

## **Cinema of Brutality: The Implications of Onscreen Violence on Algerian Secondary Schools' Teenage Pupils**

### **Cinéma de la Brutalité : Les Implications de Violence au Filmes sur Les Elèves Adolescents des Lycées Algériens**

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#### **Abstract**

The current study endeavors to shed light on the phenomenon of violence in Algerian secondary schools and traces some of its roots to the onscreen violence that pupils are exposed too while consuming cinematic productions or otherwise violent media content. It argues that cinema desensitized teenage pupils towards all kinds of violence via the excessive screening of graphic scenes and imagery without any warnings or PG Rated signs display. Additionally, the study makes use of survey conducted in 5 secondary schools in Khenchela province to uncover the traumatic effects of violence in movies and its implication on teenage pupils. Furthermore, the study examines the absence of PG rating signs on most channels and film sources viewed by teenagers without parental guidance and deploys content analysis of several top grossing box-office movies viewed by teenagers and account for violent scenery per film. More importantly, the study makes use Mise-en-scène analysis of several violent scenes from the prior movies and their effects on teenagers. Finally, the study concludes that onscreen violence undoubtedly

plays a huge role in initiating teenagers to violence and desensitizing them towards brutality.

**Keywords:** Onscreen Violence; Teenagers; Pupils; Films; Brutality.

### **Resumé**

La présente étude s'efforce de faire la lumière sur le phénomène de la violence dans les écoles secondaires algériennes et retrace certaines de ses racines dans la violence à l'écran à laquelle les étudiants sont également exposés lorsqu'ils consomment des productions cinématographiques ou des contenus médiatiques violents. Il soutient que le cinéma a désensibilisé les élèves adolescents à toutes sortes de violence via la projection excessive de scènes graphiques et d'images sans aucun avertissement ni affichage de panneaux classés PG. En outre, l'étude utilise une enquête menée dans cinq écoles secondaires de la province de Khenchela pour découvrir les effets traumatisants de la violence dans les films et son implication sur les élèves adolescents. En outre, l'étude examine l'absence de panneaux de classification PG sur la plupart des chaînes et sources de films visionnées par des adolescents sans surveillance parentale et déploie une analyse de contenu de plusieurs films au box-office les plus rentables visionnés par des adolescents et tient compte des scènes violentes par film. Plus important encore, l'étude utilise l'analyse Mise en scène de plusieurs scènes violentes des films précédents et leurs effets sur les adolescents. Enfin, l'étude conclut que la violence à l'écran joue sans aucun doute un rôle énorme dans l'initiation des adolescents à la violence et dans leur désensibilisation à la brutalité.

**Mots clés:** Violence à l'écran ; Adolescents ; élèves ; films ; Brutalité.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have witnessed an immeasurable proliferation of onscreen violence in entertainment and mainstream media. Tv channels, mainstream news media, films, blockbusters are now infested with all sort of violence that affects the viewers on societal, behavioral and psychological levels. Yet the horrifyingly truth is that violence is not only tolerated onscreen but rather promoted and enjoyed by the large segments of society mainly on entertainment media contents. Entertainment media is now at the center of everybody's life including children and can have a huge impact of the life of the people and even alter their behaviors unconsciously (Huesmann, 2007, pp. 1-2).

Violence can be defined as any deliberate act that constitute aggressive and violent behavior (p. 2), nonetheless it cannot be limited to only physical aggression that tantamount to bodily harm. It can however, take different forms and shapes, it can be physical as corporal punishment, psychological which inflicts psychological damage and behavior adjustment, verbal using language and signs,etc. furthermore, violence is not reserved for a specific societal category, it can be inflicted by/upon any category be it children, teenagers, adults, elderly and regardless of their gender.

Recent studies on the roots of violence in society traced some manifestations and inclinations towards violence to media violence proliferation, be it mainstream (news media) or entertainment media (movies). Huesmann (2007), Slocum (2000) and Mejia, et al (2016) articulated with a large consensus that the widespread of onscreen violence on media and mainly entertainment media (movies) is one of

the main reasons of violence among children, teenagers and adults, and children exposed to excessive onscreen violence are more likely to be violent when they grow up. Furthermore, they stated that Hollywood, which came to represent the prominent geographically and linguistically unbound entertainment media source, as an agent of social control and change (Slocum, *Film Violence and the Institution of the Cinema*, 2000, p. 649).

Consequently, more types of violence are emerging and being institutionalized via cinema to the point that in the recent decades many crimes were inspired from movies, which means that movies now serve as a bridge to cross boundaries between what is reel and imaginary to what is real and bellicose (Kendrick, 2009, pp. 6-7). Furthermore, Kendrick (2009, pp. 8) considers onscreen violence as satisfactory, gratifying and meaningful for the self-affirmation, self-defense, self-discovery, self-destruction and as a release.

All in all, the study endeavors to uncover the traumatic implications of onscreen violence in entertainment media , mainly Hollywood films, on Algerian secondary school teenagers and to try to measure the amount of celluloid violence they are being exposed to via their favorite media and the overall consequences and behavioral inclinations towards violence they might undergo unconsciously.

## **2. Cinema and Violence**

Hollywood movies are the main source of entertainment in most part of the world as the latter recognize no geography nor linguistic barrier and visit any home uninvited. Nonetheless, movies are not only a source of joy and pure innocent entertainment as they are loaded and booby-trapped with ideology, violence and cultural inconsistencies. Thus, while the viewer is exposed to entertainment, s/he gets more than what s/he bargained for and this include violence and other hazardous attitudes.

Violence in entertainment media has become an essential component that flavors the exposition with more action, suspense and emotions. It elevates numerous meta-emotions that bypasses negative attitude to acceptance and assimilation and subsequently imitation (Bacon, 2015, p. 86). Hence, violence is widely celebrated by the masses as it allows for a purge and a mixed emotion of seeing the bad guys being killed or their heads chopped or their faces transfigured (Grønstad, 2008, p. 13, & Lichtenfled, 2004, pp. 4-5). One can even state, that onscreen violence is a response to some public sentiments towards some issues. According to the Surgeon General of the United States, violence is widespread in society because of the proliferation of mass media in the first place. This latter, endeavors to desensitize people towards onscreen violence and make them prone to be more hostile and aggressive and even more willing to commit violent acts (Slocum, *Violence and American Cinema*, 2001, pp. 37-38). Surgeon General also issued another report warning about the traumatic implication of televised and onscreen violence on children by making them more prone and inclined to be violent and aggressive in schools and with their peers (Bogart, 1973, p. 491).

Furthermore, the extensive spread of onscreen violence does not comprise violence inflicted by/upon adults only. It has inflicted all categories of society regardless of their age or gender. Many Hollywood blockbusters feature violent women, violent children or violence inflicted upon women, children and even the elderly (Neroni, 2005, p. 15 & Denzin, 2002, pp. 64-65). Accordingly, cinema has marketed the idea that masculinity, power, and violence go hand in hand in an intimate interlocking relation and eliciting more aggressive attitudes as a show of power and masculinity among teenagers which relatively accounts for the propagation of violence in schools.

### 3. Methodology

The current study's reasoning rests on a mixed method research that makes use of quantitative and qualitative data. It deploys a triangulated data-collection: a deductive reasoning using available literature; a Survey with open- and closed-ended questions; and Content analysis & mise-en-scène Analysis of movies). Furthermore, the use of triangulated-data will allow for more validity and credibility of the final results of the study, as Patton (1999, pp. 1192-1193) enunciated in his article 'Enhancing the Quality and Credibility of Qualitative Analysis' that: "The logic of triangulation is based on the premise that no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival explanations. Because each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of data collection and analysis provide more grist for the research mill... Studies that use only one method are more vulnerable to errors linked to that particular method than are studies that use multiple methods in which different types of data provide cross-data validity checks"

More importantly, the study deploys some of the most important tools of film studies , content analysis and mise-en-scène analysis, to provide more insight into the phenomenon of onscreen violence and its implication on the viewers from a cinematic and psychological point of view. In this regard, Klaus Krippendorff (2004, p. 18) stated that: "Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use. As a technique, content analysis involves specialized procedures... As a research technique, content analysis provides new insights, increases a researcher's understanding of particular phenomena, or informs practical actions."

## 4. Data Analysis & Interpretation

### 4.1 Survey

For the aim of collecting insightful data in regard to subject of violence proliferation in entertainment media viewed by teenage Algerians, a survey of 20 questions with open and closed ended, has been structured and administered directly to teenager people from 5 secondary schools comprising the 3 levels (1<sup>st</sup> , 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade) in 5 secondary schools in Khenchela province during the 3<sup>rd</sup> and last semester of the 2021-2022 scholar year . The language of the survey was the mother language of pupils; Arabic, to ensure their comprehension of all the questions and themes pondered throughout the survey and also to ensure their responsiveness. The outcome was analyzed using quantitative data analysis software IBM SPSS version 23, and demonstrated in clear and comprehensible tables that will be shown in results.

#### 4.1.1 Sampling

The study deployed a volunteer sampling strategy and the survey was meant to shed light on some of the major aspects of violence proliferation in entertainment media, mainly movies. The total sum of samples was 717 pupils with an age ranger of 15 to 18 years old, 63% of which were females and 37% were males. All in all, the results will sketch out some of the main themes around which the survey was designed, like the exposure ration, screen violence desensitization, and its implication on society and secondary school pupils.

#### 4.1.2 Results

The following are the results of survey conducted categorized into themes relevant to the study.

#### 4.1.2.1 Exposure ratio to violence on entertainment media

Table1 exposes the notion that media is indeed infested and infected by the epidemic of violence whether physical violence or verbal violence that will affect the viewer on different layer. While 8% of our sample think that entertainment media’s violence is at acceptable ratios or even below, 91.6% think that entertainment media and here the main reference goes to movies, is extensively colonized by all types of violence. Furthermore, with this massive propagation of onscreen violence, entertainment sources, mainly TV channels, movies download website seldom show any movie rating or warning to alarm the viewers, teenagers or otherwise, about the age limits and explicit contents or graphic imagery therein (see table2).

**Table 1. Proliferation of violence in entertainment media**

		<b>Num of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Answers</b>	No	60	8.4%
	Yes	657	91.6%
	Total	717	100%

**Table2. The presence of rating & warning signs (G, PG, PG-13, R, NC-17) on media entertainment sources**

		<b>Num of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Answers</b>	Yes	225	31.4%
	No	492	68.6%
	Total	717	100%

#### 4.1.2.2 Teenage desensitization towards onscreen violence

Among the themes surveyed in this study is teenage pupils’ attitudes towards onscreen violence. The question was an open-ended question coded for positive



and negative reviews towards celluloid violence. The result was shocking as 63% of our sample showed positive attitudes towards onscreen violence (see table3). Some samples enunciated that they refuse to view any violence-free entertainment contents.

**Table3. Teenagers' positive attitude towards onscreen violence**

		<b>Num of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Answers</b>	<b>No</b>	264	36.8%
	<b>Yes</b>	453	63.2%%
	<b>Total</b>	717	100%

More importantly, most teenagers, 80.6% (as shown in table4 below) are unaware of the downside of the excessive onscreen violence, which, on short term, will alter their behavior and direct it to be prone to violent reactions and violent attitudes, damage them psychologically and pushes them to believe that violence is the answer, and mainly desensitize them towards brutality, atrocity and violence on reel or in real.

**Table4. Teenagers' unawareness of the psychological and behavioral effects of onscreen violence exposure**

		<b>Num of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Answers</b>	<b>No</b>	578	80.6%
	<b>Yes</b>	139	19.4%
	<b>Total</b>	717	100%

### 4.1.2.3 onscreen violence inroads in society

The other pertinent theme surveyed in this study is pupils' attitudes towards school violence and its relation with onscreen violence they have been or they are exposed to when consuming entertainment or mainstream media. Table5 shows a split in opinion as 51.6% of the total sample believe that onscreen violence is harmful and it is one of the reasons behind school violence, while 48.4% thinks with uncertainty that onscreen violence is merely entertainment and does not affect pupils' behavior in school.

**Table5. Onscreen violence promotes teenage violence in schools**

		<b>Num of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Answers</b>	<b>No</b>	347	48.4%
	<b>Yes</b>	370	51.6%
	<b>Total</b>	717	100%

Consequently, when secondary school pupils were inquired if they believe that onscreen violence institutionalize and promote violence in society only 45% agreed (see table 6), which proves a great deal of unawareness of the phenomenon of onscreen violence and its factual psychological , behavioral and social implications on pupils, especially when they consume unsuitable explicit or violent content not appropriate for their age and not compatible with their social and cultural background , and here we refer not only to corporal violence , but also to smoking, drinking and sexual activities.

**Table6. Onscreen violence institutionalizes and desensitizes violence in society**

		Num of Respondents	Percent
Answers	No	394	55%
	Yes	323	45%
	Total	717	100%

## 4.2 Content Analysis of Violence in films

### 4.2.1 Film selection

In the survey that was previously deployed in this study pondered some pertinent questions relevant to the atmosphere of exposure. One of the questions asked the questionees about the sources of exposure to mainstream media and entertainment media while another question inquired about the most entertaining memorable action films that the questionees deserves to be watched by everyone. Accordingly, the survey revealed the foremost sources of exposure to mainstream and entertainment media Algerian teenagers comprised but not limited to; TV channels and internet downloads & streaming. For TV channels, most teenagers enunciated that their sources of entertainment media are the following channels: MBC 2, MBC Action, MBC Max, MIX TV ...etc. As for the internet downloads or streaming, the main sources were comprised film databases like Egybest, Netflix and torrent downloads. The survey revealed 57 memorable films among Algerians 99% of which are Hollywoodian action films.

The second step was to cross-compare the 57 list with the most exhibited movies in the previously cited TV Channels for the past 5 years, and the most downloaded movies on Egybest and streamed on Netflix. The list of films was then categorized according to the IMDb rating (Internet Movies Database) equal or over

5/10. The final result of 10 movies represented the most viewed Hollywood action movies by teenage Algerians.

#### **4.2.2 Coding Scheme**

After watching each of the 10 movies for 3 times, the study's coding implements were decided to be physical violence implement and verbal violence implement. Each implement included several categories that serve the same purpose of revealing violence, its types or indexes in the list of 10 most watched movies. Accordingly, coding categories in the first implement of physical violence included: beating, killing, blood, gore, automatic and semi-automatic weapons, traditional weapons, knives, battery, corporal violence and any type of corporal violence directed towards women, children and innocent civilians for the purpose of inflicting bodily harm. The second implement of verbal violence included the following categories: swearing, yelling, shouting, insults, profanities (profane language) and any other verbal articulation deemed inappropriate. After that, the total number of scenes in each film was counted, and also the number of scenes with physical violence implement and verbal violence incidents.

#### **4.2.3 Results**

The table below (table7) represents the outcome of content analysis of the most watched and yet memorable movies that have been consumed by Algerian secondary schools' teenagers in the previous years. The proliferation of violence in this list is beyond measure as it ranges from 56.8% to 87.7% with an average ration of 75.6% for the entire list. If we consider that the average teenager consumes a 90 minutes movie per week, out of which 56.8% is violence (verbal and physical), the yearly ratio of exposure to onscreen violence is 39 hours, only from exposure to entertainment media, not to mention the daily exposure to mainstream media on social networks and YouTube which are deemed even more hazardous. The table

also reveals the popularity of violence infested movies and the horrifying desensitization of the public and mainly teenagers towards this phenomenon which will certainly result in a shift of violence from a likeable celluloid entertainment to a factual and cultural dilemma that affects all segments of society indiscriminately.

**Table7. Content analysis of physical and verbal violence in top 10 movies watched by Algerian secondary school teenagers**

Num	Film	Rating /10 (IMBD )	Num of Scenes	Scenes with implement of violence	Verbal Violence incidents	Violence Ratio to the Sum of Scenes
1	Bad Boys	6.8	288	234	160	81.3%
2	Training Day	7.7	86	63	153	73.3%
3	American Sniper	7.3	94	70	119	74.5%
4	Gladiator	8.5	74	42	47	56.8%
5	Gangs of New York	7.5	102	74	114	72.5%
6	The Expendables	6.4	228	165	88	72.4%
7	London Has Fallen	5.9	122	96	43	78.7%
8	John Wick	7.4	95	83	60	87.4%
9	The Equalizer	7.2	81	57	61	70.4%
10	Nobody	7.4	172	131	49	76.2%
<b>Total</b>	Most Popular films	/	1342	1015	/	75.6%

### 4.3 Mise-en-scène Analysis

#### 4.3.1 Film Selection

The mise-en-scène analysis method used mainly two films that appear in the top 10 movies list watched by secondary school teenagers and received more

favorable votes by our population than the other films. The first film was 'American Sniper' which is an action movie that features the story of Chris Kyle, an American SEAL sniper who was deployed to Iraq. the film was conveniently coded for implement of physical violence directed towards children or committed by children. The second film, was 'Gangs of New York' , a historical action movie, which features the story of Amsterdam Vallon and William "Bill the Butcher" Cutting. The movie was conveniently coded for blood and gore.

#### **4.3.2 Implement of physical violence directed against/by children**

The set of scenes displayed in figure1 shows different scenes from the movie American Sniper. The movie as already stated follows the trails of the American SEAL sniper and war hero, Chris Kyle. In Scene 1, the child Chris is being introduced to violence without any dire consequences as he punches a bully in school and the other children in the same scene are cheering for this act of violence. The second scene shows Chris being praised by his father for committing such an act of bravery of standing up and beating another kid while threatening the younger kid not to be a sheep, meaning a coward.

As the story unfolds on the Iraq war, other acts of violence committed against children by soldiers and terrorist alike are displayed (figure1 scene 3 and 4). While scene number 3 shows a SEAL trying to snatch a child from his father as leverage, scene 4 shows a very graphic imagery of a terrorist using an electric drill to penetrate the skull a child while the latter was screaming incoherently of pain. A one can only imagine the shock, the horror and the trauma that underage viewers are left in after being exposed to such savagery.

Figure1. A set of scenes featuring child violence in 'American Sniper'



Source: Eastwood, C. (Director). (2014). American Sniper [Motion Picture].

#### 4.3.2 Implement of violence featuring heavy 'blood and gore'

The scenes shown below in figure2 were extracted from the movie 'Gangs of New York.' The movie is a historical narrative of some gangs that existed in New York during the half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In scenes 1, the director used a low angel shot to emphasize the laughter of the assailant who successfully chopped off the blood-dripping ear of her opponent while in scene 2, the director used a close-up shot and deep focus shot to emphasize the brows, blood and of the assailant who took down his enemy. Furthermore, scene 3 shows the leading actors training on using knives to wield deadly stabs to their opponents. Finally, scene 4, the director deploys an above shot with no faces but just mutilated dead body swimming in a blood and assailants walking indifferently across these bodies as a show of power and domination over the other.

Figure2. Set of scenes featuring blood and gore in 'Gangs of New York'



Source: Scorsese, M. (Director). (2002). Gangs of New York [Motion Picture].

## 5. Discussion

The results obtained from the survey show a great deal of exposure to onscreen violence among teenage pupils of Algerian secondary schools. they also show the unawareness of this categories of the traumatic implication of such exposure disguised as entertainment. furthermore, the results showed that most of entertainment media consumed by these pupils display expose them to either corporal or/and verbal violence with out warning or alarming them about such graphic or explicit content.

More importantly, the survey showed a huge affection and acceptance of onscreen violence among teenagers that tantamount to assimilation and imitation after being gradually desensitized, and the movies that have been chosen by teenage pupils under 17 shows their attachment with onscreen violence as entertaining and amusing despite the fact that most of the films that appear in the top 10 movies watched by teenagers are deemed unsuitable to teenagers below the age of 17.

Also, the mise-en-scène analysis revealed a psychological strategy deployed while shooting action films that increase teenagers' attachment with this film genre



that is infested with violence and draws them towards assuming the roles of the macho man and the vigilante who exercise their power and masculinity regardless of the violent means or ends. It also gives a rise to the old saying “ends justify means” which means you can deploy excessive violence and exercise aggression as long as you feel you are on the right path resembling Batman, Cat woman, Robin Hood and many other Hollywood film protagonists who legitimize violence in the eye of viewers.

## **6. Conclusion**

The study has revealed that onscreen violence constitutes an immense danger to secondary schools in Algeria and it is, indeed, one of the reasons behind the proliferation of violence among teenage pupils in schools. Additionally, the study confirms that the excessive exposure to violence in movies or on TV may very well prompt an inclination towards aggressiveness and violence, be it verbal or physical. Also, the results of the study showed a total lack of awareness about onscreen violence and its implications among teenage pupils and even children which calls for immediate sensibilization and awareness campaigns among these latter categories, and calls also for more parental guidance and scrutiny of the content of entertainment media consumed by teenagers and its suitability with their age, values and cultural identity.

Finally, the study calls for a strict regulation on entertainment media sources, mainly TV channels, and the necessity of displaying movie ratings and warnings whenever there is violently illicit; explicit or graphic contents that might harm the viewers, because the excessive exposure to such content may very well result in aggressive and violent child and teenager and subsequently leads to more school violence.

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