

A Milanese *verlan*

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Short introduction: this brief text develops maintaining a deliberately mocking tone, turning any stereotype into absolute truth – straining it to the absurd.

I have been living and working in Paris since January 2020, thanks to Your First EURES Job initiatives. Any distinguishing personal marks? I am originally from Milan.

Being a Milanese means, to most Italians, acting snooty, being perfectionist and particularly arrogant. In Milan, we believe that anything in Italy takes place here – only later spreading throughout the Peninsula.

However, Milanese people too often forget that for every *Milanese* there will be a *Milanese of a Milanese*, and that for every *Milanese of a Milanese* there will be a *Milanese of a Milanese of a Milanese*.

With this rather poorly expressed statement, I mean that every citizen of the world will always identify in another community, far from his or her own, features of obnoxious pride. While living in Paris, I could experience first-hand the stereotypes concerning Parisians. I could retrace in people around me – and in the way they made me feel when talking to them – those same behaviours that are usually employed to label Milanese people in Italy.

Parisians are Paris-centric. In their opinion, there is no other place on earth offering as many opportunities as this city: if the rest of the world suddenly disappeared, Parisians would not be affected from this loss as much as you could expect. Parisians are chic without being kitsch; Parisians workers strike and protest all along the year; Parisians behave in grouchy and unsociable ways. Most of these exaggerated stereotypes keep nevertheless an element of truth.

A specific French linguistic element – the *verlan* – has especially drawn my attention during these months. It's a linguistic form that – reflecting the intellectual arrogance common to many people from Milan – I thought belonged only to recent generations of Milanese. On the contrary, it was introduced in France, many years before.

The adolescence of Milanese teenagers – in the 2000s – has been defined by a distinctive city slang, composed of rather cacophonous sound results. Syllabic inversions of bi-syllabic words – that kept the same meaning – were part of our daily communication, and I don't know if some of these forms are still in use among current high school students. Some of the most intuitive and immediately recognizable forms I can mention are *drema* (mother), *drepa* (father), *novi* (wine), *rabi* (beer), *broli* (book).

Throughout my high school years, I was persuaded (as most of my peers) that this bizarre communication tendency had originated on Milanese soil. Part of us were proud of our slang, despite the mockery of most of our fellow Italian citizens.

It's been almost a decade since my group of friends and I stopped using reversed words, and I never thought that, years later, I would have found again the same morphological inversions – in French.

Wikipedia reports that *verlan* dates back to the second post-war period and has developed in France as a form of semi-secret communication among small groups of youngsters. However, *verlan* has emerged as a common form only during the eighties. Nowadays, many expressions of *verlan* are so essential to the French current language to deserve dedicated paragraphs within the most avant-garde dictionaries.

The process followed to create new French words is the same that will later be adopted by Milanese. Simple and internationally known French words like *femme*, *homme*, *fête* and *merci* become *meuf*, *mec*, *teuf* and *cimer*. The term *verlan* itself is the inverse of the word *l'envers* which indeed means inversion.

Despite the wrong Milanese belief of being the promoters of any intellectual renewal – even the most useless ones – I had to accept that, even in this occasion, we were nothing more than copycats.

In conclusion, living international experiences helps you discover that for *every Milanese there will always be another Milanese.*