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THE FILMS OF ABDELLATIF KECHICHE

Anna Lyubynetska

Thesis advisor: Ronald Bergan

Examiner: Mary Carmel Angiolillo

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The undersigned have examined the thesis entitled: **The Films of Abdellatif Kechiche** (presented by Anna Lyubynetska, a candidate for the degree of Master of Fine Arts - Cinema and Digital Media – Directing) and hereby certify that it is worthy of acceptance

Date

Advisor's name

Date

Committee member's name

Date

Committee member's name

Declaration

I declare that I have prepared my Master's Thesis, on the topic **The Films of Abdellatif Kechiche** independently under the expert guidance of my thesis advisor and with the use of the cited literature and sources.

Date

Signature of the candidate

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ABSTRACT: THE FILMS OF ABDELLATIF KECHICHE

This thesis studies the directing and scriptwriting work of French-Tunisian director Abdellatif Kechiche. In this thesis, the director's five feature films will be analyzed based on such elements as narrative structures, themes, visual and sound language and construction of characters. On the basis of a close study of these elements, the thesis will analyze the stylistic choices, which form Kechiche's directing as well as the tools he uses to create new realist films in contemporary France. Abdellatif Kechiche explains that he doesn't want his cinema "to look like life, I want it to actually be life. Real moments of life, that's what I'm after." (Romney, 2013) This thesis will analyze the meaning of this statement.

ABSTRAKT: FILMY ABDELLATIFA KAŠIŠE

Tato diplomová práce zkoumá režijní a scenáristický přístup francouzsko-tuniského filmaře Abdellatifa Kešiše. V této práci budou probíhá analýza pěti filmů režiséra na základě takových prvků, jako jsou narativní vytváření postav. Na základě důkladné studie těchto prvků struktury, témata, vizuální jazyk, práce se zvukem a taky diplomová práce analyzuje stylistické volby, které formují Abdellatif Kešiš vysvětluje, že nechce, aby jeho filmy "vypadali režijní přístup Kechiche, stejně jako nástroje, které používá k vytvoření nových realistických filmů v současné Francii. Abdellatif Kechiche říká, že nechce, aby jeho filmy vypadaly pouze jako ze života: „Chci, aby zachycovaly skutečný život. Reálný obraz života, to je, co mne zajímá.“ (Romney, 2013) Tato práce analyzuje význam tohoto prohlášení.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis studies the work of French-Tunisian director and scriptwriter Abdellatif Kechiche. It is focused on defining stylistic choices, which he uses to create new realist films in contemporary France. It analysis his five feature films based on narrative structures, themes, visual and sound language and the construction of characters.

Abdellatif Kechiche was born in 1960 in Tunisia. When he was six years old his family moved to Paris, where he grew up on a working-class estate on the outskirts of Nice. His father worked on building sites doing construction jobs and remains the director's prime reference when it comes to the work ethic. Today Kechiche lives in Paris's Belleville area, "an Arab town". Kechiche says that for him the most important aspect of living in a working-class district is its social rather than the ethnic aspect that matters. (Romney, 2013)

Kechiche discovered his passion for films when visiting the Nice cinemateque, where he first saw the works of the key figures of Italian neorealist cinema - Vittorio De Sica, anti-establishment director Pier Paolo Pasolini, and other filmmakers who further influenced his career.

His love for cinema led him to the Conservatoire de Nice, where he studied acting. After his studies, he started his career in the theater by making a debut at the age of 19 in a play directed by Jean-Louis Thamin, *A Balcony Overlooking the Andes (Un Balcon sur Les Andes)* in Nouveau Théâtre de Nice. Starting from his first written feature, *Game of Love and Chance (L'Esquive, 2003)*, where the plot of the film is tangled around preparation for a school theater play, Kechiche in one way or another always includes the experience of theater.

In 1984 Kechiche began his film career as an actor in an influential *beur* film directed by Abdelkrim Bahloul - *Mint Tea (Le Thé à la Menthe, 1984)*. Kechiche played a young Algerian immigrant, a likable opportunist, who unlike isolated and passive victims of French racism *beur* protagonists of the 1970s, refuses to be victimized.

In his interviews, Kechiche has suggested that his acting career was little more than a step on his lengthy and torturous journey to becoming a director. In 1992 Kechiche began to develop his own screenplays, creating the characters

beyond stereotypical portrayals of immigrants, delinquents or criminals. In 2000, thanks to an advance on earnings paid by the State, Kechiche managed to finance his first feature film, *Poetical Refugee or Blame it on Voltaire (La Faute à Voltaire, 2000)*, which won the Golden Lion for the best first work at the Venice Film festival. The film tells a story of a young Tunisian man Jallel (Sami Bouajila), who comes to Paris as an illegal immigrant in search of a better life.

Against most expectations, including those of Kechiche himself, his second feature *Game of Love and Chance (L'Esquive, 2003)* won the César Award for Best Film, Best Director, Best Writing and Most Prominent Actress, as well as appearing on several critics' top ten lists of the best films of 2003. This high-profile success led to an enormous commercial interest in the film, resulting in over 400 000 spectators by spring 2005, a highly respectable result for a film shot on location in the *banlieue* with a mostly non-professional cast and a budget of a little more than 1m euro. Following this success, Claude Berri, one of the most influential producers in France, offered Kechiche a three-picture deal that elevated his status within the industry from immigrant to national filmmaker in France during the 2000s (Higbee, 2014 p.97).

The film tells the story of a group of ethnically diverse, economically disadvantaged students, who struggle to stage the well-known Marivaux play *The Game of Love and Chance (Le Jeu de L'amour et du Hasard)*. From this film, he started using language not only as the means of plot advancement, expression of character's emotions or delivering information, but to express the clash between different social classes.

His third feature *The Secret of the Grain (Le Graine et le Mulet, 2017)* became his most successful film at that time, received many awards at important international festivals, was included in the Criterion collection, and attracted over a million spectators.

The film tells a story of the first generation immigrant, a 60-year-old Slimani, who struggles to set up a new business – a restaurant, in order to secure a future for his family. The film pays homage to Kechiche's father and other first generation immigrants from Tunisia.

In 2010, his fourth feature, *Black Venus (Venus Noire, 2010)*, was released. The film is the least successful film made by the director and was even

called by film critic Jonathan Romney "borderline-unwatchable period drama" (Romney, 2013). Despite the critical reception and the size of the audience compared to his previous or following features, *Black Venus* still had several nominations at international festivals, including the lead actress, Yahima Torres, nominated for the Most Promising Actress at the César awards and Kechiche winning the Equal Opportunity Award at the Venice Film Festival.

The story of the film takes place in the 19th century and depicts a life of a real historical figure – a Khoikhoi woman from South Africa – Saartje or Sarah Baartman (Yahima Torres), who has been taken to Europe to perform in carnivals and later in aristocratic salons in Paris, mimicking savagery and exposing her body. Jonathan Romney called the film "brutally angry in its relentless depiction of sexist and racist abuse" (Romney, 2013), while Kechiche himself admitted that he failed to succeed in bringing his intended ideas through this film. "I really felt it was the film of my life, and it didn't come off" (Romney, 2013).

Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle, 2013) brought Kechiche international attention and fame. The film won 83 awards at international festivals including the Palm d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, which was for the first time awarded to the director and two of the actresses.

The film was followed by several scandals. A French film technicians' union and the lead actress Lea Seydoux blamed Kechiche for negative on-set behavior. The press also questioned a male director's legitimacy to tell a story of love between two women. Despite the scandals, Kechiche dedicated his Palme d'Or to Tunisian youth – emphatically supporting the golden trinity of a political, cultural and sexual revolution.

The film is loosely based on the novel *Blue is the Warmest Color (Le Bleu est une Couleur Chaude)* by French author Julie Morah, and tells the story of the love and passion between two women – an artist and a teacher in contemporary France. Without being political, the film addresses important contemporary themes of French society.

The release of his next film *Mektoub is Mektoub* is planned for the year 2017. According to Cineuropa the film is loosely based on Antoine Begaudeau's novel *La pression, la vraie* and tells a story of Amin, a young scriptwriter who

has recently moved to Paris, heading down to his hometown on the Mediterranean for a summer vacation, where he meets a producer who agrees to finance his first film. But when the producer's wife shows interest in Amin, he has to decide between her and his career (Lemerancier, 2016).

History of *Beur* Cinema in France

For decades, scholars and critics attempted to describe the bi-cultural influences that shaped the films made by North African immigrant filmmakers and French filmmakers with Maghrebi-French origins. Since the 1980s, these films were labeled differently by different critics as Arab, immigrant, *émigré*, Maghrebi, Maghrebi-French, second generation, hybrid, postcolonial, diasporic, national, transnational, intercultural, accented and *banlieue* or urban cinema, the most common still remaining *beur*. The word *Beur* was first used by Maghrebi-French youth from the Parisian *banlieue* as a self-affirmation of their own hybrid origins, but when adopted by media and society, it started to be used as a means of identifying the descendants of North African immigrants as not entirely French.

The history of Maghrebi-French cinema started in the 1970s when North African *émigré* filmmakers were able to access the means of production after cancelation of the strict censorship laws, which had made it difficult for any filmmaker to engage with the colonial questions in an "anti-French" manner. The cluster of the early Maghrebi-French *émigré* cinema consisted of low-budget militant films made by a small number of North-African *émigré* filmmakers, who were working on the margins of the French film industry. In terms of the general direction, in their films first, filmmakers focused on political content and social reality rather than aesthetic expression and fictional narrative. In terms of the characters, this was the first time in the history of the French cinema when the *beur* characters shifted from being secondary, exotic characters to protagonists, having the main focus in the story of the film. Though being an important milestone in French film history, Maghrebi-French cinema did not gain much attention during the 1970s. French audiences could not relate to the first *beur* protagonists, who were depicted as helpless victims of French racism, a subject denied by the majority of French society.

In the 1980s a small but influential number of films made by French directors of North African immigrant origin became known as *Beur Cinema*. The term *Beur Cinema*, according to Will Higbee, author of *Post-Beur Cinema*, started functioning as a form of "strategic essentialism, which specialized identity in order to further their collective aim, combat the oppression or exclusion effected by hegemonic discourse" (Higbee, 2013 p.13).

In the 1980s, thanks to a shift toward combining social realism with comedy and creating attractive, westernized protagonists, *Beur Cinema* finally attracted French audiences. While mainstream French *polar* (crime films) such as *La Balance* (*La Balance*, 1982) in 1982 and *Police* (*Police*, 1985) in 1985 started producing two-dimensional violent criminal *beur* characters, immersed in the world of drugs and prostitution, Maghreb-French filmmakers kept bringing new dimensions and ambiguities to the personalities of their *beur* protagonists. For example, in his film, *Mint Tea* (*La Thé à la Menthe*, 1984), Abdelkrim Bahloul depicted the main character Hammou, who was played by Abdellatif Kechiche, as a "likable opportunist, whose criminal activities are the actions of a resilient, streetwise figure who refuses to be victimized" (Higbee, 2013 p.9).

One of the trends in French cinema of the 1990s was the return to political cinema, re-emergence of "new realism" and *banlieue* cinema. Though French filmmakers were using the urban periphery as the setting for social dramas since at least the 1960s, critics started using the term *banlieue* film, following 1990s independent social dramas.

Kechiche in the Context of Maghrebi-French and *Beur* Cinema discussion

The most significant change in the perception of *Beur Cinema*, both by critics and audience, happened in 2000, for the most part, thanks to the work of Abdellatif Kechiche. For the past decade, critics and scholars have seemed to fail to agree on the way to categorize his films - as *beur* or French.

Although Kechiche is French-Maghrebi himself, and comes from an immigrant family and was first categorized as a *beur* director, as Kechiche's career developed, French critics started recognizing him as a French, rather than a *beur* director. Jean-Michel Frodon, former editor of *Cahiers du cinema* and one of

France's most influential cinema critics described *The Secret of the Grain* as: "not a *beur* film, nor a film about immigrants but a film about France today" (Higbee, 2013 p.98). James S. Williams says that the first three features of the director "constitute already one of the most significant oeuvres in contemporary French and Francophone cinema" and calls *The Secret of the Grain* "a potent French political film without all the didactic trappings and shortcomings of many other so-called *beur* or *banlieue* films that will resist the test of time", he also adds that "it should also be consecrated as an important movie in the canon of French cinema" (Williams, 2011 p. 398).

Another scholar, Panivong Norindr, analyzes one of Kechiche's films "in terms of auteur theory and French political cinema. He argues that the problematic category of *Beur Cinema* too readily essentializes the cinematic practice of an auteur like Abdellatif Kechiche. Kechiche should be regarded as an important French auteur, who reflects on contemporary issues that affect the working people of France, those of Maghrebian descent included." (Norindr, 2012 p.55).

Panivong Norindr says that Kechiche should not be "ghettoized with other filmmakers of Maghrebian descent and lumped together in the problematic category of *Beur Cinema* or *banlieue* film" (Norindr, 2012 p.65). He says that he feels "compelled to call upon the work of Renoir to try to trace Kechiche's cinematic genealogy and understand his cinematic "practice". He compares Kechiche's determination "to provide a compelling filmic portrayal of the banal relations and encounters that link the people of France" to work by such French directors as Chris Marker, Agnes Varda, and Renoir (Norindr, 2012 p.57). "He is also engaged in a different way of telling and filming a story—a way of filming that he shares with his contemporaries like Laurent Cantet and Bruno Dumont. Kechiche's peers are not to be found among the so-called *beur* filmmakers, but among contemporary directors like Ken Loach and Robert Guediguian, and Laurent Cantet, whose important films showcase important questions that touch and impact France in the twenty-first century, and foreground the issues of particular relevance to all French working class families" (Norindr, 2012 p.63).

Here is how Kechiche himself answers the question of *beurness* or *Frenchness* of his films in an interview at the French Institute:

For every director, in making film you are obsessed with the technical aspects and the actors and the script and everything else like that rather too much to actually think in terms of common points that you have. But of course, whether you are telling a story of adolescents rehearsing Marivaux, or telling the story of a truelife character like Saartjes Baartaman, you are bringing something of yourself also into that equation. So you are telling your story to a certain degree through these characters, though the work that you are making, but finally it does not matter if your name is Abdelle, Rachide, Pier, Paul or Juen-Lois, you find yourself coming through into the film. And what interests [me] more than circumstances of his origins, now is not to be identified as a filmmaker from Maghreb or a social filmmaker or any of that kind, but simply to recount the stories of himself of ourselves and recent stories of men and women and bring that story to the screen is more important than what the origins are (Tarr, 2011).

1. POETICAL REFUGEE

Poetical Refugee or *Blame it on Voltaire* (*La Faute a Voltaire*, 2000) follows the journey of a young economic immigrant Jallel (Sami Bouajila), starting from his arrival in France and ending with his deportation back to Tunisia.

Though being produced the first, *Poetical Refugee* was the second script of the director. The first written feature was, *Game of Love and Chance* (*L'Esquive*, 2003), which was produced next. The circumstances that prevented Kechiche from telling the story of *banileue* youth in his debut film, opened an opportunity to start his directing career with introducing the audience to his own view of the world within contemporary France through the eyes of the character, who arrives in France for the first time.

Starting with this feature, Kechiche set the basics of his own visual and directing style. In his following films, he continued developing his particular film language, committed by all means to staying impartial and capturing reality. In *Poetical Refugee* he sets the theme, which threads his future career – the place of "the other" in contemporary French society.

Narrative Structure

Jallel, a 27-year-old Tunisian, illegally arrives in Paris seeking asylum. After lying to the authorities about conditions of his arrival and his ethnic origins, Jallel gets a temporary authorization to reside in France for 30 days (APS) and starts his new life in a homeless shelter, where he finds himself a part of a varied multiethnic community. Seeking to belong, Jallel finds himself in the local *beur* bar, where he meets and falls in love with Nassera (Aure Atika), a Maghreb-French waitress, who promises to marry him for the documents and save him from having to leave the country upon the expiration of his APS. Nassera charges him a large sum of money for the favor and abandons him on the day of the wedding, causing Jallel to fail to gain the legal status in France, which pushes him to a nervous breakdown. This leads him to a mental hospital, where he encounters Lucie (Elodie Bouchez), a mentally unstable French woman, who falls in love with *Jallel* and whose uncompromising persistence and strange charm lures Jallel into falling in love with her. He finally makes peace and settles into

his life in Paris as an illegal immigrant, but just as his life gains a seeming stability and he finds belonging in a cross-cultural community, he is caught by police and forcefully deported back to Tunisia.

By naming the film *La Faute a Voltaire* which literally translates to English *Blame it on Voltaire*, Kechiche makes reference to two characters of French literature, and indirectly to their stories. One of the characters is Candide – a protagonist of Voltaire’s satire, who, like Jallel, discovers the new world and in the course of it, loses his illusions about it. The second character is Victor Hugo’s Gavroche – a homeless boy from the novel *Les Miserables*, who tragically dies in Paris during the anti-monarchist student uprising while signing “I fell on the ground, blame it on Voltaire...” from which Kechiche took the name of his film. In this way, Kechiche compared Jallele’s France to Candide’s illusion of the new world. In so doing, Kechiche “re-imagines” the common *Beur Cinema* or North African immigrant narrative into an “allegorical tale that engages as much with mainstream French cultural references as it does with markers of immigrant, diaspora or ethnic differences” (Higbee, 2013 p.90).

Kechiche used a simple plot and grounded it in the reference to one of the most prominent stories of French literature. At the same time, following his successful predecessors of *Beur Cinema*, he softened the difficult social struggle of the main character with light-hearted humor. Starting with this first feature, he introduced his original storytelling style – a construction of a plot around extended scenes built around everyday situations.

Focusing on the romantic plotline - the relationship between Jallel and Lucie, Kechiche tell the political story not in a political way. His narrative is very traditional, based on a linear plot line and well-delineated characters whose actions are guided by recognizable psychological and social motives. He builds his story around common human situations that everyone could relate to, bringing the subject of a Maghreb-French’s search of an identity to the global subject of belonging, human connection and love, which makes ethnically French as well as the viewer with any other ethnic background relate to the story of the main character. As Nettelbeck put it - “this is primarily the story not of the migrant and the Frenchwoman, but of two needy people brought together by circumstances” (Nettelbeck, 2007 p.309).

The film starts with the scene at the immigration office, where an older Maghrebi gentleman coaches Jallel how to successfully pass the interview. "Human rights is their thing [...]" says one of the older men, referring to the French, "[...] you should say France is a homeland of ... liberty, equality... [...]. They believe they invented freedom". On one hand – this interview is of extremely high importance since his stay in France depends on it, but on the other hand, the preparation of the interview is humorous. Kechiche uses humor to tell the story in a light-hearted way, not letting the film become a heavy-handed social drama, with the *beur* main character fighting the windmill of the French social system. He wrapped his main character's troubles in humor to be easily digested by the varied audience.

Characters and Performance

Jallel (Sami Bouajila) is a young man from Tunisia. He is forced to go to France after the death of the breadwinner of the family. He is naïve, charming and optimistic, highly educated, hardworking, sentimental and intellectual. He easily makes friends within the multicultural immigrant and local environment of the homeless shelter as well as the mental asylum. He works hard, selling fruit, then newspapers and roses in the Paris metro, always smiling and energetic despite the threat of the police raids. He charms his future girlfriend – the French woman Lucie and takes responsibility for both her and her yet unborn baby. He is pure and hardworking. Watching this character struggle for belonging makes the presence of obstacles look not only unfair but also extremely absurd. Despite all the struggles and difficulties of being a newcomer in the country and an illegal immigrant, it seems that nobody loves Paris more than Jallel, nobody feels more at home in Paris than Jallel. This character completely destroys the stereotype of the *beur* character as being criminals or misfits.

Nassera (Aure Atika) is a Maghrebi-French waitress and single mother who works at the local Tunisian Bar Alhambra. Without letting her know, the father of her child left France to marry another woman in his home country. She is one of the first characters Jallel encounters following his arrival to France, when he visits the diasporic bar seeking to belong in an unknown country. She is a *femme fatale*, she is mysterious and untrustworthy. Her character breaks a stereotype

of solidarity within a *beur* community – *Jallel* does not find support in the diasporic space of Bar Alhambra, which, after *Nassera's* betrayal disappears from his life.

Lucie (Elodie Bouchez) is an emotionally unstable young French woman, whom *Jallel* encounters in the mental institution. She falls in love with *Jallel* and through persistence finds her way into his life. *Lucie* is a misfit in a society, she can't take care of herself, living her life in an unconventional way and does not even care to have a passport. Though she actually is a French citizen, as *Jallel* she is a complete misfit to the society and in fact needs *Jallel* in order to function.

The residents of the homeless shelter are *Frank (Bruno Lochet)*, *Nono (Sami Zitouni)*, *Mostafa (Mustapha Adouani)*, *Nono (Sami Zitouni)* and the worker of the shelter - *Barbora (Carole Frank)* a unique mix of characters and backgrounds. The characters include the sexually ambiguous Paul, who becomes a Buddhist and a Breton, Frank, who is going out with an Arab barmaid Leila (Virginie Darmon). Frank is played by Bruno Lochet, famous for his role as a stereotypical character from the area of La Sarthe in the long-running TV series, *Les Deschiens* (1993-2002). The characters are part of the friendly, thriving and supportive community at the shelter, united by their social situation rather than national belonging or ethnicity.

Image

In his dedication to capturing reality, Kechiche follows the documentary-like imagery, using a handheld camera, often not respecting the rule of a line of action when editing, uses "crowded" close-ups and medium shots. The compositions in the film are simple and bring the focus of the audience to the smallest symbolic details in the picture. He craftily emphasizes the thematic meaning of scenes through locations as well as making the audience rethink the common perception of well-known places. He pays a particular attention to the naked body, using it to create a lifelike intimate feeling, connecting the viewer to his characters.

By Kechiche's own admission, his cinema is one of simplicity in mise-en-scène and photography, composed for the most part of static frames, close-ups and little movement, apart from strictly functional pans and the odd, slightly awkward zoom (tracking shots are almost entirely absent). The special contribution of Kechiche's cinema lies instead in the treatment, intensity, and development of its subject matter (Williams, 2011 p.398).

Scenes of the film are shot on location, capturing the authenticity of places where the story unfolds. The subway is one of the most recurrent spaces in *Poetical Refugee*. Key scenes happen inside, around or just outside the underground train system. Typically considered only as a means of transportation, usually, as part of a work routine, a channel to a very specific named place, in this film, the metro holds an entirely different function. It is the first place we see Jallel after the immigration office, and it is the place of his temporary jobs, as we see him selling fruit, flowers, and newspapers in the subway. It is also where he continually dodges police controls – until the final scene when he is caught – and where Kechiche chooses to place him when he is distraught following the failed marriage. "Metro evolves from an image of solitude and disarray into a space of professional and conjugal blossoming, then into the jaws of a trap, till finally, at the very end, the grounds for potential resistance and hope... What the film endorses finally, therefore, are the processes of change and generation, as well as a belief in the shared experience of collective space". (Williams, 2011 p.405).

Another important location is the bronze statue by Aimé-Jules Dalou - Le Triomphe de la République - situated at Place de la Nation (a public square and the entrance to a metro station), created to mark the 1789 revolution. The statue is a female personification of the Republic. The film starts and finishes with the detail of the statue – the "nude female figure at the rear representing 'Peace'" (Williams, 2011 p.402). In the first shot of the film, the "figure is photographed from the front and below at a low-angle with a hand-held camera. At her feet lies a splendid cornucopia, and she offers out of her right hand a long-stemmed rose that directly meets our gaze. The statue at Place de la Nation thus provide a thematic and narrative anchor to the film. Later, Jallel and Lucie will go there and sit at the base of the statue, the proximity suggesting that they can become part of the Republic's triumphal self-representation." (Williams, 2011

p.402).

“In the last sequence outside the Place de la Nation metro station in the cold light of morning following a celebration of solidarity in the hostel community, a static fixed-frame in long-shot simply waits to record the moment of Jallel’s capture by the police who haul him into a waiting vehicle after a random check.” (Williams, 2011 p.404). And again, symbolically, the film finishes with the shot of the detail of the statue, but this time the naked woman is shot from behind, turned away from the camera. Opposite from the welcoming gesture she had in the beginning of the film, now she ignorantly turned away from the audience and Jallel showing us her bare behind.

Particular importance is given to the main symbolic prop in the film – a long-stemmed rose. First, we see the rose being held by the mentioned female statue representing ‘Peace’. The second time we see the same kind of rose at Nassera’s place, standing on the night table near her bed, while she seduces Jallel. Thus the seduction of Jallel by Naserra can be also seen as symbolic. As the statue of Le Triomphe de la République, Nasserra welcomes him to France offering a red rose. Later on in the film, after managing to survive the trauma caused by Nassera and finding a way to stay in France, Jallel himself starts selling roses, extending his area of work outside the metro to the restaurants. And finally, Lucie joins Jallel in selling those roses. “It is as if the beautiful and direct, yet also mentally disturbed, Lucie becomes the very image of the France that Jallel has to learn to love.” (Williams, 2011 p.402).

Sound

In his soundtrack, Kechiche works with ambient sound and diegetic music that reflects his realistic approach to storytelling. The choice of the soundtracks in the film emphasizes his main thematic line, interlacing Maghrebi and French culture. He extensively uses language in order to support the themes of his film and contribute to the understanding of the background of his main character.

Kechiche also connects environment to the sound and the language, fulfilling the perception of the places and their meaning. Spaces “dictate distinctive registers of language; thus, when Jallel and his uncle exchange ideas of tactics and suggestions for how to circumvent the law, they speak in Tunisian

Arabic, but when they are sitting in an immigration office, in front of a poster of the declaration of human rights promising the ever-elusive *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*, Jallel speaks in a stilted but 'standard' French. " (Esposito, 2011 p.225).

He gives dimension to his main character also by the use of language. "Jallel is educated and is pictured reading Ronsard. It is thus naturally Ronsard's 'Ode à Cassandre' that he and Julie will recite on the metro while selling roses, and which, with its appropriate theme of the temporary beauty of flowers, promotes a sense of urgency in 'reaping' one's youth end enjoying it while one can." (Williams, 2011 p.402).

Similar to the real locations, the diegetic songs in the film is connected to the themes of the film. A good example is the spirited musical chant, 'Saadi Bik Ya Lella' by Lofti Jormana. The song sounds during the scene when Jallel and Lucie make love in the bedroom where they also prepare the roses for selling and ending titles of the film "encapsulates a feeling of human warmth and love, as well as the open spirit of *mixité* and community." (Williams, 2011 p.405).

Themes

In his first film, Kechiche introduces the main themes, which would thread his future career – the theme of belonging, the place of immigrants, women, artists, of "the other" in French society, as well as the struggle of lower social classes in contemporary France, and the ambiguity of the meanings of *Frenchness* and *beurness*.

Starting with the name of the film, Kechiche starts searching for the place of "the other" in contemporary France, bringing us back to the foundations and principles of the Republic and its failure. The theme is supported through the plotline, as well as visual metaphors. Jallel does not seem to be the only one in his struggle to get accepted by the state - everyone he encounters, even if having legal status in France, is forced to live on the margins of society. The friends from the homeless shelter, the patients of the mental hospital, his first love (Maghrebi-French) Nasser and his second love, (French) Lucie; everybody struggles to figure out the way of survival.

Kechiche shows the Parisian lower class population as a vivid diversity of backgrounds and ethnical origin, who are united by the place of their living and their social class rather than their ethnical origin. He brings the focus to the lower class of society, but not marginalizing people who forcefully belong to it, but brings up and treasures their hard work, which is left unnoticed, shares the joy of their friendships, support, and care for each other. Breaking the law is part of their survival, but it is not connected with violence or theft, but to create for themselves survival conditions, which the state fails to create for them.

2. GAME OF LOVE AND CHANCE

Game of Love and Chance (*L'Esquive*, 2003) tells the story of Krimo (Osman Elkharraz), a Maghrebi-French *banlieue* teenager, who in order to win the love of his classmate Lydia (Sara Forestier) joins the school theater performance of *Marivaux's* eighteenth century French comedy of manners *Game of Love and Chance*, which turns his struggle for Lydia into the struggle for his identity within the French society. The film tells a story of the third generation immigrants, their place, identity, and perspectives in the French society.

The film can be seen differently depending on the perspective from which it is viewed, depending on the background of the audience. The variety of the introduced themes gives a possibility for the film to be viewed as a romance, a comedy, a social drama, a coming of age story, a *banlieue* film or a *beur* film etc.

Working on this film, Kechiche started a fruitful collaboration with Bulgarian *émigré* cinematographer Lubomir Bakchev, with whom they developed the most convenient ways of filming in order to achieve the desirable realistic look of the film. He went on introducing new cinematic characters from the *banlieue*, continued developing his own unique style of storytelling based on dialogue-heavy extended scenes and broaden the possibilities of using the French language as one of the strongest elements in his film language.

Narrative Structure

Krime is a Maghrebi-French teenager who lives with his mother in the *cité* (housing complex) of Paris *banlieue*, while his father is in jail.

After being annoyed by his constant absence, his girlfriend Magalie (Aurelie Ganito) attempts to break up. The same day he meets his old "homie" Lydia, who, despite his hesitations, convinces Krime to visit the rehearsal of the school staging of *Marivaux's Game of Love and Chance*. Watching Lydia perform, Krime falls in love with her. Krime joins in rehearsals for the play to spend time with Lydia.

After starting to learn the dialogue, Krime realizes that the language of the play is challenging for him. Despite his efforts and Lydia's encouragement, he

fails to reach the expected result, being each time humiliated by the teacher, for not being able to speak "proper" French.

Desperate and impatient, Krimo tells Lydia about his feelings, but Lydia refuses to give him a definite answer on the spot. Her dodging gradually leads to the growing conflicts within the community. Lydia starts being pressured by all the members of the community to give the exact answer to Krimo and resolve the situation which one way or another puts everybody's life out of balance.

When Krimo's friend Fathi (Hafet Ben-Ahmed) forcefully brings Lydia, Krimo and few of their friends outside the area of the *cité* to settle their romantic relationship, they encounter police officers who brutally rout the teenagers, beating one of the girls with Marivaux's book, which they found in her bag.

After the event with the police, Krimo quits participation in the play and stops his communication with Lydia.

Kechiche puts his main character, Krimo, simultaneously into two struggles, which reinforce each other. First, the struggle for his classmate Lydia, who on the one hand seduces him and shows affection, and on the other hand, does not want to give him a definite answer. Second, the struggle to fit into the definition of "French" when trying to deliver the lines from Marivaux's play. In this way, the plot's structure strongly holds together the story and the theme of the film, creating a multi-dimensional world that influences the main character as a particular person, Krimo, as well as what he stands for, a Maghrebi-French *banlieue* citizen of France.

The film is constructed of scenes, which capture the everyday reality of the *banlieue* kids; they are rich with the constant chatter of the characters. Most of the scenes start in the middle of the conversation when characters gossip and discuss mundane things. The dialogues develop in a sort of spiral way - characters often repeat themselves, slowly moving the conversations forward. The dialogues, though often simple, are always charged with energy. No matter the topic, each character has a strong opinion about the issue being discussed and stands his or her ground till the end. The verbal fight scenes seem endless but captivating - the characters scream, interrupt each other; gesticulate with extreme passion, creating the feeling of real life.

Kechiche gives special and unique importance to the secondary characters. He tells his story through the community rather than only through two of his main characters. He gives the secondary characters their own space, sometimes even moving the story forward without protagonist's participation. They influence the main character's decisions and actively participate in the plot twists of the film. Moreover, they are not used to represent and support the wants and needs of the main characters, but have their own agendas and dynamics within their group. For example, Lydia's friends don't support her behavior when she does not give the exact answer to Krimo, creating a "girls against boys" conflict. On the contrary, the girls insist that Lydia act morally and not keep Krimo waiting. There is a similar situation with the character of Krimo and his friends. Instead of supporting Krimo in his desire to win over Lydia, they want him to reunite with his ex-girlfriend and make things go back to "normal". This way, when pressuring Lydia to give the answer to Krimo, his friends were following their own agenda of getting Krimo back into their group rather than helping Krimo to get what he actually wants.

Kechiche created a very special, interesting and emotional climax of the film. He would further use this approach in his next film *The Secret of the Grain* (*La Graine et le Mulet*, 2007). First of all, by definition of the climax, he puts his main characters in the most difficult position, but then, he adds unexpected and extremely emotional pressure on his main characters. The climax takes place outside of the *cit *. Krimo's friend Fathi forces Lydia and Krimo into the car telling Lydia to make up her mind and tell her decision to Krimo. Fathi and two of Lydia's girlfriends are waiting outside the car, further away, observing the couple. Lydia feels trapped and extremely frustrated, Krimo is embarrassed and also ashamed. They are now not only forced to face each other, cornered physically and in time; they are also as on display observed by their friends. This is the moment – the pressure is high, Lydia has to decide now, it's now or never.

The scene could be cut at this moment and proceed to the next scene, which takes place at the school theater performance, where we discover that Krimo abandoned his participation in the play and thus got rejected by Lydia in the car. But Kechiche does not leave the car scene at that. When Krimo and Lydia argue in the car, while their friends peacefully sit further away observing, suddenly a police car appears. The policemen and a policewoman search the car

and the teenagers – a simple questioning and search turns into a violent raid, culminating itself with the policewoman beating one of the girls with, symbolically, the Marivaux book. This shocking scene does not have visible consequences in the story, since we never find out if any of the kids got arrested and exactly how much time passed between this scene and the scene that follows. Also, it could be easily removed without damaging the plot of the film. But the emotional impact it has, and its contribution to the understanding of the theme of the film is crucial. The police here serve as the extension of the school, judging the kids based on their ethnicity and trapping them in the social conditions in which they were born.

Characters and Performance

Krimo (Osman Elkharraz) is a third generation immigrant from North Africa. Krimo is a teenager, he is a *banlieue* youth, he is a caring son, a good friend, a bad boyfriend and a Maghrebi student. He is shy but persuasive, he has his deep inner world, which he does not share with anybody. Krimo lives with his mother, while his father is in jail. He does not seem to enjoy visiting his father but treasures the paintings of ships in the sea, drawn by his father in jail, and placed by Krimo on the wall in his bedroom. His relationship with the mother is warm and westernized. Though he spends most of his time with his neighborhood friends, who participate in fights and watching pornography, he seems to seek something different and thus gets attracted by the glimpse of a different reality, to which he is presented by Lydia. Though knowing her since childhood, not coincidentally he falls in love with her particularly when she reads Marivaux's lines. Though he was born France, he is still forced to struggle to define his own identity.

With Krimo, Kechiche introduces to the cinema another archetypical character. Begag defines Krimo's generation as *jeunes ethniques (young ethnics)* and divides kids of the generation into three groups - *rouilleur (rooster)*, *delouilleurs (de-roosters)* and *intermediarie*. If *rouilleur* is the one who mistrusts the state and rebels, a *delouilleur* fights for a better place in a society, and the *intermediarie* is the undecided one. While his friends are *rouilleurs*, his object of

desire is the ethnically French woman, Krimo is *intermediarie* and represents the majority of the *jeunes ethniques* (Higbee, 2013 p. 107, 108).

Lydia (Sara Forestier) is a pretty blond girl, a *banlieue* teenager, a French woman, a good student, Krimo's classmate and neighbor. She is extremely confident, opinionated, talkative, witty, emotional and feisty.

Kechiche has stated that he wanted a white girl to play Lydia so that the film was not completely attached to one particular culture, and also to prevent the charge of reverse discrimination through only having *beur* actors (Williams, 2011 p.409).

Though according to Kechiche, Lydia was picked to look ethnically French for the reason of diversity, the fact that she is being an unfulfilled love interest of the Maghrebi-French protagonist makes it difficult not to see her as a symbolic character.

Unlike the French woman in *Poetical Refugee*, who was depicted as a mentally unstable helpless character, fighting for the love of illegal Maghrebi immigrant, Lydia is confident and self-dependent. The only thing she is indecisive about is if she wants to be in a romantic relationship with her Maghrebi-French friend Krimo. This indecisiveness lays in the core of the film, underlined by its French name *L'esquive* which translates to English as "dodge".

From time to time we get a hint that Lydia is in a more privileged position than her friends which makes us feel that for her a life in a working class community is temporary. For example, she is the only one among other kids, who is not being called out on the street by her friends through screaming her name by the window, but rather by ringing the house intercom.

Most of the time on screen Lydia is dressed in the 18th century dress that reaches all the way to the ground, with the jeans jacket and black sporty backpack on top of it. One moment she pronounces perfectly the lines from *Marivaux's* play, while gracefully cooling herself with a fan, and the next moment she is spitting on the ground in a boyish way unstopably chatting in a *banlieue* manner of speaking, calling her girlfriends "brother" and "homie".

Krimo's Mother (Mariam Serbah), unlike the parent characters of *beur* films, is depicted as a westernized parent who offers her son pasta for dinner,

permits him to hang out with his friends till late at night and passes no judgment when he does not want to visit his father in jail.

It seems that their relationship combines the good from both worlds. On the one hand, we can see the mother as a westernized "friend parent"; on the other hand, there is still a humble subtleness and respect which comes from the Maghrebi background. Unlike the typical representation of a Maghrebi family, consisting of dozens of family members, *Krimo's* Mother lives independently with her son.

Krimo's Teacher (Carole Franck), though she rarely appears on screen, is one of the most important characters in the film. She serves as the main antagonist who prevents *Krimo* from achieving his goal in the context of film's thematic plotline, that is, finding his own identity within the French Republic.

During class rehearsals, the teacher gets more and more frustrated when correcting *Krimo's* language as he tries to deliver Marivaux's lines; she insists on him enjoying the pleasure of 'coming out of himself' ('Free yourself! Give yourself!'). Due to this pressure *Krimo* feels himself an outcast, assuming the state-driven status of excluded victim. The scene "has been criticized for its apparent acceptance of a social determinism" which sets the students' minds on their marginality (Higbee, 2013 p. 106). On the other hand, the students manage to perform the play successfully, though without *Krimo's* participation, which brings a glimpse of Kechiche's optimism and hope of change.

Krimo's failure represents the failure of the French school system represented by *Krimo's* Teacher to carry the values of the Republic. "White female school-teacher makes no attempt to release natural creativity of her culturally diverse students. Rather, they must fit into the pre-set rules and forms of the system she represents or risk finding themselves excluded." (Williams, 2011 p.410).

The Policemen appear in the film only once but still have important and impactful roles in the film, that strongly connects the audience to understanding the emotional journey of the protagonist. Paradoxically, if the scene with the policemen were taken out of the film, the plotline would not suffer, though the emotional connection to the character would not be as strong. The Policemen serve as a powerful extension of *Krimo's* Teacher in the representation of

France's institutions, showing the exclusion of some French citizens from French society. If Krimo's Teacher was morally pressuring, The Policemen beat up one of the Maghrebi-French girls, Frida (Sabrina Ouazani) with Marivaux's book, while frisking Krimo and his friends for apparently no evident reason.

Frida (Sabrina Ouazani) and Rachid (Rachid Hami) are Krimo's classmates and neighbors. Both of them fit Begag's description of *delouilleurs* ("de-roosters") and represent the part of Maghrebi-French *banlieue* youth, who work hard to get out of their social environment in order to live a better life. We never see Rachid with other guys gossiping or planning fights on in the corners of *cit  *. We see Frida constantly rehearsing, perfecting her language and acting skills.

Fathi (Hafet Ben-Ahmed), on the other hand, is a *roulleur* (rooster) and the one who reflects the mainstream media stereotype of a young alienated *banlieusard*. Fathi is the one who would beat up a girl – we see him hurting Frida and blackmailing her, taking away her phone; he is the one who organizes the pornography screening for the boys; he is the one who takes responsibility for the dynamics within the community, watching so that things go fair, according to him. He is the one who wants Krimo to get back with his ex-girlfriend because she is "cool" according to him; he forces Krimo and Lydia to clear things between them.

The Girls in the *banlieue* environment of the film are represented in a new for *banlieue* cinema way. They are strong and opinionated, able to stand for themselves, speak for themselves. Their equality with their men friends is emphasized through their speech and the way they refer to each other and using masculine references as "brother and talk about having "balls". When boys attempt to control them, they are met with verbal rebuttals. They do the same things as boys and meet each other in the same places, open spaces of the site. "This representational strategy is, again, rare in the *banlieue* film, where external spaces tend to be exclusively coded as masculine" (Higbee, 2013 p. 105).

Image

Together with refining his own visual language, which now includes zooms and tracking shots, Kechiche discovered a new way of viewing the *banlieue*

landscapes, introduced a new meaning to his wide shots and attributed certain camera angles exclusively to his main character.

Kechiche pays particular attention to extreme close-ups, using them in the plot's turning points and the protagonist's decision-making points in the film. In the second scene of the film, in which Krimeo has an argument with his girlfriend Magali, trying to convince her of his innocence, Kechiche starts with a two shot, using a pan between characters, then cuts between close-ups of a characters' faces, and finally at the end of the scene, Kechiche cuts to the close-up of Magali's neck, while her face is turned away from Krimeo. Though this shot is technically an over the shoulder of Krimeo, it is perceived as an extreme close up of Magali's neck, Krimeo being out of focus and occupying only a small part of the frame. Following this extreme close up Krimeo accepts Magali's unshakable rejection and leaves.

Another example of the important role of extreme close-ups in Kechiche's film is the scene where Krimeo is being convinced by Lydia for the first time to join the rehearsal. Lydia is trying to persuade Krimeo, with camera "jumping" from one character to another, and at the movement when the camera goes to extreme close-ups, which show details of Lydia's face, her eyes and then lips, Krimeo is finally convinced and makes one of the most important decisions in the story – to follow Lydia. Similarly to the extreme close up of Magali's neck, the extreme close ups of Lydia's face urge him to immediate action.

In a dialogue saturated scenes, Kechiche often surrounds close-ups with silence, creating a space for the viewer to enter the mind of the characters. For example, in the scenes described above, extreme close-ups are accompanied by the silence of the characters and are thus more emotionally tense. In this way, the audience has time to sense the feelings of the characters, almost hear their thoughts. This silence appears also in the scene where Krimeo's Teacher explains to the students the meaning of Marivaux's play, imposing her opinion on them. Kechiche cuts away to silent close-ups of student's faces, who obediently and passively absorb all the information. Extremely subtly, Kechiche shows the tragedy of the scene –portraying students as silent victims of the school system.

Another significant element of Kechiche's visual style that adds to the realistic image of the film is "crowding" the shot. Even in the close-ups of his

characters, Kechiche adds at least one more character, creating lively, dynamic and most importantly, realistic atmosphere, where all of the characters are perceived in the context of the presence of others.

Though close-ups are strongly connected to defining Kechiche's visual style and used to establish the strong connection between the feelings of the characters to the audience, in his second feature Kechiche broadens a number of functions attributed to his wide shots.

First of all, Kechiche uses wide shots to visually contribute to the theme of the film, challenging the common depiction of *banlieue*. Unlike other *banlieue* and *beur* films set in *the banlieue*, which used the site to visually isolate the characters of the films, placing them in dead-space rooftops, stairwells, and basements, "Kechiche at times employs the cinematic potential of the *cit *'s dehumanizing post-war architecture" (Higbee, 2013 p. 106). Kechiche explained that he chose this particular *cit * precisely for its theatrical look, and the fact that the *cit * allowed him to isolate the characters against "an architectural backdrop that was very stylized, expressive, almost symbolic" (Williams, 2011 p.407). On the other hand, Kechiche intentionally "borrowed" the isolating dead places of the *banlieue* films to underline the rebellious personalities of his *roulleur* (*rooster*) characters. For example, he placed the scene in which neighborhood boys together with the most stereotyped problematic *banlieue* teenage character Fathi, where they gossip about Krimo's crush on Lydia, in a corner of the *cit *, having most of the characters placed against the wall or in the corner of the building.

Secondly, Kechiche mainly uses the wide shot to conclude the scene, while using a close up for the opening. This way he keeps the audience focused on the characters, the interaction between them, which drives the plot of the film. During the unraveling of the scene, we easily follow an uncomplicated *mise-en-sc ne* and have no difficult in special orientation, and thus we don't need the usual establishing wide shot to lead us into the scene. A wide shot in the film, placed at the end of the scene does not have an informative mission, but a strong thematic contribution, as if at the end of the scene Kechiche reminds us of the location where the particular scene just took place.

He also places these thematic wide shots in the middle of scenes. For example, in an emotionally intensive scene, where Krimeo is struggling both to attract Lydia and to perform well at the rehearsal, Kechiche cuts between two close ups of Krimeo and Lydia. At a certain point, Lydia tells Krimeo to sit closer to her, as an acting choice for his Marivaux character. At that moment, Kechiche cuts to the wide shot, showing Krimeo and Lydia sitting on the bench with the view on the *cit * in the background, making us get out for a second of these particular character's emotional struggle and observe them from the distance, as two unknown *banlieue* kids having a chat on the bench at *cit *. Together with reminding us at that moment of the theme of the film, this cut also serves similarly to the extreme close up, radically changing the perspective before the protagonist will make an important decision, as in this case, to try to kiss Lydia.

Finally, as in *Poetical Refugee*, Kechiche uses a wide shot in order to express the solitude of the character. For example, he finishes the film with a wide shot of Lydia, who goes away alone disappearing behind the building after she received a silent rejection from Krimeo.

Though the film includes a lot of characters, each being easily distinguished and understood, using zooms and extreme camera angles, Kechiche creates a special poetic space for his main character, visible only to the audience.

For example, in the scene where Lydia coaches Krimeo for the play, in order to help him embody the character, she tells him to imagine that there is a chandelier hanging from the imaginary ceiling. Krimeo looks up – we see the over-the-shoulder that looks more like Krimeo's point of view of the tree, with its leaves shivering in the wind, then there is a cut to Krimeo's face, shot from the high angle, as if it's a point of view of the tree, with the camera moving up from Krimeo, as if his mind is flying up. This moment has a comical shade to it too, since he gets so distracted looking at the tree that he forgets to start the scene, annoying Lydia. But with this moment, the viewer is entering his mind and connecting to Krimeo's true self.

Sound

The soundtrack of the film consists of the diegetic atmosphere of the real locations, subtle inserts of ethnic music also connected to the locations and most importantly, the extensive use of language, which reflects the identity of the characters.

The “juxtaposition of “high” cultural references to Marivaux’s play with street slang foregrounds the creativity, resourcefulness (and humor) of these supposedly alienated young people, as well as their ability to embrace and engage with French cultural mainstream, in spite of the socio-economic and cultural dynamics that perpetuate their exclusion from wider French society” (Higbee, 2013 p. 106). However, Krime’s failure to learn and deliver Marivaux’s French and the psychological punishment of the teacher does not leave the space for Krime to find his own identity within his language.

While outside spaces are always filled with the ambient sounds of the *cité*, the inside spaces (apartments, cars) are filled with the Maghrebi music. In this way Kechiche attaches home as a location to a metonymical home of Maghreb.

Similar to the image, Kechiche creates a special sound space for his main character. Only two times do we hear non-diegetic music in the film, and one of them is used in order to reflect Krime’s inner state of mind. After Krime’s first failed attempt to perform his lines at the open rehearsal in the class, we see him sitting in his room and smoking. Krime is shot with a long lens, the camera zooms in with an awkward shaking movement, we see Krime against the beautiful lights of the houses just after the sunset. In the background, we hear a distant sound of atmospheric music, which does not come from any device in a real space, but specifically, underlines the melancholic state of mind of the character.

The second time Kechiche uses non-diegetic music is in the final credits of the film. We hear Balkan gypsy accordion music (‘Slijivovica Impro’ by Branislav Zdravkovic, Dario Ivkovic and Raoul Cepelnik). “The fact that the final passage of music is clearly an improvisation (we hear at one point the musician’s whispered voice) re-emphasizes the idea of performance and of work in process. Together with the dedication, the composite effect is of an idiosyncratic and fluid open frame of cultural *métissage* incorporating indigenous French and diasporic Arab

culture, the dialect and subculture of the *cit *, and a symbolic meeting of East and West through the music of Serbia (Williams, 2011 p.411).

Themes

In his second film, Kechiche continues questioning the place of Maghrebi-French citizens of immigrant background in the contemporary French society, this time, moving his focus towards the already represented in French cinema *banlieue*, to which he gives a new fresh perspective. First of all, he makes us see the broader than the stereotypical view on the *banlieue* life, secondly, he questions the determinism of the social conditions of *banlieue* youth.

The film starts with the typical cinematic representation of *banlieue* kids, led by *roulleur* Fathi, talking in *banlieue* slang, interrupting each other, planning their upcoming fight. They are represented in a typical manner, *banlieue* youth depicted as outlaws and criminals. But instead of witnessing the fight in the next scene, we are invited by one of the *banlieue* kids, Krimo, to enter his life – to see his struggle in the relationship with his girlfriend, to see his tender relationship with his mother and his sadness about his father, who is now in prison. Kechiche invites the viewers to consider these young men and women as full members of the French society and develops the story in another direction. He makes us see that the typical representation of *banlieue* youth is narrow and inaccurate; he shows that the stereotype is not representative of everyone living in that world and that interactions between *banlieue* youth are more complex than seem to be on the surface.

By rethinking the representation of *banlieue* youth, Kechiche raises the question of determinism with regard to the social conditions. He emphasizes the failure of the Republic in relation to the French lower social class and citizens with the immigrant background. The class teacher explains to her *banlieue* students that the poor can fall in love only with other poor and that love exists only in the same social class. However, Kechiche also takes away the absolute power from the authorities over the life of his character, by simply showing different aspects of their lives, without locking his story on their social conditioning. He provides two equal antagonists for his main character Krimo: the teacher, who represents the state, and Lydia, his love object. These two

antagonists influence Krimeo equally, which does not place all of the power in determining Krimeo's life choices onto the State, but equally, spreads the influence between external circumstances and the human factor. "If I want these kinds of interventions in my film [the unexpected disruption caused by individual protagonists], it's because I don't want solely to lay the blame at the level of [French] society. I want there to be complications that are not simply caused by institutions [...]" (Higbee, 2013 p.111).

In addition to showing the variety of characters inhabiting the *banlieue*, Kechiche shows the complexity of each character. For example, in one of the scenes, Fathi, who represent the stereotype of *banlieue* kids (and going to end up being criminal) encounters Krimeo's mother. His tone of speech is completely different when he talks to her: he talks calmly and with respect; they discuss their common problem. Fathi's relative, the same as Krimeo's father, is also in jail. This tender and respectful interaction gives us an opportunity to understand the character and see that he is only a kid who is born into difficult circumstances. The scene also shows the potential to change even for this extremely stereotypical character.

3. THE SECRET OF THE GRAIN

The third film made by the director, *The Secret of the Grain* (*Le Grain et le Mulet*, 2007), is based on one of his most personal scripts. The film tells a story of a first generation Maghrebi immigrant and serves as a tribute to the director's father. Kechiche wanted his father to be the lead in the film and planned to shoot it at the location, where he grew up. Kechiche's father died in 2004 forcing him to postpone the shooting, move the location to the neighboring port of Sete and cast his father's friend, Habib Boufares, as the main character. (Berghahn, 2013 p.150).

Jean Renoir believed that realism on screen was closely connected to the filmmaker's experience, which came from shooting "local people, while breathing the local air, while eating the local food, and while living the lives of these workers" (Norindr, 2012 p.57). Kechiche made the actors and crew members for one month before the shooting of the film eat and live together on location. He shot the dinner scenes only when the actors were hungry and he didn't cut between takes, making the actors stay in the scene long enough to create a real flow of life. Instead of focusing on the authenticity of a plot, he focused on the authenticity of characters.

Kechiche used big ellipses, letting the audience observe mostly the everyday routine around consequences of his protagonist's decisions. He used extended seemingly improvised scenes and established with his cinematographer a technique of shooting with two light DV cameras, which gave freedom to his big cast, which contains both non actors and professional actors.

Narrative Structure

Slimane (Habib Boufares), a 60-year-old first generation Maghrebi immigrant, who all his life worked as a shipyard worker at the Mediterranean port at Sete, gets his work hours cut, due to the decline in his work performance. This circumstance puts Slimane in a desperate position since it threatens his ability to take care of his big family, which in fact, consists of two families – his ex-wife, their children and grandchildren, and his lover and her daughter, Rym (Hafsia Jerzi). As a solution to his trouble, Slimane, with the help and support of

Rym, decides to start a business – open a couscous boat restaurant. When Slimane and Rym encounter bureaucratic obstacles and prejudices, reducing to zero their chances of success, they come up with the idea to organize a big dinner for the local authorities and decision makers in order to practically demonstrate their capability and convince them to support their project.

During the course of the event, despite the natural rivalry, both families join forces to make the dinner succeed. But because of the irresponsible behavior of one of the family members, who due to his personal problems escapes the dinner and by accident takes away the main dish of the evening, couscous, all of the effort is put under threat.

Kechiche puts realistic characters and their circumstances into the fairytale kind of plot, creating “fiction familiale”, combining “familiar characters with an identifiable socio-cultural identity and the fantastic tale of “aberrant protagonists.” Rather than narrating a grand story of an immigrant’s success, Kechiche uses the “conte cruel” to explore the everyday life of French workers who valiantly try to eke out a living (Norindr, 2012 p.59).

Ginette Vincendeau categorizes Kechiche’s film as melodrama, pointing out that Kechiche “shares the impulse” of French melodrama to “celebrate father figure”, underlying that “melodrama normally favors women [characters]” (Norindr, 2012 p.63).

Rather than resolving the different plot lines, as is conventional in a melodrama, Kechiche prefers to adopt many narrative ellipses. Although the story of the film includes all elements of a classical structure, Kechiche has an unusual approach towards the depiction of the protagonist’s decisions, showing the viewer only the results of those decisions. We don’t see Slimane finding out about the boat, buying it; we don’t see the moment when the idea of opening a restaurant on the boat comes to him. We don't see Slimane in the midpoint of the film when his most important decision was made – to organize the dinner for the authorities - we find out about it through secondary characters and Rym. After Slimane and Rym get a series of rejections from the authorities, we want to know what they will do in order to fulfill their goal, but instead of following Rym and Slimane, Kechiche shows us Maghrebi old men sitting outside Slimane's lover's Maghrebi Hotel De l'Orient, gossiping and at the same time slowly

revealing the decision of Slimane, putting the audience in the position of eavesdroppers or gossiping old Maghrebi men, as if we are one of them. This way the main turning points in the film are shown through ellipses, putting the focus not on the main carcass of the story, but inside of the scenes, relationships within the family, rather than on the big struggle between Slimane and authorities.

Following the storytelling style created by Kechiche in his previous films, he makes obstacles for his protagonists based on a "human factor" rather than merely on external circumstances of their lives. Although the actions and goals of the characters are limited by external circumstances of their social place in the society, their destiny is heavily defined by the people, who belong to the character's everyday environment. The same as in *Game of Love and Chance*, where Lydia's dodging contributes to Krimo's failure to find his place in the French society, and similar to when Nassera abandons Jallel leaving him without documents in *Poetical Refugee*, Slimane's success is being put under threat by his own son.

In his third film, Kechiche also continues the tradition of integrating performances into everyday life. In *Poetical Refugee*, we saw main characters reading poetry to the passengers in the metro, when selling roses, changing the perspective of illegal immigrants as uneducated. In *Game of Love and Chance*, we saw *banlieue* teenagers performing Marivaux's play on the backdrop of *cit *, ruining the media stereotype of *banlieue* youth as the ones who have no hope to get out of their low-class circumstances. In *The Secret of the Grain*, the performance happens on the boat at the dinner for the French authorities, when Rym, Slimane's stepdaughter, performs a traditional belly dance in order to seduce and stall the French audience, upon whom the fate of her stepfather Slimane and his family depend. Rym seduces the French audience with Maghrebi culture.

Following *Game of Love and Chance*, in *The Secret of the Grain*, Kechiche continues to perfect his unique way of constructing very long scenes out of seemingly constant everyday chattering of the characters, almost invisibly driving the story forward. This technique initially was misunderstood by some critics, "who found the scenes of family life rambling on for too long", while praised by others (Norindr, 2012 p.57); for example, the critic of *The Guardian*

commended them precisely because they conveyed perfectly “the easygoing, directionless quality of real life,” “radiat[ing] charm and authenticity” (Bradshaw, 2008). For A.O. Scott, of *The New York Times*, “The scenes, though they feel improvised, at times almost accidentally recorded, have a syncopated authenticity for which the sturdy old word realism seems inadequate.” All of these critics are unanimous in declaring, in one form or another, the film’s faithfulness and intimacy to “reality,” stressing different aspects of the film’s realism, as a documentary, a chronicle, an authentic portrait, a slice of life.

For example, the twenty-minute dinner sequence is contracted out of three scenes, united within one space and time, creating the feeling of constant un-interrupted flow of small uneventful but captivating routines. The sequence depicts the preparation of the family for the dinner, Slimane’s daughter convincing the Russian wife of Slimane’s son to join the dinner and the dinner itself. While we observe constant chattering of the family members in a very everyday manner, greeting each other, setting the table, preparing food, complementing the food etc., we discover a lot of things about the world and life of the characters, about their personalities as individuals and we are subtly given information which will be crucial for the drama to unfold. Unforcefully and almost casually, during the sequence, we learn that the Russian wife of Slimane's son knows about her husband’s cheating and that the sisters, though disagreeing with him, are covering his sins, which later in the film pose the main threat for Slimane’s goal to succeed. We learn that Slimane's ex-wife makes a very delicious couscous, which later on will be the main focus of the drama. We find out that Slimane's ex-wife still loves Slimane and their children still have hope they will be together, which will later fuel the tension between the families, etc. This way the dinner scene very subtly but precisely places all the "ticking bombs," which will have the potential to explode during the most important climactic scene of the film – the mirror to the home dinner – the dinner scene for the French authorities.

The same as in *Game of Love and Chance*, Kechiche elevates the emotional impact of the climax of the film by bringing a third party into the middle of the biggest struggle of the protagonist, giving an unpredictable emotional stress to the character and to the audience. In *Game of Love and Chance*, the emotional impact was made by the police, who unexpectedly

appeared in the middle of the scene, beating up the characters, and in *The Secret of the Grain*, when looking for his wife in order to ask her to make another batch of couscous, Slimane encounters the desperate screams of his son's Russian wife, who directs her anger at him during a six-minute highly emotional monologue.

Characters and Performance

This story includes many characters: the two parts of the extensive family, neighbors, authority members, etc. Not to miss out on the important contribution of each of them, it is more effective to analyze those characters, looking at them within groups.

Generations

Kechiche depicts three generations of Maghrebi immigrants. Slimane is the first generation immigrant, he is the father and the grandfather of the family, the connection of the now French family to their Maghrebi roots. Slimane's children are *beur* – westernized and strong daughters and somehow irresponsible sons. The third generation is represented by Slimane's Maghrebi-French grandchildren.

Kechiche shows the difference between the three generations in the beginning of the film through a simple prop – a fish – how its meaning differs for family members of different generations. The scene takes place at Slimane's daughter's apartment when he arrives to deliver a fish he brought from work. To Slimane, the fish is closely connected to his roots as the Maghrebi immigrant. It is also the main ingredient of North African cuisine. Together with this, it represents his life in France, being inseparable from his job. It is also a symbol of the now vanishing past since Slimane is being forced to leave his job due to his old age, and also since Sete is now changing from the industrial city to a tourist attraction. Slimane delivers the fish to his *beur* daughter as an act of care and love. Instead of being grateful, the daughter acts annoyed to receive "more fish". And later we discover that all of the freezers of the family members are stuffed with the fish Slimane brings them regularly. His grandson takes the fish into his hands, playfully bringing it close to his younger sister and calling it Nemo, like

the fish in the Pixar American animation film. This way we can see the contrast of meaning given to the fish by all three different generations.

Another important aspect of the relationship between the generations is expressed through the relationship between Slimane and his stepdaughter Rym. We witness a beautiful relationship of care, support, and understanding. As in *Game of Love and Chance*, Kechiche continues to depict a respectful attitude of the *beur* children towards their immigrant parents.

Maghrebi Family

Kechiche does not idealize or victimize the Maghrebi family. When it's discovered that the couscous is gone and family has to stall the French guests, they decide to give them more alcohol "Let's serve drinks. [...] You know, alcohol is nourishing. Especially for the French. Give them drinks, they'll forget their wives [...]". They are shown covering each other's sins – Slimane's daughters are hiding their brother's, Majid (Sami Zitouni) affairs from his Russian wife. They are shown betraying - Slimane's son abandons the family in a crucial moment in order to cover his own back.

Slimane's family is broken, making all of the members struggle to unite it. His ex-wife struggles to hide her feelings for him from their children, the children want them to unite, the lover is jealous of his family and Rym is fighting for him instead of her mother. In a not idealized, life-like manner the two parts of Slimane's family manage to unite in the collective effort for Slimane's business to succeed.

Men and Women

Though the protagonist of the film is a man, the plot of the film is moved by women. The women in the film are empowered, active, strong leaders of the family. Though the main hero is Slimane, Rym is the one who stands behind all of his decisions. She is the one who encourages, supports and even speaks for him. In the sequence in which Slimane and Rym ask authorities for the permit to open the restaurant, Slimane struggles to put a sentence together, while Rym confidently takes the role of the one responsible, talking to authorities instead of him. On the other hand, she does not take away his power or his dignity, making him feel that he is the one in charge, supporting him, encouraging and

complimenting all his efforts, which gives, even more, humility and nobility to her character.

We never find out whose idea it was to organize the dinner for the authorities. Rym is the one who tells about the idea to the old men near the hotel and thus to the audience. She says that Slimane decided to organize the dinner, but the audience is still left with the doubt. Also, though the decision was formally made by Slimane, it was the women who made the dinner happen. His wife and daughter cooked the food, delivered it to the boat, welcomed guests, served the tables; it was Rym who, in the devastating moment when the dinner was threatened, found a solution to perform in front of the guests.

Men, on the other hand, are depicted as the ones who are being led by women. They are the ones who are gossiping, as the old men who sit on the porch of the hotel making fun of Slimane's idea. They are the ones who are irresponsible, as Slimane's son, who cheats on his wife, making his family cover for him. They are the ones who are unaware and unable to take responsibility – as Slimane's youngest son, who does not stop his brother from running away.

Romeo and Juliet

Kechiche adds an interesting touch to the story, creating a hint of a romantic attraction between Slimane's stepdaughter Rym and his son Riadh (Mohamed Benabdeslem). Though there is no story between them, there is an invisible forbidden flirtation between them, which adds an interesting dynamic to each scene when they are both present. These scenes usually involve only Slimane and from one side remind us of the tension between two families, having both of their representatives – Rym and Riadh, and the "price" they are fighting over – Slimane. On another side, the attraction between the two characters reminds us of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, whose relationship also was not possible because of the rivalry of their families.

Image

Kechiche visual style is closely linked to his way of working on set, directing actors and his dedication to "capturing reality". Together with Bulgarian émigré cinematographer Lubomir Bakchev, he finds a way to create the

conditions for real life to unfold in front of the camera. As with his previous film, *The Secret of the Grain* was shot with a two-camera digital set up, combining static shots with close ups. This way the camera can move freely between the actors, following their actions, without restrictions, the usual restriction of actors in their movements, leaving them the space for improvisation. Kechiche compromises the lighting and often the composition for the sake of creating creative space for the actors, giving them an opportunity for impulse, improvisation and focus on the interactions between the characters rather than "hitting the mark".

Compared to *Game of Love and Chance*, we can see more pans, which create connections between the characters, giving a feeling of chaotic unity within the family. The settings are simple and neat. As in *Poetical Refugee*, Kechiche uses a close-up of the character's face on the backdrop of the solid background. The most emotional, charged and painful scene in which the Russian wife of Slimane's son is caught in the middle of the nervous breakdown is shot in close-ups, with the main character of the scene being shot against the wall, with her face, distorted in desperate, full of tears. Though Kechiche cuts to Slimane and pans to the woman's brother, the scene is mainly shown through the close-up of the woman, as Dreyer's *The Passions of Joan of Arc*, shot against the solid background in a close-up.

Kechiche exposes to the audience not only the real emotions of his characters, in all their rawness and authenticity, he gives an equal role to the physical appearance and exposure of the characters, establishing the close connection with the audience, where no aspect of the characters vulnerability is hidden. The audience sees the messy hair of Slimane's ex-wife Souad (Bouraouia Marzouk), her face moist from the sweat, her heavy breasts half exposed while she bends to wipe the floor with a persistent motion. We see Slimane naked and vulnerable, sitting on the bed, after failing to have sex with his also half-naked lover Latifa. We see a sequence of extreme close-ups of Rym, her beauty – a big belly shaking in the ethnic dance. Filling the whole screen, her body glittering from sweat. Kechiche shows the real bodies of real people, bringing us intimately close to his characters.

Kechiche continues using locations and names of places to support the themes of his films. Latifa's hotel – the place where the local Maghrebi

community gathers to spend their evenings, eat, dance, gossip is called Hotel de l'Orient. On the other hand, Slimane wants to place his couscous restaurant, which is meant to serve as a place of gathering for his community as well as sharing the Maghrebi culture with the local ethnically French people, at Quai de la Republique. But ironically, for the time of the dinner for the authorities, he has to place the restaurant near Hotel de l'Orient.

Again Kechiche uses the boat as a symbol of change, hope, and the better life. In *The Secret of the Grain*, the boat represents the transformation of Sete from an industrial port to a tourist city and Maghrebi community's afford to use the potential of this change and integrate into the French society, offering their culture and hospitality. Moreover, the boat here is not used as a means of travel back to Tunisia, but as a means of encoding, grounding in France, at the very Quai de la Republique.

Sound

Kechiche stays committed to exclusively diegetic sound, which contributes to his general realistic approach - casting nonactors, shooting at real locations and capturing the dynamics of the real flow of life. He uses Maghrebi music coming from the radio or played by the characters in a shot. For example, when Slimane passes by a neighboring open room, we see and hear the two men playing the instruments. Music in Kechiche's films is often connected to the representation of home and Maghrebi culture. Almost each time when we are in someone's apartment we hear the music.

Music is also used to distinguish the Maghrebi culture from the French. In this film, it is used to create a fascination with "the other". With the help of music and dance, Kechiche makes the audience experience the excitement of an exotic culture, placing us in the position of the French audience.

Themes

Kechiche questiones the boundaries and understanding of *Frenchness*, shifts the focus from nationality to class and praises the first generation immigrants and women by giving attention to their sacrifice.

This change in the definition of *Frenchness* is visible even more in the following scene. Slimane tells the bad news about his work to his daughter and her husband. "They are reviewing personnel. They don't want Frenchmen... Rather have immigrants" – the daughter's husband says. These lines are crucial to the understanding of the *Frenchness* because the second generation immigrants don't consider themselves immigrants, they consider themselves French because they have the same problems that the French have based on their social class rather than based on their ethnic belonging.

Kechiche acknowledges the sacrifice made by the first generation immigrants, making the story of his father a starting point of the script and putting the theme of sacrifice at the base of the film. Unlike the other characters, the character of Slimane has no energy and seems almost lifeless and tired. His only desire is to leave something for his family before he dies. He is living in a tiny apartment in the hotel, he almost does not eat, only drinks coffee, he seems to live only for others.

The theme of sacrifice is expanded as well to women, who sacrifice their feelings to support Slimane.

4. BLACK VENUS

Black Venus (*Venus Noire*, 2010) is a period drama, telling a story of a North African tribeswoman, which takes place in London and Paris between 1810 and 1815.

Black Venus "was simultaneously a notable departure and further confirmation of the thematic and stylistic continuity" that characterizes Kechiche's films (Higbee, 2013 p.120). In an interview with Carrie Tarr, Kechiche said that he was obsessed with the story of Saartie Baartman for a long time (Tarr, 2011). Though being the most ambitious film by the director with the budget of 12.7 million euros, it has become the least critically and financially successful. Romney accurately notes that the film "comes across as brutally angry in its relentless depiction of sexist and racist abuse", but that's not what he intended (Romney, 2013).

Narrative Structure

The film starts and ends at the Royal Academy of Medicine in 1817, where anatomist Georges Cuvier (Francois Marthouret) gives a lecture on the anatomy of Saartjie Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman, whose naked molded cast stands in the middle of the auditorium with her genitals cut off and placed separately in a jar for exposition.

The main story of the film take place seven years earlier, in 1810, when Saartjie Baartman (Yahima Torres) moved from South Africa to Europe, following her boss Hendrick Caesar (Andre Jacobs). She is promised success and a good life at the same time being forced by Hendrick to perform at the London freak shows, acting as a wild savage. Being morally controlled by her boss, she is unable to confront him and acts out by sabotaging the performances. Being unable to protect herself from his punishments, verbal and physical assaults, she spends her days drinking whiskey and wine. During that time, Hendrick encounters a bear-tamer Reaux (Olivier Gourmet), who, by promising money and help in "taming" Saartjie, and by showing his affection and appreciation to Saartjie, convinces them to move to Paris and perform in aristocratic salons. In Paris, Saartjie is exposed to even more humiliation and treated as a sex object.

Being unable to handle the humiliation, she sabotages her performances and finally gets abandoned by both of her bosses. Saartjie ends up working as a prostitute in Parisian brothels and dies alone from a combination of pneumonia and venereal disease. In the meantime, French anatomists take an interest in her unusual anatomy, presuming her to be a "missing link from ape to man" (Bellinger, 2010).

Following Saartjie's biography, Kechiche chooses to tell the story in a Kafkaesk way -starting the story from the low point in the life of the characters, and declining more and more at each stage of the film, making the main character hapless and miserable, without giving her a chance to recover. Though Kechiche never concludes his films with a "happy ending", leaving the protagonists without their goals reached, one could still see the potential for the further development of the story off-screen and leaves the viewers with a hope that the sacrifice of the protagonist was done for a better future. But the narrative of *Black Venus* moving to Saartjie's death through acts of degradation, exploitation, objectification and violence, does not leave any room to imagine a better future for the character. Kechiche makes an attempt to create a hope by inserting documentary footage of Saartjie's remains being repatriated to her homeland in Gamtoos Valley in 2002, but because the footage is removed from the space of the story, and placed in the final credits of the film, the attempt seems unconvincing.

Kechiche never allows the audience to fully enter the thoughts and feelings of Saartjie. The character is not connected to any other character. She does not trust anybody, she has no friends, that's why she keeps silent. As an audience we are placed in the same position as anybody else surrounding Saartjie, without a privilege to know her real self, her personality. We only witness her silent pain.

Black Venus is not constructed with extensive dynamic dialogue, common for Kechiche's style. The scenes in the film rather remind scenes similar to a Hollywood period drama. The only scene that reminds us of Kechiche's style is the one, close to the end of the film, which includes a few actresses from Kechiche's previous film – Bouraouia Marzouk and Leila D'Issernio, who in this case play secondary characters. The scene is set in a Paris brothel, where prostitutes, with Saartjie among them, are waiting for the clients to come. The women are laughing, smoking, joking, interrupting each other. The scene

conveys the feeling of the everyday life of the women, not focusing on the tragedy of their profession, but embracing the life as it is. Unfortunately, it is the only scene in the film pursuing Kechiche's original style of storytelling.

Characters and Performance

Saartjie Baartman (Yahima Torres). The film is the screen début of Yahima Torres, a Cuban *émigré* living in Paris – another discovered talent by Kechiche. Unlike his previous female characters, Saartjie is unable to articulate her feelings and emotions, making her closer to protagonists of Kechiche's previous films - *Krimo* and *Slimane*. She is completely detached from the world she lives in, shielding herself from it by alcohol abuse. Her emotions are expressed only through her silence, tears of shame and sorrow for her lost family. The only glimpses of her personality we see are through her longing for beauty and art, which we can see when she sabotages her freak show performance by singing and playing an instrument, mesmerizing the audience with the beauty of her performance.

Hendrick Caezar (Andre Jacobs) and Reaux (Olivier Gourmet) are the film's villains, who keep Saartjie in unofficial, but moral slavery, using her for their own profit. It is the first time when one of Kechiche's characters can be categorized as a villain. It looks like he intended to create multidimensional characters, but the impact of negative traits was overwhelming leading to a difficulty to perceive the complexity of their personality. It seems that Kechiche tried to create interesting dynamics between Hendrick and Saartjie, by uniting them with the desire to protect their actions in the eye of a public and save their illusion of dignity. This intention is clear during the court scene, where, when questioned by the judges, Saartjie convinces the ones present that it was her choice to perform like a savage and that she exposed her body voluntarily. This intention is however overpowered by the general tone of the rest of the film.

Jeanne (Elina Lowensohn), a French prostitute, unlike Saartjie, has the power and control over her own life. She competes with men in drinking contests; her body is covered with tattoos, representing the adventures she went through. She uses her body to gain money, but she is the only one in control of it. She is depicted as a joyful strong woman, in charge of her own fate. Her

character is the only character in the film, who has conflicting traits and creates an interesting contradictory dynamics of a real person.

Audience of the freak shows and salons. Following his ambitions to break the stereotypes and create the multidimensional world, Kechiche acknowledges that not all the people in the audience of the freak shows or the salons were insensitive to Saartjie's suffering. Almost each sequence involving the performance or public discussion of the subject incorporates alternative opinions and reactions of the members of the audience. For example, in the scene at the salon, in which Saartjie starts crying of humiliation, audience members notice her tears and go away.

Image

Though Kechiche and Lubomir Bakchev stayed loyal to the style of filming, the film failed to deliver the genuine realistic impact of the previous films. The 12.7 million euro budget was mainly spent on the detailed cinematic reconstruction of historical locations, the details of which overwhelmed the screen, losing the simplicity of the setting of his previous work. Though Kechiche continued using the close up of the characters in order to deliver their most intense feelings, it does not seem to have the intended effect.

Like Kechiche's characters in his previous films, the protagonist of *Black Venus* expresses herself through a public performance. Being forced to act as a savage, the stage becomes the only place where she lets herself express herself through her own way of dance and music. While the music becomes her means of rebellion, similar to Rym in *The Secret of the Grain*, in her dance, she has to fascinate the European audience by degrading herself to a sexual object.

Sound

Kechiche used nondiegetic music to support the mood of a particular scene, an approach, which falls out of his usual film language. Here he also used music as the only protagonist's tool against her offenders. A part of Saartjie's show as a savage, musical performance is included on an instrument similar to a

violin. But Saartjie uses the instrument as a way of sabotaging her position. At one of her performances at the French salon, Saartjie is expected by her masters to imitate the beautiful melody performed by the musician by producing unbearable sounds which would disturb the audience and contribute to her wild and savage image. Instead, Saartjie chooses to follow the musician, when they together create a beautiful improvisation, charming the audience, leaving it confused and frozen in fascination.

Theme

Though being displaced in time, *Black Venus* takes place in the "space" of French history, and being a part of the director's *oeuvre*, forces us to look for the links between the past and the present of France. In his interview to Carrie Tarr (Tarr, 2011), Kechiche said that his intention was not to suggest a certain theory surrounding the story of Saartjie, but rather to raise questions. This time Kechiche focused on a purpose of gaze, voyeurism and the ambiguity of free will.

He makes sure that the audience of the film is part of the voyeuristic experience, placing us in the seat of the audience of the freak shows. He deliberately shows extreme close ups of Saartjie's dead naked body and the close up of her cut off genitals. "When you are dealing with the question [of] voyeurism and you are depicting it in the film, even if your intention is not to be to be voyeuristic, inevitably ... you can fall into that trap yourself ... Maybe we are all voyeuristic in watching the story." (Tarr, 2011) He welcomes the film audience to associate itself with the audiences within the film's story, showing a variety of their opinions and reactions to the show, showing the fascination with Saartie's body as well as their compassion to her suffering.

5. BLUE IS THE WARMEST COLOR

Blue is the Warmest Color (*La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2*, 2013) tells a story of love and passion between two women in contemporary France and fast became the biggest commercial and critical success of the director.

In an interview, Kechiche said that the idea of the film came from merging his interest in the character of the French teacher, who is going through an emotional crisis and the book *Blue is the Warmest Color* (*Le Bleu est une Couleur Chaude*) by Julie Maroh. His interest in the character started when he was working together with the actress on the part of the French teacher in *L'Esquive*. When he read the graphic novel - the two ideas started to merge (2013).

Aside from its success, Kechiche was publicly criticized by one of his actresses and crew members for his work ethics. Before, Kechiche talked about finding it hard to get himself accepted in the French cinema *milieu*, but not because of his ethnicity, but rather because he is working-class. "...the way I work doesn't fit the rules of the system – because I'll give a lead role to a laborer, or because my films are too long, or because I'll make a film about couscous. It upsets people in the business, but I'm opening things up [...] I never showed anyone a lack of respect. I might have shouted sometimes because I thought I'd get somewhere by raising my voice – but I never called anyone names." If people find his methods chaotic, he says, so be it. "Either you want to make something that's prefabricated, mapped out, pre-programmed – or you see cinema as a real opportunity to create, like painting or literature." Besides, he doesn't see himself as unusually demanding. "I'm just normally demanding. In France, you'd say extremely demanding. Because we French spend our time whining and moaning. In any other country, I'd be considered perfectly normal when it comes to working." (Romney, 2013).

"The director's quest for truth has led him to develop unorthodox working practices. He dispenses with the traditional calls for "Action" and "Cut", instead letting the camera roll at length, without interruption – continuing to film the actors so as not to break the tension on set. He shoots vast amounts of material. He won't keep to a rigid schedule: certain scenes, he says, like the sex and the dinner scenes in *Blue is the Warmest Color* could only be shot when he and the actors were in the right mood. "There has to be the physical desire, like when

you film meals – you have to wait for the actors to be hungry. And then you do two takes – you can't do more than that." (Romney, 2013).

In any case, the film successfully premiered at the Cannes Film Festival with Kechiche and the two lead actresses of the film sharing the Palme D'Or that year.

Narrative Structure

Adele (Adele Exarchopoulos) is a high school student living in the northern French city of Lille. She comes from a lower middle-class family and wants to become an elementary school teacher. One of her schoolmates, Thomas (Jeremie Laheurte), shows an interest in Adele, and she gets encouraged by her girl schoolmates to go out with him. After some hesitation, Adele agrees to go on a date with Thomas. On the way to her date, Adele sees Emma (Lea Seydoux), and falls in love with her at first sight. Adele starts dating Thomas but dreams about Emma. One day one of her classmates playfully kisses her and Adele feels the attraction and starts realizing her own homosexuality. When Adele approaches her classmate, she claims that the kiss was only a joke. One night Adele goes out with her friend Valentin (Sandor Funtek) joining him at a gay club. Leaving Valentin, Adele goes to the neighboring lesbian bar, where she encounters Emma. Emma turns out to be a former fine arts student, an artist, and an intellectual. The girls find themselves attracted to each other. Emma starts visiting Adele at her school, going on walks after the classes. Adele breaks up with Thomas and struggles to prove to her girl classmates that she is not a lesbian. Eventually, Adele starts dating Emma. The girls introduce each other to their families. Emma's family is from an upper social class, open-minded and supportive towards Emma's artistic ambitions. She introduces Adele as her girlfriend. Adele's family is from the lower social class; they question Emma's ambitions to earn money by art, finding it impossible. Adele introduces Emma to them as her friend. Adele meets Emma's artistic friends and struggles to find her place among them. While Adele starts teaching in elementary school, Emma passionately develops her artistic career, contributing most of her time to her work, leaving Adele without attention. Feeling lonely, Adele finds comfort in a sexual affair with her co-worker. Emma finds out about Adele's infidelity and

breaks up their relationship, leaving Adele in complete despair. For a few years, Adele can not manage to forget Emma and seldom makes attempts to bring her back, finally realizing that they will never be together.

In their interview to *DP/30: The oral History of Hollywood*, Seydoux and Exarchopoulos said that whilst shooting the film, the director did not follow the script, using it only as a starting point for the story to happen (2013). Based on the interviews with Kechiche and his actors, it is clear that the main focus was to create the real story which would unfold in front of the camera without locking it in scripts, dialogues and time of the shooting. He allows a possibility to shoot a scene knowing in advance that it might not be included in the film, only for actors to live the necessary experience for their character.

Comparing the title of the book and the English title, the French title of the film, *La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2*, more accurately delivers the idea that, if life is a novel, there are more chapters in store" (Lane, 2013) Kechiche takes a story of love, and gives it the most unique, honest and contemporary spin. If the first part of the story is entirely about the love between Adele and Emma, the second part of the story is about a social clash between their environments. The third part of the story consists of repetitive scenes which depict Adele's long struggle to forget Emma. This part, which includes only one character, Adele, shows loneliness as an important part of love, often neglected in stories about love. This way, Kechiche once again pushes the boundaries and explores the common topics, deeper into the known subject, making the audience look at things differently.

Characters and Performance

Adele. Initially, the main character had the same name as the character from the original comic book - Clementine, but during the process of filming, she was given the name of the actress – Adele, which also means *justice* in Arabic (Kazamia, 2013). This is a good example of Kechiche's devotion to blurring the borders between reality and film space, molding the film characters from real people.

Adele is a lower social class teenager, who over the course of the events discovers her sexuality and herself. She treasures romantic love as the main source of happiness and satisfaction. She is sensual and perceives the world through her tactile senses. Kechiche creates the main character, who enters the viewers' perception not only through visual, but almost, through, all of the senses. He always brings the camera close to her face, to her skin. He lets us observe her in the most intimate moments – we see her completely relaxed face when she sleeps, we enter her dreams, we see her tears, sweat, we almost see the food being chewed in her mouth. She has small gestures, closely attached to her character: adjusting her messy hair (tight in the clumsy chaotic ponytail), pulling up her pants which keep on sliding down, eating food as a nervous addiction. She eats when she is upset, when she is nervous when she is in love. Adele is always late, living in her own world. She is opinionated.

We find out about Adele through her conversations with other characters. The information we know about Adele, her opinions, her taste, adds not only to the story of the film but also contributes to her uniqueness as a person.

Emma (Lea Seydoux) is a love object of the main character, Adele. She contrasts Adele by belonging to a different social class, thus believing in more possibilities for herself. Unlike Adele, who finds the source of her happiness in love and relationship, Emma finds her happiness in career and self-realization, while the relationship is a pleasant addition.

Emma belongs to the higher middle social class. She is an artist and an intellectual. She is openly gay, opinionated, strong and confident.

Valentine (Sandor Funtek) is Adele's closest friend. We don't know much about him, but we can see that Adele trusts only him, and that she feels safe and honest only around him. Valentine's character is also a vehicle for conversation about interesting dynamics within communities, and the pressures in society surrounding certain topics, in this case – homosexuality. The fact that Valentine is gay does not disturb any of his classmates, but they attack Adele when start suspecting that she is gay.

Communities. It is interesting to look closely at the dynamic noticed by Kechiche within communities. In one of the scenes, Adele is being verbally attacked by several girl classmates, who suspect that she is gay. The girls

become aggressive and insult Adele. Another classmate finds out that Adele is lesbian in one of the previous scenes. At this point, one would expect all the girls to follow the leader in the accusations of the aggressive girl and the girl who knows the truth about Adele speaking up, but none of this happens. Adele is being dragged out of the fight by her friend Valentine. The girl, who attacked Adele the most, is being told off by other classmates for being aggressive and unfair, and the girl who knows the truth never says anything. This way the crowd of school teenagers is depicted as a group of individuals who are making their own conscious decisions, rather than a herd that follows the one who screams the loudest.

The Parents of Adele and Emma (Catherine Salee, Aurelien Recoing, Anne Loiret, Benoit Pilot). Unlike the main characters, their families are portrayed in a more simplistic way, collecting the elements that reflect their social class. They bring us to the source of the future conflict between Adele and Emma, set the ground for the impossibility of those two women to be together. Before Adele and Emma are introduced to each other's families, their life seems to be flawless. Before entering each other's environments, the story is only about Emma and Adele. But as the story unfolds, we see the clash in their upbringing, which influences their beliefs and life choices, subconsciously setting the ground for their future separation.

At Adele's home, they eat pasta and at Emma's home, they eat oysters. The upper social class parents of Emma are open-minded – Adele is at their home as Emma's girlfriend, while Emma is introduced to Adele's parents as a friend who helps Adele with her philosophy class. Adele's parents are puzzled with Emma's choice to pursue a career of an artist, believing that an artist "earns money only after death", and that it's good for a woman to be married to a businessman, because to work in the government institution is the secure way to live; Emma's parents, on the contrary, are puzzled by Adele's seemingly boring choice to become an elementary school teacher. The open-mindedness of Emma's parents is also shown through small details – her mother is divorced from Emma's father and now in her second marriage, while Adele's parents were together all their life; Emma's mother smokes and Emma is smoking in the presence of her parents.

Antoine (Benjamin Siksou). We don't know much about the man, who becomes the catalyst for the breakup of the main characters, but we do know enough to understand the complexity of Adele's struggle. Antoine is Adele's co-worker, a pleasant looking young man who seems to really like her. They enjoy their time together, they are most certainly from the same social class and could be a "perfect fit" for each other. The fact that we are not shown the relationship between them, but only given glimpses of their interaction to understand what actually happened between them, reflects Adele's attitude towards their relationship as something unimportant, a way to escape loneliness when her partner is not paying her any attention. His unimportance is underlined when Adele does not even go to him to find comfort after the breakup. Adele can't find her comfort with a person from her own social class. Restricted by the borders of her social class, she seeks to be with Emma, who is free and determined. From a few conversations between Emma and Adele, we also find out that Adele writes, and is encouraged by Emma to make her works public. Through her choice to be with someone like Emma instead of someone as her lover, we also understand Adele's inner desire to be free of her social class restrictions and to live the life she wants. And though failing to be free herself, she holds on to Emma as the only way to feed her thirst to be free.

Samir (Salim Kechiouche). Another important character who contributes to the theme of the struggle of the lower social classes is Samir, a French-Maghrebi actor, whom Adele meets at Emma's art party. He is the only person with whom Adele is able to connect to the party of upper-class artists. As Adele, he seems to be of a lower social class, and proceeds to reach his dream and live his life as an actor, even though he struggles to get acting jobs. In the end of the film, Adele meets him at another of Emma's parties to find out that he decided to change his career and started to work in real estate. Again, Kechiche breaks the stereotype of dividing people based on their ethnic background, but rather dividing them based on their social class. He unites Adele and Samir based on their social class, showing how they face similar problems and struggles to pursue their dreams. Like Antoine, Samir is of no interest to Adele. At the end of the film, we see Adele leaving Emma's party for the last time. She walks away without looking back. Samir tries to find her but does not see where she has gone. While Samir gave up on his dream of being an actor, and Antoine was embedded into his social status, Adele keeps going her own way.

Image

The use of extreme close-ups in this particular film is even more justified than in the previously ones since it tells the story of love and passion. Kechiche makes us watch the characters from the distance of their lovers, to enter their intimate space. As Adele said in her interview "this film is about skin" (Kazamia, 2013).

"Close-ups permit me to capture the details that we normally do not perceive. Behind these details is an emotion, a sentiment, a state of being. Cinema can do the magic of exposing what is behind facial expressions, like a magnifying glass. The close-up forces you to be as close to the truth as possible. It manages to find the truth. The close-up makes truth obligatory" Kechiche said. (Badt, 2013 p.149)

As in his previous films, Kechiche rarely uses the establishing shot in the beginning of the scene, often changing the scene from one close up to another one. He mostly uses wide shots to show the loneliness of the characters or the absence of another character. For example, in the scene that takes place in the lesbian club, after their first conversation, Emma leaves with her then girlfriend, while Adele is left alone sitting at the bar. Though the bar is crowded, and Adele's friend is in a nearby gay club, and there is no relationship between Emma and Adele yet to lose, Kechiche cuts to the wide shot to express Adele's thoughts and feelings - Emma was here and now she is gone. Adele feels lonely in a crowded place, since the only person that matters to her is Emma.

More so than in his other films, Kechiche uses changes of focus, switching between the close-up of the character in the foreground and the wide shot of another character in the background. Combining cuts, pans and inside frame editing, Kechiche creates a dynamic flow of the scene, reinforcing the nature of relationships between multiple characters. For example, he would cut when he wants to establish that a character is hiding something from another; but he would change the focus if he wants to unite two characters who, though they are not interacting with each other, are thinking about each other; he would pan from one character to another in order to create an invisible dialogue or connection between two characters even though they are not talking to each other.

The same as with close-ups, special attention to the naked body in this film is even more justified and important. If in previous films, the depiction of the naked body contributed to the general feeling of honesty and realism, in *Blue is the Warmest Color*, the naked body looks like the one from a painting. The sex scenes between Emma and Adele look idealized, beautifully lit and harmonically positioned, which contributes to the feeling of idealization that comes with love, as isolated from the outside world.

Kechiche gives the naked body a special meaning, which signifies love between the characters. After seeing Emma for the first time, Adele dreams about her, imagining them having sex, seeing her naked and revealing her own naked body. Even when the relationship between the characters starts to crack, we see them naked in the presence of each other, though not having sex. In the last sequence of the film, when Adele has not been together with Emma, she prepares to see her at her exhibition for a long time, hoping one last time to win her back. We see her naked in a shower, cleaning her body, then dressing and putting on the makeup- moments not necessary for the story but important as a visual representation of their love and passion.

Food keeps playing a very important role in Kechiche's film. Adele is obsessed with food. There is even a story that Kechiche made a decision to cast Adele for the main part after he saw her eating. This describes the importance of food for Kechiche himself and his main character. Food becomes one of the main expressions of the character. We see her eating on her first day with her then boyfriend, on the picnic with Emma, and even when she is upset and crying, she reaches out for a box of candies that she keeps under her bed as a way to comfort herself. Food becomes the main connection between Adele and Emma's friends, with whom she can't connect through conversation. She is the one who cooks for the party, making everybody compliment her cooking skills. She prepares the food that she eats at home, that reflects her social status – pasta, which we see in the dinner scene at her parent's place.

Kechiche uses special camera angles and movements to express the feelings of his protagonist in the most important life changing points of the story. He uses a long tracking shot following Adele who walks down the school hall after she got rejected by her classmate, who made her think she is attacked by her. Adele walks down the hall ignoring her classmates who are calling her

names. She walks without stopping, encounters Victor and tells him to take her out to the gay bar – the decision which further leads to encountering Emma and changing her life.

He uses the shot from the back of Adele's head before she meets her then boyfriend to break up with him. This way we almost observe her thoughts, her determination and bitterness about the decision that has been made already and now is about to be executed.

He uses an "upside down" shot of Adele to express that her world is now taking a radical turn – she discovers that she is lesbian. The shot is placed in the regular family dinner scene following the first kiss with the girl classmate. The dinner scene is shot in the same way as the previous dinner scene, but towards the end of it, following her mother's comment "You look like you had a very nice day," Adele leans back in her chair and stretches her arms, when the camera cuts to the top inside down shot of Adele's face, while she stretches in satisfaction, finishing the scene.

In the art party scene at Emma's house, where Adele encounters her friends and notices her close connection to one of the guests – the future Emma's girlfriend – Lise (Mona Walravents), Adele's emotions and anxiety are reflected through a projection of a black and white film behind her. Though Adele shows no expression of concern, a woman's face on the projection depicts anxiety. Kechiche amplifies the feelings of Adele panning and cutting between Adele's face, Emma and her future girlfriend, including the projection in Adele's frame, cutting to the sexual dance moves of the people around her. This way only with the help of visual elements, without interaction between the characters, Kechiche delivers the complex emotions which Adele experiences in the scene.

In this film, Kechiche for the first time uses beautiful commercial looking shots of characters in love. He uses a close up of Adele and Emma kissing in the rays of sun shining into the camera, he uses beautifully lit shots of the naked bodies when they are making love, he uses beautiful wide shots of Adele and Emma surrounded by the blossoming nature, using the spring season as a backdrop for the coming of age story of love. These kinds of shots almost break

the consistency of his style but serve the pursuit of creating the image of illusion and isolation of love, which will be later crashed against reality.

As the name of the film suggests, blue becomes a symbol of Adele's love and of her coming of age. In the beginning of the film, Emma has blue hair, at the end of the story Emma's hair is back to her natural color, but Adele is wearing a blue dress. As in his other films, Kechiche gives to the viewer a responsibility to decide whether the story has a good or bad ending. Adele's blue dress at the end of the film can be interpreted as an optimistic sign of Adele finally growing up, or it can also be given a pessimistic interpretation of Adele chasing her past that has gone away from her.

Sound

Kechiche uses music to support the themes of the film as well as capture the reality of time at which the story takes place. Kechiche uses the pop hit song of 2011 "I Follow Rivers" by Lykke Li making his main characters connected to the time they live in. This way, with the help of music, he shows not the otherness of his characters but embeds them in the contemporary western world. The music is used at both demonstrations – the student demonstration against privatization and job cutting and at the pride parade - to contribute to the reality of those events. He uses ethnic music from different countries in the public spaces of Lille to underline France's ethnical diversity. Adele and her classmates listen and dance to Maghrebi music when resting after the demonstration in the festival atmosphere surrounded by other people. Adele and Antoine, when they first go on a date, dance to Latin music at the bar.

The music theme of the film is played by the street musician using a hung instrument. This tune is used only two times in the film – in the beginning, when Adele first sees Emma, and in the end, when Adele realizes that they will never be together, thus signifying the end of their story together. When this melody sounds in the end of the film, it is the only time when Kechiche uses non-diegetic sound creating the feeling that the melody sounds in Adele's mind. As predicting the feeling of love, as it is something magical and not controllable by people, the melody starts before Adele sees Emma for the first time and continues till the moment they see each other and fall in love by just looking at each other. And

the same in the end of the film - the melody starts after Adele leaves Emma's party, signifying something unexplainable and uncontrollable that emerges and finishes not when two people are together, but independently from them. Kechiche talked about this theme music at the New York Film festival press conference "At first I imagined that for that scene [the first encounter of Adele and Emma on the street], I would have music, but the music that I was working with just didn't fit [...] I really wanted to bring out the emotion. [...] And then by chance I met a musician who produced a musical sound that was very melancholic [...] and it felt right to me. [...] for that first meeting between them I used that because I thought it strengthens emotion in the scene" (2013).

Themes

Kechiche brings the focus to contemporary French society, reflecting on its main issues, breaking established stereotypes and representing society as a variety, including all its contradictions, ambiguities and controversy. He touches upon the already common theme of French education and the school system, bringing new themes of the struggle of an artist in contemporary society and questions the possibilities of artists from the lower social class. He develops the theme of the possibility of coexistence between social classes, touches upon the subject of acceptance of minorities in the society, focusing in this case mainly on the place of sexual minorities in the contemporary French society. He brings up the subject of contemporary teenagehood and what it is like to be growing up in the contemporary western world. He again embraces and empowers women and most importantly, focuses on the theme of romantic and sexual love.

Kechiche created a truly multi-layered film, paying delicate attention to each of the themes, cleverly interlacing them within one storyline and one main character.

Conclusions

After analyzing in detail the film language and storytelling elements of Abdellatif Kechiche, we can trace stylistic and thematic patterns which repeat themselves and develop from film to film, together forming the unique and important voice of this contemporary director.

Aside from tracing the patterns in Kechiche's choices for the script and characters design, visual style, soundtrack, and themes, it is also important to mention his working methods, which are inseparable from establishing him as an auteur. Despite limited budgets, Kechiche manages to follow his own creative pace when preparing and shooting his film, approaching shooting as a creative process, without locking it within borders of a written script. In this way, he allows real life and magic of the moment to enter the story. He invites his crew to experience the life of characters of the film, before the shooting living in the environment of the film, experiencing firsthand the culture of the place. He starts working with his actors a year or a half year before shooting in order to study their personality, and merge his characters with the actors. He abandons the script after the actors have read it once, in order for the story to unfold in its natural way. He keeps shooting between the takes, catching natural moments – when actors are sleeping, walking or eating. He shoots scenes which he knows St Patric won't be in the final cut of the film, just for the actors to go through the experience needed for understanding and development of their characters. Kechiche values and respects time, which is the ultimate creator of experience for him, for his actors, for his characters, and for his audience. The value of time is seen through the slow pace of his speech, through the time he takes to prepare and shoot his films, though the long extended scenes which form his films, imitating the real pace of life and its dynamics.

Narrative Structure

The narrative structure which supports Kechiche's primary themes, traced through all of his films, is a search for the place of Maghrebi immigrants and lower class citizens in French society. Kechiche uses this search to create the structure of his stories, often interlacing it with or basing it on French literature. He creates a connection between his *beur* characters and fundamental characters of French literature created by such authors as Marivaux, Voltaire, and Hugo. His

films are carefully threaded with references to the works of French poets, playwrights, philosophers, sculptures, etc. Such references are often embedded in the stories of his *beur* characters in French culture and basic to their structure.

Supporting his dedication to reality, the scenes in Kechiche's films unfold slowly, in a lifelike pace, though the constant dialogues and everyday actions. He focuses his attention on everyday rituals, finding fascination in the ordinary. As Higbee (Higbee, 2013 p.97) noted "[Kechiche's] mode of humanist storytelling – intimately observed but resolutely non-partisan and politically engaged without being ideological driven- as well as his ability to draw subtle performances of considerable intensity from his actors have won his almost universal praise."

Another important attribute of Kechiche's plot building, which unites all of his films, is placing importance on the communities surrounding his main characters, underlying their diversity, but also serving as important influences which often define the protagonist's decisions and shows the world as a complex and dynamic matter.

Characters

Kechiche introduced to French and international audiences a whole new world of cinema characters, breaking common stereotypes of *beur* and *banlieue* as well as stereotypes of the lower social class in France. He depicts Maghreb characters as educated and hard working. He depicts a family as a constantly changing dynamic community, women as a strong force of life, members of communities as individuals.

Film after film, he walks his audience through his France – multicultural France of working class, France of "the other", challenges the understanding of *beur* and *banlieue*. He introduces us to all the variety and complexity of characters inhabiting contemporary France – the Frenchmen and Frenchwomen, illegal immigrants, economic refugees, *banlieue* youth including *jeunes ethniques*, *rouleur*, and *delouilleurs*, from first to third generation *émigré*, etc.

Image

Kechiche keeps the visual consistency through all of his films, being committed to the realistic documentary-like look. The dynamic documentary feel of his images reminds one of Cassavetes, and the simplicity of the setting

reminds one of Dreyer. The main attributes of Kechiche's visual style would include extensive use of extreme close-ups, "crowded" close-ups, dynamic handheld camera, which follows the action and captures the smallest expressions of the characters, pans and zooms.

Another key element that defines Kechiche's visual style is his attention to the naked body. With his realistic depiction of the naked body, he dissolves the border between his characters and the audience, letting the audience witness the characters in the most intimate and most vulnerable moments.

Kechiche supports the theme of his films with symbolic imagery – props, locations and names. He uses the symbol of the rose and Le Triomphe de la République situated on Place de la Nation to express the relation between illegal immigrant Jallel and the French Republic in *Poetical Refugee*, Marivaux's book *Games of Love and Chance* to beat up a Maghrebi-French girl by French policewoman in *Games of Love and Chance*, a struggle of *émigré* restaurant on a boat to be parked at Quai de la République in *The Secret of the Grain*, etc.

Sound

Kechiche uses diegetic sound, with few exceptions. The diegetic music supports his general realistic style. He often uses music to reflect the ethnical background of his characters, as well as to contribute the atmosphere of the location on a screen. In some of his films, he also uses the melancholic non-diegetic soundtrack to reflect on the inner state of mind of his protagonists, as it is in *Blue is the Warmest Color* and *Games of Love and Chance*.

The soundtrack of his films is always very busy with the dialogues; the use of language being one of the most important elements of his style, which reaches its peak in *Games of Love and Chance*, where it became a part of the drama, an obstacle to the protagonist.

Themes

The director explores the place of the other in contemporary society and the struggle of the French working class. Together with it, he breaks the common perception of the *émigré*, *banlieue* as well as empowers his women protagonists and equally divides the power over one's life between the Republic

and individual circumstances created by the character's own emotions and feelings.

As very accurately and uncompromisingly noticed by Norindr (Norindr, 2012 p.63)- to " [...] trace a cinematic genealogy [of Kechiche], one would have to identify the rare filmmakers who deal in a sustained fashion with everyday life and the economic realities that affect the well-being of working class subjects. It should be made clear that French cinema has largely neglected the working class. He seems to access social and cultural history precisely to destabilize symbols, archetypes, and stereotypes. It is as if he needed first to establish a solid cultural, historical and symbolic frame in order then to perform the real business of cultural de-symbolization and de-decentralization."

The work of this director gained even more importance in the context of contemporary refugee crises. Through his strong storytelling and cinematic choices, Kechiche's films have a power to influence the viewers, shifting their perspective on Maghreb immigrants, immigrants in general, at minorities and finally reducing the borders between "us" and "the others".

APPENDIX 1: Credits

Filmography

Director and scriptwriter (feature films)

Poetical Refugee (2000)

Games of Love and Chance (2003)

The Secret of the Grain (2007)

Black Venus (2010)

Blue is the Warmest Color (2013)

Mektoub is Mektoub (in production)

Director and scriptwriter (short film)

Sueur (2008)

Actor

Un Balcon sur les Andes (1982)

Mint Tea (1984)

Les Innocents (1987)

Bezness (1992)

Un Vampire au Paradis (1992)

Marteau Rouge (1996)

The Secret of Polichinelle (1997)

The Magic Box (2002)

Sorry, Haters (2005)

Awards

Namur International Festival of French-Speaking Film: Best Actor; for *Bezness*, 1992

Venice Film Festival: Luigi De Laurentiis Award, CinemaAvvenire Award; for *Poetical Refugee (La Faute a Voltaire)*, 2000

Namur International Festival of French-Speaking Film: Jury Special Prize, Youth Jury Emile Cantillon Award; for *Poetical Refugee (La Faute a Voltaire)*, 2000

Angers European First Film Festival: European Special Jury Award; *Poetical Refugee (La Faute a Voltaire)*, 2001

Entrevues Film Festival: Gran Prix; for *Game of Love and Chance (L'Esquive)*, 2003

Istanbul International Film Festival: International Competition; for *Game of Love and Chance (L'Esquive)*, 2004

Stockholm Film Festival: Honorable Mention; for *Game of Love and Chance (L'Esquive)*, 2004

Torino Film Festival: Best Director, Best Script, Cinema of Peace; for *Game of Love and Chance (L'Esquive)*, 2004

Cesar Awards: Best Film, Best Director, Best Screenplay; for *Game of Love and Chance (L'Esquive)*, 2005

Buenos Aires International Festival of Independent Cinema; for *Game of Love and Chance (L'Esquive)*, 2005

Lumiere Awards: Best Screenplay; for *Game of Love and Chance (L'Esquive)*, 2005

Venice Film Festival: Special Jury Prize, FIPRESCI Prize, SIGNIS Award, Young Cinema Award; for *The Secret of the Grain (Le Graine et le Mulet)*, 2007

Prix Louis Delluc: Best Film; for *The Secret of the Grain (Le Graine et le Mulet)*, 2007

Cesar Awards: Best Film, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay; for *The Secret of the Grain (Le Graine et le Mulet)*, 2008

European Film Awards: FIPRESCI Prize; for *The Secret of the Grain (Le Graine et le Mulet)*, 2008

French Syndecate of Cinema Critics: Best Film; for *The Secret of the Grain (Le Graine et le Mulet)*, 2008

Lumiere Awards: Best Director; for *The Secret of the Grain (Le Graine et le Mulet)*, 2008

Etoiles d'Or: Best Film, Best Director, Best Writer; for *The Secret of the Grain (Le Graine et le Mulet)*, 2008

Venice Film Festival: Equal Opportunity Award; for *Black Venus (Venus Noire)*, 2010

Cannes Film Festival: Palme d'Or, FIPRESCI Prize; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2013

Austin Film Critics Association: Best Foreign Language Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2013

French Syndecate of Cinema Critics: Best Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2013

Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards: Best Foreign Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2013

New York Film Festival: Best Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2013

Prix Louis Delluc: Best Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2013

San Sebastian International Film Festival: FIPRESCI Film of the Year; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2013

Cesar Awards: Most Promising Actress; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

CinEuphoria Awards: Top Ten of the Year – Audience Award; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Film Independent Spirit Awards: Best International Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Fotogramas de Plata: Best Foreign Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Gold Derby Awards: Foreign Language Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Golden Ciak Awards: Best Foreign Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Guldbagge Awards: Best Foreign Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

International Cinephile Society Awards: Best Adapted Screenplay; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

International Online Cinema Awards: Best Non-English Language Film, Best Adapted Screenplay; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Italian Online Movie Awards: Best Picture; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Lumiere Awards: Best Director; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Robert Festival: Best Non-American Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

SESC Film Festival: Best Foreign Film, Best foreign Director; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Etoiles d'Or: Best Film, Best Director; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Bodil Awards: Best Non-American Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2015

Nominations

Namur International Festival of French-Speaking Film: Best Film; for *Poetical Refugee (La Faute a Voltaire)*, 2000

Torino Film Festival: Best Feature Film; for *Game of Love and Chance (L'Esquive)*, 2004

Ale Kino!: Golden Poznan Goat; for *Game of Love and Chance (L'Esquive)*, 2005

Venice Film Festival: Golden Lion; for *The Secret of the Grain (Le Graine et le Mulet)*, 2007

Dubai International Film Festival: Best Feature- Bronze; for *The Secret of the Grain (Le Graine et le Mulet)*, 2007

Argentinean Film Critics Association Awards: Best Foreign Film, Not in the Spanish Language; for *Game of Love and Chance (L'Esquive)*, 2008

David di Donatello Awards: Best European Film; for *The Secret of the Grain (Le Graine et le Mulet)*, 2008

Italian National Syndecate of Film Journalists: Best European Director; for *The Secret of the Grain (Le Graine et le Mulet)*, 2008

Lumiere Awards: Best Film; for *The Secret of the Grain (Le Graine et le Mulet)*, 2008

Film Independent Spirit Awards: Best Foreign Film; for *The Secret of the Grain (Le Graine et le Mulet)*, 2009

Venice Film Festival: Golden Lion; for *Black Venus (Venus Noire)*, 2010

Black Reel Awards: Best Independent Film; for *Black Venus (Venus Noire)*, 2011

Cannes Film Festival: Queer Palm; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2013

European Film Awards: European Direcotr, European Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2013

Chicago International Film Festival: Audience Choice Award; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2013

Alliance of Women Film Journalists: Best Non-English Language Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2013

Munich Film Festival: Best International Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2013

Tbilisi International Film Festival: Jury Award; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2013

BAFTA Awards: Best Film not in the English Language for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Cesar Awards: Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Director, Best Film, Best Cinematography, Best Sound, Best Actress, Best Editing; *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Amanda Awards: Best Foreign Feature Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Cinema Brazil Grand Prize: Best Foreign-Language Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

David di Donatello Awards: Best European Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Gaudi Awards: Best European Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Globes de Cristal Awards: Best Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Goya Awards: Best European Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

International Cinephile Society Awards: Best Director; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

International Online Cinema Awards: Best Director; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Italian Online Movie Awards: Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Online Film and Television Association: Best Picture; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Polish Film Awards: Best European Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Seattle Film Critics Awards: Best Foreign-Language Film; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2014

Argentinean Film Critics Association Awards: Best Foreign Film, Not in the Spanish Language; for *Blue is the Warmest Color (La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 et 2)*, 2015

APPENDIX 2: List of other reference films, theater plays, literature (in alphabetical order)

Bahloul, A. (Director) *Le The a la Menthe (Mint Tea)* [Motion picture]. 1984. Belgium, France

Begaudeau, A. (Writer). *La blessure, la vraie* [Novel] 2011. France

De Ronsard P. (Poet) *Ode à Cassandre* [Poem]. 1524-1585. France

Deschamps J. and Makeieff M. (Creators). *Les Deschiens* [TV comedy series]. 1993-2002. France

Dreyer C.T. (Director). *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc (The Passion of Joan of Arc)* [Motion picture]. 1928. France

Hugo V. (Writer) *Les Miserables* [Novel]. 1862. France

Kassovitz M. (Director, writer). *La Haine* [Motion picture]. 1995. France

Marivaux (Playwrite). *The Game of Love and Chance (Le Jeu de L'amour et du Hazard)* [Theater play] 1730. France

Morah J. (Writer). *Le Bleu est une Couleur Chaude (Novel Blue is the Warmest Color)* [Graphic novel]. 2010. France

Pialat M. (Director). *Police* [Motion picture]. 1985. France

Stanton A., Unkrich L. (Directors and writers). *Finding Nemo* [Animation]. 2003. USA

Swaim B. (Director). *La Balance* [Motion picture] 1982. France

Thamin, J.-L. (Director). *Un Balcon sur Les Andes (A Balcony Overlooking The Andes)* [Theater play performance]. France: Nouveau theatre de Nice

Voltaire (Writer). *Candide* [Novella]. 1759. France

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Romney J. *Abdellatif Kechiche interview: "Do I need to be a woman to talk about love between women?"* The Guardian. 2013. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/oct/27/abdellatif-kechiche-interview-blue-warmest>

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