "I have my own label, which belongs to me, *to my family*", suggesting his friends or family also have shares in the company. When not in the form of money, providing services such as recording sessions for free (or at discounted prices) also contributes to financial support. This requires a tight and trustworthy social network, which, as Yanis emphasized, often translates into relying exclusively on family or family-like ties:

> There are elder brothers here, they give me a lot of strength too, (...) they've got contacts at the stadium, they've got contacts in the world of work, they've gotten me jobs, they've found me money, downtown Marseille it's like a little village in Corsica, it's family-oriented. (...) If it wasn't for the people behind me, I'd have gone back to dealing drugs

> a long time ago. It's the people behind me who give me the strength to do what I'm doing today.

This also entails a strong belief in doing things "by the street, for the street", that is, prioritizing the employment of people from one's network. As Assane put it, this is also a terrain of negotiation with labels:

> Before, record companies just wanted to sign the artist. Now the artists say no. They already have a whole team from their neighborhood to work with, so it's either the record company signs the whole team with the artist, or he goes and signs somewhere else. And that even includes the driver: 'I've got a kid from my neighborhood who's willing to do this for me, I don't want it to be someone else.'

While in Marseille, independent networks are stronger within the rap industry than fashion or cinema, Assane expressed his optimism: "With all the schools that have come down from Paris, in 10 years you won't be able to come and make your film in the suburbs with your crew, because the suburbs will already have their cameramen".

"Ever since childhood, it's been the first *job* I wanted to do."
–Yanis

Concluding Remarks

This thesis started with the story of Dylan Robert, who was *taken* out of prison for a leading role in "Shéhérazade" only to be *placed back* a few months later. What does the bringing of "the street" onto Cannes' red carpet tell us about the economic restructuring of Marseille and its effects on the working class?

A succession of crises followed the deindustrialization of Marseille in the 1970s, leaving the city crippled by poverty. Several strategies were emplaced under the invisible hand of the state to turn the city back into the economic and cultural capital it once was. Chapter 2 sheds light on the urban and cultural policies that shaped the rebranding of Marseille into a "capital of diversity" and a "capital of rap"; a project full of contradictions that rests on the 'inclusive-exclusion' of a segment of its population. Among them, Chapter 3 expands on how socio-cultural associations seek to replace the school among lower-class youth prone to early school dropouts, using rap as a tool to keep them off the street. This raises tensions with emerging rappers, concerned with their professionalization. Success, understood as being the provider of one's household, is perceived by many as being more easily accessible through music, cinema, or fashion, rather than traditional working-class jobs. That is partly because younger generations no longer wish to settle for minimum wage. As introduced in Chapter 2, the "industry of the street" joins branches of the music, fashion, and cinema industries, on the grounds that they all rely on the commodification of "the street" as a physical (the quartiers nords and the working-class districts of the city center), symbolic (racialized and stigmatized), and social space (shared experiences of age, class, race, and gender).

Chapter 3 deepens our understanding of the process whereby "the street" is stereotyped, fetishized, and commodified. Examples illustrate how "the street" is criminalized, resulting in its inhabitants not having a legitimate say in their representation. The development of cinema

in Marseille, and its claims to 'authenticity', risk naturalizing such stereotypical representations by appealing both to the language of history and myths. Myths unravel the binary structure of stereotypes (Hall, 2013), combining hate or fear with a form of desire and adoration. This tension is illustrated by the term "bandeur de cité", which means "the one who gets sexually aroused by the suburbs", and the related figure of the "iencli" (slang word for customer); "the street" is thereby commodified for profit. Chapter 4 expands on the understanding of "the street" as a cultural commodity. "Street credibility", i.e., the association with the street as a symbolic space, can be purchased in the form of access to certain places or people. Brands employ strategies such as "seeding" or "tribal marketing" to reduce the costs thereof by relying on gifting products to target communities ("the street"), and word-of-mouth as advertising.

How do the actors of "the street" deal with simultaneous experiences of "stigma" and "success"? Chapter 3 introduces the re-appropriation of stereotypes in a celebration of difference as a strategy to counter stereotypical representations of "the street". Despite its potential to re-humanize "the street", this strategy remains trapped within the binary structure of stereotypes (Hall, 2013). Instead, most of my interlocutors directed their attention to financial interests; if the street sells, they ought to be remunerated for it. This leads to the strategies enumerated in Chapter 4: negotiating contracts and legal rights, racketeering and gatekeeping, and independence from the industry. Negotiating contracts included displaying legal knowledge by following the lawyer-banker-accountant rule, and reversing the power-balance by imposing a price for one's work. Racketeering and gatekeeping were mainly led by drug-trafficking networks, setting a price on the imagery of the suburbs, either by regulating access or by demanding post-facto compensation. Independence included building a career 'wisely' and relying on alternative sources of funding, such as cumulating jobs and trustworthy social solidarity networks.

The final question my research sought to explore concerned the continuities and ruptures between traditional working-class conditions and the workings of the "industry of the street". Chapter 4 analyses the street as a zone of non-being (Grosfoguel et al., 2015), exploring how the "industry of the street" is informed by hierarchies of (past) colonial relations. This first and most obvious way is the fetishization and the commodification of alterity explored in Chapter 3. Building upon this, Chapter 4 sheds light on how the blurring between work and leisure, enhanced by the lack of formal education and the approach of socio-cultural associations to rap as a form of entertainment, contributes to the double devaluation of the street, driven by both capital and the state, and informed by processes of racialization (Kalb, 2023). This is reflected in the fact that the "industry of the street" operates neither on free wage-labor relations (exploitation) nor on overt dispossession (expropriation), but on debt, gig fees, and royalties, leading to the precarization of work (Fraser, 2018). Besides, the fact that "the street" as a symbol can be dissociated from "the street" as a social space to be extracted for profit, as in the case of "industry plants", suggests the disposability of the "jeune de banlieue" (Yates, 2011). While traditional working-class conditions tend to be characterized by long working hours, low wages, dangerous workplaces, and a lack of workers' rights, the "industry of the street" suggests an increasing precarization of work, characteristic of post-Fordism.

This leads to my main argument: the significance of understanding "the street" as an industry. As explained in Chapter 2, proponents of the 'knowledge economy' suggest that, under contemporary capitalism, the value of labor can no longer be calculated in socially necessary time because production is dominated by immaterial labor, whose fundamental component is knowledge. Knowledge, they argue, cannot be reduced to socially necessary time (Amorim, 2014). This understanding of creative economies contributes to the obscuring of the (very material) relations of production delineated above. Instead, my conceptualization of the "industry of the street" follows a Marxist understanding of value, paving the way for a

reformulation of rap (and other creative industries) as "work" (Jaeggi, 2017). This emphasis is essential to unravel the forms of subsumption this industry entails, as delineated in Chapter 3, but also its emancipatory potential.

Despite relying on mechanisms of exploitation and expropriation, the "industry of the street," and possibilities of 'success' therein were still perceived by many of my interlocutors as emancipatory, resonating with Malheiros & Padilla's work (2015). As Bhattacharyya suggests, "when people are marginalised or excluded from the workings of capitalist production, they express a desire to leap into, not out of, capitalist relations" (2018, p. 153). Fraser's conceptualization of boundary struggles, negotiating "where economy meets polity, where society meets nature, and where production meets reproduction" (2017, pp. 35-36), expands traditional understandings of class struggle to include other forms of labor, considered "non-work" or "almost-work". The struggle for a reframing of rap (and creative industries) as work should be the first step towards better working conditions.

Overall, this thesis contributes to the rapidly expanding scholarship on French rap by extending its scope to broader mechanisms of surplus extraction and social reproduction. Building upon studies that explored consumption and taste, this thesis sheds light on the hidden abode of production. This research also speaks to the scholarship on racial capitalism by exploring how race is mobilized in the service of capital in the context of the "industry of the street" in Marseille. Given the exponential growth of cinema in Marseille over the past couple of years, the "industry of the street" is only likely to expand its grip on the city. Further research should investigate the exact nature of the state-capital assemblage under which the "industry of the street" emerged, and draw a more detailed mapping of the actors and their relations to one another at different scales, including the structure of multinational labels and brands that were omitted in this thesis.

Appendix

This thesis comprises a selection of quotes extracted from conversations and interviews held with some of my participants. The names of all my interlocutors were changed to protect their anonymity, except for Marvin, who gave consent for his name to be shared. His name is revealed because his photographic work is analyzed in Chapter 2. Below, I introduce the interlocutors whose words were included in this work.

Assane, Soufiane, and Ismaël are all social workers in their thirties. Assane works with emerging rappers in the city center and incarcerated youth interested in cinema. He is also a video clip maker. Soufiane works with youth throughout the city, and occasionally works in collaboration with Assane's association. Ismaël leads an association in the quartiers nords, centering on after-school homework assistance for local youths.

Ibrahim and Isaac are two elder rappers, also in their thirties. They started their careers together, and now both lead their own writing and rapping workshops for youth. Next to this, they still make music, from which they partially make a living.

Mehdi, Yanis, Abdel, Kaïs, and Evan are all emerging rappers in their late teens and early twenties. Mehdi and Yanis are from the city center of Marseille, Abdel and Kaïs are from the quartiers nords, and Evan is from Marignane, a city near Marseille. Mehdi and Evan are in more advanced stages of their careers and have already set up their own labels. Yanis is planning to do so as well in the upcoming years, but is still looking for the necessary funding. Abdel and Kaïs are still developing their careers, but already have several recorded songs.

Jules is a fixer in his mid-twenties. Originally from the center of Marseille, he owns a rap media based on Instagram publishing about emerging rappers, and working closely with brands for organising campaigns and events. Alex is his friend and collaborator.

Marvin, Gabriel, and Naël are photographers. Marvin is a more established photographer in his mid-thirties from the banlieue of Paris. His work centers on French

banlieues and banlieue-like spaces abroad, capturing what he refers to as “the faces of the forgotten”. Gabriel and Naël are two emerging photographers in their twenties. Gabriel’s work aims to depict everyday life in the city center of Marseille, where he is from. He also worked in collaboration with several rappers and brands, but he put his career on hold because the demands and pressure were too high. Naël’s work is popular on Instagram and depicts banlieues throughout France. Marius is an acquaintance of Naël, they worked together on several photography projects.

Paul is a producer based in Paris. Léo is a manager for two emerging rappers from Avignon, a city near Marseille. Marc is a film studio owner who recently opened a studio for shooting rap video clips in the quartiers nords. Jérome is in his early thirties, he is a manager and owns a rap media. Kayden is an emerging actor in his early twenties. He was proposed a role in a famous Marseillais film, but hasn’t managed to find another role after that. He blames himself for not having grasped the chance to jumpstart his career. Adam is a visual artist in his early twenties.

Éden, Louis, and Raphaël are (upper) middle-class white men from Marseille and neighboring towns. I know them from my circle of friends.

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