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**Documentary Representations of Alterity
on Television:
Diversity and National Identity in
Contemporary France**

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2013

Abstract

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Documentary Representations of Alterity on Television: Diversity and National Identity in Contemporary France

Since the turn of the millennium, there is a growing literature concerned with investigating the representation of minorities on French television. This thesis sets out to explore the documentary representation of four types of alterity (non-Western, urban, rural and regional France) in a selection of documentaries broadcast on French television between 1995 and 2010. The originality of this thesis lies in its comparative approach to the question of alterity. This research seeks to contribute to the nascent field of diversity and minority studies, and explore the manner in which these documentaries contribute to the construction of contemporary French identity.

The study examines documentaries in a range of styles, from ‘art-house’ films to ‘hybrid’ popular factual entertainment, broadcast on ‘mainstream’ and ‘cultural’ channels. Additionally, the thesis seeks to assess the extent to which the medium of documentary offers an alternative representation of alterity when compared to other forms of visual culture, in particular the news coverage and documentary treatment of recent events. The juxtaposition of ‘mainstream’ and ‘cultural’ channels, and of documentary and news coverage, is designed to provide an analytical framework in which to assess the questions of alterity and national identity, in a manner that is, simultaneously, representative of a range of channels and styles, and different forms of factual representation.

From this research emerges a recurrent opposition between a suburban dystopia (epitomised by the *banlieue*) versus a rural idyll (whether ‘peasant’, regional or non-Western). This shows a correspondence between the documentary representation of alterity and France’s contemporary concerns with questions of national identity and citizenship, which has engendered a ‘turn to nostalgia’ and the idealisation of rural or ‘traditional’ lifestyles.

Table of Contents

Introduction – Documentary Representations of Alterity on Television: Diversity and National Identity in Contemporary France.....	1 - 46
❖ Immigration and Citizenship in France: Attitudes to Diversity and National Identity.....	9
• <i>A Brief History of Immigration in Twentieth-Century France</i>	11
• <i>Diversity and National Identity in Contemporary France: The Rise of ‘Neo-Republicanism’.....</i>	15
• <i>A ‘Crisis’ of National Identity?.....</i>	23
❖ Documentary Representations of Alterity on French Television: Thesis Outline.....	29
• <i>Film Corpus: Methodology.....</i>	34
• <i>Visual Analysis – The ‘Voice’ of the Film.....</i>	36
• <i>Key Research Themes.....</i>	38
• <i>Chapter Outline of Thesis.....</i>	41
Chapter 1 – Encounters with the Ethnographic ‘Other’: The Celebrity and Anthropologist ‘in the Jungle’.....	47 - 103
• <i>Adapting ‘Ethnography Documentary’ for Television Audiences.....</i>	56
❖ Celebrities in the Jungle: Ethnography as Popular Factual Entertainment.....	62
• <i>Spatial Alterity of an ‘Unknown Land’.....</i>	64
• <i>Representing the Ethnographic ‘Other’.....</i>	71
• <i>Constructing Inter-Cultural Interaction.....</i>	78
• <i>The ‘Clash of Cultures’: Ethnography as Popular Entertainment</i>	82

❖	Encounters with the Ethnographic ‘Other’: The Ethics of Representation.....	94
•	<i>The ‘Embodied’ and Interactive Camera.....</i>	95
•	<i>The ‘Return’ Gaze: The Observer Observed.....</i>	99
✱	The ‘Celebrity’ and the ‘Anthropologist’	102

Chapter 2 – The *Banlieue* as an Epicentre of Spatial, Social and Ethnic Alterity..... 104 - 186

•	<i>The ‘Universal’ Banlieue: A Media Construct?.....</i>	109
❖	The Riots of 2005: Spectacular Journalism and the ‘Universal’ <i>Banlieue</i>.....	114
•	<i>TF1 and France 2’s ‘Search for the Spectacular’</i>	125
•	<i>Suburban Cityscapes: Representations of Alterity.....</i>	127
•	<i>‘Feral Youth’ and the Socio-Cultural Alterity of the Banlieue.....</i>	140
❖	Documentary Representations of the ‘Extraordinary’ and ‘Ordinary’ <i>Banlieue</i>.....	147
✱	A Documentary Review of the 2005 Riots.....	148
•	<i>Chaotic Landscapes: The Dangers of Info-tainment.....</i>	149
•	<i>Voices from the Streets.....</i>	153
•	<i>Approaching the ‘Rioter’.....</i>	157
✱	‘Breaking Down’ Alterity?: The Work of Benguigui and Tavernier.....	166
•	<i>Urban Landscapes: Monochromatic and Technicolour Visions.....</i>	170
✱	‘La peur des <i>banlieues</i> ’	181

Chapter 3 – *La France Profonde*:

Visible and Vanishing ‘Peasants’ in Rural France....	187 - 247
• <i>Visible and Vanishing Peasants</i>	194
❖ ‘Visible Peasants’: José Bové and the ‘McDonald’s Incident’	196
• <i>Fast-Food Journalism</i>	201
• <i>A Documentary ‘Riposte’?</i>	212
❖ ‘Vanishing Peasants’: Rural Isolation and Irreducible Alterity	226
• <i>Visual Landscapes and Sensual Soundscapes</i>	229
• <i>‘Peasant Profiles’: Representing Irreducible Alterity</i>	236
* Peasants into Frenchmen?	243

Chapter 4 — Regional Identities: The Place of Breton and Basque Cultural Identity in the French Nation-State..... 248 - 309

❖ An Exploration of Language Policy in France: Changing Attitudes to Cultural Diversity and Plural Identities	256
• <i>République Une–Langue Une: The Enduring Ideology of Language Policy in France</i>	259
• <i>Pragmatism and Resistance: Social Attitudes to Language Shift</i>	264
• <i>1970s to 2000s: A ‘Cultural Revival’ of Regional Identity, or a ‘Crisis’ of National Identity?</i>	269
❖ Regional Alterity and the Culture Economy: The ‘Commodification’ of Heritage and Tradition	278
• <i>Scenic Landscapes and Native Ecology</i>	280
• <i>Working In Harmony with Nature</i>	284

• <i>The ‘Indians’ of France: Regional Society as an ‘Exoticised’ Other?</i>	293
• <i>Nostalgia and the Commodification of Regional Culture</i>	300
* A Desire to Seek Refuge?.....	305

Conclusion – Alterity and National Identity in Contemporary French Documentary..... 310 - 325

• <i>General Trends in Documentary Representations of Alterity</i>	317
• <i>A Documentary ‘Search for the Spectacular’?</i>	320
• <i>Alterity and National Identity in Contemporary French Documentary</i>	324

Appendices

Appendix 1 – ‘Ethnographic Documentary’ Corpus..... 326 - 327

Table 1.1 – ‘Ethnographic Documentary’ Corpus: Breakdown per Channel

Table 1.2 – ‘Ethnographic Documentary’ Corpus: Scheduling Position

Appendix 2 – *Banlieue* Documentary Corpus..... 328 - 329

Table 2.1 – *Banlieue* Documentary Corpus: Breakdown per Channel

Table 2.2 – *Banlieue* Documentary Corpus: Scheduling Position

Appendix 3 – Rural France Documentary Corpus..... 330 - 331

Table 3.1 – Rural France Documentary Corpus: Breakdown per Channel

Table 3.2 – Rural France Documentary Corpus: Scheduling Position

Appendix 4 – Regional Identities Documentary Corpus..... 332 - 333

Table 4.1 – Regional Identities Documentary Corpus: Breakdown per Channel

Table 4.2 – Regional Identities Documentary Corpus: Scheduling Position

Appendix 5 – Combined Corpus..... 334 - 335

Table 5.1 – Combined Corpus: Breakdown per Channel

Table 5.2 – Combined Corpus: Scheduling Position

Bibliography..... 336 - 367

Filmography..... 368 - 370

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Dedication

To my parents and my friends.

For their understanding and patience with my numerous absences and long silences during the course of my research.

Introduction – Documentary Representations of Alterity on Television: Diversity and National Identity in Contemporary France

La République est paradoxale. Elle place l'égalité des droits au coeur de ses valeurs. Mais, confrontée à l'immigration et à la diversité culturelle, elle tend d'abord à oublier ses propres principes, avant de céder à leur application dans les plus mauvaises conditions.

(Patrick Weil 2005).

In France, the first decade of the twenty-first century has been dominated by the question of national identity, due to a number of events that have provoked debate and reflection on the nature of citizenship in a postcolonial society. France's 'colour-blind' or 'universalist' model of citizenship, which purports to treat all citizens equally 'sans distinction d'origine, de race ou de religion' (Article 1 of the French Constitution of 1958), appears increasingly at odds with the experiences of parts of the population that are stigmatised on a daily basis, for reasons of an imputed ethnicity, religion or place of residence. Internal pressures, such as the high rates of unemployment in disadvantaged suburbs and post-war demographic changes in society, coupled with France's declining influence on the European and world stage, and the effects of global market forces on the national economy, have led to the widespread perception that France is undergoing a period of 'decline' that is engendering a 'crisis of identity'. The response to this predicament has resulted in the rise of 'neo-republican' rhetoric on both sides of the political spectrum (centred on concepts such as *intégration* and *laïcité*, cf. Chabal 2011: 138-139), and the corresponding 'turn to nostalgia' that has seen the transformation of regional and rural societies, from a subject of ridicule (requiring modernisation and integration into the nation), into a purveyor of 'authentic' or 'traditional' French values that provide a model for national identity.

Culture has long been used as a vehicle for the promotion of national identity at home and abroad, with the French State demonstrating a particular interest in harnessing the potential of the audio-visual media of television and cinema. Successive governments have financially supported French cinema and have sought to protect the industry by successfully negotiating the right to exempt cultural products from free trade (as agreed during the 1993 round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, cf. Gordon and Meunier 2001: 25-26). Recognising television's role as a medium of mass-communication, the French State has also tasked television channels to promote national cohesion and identity (cf. Sergeant 2003). As a result, the medium of television provides valuable source material for research into the construction of national identity and attitudes to diversity. Therefore this thesis sets out to explore the representation of alterity, 'the idea of difference, the opposition of Self and Other' (Taussig 1993: 1), in a selection of documentaries broadcast on French television between 1995 and 2010. The starting date of 1995 is determined by the passing of the 1995 *Loi du dépôt légal de l'audiovisuel*, requiring all television and radio transmissions (programmes and advertisements) to be archived for posterity at the *Institut national de l'audiovisuel* (INA). I determined that a period of fifteen years (1995 – 2010) would provide a sufficiently large corpus with which to assess the representation of alterity in contemporary French documentary. Each chapter examines a different form of 'otherness' (non-western societies, urban, rural and regional France) and examines the manner in which this representation of difference informs the construction of national identity. Although questions of form are a central part of the thesis' analysis (in particular, how the landscape and film subjects are framed by the film-maker), this

research will also focus on the content of the documentaries and the context in which they were produced and broadcast. Consequently, the thesis adopts the interdisciplinary perspective of visual culture studies, which interprets film as a cultural product that is created by a particular society in response to a specific context. This study of alterity seeks to contribute to the emerging body of work concerned with investigating the representation of minorities on French television. Research into the portrayal of ‘otherness’ in visual culture is urgently required, given the ‘traditional’ reticence of French academics towards any form of identity politics, often for reasons that such ideas are perceived to be incompatible with the republican principle of ‘colour-blind’ citizenship.

Since the turn of the millennium, a number of publications have sought to address the question of diversity in the French media. For example, Michael Scriven and Emily Roberts’s (2003) edited volume *Group Identities on French and British Television* offers a comparative study of British and French television and examines the hypothesis that the arrival of cable, satellite and digital channels has the potential to increase the number of programmes catered for, and featuring, minorities. Isabelle Rigoni’s (2007) *Qui a peur de la télévision en couleurs?* adopts a similar approach, and examines the representation of the ‘immigrant’, ‘Islam’, ‘young people’ from the deprived suburbs (*banlieues*) and ethnic minorities on French television. Alternatively, Claire Frachon and Virginie Sassoon (2008) assess the various measures taken by television channels and public institutions in France, Germany, Britain and the United States to develop a more representative depiction of each nation’s communities. Monographs offering an historical analysis of the media’s changing attitudes to various

minorities in France have further contributed to this field. Subjects include: the *banlieue* (Boyer and Lochard 1998; Peralva and Macé 2002), Islam (Rabah 1998; Deltombe 2005) and immigration (Mills-Affif 2004). Unsurprisingly, the key findings of this nascent research reveal that minorities are under-represented on French television (whether as actors in fictional programmes, as journalists or presenters, or as the subject of documentary or factual programming), and furthermore, that when these social groups are depicted on the screen, it tends to be in highly stigmatising terms. This is especially evident with the treatment of Islam, where journalists concentrate on a minority of extremists and overlook the peaceful majority of Muslims. Overall, these studies reveal the French media's tendency to either ignore the presence of minorities, or to present them as culturally incompatible with French society, and in extreme cases, as a threat to national security.

As an area of research, television studies emerged in the 1990s. To date, this field has been particularly characterised by an engagement with the phenomenon of the 'reality television' genre (for instance, Bancel *et al.* 2002; Roux and Teyssier 2003; Hill 2005; Segré 2008; Taddeo and Dvorak 2010), and with the 'hybrid' forms of television documentaries that developed in the 1990s (for instance, 'docu-soaps', 'docu-drama', 'drama-documentary', cf. Kilborn and Izod 1997; Beattie 2004; Hogarth 2006). Whilst the rise of television studies is part of a wider contemporary movement towards media and cultural studies, the development of new technology and infrastructure in the past twenty years has also made it feasible to envisage the study of this medium. From a practical perspective, DVD technology, digital downloads and on-line video-on-demand services have made programmes more readily accessible for researchers. Likewise, the

establishment of national television archives, such as the inauguration of the INAthèque in 1995, has transformed the facilities available for academics, including the creation of specialised software and the possibility to publish still images extracted from programmes of interest. As François Jost (2007c: 3) comments ‘[a]lors qu’auparavant, il fallait travailler avec ses souvenirs ou avec des enregistrements effectués au petit bonheur la chance, il est loisible aujourd’hui d’étudier les émissions systématiquement, avec la même rigueur qu’un texte ou qu’un film’.

However, research into the representation of social and cultural diversity on French television may also be attributed to an ongoing paradigm shift within French academia, which is beginning to reassess its resistance to engage with the fields of identity politics and postcolonial studies (which are well-established fields in the Anglo-Saxon academy). The past decade has seen a number of French historians and social scientists undertake research into the nation’s ethnic and religious minorities (Geisser 2003; Guénif-Souilamas 2006), attitudes to immigrants (Gastaut 2000; Weil 2005), and the paradoxical nature of ‘colour-blind’ citizenship (Rudder, Poiret and Vourc’h 2000; Reynaud Paligot 2006).¹ Aside from revealing the extent to which minorities are stigmatised and discriminated against, a recurring theme questions whether the model of French citizenship is actually helping or hindering the acceptance of France’s postcolonial demographic changes. For example, cultural and media sociologist Eric Maigret (2007: 12) asserts that the republican principle which, for reasons of equality,

¹ This is not to ignore the pioneering contributions of French historian and immigration specialist Gérard Noiriel (1988), political scientists and Islam specialists Gilles Kepel (1987) and Bruno Etienne (1990), or the contributions of Anglo-Saxon researchers such as Alec G. Hargreaves (for instance, 1995; 2007) and Maxim Silverman (1992) to this field. Nevertheless, as Noiriel himself admits in his preface to the revised edition (2006) of his 1988 monograph, *Le Creuset français*, it has taken until the turn of the century for historical research into immigration to become an established discipline in France. Etienne (1990: 3) also speaks of the scorn of the academic establishment when he and a few others began to study Islam in the 1980s.

refuses to acknowledge the existence of minority groups, has the opposite effect desired: ‘[q]uand rien n’est fait ni dit, ne disparaît pas la discrimination; au contraire, celle-ci joue alors avec toute la violence de l’évidence’. Historian Achille Mbembe (2011: 93) draws similar conclusions and argues that France’s ‘radical indifference to difference’, which prevents the collation of statistics on minorities and rejects any form of affirmative action, has the effect of producing a ‘relative indifference to discrimination’. Moreover, sociologist Eric Macé (2006: 193) suggests that the policy ‘ne pas qualifier, ne pas nommer’ actually results in ‘positive discrimination’ for the white majority. As a consequence, certain scholars in France, such as political scientist Patrick Weil (2005) are asking:

Faut-il adopter en France des politiques d’*affirmative action*? La question est devenue légitime tant les discriminations à l’encontre de Français de couleur mettent en cause l’un des fondements essentiels de notre République: l’égalité devant la loi, ‘sans distinction d’origine, de race ou de religion’ (Article 1 de la Constitution de 1958).

(Weil 2005: 77).

The ‘awakening’ of French academics to the problems of France’s minorities, has also taken place alongside a realisation within France’s audiovisual regulatory body, the *Conseil supérieur de l’audiovisuel* (CSA), of the need to quantify television’s representation of diversity. According to Macé (2007: 263), this change in the CSA’s attitude was influenced by the 1998 campaign conducted by the social pressure group *Egalité* and the subsequent actions of the *Conseil représentatif des associations noires* (Cran), which denounced the marginal presence of non-white social groups on television. Frachon and Sassoon (2008: 42) also highlight the significance of the CSA’s meeting with *Egalité* in October 1999 and the subsequent introduction of a section

entitled ‘Représentation des minorités’ in the CSA’s annual report in 2000. Although the regulatory body declared its hostility to imposing quotas, it nevertheless indicated a willingness to conduct research into the representation of minorities on French terrestrial television and to carry out a comparative study of the practices of other North American and European countries. Eight years later, the CSA set up the *Observatoire de la diversité dans les médias audiovisuels* in 2008, to monitor and assess the results of this research. However, after approximately eight years of study, the conclusions drawn in the CSA’s November 2008 report reveal that since 1999, there has been virtually no improvement in television’s representation of diversity (cf. Frachon and Sassoon 2008: 45-46). Macé (2006: 189) attributes the ‘conservative’ attitude of French television to the strength of ‘l’hégémonie républicaniste sur l’imaginaire collectif national, c’est-à-dire la définition de la France comme une nation égalitariste en droit, et qui au nom de cela se désintéresse des discriminations de fait, surtout lorsqu’elles touchent des minorités postcoloniales et postimmigration’. Consequently, Macé (2006: 190) argues that change is only likely to take place if there is a political move to address these questions publicly: ‘faute d’une ouverture politique sur ces questions-là dans la sphère publique, les professionnels de la télévision n’ont aucun intérêt à prendre le risque commercial de se démarquer du type de représentation considérée comme dominante au sein du grand public’.

Whilst the lack of progress in improving diversity on television suggests that the CSA might have to evaluate the merits of imposing more robust measures on channels to encourage change, it is nonetheless significant that over the past ten years the regulatory body has moved from a policy of ignoring difference, to a position in which

minorities are acknowledged (even if, for the moment, this remains largely symbolic without any official measures or guidelines). Similarly, since the turn of the millennium, the emergence of French scholarship which engages with questions of immigration, discrimination, citizenship and the representation of diversity, indicates a growing awareness of the need to reconsider the belief that to ignore difference is to facilitate the ‘integration’ of minorities. Although this might appear evident for academics from countries such as the United Kingdom or United States (where ethnic monitoring is commonplace and widely accepted), in order to understand the importance of this change within French society, it is necessary to have an awareness of the historical relationship between immigration and the conception of French citizenship. Therefore, this introduction is composed of two parts. In the first section, I provide an overview of the history of immigration and model of citizenship. This section also discusses the development of a ‘crisis’ of national identity, commencing in the 1980s, and the subsequent rise of ‘neo-republican’ rhetoric and the ‘turn to nostalgia’ that have emerged in response to this situation. The second part introduces the key research questions and concepts to be explored in the thesis, defines the methodology and overall structure of the chapters, as well as outlining the original contribution of this research to the fields of television documentary and contemporary French cultural studies.

❖ Immigration and Citizenship in France: Attitudes to Diversity and National Identity

La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale. Elle assure l'égalité devant la loi de tous les citoyens sans distinction d'origine, de race ou de religion. Elle respecte toutes les croyances.

(French Constitution of 1958, Article 1).

The French model of citizenship is based on the principle that, regardless of origin, an individual may become a French citizen through the acceptance of republican values (for instance, *liberté, égalité, fraternité*) and the acquisition of the French language. In other words, '[o]n ne devient pas français par le sang, l'ethnie ou la religion, on devient français par l'adhésion aux valeurs de la République [...], valeurs pensées comme universelles, c'est-à-dire valables pour tout individu' (Rozès 2006: 41). For reasons of the equality of all citizens, the 'universalist' model does not recognise the existence of any cultural, religious or ethnic groups within the nation; instead, the French model seeks to 'assimilate' or 'integrate' an individual into the national community.² As a result, the French model of citizenship is often described as a 'melting pot' (epitomised by Gérard Noiriel's (1988) pioneering study of immigration in France entitled *Le Creuset français*), and is contrasted with the Anglo-Saxon 'multi-cultural' or 'mosaic' conception of citizenship, in which minorities are officially recognised and are permitted, or even encouraged, to retain their cultural traditions of origin.

² Although the terms 'assimilation' and 'integration' do not have exactly the same meaning and have been used in different ways by politicians, the overall sense is that immigrants must become part of the nation by adopting the values and culture of the 'dominant' or 'host' society (sometimes with the active involvement of public institutions). For a definition of 'assimilation' and 'integration' cf. Maghraoui (2003: 220-221).

In practice, however, the French republican tradition of ‘colour-blind’ citizenship has not always been universally applied. Maxim Silverman (1992), for example, cautions against the definition of the French or any other model of citizenship in absolutist terms:

French history is littered with classifications of groups according to racialised criteria. The continued use today of the term ‘French Muslims’ (‘Français musulmans’ or Harkis) to refer to Algerians who fought for France during the Algerian War (1954-62) and who, since their arrival in France during or after the war, have had full French nationality and citizenship status, casts doubt on the individualist and universalist tradition.

(Silverman 1992: 4).

In addition, Silverman (1992: 4-5) underlines the manner in which contemporary political and popular discussion of immigration ‘designates specific categories of people according to *racialised* criteria’. This results in the common assumption that those of non-European origin are ‘immigrants’ (despite the fact that many are French nationals), whereas Europeans (especially those of Portuguese, Spanish or Italian origin), are often perceived as ‘French’, although many choose not to undergo the naturalisation process.³ Research into the history of immigration in France has also highlighted the manner in which each wave of new arrivals has initiated a period of social tension and rejection of the immigrant ‘other’. For instance, Noiriel (1988: 247-294) draws parallels between the present-day depiction of non-Europeans as ‘incompatible’ with French culture and society, and early twentieth-century hostility to the arrival of Southern and Eastern European migrants, who were also described as culturally ‘other’. Similarly, Esther Benbassa (2004) reveals France’s historical suspicion of religious minorities, by

³ This is increasingly commonplace, as European citizenship bestows the right to work in any member state, thereby rendering it less urgent to become naturalised in order to remain in a particular country.

comparing the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' debate over the integration of the Jewish population, with the contemporary discussion of the position of Islam in France. Taken as a whole, these historical and contemporary examples indicate that, whilst in theory, France's model of citizenship is universal in nature and open to all, in practice, this does not necessarily mean that difference is treated with indifference by French society.

- *A Brief History of Immigration in Twentieth-Century France*

Over the course of the twentieth century, France, like the United Kingdom, has looked to other countries to provide a solution to labour shortages, most notably after the Second World War. Although many immigrants returned to their native country once work had dried up, a substantial number chose to settle in France, where now second, third, and even fourth, generations live as French citizens. A comparison of the proportion of non-nationals living in France, reveals that, contrary to popular belief in a recent increase in the numbers of immigrants in France, levels have remained fairly constant over the course of the twentieth century. In 1931, the percentage of foreigners residing in France stood at 6.6 per cent (Weil 2005: 13). Between 1975 and 1999, non-nationals accounted for 7.4 per cent of the population at every census (Hargreaves 2007: 28), a figure which rose to 8 per cent in 2008 (INSEE 2012: 96). Since decolonisation, there has been a rise in non-European migration (and a corresponding decrease in European migration), with the highest proportion originating from France's former

North African colonies (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia).⁴ Thus, whilst the percentage of foreign nationals living in France has remained fairly constant over the past seventy years or so, what has changed is the geographic origin of populations emigrating to France and the manner in which they are viewed and considered (cf. Gafaiti 2003; Gastaut 2000).

Although overseas recruitment was a key part of France's post-war economic revival, it was not until the 1970s that a serious political debate about immigration began to take place. The economic crisis, and the subsequent loss of jobs in industries employing unskilled workers, led to a series of political attempts to reduce and even stop immigration, in an effort to lower the levels of unemployment in France. The determination to halt the influx of economic migrants, and the difficulty of achieving this objective, is demonstrated by the implementation of five different immigration policies over a period of ten years. In 1978, President Giscard d'Estaing's government attempted to organise the forced repatriation of immigrants. It was hoped that this policy would result in the return of 100,000 immigrants per year, over a period of five years (Weil 2005: 16-19). Algerian nationals were the particular focus of this scheme. However, in reality, only about 5,000 people were expelled per year from France between 1978 and 1981. Indeed, Hargreaves (2007: 26) argues that this aggressive strategy was ultimately counterproductive. Previously, many North Africans had chosen to work under a rotation system, coming for a short period, before returning home to be replaced by another family member or neighbour. With the hardening of immigration laws, many chose to remain and bring their families to France, fearing that

⁴ It is beyond the scope of this introduction to provide greater detail on these changes. For more information about the history of immigration in France, cf. Weil 2005; Noiriel 2006; Hargreaves 2007; Gastaut 2000.

they would otherwise lose access to job opportunities. As a consequence, Hargreaves (2007: 26) indicates, the non-European population residing in France actually rose during this period, and was further increased by a rise in the number of asylum-seekers and illegal immigrants.

By the 1980s, the failure of successive immigration policies, coupled with the birth of a second generation, led to a realisation that immigrants were not just a short-term solution to labour shortages (who would return home at the end of their contract), but were establishing themselves as a long-term part of French society. It was therefore decided in 1984 to grant legal immigrants who had settled in France the right to stay on a permanent basis. (This contrasts with British and German recruitment policies, which accorded migrant workers the right to settle as early as 1962 and 1972 respectively cf. Weil 2005: 20.) Thereafter, the dominant theme of the 1980s and 1990s was for the need for these populations to ‘integrate’ into French society. The automatic acquisition of French citizenship for children born in France to settled immigrants (by *jus soli*) was similarly debated. In 1993, the reform of the nationality laws resulted in children of immigrants no longer being granted citizenship at birth, but having to request French nationality between the ages of 16 and 18. This was part of a series of repressive measures taken in the 1990s to discourage immigration (cf. Gastaut 2000, Section IV: 2.2). For Hargreaves (2007: 35), the removal of automatic citizenship for children with immigrant parents is a powerful symbol of France’s ‘doubts over the commitment of young people of immigrant origin to the dominant values of French society’. The continuing misapplication of the term *immigré* to people who are French citizens (but are of non-European ancestry), added to the rise in the 1990s and 2000s of the usage in

popular parlance of the terms *Français de souche* (of French stock) and *Français de papier* (legally French, but implying that the person is not French by culture or ‘ethnicity’), are further indications of the contemporary difficulty in accepting demographic change in French society. Accordingly, Weil (2005) argues that, as a result of a portion of French society rejecting diversity (and by extension the model of universal citizenship), future French citizens are finding it increasingly hard to identify with the nation. As a result of the daily stigmatisation encountered by many naturalised citizens, the impression ‘de n’être qu’un “Français de papier” admis à contre-cœur’ (Weil 2005: 64) is a common experience.

If research into the history of immigration has revealed the disparity between the theoretical model of ‘colour-blind’ citizenship, and the often contradictory application of this principle in practice (outlined above), academics have also pointed out the limitations of the French ‘melting pot’ model. For example, in the first French publication to discuss the concept of multi-culturalism in a French context, sociologist Farhad Khosrokhavar (1996: 115) questions whether the model of ‘integration’ has become ‘repressive’, as it requires individuals to conform to an abstract universal model, which is increasingly difficult to achieve when this social group is progressively ethnicised and economically excluded. Noiriel (2006: iii) also highlights the manner in which the French model of assimilating immigrants into *le creuset français* has also resulted, not only in the ignorance of the role immigration has played in forming French society in the twentieth century, but also in the omission of the acknowledgement of the immigrant as a fundamental part of French society (he estimates that a third of the French population has ‘foreign’ ancestry within living memory). In a similar vein,

Hargreaves (2007: 11) highlights the refusal to collate statistics on minorities as a reflection of a ‘long-standing unwillingness’ to officially recognise immigrants and their descendants as ‘structurally identifiable groups within French society’. As a result, ‘in the official mind of the state, the formal integration of immigrants and their descendants has until recently gone hand in hand with their obliteration as a distinctive component of French society’ (Hargreaves 2007: 11). Ultimately, unlike the United States which has constructed an official narrative on the enrichment brought about immigration (albeit an ambiguous narrative), France’s ‘melting pot’ principle and the subsequent ‘national amnesia’ about immigration’s contribution to contemporary France (Boubecker 2009: 82) suggests that whilst people may acquire French citizenship, immigration is not perceived to benefit or enrich French culture and society. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that immigrants are often stigmatised and rejected. In the next section, I discuss the manner in which the presence of postcolonial minorities in contemporary France has provoked a ‘crisis’ of national identity and a revival of republican rhetoric.

- *Diversity and National Identity in Contemporary France: The Rise of ‘Neo-Republicanism’*

The question of national identity in France has been a dominant theme of the first decade of the twenty-first century, due to a number of events that have provoked debate and reflection on the nature of citizenship and what it means to be French in a postcolonial society. A turning point in French politics occurred on 21 April 2002,

when the extreme right-wing *Front national* candidate, Jean-Marie Le Pen, came second to the incumbent president, Jacques Chirac, in the first round of the presidential elections. Although analysis later showed that this unexpected and unprecedented result was more the result of the share of the left-wing vote being split between rival candidates than a substantial rise in support for the anti-immigration politics of the *Front national*, the result nevertheless raised questions about French attitudes to immigration (cf. Howarth and Varouxakis 2003: 80-83).

A second issue discussed during this period centres around the tension between the position of France as a secular state, in which religious belief is confined to the private sphere, and the presence of minorities who publicly affirm their faith in a visible manner and do not wish to separate their public persona from the private. This matter has primarily involved a polemical debate over the small minority of women of Muslim faith who wear the *hijab* (headscarf or veil). Whilst this was not a particularly ‘new’ subject, with the first discussion emerging in 1989 (when three girls were expelled from school for refusing to take off their *foulard*), in July 2003, it gained fresh impetus when President Jacques Chirac appointed a commission to reflect on the application of *laïcité* (secularism). Led by Bernard Stasi, the commission’s report, delivered in December of that year, made twenty-three recommendations, only one of which was retained by the government (cf. Winter 2008; Bouamama 2004). This concerned the prohibition of *signes ostensibles* (visible or ostentatious religious symbols) in public establishments (affecting primarily schools, but also public sector employees working, for example, in hospitals). On 15 March 2004, this proposal became law.

If the early part of decade focused on the position of ethnic and religious minorities in French society, the suburban riots of autumn 2005 revealed the extent of the socio-economic difficulties faced by residents of disadvantaged outer-city neighbourhoods (*banlieues*). Outbreaks of civil unrest in these marginalised areas have been a recurring feature of French society since the 1970s. However, the significance of the 2005 riots lay not only in their unprecedented duration and intensity, but also in their scale. During a period of three weeks (October 27 - November 17), over three hundred cities were caught up in the disturbances, leading the government to declare a state of emergency (*état d'urgence*) on 8 November 2005. Aside from the scope of the riots, the particular importance of this event was that it demonstrated for the first time in contemporary history a 'processus d'identification collective' (Mucchielli 2007: 5) between individuals living in socio-economically deprived areas across France. The 2005 riots also highlighted the failures of successive governments to tackle the issues of unemployment, educational underachievement and discrimination that particularly affect these suburbs.

The question of national identity was further brought into the spotlight when Nicolas Sarkozy made a pledge in his 2007 presidential manifesto to address this issue if elected. From a political point of view, the decision to focus on what it means to be French today was part of a strategy aimed at winning over a part of the electorate who would otherwise have voted for the *Front national*. A debate on national identity was a way of alluding to, whilst disassociating from, the subject of 'immigration' which has long been the monopoly of the *Front national*. After Sarkozy's election, and against the backdrop of a new veil debate launched in June 2009 (this time against full-face veils,

known as *burkha* and *niqab*), the President set in motion a discussion on the subject of national identity in December 2009. His open letter was featured on the front page of centrist newspaper *Le Monde* (9 December 2009) and subsequent reactions by politicians from both sides of the political spectrum kept the topic in the headlines for the next few weeks. The following year on 13 July 2010, legislation was approved in a session of parliament to prohibit the covering of a person's face in public. Although neutrally phrased, to avoid singling out particular individuals or faiths (and to permit the application to protesters on demonstrations), the media widely labelled this as the 'ban on the *burkha*'.

On the whole, the events outlined above may be read as a continuation of various social and political themes of the past three decades; the 1980s and 1990s also had incidents similar to those of the 2000s. For example: the first televised coverage of the problems of the *banlieue* in 1981, inaugurated by the car 'rodeos' (joy riding plus vehicle arson) in the suburb Les Minguettes (near Lyon); the 'discovery' of the second generation of North Africans with events such as the *Marche pour l'égalité* in 1983; the first *voile* affair in 1989; serious riots in Vaulx-en-Velin (Lyon) and Mantes-la-Jolie (Ile-de-France) in 1990; and a second *hijab* debate in 1994. Of particular interest is the rise in the popularity and usage of 'republican' ideology that has coincided with these moments when the profound changes in post-war French society were exposed. Historian Emile Chabal (2011: 138) notes that since the 1980s, 'politicians and intellectuals have increasingly called upon what they see as France's republican tradition to justify a wide range of political actions. For instance, opposition to the wearing of *signes religieux* in state schools was framed in terms of its incompatibility

with the concept of *la laïcité républicaine*. The 1980s was also the decade when the *Front national* party began to establish itself as a permanent part of the political landscape, with notable successes in the 1989 legislative elections in Dreux and Marseille, bringing the subjects of ‘immigration’ and ‘integration’ to the forefront of political debate (cf. Hargreaves 2012).

The ‘neo-republican’ revival that has emerged since the 1980s involves ‘the resurgence of an explicitly republican discourse that advocates and defends a “strong” notion of the *République*’ (Chabal 2011: 138). Central to this renaissance is the notion of the existence of a *fracture sociale* (social or class divide) within French society, which imperils the cohesion of the nation. This term gained particular impetus after being used by Jacques Chirac in his 1995 presidential campaign, as a way of referring collectively to the issues of unemployment, spatial and social exclusion, and discrimination. More recently, the term *fracture coloniale* has been used by French historians Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel and Sandrine Lemaire (2005), as a way of highlighting the colonial fault lines that exist in contemporary society. Whether ‘colonial’ or ‘social’, the idea of a ‘fractured’ or ‘fragmented’ society is perceived as a threat to the nation as it implies the notion of a France ‘where individuals lose sight of shared interests and become alienated from collective goals and values’ (Murphy 2011: 35). According to advocates of the *fracture sociale*, the solution to this possible ‘disintegration’ lies in the concepts of ‘integration’ and ‘*laïcité*’ (secularism). Although ‘integration’ is not a clearly defined concept, and has been used in different ways by both the left and right, since the 1980s, the idea has become part of the political consensus. The main principle lies in the belief that individuals should actively (and

often with the intervention of public institutions) work to become part of French culture and society. This is often presented as ‘a kind of “choice” between either “integrating” into the “French” nation or keeping a kind of cultural umbilical cord with the country of origin’ (Maghraoui 2003: 221). Nevertheless, Chabal (2011: 143) asserts that it is incorrect to assume that the term ‘integration’ merely applies to ethnic minorities, as the very concept of ‘ethnic minorities’ remains taboo in France, a country in which it is forbidden to collate statistics on the ethnic origins of citizens. Instead, Chabal argues that ‘integration’ also includes individuals who are socially and economically excluded from mainstream society, through factors such as unemployment and the territorial stigmatisation that often comes from having an address in an undesirable suburb or *banlieue*. In other words, it is the responsibility of every citizen to ‘integrate’ into society.

The model of ‘integration’ is often touted as the ‘republican’ or ‘French’ solution to the presence of minorities within a postcolonial society. In political rhetoric, it is often used in juxtaposition with a fierce rejection of the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ model of ‘multi-culturalism’, which is often described as incompatible with the French notion of ‘universal’ or ‘colour-blind’ citizenship (‘sans distinction d’origine, de race ou de religion’, Article 1 of the French Constitution of 1958). ‘Multi-culturalism’ or the dystopian version often presented as *communautarisme*, ‘a fearful descent into isolated and discrete communities’ (Chabal 2011: 144), is constructed as a concept which would involve the fragmentation of the nation as it involves ‘the affirmation of minority status at the expense of national identification’ (Gondola 2009: 163). Perhaps the most significant indication of France’s hostility to the idea of ‘multi-culturalism’ and the

issue of identity politics, lies in the historical refusal of French academics to discuss such concepts. Unlike in the Anglo-Saxon world where for instance, the fields of race, ethnicity, gender and postcolonial studies have been well-established disciplines for some time, in France these are still controversial subjects, that are often rejected as ‘incompatible’ with the French model, or for reasons that to study ‘minorities’ is to exacerbate tensions within society.⁵ This has led the historian Achille Mbembe (2011: 87) to describe the pre-millennium dismissal of postcolonial studies in France as akin to an ‘imperial winter’ which resulted in the ‘relative provincialisation of French thought’.

Alongside the principle of ‘integration’ lies the concept of *laïcité* (secularism), which in ‘neo-republican’ discourse has become an intrinsic part of the conception of the nation-state, to the extent that it is often seen as sharing equal status with the central trio: *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. Although religion has always been a sensitive issue in France (whether during the religious wars between Catholics and Protestants, or the battle between church and state), Chabal (2011: 145) identifies the first *affaire du foulard* (headscarf) in 1989 as the moment when a ‘historical legitimacy for *laïcité* was constructed’. During the lengthy controversies over the *hijab*, the historical identity of France as a secular state was frequently used to justify the prohibition of such symbols, firstly from public establishments, and secondly, from the public space altogether (in the case of the full-face veil).⁶ Nevertheless, historians of French secularism have highlighted that the basis for such historical justification is often flawed (cf. Baubérot 2004; Chabal 2011: 145-148).

⁵ The signs that this position is gradually changing will be discussed shortly.

⁶ The 2004 and 2010 ‘veil’ laws were also justified on the grounds of equality between the sexes. Sociologist Christine Delphy (2006: 81) suggests that the issue of equal rights was particularly highlighted in the media, as the secular argument on its own was not sufficiently convincing.

The extent to which the concept of *laïcité* has become a consensus (although the meaning is often fluid and vaguely defined) is illustrated by the use of the slogan *laïcité sacrée* during a demonstration in 2005 marking the centennial of the 1905 law separating church from state. For philosopher Pierre Tévanian, the use of the term ‘sacred secularism’ on the 1905 anniversary:

demonstrates the transformation of secularism into a sacred symbol in public debates. An organising social principle, subject to democratic debate and perpetual critique and revision, has become a timeless value, open neither to criticism nor to amendment, whose mere utterance can supposedly exorcise all social problems.

(Tévanian 2009: 189).

Thomas Deltombe (2005: 350) has also underlined the manner in which journalists use the term *laïcité* as a ‘magic word’ to shield themselves from accusations of islamophobia whenever Islam is discussed. The gradual radicalisation of proponents of secularism has led scholars of secularism in France to define them as ‘intégristes de la laïcité’ (Geisser 2003) or ‘religious secularists’ (Tévanian 2009: 189). Equally, Joël Roman (2006: 79) has pointed out that these radical secularists, who spend their time denouncing the dangers of *communautarisme*, have in fact developed a form of ‘national-republican’ *communautarisme*. The consequences of this growing and unquestioning acceptance of *laïcité* as a ‘republican’ principle has resulted in the transformation of secularism, as a means to ensure social cohesion, into a tenet of national identity. As a result, ‘être français, ce n’est pas montrer de différence visible. L’espace public, normalement neutre, s’est transformé en espace de l’identité française’ (Bertossi: 2007: 11).⁷

⁷ For a discussion of the concept of a ‘neutral’ public space and the requirement for French citizens to be ‘neutral’ cf. Tévanian (2009).

- *A 'Crisis' of National Identity?*

Centred on the concepts of *fracture sociale*, 'integration' and *laïcité*, the rise of a 'neo-republican' discourse arguably may be attributed to a response to internal changes in France's demographics; notably the presence of 'visible' religious and ethnic minorities.

For example, Chabal argues that it is only:

with the ultimate consolidation of a neo-republican narrative in the past three decades that France finally has something akin to a consensual interpretation of the nation [...] France's postcolonial challenges appear to have encouraged the emergence of a sharper and clearer definition of the nation than before, one that is built on French history and draws from the well-worn political language of republicanism.

(Chabal 2011: 148-149).

Whilst the need to define what it means to be French may well be the result of internal pressures created by the realities of a postcolonial society, external factors have also led to the perception that French identity and culture are under threat and require protection. Bertossi (2007: 13-14) highlights, for instance, the manner in which the construction of a political Europe has disrupted the balance of national identity and sovereignty. This he contends has been particularly severe in France, as the existence of a political Europe challenges certain founding principles of the Republic. Firstly, the creation of a European citizenship that accords certain rights to citizens regardless of nationality or place of residence (for example, the eligibility of non-nationals to vote in certain local elections; cf. Article 8 of the Maastricht Treaty), challenges the sovereignty of a Republic which bestows citizenship rights in accordance with an individual's status as a French national. In second place, Article 13 of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty requires

member states to monitor and take action against discrimination in order to ensure the safeguarding of equal rights of citizens, which is contrary to the juridical and constitutional tradition of France (in other words, ‘positive discrimination’ or the monitoring of ‘minorities’ are policies that are contrary to the Republic’s principle of equal treatment for all citizens). Finally, the European Union’s measures to protect and promote cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity, such as the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (1992), flies in the face of ‘la tradition jacobine française du monopole de l’identité nationale dans l’espace public’ (Bertossi 2007: 14).⁸

A second external factor that is perceived as placing pressure on France’s sovereignty and cultural identity is the role of globalisation. Philip H. Gordon and Sophie Meunier (2001) have for example identified three main challenges posed by the role of global market forces. Although Gordon and Meunier (2001: 23) acknowledge that since the 1980s France’s economy has undergone a transition from state-controlled *dirigisme* to market liberalisation, they argue that the tradition of political control over the economy makes it particularly difficult for the French to accept that ‘the market, and not the state, determines economic relationships’. A second aspect lies in France’s declining influence at a geo-political level, which has affected a country that used to be internationally prominent and still desires to be so. The rise of the United States and collective organisations like the United Nations and the European Union has resulted in the reduction of France’s traditional diplomatic role and global stature. Most

⁸ This is perhaps best exemplified in Article 2 of the French Constitution: ‘La langue de la République est le français’. It is interesting to note that Article 2 was modified to include this statement of the French language’s sovereignty in 1992, the same year that the European Union proposed the Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. France’s conception of the French language as a founding principle of national identity, as well as the reaction to the European Charter, will be discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

importantly, Gordon and Meunier contend, the impact of globalisation is perceived to threaten France's culture and identity:

[t]his is of course a recurring theme in France, but it has re-emerged and taken on particular momentum today, because of the way in which new technologies and the growing ideology of free trade have helped to make societies more susceptible than ever to foreign cultural influences, and in particular to that of the United States. The spread of the Internet and other communications technologies; trade liberalisation in agricultural goods, intellectual property, and services; and the dominant role of the United States (and thus the English language) in global business all combine to make the French worry about their cultural, linguistic, and culinary traditions – in short, their national identity – in a globalising world.

(Gordon and Meunier 2001: 23-24).

Taken together, France's waning influence on global and European affairs, added to the increasing impact of global market forces on France's economy and culture have led to the perception within France that the country is undergoing a process of decline.

For Chabal (2011: 141) this 'declinism' syndrome is undoubtedly linked to the idea of the 'fragmentation' of the nation-state (*fracture sociale*). He cites Nicolas Baverez's (2003) *La France qui tombe* as epitomising this trend. Alternately, the presence of postcolonial minorities (especially in disadvantaged suburbs where their numbers are more concentrated) has also led a certain part of society to believe that the values of the Republic are being eroded and must be defended. This has led to a growing literature, denouncing in particular the influence of 'Islam' on the Republic, which glories in the use of emotive and 'politically incorrect language' (cf. Vidal 2010). A notable example is the highly publicised book *Les Territoires perdus de la République* (Brenner 2002) which collates experiences of (often anonymous) teachers working in the *banlieues*, who describe the disrespectful, violent, sexist and anti-Semitic behaviour

of their ‘Muslim’ pupils.⁹ The reception of this book by journalists and the subsequent use of the concept of ‘lost territories’ by politicians, including Jacques Chirac and Jean-Pierre Raffarin, has exacerbated this notion of decline and the belief in the incompatibility of Islam and French culture (cf. Deltombe 2005: 303-306). Likewise, the perception that France is undergoing a ‘crisis’ of national identity has also increased the desire to re-establish a ‘strong’ Republic and to ‘re-conquer’ these *territoires perdus*.

The rise of ‘neo-republican’ rhetoric may therefore be read as a consequence of the nation’s perceived decline and ‘crisis’ of identity, due to external factors such as globalisation and the internal pressure of post-war demographic changes. This has also led to increasing support for cultural protectionist policies over the past few decades. Perhaps the most famous example is the legislative approach taken to protect the French language from the incursion of English, enshrined in the *Loi Bas-Lauriol* (1975) and the *Loi Toubon* (1994), which render the use of French obligatory in all forms of advertising.¹⁰ Equally, France’s determined lobbying to exempt cultural products from free trade agreements, during the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1993, is another illustration of this policy of protectionism (cf. Gordon and Meunier 2001: 25-26). Ultimately, the result of this ‘crisis’ of confidence and the subsequent emergence and dominance of ‘neo-republican’ ideology over the past three decades, has led to a growing consensus over the definition of ‘republican’ values such as ‘*laïcité*’, which provide the foundation for national identity. In other words, whilst ‘the nation

⁹ I use the term ‘Muslim’ in inverted commas, as the term ‘Muslim’ is increasingly being applied by the majority white population to refer to minorities that are perceived to have origins in countries that practice Islam. This is often contrary to the cultural and religious beliefs of the individuals concerned, who may often not identify themselves as ‘Muslim’.

¹⁰ For an outline of the content and consequences of this linguistic legislation cf. Gordon and Meunier (2001: 35-36).

has been undermined and redefined by its colonial (and postcolonial) “periphery”, Chabal (2011: 149) argues that the country has also demonstrated an ability to interpret and adapt to these changes by encouraging ‘the emergence of a sharper and clearer definition of the nation than before, one that is built on French history and draws from the well-worn political language of republicanism’. Nevertheless, this ‘neo-republican’ consensus has arguably resulted in the further stigmatisation of citizens who are not deemed to ‘belong’ to this tradition.

Whilst the realms of French politics have been characterised by the rise of ‘neo-republicanism’, the ‘crisis of identity’ has also registered in the cultural sphere with a ‘turn to nostalgia’, epitomised by the advent of the ‘heritage film’ as the dominant genre of French cinema in the 1980s and 1990s (cf. Powrie 1997; 1999). Adaptations of classic novels by Émile Zola, Honoré de Balzac and Alexandre Dumas (for instance, *Germinal* (Berri, 1993), *Le Colonel Chabert* (Angelo, 1994) and *La Reine Margot* (Chéreau, 1994)), were particularly successful at the box office, along with films offering nostalgic representations of rural idylls, such as the cinematic reworking of a number of Marcel Pagnol’s novels set in the countryside of Provence, including *Jean de Florette* (Berri 1986) and *La Gloire de mon Père* (Robert 1990). The popularity of films recalling a ‘golden age’ when France was a global power and when ‘republican’ or ‘traditional’ values were especially strong testifies to a widespread desire to seek refuge in the past and remember past glories; it is a ‘nostalgia for grandeur’ (Mbembe 2011: 105). Tyler Stovall and Georges Van den Abbeele (2003: 7) have also suggested that the turn to memory by French historians, in works such as Pierre Nora’s *Les Lieux de*

mémoire (1984-1992), also mirrors this cinematic genre as it is ‘a reaffirmation of and harkening back to traditional French values and identity’.

In a similar manner, rural studies specialists have also underlined the manner in which the figure of the French ‘peasant’ has been reinvented in the past few decades. For example, Annie Moulin’s (1991: 191) historical survey of the place of the ‘peasant’ in French society underlines the transition from the 1950s, a time when ‘peasants’ were ridiculed for their backwardness and refusal to modernise, to the growing idealisation of country life that emerged in post-1968 society. Academics studying the evolution of rural communities have also identified the 1980s as marking the first time in post-war history that the rural exodus has been reversed, with a substantial number of people returning to live in the countryside, either on a permanent basis, or in second homes (cf. Trotignon 2006; Topalov 2008). Regional cultures have also undergone a corresponding re-valorisation and this has led to the development of specialised rural and regional forms of tourism in France, a process that has been encouraged by successive governments as a way of stimulating economic growth in areas with little industry.

Overall, whilst certain forms of alterity have become increasingly stigmatised over the past thirty years as a ‘threat’ to national identity and culture (in particular ‘immigration’ and ‘Islam), other forms of cultural difference (rural and regional cultures), that were previously seen as an obstacle for the cohesion of the nation, are being reinterpreted as the ‘roots’ or foundations of the French nation. Nonetheless, if the ‘crisis’ of national identity has provoked the development of a ‘neo-republican’ revival, coupled with a ‘turn to nostalgia’, there are signs that attitudes to diversity are

gradually changing since the turn of the millennium. In this introduction I have for instance highlighted the manner in which French intellectuals are beginning to engage with questions of postcolonial minorities, immigration and citizenship, and the CSA's move towards the monitoring and encouragement of diversity on television. Although arguably these movements are in their infancy, and have yet to make their impact on public opinion or televisual productions, it is nevertheless an indication that France is becoming progressively aware of the need to define a more inclusive model of citizenship that reflects the plurality of contemporary society. Perhaps the most visible political symbol of this change is found in the inauguration of France's first museum of immigration (*La Cité nationale d'histoire de l'immigration*), which opened in 2007, in Paris at the Palais de la Porte Dorée.

❖ **Documentary Representations of Alterity on French Television: Thesis Outline**

Photographier c'est non seulement refléter la réalité, c'est aussi réfléchir sur elle et s'y réfléchir.

(Achutti 2002: 51).

France has long been aware of the power of visual culture to promote national culture and language, both at home and abroad, and this is one reason for the country's long-term and generous support of its film industry. Elizabeth Ezra and Sue Harris (2000: 2) for example, have commented how certain films, such as *Germinal* (Berri, 1992), *Nikita* (Besson, 1989) and *La Haine* (Kassovitz, 1995), have assumed an 'ambassadorial' role for French cinema 'on the world stage'. Similarly, Russell Cousins (1999) has analysed how, through government support, *Germinal* achieved iconic status as an 'archetypal'

French film during the 1993 GATT trade negotiations. The power of television to promote national identity and unity has also been recognised by successive French governments. Serge Regourd (1999: 55) highlights how television's public sector companies are specifically charged with 'the defence of the French language and the spreading of French culture abroad' in Article 5 of the 1982 Audiovisual Communication Law. Financial support for French satellite channels TV5 and the news channel France 24 are additional examples of the French government's commitment to promoting French culture on the world stage. By extension, France 24 also demonstrates France's desire to continue to exert geo-political influence, by providing an alternative 'French' perspective on current affairs; a response to the hegemony of American news channel CNN. Within her own borders, the French state has also tasked television channels to promote national cohesion and identity, a mission that equally applies to regional broadcasters, such as France 3, which often causes a difficult balance between serving local and national communities (cf. Sergeant 2003).

Television, as a medium which is linked to the promotion of French culture, is also a valuable source of analysis for the construction of national identity as it is an instrument of mass-communication. According to research conducted by the independent company Médiamétrie (which specialises in analysing the behaviour of television audiences), in 2010, nearly 27 million homes in France were equipped with a television, with over 58.5 million people over the age of 4 (out of a total population of

65 million in 2010) having access to this audiovisual medium.¹¹ Although current research suggests that the principal effect of the media is not to modify public opinion, but to reinforce pre-existent views (cf. Peralva and Macé 2002: 7-13), the ‘reach’ of television is nevertheless significant in terms of the percentage of the total population which may potentially receive these ideas.¹² Indeed, Macé (2006: 189) argues that due to the inherent nature of television as a medium of mass-communication, television has to reflect ‘le *conformisme provisoire* du moment’ (original emphasis), in order to maximise audience share. As a result, ‘la dimension politique de la télévision s’analyse moins dans les effets de la télévision sur la société que dans les effets de la conflictualité sociale et culturelle sur les représentations télévisuelles’ (Macé 2006: 193). The effect of public opinion on television is particularly visible in the case of the (under-)representation of ethnic minorities:

[S]i les formes de présence des minorités non blanches ne sont très certainement pas réalistes d’un point de vue socio-démographiques, elles illustrent de façon très concrète l’incapacité française à intégrer, au sein de son imaginaire collectif national, les descendants non blancs de sa propre histoire nationale, coloniale et postcoloniale.

(Macé 2007: 263).

¹¹ E-mail dated 26 May 2011, from Jean-Pierre Panzani, director of Marketing and Development at Médiamétrie, to the French national television archives (INA). The precise figures cited in the e-mail were as follows: 26,816,000 homes equipped with a television; 58,543,000 people over the age of 4 having access to a television. During the course of my research, this e-mail was (and possibly still is) available for consultation in the INA’s Médiamétrie folder. To my knowledge, these figures have not been cited elsewhere. The figure for France’s total population in 2010 comes from INSEE research, available on-line at <www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?ref_id=ip1332> [consulted 15 March 2013].

¹² Nevertheless, Peralva and Macé’s (2002) study of the representation of suburban violence by the French media, reveals that there are occasions when television has provoked unrest through the manner in which it interprets and portrays violence. This is particularly visible in the case of the outbreak of vandalism in Strasbourg in December 1997 (cf. Peralva and Macé 2002: 169-174). In Chapter 2 of this thesis, which explores the representation of the *banlieue* (deprived suburbs), I discuss in further detail the possible effect of the media on public opinion.

Accordingly, television provides valuable source material for researchers interested in studying French attitudes to minorities and the manner in which national identity is constructed. To adapt Susan Hayward's (2000b: 106-107) assessment of the role of cinema, television functions 'as an integral part of nation-building', whilst at the same time making 'visible the contradictions inherent in the prevailing conceptualisation of the nation-state'.

This thesis analyses the representation of alterity on television through the medium of the documentary for the following reasons. Firstly, the television documentary is often neglected by visual cultural specialists, who often favour fictional representations and those conveyed by news journalism. Even documentary specialists regularly overlook this genre in favour of 'art-house' documentary films.¹³ Yet, considering the potential audience for documentaries broadcast on television, and especially the 'serious' nature of the genre, which seeks to elicit what Dai Vaughan (1992: 101) has described as the 'documentary response' (where 'the image is perceived as signifying what it appears to record'), television documentary undoubtedly contributes to visual culture and therefore offers useful insight into contemporary society. In second place, the choice of the documentary was based on the consideration of the findings of academics, such as Patrick Champagne (1993), Marc Ferro (1993) and Thomas Deltombe (2005), who reveal the extent to which news journalism offers simplified and distorted representation of events. This is in part due to the nature of a medium that has a limited time to research and compile a report, and a restricted amount of airtime to explain an event. (On average, France's flagship evening news

¹³ Hogarth (2006: 12) for example, cites the example of Stella Bruzzi (2000) who sets out to examine 'contemporary and accessible' British documentaries, but only dedicates one chapter out of six to television.

programmes on TF1 and France 2 allocate less than two minutes per news item.) According to Peralva and Macé's (2002) research of journalistic practices, time restrictions often result in the editorial line being decided before the journalist is sent to report from the scene:

le reportage d'actualité [...] n'est bien souvent que l'illustration par l'image et le son d'un commentaire déjà constitué avant même que le journaliste ne se soit rendu sur place. Le plus souvent, le 'sujet' du reportage est décidé par les rédacteurs en chef lors de la conférence de rédaction matinale, et affecté à un journaliste rédacteur.

(Peralva and Macé 2002: 102).

Although the documentary film-maker is also similarly constrained, chiefly by the extent of the financial resources available for making and producing a film, in general terms, a documentary enjoys the advantages of time; firstly, to research a subject and secondly, to develop or present an issue to the viewer (an average length for documentary on French television is 52 minutes). If news journalism may be described as 'ephemeral' in nature (Wagner 2011: 21), on the whole, documentary seeks to make a slightly more 'permanent' mark on the audiovisual landscape. For example, documentaries may often obtain a 'second viewing' through repeats and/or cinematic or DVD release. As a result, when designing this research project, I decided to investigate the extent to which the documentary genre offers an alternative representation of alterity to that conveyed in news journalism and (where appropriate) fictional film.

- *Film Corpus: Methodology*

The starting point for the selection of my documentary film corpus was the *Institut national de l'Audiovisuel's* database (INA). Based in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (François Mitterrand site), the INA was set up in 1975 and archives all radio and television broadcasts in France since 1995 (following the application of the 1995 Law on *le dépôt légal de l'audiovisuel*). It also houses extant pre-1995 programmes. Using a key word search of their television database (for example: 'ethnography' + 'documentary'), I first collated information on all documentaries that fell within the search criteria (1995 – 2010; programmes over 30 minutes).¹⁴ This selection process also used the programmes' abstracts to define appropriateness, as not all documentaries found using the key word search were necessarily germane (for instance, the word 'voile' + 'documentary' provided programmes on sailing as well as on the *hijab*). I then analysed this refined corpus to gain an overview of recurrent themes and conducted a statistical evaluation of factors such as: the number of documentaries per year; the number of documentaries per channel; the time slot allocated; the number of viewers;

¹⁴ A standard length for the documentary genre on French television is an average running time of 43 minutes for Arte and 52 minutes for *France Télévisions*. Commercial channels tend to favour shorter forms of reporting (15 – 25 minutes) that are often included in a 'magazine format'. This category of programme juxtaposes several reports together, with each film introduced by a studio presenter, who may also interview the people involved in making the film. These short reports may then be re-broadcast on their own as a way of filling up a television schedule in the early hours of the morning. As these magazine formats are a distinct category of television programme, I have chosen to exclude these short reports from my corpus (this is also for reasons of manageability), and instead focus on the longer form of documentary with a running time of over 30 minutes.

and the total audience share.¹⁵ The purpose of this survey was threefold. Firstly, to gain an insight into the treatment of the documentary genre on television and compare whether this varied according to subject (for example, is ‘ethnographic’ documentary given more prominence than programmes on French ‘peasants’?), according to channel, and according to the time at which a programme is broadcast. In second place, this assessment also permitted a comparison within each subject category to reveal general patterns and to identify any ‘anomalies’ (for instance, an especially successful documentary, or a rise in the number of documentaries broadcast on a particular subject in a specific year). Finally, as the combined corpus of the four themes explored in this thesis generated nearly five hundred documentaries that fulfilled my criteria, this statistical analysis enabled me to narrow down the field and choose a range of films for each topic.¹⁶ After viewing these documentaries, I was then able to make a final selection of films. As this research is based on a visual analysis of the representation of alterity, I selected documentaries that adopted a distinctive aesthetic approach to framing ‘otherness’ and provided the most scope to explore the key research questions of this thesis. In this study, I use the term ‘documentary’ in an inclusive manner to incorporate non-fictional programmes made in a range of styles, from ‘art-house’ documentaries made by an established and critically acclaimed director such as

¹⁵ The INA’s database provides statistics on the number of viewers and the total audience share (in other words, the percentage of the audience watching a particular programme). These statistics are provided by the independent company Médiamétrie. It is essential to compare both figures as the number of viewers varies according to the time of day, meaning that although a programme may be watched by a small audience, the total percentage of people watching a particular channel may be high.

¹⁶ Appendices 1 – 5 provide further information about the corpus of 483 documentaries selected for analysis in this thesis. Appendices 1 – 4 individually provide information on each of the four types of alterity explored in the thesis (for example, Appendix 1 provides information about the ‘ethnographic documentary’ corpus, including the number of films broadcast per channel and a breakdown of the time at which these programmes were televised). Appendix 5 offers a comparative analysis of the overall corpus of 483 documentaries.

Raymond Depardon, to ‘hybrid’ popular factual entertainment programmes made for a prime time audience on a mainstream channel (for example, France 2’s ‘ethnographic documentary’ series *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*).

- *Visual Analysis – The ‘Voice’ of the Film*

Whilst interviews and voice-over commentary may overtly display people’s attitudes to a certain issue, the manner in which the film-maker chooses to frame a landscape or a film subject is equally eloquent. In Chapter 2 of this thesis, for example, I demonstrate how the use of wide-angle and vertical panning shots create the *banlieue* as a threatening place of spatial alterity. Likewise, in Chapters 1 and 4, the depiction of individuals surrounded by the natural environment may alternately relay a sense of living in harmony with nature. This thesis therefore explores what documentary film theorist, Bill Nichols (2005), has referred to as the ‘voice’ of a documentary:

By voice I mean something narrower than style: that which conveys to us a sense of a text’s social point of view, of how it is speaking to us and how it is organising the materials it is presenting to us. In this sense, voice is not restricted to any one code or feature, such as dialogue or spoken commentary. Voice is perhaps akin to that intangible, moirélike pattern formed by the unique interaction of all a film’s codes, and it applies to all modes of documentary.

(Nichols 2005: 18-19).

In particular, this research focuses on two aspects: the manner in which the landscape is represented, and the way people are framed. The aim is to assess what this aesthetic reveals about attitudes to various forms of alterity found within France’s borders (urban, rural, regional) and *extra-muros* (‘ethnographic’ documentary of ‘Third’ or ‘Fourth’ world populations). Ultimately, this exploration of alterity permits the reflection on the

question of national identity and what it means to be French in the twenty-first century.

My investigation of alterity also examines whether the representation of ‘otherness’ varies according to the channel on which it is broadcast, by comparing documentaries broadcast on generalist or ‘mainstream’ channels, TF1 and France 2, with ‘educational’ or ‘cultural’ channels, France 5 and Arte. For example, Chapter 1 compares the hugely popular France 2 programme, *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* (in which a celebrity is taken away to spend a few weeks living with a remote non-western community), with two documentaries, shown on Arte, made by anthropologist Stéphane Breton. By bringing together two different forms, my aim is to examine whether the medium of documentary offers an alternative perspective on an issue such as the *banlieue* (disadvantaged suburbs) to that presented in news journalism (in this case, France 2 and TF1’s flagship 8:00 p.m. news bulletins).¹⁷ This involves a comparative study of two recent events: the 2005 suburban riots and the dismantling of a McDonald’s in 1999 (Chapters 2 and 3). The juxtaposition of ‘mainstream’ and ‘cultural’ channels, and documentary and news coverage, is designed to provide an analytical framework in which to assess the questions of alterity and national identity, in a manner that is, at once, representative of a range of channels and ‘voices’, and simultaneously, that provides a sense of perspective between different forms of factual representation.

¹⁷ The decision to select the 8:00 p.m. newscasts of TF1 and France 2, as opposed to the lunchtime bulletins at 1:00 p.m., was based on the fact that these programmes are broadcast in prime time when audiences are high (a combined audience of approximately 15 million viewers – TF1: 9.5 million; France 2: 5.5 million).

- *Key Research Themes*

In his influential analysis of television, *Sur la télévision* (1996), sociologist Pierre Bourdieu examines the mechanisms of news production and draws attention to the manner in which the pursuit of audience ratings influences the way journalists select and represent issues. Bourdieu (1996: 18) is particularly critical of what he terms television's 'recherche du sensationnel, du spectaculaire' and argues that the medium is inherently prone to the 'dramatisation' of events. This 'dramatisation' is achieved in two ways. Firstly, the very act of representation 'dramatises' an event, as it transforms an incident into an audio-visual narrative, through the selection of words and images. In second place, the type of subject, and the approach taken to portray it, display a proclivity for exaggeration (Bourdieu 1996: 18). For Bourdieu, the danger of this 'search for the spectacular' lies in the particular quality of the visual medium to evoke 'ce que les critiques littéraires appellent *l'effet du réel*, elle peut faire voir et faire croire à ce qu'elle fait voir' (Bourdieu 1996: 20). In other words, the power of television lies in its ability to give a corporeal form to an event or idea, which subsequently through its 'visuality' is potentially able to convince the viewer of the 'realism' or validity of this depiction. In light of more recent research into audience responses to television programmes, which indicates that viewers select arguments or ideas that conform to their own pre-existent opinions (cf. Peralva and Macé 2002: 7-13), in this thesis I adopt a more cautious view of television's ability to influence public opinion. Instead, I follow Macé's (2006: 189) argument (discussed earlier) that television often conveys

ideas that reflect ‘*le conformisme provisoire*’, in order to maximise a programme’s appeal. However, Bourdieu’s (1996: 18) analysis of television’s tendency to ‘search for the spectacular’ is a key concept for this thesis’ exploration of alterity. In particular, I assess whether the documentary genre also displays a proclivity to ‘dramatise’ or enhance the sense of ‘otherness’, through the manner in which it represents the landscape and film subjects.

The second area of research with which I engage concerns television as a medium that functions as a vehicle for stereotypes. A common theme that emerges from scholarship that examines the representation of ethnic and religious minorities on television is the manner in which individuals are reduced to stock figures (for instance, ‘the immigrant’ or ‘the Muslim’). Nacira Guénif-Souilamas (2006: 110) has identified four common stereotypes of ‘Muslims’ conveyed by the French media: ‘*la Française voilée*’, ‘*la beurette*’, ‘*le garçon arabe*’ and ‘*le musulman laïc*’. Based on gender and on a manichaeian construction of ‘positive’ (‘*la beurette*’ and ‘*le musulman laïc*’) versus the ‘negative’ (‘*la Française voilée*’ and ‘*le garçon arabe*’), Guénif-Souilamas (2006: 110) illustrates how French citizens of Muslim faith or culture have become ‘*effacés par leur stéréotype*’. Mathieu Rigouste (2007: 129) has also underlined the manner in which the media constructs the figure of the ‘immigrant’ in terms of a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ model. He argues that through the ‘promotion’ of ‘good immigrants’, the media subsequently legitimises ‘*le bannissement des “mauvais”*’ (Rigouste 2007: 129). A similar point is made by Deltombe (2005: 217) in his assessment of television’s representation of Islam: ‘[e]n comparant le nombre de reportages consacrés respectivement à l’islamisme et à l’islam modéré, on constate que les quelques reportages qui visent à valoriser le second

ont pour fonction de légitimer la profusion de ceux qui stigmatisent le premier’. The consequence of this dualistic form of stereotyping is described by Guénif-Souilamas (2006: 112) as creating a form of ‘racisme vertueux’. In other words, it becomes legitimate to criticise certain ‘negative’ figures, as the existence of a ‘positive’ counterpart ostensibly cancels out the potential accusation of ‘racism’ or ‘stigmatisation’; to say that *all* ‘Muslims’ or ‘immigrants’ are ‘bad’ would be construed as ‘racist’, however by defining some as ‘good’ and others as ‘bad’ supposedly mitigates this effect. Saïd Bouamama (2004) has referred to this practice as ‘respectable racism’.

In view of this research into the representation of ethnic and religious minorities, I examine whether stereotypes are found in the depiction of other forms of alterity, and if binary constructions (‘positive’ and ‘negative’) are also discernible. In addition, I investigate whether Edouard Mills-Affif’s (2004: 273) conclusion that ‘il n’y a pas un mais des regards sur les immigrés, chacun d’eux étant construit en fonction de l’horaire de diffusion’ is also applicable as a general rule to the portrayal of difference on television. Moreover, I expand this idea to include an assessment of the extent to which this documentary representation of alterity varies according to the channel on which a film is broadcast. In sum, the key research questions to be explored in this thesis are as follows:

- To what extent does the documentary offer an alternative representation of alterity, when compared to other forms of visual culture? (As a genre, does documentary display a tendency to ‘search for the spectacular’ and ‘dramatise’ events (Bourdieu 1996: 18)?)
- Does this portrayal vary according to the type of alterity being represented? (Are there particular stereotypes associated with certain forms of difference?)

- Is the depiction of ‘otherness’ altered in accordance to the channel and in view of the time at which a documentary is broadcast?
- What do these documentaries reveal about contemporary French attitudes to difference and in what ways do these representations contribute to the construction of national identity?
- *Chapter Outline of Thesis*

The thesis comprises four chapters. In each chapter, I explore a different form of alterity (non-western societies, urban, rural, and regional France) and concentrate on the manner in which the landscape and film subjects are represented (what Nichols (2005: 18-19) describes as the ‘voice’ of the film). Chapter One explores the representation of aboriginal societies in ‘ethnographic documentary’.¹⁸ I compare France 2’s mainstream series *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* with two documentaries, made by anthropologist Stéphane Breton, and broadcast on ‘cultural’ channel Arte. Alongside the examination of the depiction of the ethnographic ‘other’, this chapter also investigates the way in which the decision to target a particular audience affects certain editorial decisions. For example, *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* decides to dub the voices of the host families into French, whereas Breton uses subtitles. I begin with a study of ‘ethnographic’ film as it is by far the most widely represented form of alterity shown on television (providing the largest corpus of films fitting my criteria), and for the reason that it provides an opportunity to compare the portrayal of *external* ‘otherness’ with forms of *internal* alterity found within France’s borders. As will become clear, there are

¹⁸ I use the term ‘ethnographic documentary’ in inverted commas, to signal the range of programmes included in this category, which includes documentaries made by anthropologist film-makers and more popular material made for a general audience. In other words, ‘ethnographic documentary’ refers to the subject of the film (non-western societies), rather than a particular expertise or mode of film-making.

numerous similarities between the portrayal of aboriginal societies in ethnographic film and rural and regional communities in France. Themes to be explored in this chapter are: the ‘clash of cultures’ as a form of entertainment; globalisation and the destruction of traditional societies; and the idealisation of ‘natural’ man living in harmony with nature.

Chapter 2 analyses representations of urban France. In particular, this chapter focuses on the country’s deprived suburbs (*banlieues*), which are commonly depicted as epicentres of spatial, social, ethnic and religious alterity. I contrast the documentary representation of the *banlieues* in extra-ordinary and ordinary circumstances. Firstly, I conduct a case study of the 2005 riots and compare the television news coverage of these events with two documentaries which review the riots several years later. This provides the opportunity to explore the extent to which the documentary genre displays a tendency to ‘search for the spectacular’ (Bourdieu 1996: 18). The chapter then examines two documentaries that attempt to move away from these stereotypical images of suburban violence and offer an alternative view of ‘ordinary’ life in the *banlieue*. A key feature that emerges is the manner in which both documentary and news journalism construct a ‘universal’ *banlieue*, through the visual standardisation of the way the cityscape and young residents are filmed, and through the thematic focus on incidents of violence and civil unrest. Rather than alterity providing a source of amusement, as is found in the meeting between the western ‘self’ and the non-western ethnographic ‘other’ of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*, in Chapter Two, the ‘otherness’ of marginalised suburbs is depicted as a threat to national cohesion.

Chapters Three and Four move away from images of suburban dystopia, towards France's rural and regional areas. Previously seen as obstacles preventing the establishment of a sense of national identity, rural and regional France are increasingly being reinterpreted as a source of 'authentic' French culture, due to the perception that these societies have managed to preserve their 'traditional' ways of life. This idealisation and nostalgic representation of rural and regional life is examined as a response to France's 'crisis' of identity (provoked by the presence of ethnic and religious minorities and globalisation's perceived erosion of national identity). Chapter 3 investigates the representation of the 'peasant'. In the first half of the chapter, I assess the figure of the 'visible peasant' fighting to protect rural communities and traditional methods of small-scale farming. Epitomised by the farmer and agricultural activist, José Bové, this section compares the news coverage and documentary representation of the 'dismantling' of a McDonald's in August 1999 (as part of a campaign led by farmers against genetically modified organisms). This offers the opportunity to develop the theme of the 'search for the spectacular' addressed in the previous chapter. Specifically, I explore the manner in which the news coverage concentrates on the visual aspect of the event, as opposed to the motivation for the demonstration, and how José Bové became the central focus for this coverage. An important point of comparison for the representation of the 'McDonald's incident' is provided by Melissa A. Wall's (2005) case study of international news agencies, Associated Press and *Agence France Presse*. The second half of the chapter addresses the figure of the 'vanishing peasant' and examines the critically acclaimed documentary trilogy *Profils paysans* (1998-2008), made by Raymond Depardon. I explore Depardon's fixed-frame style of filming and

the way he constructs rural France as a place of spatial alterity, which is not only cut off from the rest of the country (*la France profonde*), but also appears to exist outside contemporary time. *Profils paysans* offers a vision of rural France that is fated to disappear, as a result of the forces of modernisation and the arrival of a global market economy; a trope which mirrors the portrayal of non-western societies in certain ‘ethnographic’ films discussed in Chapter One of the thesis.

Chapter Four considers two regions of France which have a particularly strong cultural identity: the *Pays basque* and Brittany. The chapter develops in further detail the historical perception of regional culture as a rival for national identity, and the way the state, especially under the Third Republic (1870-1940), sought to undermine regional language and culture through the creation of the national education system. Equally, I investigate the ‘cultural revival’ of regional identity in the 1970s and place this renaissance within the wider national and international context of the period. In particular, I analyse the relationship between the French language as a fundamental part of the construction of national identity, and the tension between France’s national and regional languages that results from this tenet. The second part of this chapter assesses TF1’s long-running documentary series *Histoires naturelles* (1982 – present), which depicts traditional methods of hunting and fishing in regional France. I underline the way in which the cultural alterity of the Basque country and Brittany is enhanced by the programme’s framing of the landscape and people. Furthermore, I reveal how this aesthetic approach constructs regional life as being close to nature, with a population that has remained in touch with traditional craft and knowledge, and as a result, is able to live in harmony with nature. This provides the scope to widen the chapter’s

discussion of regional France to include a comparison with ‘ethnographic documentary’ (are regional populations depicted as an ‘exoticised other?’), and an exploration of the increasing ‘commodification’ of regional culture.

As an emerging area of research, the representation of alterity on television has focused on the most ‘visible’ forms of ‘otherness’, namely France’s ethnic and religious minorities. In view of the considerable stigmatisation faced by these populations, and the manner in which French academics have (until the turn of the millennium) elided questions of identity politics and discrimination, this is undoubtedly a vital area of study to understand the effects of postcolonial demographic changes on contemporary French society. Nevertheless, the ‘turn to nostalgia’ is also an important part of France’s response to a perceived ‘crisis’ of identity. Whilst the rise of the ‘heritage’ film as the dominant genre of French cinema of the 1980s and 1990s has been analysed by scholars, such as Powrie (1997), Cousins (1999) and Esposito (2001), documentary’s ‘nostalgic turn’ does not appear to have been addressed by visual culture specialists. The originality of this thesis therefore lies in the adoption of a comparative approach which includes additional forms of alterity that have received less attention by scholars (notably, ethnographic film, rural and regional France). In other words, this thesis seeks to contribute to the nascent field of diversity and minority studies, and explore the manner in which these documentary representations of alterity contribute to the construction of contemporary French identity. As the first section of this introduction demonstrates, France offers a particularly rich example of the manner in which western countries (especially former colonial powers) are currently having to renegotiate and

adapt their model of citizenship, to respond to the arrival of new migratory populations and an economic context which is increasingly influenced by global market forces. The tension between the ideal of France's 'universalist' model of citizenship and the application of this principle in practice provides a well-defined foundation for the study of diversity and the construction of national identity.

Chapter 1 – Encounters with the Ethnographic ‘Other’: The Celebrity and Anthropologist ‘in the Jungle’

[...] alterity is every inch a relationship, not a thing in itself
(Taussig 1993: 130).

On 20 July 2006, the inauguration of a new museum by French President Jacques Chirac, made headline news on France 2’s flagship 8:00 p.m. news programme. Ten years in the planning, the Musée du Quai Branly was finally opened in a lavish ceremony attended by numerous international dignitaries, including three of France’s former Prime Ministers and the Secretary General of the United Nations, Koffi Anan. Celebrating the artwork of cultures from across the continents of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas, the Quai Branly is designed to be a shining example of the idea that: ‘il n’existe pas plus de hiérarchie entre les arts et les cultures, qu’il n’existe de hiérarchie entre les peuples’ (Jacques Chirac, opening ceremony address). For an audience unfamiliar with French society, it may appear strange that a cultural event, such as the opening of a museum, would be deemed sufficiently important to merit being placed as the first item in the running order of a national news bulletin. It is not as if there was an absence of news on that particular Tuesday. For instance, the parliamentary session at the *Assemblée nationale* was suspended when the socialist opposition walked out in protest, after the Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin, accused their leader, François Hollande, of ‘cowardice’. In a thirty-five to forty minute newscast, it would perhaps be expected that the opening of a museum would be placed towards the end of the programme, perhaps after international news, and before the round-up of the 2006 Football World Cup. However, France 2 was not alone in according such prominence to the inauguration of the Musée du Quai Branly. TF1’s

8:00 p.m. news programme also decided to highlight this event, placing it as the second news item, directly after a brief report on the fracas in parliament.¹

Under the Fifth Republic (1958 – Present), it has become an unofficial tradition for each President to leave a mark on the Parisian landscape, with the creation of a cultural *grand projet*. Examples include: the development of the Centre Beaubourg, initiated by President Georges Pompidou (1969-1974); the transformation of the Orsay railway station into a museum under President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing (1974-1981); and numerous projects commissioned under François Mitterrand’s presidency (1981-1995), such as the Louvre’s glass pyramid, and the creation of a new building for the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* in Paris’ thirteenth *arrondissement*. The Musée du Quai Branly is therefore a continuation of this custom, a moment in which the soon-to-be outgoing President, seeks to establish his legacy and mark on the French cultural landscape. The sense of an historical state occasion is illustrated by the opening image which accompanies the news headlines on both France 2 and TF1’s coverage of the event, depicting President Chirac unveiling a commemorative plaque covered by a French tricolour. France 2 reinforces the portentous nature of the occasion, by including a second report which features archival footage of former presidents inaugurating their own *grand projet* (a sequence which lasts nearly as long as the item on the Quai Branly ceremony). The effect of this second report is twofold. Firstly, it inscribes the present day’s events into a wider historical context, establishing a link between Chirac and other

¹ The widespread interest in the Musée du Quai Branly is also demonstrated by two documentaries broadcast on Arte in anticipation of the opening. The first, *Histoires secrètes des arts premiers* (19/06/2006) offers an insight into the history of certain objects from the museum’s collection, whilst the second, *Le Musée du Quai Branly: Le dialogue des cultures* (06/10/2006) discusses the conception and organising principles of the museum. A number of ‘cultural review’ programmes such as *Des mots de minuit* (France 2, 20/09/2006) also made ‘special editions’ on the Quai Branly, with the museum’s director, Stéphane Martin, a regular contributor to such programmes. The opening of the museum has also attracted considerable academic interest from anthropologists (cf. Dupaigne 2006; L’Estoile 2007; Price 2007) and by the honorary *conservateur général des Musées de France*, André Desvallées (2007).

presidents. In second place, the sense of continuity and tradition that is visually suggested in this sequence, implicitly bestows legitimacy on a project which, according to official figures, cost an estimated 235 million Euros to build (L’Estoile 2007: 10).² Likewise, the presence of former Prime Ministers from both sides of the political spectrum provides a further sign of a favourable consensus within the political classes for the project, whilst the museum is given an international ‘seal of approval’ through the attendance of numerous dignitaries from around the world.

If I begin with a discussion of the Quai Branly, it is for the reason that the opening of the museum highlights a key theme of this chapter, notably the question of how to represent the ethnographic ‘other’ in a manner befitting a postcolonial world. As will become apparent, the museum also provides evidence of France’s changing attitude towards manifestations of cultural diversity. Whilst the television coverage focused on the visual aspects of the ceremony, devoting considerable attention to the members of France’s political establishment in attendance and the variety of nationalities invited, the opening of the Quai Branly is also significant for the reason that it marked a substantial reconfiguration of the academic institutions charged with the scientific study of other cultures. The Musée du Quai Branly is the keystone in a major reorganisation of the manner in which world cultures are represented in French museums. This has involved closing the Musée de l’Homme, France’s main ethnographic museum located at the Trocadero, and the transferral of a large part of its collection to a new site at the Quai Branly near the Eiffel Tower. Although a number of objects on display in the new museum may be familiar to the public, the manner in which they are now presented

² This does not include the cost of the acquisition of the land (a prime location situated near the Eiffel Tower), or the running costs of the museum. Neither TF1 nor France 2 make any reference to the cost of building the new museum.

marks a radical change in emphasis: what was previously displayed as an ethnographic *object* is now exhibited as an aesthetic *work of art*. This shift from the ‘scientific’ to the aesthetic is demonstrated by the replacement of anthropologists by art historians at the head of the museum and the promotion of the Quai Branly as a museum of *arts premiers*, that is to say, art by ‘first’ or aboriginal peoples from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas.

Such a major alteration in the museum’s style of exhibition was not achieved without controversy. An attempt to save the Musée de l’Homme was made by a small group of anthropologists, spearheaded by Jean Rouch, in the form of a committee named *Patrimoine et Résistance*, a reference to the Museum’s resistance committee that met there during the Second World War. Meanwhile, staff at the Musée de l’Homme went on a two-month strike in protest, whilst intellectuals such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Louis Dumont weighed in on both sides of the debate.³ Notwithstanding the desire to save the historical ‘home’ of anthropological research, at the heart of the debate is a questioning of the politics of representation in museums. In a postcolonial world, in which ethnic groups, such as the Maoris of New Zealand, are setting up their own museums and asking for the return of certain objects held in museums across the world, what right do Western museums have to represent the ‘other’ and how should they undertake this task? As anthropologist Jean Jamin (1999) wrote: ‘faut-il brûler les musées d’ethnographie?’.

³ Cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss ‘Une synthèse judicieuse’, *Le Monde*, 9 October 1996; Louis Dumont: ‘Non au musée des Arts premiers’, *Le Monde*, 25 October 1996; André Langaney. ‘L’idée d’un musée des Arts premiers ou primitifs est fondamentalement raciste’, *Libération*, 18 June 1997. For a detailed analysis of this debate cf. L’Estoile (2007: 15-18)

The controversy surrounding the Musée du Quai Branly is not unique to France and is indeed part of a wider phenomenon which has seen academics engage in a critique of museum practices since the 1990s (for example, Karp and Lavine 1991; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Gonseth, Hainard and Kaehr 2002; L’Estoile 2007). Ethnographic museums, many of which were founded under colonial rule, have also been actively involved in a process of re-adaptation, seeking closer collaboration with representatives of indigenous communities and/or undertaking a conversion into art museums. Both strategies can be attributed to an attempt to adapt institutions to the realities of a globalised world, in which trans-continental migration between the developed and developing worlds is now a two-way affair. In the case of the Quai Branly, there are many features of this transformation which suggest a desire to leave the country’s colonial past behind. Perhaps the clearest evidence of this is the decision to build a completely new museum, whose architecture stands in stark contrast to that of the Musée de l’Homme. Replacing the austere, concrete, rational lines of the Palais de Chaillot, built in 1938, is a building that seeks to reflect in its internal and external architecture the cultural diversity of the continents on display in the museum, by using exotic woods and colours that reflect the traditional materials used by these societies (cf. L’Estoile 2007: 292-295). The selection of a name for the museum is also symptomatic of this crisis of representation, avoiding as it does the issue of whether it is a museum of mankind, civilisations, non-western societies, or art. Instead a ‘neutral’ name which describes its geographical location in Paris was chosen; it has also been suggested that at some point in the future the museum might be renamed after the initiator of the project, Jacques Chirac. In either case, it is interesting that the name

explicitly links a museum of non-European cultures to France, through the connection with Paris and, potentially, to France’s tradition of presidential *grands projets*.

In his analysis of the history of the ethnographic museum in France, anthropologist Benoît de L’Estoile (2007: 26) suggests that the desire to promote the aesthetic value of art from outside the European tradition is a form of symbolic reparation for a colonial past that is commonly perceived to have ignored or denigrated the cultures of the colonised. It is ‘le temps de la reconnaissance’ for the *arts premiers* (Degli and Mauzé 2000). The reassessment and rehabilitation of non-European art is embodied not only with the opening of the Quai Branly, but also with the decision to widen the remit of the previously eurocentric Louvre. In the past decade, two new departments dedicated to non-Western art have been opened. An eighth department specialising in art from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas, based in the Louvre’s *Pavillon des Sessions*, opened in 2000. The Louvre’s ninth department dedicated to Islamic art was inaugurated in September 2012. As the best-known and most-visited museum in France, these additions to the Louvre are highly symbolic of the country’s commitment to the valorisation of non-European art forms.⁴ As the former director of the Quai Branly project, Germain Viatte contends, this decision is a testament to ‘la détermination politique d’affirmer de façon symbolique et forte l’égalité des cultures et la reconnaissance de cette égalité par la France au sein de son institution la plus prestigieuse’ (Pomain 2000: 80; cited by Dias 2002: 18). In addition to the notion of equality, L’Estoile (2007: 10) draws attention to a speech given by Jacques Chirac on 23

⁴ Non-Western art has been excluded from the Louvre since 1911, when the creation of new museums and the development of anthropology led to such objects being reclassified as ‘ethnographic’ and subsequently put on display in other museums. For a more detailed overview of this history, cf. Nélia Dias (2002).

June 2004 (in honour of an international meeting between American Indian communities), in which he expressed the desire that: ‘le musée du quai Branly sera une nouvelle manifestation de la foi de la France dans les vertus de la diversité et du dialogue des cultures’. Although the belief in the ‘virtues of diversity’ may be read as a reference to the 2001 UNESCO declaration on cultural diversity, for which France was a signatory nation, in view of France’s historical tradition of ‘colour-blind’ citizenship, which does not recognise the existence of group identities within the nation (cf. Introduction), Chirac’s support of the right to difference is striking.

In the introduction to this thesis, I outlined certain signs that indicate that since the turn of the millennium, French academics and regulatory bodies such as the CSA (*Conseil supérieur de l’audiovisuel*), are beginning to revise their traditional ‘radical indifference to difference’ (Mbembe 2011: 93), and address issues of identity politics. Although this paradigm shift within French academia is notable in its own way, for the French president to express support for such an idea is highly significant, due to the political ‘weight’ which such statements inevitably carry.⁵ For L’Estoile (2007: 24), the commitment to the promotion of diversity, symbolised by the Musée du Quai Branly and the signing of the 2001 UNESCO declaration on cultural diversity, are indications that France is currently moving towards a new form of universalism, based on the right to difference (*universalisme différentialiste*), rather than the assimilation of difference (*universalisme assimilationiste*). An example of ‘assimilationist universalism’ is found in France’s universal declaration of *Les Droits de l’homme*, which ‘fait abstraction des *identités* singulières pour ne voir que la commune humanité qui les transcende. On peut

⁵ Although this speech was made at a reception at the Elysée Palace to a selected group of people, Chirac’s address was given a wider audience, as the text was published on the Elysée’s official website. This also adds an air of permanency or intent to the statement.

parler d’un universalisme *assimilationniste*, au sens où tous les hommes sont considérés comme des semblables, et donc jouissent des mêmes droits quelle que soit leur particularité’ (L’Estoile 2007: 24). This contrasts with the ‘differentialist’ form of universalism, whereby humanity is conceived as being composed of a multitude of different cultural identities, the uniting principle being the right to difference. Nevertheless, L’Estoile (2007) suggests that this change is not necessarily disinterested, and may instead be read as another example of France’s desire to protect her own identity and culture in a world that is increasingly affected by global market forces:

Tout se passe donc comme si, après avoir revendiqué pendant deux siècles le flambeau de l’universalisme assimilationniste en se proclamant Patrie des droits de l’Homme, la France affirmait désormais un nouvel universalisme en se posant, avec la création du musée du quai Branly, en championne de la diversité culturelle. En même temps, cette revendication universaliste est aussi une revendication particulariste, au sens où elle implique aussi la défense d’une ‘identité française’ singulière contre ‘la mondialisation laminoir’. Ce thème fait à son tour écho à la revendication de ‘l’exception culturelle’, qui a été depuis les années 1990 un des principaux chevaux de bataille de la diplomatie française, souvent en opposition explicite avec les Etats-Unis, soupçonnés de vouloir imposer partout leur culture.

(L’Estoile 2007: 24).

As a museum, the Quai Branly’s decision to focus on the aesthetic aspect of non-European material culture (artefacts produced by a particular culture), as opposed to their quality as an ethnographic object, offers an example of one of the possible responses to the question of representing the ethnographic ‘other’, in a manner that is in keeping with the realities of a postcolonial world. As a political statement, the Quai Branly is promoted as an embodiment of France’s commitment to championing cultural diversity; additionally, the museum potentially symbolises a transition towards the acceptance of group identities in contemporary France. From an anthropological

perspective, it is worth considering briefly the extent to which the Quai Branly achieves the aim of transforming the representation of cultural alterity.

Unlike the Louvre, which now includes art from all five continents, there is a noticeable absence of European artefacts in the Quai Branly. European culture will form the subject matter of a separate museum to be opened in Marseille in June 2013 (cf. Colardelle 2002).⁶ The effect is to create or maintain a distinction between European and non-European cultures and consequently damages the desire to promote equality and dialogue between cultures. This separation between ‘us’ and ‘them’, is in many ways reinforced by the decision to abolish the notion of time within the museum, in order to focus purely on the aesthetic, rather than the historical encounters between the West and the ethnographic ‘other’ that resulted in the acquisition of these objects.⁷ The abolition of time, added to the notion of *arts premiers* with its overtones of ‘primitive’ or ‘first’ people, creates the impression of these cultures as removed from western history and existing in a separate time and space. As a result, the issue of representation is depoliticised. The exclusion of the ‘self’ in the representation of the ‘other’, therefore impedes inter-cultural ‘dialogue’ and fails to take into account changes in anthropological practices since the 1980s, when anthropologists began to explore the question of authorship and discuss fieldwork as an encounter between ‘self’

⁶ The museum’s website is now up and running: <<www.mucem.org>>. The decision to build a new museum in Marseille and not as is usually the case, in Paris, is part of a policy of decentralising the arts in France that was started during the Mitterrand presidency in the 1980s (cf. Rogers 2002: 497-499). The location in France’s largest southern city, is also a reflection of the museum’s aim to be a *Musée des civilisations d’Europe et de la Méditerranée*.

⁷ This contrasts with the approach taken in the newly-reorganised Ashmolean museum in Oxford, which precisely foregrounds the theme of communication and exchange between populations and cultures.

and ‘other’.⁸ Thus on the one hand, the Quai Branly does offer a different approach to the representation of alterity, as it emphasises the aesthetic qualities of non-European art and promotes the concept of cultural diversity. On the other, the omission of European cultural artefacts, coupled with the abolition of an historical timeline and the excision of the ethnographic encounter, reinforce the separation between Europe and the ‘other’; it is as if non-western cultures exist ‘outside time’ (Fabian 1983) and are ‘without history’ (Wolf 1982).

- *Adapting ‘Ethnography Documentary’ for Television Audiences*

A similar range of issues is raised when representing the ethnographic ‘other’ in visual media. This chapter examines ‘ethnographic documentary’ and adopts a comparative approach.⁹ The first part of the chapter, explores the popular series *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*, broadcast at Prime Time on the mainstream channel, France 2.¹⁰ The second section, assesses two documentaries made by anthropologist, Stéphane Breton, also shown at Prime Time on cultural channel Arte. Both programmes achieved above average viewing figures. I focus on an aesthetic analysis of the manner in which the

⁸ The ‘reflexive’ turn in anthropology is outlined in this chapter’s exploration of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*’s representation of the ethnographic encounter between the ‘celebrity’ and the ethnographic ‘other’. This paradigmatic shift is further discussed in Chapter 3.

⁹ I use the term ‘ethnographic documentary’ in inverted commas, to signal the range of programmes included in this category, which includes documentaries made by anthropologist film-makers and more popular material made for a general audience. In other words, ‘ethnographic documentary’ refers to the subject of the film (non-western societies), rather than a particular expertise or mode of film-making.

¹⁰ The categories ‘Daytime’ (8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.), ‘Access Prime Time’ (6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.), ‘Prime Time’ (8:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.) and ‘Second Time’ (10:30 p.m. – 00:00 a.m.) are derived from Boyer and Lochard’s (1998) study of the representation of the *banlieue* on television. I have added the category ‘Third Time’ (00:00 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.) to refine the analysis. The terms *première*, *deuxième* and *troisième parties de soirée* are in common popular usage and are frequently employed by television continuity announcers to present a channel’s evening programmes.

landscape and people (the ethnographic ‘other’ and ‘self’ of the celebrity or anthropologist) are depicted in the documentaries. The key research question of this chapter concerns the question of how to represent the ethnographic subject and the way this portrayal is affected by the desire to maximise viewing figures. A second objective is to discuss what these ‘ethnographic documentaries’ reveal about French attitudes to cultural alterity and how this informs the construction of national identity in contemporary France. In order to provide a context for this investigation, I begin with an overview of the major trends in ethnographic documentary on French television, between the period 1995 – 2010, from which my corpus is selected.

Out of the four types of alterity explored in this thesis, programmes with ethnographic content make up the largest corpus of films. The initial key word search of the INA’s database brought up over five hundred programmes broadcast between 1995 and 2010, a figure which includes documentaries, short reports, interviews and debates with anthropologists, and literary discussion programmes. Following a process of selection (excluding all programmes other than documentaries over 30 minutes), this left me with a corpus of 166 documentaries covering the following categories: ‘ethnographic documentary’ of non-European cultures; the origins of man; profiles of anthropologists and famous ethnographic expeditions; and forensic anthropology.¹¹ As this chapter concerns the representation of the ethnographic ‘other’, I further refined this corpus to focus on non-European ‘ethnographic documentary’. In general terms, ‘ethnographic documentary’ is largely found on ‘specialist’ channels with a cultural or educational remit (La Cinquième, France 5 and Arte account for 82% of the total corpus), whereas it

¹¹ For more information about the documentary selection process, cf. Introduction of thesis, pp. 33-35.

is virtually absent from commercial channels: TF1 (1 documentary), Canal Plus (1 documentary). *France Télévisions*’ mainstream channel, France 2, with the notable exception of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*, tends to avoid the ‘ethnographic documentary’ genre altogether.¹² As a rule, ‘ethnographic documentary’ can be found at virtually any time of day however except for Arte and France 5, the genre is rarely broadcast at Prime Time on French television (8:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.). This suggests that schedulers concerned with the commercial imperative of attracting high viewing figures to maximise advertising revenues, do not consider that the ‘ethnographic documentary’ is capable of fulfilling this requirement.¹³ Consequently, ‘ethnographic documentary’ is arguably perceived to be a minority interest genre and is therefore found mostly on smaller ‘arts’ channels, whose overall market share is low: in 2009, France 5’s average share of the total television audience was just over three per cent, whilst Arte’s share fell from three to two per cent.¹⁴

In view of the fairly marginal status of ‘ethnographic documentary’, *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* defies the unwritten rules of the television scheduling of this genre. Firstly, it is broadcast on *France Télévisions*’ mainstream channel, France 2, (nationally the second most watched station after TF1). Secondly, the series is placed in

¹² France 2 does however broadcast the occasional documentary in the ‘origins of man’ genre. This suggests that programmes exploring the evolution of man are able to attract a wider audience than is generally the case for ‘ethnographic documentary’.

¹³ Unlike in Britain where the BBC as a public service broadcaster does not rely on advertising revenue to supplement its income, the public sector in France competes with commercial channels for this source of revenue. In 2010, the French President, Nicholas Sarkozy, announced an end to advertisement on *France Télévisions*’ channels at prime time. The principal motivation for this decision was to enable *France Télévisions* to have more flexibility in its programming choices, as the company would no longer have to pursue ratings in order to maximise advertising revenues during peak viewing times. For the moment, it is too early to say whether this change has altered France 2 and France 3’s evening schedules.

¹⁴ All statistics cited in this thesis relating to audience viewing figures (unless otherwise indicated) are based on my own research of the INA’s database. Médiamétrie, an independent company which monitors viewing habits of television and radio audiences in France, provides information on the viewing figures and total market share of individual programmes to the national television archives (INA).

a prime-time position, immediately after the 8:00 p.m. evening news (starting at 8:30 p.m. – 8:50 p.m.). Finally, it has proved to be a ratings ‘hit’ for France 2, attracting an average of 5.4 million viewers and obtaining an average twenty-two per cent share of the total evening television audience. In comparison, on the same nights, TF1 with its selection of celebrity based magazine shows and American drama series, obtained an average 6.7 million viewers and secured 28 per cent of the total market share. For France 2, the audience share for *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* (21%) is above the channel’s average for prime-time programmes (17% in 2009). What is unusual, is that it is an *ethnographic documentary* that has been able to produce such results.

The analysis of the INA’s database carried out during the course of this research, reveals that the most popular documentaries of the past fifteen years on French television, have been programmes which adopt ‘hybrid’ techniques that ‘fuse documentary and dramatic impulses’ (Kilborn and Izod 1997: 147). These ‘hybrid’ documentaries emerged in the 1990s, alongside the development of reality television, and together signalled the rise of ‘popular factual entertainment’ that shifted the documentary ‘away from its traditional focus on argumentation and public education toward the pleasures and conventions of entertainment’ (Beattie 2004: 203). The composite nature of these programmes is reflected in the various neologisms coined to describe these new forms: ‘documentary-drama’ (often contracted to ‘docu-drama’), ‘drama-documentary’, ‘docu-soap’ and ‘docu-fiction’ are some of the most commonly

used.¹⁵ Two particularly successful examples of ‘hybrid’ documentaries broadcast on French television in the last decade are: *L’Odyssée de l’espèce* (France 3, 2003) and *Le Dernier jour de Pompéi* (France 2, 2004). Shown in the peak-time evening slot, both programmes attracted nearly nine million viewers and respectively obtained 34 and 32 per cent of the total market share, making them the most watched programme at time of broadcast. The only other factual programme to come close in recent times to these figures (excluding *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*), is a documentary on the Earth’s biodiversity, presented by environmental journalist, Yann Arthus Bertrand. Watched by 5.5 million viewers, *La biodiversité: Tout est vivant, tout est lié* (France 2, 2006) narrowly managed to secure a higher audience share than TF1’s screening of *The Lord of the Ring*.

The popularity of *L’Odyssée de l’espèce* and *Le Dernier jour de Pompéi* may be attributed in part to the programmes’ subject (the evolution of man and the destruction of Pompeii). Programmes on the ‘origins of man’ are occasionally featured on mainstream channels such as France 2 and TF1 and usually perform relatively well, suggesting that there is a fairly broad interest in such topics. However, as this is not the first time that these issues have been explored on television, the reason for their exceptionally high viewing figures, arguably lies in the ‘docu-drama’ format of these two programmes. *L’Odyssée de l’espèce* combines the results of recent academic research into a ‘scientifically based’ narrative (overseen by the internationally renowned

¹⁵ It is beyond the scope of this chapter and thesis to engage in a lengthy discussion of reality television or ‘hybrid’ documentary. For a discussion and definition of the ‘docu-soap’ genre, and the difference between ‘docu-drama’ and ‘drama-documentary’ cf. Bruzzi (2000: Chapter 3); Beattie (2004: Chapter 8). Annette Hill’s (2005) monograph *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television* offers a useful introduction to the reality television genre. French academics have also analysed the arrival of reality television in France, particularly the first reality game-show *Loft Story* (M6), based on the *Big Brother* format, which ran for two series in 2001 and 2002 (cf. Razac 2002; Roux and Teyssier 2003; Jost 2007a, 2007b; Segré 2008).

paleo-anthropologist Yves Coppens), and through the use of computer generated imagery and human actors, offers the spectator a dramatised re-enactment of the various stages of the evolution of man. More traditional forms of documentary such as interviews with experts are sidelined in favour of creating a compelling ‘docu-drama’.¹⁶ *Le Dernier jour de Pompéi* adopts a similar strategy, basing a narrative on Pliny the Younger’s first century account and archeological evidence provided by the excavation of the site. In contrast, the most popular ‘non-hybrid’ ‘ethnographic documentary’, *Toumaï: Le nouvel ancêtre* (France 2, 2006), broadcast at prime time, achieved just under three million viewers and an 11.5 per cent share of the audience. For a documentary with anthropological content, these figures are very respectable, however, in terms of France 2’s market share at prime time, this is considerably lower than the usual average of 17 per cent. This appears to indicate that *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* and *L’Odyssée de l’espèce*’s success in engaging a larger proportion of the public than is usual for an ‘ethnographic documentary’, lies in their creative repackaging of the genre for a mainstream audience. In other words, both programmes transform ethnography and paleo-anthropology into ‘popular factual entertainment’.

¹⁶ *L’Odyssée de l’espèce* was also broadcast in a slightly longer three episode format on cable and satellite channel Planète in which elements such as interviews with specialists were included, thereby situating the programme closer to the documentary end of the spectrum. A review in the cultural radio and television guide *Télérama* however commented that whilst this longer version was perhaps more precise from an educational point of view, much of the power of the dramatised sequences was lost (*Télérama*, 11 – 17 January 2003, n°2765, page 105).

❖ **Celebrities in the Jungle: Ethnography as Popular Factual Entertainment**

Created in 2004 by television presenter, Frédéric Lopez, *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* features a French celebrity who is taken away by Lopez to live in a ‘traditional’ manner with a remote community for a period of two to three weeks. Each episode of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* is structured in the same manner: the programme opens with the journey to the destination; Lopez and the celebrity are welcomed by the host family; both individuals spend a few weeks joining in with the daily tasks of the community; the film concludes with an often tearful farewell between the ‘star’ and the hosts. The average running time of an episode is 100 minutes, almost double the ‘standard’ 52 minute length allocated to the documentary genre as a whole on French television. Originally made for France 5, where four episodes were shown between late 2004 and 2005, the programme transferred in 2006 to the larger parent channel, France 2, along with a sizeable increase in the series’ budget. As of 14 December 2010, there have been eleven episodes, broadcast at intervals of approximately six months on France 2, featuring a mixture of actors, comedians, musicians and an ex-supermodel.¹⁷ In 2009, a book of photographs from the series was published and instantly became a number one best-seller in the non-fiction hardback section (Lopez 2009). Interestingly the volume does not include a single image or reference to the first four programmes produced by France 5.

¹⁷ A full list of these programmes is contained in the filmography.

Both incarnations of the programme on France 5 and France 2, follow the same principle of taking a household name away to a far-flung region of the world. A substantial difference in the financial resources available however, ensures that there is a visible divergence in the style, content and finish of the two series, which possibly explains why the tie-in book makes no mention of the earlier episodes. In France 5’s version there is only one week available for the crew to film and travel to and from the location. Such a tight schedule inevitably has an impact, not only on the choice of possible destinations, but also on the manner in which the programme is produced. With almost two days lost in transit, leaving only five or six days to shoot, there is an urgency to produce useable footage quickly. The solution adopted by the producers is to create a structured itinerary for each day of the sojourn, which includes visits to different locations and communities, thereby maximising the number of opportunities for capturing interesting and varied material.

For instance, Emmanuel Béart’s visit of the island of Socotra (Yemen) comprises expeditions to the island’s mountainous regions populated by nomadic goat herders, an arid plateau where honey is collected, and to the fishing communities located on the coast. There are also a couple of scheduled meetings with a French apiculturist, who is teaching the local population about the science of beekeeping, and a French marine biologist who takes Béart diving. In this series it is therefore the producers who engineer the events that form the basis of the film. In contrast, as a result of the additional time and financial resources, the later version on France 2 is able to focus on the daily routine of a single community and wait for ‘something interesting to happen’ between the programme’s ‘star’ and the non-western ‘other’. As a consequence there is

a major difference of purpose between the two series. France 2’s focus is on the relationship that forms between the celebrity and host family, whereas France 5 presents an account of a famous person’s visit to an unusual location. As this chapter’s primary interest is on the representation of cultural alterity and the ethnographic encounter between ‘self’ and ‘other’, I assess the eleven programmes broadcast on France 2.

My analysis of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* is composed of three parts. In the first, I explore the aesthetic approach to the landscape. Although, each instalment of the series features a different location and has employed to date, four different directors, there are nevertheless a number of recurring sequences found in each film. The second section examines the manner in which the ethnographic ‘other’ is filmed and how the relationship between the ‘self’ of the celebrity and the host family is constructed through post-production editing to enhance the impression of ‘inter-cultural’ dialogue and exchange. This also includes a discussion of the way the ‘clash of cultures’ is dramatised for its comic or entertainment value. In the final part, I assess what *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*’s representation of the ethnographic ‘other’ reveals about French attitudes to non-western alterity, and consider the extent to which this depiction reflects contemporary anxieties in French society over questions of national identity and culture.

- *Spatial Alterity of an ‘Unknown Land’*

Each episode of the series opens with footage filmed from a helicopter flying over an unidentified landscape. The film then shifts to a sequence which juxtaposes the celebrity leaving home and taking a taxi to the airport, with the presenter Lopez who is

waiting at the airport. Upon arrival, the ‘star’ is blindfolded to prevent him or her discovering where they are going, until they are both seated in the airplane and the first stage of the journey is underway.¹⁸ Inter-cut into this opening ‘airport sequence’ is the occasional shot of the environment in which the host community lives. This adds to the mystery of the ‘airport sequence’, by providing the viewer with an anticipatory glimpse of the intended destination (Figure 1.1). Although the programme’s port of call is mentioned in the title credits (superimposed over the helicopter footage), the reference is deliberately vague and often refers to the ethnic group of the host community, or to a relatively obscure geographical region. For example: *Patrick Timsit chez les hommes fleurs* (2006), *Adriana Karembeu chez les Amharas* (2008), *Gilbert Montagné au Zanskar* (2009). The suspense of this sequence is further heightened by the manner in which Lopez draws out the moment in which he reveals to the celebrity the place where he or she is being taken. Rather than beginning with a recognisable country or land mass, Lopez deliberately inflates the obscurity of the



Figure 1.1
Opening ‘airport sequence’.
Top still: helicopter fly-over
Bottom still: ‘revelation sequence’
in airplane.
Edouard Baer chez les Dogons
(2009).

¹⁸ This subterfuge is achieved through the programme makers providing the equipment for the ‘star’, who tries on a range of clothes for hot and cold climates before leaving (extracts from this dressing room fitting session are included in every programme, perhaps to assure the audience of the veracity of the celebrity’s lack of foreknowledge).

destination, as he begins the ‘revelation sequence’ with the name of the host community and the area in which they live. These ‘exotic’ sounding names have no meaning for the ‘star’ who, often with some embarrassment, attempts to guess at random the particular continent that he or she might be heading to:

- Lopez: Je vous emmène à la rencontre des Himbas.
 Robin: Pardon?
 Lopez: Les Himbas.
 Robin: Les Himbas... Et on les voit dans quelle région les Himbas?
 Lopez: Dans le désert du Kaokoland.
 Robin: Dans le désert du ...?
 Lopez: Du Kaokoland.
 Robin: Qui est bien sûr?
 Lopez: C’est une des plus belles terres sauvages de la planète.
 Robin: Qui est où?
 Lopez: C’est au nord de la Namibie.

Consequently, the opening sequence of each programme explains the format of the series (a celebrity agrees to a *rendez-vous* in an ‘unknown land’), and visually embodies the mystique of the title, by delaying the moment of revelation for as long as possible, all the while providing the occasional ‘clue’ for the viewer with interspersed shots filmed on location. The remoteness of the destination, suggested in the series’ title and in Lopez’s ‘revelation sequence’, is also aesthetically suggested in the film’s very first sequence filmed from a helicopter. This aerial footage begins with a panoramic view of a featureless landscape through which the helicopter is flying (Figure 1.2, *left*), and in a continuous movement, as the host community’s settlement is reached, the helicopter angles downwards to permit the camera man to frame the entire village within a wide-angle shot (Figure 1.2, *middle* and *right*). Although lasting approximately thirty seconds, this sequence reinforces firstly, the distance needed to travel to the location (it is so remote that there is no dedicated transport route other than chartering a helicopter),

and secondly, it underlines the isolation of the group who are living ‘in the middle of nowhere’ surrounded by the natural elements (for instance, ocean, desert or mountains). The spatial alterity of the destination, conveys from the outset the exceptional and exclusive nature of this journey; it is very much an expedition ‘off the beaten track’.

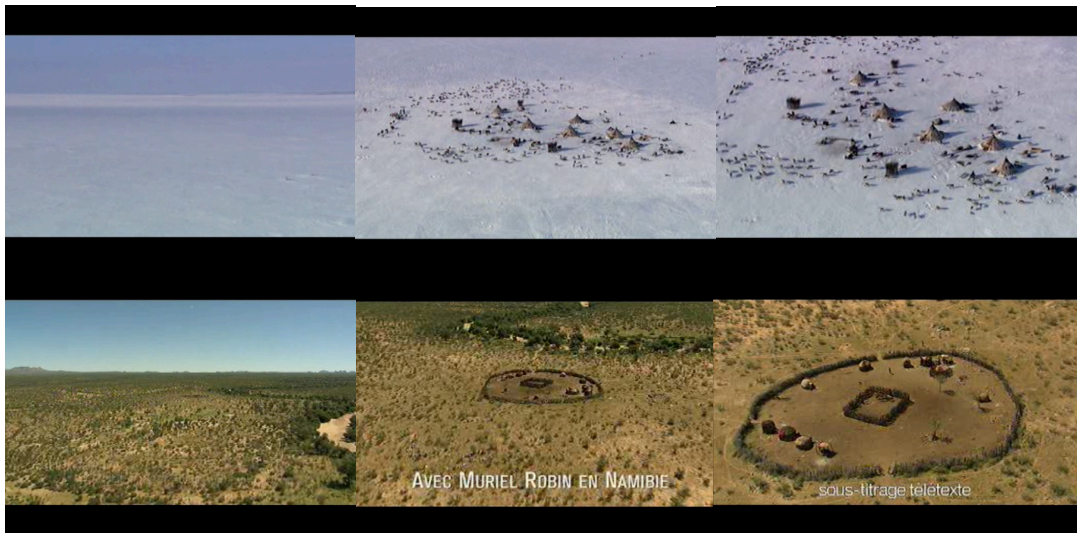


Figure 1.2

Left: Aerial shot, flying over featureless landscape.

Middle and right: Camera vertical panning shot over village.

Top row: *Charlotte de Turckheim chez les Nénètes* (2007).

Bottom row: *Muriel Robin en Namibie* (2006).

Rendez-vous en terre inconnue's opening helicopter sequence adopts an approach which is reminiscent of conventions used by earlier explorers to describe their travels into ‘uncharted territory’. For instance, Fatimah Tobing Rony’s (1996) study of early ‘ethnographic’ film highlights how the Albert Kahn archive includes footage which ‘almost always includes panoramic views of the landscape, often from the point of view of an arriving traveller on an incoming ship or train’ (Rony 1996: 81). Rony (1996: 81-82) argues that ‘within the context of imperialism and entrepreneurial prospecting’, the overall effect of these panoramic views is to ‘ground the representation of travel as penetration and discovery’. She also draws a parallel between her research into early ‘ethnographic’ film and the work of Mary Louis Pratt

(1985) who has made a study of travelogues written by explorers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century.¹⁹ In particular, Rony (1996: 82) cites Pratt’s (1985: 124) comment that the language chosen by the explorer to describe the landscape suggests a ‘fantasy of dominance [...] The eye “commands” what falls within its gaze; the mountains “show themselves” or “present themselves”; the country “opens up” before the European newcomer, as does the unclothed bodyscape’.

Whilst the historical context within which *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* is made, is far removed from the time of imperialist expansion, the helicopter footage nonetheless not only conveys the sense of ‘penetrating’ a distant land, but also from its airborne position, communicates a visual ‘dominance’ over the landscape. In addition, the sequence arguably demonstrates the technological knowledge of the ‘West’ which renders this journey possible: the helicopter permits access to remote locations, in a comparable manner to the invention of the train in the nineteenth century, which enabled the traveller to travel vast distances. (That is to say, the panoramic view from the helicopter functions as the modern-day equivalent of the Albert Kahn footage which used the train or the ship to film such shots.) Similarly, the emphasis on the spatial alterity of the destination and the prominence of the representation of the journey (with as much as twenty minutes, out of an average 100 minute film, allocated to this narrative), conjures up the (ethnocentric) allure of an arduous expedition into a *terre inconnue* that bears considerable resemblance with earlier travelogues. On many occasions when Lopez and the celebrity have to wait to be met by the host family, the impression of the two as pioneering explorers, penetrating unaided into an unknown

¹⁹ Cf. Pratt’s monograph (1992) *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, which expands and develops her earlier (1985) article.

territory, is visually constructed through the camera work. For example, in *Bruno Solo chez les cavaliers mongols* (2007), the helicopter sets both men down and then takes off, leaving Lopez and Solo waiting for the arrival of their host. This sequence is filmed in a wide-angle shot, thereby creating the impression of the two men standing alone and vulnerable in the middle of a vast landscape that does not show any signs of human habitation (Figure 1.3).²⁰



Figure 1.3
Bruno Solo and Frédéric Lopez ‘alone’
in the plains of Mongolia.
Bruno Solo chez les cavaliers mongols
(2007).

If the construction of the opening sequences of each instalment of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* is designed to heighten the sense of a mysterious and exceptional expedition to a far-flung destination, the series’ overall approach to representing the landscape displays a similar emphasis on the spatial alterity of the environment in which the host community lives. To be fair, this is somewhat inevitable in view of the series’ choice of locations which are situated at climatic extremes (for instance, the high altitudes of the Himalayas, the Namibian desert, the Siberian tundra). Nevertheless, two types of sequences particularly reinforce the ‘otherness’ of the terrain. The first group contains footage shot at wide-angle, either from a helicopter, or on occasion, from a crane (Figure 1.4). On the one hand, these moments provide a descriptive function, enabling the viewer to grasp the overall shape of the land. On the other, the framing of the landscape reinforces the underlying theme of spatial alterity, by suggesting the boundless and ‘untamed’ character of an environment that is dominated by nature rather than man. The second category of landscape footage, demonstrates a particular interest

²⁰ The issue of the invisible camera crew being used to create a sense of intimacy between Lopez and the ‘star’, as well as between the ethnographic ‘other’ and the French visitors, is discussed shortly.

in the region’s flora and fauna and draws attention to this distinctive local ecology by including examples filmed in close-up (Figure 1.5). For the Western viewer, unfamiliar with the programme’s location, the foregrounding of ‘strange’ plants and wildlife further inscribes the landscape as a place of ‘otherness’. The combination of wide-angle and close-up shots underlines the spatial and ecological alterity of the region, and potentially induce a sense of *dépaysement* (a change of surroundings) for the audience, who are transported through the medium of film to an ‘exotic’ location. The high production values of the programme visible in such sequences (the use of high definition cameras, and establishing shots filmed from a helicopter or crane), enhances the aesthetic qualities of the natural environment and constructs the landscape in a manner that is designed to be visually captivating. The similarities between certain of these landscape sequences and the photographs selected to illustrate the tie-in book for the series (Lopez 2009), indicates the importance and care taken by the series’ producers to provide arresting and pleasurable ‘visuals’ for the viewer.



Figure 1.4
Top: Siberian tundra. Charlotte Turckheim chez les Nénètes (2007).
Bottom: Namibian desert. Muriel Robin en Namibie (2006).

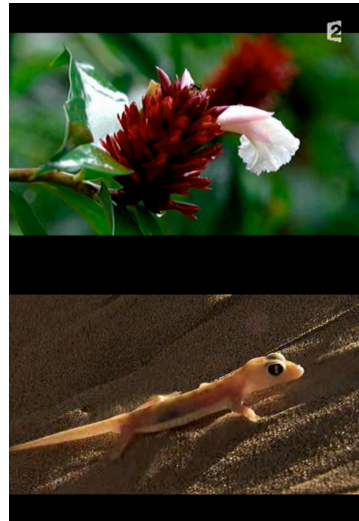


Figure 1.5
Top: Flower in the Indonesian rain-forest. Patrick Timsit chez les hommes fleurs (2006).
Bottom: Lizard in the Namibian desert. Muriel Robin en Namibie (2006).

- *Representing the Ethnographic ‘Other’*

A comparison of footage depicting the first sight of the ethnographic ‘other’ taken from different episodes of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*, reveals a common aesthetic approach (Figure 1.6). All of these brief sequences are intercut into the programmes’ opening ‘airport sequence’ and provide an enigmatic glimpse of the host community. Each community is represented in their natural environment engaging in a traditional activity (for instance, riding on horseback, climbing a tree) and is framed with a wide-angle shot, often in silhouette, making it difficult to identify the individual(s) being portrayed. These four examples provide the first indications that the programme seeks to establish a link between the ethnographic ‘other’ and the natural environment in which they live. This is achieved by the initial footage, which situates the ethnographic



Figure 1.6

First view of the ethnographic ‘other’. Footage intercut into the ‘airport sequence’.

Top left: Floating community living in the Indian ocean, near the Banggai archipelago (Indonesia). *Marianne James chez les Bajaus* (2010).

Top right: Nomadic horse rearers living in Mongolian plains. *Bruno Solo chez les cavaliers mongols* (2007).

Bottom left: Nomadic reindeer herders living in Siberian tundra. *Charlotte de Turckheim chez les Nénetses* (2007).

Bottom right: Forest-dwelling community in Mentawai archipelago. *Patrick Timsit chez les hommes fleurs* (2006).

subject within a distinct landscape and demonstrates his or her mastery over the natural elements (for example, conquering the sea, or the arctic climate of Siberia). The initial impression is further strengthened by the thematic content of each programme, which focuses on the methods developed by each community to enable survival in these geographical extremes. In every instalment of the series, the skill and resourcefulness of the ethnographic subject is highlighted in sequences that depict his or her ability to exploit the available natural resources. For example, by digging into solid rock, the Dogon villagers in Mali are able to find sufficient water to irrigate crops in the middle of the desert. Likewise, in the desert of Namibia where wood is scarce, the Himba community have adapted the by-product produced by their domesticated livestock into a building material and fuel source. The incompetent and often comical attempts by Lopez and the celebrity to assist in the daily chores of their host family, further underlines the adroitness of the ethnographic ‘other’.

Rendez-vous en terre inconnue’s depiction of the ethnographic ‘other’ as masters of their natural surroundings, is a theme found in other examples of ‘ethnographic documentary’. A number of programmes in my ‘ethnographic documentary’ corpus of 166 films, draw attention to the link between indigenous populations and their environment in their titles. For example: *Le Peuple de la forêt: Les Pygmées de Gabon* (France 3, 2000), *Nouvelle Guinée: Le Peuple des arbres* (France 5, 2002), *Les Hommes crocodiles de la forêt* (France 5, 2004). As this selection indicates, it is the ‘hunter-gatherer’ communities of the so-called ‘fourth world’ that are particularly associated with nature. Indeed, documentary makers demonstrate a particular predilection for these forest-dwelling communities, with the island of New Guinea (split between Irian

Jaya and Papua New Guinea) and the Amazon rain-forest featuring as the most popular locations for ‘ethnographic documentary’ in my corpus. Anthropologists Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins’s (1993) seminal study *Reading National Geographic*, which analyses six hundred photographs selected from the magazine *National Geographic*, equally reveals that other forms of popular visual culture adopt a similar approach:

One of the most distinctive features of *National Geographic*’s coverage of the world is its sharp focus on the people of the fourth world as peoples of nature. This was often explicitly the case in the colonial period, as when an April 1953 article on New Guinea interspersed photos of Papuans in elaborate, sometimes feathered dress, with photos of local birds. In more recent years, local people are sometimes portrayed as conservators, holding a special relationship with nature, rather than directly in and of it.

(Lutz and Collins 1993: 109).

Lutz and Collins’s (1993: 120) statistical analysis of the locations of *National Geographic*’s articles between 1950 and 1986, reveals a similar emphasis on the Asian continent (35%) and Latin America (22%), and the anthropologists highlight how, on the basis of population, the most over-represented countries in the magazine are Japan, Mexico and the island of New Guinea. A possible reason for this discrepancy ‘might be explained by referring to one explicit intent of editorial policy at the *National Geographic*, which has been to bring “the remote corners of the earth” into American homes’ (Lutz and Collins 1993: 120). In the case of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*, the ‘remote corners of the earth’ brought to the French television audience, particularly favours the Asian continent (6 episodes out of 11), with Africa the next most popular (3 programmes). This is perhaps due to the variety of populations who live in Asia and the climatic extremes found in this region, thus the ‘Asian’ episodes of the series feature two communities living near the Arctic circle (Russian and Mongolian sides), two

Indonesian islands (forest-dwelling and ocean-based fishing societies), and episodes in the Mongolian plains and Himalayan mountains.

Of particular interest for this chapter’s study of the representation of the ethnographic ‘other’, is Lutz and Collins’s (1993: 89) identification of three key themes found in *National Geographic*’s photographs of indigenous societies: the populations are ‘exoticised’, ‘idealised’ and ‘naturalised’. Dressed in brightly coloured traditional garments and portrayed engaging in mysterious rituals, the people are depicted in the magazine as exotic, through the creation of an ‘other’, ‘who is strange but – at least as important – beautiful’ (Lutz and Collins 1993: 89-90). The idealisation of these societies’ way of life is epitomised by the recurrence of the portrait of a smiling person in a third of the sample pictures, projecting ‘the ideal of a happy life’, and the construction of third and fourth world societies as a world ‘in which there is neither much poverty nor great wealth’ (Lutz and Collins 1993: 96; 103). Returning to the first images of the host communities in *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*, depicted in Figure 1.6, it is possible to describe the individuals who feature in these sequences as ‘naturalised’ and ‘exoticised’ in much the same way as the photographs in *National Geographic*. The ethnographic ‘other’ is ‘naturalised’ through the visual association between the natural environment and the native population, and ‘exoticised’ through the type of traditional activity with which they are engaged. This exoticism is arguably enhanced by the framing of the sequences, which tends to obscure the individuality of the persons being filmed, thereby conveying the sense of the ‘other’ as an anonymous and mysterious representative of a particular ethnic group.

In my discussion of the manner in which the natural environment is represented in *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*, I underlined the manner in which the combination of wide-angle and close-up shots creates a landscape which is designed to highlight the ‘exotic’ nature of the topography and local flora and fauna. A similar aesthetic care is taken with the manner in which the ethnographic ‘other’ is depicted in the series. In the same way that the location of each programme focuses on an outstanding landscape situated at a climatic extreme, each community featured in the series is visually distinctive, both in their colourful form of dress, their physical characteristics and their picturesque dwelling. For example, the Himba women of Namibia wear elaborate head-dresses and colour their skin with red ochre (Figure 1.7, *middle still 2*). Likewise, there is a recurring use of close-up portrait shots of the face of certain individuals that draws attention to their aesthetic characteristics as non-Europeans (Figure 1.7, *top*). Indeed, the consistency with which *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* features individuals that are uncommonly photogenic, raises the question of the extent to which the producers of the series placed not only considerable effort and importance in finding exceptional locations to film in, but also in finding memorable people who were

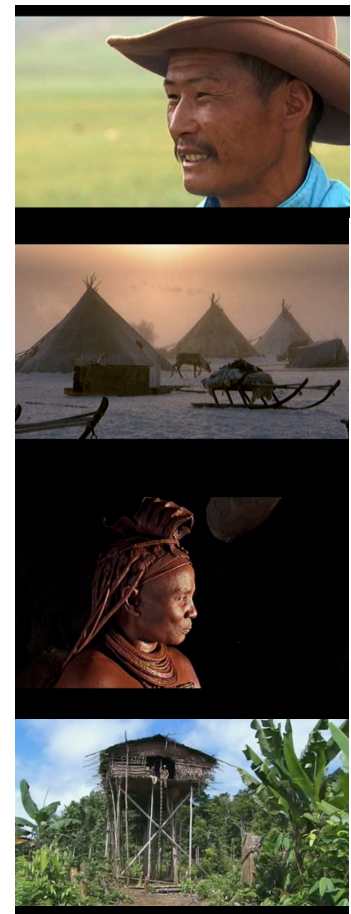


Figure 1.7

Top: Batbayar. *Bruno Solo chez les cavaliers mongols* (2007).

Middle still 1: Nénetses encampment. *Charlotte Turckheim chez les Nénetses* (2006).

Middle still 2: Katjambia. *Muriel Robin en Namibie* (2006).

Bottom: Korowāi house on stilts. *Zazie chez les Korowāi* (2009).

at once ‘strange but – at least as important – beautiful’ (Lutz and Collins 1993: 89-90).²¹ It is also possible to suggest that the ‘exotic’ alterity of the host community is further enhanced by the presence of Lopez and the celebrity who embody the figure of the ‘white European’ and provide visual contrast with the ethnographic ‘other’ (who is without exception non-white). This physical polarity is particularly visible in the episode featuring Adriana Karembou, a tall blond and blue-eyed former supermodel, and her Ethiopian host family.

Whilst *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* does display a tendency to ‘exoticise’ and ‘naturalise’ the ethnographic ‘other’ in a manner that bears considerable resemblance to Lutz and Collins’s (1993) photographic study of *National Geographic*, the series does not wholly reduce these communities to a series of picturesque but anonymous and generic archetypes of the non-Western ‘other’. Arguably, the series attempts to achieve the precise opposite. Although the group which act as hosts for Lopez and the ‘star’ vary in size in accordance to their mode of life (from the extended three-generation family to a larger village community related by kin), each programme singles out one or two particular individuals who act as a central focal point for the programme (they are often leaders in their social group). This person is presented to the viewer as an *individual* with an identifiable face (aided by the considerable amount of footage shot in close-up), name (Lopez and the ‘star’ are on first name terms with their host) and personal history. Details about the host’s life story are an important element of the

²¹ The production company behind *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* spends a considerable amount of time and resources researching possible locations. According to the producer, Franck Desplanques, the series employs two full-time researchers based in Paris. Once a destination has been decided, the producer, Desplanques, then spends one month scouting the region for a suitable family or community that is willing to participate in the programme. (Interview with Desplanques in 2009, conducted by Lopez in front of a live studio audience, following the broadcast of *Gilbert Montagné au Zanskar*). This extensive preparation before filming even takes place, indicates the importance of providing striking ‘visuals’ and strong personalities in order to engage a mainstream audience (this issue is addressed in the following paragraphs).

programme and function as a way of establishing the individuality of the ethnographic ‘other’. Examples include, Ama Himbé, who spent five years digging into solid rock in the hope of finding water for his village, and Dolma, who left home at the age of thirteen to study traditional medicine, in order to tend to the needs of her community that is cut off for eight months of the year. The result of these strategies is to underline the particular individual’s force of character and status as an ‘exceptional’ being. This creates what might be described as a chiasmic effect between the French celebrity, who is ‘known’ to the French viewing public but represented in an unfamiliar location, and the ethnographic ‘star’ of the programme, who is ‘unknown’ to the audience but situated within a ‘familiar’ traditional non-European setting. Overall, *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* depicts the ethnographic ‘other’ in a manner that simultaneously reinforces his or her alterity through ‘exoticism’ and ‘naturalisation’, whilst attempting to break down this ‘otherness’, by presenting the ethnographic ‘other’ as an identifiable individual with a distinct personality and life story. The series’ decision to place the spotlight on one particular individual from the host community who is ‘paired’ with the French ‘star’, creates a binary structure which drives the narrative of the film forward by highlighting the contrast and complementarity between the two ‘personalities’. In the next section I discuss how this relationship is visually constructed to engender a sense of immediate rapport and inter-cultural exchange between ‘self’ and ‘other’.

- *Constructing Inter-Cultural Interaction*

According to one of the series’ directors, Christian Gaume, interviewed for a one-off ‘special’ edition of the programme (*Retour en terre inconnue: La spéciale*, 2009), the camera crew that film *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* is made up of six to seven people (including two camera operators, the series producer and producer’s assistant). Also present on the majority of the expeditions are two translators, a French medic and a flexible number of porters and guides. In other words, excluding porters and guides, the core ‘team’ involved in making the programme comprise eleven or twelve people, who are present on the scene of filming.²² However, with the exception of Lopez and the celebrity, the rest of the team are ‘invisible’ and are not seen on camera. Whilst in the earlier ‘expedition sequences’, the ‘invisible’ camera crew may at times frame the presenter and celebrity in such a way as to present them as ‘isolated pioneering explorers’ (as in the example when the helicopter takes off and leaves Lopez and Bruno Solo ‘alone’ in the vast plains of Mongolia, cf. Figure 1.3), once they have arrived at their destination, this ‘objective’ camera technique is designed to establish an atmosphere of intimacy between the host family and their French guests. This places the emphasis of the film firmly on the presenter, the French ‘star’ and the host family; in other words, on the relationship between the ‘celebrity’ and ‘other’.

The second key feature of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* that is of particular interest for this chapter, is the decision to dub the voices of the ethnographic ‘other’ into French, and furthermore, to edit out the role of the interpreter who acts as an

²² That is to say: 6 /7 camera crew, 2 translators, 1 doctor, 1 presenter (Lopez) and 1 celebrity.

intermediary between the two parties. In the one-off special, Lopez justifies this technique for the reason that the programme would have to be three times as long, if the lengthy process of interpreting each side of the conversation was shown. However, the inclusion of the interpreter would also introduce a third-party into the sequence and subsequently disrupt the intimate atmosphere between ‘self’ and ‘other’ that is constructed by the post-production editing process (as well as causing a ‘scene’ to ‘drag’ by the drawn-out conversation).²³ Conversations between the French guests and their hosts are edited to construct a sense of immediate exchange, through the combination of point of view shot/counter-shot sequences, whilst the dubbing of the voices of the ethnographic ‘other’, create the impression that the host is speaking directly to his or her guest (Figure 1.8). As a result, communication appears to be effortless and instantaneous; a ‘two-way’ conversation. At other times, especially in the initial sequences as the two parties become acquainted, inter-cultural exchange occurs



Figure 1.8
‘Two-way’ conversation between Sissay Abebe and Adriana Karembeu.
Adriana Karembeu chez les Amharas (2008).

²³ The special edition *Retour en terre inconnue* reveals that the editing process is long, requiring four months to transform approximately 100 hours of footage into a 100 minute episode.

through the non-verbal language of smiles and gestures. Such moments are often highlighted with a close-up. This is especially apparent when touch is used as a form of communication and a person’s hand reaches out to grasp the other (Figure 1.9). Although such incidents of non-verbal communication may demonstrate a lack of familiarity in the early stages of the visit, later on once the ‘relationship’ has become ‘established’, such instances appear to convey the impression of a shared ‘bond’ or common humanity, which surpasses the barriers of language or culture. Anecdotal evidence reported by Lopez (2009) in his preface to the tie-in book, appears to suggest the effectiveness of this technique on the viewers of the series: ‘Il m’a fallu plusieurs années de dialogue avec les téléspectateurs pour comprendre que ces films réveillent en chacun de nous un sentiment très fort d’appartenance au genre humain’.



Figure 1.9
Non-verbal communication between ‘self’ and ‘other’.
Top: Marianne James and Bodome. *Marianne James chez les Bajaus* (2010).
Bottom: Frédéric Lopez and Ama Ibé. *Edouard Baer chez les Dogons* (2009).

In discussing the manner in which the relationship between the ‘self’ and ‘other’ is constructed by the editing process, I do not mean to expose the ‘artifice’ of the series, or pour scorn on the possibility of inter-cultural dialogue between two people who do not speak the same language. The question of how to represent the ethnographic subject is a complex issue, with an extensive literature within the field of anthropology (for example, seminal texts include: Geertz 1988; Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986) and among visual anthropologists (cf. Hockings 2003 [1975]; Rollwagen 1988; MacDougall 1998; Jenssen 2009). Within visual anthropology, a notable strand of the

debate among academics and ethnographic documentary film-makers has centred on the issue of the manner in which the ‘voice’ of the ethnographic ‘other’ is included in a film. Since the invention of synchronised-sound camera technology in the 1960s, it has been possible to include the words spoken by the ‘other’, leading to the decision of whether to use subtitles, voice-over commentary (to ‘interpret’ the words of the speaker), inter-titles or dubbing to translate dialogue.²⁴ As anthropologist and film-maker Colette Piault (2007) observes, whatever option or combination is decided upon, the power to ‘direct’ the speech of the ethnographic subject rests with the film-maker:

[i]f one accepts that speech in a documentary film gives a sense and direction to images, and is both a mediator of knowledge and an instrument of power, one can readily appreciate that the control or free expression of these words can be a matter of critical importance for the film-makers. The solutions proposed, and the strategies adopted are therefore revealing of their attitudes and personal relationships with others as well as with themselves.

(Colette Piault 2007: 38).

In view of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*'s approach to representing the ethnographic ‘other’ as an individual, the decision to translate conversations through the medium of a dubbed soundtrack may in part, be attributed as part of an overall strategy to reduce the alterity of the ‘other’. However, as the series is also aimed at a mainstream prime-time audience, the decision to favour the use of a voice-over to represent the ‘other’ (as opposed to subtitles), may also be read as part of an overall strategy designed to create a programme that presents ‘ethnographic documentary’ in an engaging and accessible way.²⁵ In other words through the combination of montage and voice-over track, the

²⁴ Cf. Barbash and Taylor (1997: 420-429) for an outline of some of the advantages and disadvantages of each method.

²⁵ As Barbash and Taylor (1997: 423) indicate, subtitles are often seen by programme makers as ‘intrusive and distracting’ for the viewer and as disrupting the medium of film as an audio and visual experience: ‘reading (subtitled text) is a different cognitive process from listening and watching’.

series places the emphasis on the programme as a meeting (*rendez-vous*) between the ‘celebrity’ and the ‘other’, that reveals a shared ‘humanity’ between people from different parts of the world. This underlying ‘message’ of the series arguably reveals more about French cultural identity as a country that constructs itself in popular parlance as *le pays des Droits de l’Homme*, than about the ‘ethnographic’ encounter in itself.

- *The ‘Clash of Cultures’: Ethnography as Popular Entertainment*

A final point to be explored in this analysis of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*, concerns the ‘clash of cultures’ theme found in each episode of the series. This ‘clash’ is found in two distinct forms: the opposition of Western and non-Western cultures (embodied by the French ‘star’ and the ethnographic ‘other’), and the confrontation between ‘traditional’ ways of life and a modernising nation-state. In this section, I first consider the ‘clash of cultures’ between ‘celebrity’ and ‘other’ and examine the manner in which such sequences are edited to enhance the ‘drama’ or entertainment value of these moments of cultural conflict. The second aspect evaluates the series’ attempt to avoid the representation of non-Western societies as cut off from the rest of the world and living in a timeless world of tradition. For example, *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* includes sequences representing the ethnographic ‘other’ using modern technology and discusses the impact of commercial and/or geo-political forces on indigenous societies (such as the privatisation of Mongolian land which threatens nomadic populations

whose existence and livelihood is based on the ability to roam vast distances to find suitable pastures for their horses).

A particularly vivid example of the ‘clash’ between Western and non-Western cultures occurs in the episode *Zazie chez les Korowai* (2009) during a sequence depicting a foraging expedition in the New Guinean rain-forest. Zazie (a popular singer/songwriter) accompanies the Korowai women on a quest to find food, whilst Lopez follows the men of the group to find suitable wood for making bows and arrows. En route, the men stop at a rotting sago palm tree and proceed to collect a number of maggots feeding on the putrefying tree. To Lopez’s consternation, the Korowai then proceed to eat the larvae and a number of other insects found in the vicinity. Although Lopez is offered the opportunity to eat one of the grubs, he recoils in shock at the idea of eating a maggot that is still alive (Figure 1.10, *top left*). The sequence then cuts to a close-up shot of Zazie holding between thumb and forefinger a writhing larvae. Although she expresses a feeling of revulsion, Zazie nevertheless ventures to taste the grub, before spitting it out in disgust (Figure 1.10, *bottom row*). In both cases, the discomfort of Lopez and Zazie appears to cause much amusement for their Korowai hosts. Besides providing a moment of dramatic tension (will Zazie or Lopez dare to eat a maggot?), the manner in which the scene is edited serves to reinforce the impression of a ‘clash of cultures’ through the repeated juxtaposition of footage of the Korowai eating the larvae (*top right*), with the horrified facial expressions of Zazie and Lopez (*top and bottom left*). Intercut into this sequence are a number of close-ups of the flailing grubs held in the palm of a hand, illustrating that they are very much alive when eaten. Also included is a close-up shot of the larvae eating away at the rotting flesh of

the tree (*top row, middle*). Halfway through the Lopez portion of the sequence, there is a brief intervention of voice-over commentary from the presenter. Rather than explain the importance of this protein source for the Korowāi community, Lopez merely informs the viewer that the men know exactly where to find ‘ces larves dont ils raffolent’.



Figure 1.10

Foraging expedition with the Korowāi. ‘Grub eating sequence’.

Top left: Lopez attempts to hide his surprise and revulsion. *Middle:* Larvae feasting on rotting sage palm tree.

Right: Korowāi eating larvae.

Bottom left: Zazie looks in disgust at the grub writhing in her fingers and then attempts to try it before spitting it out in horror.

Zazie chez les Korowāi (2009).

Whilst this sequence is sensational in its content (breaking a Western taboo of eating live creatures), and is sensationalised through the framing of the grubs and individuals in close-up, the footage also provides another example of the manner in which the ethnographic ‘other’ is ‘naturalised’ (Lutz and Collins 1993: 89). The Korowāi are shown to be knowledgeable about the forest’s flora and fauna and are depicted as extremely proficient in locating food on these foraging expeditions. As if the visual representation was not sufficient, Lopez’s voice-over additionally draws attention to the group’s resourcefulness. At an anthropological level, the sequence reveals the cultural relativity of what is considered to be an acceptable source of

nourishment. Larvae are not eaten in France, not on account of their potential harm to a person’s health, but for the reason that they are culturally deemed unfit for consumption. Likewise, a visitor to France might be similarly surprised if presented with a plate of snails or frogs’ legs. That Lopez consents to eat a cooked grub at a later point in the narrative, suggests that it is less the particular choice of food that shocks the presenter, than the fact that the maggots are eaten whilst still alive (indeed, he asks whether the larvae continue to move around inside the body once swallowed). With the possible exception of oysters, which are mostly consumed ‘raw’, French culinary tradition does not include the ingestion of living protein. If the oysters are still alive when eaten, they at least do not attempt to wriggle off the plate. In Claude Lévi-Strauss’s (1964) seminal work, *Mythologiques: Le Cru et le Cuit*, the transformation of food from the ‘raw’ state to the ‘cooked’, through the application of fire, is described as marking the emergence of humanity and is the culinary equivalent of the development of the sexual taboo regarding incest. Man cooks his food; animals eat their meat raw. This is not to suggest that the Korowai are remnants of an earlier ‘proto-human’ society (for they do cook some of their food), but that they are driven by an instinct for survival in a land where starvation is a daily reality. For this reason, they do not hesitate to cross the ‘line’ between the ‘raw’ and the ‘cooked’, in order to gratify their physical needs. In contrast, the French visitors, used to being able to satisfy their hunger with minimal effort, do not feel the need to infringe this taboo and have therefore come to perceive the ‘raw’ as undesirable, if not ‘savage’ or ‘animalistic’.

Although footage such as the ‘maggot eating sequence’ demonstrates the differences between Western and non-Western cultural attitudes, *Rendez-vous en terre*

inconnue also shows a predilection for representing the collision of traditional modes of life and modern technology. For instance, in *Gilbert Montagné au Zanskar* (2009) a sequence depicting Dolma and her family watching television is introduced by a close-up shot of a satellite dish positioned next to a solar panel. Other examples include the contrast between: the use of a motorbike to follow a galloping horse in the Mongolian plains (*Bruno Solo chez les cavaliers mongols*, 2007), a traditional Indonesian wooden boat powered by an outboard motor (*Marianne James chez les Bajaus*, 2010), and the use of snowmobiles to pull wooden sleighs (*Charlotte de Turckheim chez les Nénètes* (2007). Over the course of the eleven episodes of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*, Lopez refers regularly in the ‘revelation sequence’ to the idea of a journey to discover what it means to be (for instance) ‘Dogon’, ‘Himba’, or ‘Korowai’ in the twenty-first century. In other words, from the outset of the programme Lopez endeavours to establish the notion that the expedition to an ‘unknown land’ is neither an attempt to ‘turn back the clock’ to meet ‘early man’, nor to make contact with a society that is untouched by the modern world. Nevertheless, the representation of the ethnographic ‘other’ using modern technology does not usually appear until approximately the half-way point of the documentary, once the host’s ‘traditional’ mode of life has been firmly established. The rarity and brevity of such sequences equally suggests that such moments are included to provide a source of amusement or surprise for the Western viewer, rather than a sustained design to situate indigenous communities within the contemporary world of industrialised society. In terms of the overall content of the series, there is more time devoted to picturesque footage of the traditional sleighs of the

Nénètses, or the supreme horsemanship of the Mongolian nomads, than footage of the ethnographic ‘other’ using snowmobiles or motorbikes.

If sequences of the ethnographic ‘other’ using modern technology to facilitate their ‘traditional’ way of life are relatively rare, the series nevertheless attempts to examine the impact of geo-political forces of modernisation on indigenous communities. Each instalment of the series includes a visit to a nearby town or settlement, often to visit family members who have chosen to leave their ‘traditional’ home and settle in towns. For example, in *Muriel Robin en Namibie* (2006), Katjambia and a few others are taken by road to the local town that is two days walk away from their village. As is often the case during moments of transition between locations, Lopez provides a piece of voice-over commentary which introduces the theme of the following sequence:

A deux jours de marche du campement de Katjambia, c’est le choc des civilisations. Depuis son indépendance en 1990, le pays n’a qu’une idée en tête: devenir une nation moderne et le faire savoir. En seize ans, la société namibienne a dû absorber des changements qui ailleurs se sont étalés sur plusieurs générations. Pour les Himbas, il est difficile de trouver sa place. Beaucoup d’entre eux ont déjà succombé à la tentation de venir habiter en ville et certains ont troqué la tenue ancestrale pour des vêtements de l’époque victorienne. Une minorité a choisie de garder fièrement le mode de vie et les parures des ancêtres. Comme Katjambia, ils bravent ainsi le regard méprisant du reste de la population.

The ‘choc des civilisations’ described by Lopez in his commentary, is illustrated by footage shot in town, which centres mainly on a shopping spree at the supermarket. This provides a visually striking contrast between images of a developing modern consumer society and a small group of Himba women who continue to dress in a traditional non-Western manner (Figure 1.11, *bottom*). As if to reinforce the theme of modernisation, a piece of American country and western music is mixed into the

documentary’s soundtrack to accompany footage of the Himba women pushing supermarket trolleys around the aisles. Whilst Robin (the celebrity) follows the women around the supermarket, the sequence cuts to Lopez who is sitting outside with a local townswoman. Through the interpreter, who for once is visible in shot, Lopez asks the woman (dressed in brightly coloured clothes from head to foot), what she thinks about the Himba women who continue to wear traditional dress in town. Her answer, in which she expresses her disapproval of the women’s state of indecent undress, perfectly complements the ‘clash of cultures’ theme of the sequence.

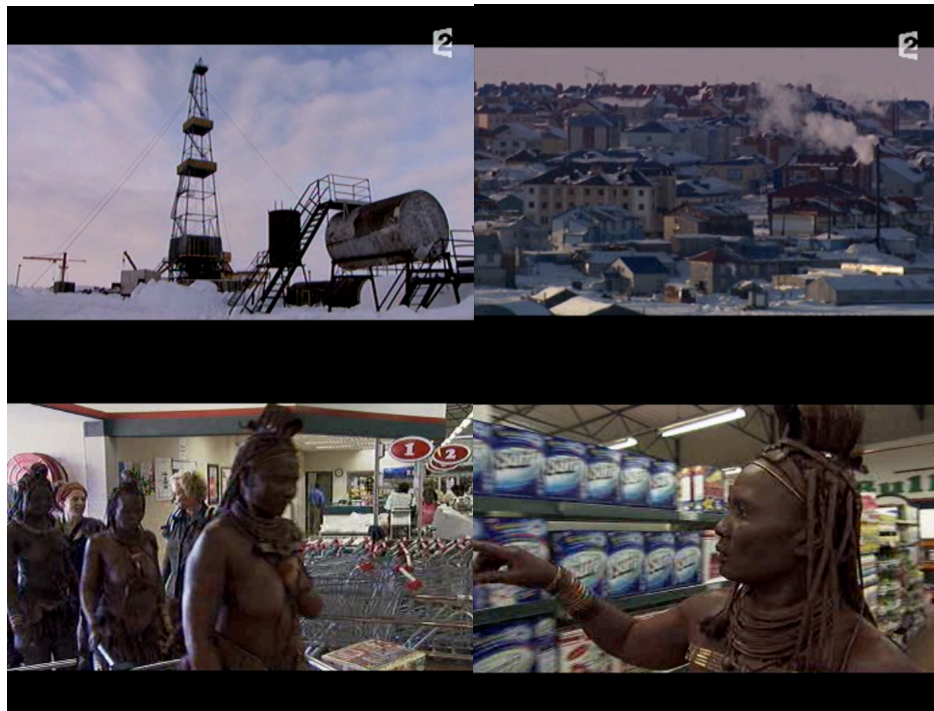


Figure 1.11

The impact of modern consumer society.

Top left: Gas rig in Siberian tundra. *Right:* New town housing rig workers. *Charlotte Turckheim chez les Nénetses* (2007).

Bottom left: Katjambia and other Himba villagers visit a supermarket in the local town. *Muriel Robin en Namibie* (2006).

Contact with modernity in *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* is represented as a threat to the lifestyle and culture of the ethnographic ‘other’. Those who leave their rural homes for the towns are described in Lopez’s commentary as ‘succumbing to temptation’, and are often shown as unemployed and living in poverty. Similarly, in the

episode *Charlotte de Turckheim chez les Nénètses* (2007), the nomadic population of reindeer herders are depicted as menaced by the commercial exploitation of the region’s extensive natural gas reserves. After numerous sequences of pristine snow-covered landscapes and aesthetic images of reindeer and wooden sleighs, footage of a gas derrick looming over the landscape and an establishing shot filmed from a helicopter flying over the ‘mushroom’ town that has sprung up to house the gas platform workers, offer a jarring sign of the incursion of the modern world into the lives of this nomadic community (Figure 1.11, top row). Once again, Lopez’s voice-over commentary reinforces the alien nature of this sight, describing the derricks as ‘monstres de fer’ and drawing attention to the size of these structures: ‘cette plate-forme métallique occupe à elle seule la superficie d’un pâturage nécessaire à un troupeau entier’. Faced with the implantation across the tundra of a growing number of towns serving the natural gas industry, Lopez additionally underlines the Nénètses’ anxiety and sense of powerlessness.

Whether the ethnographic ‘other’ is represented in a supermarket, or standing in the shadow of a ‘monstrous’ gas derrick, *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* presents the meeting of the ‘traditional’ and the ‘modern’ as ultimately destructive for indigenous societies. For instance, the viewer is informed that the Himbas’ desire for ‘exotic’ products found on the well-stocked shelves of the supermarket, has led certain members of the community to sell their cattle in order to find the money to buy the desired goods. As livestock is the Himbas’ means of sustenance and only possession of value, the loss of this capital endangers their ability to continue living in the desert, potentially resulting in an enforced exodus to search for paid work in the nearest town. Likewise,

in the ‘snowmobile sequence’, Lopez’s voice-over commentary highlights that whilst these motorised vehicles have dramatically cut the time the Nénètses spend travelling across the tundra, this mode of transport requires petrol and that to buy this fuel requires money. Furthermore, unlike the Nénètses’ reindeer herds, these Soviet-era machines are said to be highly unreliable, frequently leaving individuals stranded in the wilderness and resulting in a number of accidental deaths. Taken together, these examples portray the ethnographic ‘other’ as endangered by the ‘seduction’ of western consumer culture and a dependency on modern technology which require access to a regular source of income.

Rendez-vous en terre inconnue also represents indigenous populations as ‘threatened’ with acculturation through the means of education. Perhaps what is most noticeable in sequences featuring the children of the ethnographic ‘other’, is the manner in which the series places emphasis on a Western view that mourns this change or loss of culture, that is often in opposition to the opinions of the individuals concerned. An example is found in *Charlotte de Turckheim chez les Nénètses* (2007), when the host family (accompanied by Lopez and Turckheim) visit their elder children who are attending a boarding school in the nearest town. Schooling is free of charge for the indigenous populations of the tundra, as a result of the nationalised Russian energy company, Gazprom, pouring money into the local area to compensate for the destruction and pollution of the tundra. After the initial reunion of the family, the sequence moves to a discussion in which the eldest daughter explains her desire to study accountancy and live in town. She rejects the idea of returning to live in the tundra as life is ‘trop dur’. When her parents are asked by the celebrity if they are happy with this decision,

or whether they would prefer for at least one or two of their four children to return to live with them in a ‘traditional’ manner, both state their desire for their offspring to gain a good education and learn a trade. Nevertheless, despite the positive attitude of the parents towards their daughters’ education, this conversation is then followed by a brief voice-over from Lopez, who informs the viewer that like her, ‘soixante pour cent des étudiants nénétses refusent de retourner dans la tundra et font le choix du confort.’ The implied criticism of those who ‘choose comfort’ over life in the wilds of Siberia, is moreover augmented by the addition of a piece of melancholic piano music to Lopez’s commentary. This musical addition to the soundtrack is also superimposed over the following sequence, which features an extract from an interview with the programme’s main ethnographic ‘star’, who describes how many Nénétses, seduced by an easier life, have lost their cultural traditions and sense of place. As with the previous example of the local townswoman in the Namibian episode (who disapproves strongly of the Himbas’ lack of clothing), this interview serves as a support for the series’ theme of a destructive ‘clash of cultures’, between the homogenising force of modernisation and the disappearing world of the ethnographic ‘other’.

Whilst the ethnographic ‘other’ who resists the allure of modern consumer culture and remains faithful to the ways of his or her ancestors is represented in *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* as a ‘heroic’ or ‘idealised’ figure, those whom Lopez describes as ‘succumbing to the temptation’ of urban or westernised living are often portrayed as ‘victims’, unable to adapt to the requirements of modernity and falling into a destructive spiral of poverty, unemployment, acculturation and even alcoholism. The series’ idealisation of the ‘naturalised’ ethnographic ‘other’, living a simple life close to nature,

and the moments of nostalgia shown at points when this way of life appears threatened (such as in the above example of acculturation through education), are themes that are also found in other forms of visual culture that represent the ethnographic ‘other’. L’Estoile (2007: 290) for example, refers to the 2006 *Peuples* photographic exhibition at the Musée de l’Homme, which organised black and white images of indigenous populations into two thematic categories. The first, entitled *Harmonie*, portrayed aboriginal societies in an unspoiled natural environment ‘souriants dans l’innocence du premier âge’ (L’Estoile 2007: 290). In contrast, the second group of photographs, organised around the headings *Intégration désintégratrice* and *Destruction*, evoked the ruinous and tragic consequences that contact with ‘modern’ or ‘Western’ culture had wrought on these ‘traditional’ communities. Focusing on the latter theme in particular, L’Estoile (2007: 290) describes the exhibition’s underlying message as one of a ‘paradis perdu, de la perte d’identité et de la chute dans un monde de corruption et de violence’. A similar theme is also found in a 2009 July edition of the hebdomadal international current affairs magazine, *Courrier International*, that I came across (*Courrier International*, N°976, 16-22 July 2009). Underneath the title, ‘Amazonie: Les derniers hommes libres’, the edition featured on its front cover an ‘idealised’ photograph of a smiling group of Awás Indians holding spears and surrounded by the dense green vegetation of the Amazonian rain-forest. However, inside the magazine out of the nine articles dedicated to the indigenous populations of the Amazon, seven explore the changes that threaten the survival of these small communities using words such as ‘menace’, ‘dégâts’, ‘engrenage fatal’, ‘choc’ and ‘urgence’ in their titles.

Since the transfer in 2006 of the ‘ethnographic documentary’ series to the mainstream channel, France 2, *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* has managed to sustain above average viewing figures over the course of the seven years the programme has been broadcasting (2006 – Present). In view of this, it would appear that the gambit to repackage what is usually considered to be a ‘minority-interest’ genre for a mainstream prime-time audience has been largely successful. Evidently *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*’s representation of an ‘idealised’ and ‘exoticised’ ethnographic ‘other’, living a traditional life ‘close to nature’, has struck a chord with a proportion of the French public. Nonetheless, it is arguably the way in which the series has adopted certain features of ‘popular factual entertainment’, which is responsible for the programme’s success, as a similar idealisation and nostalgic depiction of the ethnographic ‘other’ may be found in more ‘conventional’ documentaries without such programmes gaining a large audience. In her study of the audiences who watch popular factual entertainment, Annette Hill (2005: 39) outlines that the appeal of such formats resides in their focus ‘on telling stories about real people and real events in an entertaining style, usually foregrounding visuals, characterisation and narrative above all else’. In the final section of this chapter, I explore two documentaries made by anthropologist, Stéphane Breton, which display a distinctively different approach to representing the ethnographic ‘other’ to that found in *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*.

❖ Encounters with the Ethnographic ‘Other’: The Ethics of Representation

L’ethnologie est l’art d’échanger des regards,
pas seulement d’observer des faits exotiques.
(Breton 2005: 117).

Broadcast at prime-time on Arte, *Eux et moi: Un ethnologue en Papouasie Occidentale* (2001) and *Le Ciel dans un jardin* (2003) were filmed during the course of anthropologist and film-maker Stéphane Breton’s fieldwork in a remote mountain village situated in the Irian Jaya side of the island of New Guinea. Both documentaries focus on the ethnographic encounter and explore the evolution of the relationship between the ‘self’ of the anthropologist and the ethnographic ‘other’. *Eux et moi* (2001) depicts the often confrontational nature of this meeting and illustrates the extent to which the acceptance of the ethnographer’s presence in the field is not a *fait accompli*, but involves a long process, during which the ethnographer is often ignored or rejected, and on occasion, even ‘deceived’ by the ‘other’. *Le Ciel dans un jardin* (2003), made one year later in the same location, represents a notable change in this relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other’. Whereas in the first documentary, Breton spends a considerable amount of time justifying or explaining his presence to the ‘other’, in the second, he is included as part of the scene. In terms of viewing figures each film performed well, obtaining just under 1.4 million (*Eux et moi*) and 1.2 million viewers (*Le Ciel dans un jardin*), and with respectively, 6.6 per cent and 5.4 per cent of the total television audience, almost doubled Arte’s average audience share of just under 3 per cent. For the purposes of this chapter’s exploration of the representation of the

ethnographic ‘other’, in this section I focus on two aspects of Breton’s approach to framing the ‘other’. Firstly, the ‘embodied’ camera, which associates the anthropologist as an integral part of the documentary image. In second place, I examine the question of the ethics of representing the ‘other’, by assessing Breton’s inclusion of the ‘return gaze’ of the ethnographic subject.

- *The ‘Embodied’ and Interactive Camera*

In contrast to the ‘invisible’ camera style of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*, in which the presence of the camera crew and other third-parties (such as the interpreters) are excluded from the pro-filmic space, Breton adopts an ‘interactive’ mode of film-making in which the camera functions as an extension of the ethnographer’s body.²⁶ Mounted on Breton’s shoulder at head-height, the camera moves through space as the ethnographer/film-maker walks, and swivels as Breton turns his head to look at someone or something. The inclusion of an occasional glimpse of Breton’s hand as he reaches out to grasp an object (Figure 1.12, *stills 2 and 4*), further inscribes the film-maker’s corporeal presence into the visual image of the documentary, whilst the inclusion of his voice as he interacts with the Wodani villagers in the pro-filmic space, added to his



Figure 1.12
Embodied camera.
Eux et moi: Un ethnologue en Papouasie Occidentale (2001)

²⁶ Documentary film theorist Bill Nichols (1991: 98) defines the ‘interactive mode’ as a documentary which calls ‘attention to the physical and historical presence of the film-maker by means of the interaction between social actors and the camera’.

first-person voice-over commentary, provide an ‘audio’ dimension to the ethnographer’s physical presence in the film. In other words, Breton adopts an aesthetic approach, which establishes a link between the ‘eye’ of the camera and the ‘I’ of the anthropologist/film-maker, and places his ‘self’ as an integral part of the film; it is an ‘embodied’ camera. As *Eux et moi* and *Le Ciel dans un jardin* are about the evolution in the relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other’, the manner in which Breton frames his interactions with the ethnographic subject gradually develops over the course of the two documentaries.

For example, in *Eux et moi*, contact between Breton and the ethnographic ‘other’ largely takes place outside in the open, or on occasion, in the cabin he built for himself. Although, over the years, Breton has managed to establish a certain familiarity with a few members of the community, such as his ‘adoptive father’, Obapui, and ‘son’, Esau, the ethnographer’s presence is by no means accepted by the whole community. *Eux et moi* includes several sequences when the ethnographic ‘other’ displays hostility towards the film-maker. For example, one man asks ‘on est entre nous, pourquoi tu filmes?’, whilst Breton’s future neighbour, Taimbuga, rejects the gaze of the camera and attempts to move out of shot, stating ‘je veux pas de ton truc’. Similarly, Breton includes in the documentary a sequence in which one of the Wodani attempts to dupe him into buying an almost worthless shell at a vastly inflated price. Through the inclusions of such moments, Breton underlines that the balance of power in the ethnographic encounter does not always lie with the western ethnographer, who is neither omniscient nor automatically welcomed by the ethnographic ‘other’. Indeed, in the Director’s Commentary to *Eux et moi* (which features as a DVD extra on the commercial release

of the two documentaries), Breton likens the ethnographic journey as a return to childhood:

Le dépaysement de l’ethnologue, c’est moins un dépaysement à cause d’un pays exotique, qu’un dépaysement du fait d’une ignorance à laquelle on n’est pas habituée, la capacité de s’exprimer, etc. Donc, c’est vraiment un retour à l’enfance, c’est très dérangeant. On se sent souvent très mal à l’aise.

(Breton: *Eux et moi*, Director’s Commentary).

Arguably, the recurrence of footage found in each film in which Breton walks behind the ‘other’, provides a visual allusion to this ignorance; it is not the ethnographer who leads or directs the relationship, rather he has to follow in the footsteps of the ‘other’.

Whilst *Eux et moi* is characterised by the difficulty in approaching the ethnographic ‘other’, as the relationship matures and Breton’s need to justify his presence diminishes, the ethnographer is granted access to areas that had previously been off-limits to him. In *Le Ciel dans un jardin*, for example, Breton is able to accompany his neighbour’s wife to the family’s vegetable garden, a significant step as Breton explains in his voice-over, since ‘le jardin est un lieu intime, un niveau de la vitalité d’une femme, comme regarder ses enfants’. Indeed, the change in the relationship between ethnographer and ‘other’ is such that Baimtoboro now calls him to join her when she leaves in the morning to go and work in the garden. As a consequence, in *Le Ciel dans un jardin* there is less need for dialogue between ‘self’ and ‘other’, instead Breton is able to ‘be’ with the Wodani. An example of this more accepting relationship is found in the opening minutes of the documentary, in a sequence filmed inside his neighbour, Taimbuga’s hut. In a sequence lasting just under three minutes, Breton, seated on the floor, films Taimbuga and Obapui as they sit smoking in silence (Figure 1.13). Apart from the occasional yawn, nothing happens in

this sequence. It is an intimate moment shared between men who are sufficiently at ease with each other that conversation is not necessary. Instead each sits in contemplation. As if to reflect the languor of the men, the length of the shots are long, lasting between twenty and sixty seconds. In addition, there are also a few close-up shots depicting details, such as the manner in which the smoke curls upwards, or the way Taimbuga taps his cigarette to distribute the tobacco more evenly. Although silent and immobile, the ethnographer is included into the group, for the precise reason that his presence is accepted and ignored by Taimbuga and Obapui. Unlike in *Eux et moi*, when the encounter between ‘self’ and ‘other’ was a cause for comment and debate, in *Le Ciel dans un jardin*, the ethnographer has earned the right to observe and participate in moments of everyday life. As a result, the ethnographer/film-maker has the time to look closely at the small and intimate gestures of the ‘other’.



Figure 1.13
A moment in time.
Le Ciel dans un jardin (2003).

From an aesthetic point of view, the use of the close-up in this sequence marks a key difference of approach between *Eux et moi*, which features few close-ups, and *Le Ciel dans un jardin*, where this is a recurrent technique. As the ethnographic filmmaker and documentary theorist, David MacDougall (2006: 21) argues, ‘the close-up creates a proximity to the faces and bodies of others that we experience much less

commonly in daily life. The conventions of social distance normally restrict proximity except in moments of intimacy’. Therefore, to use this style of framing in *Eux et moi* would be inappropriate, as it would visually imply a sense of familiarity between ‘self’ and ‘other’ that was not yet established. In contrast, the use of the close-up in *Le Ciel dans un jardin*, reflects the development of a more peaceful and tolerant rapport between Breton and the Wodani. Whilst the close-up and the ability to participate in a scene, without necessarily engaging in any form of conversation or physical exchange, is a notable difference in *Le Ciel dans un jardin*, the overall approach to representing the ‘self’ and ‘other’ is distinctly similar in both documentaries. Breton’s camera remains ‘embodied’ and interactive, in an approach which resembles what MacDougall (1998: 89) has termed a form of ‘deep reflexivity’, in which ‘subject and object define one another through the work, and the “author” is in fact in many ways an artefact of the work’. In the next section, I examine Breton’s inclusion of his ‘self’ as an integral part of the documentary image, as part of an ethical quest to mitigate the effect of the inherent power imbalance between the ‘observer’ and the ‘observed’.

- *The ‘Return’ Gaze: The Observer Observed*

In my discussion of the representation of the ethnographic encounter in *Eux et moi*, I indicated how Breton includes, at several points in the documentary, moments in which the ethnographic ‘other’ displays hostility towards the presence of the ethnographer (for instance, ‘On est entre nous, pourquoi tu filmes?’). Whilst such sequences depict the difficulty in establishing a relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other’, they also demonstrate the inherent voyeurism of film. In his study of the relationship between tourism and the

image, ethnographer Marc Augé (1997: 162) contends that ‘fabriquer des images (photographier, filmer), c’est à la fois s’appropriier l’espace et le transformer, d’une certaine manière: le consommer’. Augé’s notion of the camera’s gaze as exerting a form of spatial dominance that is also a form of consumption, is equally felt by Breton, who acknowledges that ‘filmer quelqu’un, c’est une forme de viol, ou de violation’ (*Eux et moi: Director’s Commentary*). It is for this reason, Breton explains that he chose to include the ‘return gaze’ of the ethnographic subject as an intrinsic part of his documentary style of representation. It is a question of ethics: ‘un regard est légitime s’il donne le droit d’être retourné [...] Le droit que j’ai de filmer, il est signifié par le regard de celui que je regarde’ (Breton, *Eux et moi: Director’s Commentary*). If the ‘return gaze’ of the ethnographic ‘other’ is visually one of the most striking features of Breton’s documentaries, it is nevertheless, only one of a number of filmic strategies designed by the ethnographer to mitigate the power imbalance that is an inherent part of the relationship between the ‘observer’ and the ‘observed’. For example, whether the ethnographic ‘other’ is standing or sitting, Breton adjusts his position in order to remain at eye-level. As a result, the spatial relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other’ is placed on a horizontally equal plane, where each may look at the other directly ‘eye to eye’. In addition to this desire to situate the visual rapport between ethnographer and the ethnographic subject on an equal basis, both documentaries also reveal a desire to establish an aural parity between the two parties. This is achieved through the use of subtitles to translate the conversations that take place in the pro-filmic space.²⁷

27 It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the use of subtitles in ‘ethnographic documentary’, however there is a considerable amount of literature devoted to this subject in the field of visual anthropology. Cf. Augé and Colleyn (1990); Barbash and Taylor (1997); MacDougall (1998); Grimshaw (2001); El Guindi (2004).

Through the inclusion of the ‘return gaze’, Breton further establishes the subject of his documentaries as the representation of an ethnographic encounter between ‘self’ and ‘other’. For it is not just the ethnographer’s view of the ‘other’ that is portrayed through the ‘embodied’ camera, it is also a reciprocal exchange in which the ‘other’, not only gazes back, but also engages in conversation with the ‘self’. The effect is to evoke ‘one of the primal experiences of daily life – of look returned by look – through which we signal mutual recognition and affirm the shared experience of the moment. It is the look of exchange that says, “at this moment, we see ourselves through one another”’ (MacDougall 1998: 100). As a consequence, the ‘return gaze’ also demonstrates the reversibility of the notion of ‘alterity’. This is particularly visible in *Eux et moi* in a short sequence of about twenty-five seconds, in which Dingimbaina and another man are represented standing outside Breton’s cabin and looking through the window into his personal space. ‘Tu vois quelque chose?’ one man asks the other (Figure 1.14). The following sequence is shot inside the ethnographer’s abode and features three extreme close-ups of an eye looking in through the window. Whilst the inclusion of the ‘reverse gaze’ and the ‘interactive’ style of Breton’s camera work allude to the interchangeable nature of ‘otherness’, in this sequence the reversal of roles is directly evoked. It is Breton who is now the observed ‘other’, an object of curiosity for the ‘self’ of the Wodani.



Figure 1.14
The ‘observer’ observed
Eux et moi: Un ethnologue en Papouasie Occidentale (2001)

* The ‘Celebrity’ and the ‘Anthropologist’

The juxtaposition of an ‘ethnographic documentary’ series made for a prime-time audience, with two documentaries made by an anthropologist/film-maker during the course of his fieldwork, reveals that the representation of the ethnographic ‘other’ varies in accordance with the intended viewer and the type of channel on which it is broadcast. As a piece of popular factual entertainment, *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* places particular emphasis on spectacular visuals, engaging personalities and a narrative that provides moments of suspense, comedy and drama. The manner in which the ethnographic ‘other’ is framed, creates an individual that is ‘naturalised’, ‘exoticised’ and ‘idealised’, whilst the relationship between the ‘celebrity’ and the ‘other’ is also ‘idealised’. In contrast, Breton places the ethnographic encounter at the heart of his documentaries and demonstrates that the relationship between the ‘self’ and ‘other’ is often fraught with difficulties and is inherently unequal. As a result, Breton adopts a documentary style of filming the ‘self’ and ‘other’ that attempts to attenuate the imbalance between the ‘observer’ and the ‘observed’. Evidently, the success of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* indicates that the series’ representation of an idealised and exotic ethnographic ‘other’, living a ‘traditional’ life close to nature, has managed to attract a considerable proportion of the French public. Over the course of this thesis, it will become apparent that this nostalgic depiction of alterity is not exclusive to non-Western societies and is also found within France’s own borders. Whereas *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* offers a vision of a shared humanity that transcends the barriers of language

and culture, the next chapter reveals that closer to home, in urban France, certain spaces are depicted as epicentres of alterity that threaten the cohesion of the nation.

Chapter 2 – The *Banlieue* as an Epicentre of Spatial, Social and Ethnic Alterity

In its literal sense, the term *banlieue* simply refers to an urban area existing on the outskirts of a town or city. As the case of the capital evinces, these suburbs can vary widely in their social mix: from the (mainly white) rich areas of Neuilly in Greater Paris, to the economically deprived and ethnically diverse *département* of Seine-Saint-Denis, on the north-eastern side. It is, therefore, more accurate to talk about *banlieues* in the plural rather than the singular.¹ However, when the word *banlieue* is used, whether in popular or academic parlance, it is a specific space that is being referred to: urban zones where unemployment is often several times the national average, where the population of ethnic minorities is highly concentrated, and where social unrest is frequently seen in the form of rioting and other types of violence. Visually, this space is identified with the massive *grands ensembles* building projects of the 1950s and 1960s, when high-density tower blocks were built on the periphery of towns and cities, to replace housing-stock lost during the war and to provide accommodation for the workforce of newly-constructed industrial zones. According to official government statistics compiled by the Délégation interministérielle à la ville (DIV), in 2007, nearly 8% of the French population is said to reside in these economically disadvantaged suburbs. The same report records that across France there are a total of 2,200 districts said to be ‘en difficulté’, with 751 areas classified euphemistically as *zones urbaines sensibles* (ZUS) (cited in Wagner 2011: 36).

¹ Urban studies specialist, Pierre Merlin (1998) has, for example, identified seven distinct ‘types’ of *banlieue* that have evolved over the course of the history of urban development in France. These include the *faubourg* and *bidonville* (now non-extant), the bourgeois suburbs with its *pavillons*, the *grands ensembles*, and new towns built to relieve pressure on congested cities.

Research into the French *banlieue* emerged in the late 1980s (for example, Kepel 1987) and became a significant area of study in the 1990s and 2000s, reflecting the social and political concerns of this period which were dominated by questions of immigration, national identity and the ‘integration’ of ethnic minorities (and embodied by the rapid rise of the extreme right-wing Front national political party). As a location that offers a magnification of socio-economic and demographic changes in post-war France, the *banlieue* has attracted the attention of scholars from a variety of disciplines, exploring questions such as: citizenship and immigration (Silverman 1992; Hargreaves 2007); urban planning (Soulignac 1993; Mitchell 2011); multiculturalism and republican ideology (Gondola 2009; Mbembe 2009; Boubeker 2009); and the mechanisms involved in the production and reproduction of the *banlieue*’s marginalisation (Rey 1996; Begag 2002b). Social scientists have also shown interest in the suburbs’ distinctive social and cultural identity, reflected for instance in the existence of *banlieue* slang (*verlan*), whilst critics in film and literary studies have engaged with the work of artists who use the *banlieue* as a setting for their novels or films (Lepoutre 2001; Tarr 2005; Blattner 2011; Le Breton 2011; Wagner 2011). Perhaps the most significant contribution of the field of *banlieue* research, lies in its systematic exposure of the chasm between the portrayal of the *banlieue* in mainstream culture and life as it is experienced by suburban residents. Henri Rey’s *La peur des banlieues* (1996) offers an early example of a desire to examine and challenge the basis of many common stereotypes and misconceptions about these residential zones, as well

as provide a historical context for this ‘fear’ of the urban margins which pre-dates the construction of the post-war *grands ensembles*.²

From the point of view of visual culture, the *banlieue* finds its most obvious representation in the so-called *banlieue* film, which emerged in the 1980s, and was identified as a distinct genre of French cinema in the 1990s, by scholars such as Carrie Tarr (2005).³ Although certain *banlieue* films such as *La Haine* (Kassovitz 1995) have managed to attract significant media interest and critical praise, an assessment of box office figures reveals that *cinéma de banlieue* remains, on the whole, the preserve of a minority of the French public. For instance, *La Haine*, one of the most iconic and successful examples of this genre, was seen by two million viewers (Wagner 2011: 199).⁴ Nevertheless, the small audiences for this type of film do not necessarily diminish the cultural importance or influence of *cinéma de banlieue* on the public, as reviews written by journalists in the specialist and mainstream media provide additional exposure for these fictional representations of the *banlieue*. An example of this is highlighted by anthropologist David Lepoutre (2001: 431), who notes the popularity of the use of *verlan* slang by journalists at the time of *La Haine*’s release, and the existence

² Historian John M. Merriman’s study (1991) of nineteenth century working-class suburbs known as *faubourgs*, reveals similar concerns and fears of the suburban ‘other’. In particular, these *faubourgs* were represented as places of ‘lawlessness’ and served as ‘a mirror with which the upper classes viewed the most frightening images of their changing urban world’ (Merriman 1991: 225).

³ The series of articles written by Carrie Tarr in the 1990s, collected in her 2005 publication *Reframing Difference: Beur and Banlieue Filmmaking in France*, constitute a key reference for scholars working in this field of film studies. David-Alexandre Wagner’s (2011) qualitative and quantitative analysis of *banlieue* films produced between 1981 and 2005 offers a more recent examination of the themes of this fictional genre, including an extensive review of the literature produced on *cinéma de banlieue*. His perspective as a French academic offers an interesting criticism of work produced by Anglo-Saxon scholars such as Tarr (cf. Wagner 2011: 28-33; 197-204).

⁴ Whilst this is a respectable figure for a low-budget film made by an as-then relatively unknown filmmaker, it pales compared to the unexpected record-breaking success of *Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis* (Boon 2008) made on a limited budget by a French comedian about an unfashionable part of northern France (over twenty million viewers according to official CNC statistics). For more information about *Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis*, see the introduction of Chapter 4 of this thesis which discusses the film’s representation of regional France.

of a number of articles in the mainstream press purporting to instruct the reader in ‘le langage des cités’.⁵ In other words, it is not necessary to see a *banlieue* film at the cinema (or on television) in order to acquire a passing acquaintance with the genre and the manner in which these cityscapes and their inhabitants are represented. Whilst it is difficult to quantify the impact of such films on mainstream culture, the fact that *cinéma de banlieue* has become an established and academically recognised genre of French cinema suggests that it has the potential to play a long-term role in shaping public perception of life in the urban margins.

However, *banlieue* cinema is a relatively recent addition to the French film canon, emerging as it did approximately thirty years after the construction of the first *grands ensembles* projects of the 1950s and 1960s. As a result, researchers interested in establishing an historical perspective of the changing representations of the *banlieue* have turned to non-fictional audiovisual sources of information. Perhaps the most well-known of these studies is sociologists Henri Boyer and Guy Lochard’s (1998) survey of France’s television archives, which explores the portrayal of the *banlieue* in programmes broadcast between 1950 and 1994. Of particular interest to this chapter’s assessment of a selection of contemporary documentaries, is Boyer and Lochard’s (1998) identification of three distinct phases in the representation of the *banlieue*. In the first period (1950-1981), the initial enthusiasm that greeted this new form of architecture as the future of urban planning, was gradually replaced by disillusionment

⁵ In view of the use of the northern French *Ch’ti* dialect in articles written at the time of *Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis*’s release in 2008, it would seem that where possible, there is a general trend among journalists to include examples of ‘non-standard’ French in their work, possibly to convey a sense of mystery or exoticism for the reader unfamiliar with the terminology, or to establish a sense of complicity with those who are conversant with the usage. The overall effect is to reinforce the alterity of the place or society being represented, whether this is the humorous non-threatening kind of cultural difference portrayed in *Bienvenue*, or the more disturbing sense of cultural incompatibility often projected with the adoption of foreign terms such as *niqab*, *jihad* or *sharia* law by journalists discussing Islam.

with the quality of life and the increasing identification of the *banlieue* as a place of social problems. The second phase (1981-1989) saw the rise of sensationalist reporting, which represented the *banlieue* as an epicentre of ethnic alterity, urban violence and disaffected youth. Although civil unrest in the suburbs had been a feature of suburban life since the 1970s, it was not until the summer of 1981 that such incidents received national coverage on television and newspapers (inaugurated by the car ‘rodeos’ in the Minguettes suburb of Vénissieux near Lyon). In the third and final period (1989-1994), Boyer and Lochard (1998) discern the emergence of an alternative model of journalism, which attempted to seek out and explain the underlying causes for the social and economic problems encountered in these urban zones. The sociologists also refer to a number of programmes which sought to legitimise certain forms of ‘street’ culture such as rap music and graffiti (Boyer and Lochard 1998: 112-113). Nevertheless, this form of ‘positive’ coverage, which Boyer and Lochard (1998: 111) describe as an attempt to make amends or ‘reparation’ for the excesses of the 1980s, did not result in the disappearance of dramatic news items depicting the *banlieue* as a place of lawlessness and violence.⁶

Since the 1980s, the regular outbreak of civil unrest in these *quartiers sensibles* has provided a staple for current affairs programming, providing dramatic images of burning cars and ‘feral youth’ attacking police forces attempting to restore order to the streets. According to the research of sociologists Angelina Peralva and Eric Macé (2002: 104), reports on ‘urban violence’ have become such a recurrent feature of news

⁶ Indeed, a parallel could arguably be drawn between the inclusion of ‘positive’ news items on the *banlieue* and the occasional reports on moderate Islam, which are used as a token fulfilment of the criteria of ‘balance’, in order to justify the extensive coverage of extraordinary events such as riots or acts of terrorism by Islamists. The extent to which these attempts to provide a more favourable representation of the *banlieue* are successful in changing attitudes, is a central area of discussion in this chapter.

bulletins, that it has become a recognised category of its own (*violences urbaines*) with a dedicated team of journalists. In light of this development, there is a growing body of work examining the media’s representation of France’s disadvantaged suburbs (Peralva and Macé 2002; Amorim 2002), which has shown a marked increase in the number of publications since the nation-wide ‘riots’ of 2005 (Balaïd 2006; Mauger 2006; Mucchielli and Le Goaziou 2007; Tshimanga, Gondola and Bloom 2009; Koff 2009; Duprez 2009; Moran 2011; Mitchell 2011; Murphy 2011).⁷ A key part of this research concerns the manner in which this coverage contributes to the stigmatisation of the *banlieue* and its inhabitants.

- *The ‘Universal’ Banlieue: A Media Construct?*

Whilst each of France’s 2,200 struggling districts has a distinctive social and economic history, academics working in the field of *banlieue* studies, have underlined the manner in which public discussions of the urban periphery appears to transcend a specific geographical location and act as a metonym for a number of important social issues challenging contemporary French society (for example, crime, unemployment and the ‘integration’ of ethnic minorities). Political scientist Henri Rey observes:

Depuis une quinzaine d’années, évoquer les banlieues ne revient pas à relever que toute agglomération se compose d’une ville-centre et de périphéries [...] et que, par exemple, les trois quarts de ceux que l’on appelle les Parisiens vivent en réalité en banlieue [...] Non, en France plus particulièrement, parler des banlieues c’est désigner le point fragile de l’équilibre social, celui qui risque de rompre.

(Rey 1996: 7).

⁷ The large number of articles, edited volumes and monographs produced on the events of 2005 is a reflection of this incident’s significance in contemporary French history, as it is the first time that unrest in one suburb has spread to other similarly disadvantaged areas across the country. The references provided in the text are a selection of the academic work produced on this event. A more detailed review of this material is made in the first part of this chapter, which examines the 2005 ‘riots’.

As a location in which socio-economic problems and the presence of ethnic minorities are more highly ‘visible’, the *banlieue* has come to represent an epicentre of alterity in contemporary French society. Although it is true that these peri-urban areas suffer higher levels of crime, unemployment and other social problems, such as educational underachievement, it is possible to argue that the widespread ‘fear of the *banlieue*’ (Rey 1996) is a response to the images of suburban dystopia portrayed by the media (and certain apocalyptic *banlieue* films), rather than a reaction to an actual menace to the cohesion of French society. Social historian David-Alexandre Wagner for instance contends:

Le ‘malaise des banlieues’ est peut-être une réalité vécue, de différentes façons, par les habitants qui y vivent, mais c’est aussi et surtout le produit d’un ensemble d’images, de représentations, véhiculées par les médias auprès de l’ensemble de la population. [...] Il apparaît clairement que ces représentations jouent un rôle central à la fois dans la perception qu’ont des banlieues les personnes qui n’y habitent pas, et dans la perception qu’ont d’eux-mêmes les habitants de ces banlieues.

(Wagner 2011: 13).

Wagner highlights the manner in which the media do not just reflect society but play an active role in constructing the manner in which people and places are perceived. This is achieved primarily through the choice of subject matter (for instance, journalists’ tendency to focus on extra-ordinary events such as ‘rioting’ as opposed to ‘ordinary’ life in the *banlieue*), and the manner in which images and terminology are used to represent these incidents. Merely by choosing to adopt the singular to refer to the *banlieue* (as opposed to the plural), over two thousand disadvantaged urban zones are amalgamated into one category. One consequence of this practice is that an incident in one particular suburb, occurring as a result of a specific set of circumstances, is construed as being

representative of a generalised phenomenon of life in the suburbs, thereby, giving rise to the idea of a ‘universal’ *banlieue*.

Wagner’s argument echoes many of the concerns raised by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1996) in his critical analysis of television and journalistic practices. Indeed, Bourdieu (1996: 18-19) cites the representation of the *banlieue* as a prime example of what he describes as television’s proclivity to dramatise events and ‘search for the spectacular’. Additional research appears to support Bourdieu’s belief in television’s power to convince and influence public opinion, due to the medium’s particular ability to evoke what literary critics describe as ‘*l’effet du réel, elle peut faire voir et faire croire à ce qu’elle fait voir*’ (Bourdieu 1996: 20). For example, David Lepoutre’s (2001) anthropological fieldwork in a Parisian suburb, reveals the impact of this coverage on the residents of these stigmatised areas and testifies to a range of reactions induced by this treatment, ranging from the adoption and propagation of these negative stereotypes, to the aggressive rejection of these images. This may result in local people refusing to speak to the journalists and occasionally displaying verbal or physical hostility towards reporters (cf. Lochard 2002: 40).⁸ Alternatively, there have been a number of documented examples in which young people have collaborated with journalists and provided them with ‘ideal’ images and sound-bites, to the extent of staging criminal acts such as arson for the benefit of the television cameras (cf. Boyer and Lochard 1998: 85).⁹

⁸ Perhaps the most emblematic example of this resentment is found in a scene in *La Haine* (Kassovitz, 1995), in which the three young protagonists insult a group of journalists and tell them to go away (in less than polite terms).

⁹ Another more recent example of the manner in which local residents negotiate and resist this territorial stigmatisation on a daily basis is found in sociologists David Garbin and Gareth Millington’s (2012) case study of the infamous Parisian suburb of La Courneuve.

Whilst there now exists a number of studies written on the representation of the *banlieue* in contemporary visual culture (fiction films and news programmes), there is a noticeable absence of material addressing the documentary treatment of this subject, despite the relatively large number of programmes made on this subject. During the course of my analysis of the National Television Archives' (INA) database, I identified 111 documentaries broadcast between 1995 and 2010, which explore aspects of life in the suburban margins. This averages out at around 7 documentaries per year. Unsurprisingly, the channel which features the highest proportion of documentaries is the specialist arts channel Arte (29%), with over fifty per cent of programmes on the *banlieue* broadcast at prime time (8:00-10:30 p.m.), often as part of a themed evening of programmes on urban communities. However, perhaps the most visible indicator of the significance of the *banlieue* in contemporary French society, is the high proportion of programmes found on television's second most watched channel, France 2.

Although France 2 is positioned as a mainstream generalist channel, whose main rival is the privately owned TF1, the channel does have a tradition of investigative reporting with long-running documentary series such as *Infrarouge*. On the whole, France 2 tends to focus on contemporary social issues which attract or concern a wide public, whilst subjects with more limited appeal tend to be reserved for France Televisions' other channels. Comprising 27 per cent of my film corpus, France 2's documentary offering on the *banlieue* outweighs France Televisions' other terrestrial channels which have a more explicit cultural or educational remit (France 3: 13%; France 5: 10%). Moreover, an assessment of France 2's scheduling of these programmes, reveals that over half of these programmes were broadcast in what

constitutes a prominent position for the documentary genre on this channel (Second Time: 10:30 p.m. – 00:00 a.m.). That France 2 regularly broadcasts documentaries on the *banlieue* (averaging nearly 2 programmes a year), and furthermore, places them at a time when audiences are still significant, offers an insight into the prominence of this issue in contemporary France.

In this chapter, I examine a selection of contemporary documentaries and assess the manner in which they contribute to the canon of *banlieue* visual culture. I compare the manner in which documentary film-makers represent the cityscape and population of these disadvantaged suburbs, with the images relayed by news journalism (and where appropriate *cinéma de banlieue*). A central concern of this analysis is to determine the extent to which these non-fictional films offer an alternative view of these peri-urban zones. In order to address this research question, my chapter is divided into two parts. In the first section, I investigate the issue of urban violence (the subject most frequently associated with the *banlieue*), with a case study of the 2005 autumn riots. The second part of this chapter focuses on the documentary representation of the *banlieue* and is comprised of two subsections which explore the ‘extra-ordinary’ and ‘ordinary’ *banlieue*. The first, evaluates two films which review the 2005 riots (*Quand la France s’embrase*, France 2, 2007; *La tentation de l’émeute*, Arte, 2010). A key aim is to evaluate whether these documentaries, benefiting from the length of the genre’s format and their distance from the events of 2005, offer an alternative representation of the riots. I also investigate whether these programmes display a similar tendency found among news journalism to ‘search for the spectacular’ (Bourdieu 1996: 18-19). The second subsection focuses on two documentaries which attempt to deconstruct certain myths commonly portrayed about the *banlieue* and its population, by filming the

‘everyday’ life of ‘ordinary’ people. Bertrand and Nils Tavernier’s *De l’autre côté du périph* (France 2, 1997), made in response to the Debré law on immigration, focuses on the ethnic diversity of the suburbs and the notion of ‘integration’, whilst Yamina Benguigui’s *9/3: La mémoire d’un territoire* (Canal Plus, 2008), offers a social history of Seine-Saint-Denis which reveals the important economic role played by this *département* in France’s post-war economic reconstruction. Finally, the chapter considers whether the period between 1995 and 2010, from which this chapter’s film corpus is sourced, constitutes a modification or continuation of the overall trends identified by Boyer and Lochard (1998) in their study of programmes broadcast on French television between 1950 and 1994.

❖ **The Riots of 2005: Spectacular Journalism and the ‘Universal’ *Banlieue***

From an historical point of view, since the 1970s, there have been frequent outbreaks of urban unrest in the disadvantaged suburbs of France. Yet it was not until 1981, that such incidents gained the attention of the media and became widely reported at a national level. Inaugurated in the *quartier* of Les Minguettes in Vénissieux (a suburb of Lyon), a series of disturbances dubbed by the media as car ‘rodeos’, involving youths joy riding stolen cars around their ‘cité’, often chased by the police, and finishing in the destruction of the vehicle by arson, became a regularly featured news item during the so-called ‘*été chaud*’ of 1981. According to sociologist and media specialist Laurent Mucchielli (2009: 732), the term ‘riot’ was not used until 1990, when a series of more

serious events, including fights between the police and hundreds of individuals, took place in Vaulx-en-Velin (a suburb of Lyon) and Mantes-la-Jolie (Greater Paris), following incidents with the police which resulted in the deaths of two local boys. In the aftermath of these events in 1990, the government set up a Ministry of Urban Affairs tasked with co-ordinating urban policy, and created what Mucchielli (2009: 732) describes as ‘new instruments for repression’, namely the creation of the Anti-Crime Brigades (BAC) and a new section within France’s domestic intelligence agency, the *Renseignements généraux* (RG). Despite the attempt of successive governments to combat urban violence, riots in the *banlieue* have become a recurrent social phenomenon and receive a considerable amount of attention in the media, to the extent that there exist dedicated teams of journalists specialising in the category of ‘violences urbaines’ (Peralva and Macé 2002: 104).¹⁰

Whilst there have been riots both before and after 2005, I have chosen to examine the coverage of the events of October and November 2005 for three reasons. Firstly, for the unprecedented scale and duration of this unrest. During a period of three weeks (October 27 – November 17), over three hundred towns and cities across France became caught up in civil disturbances, causing an estimated 200 million euros worth of damage (according to the French Federation of Insurance Companies), and resulting in the arrest of nearly 5,000 individuals (Mucchielli 2009: 733-734).¹¹ On November 8, twelve days into the crisis, the government chose to declare a state of national

¹⁰ Laurent Mucchielli and Abderrahim Aït Omar (2007: 12) cite 13 riots occurring in suburbs across France between 1995 and 2003. Since 2005, there have also been riots in the *banlieues* of Paris in November 2007 and in July 2009 in the town of Saint-Etienne (Hussein 2011: 56).

¹¹ Sociologist Laurent Mucchielli (2009: 736-737) has identified three separate phases to the autumn unrest. First, the local riot in Clichy-sous-Bois (October 27 – November 1); second, the spread of rioting to neighbouring Parisian suburbs (beginning the night of October 31/November 1); and third, the extension to other parts of France (November 3 onwards).

emergency and put into action the 3 April 1955 decree permitting local authorities to instigate a curfew. Originally passed by parliament to contain civil unrest in France during the Algerian War of Independence, the legislation had not been used subsequently in the Hexagon, until November 2005.¹² In second place, this three-week period also saw an unparalleled amount of coverage and debate in the media. TF1 and France 2 evening news programmes devoted respectively 163 and 152 reports on the *banlieue* over these twenty one days of violence, averaging 8 news items per bulletin for the commercial channel and 7 reports for the public service broadcaster, with a peak on November 9 (TF1: 16 items; France 2: 14 items).¹³ A final reason for examining the 2005 riots is due to the significant influence these events have had on raising public, political and academic awareness in France of the need to debate and take action on issues such as: discrimination (racial, class, territorial), *banlieue* policing, immigration and the place of ethnic minorities in society, citizenship, unemployment and educational underachievement. Tshimanga, Gondola and Bloom (2009: 7-8) have for example argued that the events of 2005 mark a ‘rupture’ in French society that ‘has shattered the French idea of universalism’ and revealed a need to build ‘an inclusionary French social model of the future’.

¹² The only other occasion the 1955 law has been used is in 1986, when President François Mitterand invoked the decree to put down separatist unrest in French New Caledonia (Tshimanga, Gondola and Bloom 2009: 5). Considering that, on 8 November 2005, the majority of incidents had peaked by this time, and calm was returning to the streets in many areas, certain figures, such as the politician, Patrick Braouezec (2006: 45), have questioned the necessity of implementing the decree at this late stage. Similarly, the wisdom of utilising a piece of legislation associated with such a socially divisive period in France’s recent history is also contentious. As only seven out of the twenty-five *départements* authorised to impose a curfew chose to do so (Mucchielli 2009: 734), it is likely that political factors, rather than practical necessity, influenced this decision; an attempt to reassure the public that the government was actively working to restore order to the streets.

¹³ Statistics compiled from the *Institut national de l’audiovisuel*’s database during the course of my research into the 2005 riots for this chapter.

As is often the case in outbreaks of civil unrest in suburban France, the riots of 2005 were triggered by an incident in a Parisian *banlieue* involving the police and a number of teenagers. On 27 October 2005, the police were called in to investigate an alleged theft at a building site in Clichy-sous-Bois, a suburb of the infamous Seine-Saint-Denis *département*. Having attended the scene, the police proceeded to question a group of six adolescents who were in the area at the time of the theft. Not wishing to be detained by the authorities, the group of boys split up and fled the scene. Three of the teenagers climbed over a fence and sought refuge in an EDF electrical power station. Fifteen-year old Zyed Benna and his seventeen-year old friend Bouna Traoré were fatally electrocuted, with the third boy, Muhittin Altun aged seventeen, escaping with severe burns.¹⁴ As news of the deaths circulated, and rumours of a police chase spread, a number of local youths descended into the street to express their anger. A night of arson and vandalism ensued, during which firemen attending the scene were attacked with projectiles.

Such events are not uncommon in socio-economically disadvantaged areas of France where a state of tension between local inhabitants and the police often prevails. Confrontations between the police and young people are a regular occurrence and, over the years, there have been a number of teenagers who have died (whether indirectly or

¹⁴ It was later found that the alleged theft at the building site had not actually taken place and that the group of teenagers were said to have been taking a short cut on their way home after playing football. According to the lawyers hired by the families of the three victims, the boys fled from the police, as they did not have their identity cards with them. This would have meant being detained at the police station, thereby missing the breaking of the Ramadan fast with their families (cf. Mignard and Tordjman 2006 for more details).

directly) as a result of police intervention in their suburb.¹⁵ As was the case with the deaths of Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré in October 2005, vandalism and violence are often the subsequent responses to these tragic incidents. Whilst the events in Clichy-sous-Bois are not particularly unique, the manner in which the unrest spread nationwide to other *banlieues* is the first example of a ‘processus d’identification collective’ (Mucchielli 2007: 5) taking place amongst the country’s disadvantaged urban population. As a result, a significant part of the research into the 2005 riots attempts to identify possible reasons to explain why a local misadventure in Clichy-sous-Bois became a national crisis. Two notable lines of analysis concern the political handling of the riots and the role of the media.

Sociologist Nasser Demiati (2007), for example, assesses Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy’s management of the events of autumn 2005. In particular, Demiati focuses on Sarkozy’s statements made to the press following the deaths in Clichy-sous-Bois (October 28) and in response to a tear gas grenade being set off inside the Bilal mosque in Clichy-sous-Bois (October 30). Demiati (2007: 68) highlights the manner in which the Interior Minister’s rhetoric during the riots consistently sought to criminalise young people (including the victims of the EDF power station) and place the blame for the unrest on the existence of an anti-institutional culture in the *banlieue* and the presence of criminal gangs who were said to be orchestrating the violence. Sarkozy’s choice of language, especially his use of the term *racaille* (rabble, trash, scum) to describe young people living in the *banlieue*, coupled with his declaration of his

¹⁵ For example, in December 1998 a riot broke out in the Grand Mirail suburb of Toulouse as a result of the death of Habib, a seventeen-year old boy, who bled to death in the street after being shot by a policeman (see Peralva and Macé (2002: 119-121) for a detailed analysis of the media’s coverage of this event). For an analysis of the confrontational nature of the relationship between the police and young people living in the *banlieue*, see Sire-Marín (2006: 116-130) and Mohammed and Mucchielli (2007: 104-125).

determination to ‘clear’ the suburbs of these trouble-makers, are also cited by Demiati (2007: 58) as examples of the confrontational and ‘provocative attitude’ adopted by the minister. Although Demiati (2007: 58) qualifies Sarkozy’s role during the riots as akin to the behaviour of a ‘pompier-pyromane’ (fireman-arsonist), he does acknowledge, by way of conclusion, that it is the difficult living conditions of these neglected suburbs that are ultimately responsible for this outbreak of civil disobedience. Nevertheless, the sociologist maintains that:

il est indéniable que le langage injurieux du ministre de l’Intérieur [...] et sa gestion des événements portée par une surenchère sécuritaire et un soutien inconditionnel aux opérations de police [...] ont contribué à attiser et sans doute à amplifier des violences.

(Demiati 2007: 75).

A similar argument is put forward by sociologist Gérard Mauger (2006: 29-30), who contends that the rapidity of Sarkozy’s response to the Clichy-sous-Bois incident, in which he disclosed that the youths were suspected of being involved in a theft at a building site and denied that the police gave chase to the boys, might have acted as a contributing factor to the development of a feeling of anger and solidarity between young people living in other *banlieues* across France: ‘en attribuant un cambriolage aux victimes, il les prive de l’innocence associée au statut de victime, en niant que les policiers les ont poursuivis, il exonère la police de toute responsabilité’. The lawyers Jean-Pierre Mignard and Emmanuel Tordjman, acting on behalf of the three families involved in the Clichy-sous-Bois tragedy, also insist that the Interior Minister’s rejection of the possible innocence of the boys, at a time when the investigation was only in its preliminary stages, consolidated the feeling among young people living in the *banlieue* ‘qu’on ne faisait plus de distinction, qu’ils étaient tous considérés comme des

adversaires, des étrangers à ce pays en somme, qu'ils soient majeurs ou mineurs, délinquants ou victimes' (Mignard and Tordjman 2006: 52).

Whilst academics such as Demiati (2007) and Mauger (2006) are critical of Sarkozy's (mis)management of the 2005 urban violence, political scientist Harlan Koff (2009: 772), draws attention to the widespread public support for the repressive policing tactics used to quash the unrest, noting that the popularity of the Interior Minister rose by eleven per cent, following the application of the 3 April 1955 decree permitting local authorities to instigate a curfew. Similarly, sociologist Véronique Le Goaziou's (2007: 38-39) analysis of approximately five hundred *Agence France Presse's* dispatches, issued by members of the ten largest political parties during the three weeks of rioting, reveals that there was a total absence of debate or discussion of the measures implemented by the government to restore order. Indeed, she concludes that on all sides of the political spectrum there was a consensus: to condemn the acts of violence taking place; to avoid commenting on the social and economic failures of policies of urban regeneration; to elide the question of how these areas are policed. According to Le Goaziou (2007: 41), even the largest party in opposition, the *Parti socialiste* appeared to have signed a 'pact of non-aggression' with the government. Although certain members of the Socialist Party were critical of Sarkozy, significantly it was his confrontational style and language that were condemned, rather than his choice of policy.

In December 2005, the official report into the riots conducted by the *Renseignements généraux* (RG), concluded that the unrest was a spontaneous event that had not, as the Interior Minister had suggested, been orchestrated by any form of

organised group.¹⁶ Alec G. Hargreaves (2007: 8-9) interprets the widespread acceptance of the RG's report among the political classes and the mainstream media, as marking an important change in attitude towards the *banlieue*. During the 1980s and 1990s, it had been common to blame outbreaks of urban violence on the failure of immigrants to 'integrate' into French society and to ignore the failure of successive government to improve the social and economic prospects of the *banlieue*. In 2005, Hargreaves asserts that only a minority adopted the strategy of blaming the disorder on Islamic extremists or cultural incompatibility:

In other words, the disturbances in the *banlieues* arose not from some alien cultural force preying on France from without but from failings within the fabric of French society itself, for which the responsibility lay to a very considerable extent on the majority ethnic side.

(Hargreaves 2007: 9).

Nevertheless, whilst it may be correct to argue that there was an *overall* change in attitude, the high-profile exposure given to some of the more outrageous comments made during the unrest, suggests that the French media did not always show such moderation or care in their coverage. One such example of this tendency to 'search for the spectacular' (Bourdieu 1996: 18), is the attention given to the comments made by philosopher Alain Finkielkraut, who denied that the riots were a reaction to racism or poverty, but were fuelled by an ethno-racial element: 'Ils ne sont pas malheureux, ils sont musulmans'. These remarks, made to the Israeli journal *Haaretz* (18 November 2005), were reprised in the respected centre-left newspaper *Le Monde* (18 November 2005), which featured Finkielkraut's comments on its front page, alongside claims that

¹⁶ The findings of the *Renseignements généraux*'s investigation were published in the daily newspaper *Le Parisien* (07.12.2005).

polygamous families unable to control their children were responsible for the riots.¹⁷ Whilst the media's decision to give substantial publicity for such extreme views is questionable in the least, for social scientist Alain Bertho, it is the absence of any critical appraisal of these opinions that is a particular cause for concern:

Quand un ministre dénonce la polygamie comme cause des violences, c'est sur la polygamie que titre la presse, et pas sur l'énormité du propos... Quand Alain Finkielkraut se laisse aller à des propos inqualifiables mais sans ambiguïté dans un journal israélien, *Le Monde* lui fournit une page entière pour répéter la même chose en termes plus châtiés...

(Bertho 2006: 31-32).

Mauger (2006: 50) also emphasises the manner in which journalists focused during the riots on 'les événements les plus spectaculaires et les plus scandaleux, quand bien même il s'agissait d'événements isolés [...] ou sans rapport avec l'émeute'. Taken together, the media's selection of the most sensationalist comments and incidents arguably had the potential to exacerbate tensions and anger in the marginalised suburbs and to increase the sense of insecurity among the public, thereby resulting in the further stigmatisation of these urban areas as epicentres of alterity and lawlessness.

However, interviews with young people who witnessed or participated in the 2005 riots reveal that neither the Interior Minister's handling of the Clichy-sous-Bois incident, nor the media's coverage of events were the principal causes for the spread of violence. Mucchielli (2009: 744) reports that in both of the suburbs where he carried out his fieldwork, the primary reason given by rioters for their participation in the

¹⁷ The 'polygamy' theory was promoted by several figures in authority. For example, Hargreaves (2007: 4-5) refers to comments made by the permanent secretary of the Académie française, Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, in a *Le Monde* article (17.11.2005); Le Goaziou (2007: 54-55) points to remarks made by the President of the UMP party in the *Assemblée nationale* (reported on radio station RTL, 16.11.2005), which were subsequently repeated by the Minister for Work, Gérard Larcher, in an interview with the *Financial Times*.

violence was to express anger at their daily experiences of being humiliated and treated as ‘second-rate citizens’ in their dealings with the police, the education system and their lack of employment possibilities. As a result, ‘[u]nderlying their revolt we find feelings of injustice, abandonment and rejection. They are under the impression that they have no future and that the rest of society is cynical towards them. This ends up constituting a mentality that I call “collective victimisation”’ (Mucchielli 2009: 744). Anthropologist John P. Murphy (2011: 46) also testifies to the existence of a similar sentiment of frustration among the rioters he interviewed in Limoges, that indicated ‘the existence of a nascent collective consciousness based not on any common *cultural* “otherness” but on an awareness of sharing precarious *social* (class) positions’. According to Mucchielli (2009: 747-748), this sense of precariousness is due to a ‘two-fold crisis’ in the integration of suburban youth into society. The first predicament is found at a socio-economic level, and is epitomised by the difficulties experienced by this group in finding employment. Without work, access to social status and the sense of having a place in society is hindered. Secondly, Mucchielli contends there is a symbolic and political crisis of integration as:

access to citizenship is made particularly difficult for these young men, who view themselves as completely overlooked by the model that prevails in the present political order, who are no longer solicited or represented by the traditional political forces, and who are relatively unprepared for the construction of independent, sustained, non-violent collective action as opposed to the fleeting, hot-blooded outbreaks embodied by riots.

(Mucchielli 2009: 747).

Although the events of autumn 2005 were a spontaneous outbreak of violence, without any of the explicit demands or attempts to explain these acts usually found in other forms of social protest, Mucchielli (2009: 747) concludes that the riots did convey a

political message of sorts (Mauger 2006 has described this as a ‘proto-political’ form of protest). Contrary to the accusations of a culture of anti-republicanism or anti-institutional behaviour, Mucchielli (2009: 748) argues that the rioters were not challenging the state, but were instead ‘appealing about their future in French society’. In other words, these young people were expressing a desire to contribute and participate in society and were ‘protesting their exclusion from the basic Republican ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*’ (Koff 2009: 787).

Having outlined the arguments put forward by academics researching the possible causes for the 2005 riots, in the next section of this chapter, I investigate the manner in which the two main national evening news programmes on TF1 and France 2 represented these events. The primary aim of this discussion is not to determine whether this coverage potentially incited violence (aside from sociological research, such as that carried out by Mucchielli 2009 and Murphy 2011, this is difficult to prove either way), but to examine the manner in which the geographical landscape of the *banlieue* and its inhabitants are portrayed. This will provide the opportunity to assess the extent to which such coverage contributes to the construction of the concept of the ‘universal’ *banlieue* as an epicentre of alterity and subsequently engenders the stigmatisation and ‘fear of the *banlieue*’ (Rey 1996) frequently encountered in French society.

- *TF1 and France 2's 'Search for the Spectacular'*

In general terms, the coverage of the riots on TF1 and France 2 may be separated into three types of news items. The first, and by far the largest category, is comprised of reports which cover the acts of vandalism and violence that took place during the autumn unrest of 2005. This may take the form of a report depicting the aftermath of a night of rioting (for instance, burnt-out cars and buildings), or dramatic 'live action' footage of confrontations between the various police forces and hundreds of youths (usually filmed behind police lines). Reactions to the incidents by local residents and politicians are also featured in this type of reporting. The second group, concerns news items which purport to explain or provide context for the violence. During the riots, both channels included a number of reports outlining the socio-economic difficulties of the *banlieue*, for instance, the high rate of unemployment, low educational achievement and poor transport links, as well as providing an assessment of whether urban policies, such as the creation of the *Zones d'éducation prioritaire* (ZEP) in 1981, have had any effect on addressing these issues. The third type of report offers 'positive' news stories from the *banlieue*, portraying examples of outer-city areas that have managed to 'turn a corner', through successful local authority investment, or the work of community support groups. Likewise, there are a number of pieces which profile young adults born in these disadvantaged suburbs who have become successful entrepreneurs in their local community.

Over the three weeks of coverage, reports on the violence ('Type 1') made up approximately 74% of the total coverage on TF1 and 83% on France 2.¹⁸ Social context news items ('Type 2') were more often featured on TF1 (19%) than France 2 (10%), however, examples of 'positive' reporting ('Type 3') were roughly equal at around the seven per cent mark. The analysis of the running order of the news bulletins during the riots, also reveals that coverage of the violence was prominently featured as headline news. Over the twenty-one days of coverage, the riots featured as the first or second news item on a total of 18 occasions for TF1 and 19 for France 2. 'Type 2' and '3' reports were placed in the latter parts of the programmes.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine every aspect of the television coverage of the riots on France 2 and TF1.¹⁹ Instead, I concentrate on examining the manner in which the cityscape of the *banlieue* and the youth population are represented during the unrest, as this provides the basis for a visual comparison with the documentary portrayal of the same events to be explored shortly. This analysis will provide the opportunity to comment on journalistic practices (to determine the extent to which Bourdieu's (1996: 18) 'search for the spectacular' is applicable) and explore in what way this aesthetic approach contributes to the construction of the *banlieue* as an epicentre of alterity.

¹⁸ All statistics referring to news coverage of TF1 and France 2 are drawn from my own analysis of the INA database.

¹⁹ Although I have not come across any literature which specifically examines the television coverage of the riots, sociologist Gérard Mauger (2006) does refer occasionally to the audiovisual medium to provide a point of comparison for his study of the written press during the autumn unrest of 2005.

- *Suburban Cityscapes: Representations of Alterity*

In this section, I investigate the depiction of the *banlieue* in ‘Type 1’ reports that cover the effects of the riots on the urban landscape and contrast this with the representation of the ‘ordinary’ *banlieue*, found mainly in ‘Type 2’ reports, which attempt to provide context on life in the marginalised suburbs. With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to designate October 28 as ‘Day One’ of the coverage of the 2005 riots, yet at the time of broadcast, there was nothing to indicate that this incident in Clichy-sous-Bois was anything other than yet another *fait divers* in a *banlieue* which had a tragic outcome. It is therefore interesting to compare the early treatment of the events in Clichy-sous-Bois with later footage when the riots had spread nation-wide, ultimately provoking the declaration of a state of emergency.

From a visual perspective, TF1 and France 2’s initial report on the Clichy-sous-Bois incident (broadcast on October 28), demonstrate significant similarities in the representation of the cityscape (Figure 2.1). Both news items open with an image of a burning car (*Left*), include footage of the aftermath of the night’s unrest (*Middle*), and depict a damaged fire-engine which came under attack during the riot (*Right*). The decision of both channels to introduce the news item with a burning car is unlikely to be a coincidence, given the manner in which this particular image has become a symbol of civil disturbances in the *banlieue*, ever since 1981, when the car ‘rodeos’ in Les Minguettes first came to the attention of the national media.²⁰ A comparison with other ‘Type 1’ reports made during the 2005 riots, reveals a strong consistency in the visual

²⁰ The burning car’s iconic status as a sign of civil unrest is further supported by its frequent appearance in *cinéma de banlieue* in films such as *La Haine* (Kassovitz 1995).

content of this category of news item, which tends to incorporate: dramatic and ‘colourful’ pictures of burning cars (and other property); ‘action footage’ of the police and firemen endeavouring to re-establish order to the streets; confrontations between the police and local youths; and images of the destruction caused by the violence that often include interviews with shocked residents. The effect of this visual standardisation transforms what is an individual event, occurring as a result of a specific set of circumstances, into an illustration of a wider phenomenon. Each incident therefore acts



Figure 2.1

Note the similarities between the images, as if the journalists from both channels were following each other around (*top row*: TF1; *bottom row*: France 2).

Left column: Burning cars. The opening images of TF1 and France 2’s news coverage of the Clichy-sous-Bois incident broadcast on 28.10.2005. *Middle column*: The aftermath of a night of rioting. *Right column*: Close-up of a fire-engine’s windscreen, damaged during a skirmish.

as a further illustration or ‘proof’ of the existence of a ‘universal’ *banlieue*, which regardless of geographical location, is constantly awash with ‘feral youth’ committing acts of vandalism and violence. This is particularly visible in France 2’s coverage on October 28, in which the attack on the firemen is linked to other such examples, including the extra-ordinary occasion in 2001 when a fire-engine was ambushed in

Aulnay-sous-Bois, after being lured out by a hoax call. The Clichy-sous-Bois incident serves as a pretext to recycle dramatic footage of the ambush in Aulnay-sous-Bois and thereby adds spectacular ‘action’ to the ‘static’ visuals of the fire-engine damaged in the disturbances during the night of October 27.

In addition to a notable penchant for spectacular images, the reporting on the unrest in Clichy-sous-Bois also demonstrates an inclination for sensationalist language to describe the *banlieue*. Perhaps the most commonly recurring theme is the description of the suburbs as a war zone. For example, the newsreaders of both channels refer to the outbreak of violence and vandalism as ‘guérilla urbaine’ on October 29, a term which is reused by France 2 on November 3 and 5, when civil disturbances had spread to neighbouring Parisian suburbs and to other towns across France. Likewise, TF1’s coverage includes a number of sound-bites from residents which refer to a state of warfare: ‘On se serait cru en temps de guerre’ (October 28), ‘on se croirait en guerre’ (November 3).²¹ A particularly vivid example of the prevalence of this war-like imagery, present even in the early stages of the autumn unrest, is found in TF1’s report from Clichy-sous-Bois on October 29. Although both channels feature ‘live action’ footage of confrontations between police and local youths on ‘Day Two’ of the coverage, it is TF1’s report which most readily exploits the audio and visual potential of the medium to reinforce the drama of the footage. Visually, this is achieved by juxtaposing footage of groups of youths throwing projectiles at the police lines, with images filmed behind the ranks of police as they respond to the violence (Figure 2.2).

The montage of this sequence therefore offers a visual illustration of the accompanying

²¹ Although France 2’s interviews with local people do not explicitly use the word ‘guerre’, a similar sense of menace is implied with comments such as ‘Je rentre chez moi toute suite et je ne sors plus. Ah oui, on est inquiet [...]’ (young mother interviewed on October 28).

commentary, which describes the clash between the police and young people in war-like terms:

A chacun ses armes. D'un côté, une variété de projectiles: bouteilles, barres de fer, blocs de pierre. De l'autre, la riposte des CRS [riot police]: 150 tirs de flash-balls, une cinquantaine de bombes lacrymogènes. Environ 300 jeunes de la cité face à 400 policiers. La ligne de front la voilà: la principale rue du quartier.
(TF1 newsreader, October 29).

In addition to the choice of language, the journalist's short sentences also heighten the tension, whilst the use of the present tense adds a sense of immediacy to the footage. The sense of danger, conveyed by the visual and verbal approach of the report, is further increased by the inclusion of shaky hand-held camera work, as the reporters run with the police to escape being hit by objects being thrown at them from the roofs and windows of the high-rise blocks.



Figure 2.2
From *left to right*: Sequence depicting clashes between police and rioters in Clichy-sous-Bois, broadcast on 29.10.2005. The juxtaposition of footage filmed from different perspectives reinforces the drama of this confrontation and the war-like imagery used in the reporter's voice-over commentary.

Whilst it would be incorrect to suggest that such confrontations do not pose a risk of injury for journalists attempting to report on these events, the treatment of this particular incident is designed to enhance the spectacle for the viewer, through careful editing and a commentary which demonstrates a flair for the dramatic. This reinforces the notion of the *banlieue* as a place of lawlessness, where outsiders are met with hostility, and where the police are only able to enter in large numbers. Significantly, the initial coverage of the Clichy-sous-Bois incident reveals a similar readiness to dramatise and ‘search for the spectacular’ (whether visual or verbal) as later coverage of the unrest does. For instance, at the height of the riots, TF1 chose to focus on only the most violent events, often prefacing the opening news item with the phrase ‘L’incident le plus grave s’est déroulé à ...’. Although it is understandable that, due to the number of incidents, it was not possible to cover every disturbance, the potential effect of this selection process is to distort the scale and severity of the riots for the viewer, thereby inflating the construction of the *banlieue* as a no-go area. Likewise, if the aim of certain young people participating in acts of vandalism was to obtain the attention of the media, the ‘search for the spectacular’ may arguably have incited an escalation in the violence to ensure coverage.

Whereas at the peak of the 2005 riots, TF1 opened its bulletins with a report on the most violent incident of the previous night of rioting, France 2 often began its programme with an item which compiled footage from a range of disturbances that had taken place in different suburbs across France. For example, on November 5, France 2’s news programme includes within the same report, images from Toulouse, Lille, Rouen, Yvelines and Aubervilliers (Ile-de-France). On the one hand, this approach provides an economical solution (in terms of airtime used) to the challenge of

representing the magnitude of the riots. On the other hand, the absence of accompanying graphic titles renders it difficult to separate the images of destruction from each other; it is only by listening to the accompanying commentary that the viewer is able to distinguish footage shot in the northern town of Lille from the south-west city of Toulouse: ‘Une concession automobile à Toulouse. Un centre EDF à Lille. Un bus incendié à Rouen et ses passagers sortis *in extremis* [...]’. However, even though this verbal description enables the differentiation of the images, it might also conceivably incite an amalgamation of these incidents into one large riot occurring simultaneously across France. In other words, the result is to transform a series of local outbreaks of violence into a national event, potentially reinforcing certain political interpretations made at the time, which suggested a co-ordinated orchestration of the violence by criminal gangs. Alternately, the merging of these separate acts of vandalism contributes to the construction of a ‘universal’ *banlieue* that transcends a specific geographical location, in a similar way that the comparison made between the attack on the firemen in Clichy-sous-Bois and the pre-meditated ambush of a fire-engine in Aulnay-sous-Bois (France 2, October 28), is used to provide evidence of the widespread nature of this type of behaviour.

The high-profile use of statistics to quantify the extent of the damage inflicted during the unrest also achieves a similar amalgamating effect. Daily updates of the number of vehicles set alight, the amount of arrests made, and the number of towns caught up in the unrest, are just some of the figures offered up to the audience to illustrate the extent of the destruction and chaos on the streets:

Phénomène nouveau pour cette neuvième nuit d'émeutes dans les cités: les violences se sont donc étendues à plusieurs villes de province, dont Rennes, Strasbourg, Toulouse, Pau et Bordeaux. Au total 897 véhicules ont été brûlés, ainsi que des écoles, des centres commerciaux, des entrepôts. Plus de 250 personnes ont été interpellées.

(TF1 newsreader, November 5).

Après treize jours de violences urbaines, l'état d'urgence est entré dans les faits la nuit dernière. Le décret indique que vingt-cinq départements sont potentiellement concernés [...] Depuis près de deux semaines, au total 6,000 voitures ont brûlé sur le territoire français [...] 173 personnes ont été condamnées à de la prison ferme depuis le début des violences.

(France 2 newsreader, November 9).

By itself, the inclusion of such statistics may appear anodyne, an attempt to paint a more precise or detailed picture of the events. However, during the extension of the violence outside the Greater Parisian area, the use of such figures became a central part of the television coverage of the riots on both channels.

TF1 also provided a geographical dimension to these numbers, offering the viewer a breakdown of the incidents on a region-by-region basis, with the helpful addition of a series of maps pinpointing flash-points (Figure 2.3). The potential for this approach to incite additional violence, appears to have been recognised a week into the riots, with the *Renseignements Généraux* issuing a notice urging the media to refrain from such coverage; a plea that was met with varying degrees of success. As Mauger (2006: 50) points out, the daily updating of a map of France had the



Figure 2.3

Top: Map of France depicting towns affected by outbreaks of violence (TF1: 06.11.2005).

Bottom: Regional analysis of affected areas in Greater Paris (TF1: 05.11.2005).

potential effect of offering an unintentional ‘invitation to join in the movement’. To this, I would add that the daily updating of the number of vehicles set alight also had the potential to introduce a form of ‘competitive rioting’: either, to surpass the previous night’s score, or to outdo another rival neighbourhood in the scale of damage or disruption. Moreover, sociological fieldwork carried out by Mucchielli (2009) indicates that the effect of such coverage is particularly discernible at a local level between contiguous urban areas, rather than between suburbs located in different parts of the country:

When TV or newspapers publish maps showing the number of cars burning in the different neighbourhoods of a city, they do stimulate comparison and motivation among some young people. Likewise, when the media question why the rioting has ‘still not’ spread to a particular neighbourhood, and when they speak about the local authorities’ fears, they bring to mind what Robert K. Merton used to call a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ (Boucher 2006).

(Mucchielli 2009: 739).

Overall, the analysis of the representation of the cityscape in ‘Type 1’ reports reveals an urban landscape lit at night by the fires of torched vehicles, and by day, filled with burnt-out carcasses of cars and buildings. A picture of a suburban dystopia is equally conveyed by the ‘live action’ sequences depicting confrontations between the police and young people, which further reinforce the impression of the *banlieue* as a no-go area. The tendency of such news items to ‘search for the spectacular’ and enhance the drama of such incidents, through the careful structuring of a report’s visual and audio content, further contributes to the construction of these marginalised outer-city areas as epicentres of alterity, where the rule of law and respect for social hierarchy has broken down. Similarly, the ‘amalgamation effect’ achieved by linking incidents occurring in separate suburbs often years apart, as well as by using maps and statistics, actively

constructs the notion of a ‘universal’ *banlieue*, which regardless of geographical location, is awash with ‘feral youth’ committing acts of vandalism and violence. As a result, this visual standardisation in the representation of France’s peri-urban zones, whether an isolated *fait divers* or on the national scale of the 2005 riots, plays a significant role in creating ‘*la peur des banlieues*’ (Rey 1996) and the stigmatisation of these areas and the population that resides there.

Admittedly, this effect is somewhat inevitable given the nature of the events being reported. Described by Mucchielli (2009: 731) as the ‘most important riot in the history of contemporary French society’, the extensive news coverage of the autumn unrest of 2005 is equally a reflection of the unprecedented scale and duration of this outbreak of violence in France’s suburbs. Nevertheless, an examination of the manner in which the cityscape is represented in ‘Type 2’ reports, which describe ‘ordinary’ life in the *banlieue*, demonstrates a similar, if less overt, construction of alterity.

Over the course of the three weeks of rioting, an examination of the aesthetic approach in ‘Type 2’ reports, reveals consistent similarities in both channels’ representation of the urban landscape, despite the changes in location and personnel. For example, the architecture of the suburbs is framed in three different ways. The first group of images, films the buildings of the cityscape at an extreme wide-angle, positioned either close to the ground or from a rooftop (Figure 2.4). This enables the viewer to visualise the monumental size of these structures and appreciate the manner in which they dwarf the surrounding area. When the first *grands ensembles* were built in the 1950s, panoramic views of the cityscape (sometimes shot from a helicopter) were frequently used in promotional films and literature to proclaim the visionary nature of

the enterprise as the future of urban planning.²² However, by the 1970s, journalists were using the same footage to evoke the ‘inhuman’ or ‘monstrous’ nature of the *banlieue*’s architecture (cf. LeVasseur 2011: 40). Whilst reports providing social context made by journalists during the 2005 riots, do not explicitly use the terminology of the 1970s, there are a number of references to the replacement of these high-density buildings with structures ‘à taille plus humaine’ (for instance, TF1: November 4; France 2: November 3). This suggests that, thirty years or so later, journalists continue to perceive and present the architecture of the suburbs as dehumanising in scale and structure.

This argument is further supported by the appraisal of the second category of footage which films an individual building at a low angle looking upwards to the (often absent) sky above (Figure 2.5). Regardless of whether the cameraman uses a fixed-frame image or a vertical panning shot to frame an edifice in this manner, the effect is analogous to the wide-angle images discussed above, in that it emphasises the magnitude of the architecture. Often blocking out the sky, the buildings shot from below appear to tower above the individual standing at street level, potentially



Figure 2.4

Top: Wide-angle shot of a monumental *barre* in a suburb of Nancy. Built in the 1960s it was designed to house 16,000 people (TF1: 02.11.2005).
Bottom: Panoramic view shot from a roof displaying a complex of high-density blocks in an unidentified suburb (France 2: 04.11.2005).

²² Cf. Boyer and Locharde (1998: 77-90) for more information. Alternatively, the documentary *Faits divers à la une* (France 3, 2003) offers a chronological overview of the changing representation of the *banlieue* landscape in non-fiction visual culture.



Figure 2.5

Low angle framing of urban architecture.

Left: Tower block in Bobigny, a suburb of Seine-Saint-Denis (TF1: 05.11.2005).

Right: High-rise block in Nancy (France 2: 03.11.2005).

contributing to a sense of insignificance. The uniformity of the cityscape and the sense of being trapped in a hostile concrete environment of gargantuan proportions is also conveyed in the third and final group of images, which fill the frame of the camera with a portion of a high-rise building (Figure 2.6). These images are often filmed at a right angle and in fixed-frame cinematography, an aesthetic approach which reinforces the cuboid nature of the succession of windows and uniform living quarters; the ‘square’ framing creates a frame within a frame, thereby increasing the impression of being boxed in by the urban landscape. As if to illustrate more overtly the sense of imprisonment, certain shots of this type also include the occasional lone individual looking out from a window or balcony.



Figure 2.6

Top: Detail of a high-rise building in an unidentified suburb (TF1: 02.11.2005)

Bottom: Spatial confinement in Clichy-sous-Bois (France 2: 31.10.2005)

Local residents are frequently included in footage which describes the urban environment of the suburbs. Leaving aside the bite-sized samples of public opinion that often add a sensationalist element to the report (for instance, ‘on se serait cru en temps

de guerre'), people are generally filmed at a sufficient distance to provide anonymity. However, the analysis of these sequences underlines a marked propensity of both channels to focus almost exclusively on the 'visible' minorities of the *banlieue* population. This not only distorts the diversity of origins found in these outer-city neighbourhoods (which also include an established white working class community made up of 'français de souche' and significant groups of people with origins in southern and eastern European countries), but also further inscribes the *banlieue* as a space of alterity, by adding an ethnic 'otherness' to this urban landscape. The number of veiled women included in such shots, also associates this space with the presence of Islam. Taken together, the portrayal of the cityscape in 'ordinary' footage of the *banlieue* conveys a distinct sense of spatial, ethnic and religious alterity. Irrespective of changes in location, time, personnel and television channel, the visual consistency in the representation of this suburban space is such that footage shot in one *banlieue* appears almost identical to images filmed in another. As a result, this aesthetic standardisation reduces the specificity of the footage and arguably contributes an additional facet to the construction of a 'universal' *banlieue* that transcends geographical location.

Whilst the construction of the *banlieue* as an epicentre of alterity is especially evident in the coverage of the 2005 riots on both channels, it is by no means exclusive to this particular event or genre of visual culture. Film specialist Carrie Tarr's (2005) assessment of the representation of urban space in French *cinéma de banlieue* reveals an almost identical visual approach to the cityscape:

The *mise-en-scène* of space in *banlieue* films emphasises the ways in which its protagonists are blocked and fenced in by their surroundings: typically, shots of anonymous high-rise flats and graffiti-covered walls block their horizon and imprison them in spaces of socio-economic deprivation, alienation and isolation. (Tarr 2005: 20).

Mireille Le Breton (2011: 135) also identifies a tendency in ‘*beur*’ literature of the 1980s and 1990s, to depict the spatial landscape of the *banlieue* as a ‘monstrous territory personified to devour the body and soul of its inhabitants’. Characters in novels of this period are seen as ‘victims of their environment’ unable to fight ‘a form of geographical determinism where territories act upon passive characters’ (Le Breton 2011: 135). Similarly, the depiction of the *banlieue* as a space of ethnic and religious alterity is also found in visual culture. Boyer and Lochar’s (1998) research reveals that non-fictional representations of the *banlieue* in the 1980s were dominated by the ‘discovery’ of the second-generation *beur* population (of North African origin) and the issues of integration and immigration, whilst in the 1990s, the suburbs became increasingly associated with radical forms of Islam. *Cinéma de banlieue* specialists Tarr (2005) and Wagner (2011), also testify to corresponding trends in the fictional genre. Consequently, it would appear that the portrayal of the *banlieue* in news journalism (analysed here through the perspective of the 2005 riots) is part of a wider network of visual and literary representations that also transmit the idea of the urban periphery as an epicentre of alterity.²³

²³ Nonetheless, recent scholarship has pointed to the emergence of a number of authors and film-makers who actively set out to contest the spatial alterity of the *banlieue*. For instance, Wagner (2011: 317) argues that since the turn of the millennium, the cityscape of the *banlieue* is generally depicted in a more positive light in fictional films, with fewer sequences depicting the vertiginous scale of the architecture of the *grands ensembles*. Likewise, Le Breton (2011: 135) highlights a number of post-2000 novels which ‘are working to “break the stereotypes” and to “re-humanise” the *banlieue*’. It would seem from my analysis of the 2005 riots, that this change is not necessarily visible in representation of the *banlieue* in news journalism.

- *'Feral Youth' and the Socio-Cultural Alterity of the Banlieue*

In this final section, I examine the manner in which young suburban residents are depicted in TF1 and France 2's coverage of the 2005 riots. Specifically, I explore the way the youthful population of the *banlieue* are often criminalised as a group or divided into 'les vrais jeunes' and 'les voyous' (Nicolas Sarkozy, interviewed on TF1 on 30 October 2005). I also assess a number of 'Type 3' reports which offer 'positive' examples of young adults born in the socio-economically deprived suburbs who have become successful entrepreneurs. This provides the opportunity to discuss whether these attempts to provide 'balance' and demonstrate that not all young people are necessarily criminals, actually helps to reduce the stigmatisation of this social group.

During the course of the autumn unrest of 2005, the most frequent representation of young people is found in 'Type 1' reports, which depict them actively confronting the police or committing acts of vandalism and violence. In 'live action' footage of clashes between the police and suburban youth, the rioters are filmed at a distance, from the perspective of the officers attempting to stand their ground as they are hit by projectiles (cf. Figure 2.1). Whilst the decision of the journalists to stand on the side of the police line to film the sequence is dictated by reasons of security and safety, the effect of this angle reinforces the outsider status of this group of young people, as it draws an imaginary line between on the one hand, the forces of law and order (and the reporters) and on the other, suburban youth contesting the authority of the state. This enhances the representation of the *banlieue* as a place of socio-cultural alterity, where the social

hierarchy and respect for law and order has broken down, to be replaced by ‘feral youth’ roaming the streets and controlling the urban space. A number of reports on the issue of parental authority in the *banlieue*, often interviewing parents who feel unable to prevent their children from becoming involved in such delinquent behaviour, further supports this notion (TF1: November 7 and 8; France 2: November 8 and 10).

To the extent that such footage does depict violent and criminal behaviour, it is not surprising that young people are portrayed as socially deviant. However, an examination of ‘ordinary’ shots of young *banlieue* residents (usually found in ‘Type 2’ reports), who are doing nothing more than walking or standing outside in a group, reveals a similar inclination to emphasise the ‘otherness’ of this population. This may take the form of an explicit comment by a journalist: ‘des petits groupes de jeunes se forment déjà. Les habitants osent à peine les regarder’ (TF1: November 6). Alternately, it may be implied visually in the way these groups of individuals are filmed. A notable example is the use of a low angle shot which places the camera at almost ankle-height in an oblique upwards-looking position. When filmed at this particular angle, the effect is similar to that of a vertical panning shot of a tower block, in that the group appears to loom menacingly over the landscape. Thus, even with supposedly descriptive footage, young people are depicted as a separate socio-cultural group that is rejected or feared by the local community. Since they are filmed from a distance and often from behind so that their faces are obscured, the impression of their social separateness is increased, as they are represented as an anonymous group rather than as individuals. As a result, the implied sense of menace created by the framing, coupled with their anonymity as individuals, creates an ‘amalgamation effect’ which potentially suggests the social, if not criminal, deviancy of all young suburban residents.

Although a large proportion of footage of young people depict them as anonymous and voiceless figures, either actively or passively threatening the social order, there are occasions where reporters solicit their views. This is usually to ask about the reasons for the riots. On the whole, these sequences provide a montage of remarks made by groups of youths and refer to topics as varied as unemployment, police racism, the provocative language of the Interior Minister (the term *racaille* is a frequent theme) and being treated as perpetual ‘immigrants’ despite being born and educated in France. Interviewees may be shot at a medium distance, or to respect the desire for anonymity, faces may be obscured by pixellation or filmed in extreme close-up to render identification difficult (Figure 2.7). Perhaps the most salient aspect of these interviews concerns the selection of young people who are, once again, from ‘visible’ minorities, with a particular emphasis on individuals with origins in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition to emphasising the ethnic alterity of this youthful population, the content of these interviews often draw attention to the social alienation of this group, as there are frequent references to their failure to find work and a place in society.

Aside from the visual or thematic content of these interviews, it is arguably in an aural capacity that the socio-cultural alterity of these youths is most apparent; many speak with a distinctive *banlieue* ‘accent’ and employ suburban slang. In other words they are heard to deviate from the linguistic norm of standard French. This is visually



Figure 2.7
Top: Unnamed young adult interviewed in Villepinte, Seine-Saint-Denis (TF1: 05.11.2005).
Bottom: Youths wishing to remain visually anonymous in Aulnay-sous-Bois (France 2: 02.11.2005).

underlined in France 2's decision to provide subtitles to transcribe the testimony of a boy in an extract of an interview broadcast on November 3. Whilst it is true that he has a pronounced 'accent', it is not sufficiently thick to be incomprehensible for a viewer unfamiliar with this mode of speech.²⁴ Whether or not the audience actually requires the boy's speech to be transcribed, in order to understand what he is saying, the use of subtitles implies a linguistic gulf between the *banlieue* and mainstream society that is sufficiently large as to require translation or interpretation. Consequently, such examples appear to reinforce the stereotypical portrait of *banlieue* youth as fundamentally 'other', since their ethnic, social, cultural and linguistic differences are highlighted perhaps even more vividly, when they are given the opportunity to express themselves.

It would be remiss to suggest that journalists are unaware of the potential to characterise the *banlieue* and its young residents as inherently violent and chaotic when covering outbreaks of suburban violence. During the course of the 2005 riots, there were a number of attempts to offer alternative examples of outer-city communities that had been successful in reducing crime, and improving social cohesion and community. For example, TF1 reports on how the work of sports coaches in Vénissieux has helped improve respect for social rules among adolescents (November 6), whilst France 2 features a local initiative in which teenagers receive a small amount of pocket money in return for their help in cleaning up graffiti and repairing residential buildings (November 3). Similarly, there are also a handful of reports profiling young adults from ethnic minorities who have become successful entrepreneurs and continued to work in

²⁴ Indeed, considering the established status of the *banlieue* film, as well as the huge mainstream success of stand-up comedian and actor Jamel Debbouze whose shows parody *banlieue* culture and language, it is unlikely that in today's world of mass-media, viewers would be unaware of such idioms.

the *banlieue* where they grew up (for example, TF1: November 7 and 12; France 2: November 3 and 8). This form of ‘positive’ journalism was particularly highlighted by France 2 in the newsreader’s introduction to these items, which warned the viewer of the need for a sense of perspective:

Alors, face à ces escalades de ces derniers jours, il faut rappeler que la vie de ces quartiers ne se résume pas aux incendies de voitures et aux situations d’échecs. Loin de là, ceux qui travaillent et ceux qui réussissent - et ils sont nombreux - vivent douloureusement ces événements. A Mantes-la-Jolie, voici l’exemple d’Aziz Senni. Il a vingt-neuf ans, il est chef d’entreprise et se rend quotidiennement dans son quartier du Val-Fouré.

(France 2 newsreader, November 3).

To the extent that these news items provide examples of young people participating in the local community, in a constructive rather than destructive manner, it is fair to say that these portraits offer an alternative to the images of ‘feral youth’ running riot found in ‘Type 1’ reports. Nevertheless, it is debatable whether ‘Type 3’ reports are able to provide a sense of perspective or ‘balance’ to the representation of the *banlieue* during the 2005 riots.

Firstly, ‘Type 3’ reports are scarce. According to my statistical analysis of the three categories of news items, ‘Type 3’ reports account for no more than approximately 7% of the coverage of the riots on TF1 and France 2. By comparison, ‘Type 1’ items make up respectively 74% and 83% of the total reporting. Taking the example of a news bulletin broadcast on TF1 on November 6, which included 12 items on the *banlieue*, the lone ‘Type 3’ news story takes up just over a minute and a half of the twenty minutes of airtime allocated to the riots. It is therefore questionable whether these infrequent and brief examples of ‘positive’ reporting are able to counter the sheer volume of footage depicting the *banlieue* as a place of violence and social breakdown.

In second place, items reporting on examples of local initiatives which have been successful in improving social cohesion, may also be interpreted as reinforcing the stigmatisation of young people. For such items suggest that it is necessary to set up a special project in order to teach suburban youths how to behave in society. Likewise, in the case of a voluntary project in which young people receive pocket money in return for cleaning and repairing residential buildings (France 2, November 3), it is possible to argue that footage of teenagers scrubbing graffiti off the walls actually reinforces the link between the defacement of public spaces and young people.

Finally, whilst profiles of local young entrepreneurs provide tangible evidence that it is possible to succeed in the outer-cities, as an alternative ‘role model’ for suburban youths, they are the exception rather than the rule. Even if they themselves speak about the difficulties and prejudice that they had to overcome when setting up their businesses, such news items gloss over the extent of these difficulties, and imply that if an individual is sufficiently determined, anything is possible. As a result, the failure of certain suburban youth to find a place in society is seen in the light of these profiles, as a personal lack of ambition, rather than as a failure of society to provide the conditions in which they might successfully ‘integrate’.²⁵ Ultimately, it would seem that the alternative form of reporting found in the ‘Type 3’ category, offers little by way of a counterbalance to the more dominant representation of young *banlieue* residents as a marginalised and alienated group, and may even, on occasion, actively add to their stigmatisation.

²⁵ It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the ways in which young people from the *banlieue* have to negotiate territorial stigma and racial or social discrimination on a daily basis. However, there are a number of recent studies conducted by social scientists which explore this issue: cf. Mucchielli and Le Goaziou (2007); Mucchielli (2009); Koff (2009); Moran (2011); Garbin and Millington (2012).

This exploration of the news coverage of the 2005 riots endeavours to deconstruct certain journalistic practices which lead to the representation of the *banlieue* as an epicentre of alterity. For example, the examination of the manner in which the urban cityscape is depicted during times of civil unrest and in ‘everyday’ life, reveals a pervasive theme of the spatial alterity of the *banlieue*. This is notably seen in the way the architecture is filmed. Similarly, the tendency to focus almost exclusively on the ‘visible’ minorities of these suburbs, both in descriptive shots of the urban space and in interviews, distorts the diversity of the population and actively constructs the *banlieue* as a place of ethnic and religious alterity. Interviews with young suburban residents also contribute to the portrait of the *banlieue* as a place of socio-cultural alterity. Overall, the coverage of the autumn unrest of 2005 demonstrates a tendency to ‘search for the spectacular’ (Bourdieu 1996: 18) by reporting on the most violent incidents of the riots. Also on display is an inclination to enhance the drama of the footage through careful editing and the addition of arresting voice-over commentary and sound-bites from local residents (and politicians). Comparisons between incidents that occurred in different places and at different times (such as the attack on a fire-engine in Clichy-sous-Bois and the pre-meditated ambush in Aulnay-sous-Bois), and the visual standardisation of the way such incidents are reported (for instance the recurring use of burning cars), also contribute to the construction of a ‘universal’ *banlieue* which transcends a specific geographical location. The examination of ‘Type 3’ reports and ‘ordinary’ establishing shots of the cityscape equally reveal, that even when the attempt is made to depict an alternative view of the *banlieue* and move away from images of lawlessness and ‘feral youth’, the result is not always the effect desired. Finally, in

order to provide a contextual framework in which these audiovisual representations of the *banlieue* are produced, I have drawn correlations between my case study of the 2005 riots and the wider field of visual culture research on the *banlieue*. In particular, Boyer and Lochard's (1998) analysis of non-fictional representations of the outer-city margins, demonstrates that the news coverage of the 2005 riots is by no means the product of the exceptional nature of the autumn unrest, but is rather a continuation of an historical pattern that depicts the *banlieue* as an epicentre of alterity. Furthermore, a comparison with research into the fictional genre of *cinéma de banlieue*, conducted by academics such as Tarr (2005) and Wagner (2011), reveals that the construction of the *banlieue* as a place of 'otherness' is not restricted to the realm of news journalism. In the second half of this chapter, I investigate whether the trends identified in this case study of the news coverage of the 2005 riots are also found in a selection of contemporary documentaries.

❖ **Documentary Representations of the 'Extra-ordinary' and 'Ordinary' *Banlieue***

To assess the documentary representation of the *banlieue*, I explore four films which look at both the 'extra-ordinary' and 'ordinary' sides of life in the outer-city margins. In the first section, I examine two documentaries which reflect on the riots of 2005. Broadcast as part of France 2's investigative series *Infrarouge* (which covers mainstream contemporary social issues), *Quand la France s'embrace* (2007) focuses on the political handling of the autumn unrest of 2005 and the methods of policing used to restore order to the streets. In contrast, *La tentation de l'émeute* (Arte, 2010) is built around a series of interviews with young people from the suburb of Villiers-sur-Marne,

conducted by sociologist and *banlieue* specialist Marwan Mohammed. The second section moves away from ‘extra-ordinary’ images of the *banlieue* and analyses two documentaries made by relatively well-known film-makers, which concentrate on the ‘ordinary’ everyday life of people in the suburbs. Filmed over a period of three months in the Parisian suburb of Les Grands Pêcheurs, Bertrand and Nils Tavernier’s *De l’autre côté du périph*’ (France 2, 1997) explores the themes of immigration and integration in the *banlieue*, whilst Yamina Benguigui’s *9/3: Mémoire d’un territoire* (Canal Plus, 2008) explores the history of Seine-Saint-Denis. My analysis concentrates on the representation of the urban landscape and young people, and considers to what extent this documentary depiction differs from the coverage of the *banlieue* in news journalism.

* A Documentary Review of the 2005 Riots

Quand la France s’embrase (France 2, 2007) offers a chronological overview of the 2005 riots in the *banlieue* and the anti-CPE student protests of 2006, and compares the differences in the role of the police and the political response to these two ‘major crises’ that struck France within a six month period.²⁶ In particular, the documentary

²⁶ In response to the autumn unrest of 2005 and the issues of unemployment and discrimination that were raised by the riots, Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin, announced in early 2006 the creation of a new employment contract aimed at young people under the age of twenty-six entering the work force for the first time. Entitled *Contrat première embauche* (commonly abbreviated to ‘CPE’), the scheme offered a young person a permanent contract in a company that was subject to a trial period lasting two years. As has often been the case in recent attempts to implement reform (especially in the field of education), the proposed bill was met with hostility. Beginning in early February, students across France began to occupy university campuses and conduct weekly marches through town centres. Under the terms of the CPE, employers were able to terminate a contract at any time during the two-year trial period without being legally required to justify this decision. Opposition to the CPE was often based on the length of the trial period and the ability for employers to dismiss employees at any point during the first two years of employment; many anti-CPE demonstrators believed that these terms would lead to a rise in unfair dismissals and create a precarious working environment for young people on a CPE contract. In early April, faced with such sizeable and sustained opposition, the government was forced to abandon the proposal. For more information about the CPE and the anti-CPE demonstrations cf. Lagrange and Oberti (2006) and Michon (2008).

highlights how a similar situation (young people concerned about their future chances of employment and social integration), was dealt with in a very different manner and, ultimately, with a different outcome for the persons concerned. Divided into two parts, the programme explores, through an extensive number of interviews with politicians and members of the various specialised police forces, how those in power responded to unfolding events and worked to restore order to the streets. Amateur and professionally-shot footage of the riots and anti-CPE demonstrations supply an audiovisual illustration of the themes and events evoked during the interviews, whilst the inclusion of voice-over commentary helps tie the material together into a strong narrative.

- *Chaotic Landscapes: The Dangers of Info-tainment*

From an audio and visual perspective, the depiction of the suburban cityscape in *Quand la France s'embrase* offers little that is different from images found in the news coverage of the same events. There is an abundance of footage of burning cars and buildings, violent confrontations between the police and youths, and the damage caused by the rioting (Figure 2.8). Compared to the brevity of a two-minute news item, in which an incident is condensed down into a series of split-second images, the length of the documentary format provides the opportunity to include longer 'unedited' sequences. *Quand la France*



Figure 2.8
Images of the urban riots
(*Quand la France s'embrase*).

s'embrace is therefore able to use a variety of source material from local and national media, as well as the occasional amateur, to represent events such as the Clichy-sous-Bois riot in greater detail. In so doing, the documentary potentially has the power to establish the image of the *banlieue* as a place of urban chaos and violence even more firmly in the mind of the viewer.

The danger of longer formats reinforcing stereotypes is an issue explored by sociologists Peralva and Macé (2002), in their assessment of the representation of urban violence by the French media. Interviews conducted with journalists during the course of their research highlighted that, although many were ideologically opposed to the form of 'info-tainment' commonly attributed to commercial channel TF1, this was in itself no guarantee against the risk of creating spectacle in longer reports:

Ce qu'il y a de commun dans les divers types d'info-spectacle mis en scène par TF1, France 2 et M6 [...] c'est la préoccupation de montrer, sous forme d'images, c'est-à-dire, en direct, 'la réalité' de la violence et de la lutte contre la violence. Montrer cette 'réalité' suppose de la reconstituer comme action, c'est-à-dire la mettre en scène. C'est pourquoi le format magazine, censé protéger le regard du journaliste des illusions de l'actualité et des insuffisances du 'news', est paradoxalement le seul qui permet de *mettre en scène* 'la réalité' de la violence. Il ne participe donc pas moins que le 'news' à l'emballement médiatique avec des effets probables sur le sentiment d'insécurité du téléspectateur.

(Peralva and Macé 2002: 188).

Peralva and Macé therefore suggest that the representation of violence in the longer 'magazine format' is, by its very nature, even more prone than news journalism to the excesses of 'info-tainment', and as a result plays a significant role in inducing a sense of

insecurity in its viewers.²⁷ Without the benefit of conducting an audience survey, it is difficult to evaluate the respective influence the news coverage and documentary treatment of the 2005 riots may have had on the viewer. Sociological research into the influence of the media on public opinion would appear to suggest that the primary ‘effect’ is to reinforce existing views, rather than to modify them, and that these responses are determined to a great extent by an individual’s social and cultural background (cf. Peralva and Macé 2002: 7-8). However, it is possible to affirm that in terms of the number of viewers, the documentary format has less ‘reach’ than news journalism. For instance, *Quand la France s’embrase*, which was shown on the mainstream channel, France 2, as part of the established documentary series *Infrarouge*, was seen by around 1.2 million people. *La tentation de l’émeute*, shown on the specialist arts channel, Arte, attracted approximately 175,000 viewers. In contrast, I calculated that during the coverage of the 2005 riots (October 28 - November 17 inclusive), the evening news bulletins of TF1 and France 2 were watched by a combined average audience of 15.5 million (TF1: 9.7 million; France 2: 5.8 million).²⁸

Whilst *Quand la France s’embrase* certainly depicts the urban landscape of the *banlieue* as an asocial space of violence, a closer examination of the programme indicates that the documentary maker was aware of the potential effect these images

²⁷ The ‘magazine format’ to which Peralva and Macé refer, are long-running series such as *Droit de savoir* (TF1), *Zone interdite* (M6) and *La Marche du siècle* (France 3). These programmes, broadcast once or twice a month, feature one or more short pieces of investigative journalism (or on occasion a ‘full’ documentary) covering topical issues, which are often subsequently discussed in a studio debate. Although this format does not have as many viewers as the evening news bulletins, it is quite a popular style of current affairs programming, regularly attracting several million viewers.

²⁸ These figures are extrapolated from my research of the INA database which records statistics (number of viewers and total audience share) collated by the independent company Médiamétrie. Viewing figures vary according to where programmes are placed in the television schedule and on what channel they are broadcast. Both selected documentaries were shown in a ‘good’ time-slot for the genre (Second Time: 10:30 p.m. - 00:00 a.m.) and gained a respective audience share of 17.6% (France 2) and 1.2% (Arte).

might have on the viewer and sought to moderate this. Whereas news coverage of the 2005 riots often represented incidents as ‘senseless violence’ (*violence gratuite*), and centred a great deal of attention on local residents’ horror and indignation at the events (at the expense of a discussion of the causes behind the violence), *Quand la France s’embrase* attempts to demonstrate that there is often a reason behind the particular choice of target. For instance, the commentary draws attention to the fact that intelligence gathered by the *Renseignements généraux* at the time of the riots, indicates that young people who had been refused the opportunity of employment, targeted the companies that had rejected them. Equally, footage of the violence occupies only a small part of the total running time; the majority of the documentary is composed of a series of interviews with politicians and various police services. Nevertheless, the programme’s omission of any interviews either with people who participated in or experienced the riots first-hand, or with academics specialising in the field of *banlieue* studies, is significant.²⁹ Even though the main concern of the documentary is to explore the decision-making process that took place behind closed doors by those tasked with restoring order to the streets, the lack of any substantial contextual information on the background for the riots reduces a complex social issue to a question of law and order. In other words, the angle taken by *Quand la France s’embrase* reinforces the notion of the *banlieue* as a territory that is populated by a younger generation which pose a threat to the social order. As a result, the suburbs are portrayed as a place of spatial alterity which require considerable policing to control and contain this violence.

²⁹ *Quand la France s’embrase* does include a brief interview with Samir Mihi, a Clichy-sous-Bois resident and *médiateur* (youth worker), who was invited to participate on the studio debate programme *Mots croisés* on 31 October 2005, to ‘represent’ the youth of Clichy-sous-Bois in light of the tragic deaths of Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré. The extract in the documentary is however, more concerned with reconstructing and commenting on Mihi’s exchange of opinions with the Mayor of Clichy-sous-Bois, that occurred on *Mots croisés*, than in asking him to explain the causes for the outbreak of civil unrest.

- *Voices from the Streets*

In view of the absence of any interviews with the young people involved in the riots, the only representation of this social group is as anonymous figures committing acts of vandalism and arson. Accordingly, *banlieue* youth are even more marginalised in this documentary than in the news coverage of the riots (although, as I demonstrated earlier, reports interviewing young people may actually reinforce stereotypes rather than moderate their social alterity). On the one hand, this is a reflection of the spontaneous nature of the civil unrest of 2005. There were no leaders or demands made. Without spokespersons to explain the nature of suburban youths' anger and desire for reform, *Quand la France s'embrase*'s omission of any such voices from the *banlieue* highlights the limited power of the marginalised to obtain recognition or representation of their views in the media. This aspect is particularly underlined by the documentary's very different treatment of the student anti-CPE demonstrators, many of whom are interviewed for the documentary.

In stark contrast to the 2005 riots, the anti-CPE protests in 2006 were a controlled and calculated affair, demonstrating the students' awareness of the need to organise opposition to the proposed employment reform on a national scale, in order to improve the chance of attracting the media's attention and to place pressure on politicians. Weekly marches held on the same day across France provided a visually arresting sight, especially as the number of protesters grew, and by marching every week through town centres they made it difficult for the issue to be forgotten. Appointed representatives from a range of student organisations also relayed the group's

concerns and demands to politicians and provided suitable sound-bites for journalists. As the selection of still images taken from footage of these demonstrations reveals, here was a movement that was acutely alert of its power to control and manipulate perceptions, through the use of snappy slogans and symbolic references to the tradition of street protests (Figure 2.9). For instance, Figure 2.9, *Middle*, depicts a girl dressed as Marianne holding a tricolour with bare breast on display, creating a visual allusion to Revolutionary imagery of popular uprisings. Perhaps the most vivid example of the students' skill in utilising historical references to social revolt, was the decision on 8 March 2006 to occupy the Sorbonne, France's most prestigious university, and scene of the student protests of May 1968. The significance of this gesture does not appear to have been lost on the government, who took the unprecedented decision to forcibly evacuate the university and barricade the whole area to prevent students from accessing the site. As Delphine Bouënel, one of the official student spokespersons, states in the documentary: 'Une fois qu'on avait pris la Sorbonne, une fois que la Sorbonne était à nous, on avait tout gagné'.

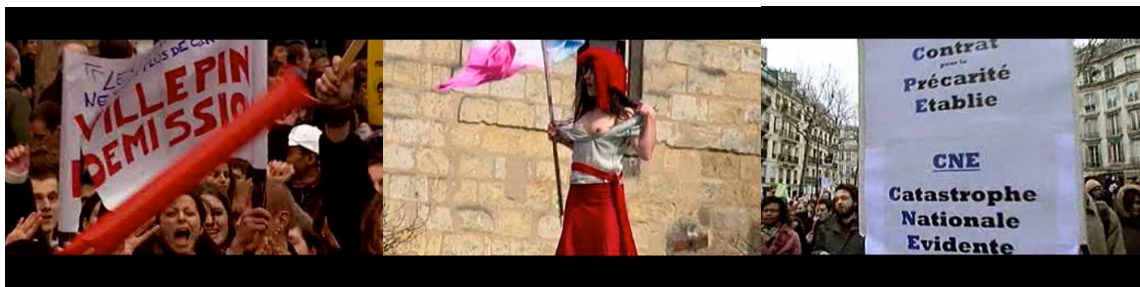


Figure 2.9

Left and Right: Anti-CPE slogans calling for Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin to resign and referring to the CPE as a 'Contrat Précarité Etablie'. *Middle:* Student dressed as Marianne. (*Quand la France s'embrace.*)

Quand la France s'embrase also draws attention to the remarkable difference in the political response to the anti-CPE protests, in its voice-over commentary:

Invisible pendant les émeutes, la gauche réapparaît. Contrairement à celle des banlieues, la forme de ce mouvement est fédératrice. Dans ces cas là, toute opposition s'en empare pour affronter le pouvoir. Dans la rue on chante, à l'Assemblée, on s'empoigne. Parfait miroir d'un pays qui aime se regarder dans la contestation.

Whereas the students were able to bolster their support for their campaign by re-establishing traditional alliances between the political parties on the left and trade unions, young people protesting in the outer-cities were ignored by the political parties, who focused on condemning the violence and avoiding discussion of the failures of successive governments to tackle the social and economic problems of these urban areas. Le Goaziou's (2007) study of the political responses to the 2005 riots underlines the total absence of debate or discussion of the measures implemented by the government to restore order. Admittedly, the student anti-CPE campaigners were using legitimate forms of street protest to publicise their concerns, as opposed to using violence. Nonetheless, a similar situation in which a minority of young people chose to express their anxieties over their future, not only elicited a different political response, but also achieved alternative outcomes.

Ultimately, the students won the argument and forced the government to cancel their policy for a new employment contract. In contrast, although following the riots of 2005 a 'Marshal Plan' was promised for the *banlieue*, political scientists Harlan Koff and Dominique Duprez (2009: 723) conclude that six months after the autumn unrest an assessment of the initiatives designed to improve conditions in the suburbs revealed the measures to be 'very thin', with many organisations claiming that they had not received

the promised funds. In a separate article, Duprez (2009) comments that whilst the riots aroused considerable attention, with journalists and the public ‘discovering’ the social problems faced by people living in marginalised suburbs:

once the emotions had subsided, appeals to people’s sense of civic responsibility had been made and potential voters had been urged to put themselves on the electoral register [...] just a few months later public opinion seemed not to have noticed that no measures of any substance had been taken to tackle the territorial segregation and exclusion from mainstream society that blight the lives of young people in disadvantaged areas.

(Duprez 2009: 767).

Sociologist Didier Lapeyronnie (2009: 21) makes a similar observation to Duprez, stating that ‘repression and silence seem to have been the only response, or absence of response, elicited by the riots’. Unlike French students who are, on the whole, politically active, levels of voter turn-out in the *banlieue* are low. As a result, Duprez and Koff (2009: 724) argue that there is little incentive for governments to take action due to a ‘lack of important electoral stakes’. Indeed, Matthew Moran (2011) argues that individuals such as Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, were actually able to benefit politically from the riots of 2005, as the anxiety and unease generated by the crisis permitted the reinvigoration of the politics of insecurity. Thus, in the run-up to the presidential elections of 2007, ‘Sarkozy’s security-oriented politics appeared reassuring to mainstream voters, whilst also appearing seductive to those voters tempted by the politics of the Front National’ (Moran 2011: 108).

Overall, *Quand la France s’embrase* represents the cityscape of the *banlieue* as a place of violence and social breakdown. Young people are similarly reduced to voiceless and anonymous figures. Although the policing of the suburbs is a key issue (cf. Mucchielli

2006; Sire-Marin 2006; Mohammed and Mucchielli 2007), the chronologically driven narrative of the programme focuses more on establishing the order in which events unfolded during the 2005 unrest, and ‘who said what to whom’, than on providing an analysis of the context out of which this nation-wide civil disturbance was born. That said, the documentary’s juxtaposition of the autumn riots of 2005 with the anti-CPE demonstrations of 2006 offers an effective exposition of the difference in political response to the two crises. Consequently, the programme illustrates the extent to which the *banlieue* and its inhabitants are politically marginalised, as opposed to the student population.³⁰ This notion is directly referred to in the closing commentary of *Quand la France s’embrase*, which observes that despite the two events occurring within a close time-frame, it is as if they existed in separate spaces ‘qui se croisent sans se regarder’.

- *Approaching the ‘Rioter’*

In November 2010, Arte marked the fifth anniversary of the 2005 riots by broadcasting two documentaries, *La tentation de l’émeute* and *Les raisons de la colère*, as part of a themed evening entitled, ‘Révoltes urbaines: Au-delà des préjugés’.³¹ *La tentation de l’émeute* attempts to ‘go beyond stereotypes’, by offering a platform for a selection of young adults to reflect on the riots, and to discuss the difficulties they face on a daily basis as residents of the stigmatised suburb of Hautes-Noues in Villiers-sur-Marne. The programme is based around a series of interviews with sixteen men and women who

³⁰ For an assessment of the *banlieue*’s political marginalisation cf. Le Goaziou (2007). Le Goaziou evaluates the manner in which left-wing parties and the unions have abandoned these disadvantaged suburbs and offers a comparison of the changes in voting habits of these *banlieue* residents, who no longer identify themselves so overwhelmingly on the left.

³¹ The latter documentary is not analysed in this chapter as it does not deal specifically with the French riots, but instead, offers a comparative assessment of other examples of civil unrest that took place in Copenhagen (2007), Greece (2008), and China (2010).

live in this area. The interviews were conducted by sociologist, Marwan Mohammed, with additional contextual information provided by contributions from sociologists, Fabien Jobard and Laurent Mucchielli.³² Included in the documentary are a few observational sequences depicting ‘life in the *cité*’, for instance, children playing in the street and a community barbecue. With the exception of the introduction at the beginning of the film, *La tentation de l’émeute* does not feature voice-over commentary and does not include any questions or comments from the interviewer. This reinforces the ‘eye-witness’ nature of the programme and throws the spotlight on a social group (chiefly young men in their early twenties) that is rarely offered the opportunity to express itself. Yet, as the introductory commentary notes:

Les jeunes de quartiers, ou les moins jeunes, leurs parents, les ex-émeutiers, ou les émeutiers en herbe, ne sont ni sourds, ni aveugles, ni muets. Ils entendent ce que l’on dit d’eux. Ils voient le monde social et la place qu’ils occupent, et parfois, ils ne demandent qu’à s’exprimer.

Interviewed on an individual basis (as opposed to the group ‘interviews’ of news coverage), the participants’ comments have been selected and organised thematically into three sections during post-production editing. The first portion of the documentary, features eight young men who describe their struggle to find work, and how the reality of being unemployed with no money often leads to criminal activities, as it is the only option available to them to make ends meet. In the second section, four women are interviewed (two of whom make only a brief appearance). Contrary to the largely negative experiences recounted by the men, the future of girls living in this outer-city

³² Marwan Mohammed, who co-wrote, researched the film and led the interviews, is a sociologist who has collaborated with Mucchielli on several pieces of research. In 2007, they co-edited a volume exploring the history of gangs and the portrayal of youths in France. They also contributed a chapter on the role of the police in France’s disadvantaged suburbs (Mohammed and Mucchielli 2007).

neighbourhood is seen in a more positive light, with girls staying longer in education, enabling them to take a more active role in shaping their future. The final section, concentrates on the complex and confrontational nature of the relationship between the police and the residents of this *banlieue*.

My analysis focuses on the visual approach taken by the film-maker to represent the residents of Hautes-Noues. In particular, I assess the decision to film the interviewees in a studio on a black background, without any spatial reference or objects to provide visual context. I argue that this aesthetic style is a calculated choice that has at least two aims. Firstly, to symbolise the spatial and social alienation experienced by residents of these disadvantaged neighbourhoods and revealed in the course of the documentary. Secondly, as a way of ‘humanising’ the figure of the ‘rioter’ or ‘delinquent youth’ from the *banlieue*.

Figure 2.10 offers a selection of still images taken from the opening sequence of *Latentation de l'émeute*, which juxtaposes, dramatic footage of confrontations between police firing tear gas and local youth throwing projectiles, with extracts from six interviews in which the definition and meaning of a ‘riot’ is discussed. Whilst the representation of the urban landscape may appear familiar once again, the contrast between the noise and action of the riot and the calm of the studio is visually and audibly striking. A closer examination of the structure of this sequence provides an early insight into the approach taken by the film-maker in representing the *banlieue* and its inhabitants. With a running time of one minute and fifty seconds, only fifteen seconds are devoted to images of rioting. The remaining one minute thirty five seconds

of the sequence is composed of extracts from the interviews. This suggests a desire to move away from the typical images of distant figures of anonymous young people committing acts of vandalism, towards a close ‘face-to-face’ meeting, where the young men are lit, not by the light of a burning car, but by the lights of a studio. Equally, the decision to film the interviews in a studio imparts an air of neutrality to the proceedings, and also demonstrates a respect for the contributions made by the documentary’s participants that deserve to be ‘officially recorded’ for posterity. (Compare this to the *vox pop*. sound-bites and ‘interviews’ of the news coverage of the 2005 riots discussed earlier.)

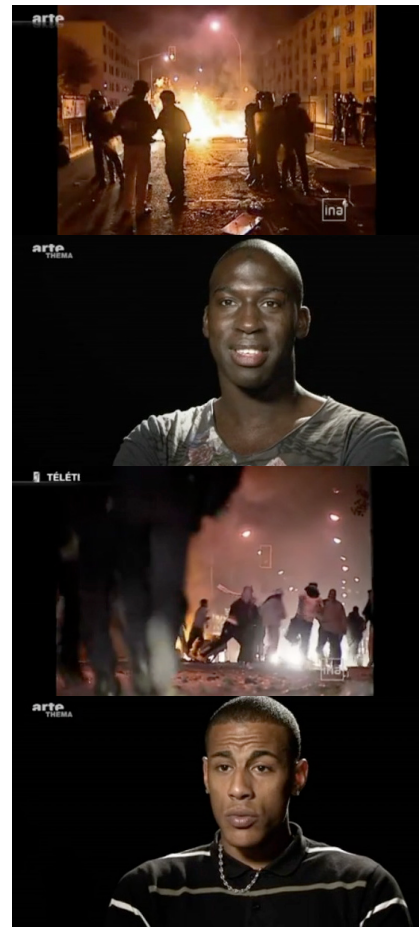


Figure 2.10
Opening sequence of *La tentation de l'émeute*.

It is possible that the viewer’s initial reaction to the black background, might be to feel threatened by the young men, whose faces are juxtaposed with images of rioting. Civil disturbances usually take place at night when people are able to hide in the shadows to avoid detection, and the darkness of the studio is reminiscent of this. Nevertheless, if the programme’s aim is to provide the opportunity for marginalised people to express their opinions and experiences, the black background also has the effect of forcing the viewer to study the interviewees’ faces, as there are no other visual distractions. Initially appearing as unnamed participants, these six young men reappear after the opening credits, this time identified by their first names. This technique therefore obliges the audience to ‘look the “rioter” in the eye’ and understand that these

are individuals with names, families and ambitions. In addition, I contend that this visual aesthetic is also designed to symbolise the theme of spatial and social marginalisation evoked by the men in their interviews. This argument is supported by comparing firstly, the manner in which men and women are represented in the film, and secondly, the alternative visual setting employed when filming the contributions of sociologists Jobard and Mucchielli.

Whilst it is true that the four women interviewed in *La tentation de l'émeute* are also filmed on a black background, there are two noticeable differences in the manner in which they are portrayed (Figure 2.11). In first place, there are a number of observational sequences of women filmed *in situ*, going about their daily lives, such as a women's support group and a local after-school sports club for young girls. This reinforces the women's opinion that girls tend to be socially better 'integrated', staying longer at school and playing an active role in the local community. The men, by contrast, are filmed largely in the studio, thereby reinforcing their accounts of their



Figure 2.11

Top Right and *Bottom Left*: Interviews with the documentary's two main women participants.

Top Left and *Bottom Right*: Observational sequences depicting the *banlieue* as a space of community.

struggle to find a space in society. In second place, the two main female contributors are introduced with a subtitle depicting their full names and a description of their job title or community role (for instance, Penda Diagouraga, Présidente de l'Association Relais Solidarité). Only two out of a total of eleven men are introduced in this way. Admittedly, the number of men interviewed is greater than the women. However, the decision to film sociologists Jobard and Mucchielli in natural light, surrounded by books in what one presumes is their place of work, offers an additional contrast to the men filmed on a black background in a studio. This would appear to add credence to the use of the black background to evoke the men's absence of social reference points or position.

The other visual aspect which stands out from these interviews is the fact that, with the exception of one individual who moved to France from Algeria as a child, all sixteen interviewees are of sub-Saharan African origin, although information concerning their family's country of origin and the amount of time lived in France is not included. Considering that this is a documentary about life in a deprived suburb of France and not a history of migration, this omission is not particularly unexpected. Arguably, the decision to elide any direct reference to ancestral background stems from the view that as individuals who were born and educated in France, they are French with the same cultural reference points as any other French citizen. Yet, the 'mono-ethnic' nature of the programme is surprising as this does not reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the *banlieue*. In my case study of the news coverage of the 2005 riots, I highlighted the manner in which journalists focused almost exclusively on the *banlieue*'s 'visible minorities', thereby reinforcing the construction of this space as a place of ethnic and

religious alterity. *La tentation de l'émeute* would appear to continue this trend, although perhaps this effect is moderated as the interviewees are presented as individuals rather than as anonymous groups of 'feral youths'. Nevertheless, the presentation of the *banlieue* as a 'mono-ethnic' community is not found in all forms of visual culture. For example, Wagner (2011) notes that since the mid-1990s, characters from other ethnic minorities in *cinéma de banlieue* have become more common and reflect more accurately the suburbs' cosmopolitan social mix, to the extent that:

Quand il est délinquant, le jeune d'origine maghrébine n'est pas seul, il est accompagné d'autres Français blancs ou noirs. À tel point qu'il faut bien se rendre à l'évidence: la délinquance est présentée comme un phénomène social et très rarement comme un problème lié particulièrement à une origine ethnique supposée des parents ou à une couleur de peau.

(Wagner 2011: 90).

The reason why only ethnic minorities from sub-Saharan Africa are interviewed is not disclosed. However, the unintentional consequences of this decision may be to invoke a direct comparison between the *banlieue* and the African-American ghettos of the United States. Indeed, this link is frequently made by members of the public, who use the term 'ghetto' to describe the character of a deprived neighbourhood (for instance, TF1, 28 October 2005: 'Ici c'est le ghetto [...] il n'y a même pas le respect, y a rien'). The autumn unrest of 2005 was also compared to the riots that took place in Los Angeles in 1992; a comparison robustly rejected by Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin, during a live interview on CNN (29 November 2005). Whilst the public and the media often make this association between France and the United States, the comparative fieldwork of Loïc Wacquant (2007: 170) demonstrates that there are fundamental differences between the two urban socio-scapes, to such an extent that to refer to the *banlieue* as

‘French ghettos’ is a ‘contresens sociologique’.³³ Given that as a sociologist Mohammed is aware of the stigmatisation of the *banlieue* and the role the media plays in constructing these outer-city neighbourhoods as epicentres of alterity, to select an unrepresentative sample and therefore run the risk of reinforcing the depiction of the *banlieue* as a place of ethnic alterity is a choice, which is perhaps best explained by the overall theme of the documentary.

La tentation de l'émeute offers a rare opportunity for the viewer to listen to a social group that is usually marginalised in news journalism. Led as it is by personal testimony, the film presents difficult topics such as discrimination, inequality and police brutality, in a compelling format that is informed by the additional contributions from Jobard and Mucchielli. Through the removal of the interviewer’s questions from the footage and avoidance of voice-over commentary to link the material together, the viewer is forced to engage with the young people, without the presence of a mediator, or ‘interpreter’. Potentially, this strategy facilitates empathy as it creates the sense that the interviewees are speaking directly to the audience, an impression that is further strengthened by the close-up nature of the camera’s framing, and the absence of any other visual distraction through the use of a black background. Taken together, these aesthetic choices potentially moderate the sense of ‘ethnic alterity’ that may be generated by the composition of the film subjects. Alternately, this is perhaps a deliberate strategy, designed to tackle head-on the media’s representation of young *banlieue* residents as a non-European anonymous group of delinquents. By focusing on

³³ Wacquant (2007: 239-240) summarises the differences in the following manner: ‘la Ceinture noire américaine résulte d’une “fermeture excluante” [...] qui s’opère sur une base “raciale” ancrée dans une opposition dichotomique enveloppante entre “Noirs” et “Blancs”. Tel n’est pas le cas dans la Ceinture rouge française: en France la relégation dans une banlieue dégradée procède prioritairement de la position de classe; elle est ensuite exacerbée par l’origine ethnique (post)coloniale (elle-même fortement corrélée au profil de classe)’.

their identity as individuals and exploring in detail the social inequalities and discrimination faced by this social group, *La tentation de l'émeute* strives to move away from sensationalist images of violence, and instead, to concentrate attention on the complexity of the *banlieue* 'issue' in order to provide a greater understanding of the context out of which urban unrest is born.

Both *Quand la France s'embrase* (2007) and *La tentation de l'émeute* (2010) review and reflect on the autumn riots of 2005, yet adopt an approach which is noticeably different. In the former documentary, the events are addressed through the perspective of the political and police responses to the violence. The urban landscape of the *banlieue* is portrayed as place of spatial and social alterity; its younger population are relegated to the margins of the documentary and only feature as anonymous distant figures. The absence of any detailed contextual information about the causes behind the unrest, or the testimony of young people who participated in the riots, potentially reduces the issues raised by the violence to a question of how to control and contain these disadvantaged outer-cities, rather than to address the more fundamental reasons for their socio-economic problems. Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of the *banlieue* riots with the anti-CPE protests does underline the political marginalisation of these areas. However, on the whole, *Quand la France s'embrase*'s chronologically driven narrative displays a similar tendency to that found in the news coverage of the *banlieue*, in its inclination to amalgamate the events of 2005 into one large riot and thereby contribute to the construction of a 'universal' *banlieue* that is defined by its spatial and social alterity. *La tentation de l'émeute*, by contrast, begins at the opposite end of the spectrum and provides the viewer with a case study of a selected group of young people

living in a specific suburb. Moreover, the programme seeks through its aesthetic choices, to enable the audience to ‘approach’ the ‘rioter’ as an individual, rather than as an anonymous group that is defined by its criminal or anti-social behaviour. Finally, the documentary’s focus on the underlying causes behind suburban violence, attempts to reduce the alterity of the *banlieue*, by clearly defining the issues raised by these urban spaces.

* ‘Breaking Down’ Alterity?: The Work of Benguigui and Tavernier

In the final part of this chapter, I examine the depiction of ‘ordinary’ life in the *banlieue* and compare two documentaries made by relatively well-known film-makers: *De l’autre côté du périph* (Tavernier and Tavernier 1997, France 2) and *9/3: Mémoire d’un territoire* (Benguigui 2008, Canal Plus). I concentrate my analysis on the representation of the urban landscape. Although there is a distance of eleven years between the films, the issues raised (for instance, unemployment, racial and territorial discrimination, immigration and the social ‘integration’ of ethnic minorities) reveal that little has changed in the intervening period for residents of these socio-economically deprived areas. However, despite these underlying thematic similarities, Tavernier and Benguigui’s documentaries offer a decidedly different approach to representing life in the marginalised suburbs. From a structural point of view, the most notable difference between the two film-makers is found in the ‘voice’ of the documentary (Nichols 2005: 18-19). *De l’autre côté du périph* offers an interactive and reflexive style of documentary in which the presence of the senior Tavernier plays a significant role; Bertrand Tavernier’s ‘voice’ is included in sequences depicting his interactions with

local residents and in the use of first-person voice-over commentary. In contrast, *9/3: Mémoire d'un territoire* adopts an expository style in which all visual and aural trace of Benguigui's presence is removed from the film.

Born in France to parents who emigrated from Algeria, Yamina Benguigui has received critical acclaim and attention for her documentary work. Active since the mid-1990s, her films have explored themes such as the role of women in Islam (*Femmes d'Islam*, 1996) and the history of North African post-colonial emigration to France. *Mémoires d'immigrés: L'héritage maghrébin* (1997), a three-part documentary which sets out to record the memories and experiences of first- and second-generation immigrants from the Maghreb, is probably the film for which she is best known.³⁴ Benguigui's oeuvre has also drawn a certain amount of critical interest from academics researching contemporary social history, as well as issues such as memory and the position of ethnic minorities in French society. For example, in her analysis of *Mémoires d'immigrés*, Sylvie Durmelat (2000: 172-173), assesses Benguigui's interest in documenting the voices of marginalised groups and compares Benguigui's role in such projects to that of a 'transmitter of memories', a 'memory entrepreneur'. Similarly, Leslie Kealhofer (2011) has examined the notion that Benguigui's work demonstrates a desire to 'build bridges' between the majority and Maghrebi populations in France. More recently, Benguigui's position as a mediator for her community has also been recognised at an official level, with appointments to the Haut Conseil à l'Intégration in 2006, and in 2008, to a local government committee in Paris tasked with combating discrimination (cf. Kealhofer 2011: 208).

³⁴ The film was selected at several film festivals, winning a number of prizes, including the Sept d'or for best documentary and a Golden Gate award in San Francisco (cf. Durmelat 2000: 172).

This section explores Benguigui's documentary *9/3: Mémoire d'un territoire*, broadcast in a prime-time evening slot on cable-channel, Canal Plus, in 2008. As the title indicates, the programme charts the history of the industrialisation and urbanisation of France's ninety-third *département* (Seine-Saint-Denis), from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day, through the use of archive footage and the testimony of residents living in different neighbourhoods, the majority of whom immigrated to France during labour recruitment drives. Context is provided by interviews with a number of academics specialising in the history of industrialisation, immigration and class-relations, and from a range of people involved in the urban planning of Seine-Saint-Denis at an administrative or political level.

In a career spanning from the mid-1960s to the present day, Bertrand Tavernier (born 1941) has made well over thirty films in the documentary and fiction genres that deal with an eclectic range of themes and often refer to 'sensitive' periods of France's history, including French colonial Africa (*Coup de torchon*, 1981) and the war in Algeria (*La guerre sans nom*, 1992). As a person who has a history of involving himself in topical issues, the terms 'militant' and 'left-wing activist' are often attached to his public persona and oeuvre. Yet, the concept or tradition of the 'artiste engagé' is not one that he himself ascribes to:

Je m'inscris dans cette tradition, et partage l'opinion de David Wark Griffith qui considérait qu'une caméra peut changer le monde. Je ne suis pas un résigné, un aquaboniste [sic]. Plutôt un cinéaste en prise sur la vie, ouvert sur le monde, attentif à ce qui s'y passe. Mais 'engagé' est un terme dont je me méfie. Je suis plein de contradictions. À la fois libertaire et social-démocrate, croyant et anticlérical, attaché à une tradition et détestant ce que la tradition peut avoir de figé, de repli sur soi.

(Bertrand Tavernier, interviewed in Douin 2006: 225).

The origins of the project which became *De l'autre côté du périph'*, a two-part documentary broadcast on successive weeks on France 2 in 1997, provide a good example of Tavernier's interest in current affairs, and the manner in which he sometimes takes an active role, using his profession as a film-maker to explore an issue. On 11 February 1997, in response to the recently passed Debré law on immigration, Tavernier and sixty-five other film-makers publicly demonstrated their opposition to the legislation by signing a call for civil disobedience.³⁵ The following day, each of the signatories received a couriered letter from Eric Raoult, Minister for Urban Planning and Integration, inviting them to go and live in one of sixty-six randomly-selected *banlieues* for a period of one month, so that they might better understand that: 'l'intégration, ce n'est pas du cinéma'. A number of residents living in Les Grands Pêchers (the Parisian suburb allocated to Tavernier by Raoult), wrote to the film-maker asking to meet him in order to discuss the contents of the minister's letter, which had shocked and angered them. The idea to make *De l'autre côté du périph'* was born during this meeting, as a way of providing a platform for the inhabitants of Les Grands Pêchers to respond to Raoult's letter, and to provide the opportunity to explore the issues of immigration and integration raised by the Debré law.

Made in collaboration with his film-maker and actor son, Nils Tavernier, *De l'autre côté du périph'* follows in the tradition of the *cinéma vérité* films of the 1960s, when the development of synchronised-sound camera technology enabled film-makers to move from the confines of the studio into the street and engage 'directly' with people,

³⁵ The Debré law of 24 April 1997 was part of a series of measures designed to restrict immigration. See Powrie (1999: 479-491) for more detail on the film-makers' involvement in this affair and for a discussion of whether this incident constituted a 'return of the political in French cinema'. Twelve of the signatories also wrote a series of articles for the newspaper *Le Monde*, explaining their hostility to the law (*Le Monde*, 19.03.1997).

responding spontaneously to events as they unfolded.³⁶ In this respect, *De l'autre côté du périph'* may be described as Bertrand Tavernier's 'voyage of discovery' of life in Les Grands Pêcheurs, documenting his conversations and chance meetings with some of the neighbourhood's residents over a period of three months. To this interactive style of filming, in which Bertrand Tavernier's presence is an important feature (either off-camera in an aural capacity or, occasionally, appearing visually in shot), Tavernier has added during post-production a reflexive style of voice-over commentary, in which he reflects on his experiences and explains the various stages in the project's development. Accordingly, Tavernier's exploration of the *banlieue* mirrors the viewer's own journey of discovery, whilst his presence in the film acts as a form of intermediary between the audience and the inhabitants of Les Grands Pêcheurs.

- *Urban Landscapes: Monochromatic and Technicolour Visions*

In *9/3: Mémoire d'un territoire*, unless a viewer is familiar with the particular building or street being depicted, the absence of any geographical references renders the architecture of Seine-Saint-Denis anonymous and un-locatable. The lack of spatial reference is perhaps surprising considering that each person interviewed in the documentary is identified by name and their place of residence (for example, Siby Sedati: Aulnay-sous-Bois; Abderrahim El Otmani: Clichy-sous-Bois). A closer examination of the manner in which the cityscape is filmed, reveals the similarities between Benguigui's approach and that found in news journalism. As Figure 2.12

³⁶ For example, ethnographic film-maker Jean Rouch's pioneering *Chronique d'un été* (1961), made in collaboration with fellow ethnographer, Edgar Morin, which loosely sets out to ask what makes people happy. For more information about the effects of synchronised-sound camera technology on documentary practices, see Lucian Taylor's introduction to David MacDougall's book *Transcultural Cinema* (1998: 4-6).

demonstrates, the high-rise buildings of the *banlieue* are represented with extreme wide-angle shots, vertical pan shots, and partial shots of edifices. This technique reinforces the sense of the spatial alterity of Seine-Saint-Denis, by emphasising the size of the structures and the manner in which they dominate the urban landscape. However, Benguigui also augments the ‘otherness’ of the *département* with additional aesthetic choices. Perhaps the most notable method is to frame the cityscape through bars, thereby increasing the impression of imprisonment, suggested in images which highlight the uniformity and ‘boxed-in’ nature of the architecture (Figure 2.12, *Bottom*). Similarly, the film-maker emphasises the ‘inhuman’ scale of the suburbs, through the construction of a landscape that is devoid of human activity or presence; the population of Seine-Saint-Denis is almost never present in this type of sequence. Added to the absence of any geographical reference, the exclusion of people in these sequences reinforces the depiction of the urban environment as a place which is uniform and inhospitable.



Figure 2.12
Cityscape of Seine-Saint-Denis.
Top to Bottom: extreme wide-angle,
vertical pan, partial shot and barred
landscape.

9/3: Mémoire d'un territoire, paints a portrait of an urban cityscape that is, in essence, not only monotonous, but also, monochromatic. Arguably, the absence of colour is inevitable in a documentary that charts the development of Seine-Saint-Denis from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day, and therefore, includes a significant

number of photographs and footage shot before the invention of colour film. On the other hand, a more detailed examination of Benguigui's aesthetic approach in the documentary, indicates that the sombre tone created by the black and white images, is carried over into the contemporary footage of *département 93*. Archive film of an urban landscape obscured by heavy smog, with chemical waste running through the streets, is replaced by modern-day images of an empty urban wasteland, where dilapidated buildings slowly decay under the exposure of the elements. Although the factories emitting polluting fumes and toxins have largely been decommissioned, the effects of the region's industrial past remain present in the highly-polluted soil of Seine-Saint-Denis which prevents or discourages redevelopment due to the cost and difficulties in decontaminating the land. The weight of this legacy, is visually suggested by Benguigui, in her wide-angle shots of the cityscape in which the skyline is not only obscured by high-rise edifices, but also by clouds or mist, in a manner reminiscent of



Figure 2.13

Left column: Archive footage of Seine-Saint-Denis, depicting the polluted atmosphere caused by the *département's* industry (*Top*) and a group of workers walking together (*Bottom*).

Right column: Present day Seine-Saint-Denis, with footage of smoke above the cityscape (*Top*) and of an abandoned factory (*Bottom*).

the smog of earlier years (Figure 2.13). This atmosphere of abandonment and decline is also enhanced by the lack of any human presence on these former industrial sites, which contrasts vividly with the black and white sequences, depicting large groups of workers walking to and from work that are included at several points in the documentary (Figure 2.13, *Bottom Right*).

Over the past few decades, the economy of Seine-Saint-Denis has undergone a process of reinvention through the encouragement of the development of tertiary industry, especially in the areas of media, sport and finance. Perhaps the most visible sign of this policy of economic regeneration lies in the decision to construct the national stadium (*Stade de France*) in this *département*, when France was selected to host the Football World Cup in 1998. As *9/3: Mémoire d'un territoire* offers a chronological approach to the history of Seine-Saint-Denis, the reference to these changes are found towards the end of the documentary. By itself, this is not particularly unexpected. However, Benguigui's decision to allocate only five minutes of a ninety minute film to these changes is worth commenting upon. In addition to eliding the significance of this economic revival for the area, a visual assessment of this sequence reveals a constructed attempt to undercut the changes brought about by the development of new centres of commerce. This is particularly evident in the manner in which the modern architecture of these areas is filmed, with a familiar framing of wide-angle and low-angle shots, in which these newly-constructed glass-faced buildings appear to loom over the landscape, in a similar way to the high-rise blocks of socio-economically marginalised neighbourhoods (Figure 2.14). A link that is more overtly made at the end of the sequence, with an establishing shot of a group of tower blocks over which is superposed the following text: 'Le paradoxe de la Seine-Saint-Denis est d'être classée au deuxième

rang des départements les plus riches de France, avec l'une des populations les plus pauvres'. From this fixed-frame image, Benguigui then juxtaposes a vertical panning shot of these tower blocks, with a wide-angle shot of a monumental *barre* which dwarfs the surrounding landscape. Taken as a whole, these aesthetic choices would seem to indicate that Benguigui is sceptical that the implantation of tertiary industry in Seine-Saint-Denis has created any significant benefits for the most marginalised of the *département's* inhabitants.



Figure 2.14

Urban regeneration in Seine-Saint-Denis. Note the similarities in the framing of these modern buildings which again conveys spatial alterity.

All in all, *9/3: Mémoire d'un territoire* constructs the urban environment of Seine-Saint-Denis as a place of spatial alterity. Grey concrete buildings loom over the landscape, whilst former industrial sites lie empty. The lack of geographical reference points with which to situate the architecture depicted in the documentary also contributes to an amalgamation of the *département's* forty *communes* (districts), into one large monotonous and monochrome *banlieue*. The cursory depiction of the area around the *Stade de France* which has undergone redevelopment, does little to mitigate the impression of Seine-Saint-Denis as a marginalised territory. Yet, as the historians Emmanuel Bellanger, Alain Faure, Annie Fourcaut and Natacha Lillo (2008) point out, this is to fundamentally misrepresent the variety of neighbourhoods and communities that make up the *département*:

La Seine-Saint-Denis résidentielle et coquette de l'ancienne Seine-et-Oise n'a pas droit de cité. Le film n'accorde non plus aucune place à une banlieue populaire, choisie et aimée, celle des promenades du dimanche et surtout celle des lotissements. Acheter un terrain pour avoir un jour une maison à soi, ce fut le rêve réalisé de foules d'employés, de petits commerçants et d'ouvriers pour qui cette banlieue encore verte apparaissait infiniment désirable. Où est ici l'exclusion?
(Bellanger, Faure, Fourcaut and Lillo, 2008: 7).

As a result, this selective representation of the urban landscape of Seine-Saint-Denis arguably reinforces the territorial stigmatisation of this *département*, since the documentary focuses only the most deprived areas, at the expense of a more representative sample.³⁷ From this perspective, Benguigui's documentary offers little to contradict the 'traditional' image of Seine-Saint-Denis which is commonly portrayed in the media as one of the most 'sensitive' and difficult suburban areas of France, that is liable to erupt into violence at any moment. Indeed, the *département's* infamous reputation is referred to in the recurring use of dramatic footage from the Clichy-sous-Bois riots of 2005 and the silent march in homage to the teenagers Zyed Bouna and Benna Traoré who died on October 27 (to whom the film is dedicated). These images are played in slow motion, with a particular emphasis on the faces of the grieving parents, and are accompanied by a piece of music which offers a lament and expression of revolt: 'Si j'avais eu ma chance, je ne chanterais pas les larmes [...] Nous avons assez de cette vie'. The overall effect is to reinforce the documentary's monochromatic representation of Seine-Saint-Denis as a place of spatial alterity and social marginalisation.

³⁷ Bellanger, Faure, Fourcaut and Lillo (2008) have also highlighted the film's historical inaccuracies and selective attitude to the *département's* history to the extent that: 'ce film invente le passé du 93 ou n'en veut retenir que le plus sombre, pour faire de ce département un territoire martyrisé depuis deux siècles. Oeuvre de mauvaise fiction, il verse dans le plus classique misérabilisme en usage à propos des banlieues' (Bellanger, Faure, Fourcaut and Lillo 2008: 8).

In contrast to Benguigui's portrayal of an inhospitable and grey urban environment, Bertrand and Nils Tavernier's depiction of the suburb of Les Grands Pêcheurs, is filled with life and movement: children play in the street, youths hang around in car parks and adults move through the *cité*, going about their daily routines (Figure 2.15). Additionally, it is also a landscape that is defined spatially at the outset of the documentary, in a sequence which provides a brief audio and visual 'guided tour' of the layout and composition of Les Grands Pêcheurs: 'Sept tours de cinq à treize étages inaugurées en 1977. 18 cages d'escaliers, 562 logements HLM [Habitation à Loyer Modéré] [...] En tout, 3,399 habitants'. Unlike *9/3:*



Figure 2.15

Les Grands Pêcheurs as a place of social interaction.

Mémoire d'un territoire, which constructs a clinical cityscape through the dominant use of fixed-frame cinematography and the absence of people, *De l'autre côté du périph'* represents the neighbourhood as a place of social interaction and exchange, through which the Taverniers and their camera meander in search of chance encounters with the local population. One such meeting occurs when the Taverniers are hailed out of a thirteenth-floor window by a resident, Henri Ollivier, who invites the film-makers up to his home. The manner in which this brief exchange is filmed and subsequently edited into the documentary, illustrates the 'interactive' and 'constructive' nature of the

Taverniers' camera work.³⁸ Initially framing the tower-blocks at ground level, the next image plunges dramatically downwards, depicting the view of the street from the inside of Ollivier's flat. This is then followed by another shot, this time looking upwards at the windows of the high-rise building in which Ollivier lives (Figure 2.16). The juxtaposition of these two alternative perspectives of the street, creates a visual link between the men and reinforces the theme of human interaction between film-maker and residents that dominates the documentary; it is Tavernier looking up through the viewfinder of his camera at Ollivier, whom (it is implied) is looking down at the film-makers.



Figure 2.16
Sequence depicting the 'interactive' camera work of the Taverniers, juxtaposing the perspective of local resident Henri Ollivier (*Left*) with the film-makers' perspective from the ground (*Right*).

Whilst the Taverniers' cityscape may be filled with people and, in contrast to the air of permanent cloud-cover in Benguigui's film, includes a sequence depicting a sunrise or sunset over Les Grands Pêcheurs' skyline, this does not mean that all is 'colourful' in *De l'autre côté du périph*. The buildings are still made of grey concrete and the social, economic and spatial marginalisation of the local population is

³⁸ MacDougall (2006: 4) defines an 'interactive camera' as one which 'records its own interchanges with the subject', and a 'constructive camera', as one which 'interprets its subject by breaking it down and reassembling it according to some external logic'.

symbolised by the recurring motif of the *périphérique* (the ring-road around Paris), which gives the film its name and features in the opening sequences of the two-part documentary. Although the residents of Les Grands Pêcheurs only live on the ‘other side’ of the *périphérique*, the ring-road acts as a barrier, cutting off the population from the centre of Paris and spatially relegating the suburb to the margins of society.³⁹ This is directly alluded to by the continuity announcer who introduces Part One of *De l’autre côté du périph’*:

A la frontière du Mexique et des Etats-Unis, du côté de Tijuana, il existe un très long mur d’acier, façon ex-mur de Berlin, qui sépare brutalement deux mondes: celui du dollar, et celui de la pauvreté. En France, bien sûr nous n’avons pas encore de frontière aussi visible. Néanmoins, de part et d’autres, dans certaines périphéries se désigne aujourd’hui une société à deux visages. D’un côté, des symboles visibles de l’opulence. De l’autre, la face cachée de notre prospérité.

The spatial and socio-economic marginalisation of the *banlieue* of Les Grands Pêcheurs is also explored thematically in the documentary, through the medium of conversations with local people, who recount some of the difficulties of their everyday lives, including the crippling cost of electricity bills due to the high-rise buildings being constructed on the ‘tout électrique’ model (including electrical heating and cooking appliances). The underground or ‘parallel’ economy is also discussed openly by residents. Nevertheless, whereas a substantial amount of visual culture (for instance, *cinéma de banlieue* and news journalism) depicts the *banlieue* as a broken, asocial territory, the Taverniers’ emphasise the active involvement of the community in creating support networks, such as the *Aide aux devoirs* group, in which volunteers help children with their homework.

³⁹ The *banlieues* around Paris are notorious for their absence of public transport and infrastructure, making it difficult to travel to the capital and also to move within the suburbs of Greater Paris. This further isolates the inhabitants of these urban zones and often makes it difficult for them to access public services and to find work outside of the area in which they live.

Consequently, the urban landscape of Les Grands Pêcheurs is represented as a communal space where people work together to ‘make the best’ of their circumstances.⁴⁰

The subordinate titles of each instalment of *De l’autre côté du périph*’ offer an additional indication of the manner in which the ‘community spirit’ of Les Grands Pêcheurs is a central theme of the documentary: (Part One) *Le Coeur de la cité*; (Part Two) *Le Meilleur de l’âme*. Through the juxtaposition of an image of spatial relegation (the ‘other side’ of the *périphérique*), with references to human qualities (‘heart’ and ‘soul’), the Taverniers construct an alternative vision of the marginalised suburbs. The play on words of the ‘heart’ of the city (spatial and qualitative) also has the effect of anthropomorphising a terrain that is usually depicted as dehumanising and alienating (as for example in Benguigui’s representation of Seine-Saint-Denis). Bertrand Tavernier’s frequent references to the generosity and hospitality of many individuals who participated in the documentary (for example, the Gerno family who twice invited the film-makers to dinner, despite recently having had the telephone line cut off for non-payment), further reinforces the atmosphere of solidarity and community suggested by the film’s reference to ‘le meilleur de l’âme’.

Moreover, *De l’autre côté du périph*’ depicts the urban landscape as a multi-ethnic space of exchange. Unlike news coverage which tends to focus on the ‘visible’ non-European part of the *banlieue* population, the Taverniers interact with people from a wide range of ethnic origins including *Français de souche*, southern European, North African and Sub-Saharan Africa. The documentary also shows that the different strands

⁴⁰ Sociological fieldwork has also drawn attention to the high levels of community support networks and organisations that exist in these disadvantaged suburbs (cf. Mitchell 2011), thereby highlighting the disparity between the representation of the ‘universal’ *banlieue* and life as it is experienced by its residents.

of the community frequently mix and do not, as is often suggested, remain closed off from each other. As a result, the solidarity of the inhabitants of Les Grands Pêcheurs is shown to be based not on an allegiance to a particular ethnic origin or cultural community, but on a collective experience of territorial stigmatisation and socio-economic marginalisation. Accordingly, *De l'autre côté du périph'* may be read as continuing in a line of 'social films' which explore and often celebrate the *banlieue* as a location of 'authentic' working-class culture.⁴¹

From an aesthetic point of view, Benguigui and the Taverniers' documentary representation of marginalised suburbs constructs the urban environment as a considerably different space. For Benguigui, it is an asocial place of spatial alterity, whose 'monstrous' monochrome architecture oppresses and imprisons local residents. In contrast, Les Grands Pêcheurs is presented by Tavernier as a space of social interaction and exchange between people from different backgrounds. However, from a thematic perspective there are perhaps more similarities than might otherwise appear at first sight. Both documentaries provide an opportunity for people who are usually voiceless to express themselves and demonstrate to the viewer that although they may live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, they are not just crime statistics, but are individuals with families and ambitions, who play an active role in their local communities. If there really is a '*crise des banlieues*' (as the media would have us believe), it is suggested in both documentaries that the problem lies not with the people who live there, but with the failure to address issues such as unemployment and

⁴¹ For an analysis of French 'social films' of the 1990s and 2000s, cf. Mariette (2010). Powrie (1999) also highlights the late 1990s (when *De l'autre côté du périph'* was made) as marking a 'return of the political' in French cinema.

discrimination (social, economic, territorial, ethnic), that are rife in these areas. Overall, both film-makers reveal a desire to rehabilitate the *banlieue* and valorise the contributions of its inhabitants by ‘breaking down’ the alterity of these residential zones and those who inhabit them. Bertrand and Nils Tavernier achieve this by engaging with the local population and discussing the problems faced by these marginalised suburbs, whilst at the same time, providing examples of the generosity and solidarity of the community. Benguigui’s alternative approach is to explain how the labour of people living in industrial suburbs such as Seine-Saint-Denis played a fundamental role in building France’s economic success; Benguigui sets out to record the ‘memory’ of the *département* 93, in order to legitimise and restore this piece of neglected social history.

* ‘La peur des *banlieues*’

To conclude this investigation of the representation of urban France, it is necessary to compare the portrayal of the *banlieue* in news journalism and the documentary form, and assess what these representations potentially reveal about contemporary French society. As a general rule, this chapter has highlighted the widespread construction of a ‘universal’ *banlieue* that is an epicentre of alterity. This representation, found in both the news coverage and documentary depiction of these suburban spaces, is built upon an aesthetic approach which is designed to reinforce the ‘otherness’ of the urban environment and its population. A notable example is the use of vertical pan shots to create an atmosphere of menace. My case study of the coverage of the 2005 riots on TF1 and France 2’s evening news programmes also revealed a tendency for journalists to ‘search for the spectacular’ (Bourdieu 1996: 18) in their selection of events and in the

construction of their reports, which are often edited to dramatise and illustrate the ‘myth’ of the ‘universal’ *banlieue*. Similarly, the amalgamation of incidents and the visual standardisation in the depiction of outbreaks of urban unrest, further contributes to the representation of these peripheral zones as places of violence and youth delinquency. The exploration of the documentary genre also revealed the potential for the longer format to reinforce this alterity. Nevertheless, certain films display a desire to deconstruct the ‘universal’ *banlieue* and examine the context out of which urban violence is born.

In the first half of this chapter I examined the coverage of the 2005 riots on TF1 and France 2’s 8:00 p.m. news bulletins and focused my analysis on the representation of the urban landscape and young people. I demonstrated how the cityscape is constructed as a place of spatial, socio-cultural, ethnic and religious alterity. This effect is achieved through the framing of the architecture, the focus on incidents of rioting and violence in which young people are depicted as anonymous asocial figures, and in the insistent focus on non-European ethnic minorities. The comparison of the representation of the initial Clichy-sous-Bois incident with the later coverage, when the unrest had spread nation-wide, reveals a similar inclination to dramatise and transform a specific incident, occurring as a result of a set of particular circumstances, into an illustration of the ‘universal’ *banlieue*. Finally, I established that this construction of the *banlieue* is neither restricted to the particular events of the autumn riots of 2005, nor to the medium of news journalism. In particular, I underlined the similarities between non-fictional representations of peri-urban space and those found in *cinéma de banlieue*. Ultimately, my analysis revealed a continuation of the post-1980 trends identified by

Boyer and Lochard (1998) in their study of the *banlieue* (sensationalism and the representation of ethnic and religious alterity).

The second part of this chapter explored documentary representations of the ‘extra-ordinary’ and ‘ordinary’ *banlieue*. I compared two documentaries which reviewed the riots of 2005, from the perspective of the authorities tasked with restoring order to the streets, and from the viewpoint of young *banlieue* residents. In the former, I outlined the manner in which the programme adopted an approach analogous to news journalism with its focus on violence (and its repression), and the exclusion of young people. In contrast, the second documentary attempted to move away from images of rioting, in order to concentrate on exploring the issues behind the violence and to provide the opportunity for young people to express themselves. I subsequently examined two documentaries which set out to represent the ‘ordinary’ everyday life of the *banlieue*. This comparative analysis highlighted that although from an aesthetic perspective the suburban cityscape was represented in opposite ways (as an epicentre of alterity and as a space of social interaction), from a thematic point of view, both documentary film-makers sought to ‘break down’ the alterity of the *banlieue* and validate the contribution of its residents. Whilst the documentary format was shown on occasion to construct the urban space as an epicentre of alterity and amalgamate marginalised suburbs into one ‘universal’ *banlieue*, overall, this genre displayed a desire to deconstruct stereotypical views of disadvantaged suburbs and their residents.

By way of conclusion, I would like to consider the legacy of the 2005 riots and what these audiovisual representations of the urban margins reveal about contemporary French society. Despite the scale and duration of the events of 2005 and the extensive coverage afforded to the unrest in the media, it would seem that public interest in the

issues of inequality and discrimination raised by these events has been of limited duration. Equally, research conducted by scholars such as Koff and Duprez (2009) highlights the absence of a substantial political response to these events. Although a ‘Marshal Plan’ for disadvantaged suburbs was promised as a response to the riots, six months after the civil unrest, few of the promised initiatives were being implemented; a situation which was met with considerable public indifference (cf. Duprez 2009; Lapeyronnie 2009). Nevertheless, among French academics the reaction to these events has been on the whole more substantial, with a number of scholars arguing for the need to discuss questions such as the French model of citizenship and the place of ethnic minorities in society.⁴²

Over the past two decades, research into France’s disadvantaged suburbs from a range of disciplines has underlined the disparity between the way these urban spaces are represented (for instance, in the media, by politicians, in visual culture) and life as it is experienced by those who reside in these outer-city margins. Yet, the myth of the ‘universal’ *banlieue* and its construction as an epicentre of alterity continues to dominate public debate, to the extent that this ‘urban legend’ has been adopted by a proportion of people who live in these marginalised suburbs (cf. Lepoutre 2001). This raises the question of what exactly makes this particular representation of the *banlieue* so pervasive, and by extension, what this reveals about contemporary French society. As a location where levels of unemployment are often several times the national average, where social disorder is more frequent, and where there is a larger than average

⁴² For example, Tshimanga, Gondola and Bloom (2009: 7-8), argue that the 2005 riots highlighted the need to build ‘an inclusionary French social model of the future’. However, their edited volume, *Frenchness and the African Diaspora: Identity and Uprising in Contemporary France*, was published in America and has yet to be translated into French, thereby suggesting that this line of research is in its early stages of development and, for the moment, remains controversial.

concentration of ethnic minorities, these disadvantaged suburbs offer a magnification of France's postcolonial demographic changes and its failure to tackle social issues such as unemployment and educational underachievement. In this sense, these peri-urban areas are places in which alterity is more easily visible.

However, the 'fear of the *banlieue*' (Rey 1996) lies more in the manner in which the suburbs are portrayed than an actual state of affairs. Whilst suburban riots recur periodically, they remain an 'extra-ordinary' event that do not reflect the everyday experience of life in the suburbs. Nevertheless, it is almost only on such occasions that the media chose to represent these neighbourhoods. As a result, images of violence are often the only representation of this urban space seen by a wide section of society. It is perhaps not surprising therefore, that the myth of the 'universal' *banlieue* has gained credence. In a similar manner, the construction of the *banlieue* as an epicentre of alterity also arguably reflects the media's ingrained proclivity to 'search for the spectacular' (Bourdieu 1996: 18). For, as Bourdieu (1996: 19) contends: 'Avec des mots ordinaires, on n'épate pas le "bourgeois", ni le "peuple". Il faut des mots extraordinaires'. I would add that for the medium of television, 'extraordinary images' are also necessary. To what extent the media has contributed to the propagation of this 'urban legend' of the *banlieue* is difficult to establish, nonetheless this chapter's case study of the coverage of the 2005 riots demonstrates that certain aesthetic choices, commonly employed by reporters, reinforce the alterity of the urban landscape and its population. Having said that, the construction of the 'universal' *banlieue* as an epicentre of alterity is not restricted to the realm of journalism, but is also found in other forms of visual and written culture. This would suggest that there is a deeper underlying reason for the widespread use of such imagery. Perhaps the myth of the

‘universal’ *banlieue* that transcends geographical location may be read as a metonym for contemporary society’s anxieties over the postcolonial demographic changes that have taken place in France. In the next chapter, I assess whether these concerns about France’s changing society are generating a revival of rural ‘peasant’ culture as a model for national identity.

Chapter 3 – *La France Profonde:* Visible and Vanishing ‘Peasants’ in Rural France

Perhaps the most often cited study of rural France is American historian Eugen Weber’s 1977 study *Peasants Into Frenchmen*, which, as its subtitle indicates, explores the ‘modernisation of rural France’ during the period 1870-1914. In particular, Weber seeks to identify the manner in which factors such as the arrival of roads, rail networks and the establishment of a national education system, transformed a country, which he argues was composed of diverse isolated communities living in relative autarky, into a nation of citizens sharing a common identity and values; how ‘peasants’ were transformed into ‘Frenchmen’. Or, to put it another way, the manner in which, ‘local loyalties, customs, and languages were broken down and replaced by a national culture’ (Lehning 1995: 2). The influence of Weber’s thesis has been wide reaching and historians in America and France have sought to analyse in greater detail the influence of factors such as the arrival of the railway and the widening of political participation on nineteenth-century rural communities (for instance, Agulhon 1970; McPhee 1992). The impact of *Peasants Into Frenchmen* also crossed over into other fields of research with American anthropologist, Susan Carol Rogers (1991) admitting that she was surprised to discover, when she arrived in the Aveyron to conduct fieldwork (1975-1989), that local traditions and culture had not been completely eroded by the homogenising forces of modernisation.

An underlying theme of research into the cause and effect of modernisation on isolated agricultural communities is the notion that change involves the inevitable

disappearance of the ‘peasant’ as a class and the loss of regional culture and traditions.¹ One such example is *La fin des paysans: Innovation et changement dans l’agriculture française*, by French sociologist, Henri Mendras (1967). In this study, Mendras argues that by the end of the twentieth century, the traditional family farm and community will have disappeared, as a result of the arrival of mechanised and industrial forms of agriculture in the 1950s.² In addition to being the passive victims of modernisation, the depiction of these rural societies as being unable to adapt to the consequences of contact with modernity, is also found in other disciplines. For instance, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s long-term ethnographic study of a rural community in the Béarn explores the problem of celibacy among small-holder farmers and how the traditional codes for choosing suitable marriage partners are actively undermining the possibility of these communities’ survival.³ In anthropological terms, the work of Weber (1977) and others describes rural France as a place of alterity, where its cultural status as ‘other’ is being reduced progressively through prolonged contact with the centralising powers of the nation-state and global market forces. In this way, the analysis shares similarities with representations of aboriginal populations, whose ‘traditional’ way of life is often portrayed as threatened to disappear with the encroachment of global or ‘western’ society, as seen in my discussion of ‘ethnographic’ documentaries in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

¹ The use of inverted commas is to indicate the manner in which the term ‘peasant’ is frequently a construction or invented symbol imposed by the ‘dominant’ classes on farmers often to promote a particular view of rural life.

² In a chapter entitled ‘Réflexions vingt ans après’, written for a revised edition of *La fin des paysans*, published in 1984, Mendras restates his conviction in his 1967 analysis (Moulin 1991: 165).

³ Bourdieu wrote three articles on this issue (1962, 1972 and 1989), which were published collectively in a volume entitled *Le bal des célibataires* (2002).

The dichotomous model proposed by Weber and others describes contacts between societies (rural and urban France) as a process by which a dominant force (modernity/progress/civilisation) subsumes a ‘weaker’ or more ‘fragile’ society; in the case of France in the nineteenth century, how affiliation to a national identity gradually replaced local and regional allegiances. Although it is undeniable that rural society in France underwent significant changes and reorganisation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, scholars working in the fields of history and anthropology since the 1990s have sought to question this paradigm based on a power relationship of ‘the dominant’ and ‘the dominated’. Ethnographies written by American anthropologist Susan Carol Rogers (1991) and Canadian anthropologist Winnie Lem (1999) demonstrate that the transformation of ‘peasants’ into ‘Frenchmen’ (or women) does not necessarily involve the eradication of local or regional traditions. Rogers (1991) discovered, contrary to her initial hypothesis, that the arrival of modern farming methods had actually reinforced the use of the traditional *ostal* system around which family farms in the Aveyron were organised.⁴ In a similar vein, Lem (1999) encountered a community in the Languedoc that was actively engaged in maintaining local traditions, and even devising various forms of ‘direct action’ to protect local viticulture and raise public awareness nationally.⁵ In her introduction, Lem (1999: 5) asserts the need to move away from the conception of rural communities as ‘dominated’ by the forces of modernisation, and to recover the ‘history and the agency

⁴ The *ostal* is defined by Rogers as ‘a type of family farm organised around an extended “stem family” and is ‘a variant of the stem family systems associated with pre-industrial southern Europe’ (1991, abstract).

⁵ For instance, conducting ‘raids’ on local supermarkets which stock foreign wine. The aim of these ‘raids’ is to smash as many bottles of non-domestic wine as possible, before running out to be photographed by local media who have been alerted ahead of the action (Lem 1999: 70 ‘Guerrilla Tactics’).

of a group of people as they confront modernity'. Accordingly, the fieldwork of Rogers (1991) and Lem (1999) offer an alternative to the model of rural societies as 'passive victims' of modernisation, overwhelmed or subsumed into the nation, and instead offer evidence that local and regional identities and traditions may *coexist* alongside national allegiances.⁶

Lem and Rogers's interest in the negotiation of identities on a regional and national scale within two different rural communities in France may be interpreted as a reflection of the wider concerns of the discipline of anthropology during the 1980s and 1990s. During what has been termed as a 'crisis of authorship', anthropologists in the 1980s began to question the positivistic model, which separated the 'self' of the anthropologist from the ethnographic 'other', and to reassess fieldwork as an ethnographic encounter between 'self' *and* 'other' in which two cultures interact with each other:

Stories of cultural contact and change have been structured by a pervasive dichotomy: absorption by the other or resistance to the other. [...] Yet what if identity is conceived not as a boundary to be maintained but as a nexus of relations and transactions actively engaging a subject?

(James Clifford 1988: 344; cited by James R. Lehning 1995: 206-207).

In addition to the reassessment of the relationship between 'self and other', anthropologists also began to re-evaluate ethnography as the product of an individual author in seminal works such as Edward W. Said's, *Orientalism* (1979), which argues

⁶ Nevertheless, Rogers (1991: 196) acknowledges that the empirical evidence that she gathered on the rise in the use of the traditional *ostal* model of farming, conflicts with the perceptions of the local community, who believe that the *ostal* system and other local traditions are in decline. In other words, the Ste Foyans have adopted as 'truth' the 'homogenising powers of the centre and the weight of their formally uniform national institutions' (Rogers 1991: 196).

that ‘the Orient’ is a construction of western scholars and artists’ imaginations.⁷ Within the field of history, a similar paradigmatic shift was also underway, with interest in the manner in which historians ‘contribute, consciously or not, to the creation, dismantling and restructuring of images of the past’, in studies such as the edited volume *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 13), which explores the construction of national traditions and heritage. Returning to the specific field of rural France, historian James R. Lehning’s study *Peasant and French: Cultural Contact in Rural France* (1995) is perhaps the clearest indication of this change in emphasis:

Our intention should not be to find when and how peasants became French, but to discover the ways in which they served to define what being French meant, and the ways in which French culture defined what being a peasant meant. [...] [T]his book is about the relations between French and rural cultures [...] It is, then, a history of cultural contact [...].

(Lehning 1995: 5).

The continuing interest in the analysis of the relationship between rural and national culture and the construction of the category of the ‘peasant’ is reflected in more recent scholarship. For example, in a 2004 study of literary and artistic representations of the ‘peasant’ during the Enlightenment, historian Amy S. Wyngaard intentionally references Weber (1977) and the subsequent change of paradigm in her title: *From Savage to Citizen: The Invention of the Peasant in the French Enlightenment*. French art historian, Catherine Clavilier’s (2009) publication offers a similar approach, exploring ‘la construction d’un mythe historique de l’agriculture au XVIIIe siècle’. In related fields, the arrival of city-dwellers in the 1980s, attracted to the idea of an enhanced

⁷ Other key references for this debate are James Clifford and George E. Marcus (1986) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* and Clifford Geertz’s (1988) *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*. Both texts analyse the question of authorship in ethnography and deconstruct the writing ‘style’ of a number of famous anthropologists.

quality of life in the countryside, and the subsequent changes in the demographic mix of the rural population, has been a point of interest for rural development specialist Elizabeth Trotignon (2006) and anthropologist Anne-Marie Topalov (2008).

From the analysis of literary and artistic representations of agricultural communities, emerge two contrasting representations of the ‘peasant’: that of ‘savage and brutish peasants’ or the ‘comically ignorant villager’, found in the works of Balzac, Zola and Molière (Wyngaard 2004: 13; 192); and the development in the eighteenth century of representations of the peasant as ‘ambitious, virtuous, and happy’, a figure to be admired, in the works of Marivaux, Rétif de la Bretonne, Greuze and Fragonard (Wyngaard 2004: 13). Although it is possible to find examples of both types of ‘peasants’ in twentieth-century representations of rural life in France, the depiction of the countryside as an idyllic place in which ‘authentic’ French culture and values still exist is by far the more common. Wyngaard (2004: 193-197) identifies during the course of the twentieth century, ‘three major moments of peasant nostalgia and propaganda’, each occurring at periods in French history when ‘concerns about modernisation and the effacement of a specifically French culture and way of life’ have been particularly prevalent: the 1920s and 1930s (the rise of America as an industrial and economic power); France as an occupied nation under the Vichy government; and the 1980s and 1990s (globalisation, presence of ethnic minorities). Notwithstanding the small reversal in the rural exodus by a proportion of affluent city-dwellers, France is no longer a country in which the majority of the population is involved in agriculture or resides in the countryside. According to an official government study in 2003 by Datar (*Délégation à l’Aménagement du Territoire et à l’Action Régionale*), in 1999,

approximately 18% of the population lived in rural areas (Trotignon 2006: 13). Yet, the ‘peasant’ and the countryside as symbols of national culture and identity remain highly significant, judging by their use by advertisers to increase sales of ‘rustic’ camembert, and in political campaigns to appeal to the electorate. Figure 3.1 demonstrates the enduring appeal of employing rural iconography for presidential campaigns and testifies to the continued association between the countryside as a ‘repository’ of values, or as a bedrock of national identity. For example, historian Annie Moulin (1991: 178) notes how the [early] career of Jacques Chirac ‘was built on a careful attention to peasant problems and issues’; an attention which he later maintained as French President (1995-2007) with annual appearances at the popular *Salon de l’agriculture*.⁸

The contemporary appetite for images and stories of ‘pre-lapsarian’ rural idylls is attested by the popularity of contemporary ‘regional’ or ‘rural’ novelists, such as Jean-Guy Soumy, Christian Signol and Claude Michelet, who regularly feature among the best-selling authors in France and whose works have been adapted for television and cinema. Anxiety over the erosion of national identity and the rise of ‘peasant nostalgia’ (Wyngaard 2004: 193) is also

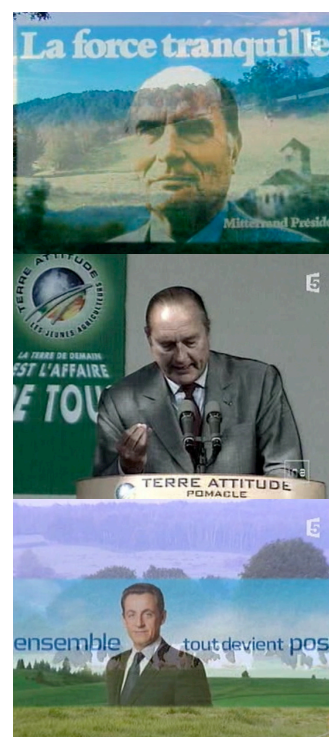


Figure 3.1
 Top and bottom: posters from the presidential election campaigns of François Mitterrand (1987) and Nicolas Sarkozy (2007).
 Middle: Speech from 2000 in which Jacques Chirac declared ‘Nous sommes tous des paysans’.
 [Source: *France rurale, un siècle de mutations* (France 5, 2008)].

⁸ The *Salon de l’agriculture* is an annual event held in central Paris showcasing new agricultural technologies and machinery but also regional food (*produits du terroir*) and rare breed livestock. The high-profile nature of the *Salon* is reflected by the attendance of politicians and the media (the opening usually features on the national evening news). According to the *Salon*’s official website (<<http://www.salon-agriculture.com>> [Accessed 22.9.2012]) 681,213 people visited the agricultural show in 2012.

reflected in the emergence of the ‘heritage film’ as the dominant genre of French cinema in the 1980s (Powrie 1997). The box-office success of Claude Berri’s depiction of rural Provence in his adaptation of a Marcel Pagnol novel in a film diptych, *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des Sources* (1986), is often identified as epitomising the heritage genre and the public’s nostalgia for France’s rural past.

- *Visible and Vanishing Peasants*

In this chapter, I examine the visual representation of rural France and its populations engaged in small-scale ‘family’ farming by the media and documentary film-makers. These depictions may be broadly categorised as falling into two contrasting images: ‘peasants’ actively fighting to defend their way of life, and ‘fossil peasants’ (Bodiguel 1978; cited in Moulin 1991: 198) passively resigned to the disappearance of their farms and way of life upon their death. The coverage afforded to these alternative representations is distinctive. Whilst militant farmers such as José Bové may become ‘media stars’, appearing on television news bulletins and on the front-pages of national and even international newspapers, the latter remain marginalised, depicted in a handful of documentaries usually scheduled in the dead of night when audiences are scarce. However, despite these apparently opposed representations, the underlying theme of these programmes is the same: the impact of modernisation and the subsequent arrival of global market forces on the ‘traditional’ family farm, which is portrayed as either struggling to survive, or as irrevocably doomed to disappear. In both cases, it would appear that more is at stake than the livelihoods of a small percentage of the rural population; it is France’s cultural heritage, or even sense of national identity that is

being threatened.

I have used the expression *la France profonde* as the title of this chapter because it reflects the polysemic nature of the construction of rural France, which is generally characterised as either a place of spatial and social alterity, where the ‘forces of progress or civilisation’ are met with resistance (a French ‘heart of darkness’), or as a place of ‘authenticity’, a bastion of ‘Frenchness’ that exemplifies deep-seated traditional values. This manichean construction of the countryside is also reflected in the changing connotations of the term *paysan* (‘peasant’) which has been used as a pejorative term to evoke the ‘backwardness’ of the country ‘bumpkin’ and, more recently, as a badge of honour or quality, to contrast with the homogenised products of large-scale industrial farming (for example, the foundation of the *Confédération paysanne* in 1987 which represents the interests of small farmers).⁹

This chapter explores how rural France is portrayed in a selection of documentaries and what these representations reveal about the place of agriculture and rural life in contemporary French society and culture. An additional aim is to compare the documentary representation of farming communities with other forms of visual representation (news reporting) and to evaluate the extent to which this reflects current or past concerns of academic research. Key to this analysis is an assessment of France’s ambiguous and often ambivalent relationship to the issue of globalisation, the perceived need to protect and preserve France’s culture and traditions, and how this influences the visual representation of ‘peasants’, as defenders of France’s heritage or, as the victims of modernisation. Relating to the central concern of this thesis, the overarching purpose

⁹ For more information on the changing usage of the term ‘paysan’ cf. Pierre Barral 1966: 72-80; Moulin 1991: 1-3.

of this chapter is to assess how these depictions of the *paysan* inform the construction of national identity; what it means to be ‘French’ in the twenty-first century.

The chapter is divided into two parts. In the first, I investigate the ‘visible peasant’, fighting to defend his (or less often, her) way of life or method of farming. This section will examine José Bové and the *Confédération paysanne*’s campaign against *la malbouffe* and for a different form of agriculture, by exploring the visual representation of the highly publicised ‘dismantling’ of a McDonald’s in 1999. In the second, I consider the ‘vanishing peasant’, and explore the theme of the destruction or amalgamation of traditional regional cultures by the forces of modernisation. To do this, I focus on the critically acclaimed trilogy *Profils paysans*, filmed over a ten-year period (1998-2008) by photographer and documentary film-maker Raymond Depardon, and evaluate the extent to which these films offer a visual ‘memory’ or archive of a ‘disappearing world’. I also endeavour to assess the visual and thematic similarities between Depardon’s depiction of rural communities as places of alterity and those made by anthropologists such as Stéphane Breton (c.f. Chapter 1).

❖ ‘Visible Peasants’: José Bové and the ‘McDonald’s Incident’

On 12 August 1999, a group of farmers affiliated to the *Confédération paysanne*, engaged in direct action and dismantled a McDonald’s that was in the process of being built on the site of an old petrol station in Millau (Aveyron). Piling the dismantled parts onto the trailers of a number of tractors, the farmers drove around Millau and offloaded the material in front of the *préfecture*, accompanied by around three hundred supporters.

This symbolic protest was a response to the United States' imposition of a 100% tax rate on a range of European goods, including *foie gras* and the locally-produced Roquefort, in reply to the European Union's prohibition of the importing of American hormone-fed beef (a decision which was ruled illegal by the World Trading Organisation – WTO). Although the initial incident was covered by national news, the real media attention occurred in response to the decision of the local judge to impose an excessively high bail on the five men arrested the following week (105,000 francs per person) (cited in Bové and Dufour 2001: 28), which was out of all proportion to amounts usually imposed on union-related activities. One of the farmers, José Bové, refused to pay and spent nineteen days in prison waiting for his appeal to be heard. Upon his release, Bové was greeted by the media as a modern-day 'Astérix', defending France against the encroachment of global market forces and Americanisation. *Bovémanie* was a term frequently used by journalists at this time to reflect the high level of public interest in this militant farmer.

Capitalising upon his raised media profile, Bové along with fellow union member, François Dufour, embarked on a sustained campaign to promote the anti-GMO (genetically modified organisms) stance of the union, most notably travelling to Seattle to participate in the huge protests that surrounded the summit of the WTO in November 1999. During the lead up to the WTO conference, Bové again captured the media's attention by publicly eating Roquefort in front of the cameras, part of a 200 kilo cheese that had been smuggled into the country.¹⁰ In France, Bové and Dufour stepped up their

¹⁰ Platters of bread and the blue cheese were subsequently distributed to the crowds of interested onlookers, a deed which was widely reported by the media. Heller (2002: 30) remarks that Bové's defiance acted as 'a visual and olfactory reminder of the stakes that had brought activists to confront globalisation in both Millau and Seattle: Roquefort stood for culture against transnational capital'.

campaign by publishing a book of interviews which explained the reasoning behind the ‘McDonald’s incident’. *Le Monde n’est pas une marchandise* (2000) quickly became a best-seller and gained the attention of the political classes.¹¹ President Jacques Chirac was filmed reading the book and famously declared ‘Nous sommes tous des paysans’, shortly after Bové’s release (Taylor 2001: 58). To maintain and spread awareness of the *Confédération paysanne*’s ideas in the lead up to the trial, Bové and Dufour undertook a two-and-a-half month tour of France, supporting other farmers involved in a variety of protests, participating in debates at universities, and attending book signings. The culmination of this campaign was a mass rally on 30 June 2000 in Millau (the day before the trial began), where the aim was to attract around 20,000 people and transform the town into ‘Seattle-sur-Tarn’. On the day, according to Bové and Dufour’s account (2001: 171), around 100,000 supporters, many from other European nations, attended the event which also included a free open-air concert featuring Francis Cabrel, the rock band Noir Désir, and Zebda, winner in 2000 of the awards for ‘best group’ and ‘best song’ at the Victoires de la musique.¹²

The ‘McDonald’s incident’ was only one part of the *Confédération paysanne*’s three-year anti-GMO campaign which included other forms of direct action, beginning in January 1998 with the destruction of three tons of transgenic maize in Nérac (cf. Heller 2002: 16-23). However, it was not until the attack on the fast-food giant,

¹¹ Translated in English as *The World Is Not for Sale: Farmers Against Junk Food* (Bové and Dufour 2001). All page references cited in this chapter refer to the English edition.

¹² Bové and Dufour’s figure of 100,000 people contrasts with news coverage, which estimates that the farmers’ aim to double the population of Millau (20,000 inhabitants) was achieved (TF1 and France 2, 30/06/2000). TF1 also adds that 30,000 people were expected to attend the evening concert. The following day, France 2 reports that up to 40,000 demonstrators were present during the rally. Regardless of the actual number in attendance, it is undeniable that the campaign mobilised large numbers from across France and Europe. Activists from similar campaigns in countries such as India and America were also present to testify at the trial of the farmers.

arguably the ‘ultimate’ symbol of globalisation and industrialised food, that the link between the GMO debate and globalisation became firmly established in the public’s mind. Some of the media’s attention is attributable to the visual nature of the dismantling of the McDonald’s and the personality of the protest’s ‘leader’. Bové’s strategic use of the term *la malbouffe* to describe the type of homogenised, mass-produced product sold by such international fast-food brands also provided a memorable and effective catch-phrase/concept for the movement.¹³ Nevertheless, it would be remiss to dismiss the sabotage of a McDonald’s as a mere publicity stunt that intelligently pandered to journalists’ appetite for dramatic visuals and ‘quirky’ personalities. The true achievement of the *Confédération paysanne* was to succeed in fundamentally altering the manner in which the media framed the issue of GM crops.

In what anthropologist Chaia Heller (2002: 6) describes as the ‘first phase’ of the GMO debate, French television newscasts were dominated by ‘images of science experts, micro-biologists arched over lab stations in spotless white coats, squeezing drops of mysterious substances from colourful pipettes, discussing the risks associated with the new technology’. Even environmental and ecological NGOs restricted their arguments to the issue of risk assessment and scientific expertise, sidelining wider concerns such as the impact of these technologies on Third World communities. The action of Roquefort farmers in Millau, however redefined this debate, and using the ‘cultural potency’ of their protest against McDonald’s, were able to ‘popularise an anti-globalisation critique of GMOs’ (Heller 2002: 34). In so doing, Heller argues, the farmers achieved two important things. Firstly, by highlighting the close ties between

¹³ For definitions and discussions of *la malbouffe* cf. Bové and Dufour 2001: 53-77; Bové and Dufour 2005: 42-47; Taylor 2001: 52-64; Heller 2002: 28-29; Birchfield 2005: 590-591.

multinationals and public and private research organisations, the union disrupted ‘hegemonic notions about science as an objective and humanitarian pursuit, standing outside the domains of society and self-interest’ (Heller 2002: 21). Secondly, and more significantly, the use of the term *malbouffe* to describe GMOs transformed a technical debate about risk, into a *socio-cultural* debate about ‘food quality, *paysan* survival and globalisation’. In other words, Bové and the *Confédération paysanne* succeeded in re-framing the debate over GM crops in such a way that it became an issue of national importance. For now the issue of GMOs was no longer limited to a handful of scientists (and therefore beyond the ‘expertise’ of the general public), but became an issue which directly affected the public as consumers, and also as citizens of a nation which values highly its culinary heritage and traditions.

Whether it is setting cars alight in France’s deprived suburbs to express anger at a police intervention, or farmers attacking a symbol of globalisation in Millau, protesters from all spheres appear to be aware of the importance of gaining media attention to highlight their cause, and that their chances of achieving this improve if they provide dramatic or imaginative ‘visuals’. Nonetheless, what Heller (2002) effectively demonstrates is that such publicity stunts do not necessarily involve the sacrificing of the substance of a campaign, in order to achieve national news coverage. In certain cases, campaigners can influence or set the agenda and the manner in which the media represent an issue. That tens of thousands of people turned up to the rally in Millau on 30 June 2000 to support the ten farmers on trial, nearly a year after the initial ‘McDonald’s incident’, is testament to the activists’ efforts to use the initial media interest as a platform to raise awareness for their cause. Gordon and Meunier (2001:

23) report that after the trial, 45 per cent of French people polled expressed support or sympathy for Bové, whilst only 4 per cent were opposed or hostile to the farmers' cause.

In the next section I examine in more detail how the dismantling of the McDonald's was visually represented in the media, beginning with an investigation of coverage on France 2 and TF1's evening news programmes. This is followed by the analysis of the documentary *Chronique d'un printemps paysan* (France 3, 2001), which engages with the *Confédération paysanne's* campaign and offers an alternative to the media's characterisation of José Bové as a 'folk hero'.

- *Fast-Food Journalism*

Contrary to the refusal of José Bové to post bail for his release, which featured as the first item in France 2 and TF1's evening news bulletins on 2 September 1999, the initial incident on August 12 did not attract much attention. France 2 devoted a 33 second 'news in brief' summary of the incident, whilst TF1 provided a short report from Millau lasting a total of 1 minute and 5 seconds. Both channels included the 'McDonald's incident' as the second of three items covering different protests held on the same day by farmers across France.¹⁴ Whereas TF1 gave the topic more prominence by featuring the report from Millau in the first ten minutes (8:09 p.m.), France 2 placed it later in the bulletin (8:22 p.m.). Despite the difference in the running order, the language and images used to illustrate the Millau event are similar. As Figure 3.2 indicates, the

¹⁴ The first report was devoted to the dispute on the profit margins made by distributors and the price paid to the producer. The third item covered a demonstration by livestock farmers against the programmed reintroduction of the bear to the Pyrenees.

concern of the reporters is to depict the actions of the farmers, as opposed to providing space for the opinions or motivations of the protesters. (This is perhaps understandable considering the small amount of time allocated to the item.) Therefore, the viewer is presented with footage of people working in teams to dismantle the McDonald's and farmers marching with banners in front of the *préfecture*.



Figure 3.2

Top row: Stills from TF1's report (12.08.1999).

Bottom row: Stills from France 2. As France 2's coverage is much shorter, there are fewer images depicting the protest. For purposes of clarity, I have chosen to omit other stills from France 2's report in order to highlight the visual similarities between the two reports (12.08.1999).

Whilst the images appear to show a lively, but ultimately ordered act of protest, the terminology used by the newsreaders offers a different interpretation. Both channels chose to label the demonstration as the 'wrecking' or 'sacking' of a McDonald's (*le saccage*): 'Un fast food en construction saccagé par des agriculteurs à Millau dans l'Aveyron, lors d'une manifestation contre les sanctions douanières décidées par les Etats-Unis' (TF1). In addition to the image of an uncontrolled 'wrecking' by a violent and angry mob, the turn of phrase 'lors d'une manifestation' may be interpreted as implying that this was a spontaneous act that took place when a protest march got out of hand.¹⁵ France 2 also appears to suggest the clandestine nature of the action by informing viewers that the destruction took place at night (despite the visual evidence of

¹⁵ On repeated occasions, Bové has publicly stated that the symbolic *dismantling* of the unfinished McDonald's was a planned event, advertised in the local press, and for which the police and local authorities were notified as to the time, location, and form of the protest (Bové and Dufour 2001: 3-6).

the footage shot in broad daylight). This tendency to dramatise an organised, if somewhat unusual form of direct action, is particularly noticeable in TF1's report which lays particular emphasis on the damage allegedly caused by the activists: 'Des cloisons abattues, des vitres cassées. Un emblème de l'empire McDonald's est complètement mis en pièces'. Similarly, the information that the police did not choose to intervene and that no person was injured during the protest, reinforces the reporter's characterisation of the demonstration as a disordered and violent incident.

Although both newsreaders make a brief reference to the retaliatory tax rate imposed by the United States as the motivation for the protest, the TF1 journalist neither attempts to offer a more detailed explanation nor includes interviews with any of the protesters. Instead, the farmers are represented as anonymous figures, filmed mostly from behind (cf. Figure 3.3, *Top* and *Bottom* stills). They are also excluded verbally from the report. A farmer is briefly seen addressing the crowd, microphone in hand, but his words are covered by the journalist's commentary. The only other information provided about the cause for the demonstration is the inclusion of a number of slogans painted on walls or on banners (cf. Figure 3.3, *Middle* still). Both channels pick up on the same examples, which express hostility to the fast-food giant (for instance, 'McDo go home'), and raise the issue of the 100% tax affecting the locally-produced Roquefort.



Figure 3.3
Protesters filmed in an anonymous fashion (12.08.1999)

Arguably, given the brief space allocated to this news item, the inclusion of these catch-phrases offers a concise way of including the protesters' views, as the farmers have designed them to summarise and highlight their campaign. However, France 2's decision to open the report with an image of the graffiti 'McDo go home' (as opposed to TF1 which opens with images of the dismantling) has the effect of giving visual priority to the anti-McDonald's aspect of the protest. This reduces the complexity of the union's campaign to an outbreak of anti-americanism, as symbolised by the footage of farmers toppling the sign indicating the construction of a McDonald's. TF1's reporter may also be said to undermine the farmers' cause with the inclusion of a brief excerpt from a press statement issued by the manager of the McDonald's, which is interrupted by an unnamed protester. The nature of their exchange is not particularly informative (a clash of opinions about the economic benefits to the community), and would seem to serve no other purpose than to reinforce the characterisation of the protest as an aggressive and uncontrolled act of destruction. Moreover, the reporter further undercuts the farmer who challenges the McDonald's manager, by commenting that this intervention 'tourne au dialogue de sourds'.

Overall, the coverage of the Millau demonstration by France 2 and TF1 offers little in terms of analysis or explanation of the nature of the protest. With the exception of the unusual form of the demonstration and the emotive language used by journalists, the anonymous nature of the filming, which reduces the farmers to a series of slogans, offers little to distinguish this specific event from a number of other protests taking place on the same day. There is nothing to suggest that this particular incident would generate a few weeks later widespread media interest, or that the unnamed farmer of

TF1's report (José Bové) would become the focus of this attention. Between 12 August 1999 and the opening of the trial of the ten farmers' on 30 July 2000, the coverage of the 'McDonald's incident' was to undergo a transformation from a perfunctory and generic report to headline news.

Opening with coverage of the court case, France 2 and TF1's news bulletins on 30 July 2000, are structured around two themes. The first, involves the triumphal arrival of the defendants, whilst the second report depicts the atmosphere among the crowds of supporters. Contrary to the 'news-in-brief' treatment of the original event, TF1 allocates just over five minutes to this item, whereas France 2 assigns in excess of seven minutes. Correspondents also provide live updates from Millau for both channels. In terms of content, the most notable change is the description of the 'McDonald's incident' as a 'démontage musclé' (dismantling) (TF1), rather than as a 'saccage' (destruction). France 2's reporter also refers to a 'dismantling', whilst the newsreader juxtaposes the opposing views of the prosecution and defence: 'le saccage ou le démontage, la nuance est d'importance, d'un McDonald's'. Similarly, a comparison of the images accompanying the opening headlines reveals a shift from the anonymous farmers of the 12 August 1999 report, to the personification of the issue in the figure of José Bové. Four out of five shots used by France 2 are close-ups of the militant farmer (Figure 3.4). TF1 also features him in half of their images. France 2's caption 'Le Bové Show' draws additional attention to the farmer.



Figure 3.4

Comparison of opening footage used for news headlines. France 2 (*Top row*), TF1 (*Bottom row*).

Note how TF1 visually summarises the themes of both reports from Millau: *Stills 1 and 2 (Bottom row, left)* depict the court case, whilst *Stills 3 and 4 (right)* cover the rally and include marchers holding banners which offer an insight into the themes of the demonstration ‘Pour une agriculture paysanne dans une Europe solidaire’ and ‘Degustation de Roquefort: Soutien aux producteurs’ (30.06.2000).

If the opening headlines of both programmes summarise the trial as ‘le procès de José Bové’, the nine other defendants are given a mention in the reports. Nevertheless, they remain unnamed and are only glimpsed in footage filmed outside or inside the court room. Visually, José Bové dominates the coverage. He also features in a prominent verbal capacity with each channel including a series of excerpts from his various press statements made during the day. Although both reports show a fascination with Bové’s physical appearance, using numerous close-ups of his moustache and pipe, the wide-angle shots of Bové diverge in emphasis. TF1 depicts the farmer surrounded by a heavy police presence and uses the newsreader’s commentary to draw attention to this aspect, ‘d’importants moyens de sécurité [...] ont été déployés’. The rally is also described as having taken place ‘without incident’. As such, this approach, which frames the farmers’ campaign around questions of security and public disorder, demonstrates an editorial line that is consistent with the tone first set on 12 August 1999.

In contrast, France 2's wide-angle shots of Bové underline the huge media interest in the trial. Bové is depicted surrounded by jostling journalists competing to obtain a sound bite. Supporting this framing is the newsreader's introduction to the item, in which the rally is described as an occasion 'hautement médiatique'. The reporter develops this theme further by recounting how, in order to gain access to the courthouse, the accused had to push their way through ranks of French and foreign journalists. However, rather than being interpreted as a sign of the legitimacy or importance of the issues raised by the campaign, the presence of the media is used to deride Bové and his supporters. France 2's newsreader makes light of the proceedings: 'José Bové avec un sens aigu de la mise en scène et du spectacle compte bien s'offrir une nouvelle tribune'. When added to the opening headline 'Le Bové Show', and the second live update, in which the journalist reports that Bové has denied having political ambitions, the amalgamated effect turns an internationally supported cause into a publicity stunt used for an individual's personal gain. By focusing on the eye-catching spectacle of the opening of the trial and the actions of one person, the channel downplays the serious issues raised by the *Confédération paysanne's* campaign. Although TF1 does not spend as much time on Bové, preferring to go straight into an account of the day's proceedings in court, the visual focus on the farmer's moustache and pipe, shown repeatedly in close-up, has a comparable effect.

In the second report from Millau, TF1 and France 2 exhibit a similar disparaging attitude towards the crowd attending the rally. Both elide the broader context and question the motivations of the supporters. France 2 describes the crowd as a 'foule hétéroclite' composed of: 'habités de ce type de manifestation'; those primarily

attracted by the free music concert; and people ‘seduced’ by Bové’s ideas. TF1 offers a similarly belittling assessment: ‘Le nucléaire, les sans-papiers, la malbouffe, toutes les causes aussi multiples soient-elles, sont bonnes à défendre’. The private channel also undermines the unity of the supporters by including images of slogans that are unrelated to the agricultural campaign (for instance, ‘No to the Lyon-Toulouse Motorway’). On the whole, the crowd is usually depicted as an anonymous mass; however, TF1 does occasionally single out ‘striking’ individuals (Figure 3.5).

This selection of ‘quirky’ people reinforces the characterisation of the crowd as filled with the ‘usual suspects’ keen to protest whenever the opportunity arises. Consequently, this diminishes the *Confédération paysanne*’s achievement in mobilising such a large number of people, and by extension, their success in diffusing their

ideas to a wide public. Whilst these stereotypical portraits are absent from France 2’s report, the journalist

demonstrates an equivalent attitude when he asks a young man if he was more interested in seeing the band Zebda play, than hearing sociologist Pierre Bourdieu speak. Although the person in fact turns out to be more interested in Bourdieu than music, his response acts as confirmation that the majority of people attending the rally are motivated by superficial reasons: ‘j’aurais préféré qu’il [n’]y avait pas Zebda. Il y aurait peut-être moins de gens qui seraient venus, et peut-être des gens plus motivés, qui préfèrent venir écouter Bourdieu’.



Figure 3.5

Top: young man with dreadlocks.

Bottom: an ‘ageing’ hippy.
(TF1: 30.06.2000)

With the exception of France 2's brief reference to the open debates headed by intellectuals such as Bourdieu (a fact which is absent from TF1's coverage), the main content of the broadcasters' reports emphasises the festive nature of the event. France 2 twice refers to an atmosphere of a 'fête de kermesse' (village fête). Sequences depicting musicians and dancers entertaining the crowd are included in both reports and specific attention is made to the gastronomic products on display. In a similar vein of comic derision used by France 2's newsreader's characterisation of Bové as a publicity seeker, the France 2's journalist implies that stall-holders have 'sold out' or compromised their ideals, by including images of the prices on books and other items: 'le visiteur comprend que la lutte contre la mondialisation passe par quelques concessions au grand Satan du commerce. Mais qu'importe le prix, l'important c'est l'esprit'. Overall, TF1 and France 2's coverage portrays the rally as a 'family day out', with free music and entertainment, good food, and a side order of political activism. Rather than focusing on the issues or the context of the 'McDonald's incident', both channels instead concentrate on the personality of Bové and the visual spectacle of the rally and treat them in a light-hearted manner.¹⁶ This has the effect of detaching the farmers' campaign from its international context, as part of a world-wide movement of 'peasant' farmers, and reduces critical questions concerning political and economic sovereignty to a local outbreak of nationalism led by Bové.

It would appear that this approach is not merely restricted to the television news

¹⁶ Both channels also treat the court proceedings in a similarly irreverential manner. In particular, they make a mockery of the prosecution's evidence. For reasons of space, it is not possible to discuss this aspect in greater detail. Suffice it to say that the news coverage implies that local justice misjudged the 'McDonald's incident' and overreacted. Firstly, by imposing an excessively high bail on the accused and secondly, by attributing an unsubstantiated estimate of the damage caused by the protest. In other words, it is the local court that is seen as responsible for transforming the protest on 12 August 1999 into such a high-profile media event.

coverage of France 2 and TF1. Melissa A. Wall's (2005) case study of international news agencies, Associated Press (AP) and *Agence France Presse* (AFP), reveals a similar handling of the issue. Of particular interest for this chapter, is Wall's (2005: 106) assessment of the manner in which José Bové and his cause are undermined through his depiction as a 'likeable yet comic figure'. Both AP and AFP focus on the activist's large moustache and cast him as a 'Robin Hood' figure (AP) or 'modern-day Astérix' (AFP). Consequently, Wall argues (2005: 107), 'by likening Bové to a cartoon character, the stories suggest that his activism and issues are not real, but entertainment – a children's story.' As with France 2's dismissal of Bové as a 'publicity seeker', the press agencies also question his authenticity with references to his background and to his 'sharp eye for publicity', implying that he is a 'publicity hound posing as a farmer' (Wall 2005: 109). Likewise, AP and AFP write off the 'McDonald's incident' as an outbreak of anti-Americanism based on nostalgia for France's traditions and a 'love of food'. Taken together, the agencies' denigration of Bové and the farmers' campaign results in the de-legitimisation of the counter-globalisation movement: 'Ultimately, the wire services tap into pre-existing frames of anti-Americanism and let the real issues of global capitalism remain unexplored. By mocking Bové's resistance, they leave no political space for this local opposition to be seen for what it is: part of a movement of global resistance' (Wall 2005: 113).

From this chapter's assessment of the television coverage of the 'McDonald's incident', it is possible to conclude that there are similarities in the visual and verbal depiction of the affair by France 2 and TF1. As my brief comparison with Wall's (2005) article

demonstrates, this approach, which singles out Bové and sidelines the broader context of the movement, is not restricted to French television coverage but is also found in other forms of national and international journalism. Returning to Chaia Heller's (2002) ethnographic analysis of the anti-GMO campaign which opened this section, where Heller (2002), Wall (2005), and my analysis agree, is that the direct action on the McDonald's enabled José Bové and the *Confédération paysanne* to gain the attention of the media and subsequently, enabled them to promote their ideas to a wider audience. Where Heller and Wall differ, is the extent to which the farmers were successful in dominating the media's approach to the issue.

According to Heller (2002), the *Confédération paysanne* were able to displace the terms of the debate from a technical debate about science to a question of culture, society and tradition. For Wall (2005: 111), neither the farmer's union nor Bové were able to influence the type of coverage afforded to their campaign by AP or AFP. Instead, Wall contends (2005: 111), the symbolic targeting of an icon of the fast-food industry trapped the campaign inside 'a popular cultural trope', with Bové transformed into a cartoon character; Astérix against the American invader. Whilst I would agree with Wall that news coverage undercut the movement, Bové was not completely 'trapped' by this coverage, as the next section of this chapter demonstrates. Instead, Bové demonstrates an awareness of the limitations of current affairs journalism and employs other formats such as the documentary and the written word to diffuse his ideas. In other words, Bové capitalised on the coverage of the 'McDonald's incident' and fed the public's interest by developing additional forums to explain the farmers' campaign in greater detail.

- *A Documentary ‘Riposte’?*

Analysis of the INA’s database carried out in the course of this research reveals that documentaries on rural France form a marginal category with an average of five to six programmes broadcast each year during the period 1995-2010. The majority of these films are found on France 3 (35%) and Arte (26%), which given that France 3 is identified in its charter as a ‘regional broadcaster’ and Arte as a ‘cultural’ channel is not greatly surprising. With the exception of Arte, which occasionally features rural themes as part of a prime-time thematic evening, seventy-three per cent of programmes are relegated to the post midnight slot (43%) or during the day when audiences are minimal (30%) (cf. Appendix 3). This is a common trend in the scheduling of television documentaries, as my statistical research in previous chapters has shown, suggesting that non-fiction films are of low priority and are placed at times when they are less likely to affect the all-important audience share during peak viewing times. If it were possible to ‘rank’ the documentaries explored in this thesis according to the time-slot that they are allocated, it would appear that documentaries about rural France are less marketable than programmes about the *banlieue* and Islam in France which tend to be shown earlier in the evening (the majority are broadcast in the Second Time slot: from 10:30 p.m.).

In view of this general trend, the fact that out of a corpus of around 100 films there are five documentaries which feature José Bové and the *Confédération paysanne* indicates that the phenomenon of ‘Bovémania’ was not purely restricted to current affairs journalists. All five programmes were broadcast within a relatively short period

(2000-2002) with three shown in 2001, less than a year after the trial and sentencing of the farmers over the dismantling of the McDonald's.¹⁷ The topical interest in the 'Bové phenomenon' is demonstrated by France 2's offering, *Coup de soleil sur Millau*, which documents the Millau rally on 30 June 2000 through a montage of footage shot on the day by a range of people who came to support the ten farmers, to whom cameras were issued. Contrary to the representation of the McDonald's incident on France 2 and TF1's news programmes and in AP and AFP coverage (Wall 2005), which tend to isolate Bové from the international protest movement, all five documentaries link the *Confédération paysanne* to the wider debate about globalisation and GM crops (to varying degrees).

Arte's two documentaries (2001 and 2002) respectively deal with the impact of global market forces on small agricultural communities across the world, and the scientific debate over GMOs, as part of the channel's weekly thematic evening slot. Whilst *Pour un autre monde* (France 3, 2001) provides an insight into the international nature of the debate around globalisation, by painting a portrait of three activists, including José Bové, and by charting the wave of protests that occurred between 1999 and 2000 in Seattle, Millau and Prague. The inclusion of Bové in these programmes which explore the topics of globalisation and GM technology, offers documentary evidence supporting Heller's thesis (2002: 13) that members of the *Confédération paysanne* 'established themselves as legitimate national experts on French food and culture as well as international experts on peasant survival, capitalist science, sustainable development, and other related questions of globalisation'. Indeed, the title

¹⁷ In chronological order: *Coup de soleil sur Millau* (France 2, 2000); *Chronique d'un printemps paysan* (France 3, 2001); *Bové en campagne contre le burger* (Arte, 2001); *Pour un autre monde* (France 3, 2001); *OGM: Et si Bové avait tort?* (Arte, 2002). For more detail, see filmography.

OGM: Et si Bové avait tort? (Arte 2002), indicates the extent to which Bové became identified with the issue of GM crops. It also denotes the ‘marketable’ potency of the militant farmer’s name, a way to potentially attract a larger audience to watch ‘yet another’ documentary on GMOs.

Since it is beyond the scope of this chapter to include a comprehensive study of all five documentaries, I have chosen instead to concentrate my analysis on *Chronique d’un printemps paysan* (France 3, 2001), as it is co-authored by the journalist Gilles Luneau, who conducted a series of interviews that formed the basis of the best-selling book *Le Monde n’est pas une marchandise* (Bové and Dufour, 2000). This programme is of particular interest as it may be interpreted as a documentary ‘riposte’ to the representation of José Bové and the *Confédération paysanne*’s campaign by the French and international media. In particular, the documentary demonstrates a notable effort to move the discussion away from the media’s foregrounding of Bové, and endeavours to place the ‘McDonald’s incident’ into the wider context of the farmers’ concerns with the consequences of globalisation on ‘peasant’ communities across the world.

As the title of the documentary indicates, *Chronique d’un printemps paysan* offers a ‘chronicle’ of Bové and Dufour’s ‘tour of France’ undertaken in the spring of 2000 and culminates with the transformation of Millau into ‘Seattle-sur-Tarn’ on 30 June 2000. The film opens and closes with a brief introductory voice-over that summarises the direct action undertaken at the McDonald’s site in Millau, which provided the impetus for the men’s tour of France. Apart from this short intervention, the film is otherwise free from commentary, and is structured around a series of observational sequences

filmed ‘in the field’, demonstrating the range of events attended by Bové and Dufour (for instance, supporting farmers’ campaigning on local issues, participating in a debate at Grenoble’s *Institut d’Études Politiques*, attending book signings, and taking part in the destruction of a field of GM crops). These sequences are linked together by short extracts of footage filmed inside Bové and Dufour’s car, as they travel from one region to other, whilst the occasional subtitle provides information about the location and theme of the following sequence (‘Les Appellations d’Origine Contrôlée en danger – Esserts-Blay, Savoie’). A final element is the inclusion of excerpts from interviews with Bové and Dufour (conducted separately) that are interspersed at various points in the film’s narrative. These provide additional context or further develop an issue raised in the observational sequences. My analysis of this documentary will be organised thematically and will consider how the following subjects/objects are filmed: the public, Bové and Dufour, the landscape of rural France, and journalists. Central to this investigation will be an evaluation of the extent to which the documentary constructs a visual alternative to that offered by journalists.

The first observational sequence showing a group of people, occurs approximately fifty seconds into the documentary, and involves a forty-two second montage of images filmed during the dismantling of the McDonald’s in Millau on 12 August 1999.¹⁸ Overall, the impression conveyed by this sequence is of a collective action carried out by a group of organised activists, whose team effort is watched by a number of interested onlookers and supporters (Figure 3.6). The visual similarities between this

¹⁸ The film opens with a woman waving goodbye to Bové and Dufour as they drive off along a country road. Shot from the rear seat of the car, the two men are unrecognisable, save perhaps for the shadowy outline of a pipe gripped in the teeth of the front passenger.



Figure 3.6

Left and Right: Groups of supporters watching the direct action on the McDonald's in Millau.

Middle: Working together as a team to dismantle the exterior walls and windows of the building.

sequence and images used to cover the incident in France 2 and TF1's news reports are striking (cf. Figure 3.2). There is however one notable exception: if José Bové is present on the scene, he is notably absent in the documentary's representation of this event. The opening sequence therefore offers the first indication that the documentary is seeking to distance itself from news coverage of the 'McDonald's affair', by constructing a visual alternative to the images previously associated with the event.

This initial impression appears to be confirmed with another example, this time in a debate at the *Institut d'Etudes Politiques* led by Bové and Dufour. During this two minute sequence, the camera spends the first thirty seconds on the audience, alternating between wide-angle shots, which indicate the number of people sitting in the lecture theatre, and close-up footage of individuals sitting listening, and even, taking notes (Figure 3.7). Only then does the film cut to a close-up of Bové sitting with the front cover of *Le Monde n'est pas une marchandise* (2000) visible in the foreground of the frame. For the remaining part of the address, the camera alternates in an equitable manner between Bové and the audience, and reveals a particular interest in demonstrating the range of ages present in the audience, as well as their reactions to Bové's address (for instance, the camera lingers on a young female student as she breaks into a smile and laughter, Figure 3.7. *Bottom* still). This is a technique found

throughout the observational sequences in the film, which offer wide-angle shots to demonstrate the number of people engaging with the actions of the *Confédération paysanne*, and close-up shots of individual faces to illustrate the wide-ranging appeal of the campaign, across lines of gender, age, and even class or profession (for instance, ‘peasant’ farmers wearing flat caps and a self-identified teacher attending a book signing).

Although the documentary makes an effort to move away from the media’s transformation of the ‘McDonald’s incident’ into a story about José Bové, as the film is a chronicle of Bové and Dufour’s journey around France, the two farmers inevitably have a significant presence. Bové and Dufour’s role in *Chronique d’un printemps paysan* may be

classified as falling into two categories: interventions ‘in the field’ as participants in the various observational sequences included in the film, and as commentators, providing additional context or explanation of their ideas during filmed interviews. In the former, Bové and Dufour tend to be filmed in medium to long shot interacting with farmers or the public. Whilst protests, such as that organised by dairy farmers against a milk processing company in Savoie, include footage of Bové and Dufour forcibly pressing the management during the negotiations, the views of other farmers are also incorporated, for example, the impassioned outburst of a man asserting the need to protect the prestige and status of the AOC label (*appellation d’origine contrôlée*). This



Figure 3.7
Selected stills taken from the audience footage filmed during Bové’s lecture showing the alternation between wide-angle shots (*Top*) and close-ups (*Middle* and *Bottom*).

takes the spotlight off the two men and emphasises the collective nature of the campaign; Bové and Dufour are spokespersons for the *Confédération paysanne* who may enjoy a higher-profile than most, but ultimately are only two farmers belonging to a union. As such, the film re-inscribes the actions of Bové into the wider context of the union's activities and goes some way to offer an alternative portrait of the movement, in direct contrast to the media's fixation with Bové.

In addition to these scenes of interaction between the men and the public, the documentary also includes examples which demonstrate the bond between the two men who live in different parts of France (Normandy and Aveyron) and practise different types of farming (Dufour is an organic dairy farmer, Bové is a 'conventional' small-scale sheep farmer). This is perhaps most visible in their joy and relief after the first day's hearing of the trial, which emphasises the collective effort of the union and Dufour in supporting the ten farmers on trial, again moving the emphasis from news headlines which gave the impression that Bové was the only one on trial. As well as providing a useful narrative device to link sequences together, the footage shot in their car also reveals their close working relationship. Moreover, it might be argued that the purpose of these 'driving' sequences is part of a strategy to subtly refute the media's undermining of Bové, which questioned his authenticity and portrayed him as the globetrotting son of educated and affluent parents. Dufour and Bové's 'tour of France' involves them sharing the driving of an ordinary French car. Likewise, their simple or rustic roots are suggested in a sequence where both men share a meal with a farming family and, sitting in a kitchen, unceremoniously serve themselves out of a casserole dish that is placed on the table. Equally, although they might be depicted as strongly

opinionated and serious when supporting other farmers, the two men are also shown to be capable of sharing a joke, for instance, when Bové refuses to do as Dufour suggests and put a Reblochon cheese in his bag, as he does not want his clothes to be ‘au Reblochon’.

Interviews with Bové and Dufour provide the opportunity for the men to add context, or depth to an issue raised during the course of one of the observational sequences shot ‘in the field’. From a visual perspective, these sequences are differentiated from the footage of the men on the campaign trail, which portrays the men as part of a crowd and members of a union. Here, the men are each filmed in a static close-up, in which their face fills the whole frame. The fixed-frame, and the absence of any other background detail, creates a stable and calm atmosphere that enhances the ability of the viewer to concentrate on the interview’s content. However, it is the manner in which these extracts are introduced in the film, which provides the main point of interest for this visual assessment.

Each time an extract of an interview with either Dufour or Bové is included, the sequence is introduced (or on one occasion followed) by observational footage of the men working on their farm (milking cows, driving a tractor, herding sheep). This serves as a visual reminder that the men’s primary occupation is farming (and not as ‘publicity seeking hounds’, Wall 2005: 109). By extension, these sequences serve to establish Bové and Dufour’s credentials as ‘expert witnesses’, able to comment on issues such as industrial agriculture and the impact of globalisation on small farms. As a consequence, this restores a sense of dignity and authority to the two farmers that is absent in the news coverage of Bové which depicts him as a comical figure. Admittedly, when

compared to the detailed exposition of their ideas in the written publications by Bové and Dufour (cf. 2001; 2005), the amount of detail supplied in these interviews offers only a brief exposition of their views. However, as the large majority of the film is devoted to observational sequences filmed *in situ*, it would appear that the documentary maker's intention is not to provide a thorough guide to the aims of the campaign, but to capture the range and extent of public support that the *Confédération paysanne* managed to generate as a result of the events in Millau on 12 August 1999. The inclusion of book signings and people holding Bové and Dufour's *Le Monde n'est pas une marchandise* (2000), offers perhaps a hint to the interested viewer that further information is to be found in the book.¹⁹ Dufour himself acknowledges, during the course of an interview in the film, the importance of the written medium: 'le livre a été un support extrêmement important et va rester un outil extrêmement puissant de compréhension et, je dirais, de donner envie de se mobiliser'.

A third element that offers a distinctive visual approach is the manner in which the natural environment of rural France is filmed. As Figure 3.8 demonstrates, these rural panoramas are depicted as working landscapes, populated by people, often working together as a community. This establishes a link between local residents and the natural environment, and offers an alternative perspective to images of 'pristine nature' that are often found in nostalgic or romantic representations of the countryside. Arguably, this decision is a conscious attempt to create a visual aesthetic that reflects the efforts of farmers, such as Bové and Dufour, to establish links between rural and urban populations by explaining the role of farmers in the creation and maintenance of

¹⁹ For a critical assessment of the themes and arguments of *Le Monde n'est pas une marchandise* cf. Birchfield 2005.



Figure 3.8
Rural France as a social and working landscape.

the landscape and local traditions. In other words, it offers an example of the manner in which the *Confédération paysanne* not only re-framed the debate around GM crops, but also re-framed the characterisation of nature and made it relevant to the city-dweller:

Rather than promote an ‘environmental’ notion of nature as a distinct category from that of culture, the CP promotes a French understanding of nature *as* culture. [...] what might be called a ‘French nature’ is predicated on romantic notions of *social* rural life. These include discourses on the soil and *savoir-faire* that produce the wine, cheese, and pâtés that are emblems of French culture and history.

(Heller 2002: 18-19).

Finally, we should also note the numerous observational sequences which include the presence of the media. If the purpose of the film is indeed to demonstrate the extent of public support for the farmers’ cause, the inclusion of media interest in the tour adds additional weight and authority. Nevertheless, I would contend that images of journalists eagerly jostling to attract José Bové’s attention, also serve an additional

reflexive function: to expose the reporting methods of journalists and reveal the element of performance required by Bové and others to conform to the ‘rules’ of representation. The most vivid example is found in the organised destruction of a field of GM crop by a large group of activists, many of whom are masked to avoid being identified and prosecuted.

In the middle of this field, stands a line of journalists, waiting to film or photograph José Bové, the ‘militant folk hero’ taking on the multinational corporations. Standing a few meters away, unmasked and facing the array of cameras, Bové takes a number of swings at the crop with his scythe and then turns to call Dufour to come and join him in front of the cameras (Figure 3.9). A little further away, a masked woman



Figure 3.9

Left: Bové ambushed by a journalist during the demonstration by dairy farmers.

Middle: Bové destroys a field of genetically modified oilseed rape in front of a row of journalists.

Right: Close-up of the media.

looking at the two men posing for the cameras observes wryly: ‘Ah, ils sont beaux les politiques dans le champ, hein! C’est pas pour la politique, c’est pour les enfants qu’on le fait. Pour les enfants de la terre. Ni pour les Verts, ni pour les autres’. Whilst this sequence effectively demonstrates journalists’ fixation on dramatic visuals and identifiable personalities (another approach would have been to film the action from a distance to demonstrate the level of organisation and people involved), as well as Bové and Dufour’s willingness to comply with these requirements, the documentary also

includes instances of the men subverting the media to put forward their particular ‘message’. An example of such behaviour is seen in Savoie towards the end of the dairy farmers’ protest, when a lone journalist corners Bové, and asks him if the purpose of his tour of the countryside, universities and bookshops is ‘pour faire connaître votre nom’. Bové completely ignores the personal nature of the question and launches into a succinct summary of the *Confédération paysanne*’s campaign, which also highlights the manner in which globalisation affects all citizens.

On the whole, *Chronique d’un printemps paysan* offers an effective ‘riposte’ to the ‘fast food journalism’ offered by national and international newscasters. By creating a visual aesthetic which highlights the range of public support for the farmers’ campaign and presents Bové and Dufour ‘in the field’ as part of a group of farmers, the documentary effectively moves away from the media’s representation of Bové as a lone folk hero fighting the American invader. *Chronique d’un printemps paysan* also subtly exposes the superficiality of the media through the reflexive inclusion of journalists attempting to capture colourful visuals and elicit dramatic soundbites from Bové. Whilst the film demonstrates Bové and Dufour’s willingness to co-operate and provide such footage, it also reveals the farmers’ awareness of the importance of using this coverage to disseminate their ideas to the public and their occasional subversion of the medium to do so (for instance, Bové ignoring the journalist’s question). The inclusion of extracts from interviews with the two men also offers an *aperçu* into the serious and considered nature of their propositions for agricultural reform (refuting the media’s creation of the ‘comical Bové’), and demonstrates that local concerns about the price of Roquefort are

only a minor component of a much more complex issue of the plight of ‘peasant’ farmers around the world. In a similar manner, the visual emphasis on the countryside as a social and working landscape reinforces the wider consequences of the disappearance of the family farm model; it is the rural environment and the transmission of cultural and culinary traditions that are threatened, not just families involved in farming.

Nevertheless, the close analysis of *Chronique d’un printemps paysan* also reveals the limitations of the documentary’s ability to provide a detailed exposition of Bové and Dufour’s ideas. Arguably, this is not the primary aim of the film, which mainly concentrates on public support for the farmers and the variety of problems and difficulties faced by smallholders across France. However, when the documentary is compared to Bové and Dufour’s written publications (2001; 2005), the content of the interview extracts included in the film may appear somewhat superficial and overly brief. To be fair, this is inevitable in a documentary that has only fifty-two minutes to cover a complex issue in a way that remains engaging for an audience who may have a varying range of expertise and interest in the issue. It would be therefore more reasonable to consider *Chronique d’un printemps paysan* as a vehicle for Bové and Dufour to provide a more considered introduction to the ‘McDonald’s affair’ and the broader aims of the *Confédération paysanne*; a documentary ‘riposte’ to journalists’ coverage of their campaign for reform.

Chronique d’un printemps paysan as well as the other four coterminous documentaries on Bové, were commissioned and broadcast at what could be considered the height of ‘Bovémanie’ and public concern over the safety of food after a number of

health scandals involving intensive farming practices. A dozen years or so later, to what extent is it possible to discern the continuing influence of the ‘peasant’ farmers’ actions? Judging by the inclusion of footage of the ‘McDonald’s incident’ in the short documentary *McDo: Une passion française* (Arte, 2010), it would appear that in the mainstream media José Bové is irrevocably linked to the events in Millau and is still seen as a key figure in the ‘anti-fast food’ movement in France.²⁰ If the debate on GM crops has perhaps faded from the agenda of current affairs programmes, Bové has continued to build on the platform offered by the public’s interest in the ‘McDonald’s affair’ and has used his media profile to meet political decision makers at a national and European level. More recently, in an attempt to engage directly with agricultural policy reform, Bové has moved into the political sphere, participating as a candidate in the 2007 French presidential elections (1.3% of the vote; 9th out of 12 candidates), and more successfully in 2009, when he was elected as an MEP.²¹ In terms of the legacy of the *Confédération paysanne*’s campaign, it is potentially in Bové’s role as vice-president of the EU’s Commission for Agriculture and Rural Development, currently responsible for drafting the new Common Agricultural Policy (due to appear in 2013), that the drive for reform will be realised.

In the final part of this chapter, I move from the examination of ‘visible peasants’ actively engaged in a fight to preserve their livelihoods, to the analysis of ‘vanishing

²⁰ Although Bové and Dufour may express reservations about the homogenised type of food proposed by the industrial farming model and global fast food companies, they are at pains to point out that the direct action against McDonald’s was not specifically targeted at the industrial giant (e.g. 2001: 13; 53-57; 2005: 42-47). Instead, the two men argue for the need to preserve choice (i.e. McDonald’s *and* Roquefort and not either/or).

²¹ Election results from the official government statistics: http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/sections/a_votre_service/resultats-elections/PR2007/FE.html

peasants' who are usually depicted as passive victims of global market forces and fated to disappear.

❖ **'Vanishing Peasants': Rural Isolation and Irreducible Alterity**

Raymond Depardon (b. 1942) is one of France's most respected photographers and documentary makers still currently active. In his early career, working for agencies such as Cartier-Bresson's Magnum, Depardon reported from all over the world, covering conflicts and social issues in places as diverse as Algeria, Vietnam and Chad. The quality of his work is demonstrated by the publication of his photographs in a number of hardback collections (e.g. Depardon 2012, *Afriques*; Depardon and Bergala 2006, *New York*). As a documentary maker, Depardon's best known films focus on public institutions: the police (*Faits divers*, 1983), hospitals (*Urgences*, 1987), and the justice system (*Délits flagrants*, 1994). His cinematographic style has been characterised by a move from direct cinema in *Faits divers* (mobile and responsive hand-held camera) to an increasingly static observational style of filming in *Délits flagrants* (fixed camera on tripod). For film theorist Sarah Cooper (2006: 64) this 'move from proximity to distance' is part of Depardon's aesthetic and ethical search to find the 'right distance' between film-maker and subject.²² Although Depardon's visual approach to film has become increasingly static, eschewing direct involvement with a scene, since the mid-1990s Depardon's films have included the use of first-person voice-over commentary spoken by himself. According to film studies specialist, Antony

²² For a detailed analysis of this change in documentary rhetoric, see Cooper's chapter 'Raymond Depardon: Finding the Right Distance' in Cooper 2006: 62-76.

Fiant (2011: 2), Depardon's use of the subjective 'voix-je' is part of a wider trend in contemporary French documentary which is demonstrating an interest in reclaiming the voice-over and harnessing the creative potential of the film-maker's voice to add an intimate dimension to film: 'à travers ces films et leurs voix, les cinéastes *se racontent*, s'inscrivent dans un questionnement existentiel, voire métaphysique' (original emphasis).

Profils paysans is a documentary trilogy made by Depardon which follows the lives of a number of small-scale farmers living in the isolated plateaux of the Massif Central over a period of ten years (1998-2008).²³ Broadcast on the premium cable channel Canal Plus, the documentaries reveal the gradual evolution of the relationship between film-maker and *paysans*, moving from awkward silences in *L'Approche* (1999), to a more interactive exchange in *Le Quotidien* (2004) and *La Vie moderne* (2008). According to Depardon's book of photographs and texts, *La terre des paysans* (2008), which complements the film triptych, the initial project began as early as 1993 when he began to travel in these regions to meet potential subjects.²⁴ Depardon's acquaintance with the people portrayed in his documentaries is therefore built up over a substantial period of time (some pre-existing *Profils paysans*), much like the long-term nature of the relationship between anthropologist and ethnographic subject. In addition, *Profils paysans* is also informed by Depardon's own childhood experiences, brought up

²³ The three documentaries are as follows: *L'Approche* (1999), *Le Quotidien* (2004) and *La Vie moderne* (2008).

²⁴ *La terre des paysans* does not have page numbers, however, the photographs are organised chronologically according to year. Depardon refers to the early stages of the film project in a text that is situated under a photograph entitled '1993 Madières, Hérault'.

as he was, on a small holding by his parents in the Massif Central, and by his own professional career as a photographer.²⁵

It is worth noting that *Profils paysans* (1999-2008) was broadcast during a period of renewed interest in rural France and the future of small farming communities, led in part by the high profile of José Bové and the *Confédération paysanne* who were making regular media appearances at the time. This perhaps goes some way to explain the favourable reviews of Depardon's work in all sectors of the popular and specialised press. In his analysis of the first film, *L'Approche* (1999), sociologist Pascal Reyssset (2003: 181) observes the across-the-board praise for the documentary's aesthetic qualities and subject matter from the 'established avant-garde' (*Les Cahiers du cinéma*), to national newspapers (*Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*) and the popular and specialist television press (*Télé Sept Jours*, *Télérama*). The final instalment of the trilogy, *La Vie moderne* (2008) won France's César for Best Documentary and was shown in fifteen film festivals around the world including a selection at Cannes. However, in spite of this favourable reception, my examination of Canal Plus's scheduling of the trilogy reveals yet again the marginal status of documentary on television, even when made by an acclaimed and well-established artist like Depardon. With the exception of *La Vie moderne*, shown at 10:57 p.m., the other two films were pushed into the nether regions

²⁵ As a photographer, Depardon worked on two features on 'peasants' in isolated regions of France for the magazine *Le Pèlerin* (1986) and the newspaper *Libération* (1990). These reports are reproduced in facsimile in Depardon's 2008 book *La Terre des paysans*. Depardon also wrote the autobiographical *La Ferme du Garet* (1995) which describes the family farm on which he grew up and offers an early example of his interest in exploring his roots as a 'fils de paysans'.

of the television schedule (*L'Approche*, 5:26 a.m.; *Le Quotidien*, 2:23 a.m.).²⁶ Nevertheless, the decision to issue all three films on DVD suggests that there was sufficient interest in the trilogy to justify commercial release.

In the final section of this chapter, I explore the way in which Depardon negotiates the question of audio-visual representation by examining the manner in which he films the landscape and people of rural France, focusing in particular on the use of 'fixed-frame cinematography' (Cooper 2010: 64). The issue of agency (the power dynamics between film-maker and film subject) and the problems of representation will also be discussed. A final point of investigation considers to what extent *Profils paysans* follows the analysis of scholars such as Weber (1977) and Mendras (1967) which predicts the end of the 'peasant', overwhelmed by the forces of modernisation and global market forces.

- *Visual Landscapes and Sensual Soundscapes*

In my analysis of *Chronique d'un printemps paysan*, I argued that there was a distinctive visual approach to the French countryside, which emphasised the social and working nature of the environment and linked the rural 'paysan' population as a fundamental part of the natural landscape. Although *Profils paysans* also includes footage of everyday activities (for instance, taking sheep out to pasture), throughout the trilogy there are a number of recurring sequences, which are aesthetically distinct in

²⁶ It is strange to note that when repeated at a later date both documentaries (Part 1 and Part 2) were given a better time-slot (10:42 p.m.; 10:41 p.m.), which although is not in 'prime time' (8:00-10:30 p.m.), is in what might be considered a prominent position for the documentary genre. Considering that the second broadcast of *L'Approche* (02/05/2001) was nearly five months after the premier, it is possible that Canal Plus decided, in light of the media's interest in José Bové and the 'McDonald's affair', that there would potentially be a larger audience for the film.

depicting the landscape without people. These sequences fall into two categories: footage filmed from a moving vehicle, and static fixed-frame images of the countryside. I concentrate on these particular representations of the rural environment as they reveal key aspects of Depardon's relationship with the people and places portrayed in the films.

The first and third documentary open with footage captured in a moving vehicle travelling along a winding country road towards an (as yet) unknown destination. Similar examples are found interspersed at other points in the trilogy. From a purely visual perspective, these images filmed driving along tree-lined lanes reveal a landscape dominated by the natural world with virtually no evidence of human habitation. In addition to creating the impression of a journey to a remote and distant part of France, *la France profonde*, these sequences also reinforce the isolation of these rural communities. Besides the absence of urban development and the spatial distance between individual farms, this road footage also demonstrates the hostility of the terrain: the roads are often extremely narrow dirt tracks, full of twists and turns, making travelling a slow and perilous affair, especially when covered in snow. The geographical remoteness of the chosen locations is further reinforced by the inclusion of additional static images of an occasional lone signpost for a village at separate points in the trilogy (Figure 3.10). With the absence of any reference



Figure 3.10
Top and Bottom: Winding country lanes.
Middle: Isolated signposts for the villages of Le Villaret and Grizac.

to a well-known town or city, these man-made markers, often faded and half-obsured by vegetation, reinforce the impression of a landscape and community that lives very much cut off from the rest of the country.

From a practical perspective, the footage of Depardon driving along a country lane provides an effective narrative device to link together material shot at different times and places, and creates a common visual aesthetic across all three films. This technique is also found in *Chronique d'un printemps paysan*, which introduces a new location or theme with footage of Bové and Dufour on the road. However, in *Profils paysans* these sequences also feature voice-over commentary and an extract of Gabriel Fauré's *Elégie, Opus 24*. The addition of commentary and music to the original soundtrack suggests a further function for this material other than the structural and visual purposes outlined above.

Despite the absence in *Profils paysans* of a direct reference to Depardon's own childhood as a 'fils de paysans', the personal nature of the project is more overtly referenced in the accompanying book, *La terre des paysans* (Depardon 2008), which includes photographs of his parents and their farm. Film theorist Sarah Cooper (2010: 65) has also noted the decision to include the autobiographical documentary *Les Années déclin* (1983) on the DVD release of the first film *L'Approche*, which suggests 'a relationship between the autobiographical and the lives of these farmers'. Depardon has also spoken in interviews about his journey of personal discovery and the catharsis that resulted from this project (for example, Frodon 2008). Within the documentary films, Depardon's voice-over commentary offers the occasional insight into his emotional connection with rural France and provides support for Fiant's (2011: 8) observation that

Depardon is increasingly interested in including a self-reflexive element to his films: ‘Il ne s’agit dès lors plus de restituer un monde précis avec détachement, mais de se situer personnellement dans ce même monde’. Perhaps the clearest example of Depardon’s ‘voix-je’ occurs in the closing moments of the last film, superimposed over footage of Depardon driving away from the village of Villaret, when the cineaste states:

[J]e n’ai plus peur de dire mon attachement à la terre des paysans. Apaisé, je retournerai aussi sur les hauts plateaux froids et les vallées profondes du Massif. Ce soir, je filme cette lumière qui n’est pas comme les autres et je ne suis pas prêt de [sic] l’oublier.

Nevertheless, the use of voice-over in *Profils paysans* is not limited to personal reflections by Depardon such as that cited above. Indeed, the use of the first pronoun ‘je’ is a fairly rare occurrence and, on the whole, the use of voice-over commentary tends to be for the purpose of providing information for the viewer.²⁷ As the trilogy progresses, and the rapport between film-maker and subjects evolves, the amount of commentary decreases. However, whilst the occasions on which Depardon directly includes his personal observations may be few, the use of Fauré’s *Elégie, Opus 24* as a leitmotif throughout the three documentaries offers a powerful musical evocation of the sense of loss and mortality that pervades the films.²⁸

Thematically *Profils paysans* is about the passing of time and the disappearance of a generation of *paysans*, whose way of life will die with them due to the difficulty in finding a successor. Louis Brès and Marcèle Brès both die during the filming, with

²⁷ Fiant (2011) offers a detailed analysis of the use of voice-over in Depardon’s triptych. He identifies four primary functions: to introduce the people filmed; to identify where and when the sequence is filmed; to signal a change of location; to refer to past or future events.

²⁸ *La Vie moderne* also includes a brief excerpt of Fauré’s *Pavane*, which occurs once in the film in addition to the *Elégie*. Nonetheless, the mood of the *Pavane* is in keeping with the *Elégie* suggesting a similar function for this piece of music.

Louis Brès's death marking the end of *L'Approche* and the starting point of the second film, *Le Quotidien*. *La Vie moderne* is dedicated to their memory. The voice-over commentary also makes numerous references to the time at which a sequence was filmed and in the final documentary provides a visual comparison of the changes which have taken place over the ten-year period, including the visible decline of Marcel Privat, who at the end of *La Vie moderne* is no longer able to take his sheep out to pasture (Figure 3.11). There are also a conspicuous number of clocks included within the frame of sequences filmed in people's homes, offering a visual reminder of a disappearing world. Fauré's *Elégie* therefore offers a musical transcription of this loss, with its minor key and the melancholic tone of the cello offering a lament for the 'vanishing peasant', accompanied by the sustained rhythmic chords of a piano which conjures the image of a bell tolling.



Figure 3.11

Top row: Footage taken from *La Vie moderne* which juxtaposes images of Marcel Privat in 2000 and 2008.

Bottom row: The almost identical framing of these two sequences from *L'Approche*, subtly suggests the passage of time. *Left:* Marcéle talks with the Pantel couple. *Right:* The young couple have become parents. Nathalie holds her baby son in her arms. (Note also the presence of the wall clock in the top right hand corner of the frame.)

In contrast to the mobility of the road footage, the second ‘category’ of landscapes without people is static in nature, consisting of fixed-frame sequences of the countryside. Fixed-frame cinematography is a distinctive part of Depardon’s approach to documentary, present in his *oeuvre* since the mid-1990s (for example, *Flagrants délits*, 1994), and is the dominant visual technique used in *Profils paysans* to film the landscape and the people who inhabit it. This aesthetic approach is perhaps an indication of how his first profession as a photographer informs his work as a documentary maker. However, this does not imply that Depardon is a photographer attempting to make films using the language of the still image. I would argue that in these fixed-frame sequences of the natural landscape, Depardon is drawing attention to the differences between the two visual media and exploring and exploiting the aesthetic ability of the moving image to capture movement and sound.

In such sequences, the immobility of the camera, framing the landscape like a painting or photograph, permits the viewer not only the time to appreciate the beauty of nature, but also to experience the manner in which the howling wind resonates in the mountains, rustling leaves, and bending trees over with its blunt force (Figure 3.12). The effect is to restore the *audio* to the visual experience and to capture a visual landscape that is also a sensuous soundscape. Depardon’s interest in the recording of the natural sounds of the rural environment is also felt at other points in the film, such as



Figure 3.12
Still taken from a fixed-frame landscape sequence showing the moving shadows cast by the clouds on the hills below.

the sound of bird song which penetrates into kitchens, or the distant bells of grazing sheep which accompany the closing credits of *La Vie moderne*.²⁹ Returning the visual qualities of these sequences, the beauty of the natural environment and the static nature of the image also bring to mind other artistic genres, such as painting, which has a long history of representing rural landscapes. This visual association with art is also seen in Depardon's 'portraits' of figures such as Raymond and Marcel Privat whose faces are framed aesthetically on numerous occasions (Figure 3.13), whilst the link to portraiture is also suggested by the title *Profils paysans*. For sociologist Pascal Reyssset (2003: 189), Depardon's construction of a clear aesthetic style in *Profils paysans* results from a desire, 'pour passer du témoignage au film, pour traduire un témoignage dans la catégorie des oeuvres artistiques et les faire accéder au statut d'objet culturel'.



Figure 3.13
Peasant profiles from *Le Quotidien*.
Left: Raymond Privat.

Right: Marcel Privat.

From these two alternative approaches to the landscape, it is possible to identify certain key themes and aesthetic techniques that are present in the trilogy as a whole. Firstly, the depiction of the rural landscape as a hostile and isolated place, dominated by the

²⁹ From a technical point of view, Depardon's desire to represent the pro-filmic soundscape of the countryside in optimum quality is also reflected in his decision to delegate responsibility for the recording of sound to his wife, Claudine Nougaret, rather than working on his own.

forces of nature, and geographically remote from the rest of French society. Secondly, the absence of people in these sequences also permits a space for reflection, both for Depardon in his voice-over commentary, and for the viewer to contemplate the landscape and reflect on the film. Finally, the addition of a musical leitmotif creates an elegiac tone that emotively enhances the theme of mortality that dominates the documentaries. In the next section, I explore how these themes and techniques are further developed in the manner in which Depardon films the *paysans* of rural France.

- *‘Peasant Profiles’: Representing Irreducible Alterity*

In an article which offers a sociological analysis of the reception of the first film, *L’Approche*, Pascal Reysset (2003: 190) comments on Depardon’s use of fixed-frame cinematography: ‘[f]ilmer en plans fixes, [...] conduit à faire oublier le cinéaste dans le processus même de représentation et, ce faisant, à construire la neutralité et la naturalité de l’observation’. Contrary to the use of multiple angles which enables the viewer to grasp the diversity and complexity of social reality, Reysset (2003: 191) argues that static sequences ‘annihilent toute vue alternative sur le sujet filmé et regardé’. Whilst the latter part of this quotation, regarding the absence of an alternative perspective, is valid as a general comment on the documentary genre, I do not share Reysset’s observation that the use of this aesthetic technique is designed to create a ‘neutral’ and ‘natural’ point of observation through the effacement of the film-maker’s presence. Although this is a technique that is often employed in documentary films, especially for the purpose of recording interviews (for example, Benguigui’s *9/3: Mémoire d’un territoire*, which attempts to facilitate empathy between viewer and interviewee through

the effacement of the film-maker's presence, cf. Chapter 2), I do not believe that this is the case in *Profils paysans* which is as much a film about the evolution of the relationship between Depardon and his subjects as a film which explores the problematic and artificial nature of filmic representation.³⁰

Filmed over a period of ten years, and with certain relationships dating back a couple of decades, *Profils paysans* describes the gradual (but not total) acceptance of Depardon's presence in the lives of the people portrayed in the films. Accordingly, even if the dominant method remains the fixed-frame image, it is possible to discern a slight alteration in his aesthetic approach over the course of the trilogy, which mirrors the evolution of his relationship with his subjects. This change is most noticeable in the role Depardon plays in the documentaries, moving from a silent observer in the first film, watching people interact over breakfast or the sale of a calf, to a more active participant in the second film, occasionally asking questions. In the final instalment, Depardon even instigates a sequence to bring Raymond and Marcel Privat together in the same room to discuss the changes that their nephew's marriage has had on farm life. Depardon's growing engagement with the *paysans* is also reflected in the reduction of his voice-over commentary, such an important feature of *L'Approche*, and the corresponding increase of his verbal participation in the pro-filmic action. Similarly, Depardon's growing ease with certain individuals is reflected by the occasional use of a close-up shot of the person's face (as previously demonstrated in Figure 3.13). Figure 3.14 depicts another such example, contrasting the single static frame used to film the

³⁰ To be fair to Reysset, at the time when his article was published only the first part of *Profils paysans* had been released, therefore making it impossible to have an informed perspective on the trilogy as a whole. Nevertheless, I would argue that Depardon's presence is visible in the first film (even if it is largely constructed as an absence) and rather than creating a 'neutral' perspective, his fixed-frame cinematography actively questions the nature of representation.

Manevals in *L'Approche* with another sequence in *Le Quotidien* which cuts between a medium shot of the couple and individual portrait shots.

If there is a perceptual alteration of Depardon's method of filming people over the course of the three films, the same is also true of the film-maker's visual approach in *Profils paysans*, which demonstrates a significant stylistic development in his documentary work as a whole. I have already touched on Depardon's increasing interest since the mid-1990s in including a self-reflexive element to his work through the use of voice-over commentary. With *Profils paysans* his personal involvement is felt, not only in the use of his own voice in the commentary, but also in the strategic positioning of the camera to film his subjects.

With a film such as *Délits flagrants* (1994), often cited as a prime example of Depardon's use of fixed-frame cinematography, the camera is positioned in what might be termed as a 'neutral' position. The *juge d'instruction* (deputy public prosecutor) and the detainee sit facing each other, framed respectively on the left- and right-hand sides of the image. Depardon frames them in profile with an unmoving camera placed squarely in the middle of the two people, neither favouring one side nor another. (This is, in itself, a politically interesting aesthetic choice in view of the film's subject matter.) In *Profils paysans*, however, instead of a side-on angle, the camera is positioned in a



Figure 3.14
Top: Fixed-frame sequence of the Maneval's kitchen from *L'Approche*.



Bottom: Three stills taken from a sequence in *Le Quotidien* showing Depardon's more flexible approach to filming the same couple several years later.

frontal manner in such a way as to look directly into the eyes of the person(s) being filmed. Whilst this is not an unusual technique for the documentary genre in general, the adoption of this frontal ‘portrait’ angle by Depardon is noteworthy, and is potentially a reflection of the personal and autobiographical nature of the project. With the exception of one sequence in *La Vie moderne* when he is briefly and partially glimpsed helping himself to the cup of coffee offered to him, thereby revealing his seated position to the left of the camera, Depardon does not physically feature in his documentaries. Nevertheless, his ‘voice’ (Nichols 2005: 18-19) is a significant presence in the trilogy, both in a direct or explicit capacity (voice-over and conversations with subjects) and in an indirect or implicit form through the stylistic choices made in the film (e.g. fixed-frame cinematography). Taken together, these aesthetic choices make it clear that the ‘eye’ of the camera is linked to the ‘eye/I’ of Depardon. Having said that, this does not mean that the ‘eye’ of the camera acts as a proxy for Depardon’s own eyes or is equated to a human eye, as the camera remains fixed and is not free to roam around the room like a person is able to.

If Depardon explores the relationship between the ‘self’ of the film-maker and the ‘other’ of the subject, as described above, *Profils paysans* also demonstrates an interest in examining the limitations of this exchange and the ability of film to represent it. Perhaps the most palpable illustration of the opacity of the filmic ‘other’ occurs during moments in which the subject ignores or refuses to respond to a question and falls silent. Anthropologist, Jason Alley (2011) has commented on Depardon’s interest in lingering on these particular moments of awkwardness:

Depardon's interviewees exhibit an ostensible willingness to speak with him. Yet this willingness is conveyed with an acute deference that holds back as much as it shares, underscoring the unnatural tenor of these exchanges. A space of reticence is thus revealed. And in those pauses and blank stares, documentary discourse is temporarily halted, forcing the viewer to consider other spaces at work. Where is the artist exactly? Where are we? What arrangements – of furniture, people, schedules – have taken place in order to render this conversation? What distances – social, economic, geographic – remain despite the film-maker's reasonable rapport?

(Alley 2011: 4).

In addition to drawing attention to the 'unnatural' nature of the filmed interview, Alley argues that these 'spaces of reticence', in which the subject demonstrates reserve, also act as a reminder of the inherent voyeurism of film; that 'we are always already on someone else's turf' (Alley 2011: 7). These gaps in the conversation moreover highlight the danger of taking for granted the notion that documentary dialogue is always successful and transparent in nature (Alley 2011: 3). Alley's analysis of Depardon's *La Vie moderne* is concerned with the verbal exchanges that take place between the film-maker and his subjects, yet I would argue that as a construct Alley's 'spaces of reticence' is also applicable in Depardon's visual representation of this relationship between 'self' and 'other'.

One such example occurs at the beginning of *L'Approche* in a sequence in which Marcèle Brès converses in her kitchen with her neighbour Raymond Privat who has come to pay a visit. The exchange is conducted in Occitan, and significantly, is not translated either by subtitles or by Depardon. The director merely remarks, by way of introduction to the sequence, that the use of their local dialect is 'une façon pour Marcèle et Raymond de garder leur intimité devant la caméra', something which he comments is understandable as this is the first day of filming. Film theorist Laura U.

Marks (2000) notes that partial translation is a strategy commonly employed by a variety of intercultural film-makers. In particular, she cites an example from Hopi videomaker Victor Masayesva Jr.'s *Siskyavi: The Place of Chasms* (1991), in which an old woman, mixing Hopi and English, explains to her granddaughter the meaning of the ceremonial patterns she is painting on a pot:

A non-Hopi (or a Hopi who does not speak the language) will comprehend that what she is describing is sacred; but the sacred elements of her speech are not translated. This not only protects the culture from prying eyes, but *defies a viewer's conventional ethnographic expectation that the image is a window onto the culture* [emphasis added].

(Marks 2000: 37-38).

In choosing to include a non-translated conversation between Marcèle and Raymond as an opening scene of *Profils paysans*, Depardon immediately highlights the limitations of documentary representation. Firstly, that a camera in a home is intrusive and represents an invasion of privacy that is not always welcomed by the individual being filmed. Secondly, that regardless of the approach adopted by the film-maker to represent the subject, a representation is always inherently partial and incomplete. This is demonstrated in an aural capacity in the non-translation of the dialogue in Occitan and visually in the single unchanging view of the kitchen that does little to describe the geography of the room. Depardon provides a 'window' into Marcèle's home, but draws attention to the restricted and limited view that this access into her life provides.

Depardon demonstrates a respect for Marcèle and Raymond's desire for privacy in choosing not to translate their conversation, and displays similar consideration for his subjects in his aesthetic decision to use fixed-frame cinematography, which allows subjects to move in and out of shot. One such example is found in the first encounter

with the Jean Roy family that takes place during the final preparations for their midday meal. The sequence begins with a familiar image of a couple seated at a kitchen table, shot at medium distance, and talking amongst themselves. After a certain period has elapsed, Depardon cuts to another shot, which reveals that their son, Daniel, is standing in a corner of the kitchen silently watching his parents being filmed. This is the first indication that there was another person present in the room. Daniel, clearly not at ease with the presence of the camera, proceeds to leave the room, during which time Depardon continues filming his parents.

In a similar manner to an audience in a theatre that cannot see what takes place in the stage's wings, Depardon's camerawork in this sequence demonstrates the partial nature of his representation of the Jean Roy family, and underlines the danger in accepting that an image or sequence necessarily represents the whole 'picture'. Additionally, although he alters the camera's position to reveal the presence of Daniel in the room, Depardon accepts the son's unwillingness to be filmed and cuts back to his parents who appear to accept the camera more readily. This is an illustration of what Cooper (2010: 64) has identified as a key feature of Depardon's *Profils paysans* which demonstrates through its aesthetic choices (fixed-frame cinematography, mobility of the subject) a search for a 'respectful distance' between the 'self' and 'other' that is also ethical in its nature. By extension, I would argue that Depardon's decision to accept his subjects' visual and verbal reticence is also part of an ethical desire to redress the balance of power between film-maker and subject, in according a certain amount of agency to the person being filmed, who is left to decide the extent to which he or she wishes to participate. (Needless to say, at the editing stage, it is the film-maker who

retains control over what material is included or omitted from the final version.) Ultimately, such sequences reveal the fragmentary nature of documentary representation and what ethnographic documentary maker and theorist David MacDougall (1998: 33) describes as the ‘fugitive subject’, who exists beyond the boundaries of the film and cannot be fully contained within. Sarah Cooper (2006: 92) offers a similar analysis, applying philosopher Emmanuel Levinas’s concept of *visage* to the relationship between documentary film-maker and subject: ‘self and other are never discrete, fixed categories even as they remain irreducible to one another’.³¹

* Peasants into Frenchmen?

In order to conclude this exploration of rural France, it is necessary to compare Depardon’s vision of the countryside, with the depiction of farming communities in *Chronique d’un printemps paysan*, and consider what these representations reveal about the place of the ‘peasant’ in contemporary French society. For as Reysset (2003: 187-188) observes: ‘[l]e documentaire, en tant que transcription cinématographique d’une réalité sociale, contribue au travail collectif de représentation des groupes sociaux’.

Both *Profils paysans* and *Chronique d’un printemps paysan* represent the traditional family farm set-up as menaced by the arrival of intensive farming and global market forces. However, in *Chronique d’un printemps paysan*, the existence of organisations such as the *Confédération paysanne*, and figures such as José Bové and François Dufour, offers evidence that the ‘self-identified *paysan*’ is actively fighting to

³¹ For a fuller synopsis of her application of the concept of *visage* to documentary film cf. Cooper (2006: 16-28).

defend his or her way of farming, and furthermore, that their campaign is achieving recognition and support from the non-rural population of France and other international organisations such as the *Via Campesina* (a global network of ‘peasant’ communities and unions). That the problems of small-scale farmers have become well known to a wide public is testament to the efforts of individuals such as José Bové and François Dufour to explain the manner in which the concerns of a minority of farmers relate to the macro interests of the nation as a whole (how certain cultural and culinary traditions depend on the survival of ‘traditional’ methods of farming). In a similar manner, the actions of Bové and other smallholders also have had the effect of defining a role for the ‘peasant’, transforming him or her into an expert commentator on important issues such as globalisation, and into a defender of France’s cultural heritage. Even if journalists are prone to adopt stereotypical caricatures of the ‘peasant’, seen in their treatment of Bové and the ‘McDonald’s incident’, *Chronique d’un printemps paysan* reveals that ‘peasants’ such as Bové are capable of subverting the media’s fixation for dramatic visuals and sound-bites. Furthermore, the documentary illustrates that Bové and Dufour are adept in capitalising on this publicity to pursue their own objectives. As a consequence, this documentary offers support to research carried out by anthropologists such as Rogers (1991) and Lem (1999), which testifies to the existence of a dynamic rural population that is adapting to the demands of a changing world, and is actively fashioning a ‘visible’ presence within national society, whilst maintaining a sense of local identity.

Whereas *Chronique d’un printemps paysan* attempts to emphasise the links between rural and urban populations, *Profils paysans* instead depicts farming

communities as spaces of spatial and social alterity that are removed from the rest of society. This effect is achieved in two distinct manners. Visually, this is conveyed in sequences that depict winding country roads dominated by nature with little sign of human habitation. This creates the impression of a journey to *la France profonde* and reinforces the relative isolation of the farms from each other within these regions. Thematically, the absence of references to the world outside the farms or villages conveys a picture of an enclosed society that appears disconnected from the nation and exists anachronistically.³² Depardon's portrayal of these farming communities as in the process of disappearing or 'vanishing', also shares more in common with documentary representations of aboriginal populations living in the 'Fourth World', than with the militant farmers of the *Confédération paysanne*. This is an aspect which Reysset's (2003) sociological analysis also picks up on:

Les paysans sont enfermés dans l'espace concret du 'ici et maintenant' sans que leur situation ne soit replacée dans des structures sociales historicisées autrement plus larges que le champ de la caméra. La déconstruction technique de l'histoire sociale se remarque bien dans le commentaire introductif: 'nous avons rendez-vous dans des petites exploitations agricoles sans histoires' ... [sic] Sans histoires ou sans histoire? L'ambiguïté sémantique n'est pas sans rappeler le débat entre sociétés sans histoire et société à histoire, société 'froide' et société 'chaude'. [...] Situés hors du temps social, ils n'ont pour vie que le seul cycle biologique et biographique.

(Reysset 2003: 190-191).

Although Depardon does not exclusively focus his trilogy on a generation of farmers in their late seventies and eighties, (he profiles two young couples starting out in farming),

³² There is only one reference in the trilogy to events occurring at a national level. This lone example is found in the final film, *La Vie moderne*, in a sequence in which Paul Argaud is filmed watching the televised coverage of the funeral of Abbé Pierre. Interestingly, this is the only occasion in which Depardon constructs a shot/counter-shot sequence, alternating between a shot looking at Paul and a counter-shot filmed from Paul's perspective. Nevertheless, this reference to the outside world still appears far removed from Paul's life and the rural society of *Profils paysans*, considering that the live coverage of the funeral is viewed through a rather battered black and white television set.

the overall tone of *Profils paysans* is of a world that is in the process of disintegrating. In this sense, his documentary films correspond to the rural studies research of the 1970s, in which the agricultural community was treated as a ‘coherent world unto itself’ (Rogers 1995: 383) and was forecast to disappear through the arrival of global market forces (for instance, Weber (1977) and Mendras (1967)).

In conclusion to this chapter, it is worth considering what *Profils paysans* and *Chronique d’un printemps paysan* reveal about the place of the ‘peasant’ in contemporary French society. Have ‘peasants’ become amalgamated into mainstream culture, disappearing as a distinctive social group as predicted by academics such as Weber (1977) and Mendras (1967), or are they in the process of leading a new movement in which they place themselves at the centre of authentic French culture? The existence of documentaries about small-scale farmers such as José Bové and those of *Profils paysans*, demonstrates that the concept of the *paysan* (however defined) continues to exist within the nation’s consciousness, and still plays a role in defining what it means to be French. Perhaps, rather than concluding that peasants have been transformed *into* Frenchmen, individuals such as José Bové reveals that peasants *are* Frenchmen and that it is possible to be both ‘peasant’ *and* French in today’s society. In other words, in representations such as *Chronique d’un printemps paysan*, the alterity previously ascribed to ‘peasant’ communities has disappeared, and the *paysan* has been transformed from a figure of ridicule, into a defender of traditional values and, in certain cases, as a model for national identity.

Nevertheless, Depardon's trilogy also demonstrates the continued power and attraction of the representation of 'peasant' society as menaced with extinction (also seen in certain types of 'ethnographic' documentaries on television, cf. Chapter 1). This fascination with the 'beauty of death' (Fabre 1996; cited in Bessière 1998), and the desire to protect and preserve 'traditional' ways of life, will be developed in the next chapter, which examines the place of regional cultures and identity in contemporary society. In particular, I assess whether regions, such as the *Pays basque* and Brittany, are portrayed as places of cultural alterity that threaten the cohesion of the nation, or may offer a key to the redefinition of citizenship that is more in accordance with the postcolonial demographic changes within French society.

Chapter 4 — Regional Identities: The Place of Breton and Basque Cultural Identity in the French Nation-State

Experience proves that it is possible for one nationality to merge and be absorbed in another: and when it was originally an inferior and more backward portion of the human race the absorption is greatly to its advantage. Nobody can suppose that it is not more beneficial to a Breton, or to a Basque of French Navarre, to be brought into the current of the ideas and feelings of a highly civilised and cultivated people – to be a member of the French nationality [...] than to sulk on his own rocks, the half-savage relic of past times, revolving in his own little mental orbit, without participation or interest in the general movement of the world.

(John Stuart Mills, 1863; cited in Mees 2003: 182).

In 2008, the tale of a post-master living in Provence who is sent as a punishment to work in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais (the French ‘north of norths’) became the country’s most highly successful film to date. With over 20 million tickets sold, *Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis* (Dany Boon, 2008) was the highest-grossing production of the year and the second most popular film in the history of cinematic releases in France.¹ As well as finding favour with the French public, *Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis* also performed well at a European and international level, a feat that is perhaps surprising considering that the majority of the film’s humour derives from linguistic word play between standard French and the distinctive northern accent and ‘dialect’ of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais (*Ch’timi*). The unexpected success of this modest-budget film drew a considerable amount of attention by French journalists and, as the titles of certain articles indicate, it became fashionable to parody the *Ch’ti* ‘dialect’ (‘Vin dious que ch’té bin!’ *L’Express*, 6 March 2008), in a manner similar to the vogue for the use of *verlan* (banlieue slang) after the release of Kassovitz’s *La Haine* (1995). A series of controversies surrounding *Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis*, such as the lack of recognition at the Césars (France’s

¹ To date, James Cameron’s *Titanic* (1998) holds the box-office record in France. According to official CNC statistics, 20.36 million spectators saw *Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis*, whilst *Titanic* sold 20.58 million tickets.

national film awards), and the role of the Pas-de-Calais local authorities in financing the film, ensured that Boon's creation remained in the media spotlight.

As an example of popular visual culture that engages with issues of language and regional identity, *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* has also proven of interest for academics working in film studies (Royer 2010; Harrod 2012) and for Picard language specialists (Dawson 2008; Auger 2010).² As the *Ch'ti* 'dialect' and accent is such an important feature of *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*, it is unsurprising that all four comment on the use of language in the film. Alain Dawson (2008: 4) is critical of the film's caricature of Picard which is inaccurate to the extent: 'qu'il est tentant de penser que le picard du film résulte de l'application du mode d'emploi présenté par M. Galabru au début du film: "Ils font des [o] à la place des [a], des [k] à la place des [j], et les [j] ils les font, mais à la place du [s]"'. Although film scholar Mary Harrod (2012: 78) offers a similar assessment, 'an inauthentic hodgepodge of certain Picard elements that might have been uttered in nearby rural areas two or more generations ago', she argues that this is one of a number of strategies used in the film to facilitate identification for a viewer unfamiliar with the Nord-Pas-de-Calais:

[...] Boon's invented *ch'timi* provides the ideal fantastic tongue for his fantasy land. That is, the film's idiom is well suited to mediating identification with its speakers by a broad range of spectators because it is unfamiliar – yet, as based on French, not totally alien – to most potential viewers. Moreover, its grammar is unpacked before them in such a way that they may enjoy the sensation of having appropriated a new form of language for themselves.

(Harrod 2012: 80).

² Picard is a regional language spoken in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais from which the *Ch'ti* dialect is derived. For an overview of the differences between Picard grammar and 'standard' French, cf. Auger 2010.

In other words, the film's use of an 'invented' or 'hybrid' '*ch'timi*' offers a taste of the 'exotic' in a manner that remains accessible to a wide public. A film in 'authentic' Picard, a language that has a grammar that is distinct from French (cf. Auger 2010), would have a reduced potential in obtaining an audience outside the small circles of Picard-speakers even if subtitles were used. As such, Harrod (2012: 78) argues *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* follows the historical model in French cinema, identified by Michel Chion (2008), in which specific regional accents are largely absent.³

Notwithstanding these valid criticisms, as Michelle Royer (2010: 148) comments: 'If the film is a caricature of regional differences, it has nonetheless opened a transcultural dialogue'. The high levels of ticket sales across all regions of France demonstrates an interest and attachment to the concept of regional identity, that goes beyond personal ties to a particular place in which an individual was born or lives (i.e. people outside the Pas-de-Calais identified with the film).⁴ As a consequence, the popular success of *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* has raised awareness of the place of regional identities and languages in a country where French is constitutionally the only officially recognised language (Article 2: 'La langue de la République est le français'). Of particular interest for this chapter is the manner in which the film reveals that language and identity are not fixed monolithic entities, but are constantly being

³ In *Le Complexe de Cyrano* (2008) Chion contends that the use of language in French cinema offers an example of the effects of language policy, which has traditionally sought to valorise the use of 'standard' French and eradicate regional dialects and accents. Chion's analysis of the history of French cinema reveals that regional accents are rarely heard, and that when used, there is a tendency to fabricate 'exotic' regional accents for comic effect (for instance, Fernandel's generalised 'midi' accent and the rural bumpkin – *le plouc rural*).

⁴ One contemporary example of the attachment many people have for a particular geographical or cultural region of France is found in the controversy generated over the implementation in April 2009 of a new European standardised vehicle registration plate, which removed the number of the *département* from the licence plate. The government was eventually forced to concede to public demand, and permitted the addition of the *département* number and emblem on the right-hand side of the plate.

redefined and recreated by its users. Whilst the *Ch'ti* dialect and accent used by the characters in *Bienvenue chez les Ch'ti* may be 'fantastical', as Harrod (2012: 80) suggests, the film nevertheless draws on an actual socio-cultural change taking place in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, where there is a growing number of people for whom: 'the term *Chti* or *Chtimi* has demonstrably greater cultural resonance than *Picard*', perhaps as '*Picard* appears too academic and serious for the realities to which it refers' (Pooley 2007: 94; 102). Extrapolating from sociolinguist Tim Pooley's (2007) research (published a year before the film's premiere), *Bienvenue chez les Ch'ti* may be interpreted, not only as another example of local people reclaiming a previously pejorative term (*Ch'ti*) and transforming it into a 'symbol of local pride' (Pooley 2007: 94), but also, of the increasing commodification of *Ch'ti* identity and culture.⁵

If I begin with a discussion of *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*, it is because the film highlights a number of key themes to be explored in this chapter's examination of regional identity in documentary films. Firstly, Boon's film represents the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region as a place of cultural, linguistic and spatial alterity (there are repeated visual references to the time needed to travel to this 'north of norths'), and yet does so in a manner that remains accessible to a national (and international) audience. In second place, the contrast between the public and academic reception of the film, reveals the tension between the perception of regional identity in social practices, and in theoretical or political terms. For instance, the popularisation and adoption of *Ch'ti*

⁵ Dany Boon who directed and starred in *Bienvenue chez les Ch'ti*, is also a successful stand-up comedian whose material is largely inspired by his (self-proclaimed) *Ch'ti* identity. The sales of the DVD of his show, *Dany Boon: à s' baraque et en ch'ti* (2003), made entirely in *Ch'ti* dialect and featuring French subtitles, outsold any previous one-man show in France (Harrod 2012: 76). Pooley (2007) cites the use of the term *Ch'ti* as the name of a city guide and as a brand name for a range of products, including beer, as examples of the positive connotations being publicly associated with this identity; such a usage may also be interpreted as the 'commodification' of *Ch'ti* identity.

identity in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, has generated a considerable amount of emotion and anger among Picard enthusiasts in the region, as is illustrated by the co-founder of the Comité Régional Picard du Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Claude Hoden's reaction to this social change: 'Quant au *ch'timi*, ce n'est pas une variété du picard mais un jargon vulgaire, du français argotique patoisé. Ce faux patois génère un faux folklore, une vraie chienlit qui souille et offense l'éminente dignité des Picards' (Pooley 2007: 94). A third aspect concerns the use of regional identity and language as a commodity, whether as subject matter for a film, or as a marketing strategy to encourage tourism or sell beer.⁶ Finally, the plot of *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* in which a post-master from Provence is successfully initiated into the 'Ch'ti' culture and 'language', offers a universalising message in which a shared sense of French nationhood or common humanity overrides cultural or linguistic differences, and reveals that the coexistence of plural identities (regional and national) is possible.

The issues raised by *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* regarding regional identity and the use of language are also found in other regions of France where local dialects and accents coexist alongside national culture and 'standard' French. Two regions that are most often used as case studies to explore such questions are Brittany and the *Pays basque*.⁷

As places which are geographically distant from Paris and occupy a peripheral location

⁶ *Bienvenue chez les Ch'ti* features several examples of local product placement (such as the use of the beer brand *Ch'ti*). By extension, the film's positive representation of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais has raised the profile of a region previously associated in negative terms with class conflict (exemplified in Zola's *Germinal*, cf. Harrod 2012: 78). It is likely that tourism in the region will have benefited from the national and international success of the film.

⁷ In this chapter, the *Pays basque*, or Basque country, refers to the three historic Basque provinces found on the French side of the border which form part of the Aquitaine region (sometimes referred to as *Iparralde*, or the northern provinces). Unless otherwise specified, I shall not refer to the autonomous Basque province in Spain, as it is considerably different in social, political, and economic terms.

in the hexagon (westernmost peninsula and adjoining the French-Spanish border), these regions have proven of particular interest for the study of the formation of the French nation-state, and the diffusion of national identity, culture and language. This is in part due to the relatively late inclusion of these regions into the nation-state, and the existence of indigenous political movements that have nationalist or separatist agendas. Other factors that make these areas distinct from the rest of the country are the non-Latin ethnic and linguistic origins of the Breton and Basque populations. Contrary to the French language, which developed from Latin, Breton is descended from the Celtic family of languages, which also include Welsh and Gaelic, whilst the Basque language is a unique example of a pre-Indo-European language.⁸ The populations of these regions are also known for having a high level of awareness of their separate cultural identity, and are actively engaged in promoting and preserving this distinctiveness (whether through cultural or linguistic associations and/or political activism).

As places which are geographically, historically, culturally, linguistically and ethnically ‘other’, Brittany and the Basque country are popular locations for programmes on regional France and are also noted holiday destinations for French and foreign tourists. Academics from a variety of disciplines have also been consistently attracted to these peripheral societies, researching questions such as the impact of modernisation and language policy in regional communities. Such research follows a similar paradigm to scholarship on ‘peasant’ societies discussed in the previous chapter.

⁸ Over the centuries, linguists have put forward various theories to explain the origins of the Basque language, however, none have proven conclusive. The advent of the study of blood types by scientists in the 1960s and, more recently the genetic testing of the Basque population in the 1990s, has provided peer-reviewed evidence that the Basque people have been living in the same area for around 20,000 years. In other words, the Basque population are the direct descendants of a Palaeolithic community that existed before the Indo-European migration. For a more detailed overview of the history of linguistic theories on the Basque language, and for references to scientific research on the Basque population cf. Dendaletche (2005: 113-135).

For instance, sociologist Edgar Morin's (1967) study of a town in rural Brittany, *Commune en France: La métamorphose de Plodémet*, examines the impact of modernisation on a small regional community and its effect on local identity and culture. In more recent scholarship, the ability of regional culture and identity to resist and adapt to the arrival of modernity has been explored in publications such as Caroline Ford's (1993) study of religious and political identity in Brittany, which contends that certain areas of Brittany 'did not unreservedly adopt the values exported by Paris but rather created new cultural and political forms grounded in local traditions' (Ford 1993: 227).⁹

Since the 1990s, researchers have shown an increasing interest in moving away from 'traditional rural settings', to the study of the 'contemporary' context in which Brittany and the Basque country exist as part of the French nation and wider European community. For example, political geographer Jan Mansvelt Beck (2008) analyses whether the European Union's encouragement of cross-border co-operation between member-states has created a new setting and political opportunity for Basque nationalism. In a similar vein, historians Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga (2009) compare Basque terrorism and the failed ceasefire of 2006, with the peace process in Northern Ireland. Of particular consequence for this chapter is the growing field of research into young people's attitudes to their Breton or Basque identity and the place of these regional languages as part of this cultural identity (for instance, Hoare 2000; Delon 2007; Hornsby 2008). This scholarship is also characterised by an exploration of

⁹ Contrary to the prevailing paradigm of the time, which saw modernisation as a homogenising force that involved the inevitable disappearance of local culture (e.g. Mendras 1967 *La Fin des paysans*; Weber 1977 *Peasants into Frenchmen*), Morin's study reveals that the arrival of such forces actually resulted in the reinforcement of local identity among the townspeople of Plodémet.

the multi-faceted nature of identity, which is refashioned and recreated in accordance with the changing social demands of individuals and communities. The edited volume *Bretagne plurielle: Culture, territoire et politique* (Dugalès, Fournis and Kernallegenn 2007), offers an example of the complexity of attempting to define Breton identity(ies).

To explore the place of regional identity in French society, the chapter is divided thematically into two parts. In the first, I examine the process of *language shift* (cf. Gal 1979), whereby regional languages or dialects moved from a dominant position to a marginal status, as French became increasingly adopted by the local population. This section will assess a documentary broadcast on France 3 in 2001, *Brezhoneg: Un siècle de breton*. Whilst the programme to an extent provides a strong historical narrative of ‘Bretons into Frenchmen’, the participation of key Breton academics also offers an insight into the heterogeneous nature of this process. In addition to a discussion of the political ideology and social reasons that encouraged this linguistic change, this section will consider the ‘cultural and linguistic revival’ of the 1970s in light of Delon’s (2007) findings that this renewed affirmation of regional identity among a younger generation is partly due to a ‘disenchantment’ with their French identity. Although this section focuses on a documentary that explores Breton culture and language, my discussion will not be restricted to this particular region and will make comparisons, where relevant, with other regions such as the Basque country.

In the second part of this chapter, I investigate the paradox of a government which seldom acknowledges the existence of a multi-lingual and multi-cultural nation, and yet, plays an active role in promoting cultural tourism in France that is based on the

notion of distinctive regional identities and traditions.¹⁰ In regions that are largely rural (such as the Basque country), the development of cultural tourism is seen as a vital component in generating employment and improving economic revenue. To explore the visual representation of Brittany and the *Pays basque*, I analyse two episodes from TF1's long-running documentary series *Histoires naturelles*. With its focus on traditional activities such as fishing and hunting, the series offers an example of visual culture that draws on the mythology of the countryside ideal, and constructs a rhetoric that plays on the notion of alterity and exoticism. By extension, the analysis of *Histoires naturelles* will provide the basis to widen the scope of this chapter to include a discussion of recent research into the commodification of regional culture in France.

❖ An Exploration of Language Policy in France: Changing Attitudes to Cultural Diversity and Plural Identities

Le fédéralisme et la superstition parlent bas-breton [...], le fanatisme parle basque.
(Barrère, Comité de salut public, 27 January 1794;
cited in Larramendy 2008: 34).

Brezhoneg: Un siècle de breton (2001) charts the profound changes that took place in Lower Brittany between the late nineteenth century to the turn of the twenty-first. Alongside the transformation of a primarily rural agricultural society into a modern urban economy ('peasants into Frenchmen'), the film focuses in particular on the

¹⁰ In recent years, the linguistic diversity of the nation has been officially recognised with for example, the renaming in 2001 of the governmental body responsible for language policy (*Délégation générale à la langue française*) to include regional languages (*Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France*). For more information, cf. the DGLF's website: www.dglf.culture.gouv.fr. The Constitution was also amended in 2008 with the addition of Article 75-1, which states that 'les langues régionales appartiennent au patrimoine de la France'. However, as I shall discuss at a later point in this chapter, this official acknowledgement does not imply an equality of status between regional languages and standard French.

linguistic upheaval that took place in this region. Over the course of a century, the various ‘Breton dialects’ spoken in south-west Brittany moved from a position of dominance (80% of the population speaking ‘Breton’), to a minority status (16% able to converse in ‘Breton’).¹¹ Broadcast on France 3, the documentary is structured chronologically, and encompasses key events such as the nation-building projects of the Third Republic, the First and Second World Wars, post-war reconstruction, and the ‘cultural revival’ of the 1970s. These pivotal moments in history demonstrate both the effects of the French nation-state on the region of Brittany (for instance, the impact of a national education system), and the role the Breton population played in national events (over three hundred thousand Bretons were mobilised in World War One). *Brezhoneg* is composed from a mixture of primary source archives (film, photographs, newspapers), interviews with Bretons who experienced first-hand these social changes, and academics specialising in the question of Breton identity, culture and language (for instance, linguist Henriette Walter, sociologist Ronan Le Coadic and Breton historian Fañch Broudig). A voice-over commentary provides additional information and acts as a narrative device to link the material. Although the style of the documentary is expository in nature, the range of attitudes to and experiences of Breton identity

¹¹ Prior to the efforts of intellectuals such as Roparz Hémon in the 1920s and 1930s to codify and create a ‘literary’ Breton, ‘Breton’ as a language did not exist in a standardised form, and was instead a series of distinct dialects spoken in different parts of Lower Brittany. Since the 1970s, and the development of mono- or bilingual education, the number of ‘standard’ Breton speakers has increased, whilst local dialects tend to be spoken by a diminishing ageing population. A similar situation also exists in the Basque Regions in Spain and France where a unified Basque language, *batua*, has become the ‘official’ language of administration and education since 1968 (Larramendy 2008: 39). The statistics concerning the number of Breton speakers are provided in the introductory commentary of *Brezhoneg*. Although the source for these figures is not specified, the presence of key Breton specialists in this film, and additional references to other academic publications in the closing credits, would suggest that they are sourced from a recognised source(s). McDonald (1989: 6) refers to a 62% drop in the number of Breton speakers over a century, which would appear to correspond to the figures in *Brezhoneg*.

recounted by the interviewees, moderates a potentially authoritarian approach to the history of the Breton language, and demonstrates the plural nature of Breton society.

Figure 4.1 comprises a selection of stills taken from the opening sequence of *Brezhoneg* which juxtaposes a variety of opinions concerning the place and utility of Breton in post-war France, which ranges from the negative, ‘Apprendre le breton, pour communiquer avec qui? Avec nos morts? C’est pas intéressant’ (Marc Botros, Brest), to the militant stance of an unnamed young man who demands official status for the language and the creation of a Breton parliament. In addition to demonstrating the complexity of the question of language in Brittany, the sequence is also notable for the inclusion of two French presidents and footage from classrooms in which Breton is being taught. The decision to include extracts from speeches by De Gaulle and Mitterrand in the opening sequence underlines the manner in which language has remained at the forefront of political debate over the course of the Fifth Republic, for politicians on the left and right of the political spectrum. Within the space of just over



Figure 4.1

Top Row: Interviews with Breton-speakers.

Bottom Row. Left: President de Gaulle addressing a crowd in Breton; *Centre:* Mitterrand speaking about language policy; *Right:* Children learning Breton.

three minutes thirty seconds, this sequence summarises the key themes to be explored in the documentary. Firstly, the political and social aspects involved in the process of language shift, and secondly, the fundamental importance of education in the implementation of this transition (whether as a medium for the protection and promotion of regional languages, or as a means to promulgate a national language and culture).

I explore the question of regional identity and language thematically, beginning with an examination of the political ideology behind language policy, before moving on to consider the social role of the Breton population in this change. Finally, I consider more broadly the compatibility of regional and national identity, and examine the ‘gap between policy and practice in France’ concerning, on the one hand, ‘the official account of France as a linguistically unified nation’, and on the other, the reality of a multilingual nation in which an estimated 10 million people grew up speaking a language other than French (Le Nevez 2008: 309-310).

- *République Une–Langue Une: The Enduring Ideology of Language Policy in France*

The slogan ‘République une, langue une: la langue doit être une comme la République’, offers a concise summary of the fundamental nature of the connection between the French language and the nation, and by extension, the duty of French citizens to master the language of the Republic. From a historical perspective, the commission of a study into the use of the French language in France within the first few years of the First Republic reveals the manner in which the creation of a monolingual France was seen as

an essential part of the nation-building process. Written by Abbé Grégoire, and published in 1794, the report's title *Sur la nécessité et les moyens d'anéantir les patois et universaliser l'usage de la langue française* indicates in no uncertain terms the desire to 'annihilate' regional differences in favour of the French language.¹² In addition to creating a unified nation, the justification for the eradication of linguistic difference was closely tied to the republican concept of citizenship, which on the basis of equality, refuses to acknowledge any form of group identity (be it, ethnic, religious, or in this case, linguistic). Perhaps the most explicit transcription of this ideology is found in a grammatical convention in French, which reserves the use of the upper case to citizens who are represented by a state, whilst members of an ethnic, cultural or religious minority are referred to in the lower case. For example, 'un Français', 'un Anglais', but, 'un breton' and 'un musulman'.¹³

Brezhoneg begins by reminding viewers, with a quotation from the 1794 Convention, that the question of language policy goes back to the Revolutionary period where the formation of a monolingual nation was considered to be at the heart of the creation of national identity. The documentary's inclusion of quotations from a range of periods, such as that of Anatole de Monzie in 1925 (cf. Figure 4.2), and footage of François Mitterand commenting on the primacy of the French language, illustrates the persistence of this concept into the twentieth century. Similarly, *Brezhoneg*'s repeated use of footage filmed in various classrooms over the course of the twentieth century,

¹² Abbé Grégoire's (1794) report, along with contemporaneous responses to Grégoire's study, is reproduced and discussed in Certeau, Julia and Revel's 1975 publication *Une politique de la langue: La Révolution française et les patois, l'enquête de Grégoire*. The original document is available for consultation in Paris, at the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (François Mitterand site: reference: LE38-810).

¹³ In his study of Breton identity, sociologist Erwan Delon (2007: 18) draws attention to this grammatical 'injustice' and expressly signals that 'j'écris Breton avec un B majuscule dans un souci d'égalité', as he cannot accept this custom which is based on the 'injustices de l'Histoire'.

underlines the major role played by the development of a national education system in this process of language shift. Of particular note, is the inclusion of a short extract of film in which an *instituteur* is seen preaching to a primary school audience about the benefits of learning French (Figure 4.2 *Centre*).¹⁴

His categorical opinion that ‘le français est indispensable si vous voulez accéder au monde moderne’, offers an example of the manner in which republican ideology was diffused throughout the country by means of the centrally trained *instituteur*, whose role was to instil republican principles such as *laïcité* (secularism) and morality in the nation’s children.¹⁵ The schoolmaster’s passionate affirmation of the necessity to learn French to gain access to the modern world, bears considerable resemblance to the tenets of the earlier 1794 address to the Convention, in which regional dialects and languages are disparaged as remnants of a bygone era: ‘ces jargons qui sont encore des lambeaux de la féodalité et des monuments de l’esclavage’.



Figure 4.2

Top and bottom: Political attitudes towards regional languages over the centuries (1794 and 1925).

Centre: A school-master preaching the necessity of learning French to his class.

¹⁴ Eric Hobsbawm compares the development of primary education under the Third Republic as ‘the development of a secular equivalent of the church – primary education, imbued with revolutionary and republican principles and content, and conducted by the secular equivalent of the priesthood – or perhaps, given their poverty, the friars – the *instituteurs*’ (Hobsbawm 1983: 271).

¹⁵ The figure of the *instituteur* as a staunch defender and spokesperson for republican ideology is one that has considerable resonance in visual culture. One of the most well known examples is found in the film made of Marcel Pagnol’s novel *La Gloire de mon père* (Yves Robert 1990), which features an *instituteur* who might be described as the archetypal Republican.

Whilst *Brezhoneg* constructs a narrative which reveals the inevitable and irreversible nature of the process of language shift in Brittany, the inclusion of footage of all post-war Presidents (with the exception of Jacques Chirac) addressing questions of language, acts as a potent reminder that the status of the national language remains a pertinent and politically charged question in contemporary society, despite the hegemonic position of French on the territory. If the militant tone of the Minister of Public Education, Anatole de Montzie, ‘[p]our l’unité linguistique de la République, la langue bretonne doit disparaître!’ (1925), has been replaced by a more conciliatory approach to France’s regional languages, the tradition of one nation–one language, remains firmly enshrined. This is illustrated in an extract of a speech by President Mitterrand included in the opening sequence of the programme, which reprises ideas found in the earlier material discussed above:

Tant qu’ils étaient enfermés dans leur langue, ils étaient aussi enfermés dans leur condition sociale. Ça, ça a été la grande vocation de la Troisième République à la fin du siècle dernier. Et puis, on est arrivé dans un excès contraire, on a tout raboté, et ce qui fait la richesse de la France dans sa diversité, bon, on l’a un peu oublié. Moi, j’essaie de le restaurer.

On the one hand, Mitterrand acknowledges that policies for the linguistic homogenisation of France might have suffered from an excess of zeal, which occulted the notion that the richness of the nation lies in her diversity. On the other, the President argues, in a manner reminiscent of the ‘mission civilisatrice’ used to justify colonial expansion under the Third Republic, that the arrival of French ‘liberated’ a population that were ‘trapped’ or ‘imprisoned’ by their regional dialect which denied the possibility of social mobility. In light of the 1992 European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, *Brezhoneg* also addresses the role of the European Union in determining

matters of language policy and the controversy that this has generated amongst the political class in France. For in its proposal of equal status for regional and minority languages, the Charter challenges the primacy of French and thus puts into question a fundamental principle of republican ideology on which national identity is built.¹⁶

The documentary's selection of examples of historical figures in authority commenting on issues of language, imparts the impression of the resolute and unequivocal nature of the policy to universalise the French language. Research by the anthropologist Mary McDonald (1989) into the application of language policy in Brittany however reveals that, even at the height of the Third Republic (1870-1940), the prohibition of regional languages in schools was by no means systematically applied. She cites the example of a General Inspector named Carré who advocated that as part of the early stages of learning French, Breton could be used in 'a restricted and well determined way' to facilitate vocabulary assimilation (McDonald 1989: 49). The same inspector also proved accommodating regarding the case of one school in which the schoolmaster expressed a desire to continue using Breton in certain contexts (McDonald 1989: 49). In addition, McDonald (1989: 50) draws attention to the range of opinions concerning pedagogical methodology found in educational journals of the period, and concludes that, 'the very existence of debate of this kind suggests flexibility in the interpretation of the texts of the law'. Cultural historian Anne-Marie Thiesse (1997) has also demonstrated that, even during the Third Republic, national textbooks showed considerable regional variation and drew on local imagery to represent the nation.

¹⁶ The issue of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages will be treated in further detail shortly.

- *Pragmatism and Resistance: Social Attitudes to Language Shift*

In addition to offering an exposition of the political aspect of language in France, *Brezhoneg* also explores the role played by the population of Lower Brittany in the process of language shift from Breton to French. This is primarily achieved through the medium of interviews with individuals in their sixties and seventies who came from Breton-speaking families and encountered French for the first time in the classroom. These interviewees are from the intermediate generation that became bilingual in Breton and French. Subsequently, in order to ensure a smooth transition for their children into the Francophone education system, the preponderance of this age group opted to speak French in the home, as a way of minimising the difficulties they themselves had experienced as monolingual Breton speakers. One aspect that stands out from this testimony is the eagerness to learn French. For example, Jean-Marie Scraigne from Huelgoat states ‘[...] on était content d’apprendre [le français], parce que ceux qui savaient pas le français n’étaient pas considérés. Et on admirait les gens des villes et des bourgs qui parlaient français, on se sentait diminué vis-à-vis d’eux’. As well as being motivated by the desire for social respectability, the acquisition of French was also seen by certain interviewees as a chance for social mobility. Marc Botros (Brest) describes French as a ‘porte de sortie’, a choice of language that recalls François Mitterand’s speech cited earlier, in which he describes non-francophones as being ‘trapped’ in their social condition.

From these interviews, it is possible to construe that part of the process of turning ‘Bretons into Frenchmen’, aside from the practicalities of teaching French, also

included persuading the non-francophone of the value of speaking the ‘national’ language, if not necessarily the wholehearted espousal of the ideology behind this policy. It is notable that all of the people interviewed in the documentary speak French fluently, even those for whom it is not their mother tongue. The majority of interviewees also seem to accept the necessity of this linguistic change. For instance, an unnamed man affirms with considerable emotion, ‘Pas un seul instant vous me ferez dire que mon père et ma mère ont eu tort en m’apprenant le français plutôt que le breton!’ The writer Naig Rozmor, adopts a similar stance, although she questions some of the methodology used: ‘L’apprentissage de la langue française, ça me semble une nécessité. Notre langue n’était pas suffisamment une langue de communication, il fallait préparer l’avenir. Cela était très bien, mais pas le procédé qui a été employé’.

Eugen Weber’s *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1977: 485) concludes by arguing that the integration of rural France into the nation-state consisted of a process of acculturation akin to the form of cultural imperialism practised in France’s colonies, and draws on Franz Fanon’s observation that: ‘[t]he colonist only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loud and clear the supremacy of white man’s values’. To what extent the interviewees’ keenness to learn French, and the perception that this was essential to ‘prepare the future’, is a sign of their ‘colonisation’ by the centre is difficult to establish from the brief excerpts included in *Brezhoneg*. However, it is possible to infer that the desire to learn French was motivated by pragmatic reasons; not only to rid themselves of the social stigma attached to non-francophones, but also, to be able to respond to the demands of a developing economy, in which the increased circulation of people and goods required the ability to communicate outside of an

individual's local community. This aspect of language change is directly addressed in *Brezhoneg* by Breton historian Fañch Broudig, who asserts that the positioning of French as the language of education was also a response to social demand at a 'grass-roots level', and not simply imposed by the Republican ideology of 'one language—one nation'. In other words, Broudig upholds the idea that once Breton was no longer seen as a useful economic tool, the transition to a French-speaking Brittany was inevitable. A similar pattern of language shift is also attested in other regions of France. For instance, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (2002) fieldwork in a rural community in the Béarn region of France during the 1960s and the 1970s, reveals the link between the acquisition of French and the chances of securing a marriage partner.

Whilst *Brezhoneg* reveals that the process of language change was also a self-imposed process, implemented by the local population in Lower Brittany, the documentary also acknowledges that this was not a *fait accompli*, and that there were those who sought to resist this social and linguistic change. In particular, this resistance took the form of an intellectual countermovement that emerged in the 1920s, led by Roparz Hémon, who played a key role in the development of Breton cultural and educational institutions in the 1930s and 1940s. The overall aim of this group was to raise the status of Breton from a language or 'dialects' spoken in agricultural communities, to a language capable of literary and intellectual expression. To do so, Hémon and his fellow contributors sought to develop a scholarly tradition, by founding a Breton literary journal *Gwalarn*, and publishing Breton translations of classic literary works to increase the availability

of written Breton. They also embarked on a process of codification and enrichment of the lexicon.

In linguistic terms, Hémon and the Gwalarn group sought to transform Breton from a series of ‘dialects’ used in informal contexts (‘low’ status), into a stable language with fixed rules and a vocabulary able to fulfil the demands of formal or ‘high’ status functions. As such, Gwalarn’s efforts to modernise and develop Breton, follows sociolinguist Charles Albert Ferguson’s (1968) three-step process required for a dialect or ‘less-developed’ language to become a ‘developed’ language. Namely: (1) the development of a writing system; (2) the standardisation of the language; and (3) the modernisation or expansion of the vocabulary.¹⁷ Similar movements, aiming to protect and raise the prestige of regional languages, were also found contemporaneously in other areas of France, such as Frédéric Mistral’s revival of Occitan in Provence.

Nonetheless, if the desire of figures such as Hémon was to combat the hegemony of French culture and language, the effect of the process of codification resulted in the separation of the Breton used in literary circles from the Breton dialects spoken by ‘ordinary’ people in Brittany. As sociolinguist Yves Le Berre comments in *Brezhoneg*, Hémon’s Breton was created in a similar fashion to Esperanto, in that it was founded ‘sur la base de parlers vivants, mais qui ne ressemble à aucun parler vivant’. This does not imply that this ‘literary Breton’ was in some way ‘inauthentic’, as this process of standardisation is common to all languages as they move from ‘dialect to standard’ (Lodge 1993). However, it does indicate that the aspirations of groups such as Hémon’s were increasingly divorced from the lives of the majority of the population,

¹⁷ For an introduction to the process of codification in the French context cf. Lodge 1993. For a historical analysis of the development of the French language, see also Huchon 2002, Walter 1988.

who were ever more aware of their need to master French to maximise their employment prospects. Bourdieu, who has made a study of the education system and intellectual life in France (cf. 1984; 1987), comments on the dissociation between intellectual debates about regional languages and the practical necessity for peasants to learn French:

Paradoxe particulièrement éclatant dans l'ordre de la culture et surtout de la langue où certaines fractions des intellectuels, portés par la logique de leurs intérêts spécifiques, leur demandent [aux paysans] par exemple de retourner à leurs langues vernaculaires au moment où les exigences tacites des marchés économique, matrimonial et scolaire leur imposent, plus brutalement que jamais, de les abandonner.

(Bourdieu 2002: 257).

Brezhoneg's treatment of the process of language shift in Lower Brittany over the course of one century, illustrates both the political desire to impose the use of French throughout the country, and the social demand of the regional population to acquire French. Through its examination of a range of quotations and archive footage of French politicians from different periods of history, the documentary demonstrates that the republican ideology, which places language at the centre of national identity, continues to endure in the twentieth century. Similarly, interviews with a range of people who experienced first-hand this transition from Breton to French, provides the viewer with an insight into the complexity of this social change and the diversity of opinions and experiences of this intermediary generation. Whilst the overall narrative of the documentary suggests that this language shift from Breton to French was inevitable, the inclusion of testimony from Breton speakers and from academics specialising in this history, moderates the impression that this change was imposed from the 'top-down' and reveals that the adoption of French in Lower Brittany was also at the behest of local

people. In view of the ‘cultural revival’ of the 1970s, the latter part of *Brezhoneg* considers the future for Breton language and culture in contemporary France.

- *1970s to 2000s: A ‘Cultural Revival’ of Regional Identity, or a ‘Crisis’ of National Identity?*

After a period of post-war modernisation, during which many parents chose to use French in the home to raise their children, *Brezhoneg* portrays the 1970s and subsequent decades as a time when social manifestations of Breton culture and language re-emerged. One of the most noticeable aspects of this movement was a series of demonstrations concerning the right to education in Breton.¹⁸ The sustained nature and extensive support for educational reforms is visually indicated in the documentary through the inclusion of a range of footage from street protests over several decades (Figure 4.3). Alongside these demands, this period was also notable for the creation of a number of cultural festivals celebrating Breton and/or Celtic identity, such as the annual *Interceltique* music festival held in Lorient (founded in 1970), and the revival of traditional



Figure 4.3

Top and Bottom: Demonstrations in favour of Breton-language education. *Centre:* children marching in support of the 1992 European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

¹⁸ For example, the development of bilingual classes, the introduction of a Breton language option in secondary schools (1979), the creation of a university degree in Breton (University of Rennes 1981) and a CAPES (postgraduate education qualification) to create a specialised and elite teaching profession (1986). In parallel to the movement to incorporate Breton into the French national education system, the privately-funded *Diwan* movement, offering immersive education in Breton at primary school level, was founded in 1977. For more information on the history of Breton in schools cf. McDonald 1989: 44-72. McDonald also assesses the *Diwan* movement (1989: 175-218).

Breton ‘village fêtes’, *fest noz*. The development of radio and television stations broadcasting in Breton also provided a platform for the diffusion of Breton culture and language. In addition to these periodic expressions of Breton identity, perhaps the most significant change regarding the status and role of Breton, was the implementation of dual language road signs in Brittany in the 1990s. As property of the state, these signposts offered an official recognition of the legitimacy of the region’s linguistic heritage and established a visible presence for Breton in the public landscape of Brittany.¹⁹ Nonetheless, as Michael Hornsby (2008: 133) points out in his study of the contemporary Breton linguistic landscape, the ‘official’ Breton toponyms used on these signs do not necessarily match the local names used by residents.

From a visual perspective, the most notable difference with the post-1970s sequences is the appearance of visible displays of Breton language and culture on signposts, banners, and perhaps most significantly, in the classroom. These images contrast with earlier historical material shown in the programme, in which Breton is largely absent (with the exception of the brief references to minority publications by Breton intellectuals such as Hémon). Similarly, footage of the ‘cultural revival’ reveals a reversal in social attitudes towards regional identity and language, moving from the shame expressed by several interviewees of the inter-war generation, to a younger generation who are proud to display publicly their Breton culture. Nevertheless, whilst it may be true that Breton language and culture has acquired a permanent presence in contemporary Brittany through Breton language media, cultural festivals, and bilingual

¹⁹ This decision to adopt a dual language system of road signs was a response to a guerrilla campaign conducted in Brittany, which involved the defacing of over 10,000 signposts, symbolically removing French place names and often adding tags in Breton. Bilingual road signs are also found in the Basque country and in Corsica where similar underground protests took place in the 1990s.

education, this does not signify the retreat of a centralised linguistic policy of ‘République une–langue une’. *Brezhoneg* outlines as a case in point, the controversy generated over the European Union’s Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (1992).

It is worth briefly summarising the various stages in the lengthy debate among French politicians over the European Charter, as it highlights several important aspects of contemporary attitudes to language and identity in France. In 1999, France finally chose to ratify the Charter (39 articles out of a total of 98), only for the decision to be declared unconstitutional by the *Conseil Constitutionnel* (Constitutional Council) in June of the same year. Leaving aside the constitutional argument, perhaps the most important aspect of this episode was not that France agreed to sign the Charter, but that they chose to accompany this signature with a written Declaration which reiterated the dominant position of French. French remained the obligatory language for legislative texts and for all government departments and public services, whilst the teaching of regional and minority languages was to remain optional.²⁰ Amid heated exchanges in the *Assemblée nationale* a further compromise was reached in 2008 and an additional article (Article 75-1) stating that ‘les langues régionales appartiennent au patrimoine de la France’ was added to the Constitution.²¹ However, in the eyes of the European Union, although France is listed as a signatory to the Charter (as of 1999), the 2011

²⁰ It is interesting to note that France’s decision to sign the Charter in 1999, took place seven years after the amendment of Article 2 of the Constitution which officially reinforced the position of French as the language of the Republic, ‘La langue de la République est le français’; the same year that the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages was agreed (1992).

²¹ The modification of the Constitution in 2008, followed on from a decision in 2001 to expand the remit of the governmental body responsible for language policy, to include regional languages (renamed as the *Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France*). The addition of Article 75-1 may therefore be read as a further step towards the official acknowledgement of the presence of regional languages in France, albeit a recognition which is conceived within a regulatory framework governing usage.

official survey into the application of the Charter, states that France has yet to apply the treaty, commenting ‘Language is an extremely sensitive matter’.²² Three years after amending the Constitution, it would seem that the issue is still capable of inciting considerable passion, judging from the response of the Secretary of State, Georges Tron, to a question suggesting the reopening of the debate on the Charter of Regional and Minority Languages in a session of the Senate.²³ Significantly, Tron underlines that the 2008 amendment concerning the status of regional languages is ‘la simple reconnaissance d’un état de fait et n’a pas à lui seul d’effet normatif’. It therefore appears unlikely, in the near future, that regional languages will achieve additional status or recognition other than at a symbolic level.²⁴

Brezhoneg was broadcast in 2001, before the amendment of the Constitution, and therefore is only able to cover the social mobilisation of people demonstrating in favour of the Charter in the 1990s. However, the documentary features an interview with the French MEP, Bernard Poignant, tasked with the portfolio on regional languages, which exemplifies the strength of hostility to the Charter among the political class: ‘je m’opposerai vigoureusement à ce que toute autre langue que le Français soit une langue officielle. Ce serait une *régression considérable*, [...] ça serait porter un coup fatal à la langue française et à son rayonnement international’. As the documentary only offers a

²² Source: Council of Europe/ERICarts, Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe, 12th edition (2011) available for consultation online: www.culturalpolicies.net/web/monitoring-ssi.php [accessed 30.10.2012].

²³ A transcript of this reply is available on the government website, www.delegfrance-conseil-europe.org/spip.php?article556 [accessed 30.10.2012].

²⁴ Although it concerns the principle of secular education, the lengthy and polemical debate over the right to wear the *hijab* in schools and public institutions (1989-present), offers a comparable example of the controversy provoked by the desire of certain minorities to affirm their identity in a country, which does not officially recognise the existence of such groups. See Introduction of this thesis for an overview of the *hijab* affair.

brief excerpt from the interview with Poignant, it is not possible to know whether this is the only reason for which the MEP is opposed to the granting of equal status for minority languages in France. (Other possible objections are for example, based on ideological grounds as illustrated by the Constitutional Court's decision, or on the question of sovereignty and the issue of whether the European Union should have jurisdiction over such matters.) Nonetheless, it is interesting that the film-maker focuses on Poignant's notion that the official recognition of any other language in France would threaten the status of French ('a fatal blow') and would result in the loss of international status for the language.

In spite of the increased visibility of the Breton language and the positive connotations that it now enjoys, research into the use of regional languages in France reveals that there has been a sharp decline in usage. Michael Hornsby (2008: 131) describes the Breton-speaking community as 'fragmented', divided between an ageing number of native-Breton speakers, semi-speakers (able to understand but not fluent speakers), and 'neo-bretonnants' who have learned standard Breton at school. Sociologist Erwan Delon (2007: 207) cites the Head of the private bilingual *Diwan* schools in Ile-de-France, who is pessimistic as to the future of Breton since twice as many speakers are being lost as are being created. In the *Pays basque* this situation is even more critical, with a rate of decline six times greater than the number of new Basque speakers (Ahedo Guttatxura 2005: 76). Although regional languages have acquired a place within the education system (private and state-funded), the proportion of students enrolled in these options remains small. According to official statistics from the Academy of Bordeaux, in 2006, bilingual education in Basque and French

accounted for 18% of the school population (Beck 2008: 383), whilst a sum total of 6,000 pupils were involved in some form of Breton education at primary and secondary level (Delon 2007: 207).

McDonald's (1989: 303-304) research into the use of Breton in schools in the 1970s and 1980s, revealed that Breton occupied a peripheral status as an 'optional extra' for two thirds of students learning Breton (as opposed to a core position as a second or third modern language option). This trend identified by McDonald, in which Breton is a 'cultural plus' but not an essential part of the curriculum, would appear to have continued into the 1990s, with 68% of 8–18 year-olds surveyed by Hoare agreeing that it was more useful to learn a modern language such as English or German, rather than learn Breton (Hoare 2000: 339). Once again, these findings highlight that the survival of a language is linked to the practical use to which it can be put, as was seen in the earlier discussion of *Brezhoneg*'s portrayal of language shift in Brittany. A similar point is made by Beck (2008: 383), who compares the percentage of pupils enrolled in monolingual-Basque schools in the French Basque country (7%), with those on the Spanish side of the border where bilingualism (Spanish and Basque) is seen as an asset for the employment market (45%). As a result, in view of the limited circumstances in which it is possible to use minority languages, it would seem that continued use depends to a large extent on the public's willingness to actively learn and speak these languages. This is by no means an easy task, as Hoare (2000: 343) concludes '[d]espite 74% of those surveyed agreeing with the importance of preserving the Breton language, only 16% were "very interested" in improving their language skills'.

In light of this research, Poignant's view that the French language would suffer a

‘fatal blow’ if equal status was granted to regional and minority languages, may seem out of proportion. Firstly, since the number of people able to speak a regional language is in sharp decline and accounts for a tiny minority of the overall regional population, this makes it unlikely that regional languages would ever replace French within the region let alone at a national level. In 1999, out of a population of just over 4 million living in Brittany, Breton speakers accounted for just over 300,000 people, (cf. Hornsby 2008: 130). Secondly, equal or official status for minority languages does not automatically result in a sudden increase in the number of people able to speak another language, for the pragmatic reason that unless it is perceived to provide economic benefit (as in enhanced employment prospects), it is unlikely that many people will invest the time to learn a language which has limited practical use. Instead, Poignant’s comments about the European Charter may be interpreted as originating from a deeper held anxiety over the decline of the use of the French language on the world stage (*rayonnement international*), to which the debate on regional and minority languages has become amalgamated. Faced with a waning of the international influence of French, and the rise of English as the global *lingua franca*, France has over the past few decades attempted to halt this process through the enactment of legislation designed to limit the use of English in France (Loi Bas-Lauriol, 1975; Loi Toubon, 1994). This concern with the status of the French language within France and outside her borders, mirrors similar debates surrounding the effects of globalisation on French culture that has also seen the government pursue protectionist policies.²⁵

²⁵ Most notably with the successful exemption of ‘cultural goods’ from free trade achieved during the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations in 1993. For an introduction to France’s complex relationship with globalisation, which provides an overview of recent linguistic policy, as well as the GATT negotiations, cf. Gordon and Meunier 2001.

Brezhoneg concludes its historical survey of language shift in Lower Brittany with a glance at the future prospects for the survival of Breton language given the statistic that only 16% of the population is able to speak Breton, of which two-thirds are aged over sixty years old. Above all, in view of the decline of the language, the documentary muses on possible explanations for the origins of the ‘cultural revival’ of the 1970s and the current vogue for Breton cultural manifestations, such as the *Interceltique* festival, which has grown to include performers from other Celtic nations. Breton specialist and documentary participant, Jean Le Dû, suggests that one possible motivation for this social trend lies in the mystique and creative potential of a minority culture commonly perceived to be in decline: ‘on défend quelque chose d’exotique, quelque chose qui n’existe plus, quelque chose qui est en train de disparaître. On le défend en le recréant’.

Le Dû’s observation that the ‘exotic’ and ‘endangered’ status of Breton culture is part of the appeal for a certain part of the population, corresponds with Delon’s (2007) study of young Bretons, whom he describes as ‘enchanted’ by the possibilities of this cultural identification (‘une identité enchanteresse’). Whereas Brittany’s lack of political autonomy was previously a disservice to the region’s ability to protect the Breton language and culture, Delon argues (2007: 269-270) that it is precisely the absence of a formalised structure that attracts young people: ‘cette identité devient plus idéalisée, plus voulue et n’est pas touchée par les représentations négatives dont est affublée la France, en grande partie à cause de l’appareil d’Etat, auquel elle est assimilée’. In other words, young people are ‘enchanted’ by Breton culture, firstly because it is not imposed but is a matter of individual choice, and secondly, as the idealised or abstract nature of

this cultural identity permits the freedom to pick and choose those aspects that most appeal to an individual.²⁶

Although it might be ‘fashionable’ among the younger generation to identify themselves along regional lines, this does not necessarily imply a rejection of national culture and identity. A number of recent surveys (Hoare 2000; Cole 2006; Delon 2007; Beck 2008) reveal that a majority of the population identify themselves as both French and Basque/Breton/etc. For instance, Beck (2008: 382) found that 59% of those surveyed in the *Pays basque* ascribed equal status to national and regional identity. A similar situation is also found in Brittany, according to Cole (2006: 47), where 57% described themselves as equally Breton and French, as opposed to only 2% that affirmed that they were Breton and not French. Likewise, anthropologist Ellen Badone’s (1987: 186) fieldwork in Lower Brittany highlights other forms of group identity based around smaller local units of ‘*quartier*, parish, and *pays*’. Consequently, it would appear that a significant number of people perceive identity as hybrid or plural; that regional and national identities are compatible and can *coexist* alongside each other.²⁷ As such, this reveals a ‘gap between policy and practice’ (Le Nevez 2008: 310), between a Republican tradition, which refuses on the basis of equality to officially

²⁶ Delon’s (2007: 269) research also reveals that the majority of the young people studied express dissatisfaction with the French state and ‘le décalage effectif qui existe entre les idéaux proposés et la réalité’. This ‘disenchantment’ or disconnection from French society is a significant part of the search to redefine themselves as ‘Bretons’. Al Louarn (2007: 239) arrives at a similar conclusion in his study of the rise of the nationalist Basque political movement *Abertzale*: ‘On peut parler de crise du système français dans le sens où la politique d’assimilation a été mal faite et probablement trop tard pour être efficace: la génération *abertzale* est l’expression d’un mécontentement devant des promesses qui n’ont pas été tenues’. I would argue that a parallel might be drawn with the ‘re-islamisation’ of a certain proportion of young people from ethnic minorities who, having failed to be accepted as French citizens by the majority white population, seek to redefine themselves through religion.

²⁷ This would appear to be supported by research that highlights the historical weak support for regionalist or nationalist political parties in France, which rarely obtain more than a few percentage points in elections (cf. Schrijver 2004; Ahuro Guttatxura 2005). A survey carried out in 2000 revealed that 76% of Breton were opposed to independence (Delon 2007: 157).

recognise regional languages or identities (other than a symbolic acknowledgement), and a society that clearly perceives itself in plural terms. In the next section, I explore this ‘gap’ by examining the public’s fascination for regional alterity, and the French government’s promotion of cultural tourism based on the principle of distinctive regional traditions.

❖ **Regional Alterity and the Culture Economy:
The ‘Commodification’ of Heritage and Tradition**

Histoires naturelles is a long-running series that began broadcasting in 1982 on TF1 and remains to date a fixture in the schedule. As such, *Histoires naturelles* is an unusual example of a non-fiction format that has survived the channel’s privatisation in 1987, and the subsequent sidelining of the documentary genre in favour of popular entertainment.²⁸ The remit of this mainstream series is to depict hunting and fishing as well as other traditional activities undertaken by communities living in rural France. Each programme therefore offers an *aperçu* of life in a particular region of the country and is structured around observational sequences depicting the flora and fauna of the area, conversations with local people, and ‘daily life’ sequences following certain figures of the community at work or during periods of leisure.²⁹ Questions are asked in

²⁸ TF1 does air the occasional documentary, however, as my research of the INA’s database reveals, at least on the themes that I am concerned with in this thesis, they are few and far between. The commercial channel’s positioning of this genre follows similar patterns with the public service channels of *France Télévisions*, generally relegating documentaries in the ‘third’ part of the evening schedule (post midnight slot). *Histoires naturelles* conforms to this pattern, shown at a variety of times during the early hours of the morning (often around 1:00 or 2:00 a.m.).

²⁹ On occasion *Histoires naturelles* has made programmes on rural cultures outside France for example, *Brésil: Le rêve amazonien* (1996). Nevertheless, the themes of hunting and fishing remain the central concerns of the programmes.

an informal and conversational manner by a person off-camera, who accompanies and interacts with people as they go about their tasks.

For the purposes of this chapter, I examine two programmes from the series. The first, *Voir Molène* (2002), offers a portrait of life on one of the more remote islands off the west coast of Brittany (Finistère), whilst the second, *Doxpi: La force basque* (2004) is filmed in the Basque country and concentrates on the sporting tradition of the *pays*. Pierre Dospital, a former rugby player who represented France on many occasions, and who describes himself as ‘cent pour cent basque’, acts as a guiding presence in this programme. Although two different camera crews film the documentaries at an interval of two years (2002 and 2004), as would be expected of a long-running series, there are a number of visual elements and structural features (outlined above) common to both individual episodes.³⁰

As my interest is primarily with the visual representation of regional France in *Histoires naturelles*, I analyse the documentaries thematically, beginning with the manner in which the landscape is filmed, before moving on to consider the way local people are depicted. The aim of this visual assessment is to determine to what extent the Island of Molène and the Basque country are portrayed as places of alterity (for instance, spatial, ecological), and the degree to which the inhabitants of these regions are represented as culturally ‘other’. By extension, the analysis of *Histoires naturelles* will provide the basis to widen the scope of this chapter to include a discussion of the manner in which cultural tourism is promoted by local and national authorities on the

³⁰ Whilst those involved in filming the programme may change (as is inevitable with any series that is thirty years old), at the post-production stage, the team remains the same, with the co-creator Jean-Pierre Fleury listed as producer in the closing credits. It is likely that the stability of the editorial team plays a significant role in creating a cohesive visual and structural approach for *Histoires naturelles* as a whole.

premise of distinctive regional traditions and identities. In particular, I evaluate the ‘commodification’ of culture and the use of heritage or *patrimoine* as catalysts for economic development in France’s regions by exogenous and endogenous actors.

- *Scenic Landscapes and Native Ecology*

Whilst the landscapes of Molène and the *Pays basque* are significantly different (coastal island and mountainous region), the visual techniques employed in both programmes demonstrate a consistency of approach in the representation of the local surroundings. Most notably, each programme demonstrates a particular interest in the distinctive flora and fauna found in each region, and draws attention to local ecology by including examples filmed in close-up (Figure 4.4). The sight of a crab or wild mountain horses may not inspire the *dépaysement* that ‘strange’ insects in a Papua New Guinean



Figure 4.4

Left Column: Close-ups of sea life found on the Island of Molène.

Right Column: Wild horses and free-ranging pigs in the Basque mountains.

rainforest may convey to the viewer (as seen in *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* cf. Chapter 1), nevertheless, the foregrounding of such wildlife helps inscribe the landscape with a characteristic ‘regional’, if not ‘exotic’, identity. Even though the ‘seagull’ (herring gull) is neither particularly rare nor endemic to the island, the inclusion of such a ‘generic’ bird further reinforces Molène’s identity as a coastal region, by the very nature of the gull’s universal association with the sea.

In addition to native fauna filmed in close-up, the programmes also offer panoramic views of the local topography. These sequences are visually approached in two ways. Occasionally, as in the opening of *Doxpi: La force basque*, the camerawork is mobile, panning from right to left, conveying the vastness of the landscape which stretches further than the eye can see. More often, the landscape is filmed in a static

wide-angle shot (Figure 4.5), similar to Depardon’s approach in *Profils paysans* discussed in the previous chapter. At one level, the purpose of these observational sequences is descriptive, providing the viewer with a ‘global overview’ of the contours and features of the landscape that cannot be conveyed by close or medium angle shots. A more detailed examination of these examples also reveals, in addition, a visual approach which aims to present the natural environment in a manner that is aesthetically pleasing. This is perhaps most

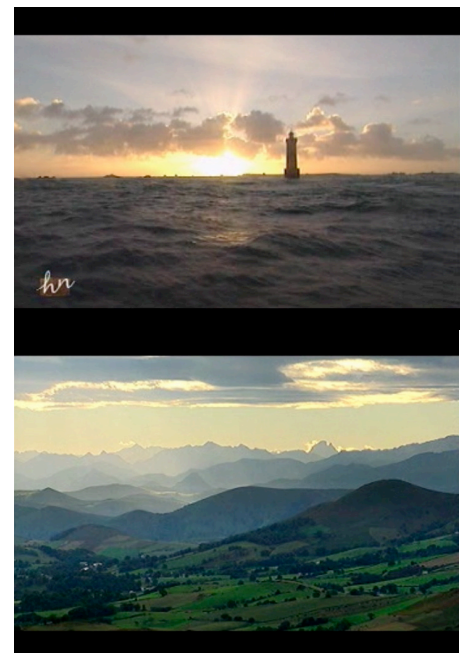


Figure 4.5

Panoramic views of local landscape.
Top: Looking out to sea from Molène with the local lighthouse visible on the horizon.

Bottom: The rolling mountains of the Basque Country.

evident with the static sequences, which demonstrate not only careful attention to the visual framing of a scene, but also, the strategic use of natural phenomena such as a sunrise/sunset or the appearance of a rainbow, to further enhance the beauty of the image.

Along with a similar aesthetic approach to the distinctive landscapes of Molène and the Basque country, the programmes also share an interest in filming certain patterns of behaviour by local wildlife. One such example concerns birds flying in formation. In *Voir Molène*, this imagery recurs at various intervals in the film, whilst in *Doxpi: La force basque*, a series of sequences depicting the migratory flight of *palombes* (wood pigeons) provides a final ‘climax’ for the documentary. Likewise, both films include solitary birds flying over the landscape, acting as a possible visual metaphor for the isolation of the communities that feature in the programmes. Admittedly further analysis would be required to determine whether such images are common to the series as a whole, however, this interest in nature is in keeping with the idea conveyed by the series’ title *Histoires naturelles*. The creators’ decision to highlight the ‘natural history’ angle of the programmes, as opposed to a more ‘human’ or ‘regional’ angle (*Histoires rurales/régionales*), suggests that the flora and fauna are an important part of the series’ overall concept. Indeed, as will become apparent, the inclusion of natural occurrences such as migrating birds is part of a wider strategy, which inscribes the local populations of Molène and the *Pays basque* firmly within a natural environment, in which nature and tradition are the guiding forces for these geographically remote and culturally distinct communities.

With the exception of a few sequences depicting people playing sport on man-made pitches (for example, *pelote* and rugby), the documentary conveys the image of the Basque country as being primarily characterised by vast open expanses of rural landscape that is untouched by the marks of human habitation.³¹ Apart from the occasional solitary individual shepherd, the impression is of an area that is largely untamed by ‘civilisation’, where horses and other animals are able to roam free. As Molène is a small island, it is perhaps not surprising that human intervention, in the form of buildings such as the lighthouse and church, features more prominently in the visual aesthetics of the documentary. Nevertheless, whether filmed looking out to sea, or looking back to the shore from onboard a boat, the island is inevitably framed by the presence of the sea, indicating the strong hold the natural elements have on the daily lives of the population. In certain sequences, such as the on-shore footage of the lighthouse, the camerawork’s use of a wide-angle shot reinforces the power of the sea, by demonstrating the magnitude of the seascape and the relative insignificance of the structure.

Overall, the visual approach to the landscape in *Voir Molène* and *Doxpi: La force basque* draws attention through the use of close-up and wide-angle shots to the distinctive regional ecology of these areas, and does so in an aesthetic and pleasing fashion. The virtual absence of man-made structures in the Basque country and the significant audio-visual presence of the sea and wind in images of Molène, highlight the remote and enclosed character of these communities. Furthermore, the camera’s interest

³¹ It is perhaps surprising that the picturesque and distinctive architecture of Basque houses is absent from the programme. There is a glimpse of the red-timbered houses in a brief sequence depicting an outside game of *pelote*. However, the only extended footage of a house is in the interview with Pierre Dospital who is filmed sitting by the hearth.

in capturing ‘natural history’ moments such as airborne birds conveys the impression of a landscape that is dominated by nature rather than man. As the following analysis demonstrates, this visual approach, which singles out the influence of the natural environment on the landscape, is also found in the series’ representation of the local Basque and Breton communities.

- *Working In Harmony with Nature*

If the aesthetic approach to the landscape of the *Pays basque* and the Island of Molène is designed to enhance the notion of a distinctive local ecology, the same is also true for the populations of these areas, who are depicted as having a discernible ‘regional’ identity and way of life. This idea is conveyed thematically in the content of the programmes, which demonstrate a particular interest in what Christopher Ray (1998: 3) has described as the ‘markers’ of local specificity (for example, traditional foods, regional languages and crafts), and is reinforced indirectly through the visual approach to the subject matter. Thus, in accordance with the series’ title, *Histoires naturelles*, the film-makers devote particular attention to activities that have developed in response to the local ecosystem, such as rock pool fishing for shellfish (*Voir Molène*), and the annual hunt for *palombes* (wood pigeons) during their winter migration through the valleys of the Pyrenees (*Doxpi: La force basque*). Other examples of regional culture featured in the programmes include: the Molène tradition of smoking sausages over a fire stoked with dried seaweed, and the father and son *chistera* artisans who hand-make the baskets used for the Basque sport of *pelote*. In addition to ‘active’ sequences, the documentaries also include conversations with people who are aware and proud of their

cultural identity, and are actively engaged in protecting or continuing these local traditions (for instance, reintroducing a traditional Basque breed of pig, and maintaining a human presence on the lighthouse off Molène).

In contrast to Raymond Depardon's *Profils paysans*, which elects to represent people in the intimate setting of their homes, *Voir Molène* and *Doxpi: La force basque* on the whole favour natural settings outside the home. Excluding people filmed at their place of work, only three individuals invite the camera crew into their homes to be interviewed (Pierre Dospital, Artus de Montalembert and Jacqueline Coquet). On the one hand, this is perhaps a reflection of the difficulty in establishing a relationship of trust between documentary maker and subject during the relatively short-term nature of the filming process.³² On the other hand, it is equally plausible that the directors of the two documentaries chose the people most able or willing to provide insight into local life as a result of their particular position in the community.³³ Nonetheless, I would contend that the preference for representing people outside the home is due to the underlying theme of the series, which explores the manner in which regional populations have learnt to harness the natural resources of their environment and have developed, as a consequence, a distinctive way of life and cultural identity. This view

³² Depardon's first instalment of *Profils paysans* demonstrates the difficulty of gaining the trust of his film subjects and the patience and commitment required to gain access to their lives (in one case taking ten years to be invited into Paul Argaud's house) (cf. Chapter 3). Stéphane Breton's *Eux et moi: Un ethnologue en Papouasie Occidentale* also demonstrates that even long-term fieldwork, carried out over a number of years, does not imply the acceptance of the ethnographer's presence by all members of the community (cf. Chapter 1).

³³ For example, Jacqueline Coquet is a chronicler of the island's social history and therefore knows most of the families living on Molène. Artus de Montalembert is a second home owner and 'newcomer' to the island. Pierre Dospital, as a former rugby player, is familiar with being interviewed by the media.

would appear to be supported by the following analysis of the visual representation of the inhabitants of these communities.

Whilst the landscape is filmed with a mixture of close and panoramic shots, as a rule, the participants in the documentaries are filmed at a medium to long distance.³⁴ Unlike Depardon's fascination with the 'portrait-like' quality of certain faces (in particular the Privat brothers, cf. Chapter 3), the camerawork of the *Histoires naturelles* series does not place a similar aesthetic importance on the film subjects' faces, which are never shown closer than a 'head and shoulders' shot. Instead, the individuals who appear in the programmes are filmed with a wide angle, surrounded by nature. It is possible to discern two 'types' of sequences: 'static' sequences where individuals, standing or sitting, converse with an off-camera crew member, and 'action' sequences, depicting locals engaging in activities such as fishing or hunting. During these 'action' sequences, the person or a member of the group being filmed describes or explains the purpose of their activity, often prompted by questions from the off-camera crew member.

Figure 4.6 offers a selection of still images taken from 'static' sequences, which introduce individuals for the first time to the audience. From a thematic point of view, these sequences offer an opportunity for local people to speak about their chosen profession. It is therefore logical that the film-maker should choose to film them outdoors at their 'place of work', surrounded by the 'marks' of their trade.

³⁴ Close-ups in the programme are limited and tend to be reserved for capturing the precise movement of a craftsman's hands. This usage is explored shortly.

Nevertheless, the avoidance of the close-up is an aesthetic choice that is maintained throughout and across the two documentaries. As such, this suggests that the manner in which people are framed is intentional, which poses the question of the underlying reason for this approach. One such explanation is that the favouring of the medium and long shot establishes a strong visual association between the local people and the natural world. This may be interpreted as implying an equality or balance between man and nature, as the person does not dominate the image, but is instead depicted interacting with the natural environment. Indeed, this aesthetic approach arguably underlines the series' characterisation of these regional communities as being 'close to nature', and partaking in a more 'natural' way of life



Figure 4.6
Stills from 'static' sequences.
Top: *Doxpi: La force basque*
Bottom: *Voir Molène*



Histoires naturelles' tendency to characterise regional societies as being 'close to nature' is perhaps more explicitly seen in 'active' sequences, which depict individuals or groups engaged in activities such as fishing and hunting. One such example is a sequence in *Voir Molène* in which local resident, François Lebousse, is filmed rock pool fishing at low tide. As with the static interviews, the camera remains at a distance, and frames Lebousse against the backdrop of the rocks and the water. The perspective of the camera is not fixed throughout the sequence, and the camera alternates between long

and medium shots of Lebousse when he finds something of interest (Figure 4.7). Examples of local flora and fauna are also incorporated into the sequence, either shot in close-up, or with a wide-angle (birds flying over water). Whilst these images of wildlife do not add any specific information to the sequence (other than the type of creatures found in the area), the effect of these visual digressions away from Lebousse's activities is to inscribe his actions into a broader natural context.



Figure 4.7
Rock pool fishing with François Lebousse.

In addition to demonstrating a continuation of the visual approach found in the ‘static’ sequences, which eschew the use of close-up, this example of rock pool fishing further develops the association between the islanders and nature, by revealing Lebousse's knowledge of native flora and fauna. Lebousse identifies the various types of fish and shellfish as he locates them, demonstrates an awareness of the regulations regarding the right to remove them, and provides information about the preparation of such delicacies. As a result, this sequence depicts a population that is close to nature in their daily activities (leisure or work), and is knowledgeable about how best to use the natural resources that surround them. From the conversation between the fisherman and

the off-camera commentator, also emerges the idea of this local knowledge as being innate. In response to the commentator's question concerning whether one needs to be a mathematician to understand tidal patterns and barometer pressure, Lebousse replies that being 'breton et molénais' is sufficient qualification. A similar notion is also advanced at a later point in the documentary, when the President of the volunteer coastguard service, François Tanguy, states that the islanders all have 'à la naissance [...] du sel dans le sang'.

The locals' belief in the 'natural' acquisition of such expertise reflects rural sociologist Jan Douwe Van der Ploeg's (1990) research into farming techniques in small agricultural communities, in which he argues that local knowledge about the most suitable way to manage land and natural resources developed 'organically' in response to the specificities of climate and geography. In other words, contrary to modern farming, which tends to impose a homogenous 'one-size-fits-all' model, each society developed a specific 'art de la localité' (Van der Ploeg 1990) based upon a tried and tested understanding of the local ecosystem. An illustration of Van der Ploeg's, 'art de la localité' is found in *Doxpi: La force basque*, in a sequence depicting the annual clearing of the slopes from the bracken that grows pervasively in the region. Lasting around one minute and forty seconds, this sequence is composed of a series of wide and medium angle shots that depict a group of men working together. Juxtaposed over these images is a piece of voice-over commentary from one of the workers, who explains that the purpose of this activity is twofold. Firstly, it prevents the terrain from becoming overgrown, it 'cleans the landscape', and secondly, it provides a useful source of bedding for livestock during the winter.

Figure 4.8, which features a selection of stills taken from this sequence, reveals the manner in which the people are framed within the natural landscape and, in the absence of close-ups, are depicted as a group rather than as individuals. The relative anonymity of the men wearing ‘traditional peasant’ dress (blue trousers, rolled-up shirt-sleeves, with the occasional beret), and their use of wooden rakes, creates the impression of a timeless image; a scene that might be depicted in an eighteenth or nineteenth century painting of rural life in the countryside.³⁵ In addition to providing a demonstration of the resourceful nature of the locals, who have learnt to turn a potential problem into an asset, this sequence also conveys the impression of a harmonious community working together in time-honoured fashion. As described by the anonymous Basque worker, it is: ‘un moment convivial, autant pendant le travail qu’après pendant les repas, c’est un bon moment entre paysans, entre voisins’.



Figure 4.8
Clearing bracken in the Basque country.

From the bracken clearing example emerges the idea of a society that continues to observe traditional practices of land management and for whom seasonal rituals or customs are a way of maintaining community ties ‘entre voisins’. It also hints at another key theme of the series as a whole: the continued transmission of this local

³⁵ Whilst the men do use a tractor to transform the collected bracken into sheaves, the amount of time allocated to this part of the process is smaller than the space accorded to footage of men using wooden rakes.

knowledge from generation to generation. Whether it is a grandfather using seaweed to fertilise his vegetable patch, watched by his grandson in *Voir Molène*, or the Ospital family who gather together once a year for the *palombe* hunt in *Doxpi: La force basque* (a custom that this particular family have been observing for nearly one hundred years), the common thread of both documentaries is of a group of people who are aware of their local customs and are actively engaged in ensuring their continuance by involving the next generation. Perhaps the clearest example of how this theme is reinforced through the aesthetic approach of the film-maker is in a sequence depicting the work of the *chistera* craftsmen in *Doxpi: La force basque*.

Unlike outdoor sequences, such as the rock pool fishing and bracken clearing examples, which favour medium and long shots to frame the individuals, the representation of craftsmanship in the documentary is notable for the use of the close-up. The *chistera* sequence for instance, features a number of close-ups depicting different parts of the basket-making process, which are juxtaposed with wide-angle shots framing the two craftsmen working at a table, and medium shots of both men filmed in isolation (Figure 4.9). From the craftsmen's commentary, the viewer learns about the history of the development of the *chistera* basket, and of the family relationship between the two men, who are father and son. The idea of the transmission of this *métier* from generation to generation is directly referred to by the elder man, who explains that his father and grandfather earned their living as *chistera* artisans, and that his son has now taken up the family trade.



Figure 4.9
Chistera artisans at work.

The use of the close-up in this sequence has a practical function in providing the viewer with a more detailed view of the intricacies of the basket-making process. It also draws attention to the precision and skill of the artisan's movements and the manner in which he handles his tools and materials, which demonstrate the ingrained nature of the *geste*, his experience and technique. However, by extension, the tightness of the frame has the additional function of highlighting the hand-crafted nature of the object. Unlike mass produced objects made in a factory by machines, each *chistera* is a unique object made according to a series of trade secrets, that are exclusive to each family of makers, and have been passed down from generation to generation. In other words, the use of the close-up in this sequence 'magnifies' the hand-made quality of the object, and the care and time that goes into making such an item. As an example of what anthropologists would classify as 'material culture' (an artefact that is produced by a particular culture), the inclusion of the *chistera* sequence in the documentary offers 'evidence' of the distinctive practices and traditions of the Basque people, thereby

drawing attention to the cultural alterity of this population. Consequently, the aesthetic approach in this sequence, which through the use of the close-up is visually distinct from the outdoor sequences, emphasises the ‘man-made’ or ‘man-inspired’ aspect of this particular craft, just like the use of the long to medium shot depicting people surrounded by nature, highlights the ‘nature-inspired’ aspect of local people’s knowledge about their natural environment.

Taken as a whole, the representation of the Basque and Breton people in these documentaries conveys the impression of regional France as a place where traditions continue to be maintained, whose population remains close to nature and is united through a common cultural identity or heritage which they continue to observe and transmit. In the final section, I examine *Histoires naturelles*’ inclination to portray regional France as a place of alterity by comparing this series with the depiction of non-western societies in ethnographic films.

- *The ‘Indians’ of France: Regional Society as an ‘Exoticised’ Other?*

Lutz and Collins (1993) assessment of the manner in which the magazine *National Geographic* represents non-European people as ‘naturalised’, ‘idealised’ and ‘exoticised’ is a useful tool of analysis and comparison for the representation of the regional populations of Molène and the *Pays basque* in *Histoires naturelles*.³⁶ In an example such as the rock pool fishing sequence, François Lebousse is ‘naturalised’,

³⁶ Cf. Chapter 1 for a more detailed examination of Lutz and Collin’s (1993) findings. Chapter 1 also uses Lutz and Collin’s (1993) study of the photographic representation of non-western populations, as a point of comparison for my own analysis of the audio-visual portrayal of such societies in mainstream and specialised ethnographic documentaries.

through the aesthetic approach that frames him against the natural landscape, and by the content of the sequence which shows him as having an innate understanding and knowledge of the local climate and resources of the environment. Likewise, the bracken clearing in the Basque country offers an ‘idealised’ portrait of a harmonious community working together for the common benefit. Whilst it is true that neither *Voir Molène* nor *Doxpi: La force basque* include examples of ‘radical alterity’ or the ‘clash of cultures’ found in ethnographic documentaries (for instance, the ‘worm eating sequence’ of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*, cf. Chapter 1), the Basque and Breton communities are ‘exoticised’ (to a lesser degree), through the series’ focus on the ‘markers’ of local specificity (Ray 1998: 3). In other words, *Histoires naturelles* ‘exoticises’ the Basque and Breton populations by concentrating on what makes their way of life distinct, as opposed to what links these communities to a shared national cultural identity. As such, children in the Basque country are filmed playing *pelote*, or in the case of Molène, playing on a sandy beach, as opposed to playing video games on a computer. Accordingly, the inhabitants of these two regions are depicted as following traditional pursuits and as relatively untouched by the concerns of a modern industrialised society. This characterisation of these communities is further enhanced by the selection of people interviewed in the programmes who are all, without exception, committed to pursuing traditional lifestyles and maintaining local customs in some form or another.

Histoires naturelles’ focus on traditional activities, coupled with the absence of any references to the world outside these communities (save for Pierre Dospital’s reference to his international career as a rugby player), creates the impression of

regional life as spatially separate from the rest of France. Indeed, the ‘naturalisation’ of the Molénais and Basque people in these programmes, who are depicted as being in touch with the natural rhythm of the seasons, undertaking certain activities at specific times of the year, has the effect of conveying a sense that these communities exist in a different time zone from the rest of urban society; one which is in touch with a seasonal or solar calendar as opposed to the atomic clock. This is particularly noticeable in *Voir Molène* which devotes a large amount of time to the manner in which daily life is ruled by local weather forces. Whether it is the arrival of the mainland ferry bringing the post and supplies, or the change of shift at the lighthouse, all activities are dependent on the sea, making it difficult for the islanders to plan ahead. The two communities are also represented as having a different relationship to time, enjoying a less rushed lifestyle where they are able to help and socialise with their neighbours, as well as carry out traditional activities such as smoking sausages, which require time and effort (three hours a day over a minimum of twelve days).

This depiction of regional France as existing in a separate time zone from the rest of the country bears considerable similarity to the depiction of aboriginal people in non-western societies who are often portrayed as being ‘outside time’ (Fabian 1983) and ‘without history’ (Wolf 1982). Since the people interviewed in *Histoires naturelles* demonstrate an awareness and desire to protect and preserve local traditions and history (for instance, contributing to a social history of the Island of Molène, or training the next generation of craftsmen), it would be erroneous to suggest that the series depicts these communities as being ‘without history’. However, the notion of history is shown to exist more in the form of an informal oral tradition or system of apprenticeship, as

opposed to a more formalised form of knowledge that is taught in schools and other educational establishments. That is to say, the history of these communities remains a local affair that stays separate from national history.

To be fair, the absence of historical context in *Histoires naturelles* is understandable, as this series does not purport to explore the relationship between France as a nation and her regions. Nevertheless, this omission does testify to a wider state of affairs in which regional history tends to be excluded from the overall narrative of national history as it is taught in schools. This is a point brought up by the President of the Institute France-Euskadi, Jean-Philippe Larramendy (2008), who regrets this state of affairs:

Le problème, c'est que les pays, les régions qui font aujourd'hui partie de la France ont perdu leurs histoires propres qui n'ont pas leur place dans le roman national. Le petit Breton étudie Philippe-Auguste et Saint-Louis comme s'ils avaient régné sur ses ancêtres alors que le Traité d'union de la Bretagne avec la France n'a été signé que quelques siècles plus tard. Et le petit Basque voit la guerre de Cent Ans du côté de Charles VI et Jeanne d'Arc alors que les troupes 'anglaises' parlaient entre elles gascon ou basque! Il est normal que nos enfants étudient l'histoire de la France puisqu'ils sont français. Ce qui n'est pas normal, c'est ce qu'ils n'apprennent pas aussi l'histoire de leurs ancêtres.

(Larramendy 2008: 12-13).

Whilst Larramendy's (2008) study of contemporary Basque identity may be interpreted as an attempt to redress this state of affairs, exploring the historical relationship between France and the Basque country, as well as the cross-border relations with Spain, the book may also be read as a challenge to the manner in which this region is represented in programmes such as *Histoires naturelles*. For in his prologue, Larramendy (2008: 13) makes clear that he will neither be discussing traditional culture, Basque sports, agriculture, fishing or gastronomy, but will instead focus on questions of language,

economics, democracy and ‘l’ouverture au monde’. Indeed, Larramendy’s aim, as the title indicates *Etre basque aujourd’hui: De Roncevaux à Guggenheim*, is not only to demonstrate the Basque people’s contribution to past historical events such as the Battle of Roncevaux (778 AD), but also to highlight contemporary contributions whether in terms of culture (for example, the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao), or the region’s economic contribution (for instance, the French Basque coast is the European capital for the surf industry, generating over a billion euros a year). A similar desire to move away from the representation of the *Pays basque* as a rural idyll, populated by people observing traditional lifestyles, is also found in another recent publication by biologist Claude Dendaletche (2005), who also addresses the media’s representation of the issue of Basque nationalism and the stereotype of the Basque as terrorist. Consequently, the scholarship of Larramendy (2008) and Dendaletche (2005) may be said to be reinscribing the Basque region, not only in the historical narrative of the French nation, but also, as an active participant in contemporary events. In other words, they describe the Basque country not merely as a past repository of traditional values, but as a modern and dynamic contributor to contemporary French (and Spanish) culture and society.

A final point of similarity between *Histoires naturelles*’ representation of regional France, and the portrait of non-western societies in ethnographic documentaries, is found in the depiction of these ‘traditional’ ways of life as being menaced with disappearance. *Voir Molène* and *Doxpi: La force basque* both conclude with the off-camera commentator asking contributors how much longer they believe it will be possible to maintain their traditions and lifestyles. Overall, the responses from the interviewees are pessimistic. Pierre Dospital expresses anxiety for the future ‘on

commence à vendre un peu notre vie de basque’, whilst Artus de Montalembert, refers to the ageing population of the island and how ‘ceux qui ont vraiment cet esprit de Molène vont mourir tous les uns après les autres’. This sense of precariousness is further enhanced by the commentator’s description of the islanders as ‘des résistants’ fighting to hold onto their cultural identity. However, it is the use of the term ‘Indians’ in both programmes to describe the Basque and Molénais population that is particularly striking. In *Voir Molène* this word is used by Montalembert to refer to the inhabitants who continue to observe the customs of the island, whereas in *Doxpi: La force basque* it is the commentator who asks Dospital whether the Basques are not already ‘des indiens qu’on vient voir comme dans leurs réserves’. The comparison of the Basque and Breton population with ‘Indians’ (as in ‘Red Indians’) associates regional life with the notion of an earlier ‘aboriginal’ society that has continued to survive in remote areas of France, where the physical geography (mountainous region and coastal island) has created a natural ‘reserve’ for these communities.

Although the word ‘Indian’ is only used once in each programme, this term arguably may be said to epitomise *Histoires naturelles*’ overall approach to the representation of regional France in the documentary series. As I have demonstrated earlier, the thematic content, which concentrates on traditional activities, when added to the visual framing of the landscape and inhabitants (the use of close-up and wide-angle shots), enhances the notion of regional France as a place of alterity (be it cultural, spatial, ecological...). Likewise, the similarities between the aesthetic approach of *Histoires naturelles* and that deployed in the photographic representation of non-western societies, as analysed by Lutz and Collins (1993), further separates these

regional communities from contemporary French society; Basque and Breton society is depicted as *allochronic* ('outside time') (Fabian 1983) and ahistorical in terms of the country's national history. By extension, the remit of the documentary series, which centres on hunting and fishing techniques in regional France, alludes to an earlier hunter-gatherer society that relied on such techniques for survival. Indeed, the myth of 'natural' or 'primitive' man is visually underlined in the opening title sequence of every episode of *Histoires naturelles*, composed as it is from a series of illustrations featuring people hunting and fishing, drawn in a style akin to early cave paintings made by pre-historic man (Figure 4.10).

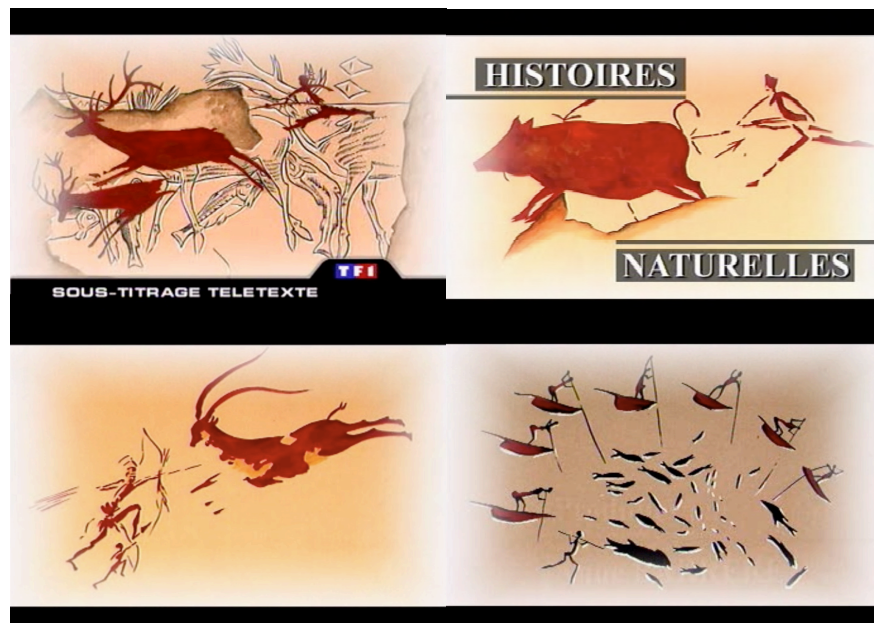


Figure 4.10
Histoires naturelles' opening title sequence depicting hunting and fishing scenes (selected stills).

Whilst it may appear extreme to equate regional societies in the West with traditional hunter-gatherer communities living for example in the Amazonian rainforest, the use of the term 'Indians' is not unique to *Histoires naturelles*' representation of regional France. Social anthropologists Julie A. Lacy and William A. Douglass's (2002)

study of cultural tourism in France reveals that this terminology is used in official governmental brochures which ‘increasingly extol the French Basque country as a timeless repository of ancient traditions. In some of the literature, the visitor is invited to come and literally see the “Indians of Europe”’ (Lacy and Douglass 2002: 11). In the context of tourism, the representation of Basque society as the last remnants of an ‘ancestral’ society is defined by Lacy and Douglass (2002: 10) as part of a marketing strategy; such promotional literature plays on notions of cultural alterity and *allochronism*, in order to attract tourists to the region, and to carve out a distinctive identity for the Basque country on the global tourist market. Accordingly, Lacy and Douglass’s (2002) research suggests that the depiction of regional France as a place of ‘otherness’ is by no means restricted to *Histoires naturelles* but is part of a wider social phenomenon.³⁷

- *Nostalgia and the Commodification of Regional Culture*

Histoires naturelles began broadcasting on TF1 in 1982, at a time when the newly-elected socialist government of President François Mitterand was actively engaged in pursuing a series of decentralisation policies which involved increasing the decision-making powers of local authorities in terms of economic planning.³⁸ A key part of this strategy involved encouraging what rural economist Christopher Ray (1998) has termed the ‘culture economy’ approach to rural development. According to Ray’s definition (1998: 4) the concept of the ‘culture economy’ involves the use of ‘the territory, its

³⁷ For example, the previous chapter’s assessment of the documentary representation of rural ‘peasant’ society reveals a similar representation of alterity (most notably in Raymond Depardon’s *Profils paysans*).

³⁸ For a detailed introduction to the history of decentralisation policy in France, see Alistair Cole (2006).

cultural system and the network of actors’ as a ‘set of resources to be employed in the pursuit of the interests of the territory’. This cultural approach may also be described as the use of ‘heritage’ to promote economic growth in regions where there is relatively little industry or commerce. Such an approach may take the form of promoting leisure or sport tourism through the creation of cycling or hiking trails, using an aspect of local history or tradition to create a themed museum (for instance, relating to former industries such as the silk worm trade), or promoting traditional cuisine or craftsmanship.

Although such enterprises may be developed at a local level by endogenous actors, the initiative for heritage promotion may also come from exogenous bodies at a national, and increasingly, at a European level (through programmes such as LEADER, cf. Ray 1998: 5; 7). Since the 1960s, the French government has been involved in the economic development of regional societies, through the establishment of bodies such as: the *Délégation interministérielle à l’aménagement du territoire et à l’attractivité régionale* (DATAR) established in 1963; the creation of regional natural parks (1967); the development of ‘ecomuseums’ in 1971 (territorial museums which reflect local society, culture and natural environment); and in the 1980s, with the publication of an inventory of France’s *patrimoine* or national treasures which included culinary dishes alongside a list of the nation’s churches and castles.³⁹ In addition to providing economic benefits for rural areas of France, regional tourism is also supported and encouraged by local and national authorities as a means ‘to support valued lifeways and

³⁹ Peter Davis’s (2011) article offers a historical overview of the development of the concept of the ‘ecomusée’ in France, as well as providing a number of case studies. There is a growing literature on the concept of ‘ecomuseums’ and the use of ‘eco-cultural’ tourism to develop rural areas (cf. Wallace and Russell 2004; Kneafsey 2001; Rogers 2002; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). For an analysis of the role of traditional regional food and cuisine as a tourist attraction in France see Bessièrè (1998).

landscapes that might otherwise disappear [...] preserving them and making them available for the use, edification, and enjoyment of all' (Rogers 2002: 477). In the light of this political context, the creation of *Histoires naturelles* in 1982, and more importantly the manner in which the series represents regional society, arguably reflects the valorisation of local culture and the promotion of heritage tourism of this period.

If the 'culture economy' is driven by a political desire to develop the economy of rural areas, it also requires society to adhere to this concept for the initiative to be successful. In accordance with Ray's (1998) thesis:

Underpinning the idea of a cultural economy is cultural identity as a *need*: the territory's need for endogenous development and the psychological need by individuals for a sense of identity, whether as the rediscovery of authenticity/roots or as a personally selected portmanteau of identities as imagined by the postmodernists.

(Ray 1998: 14).

One manifestation of this 'psychological need' for a sense of identity is the growth of young people who are seeking to define themselves in regional terms, as testified in my earlier discussion of the 'cultural revival' of Breton identity and culture, portrayed in the documentary *Brezhoneg*. This creative reinterpretation of regional culture to form alternative group identities is an example of what sociologist, Michel Maffesoli, (1996) has described as the decline of individualism in end of twentieth-century society, and the rise of 'neo-tribalism', in which people increasingly identify themselves with 'micro-groups' or 'tribes', as a response to the 'growing massification' of culture. Another way of satisfying this 'psychological need' described by Ray (1998: 14) is through the consumption of culture. Sociologist John Urry, author of the seminal work *The Tourist Gaze* (2002: 9; [1990]) compares the tourist to: 'a kind of contemporary

pilgrim, seeking authenticity in other “times” and other “places” away from that person’s everyday life. Tourists show particular fascination in the “real lives” of others that somehow possess a reality hard to discover in their own experiences’. For the urban resident, this quest for ‘authenticity’ often lies in the countryside.

Alongside the temporary escape from modernity offered by travel, research into the social demographics of contemporary French society reveals a more permanent social change in recent decades. According to studies carried out by rural development specialist Elizabeth Trotignon (2006) and anthropologist Anne-Marie Topalov (2008), the 1980s marked a reversal in the trend of rural exodus. City-dwellers attracted to the idea of an enhanced quality of life began to return to live in the countryside either settling permanently in rural communities (often continuing to commute to their urban place of work), or on a more temporary basis, with the rise of second home ownership. Even if the ‘re-population’ of the countryside has not reversed a largely urbanised population, this tendency coupled with the expansion of rural cultural tourism, testifies to a society that has invested in the notion of regional France as a place that offers a way of life that is somehow more rooted in a sense of place, tradition, and community identity than is offered by urban living.

Social anthropologists specialising in the anthropology of rural or cultural tourism, highlight the manner in which the countryside ‘is increasingly viewed as both a commodity in itself and as a set of commodifiable signs and symbols which may be attached to particular places, peoples, products, and lifestyles’ (Kneafsey 2001: 762). An example of the commodification of regional culture in France is found in sociologist Jacinthe Bessière’s (1998) study of the development of traditional cuisine as a tourist

attraction in rural France. Bessi re (1998: 24) describes local food as a means for a city dweller to escape ‘in a real or imagined manner from his daily routine and ordinary fare to find solace in regional and so-called “traditional” food’. She suggests (1998: 24) that the roots of this form of gastronomical tourism lie in a desire to seek refuge from a modern urban diet of processed food that is ‘devoid of tradition and identity’, and which ‘merely fulfil biological needs in the manner that a vitamin supplement might satisfy a deficiency’. One of the consequences of this social craving for food that is linked to a specific place and culture, is the development of a range of products that purport to satisfy this demand. As such, Bessi re’s analysis offers an illustration of the commodification of the ‘countryside ideal’, which has been described succinctly by rural geographer Clare J.A. Mitchell (1998) as a two-step process involving, first the idealisation of the countryside, and in second place, the development of cultural products to respond to the demand to experience this myth.

With its focus on traditional crafts, food, and activities such as hunting and fishing, *Histoires naturelles*’ depiction of regional society as a place where people have kept in touch with the natural world, and whose way of life is relatively unaffected by the concerns of the modern world, offers an example of visual culture that reflects and contributes to the idealisation of the countryside. Consequently, the documentary series may be said to draw on contemporary social attitudes to rural life, arguably, to offer a cultural product designed to respond to this nostalgia for natural/traditional lifestyles. By extension, *Histoires naturelles* may be said to play a role in sustaining and

developing the market for cultural tourism with its audio-visual ‘picture postcard’ of life in regional France.⁴⁰

* A Desire to Seek Refuge?

As a way of concluding this chapter’s exploration of regional identity and culture in France, I would like to make a few remarks about what these documentary representations potentially reveal about contemporary French society. Taken as a whole, *Brezhoneg* and *Histoires naturelles* characterise the past few decades as a time of ‘cultural revival’ for regional identity and traditions, whether as a source of inspiration for young people seeking to develop their sense of self, or as a means to seek refuge in an alternative universe that seems to offer values that are felt to be missing in everyday life. The idealisation of ‘traditional’ lifestyles, and the subsequent commodification of this ideal, found in examples of visual culture such as *Histoires naturelles*, may be read as a reaction to the perceived globalisation or homogenisation of society; that is to say, the desire to seek out examples of indigenous culture that are linked to a specific place, time, and community is a form of counter-movement to the ‘McDonaldization’ of society (Ritzer 2004).⁴¹

⁴⁰ A similar claim could be advanced for the ‘heritage film’ genre, which emerged as the dominant genre of French cinema in the 1980s and 1990s (cf. Powrie 1997). Examples of this genre which focuses on regional society in a nostalgic manner include, *La Gloire de mon père* (Robert 1990) and more recently, *Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis* (Boon 2008).

⁴¹ Nevertheless, the commodification of local culture also involves the selection and ‘packaging’ of certain aspects of regional identity that are deemed suitable or accessible for the tourist market. This may take the form of bilingual labelling of food products to convey a sense of ‘authenticity’ or ‘exoticism’, or the creation of standardised events or souvenirs for the tourist market. There is a growing literature of case studies analysing cultural tourism’s use of regional languages and the development of recognised standards for this form of tourism (such as *Gites de France*, or *Appellation d’origine contrôlée*), as well as the social processes involved in this selection of culture (cf. Hornsby, 2008; Kneafsey, 2001; Bessière 1998; Rogers 2002).

In the first part of this chapter, I explored the history of language policy in France and discussed the manner in which the creation of a linguistically homogenised society was seen as an essential part of the nation-building process as early as 1794. The process of language shift in regions such as Brittany did not however make substantial inroads until the creation of a national education system under the Third Republic (1870-1940). *Brezhoneg*, through its selection of archival material and interviews with a generation who experienced this transition first-hand, demonstrates that this change from Breton to French was based as much on a political desire to achieve nation and linguistic unity, as on a social demand to acquire a language which would improve the chances of social mobility. The documentary's inclusion of footage of recent post-war Presidents addressing questions of language, also testifies to the continuation of the republican ideology of 'République une-langue une' into the twentieth century. The recent controversy over the European Union's Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (1992) indicates that despite the hegemonic position of French within the Hexagon, politicians still subscribe to the notion of the need to protect the position of the French language. Finally, the 'cultural revival' of Breton culture and language in the 1970s, illustrates a social shift of attitude towards regional identity, which is no longer seen as a sign of parochial backwardness or shame, but as a source of pride. This reversal of position is also mirrored by a political climate that no longer sees regional culture as a potential menace to the cohesion of the nation, but conversely, as a source of cultural diversity that merits support and protection.

The second half of my chapter assessed the manner in which contemporary Breton and Basque society was portrayed in the documentary series *Histoires*

naturelles. In particular, this investigation focused on the visual aesthetic used to represent the landscape and people, which underlined the thematic depiction of these communities as being ‘close to nature’ and as actively engaged in preserving and transmitting their cultural traditions. Furthermore, I argued that the aesthetic approach of the series enhanced the impression of regional society as a place of alterity (for instance, ecological, cultural, spatial) and *allochronism* (Fabian 1983), in a manner that bore significant similarities with the representation of aboriginal societies in ethnographic documentaries. However, whilst regional France may be characterised as a site of ‘otherness’, there is no suggestion that this represents a menace to national identity; all the interviewees speak perfect French, and despite Pierre Dospital describing himself as ‘100% basque’, this did not preclude him from being proud to represent France at international rugby. In other words, regional identity is seen as being compatible with national culture, a concept that is also present in *Brezhoneg*’s portrayal of Breton society. Lastly, I discussed *Histoires naturelles* as an example of visual culture, which reflects and contributes to contemporary society’s idealisation of the countryside, and feasibly fuels the development of cultural tourism.

A final point concerns the representation of regional culture as menaced with disappearance and needing protection. This is a theme that is present in both *Brezhoneg* and *Histoires naturelles* and is also a significant basis for the support and development of cultural tourism in regional France. Whilst factors, such as the diffusion of national culture in nineteenth- and twentieth-century France and the impact of global economic forces, have inevitably had an impact on regional society and culture, anthropological fieldwork in rural France (for instance, Lem 1999; Rogers 1991; Lehning 1995)

demonstrates that these processes have not resulted in the homogenisation or eradication of local culture. Indeed, to conceive of culture as a monolithic entity that does not alter or adapt according to the changing needs of society is a fundamental misconception. Even Eugen Weber's (1977: 475) pioneering work *Peasants into Frenchmen* reminds the reader that 'rites are functional. They serve particular interests. When such interests disappear [...] the rites may persist as long as they are no bother, especially if they provide some fun'. Similarly, scholars specialising in the heritage industry point out that:

[d]espite a discourse of conservation, preservation, restoration, reclamation, recovery, re-creation, recuperation, revitalisation, and regeneration, heritage produces something new in the present that has recourse to the past. [...] Heritage not only gives buildings, precincts, and ways of life that are no longer viable for one reason or another a second life as exhibits of themselves. It also produces something new.

(Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 149-150).

Nevertheless, in spite of this academic research, the perception that regional culture is being eroded, remains a powerful trope in contemporary society. It is plausible to suggest that this is, in part, a reflection of a widespread anxiety in western society of the effect of globalisation on national and local culture. On the other hand, historian Patrick Young's (2009) analysis of regional costume and tourism in rural Brittany between 1890 and 1937 reveals similar anxieties and efforts to preserve Breton culture. He argues (2009: 644) that travel narratives of the period, which decry the disappearance of regional culture, 'served to affirm the traveller's distinction and fragile possession amidst changing conditions in the region'. Following on from Young's point, it might be said that from a cultural tourism perspective, in a manner similar to the 'exoticisation' of these societies, the contemporary portrayal of regional cultures as

menaced with disappearance offers a method of enhancing the appeal and experience of the visit. In addition, it imparts a sense of urgency, to ‘come and see the last “Indians” before they vanish into history’.

This chapter’s exploration of documentary representations of regional France reveals a considerable number of similarities between the depiction of rural societies in programmes such as *Brezhoneg* and *Histoires naturelles*, and those offered in other forms of visual culture, such as ethnographic films and the ‘heritage film’ fictional genre. Overall, there is a tendency to idealise the countryside and look to France’s historical past. Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (1989: 108) has described this as a form of ‘imperialist nostalgia’ whereby ‘people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed [...] people destroy their environment and then worship nature’. I would argue, in addition, that this regional ‘cultural revival’ and celebration of local heritage also reflects a deeper unease of contemporary French society. Faced with a decline in political and linguistic influence on the world stage, and the difficulty of coming to terms with postcolonial demographic changes, France has turned to regional societies, that appear less affected by these changes, as a way of seeking reassurance and inspiration for ways to define what it means to be French in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion – Alterity and National Identity in Contemporary French Documentary

If there is no ‘other’ then we do not have a ‘self’, if there is no ‘self’, then we do not have anything to grasp.

Chuang Tzu (cited in Gladney 1996: 477).

In her essay ‘National Cinemas and the Body Politic’, Susan Hayward (2000) examines the relationship between the idea of ‘national cinema’ in an economic and political context (the structures or ideology which support the film industry), and cinematic expressions of nationhood. With reference to French cinema, Hayward (2000) argues that mainstream cinema adopts an approach to difference akin to that seen in ‘political-cultural manifestations of a nation-state’:

What we do not understand – no matter what location we are looking or desiring from – we simplify. We reduce to stereotypes. [...] We speak of Asia, or the Orient, or Latin America or Africa. We do this so we do not have to see them. The ideology of mainstream cinema works in a similar fashion. Comedy and gangster films – which are the two top generic types of films produced by the French film industry – are redolent with stereotypes and expose difference as either amusing or threatening. The comfort of such genres is ‘we are not like that’. What goes on, of course, is a form of comfort in denial (of difference).

(Hayward 2000: 107).

Although Hayward is referring to the fictional film genre, this thesis’ exploration of non-fictional representations of alterity on French television, reveals a comparable use of stereotypes to depict the ‘other’. Whether the comical caricature of the militant ‘peasant’, José Bové, created by the news media, or the construction of a ‘universal’ *banlieue* as an epicentre of alterity, journalists and documentary makers equally demonstrate an inclination to depict difference as ‘amusing or threatening’ (Hayward 2000: 107). Nevertheless, the investigation of ‘ethnographic documentary’ and

programmes on rural and regional France, indicates that certain forms of alterity are also idealised in contemporary visual culture. This is particularly evident in the case of populations that are portrayed as being ‘close to nature’ and therefore seen to maintain the ‘traditions’ of their ancestors. As a result, to conclude this study it is necessary to consider what these documentary representations of ‘otherness’ disclose about attitudes to difference and how this informs the construction of national identity in contemporary France.

In the Introduction to this thesis, I discussed the first decade of the twenty-first century as a period that has been dominated by the question of national identity, following a number of events that have provoked reflection and debate over the nature of citizenship and what it means to be French in a postcolonial society. Examples include: the leader of the extreme right-wing *Front national*, Jean-Marie Le Pen, achieving second place in the 2002 Presidential elections; the 2003–2004 and 2009–2010 polemics over the *hijab* and full-face veils (and subsequent legislation); and the national riots of 2005 in the country’s deprived suburbs (*banlieues*). Such instances have exposed the tensions in contemporary French society, between a nation-state that proclaims a ‘colour-blind’ or ‘universalist’ model of citizenship based on equality, and the experience of parts of the population who are stigmatised on a daily basis for reasons of their supposed ethnicity, religion, or place of residence. Whilst the issues of national identity and diversity have been particularly prominent since the turn of the millennium in political and cultural spheres (and increasingly amongst French academics), when viewed in historical context, the question of immigration or the place of religion in the public sphere may be read as a continuation of the social and political

themes of the past three decades. The 1980s and 1990s also had similar examples of suburban violence, discussions of immigration and citizenship, and the right to wear religious symbols in school. Scholars such as historian, Emile Chabal (2011), have noted the development of ‘neo-republican’ political rhetoric and the ‘turn to nostalgia’ that have emerged in response to a perceived ‘crisis of identity’, brought about by internal and external pressures in French society over the past thirty years (for instance, demographic change, France’s declining geo-political influence, and the role of global market forces). A similar pattern has also been registered in the cultural sphere, in particular with the rise of the ‘heritage film’ as the dominant genre of French cinema in the 1980s and 1990 (cf. Powrie 1997; 1999). From my examination of the documentary representation of four types of alterity (non-western societies, urban, rural and regional France), it appears that many of France’s contemporary concerns about diversity and national identity are reflected in the corpus of films discussed in this thesis.

Perhaps the most notable trope to emerge from my research is the recurrence of the opposition of a suburban dystopia (epitomised by the *banlieue*) versus a rural idyll (whether ‘peasant’, regional, or non-Western). In Chapter 2, I discussed for example, the manner in which the *banlieue* is consistently constructed by journalists, and even certain documentary makers, as an epicentre of alterity that threatens the cohesion of the nation. As a space which magnifies the changes and problems in contemporary society, through its concentration of ethnic minorities, inordinately high levels of unemployment and educational underachievement, France’s disadvantaged suburbs have come to embody in popular parlance what political scientist Henri Rey (1996: 7) has described as ‘le point fragile de l’équilibre social, celui qui risque de rompre’. In spite of the

development of the field of *banlieue* studies in the late 1980s, which has underlined the disparity between political and socio-cultural representations of the *banlieue* and life as it is experienced by those who reside in these outer-city margins, these urban spaces continue to be depicted in highly stigmatising terms.¹ My case study of the news coverage of the 2005 riots and the comparison with documentaries exploring the ‘extraordinary’ and ‘ordinary’ *banlieue* reveals the power of the myth of the ‘universal’ *banlieue* and the difficulty in constructing an alternative to it, even by those who seek to rehabilitate this urban space.

If the representation of the *banlieue* acts as a metonym for France’s social problems and anxieties related to the coming to terms with the realities of a postcolonial society, the ‘crisis of identity’ has also engendered a ‘turn to nostalgia’ and the idealisation of rural or ‘traditional’ lifestyles. The most striking aspect of this investigation of the portrayal of the non-Western ‘other’ (Chapter 1), the ‘peasant’ (Chapter 3) and the regional populations of Brittany and the *Pays basque* (Chapter 4), is the similarity of approach to framing these diverse and spatially distant populations. For instance, the mainstream ‘ethnographic documentary’ series, *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* (France 2), depicts the non-Western ethnographic ‘other’ as ‘naturalised’, ‘idealised’ and ‘exoticised’ (Lutz and Collins 1993: 89). TF1’s series, *Histoires naturelles*, also portrays France’s regional societies along similar lines. Firstly, the ecological and cultural distinctiveness of the Breton and Basque landscapes and people are highlighted through the use of close-up (they are ‘exoticised’). In

¹ Recent research in *cinéma de banlieue* (Wagner 2011) and literary studies (Le Breton 2011) indicates that there are nascent signs of alternative portrayals of the *banlieue* emerging in visual and written culture. However, it is too early to determine whether the ‘reinvention’ of these disadvantaged urban areas will reverse the current dystopian vision.

second place, the series demonstrates a predilection to frame the regional population outside in the natural environment. Eschewing the close-up, the use of wide-angle depicts individuals as surrounded by nature, whilst the type of activity registered (such as hunting or fishing) demonstrates the locals' considerable knowledge of the region's flora and fauna (they are 'naturalised'). Finally, *Histoires naturelles*, offers a vision of regional society as relatively untouched by modernity, whose inhabitants enjoy a slower pace of life that follows the natural rhythms of the season, and who are actively engaged in maintaining and transmitting the traditions of their forefathers (they are 'idealised').

In contrast to the representation of the disadvantaged suburbs as a place where society has broken down, rural and regional France are portrayed as close-knit communities where neighbours are willing to help each other. For instance, in *Chronique d'un printemps paysan* (France 3), which follows militant 'peasant' farmers José Bové and François Dufour's anti-G.M.O. campaign tour of France, the documentary depicts the countryside as a social landscape that is populated by people often working together as a community. Likewise, the documentary includes examples of collective direct action undertaken by local farmers, either to support a union member, or to raise public awareness of a shared plight. *Histoires naturelles* equally places considerable emphasis on community solidarity, for example, on the bravery of the volunteer coast-guards on the Island of Molène, or on local Basques working together 'for the common good', to clear bracken from the hills in order to prevent the landscape from becoming overgrown. In other words, 'peasant' and regional societies are idealised as places where family and community ties are strong, and where local identity and cultural traditions (for example, regional food or craft activities) are

maintained; the inverted image of the *banlieue*, where the presence of multiple identities, traditions, languages and religions are often portrayed as a threat to national unity and identity. Although the survival of the isolated societies depicted in *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* is dependent on the co-operation of the extended family or social group working together as a team (for example, during foraging expeditions in the New Guinean rain-forest), the ethnographic ‘other’ is similarly represented as living in harmony with his or her community and actively pursuing an ancestral way of life. Overall, the dominant theme present in these documentary representations of the rural, regional and non-Western ‘other’, is of a group of people who are united by a common culture and identity that is ‘rooted’ in ‘tradition’.

Nevertheless, these ‘traditional’ societies are also depicted as threatened with disappearance, whether in a figurative sense, as in a loss of culture or way of life (for example, as represented in *Histoires naturelles* and *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*), or in a literal manner, with the demise of a community that has not been able to transmit its knowledge to the next generation (as is suggested in Raymond Depardon’s *Profils paysans*). Whilst certain figures, such as José Bové and the ethnographic ‘stars’ of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*, are shown to be actively fighting to preserve their way of life (often finding creative solutions or adaptations to do so), others appear passive and powerless to resist change (for instance, Depardon’s ‘peasant’ communities). Arguably, the ethnographic ‘other’ of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*, who is presented as admirably fighting to maintain his or her ‘traditional’ way of life, reflects or even justifies contemporary France’s own desire to protect the French language and culture from outside influences. However, perhaps the most telling indication of contemporary

France's concern with the effect of global market forces on national culture and identity, is found in the extensive public support and media coverage of José Bové and the nine other farmers arrested for the dismantling of a branch of McDonald's in Millau discussed in Chapter 3.

Nominated as the 'most popular man' of 1999 in France (Taylor 2001: 53), Bové and the 'McDonald's incident' struck a chord with the French public, undoubtedly due to the high-profile nature of the fast-food chain, which best exemplifies what George Ritzer (2004) has described as the 'McDonaldization of society'. France's perceived 'crisis of identity', and the subsequent idealisation of rural and regional societies that are believed to have maintained a distinctive and traditional way of life, is also manifested in the portrayal of José Bové as a (albeit somewhat 'comic') 'hero' defending French gastronomic traditions against the influence of the United States. Significantly, the popularity of Bové exemplifies the transformation of the representation of the 'peasant' that has taken place in France over the past forty years. Previously a stigmatised figure depicted as parochial and backward, requiring assimilation into the nation (as outlined in Weber's (1977) *Peasants into Frenchmen*), the rise of Bové indicates the manner in which 'peasants' are currently seen as representatives of an 'authentic' or 'traditional' French culture ('peasants' as Frenchmen). Yet, if the current valorisation of regional and rural France may be read as a response to internal and external pressures on national identity and society (a desire to flee from the diversity of the urban *banlieue* and seek refuge in the (mainly white) countryside), the controversy over the 1992 European Charter for Regional and

Minority Languages reveals France's continuing attachment to the idea of a nation united by a common identity and language explored in Chapter 4.

- *General Trends in Documentary Representations of Alterity*

Each chapter of this thesis examines a different form of alterity (non-Western societies, urban, rural and regional France) and focuses on the visual analysis of a selection of documentaries drawn from a larger corpus of films (usually over one hundred programmes per subject). In each chapter, I also include a statistical overview of the total corpus of documentaries (Appendices 1 – 5). For example, I may highlight the channel which broadcasts the highest number of programmes on a particular theme, or draw attention to the scheduling of these documentaries. The purpose of this information is to provide a context in which to situate the selected corpus of documentaries discussed in each chapter.² For instance in Chapter 1, the analysis of the corpus of 166 'ethnographic documentaries' reveals the extent to which *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* (France 2) demonstrates an exception to the general trend for the genre, in that it is shown at prime-time, is broadcast on a mainstream channel, and obtained record audiences for the 'ethnographic documentary' corpus as a whole (cf. Appendix 1). By way of concluding this thesis' investigation of the documentary representation of alterity, I compare data derived from the four categories of 'otherness' and assess the main tendencies.

² As outlined in the Introduction, the purpose of this statistical analysis was also, in the initial stages of this research project, to permit the selection of representative sample of documentaries that would form the basis of the source material analysed in this thesis.

Out of a combined total of 483 documentaries, certain patterns emerge concerning the treatment of the documentary genre on French television between the period (1995 – 2010) from which this corpus is selected.³ Firstly, the largest broadcaster of the documentary form is the cultural arts channel Arte (34%), followed by France 3 (21%) and France 5 (16%) (cf. Appendix 5). In contrast, the two most popular mainstream channels, TF1 and France 2, account respectively for (6%) and (12%) of the total corpus. Overall, commercial channels (TF1, Canal Plus, M6) display a tendency to avoid the documentary genre.⁴ For example, during the constitution of this thesis' corpus, a search of the INA's database found only one documentary over 30 minutes broadcast on the commercial channel M6 (this was subsequently excluded from my corpus, as it was felt not to be representative of the channel's general eschewal of the longer documentary form). In terms of the time at which these programmes are broadcast, television schedulers display an inclination to place the documentary when audiences are scarce. Sixty-two per cent of the total corpus is found in 'Daytime' (8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.) and 'Third Time' slots (00:00 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.).⁵ Arte is the only channel that regularly televises documentaries in a 'Prime Time' position (8:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.), often as part of a 'themed' evening, which comprises two or three

³ As established in the Introduction, the starting date of 1995 is determined by the passing of the *Loi du dépôt légal de l'audiovisuel* in 1995, permitting the National Television (and Radio) archives (INA) to archive all material broadcast on terrestrial channels.

⁴ Commercial channels tend to favour shorter forms of reporting (15 – 25 minutes) that are often included in a 'magazine format'. This category of programme juxtaposes several short reports together, with each report introduced by a studio presenter, who may also interview the journalist or film-maker who made the film. As stated in my Introduction, this form of short documentary is excluded from my corpus, which instead focuses on the longer form of documentary with a running time of over 30 minutes (an average standard length is around 43 minutes for Arte and 52 minutes for *France Télévisions*).

⁵ The categories 'Daytime' (8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.), 'Access Prime Time' (6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.), 'Prime Time' (8:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.) and 'Second Time' (10:30 p.m. – 00:00 a.m.) are derived from Boyer and Lochard's (1998) study of the representation of the *banlieue* on television. I have added the category 'Third Time' (00:00 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.) to further refine the analysis. The terms *première*, *deuxième* and *troisième parties de soirée* are in common usage and are frequently employed by television continuity announcers to present a channel's evening programmes.

complementary documentaries. Nonetheless, this is not to suggest that mainstream channels rarely schedule the documentary genre at peak viewing time. As the example of *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* demonstrates, a generalist channel, such as France 2, will occasionally programme a documentary at prime time, if the subject matter is thought to be of widespread appeal, and if the programme presents its material in an engaging manner. Chapter 1 of this thesis, for instance, underlines that the most successful documentaries of the past fifteen years (1995 – 2010) have been ‘hybrid’ ‘docu-dramas’, which adopt certain conventions of popular factual entertainment (such as the re-enactment of an event with actors or computer generated images). *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* follows in this trend of popular factual entertainment, with the series’ use of a ‘celebrity’ and emphasis on spectacular visuals and strong ‘human-interest’ narrative.

A comparison of the four types of alterity examined in this thesis, reveals that documentaries on rural and regional France are afforded a similar treatment, with 73 per cent of programmes on ‘peasants’ broadcast in ‘Daytime’ and ‘Third Time’ positions (30% and 43%), compared to 77 per cent for documentaries on Brittany and the Basque country (35% and 42%) (cf. Appendices 3 and 4). In contrast, ‘ethnographic documentaries’ are rarely shown late in the evening (‘Second’ and ‘Third Time’ equates to 11% of the ‘ethnographic documentary’ corpus), and are instead shown in ‘Daytime’ (51%), and unusually, in ‘Access Prime Time’ (6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.) (18%) (cf. Appendix 1). Out of all four categories, documentaries on urban France (the *banlieue*) are featured in the most prominent peak viewing positions with ‘Prime Time’ and ‘Second Time’ accounting for 57.5 per cent of the *banlieue* corpus (22.5% and

35%) (cf. Appendix 2). This provides an indication of the significance of the *banlieue* ‘issue’ in contemporary French society. Correspondingly, whilst rural and regional France may be idealised (cf. TF1’s series *Histoires naturelles*, Chapter 4), and obtain box-office success with the French cinematic ‘heritage’ film genre (cf. Chapter 3), this does not appear to translate into a high-profile position for the documentary treatment of these subjects on French television. To sum up, outside of ‘minority’ channels (in terms of audience share), such as Arte and France 5, documentaries representing the four types of alterity investigated in this thesis are generally relegated to the margins of schedules. ‘Hybrid’ documentaries are a notable exception, however, arguably due to the high costs involved in producing such programmes (which are often co-financed by various countries), this type of programme remains a relatively rare event on the small screen.

- *A Documentary ‘Search for the Spectacular’?*

A key research question outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, was to determine the extent to which Pierre Bourdieu’s (1996) critical analysis of television as a medium that displays a tendency to ‘dramatise’ events through a ‘search for the spectacular’ (Bourdieu 1996: 18), is also applicable to the documentary genre. In order to investigate this question, I constructed a comparative framework that approached this idea in two contrasting and complementary ways. The first method examined a contemporary event, such as the 2005 riots (Chapter 2), or the dismantling of a McDonald’s by protesting farmers in August 1999 (Chapter 3), and juxtaposed the depiction of this incident in the flagship 8:00 p.m. evening news programmes of TF1

and France 2, with the documentary representation of the same issue.⁶ In the second, I explored whether the representation of alterity varied according to the scheduling and channel on which a documentary is broadcast. For instance in Chapter 1, I compared the representation of the ethnographic or non-Western ‘other’ in a mainstream programme broadcast at ‘Prime Time’ on France 2 (*Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*), with two documentaries made by anthropologist and film-maker, Stéphane Breton, that were also shown at peak viewing time on the cultural channel Arte.

In terms of the coverage of the 2005 riots by journalists, Chapter 2’s analysis indicates the manner in which these events were dominated by images of violence and anonymous rioting youth, often involved in large confrontations with hundreds of riot police. Although these ‘dramatic’ images were to some degree inevitable in view of the scale and severity of the disturbances, TF1 and France 2’s news programmes tended to focus on the most serious and visually spectacular incidents, at the expense of providing a context for the outbreak of civil unrest (for example, the territorial discrimination faced by *banlieue* residents, or the socio-economic context of the suburbs). Equally, when each channel attempted to offer a different view of these urban areas, interviewing young residents or profiling successful local community initiatives, these contributions often reinforced the dominant representation of the *banlieue* as an epicentre of alterity. The comparison of news journalism with the documentary portrayal of the 2005 riots, revealed that the longer format also has the potential to reinforce the vision of the deprived suburbs as a place of social and spatial alienation. For instance, *Quand la*

⁶ The decision to select the 8:00 p.m. newscasts of TF1 and France 2, as opposed to the lunchtime bulletins at 1:00 p.m., was based on the fact that these programmes are broadcast in prime time when audiences are high (a combined audience of approximately 15 million viewers – TF1: 9.5 million; France 2: 5.5 million).

France s'embrase (France 2, 2007), displays a similar tendency to focus on the visual 'spectacle' of the violence, as opposed to a more detailed examination of the circumstances out of which riots are borne. If Chapter 2's analysis of the representation of the *banlieue* reveals the importance of dramatic visuals for news journalism (and on occasion, the documentary genre), Chapter 3's assessment of 'José Bové and the McDonald's incident', provides an example of the emphasis of news journalism on a 'human-interest' angle or central 'character' who becomes the focus of an issue. For example, the initial coverage of the dismantling of the McDonald's was fairly low-profile and placed as part of a wider feature on a series of demonstrations led by farmers. However, as events unfolded, with Bové refusing to post bail, the coverage became increasingly concentrated on the militant farmer and showed a particular fascination for his distinctive moustache and pipe (depicted repeatedly in close-up). Alternatively, the documentary *Chronique d'un printemps paysan* (France 3, 2001), demonstrates an aesthetic approach designed to deflect the viewer's attention away from Bové and onto the wider group of farmers involved in the *Confédération paysanne's* campaign. Taken together, both chapters indicate that the documentary may also, at times, adopt an aesthetic and thematic approach that 'dramatises' and searches for the 'spectacular' (Bourdieu 1996: 18).

Whether broadcast at peak viewing time (such as, France 2's *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*), or in the post-midnight slot (for example, TF1's *Histoires naturelles*), documentaries shown on mainstream channels are characterised by a high level of visually pleasing footage of picturesque landscapes and people. This is particularly visible in France 2's popular 'ethnographic documentary' series, which features

outstanding landscape sequences of climatic extremes (for instance, the Siberian tundra or the Namibian desert) and aesthetically pleasing non-Western individuals with a distinctive mode of dress and place of abode. In addition, *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* provides an indication of the importance of providing a ‘taut’ narrative with central ‘characters’ (the ‘celebrity’ and the ethnographic ‘star’), moments of ‘suspense’ (for instance, the mystery of the intended destination) and ‘comedy’ (such as the ‘celebrity’ clumsily attempting to help in daily chores). This is not to suggest that documentaries shown on smaller cultural channels necessarily avoid scenic footage of landscapes or visually appealing people (for an example, cf. Chapter 3’s discussion of Raymond Depardon’s *Profils paysans*). However, the most conspicuous difference between documentaries made by Depardon or Stéphane Breton (Chapter 1) and a series such as *Histoires naturelles* (Chapter 4) or *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* (Chapter 1), is the relationship to time. Breton’s *Le Ciel dans un jardin* (Arte 2003) is about the small gestures made by the ethnographic ‘other’, (for example, the way a potato is held and slowly eaten), rather than a series of action-driven sequences found in a programme such as TF1’s *Histoires naturelles*, which is constructed around a succession of images or ‘scenes’ depicting various aspects of regional life (sport, traditional crafts, hunting and fishing, local food). Alternatively, whilst *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* creates the impression of instantaneous communication between the ‘celebrity’ and ethnographic ‘other’ by removing the lengthy third-party translation process, Depardon prefers to underline the limitations of representation, by including moments when his film subjects fall silent, hesitate, or refuse to respond to a question. Overall, the comparison between documentaries broadcast on mainstream channels and on smaller channels

reveals that a channel's selection and positioning of the documentary genre is influenced by an individual programme's visual or thematic appeal. In other words, a documentary broadcast at prime time on a mainstream channel is likely to place emphasis on striking visuals and action- or personality-based narrative, whereas there is a higher probability that a documentary that is more self-contained will be placed either at the margins of the television schedule, or on smaller 'minority-interest' channels.

- *Alterity and National Identity in Contemporary French Documentary*

By way of conclusion, I would like to offer a few remarks on the nature of alterity and its representation in contemporary French documentary. Judging by the number of viewers tuning in to watch a 'hybrid' documentary, such as *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue* (an average audience of 4.8 million), or the approximately extra one million people who watched TF1 and France 2's news coverage of the 2005 riots, alterity clearly attracts, whether it is represented as 'reassuring' (a common 'humanity' between Western and non-Western 'other') or 'threatening' (the epitome of France's *fracture sociale*). Likewise, nostalgic portraits of regional or rural life, as a remnant of an earlier harmonious and 'natural' way of life, offers a similar appeal that is translated into other forms of visual culture (such as 'heritage' cinema), or the popularity of regional or rural tourism based on the premise of distinct local identities and culture explored in Chapter 4. As this thesis' exploration of different forms of 'otherness' reveals, the depiction of the 'other' in documentary or news journalism is often at odds with research conducted by anthropologists or sociologists in the field. The representation of France's

disadvantaged suburbs is perhaps the most conspicuous example of this disparity.⁷ Whilst alterity might be exaggerated for ‘comic’ or ‘dramatic’ purpose (as in *Rendez-vous en terre inconnue*’s ‘live maggot-eating’ sequence), in an anthropological sense, the construction of the ‘other’ is an essential part of the construction of the ‘self’: ‘[a]ll systems of otherness are structures of identity and difference that have more to do with the establishment of *self*-identity than with the empirical reality of the other’ (Rapport and Overing 2000: 14). As Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson’s (1994) seminal work *The Established and the Outsiders* reveals, even among a relatively homogenous social community, there will always be those who are considered by the dominant or ‘established’ group as ‘outsiders’ and therefore irreducibly ‘other’ in nature. In other words, contemporary France’s idealisation of rural and regional communities and the rejection of the postcolonial society manifested in the disadvantaged suburbs, reveals more about the nation’s own construction of national identity than the identity of the ‘other’ being represented. Ultimately, if the considerable body of work produced by academics studying the representation of ethnic, religious or suburban minorities in visual culture has yet to have an impact on the depiction of these social groups, perhaps the answer lies in the notion that ‘myths’ are more powerful as a means of persuasion than the ‘cold reality’ of facts:

Les faits ne pénètrent pas dans le monde où vivent nos croyances, ils n’ont pas fait naître celles-ci, ils ne les détruisent pas; ils peuvent leur infliger les plus constants démentis sans les affaiblir.

(Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*; cited in Mauger 2006: 5).

⁷ Academics studying the representation of Islam in the French media have equally spoken of an ‘imaginary Islam’ (cf. Deltombe 2005: 8; Geisser 2003: 20).

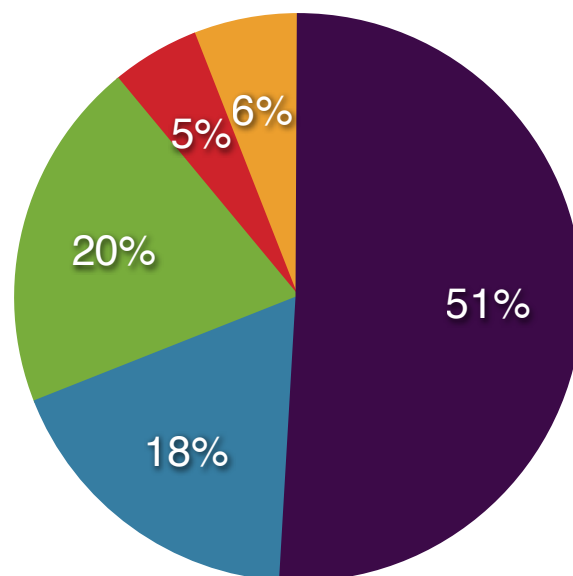
Appendix 1 – ‘Ethnographic Documentary’ Corpus

Table 1.1 – ‘Ethnographic Documentary’ Corpus: Breakdown per Channel¹

Channel	TF1	France 2	France 3	Canal Plus	La 5e	France 5	Arte	Total
Number of films	1	12	16	1	6	40	90	166
Percentage of Corpus	0.5%	7%	10%	0.5%	4%	24%	54%	–

Table 1.2 – ‘Ethnographic Documentary’ Corpus: Scheduling Position

- Daytime (8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.)
- Access Prime Time (6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.)
- Prime Time (8:00p.m. - 10:30 p.m.)
- Second Time (10.30 p.m. - 00:00 a.m.)
- Third Time (00:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m.)



¹ The channel *La 5e* no longer exists. The educational and cultural remit of this channel is now offered by *France 5*.

	Daytime (8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.)	Access Prime Time (6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.)	Prime Time (8:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.)	Second Time (10:30 p.m. – 00:00 a.m.)	Third Time (00:00 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.)	Total per Channel
TF1					1	1
France 2			11		1	12
France 3	15	1				16
Canal Plus	1					1
La 5e	6					6
France 5	31		7	1	1	40
Arte	32	29	15	7	7	90
Total No. of films	85	30	33	8	10	166
Percentage of Corpus	51%	18%	20%	5%	6%	–

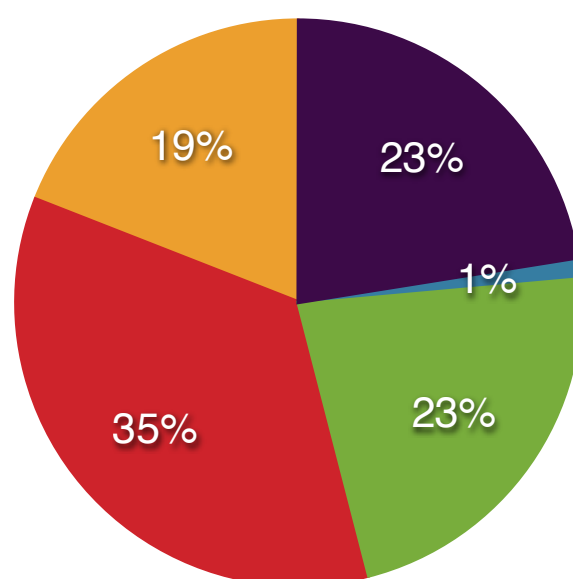
Appendix 2 – *Banlieue* Documentary Corpus

Table 2.1 – *Banlieue* Documentary Corpus: Breakdown per Channel¹

Channel	TF1	France 2	France 3	Canal Plus	La 5e	France 5	Arte	Total
Number of films	1	30	15	12	10	11	32	111
Percentage of Corpus	1%	27%	13%	11%	9%	10%	29%	–

Table 2.2 – *Banlieue* Documentary Corpus: Scheduling Position

- Daytime (8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.)
- Access Prime Time (6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.)
- Prime Time (8:00p.m. - 10:30 p.m.)
- Second Time (10.30 p.m. - 00:00 a.m.)
- Third Time (00:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m.)



¹ The channel *La 5e* no longer exists. The educational and cultural remit of this channel is now offered by *France 5*.

	Daytime (8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.)	Access Prime Time (6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.)	Prime Time (8:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.)	Second Time (10:30 p.m. – 00:00 a.m.)	Third Time (00:00 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.)	Total per Channel
TF1					1	1
France 2	4		1	16	9	30
France 3	1		2	7	5	15
Canal Plus	2		1	8	1	12
La 5e	10					10
France 5	6		4		1	11
Arte	2	1	17	8	4	32
Total No. of films	25	1	25	39	21	111
Percentage of Corpus	22.5%	1%	22.5%	35%	19%	–

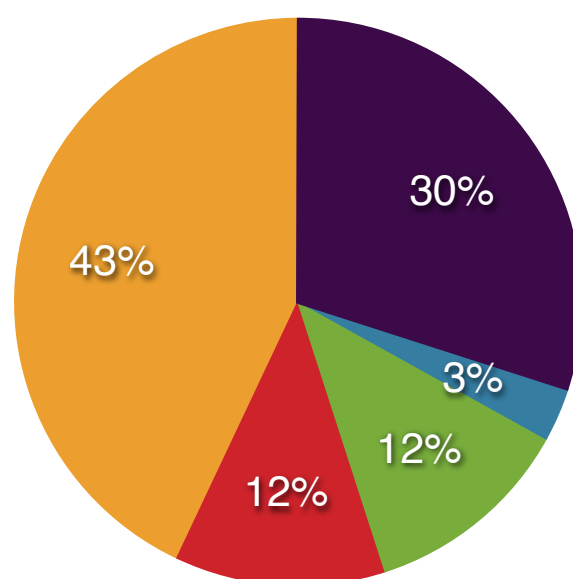
Appendix 3 – Rural France Documentary Corpus

Table 3.1 – Rural France Documentary Corpus: Breakdown per Channel¹

Channel	TF1	France 2	France 3	Canal Plus	La 5e	France 5	Arte	Total
Number of films	5	9	33	5	6	11	24	93
Percentage of Corpus	5.5%	10%	35%	5.5%	6%	12%	26%	–

Table 3.2 – Rural France Documentary Corpus: Scheduling Position

- Daytime (8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.)
- Access Prime Time (6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.)
- Prime Time (8:00p.m. - 10:30 p.m.)
- Second Time (10.30 p.m. - 00:00 a.m.)
- Third Time (00:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m.)



¹ The channel *La 5e* no longer exists. The educational and cultural remit of this channel is now offered by *France 5*.

	Daytime (8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.)	Access Prime Time (6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.)	Prime Time (8:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.)	Second Time (10:30 p.m. – 00:00 a.m.)	Third Time (00:00 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.)	Total per Channel
TF1					5	5
France 2	1			1	7	9
France 3	6			2	25	33
Canal Plus	3				2	5
La 5e	6					6
France 5	9		2			11
Arte	3	3	9	8	1	24
Total No. of films	28	3	11	11	40	93
Percentage of Corpus	30%	3%	12%	12%	43%	–

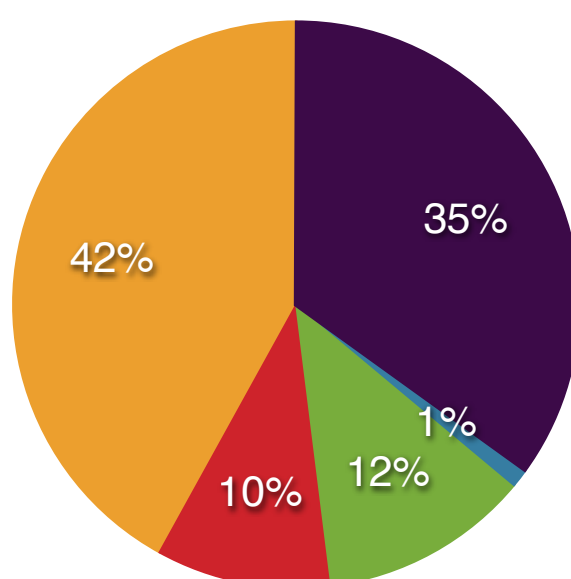
Appendix 4 – Regional Identities Documentary Corpus

Table 4.1 – Regional Identities Documentary Corpus: Breakdown per Channel¹

Channel	TF1	France 2	France 3	Canal Plus	La 5e	France 5	Arte	Total
Number of films	21	6	39	3	13	15	16	113
Percentage of Corpus	19%	5%	35%	3%	11%	13%	14%	–

Table 4.2 – Regional Identities Documentary Corpus: Scheduling Position

- Daytime (8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.)
- Access Prime Time (6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.)
- Prime Time (8:00p.m. - 10:30 p.m.)
- Second Time (10.30 p.m. - 00:00 a.m.)
- Third Time (00:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m.)



¹ The channel *La 5e* no longer exists. The educational and cultural remit of this channel is now offered by *France 5*.

	Daytime (8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.)	Access Prime Time (6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.)	Prime Time (8:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.)	Second Time (10:30 p.m. – 00:00 a.m.)	Third Time (00:00 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.)	Total per Channel
TF1				1	20	21
France 2	3			1	2	6
France 3	14		1	3	21	39
Canal Plus	2			1		3
La 5e	13					13
France 5	6		4		5	15
Arte	1	1	9	5		16
Total No. of films	39	1	14	11	48	113
Percentage of Corpus	35%	1%	12%	10%	42%	–

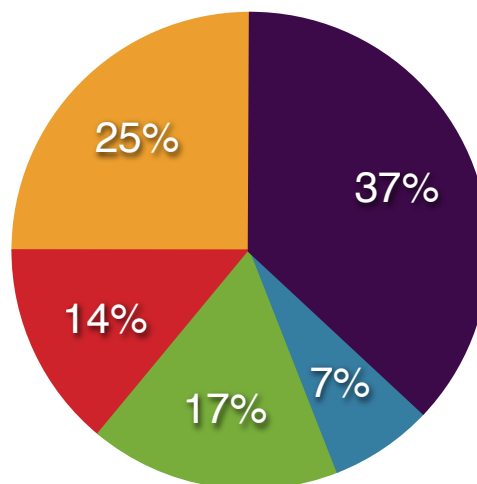
Appendix 5 – Combined Corpus

Table 5.1 – Combined Corpus: Breakdown per Channel¹

Channel	TF1	France 2	France 3	Canal Plus	La 5e	France 5	Arte	Total
‘Ethnographic’	1	12	16	1	6	40	90	166
<i>Banlieue</i>	1	30	15	12	10	11	32	111
Rural France	5	9	33	5	6	11	24	93
Regional	21	6	39	3	13	15	16	113
Total	28	57	103	21	35	77	162	483
Percentage of Corpus	6%	12%	21%	4%	7%	16%	34%	–

Table 5.2 – Combined Corpus: Scheduling Position

- Daytime (8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.)
- Access Prime Time (6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.)
- Prime Time (8:00p.m. - 10:30 p.m.)
- Second Time (10.30 p.m. - 00:00 a.m.)
- Third Time (00:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m.)



¹ The channel *La 5e* no longer exists. The educational and cultural remit of this channel is now offered by *France 5*.

	Daytime (8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.)	Access Prime Time (6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.)	Prime Time (8:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.)	Second Time (10:30 p.m. – 00:00 a.m.)	Third Time (00:00 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.)	Total No of films
‘Ethnography’	85	30	33	8	10	166
<i>Banlieue</i>	25	1	25	39	21	111
Rural	28	3	11	11	40	93
Regional	39	1	14	11	48	113
Total No. of films	176	35	83	69	120	483
Combined Corpus	37%	7%	17%	14%	25%	–

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Filmography

Chapter 1 – Encounters with the Ethnographic ‘Other’: The Celebrity and Anthropologist ‘in the Jungle’

*Rendez-vous en terre inconnue, France 5/France 2 (2004-2010)*¹

Director	Title	Channel	Day and Date of Broadcast	Time Broadcast	Duration (minutes)
Nicolas Cennac	<i>Thierry Lhermitte à Madagascar</i>	France 5	Sunday 26.12.2004	5:25 p.m.	89
Thierry Robert	<i>Pierre Palmade au Niger</i>	France 5	Sunday 06.02.2005	1:43 pp.m.	85
Roland Theron	<i>Emmanuelle Béart à Socotra</i>	France 5	Sunday 22.05.2005	1:38 p.m.	90
Xavier Lefebvre	<i>Muriel Robin au Cameroun</i>	France 5	Sunday 09.10.2005	3:27 p.m.	88
Pierre Stine	<i>Muriel Robin en Namibie</i>	France 2	Thursday 31.08.2006	8:46 p.m.	117
Alain Compost	<i>Patrick Timsit chez les Hommes fleurs</i>	France 2	Thursday 28.12.2006	8:50 p.m.	84
Christian Gaume	<i>Charlotte de Turckheim chez les Nénetes</i>	France 2	Thursday 12.07.2007	8:54 p.m.	100
Pierre Stine	<i>Bruno Solo chez les cavaliers mongols</i>	France 2	Thursday 27.12.2007	8:56 p.m.	106
Christian Gaume	<i>Adriana Karembeu chez les Amharas</i>	France 2	Monday 07.07.2008	8:50 p.m.	94
Luc Marescot	<i>Edouard Baer chez les Dogons</i>	France 2	Monday 05.01.2009	8:35 p.m.	101
Pierre Stine	<i>Zazie chez les Korowāi</i>	France 2	Tuesday 30.06.2009	8:38 p.m.	107
–	<i>Retour en terre inconnue – La spéciale</i>	France 2	Tuesday 01.12.2009	8:38 p.m.	154
Christian Gaume	<i>Gilbert Montagné au Zanskar</i>	France 2	Tuesday 01.09.2009	8:40 p.m.	100

¹ The series is still in production, however programmes broadcast after 2010 are not included here as the remit of this thesis is to examine documentaries broadcast between 1995 – 2010.

Director	Title	Channel	Day and Date of Broadcast	Time Broadcast	Duration (minutes)
Pierre Stine	<i>Marianne James chez les Bajaus</i>	France 2	Tuesday 06.04.2010	8:36 p.m.	98
Christian Gaume	<i>Gérard Jugnot en Bolivie</i>	France 2	Tuesday 14.09.2010	8:41 p.m.	104
Pierre Stine	<i>Virginie Efiza chez les Tsaatans</i>	France 2	Tuesday 14.12.2010	8:46 p.m.	89

Stéphane Breton, Arte (2001; 2003)

Director	Title	Channel	Day and Date of Broadcast	Time Broadcast	Duration (minutes)
Stéphane Breton	<i>Eux et moi: Un ethnologue en Papouasie occidentale</i>	Arte	Saturday 20.10.2001	8:44 p.m.	63
Stéphane Breton	<i>Le Ciel dans un jardin</i>	Arte	Saturday 13.12.2003	8:42 p.m.	63

Chapter 2: The Banlieue as an Epicentre of Spatial, Social and Ethnic Alterity

Director	Title	Channel	Day and Date of Broadcast	Time Broadcast	Duration (minutes)
Michel Royer	<i>Faits divers à la une</i>	France 5	Friday 07.03.2003	5:09 p.m.	51
David Dufresne; Christophe Bouquet	<i>Quand la France s'embrase</i>	France 2	Thursday 18.10.2007	11:18 p.m.	78
Benoît Grimont	<i>La tentation de l'émeute</i>	Arte	Tuesday 09.11.2010	10:37 p.m.	53
Bertrand and Nils Tavernier	<i>De l'autre côté du périph'</i> Part One: <i>Le coeur de la cité</i> Part Two: <i>Le meilleur de l'âme</i>	France 2	Sunday 07.12.1997	10:47 p.m.	85
			Sunday 14.12.1997	10:43 p.m.	63
Yamina Benguigui	<i>9/3: Mémoire d'un territoire</i>	Canal Plus	Monday 29.09.2008	8:54 p.m.	88

Chapter 3: La France Profonde: Visible and Vanishing ‘Peasants’ in Rural France

Director	Title	Channel	Day and Date of Broadcast	Time Broadcast	Duration (minutes)
Escudero Alvarez	<i>Chronique d'un printemps paysan</i>	France 3	Monday 12.02.2001	01:52 a.m.	52
Raymond Depardon	<i>Profils paysans: Chapitre 1 – L'approche</i>	Canal Plus	Tuesday 05.12.2000	05:26 a.m.	89
Raymond Depardon	<i>Profils paysans: Chapitre 2 – Le quotidien</i>	Canal Plus	Saturday 18.12.2004	02:23 a.m.	81
Raymond Depardon	<i>Profils paysans: Chapitre 3 – La vie moderne</i>	Canal Plus	Tuesday 15.12.2009	10:57 p.m.	83
Eric Pittard	<i>Coup de soleil sur Millau</i>	France 2	Sunday 10.12.2000	12:43 a.m.	53
–	<i>Bové en campagne contre le burger</i>	Arte	Thursday 30.08.2001	9:38 p.m.	28
Patrick Sobelman	<i>Pour un autre monde</i>	France 3	Wednesday 05.09.2001	10:57 p.m.	83
Sophie Lepault	<i>OGM: Et si Bové avait tort?</i>	Arte	Tuesday 08.10.2002	9:40 p.m.	52

(Other documentaries on José Bové mentioned in chapter)

Chapter 4: Regional Identities: The Place of Brittany and the Basque Country in the French Nation-State

Director	Title	Channel	Day and Date of Broadcast	Time Broadcast	Duration (minutes)
Eric Pittard	<i>Brezhoneg: Un siècle de breton</i>	France 3	Monday 10.12.2001	12:06 a.m.	53
Jean-Pierre Fleury; Christophe Resse	<i>Voir Molène (Histoires naturelles)</i>	TF1	Wednesday 03.04.2002	12:13 a.m.	52
Jean-Pierre Fleury; Anthony Martin	<i>Doxpi: La force basque (Histoires naturelles)</i>	TF1	Wednesday 24.11.2004	01:52 a.m.	51