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There's 'more' to life: British migration to rural France

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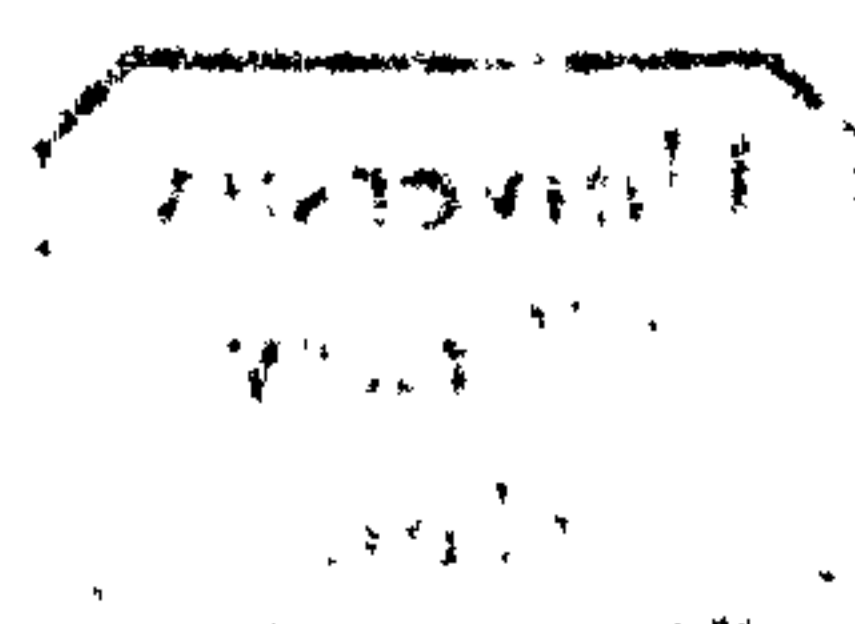


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THESIS SUMMARY

This thesis is about the lives of Britons who migrate to the Lot, a rural, inland *département* in southwest France. It shows that, while these migrants are a diverse population, they hold in common the pursuit of a different way of life. Both their imaginings of life in rural France and their previous experiences of life in Britain motivate their migration and continue to impact on their new lives in the Lot. The migrants view the lives they led in Britain as constraining, while they imagine that through migration and living in the Lot, they augment their abilities to define the world (and their lives) in their own terms. Following migration however, they soon realize that leading a different way of life is not such a straightforward process; although they desire to be a part of the local community and acquire what they imagine to be a rural French lifestyle, this takes both time and effort to achieve. As their narratives demonstrate, they thus occupy an ambiguous position between the lives they led in Britain and the lifestyle they associate with rural France. They strive to overcome these feelings of ambivalence by demonstrating the distinctiveness of their new lives. The ultimate measure of this distinctiveness is integration into the local population. Their narratives thus reveal their attempts to become insiders of the Lotoise community. The thesis concludes by arguing that the pursuit of difference is a central feature of the migrants' daily lives. The persistence of this quest highlights the fact that the migrants never fully resolve their ambivalence. This thesis thus emphasizes that it is the process of achieving a distinctive life that is a characteristic of the lives of British migration in the Lot (rather than the different way of life itself). It seems that there is always 'more' to life.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an in-depth study of Britons of all ages who are permanent residents of the Lot, a rural inland *département* (administrative unit) in southwest France (see Figure 1.1 & 1.2). It describes how these migrants explain their decision to migrate and examines the stories that they tell about their new lives in the Lot. The ethnographic examples throughout the following chapters emphasize that these Britons have complex motivations behind their migration. Their motivations are driven by their unsatisfactory experiences of life in contemporary Britain and their anticipations of what their future would be like if they remained there. In this manner, they emphasize the constraints that they had felt before migration. They also stress their idyllic imaginings of life in rural France and their desires to be a part of this alternative landscape. Their stories thus reveal aspirations to achieve a different way of life following migration; a way of living that they will find more fulfilling than their life in Britain.



Figure 1.1: Map of the Lot *département* southwest France

My interest in the British living in rural France was first sparked on a visit in 2000 to the Lot when I stayed with a British family who had migrated in 1991. My subsequent investigations revealed that, despite the magnitude of this phenomenon – approximately 200,000 British nationals live permanently in France (Sriskandarajah and Drew 2006) – it has received very little academic attention. Notable exceptions to this are the studies carried out in the early 1990s by Buller and Hoggart (1992, 1993, 1994a, 1994b; Hoggart and Buller 1994) and Barou and Prado (1995), which draw on data collected from Britons living across France. In recent years, Gervais-Aguer (2004, 2006) and Depierre and Guitard (2006), have produced studies that focus on those living in particular regions of France. These previous studies used predominantly quantitative methods, drawing their conclusions from surveys and questionnaires. Therefore, while there are ethnographies of similar groups of migrants living in Spain (O'Reilly 2000; Oliver 2002) and Mallorca (Waldren 1996), this thesis is the first full-length ethnography of the British living in rural France. I draw upon ethnographic data derived from long-term fieldwork and qualitative research to provide detailed insights into the lives of my respondents in the Lot. By examining the migrants' experiences of life both before and after migration, I reveal the true motivations behind their decision to migrate (cf. Fabricant 1998).

The ethnography that I present shows that the migrants are preoccupied with distinction; they aspire towards a different way of life to that which they had in Britain, but they also strive to show how their lives in the Lot are distinct from those of their compatriots. As their narratives demonstrate, they perceive that ultimately this can be achieved by becoming an insider to the local population (cf. Herzfeld 1992; Waldren 1996, 1997); by achieving what, in their perception, is an 'authentic' way of life. Their narratives emphasize that they have not yet reached this goal. Instead, my respondents occupy a liminal space between France and Britain, between the rural French way of life that they desire and the British lifestyle that they want to escape (cf. O'Reilly 2000). This is also a

transnational space, where they maintain relationships and affiliations in both France and Britain (cf. Vertovec 1999) through retelling their stories about migration and their lives in the Lot. Indeed, it seemed to me that these transnational links were a central and indispensable part of their lives.

The migrants maintained regular contact with friends and family back in Britain by telephone, letter writing, and latterly by email. These friends and family often visited the Lot for their holidays, taking advantage of the cheap flight deals and the low cost of staying with friends and family. I question whether my respondents would have been so eager to live in rural France if the maintenance of these transnational ties had not been so easy. Indeed, they often told me that it was because they were still relatively (geographically) close to their families that they had chosen France in the first place; if they had to return to Britain urgently, it would be easy and fast. It is somewhat paradoxical therefore, that the focus of the migrants' narratives is on their efforts to escape this ambiguous position of liminality and, to a lesser degree, transnationality. They find that in this 'betwixt and between' status there are still obstacles to the way of life that they want to lead (cf. Favell 2003).

The continued pursuit of a different way of life following migration is thus an attempt to resolve the persisting sense of ambivalence in their lives. Their uncertainty is caused not only by their liminal position between two different ways of life, but also, I argue, results from the particular circumstances that enable their migration. They can choose to pursue a rural and traditional way of living only because they are powerful European actors with the right to freedom of movement within Europe (and, of course, relative financial security). This is in stark contrast to the lives of their local French neighbours who lead their lives the way they do out of necessity. Therefore, following migration, the quest for a different or 'authentic' way of living characterizes the migrants' daily lives as they strive to show that they know how to *really* live in the Lot. This continual pursuit of difference is the common thread drawing my exploration of

further themes together. These themes include how the migrants explain their migration, their imaginings of, and interactions with, the Lotoise landscape and members of the local community, and how they talk about and classify themselves and others.



Figure 1.2: Map of France with highlighted area denoting the location of the Lot *département*

This thesis makes general contributions to several fields of research. The first of these is the anthropology of rural France, which predominantly focuses on peasant societies (see for example Bourdieu 1962, 1977, 1980, 2002; Zonabend 1984; Segalen 1983, 1991; Rogers 1991; Reed-Danahay 1996). While these studies often highlight out-migration and in-migration of peasants, they omit other migration flows. The notable exception to this is Barou and Prado's (1995) study of the English living in the French countryside. My thesis follows this research to give further insights into the diversity of the population of rural France.

This thesis similarly makes a timely contribution to the field of migration studies, both in respect of migration to France, but also to research on lifestyle migration. Studies of immigration to France predominantly apply a 'problem' or 'policy oriented' approach (Fassin 2001). In the last twenty years or so, this approach has been directed almost exclusively towards the problems caused by African incomers (Silverman 1992; Hargreaves 1995; Noiriel 1996). Although migration from Africa undoubtedly deserves attention, since 1962, the recorded number of migrants residing in France who originate from other European countries has exceeded incomers from Africa (INSEE 2005). My research thus plays a role in redressing the balance in this field, helping to reveal the true diversity of the migrant population in France.

This 'problem' and 'policy oriented' approach is also common to many studies of British and other Northern Europeans living in southern Europe. These studies examine, for example, issues such as social care and welfare (see for example Blakemore 1999; Warnes, King, Williams and Patterson 1999; Warnes, Friedrich, Kellaheer, and Torres 2004), and draw exclusively on the experiences of retired migrants. In this manner, the studies continue to imply that most Britons living in southern Europe are retired (O'Reilly 2000). Nevertheless, other studies of this form of migration (retired or not) pay closer attention to the diversity of these migration populations (see for example Waldren 1996; King and Patterson 1998; King, Warnes, and Williams 2000; O'Reilly 2000; Oliver 2002). My ethnography is influenced by these more sensitive and complex analyses of this lifestyle-driven migration.

THE LOT

The Lot *département* in the midi-Pyrenees region of France has around 167,500 inhabitants. There are 32 inhabitants per square kilometre, compared to the 388.7 inhabitants per square kilometre in England. This low population density is one attraction of this beautiful part of rural France. However, the *département* also has a rich and colourful history of

human settlement and activity, which serves as a fitting introduction to my field site.

Throughout the *département*, there is evidence of the local history and people who have occupied the land over the centuries. This evidence records that humans have lived in this part of the world since the time of Cro-Magnon man. As one of my respondents once remarked, this was, 'a landscape steeped in history'. Indeed, at Cabrerets, it is possible to visit the *Grotte de Pech-Merle*, part of the cave systems that extend beneath the vast limestone cliffs to the east and north of the *département*. The underground galleries at *Pech-Merle* are full of stunning limestone formations and prehistoric cave paintings from the early Magdalenian era (around 16000-17000 years ago). But on the *causse* (limestone plateaux) above is evidence of later settlers in the area. Throughout the region, dolmen (megalithic stone tombs) litter the landscape, erected by the early farming and pastoral communities that settled in the area from around 7000 BC. Much later, around 700 BC, the Celts migrated to the region, setting up trade routes, towns, and hilltop fortresses. The Romans finally overpowered them during the reign of Julius Caesar.

During their occupation, the Romans established *Divona Cadurcorum* as the regional administrative centre. On this site today stands the modern-day administrative centre (*prefecture*) of the Lot, Cahors, its name a derivative of the original Latin. Little archaeological evidence remains of this period in the region's history, but from time to time, there is a discovery that brings the town's Roman roots into focus. Excavations for the foundations of new buildings often reveal long-hidden Roman ruins. Indeed, at the time of my fieldwork, an area near the station in Cahors was cordoned off for archaeological investigation before it was built over. And when I returned in 2005, work on the new underground car park beneath the *Place François Mitterand* in the centre of the town had been halted by the discovery of Roman remains.

Although many of the British in the Lot were aware of this long history – they often took visitors to the respective sites and museums in the *département* – it was the history that they, as Britons, shared with the Lotoise that they found most interesting. For example, parts of the modern-day Lot had been within the Aquitaine region of France during the middle ages. Eleanor of Aquitaine inherited this domain from her father in 1137 and when, two years into her marriage to Henry of Anjou (Henry II) he succeeded to the English throne, Eleanor's lands fell under English rule. The evidence of the skirmishes between the English and the French that occurred during the English rule of the area are the troglodyte castles throughout the *département*. One example of this is the *Château du diable* (the castle of the devil), otherwise known as the *Château des Anglais* (the castle of the English) built into the cliff face looking down over the Célé river at Cabrerets (see Figure 1.3). It was not until 1453, during the Hundred Years' War, that the English throne finally relinquished its hold on this part of France. As one of my respondents' jokingly replied when her French bank manager asked her why she had moved to the Lot, 'we've come to reclaim the land that we lost during the Hundred Years' War'.

However, it is the more recent history that has made the Lot what it is today. Before the advent of the steam train, people living in the Lot had a locational advantage in the transportation, and indeed exportation of their products because of the river Lot, which flows through the *département* and into the Garonne River. This larger river then flows out to the sea at Bordeaux. Indeed, on a recent trip to Norway, I learned that in the eighteenth century the Hanseatic merchants based in Bergen had imported their stockfish from the Lot. However, the invention of the railway eventually resulted in the demise of transportation by boat from such inland areas. The train was much faster. I believe that the train brought a degree of economic decline to the area, and some depopulation.

But following the second war, when France experienced rapid urbanization and industrialization, rural depopulation started to change the face of the

French countryside. There were jobs in the towns and cities, and the mechanization of agriculture meant that fewer labourers were needed on the farms. The Lot particularly suffered during this period because much of the land in the area was unsuitable for the use of machinery; many of the local farms could not keep up with their mechanized competitors.

Industrialization and urbanization thus led to a large rural exodus from many parts of France, including the Lot. The call of the towns and cities has continued to this day; young people leave the villages for school and later for university and job opportunities. In some of the more isolated hamlets there are no young families left because there are no schools nearby. As the older farmers die, there are few younger farmers to step into their shoes. Simply, jobs in the towns pay better than, what is on the whole, small-scale agriculture. Furthermore, the towns have the amenities that many rural locations in the Lot lack.



Figure 1.3: Château des Anglais, Cabrerets

Nevertheless, agriculture remains a central feature of the local economy. Today successful farmers specialize or diversify. For example, some offer rustic *table d'hôte*, a full-course meal at a fixed price ordinarily made up of products from their farm, or focus on attracting rural tourism. Others have found that organic farming reaps financial rewards; those who remain in traditional agriculture focus on good cash crops: maize for animal feed and tobacco. The Lot has its own *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC) for the red full-bodied Cahors wine, which means that wine production can pay well. To the west of Cahors, where the land is best for vineyards, the

landscape is covered with row upon row of vines. The region also produces foie gras, the rich duck or goose liver produced by gavage (force feeding the animals through a tube straight into their stomachs). This is a gourmet speciality and is therefore sold at a high price. Similarly, once a year is the annual truffle market at Lalbenque, 'the capital of the black truffle'. Again, this is a valuable commodity in the gastronomic market.



Figure 1.4: The characteristic brown tiled roofs of the houses in the Lot

Despite the flourishing of specialist markets, over the last fifty years many smaller farms have fallen by the wayside as their owners die and there is no one to take over the day-to-day running of the farms. As *The Rough Guide to the Lot and Dordogne* states, 'Since the 1960s both nostalgic Parisians and north Europeans – predominantly British, but also increasing numbers of Dutch and other nationalities – have been snapping up property in the area' (Dodd 2007: 396), and moving in. Indeed, many of my respondents had bought and renovated abandoned and derelict farmhouses with some land. They were particularly attracted, it seems, to the traditional houses, which had characteristic brown tiled roofs (see Figure 1.4), and often had other local architectural features (for example the *Pigeonnier*, a pigeon house often found on the front of farmhouses in the area or freestanding in the fields – see Figure 1.5). These invariably required extensive renovation. My respondents either used the land for their own purposes, putting aside an area to cultivate vegetables, or build a swimming pool, or, if it was too large, they would turn some land over to tenant farmers.

Rural tourism is another important contributor to the local economy. The Lot attracts visitors from all around the world, as a visit to any of the major tourist sites in the area would demonstrate. As the website for local tourism boasts, the area offers, 'steep villages with brown tiles [the traditional roof tiles used in the area], the sprawling wildernesses of the *causse* [limestone plateau], the opulence of the rivers at the foot of impressive cliffs, caves decorated by the first men'.¹ The many sites of outstanding natural beauty, the medieval hilltop villages, and the caves attract numerous tourists including hikers and mountain bikers.



Figure 1.5: An old Lotoise farmhouse with a *Pigeonnier* tower

Tourism provides a source of income, not only to members of the local population, but also to many of the incomers to the area who seek to earn a living in the Lot. Many of my respondents, for example, needed an income to support their lives in France, and tourism seemed to many of them to be the most easily accessible market. As I explain in chapter two, the migrants often ran *gîte* (holiday rental cottages) during the summer months, and one couple had set up a *chambre d'hôte* (bed and breakfast). Although many of the guests to these British-run establishments were British, my respondents hosted guests from all over the world. However, time will tell whether the tourist industry in the Lot will continue to reap rewards for all its stakeholders. In 2004 when I carried out my research, several of the migrants who ran *gîte* had struggled to fill them for the

¹ 'Villages escarpés aux tuiles brunes, étendues sauvages des Causses, opulence des rivières au pied de falaises impressionnantes, grottes décorées par les premiers hommes...' Quercy tourisme 2007. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from French into English throughout this thesis are my own.

summer months. As they explained to me, there were a greater number of gîte than the demand from tourists required. For their British visitors, they told me, visiting the Lot was no longer a cheap holiday. One company monopolized the cross channel ferry, and the Euro tunnel was no less expensive. With the cost of petrol, transport, the gîte rental, and food, it seemed that it was cheaper to get a package holiday from Britain.

Tourism has had an impact on the character of the area. While for most of the year, the pace of life is incredibly slow, with the tourists around in the summer everything changes. Outside of the main tourist season (May-September), many of the shops and restaurants outside of the towns remain shut. Even in Cahors, it is often difficult to find a bar open during the winter evenings. The medieval villages that in the summer are occupied by artisans and craft people selling their wares are largely empty; it seems that there is seasonal migration to cater for the needs of the tourists. In the winter, everything is dead. As a respondent once remarked, 'everybody hibernates in the wintertime'. This is partly because it can be quite cold. The winter that I began my research, on some nights the temperature fell to below -5°C , and in January and February, the temperature during the day was often below 10°C . In the last few years, the Lot has even seen snow (see Figure 1.6). But in the summertime, when the temperature reaches the mid- to high 30s, everything bursts into life. The landscape becomes much more colourful. There are busy night markets in the towns and villages that attract both locals and tourists. And the shops, bars, and restaurants stay open until late. People eat in the restaurant gardens or out on their private terraces, and the pavement cafés are brimming with customers throughout the day. But one thing never changes; small shop owners religiously shut up shop at midday and reopen at two in the afternoon.

The tourists also bring changes to the area, which many of my respondents complained about. They told me that the roads, normally quiet and empty (you would be (un)lucky if you came across a tractor)

were busy and full of traffic. There was nowhere to park in Cahors, and the prices at the supermarket were inflated to reap the benefits of the tourists. The peak tourist season, however, only lasted a couple of months and then life settled back into a slow rhythm again.



Figure 1.6: The garden of one of my respondents covered in a blanket of snow (February 2005)

The British are not the only people attracted to the Lot. As my respondents explained, there were many Dutch living in the area. Indeed, many of the migrants commented on the services supplied by the Dutch primarily for the Dutch population (see chapter seven) and it seemed that many of my respondents who lived to the west of Cahors had bought their property from an estate agency run by a Dutch man. There was also a handful of Americans who had settled in the area; and a large proportion of the French population living locally were French retirees who had moved out of the towns and cities to the countryside when they retired. I had occasional opportunities to talk to these other incomers. For example, I met several of the French retirees who lived in the same village as I lived at the local keep fit club, and met some American and Dutch migrants at drinks parties. It seemed, on the surface, that these other incomers to the Lot had similar motivations to my respondents: the desire for a different way of life. I similarly had a few opportunities to speak to the *paysan*, the local French who worked on the land and the elderly French who seemed to make up a large proportion of the population, particularly in the villages

to the east of Cahors.² However, during my fieldwork, my attention was on the British migrants in the Lot, and in this thesis, I will not attempt to make any substantial sociological evaluations about the local French or other incomers to the Lot.

The change that the British and other incomers have brought to the countryside to the east of Cahors is evident to the naked eye; buildings have been restored and the population of some of the most depopulated villages has been reinvigorated. Ardagh explains the reaction of the local population to these incomers, 'in some areas of rural depopulation, they have been welcomed locally for helping to check the process of decline (2000: 699). It seems that migration to the rural, in part, offsets rural depopulation (Dodd 2007).

The history and contemporary character of the Lot influence my respondents' migration; it is predominantly their imaginings of life in rural France, in contrast with their experiences of life in Britain, that lead them to choosing the Lot as a migration destination. As I discuss in the ethnography throughout this thesis, in the migrants' perception, the different way of life that they seek is exclusively available to them in the Lot.

RESEARCHING BRITISH MIGRANTS IN RURAL FRANCE

When I was ten-years old, I moved with my family from Britain to the United States. My experiences of living abroad, albeit in another English speaking country, were the beginnings of my interest in migration. As I grew older, I realized that my maternal family had its own history of migration; my grandfather had moved to Hong Kong from Wiltshire in the 1950s and married my grandmother, who had lived in Hong Kong all her life. My mother was born and stayed in Hong Kong until she was eighteen when she chose to go to university in England; she never went back to

² As Ardagh described, 'The word paysan denotes the whole social class of poor people who earn their living from the land, whether as farmers or labourers. It is a less archaic and pejorative term than 'peasant'. 'Countryman' might be a fairer translation' (1973: 111).

Hong Kong to live. Then, in the early 1990s, my grandparents moved to England when my grandfather retired. The discovery of this family history led to my fascination with why people choose to migrate to other countries.

I had visited the Lot twice yearly from 2000 until 2003. On these occasions, I stayed with some close family friends who lived in the area. During my visits, I was introduced to other Britons living locally and I became aware of their various stories about migration and exposed to their opinions about why life in rural France was better than that offered by contemporary Britain. These stories enticed me to examine the phenomenon more deeply; I wanted to know why these Britons had moved and find out more about their lives in France. But it was in 2001, when I did an undergraduate course on the anthropology of migration that I realized the distinctiveness of the British living in the Lot. The literature that I had read about the British abroad seemed predominantly to examine International Retirement Migration. What had particularly caught my attention was that there seemed to be Britons of all ages living in the Lot. Indeed, the friends I lived with had moved to the Lot as a family; the adults had still been of working age.

My subsequent fieldwork revealed that the British in the Lot were an even more diverse population than I had previously anticipated. They ranged in age from young children to people who were almost in the eighties. My respondents had made the decision to migrate at various points in their lives. Although there were a significant number of retirees, many of whom had taken early retirement, there were also those who had chosen to migrate when they were aged in their thirties and forties. I focussed on those who had migrated to the Lot in the last twenty years mainly because I encountered many of these relatively recent migrants during my fieldwork. As I discuss later in this introduction, my decision to live for the duration of my fieldwork with a family who had moved to the Lot in the early 1990s influenced whom I met. At the start of my research, they acted as gatekeepers, introducing me to other Britons they knew in the area,

most of who had migrated from the mid-1990s onward.

Age was not the only signifier of diversity among the population; the timing of my respondents' migration revealed that there were various features of their lives back in Britain that influenced this decision to migrate. Some of these were specific to individuals, but in some cases, wider societal concerns also had an impact. By mapping British migration to the Lot in terms of the time of arrival and the age of my respondents, I highlight the different economic, social, and political contexts behind the migrants' decisions to migrate. To a greater and lesser degree, the migrants' narratives implied that these events impacted on their decision to migrate. The following description gives a broad picture of how the migrants felt about the economic, social and, to a lesser degree, political contexts of their lives in Britain. This provides a preliminary insight into some of the themes that arise in my later discussions examining the decision to migrate.

For those who chose to migrate in the late 1980s and 1990s, there was clear evidence that the economic recession that hit the United Kingdom in the late 1980s had had an impact on their decision to move to France. Many of these migrants, who were often below state retirement age, had been made redundant (or chosen to take voluntary redundancy) back in Britain, but by selling their properties or cashing in their savings they were able to accumulate enough economic capital to move to rural France. As my respondents told me, at this time property in the Lot was cheap, not only in comparison to Britain, but also compared to other French *département* such as the Dordogne and Provence. In addition, these early migrants told me that in the late 1980s, their working environments had become highly pressurized and geared towards promotion on the basis of achievement rather than years of service. They had not liked these changes as they had felt that their lives were becoming more about work than they wanted them to be.

Later migrants, those migrating from the mid-1990s until 2003, experienced different events leading up to their migration. During this period, a large number of retirees migrated. Their stories about the decision to migrate often revealed that they had made money by running their own businesses, but had decided to sell these to fund their retirement lifestyles. Unlike their compatriots who had migrated earlier, they had profited from the entrepreneurial spirit that had taken hold of Britain in the 1990s. By the time of their migration, property prices in the Lot had begun to increase, so they needed more capital to buy property than their predecessors. But, as their lifestyles following migration revealed, they had kept enough money aside to live comfortably in rural France. Their favourable financial situation was also the result of the rising property prices back in Britain; they had often sold their homes there at a considerable profit.

The rising property prices in Britain had also influenced the younger migrants moving at this time. In their case, however, this was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it meant that they had the capital to buy property in the Lot. On the other hand, it was because of the overall cost of living that they had chosen to leave Britain in the first place; they found that they could not easily afford to achieve their aspirations if they remained in Britain. They invested the money from the sale of their homes in the southeast of England both in their properties, but also in establishing businesses, with the hope that these would provide them with a source of continuous income. Their emphasis on the desire to continue working in the Lot revealed a further motivation behind their migration that was not shared by either the retirees or earlier migrants: they had had enough of working for other people. As they explained to me, they wanted to be in control of their working environment. Back in Britain, the high cost of living meant that it was costly to set up businesses while in France their overheads were cheaper.

How the migrants perceived the current social context in Britain at the time of their migration also influenced the decision to migrate. This was particularly apparent in the case of the retirees, who frequently stressed their overwhelming concern that British society did not value older people. In many cases, their families had not lived close to them, so they had not had regular interaction with their children and grandchildren. In contrast, they believed that in rural France older people were valued to a greater degree. The number of these older people on the streets of the local French towns and villages also indicated to them that the lifestyle in the French countryside was conducive to living longer.

The younger migrants moving at the same time as these retirees also discussed how the social context had influenced their decision to migrate. They had grown tired of the constant one-upmanship among their friends, but had also disliked the lack of community in their neighbourhoods, where they had found it increasingly difficult to get to know their closest neighbours due to long working hours and high fences around properties. Just as the retirees had stated, they felt that British society was in decline. Indeed, earlier migrants had also drawn attention to this when they had described how they were worried about their children growing up in Britain, citing possible threats such as bullying and paedophilia.

This brief account of the broad political, economic, and social contexts of the migrants' lives before migration provides an initial indicator of the various considerations that lie behind the decision to migrate. As the examples and discussion in chapter two and three highlight, this is a complex decision, which ultimately had an impact on how my respondents lived after migration. By drawing attention to the diverse contexts of their lives back in Britain, I demonstrate that it is important to recognize that essentialized understandings of these migrants undermine the inherent heterogeneity not only of their lives before migration, but also their lives in the Lot.

The ethnographic information upon which this thesis is based was collected during a 12-month period of field research in the Lot. My first period of extended research was for nine months, between December 2003 and September 2004. I then returned to the field for three months in summer 2005. These extended periods of deep, interactive research allowed me to carry out more in-depth investigations of the migrants' narratives and lives (cf. Marcus and Fischer 1986; Geertz 1993; Gupta and Ferguson 1997). This reflects the nature of ethnography, which, as Marcus and Fischer (1986) argue, is interpretive. I believe that the time between my two periods of research allowed me to reflect on the material I have collected on my fieldwork, and therefore after my return visit, I was able to focus on the consolidation and verification of this knowledge.

For the duration of my fieldwork, I chose to live with my family friends. I am very grateful that they allowed me to share their lives with them, not least because of the amount of participant observation that this living situation allowed. From the moment they got up until the time they went to bed, I could observe and participate in many aspects of their daily lives. They were willing, as they had been in my earlier visits, to introduce me to their friends and acquaintances in the Lot. In the first month, while I settled into my fieldwork, they made sure that invitations from their friends to join them for social events included me. And it was through their introductions that I soon built up a group of respondents; each person that I interviewed in turn passed on the details of at least one other Briton living in the area.

Undoubtedly, my position and previous experiences in the field influence the insights I reveal in this thesis. Living with my friends, who had lived in the Lot for thirteen years and had migrated as a family, I realized that not all Britons living overseas are retirement migrants and through their personal introductions, I soon met migrants of all ages. I argue that had the situation been different, I may not have focussed so sharply on the diversity of the British population in the Lot.

In addition, without my friends, attempts to contact the Britons living locally would have been a lot more difficult and complicated. This is in part because these migrants socialize mainly in private homes. There were very few public places where Britons regularly congregated; this is in stark contrast to the experience of O'Reilly (2000) who initially tracked down the British living on the Costa del Sol in bars and clubs. I had tried to get in contact with potential respondents in other ways, but these had been largely unsuccessful. I placed an advertisement in the window of the *boulangerie* (bakery) in the local village, but the only response was from a fellow researcher carrying out a study of bilingual children. I also sent emails and made telephone calls to those migrants who advertised businesses in the classified section of the French News (an English language newspaper produced and distributed in France). While I had two responses, the other twenty or so enquiries never came to anything, despite my repeated attempts at contact.

Once I had made initial communication with potential respondents, I would arrange an interview to discuss why they had chosen to move to the Lot. During these interviews, I adopted an informal interviewing technique, using non-structured, non-interrogative, informant-led interviewing. I interviewed forty-nine British residents of the Lot in total at this initial stage. Many of my respondents had migrated as married couples, with or without children, and my interviews reflected this trend, as I often conducted interviews with both partners present. In principle, this meant that they had equal opportunities to respond to questions (Brannen 1988). However, in this situation there was always a possibility that one partner would dominate the discussion; as various authors have argued, women often feel inhibited during joint interviews (see for example Pahl and Pahl 1971; Jordan, James, Kay and Redley 1992; McKee and O'Brien 1983). I remained aware of these potential disadvantages in my technique throughout the interviewing process, and on occasions when I felt that one partner was dominating the discussion, I would actively encourage the other partner to participate. I must emphasize, however, that these

occasions were extremely rare. The dynamics between husband and wife more often provided rich and detailed accounts of daily life in the Lot and the events leading up to the decision to migrate. In my experience, as Edgell (1980) argues, joint interviewing helped with the establishment of rapport, and provided respondents with a sense of confidence. The technique was also useful because one partner would often prompt the other with anecdotes and in the process a more complex account would emerge (cf. Seymour, Dix, and Eardley 1995).

Over the two periods of research, I carried out seventy-five unstructured interviews, in addition to extensive participant observation. These ranged from one to four hours in length. I often recorded these on a digital voice recorder, which meant that I did not take notes during the interviews. I argue that the inconspicuousness of the recorder (it was only 10 cm by 4 cm) and my decision not to take notes helped the uninterrupted flow of interviews and helped my respondents to feel at ease. As they often told me at the end of interviews as I reached across tables to retrieve the recorder, they had forgotten that I was interviewing them. Once I returned to my house, I would transcribe the interviews and record the key points of the interviews within my field diary.

Although the migrants had often given me information over the telephone, I felt it was important to meet face-to-face, and often arranged to visit them in their own homes. This choice of location was beneficial for a number of reasons. For a start, my journeys to their homes were interesting as they made me think about where these were situated i.e. how close they were to other houses, villages, and towns. Indeed, the amount of travelling I did around the *département* made me reflect on my initial description of my participants as a 'community'; the British living in the Lot were so dispersed that it soon became apparent that they did not exist as a geographically located 'community' (cf. King and Patterson 1998). This dispersal also meant that, in the absence of official records, it was difficult to assess how many Britons lived in the Lot.

Furthermore, carrying out these interviews in my respondents' homes helped me to develop a more critical awareness of the lives they led in rural France. While many of them explained to me that they were trying to live like the French, the objects in their homes, their routines and habits, indicated to me that they still had a long way to go. I remember visiting Julian and Janet Ford's house for the first time and thinking, as I surveyed the living room, how quintessentially English it appeared to be. All the shelves, tabletops, and dressers were home to pottery figurines and other ornaments. There were other cases where I walked into people's homes and recognized the old English furniture, slightly misplaced in the old French houses that many of the British residents of the Lot lived in.

It initially struck me as slightly unusual that some of my respondents kept to a seemingly rigid routine about when to drink tea. For example, each time I visited Hannah Blunden, she would wait until 11 a.m. (I only ever visited her in the morning) before offering me a cup of tea. Connie and Harry Earl were the same; they drank tea with breakfast, then at 11 a.m., had a cup following lunch at 2 p.m., and a final cup at 4 p.m. The more I thought about it, the more these routines came to demonstrate that some of my respondents continued to maintain British habits, or at least habits which I consider to be stereotypically British, despite stating that they wanted to become like the French. As I discuss later in this thesis, the contents of their store cupboards provided further insights into the extent to which they had achieved their explicitly stated ambitions of living in France. Tea again figured highly for, as many of them complained, although it was slowly becoming easier, it remained difficult to get the tea that they wanted from the French supermarkets.

Perhaps the most telling object in my respondents' homes were the satellite dishes and digital decoders that enabled them to receive British television in their French homes. Not all of the migrants had them, but those that did justified them in a variety of ways. The most common excuses were that French television was poor and there was too much

advertising on French channels. I found that these explanations were often redundant because some of the migrants had never even tried to connect the aerials receiving French broadcasts to their televisions. The migrants never told me what I thought might be the real reason behind their decision to watch British television, that the French television was difficult for them to understand. My feeling was that, although this may be the case, they were reluctant to tell me because they were afraid that I would judge them negatively. After all, the image of Britons living in their renovated French farmhouses, watching the BBC, evokes images that strike a chord with images of the colonials. However, as I explain later in this thesis, this form of migration is much more complex than these stereotypical depictions reveal.

On reflection, I believe that receiving British television provides many Britons living abroad with a highly-valued link to Britain, but that this can fundamentally impede the extent to which they adapt to their new environment. The degree to which this impacts on the migrants lives depends on the amount of time migrants spend watching it, and what other sources they refer to e.g. whether they watch local television stations and read local newspapers. For example, I found that it was often the case that, unless it was reported on BBC News, many of my respondents would not know what was going on in France. Many of these moving to France with their young children had told me that while they had felt that Britain was not a safe place for their children (after all, look at the number of children who go missing), they considered that France was safer. I was stunned that they failed to take into account the recently reported (in the French news) conviction of all the adults in a village near Poitiers on the grounds of paedophilia. Alongside other indicators, such as the absence of French newspapers and magazines in my respondents' homes, this gave me evidence suggesting that, in some cases, there was very little inter-cultural communication between the British living in France and the French.

My choice to carry out interviews in the migrants' homes also gave me opportunities to witness first hand some of their interactions with members of the local French population. This was useful to me because it gave me the chance to really gauge the degree to which my respondents could communicate with the French. For example, when people came to the front door or telephoned, my respondents often had to think on their feet, so to speak. In some cases, there was evidence of hesitation and lack of understanding on the part of the migrants, but in other cases, it was clear that they had really been working hard to improve and develop their French. For example, I was with Sally Stampton one day when the vet rang to tell her that the operation on her dog's leg had gone well. Sally kept the vet on the telephone for a while, asking further questions about the procedure and the recovery process. This evidence confirmed to me that Sally really was determined to make life in France work for her and her son, and an important part of this, as she told me time and again, was being able to speak French fluently.

Although my visits to the migrants' homes revealed the extent to which they were still attached to their British habits, routines, and products, I also, as the previous example illustrates, gained insights which indicated that many of my respondents were adopting practices they associated with being French. For example, my respondents had invariably adopted the French practice of having an aperitif before dinner. They were often keen to try local wines and liquors (some had even attempted to distil their own with fruit from their gardens which was something that many of the local French did), and would encourage guests to try these regional specialities too. I also witnessed how some of them drank with both lunch and dinner, justifying it to me on the grounds that this was how the French drank. Their daily meals also reflected what they associated with being French, and often included a salad course. Indeed, one of my overwhelming memories of my time in France is eating lettuce every day. And then there was the bread, bought fresh from the *boulangerie* (bakery), to accompany each meal. Undeniably, these aspects of life are derived from the stereotypes of

the French in the British imagination. I do not question whether these aspects really are a part of life for most French people; what I find interesting is that the British living in the Lot draw on them as signifiers that they are beginning to live French lives.

Finally, although they were in a minority, there were migrants who had chosen to furnish their houses with French furniture. For example, Martin and Sarah Johnstone, who ran a bed and breakfast, explained how they had visited second-hand furniture fairs to fill their houses with traditional French furniture. As I witnessed, this furniture really did fit in with the architecture and simple, rustic style of their restored French farmhouse. Lucy and Jasper Pinson, who were in the process of renovating their house, which included a tower that had, so they told me, been built by the Knights Templar, had also chosen to furnish their house with old French furniture. The material evidence in these homes spoke volumes, indicating that these two couples had taken the time to explore the features that made these properties quintessentially French. This is not to say that other migrants did not have this same knowledge, but in these two cases, it was written on the homes themselves for all to see. While the material culture within the migrants' homes often gave an initial glimpse into their lives, I gained more detailed insights from the interviews I conducted. These were a useful ethnographic tool; they gave my respondents the sense that I was a credible researcher and gave me further access to the field. The rapport I built up during interviews resulted in opportunities to carry out participant observation; the interviews also allowed the migrants' individual interpretations to emerge, inspiring insights that I might otherwise not have considered (cf. O'Reilly 2000; Oliver 2002). Early on in my research, I realized that my respondents were very keen to talk about themselves, sharing many aspects of their lives with me. During my repeated visits to their homes, I was able to compile their life histories and build up a bank of narratives relating to their lives before and after migration. This rich empirical data has been an invaluable source of knowledge about the migrants' lives, which has subsequently informed the description and

analysis that I present in this thesis.

The value of collecting and analysing narrative has been highlighted by many qualitative researchers (see for example Mitchell 1981; Polkinghorne 1988; Maines 1993; Orbuch 1997). Indeed, as a ubiquitous feature of daily life, narrative analysis can reveal a lot about the authors of particular accounts as well as the content. Recently, narrative analysis has been concerned with examining the project of the reflexive self (cf. Giddens 1991; Polkinghorne 1991; Rosenwald 1992; Maines 1993; Ochs and Capp 2001; Jackson 2002). Investigating people's accounts in this way is based on the premise that people tell stories and present narratives about their lives in order to produce a coherent life history. As a process, the narrative project strives to make rational sense of the events in the individual's life. Each narrative within the project is specific to a particular point in time and history. The production of the self is thus never complete; it is a continuous process. But the paradox is that this leads to a feeling of emptiness, incompleteness within the individual. Indeed, although the project is to provide some logical progression to life, the examination of the accounts that make up this project reveals the many contradictions, the actual lack of coherence in people's lives. But in an age that values coherence and rationale above all else, authors of narratives try to conceal these contradictions.

In this thesis, I draw on the narratives of my respondents extensively. The information these narratives entailed provided me with unique insights into the study of subjectivity and how the self is reflexively (re)constructed over time. While I do not conduct narrative analysis, I have incorporated the content of these narratives – the examples and revelatory incidents described in them – in my ethnography. Furthermore, the theory behind the use of narratives within qualitative research complements my analysis of the British living in the Lot, in particular with respect to the role narratives can play in people's lives.

Of particular pertinence to the case of the British living in the Lot is the idea that performing narrative is a way that individuals regain or augment the sense that they have control over their lives (Becker 1997; Ochs and Capp 2001; Frank 2002; Jackson 2002). Narratives can help in the construction of a sense of continuity and the maintenance of a sense of direction in a world which is increasingly flexible and fragmented (Giddens 1991; Bauman 1995; Sennett 1998; Burkitt 2005). As an intrinsic part of daily life, individual's accounts may operate to construct and maintain meaning, to create understanding of the self and the social world (Bruner 1990; Gergen and Gergen 1988, Langellier & Peterson 2004). The evidence for this is found in the way that narratives resolve the individual's feelings of uncertainty. It is unsurprising therefore, that the role narratives play in poignant events in people's lives has been the focus of much scholarly interest. One example of this has been the focus on narrative within the context of health and illness (see for example, Kleinman 1988, 1995; Frank 1995, 1998; Garro and Mattingley 1999; Greenhalgh and Hurwitz 1998; Hurwitz, Greenhalgh, and Skultans 2004). But as Burkitt highlights, there are other 'periods of crisis... which became the locus of change and transformation' (2005: 104). The example that Burkitt (2005) uses is losing a job. As I discuss further in chapters two and three, my respondents' accounts often revealed that the decision to migrate coincided with a major change, such as retirement and redundancy, in their lives, which could be considered as a 'period of crisis' (Burkitt 2005: 104). Equally, their lives in rural France are full of uncertainty and so narrative continues to be a central feature of their lives.

There is a further point that can be taken from narrative analysis, the idea of incompleteness. As this thesis demonstrates, British migrants in the Lot continue to tell their stories, stressing that they have never quite achieved their goals for life in rural France. Their accounts, as I discuss them, reveal how my respondents wish to be seen (cf. Jackson 2002). Their stories about life in rural France are this part of the project of the reflexive self, through which they continually reinvent themselves. In this respect, it

would be surprising if they ever reached their goals. Maybe it was for this very reason that people seemed very willing to talk to me about their lives, and I felt that rapport was established quickly.

Looking back on those early days in the field, I realize that people positioned me as they would a new migrant. As several of them explained, friendships quickly built up among them and it was often the case that 'veterans' would take newcomers under their wing, showing them what was so great about living in rural France. Indeed, in many ways, I resembled them – I was British and had moved to the Lot (albeit temporarily). That my experiences of entering the field echoed those of my respondents allowed me in part to experience the way that the migrants had learned how to live in the Lot; indeed, the comparisons of my experiences with the lives of my respondents often formed the basis of discussions we had in later interviews. This highlights that personal involvement is an important characteristic of fieldwork (Okely 1994; Wolcott 1995; Grimshaw 2001) that encourages empathetic understanding (Okely 1992, 1994, 2001; Clifford 1997). The difference was that I did not go and live as a Briton in the Lot; if I had done that, I may have serendipitously encountered only a handful of Britons during my stay.

In the early days, my respondents often turned my interviews around on me, asking me what I liked about living in the Lot, and joking that I was just there for an extended holiday, enjoying the weather and the wine. I argue that these jokes reflected their concerns about how other people saw them and the motivations behind their decision to migrate (see also chapter six). As I returned to their homes time and again, they told me more details about their lives; in some cases, this was information that I would never choose to repeat because it was so intimate. This establishment of rapport was also aided by providing help to my respondents. This included giving lifts to those who did not drive, carrying out internet searches for those without computers, and producing marketing material for those who ran gîte.

Over time, I received invitations to dinner parties, lunches and coffee in Cahors (the local town), and other outings with my respondents. Although I continued interviewing, these other events gave me the opportunity for further participant observation. This was an important aspect of my research because it allowed me to verify what the migrants had told me in interviews. For example, one of my respondents told me that he spoke French well but, while we drank coffee one afternoon the telephone rang and he struggled to understand what the French woman on the other end of the phone was saying; in the end he passed the receiver to me to see if I could understand what she wanted.

During my research, I found that my respondents in the Lot constantly talked to me about their lives in rural France and their initial decision to migrate. I was aware that these were stories that they told their friends and families back in Britain and elsewhere, their compatriots in the Lot, and the local French. Their narratives demonstrated their preoccupation with the changes that migration had brought to their lives and to those of others. They thus provided their own insights into and explanations of British migration to the Lot. It is thus that my analysis throughout this thesis is informed by their theories.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

In the following chapters, I examine my respondents' stories about their migration and their lives in the Lot. Each of the six ethnographic chapters discusses a different feature of the migrants' stories in order to provide a complex account of their reasons for choosing to migrate. The last chapter draws together earlier discussions to analyze British migration to the Lot. I argue within the conclusion that their migration and subsequent experiences of life are framed by particular cultural considerations. My intention in presenting this theoretically informed discussion at the end of the thesis is to allow more general conclusions to emerge from the preceding, more ethnographically based, chapters.

In chapter two, I introduce my respondents, outlining the circumstances that led to their migration. The presentation of this general sociological background is a response to previous studies, which treat the British living in each area of rural France as a homogeneous group (see for example Buller and Hoggart 1994a; Barou and Prado 1995). I also highlight the British middle class origins of my respondents, but emphasize that the migrants' expectations (and imaginings) and experiences of life in rural France are related to the events leading to their migration. These are varied. As I argue, the differences in the migrants' aspirations for, and approaches to, life in the Lot are linked to the time of their migration and their position in the life course at this point (i.e. whether they were retiring or had young families). I therefore describe the characteristics of four different groups of migrants: the pioneers, the family migrants, the retirement migrants, and the mid-life migrants. This model of British migration to the Lot provides a framework for the proceeding chapters.

I focus on how my respondents explain their migration in chapter three. While the realization that they could have a different (and better) way of life than they had in Britain prompted migration, this realization was provoked by different events. In many cases, my respondents had experienced or anticipated a change in their lives that brought them to the decision to migrate. The migrants' stories about life back in Britain show that they had felt that their individual agency was limited in some way. In contrast, they present their lives in the Lot as a way of escaping the constraints that they had been under back in Britain. Drawing on the different groups of Britons living in the Lot that I described in chapter two, I show here how members of each group describe in similar ways the limitations to the lives they led in Britain and the events that led them to recognize these.

Chapter four is an exploration of the way my respondents discuss their relationships with the rural French landscape. Ambivalence characterizes how they relate to their new surroundings. On the one hand, they want to

gaze on the local landscape and the people who live within it. The migrants' descriptions reveal that they imagine the Lotoise landscape as a rural idyll. On the other hand, they strive to show that they live within this landscape. Although they had originally imagined that this would be simple, living in the Lot they quickly realize that getting to this point takes a lot of time and effort. The ethnographic examples in this chapter therefore demonstrate that the landscape becomes meaningful (rather than symbolic) to the migrants both because of their cultural imaginings and lived experiences of the landscape; the different way of life that they seek is thus specifically available to them in the Lot.

Chapter five continues the theme of ambivalence, showing that uncertainty is a persistent feature of the migrants' lives following migration. My respondents' ambivalence is evident in their discussions of 'Europe', and its impact on their lives, and how they contrast their imaginings of (and preparations for) life in France with their experiences of the reality of living in the Lot. In particular, the chapter argues that the source of the migrants' ambivalence is the conflict between their desire for a different way of living, characterized by its traditional features (i.e. community spirit, living closer to nature), and their realization that they cannot live without certain aspects of modern life. The British living in the Lot are thus in an ambiguous position as privileged European actors who choose to become marginal. As chapters six and seven show, they attempt to resolve these feelings of ambivalence in their everyday lives by distinguishing themselves from others.

In chapter six I thus examine how the migrants promote their lives as distinctive through their presentations of tourists and other Britons living abroad as leading indistinct or destructive lives. On one hand, the migrants' narratives demonstrate their belief that tourists living in the Lot do not have the knowledge of how to live there. They show that they had had to explain the basics of life in the Lot to these visitors. They equally stress how Britons living in the Dordogne and Spain do not try and live

within the landscape, thus remaining separate from the local population. Their criticisms of these others reveal that a different way of life is characterized, in part, by successful integration into the local population. On the other hand, the migrants' narratives demonstrate their perception that the presence of tourists and their compatriots in other migration destinations brings destruction to the distinct way of life on offer. As I argue, how my respondents talk about these others reflects their uncertainties about the lives they lead in the Lot; they are well aware, for example, that other people talk about them in similar ways. Their discussions of tourists and other Britons as indistinct and destructive are therefore a way that my respondents attempt to displace their own feelings of ambivalence.

I discuss the migrants' efforts to show that the way of life that they aspire to is distinctive in detail in chapter seven. In order to show this, I contextualize my respondents' discussions of their compatriots in the Lot within the broader concept of authenticity. On the one hand, there are those among their compatriots who they imply lead less authentic lives than them. On the other hand, there are others whose lives they aspire towards. They present these others as leading more authentic lives than those they lead, by describing them as integrated and settled members of the local community. Therefore, I argue that the migrants' pursuit of a different way of life is in fact a quest for 'authentic living'. As their narratives show, this quest remains a quintessential feature of their daily lives following migration.

In the conclusion, I draw together the themes raised in the previous chapters to explain what the migrants achieve by living in the Lot. I show that the constant pursuit of different is how the migrants' strive to overcome their feelings of ambivalence. As I argue, the process of achieving a distinct and authentic way of life is how the migrants augment their agency; in rural France they believe that they can (eventually) regain full control over their lives, which they felt, had been constrained in Britain.

But the longer they live in the Lot, the more they realize they still have to learn if they are to achieve their goals. It seems that there is always 'more' to life.

CHAPTER 2: FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE

In this chapter, I discuss some of the characteristics of my respondents' migration, focussing on the similarities and differences between them. This reveals the diversity of the lives they led prior to migration, a point largely overlooked in previous studies of the British living in rural France (see for example Buller and Hoggart 1994a; Barou and Prado 1995). Indeed, the migrants themselves recognize that, while they have the similar expectations of their lives in the Lot, this does not mean that they came to the decision to migrate from the same route. As Susan Sparrow, a retiree living in the Lot, told me, 'We all want a different way of life, but we're all from different walks of life'. This acknowledgement of heterogeneity among the migrants builds on previous explanations for British migration to France, which conclude that it is the search for a particular lifestyle (see for example Buller and Hoggart 1994a; Barou and Prado 1995; cf. O'Reilly 2007b). At the same time, it echoes the findings of earlier studies of International Retirement Migration (see for example King and Patterson 1998; Warnes, King, Williams, and Patterson 1999). As King and Patterson state in the case of British retirees living in rural Italy, 'people have come to Tuscany through many geographical, career and life pathways' (1998: 157). Similarly, studies of Britons living in Spain, a popular migration destination, recognize the diverse backgrounds of this population (see for example O'Reilly 2000; Oliver 2002).

Over the course of this chapter, I discuss the migrants in the framework of their lives before migration. I classify my respondents as belonging to one of four groups: the pioneers, the family migrants, the retirement migrants, and the mid-life migrants. These categorizations reflect how the British living in the Lot classify themselves and their compatriots living in the area. As I discuss in chapter seven, the processes of distinction that my respondents engage in is a further indicator of their position in the middle

class. The groups I describe also echo the classifications made by one of Buller and Hoggart's participants living in the Lot:

Crudely speaking there are: [1] retired or early retired who tend to integrate much more slowly... [2] the mid-life refugees like ourselves who make a lot of how well they have adjusted... [3] driftwood of the UK recession – younger and much poorer than previous groups (1994a: 115).

Although Buller and Hoggart (1994a) had this evidence of how migrants engage in processes of distinction, they concluded that in the Lot, age, class status, and residential status had little impact on the social activities in which an individual took part. As I show in this chapter, when I carried out my research in 2004 and 2005, these features of the migrants' lives did impact on the activities in which they participated. For example, the retirement migrants were much more likely to socialize exclusively with other Britons than the mid-life migrants, who often spent a large amount of their time with the local French.

While all my respondents have in common their migration destination, their membership of the middle class, and their desire to lead a different way of life, I present the differences between them to show that they are not a homogeneous group. I describe the characteristics of each group of migrants below. My respondents in each group share the events that led to their decision to migrate, the approximate time of their arrival in the Lot, and their position in the life course at the time of their migration (i.e. whether they had a family, were middle-aged, retired etc.). I group the migrants based on observable sociological characteristics and the stories that they told me. As I argue, their shared sociological background leads members of a group to hold in common their expectations and aspirations for life in the Lot.

My treatment of these categories may initially appear rigid, but, as I show, sometimes people do not fully fit in to the groups I describe. Therefore, the model allows for a degree of fluidity. I see this classification as a conceptual tool that will provide some clarity to the ethnographic chapters

that follow. Using this model, I introduce my respondents, describe some of the features of their lives before migration, and suggest how these influenced their decision to migrate and their imaginings of life in rural France.

CLASS AND BRITISH MIGRATION TO RURAL FRANCE

I identify my respondents in the Lot as members of the British middle class (cf. Buller and Hoggart 1994a; Barou and Prado 1995). This is based on my knowledge of their educational background and occupational status back in Britain, and their self-categorization in the context of their narratives and their comparisons with others. The class status of British migrants in rural France has similarly been noted by Buller and Hoggart (1994a), who state that through migration to rural France, Britons reclaim a class values no longer attainable in Britain, and Barou and Prado (1995) who stress that the search for 'quality of life' is a specifically middle class endeavour. Casado-Díaz, Kaiser, and Warnes similarly argue that Britons choosing to move abroad – in their case retirees – have the affluence of the middle class; international retirement migration thus, 'remains selective of the more affluent and is strongly patterned by the socio-economic background of the migrants' (2004: 362). My argument also reflects O'Reilly's definition of lifestyle migrants as, 'relatively affluent individuals, moving, en masse... to countries where the cost of living and/or the price of property is cheaper; places which, for various reasons, signify something loosely defined as quality of life' (2007a: page not given).

I adopt Bourdieu's (1984) discussion of distinction to explain how the migrants' stories demonstrate their middle class status. Bourdieu (1984) argues that distinction is characteristic of middle class engagement in class reproduction. Although he focussed on the French case, I argue that that his examination can shed some light on the experiences of my British middle class respondent living in rural France. As I explain in chapter six, in their narratives they take great pains to distinguish their lives from those

of their compatriots back in Britain and those living in other migration destinations and more locally in the Lot. Their class status of my respondents is also evident in their common motivation to lead a different, or distinctive way of life; resonating with Bourdieu's (1984) discussion of the middle class goal of achieving a distinctive lifestyle. Their middle class status informs the migrants' decision to migrate and their choice of destination. They choose to live in the Lot because they imagine that it offers them a distinctive way of life unattainable back in Britain.

TALKING ABOUT DIVERSITY

My respondents living in the Lot expressed the diversity among them in various ways. For example, Robert and Justine Harding told me, 'Everyone comes down here for different reasons', highlighting that a variety of motivations led to migration. There were also those who explained that their migration had led to them making otherwise unlikely friendships. As Martin and Sarah Johnstone stated, 'you tend to mix with people you might not necessarily have chosen to be friends with in England'. Others drew attention to the divisions among the British population living in the Lot. For example, Ron Stampton explained that 'being British is not enough to hold people together'; Susan and Trevor Sparrow similarly told me that just because everyone came to the Lot to lead a different life, it didn't mean that they all got along. Ron also told me that he felt that it was because he had different values that he did not enjoy the company of some of his compatriots living in the Lot. Each of these examples contains the implicit suggestion of diversity among the British population of the Lot.

The mid-life migrants were most likely to stress the differences between Britons living in the Lot in terms of their positions in the life course at the time of migration. For example, William and Victoria Cardew, a couple in their early forties, drew attention to the range of ages of the Britons living in the Lot when they told me, 'We know a lot of people who are out here and working; people with young families and stuff like that'; it was not, they

concluded, only retired people who moved. William and Victoria implicitly suggest that they, and others like them, were different to retirement migrants. Indeed, as I argue later in this chapter, the lives led by family and mid-life migrants resembled one another, while the retirement migrants led noticeably different lives.

Jon and Kay Morris, also mid-life migrants, talked about the different motivations of their compatriots living locally:

There are the ones that want to come over because they've got English friends in the area and they know they'll mix, and the circle will be within the English group. And then you'll have the others. I mean, we know English people who are on the edge, and you touch that group as well. And then you'll have people who will move to a very rural part of France where it's literally French, although it's getting harder and harder to think of places that haven't been invaded... some people just come here because they know English people... they're not worried about whether they speak French at all. They've got Sky TV and they don't have French TV. They couldn't tell you what's going on in France.

As I witnessed, these different motivations behind migration impacted on the experiences of life in the Lot that my respondents in the different groups had. Although I came across a few Britons who had bought homes in the area because they had friends locally, most of these were second-home owners. Many of my respondents however, had inadvertently (or so they told me) bought houses in areas that attracted many Britons. The result was that they had easily met their compatriots and developed small groups of British friends and acquaintances within the locality. This was most evident among the retirement migrants. There were also many Britons who were 'on the edge', socializing with both their compatriots, but also making an effort with the local French population. The family and mid-life migrants occupied this position to a greater and lesser extent. Finally, Jon highlighted that some people live in remote places where there are only French inhabitants. I came across no migrants who were so detached from their compatriots living locally. However, I argue that many of the

mid-life migrants socialized with their French neighbours at least as often as with other Britons.

This brief discussion gives some insight into the different groups of Britons living in the Lot. In Jon's account, he implies that there are different ways of living in the Lot; there are the people who socialize exclusively with their compatriots, those who integrate fully into the French population, and others who are in-between these two positions. As I demonstrate throughout this thesis, most of my respondents in the Lot occupy the ambiguous position between integrating and not integrating. However, I argue in this chapter that the degree to which they integrate or not depends, in part, on which group they belong to. For example, the retirement migrants appear to find it much more difficult to communicate with the local French, and so their stories predominantly reveal that they socialize almost exclusively with the British. The mid-life migrants, at the opposite end of the spectrum, seem to be much closer to members of the local population.

In the classifications I draw out below, I do not intend to make a judgement on the value of one position over and above the other. Instead, it is my aim to show how experiences of life in the Lot are influenced by a number of factors. Primarily, the migrants' aspirations and expectations of life in rural France result from the events leading up to migration and their age at arrival in the Lot. However, it is also the case that where my respondents decide to live, and the activities in which they choose to participate, impact on their experiences of living in the Lot.

THE BRITISH WHO MIGRATE TO THE LOT

Jon and Kay identified how the three different types of migrants were attracted to different features of the life available to them in the Lot. Simply, these were: having British friends living in the area, the possibility of living in isolation from other Britons, and a combination of the two. Further to this, Jon and Kay identify the basic social interactions that

people engage in following migration. In addition, examining the migrants' narratives revealed that a transformation in their lives often influenced the decision to migrate. For example, many of the family migrants had been made redundant at a time in their life that was ordinarily characterized by work and providing for the family financially, leading them to question what to do next. The retirement migrants anticipated a change in their lives following retirement and took control of this through migration. The mid-life migrants realized that they did not want to continue working the long and thankless hours that were a feature of their working lives in Britain until they either reached retirement or burnt out.

The model that I present below describes the characteristics of the four groups of Britons living in the Lot: the pioneers, family migrants, retirement migrants, and mid-life migrants. In each case, I outline when they migrated, their position in the life course, the general events that brought them to the decision to migrate, and broadly describe the characteristics of their lives following migration.

The pioneers

The group of Britons migrating to the Lot that all my respondents recognize are 'the pioneers'.¹ They arrived in the Lot between the 1950s and the late 1980s. I would describe them as bohemian, choosing to lead (then) unconventional lives. My reference to these migrants as 'pioneers' reflects how subsequent migrants see them as trailblazers, implying that they were the first contemporary Britons to live in the Lot. It is also an appropriate description because many of my respondents held them up as an example to follow. Indeed, as I discuss in chapter seven, the pioneers had achieved a mythical status in the minds of their compatriots living in the Lot.

My own experience of migrants in this group was limited and much of the description that follows is an amalgamation of what other Britons told me. I

¹ This does not mean that there were no Britons living in the Lot before this group; indeed, the Lot has a long history with England, being one area of France that England lost during the 100 years war.

found that these migrants were elusive. Many of them were women who had married local French men and, taking their husband's surnames, they literally disappeared; unless they wanted to be found it was like looking for a needle in a haystack! There were also a few single men and one couple within this group.

On the rare occasion when I did encounter one of these early migrants, they expressed interest in my research but did not feel that they wanted to contribute. For example, when I briefly returned to the field in 2005, I attended a party where I met Sue, a woman who had been living in the Lot for over twenty years. I asked if I could meet up with her again, and she told me that she wasn't interested. As I questioned her further about why she would not talk to me about her experiences of migration, she told me that she had nothing in common with later migrants; she was different. Although I explained to her that I was interested in the diversity of the British residents of the Lot, she still refused to give me an interview. Her brief comments revealed that she held stereotypical ideas about other Britons living in the area, as she told me they did not speak French or socialize with the local population while she did. I show later in this thesis, that the emphasis on how her life was distinct from those led by her compatriots is also used by other Britons living in the Lot. As I argue in chapter seven, distinguishing themselves from other migrants, is how the migrants claim that their lives are distinctive.

Other migrants in this group were a couple who had settled in the Lot thirty years previously. I was briefly introduced to them during the night market and dinner in a nearby village. I did not have much of a chance to speak to them, but I watched as they greeted many of the French residents of the village. This was an unusual sight; many of my respondents only had a handful of French acquaintances.

The exact age of 'the pioneers' at the point of arrival in the Lot was more difficult to ascertain, reliant as I was on secondary data. However, I have reason to believe that many of them were in their twenties or early thirties.

My respondents' narratives about these early migrants often presented them as single women who married French men and then had children. This strongly suggests that they were below a particular age when they migrated. The only exception to this was the British couple I bumped into at the night market. Harold and Min Jones told me that this couple were artists (cf. Barou and Prado 1995). They had ended up living in the Lot by accident when their caravan broke down there one summer. At the time, they had been in the process of migrating from Britain to Spain; they never moved any further, buying a large house in the village, from which they now run an art gallery. As Harold and Min told me, the local French accept them as part of their community; they have become relatively well-known artists, and their neighbours are proud that they live nearby because the gallery puts their village on the map.

My respondents in the Lot often depicted 'the pioneers' as being part of the local community. I argue that their reasons for migration influenced their experiences of life in the Lot. For instance, many of these migrants initially came to France, as Sue told me, 'to experience a different culture'. They therefore actively sought interaction with members of the local population. Additionally, at the time of their migration, Britons living in the Lot were few and far between. There was little opportunity for them to socialize with their compatriots. Now that they have lived and worked in France for between twenty-five and fifty years, maybe they do not feel the need to seek out other Britons.

As I discuss later in this thesis, it is apparent that these depictions of the pioneers have some significance for my respondents. I argue that these early migrants, who seem to be integrated members of the local population, lead the lives that many of my respondents aspire towards. I therefore include these descriptions here, precisely because they reveal what the migrants believe constitutes the different way of life that they seek.

Family migration

The second group of migrants moved as small family units. They bought property in the Lot between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s. As they explained to me, the decision to migrate was often influenced by considerations for their children. For example, it was common for them to tell me that living in the Lot provided a better life for their children, or explain that the house there was a place where they could spend more time together as a family. The timing of their migration, however, often coincided with a change in working status of one of the parents, such as redundancy or early retirement. This led me to believe that the circumstances in which this transformation occurred, and the impact the migrants anticipated it would have on their lives, also influenced their actions. At the time of migration, parents were aged from the late thirties to early fifties, while the ages of the children varied.

My respondents in this group include:

- Roger Hardcastle, who moved to the Lot in 1990 with his Czechoslovakian wife and her 11-year old daughter; this coincided with his early retirement in his fifties.
- James and Sian Harvey-Browne, who had previously lived on the outskirts of London, but migrated in 1993 when James was made redundant. At the time, they had four children under the age of eleven. They themselves were aged in their thirties. Since living in the Lot they have had a further two children. They now run a gîte (holiday rental cottage), and do occasional work such as gardening for other people.
- Trish and Tom Craven who moved to the Lot in 1991 with their 11-year old daughter. They had run a bed and breakfast near Gatwick, and Tom had worked as an electrician. Business was dwindling when they moved. While they initially ran a gîte in the Lot, they have recently given this up. Tom still works as an electrician and builder.
- Robert and Justine Grange who bought their house in 1989 to use as a family holiday home. At this time, they lived and worked in Hong Kong but their children were at school in Britain. Every summer they would try and spend as much time as possible together in the Lot as a family. In this respect, it was their primary familial residence. When they first bought the house, Robert and

Justine were aged in their forties. Upon retirement in 2002, they moved to live in the Lot permanently, where they now also run a gîte.

- Harold and Min Jones, who moved from the Suffolk countryside to the Lot when Harold took voluntary redundancy in 1987. They migrated with their three children, who were then all under the age of eleven. At this time both Harold and Min were aged in their forties. They now run a gîte.
- Harry and Connie Earl who moved from rural Lincolnshire to the Lot when Harry took early retirement in 1991. They took their two sons who were then aged 11 and 14 with them. Harry was in his forties and Connie in her thirties. They have run a gîte, which adjoins their house, since 1992.

It was not only the time and circumstances of their migration that my respondents shared; they held in common the area that they chose to live in. Apart from Roger Hardcastle, all migrants in this group live to the east of Cahors close to the river Lot. The landscape here is awesome, rugged, and dominated by immense limestone cliffs (see Figure 2.1). Rather than live in isolation, all of these migrants live in villages. These family migrants explained that one of the reasons they had chosen to live in villages was because they were well-serviced by public transport. They all lived within walking distance of the main road that ran along the Lot valley, and there was an hourly bus service to and from Cahors. As the migrants explained to me, this meant that their children could get to school on the bus, but it also meant that they had the freedom to go and see their friends in the town at weekends, without having to rely on their parents to transport them. Some of the adults also told me that the frequency of public transport would be more important to them as they grew older and could not drive everywhere.

Most of the family migrants had bought an old house in need of renovation. They did as much of the necessary work on the house by themselves. In the accounts of their lives immediately following migration, they stressed that they had wanted to save money. The renovations that they had to do to their house were often extensive. Harry and Connie spent the first winter with a leaking roof, which had to be completely

removed and replaced. Harold and Min told similar stories of how they had had to replace a lintel. In both cases, they and their families had continued to live in their houses while the work went on around them. I had the opportunity to speak to some of the children who had been brought to live in the Lot. They remembered the early days fondly, albeit stressing that times had been hard for their families. What they all told me, however, was that they believed their parents had been brave and adventurous to migrate from Britain to France at a time when it was not such a common thing to do.



Figure 2.1: Landscape to the east of Cahors

Because they could not yet receive their British pensions, and had used most of their capital from properties in Britain to buy their houses in France, money was often tight for the family migrants in the early days. Most of them had soon set up *gîte* or *chambre d'hôte* (bed and breakfast) once they arrived in the Lot in order to provide some income. For some of these migrants, even these establishments did not generate enough money to support their families comfortably. This led to them pursuing occasional work such as cleaning local hotel rooms, gardening, or working on the boats that ferried tourists up and down the river.

Most of the work that the family migrants took on was seasonal. They most often only opened up their *gîte* during the summer season because otherwise they would have to invest in central heating. As they often explained to me, they could not envisage people wanting to visit the Lot in

the wintertime when everything was closed, and when it could be quite cold. The seasonal nature of their income left many of the family migrants uncertain about whether they would have enough money to live from year to year. When I carried out my research in 2004, many of them struggled even to fill their gîte during the summer months. It seemed that there were not enough tourists to fill all the locally available holiday properties. Unlike their compatriots, the mid-life migrants, family migrants did not have plans beyond casual labour and the running of their establishments. They were also less well versed in marketing, and were struggling to promote their gîte while the mid-life migrants seemed to spend more time working on their marketing. My assessment of this is that the mid-life migrants had come from executive jobs, where they had had to use exactly the same skills they now needed to advertise their establishments successfully. The family migrants, who had often worked as teachers or civil servants did not have these talents.

Roger was the only family migrant who did not need an income in the Lot. Retiring early, he had been able to cash in his private pension. Similarly, while they still worked in Hong Kong, Robert and Justine had no need of additional income in rural France. However, neither Robert or Justine had pensions and when they retired, they bought two gîte to rent out.

According to the family migrants, until the late 1990s there were still very few Britons living in the Lot. As a result, migrants did not automatically socialize with their compatriots; they came across one another by chance. For example, Connie told me how she had bumped into Min in the local post office only days after Connie and her family had moved into their house. Min had already been living in the Lot for five years and rapidly became a valuable source of information and a good friend to Connie. Aside from these serendipitous encounters, however, these family migrants relied on the local community to help them establish themselves. Their children attended French schools and soon brought friends home. I argue that the children's socializing had a knock-on effect on the parents,

who had to spend some time speaking in French to other parents. However, even today many of my respondents from this group do not speak fluent French; while most of them have a good level of conversational French, they often told me that they were still not comfortable with their abilities, and that they found it tiring to try and speak French for any length of time.

In their recollections of their early life in the Lot, the adults who had migrated with young families in the late 1980s and early 1990s explained that they had hoped over time to become increasingly competent in French. Alongside this, they had dreamed that they would be able to interact more easily with the local population. However, for those whose children had now left home, they found that there were fewer opportunities for interaction with the French; everybody that they had previously met had been through their children. Harold and Min told me that they now did not really know any French people other than their neighbours, and they kept to themselves. Harry and Connie had made a handful of French friends in their village, but these were mostly incomers from Paris. Roger Hardcastle, and Robert and Justine Grange, who spoke French more fluently than other family migrants, appeared to have a higher level of interaction with members of the local French population. I argue that their confidence in speaking French meant that they were much more likely to approach members of the local community and show willing to participate in local events, while their fellow family migrants were more reticent.

As I mentioned previously, the quality of life that these migrants wanted for their families influenced the decision to migrate. Most of them had become disillusioned with life in Britain, which they believed had suffered under the Conservative government led by Thatcher and then Major. At the time of their migration, Britain was either in, or just emerging from, the recession, and they did not believe that the life on offer to them in Britain was what they wanted for their children. Rural France appeared to offer a better life and future (at a price they could afford) as well as presenting them with

the opportunity to spend more time together as a family now that the parents no longer worked full-time.

However, over time, the centrality of family in my respondents' lives has shifted as their children leave home. For many of the family migrants, this point in their life coincides with reaching retirement age. Without their children at home, and claiming their British pensions, these migrants have a higher disposable income and less need to generate more money. This means that they also have more time on their hands, and they seem to be making new friends both with other Britons (mostly retired) and members of the French population (although a lot of these are incomers to the area who moved from the towns and cities following retirement). They often form these new acquaintances through their membership of local clubs and associations, such as the village rambling and keep fit clubs, and the golf club. The paradox is that these French incomers are equally peripheral to the local community. Just as the British living in the Lot occupy an ambivalent position as powerful European actors who choose to lead marginal lives (see chapter five), the French incomers to the area are ambiguous because they are urban dwellers who choose to live in the rural.

I also include two single women in this group. They share in common with the family migrants the time of their migration, but they explained to me that their love of France and its culture (although this was very loosely defined in their narratives) motivated their actions. This enthusiasm for France, although not central to the accounts of my other respondents in this group was also evident in the accounts of Justine Grange and Roger Hardcastle; they had both had long relationships with France that resulted in the desire to live there. Similarly, both the women I discuss here had extensive prior knowledge and experience of French culture and language when they moved to the Lot.

- Jane Campbell moved in 1993, leaving her job as a French teacher. She had bought a house with Harry and Connie Earl in 1992, and has lived with them ever since. At this time, she was in her forties.

Living in the Lot, she works as a tour guide (in both French and English), gives occasional French lessons, and undertakes translation work.

- Hannah Blunden visited France in 1993 with the intention of buying a house. When she found the ideal house in the Lot she retired, leaving her job in Norway. At this time, she was in her late sixties.

In many ways, both Jane and Hannah bridge the gap between the pioneers and the family migrants. Both speak fluent French, which should mean that they integrate well with the local population. However, they still maintain strong links with other British residents; Jane through Connie and Harry, and Hannah through her involvement with the *Association France Grande-Bretagne (AFGB)*, a cultural association that I describe more fully when I talk about retirement migrants. As with the family migrants, both Jane and Hannah live to the east of Cahors. However, unlike the family migrants, their decision to migrate was not in response to an enforced change in working status; instead, the desire to migrate brought about the decision to leave their jobs.

Jane has lived with Harry and Connie since she moved to the Lot. In fact, they co-own a house, and had lived together in Britain for a year before Harry and Connie migrated. To all intents and purposes, Harry, Connie, and their two sons are Jane's family. Indeed, I witnessed Connie telling her eldest son that if anything were to happen to her and Harry, she hoped he would ensure that Jane was well looked after. While Hannah was different to the family migrants in many ways – she was retired, had no family with her when she migrated, and did not have to work once she arrived in the Lot – I argue that she fits more closely into this group rather than the pioneers or the retirement migrants. What this example shows is that there are differences, even among the migrants in one group.

Pat and Jean Porter also migrated to the Lot at the same time as the family migrants. However, I argue that they are distinct from the others moving at this point because their migration was motivated by their desires to run a vineyard and produce wine. Although they could have set

themselves up in Britain, where they had trained, they told me that the support was better structured in France. As they explained, it was this dream that initially led to migration; their priority was to run a vineyard. Their lives in the Lot were consequently different to those of their compatriots, resembling more closely those of other local producers, As they explained, their daily lives are very busy because they still work. However, they like their surroundings, and find the work that they do more fulfilling than they had found their jobs back in Britain.

As I highlight in this section, family migrants share many features of their migration: moving as a family, the coincidence of migration with a change in their working status, and the location of their property in the Lot. Most of them emphasize that central to their decision to migrate were changes to their working status and considerations for their families. These characteristics distinguish migrants in this group from my other respondents.

Retirement migration

Although many of the migrants who originally moved with their families are now over state retirement age, I do not classify them as retirement migrants (cf. King and Patterson 1998). While some of the migrants in this group had waited to retire at state retirement age or above, several of them had taken a decision to take their retirement early. Their migration took place between 1995 and the time of my research. It seemed to me that this was the fastest growing group of migrants in the Lot. When my respondents told me that they knew more people who were moving to rural France, they invariably told me that these were retired people. Financially, I believe that my respondents who were retirement migrants had the easiest migration; at the end of their working lives, they moved to the Lot with a regular and known income from their pensions. Many of them also had a large amount of capital from the sale of their properties in Britain. They told me that this money was enough for them to buy a property and to lead a reasonable life in rural France. Although most of

them lived comfortably, I saw little evidence that they were wealthy. Indeed, my retired respondents often explained that they budgeted carefully for their daily expenses, and some of them had to find small ways to supplement their income in order to support their lifestyle. For example, one couple rented out their home as a gîte for three months every summer while they lived in their caravan on a campsite two miles down the road. I argue that the loosening of financial constraints, particularly now that they are no longer fully reliant on an income from working, is one reason that there are so many retired British citizens moving to the Lot (cf. Warnes, King, Williams, and Patterson 2000; Oliver 2002).

Retirement migrants are distinct from their compatriots who migrated with young families because they move either alone or as couples. This means that their motivations are not centred on their aspirations for, and their relationships with, their children; for some, these are a concern, but they are not the primary influence on the decision to migrate. Instead, migrants in this group emphasized that they could afford to have the life they wanted in the Lot, whereas they were unsure whether this would have been possible had they not moved. They explained that they enjoyed the way of life rural France offered them; the food and wine were good and cheap, and the weather was better than it had been in Britain. Those who were part of a couple explained that one thing they really savoured about their lives was the fact that they could spend so much time together. This is reflected in the fact that most of the retirement migrants I encountered were in couples.

- Daniel and Alannah Tapper took early retirement in 2002 and moved to the Lot when they were both in their late fifties. They got married soon after migrating.
- Brian and Sally Waites had both run successful businesses in Britain. They moved to the Lot in 2002 when they retired. At this time, they were both in their early sixties.
- Julian and Janet Ford sold their jointly owned company in 2001 to finance a property and life in France. At this time they were both in their fifties. Until their new-build house was completed, they lived on site in a caravan.

- Ron and Barbara Stampton moved to the Lot when Ron retired from his job as managing director of a company in 1998. Barbara had taken early retirement in 1988. When they migrated, Ron was 67 and Barbara was a few years younger. They moved within weeks of Ron's retirement, even though they had to live in a gîte while the builders finished the work on their newly built house.
- Barney and Betty Monty moved to the Lot in 2002 from the southeast of England when Barney retired. At this time, they were both in their late fifties. They had owned a holiday home in the Lot for fifteen years and decided that they would like to live in the area permanently. They sold their holiday home and bought another house in a different part of the Lot.
- Vic and Anne Wilson moved to the Lot in 1999 after taking several holidays in the area (many of which they had spent in Connie and Harry's gîte). Vic had taken early retirement and was in his early sixties, while Anne was in her fifties.
- Trevor and Susan Sparrow moved to the house they owned in the Lot when they retired in 1998. They had bought it some years earlier as a holiday home. At the point of migration, they were in their sixties.
- Hector and Beth MacDonald bought their house in the Lot in 2002. At this stage, Beth had retired and was in her seventies, while Hector had cut down his working hours; he was only in his fifties. While Beth lived in rural France all year round, Hector worked abroad, using the house in France as a base. Initially, they lived in a small hamlet east of Cahors but Beth, who did not drive, found that it was very difficult to get everything she needed when Hector was away. As a result, they moved to Montcuq, a small town to the west of Cahors, in 2005.
- Bob and Mary Potter moved to a small hamlet near Duras (Lot-et-Garonne) when Bob retired in 2002. Mary, who had been an accountant in England, continued to work from home for some of her clients. They had previously owned a holiday home on the same area.
- David Lomax and his French wife Marie left London in 2000 for the house they had bought in the Lot in the early 1990s. David had just taken early retirement, aged in his early fifties.

I also include some single women in this group:

- Vivian St. John moved to the Lot in 1999. At this time, she was in her late fifties. Her husband had just died.
-

- Lottie Smith moved to the Lot in 2002 when she took early retirement at the age of 54.
- Samantha Harris moved to the Lot in 2002 with her husband when they both retired. Her husband died soon after they arrived, and she chose to stay in France.

In contrast to the family migrants, retirement migrants live predominantly to the west of Cahors. The landscape here is more reminiscent of the stereotypical French countryside than that found by their compatriots in the east (see Figure 2.2). To the west of Cahors, the vista contains gentle slopes, clad with row upon row of vines, similar to the pictures that grace the covers of many of the books about living in rural France (see for example Mayle 1989, 1990; Drinkwater 2001).



Figure 2.2: A typical landscape to the west of Cahors

Retirement migrants often had homes within walking distance of a small, well-serviced town, such as Prayssac. For example, in addition to a popular weekly market, Prayssac has two supermarkets, several bakeries, a handful of dentists and doctors, a beautician and hairdresser, a large pharmacy, a tobacconist, restaurants and cafés, shoe and clothes shops, banks, a cinema (which screened films in their original language), and a library. People living in the vicinity could easily carry out all their daily errands without leaving the town. My respondents often told me that this was one reason that they had chosen to live near a town; they explained that they anticipated a future when they would not be so mobile and they wanted to have everything they needed nearby.

There were some exceptions to this, where retirement migrants lived at a distance from towns. For example, Barney and Betty had chosen to live on top of a hill about ten minutes' drive from Prayssac. The village at the bottom of the hill had a bakery and café, but no other services. Similarly, Vic and Anne had to travel for half an hour to reach Cahors, but they were a five minute drive / thirty minute walk from a relatively well-serviced village. The locations that Barney and Betty, Vic and Anne had chosen were similar to those picked by family migrants, many of whom had to travel up to forty-five minutes by car to reach the local hypermarket, cinema, dentist, or library.

Retirement migrants appeared most commonly to socialize with other Britons. Of all my respondents, they also seemed to socialize the most frequently, a feature of their lives often commented on by other migrants. In part, I believe that where the retirement migrants lived influenced the pattern of their socializing. For example, Prayssac, a small town where many of my retired respondents lived, was reputed to have a high density of Britons. It was common to hear British people speaking in the streets, as I discovered on my many visits to the town. Therefore, it was easy for Britons resident in the area to meet their compatriots. The migrants in this group who lived in more remote areas had fewer British friends and acquaintances. They did not encounter them with the same frequency, and as they explained, they did not really want to surround themselves with other Britons. Another factor contributing to the patterns of socializing of retirement migrants was their limited ability to speak French. This meant that communication with members of the local French population was often difficult.

The frequency with which the retirement migrants socialized, and the number of friends and acquaintances they seemed to have, resulted, I argue, from the amount of leisure time that they had. Additionally, it is possible that, in contrast to the family migrants they had more friends because, as Huber and O'Reilly (2004) argue of the Swiss and British

elderly living in Spain, 'friendship networks gain in importance as family networks are lacking'.

Most of the socializing of my retired respondents took place within private homes, with only occasional group excursions to restaurants. Indeed, many of my respondents told me that they rarely left the house other than to shop and visit friends. This also provides an explanation for why they did not have many opportunities to meet with members of the local population. The British retirees living in the Lot often told me that it had been their intention to have French friends. However, because their encounters with these others are limited – due to their poor French and the fact that they do not work – this is difficult to achieve (see Oliver 2002 and Huber and O'Reilly 2004 for a similar discussion of the British in Spain).

Aside from chance meetings, these migrants often met their compatriots through their membership of particular clubs, classes, and associations attended by other Britons. These included the *Association France Grande-Bretagne* (AFGB), language classes, and the golf club. Indeed, many retired Britons had joined the Cahors branch of the AFGB. This is a cultural association, which was established following the first world war to encourage the French and British to learn about one another's culture, language, and history. The activities that the association runs today include visits to sites of historical and cultural interest, dancing classes, themed evenings, and French and English language workshops. As a member of the association's committee told me, many newcomers to the Lot now join with the express purpose of meeting other Britons. She often fielded calls from potential and new migrants who explained to her that this was their motivation for joining the association. Indeed, I was at her home one day when she received such a telephone call. She explained to me that, while there had been equal numbers of French and British members five years ago, and they had carried out committee meetings in French, seventy-five percent of the members were now British, and committee

meetings now had to be in both French and English because some of the executives did not speak French very well.

The association's language workshops were particularly popular among the retirement migrants because there were few other places that offered appropriate French classes. Those retirees who had not joined the AFGB also sought help with their French. And although there were few places offering lessons across the *département*, two or three classes were offered weekly in Prayssac. Although many of the British retirees living in the Lot told me about their attendance at lessons, they also told me, as Huber and O'Reilly discovered in the case of the British living in Spain, about their 'frustration with their attempts to learn the language; many also say that they are too old to learn' (2004: 335).

While many of the retirement migrants persevered with their French, their attendance at classes also provided them with an opportunity to meet other British migrants. According to my respondents, these lessons had emerged as a response to the demand from British incomers and were exclusively attended by Britons. Indeed, in many instances, when my respondents gave me the details of their compatriots who lived locally, they explained that they had first met at French lessons.

Through the compatriots they initially met at language classes and AFGB events, as well as by chance in supermarkets, markets, and hospitals, the retirement migrants' group of British acquaintances soon grew. It was usually the case that new residents would be invited to attend a dinner party held by one of the people they had serendipitously met. On this occasion they would meet many other Britons and would, consequently, receive further invitations; they would be expected to reciprocate at some stage.

Although they were in a minority, there were several exceptions to this pattern of socializing. Bob and Mary socialized almost exclusively with their French neighbours, and Brian and Sally, although they knew other

Britons living in the area, also had French friends who they had met through the local classic car club. It seemed to me that they spent more time with these French friends than they did with their compatriots; every weekend there were rallies and other related events in which Brian and Sally participated. David was also involved with some of the locally organized clubs and associations, such as the choir. Furthermore, because of his French wife, he had many connections with the local French. Like Bob and Mary, he spoke French to a very high level. The other exceptions were the single women, Lottie, Samantha, and Vivian. They all told me that they most often socialized with members of the French population that they had met by chance. Lottie and Vivian had met people while out walking their dogs, and Samantha had made herself join in with activities in the village after her husband died unexpectedly. The extent of their high level of socializing was illustrated by the fact that both Samantha and Vivian had plans to take short holidays with their French friends. In each of these cases, the women did not speak fluent French, nor did their French friends speak much English, a point I discuss later in this thesis.

While most of my respondents in this group bought old French houses, in contrast to their compatriots who arrived in the Lot earlier, some of these migrants had opted to live in newly-built houses (see Figure 2.3). In many cases, these were bungalows, and some of my respondents explained to me that this was a deliberate choice. They were aware that as they grew older they might not cope very well with stairs. Furthermore, those respondents who had lived in old houses back in Britain recalled how much time and money they had spent on the maintenance of these. In contrast, all newly built houses in France come with a five-year guarantee; if anything goes wrong with a house within this period of time, the contractor has an obligation to repair it. Living in France, these retired migrants told me, was their retirement; a time for relaxation and rest, not to be interrupted by having to carry out work on their houses.



Figure 2.3: A newly built house

Migration to France and retirement go hand in hand for these migrants. The way that they live in the Lot is the way that they imagined their retirement. Most of them have the time and the money to eat, drink, entertain, and spend time with their spouse. Indeed, 'selected aspects of the cuisine, wine, a slower pace of life, and again an outdoors lifestyle' (Casado-Díaz, Kaiser, and Warnes 2004: 363) were aspects of their lives that they highlighted in the accounts of their lives in France.

The associations between leisure and life in the Lot that retirement migrants express in their narratives link with their withdrawal from working life. It is therefore unsurprising that many of my retired respondents had previously taken holidays in the Lot. This is unlike the family migrants, most of whom had visited other *département* but not the Lot. For some of these retired migrants, the Lot had been their only holiday destination for ten to fifteen years before migration. This demonstrates that in some cases there is a correlation between the Lot as a holiday or second home location and a migration destination (cf. O'Reilly 2000; Warnes, King, Williams, and Patterson 2000; Oliver 2002; Casado-Díaz, Kaiser, and Warnes 2004; Hall and Müller 2004).

While these migrants seek a particular lifestyle, this is a way of life that they associate with retirement, and is distinct from their working lives. Leisure and positive ageing are the key motivations behind their migration, and their subsequent lives in the Lot reflect this. It is therefore clear that the lives that retirement migrants lead are different to those led by their

compatriots the family and mid-life migrants. These other groups of migrants recognize that their lives in the Lot have, to an extent, to include both living and working; their lives are not characterized by leisure to the same extent as those led by the retirement migrants.

Mid-life migration

The final group of British migrants living in the Lot that I document arrived in the Lot from 1998 onwards.² Their migration, therefore, coincides with that of the retirement migrants. However, my respondents in this group are much younger than their compatriots at the time of their migration; when they moved to the Lot, my respondents in this category were aged between thirty and forty-five. Although in many ways their lives in the Lot appear to resonate with those of the family migrants, their lives leading up to migration were different. This meant that many of the mid-life migrants were in a better financial position than the family migrants had been. This was because the mid-life migrants chose to leave their jobs and move when they could afford to comfortably live in France, while many of the family migrants had been made redundant.

The mid-life migrants include:

- William and Victoria Cardew, who gave up their jobs as teachers to move to France in late 2002. At this time, they were both in their late thirties. They left Victoria's two adult sons in Britain. William now runs a small computer business from home, and Victoria works as an English language assistant in a local school.
- Martin and Sarah Johnstone who moved permanently to the Lot in 2001 when Sarah gave up her job working for a London bank. They had bought their house two years earlier. At this stage, they were both in their late forties. They now run their home as a *chambre d'hôte* (bed and breakfast) and have a gîte in the neighbouring village.
- Keith and Sarah Hammond who moved in October 2002 once their children had left home. At this stage, they were both in their early

² When I briefly returned to the field in 2005 I heard rumours of new migrants who had yet another distinct feature to their migration. They were putting life in France on trial; spending six months there before deciding whether to migrate. Therefore, I leave the field open for further interrogation rather than claim that my analysis is an exhaustive account of migration to the Lot.

forties. They now run a gîte and Keith works as a carpenter and odd jobs man.

- Jack Stone who took the decision to move in 2003 when he visited a yoga retreat in the Lot. At this time, he was 31. He now works as a gardener and odd-job man.
- Jon and Kay Morris who left their jobs in London to move to the Lot in 2002. They were both 40. They immediately bought two gîte to rent out and have subsequently set up a business making and selling handmade greetings cards.
- Sally Stampton who moved to the Lot in 2002 to be closer to her parents, Ron and Barbara, who had migrated in 1998. She made the decision to migrate when she was offered a job by one of her parents' friends in the Lot. She moved with her son Ollie. She was in her early forties, and he was aged nine.
- Simon Glass who moved to the Lot in 2002 when he was 40. He had been doing a lot of freelance work and realized that he could work from home just as easily from France as elsewhere. He runs a relocation business in the Lot and goes back to Britain to work from time to time. In addition to this, he owns a flat in Cahors, which he lets out on a permanent basis.
- Jasper and Lucy Pinson who chose to leave their jobs in England and move to France in 1998. At this time, Lucy was pregnant with their second son and aged in her early thirties while Jasper was in his forties. Now living in the Lot, Lucy continues to work as a chiropodist, for a British doctor based in the Dordogne twice a week. Jasper runs a *brocante* (a second-hand shop) specializing in old French furniture.

Initially, the idea that they could escape from the rat race in Britain led mid-life migrants to consider living in France. However, they chose France because of the way of life that they believed they could experience there; it was not just that they wanted escape, as they explained, they wanted to become as much French as they could. The degree to which they managed to achieve this distinguished the mid-lifers from the family and retirement migrants. For example, many of them had established friendships with members of the local community, joining the football, rugby, and tennis clubs, or taking part in their village's walking group. They seemed to want to know more about the history of the area they lived in, and many of them had taken to growing their own fruit and vegetables,

and in one case, raising their own chickens. This required the simultaneous rejection of the idea that they were in any way similar to other Britons living locally who did not share their understandings of how to live, and their realization that they were different to members of the local French population. As a result, they occupied an ambiguous status between the two positions.

Of all my respondents, members of this group of migrants were, in my opinion, the most integrated into the local French population. However, their taste for a simpler way of living, in contrast to the lives of many of their French neighbours, was borne out of luxury; as I discuss further in chapter seven, they had chosen to pursue this way of life that in the case of their neighbours, would be classed as a necessity.

My respondents who left Britain during mid-life emphasized that they wanted to find a steady supply of income once living in the Lot. Their employment choices also reflected their desires to escape from the rat race to lead slower, more fulfilling, and healthier lives. They therefore rarely took on full-time employment, and many of them were self-employed. Although some of them ran gîte, this was often in addition to other income-generating activities. For example, one migrant ran a relocation company, while another worked as a carpenter, several carried out work as odd-job men, while others tried to set up small businesses in the Lot. As many of my respondents in this group told me, gaining control over when, and for how long, they worked made them feel as though they were more in control of their lives than they had been back in Britain.

Their employment decisions following migration were not the only thing that they had in common; the lives that they had led in Britain also had similar features. Many of my respondents in this group had held jobs at executive level, or had been high achievers in their professions.

Nevertheless, they told me that they had grown to believe that there had to be more to life than their lives in Britain – where they worked hard and had

little time of their own – could offer them. They all made the seemingly radical decision to pack it all in and move to rural France.

However, this move was often well planned, sometimes involving years of preparation. They had invested time and energy into finding out about the practicalities of living in France, while many of their predecessors had waited until they had settled in the Lot. Indeed, some of these migrants had previously lived in France, while others had opted to spend six months living in rented accommodation before committing themselves to buying a property.

Furthermore, testament to their extensive preparation was the fact that many of these mid-life migrants spoke a high level of French before migration. In each of the couples, for example, one partner had often spent time living in France previously, or had studied French to an advanced level. Their linguistic abilities facilitated communication with the local French and improved their opportunities for employment and socializing. Unlike many of their compatriots, these incomers regularly took part in local community events and associations, which has enabled them to develop friendships with members of the French population. For example, my respondents in this group were often members of a local sports club, which involved their participation not only on teams, but also in the maintenance of the grounds, fundraising events, social evenings, and occasional weekend trips. These migrants implied in their narratives that they were, to a degree, integrated into the local community. The only exception to this was Jack, who had only been living in the Lot for six months when I first met him. Although they did know and socialized with other Britons living in the Lot, these mid-life migrants were always keen to assert that they were closer to the local population than to their compatriots, a distinction I discuss further in chapter seven.

Finally, unlike migrants in other groups, not all mid-life migrants owned property in the Lot outright. Although there were some who had profited from increasing property prices in the southeast of England and had had

sufficient capital to buy, others had to rent property or somehow organize a mortgage. When they did purchase property, they often invested in old houses situated on the edges of small villages or towns, but there were also those who opted to live in isolated hamlets at a distance from any amenities. The alterations that they had to make to their properties were rarely as extensive as those that the family migrants had had to carry out, or if they were, they would try and organize the major structural work to be done before they had to live in the house. For example, Martin and Sarah Johnstone started the renovation work on their property a year before they moved to France. While Martin was doing the work on the house in the Lot, Sarah continued to live and work in Britain. Unlike the family migrants, these later incomers to the Lot could afford to buy their houses in rural France without selling their properties back in Britain. Although many of them did finally sell when they migrated, others continued to own a rental property back there. As I witnessed, however, when there were financial concerns, they soon decided to sell these properties and release some capital.

The locations that mid-life migrants chose for their homes in the Lot were revealing about the way of life that wanted to lead once living in rural France. In contrast to migrants from the other groups, who moved to France from all over Britain, these mid-life migrants had all moved from greater London and the south of England. More specifically, they had all lived in urban or suburban neighbourhoods; therefore, mid-life migrants were all urban-rural migrants. Life in rural France was, as they persisted in telling me, the antithesis of the lives they had led in urban Britain.

LIFESTYLE AND MIGRATION

While the groups of British migrants living in the Lot seem to have different motivations, aspirations for, and experiences of life in rural France, they hold in common the desire for a different way of life to that which they led in Britain. In respect to their motivations, they differ from other contemporary migrants. Although these others too are motivated by the

promise of a better future, they have pressing reasons for their migration. For example, labour migrants have economic needs, which they cannot meet in their countries; others, such as refugees and asylum seekers are forced by political strife to migrate. In this respect, the British living in the Lot lead relatively privileged lives, they chose to leave Britain, just as they may choose to go back or live elsewhere.

I argue that the British living in the Lot classify as lifestyle migrants because their desire for a better lifestyle motivates their migration. As O'Reilly describes, the main reasons for migration among lifestyle migrants include:

... the lifestyle (quality of life, pace of life, slower, relaxed life); the climate/ sun (which enables health and relaxation); the cost of living, cheap property (enabling early retirement and/or a better lifestyle); a business opportunity (to fund a better life); for a better life for the children; the culture (which includes community, respect for the elderly, safety, and less crime); closeness to home, and other ties and connections; the desire to leave their home country (because of high crime rates, and too many immigrants!, or to escape the rat-race, failing business, unemployment, or political situation); and to go somewhere 'you can be yourself' (2007b: no page number given).

The evidence in this and the following chapter confirms that members of the British population living in the Lot may draw on a variety of these motivations in their accounts of why they moved to rural France. The only reason I did not encounter was the suggestion that there were too many immigrants living in Britain. On top of the reasons outlined here, I also highlight the migrants' desires for a rural life, which resonates with Buller and Hoggart's (1994a) argument that migration of the British to rural France is a form of international counterurbanization. Although many of them moved from the countryside in Britain, it is apparent, as I discuss more thoroughly in chapter four, that they felt that this rural landscape no longer offered them the rurality that they desired. In other words, they associated the British countryside with the urban rather than the rural; it had the same high levels of crime and disorder as they described of the

towns and cities. But moving to rural France, the migrants believe that they have found the 'real' rural idyll.

In the ethnographic chapters that follow, I describe the characteristics of the different way of living that my respondents pursue. I thus demonstrate with concrete examples what constitutes a distinctive lifestyle for each group of British migrants living in the Lot, and show how this influences their experiences of life following migration.

CONCLUSION

This chapter builds on previous conclusions about the British living in the Lot (see for example Buller and Hoggart 1994a; Barou and Prado 1995) to recognize that Britons resident in this *département* 'come from all walks of life'. It also demonstrates that the various events leading to this migration influence the decision to migrate, as well as the migrants' aspirations for, and experiences of, life in rural France. Although I recognize that British migrants in the Lot are heterogeneous, I classify them as following four groups, summarized in Figure 2.4. The migrants in each group, as I will further elaborate in the following chapter, hold in common the time and circumstances of their migration, how they explain their decision to migrate, and their expectations of what life in the Lot will be like. My use of this model is important for two reasons. On the one hand, it introduces my respondents and provides general sociological background on the Britons who move to the Lot. On the other hand, it provides a framework to help facilitate the ethnographic descriptions in the following chapters.

I learned about the pioneers through the narratives of my respondents in the Lot. They imagined these pioneers as integrated members of the local community, stressing that they admired these early migrants. This emphasis on their admiration of their compatriots reveals that integration is something that the migrants value. Indeed, as the ethnographic examples throughout this thesis reveal, this is something to which my respondents aspire.

The pioneers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moved to the <i>Lot</i> pre-1988 • Either migrated as individuals or as part of a young married couple • Between 20 and 30 years of age at point of migration • Previously employed in Britain as artists or students • Employment continued in the <i>Lot</i>, with artists setting up studios and others being employed by the French community (often for tourism) • Individuals often married into the local community • Fluency in French language • High levels of interaction with and incorporation into the local community
Family migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moved to the <i>Lot</i> between 1988 and 1995 • Migrated as family units, comprised of two (or more) adults and children, as individuals, or for work • Purchased old houses outright which they have subsequently had to renovate • Had not visited the <i>Lot</i> prior to property purchase • Live mainly to the east of Cahors in, or on the outskirts of villages • Adults aged between 40 and 55 at point of migration; children of various ages • Migration often coincided with voluntary redundancy or early retirement • Employed in small-scale private enterprise e.g. holiday homes • Adults proficient in French but rarely fluent • Increasing interaction with local community; higher interaction with other Britons
Retirement migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moved to the <i>Lot</i> from 1995 to present • Migrated as couples or as individuals • Purchased new or old houses; employed third parties to work on property • Had visited the <i>Lot</i> on holiday prior to migration • Live mainly to the west of Cahors in close proximity to a town • Aged 55+ at the point of migration • Previously employed at executive level in private enterprise • Migration coincided with retirement (sometimes early retirement) • Rarely continue work in the <i>Lot</i> as many are drawing private pensions • Varying levels of proficiency in French, many attending French lessons • Limited interaction with the French community; high levels of interaction with other members of the British community
Mid-life migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moved to the <i>Lot</i> from 1998 to present • If purchasing property, they bought old property; however, in some cases this was achieved through obtaining a mortgage, while others rented homes • Many had lived in France previously for a short length of time • Live on the outskirts of villages or in the countryside • Adults aged between 30 and 45 at point of migration • Previously many of them were employed at executive level in enterprise, or were high achievers in their professions • Previously lived in the southeast of England in urban or suburban locations • Migration coincided with a desire for a different lifestyle • Necessity to continue work in the <i>Lot</i> • High level of French • High levels of interaction with the French community and low levels of interaction with other Britons in the area

Figure 2.4: Overview of the groups of Britons living in the Lot

However, integration was not an initial motivating factor in migration. Instead, family migrants stressed that the belief that they could have a better quality of life for their children and spend time together as a family in the Lot gave them the impetus to migrate. Being made redundant also impacted on this decision. Once they lived in the Lot, the family migrants had no income and therefore had to spend time earning money. Their lives in the Lot are thus characterized by living and working. In this respect, their lives are similar to those led by the mid-life migrants, who also choose to work. The mid-lifers are equally motivated by the desire for a better quality of life, but this is related specifically to their working status. Living in the Lot, they escape the constraints of being an employee and find that they have more control over their time. In the case of both the family and mid-life migrants, it is clear that their lives contrast to the leisurely lives led by the retirement migrants. As the examples in the following chapter show, life in the Lot is attractive to British retirees because it represents a reprieve from their working lives.

Despite my attempts to categorize the migrants into discrete groups, I recognize that there are those migrants whose lives do not fully resemble those of others who migrated at the same time. For example, the single women who arrived alongside the family migrants had a lot in common with them, but also with the pioneers, and the single women who migrated at the same time as the retirement migrants had become more integrated into the local population than their compatriots. Indeed, it was frequent for respondents not to share all the characteristics common to members of their group. As a result, I reiterate that my classifications are broad generalizations rather than definitive statements about my respondents. In the following chapter, I will have an opportunity to provide a more complex picture of the migrants and their decision to migrate, and discuss the way in which they share similar migration stories with their compatriots in the same group.

Overall, British migrants migrate to the Lot, as they argue, to experience a different way of life. What indicates that this is available in the Lot, what it means to them, how they attain this once living in rural France, and their experiences of life there, vary depending on their lives leading up to migration. But, for all of them migration is motivated by their desire as William Cardew told me, 'to try something different... it's a more relaxed way of life... the way of life is preferable'.

CHAPTER 3: TELLING MIGRATION STORIES

In this chapter, I argue that the migrants' stories about the decision to migrate and their lives following migration demonstrate their common desire to lead a different and preferable way of life than they believe Britain offers them. As I show through the ethnographic examples below, how my respondents imagine this lifestyle differs, depending on which group of migrants they are from. I therefore present the stories of family, retirement, and mid-life migrants to highlight what my respondents in each group hold in common.

I also argue that migration is a way that Britons living in the Lot augment their individual agency. For example, the family migrants, many of who lost their jobs in Britain and were forced to make changes in their lives, present their migration positively in terms of the quality of life it enables.

Emphasizing that they were proactive in changing their future, they reclaim some of the agency denied to them in the termination of their working life. For retirement migrants, migration is, instead, a pre-emptive action to combat their fears that their lives following retirement in Britain will be unsatisfying. The mid-life migrants fall between the positions of these two groups. On the one hand, their narratives demonstrate that they felt unfulfilled by their lives in Britain; they explain that they did not have the control over their lives that they desired. On the other hand, they also anticipated that their lives would not improve if they stayed in Britain. They therefore decided to move to rural France, where they believed they would have a greater degree of control over their lives.

As all of my respondents' narratives confirmed, migration to the Lot was one way that the migrants tried to escape the constraints that they had felt on their lives in Britain. One of the recurring features in these narratives was the discussion of what life had been like in Britain. As Trish Greenham told me of her decision to migrate, 'things were getting bad in

England and Tom said, "I don't know. I think we should shut up and move to France. Set up a bed and breakfast or something". That was it'. This confirms O'Reilly's (2000) argument that migration abroad provides an escape from discomfort with life in Britain (cf. Oliver 2002). My examination of this feature of the migrants' stories contributes further to understanding why the British migrate to the Lot.

TELLING STORIES

Throughout my research and following my return to Britain, my respondents told me their stories about what had prompted them to migrate and their experiences of life following migration. For example, I had first sent an email to William Cardew when I found his business advertised in the classified section of the *French News* (an English language newspaper sold throughout France). His response to my request for an interview was revealing, 'My wife and I have been living here for a little over a year, escaping from teaching in England'.

As I witnessed, these stories about migration were not only prompted by my questions. My respondents told them all the time, at dinner parties with other migrants, in emails to their friends and families back in Britain, and to their neighbours living in the Lot. The Christmas newsletter that I received in December 2005 from Martin and Sarah Johnstone is one example of the kind of stories the migrants tell to their friends and family back in Britain:

May found Martin still very busy with the pool, and I was very busy with lots of B and B guests. A friend of ours came with her friend and Martin gave them his first course in stained glass work... I also started to learn... Unfortunately, I didn't get mine finished, as I wasn't able to do it all day... Then we had a few days off and went to Paris with a group from the village.

In the newsletter, Martin and Sarah stress that they have been very busy working on the house, and running the bed and breakfast, but that they had managed to fit in a trip to Paris with their French neighbours. In this

narrative, Sarah and Martin suggest both that they work in the Lot, and that they try to integrate with the local population.

Other migrants similarly told me how they kept their friends and family back in Britain up to date with their news about life in the Lot. This communication is one way that they maintain their relationships and affiliations with others in Britain. But as my respondents stressed, they explained why they wanted to live in the Lot to their French neighbours who, as many of the migrants told me, were always curious about why these Britons had moved to rural France. In their tales to the French, they stressed how they wanted to know more about living in the Lot. The migrants' discussions with these local actors initially centred on convincing them that they were unlike other Britons living in the area. As Sarah Hammond told me:

The French people here have got their theory that every single English person is rolling in money. I think the trouble is because the majority of English people who come here to live are like that. They all want two acres of land; they want it isolated.

Sarah then explained to me that she had eventually managed to persuade her French neighbours that she was different:

We've had people at the football club just the same way; they didn't want to be friends with us. And one gentleman, whose house we've actually been to and had aperitifs, now, ummm, he said to me, 'You and Keith just aren't English. Are you sure you're not French?... You and Keith are different'.

The examples above provide evidence that Britons living in the Lot have a transnational audience for their tales; through telling their stories, the migrants maintain their relationships and affiliations with other social actors both in Britain and in France (cf. Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Vertovec 1999). Their stories are thus part of 'the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations...

link together their societies of origin and settlement' (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994: 7).

The migrants' stories are not only revealing because of their specific content and the audience that they are presented to. Storytelling itself helps them to augment their agency. As Giddens (1991) argues, at times when life becomes uncomfortable in some way, people tell stories to try and make sense of the world again (cf. Becker 1997; Ochs and Capp 2001; Frank 2002; Jackson 2002). The content of these stories reflects how the individual overcomes discomfort in their lives (Giddens 1991). On the one hand, the discomfort that the migrants feel could relate to their uncertainty about their future, to their general dissatisfaction with the life on offer to them in modern Britain. The changes in their lives that lead to migration provoke them to examine their lives in more detail; unsettled by these transformations, they reassess the way they understand the world (cf. Bourdieu 2000). On the other hand, the migrants' discomfort could originate from the ambiguous position they occupy, where they have rejected life in Britain but have not yet become fully integrated members of the rural French community. In this interpretation, telling their stories is how the migrants strive to overcome their ambivalence.

MIGRATION STORIES

Each of the stories recorded in this section outlines the reasons and motivations that my respondents in the Lot cited as leading to the decision to migrate. Their expectations of life following migration are an intrinsic part of these explanations. I briefly present the migrants' descriptions of their lives in the Lot, to show how these often corroborate their early imaginings of what life would be like. I start with the family migrants, demonstrating that their narratives present migration as the search for a particular 'quality of life' for their families.

Quality time

As I outline in chapter two, the migration of family migrants often coincided with redundancy or early retirement. However, as their narratives demonstrate, the migrants play down this (often) negative event and exaggerate instead the positive consequences of migration on their lives. The benefits they derive from migration include healthier and safer lives for their children, and 'quality time' to spend together as a family. I argue that by emphasizing that they were proactive within the decision to migrate, these migrants shift the focus from the negative events leading to their migration. Their stories of migration thus conceal their fears that had they remained in Britain they would not have been able to provide adequately for their families.

James and Sian Harvey-Browne

I carried out my first interview with James and Sian late in May 2004. It was a beautiful, warm, and sunny day, and they decided that the interview would take place outside. We walked round to the back terrace of their gîte, and we sat, sipping coffee, looking down on the trees that led from their garden to the river on the floor of the valley. The occasional car drove by on the road at the front of the house but the only other things we could hear were the wind gently rustling leaves and the gentle flow of the river below us. On every occasion that I interviewed James and Sian, we sat in the same place. In these tranquil surroundings, they explained why they had decided to leave Britain.

Living in Croydon, James and Sian felt increasing dissatisfaction with life in suburban Britain. Sian's parents lived in Spain, and returning from a holiday to visit them, Sian and James recognized differences in the quality of life that they were leading in Croydon, and what could be available to them if they lived elsewhere. When James became redundant, they decided to move to the Lot, attracted by the cheap cost of property. James summarized their reasons for moving, 'Quality of life, or perceived quality of life should I say... cheap property prices and redundancy in England'.

James later clarified what he had meant by 'quality of life':

Several things really – the quality of food we buy, mainly the vegetables; they're so much different to what we were used to... they're, sort of, better quality... the pace of life I suppose as well. That was quite important because it was quite stressful where we were... those are the two main things really.

Adjusting to the slower pace of life in the Lot took some time, but it was ultimately enjoyable:

It is a pleasure. You've got your own garden, and you probably tend to grow your own vegetables more because you're that bit further away from the main town. You have to adapt your lifestyle knowing that.

Additionally, James and Sian stressed that there were other advantages to living in the Lot rather than Croydon. In particular, they emphasized certain health benefits:

One of our sons suffers from asthma very badly and when we lived in Croydon we found that every time we went out shopping he'd suffer from the pollution in the towns... and we thought we'd come and find somewhere less polluted.

They also told me that they had increasingly worried about allowing their children to play outside. Conversely, they believe that the Lot is a safer place to bring up children, and 'don't worry about them at all', allowing them greater freedom than they had before migration. James and Sian additionally told me that young people in the Lot were not as materialistic as those back in Britain. They were glad that they had removed their children from these material pressures and hoped that it would instil them with a more balanced approach to money and material possessions.

As their narrative demonstrates, James and Sian perceive that the Lot provides their family with a quality of life that had not been available to them in Britain. As I recount below, Robert and Justine Grange also emphasize this feature of life in the Lot.

Robert and Justine Grange

My first visit to see Robert and Justine in their home was one hot morning in July 2004. The front door was wide open, opening onto the sitting room. There was no one in sight, but I could hear the sound of activity in the house beyond. I knocked and called out. Justine entered from a room to the right of the sitting room. She invited me to sit down while she found Robert and prepared the coffee. Sitting waiting for my hosts to return, I took in the decoration of the room, which combined the simplicity of the old French house with mementoes from their time in Hong Kong. Particularly prominent was the heavy rosewood furniture and the Chinese silk rug on the floor. When we all sat down together, Robert and Justine outlined the events that had led them to the decision to buy a house in the Lot.

When their children chose to leave home to complete their secondary education in Britain, Robert and Justine were happy; this move would bring their children more opportunities than they would have had in Hong Kong. However, they soon realized that they missed their children a lot. In addition, they knew that when they retired they would have no pensions and decided that an investment in property would give them some financial security for the future (they did not own property in Hong Kong).

It was a combination of these factors that brought them to the decision to buy a family holiday home; this would provide them with somewhere to live as a family during the summer, reducing the cost of flying the children between Britain and Hong Kong, as well as being an investment for their retirement. To begin with, they considered the Lake District. As Justine recalled,

The property in the Lake District was very expensive. And the season up there is so short and you get good weather about five days a year, and that wasn't very suitable after having spent a long time in Hong Kong where there's, you know, quite a lot of sunshine, quite a lot of warm weather. And so, we kind of couldn't quite face going back to England.

Justine had spent some of every summer of her teenage years in France, and was, by her own admission, a devoted Francophile. In consequence, when they had the opportunity one summer to spend two weeks in the Dordogne, they lined up some properties to view in the surrounding area. By the end of their stay, they had put in an offer on a house in the Lot, the house that we were now sitting in.

Until Robert and Justine retired, the family spent their summers together in the house. The reason that I do not talk about them as second-home owners is because this was their primary family residence during the time when they lived in Hong Kong and their children in Britain. It was the place where they spent the most time together. This was evident in the way they described daily life, 'We had a house rule with the kids that they could go and do what they liked during the day as long as they'd done the house painting'. They also invited friends and family to visit, which solved the problem of seeing everyone when they lived so far away:

We had long holidays here... I'd break up from school, fly across to pick up one or two children, and come straight down here. And then, friends and relatives who wanted to see us, they could come down here instead of us trawling around the UK. We had one terrible holiday just before all this happened where, um, we just drove around Britain, spending two or three nights with people who wanted to see us, which is lovely when you're with them, but a killer for us and the children; so we said, never again, never, never, never. So that was the theory, if we had this, people were most welcome to come and stay with us... but we weren't prepared to drive around any more, you know, visiting people.

While their previous holidays had allowed the family to be together, as the above quotation reveals, all the travelling had been tiring and impacted on the quality of the time that they spent together. The house in the Lot gave the Granges the space to welcome friends and family, while also being able to spend 'quality time' together in the course of their daily lives.

Since Robert and Justine's retirement, when they finally took the decision to move permanently to the Lot, the house has continued to operate as a base for their children to visit. On every occasion that I went to the house, Vicki, their eldest daughter, and India, their three-year old granddaughter, were staying with them. As we sat downstairs, chatting and drinking coffee, we could hear India charging up and down on the floor above us. The wooden floors on the first floor of the house made the noise worse. From this example, I had the feeling that Robert and Justine expected their family to treat the house as their home, and to come and go as they pleased.

It was their feelings about Britain that ultimately brought Robert and Justine to the decision to move to the Lot when they retired. They knew that they would not stay in Hong Kong, where they had worked for thirty years, but felt that they did not belong in Britain; their feelings mirror those expressed by many people who have lived overseas for an extended time (King, Warnes, and Williams 2000). They did not like the traffic and high cost of living in Britain. Furthermore, Justine expressed her dislike of the British attitude, 'I find Britain... a very aggressive place. I'm amazed at the aggression on the radio, on TV, on advertising, everywhere, everywhere... I find attitudes to things very aggressive'.

Robert and Justine's story highlights their continuing desire to spend quality time with their family. However, further to this, it reveals the lifestyle they want to live during their retirement. This is an important consideration for the family migrants, because many of them are now approaching retirement. Their discussions of what life in the Lot will offer them during retirement similarly focus on its opposition to life in Britain. While the family migrants initially justified their presence in rural France by explaining the benefits for their families, they now explain it in slightly different terms, emphasizing what it offers them in retirement. These descriptions of life in the Lot are similar to those put forward by their compatriots, the retirement migrants.

Out to pasture

The stories of retirement migrants build on the concerns that Robert and Justine had about contemporary Britain. In particular, my respondents in this group focus on what they believe their lives would have been like if they had chosen to stay in Britain rather than migrate. Central to their presentations are the negative images of ageing that they believe are prevalent in Britain (cf. Featherstone and Hepworth 1995). Their narratives reveal that they believe that they have a lot of life left in them following migration. While they anticipate that Britain cannot provide them with the lifestyle that they believe they should lead in their retirement, the Lot, in their perception, does.

Migration abroad has been linked to positive ageing (see for example King, Warnes, and Williams 2000; Oliver 2002). The emphasis of these studies is that the reasons accompanying the decision to migrate around the age of retirement are positive, 'some to improve residential environment, some for personal development, some hedonistic, and some to strengthen family or social interactions' (King, Warnes, and Williams 2000: 16). Oliver's (2002) argument that the migration of British retirees to Spain gives them a sense of freedom otherwise inhibited (by their lives in Britain) has resonance with the accounts of my retired respondents. As their stories recalled below demonstrate, they do not only tell of their dislike of the future Britain offers them, they also highlight their perception that moving to the Lot gives them the future that they long for; and along with this, they gain more control over their lives (cf. King, Warnes, and Williams 2000; Oliver 2002).

Ron and Barbara Stampton

I first visited Ron and Barbara on a cold, bright day in January 2004. At this time of year, the view from the front of their house was beautiful, looking across the vineyards. Somewhere among the scenery hid the small town of Prayssac. They had chosen this plot of land and

commissioned a house to be built on the site when they had decided to purchase a property in France.

Ron explained to me that for him, retirement signified the end of working life. Retirement was thus characterized by having nothing to do; as Ron told me, he had worked hard all his life and had now reached a stage where he could sit back and relax. Two weeks after he retired from his job as managing director of a small business, he and Barbara moved to the Lot.

Their motivations for leaving Britain were strongly linked to how they imagined life would be if they had stayed. They had lived on an estate where most of their neighbours were already retired. As a result, they had an insight into what kind of life retirement in Britain held for them. Their understandings of this life began when one night at a dinner party with their retired neighbours, Ron realized that the most stimulating topic of conversation of the evening was about a feather duster. A few days later, Ron went out to his car to go to work and stood, wondering what the funny noise was, only to realize that his next-door neighbour was vacuuming the house at 8.30 in the morning. He concluded that the lives of his retired neighbours were empty. It struck him that there had to be more to life than keeping the house clean and tidy. He had no intention of following in his neighbours' footsteps and started to make plans to prevent this from happening.

They had been on holiday to the south of France many times and what they had seen of life there on these holidays appealed to them. They initially planned to spend part of each year in the Lot, and part of the year in Britain. However, when they realized how much money they would have to invest in their French property, they decided to move out to the Lot permanently. They explained to me that they had chosen to build a new house because there were not many old houses available and having an old house would only mean that they would need to spend time, money, and effort keeping it in good repair. Living in a new house, they committed

less of their time to the house, leaving more time, and money, for them to do what they wanted. This explanation clearly links to Ron's initial expectations for his retirement.

Once they settled in their new home, they began to make friends in the area. They say that, when they chose a plot of land for their house, they had no idea that so many other British people lived locally. Many of my respondents who lived in this part of the Lot told me the same thing. Since then, and although they are not involved in any of the British clubs or associations in the area, they have built up a small circle of friends who are mostly British. Barbara first met a lot of these at the French conversational class she attends. In addition, Ron told me that he approaches anyone that he hears speaking English and invites them for coffee. This is how I met them; Connie and Harry were having coffee in Cahors one day, and Ron and Barbara were at the next table. After introductions, Connie asked if they would be interested in participating in my research. Aside from social events, once a week Ron and Barbara try to have an outing. This is normally a drive with lunch at a restaurant. Their daughter and her son live twenty minutes down the road, so they also see them once or twice a week. Retirement has given them the time that they wanted, and both of them have resumed hobbies that they had when they were younger. For Ron, this is marquetry, and Barbara does embroidery.

Ron and Barbara explained what they found so appealing about their lives in the Lot:

Barbara	... it's the quality of life.
Ron	Yes, it's the quality of life. I wish I could have done it much earlier than I did. But then, having said that, I did enjoy every minute of my working life.

They believed that 'quality of life' attracted Britons to the Lot; for them, this included the slow and relaxed pace of life and the tranquillity of their surroundings. While once again they affirm that life in rural France is

defined by the fact that they no longer work, they also stress that it gives them a life that they wish they could have led earlier.

Their narratives also reveal that they preferred their new lives to those they would have led in Britain. As Barbara recalled, of her infrequent trips back to England, 'I find that the things I go back for are far outweighed by the things I have here. Five minutes on the M whatever and I'm ready to leave... I only go for the shopping!'¹ Life in Britain is not equivalent to their life in the Lot, which they express as being more satisfying. Ron and Barbara's stories about life following migration continue to demonstrate the goal that they had for retirement: that they would have the leisure to do nothing if they wanted. Now there is no looking back; as Ron concluded, 'Our only regret is not coming sooner'.

Trevor and Susan Sparrow

One cold Saturday morning in February 2004, I sat with Trevor and Susan in front of the wood burning stove in their open plan living area. As I drank coffee and ate gingernut biscuits, they told me why they had decided to move to the Lot when they retired.

They first bought their house in France in 1989, with the intention of using it as a holiday home until they could retire and migrate. When the time came to move, Susan realized that she was uncertain about the idea; she did not want to leave her children and grandchildren behind. However, when her children learned of her fears, they allayed them by reassuring her that they would take family holidays with them in the Lot each year.

Trevor and Susan explained to me that migration to France was a change from their lives in London, where they had both lived since childhood. While the pace of life in London had been bearable when they were young and working, following retirement, and the onset of (old) age, they wanted a slower, more peaceful way of life. At other times, they referred to themselves as pioneering, stressing that they still had life left in them.

¹ For those unfamiliar with the English way of referring to roads, the 'M' signifies that a road is a motorway.

Thus, while on one hand their accounts demonstrate that they recognize they are ageing, on the other hand they present this in terms of positive ageing. The following quotation taken from an interview with Trevor and Susan illustrates these points:

I think I've said it to you before, automatically you've got that pioneering spirit to even live outside your own country... and we'd lived and worked in London all our lives and I always feel that it's like putting old work horses out to graze. So you come away from it and you find a different life, and people are living longer [in the Lot]... and you've already got that spirit of get up and go to come here.

Once they moved to the Lot, Trevor and Susan realized that they suddenly had a lot of time. Susan explained that until they found their feet, Trevor had been constantly under her feet. However, they soon found things to fill their time. Outside the house, they often participate in different leisure pursuits, depending on their individual likes and dislikes. For example, Susan told me that she enjoys shopping for food, but Trevor does not, so she visits the supermarket alone. She also goes out to teach English in a local primary school once a week. As well as 'giving something back to the community', she explained that this provides her with space and time away from Trevor. During the season, Trevor watches the local rugby fixtures, with other (French and British) fans of the game. They told me that this works for both of them, as it gets him out of the house, but allows Susan time in the house alone. They also structure time to spend together, and are active members of the AFGB. Every week they attend the association's French lessons in Cahors. After class, they always go to lunch with some of their friends who are also members of the *Association*. They then buy fresh produce from the large weekly market held in the cathedral square. Susan told me that she timetables their individual pursuits, time spent together, and time spent with friends into their weeks. She often spent a few minutes explaining to me their plans for the next week, emphasizing how busy they were. By organizing their weeks, Trevor and Susan fill their time in the absence of work.

Although they are now retired, Trevor and Susan's stories of their life in the Lot present them as very active and energetic people. Similarly, they also emphasize that their lives are enjoyable. Despite her initial reservations about leaving London, Susan told me, 'Life down here is wonderful actually when you think about it. The only thing I miss, of course, is the children. But then they come down every summer'. Life in the Lot appears to give them what they wanted from retirement: a healthy, relaxed, but active lifestyle.

Vivian St. John

My first meeting and interview with Vivian took place in the living room on the first floor of her house. It was a bright and sunny day, and the sun streamed in through the French windows, which led out to the veranda at one end of the room. As we sat drinking coffee with the dog asleep on our feet, Vivian explained what had brought her to the Lot.

She told me that she had decided to move to France when her husband died. In the last years of his life, she had been his carer. Without him to look after, and approaching retirement age, she decided to make a further change to her way of life. She did not find life in Wales, where they had lived together, satisfying, and remembering a holiday that they had taken in France, decided that she would like to try living there.

Vivian explained to me that she had not felt safe living in rural Wales as a single woman. There was a drug problem in the area where she had lived, and she would not go out on the streets at night because of the threatening behaviour of the young people. She also found that people did not respect the property of others, a problem that she has had to deal with many times as she still has a rental property in the area. During my research, she had no end of problems with her tenants in Wales, eventually having to evict them. Even at this point, the problem did not end, as they left the property with extensive damage. She felt that drug culture and poverty were responsible for the problems in the area.

Her feelings about life in the Lot were the antithesis of those she had for Wales. As she told me 'I love living here; I love the village... it's beautiful here'. Whereas before migration she had feared for her safety even when she locked herself into the house, in the Lot she leaves the front door unlocked, whether she is in the house or not; once or twice, I arrived at the house when she was out in the village to find that I could let myself in. Moreover, she feels safe in the house, in the village, and in the local town,

It is so safe here, I mean, you do not get afraid in Cahors... this village, if I wake up in summer... maybe late in the evening, and I hear some noises coming from down on the commons. You know, from quite close to the river? I'm up and just stick a jacket on and I go down there with the dog and see what is going on. I'm not afraid... it's people, who've got the floodlights on and they're playing boules is more likely to be going on, or somebody's having a late night picnic and I'm invited for a glass of wine. You know, it's just nice.

She also explained that the attitude of young people in the area contributed to her sense of security. While she had felt threatened in Wales, she told me that the young people in the Lot seemed to respect their elders. In the streets of the village, they greeted her and stood aside to let her through. The vulnerability that she had felt in Wales did not seem to be a feature of her life in France.

Vivian's comments about the behaviour of young people were common to the accounts of many retirement migrants. They often explained that this was an indicator that, in the Lot, people still lived a traditional way of life and that this behaviour was a refreshing change to what young people were like in Britain. While I discuss the link between imaginings of local community and traditional way of life in chapter four, I argue here that the respect the retirees felt that the French youngsters had for them made them feel valued and as though they had a place in the world.

It is evident from Vivian's narrative that her life in rural Wales did not offer her the sense of rurality she desired. She did not feel safe out on the

streets at night, there was no respect for other people's property, and the young people did not respect their elders. Many of my respondents similarly described rural Britain. Vic and Anne told me that their house in rural Bedfordshire had been burgled twice. Harold and Min explained that they thought that the British in rural Britain were not honest with one another. Connie and Harry explained that a council estate had been built on the outskirts of their village in rural Lincolnshire, and the people who lived there were disruptive to the local community; Connie and Harry did not want their children mixing with those from the council estate. And Pat and Jean Porter described how their village in rural Oxfordshire had been overrun with commuters; there was nobody around in the village during the day, and at night, everyone stayed at home. Furthermore, the village suffered from the noise of the nearby motorway and the sound of planes flying overhead. The British countryside could no longer offer the 'rural idyll' that the migrants desired. As I discuss in the following chapter, in my respondents' perceptions, rural Britain was no longer distinguishable from urban Britain; it had all the same social problems. This confirms that, as Buller and Hoggart (1994a) argue, the migration of my respondents to the Lot is a form of international counterurbanization.

I argue that in the case of retirement migrants, it is often their anticipation of the future, of their lives following retirement that brings them to the decision to migrate. While the life on offer to them in Britain was not satisfying, with a little effort, life in the Lot provides a more favourable alternative: a life where they choose to do as much or as little as they want. The retirees' presentation of this opposition reveals that they feel unsettled about their new status as retirees. They fear that, because they are getting older, there will be more constraints on their agency than when they worked; the result is that they will not be able to live their lives the way that they desire. In their stories, however, they present migration as a way to overcome their sense of uncertainty about what life has in store for them; stressing the positive choice involved in the decision to migrate, these retirees deny that they are old and preserve the image that they are

still young and active (cf. Featherstone and Hepworth 1991, 1995). Life in the Lot gives these retirees the autonomy to live their lives the way they want and hold old age at bay (cf. King, Warnes, and Williams 2000; Oliver 2002).

Escaping the rat race

My respondents who left Britain for rural France during mid-life also explain their migration using the contrast between the life that they now lead in the Lot and the lives they had led in Britain. Many of them told me that they had worked at executive level or were high up in their professions. They stressed that they had taken the decision to leave their jobs for a life where they were more in control. In particular, they suggested that as they were no longer employees, they had more control over their time and found the work they did much more fulfilling. Implicit to their accounts was the understanding that their work in Britain had had a strong impact on their lives; it affected their health, the amount of free time that they had, and their overall quality of life. At some point, they realized that they could live a better life outside Britain. This was often prompted by memories and experiences of life abroad. In some cases, migrants had previously spent time living in France, while others had lived in other parts of the world. I believe that their experiences abroad were a strong influence on their decision to migrate.

Living in the Lot, my respondents in this group emphasize that they still work, which, as I discuss in chapter seven, is one way that they distinguish themselves from their compatriots. For these migrants I had the impression that working following migration is a way to pay the bills; work no longer dominates their lives the way they felt it had in Britain. As many of them told me, they found even this aspect of their lives in the Lot more pleasurable than their jobs in Britain had been. Equally, daily life in the Lot was preferable. They particularly drew attention to the slow pace and quality of life that they now had. As the examples below reveal, living and

working in rural France allows these mid-life migrants to escape the hectic lives they had led before migration.

Simon Glass

I met Simon in the local café for lunch one day in March. As we sat, eating the 12€ *ouvriers* menu (the five-course meal traditionally served to labourers) accompanied by a carafe of red wine, he recalled his decision to leave Britain. He told me that 2002 had been a bad year; his father had died, his marriage had broken up and his ex-wife gained custody of their son. Further to this, he had been ill twice in the year. He explained that his (seven day-a-week) working life compounded the impact of these events; he was exhausted. While in Australia doing some consultancy work, he finally realized the impact his busy lifestyle was having on him and decided that something had to change. After he returned from Australia, he was invited to do some work in the southwest of France and made a startling discovery, 'it was quicker and cheaper to get from Perpignan to Liverpool Street than it was from York', where he lived. He also found the lifestyle in rural France slower and more relaxed, a contrast to the frenetic life he had been leading.

Living in the Lot had had further positive impacts on his life. As he told me, 'I've lost a stone and a half. I'm not as fit as I should be, but I'm fitter than I was. I can ride my bike around here. You can't ride your bike around London'. In rural France, Simon had found the time and space that were lacking from his life in Britain. This had been beneficial, and he explained that it had given him the space to breathe and be healthy.

A further contrast to life in Britain was the support he felt that the local French community provided him. He told me that in London he had felt both lonely and anonymous. At the time of my research, he had a French girlfriend and told me how enjoyable it was to sit down for a meal with her family once a week. The local French where they lived often stopped to chat in the streets of the village, and he read this as a sign that they

valued and protected one another. Life in the Lot reminded him of how Britain had been when he was a child:

Southern French culture, it's like stepping back into an England that you do remember as a child; it's very much like 50s/60s England, our social and cultural norms... there's more respect for the elderly built into the children's culture... Children are more respectful, and possibly because of the environment, the elderly are more active... France represents something we've lost.

This nostalgic and romanticized representation of the British past and the rural French present is revealing. While in contemporary Britain Simon had felt lost, moving to a place where life was slower and people appeared to value one another, he felt more in control of his life; life took on a meaning for him that was not solely dictated by work.

Martin and Sarah Johnstone

One bright, cold afternoon in mid-February, I made my way up to the old farmhouse on the *causse* (limestone plateau) where Martin and Sarah lived. As we sat close to the wood-burning stove in their kitchen, the only source of heat in the house, drinking cups of coffee, they explained their decision to migrate.

Martin explained that he had wanted to move to France for a long time, finding urban living in Britain 'sterile, overcrowded, and unfriendly'. He believed that Britain had become this way because of the lack of space between houses, and people's concerns for the security of their properties. As he explained, in his opinion, enclosing houses behind high fences and gates did not result in chance meetings with the neighbours and it was increasingly rare to encounter even your next-door neighbours. In contrast, he felt that rural France offered the antithesis of this urban living; for Martin, the availability of space in the Lot suggested openness within the local community.

It took a while for him to convince Sarah of his plans. It was not until one day when Sarah was on the way from their home on the south coast of

England to her job in London, that she calculated how much time and money she had spent travelling. She suddenly realized that she had spent 24 hours a week on the train for the last eleven years, leaving the house before seven in the morning and not returning until after seven in the evening; and that was on the days when she did not work overtime! This translated into £3000 a year. For her and Martin to spend any time together, they got up early before Sarah went to catch the train. She realized that she did not want to continue devoting all her time to work.

However, even at this point Sarah did not pack in her job immediately, believing that such a change in their lives would need thought and preparation. As Martin and Sarah recalled, the first thing they recognized was that without a monthly salary they would need to be careful with their finances. Before they could move, they would have to save up the money for a house, so that they could buy it outright, and pay for any work that needed doing. Furthermore, as they planned to run a *chambre d'hôte* (bed and breakfast), they needed to complete works to the property within a designated time. Sarah also insisted that they learn French before they moved to France. When they eventually moved to the Lot in 2001, they had owned the house for eighteen months. Martin had spent a lot of time at the property working on the renovation, and they believed that they had another year to go before they could receive their first paying guests. Furthermore, they had learnt some French. Sarah told me that Martin had progressed quickly, while she had lagged behind. His time working on the house had also given him the opportunity to practise his language skills when the local French stopped by to enquire on his progress. The attention of his French neighbours confirmed Martin's initial feelings about the community; they were friendly and interested in what their new neighbours were doing.

Since living in the Lot, Sarah and Martin stress that they have become very involved in the life of the local community. Most weeks during the spring and autumn, they take a walk with other members of the *commune*

(the lowest level of administrative division in France). They are also members of the *commune* association, who organize dinners and events for local residents. In their narratives, Martin and Sarah emphasize that they have found the sense of community that they believed no longer existed in Britain, and of which they believe they are now valued members. This sense was particularly evident when they recalled a conversation between themselves and some of the oldest French inhabitants of the village:

Sarah They were saying the other week that it [the population] has gone up quite a bit with all the English coming in.

Martin You know, retiring here? And it's pushed the population up because it was just in danger of, you know, almost, the village would just die out; it seemed to be moving that way.

In this quotation, Martin and Sarah draw attention to the way that they and their compatriots have made a positive impact on the community (cf. Ardagh 2000). The migrants in this group were particularly keen to emphasize that their presence benefited the local community in some way.

Despite their efforts to show that they had the time to interact and socialize with their French neighbours, Martin and Sarah constantly reiterated that they worked hard even now that they lived in the Lot. For the first year after they arrived, they worked every day, from seven in the morning until late at night, on the renovation of the house. As their newsletter highlights, even after the initial drive to get the *chambre d'hôte* up and running they remained busy running the business and working on further building projects (like the swimming pool). My other respondents who knew them also told me how hard Martin and Sarah worked. Indeed, Martin and Sarah found that people often asked them how they could work the long hours involved in running the *chambre d'hôte*, where they often served a five-course dinner to their guests as well as breakfast. Their response to this question was standard, the hours they worked in the Lot were nothing compared to the hours Sarah had worked in London. Besides, they

explained, they enjoyed the variety of people they put up in the *chambre d'hôte*.

It seemed to me that Martin and Sarah were happy with the life they now led in the Lot; they got to spend more time together, they felt part of the local community, and although they worked hard, it was more pleasurable than work had been before migration. Life in rural France gave them autonomy that they had not experienced in Britain. Working for themselves, they were more in control of their own lives and time.

Jon and Kay Morris

I first met Jon and Kay in May 2004. The weather outside was warm, and we sat in their cool kitchen drinking coffee, with the washing machine gurgling and the smell of freshly made bread permeating the air. In these surroundings, they outlined their choice to move to the Lot in 2001.

Jon had recently taken a career break and he recalled his feelings upon his return to work:

I'd made the break, so going back, I'd been living in the Savoie (*département* in the French Alps), been skiing. I couldn't go back to work in an office after that. We'd just moved office buildings to this smoked-glass, air-conditioned, no opening windows building. You couldn't see whether it was sunny, or whatever, outside. That was it. I went back and, I think it was six months or so, and that was it really.

His experience of life in the Savoie, away from the harsh working environment in London had made him realize that he could have a life away without office-based work. Kay had also felt that it was time for a change, and they began to think of ways to become self-employed, where they would have more control over their time and working conditions. They hoped to start their own business but decided this was untenable in the southeast of England because of the high cost of living. Once again, Jon's fond memories of his six months living abroad came to the fore and they began to consider a life and business in France.

They had previously had holidays in the Lot and knew people who lived there. As they told me, their experiences had taught them that compared to where they lived in the southeast of England, property was cheap and they could afford to buy a house without a mortgage. This would mean that they would have greater financial freedom to establish a business. Indeed, with the capital they got from the sale of their property in England, they bought a house to live in and two cottages to use as gîte. They aimed for the gîte to give them a small income which, supplemented by a little casual work, would keep them going until they had a more sustainable business plan.

In their accounts, they stressed how different life was for them now that they lived in the Lot:

- Kay That was part of the reason for coming here, to have more free time and you could have that all the time. But then, you did say that it wasn't as important to you as it was in England.
- Jon No. It was kind of de-stressing [free time in Britain]. It's great to go out with few friends and do bits and pieces. But over here, it's different.
- Kay There's always tomorrow.

While in Britain they had craved dedicated time to get over the stress caused by work, in the Lot there was never any rush to do anything. As a result, they did not feel under so much pressure and consequently did not structure their free time in the same way. It appeared that in rural France they allowed themselves the leisure just to sit back and relax from time to time.

However, this doesn't mean that they didn't work hard. As they told me, 'It's a different life; it's a good life. We do work hard and I think that people are amazed with the amount of work we put in'. They assured me that they worked at least nine hours a day planning their business, looking after the marketing and queries about the gîte, and maintaining their properties. They were also keen to show that they contributed to the local community.

For example, Jon told me how he had helped to prepare the courts at the tennis club for the new season. They also helped at the tourist office once a week and were involved in the town-twinning project.

Jon and Kay's accounts stress that they are happy with their new lives in France while they had not found their lives before migration satisfying. In Britain, they could not afford to fulfil their dreams of working for themselves because the monthly repayments on their mortgage would be too high. In the Lot, where they had no mortgage, they had the financial freedom they needed to work towards setting up their own business.

For mid-life migrants migration is motivated by the desire for a different life where they can afford to have the futures that they dream of. Life in Britain had been oppressive, impacting on their health and quality of life. As Victoria Cardew had joked of her life before migration, 'I felt like I had a life sentence... I had worked for longer than that'. However, their stories also express their belief that, by moving to the Lot, they escape from the constraints of their work in Britain to lead what, in their perception, are more fulfilling lives.

MOVING FOR A BETTER FUTURE

The stories that Britons living in the Lot tell about their decision to migrate and their lives following migration are telling. These narratives give some insight into the motivations behind their migration, showing that in all cases migration is prompted by the search for a particular lifestyle. As lifestyle migrants, this is often revealed in their 'search for something intangible, encapsulated in the phrase 'quality of life' (O'Reilly 2007b: page not given). Although I emphasize the diverse experiences that lead the different groups to migrate, I argue that these conceal a deeper desire to lead a different and better life in the Lot than they had anticipated having if they had stayed in Britain.

All the narratives I record here express the feeling that the migrants had, in some way, been disillusioned with what had been on offer in Britain,

even though this manifested itself differently to each of them. For example, the family migrants do not want the life available to their children, retirement migrants were unimpressed by what their retirement held, and mid-life migrants felt that their lives were not as fulfilling as they could be. The migrants' accounts thus reveal that they felt their choices for how to live their lives would be limited if they stayed in Britain. Through migration, my respondents gained the autonomy to make their lives meaningful in their own terms.

However, the migrants' stories are also telling because they confirm that their particular migration has different driving forces to other forms of contemporary migration. This is evident in what my respondents do not say. For example, among my respondents there are no recorded cases of moving for work, a motivation for labour migrants, nor are they forced to leave their countries in times of political and social unrest like so many refugees and asylum seekers. Similarly, they do not choose their migration destination because of family or community connections. Following on from this point, many of them told me that one of the reasons for leaving Britain was to get away from the British. As one of my respondents once remarked, 'the purpose of coming here, at least as far as I was concerned... was actually, with due respect, to get away from the English'.

Unlike those of other migrants (see for example Anwar 1979; Al-Rasheed 1994; Linn and Barkan-Ascher 1996; Cohen and Gold 1997; Zetter 1999; Bolzmann, Fibbi, and Vial 2006), my respondents' stories do not stress the myth of return (cf. O'Reilly 2000). This is a social myth argued to be at the foundations of migrant ethnic communities (Cohen and Gold 1997). Its basic features are the collectively held belief that members of the community are working towards return to their ethnic 'homeland'. This myth operates to distinguish members of the community from those who are outsiders (Cohen and Gold 1997). It is therefore functional to the maintenance of ethnic communities formed following migration. However, in the case of the British living in the Lot, I did not find this collective myth

of return to Britain. As their narratives show, the migrants believed that what they wanted would never be available to them in Britain and collectively they spoke negatively about life there. The only sense of return I found was when they reminisced about the golden past of Britain, as I will discuss in chapter four, but this did not necessarily result in community the same way that the myth of return does for other migrant populations.

Their accounts equally do not document efforts to establish a distinct community in the Lot as is recognized in the case of many other migrant populations (see for example Fog Olwig 1993; Rapport 1993; Danforth 1995; Malkki 1995). As I will show in the following chapter, my respondents are keen to emphasize that their efforts towards community are often directed at finding a place for themselves within the existing (French) community of the Lot. At the same time, however, the British living in the Lot do help one another out. They introduce new migrants to the life available to them in the Lot and help one another with particular aspects of life there. The building of networks between the migrants and the exchange and reciprocation that I witnessed, can be considered as community-building. As O'Reilly argues in the case of the British living in Spain, 'this community-building 'work' is enabling people... to enjoy their stay there, to help them settle and feel part of things' (2000: 127).

My respondents seemed equally involved in community-building with their French neighbours. Unlike the British in Spain (see O'Reilly 2000), my respondents do not establish British-run clubs and social groups. They told me that they join groups where the membership is predominantly French, or half-French, half-British. The work they undertake in the Lot is always formalized, and while they are involved predominantly in the tourist industry, their clients often come from around the world rather than specifically from Britain. In these respects, my respondents are not as marginal to mainstream society in the Lot as their compatriots in Spain (O'Reilly 2000; 2007a).

The stories of my respondents living in the Lot show how, once they realized that they were not happy with their lives in Britain, and recognized the constraints on them, they sought to change their lifestyle. Each of the migrants recalled the moment when they realized that they wanted to bring about change in their lives. For example, Ron had an insight into the life of his retired neighbours; Jon Morris spent some time out from his job and returned to work only to realize that he believed he could get more out of his everyday life; and James and Sian Harvey-Browne took the decision to migrate when James was made redundant. In each case, it was anticipation of the future that they and their families would have if they remained in Britain that led my respondents to the decision to migrate. As Bourdieu (2000) argues, feelings of dissatisfaction with life result in strivings to bring the future to fruition faster. Ordinarily, individuals aim for time to pass unnoticed, but realizing that life is lacking in some way prevents this. Resolving dissatisfaction helps to re-establish this seamless passing of time.

However, it is only possible to confront the future actively, as the migrants do, if they have assurances in the present (Bourdieu 2000). In other words, the choice to migrate and the lives that the migrants lead in France were possible because they had a degree of security in their lives before migration. For example, family migrants sold their homes in Britain and, combined in some cases with redundancy packages, they were able to buy property in the Lot without having to take out a mortgage. In most cases, these migrants managed to reserve some of their money to provide for their families while they had no income. The retirement migrants were in a more privileged position than the family migrants. They had the security of capital from their homes, but also a steady income from their pensions. Similarly, the mid-life migrants financed their new lives in France from savings, and in many cases did not have to sell their properties back in Britain immediately. This meant that they were not under as much pressure to earn money in France as the family migrants had been.

That my respondents had assurances to facilitate migration and their way of life in the Lot is telling. On the one hand, it emphasizes that, as lifestyle migrants, my respondents were relatively affluent (O'Reilly 2007b). On the other hand, these assurances from their lives before migration demonstrate that they were not experiencing the crisis of meaning in their lives that Bourdieu (2000) refers to as disruption. Rather than having no agency and lacking meaning in their lives as Bourdieu (2000) implies, they felt that in Britain their agency was limited. They believe that life in rural France offers them the opportunity to escape from some of these constraints. The family migrants experienced threats to their agency when they lost their jobs, but in their narratives, they play down this negative event, emphasizing the positive benefits of migration for their families. The retirement migrants felt that by staying in Britain they would not be able to live their retirement the way that they desired, but in France this was possible. Through migration, the retirement migrants strive to age positively (cf. King, Warnes, and Williams 2000; Oliver 2002). The mid-life migrants did not feel that they had control over their time in Britain. However, in France, away from the working conditions that were a predominant feature of their lives before migration, they took control of their own time. In all cases, the constraints that my respondents felt were the limits on their abilities to have control over their lives. As the ethnographic examples in this chapter show, the migrants believe that now that they live in the Lot they can define their lives in their own terms.

One explanation for how the migrants augment their agency is the idea that through migration they enter a liminal phase, and thus escape their unsatisfactory lives in Britain. Indeed, previous studies of Britons living overseas concluded that liminality is a central feature of the migrants' daily lives. For example, Oliver (2002) argues that British retirees living in Spain occupy a liminal space characterized by the constant pursuit of leisure. As Turner (1982) argues, leisure, in its opposition to work, is an feature of the liminal phase. It could similarly be claimed, bearing in mind that very few of them work, that the lives of British retirement migrants in the Lot are

characterized by a sense of 'permanent liminality' (Oliver 2002). In this interpretation, the lives on offer to them in rural France are anti-structural rather than structural; the Lot offers these retirees the possibility of a break from the normal social conventions related to their position in the life course (cf. Oliver 2002). Similar to their compatriots in Spain, the retirees claim that through migration they age positively and can lead the leisured lifestyle they desire. However, in comparison to the retirees, the family and mid-life migrants stress that they both live and work in France; leisure is not the predominant feature of their lives following migration. I argue that they thus reject the notion that they live in a liminal space.

O'Reilly (2000) also argues that liminality is a feature of life for the British living in Spain. She describes how her respondents occupy a liminal space between Spain and Britain, between the Spanish and the British. The understanding of liminality that underpins both Oliver (2002) and O'Reilly's (2000) accounts, is one located between two fixed and immutable points, reflecting Turner's (1969) presentation of liminality, which I discuss further below. For O'Reilly (2000) in particular, the notion of liminality is used to indicate that British migrants on the Costa del Sol are in transition, on the threshold between Britain and Spain, between one lifestyle and another. Considering the ethnographic data that O'Reilly (2000) presents, I would argue that her respondents are on their British doorsteps looking out, rather than on their Spanish doorsteps looking in; they still have a long distance to travel if they want to escape liminality. Just as Oliver (2002) concludes that the liminality of International Retirement Migrants in Spain is permanent, there is also a sense that O'Reilly's (2000) Britons are also not in any rush to change their situations.

The narratives of my respondents in the Lot revealed the sense that they too were in a liminal space, somewhere between Britain and France, and being British and what they perceived as French. But they also stressed that they did not feel comfortable in this position, and demonstrated that they were continually striving to escape their in-between status. Most of

them repeatedly explained to me that they did not want to live with one foot in Britain and one foot in France. As I witnessed, in their daily lives the migrants were preoccupied with the idea of trying to integrate into the local population, while they also struggled to escape their Britishness.

Given my respondents' seeming impatience to move away from the liminal phase, I question here whether liminality is the most appropriate term to explain the daily lives of my respondents. Turner (1969) intended liminality, drawing on van Gennep's (1960) discussion of the tripartite structure of rites of passage, to refer to the movement of people from one social status to another. It is necessary for novices to enter the liminal space where they are gradually socialized into their new status in society. The roles and statuses both before and after initiation are fixed within the hierarchy of the society and relate to the position of individuals within the life course. Each society stresses that movement happens in a strict, linear fashion, where individuals move up the social hierarchy from one established position to another. The migrants have no well-established and commonly attributed end-point, other than the vague notion that they are headed toward a better way of life. Rather than the societal consensus that Turner emphasizes (1969, 1982) as fundamental to liminality, my respondents all seem to be on an individual quest, where they themselves (re)define the goals.

As my respondents' narratives show, what they aim towards is in a constant state of transition and flux. While they have an, albeit, ill-defined aim of leading a better life, this always seems to be out of their reach, the stakes are always changing. On the one hand, as they learn more about living in rural France they realize that they have further to go to achieve their goals than they had originally imagined (see chapter seven and conclusion). On the other hand, as I discuss in chapter seven, in their attempts to differentiate their way of life from the lives led by their compatriots also living in the Lot, they constantly redefine what constitutes a better life. This draws attention to the uncertainty that the migrants

experience once they live in rural France and calls into question whether liminality, as the linear progression from one social status to another accounts fully for the pervading sense of this in the migrants' daily lives.

The migrants' narratives stress the differences between life in rural France and life back in Britain. They emphasize how, rather than continuing to live and work with the constraints placed on their agency, they strive to lead a different (and better) life elsewhere. This explanation resonates with Turner's (1982) argument that individuals choose to enter into a liminoid state – a transitional phase where individuals are released from the constraints of industrial society (e.g. work) – to overcome the inauthentic 'communitas of necessity' (Turner 1982: 58) of which they feel they are unwillingly participants. They hope to replace this with a more authentic communitas based on 'direct, unmediated communion' (Turner 1982: 58). Through occupation of the liminoid space, individuals can re-negotiate the meaning that the social world has for them (Turner 1982). My respondents' accounts of their migration, stressing that through their elective migration they seek to escape the constraints placed upon them by British society, suggest that the migrants pursue what Turner (1982) argues is available in the liminoid: a way of defining the world in their own terms.

My respondents' experiences, as more individualistically oriented, in part fit Turner's (1982) model of the liminoid, which stresses that entrance into the liminoid phase is optional rather than obligatory (as in the liminal). Similarly, the migrants' stories express that there is a degree of experimentation involved in their lives in France that Turner (1982) emphasizes is possible in the liminoid. However, regarding the migrants' lives in rural France as liminoid also has drawbacks. In particular, I draw attention to Turner's (1982) association of the liminoid with the ludic, the leisure space almost passively experienced by the individual. This is in opposition to working space; work and leisure thus are oppositional in Turner's (1982) model. But this model does not account for the

combination of work and leisure – coupled with their active rejection of the idea that life in the Lot is one long holiday – that my respondents explicitly highlight in their accounts of life in rural France. Furthermore, Turner's (1982) argument undermines the idea that activity or work may go into the construction and maintenance of a particular leisure space. While arguably, there are aspects of their lives in France that correlate with the idea that they occasionally enter a liminoid realm – for example their participation in creating a particular aesthetic within their homes, painting, composing music – the liminoid cannot fully account for the migrants' experiences of life in rural France.

Instead, I propose that the notions of ambivalence and the anthropological concept of ambiguity are more useful in explaining the revelations of my ethnography. I use ambivalence to highlight that a sense of uncertainty and the presence of contradictory emotions are characteristic of my respondents' accounts of their lives following migration. Firstly, my respondents' accounts demonstrate their uncertainty about what they are aiming for, and how to achieve this. They constantly seek reassurance from their audience that they are doing things the right way. Secondly, their narratives reveal the persisting tension between their sense of Britishness and their belief that they need to integrate into the French population. I similarly employ the notion of ambiguity, as first identified within anthropology by Mary Douglas in her book *Purity and Danger* (1966), to emphasize the migrants' sense that they are somehow 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1966: 44), that they have contravened the established social order. In other words, the migrants feel discomfort about their position as middle class Britons living in the French countryside; they are deviant both in terms of their class but also, and more important to the themes I develop in this thesis, in respect to their nationality and culture. Their ambiguous status is further accentuated by their belief that they are different from the British back in Britain and in other migration destinations, and their realization that they are also different from the local French. As their narratives demonstrate, they continually strive to overcome these

feelings, but through their interactions with others, they are reminded of how far they still need to go before they fit in.

Understanding the migrants' experiences within a framework of ambivalence and ambiguity allows for a greater degree of flexibility; the migrants' accounts of their experiences may at times place them closer to the sense that they are British, while at other times they stress their incorporation into the local community. They are not moving towards an inevitable goal as the goalposts are always changing, but neither do they stand still. As I discuss further in the chapters four and five, ambivalence can thus shed some valuable light on how the migrants understand and experience life in the Lot.

CONCLUSION

My respondents' stories about migration and their lives in rural France show that their motivations and experiences are different to those that influence many other contemporary migration flows. The migrants' narratives tell different stories about their motivations and the events leading up to migration. This demonstrates that Britons living in the Lot are not as homogeneous as previous studies assumed (see for example Buller and Hoggart 1994a; Barou and Prado 1995). The ethnographic examples in this chapter thus confirm the categorization of my respondents into different groups, highlighting that members of each group have similar motivations behind their migration. For example, the family migrants told me how they wanted to be able to spend more time together and how their lives in France were better for their children. The retirement migrants explained that, in the Lot, they had more freedom to do what they wanted, and that they felt valued by members of the local community. Finally, the mid-life migrants discussed how they had escaped the stresses and strains of living and working in the southeast of England.

As the ethnographic examples in this chapter show, my respondents present their lives in rural France as the way that they escape

dissatisfaction with life in Britain. For example, David Lomax told me, 'I certainly wanted to get away from the lifestyle I had, which was pretty hectic and stressful'. I argue that while the migrants' experiences of life in Britain in part motivated their decision to migrate, features of their lives before migration also facilitated their move to rural France. As Bourdieu (2000) argues, dissatisfaction with the lives that they led in Britain encourages my respondents to bring the future of their lives forward. It is their assurances in the present that allow them to face their futures actively. Owning property back in Britain, having savings or pensions are assurances. For my respondents, the security of these means that migration is not as much of a risk as it would be without them. The assurances that the migrants had from their lives in Britain demonstrate that they were not completely without agency before migration. Instead, they felt that their lives in Britain placed some constraints on their individual agency.

The migrants often explained that the constraints that they felt on their lives originated from society. The transformation in their lives brought about through migration was thus about breaking free of society's expectations for them. As Jon and Kay told me,

It was quite a risk at the time. Some of our friends thought we were absolutely bonkers... because it was just moving out of that line that everybody takes. You work, you have kids, you get your own house, then you retire.

While they felt that they had limited control over their lives before migration, the migrants' stories about life afterwards reveal that through migration they had managed, in part, to augment their individual agency. On the one hand, they achieve this because of their location in-between France and Britain (cf. O'Reilly 2000; Oliver 2002) where they can overcome certain constraints to their agency that they felt in Britain. On the other hand, my respondents' narratives stress that it was through their own actions that they were able to transform their lives. The migrants' ability to imagine an alternative to their lives in Britain influenced their

decision to migrate (cf. Papastergiadis 2000). As I show in chapter four, although their negative imaginings of Britain gave my respondents the incentive to leave, their positive imaginings of how their lives in the Lot would be gave them further motivation.

As I demonstrate in the ethnographic examples throughout this thesis, gaining a different way of life is not only achieved through migration. My respondents' stories about their lives following migration thus show that they are engaged in the constant pursuit of difference. However, as the stories in this chapter show, migration is an important stage in the process of getting to this distinctive lifestyle.

CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN A POSTCARD¹

... you won't find the tortured geology of, say, the Ardèche or Verdon, or the architectural majesty of the Loire or Dordogne, yet the Lot has something else to offer: for simple, natural beauty and a sense of leafy seclusion, it's unsurpassed (Moss 2003: 26).

... the more rugged and isolated landscape of the Lot is attracting British buyers who like its peaceful rural nature; with its medieval, hilltop villages and more arid appearance (Buller and Hoggart 1994b).

For my respondents living in the Lot, the landscape is something that attracted them to the area (cf. Buller and Hoggart 1994a) and an aspect of their new lives that they value and continue to discuss. In this chapter, I argue that their discussions about the landscape indicate their feelings of ambivalence. On the one hand, the migrants stress their position as viewers of the landscape, drawing attention to its beauty. Yet, on the other hand, the migrants' stories reveal their desires to be within the landscape, to be a part of the life that goes on in the Lot.

Life in rural France represents the antithesis of the lives the migrants led in Britain. While the British landscape offered them a fast pace of life, materialism, and individualism, which are symbolic of modernity, the migrants imagine rural France as a return to tradition, a 'rural idyll' where they can experience a holistic and natural way of life (Williams 1973; Newby 1977; Strathern 1982; Perry 1986; Rapport 1993). As I show through the ethnographic examples in this chapter, while these imaginings of rural France influence the decision to migrate, to achieve the distinct lifestyle that the migrants seek involves a deeper knowledge of the landscape. My respondents' narratives thus stress that they gain this knowledge not from looking at the landscape but from living and working

¹ I borrow the title of this chapter from Rosemary Bailey's (2002) *Life in a postcard: escape to the Pyrenees*, her autobiographical account of living in the French Pyrenees.

within it. However, the idea of making an intimate connection with the landscape by 'getting your hands dirty', is itself the result of a particular cultural imagining of traditional approaches to nature.

How the migrants' relate to and understand the landscape changes over time; it takes time to see beyond the postcard. Rosemary Bailey, whose book this chapter is named after, stresses precisely this point:

It was then we found that Corbiac [her house] was the subject of the local postcard, along with the statue of Notre Dame de Corbiac, the thirteenth-century Virgin and Child, once worshipped in the monastery. We began to realize what a significant part of local history the monastery was, and our sense of responsibility for our postcard property grew (2002: 43-44).

The migrants' narratives similarly reveal how they gradually learn more about the landscape and the local people around them. Their growing knowledge influences presentations of their lives in the Lot. As I explain below, my respondents' discussions of their new surroundings thus resonate with the argument that the construction of the landscape is a cultural process (see for example Bender 1993a, 1993b, 1998; Hirsch 1995; Abramson 2000).

LANDSCAPE AS A PROCESS

As Bender (1998) argues, perception is a central feature of how an individual relates to a particular landscape. In her argument, there are three ways that people perceive their surroundings:

... the landscape as *palimpsest*; landscape as *structure of feeling*; and landscape as *embodied*. All three have marked implications for how we relate to the land and how we choose to 'protect', use, and interpret it (Bender 1998:6).

Previous theories about how people relate to their surroundings generally focus on one way of perceiving the landscape. For example, the phenomenology of landscape stresses that people have to have practical engagement for the environment to have meaning for them (see for

example Ingold 1993, 1995; Escobar 1999, 2001), and social constructionists emphasize only the culturally mediated construction of the landscape (see for example Williams 1973). However, it is possible, as Bender (1993a, 1993b, 1998) argues, that these different perceptions have a combined influence on the way that people relate to landscape at any point in time. Indeed, both Bender (1993a, 1998) and Hirsch (1995) highlight that perceptions and understandings of the landscape undergo continual transformation and reconstruction; the construction of landscape is therefore a process.

In contrast, the phenomenological perspective on landscape proposes that individuals relate to their surroundings in two primary, mutually exclusive ways: through engagement or detachment (Ingold 1993; 1995). Through embodied experience – ‘the knowledge born of immediate experience...the understandings that people derive from their lived, everyday involvement in the world’ (Ingold 1993:152) – the individual comes to know their surroundings and they become meaningful to them (cf. Escobar 1999, 2001). Conversely, according to this model, for the detached social actor the landscape has limited significance, reduced to scenery. While through engagement the individual experiences the distinct rhythms of the landscape and gains a sense of ‘place’, detachment precludes the emergence of this relationship (Ingold 1993; Escobar 1999, 2001). Phenomenological approaches to the landscape thus rely upon the polarization of engagement and detachment. As Carrier (2003) argues, the assumption behind this dualism is that, in Modern society (itself contrasted with the pre-modern), individuals are disengaged from their surroundings; all their encounters with the landscape are mediated and they can only experience it from a position of detachment.

This privileging of engagement and detachment ignores cultural constructions of landscape (Bender 1993a, 1998; Tilley 1994; Argyrou 2005). Without cultural context landscapes have no ‘sense of historical particularity’ (Bender 1998:37). Furthermore, as Carrier (2003) highlights,

Ingold's (1993) model relies on an essentialized understanding that those living in the Modern world perceive their surroundings only from positions of detachment. This contradicts more recent studies of people's relationships with the environment (see for example Strang 1997; Theodossopoulos 1997, 2000, 2003a; Dominy 2000; Johnson and Clisby forthcoming) which show that 'some people in the modern west hold a view of their environs that is more than the view that is supposed to characterize Modern societies' (Carrier 2003: 10-11). For example, as Johnson and Clisby argue in the case of expatriates living in Costa Rica, it is possible for modern actors to 'identify themselves with both Traditional and Modern approaches to nature' (forthcoming: page not given).

Deconstructing the polarization between engagement and detachment reveals instead that people understand their surroundings in a variety of ways. As Carrier argues,

... it seems unwise to assume that the alternative to dirt under the fingernails is the Parisians' distanced, tourist gaze, or even that the presence of the dirt means the absence of the distance. Rather we ought to be aware that behind the gazing eye is the thinking and affecting mind, and that such a mind can find engagements in the absence of direct, practical action in the surroundings (Carrier 2003:18).

What the individual perceives as engagement and detachment therefore emerges from a particular cultural context. This resonates with Bender (1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1998) and Hirsch's (1995) arguments that landscape is a cultural process based on both cultural construction and the individual's own experiences. As Bender summarizes,

People's experience of the land is based in large measure on the particularity of the social, political and economic relations within which they live out their lives, while at the same time their individual actions form part of the way in which their relations are constructed and changed (Bender 1993b: 246).

From this position, individuals understand the landscape both through embodied experience, and from the position of their own socio-cultural history. The ethnographic examples in this chapter show that how the migrants relate to the Lotoise landscape resonates with this argument that the construction of the landscape is a cultural process.

GAZING ON THE LANDSCAPE

Throughout their stories about living in the Lot, my respondents described the different ways that they perceive their surroundings. In this section, I address their representations of the landscape as scenery that they gaze upon. These depictions are reminiscent of their imaginings of the 'rural idyll'. I therefore highlight how they perceive the local Lotoise community as part of the landscape. My respondents romanticize the relationships that these local actors have with one another and with their environment. As I argue, these ideas of 'community' are intrinsic to their presentations of an authentic rurality (cf. Strathern 1982; Perry 1986; Rapport 1993).

The Scenery of the Lot

Many of my respondents told me about their early impressions of the landscape in the Lot. Those living in the east of Cahors told me how the scenery was a motivation to buy a property in the area. For example, David Lomax told me about the first time he had seen the view from his house, 'I saw those cliffs, and I saw the view... and the view across the Vers (a local valley) is absolutely stunning... why are we here? Because it's beautiful'.

Robert and Justine Grange also explained to me how the local scenery had influenced their decision to buy their house in the Lot. They live in a village to the east of Cahors, a few miles from the popular tourist village of Saint-Cirq Lapopie (see Figure 4.2). Their house stands on the main road through their village, and from their lounge they see the village church and across the river to the immense limestone cliffs beyond. They explained to

me how the local scenery had influenced their decision to buy property in the area:

We came through Saint-Cirq. He [the estate agent] brought us, we had lunch in Saint-Cirq and then he brought us along the fantastic road from Saint-Cirq to Bouzies. At that stage I think we would have bought the shed because it was, it was just so colossal, the view along the edge. To think that we were going to be living 3 km away from that was just something else!



Figure 4.2: View down to the valley floor from above Saint-Cirq Lapopie

For David and the Granges, the view was one of the aspects of the Lot that drew them to the area; the scenery could not be more different to the landscapes of London and Hong Kong where they had lived before migration. Since moving to the Lot, Robert and Justine have had visitors who were equally astounded by the beauty of the area:

It's surprising how many people don't know about the Lot though. I mean, we've had two or three sets of people come who have spent a lot of time on holiday in France, in either Brittany, the Loire, or Provence, and didn't know about this bit. They think it's well, it's gorgeous.

Looking out onto the view from their house, I asked them what they thought of the landscape to the west of Cahors which, as I highlighted in

chapter two is significantly different to that found to the east where Robert and Justine live. As they told me,

Justine I don't like it anything like as much, and it's not country park, and as you drive down the main road, there are all sorts of little industrial bits.
Robert It's a lot less spectacular as well.

Through the contrast between the country park, the *Parc naturel regional des causses du Quercy* (Regional, natural park of the limestone plateaux of Quercy), on their side of Cahors and the industrial zones along the valley to the west, Robert and Justine reveal their perceptions of what constitutes a beautiful landscape: the country park, seemingly natural and untouched is beautiful, while the industrial zones spoil the landscape.

The desire to live in a beautiful setting is common to many considered as lifestyle migrants (see for example Waldren 1996; King, Warnes and Williams 2000; O'Reilly 2000; Oliver 2002). It symbolizes the antithesis of what life before migration offered. For example, Waldren describes what Mallorca means to the expatriates living on the island, 'this idyllic setting epitomized the contrast to Western materialist society that most come to escape. Foreigners wanted their own piece of paradise' (1996:146). How the migrants depict the landscape (both back in Britain and in France) can signify what they imagine life in their destination offers. Therefore, by repeatedly evoking images of the rural idyll when they talked of the Lot, my respondents stressed that they were looking for social harmony, continuity, stability, and order (cf. Selwyn 1996).

The Country and the City

The link between nature and the Lotoise landscape was similarly a recurring theme in the migrants' stories about life in the Lot. For example, Pat and Jean Porter told me that, compared to Britain, 'There's more, essentially, wildlife around here. Much more animals, more birds, more flowers'. Ollie Stampton, a young boy, also told me that the Lot was different to how he remembered rural Somerset where he had lived before

migration. As he explained, in the Lot 'there's more countryside, there's more forest... there's more wildlife'. There were many other examples of this equation between nature and landscape, ranging from the awestruck amazement of Betty and Barney Monty when they first saw a herd of wild boar, to the bizarre sight of large craters in the local fields, which Anne Wilson told me resulted from the wild boars' search for roots to eat in the hot, dry summer.

The migrants drew further comparisons to the undesirable landscape of Britain when they talked about the sounds they could hear in their new surroundings. Pat and Jean described the differences between the two landscapes:

Jean When I was working, towards the end I was self-employed and working from home. And on Friday night, there used to be acrobatic aeroplanes going [makes droning noise of planes] all the time; and up and round...

Pat It makes a difference... they come here [planes] every so often and it's easy to tolerate. Basically, there's so little to hear here.

Where they had lived before migration had been a rural village, but they told me that, over time, they had increasingly witnessed the noise from planes and traffic drowning out the sounds of the countryside. Britain could no longer provide the peace and quiet that they believed the country should offer them. It seemed that they felt that there was no longer a distinction between the urban and the rural in Britain.

In contrast, the rurality that migrants imply that they have found in the Lot resonates with the 'rural idyll' that Williams identifies, 'the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue' (1973: 1). He argues that this interpretation of rurality is specific to the British middle class.

Sharp similarly argues that this reminiscence for the English past is evident in Peter Mayle's (1989, 1990) books about his life in France,

... Provence in Mayle's accounting is an English past. It is an idealized England organized around a productive, but

non-industrialized countryside from which emerges a landscape of consumption for its viewers. Furthermore, as if to reinforce the imagined value of this particular community, it can provide a rural idyll of England (1999: 206).

As Sharp (1999) highlights, imaginings of rural France converge on the idea that there is a beautiful landscape that migrants can buy into – they can have their own piece of paradise – and that this is reminiscent of the British past. But central to this imagining is also their perception that within this a sense of community spirit is available. As I demonstrate later in this chapter, this particular feature of the rural idyll is similarly valued and sought after by my respondents.

As Williams (1973) argues, within their imaginings of the rural idyll, people often evoke a past of which they have no personal recollection. Indeed this was apparent in the accounts of the mid-life migrants when they equated the Lot with the British past:

It's like stepping back in time; it's like England was 50 years ago. I hope it never changes. (Sally Stampton)

It's like it was in England in the 50s 60s and 70s. (Sarah Hammond)

Both Sally and Sarah were mid-life migrants aged in their forties when I carried out my research. It is unlikely that they have personal memories of the more distant pasts that they refer to. Their nostalgia therefore emerges from a particular cultural imagining of the British past (Lowenthal 1985).

For the retirement migrants, however, this reminiscence is more firmly grounded in experience. Vic Wilson explained to me that living in the Lot reminded him of the farm and land that his grandparents had owned. As a child, he used to frequently visit the farm. He told me that these were happy times, even though the rural Britain he recalls was post-war Britain. There was plenty of land around the farm, and he had the freedom to go wherever he wanted during the day. His nostalgia for the past links a particular lifestyle to the rural idyll. As he explained, this way of life was no

longer available to him in Britain. This shows that for him, the Lotoise landscape represents something he believes is lost (cf. Abramson 2000).

Similarly, the family migrants explained how they had witnessed the transformation of rural Britain. For example, Jean and Pat Porter told me how members of the local community had been 'priced out' of the market by commuters in rural Oxford. This resulted, so they told me, in the disappearance of the sense of community that they now valued in the Lot. Although their village in Oxford had been in the countryside, little evidence remained of practical engagement with the land through farming and cultivation. Harry and Connie similarly explained that the farmers had struggled to make a living in rural Lincolnshire, with the result that there was gradual rural depopulation in the area. Eventually, the local council decided that to make use of the unused land they would build a council estate. Harry and Connie described how this had changed the character of the village they lived in and how they had felt threatened by these incomers. These examples of how my respondents' imaginings of rural France coincide with their memories of the British rural past confirm Bender's argument that, 'People relate to place and time through memory, but the memories may be of other places and other times' (2002: S107).

The migrants' narratives reveal that they perceive certain aspects of the Lotoise landscape as 'natural' and holistic. Once more, this description of the local French landscape gains significance through the comparison to lost British rurality. As the ethnographic examples below reveal, there are several features of this rurality that the migrants emphasize are available to them in France.

Perceptions of 'community'

As Strathern (1982) and Rapport (1993) argue, the idea of community is central to idealizations of the rural. This is invariably a localized, bounded 'traditional rural community' based on mechanical solidarity (Rapport 1993: 33). In this section, I show that my respondents' perceive that the local French value 'immediate family and friendship ties, local community

solidarity and supportiveness' (Perry 1986:22), while they imply that back in Britain this was not the case.

Trevor and Susan Sparrow, retired migrants who had spent their lives in London, emphasized the presence of this 'traditional rural community' in their accounts. This was evident when they discussed a 'traditional' Occitan dance they attended the previous week, drawing attention to the involvement of the local French population of, '... all ages from children up to grandparents... what is nice is all the children come; everyone has to dance. It's just like family'. In their perception, this was evidence that members of the community had strong ties to one another. They also told me about the generosity of their neighbours, once again drawing attention to the supportiveness and friendship available to them in their village:

They are very generous, the French. In the country, like here, they give you so much and they think, 'Well, that's normal. If you have a lot, you give'. This week we've had fresh eggs, a bream, mimosa, daffodils... They're just so kind to us... it is because we're in a village in the country.

They were keen to stress that they reciprocated this generosity. This emphasizes that they participate in the everyday life in their village. Trevor and Susan's idyllic representations of the local community also support Strathern's description of how incomers to the rural view villages as "natural' communities' (1982:248). This confirms their perception that holistic, and harmonious ways of life are available in the rural.

This particular notion of community was apparent in my respondents' accounts when they discussed how local people related to one another on a day-to-day basis. For example, retirement migrants often drew attention to the behaviour of the local young people to stress that they had more respect for their elders than their counterparts in Britain. This is an example of how the migrants' position in the life course influenced which aspects of the rural community they valued. For example, Vic and Anne Wilson told me that they had been helping Jacques, the grandson of their French neighbours, with his English. To begin with, he had been a

reluctant learner, but Vic and Anne soon found a way to make the process more enjoyable. They introduced him to the English version of Scrabble™, and started to play a game with him every Saturday morning. What had initially been an exercise to help Jacques with his schoolwork soon progressed. Even after he no longer needed to learn English for school, he continued to come round every Saturday, eventually beating Vic at the game. Anne told me that she was surprised that he still came round; after all, he was a teenager and probably had friends he wanted to see. Comparing Jacques to Vic's granddaughter, Vic and Anne perceived that children in France had more respect for their elders than their contemporaries in Britain. This was a level of respect that Vic and Anne believed had been expected of them when they were growing up. In their opinion, the decline of this signalled that, in contemporary British society, people no longer valued one another.

Alannah similarly discussed how, in her perception, the French living locally had more time for one another. She took particular pains to stress that they looked after their elderly, even though the news the previous year had shown that during the heat wave, a large number of elderly people in France had died while their families had been away on holiday:

I was just thinking about the number of people who died; I just can't remember the figure offhand, maybe 15000 ...and actually, it shocks me and you, because I would have thought that the French were much more family-orientated than we are in Britain and that, and you know, there would be several generations living together, and, you know, I felt quite shocked again at the thought that that many old people could have died because their families went off and left them. The French I know, I can't imagine them abandoning their elderly parents like that; I can't sort of get my head around how that happens here.

As her account demonstrates, she had a particular imagining of how the local French looked out for their families, which is why she was so shocked by the news. Although faced with the evidence, she still found it

difficult to overcome her own imaginings of how the French related to one another.

The care and respect that the local French gave to one another, as the ethnographic examples above show, was an important feature of the retirees' imaginings of life in rural France. Many of my respondents in this group told me similar stories about how young people stood aside for them in the street and greeted them, or how local families were looking after their elderly at home. I argue that the retirement migrants' promotion of this feature of the local community reveals their fears about ageing. In Britain they feared that the lack of respect given to the elderly would result in them being treated badly as they grew older (cf. Hockey and James 1993; Higgs 1997). Ultimately, this could lead to their marginalization and exclusion from society (Higgs 1997). In turn, this would erode their feelings of self-value and worth (Featherstone and Hepworth 1991, 1995). In France, however, where they believed people valued and looked after their elderly, this was less likely to happen; they would age, but the reactions of those around them would allow them to age more gracefully and with dignity.

My respondents in other groups also emphasized that members of the local community seemed to value one another, while this had not been the case in Britain. As Kay Morris, a mid-life migrant, explained, 'they have more value for time, and people and things'. Equally, Justine, a family migrant, contrasted her perceptions of the British who, in her opinion were aggressive in attitude, with her impressions of her French neighbours, 'The French in rural France we find extremely polite, civilized, and charming people talk to you'. As Robert and Justine explained, the attitudes of their French neighbours helped them to feel that they were valued members of the community. Pat and Jean Porter also explained to me that they felt that there was a strong sense of community in their part of the Lot. They told me that 'everyone knows everyone', and in part, this was because so many members of the local population were related to

one another by blood. They implied that they were a part of this community when they told me that they were friendly with their closest neighbours and had been helping a young French girl with her English once a week. As they explained, this was a contrast to their experiences of life in rural Britain where their village had been full of commuters and nobody knew their neighbours.

The ethnographic examples in this section demonstrate the aspects of rural living valued by the British living in the Lot. As I briefly show, the aspects that they discuss may vary depending on which group of migrants they belong to. For example, the retirement migrants stress the respect that members of the local community have for their elderly. How the migrants' discuss the Lotoise population gives insights into their initial imaginings of what life in rural France could offer them, but, as I discuss later in the chapter, it also reveals that they strive to become part of this community. I argue that the migrants' presentations of their engagement with the local French not only justify their continued presence in rural France, but also stress that they have greater feelings of self-worth and value than they did in Britain. This is an indicator that they augment their individual agency through migration. I discuss the migrants' involvement within the local community in detail later in this chapter, but first it is necessary to examine the cultural construction behind my respondents' imaginings of life in the Lot.

THE MYTH OF RURAL FRENCH LIVING

Previous studies of British migration to rural France emphasized that this was a form of urban to rural migration (counterurbanization), on an international scale (see for example Buller and Hoggart 1994a; Barou and Prado 1995). The myth of the rural idyll that seems central to the accounts of my respondents is not unique. As the Commission for Rural Communities report published in 2006 stated,

It seems clear the idea of the rural idyll is strongly embedded in the perceptions and potential behaviours of the English population as a whole, with consequences in terms of migration and housing demand (2006: 67).

However, while this myth may be embedded in the minds of the British population, not everyone has the resources to bring this dream to fruition. Counterurbanization populations are thus often class based and made up of the members of the middle class (Strathern 1982; Perry 1986; Boyle and Halfacree 1998).

While the myth of the rural idyll influences international migration of this kind, Buller and Hoggart argue that there is also a myth of rural French living that:

... is becoming incorporated into the cultural experience of middle class British nationals. Even for those who do not own a French home, contemporary fiction, television and store catalogues increasingly allude to living in France (1994a: 37).

As the ethnographic examples in this chapter demonstrate, the migrants often reproduce these images of rural French living in their accounts of life in the Lot. For example, media aimed at encouraging people to buy houses abroad often incorporates visual representations, promoting idealized images of the French landscape. This is evident in the windows of estate agencies (cf. Buller and Hoggart 1992, 1993, 1994a). Examining *French Property News*,² Barou and Prado stress how selective advertising can be, 'the content of the magazine assembles idyllic images and extremely practical advice but never makes room for a real analysis of the implication of life in France for a Briton' (1995:36).³ My respondents' stories reveal the influence of these limited depictions of rural France on their decision to migrate; they tell of their initial expectations of life in

² Self-acclaimed as 'The most widely read publication for buyers of property in France' and 'The world's leading English language publication for French property' (French Property News 2006).

³ 'En fait le contenu du journal assemble des images idylliques et des conseils extrêmement pratiques mais ne fait jamais de place à de véritables analyses de ce qu'implique la vie en France pour un Britannique'.

France, which are often romantic, but as I show in the following chapter, they soon have to come to terms with how to live in the Lot

Over ten years have passed since Barou and Prado (1995), Buller and Hoggart (1994a) published their works, but little has changed in the way that the media represents rural France. If anything, the idealization of the French landscape is even more prolific. For example, there has been a recent explosion of television programmes helping people to buy and renovate homes abroad. These include *A Place in the Sun* (Channel Four), *Dream Holiday Home* (Channel Five), *Living the Dream* (BBC2) and *No Going Back* (Channel Four). The presenters draw attention to the stunning views of the countryside as the camera pans over a landscape empty of people. Equally, trips into the local town or village often coincide with market day, when all the local producers gather to sell their homegrown produce; there are never shots of people trawling around large, artificially lit supermarkets. This selected focus on the 'natural' elements of the rural landscape reconfirms and affirms imaginings of a simple rural lifestyle.

Media representations of rural France also allude to the sense of 'community' available to its inhabitants. Figure 4.1 is advertising material from a company that finds properties for people who want to live in southwest France. Not only does the advertisement display and stress the beautiful landscape of the Aveyron, it also promotes the availability of traditional values. As it states, 'The friendliness of the local people reflects the respect country France still shows to the stranger. Family values remain as a bastion of Aveyron life'. Attracting people into the French countryside, this company draws upon the notion that, 'the 'village' attracts outsiders who...see residence as entailing community' (Strathern 1982: 248). Similarly, these romantic images of rural France are found in books about living there. Barou and Prado (1995) argue that this contemporary

Finding Properties in South West France



The friendliness of the local people reflects the respect country France still shows to the stranger. Family values remain as a bastion of Aveyron life.



Aveyron Homes is a service that has been set up to help to find homes in the Aveyron. It is run in England and France by Alan Taylor. His partner in France is Pascale Fabre. Alan has been finding locations for films for the last 30 years. He seems to have a nose for discovering the unusual. For himself, he has found a tower in Whitehall, a 17th century gamekeeper's cottage in Warwickshire and a 15th century chateau near Villefranche de Rouergue. He was also instrumental in the development of Rodez airport.

Aveyron Homes

Finding Properties in South West France



The Aveyron is known as 'Green and Serene'. It is a beautiful and diverse region. It ranges from small mediaeval villages clinging to impossible hillsides to 15th century arcaded towns divided by narrow alleyways. From deep ravines cut by the noble rivers of the Lot and the Aveyron to the snowy slopes of Aubrac. From pre-historic tombs to stalactite adorned caves. From brilliantly colourful markets in Villefranche to small flea markets in surrounding villages. From simple cafes to Michelin 3 star restaurants. From horse riding to skiing, golf to hang gliding.

visit us at www.aveyronhomes.net

Figure 4.1: Advertising leaflets for Aveyron Homes

literature is largely responsible for the wide-scale distribution of particular images of France. Their evidence for this was that when they carried out their research among the British in France in the 1990s, many of their participants confirmed that they had read *A Year in Provence* (Mayle 1989), and *Toujours Provence* (Mayle 1990), and stated that this had influenced their decision to migrate. One of the pervading criticisms of these works is that they present stereotypical images of France, perpetuating the link to the rural idyll (Aldridge 1995; Sharp 1999). Paradoxically, these images were responsible for the books' success; as Sharp argues, '...it is the non-conflictual rural idyll that was behind the books' popularity' (1999:202). In other words, the concept of the rural idyll held currency for the readership. This is an important point that has relevance for the argument that I present here. Although the rural idyll is an idealistic and romantic view of life in the countryside, it is a nevertheless a myth that has meaning for my respondents.

The coincidence of these images of France with the unavailability and high cost of property in the British countryside, Buller and Hoggart (1994a) argue, led to many middle class Britons who wanted to live in the rural looking to France instead. This argument helps to explain the migration of mid-life migrants many of who explained to me that they could not afford to live in the British countryside. Similarly, Robert and Justine Grange, family migrants, who had considered living in the Lake District, explained that once they had realized how much money they would have to invest in property there, they had decided to look elsewhere. However, financial motivation does not fully account for the migration of many of the family and retirement migrants who had previously lived in rural Britain. As I argue, they describe the British countryside as having suffered from urbanization. In this respect, the migration of Britons to the Lot, from both urban and rural Britain, has the features of counterurbanization.

How the migrants discuss the British countryside in their accounts reflects Pahl's (1968) argument that there is no distinction between urban and

rural living in Britain. This does not mean that all Britons perceive this blurring of country and town. For example, there is still a large exodus of urban dwellers wanting to live in the British countryside (Commission for Rural Communities 2006; Hetherington 2006). The Britons living in the Lot however emphasize that the British countryside cannot offer them the rurality that they desire.

In rural France, my respondents perceive that there is still a difference between urban and rural landscapes. I argue that this perception is aided by the visible distance and difference of the town and the countryside. Travelling from Cahors to the homes of my respondents, the road wound between fields, alongside the banks of the river, through vineyards, and sometimes through tunnels in the cliff, a contrast to the built up residential areas in Cahors. These journeys were a constant reminder of the natural beauty of the area. The town had clear boundaries, and there were very few houses until the approach to one of the many small villages on the valley floor (along which the main road east and west of Cahors ran). The visible and geographical distinction of town and country resulted in the feeling that the urban and rural were still very different from one another.

The paradox is that, as Ardagh (2000) argues, the lifestyles of those living in the urban and rural France have grown closer together because of continual movement between the two. More urban dwellers visit the countryside at weekends and during holidays. On these visits, they get to know their neighbours. Equally, I argue, this transformation in lifestyles is the result of rural depopulation, with many young French people migrating to the towns and cities for work or study, but returning to the countryside to visit family. Ardagh argues that this dialogue between urbanity and rurality has wrought changes on the culture of the French countryside, 'The French rural world is only now emerging from a difficult period of mutation between two cultures: the old folk culture now largely vanished, and a new modern one that cannot so easily penetrate' (2000: 417). In my respondents' narratives, however, they rarely discussed the mundane

engagement of local French actors with modernity, even though many of the local farmers and producers had to compete in a European, if not global, market in order to make a living (see Ardagh 2000).

Nevertheless, there were times when my respondents demonstrated to me that the local French knew how to engage with modernity when it suited them. In a small village up on the *cause*, on the route from St. Géry to the Aveyron *département*, was a bus shelter that had been built with money from the European Union (EU). It was in a beautiful location just off the main road next to the village duck pond. It was also quite large and made from building materials that complemented those used in the construction of local houses. Driving past it, I always remembered what my respondents living to the east of Cahors had told me about the bus shelter, and it brought a smile to my face every time.

The local villagers had applied to the EU for money to build a bus shelter, fulfilling the criteria for a particular scheme that the EU was funding at that time. However, no bus passed through the village. In fact, there had never been any bus route passing through, nor were there any plans for public transport to operate in this area; it seems that the EU had never checked to see if the bus ran through the village. What the villagers really wanted was a shelter near the duck pond where they could house a barbeque. And so, to this day, the bus shelter houses the village barbeque.

My respondents took great pleasure in describing how these local actors had outwitted the EU. It seems that these villagers had manipulated what European modernity offered them. I argue the interest this bus shelter aroused among the local British population was an indicator of their own feelings about Europe. As I show in the following chapter, the migrants are able to move because of the freedom of movement permitted by European modernity, but simultaneously they reject other aspects of modernity. The local French, at least in the migrants' imaginations, incorporated modernity into their otherwise rural lives but only when it was convenient to them.

LIVING IN THE LANDSCAPE

As the following examples show, gazing on the landscape is not enough for the migrants; many of them additionally emphasize their desires to become a part of it. The migrants' accounts imply that they engage with the landscape in two ways. On the one hand, they believe that they are part of the local community; stressing the relationships they have with their neighbours and their involvement in community events. On the other hand, my respondents demonstrate their knowledge of the landscape, emphasizing how they had learned about life in the Lot by getting their hands dirty.

Part of the community

Many of my respondents drew attention to their desires to participate in local life. For example, Alannah, a retirement migrant, told me, 'I have this real regret that I haven't got French friends out here. But it's not something you can force you know? And who knows, it might happen'. As she stressed at another time, the fact that she and Daniel did not have French friends was not because they hadn't tried. It seemed that for Alannah having relationships with her neighbours was an important part of how she had imagined her life in rural France, and a feature that she continued to aspire towards. This was evident in the accounts of many of my respondents, demonstrating that even though they had originally imagined that it would become simple to be part of the community (cf. Newby 1977; Strathern 1982), they quickly realized that it was not.

The following examples show the involvement of different groups of migrants with the local community. For example, some of the family and mid-life migrants present themselves as active members of village committees, or stress their involvement in village-run associations and clubs. In contrast, many of the retirement migrants could only claim that they had attended the village fête (a big annual party). Generally, the family and mid-life migrants had more involvement in local life, but as I

explained in chapter two, this may be because they have more incentives and opportunities to do so.

Robert and Justine, family migrants, explained to me why they had chosen to live in the centre of the village, 'it is important to be in the centre of the village and to be part of the village; to know the villagers and to get on with them'. Over the years that they had been visiting the Lot for their summer holidays, they had gradually built up relationships with their neighbours, but as they stressed, they had actively pursued these:

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Robert | We were dropping in...and introducing ourselves, and we've been coming for a long time so we know them all anyway. And you've got to get involved with the community you know? It's just something you do. |
| Justine | That's the deliberate reason to move into this house, because you're right in the middle, and everyone just walks past really. If you're sitting out on the balcony there, you talk to everybody...but you do, and that was quite a deliberate thing, to be part of it. |

The practical side of this was, as Robert told me, that if anything happened to them in the house, their neighbours would soon notice. He explained that this was one reason they would stay in their house in the centre of the village when they got older.

Sarah Hammond, a mid-life migrant, similarly recalled that when she and Keith had arrived in the Lot, she had made efforts to get involved in the local community. On the first day, she had signed Keith up for the local football team, and now he trains with them twice weekly and plays a match every Sunday. Sarah soon registered herself to join the local art and yoga classes, as she explained, 'because I like both those things but also to intermingle with the local French people'.

These stories of the mid-life and family migrants were in stark contrast to what Julian, a retirement migrant, told me, 'I feel that it's up to me to get them [the local French] here first, but that's wrong. We're the new people.'

They should be helping us to join the community'. Maybe because of his views, he explained, 'we don't know French people that intimately...I mean, we know the people around here, but we don't socialize with them'. As Newby (1977) and Strathern (1982) argue, as an incomer Julian felt that he was an outsider to the community. He did not, however, attempt to overcome this sense of exclusion, unlike the mid-life and family migrants who, as I show below, strived in their daily lives to be insiders.

As the contrast with Julian's experiences highlights, the involvement of mid-life and family migrants with other members of the village community was testament to the effort that they had initially made to get to know other people living locally. Moreover, their narratives about their daily lives in the Lot emphasized that migrants in these groups actively contributed to the local community. For example, Jane Campbell was the treasurer for the local keep fit club and Justine was on the local entertainments committee, organizing the fête, and other events such as open-air film viewings. Robert and Justine further emphasized their involvement with members of the local community by suggesting that they had friendships with them. For example, they told me that they had invited their neighbours over to the house for a Chinese New Year celebration. And when I returned in 2005, they described how when they visited Thailand after the Tsunami they had sent postcards to their friends in the village, and brought back a box of orchids to share among them.

Many of the mid-life migrants similarly told me that they contributed to the local community. For example, Jon and Kay explained that they volunteered to work at the local tourist office once a week and how they had helped other members to prepare the courts at the local tennis club for the new season. They also told me that they were on the local town-twinning committee; it was Jon and Kay's job to find prospective British towns with which to twin. Another mid-lifer, Sarah Hammond, worked at the local primary school teaching English, and had plans to teach at the local secondary school the following academic year.

Although many of the retirement migrants did not contribute to the community to the same degree that their compatriots in other groups did, there were a few exceptions. Susan Sparrow, as I highlighted in chapter three, taught English at the local primary school, as did David Lomax. And Brian and Sally Waites were involved in organizing events for the local classic car club.

Importantly, my respondents unanimously stressed that the sense of community they experienced in the Lot was not something that they had felt in Britain. Although I have many examples of this point, Martin Johnstone best captured this feeling when he told me how he had found that life in suburban Britain was becoming more and more impersonal. People built high fences and walls around their property to keep people out, and as a result, you might not even know your neighbours. He explained that when he first visited rural France he had noticed that the boundaries of the land were unfenced; this indicated to him that people were more open to the idea of interacting with their neighbours. While he had felt detached from the British landscape, he felt that the Lotoise landscape offered him the possibility of engagement with members of the local community. He told me that since living in the Lot, his initial perceptions had been confirmed; he and Sarah had been welcomed into local community life. They are members of the club run for the local inhabitants, and attend the regular social events organized by the club such as dinners, games evenings, and hikes in the local area. Their involvement in this club has allowed them to make friends with many of the older inhabitants of their village.

Harry also showed that he interacted with members of the local population. However, unlike Martin, he emphasized how this distinguished him from other migrants. Twice a week Harry went out to play golf. Although he had British friends that he often played a round with, he stressed that he also played against some of the local French members of the club, and joined in the regular competition games. I accompanied him

to the golf club on one occasion, and after his round of golf, we sat in the clubhouse and had a beer together. The French owner of the golf club and his wife came over to speak to Harry, telling him about the work they were doing on the property. At the bar, Harry addressed the barmaid by name and asked her in French how she was doing. Shortly after we sat down together, Roger Hardcastle and his family entered the clubhouse. Roger had not played golf for a few weeks because he had been ill, but had come to show his daughter, who was visiting him, around the club. He too had a conversation with the owner in French before inviting us to sit down with him and his family. As Harry repeated on many occasions, other British members did not drink in the clubhouse; finding that the prices were too high, they would go into the local town instead. Although Harry also felt that the drinks were overpriced, he continued to drink there because he thought it was the right thing to do. I argue that, through his actions Harry wanted to show that he was prepared to make the effort to get to know the local French, while other Britons were not. He confirmed this when he explained to me that other British members would not attempt the basic French required to ask how the owner and other staff at the club were doing. In his perception, his attempts with the French members and staff at the golf club were evidence of his engagement, in contrast to the lack of engagement of some of his compatriots.

Interaction with members of the local community requires effort by the migrants as the above examples demonstrate. These accounts show that some of the migrants believe that their efforts make them a part of the community. However, I argue that the different groups of migrants hold different ideas about how this may be achieved. For example, many of the family and mid-life migrants seem to make a conscious and concerted effort to get involved in local life. Most of the retirees however wait, as Julian did, for the local population to approach them; they make few attempts to facilitate interaction between themselves and the French. As the migrants' narratives show, although they had initially believed it would

be easy to become part of the local community, they soon realized that it was not so simple.

Knowledge of the Landscape

Over time, my respondents in the Lot accumulate knowledge of the landscape. In their perceptions they have, in part, gained this knowledge by mirroring the intimate relationships that their French neighbours have with the landscape. For example, Vic told me that how his neighbour Claude worked and understood the land reminded him of the relationship his grandfather, who had been a farmer, had had with his surroundings. By aligning themselves with members of the local community, who, in their perception, derive their knowledge from embodied experience, the migrants imply that they too are part of the landscape. However, this idyllic representation of their neighbours confirms that even my respondents' personal engagements with the local landscape are influenced by their cultural imaginings of life in the rural idyll.

For the family migrants, knowledge of the land from working on it was important in showing that they knew the landscape. This was evident in the time and effort they spent preparing their land for crops, growing, tending, and harvesting their fruit and vegetables. The migrants' emphasis on embodied engagement echoes Theodossopoulos' (2003a) argument that farmers believe that you have to work the land in order to really feel it. While most mid-life migrants also cultivated parts of their land, the retirement migrants seldom did. As Ron Stampton explained to me, looking after vegetables was too much work, when fresh vegetables were readily available on the market. The difference in what the migrants choose to do now they live in the Lot reflects their initial imaginings of life there. For example, while the retirement migrants had dreamed of leisure, many of the mid-life and family migrants told me that they hoped that once living in the Lot they would be able to sustain themselves to some degree.

For Pat and Jean who are *viticulteurs* (wine producers) everyday life and work in the Lot requires that they engage with the landscape in some way.

They have a small *domaine* (estate), which produces approximately 18,000 bottles of wine a year. They do most of the necessary work themselves from the planting of the vines and harvesting the grapes, to bottling and selling the wine. As they told me their work on the vineyard requires intimate knowledge of the vines and grapes; for example, they have to inspect the plants for disease, know when the grapes are ripe enough to harvest, and know when and where to plant their vines. They also explained that they needed to keep one step ahead of the weather because of the effect that it could have on their crops. In a part of the world where the weather can be very localized, this requires more than checking the five-day forecast; they told me that they have to read the signs from the landscape around them to anticipate the weather. Their economic dependence on the land influences the relationship that they have with it (cf. Abramson 2000; Theodossopoulos 2003a). However, for those migrants who do not rely on the land for their livelihood, the weather is still an important consideration.

Connie and Harry have a large vegetable garden, which requires a lot of care and attention all year round. In the summer it provides them with more produce than they can eat, which means that they also work hard to preserve it. Jane, who lives with them, and Connie have become proficient at making chutneys, soups, coulis, and vegetable stews to be stored and used later. In winter the garden still provides seasonal produce, but at a slower rate than in the summer.

Every morning during the summer, I watched Connie and Harry go out among the plants to pick the ripe vegetables and pull up the weeds. This took several hours. Every evening they spent a further hour and a half watering the plot. In the autumn, they ploughed the land before planting their over-wintering plants. And when springtime came, they started the planting season again. I learned that this process required intimate knowledge of planting schedules for each of the vegetables. As Harry told me, after many years they have learned what will and will not grow, and

when the optimum time is to plant particular crops. This implies that, over time, they gain knowledge of the landscape, recognizing and moving along with its distinct rhythms.

As Pat and Jean found, close attention to the weather is necessary throughout the lifecycle of the crops. For example, even ten minutes of heavy rain could do a lot of damage. One summer evening, Connie, Jane, Harry and I visited a Parisian couple for aperitif. They lived near the viewpoint at the top of the cliff just outside the village where I was staying. From their garden, it was possible to see for miles in every direction. Sitting outside their house, we watched the storm clouds gathering, and the lightning flashing in the distance. As we left their house, the storm broke over the village, and we were relieved we had travelled up to the house in the car. As we drove down the hillside, the rain turned to hail, leaving small dents in the car roof and bonnet. In the five-metre walk from the car to the front door, I got so wet that I had to towel-dry my hair and change my clothes. The weather was too violent to do anything about the vegetable garden that night, but inspection the following morning revealed that most of the ripening tomato plants had been ruined; we bought tomatoes from the market for the rest of the summer. Furthermore, the green beans had swelled from the heavy rain, and needed harvesting before they split. Once harvested, they had to be prepared and blanched ready to freeze. It seemed to me that having such a large vegetable garden generated a lot of work. While some advance planning was possible, there were times when circumstances beyond human control intervened to change the course of events. I asked Connie and Harry why they put so much time and energy into the garden and they told me that they enjoyed it; besides which, their homegrown vegetables tasted good. I remain unsure whether they meant that they tasted better than other vegetables or whether they tasted better because of all the work that they had put into producing them. Many of their compatriots who grew

vegetables similarly explained to me that they enjoyed the process and the taste of the fruits of their labour.

The mid-life migrants told me that they associated cultivation on this level with rural living. For example, Martin and Sarah explained that they had not had the opportunity or space to grow their own vegetables in the garden of their townhouse in Brighton. They now have a large vegetable patch, herb garden, and keep free-range chickens. They told me that the produce from their land was enough to feed them and their guests in the *chambre d'hôte*.

Other migrants implied that they knew the landscape when they told me that they could recognize the signs that the seasons were about to change. Harold and Min Jones, for example, told me how they looked out of the window into the land around their house, watching for the transformations ending one season and starting another. They explained that they knew the seasons from clues in the landscape; at different times of the year, the landscape had different colours as the vegetation changed.

The emphasis that the migrants place on their knowledge of the landscape demonstrates that they engage with it as well as gazing on it. This is how they emphasize that they 'belong' in the Lot. 'Belonging' is synonymous with the idea of 'blending in', of becoming an insider. For example, the mid-life and family migrants discussed new buildings nearby. Whether these were swimming pools, greenhouses, or new homes, they often described them as 'eyesores', explaining to me that these were out of place in the Lotoise landscape. For example, Martin and Sarah told me about their dislike of the new houses on the road to Montauban:

... mock Spanish villas. And you think, what the...? And they are not in sympathy with the area. I know we're on a limit between the shallow roof and the pitched roof, but those places are just, you know, like Spanish suburbia aren't they? Of the worst kind. You know, the Costa del Sol.

Their objection to the houses was that they did not belong in the Lot, but in Spain. For these buildings to be acceptable, they would have to resemble the traditional architecture of the area. As Perry (1986) argues, incomers to the rural often aim for inclusion by trying to preserve the local heritage.



Figure 4.2: Daniel's *Pigeonnier* under construction

One outstanding example of the migrants' attempts at preservation and restoration was in fact the house of Daniel and Alannah, retirement migrants. They had spent a lot of time renovating the main property and were in the process of converting a ruined workshop into a small guesthouse. Daniel, who had been an architect back in Britain had designed a full-size *pigeonnier* (a pigeon tower, traditional to the architecture of the region) to front this building. When I visited them in late summer 2004, he was in the process of constructing this (see Figure 4.2). He had had the wooden frame constructed and put into place, but had to do the brickwork. Alannah told me that he planned to do all the remaining work himself.

Martin and Sarah had also worked hard to restore certain architectural features of their old farmhouse (see Figure 4.3). They stress this on the webpage for their *chambre d'hôte*:⁴

Our old stone farmhouse, the most recent part of which dates from 1809 (the date inscribed over the front door) has recently been restored by us. We have kept as many of the period features as possible in order to retain the rustic atmosphere of this lovely building.

⁴ I withhold this reference to protect anonymity.

The large *sejour* (living room) has a wonderful flagstone floor which is amazingly cool in summer, and we also have the old stone *evier* (sink) in the vaulted *souillarde* which was originally the kitchen.

I argue that by buying old properties and restoring them sympathetically, my respondents (mostly family and mid-life migrants) strive to show that they understand local culture. In this manner, they stress that they are insiders.



Figure 4.3: Martin and Sarah's living room. To the right the original fireplace, and to the left, the *souillarde*.

As the ethnographic examples in this section reveal, the migrants have very specific ideas about what it means to be a part of the local landscape. They aspire to become part of the community, even if they do not achieve it, and many of them explained to me that getting their hands dirty was a way of learning about their surroundings. On the one hand, the migrants' narratives thus confirm their occupation of a liminoid space, where they strive towards 'direct, unmediated communion' (Turner 1982: 58) with local actors and the landscape. On the other hand, while this is initially possible because their lives in the Lot are novel and out of the ordinary, their stories show that they want to live their everyday lives in this manner. This demonstrates clearly the tension between being British and having a house in the Lot, and being a Briton who wants to live and work in rural France; unlike tourists, they are not just there for the scenery (cf. Waldren 1996, 1997; O'Reilly 2000, 2003). As my respondents' narratives reveal,

achieving meaningful engagement with the landscape is a constant negotiation.

CONCLUSION

The ethnographic examples in this chapter show that discussions of the landscape and their relationship to it pervade the narratives of the British living in the Lot. The migrants' discussions reveal their perceptions that they relate to the local landscape in two ways: by gazing on it, but also by living within it. On the one hand, they stress that they have knowledge of the landscape gained from their interactions with members of the local community and from getting their hands dirty while cultivating fruit and vegetables and working on their houses. On the other hand, they stress how they imagine the landscape, in opposition to their representations of Britain, as a rural idyll.

The migrants' ambivalence about the landscape – understanding it through both embodied experience and cultural imaginings (as I discuss earlier in the chapter, the myth of the rural idyll emerges as a myth of middle class Britons) – reveals that for my respondents, the construction of the landscape is a cultural process (see Bender 1993a, 1993b, 1998; Hirsch 1995; Abramson 2000). Furthermore, the characteristics of my respondents' ambivalence towards the landscape show, as I discuss in the following chapter, their ambiguous position as modern actors who choose to live in the traditional.

The migrants' narratives further confirm that the construction of the landscape is a continual process when they emphasize how, over time, the way that they relate to and understand their new surroundings changes. As Alannah told me:

It's funny really because you look around and think it must all be relatively unchanged... but I've come to realize that it's not... everything has changed. Before there was even more agriculture; it's more wooded now than it was...this wouldn't have been a garden, would it... and the houses sit so well in the landscape. Over there, there are two scars where the

woods have been chopped down; one for a vineyard, and the other one, they're building something on it. It looks awful; you can see it from miles away.

My respondents initially imagined that the different way of life that they sought was available to them in rural France. However, once living in the Lot, their narratives demonstrate that the process of getting to this additionally involves the invocation of knowledge. I argue that their knowledge of life in the Lot shows that they are en route to a different way of life. However, their narratives also show that this distinctive lifestyle is not as easy to achieve as they had originally imagined.

Different understandings and appreciations of the same landscape (cf. Bender 1993a) influence the extent to which Britons living in the Lot achieve the different way of life that they seek. As the ethnography in this chapter shows, my respondents in different groups have different imaginings of how to live in the Lot. In particular, their imaginings of how the local French should behave influence the approach that the migrants take to interactions with these others. Different groups of migrants seem to hold different imaginings. The result is that each of the groups characteristically has a different level of engagement with their French neighbours. Bearing in the mind the possibility of multiple understandings of the landscape (Bender 1993a), the local French may similarly have different ideas about how to live in the rural. However, my respondents often overlooked (or were unaware of) how their French neighbours related to the landscape.

To conclude, expressing a distinction between looking at the landscape and living and working within it, the migrants' distinguish themselves from others who only gaze on the landscape, such as tourists. I argue that the British living in the Lot desire more than the beautiful view from their windows; they want to be a part of it. The landscape becomes meaningful to them rather than symbolic as it is in the case of tourists (see for example MacCannell 1976; Cohen 1988; Urry 1990) because of their embodied experiences and their particular cultural imaginings. The

narratives of the British living in the Lot about their relationships with their surroundings thus reveal their desires to belong and become insiders to the local community. However, their accounts also show that it potentially takes a long to reach this endpoint. Ambivalence therefore continues to characterize their lives.

CHAPTER 5: ABOUT AMBIVALENCE

This chapter examines the migrants' persisting feelings of ambivalence in detail. As I argued in chapter four, my respondents' ambivalence is initially apparent in the way that they both want to gaze on the landscape, but also live within it. I demonstrate below that uncertainty is equally evident in the way my respondents discuss 'Europe' and its impact on their lives, how they talk about preparing for migration, and the realities of everyday life in the Lot. I argue, therefore, that ambivalence and ambiguity characterize the migrants' lives before and after migration. Their stories of life in rural France reflect this recurring theme.

In this chapter, I also examine the possible sources of the ambivalence that the migrants experience. Drawing on my respondents' narratives, I argue that their uncertainty arises from the tensions between their initial expectations of life in rural France and the realities of life following migration. In particular, I highlight that ambivalence arises because of my respondents' positions as powerful European actors who choose to become marginal. Although they live on the peripheries of French society, they cannot escape the fact that they are only able to live in rural France the way that they desire because they are European citizens. As the ethnographic examples in this chapter demonstrate, while they move for what in their perception is a traditional way of life (see chapter four), this is only possible because they are modern European actors.

EUROPE AND MIGRATION

Barou and Prado (1995) presented the British in Normandy and the Périgord (a region which includes some parts of the Lot) as anti-European. However, as I show in this section, the narratives of the British in the Lot reveal that they express diverse and varying views of Europe. On the one hand, my respondents present Europe in their accounts as a feature of their lives which means they can migrate to, and live in, rural France. On

the other hand, their narratives show that while at times they are pro-European, at other times they are anti-European, or even vague about what Europe actually means to them. These fluctuations in the way that the migrants relate to 'Europe' thus confirm, as Goddard, Llobera, and Shore (1994) and MacDonald (1997b) argue, that local actors engage with Europe in a variety of ways.

As I describe in the ethnography below, the migrants' narratives about migration particularly emphasized the role that Europe played in the ease of their migration. For example, many of my respondents explained that migration to France was easy because they were European citizens moving within Europe. However, closer examination of their narratives reveals that in general they refer to Europe in a vague manner. For example, they prefer to associate with their British identity, rather than their 'Europeanness'. It seems that when they refer to the concepts of 'Europe' and 'being European', my respondents mainly focus on how these provide some justification for their residence in another European country.

The migrants' ideas about European identity are also implicit within their accounts. For this reason I would like to draw attention to the key themes within this literature that might be worth considering, particularly in terms of the ways they complement my proceeding discussion of the migrants' feelings about their Europeanness. I use European identity in this context to refer to the sense of belonging to Europe as experienced by the individual. In further research, I plan to investigate how this particular sense of belonging variously manifests itself in the narratives of my respondents living in the Lot. As a brief examination of the existing literature on European identity reveals, this area of research has to date received very little academic attention. Much of the literature on European identity has focussed instead on the role of collective European identity within the process of European integration (Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001).

For those who do study European identity from the angle of individual perceptions and feelings, uncertainty persists when thinking about the significance that it has in everyday life and the implications this may have for social cohesion across Europe (Grundy and Jamieson 2007). This highlights the ambiguity of the concept more generally. On the one hand, European identity implies a sense of global citizenship. On the other hand, at the level of the individual there is little consensus about what European identity is and means (cf. Bruter 2004, 2005; Grundy and Jamieson 2007).

Bruter (2005) argues that there are two distinct aspects of this identity that European citizens associate themselves with, 'civic' and 'cultural'. They may identify with the 'civic' aspects of this, focussing on their position as citizens within the political structure of Europe, and thus emphasizing their rights and membership of the political community of Europe – at present, the European Union. As the ethnography in this chapter reveals, this 'civic' European identity is strongly evident in the accounts of my respondents, with migrants focussing particularly on their rights to freedom of movement within Europe. The 'cultural' aspect refers instead to the sense of belonging to a particular group that is defined, not by political affiliation, but by an overall European culture. This aspect of European identity is evident to a smaller degree than civic aspects, but it is apparent within the migrants' accounts nevertheless. For example, my respondents often implied that there were cultural similarities between themselves and members of the French population because they were 'all European', but this was situational and often used as a way of distinguishing between themselves as Europeans, and other non-Europeans (cf. Kohli 2000).

Overall, I had a sense, as I describe below, that Europe had a very vague meaning for my respondents, and they only made this association at times when it was beneficial to them. In this respect the migrants' references to their Europeanness, or their sense of their European identity resonate with the idea that Europe is an empty concept, 'devoid of any widely shared social meaning' (Grundy and Jamieson 2007: 664; see also Breakwell

2004; Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst 2005). It is precisely because of this lack of substance that European identity is situational, emerging in relation to other aspects of an individuals' identity (Grundy and Jamieson 2007). Just as people draw on their sense of national identity in particular situations and contexts (see for example McCrone 1998; McCrone, Stewart, Kiely & Bechhofer 1998; Kiely, Bechhofer & McCrone 2005; Kiely, McCrone & Bechhofer 2005), individuals stress their European identity in ways and at times when it is beneficial to them. In this sense, individuals 'electively belong' to Europe (Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst 2005). They draw on this sense of belonging because, as Calhoun (1994) argues, it can play a particular role helping them to establish either a sense that they are similar or different to others. At other times, for example, promoting their national identity might be more advantageous to them.

The ethnography presented in this chapter confirms that European identity often interacts with British national identity (cf. Medrano and Guitiérrez 2001; Castano 2004; Citrin and Sides 2004; Risse 2004). The material, social and cultural resources that the migrants experience once living in the Lot, 'will impact on their sense of national or European context, their imaging of community and their orientation to citizenship' (Grundy and Jamieson 2007: 665). The ethnography presented in the final two chapters particularly, highlights the variations in what resources my respondents find and how much effort they put into finding them. Although I concentrate in my analysis on how they distinguish themselves from one another, approaching the same material in terms of the nascent literature on European identity may provide further insights into why the migrants choose to identify themselves in particular ways, for example as British, or as local to the Lot.

The ethnographic evidence I present throughout this thesis reveals that the migrants express attachments to Britain, to Europe, and to their locality. The burgeoning literature surrounding European identity gives some interesting insights that might explain some of the identification

process that my respondents engage in over the course of their daily lives. As Kohli (2000) argues, an individual's attachments often come into conflict. Yet somehow, despite the conflicts brought about by these diverse affiliations, individuals take control and seem to actively manage these different aspects of their identity to their benefit.

The British of the Lot

Although the British living in the Lot explain that they are able to migrate because they are European, in their statements they refer not to the sense that they identify as Europeans, but the fact of their European citizenship. As I discuss below, my respondents in the Lot identify far more readily with their 'Britishness'.

Although Susan Sparrow had described Britons in the Lot as being 'all European', the following account reveals how ambiguous this concept was to her and her husband Trevor. In their discussion of a survey that they had recently filled out at their weekly French lesson run by the *Association France-Grande Bretagne (AFGB)*, they drew attention to one question:¹

What they [the question] were saying was, "Do you find yourself a European living in Europe, an Englishman living in Europe, are you trying to become French living in Europe, or do you just live in an English enclave that happens to be in Europe?" So, do you change your attitude when you move around Europe?

Both Susan and Trevor had chosen the second option and stated that they were English living in France (which happened to be part of Europe). While he accepted that he lived in Europe, Trevor explained that he did not feel that he could reply that he was European.

It seems that although Trevor and Susan were prepared to engage with the notion that they were European citizens and therefore had the legal right to live in France, this concept held very little additional meaning for

¹ This was carried out by Didier Bésingrand of the Université d'Angers as part of his PhD thesis. It was entitled 'A study concerning the residential mobility of retired people in the department of the Lot'.

them. Beneath their ambivalence lay what they perceived to be the irony of a united Europe:

They're not this big melange of nations all wanting to be one. They're all Europeans but they still want it to be run, right; the French want it to be run like France, the Germans like Germany.

With such dispute about what Europe was, Trevor did not see what benefit claiming to be European would have for him. Instead, he readily associated with an identity that had more meaning for him: that of being English. In his mind, this was a positive association. Unlike other migrants who expressed antipathy towards Britain, Trevor and Susan always spoke favourably of it. As I recorded in my fieldnotes following my first visit to their house,

Susan was particularly proud not to reject her roots. England is where she comes from at the end of the day, and she is keen that this is known. She seems to be very patriotic, not complaining about anything to do with England.

For example, she told me about the strengths of the French medical system, emphasizing the speed of the service. In the next breath, she added that she supposed that if there was a medical emergency in Britain that the NHS would respond just as quickly and efficiently.

Harold and Min Jones were also keen that I did not assume that they had anti-British sentiments because they chose to live in France rather than Britain. As they told me, they still have links with Britain, where many of their family, including two of their three children, live and they are British. Harold told me that he thought that to reject Britain and 'Britishness' was tantamount to rejecting your own mother. They believe they are British, and while they may not choose to live there, this does not mean that they think that everything in Britain is terrible. Of course, they told me, there are faults with the British system but there are also faults with the French system. They justified this last statement by talking about the recent strike by French healthcare workers, who had just been told that because of

overspending in the system, there were going to be large-scale job cuts. They equated the current political climate in France to that of the Thatcher regime in Britain in the 1980s. Interestingly, it was their dislike of this latter political climate that had resulted in them leaving Britain. In Britain, they had felt the impacts of the political system. However, it seemed that in France, where they worked for themselves, they could just sit back and watch from a distance. They appeared to have no desire to be more involved in French national politics.

How the migrants conceptualized their identity was also evident when they discussed voting. Many of my respondents, particularly family and mid-life migrants wanted to be able to vote in French elections. Only one route would give them the rights they desired while still living in France: becoming naturalized French citizens. This was a lengthy and difficult process, as I found out from a young British woman who had lived in France since she was a child. It had taken her two years to become naturalized. As she explained, as part of this process she had been required to show evidence that she had a job in France, had lived in France for more than five years, and spoke French well. If she had married a French man, she would have had citizenship within a year.

Although some of my respondents explained that they doubted that the French would give them citizenship and therefore did not want to embark on the process, others stated different reasons. It seemed that many of them were reluctant to part with their British citizenship; it was a part of them. Unlike their European citizenship (as I explain below), they linked their British citizenship with their identity. As Kay stated, 'I'm still English... and it's a big step to shed that'.

Sian and James Harvey-Browne, family migrants with six children, told me that they had seriously considered changing their nationality to gain political rights for their children, who, they believed, would stay in France for the rest of their lives. As Sian told me, 'It's simpler for my children because – the children want to vote – and if we do it ourselves, it affects

the whole family... but I don't want to give up my British passport'. Sian continued to explain that if there were a way that she could keep her British passport, symbolic of her British identity, and have the additional rights she wanted for her children, she would happily take French nationality. She wanted the best of both worlds.

It seems that for many of my respondents, they really were 'the British of the Lot'. Despite the general dissatisfaction with the life on offer to them in Britain that they express in their narratives, the migrants seemed strangely attached to their 'Britishness'. Drawing on a deterritorialized British national identity, they present themselves as 'the British of the Lot', an imagined community existing within the social networks between local culture and national identity (cf. Foster 1991; Rouse 1992; Fog Olwig 1993; Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Malkki 1995). This provides evidence that they occupy an ambiguous position where they are neither locals nor nationals. The oscillation between these positions, where they emphasize their strong national sentiments, and their desires for a local identity, further explain their overall feelings of ambivalence.

Europe as an 'empty signifier'

I argue that the migrants' attachment to their 'Britishness' is a response to how they view 'Europe'. I had the sense that they did not feel that Britain becoming European had made much of a difference to Britain, reflecting the ambivalence that the British feel towards Europe more generally (cf. O'Reilly 2007a). For example, Jon Morris laughingly told me, 'England is not really Europe' and Trevor who, as I previously recalled, identified as British living in France, told me,

The English have got no affiliation with Europe... we've got this little island attitude... and that's why everybody [other European nations] moans at us – because we're going to be English associated with the Europeans rather than European.

It seems that the migrants defer to Europe when it suits their purposes, while they feel that generally it has little impact on their lives. Their

discussions of life following migration show that they did not encounter the similarities between France and Britain (as two European countries) that they had expected. In fact, learning how to live in rural France highlighted to them the differences between the two.

The migrants' narratives reveal that, following migration, the idea of being European became redundant to them. 'Europe' thus acts as an 'empty signifier' (Barthes 1972) in the migrants' accounts; the 'Europe' that they present is empty of meaning, despite the assumption that it holds some cultural significance for the audience. The migrants evoke it with purpose: 'Europe' provides justification for their prolonged presence in the French countryside, thus it is a significant feature of their lives, but it seems that they attach little meaning to it as a concept. This explains why, when it comes down to it, they choose to identify as British rather than as Europeans.

For example Susan explained what she believed brought Britons to the Lot, 'If you love French food, wine, and the French way of life. And of course, we're all Europeans'. In this quotation, she shows that although migrants desired a particular way of life where they 'took all the nice things', it was being European that gave them the right to live in France. Similarly, Alannah stated, 'It'll be fine as long as Britain stays in the EU', drawing attention to her right, as a European citizen, to live in France.

For Susan and Alannah, the Europe that they refer to in their narratives is vague. They do not explain any further what Europe means to them. This was the case for many of the migrants. Indeed, it is possible that this is not specific to the British living in the Lot, but indicates the ambivalence of the British to Europe more generally (cf. O'Reilly 2007a). Even when my respondents discussed their pro-European attitudes, they used them in counter-identification. For example, Trish Greenham, a family migrant, emphasized that her pro-European outlook had been central to her

decision to migrate. She juxtaposed her attitude to the anti-European beliefs of many other Britons:

I think there were two sorts of people there [in Britain] at the time... we used to like to think of ourselves as Europeans, you know, and there were others who had not got a good word to say about it all.

For Trish, the idea of a united Europe provided encouragement for her and her family to migrate. Stressing these pro-European sentiments, Trish continued to discuss what she had not liked about Britain. In this manner, she dissociated herself from life there. Although she seemed to have very strong ideas about what Europe was not, I felt that she was using this as a vague counter-identity to 'Britishness', rather than a strong identity in its own right. The examples stated here provide some evidence of how Europe is an 'empty signifier' for the British living in the Lot.

The migrants' claims to 'Europeanness' were also how they positioned themselves in respect to the local community. Pat and Jean Porter, for example, explained that migration had made them feel 'more European':

I think we've become more Europe-centred in our view of things than we were before really. I suppose the inclination to move from one European country to another heightens your sense of yourself as a European rather than anything else.

Pat and Jean subsequently explained that their French neighbours readily believed that other Europeans had a right to live in the French countryside. Although this could be viewed as speculation on the part of the British, I also encountered this justification when I spoke with my French neighbour about my research. He told me that the British incomers to the Lot had changed the mentality of people living in the area. He thought that this was a positive thing, bringing about a more European attitude within the local population. The British, of course, had the right to be in the area because they were similarly European.

In these perceptions, the focus is upon commonality, rather than the difference often highlighted between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' of the rural (see for example Newby 1977; Strathern 1982; Perry 1986). In this manner, Pat and Jean present themselves as belonging to the local community because of their shared 'Europeanness'. This is confirmed in their statement that, 'there's less xenophobia, at least in terms of the Europeans'. Through their emphasis on a common European identity, those who consider themselves to be from within Europe distinguish themselves from those without (Goddard, Llobera, and Shore 1994). Europe, therefore, acts not only as a 'negative association' (Gingrich 2006), but can be a positive expression of identity. It is in this manner that Pat and Jean imply that the boundaries of 'belonging' in the local coincide with the categories of European and non-European. 'Europeanness' thus becomes an aspect of local identity.

While European citizenship provides an explanation for how the British in the Lot are able to migrate so easily, it also justifies their presence in the French countryside: because they are European, they have the right to live in rural France, a part of Europe. However, it seems that they also draw on their 'Europeanness' to evoke a sense of commonality. This is specifically 'Europeanness' as an identity that they share with members of the local French community. In this manner, identifying as European, the migrants claim local belonging. The migrants' narratives thus reveal the contradictory ways that they relate to 'Europe' in their daily lives.

AMBIVALENCE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

I argue that ambivalence is, in fact, a feature of the migrants' lives from before migration to long afterwards. It is particularly evident when they discuss the conjunction of their expectations with reality. As I reveal below, my respondents' stories are full of contradictions; they find it difficult to come to terms with living in the Lot, yearning for some familiarity from their past, despite claiming that they moved for a different way of life. In this section, I show how over time, my respondents attempt to resolve these

ambiguities, but it seems that ambivalence is a part of their lives that they cannot escape.

Preparing for migration

On a basic level, it seems that prior to migration the migrants were knowledgeable about their legal rights as European citizens with regard to their residency; they had freedom of movement within the European Union, and could therefore live in France without having to apply for visas or work permits. But at times, their narratives about migration suggest that they had little knowledge of just how different their lives would be once they lived in France. As Jon Morris explained, 'You assume, or we certainly did – and that's with quite a bit of knowledge and French friends here – that it's Europe and things will pretty much be the same'. This was representative of the way that many of my respondents explained the ease with which they had expected to settle in the Lot. It provides an interesting contrast to the way they represent rural France as offering them a way of life that was unavailable to them in Britain.

The contradiction of moving for difference, but emphasizing similarity, reflects the ambivalence of the migrants' cultural imaginings of a 'Europe' that is significantly different from, but simultaneously similar to what they know of life in Britain. In their narratives, my respondents further stressed uncertainty by presenting themselves as unprepared for life in the Lot. For example, Sally Stampton explained, 'I didn't research it at all when I brought Ollie'. Similarly, Connie Earl described how she and Harry had been 'horribly blind and ill-prepared'. Both Connie and Sally spoke of how they had not even known whether they would be able to get their children into a school once they arrived in the Lot; they just assumed (or hoped) that it would be possible. Sian and James Harvey-Browne similarly confessed to me, 'We didn't know enough about the health service and educational systems before we came'.

At the time, I remember how shocked I was that people would move their children to a country where they had little knowledge of how the system

worked, but I now realize that this lack of knowledge in part helped them to migrate. For example, Sally told me that if she had known about how strict the French school system was she would not have brought Ollie to France. However, because she did not have that knowledge, she put him into school where he is now doing very well. As she told me, 'I'm glad I didn't know'.

The paradox is, although the British in the Lot ostensibly move for a different way of life, their narratives about migration often reveal the belief that life will not be that different because France is, as one of my respondents once remarked, 'so near to England', both geographically and culturally. I argue that this perception of similarity, as Sally's statement ('I'm glad I didn't know') highlights, is a part of the motivation behind migration. However, as I show below, the story of migration is not so straightforward.

Despite the migrants' claims that they believed that migration would be easy because they were moving within a united Europe, their narratives also tell the story of how they were preparing for possible differences; it was thus seldom the case that my respondents in the Lot were completely unprepared for the differences that they would encounter in rural France. The extent of this preparation varied depending on which group the migrants belonged to. As I explain in this section, the preparation that they had achieved depended on the resources available to them at the time of migration, and what they felt would be important to them once living in the Lot. They always found that there were aspects of living in France that they had overlooked. This was the case irrespective of how much preparation they had done in advance.

As a mid-life migrant, Sally was unusual in her lack of preparation. When mid-life migrants explained their decision to migrate to me, they described how they had made efforts to familiarize themselves with all aspects of life in France. Some of them, like Jon and Kay Morris, lived through the winter in France before buying a house. Martin and Sarah Johnstone made

certain that their *chambre d'hôte* stood a good chance to being open for business within a year of Sarah giving up her job in London. Finally, others stressed that they prepared by reading the many books about living and working in France, and attending property exhibitions. As Sarah Hammond told me, 'With the idea of coming to France I said, "well, if we're going to France, we'll do it properly". And we went to the exhibitions [about moving abroad], and we got books'. She told me that she had spent every day reading through the books and making enquiries about living in France for a year before they finally moved.

My explanation for why recent migrants had done more preparation than others is simple: they had a lot more to lose if they did not prepare thoroughly. Many of them, for example, had to earn an income once they lived in France; without this, they would not be able to support themselves. And Sarah wanted to ensure that she could get appropriate treatment in France for her serious health problems. In the case of mid-life migrants, it was therefore imperative that they explored their entitlements and options with regard to healthcare and employment. It was not enough for them to just wait and see, as they believed so many of their compatriots had done. They used their knowledge to evaluate whether and when to migrate; this preparation helped them reach the conclusion that they were making the right choice.

In contrast, all of my respondents who were family migrants explained to me that when they migrated, there had not been very much information available about living and working in France. Connie provided one example of this point by explaining that when she decided to migrate, there had only been one book, and it was extremely difficult to get hold of; they did not have the endless variety of information available to them that later groups of migrants had. This did not mean that they didn't try to find out more about the practical aspects of living in France. For example, Connie told me of her experience of trying to get information about sending her sons to school. She telephoned the French embassy in

London, day after day, but the phone 'just rang and rang'. In the end, she gave up. So Connie and Harry moved to France, and the day after they arrived, Connie was fortunate enough to meet Min Jones for the first time, who explained to her how to enrol the boys in school. Connie's story reveals that although she felt unprepared for life in France, her lack of preparation was not because she had not tried. This group of migrants had tried to accumulate information about living in France, but had been let down by its overwhelming absence.

Both the family and mid-life migrants depicted the retirement migrants as having moved to France on a whim, without any consideration of the practicalities. For example, Roy Payne, a mid-life migrant, explained to me on the phone that he thought that these retirees moved in response to 'emotional criteria' rather than 'rational criteria'. In this manner, he justified the lack of practical knowledge that he believed these migrants had about how to live in France. Sarah Hammond, also a mid-lifer, described some of her friends who had decided to retire to the area. 'Neither of them speaks French. Neither of them has read any books [about living in France]. Neither of them understands anything... of course, things became unstuck because they hadn't done things properly'. Indeed, these stereotypical images were in some cases true; as I discuss later, some of them explained that they didn't do 'things properly', but this was out of choice. However, there were also those who were well prepared for their lives in France, even though retiring to France required different considerations to those of family and mid-life migrants. The account below gives some insight into the practical arrangements that retirees might need to make when they decide to migrate.

Following my first visit to see Ron and Barbara in January 2004, I recorded their thoughts about preparing for migration in my fieldnotes:

When they decided that they would move out here, they did a lot of research into how to go about it. This means that they were prepared for some of the differences in the way the system over here works rather than bumbling along. They cannot believe how naïve some of the people moving

out here are, particularly those that are often on the television. They make all the mistakes that can be avoided by doing some simple research. Ron and Barbara used a company that helped them to move and so this eased the pain a bit, as they felt they would otherwise experience all sorts of problems that people can have when moving... Ron has registered to pay income tax on his shares over here... They told me of how they had used a foreign accounts man at the bank to help them to sort out a few financial problems and that he had tried to advise them to keep quiet about some shares, and then Ron would not have to pay the tax on them. They ignored this as corrupt... The tax issue was made easy by the Nottingham tax office, which helped them to sort out their affairs over here. Despite the efficiency of the service that they received from their negotiators when they moved here, they say that there are problems that they would have tried to find out more about if they had their time again.

Ron and Barbara, by their own admission, had done a lot of preparation and they had additional help from a relocation company. For those who do not have the money to pay a relocation company to help them with their move, it is easy to understand how they might encounter unforeseen problems. The migrants often recall these problems in their narratives about migration, and it is these stories that enter into circulation among Britons living in the Lot.

It seemed that Ron and Barbara were extremely well prepared before they moved to France, and it is true that many of the other retirees were not so well organized. However, I argue that they were not completely lacking in knowledge about their future lives in the Lot. They had often read books and watched television programmes about living in France, so were informed on a basic level. I argue that what the other migrants identify as a lack of preparation is rather a lack of urgency on the part of retirement migrants to follow through on those preparations and formalize their residence in France. Indeed, unlike the family migrants who had to put children in school and earn an income, and the mid-life migrants who had to make some money, the retirement migrants did not depend on the French system so heavily. Because of their relatively privileged position of

not having to work in France, they believed that they could afford to approach life in a more leisurely manner.

Whichever group the migrants belonged to, it was common for them to be unprepared for some aspects of their life in the Lot. Even after living in France for some time, many of the migrants remained unsure about their entitlements, rights, and the correct way to do things. As I discuss below, they often did not think about these aspects of life in France until they had to deal with them. Even then, trying to find out how to go about life could be difficult.

Trying to find the answers

My respondents living in the Lot often explained that, although they had tried to get information about the practical aspects of life in France, the local offices that were supposed to supply this knowledge did not seem to have a grasp on it either. Connie Earl told me about her trip to the local *mairie* (mayor's office) to get her *carte de séjours* (residence permit) renewed. She had first visited the *mairie* to get the right form to fill out and while there she asked the woman behind the counter to write her a list of the supporting documents she needed to provide. Congratulating herself on her foresight in this matter, she hurried home, a ten-minute walk from the *mairie*; she still had time to fill in the form, collect the necessary documents together, and return to the office with them before it closed for lunch at noon. And so, within half an hour, she left the house again, believing that she had everything that she needed to complete her application. However, when she arrived at the office, it transpired that there was one document missing; the woman behind the desk had forgotten to add it to the list. Although it would be tight, Connie believed that she could still rush home to collect this last piece of documentation and return to the office before lunchtime. So imagine her frustration when she arrived back at the office to find that, inexplicably, they had chosen to shut early for lunch!

This exasperation with the French system was also evident when Vic told me about his attempts to register to pay French income tax on his pension. After seeing the relevant people in Cahors, he was told to go to the *mairie* in St. Gery to pick up some document or other. When he arrived at the *mairie*, the woman behind the desk claimed to have no knowledge of this information and sent him packing. Although Vic had tried to keep to the rules – living in France, he should pay French income tax (at least in his understanding) – the disorganized nature of the local French bureaucrats was putting him off the idea. It would have been understandable in these circumstances if he had decided to progress no further with these efforts, but as he explained, he eventually managed to sort it out, drawing predominantly on the advice of the British Inland Revenue Office in Newcastle.

Alannah, a retired migrant, had told me similar stories about her dealings with *Caisse Primaire Assurance Maladie* (CPAM), when she had decided to register herself and Daniel for French healthcare.² Two years after she had first visited their offices in Cahors, they were finally registered. In 2004, they were in the process of trying to claim back the money that they had paid for medical treatment while they had waited for their registration to come through. As Alannah explained to me, 'I'm still having a battle with the French health people; and they're very helpful when you go in there, but they never get it quite right'.

The ethnographic examples that I relate above provide examples of the frustration that many of my respondents explained they felt when they had to deal with French bureaucracy. As they present it, this is because they are not French; they would not have to go through these drawn out processes if they were. Their stories resonate with how Herzfeld (1992: 84-85) describes the exasperation felt by a young American woman following her encounter with a local Greek civil servant. As he explains, 'as

² CPAM pays the bulk of healthcare costs (up to 70%) for those registered and contributing to the system. This contribution is obligatory, and is normally taken directly from an individual's salary. To cover the remaining costs, individuals are advised to take out 'top up' insurance.

a non-Greek, however, she was in a weak position to argue with the Greek clerk' (ibid. 1992: 85).

Although the act of migration had been easy because of the migrants' status as European citizens, their experiences of life in the Lot demonstrated to them some of the difficulties of living in France as non-French Europeans. As their attempts to find the right answers show, they never seem to be able to escape from this ambiguous position. Alannah's explanation, 'you learn to deal with things but you are never entirely sure', was thus a good summary of the uncertainty that many of the British living in the Lot felt.

Realities of life in France

For some of my respondents in the Lot, this uncertainty had potentially serious implications for their lives in France. For example, Barney and Betty Monty, who had migrated when they were in their late fifties, told me that they had no health cover in France; they joked that if Barney had an accident while working on the house, Betty would have to drive him all the way back to England for treatment. This was no small thing, considering Betty was afraid to drive in France and it would take them at least thirteen hours just to drive to Dover.

It seemed that they had not registered for health cover in France. As they explained, they were in an anomalous category because they had retired early. This meant that they were not eligible for the free health cover that CPAM provided to retirees, because they were too young.³ They claimed that they could not afford the contributions that were expected of them, and so they had no cover. Since they had been living in France for over a year, they also had not been able to renew their E-111, which entitled them to emergency treatment as British citizens visiting Europe, because they no longer had a UK address or GP. They explained that their reasons

³ In the case of those who have taken early retirement, there is an expectation that they will continue to pay their contributions to the system. Failing to do this results in lack of cover. However, after 60, individuals are no longer expected to contribute into the system and are still entitled to cover.

for returning to Britain would be that the British system would treat anyone without any questions asked. As they told me, they had their 'fingers crossed' that nothing would happen in the two years until they got complimentary cover from CPAM. This was undoubtedly a risk, but one that they were prepared to take.

This reveals that, although European citizenship provides certain entitlements, social contribution in a country augments these. As Ackers and Dwyer state,

Social entitlement, under EU law, derives not from citizenship status *per se*, but rather from the quality and location of social contribution. So, although all EU nationals have the right to move and reside in another Member State, their entitlement in that state varies considerably. The most privileged forms of benefit hinge on economic contributions in the form of paid employment (2004: 452).

Although many of my respondents (below retirement age) met their social services contributions out of their own pockets, which were particularly costly for those who were self-employed, others had some of their contributions met by the *Chèque Emploi Service*. This facility is available to those who employ casual workers, such as domestic help and gardeners. Several of the family and mid-life migrants were paid for their services in this manner. For example, Harry tended to his neighbour's garden throughout the year, and they paid him by *Cheque Emploi*. This method looked out for his neighbours as employers, providing them with accident insurance, but also meant that they had to pay towards his social security contributions. Jon Morris was also occasionally paid in this manner for looking after people's gardens, and he told me that he believed it was a good system. However, this was something that he had learnt about only once he had moved to France. This shows that even the mid-life migrants, who had spent more time before migration becoming accustomed to the practicalities of life in France than their compatriots, still had things to learn about living there.

Although Jon had previously lived in the Savoie, he explained to me how this time in France had not fully prepared him for the differences he and Kay encountered in the Lot. As I previously mentioned, they had assumed that because France and Britain were both European countries, things would be similar. But as they told me, once living in France they gradually became aware of the differences. At the bank, they had to pay a fee for the *carte bleue* (a debit card); in Britain, the banks distribute these automatically and without cost to the account holder. In addition, the bank charged them for every non-regular piece of correspondence. They bought a pay-as-you-go mobile phone, only to find that there was a time limit on the top-up vouchers; unlike in Britain where these had lasted indefinitely, a 10€ top-up bought in France would expire within fourteen days. As Jon and Kay explained, they believed that these differences resulted from an inherent lack of competition between French businesses. They had first-hand experience of this when they started to investigate the possibility of setting up their own venture.

Exploring the potential of setting up a lingerie shop in their local town, they described how they directly came up against the French aversion to competition. Although there was no such shop in the town, one of the women's clothes shops held a small range of bras. Immediately, their French 'partner' told them that it was futile to continue pursuing this business opportunity; they could not go into 'competition' with this other boutique, even though lingerie was not its sole product. After a couple of years Jon and Kay set up a small business selling handmade greetings cards on the local market. As Kay wrote in an online account of this process,⁴

Getting to the point of being able to attend the foire/market was much harder work than we had ever anticipated. Never, ever, could we have believed the number of offices we had to visit, the amount of paperwork necessary and not to mention all our own research on the internet to find out the latest law regarding setting up a small business (e.g. medical, pension, etc.).

⁴ I withhold the reference here to protect anonymity.

They contrasted their experiences of setting up a business in France with their beliefs about how it would have been if they had tried to establish a small business in Britain. They believed that they would have received tax breaks and other perks in Britain, to encourage initial success, while in France they were 'on their own'. It was evident that when they had first had the idea to set up a business, they had not realized how much work it would take to become acquainted with a system that they did not know.

Alannah similarly explained that it was only when Daniel, her husband, became ill that they realized the difficulty of organizing health cover in France. They had until that stage not applied for a *carte de séjour* (residence permit), without which they could not register for health cover from CPAM.⁵ Daniel had been diagnosed as having prostate cancer and needed urgent treatment. Without any cover, they faced the prospect of paying the bills from their own pockets.

As Alannah explained to me, until that point they had been reluctant to commit to living full-time in France; although they were living there all the time, they did not want to register there in case they decided to return to Britain in the near future. It would be a waste of time, for example, if they were to organize to pay taxes in France, and then have to revert to paying the Inland Revenue in Britain. I also had the feeling that, because they had not looked into it, they had no idea how very different the French health care system was to the NHS. Their application for health cover took two years to be processed. This was in part because they had to wait on their *carte de séjours* before CPAM would assess what their contributions into the system would be. Although they initially paid for the treatment out of their own pockets, eventually they received a partial reimbursement from CPAM.

While living in the Lot, my respondents started to face the reality of life in France for non-French Europeans. At the same time, they also expressed

⁵ The necessity for European citizens to register for a *carte de séjours* has since been removed.

hopes for the future of their lives there. I argue that these aspirations reveal that, although they liked living in the traditional 'rural idyll' (see chapter four), if they had had a choice, there were certain aspects of their lives in Britain that they would have liked to bring with them. This was particularly evident when they talked about their political rights. As European citizens resident in another Member State, they could vote in European and local elections, as well as voting by proxy in Britain. However, they could not vote in the French national elections, a political right that for various reasons, many of them desired. As Britons living in France, they thus occupy an ambiguous status as European citizens who have moved from one Member State to another. Castles and Miller identify precisely this ambiguity,

People who move from one community country to another enjoy important rights (concerning work, residence, legal status, and so on) which give them an intermediate status: they are not full citizens, since they lack voting rights, but they are considerably privileged compared with people from 'third countries' (non-EC countries) (1993: 4).

Indeed, as the examples below reveal, the migrants' discussions about their political rights following migration focus on various ways of overcoming this intermediate status, and thus, in some way, resolving their ambivalence.

One evening as I sat with Jane, Connie, and Harry on the garden terrace of their house, drinking aperitif, we started to talk about voting. It was their belief that the French government was less than desirable, a belief similarly expressed by many of my respondents; they were equally derogatory about the current British government. At the time, Jacques Chirac held the French presidency and the news in 2000 that he was implicated in some financial irregularities in the way his political party was financed had led Harry to call him a crook. Furthermore, Jane, Connie, and Harry also explained that they had little faith in the French and their ability to vote appropriately. They cited as evidence for their point the 2002 election where Chirac won the presidency because his opponent in the

second round was Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the far right party *La Front National* (all other, more liberal candidates had been knocked out in the first round). Jane, Connie, and Harry told me that they wished they could vote and in some way make a difference. As Jane asserted, the day would come when this would be possible.

When I questioned them further about whether they really thought they would have this right, or whether it was just a pipe dream, Jane adamantly stated that this was what 'Europe' was about – eventual unity on a political level. Their perception of further Europeanization was that it would encourage egalitarianism among European citizens, irrespective of their place of residence.

While Jane had explained how her aspirations were linked to her beliefs about the future of Europe, Jon and Kay explained that they wanted this political right because they felt disengaged from British national politics:

I think the way Europe is – 20 years ago, it was different – I would like to vote. We do vote at local elections, but I would like to vote for national stuff as well in France. Whereas for Tony Blair, I don't really care now you know.

I had the sense that this antipathy towards British politics was common to many of my respondents. As British citizens living in France, the policies of the French government were likely to have a greater impact on their daily lives than those of the British government. The migrants' discussions about their desires for political rights indicate their ambiguous position. As O'Reilly (2007a) argues of the British in Spain, freedom of movement may encourage migration, but once abroad, these migrants realize that some rights and entitlements remain place-based. This means that the British living in other European Member States cannot become politically integrated, as they sometimes desire. As their narratives reveal, my respondents therefore experience a degree of political exclusion once living in the Lot.

The realities of their lives in rural France highlight to the migrants the anomalous position that they occupy as European citizens living in a different nation-state. They experience difficulties organizing their lives in the Lot, and soon come to realize how different the practicalities of everyday life can be. While the migrants' abilities to imagine an alternative way of living influenced their migration (cf. Papastergiadis 2000), the perception of similarities between France and Britain also impacted on the decision to migrate. Indeed, this ambiguity is further confused by their freedom of movement within Europe. The fluctuations in the stories that my respondents tell demonstrate their ambivalence; their narratives show the tension between their acknowledgements of themselves as powerful Europeans and their desire to live on the peripheries.

THE SOURCE OF AMBIVALENCE

The ethnographic examples above illustrate that uncertainty is a pervading characteristic of the lives of British migrants in the Lot. I argue that the migrants' uncertainty arises as a response to the ambivalence that they themselves feel about their residence in rural France. Europe is the reason that they are able to live in the Lot, but, as the examples in this chapter have revealed, my respondents have a particular cultural imagining of life in France as significantly different but at the same time similar to their life in Britain. However, their ambivalence is further accentuated by their realization that their movement could potentially bring about the destruction of that which motivated their migration in the first place: a distinctive way of life. As Jon and Kay told me,

What we have come here for we will gradually destroy as there will need to be more commerce, more houses, more this, more that, service ethics will change, you'll get more English people... or more Dutch people running things. So it will change but it will probably destroy what we came here for in the first place.

While they moved to France for a different way of life, they fear that everything is becoming the same as it is in other parts of Europe. Hector

MacDonald similarly argued that incoming 'foreigners' were changing the face of the French countryside:

We, unwittingly, by coming here, are helping to destroy this, and we do it by, and I have to say 'we', the foreigners, because what we are doing is buying up the houses, which means that young people... can't afford to buy the houses.

It is thus that ambivalence arises because of my respondents' position as incomers with money.

Although on a basic level the migrants present their association with Europe, they soon find that this is not a sufficient or desirable explanation for their daily experiences. As the examples in this chapter reveal, my respondents present themselves as European citizens when it suits their purposes, primarily to justify their occupancy in the French countryside, but emphasize their Britishness at other times. Similarly, they sometimes argue that a common Europe does not exist or present it as an 'empty signifier' in their accounts. This ambivalence of local actors towards Europe is not a new theme in social anthropology. Previous studies focus on the geographical and political margins of Europe, which are undoubtedly important areas of study (cf. Goddard, Llobera, and Shore 1994). However, this chapter shows that the ambivalence of my respondents' daily lives is the result of their particular situatedness: they are powerful European actors who choose to live on the periphery.

Studies of the fringes of Europe have focussed predominantly on the uncertainties about Europe and its future held by the people who live there. For example, Mitchell, in the aptly named *Ambivalent Europeans*, argues that, 'ambivalence – and consequent anxiety about present and future – are particularly acute at the edges of Europe, in marginal places' (2002: 242). Other documented cases of national ambivalence to Europe include Cyprus (Ayres 1996), Poland (Lippert and Becker 1998; Blazyca and Kolkiewicz 1999), Greece (Carabott 1995; Lavdas 1997), the Czech Republic (Lippert and Becker 1998), and Denmark (Peterson 1998), all of

which, Mitchell claims, are in some way marginal to Europe. A later publication by Armbruster, Rollo, and Meinhof (2003) continues this theme of ambivalence, shifting the location from the geographical margins to the border communities of Europe. This last study highlights the complexity and ambiguity of ambivalence, characteristics which my respondents' accounts also reflect.

For Mitchell (2002), ambivalence emerges from the tension between the traditional and the modern, as evidence of the Maltese discomfort with modernity. This is particularly salient in the description of St. Paul's feast that Mitchell describes. As he explains, this ritual,

... could be seen as a means by which the integrity of Maltese 'tradition' is reinforced against what is seen in many circles as an encroaching Europeanisation, that in turn is a source of dangerous and morally corrupting 'modernity'... ritual mediates the relationship between the local and the supralocal, serving as a means of expressing and therefore accommodating the dilemmas and ambiguities of this relationship (2002: 1-2).

This attempt to suppress ambiguity is itself a 'modern' act, Mitchell (2002) continues. Indeed, the ambivalence between the traditional and the modern is an inherent characteristic of modernity (Mitchell 2002). Therefore, in the case of Maltese ambivalence towards Europe, anti-modernity and anti-European sentiments go hand in hand.

The ambivalence expressed by Britons living in the Lot resonates with Mitchell's (2002) interpretation of Maltese ambivalence. As Mitchell (2002) argues, the Maltese view modernity as a threat to tradition. This is also evident in my respondents' accounts. They left Britain for a different way of life, an escape from modernity as they experienced it in Britain, into tradition as offered to them (in their perceptions) in rural France (see for example chapter four). Unlike the Maltese, who expressed ambivalence in anticipation of modernity, the migrants' uncertainty is a response to their experiences of living within it. Furthermore, my respondents recognize that it is precisely European modernity, which means that they can live in the

Lot, because it gives rise to freedom of movement. Ambivalence arises, as with the Maltese, from the tension between the traditional and the modern in the migrants' lives. Therefore, at times my respondents present modernity as a risk to their idyllic way of life. As the migrants' fears for the 'destruction' of this lifestyle reveal, European modernity, imported to rural France by incomers such as themselves, presents a real threat. This is why, I argue, they can never resolve their ambivalence; they realize that they cannot fully relinquish their ties to modernity, and as long as they hold on to these, they will always risk destroying their dreams. This resonates with MacCannell's (1976) work on the tourists' quest for authenticity. As he argues, seeking the authentic destroys it; just as for the migrants, the search for a different way of life may ultimately end the distinctiveness of this lifestyle.

For Britons living in the Lot, the move back to tradition was one that they chose to embark on, and was made possible by their relatively privileged economic position. While for some people, such as their French *paysans* neighbours, there is no choice but to live on the margins, my respondents have the luxury to choose this lifestyle. In fact, it is precisely because they are modern that the 'British of the Lot' have the choice to live in the 'traditional'. Even within this new way of living however, the migrants remain ambivalent about modernity, explaining that there were certain features of modern life that they would have brought with them if they had had the choice. While they want to escape from modernity as they experience it in Britain, they realize that they cannot live without it.

CONCLUSION

The narratives that I recount in this chapter show the extent of the feelings of ambivalence expressed by the British living in the Lot. On the one hand, they acknowledge that their European citizenship allows them to move to France easily. On the other hand, they try to dissociate from the idea that they are 'European'. While their imaginings of 'Europe' at times focus on the similarities that this gives rise to, this contradicts their imaginings of

rural France as offering them a different way of life. As their stories show, they fluctuate between wanting, and at times needing, the benefits of European modernity, and rejecting these in favour of a more 'traditional' way of living. Although the idea of a common Europe is good because things work the way they expect them to, it is bad because it takes on the aspects of modernity that the migrants dislike and have tried to escape. They therefore oscillate between their positions as pro-European and not, and although they express a certain degree of nationalism in respect to Britain, they strive to show how they identify with the locals.

While the migrants' narratives reveal the ambivalence that they feel, they also show my respondents' attempts to resolve this. For example, the migrants realize that life in France will be different to the life they led in Britain, and so they spend time preparing for migration and try to familiarize themselves with these differences once they live in the Lot. This is a slow process and, as their stories show, they often struggle to find the answers that they want. In the meantime, the migrants find themselves in a position where they are neither here nor there. The realities of their lives in the Lot thus reflect their ambiguous position as European citizens living in another European Member State. As the examples in the following two chapters show, this intermediate position can last for a very long time.

Furthermore, the migrants recognize that their presence in the Lot brings certain aspects of European modernity into contact with their 'rural idyll'. Considering that they perceive modern life as a threat to 'tradition', based on their experiences and imaginings of the demise of British rurality (see for example chapter four), they fear that rural France will similarly be destroyed; their narratives demonstrate their constant efforts to keep modernity at bay. Their perception that the French countryside has changed because of the mass immigration of Northern Europeans, in whose numbers they count, is a constant reminder of their ambiguous position as modern actors who seek the 'traditional'. As I argue in the next chapter, stereotyping others as 'destructive' is a further way that my

respondents in the Lot attempt to overcome their own feelings of ambivalence.

While others locate acute ambivalence in the margins of Europe, both geographically and politically (see for example Mitchell 2002; Armbruster, Rollo, and Meinhof 2003), the case of the British living in the Lot is different. As powerful European citizens, they already have full European political rights, but they choose to relinquish these in exchange for a new way of life. Their choice to live in another European Member State limits their political rights. They no longer have the same rights and entitlements that they had when they lived in Britain. They cannot vote in French elections, and while they can vote in Britain, they find that their access to other British services is denied. For example, the family migrants told me how their children had not been eligible for British university grants and loans because they lived in France, and other migrants told me that they could no longer use the services of the NHS. And in one case, when a young British man returned to Britain to work having grown up in France, he found that he had to apply for a National Insurance Number and go through the same process as foreigners who want to work in Britain, even though he had been born there.

As becomes apparent in the ethnography I present in this chapter, the ambivalence experienced by the migrants emerges from their desires to lead different and better ways of life. Out of choice, they choose to live on the fringes of modernity and become marginal political actors. Although Britons living in the Lot view living on the margins as a positive thing, this may contradict how their French neighbours feel. Local actors may not feel as threatened by modernity as the British living in the Lot do, but instead welcome it because of the benefits and opportunities that it brings them, such as improving the local economy. The Lot is currently one of the poorest *département* in France. Traditionally a region of small-scale agriculture, its economy has suffered with the introduction of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). While there is a little industry in the area, this is

not comparable to that found in other parts of France. It has also experienced massive rural depopulation, with young people migrating to the towns and cities for work. At present, the economy of the Lot depends on what little agriculture is left in the area, wine production, and tourism. I argue that the incoming population also has a positive effect on the local economy, which would explain why generally the local French seem to welcome these migrants. While there has been no conflict yet, in the future there is a potential for disagreements between those who want and those who do not want modernity. It may be, as the migrants recognize, that the Lot will no longer offer the different way of life that people seek. This may stem the flow of British moving to the area. However, the question remains what will those Britons already living there do if the way of life that they desire disappears? It will be interesting to see how this unfolds.

I end with a quotation from Alannah who summarizes the ambivalence towards Europe expressed by so many of my respondents:

The paradoxical thing is the British on the whole seem more disposed to be out of Europe than in, and yet most of them want to live here... how does that tie up? It's just a nice place to live.

CHAPTER 6: INDISTINCT AND DESTRUCTIVE OTHERS

In this chapter, I examine why British migrants in the Lot employ stereotypes to represent tourists and other Britons living overseas. They describe these others in two ways: as indistinct and destructive. They present tourists and their compatriots in other destinations as indistinct, in the sense that they do not have or want the knowledge of how to become part of the local community (cf. Waldren 1996, 1997). These others are similarly destructive because their presence within certain locations has the potential (or already has destroyed, as some of my respondents argue) to fundamentally alter the way of life available there, to make it indistinct. I show that my respondents particularly associate this form of 'destruction' with areas that have a large number of British incomers, such as Spain and the Dordogne. In contrast to these other migration destinations, the migrants' narratives present the Lot as a place where this distinctive way of life is still available.

I argue that my respondents use stereotypes to project and confirm the distinctiveness of their lives in the Lot. It seems that my respondents are aware that others talk about them using similar stereotypes, and therefore remain conscious of their ambiguous position. Therefore, their representations of others are how they displace and resolve their persistent feelings of ambivalence. In this manner, by using stereotypes to refer to their compatriots, the migrants claim that they 'really' live in the Lot.

STEREOTYPING THE 'OTHER'

As with many stereotypes, those that the migrants employ 'can appear ungrounded in any kind of direct experience, and can magnify particular elements, while overlooking other elements' (Theodossopoulos 2003b: 177). The employment of stereotypes is thus a form of 'othering' (see

Theodossopoulos 2003b; Brown and Theodossopoulos 2004; Theodossopoulos 2007). As Barth (1969) and Cohen (1994) argue of ethnic stereotypes, stereotypes do not only define categories of exclusion but also draw the boundaries of inclusion. They therefore operate, '... as a means of affirming social solidarity and membership (Brown and Theodossopoulos 2004: 7). Therefore, for my respondents, their use of stereotypes affirms their identity as the 'British of the Lot'.

Following Herzfeld (1997), I argue that it is necessary to interrogate the way that my respondents employ these stereotypes and thus, as Theodossopoulos (2003b) highlights, question the significance that they have for them. In other words, why do my respondents feel compelled to describe others in these terms? Furthermore, as McDonald (1997) asserts, stereotypes are revealing because of what they tell us about the people using them. The examples I recall in this chapter therefore highlight how the migrants employ stereotypes to say that their lives are markedly different from those of other Britons and tourists (cf. Waldren 1996, 1997; O'Reilly 2000, 2003; Oliver 2002).

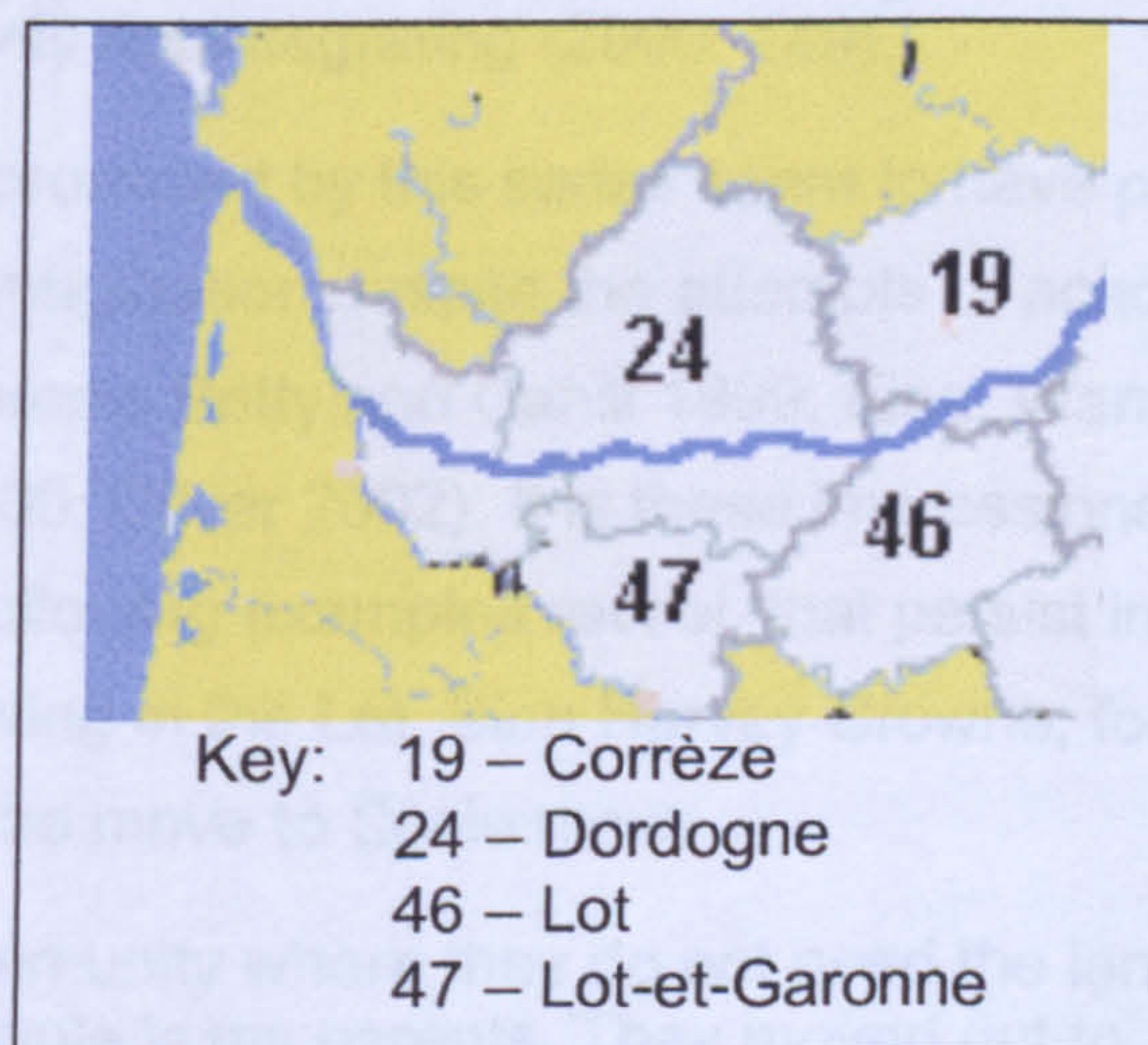


Figure 6.1: Map of the Lot and surrounding *département*

In this section, I examine how my respondents depict tourists and Britons resident in two other migration destinations in order to investigate what the migrants' use of stereotypes reveals about themselves and others. I have chosen to refer to the two migration destinations that they most frequently

discuss: the Dordogne, a *département* adjoining the Lot (see Figure 6.1), and Spain. This excludes similar discussions of for example, Normandy and Provence, other French *département* with a high density of British residents.

The British in Spain

As many other scholars record (see for example King, Warnes, and Williams 2000; O'Reilly 2000; Oliver 2002), Spain has been a popular migration destination among the British for many years. In particular, the case of the British living in Spanish tourist destinations, such as the Costa del Sol, has been well documented by the media and given rise to many popular representations of Britons living abroad. The soap opera *Eldorado*, which first aired in 1992, is the most well known of these representations. King, Warnes, and Williams summarize O'Reilly's (2000) assessment of this programme by saying that it was,

... built on a stereotype of the 'Brits in Spain' which had been constructed by newspaper and television journalism. This stereotype presented them as living lazy lives in the sun, drinking too much alcohol, behaving like old colonials, and certainly not integrating (2000: 149).

The stereotypes promoted by this series seem to have prevailed in the common British imagination despite the attempts of academics to dispel them (see for example Betty and Cahill 1999; King, Warnes, and Williams 2000; O'Reilly 2000; Oliver 2002). It is these impressions of Britons living in Spain, as the following examples reveal, that persist in the accounts of British migrants living in the Lot. Sian Harvey-Browne, for example, told me that Britons who move to Spain move,

... to a community where they do not need the language. A prime example is my parents. They moved out to Spain; they've been there eighteen years. They can probably order a couple of things in the supermarket, and that's about all... In Spain you have, sort of ghettos if you like. It's a horrible word, but you have a community of French... and then you've got the Dutch and the Germans. And they've even

got their own English butcher, their own German butcher. And you think, why bother going out there? It's only because they've got sunshine and cheap booze.

In this quotation, Sian highlights her belief that her parents have not integrated into the Spanish community. Furthermore, there was no impetus for them to integrate; the implication is that there are English service providers to respond to all their needs. It seems that the British in Spain, of whom Sian's parents are exemplary, do not need to have any contact with the local population or culture in order to live there. Sian later stated adamantly that life in the Lot was in no way similar to the life that her parents led in Spain. She perceives that her migration to the Lot has given her more than the sunshine and cheap alcohol; it has given her a 'real' way of life similar to that which the local French lead. Therefore, through the contrast between her life and that led by her parents in Spain, Sian implies that she strives for integration.

Simon Glass also highlighted the differences between the experiences of British migrants living in France and Spain:

I think there are all sorts of differences. Because of the Mediterranean coast, Spain attracts people looking for the sun. The Spanish weren't as protective of their culture. They were quite happy to have huge developments taking place. They embraced foreign money... because they had more need for it. Certainly, in Spain, if you go into a bank anybody who's anybody can speak English. They understand that it is an international language of finance.

Simon presents Spain as an easier option for Britons looking to migrate because it is better prepared for the British population. He suggests that migrants living in Spain do not move to engage with the local culture; this has already been diluted by tourism. In this way, Simon legitimates these migrants' failure to integrate because there is no expectation that they will from the Spanish, and there is no need because of the services available in English (cf. Rodríguez, Fernández-Mayoralas, and Rojo 1998). He continued to say that this was probably because of the mass tourism that the Spanish coast attracted, and the facilities that sprang up to deal with

them. As a result, there is no longer any sense that those areas in Spain that Britons move to offer a different way of life; as Simon depicts it, the only difference between life before and after migration for the Britons who live in Spain is the sunshine. In the opinions of the British in the Lot, tourism, and the mass migration of their compatriots to Spain, and as I reveal in the next section, the Dordogne, destroy the distinctiveness of a particular area (cf. MacCannell 1976; Urry 1990). However, as the next example shows, the migrants believe that rural France and more specifically the Lot provides the different way of life that they aim for through migration.

Sally Stampton spoke of her sister's experiences of life in Spain. Her sister was employed as head mistress of an English speaking school in Spain, which prepared English and Spanish students to sit English educational qualifications (GCSEs and A Levels). These schools were common in Spain, so Sally told me, where they encouraged their children to be bilingual. This meant that it was easy for British children living in Spain to get an education.

When Sally and her son Ollie first moved to France her sister had assumed that things would be the same there as they were in Spain. However, Sally registered Ollie at the local French school, which was her only option. As she recalled how her son had at first struggled because his lessons were in French, Sally told me that her sister had once again suggested that she move him to an English speaking school. Sally assured her that there were none in the area, which her sister found very hard to believe given her experience of living in Spain; besides, as Sally told me, the French education system was better. Two years after migrating, Sally was very proud when Ollie gained the highest mark in his class for spelling and grammar. In this account, Sally implies that she and Ollie are slowly adapting to their new 'French' way of life.

Common to the descriptions of Sian, Simon, and Sally is the idea that Britons in Spain do not, for whatever reason, lead 'real' Spanish lives. Their daily lives bear no resemblance to how the British in the Lot imagine local Spanish communities. My respondents thus portray the British in Spain as unconnected to the local population. Their conceptualizations thus resonate with the arguments proposed by O'Reilly (2000) and Oliver (2002) that the British in Spain are marginal to Spanish society:

British migrants live on the margins of Spanish society, not residentially but economically, socially, structurally and ideologically. They take what they want from each culture – their own and their host's – enjoying their marginality to its full advantage (O'Reilly 2000: 160).

Although I argue in chapter four (see also chapter two) that my respondents occupy a similarly marginal position in French society; the British in the Lot, as many of the examples in this chapter and throughout my thesis show, continually strive to demonstrate that they are integrated members of the local community. In this manner, they resist the idea that they are marginal. I argue that their efforts to overcome their marginality, similarly serve to resolve some of the ambivalence that they feel. For example, I argue in chapter four that they remain ambivalent following migration because they fear that they are 'destructive' to the distinctive way of life they seek. As the examples above demonstrate, presenting the British in Spain as 'destructive' and indistinct, the migrants highlight that they live differently. This confirms the distinctiveness of the lives they lead and displaces some of their anxiety, and thus their ambivalence.

Finally, the migrants' narratives make it apparent that they do not believe that it is possible to lead a distinctive way of life in Spain. While my respondents told me that they believed that Spain had once offered the authentically traditional community that they find in the Lot, this is no longer available.¹ In the migrants' accounts, the demise of this sense of

¹ The migrants' wistful imaginings of a bygone era resonate with the anthropologists' romanticization of the Mediterranean as a region (see Goddard, Llobera, and Shore 1994). In this respect, even the early anthropology of Europe treated Mediterranean peasantries as more authentically traditional.

community results from extensive tourism and immigration to the area. As I discussed at length in chapter three, the Lot still provides this elusive 'community spirit'. For example, Janet and Julian Ford told me about some of their friends who lived in Spain. They would not leave their house without fully securing it, pulling down, and locking into place the heavy metal shutters on all the doors and windows, even if they were only heading to the shop down the road to buy a bag of sugar. These friends lived away from any other houses, which may have explained their fears about intruders. But as Janet and Julian told me, the rate of crime in the British ghettos of Spain was also high. The British enclaves along the Spanish coastline, it was rumoured among my respondents, were the regular targets of thieves. Living in the Lot, whether in a village or in an isolated spot, I witnessed how the migrants rarely locked their front doors when they were in the house or garden. This demonstrated to me how much faith they had in the safety of their surroundings.

Presenting these brief impressions of the lives of the British in Spain the migrants stress that they do not want to live there, but they also emphasize what the Lot has that Spain does not. Essentially, their narratives insinuate that there is greater opportunity for them to embrace genuine French culture than there is for those in Spain to engage in a traditional Spanish way of life. My respondents' emphasis on the possibility of engaging with a typical French way of life, while the equivalent is unavailable in Spain, confirms their rhetoric for choosing their migration destination: in rural France, they perceive that there is the potential for a different way of life.

The British in the Dordogne

Similar themes emerged when the migrants spoke of their compatriots living in the Dordogne. For example, recalling her initial decision to migrate to the Lot, Sarah Hammond told me, 'The last thing we wanted to do was join an English circle. You know? One of these expat groups, which we knew was very dominant in the Dordogne region, which is why we didn't

choose the Dordogne'. By associating the British in the Dordogne with stereotypes of held of expatriates, Sarah simultaneously distances herself from other migrants who do participate in the 'English circle', from expatriates in general, and specifically from Britons residing in the Dordogne. David Lomax explicitly drew a link between his compatriots in the Dordogne and colonization, 'I certainly wouldn't want to live in the areas I've heard talk about in the Dordogne... it's like a British colony'.

In their accounts, Sarah and David evoke their perception that British residents of the Dordogne lead stereotypical colonial lives abroad. This representation resonates with how my respondents described the British in Spain as not leading particularly distinctive lives. The migrants further confirmed their pursuit of distinctive ways of living and revealed their belief that these were available in the Lot by implying that their lives there were different to those led by their compatriots in other migration destinations. For example, my respondents often stated that they had chosen not to live in the Dordogne because of the existence of an overwhelming British community of which they did not want to be a part; moving to the Lot was one way that my respondents, in Beth MacDonald's words, got 'away from the English'. I argue that the emphasis on their dislike of the behaviour of some Britons abroad serves to distance the migrants from what they perceive as undesirable associations with colonialism and expatriates.

As Jon Morris explained, 'It's known as Dordogneshire... people have got their own shops [British people in the Dordogne]; there are village cricket teams'. Jon and Kay, his wife, continued, emphasizing that they and their compatriots in the Lot had chosen to live there precisely because it wasn't the Dordogne:

Kay Well, I think that the people who've moved to live here have chosen not to live in the Dordogne... therefore, there's already a huge difference.

Jon Well, it's interesting. We had some Australian people staying in one of the gîte last summer who were touring a bit, and they'd been to the Dordogne. And they said to us, "It's bloody awful. Everywhere we

moved or went... we went to the baker's and it was an English person who owned it; we went to get canoes, it was an English person who owned it. You know, no offence, but it felt like we were living in England. And, you know, we wanted to be in France”.

Jon and Kay's narrative demonstrates their belief that life in the Dordogne is no longer French. Recalling their conversations with some Australian tourists who had stayed in their gîte gives their account further emphasis. The local population in some parts of France is no longer what tourists anticipate. British and Dutch migration impact on the demographics of the countryside and change the social landscape of the area. Jon and Kay's Australian visitors had been disappointed to find that the population in some places was not French at all. Drawing on the accounts of these tourists, Jon and Kay therefore confirm their perceptions of the Dordogne as indistinct because it has become anglicized.

The disappointment of their Australian visitors resonates with Jon and Kay's fears. They worried that the Lot would also become this way and would no longer offer them the distinctly French way of life that they moved for:

If things change like that, the popularity of France could slip in this area, literally, a lot, and people would think, there's so many English people there, or Dutch. Pretty much every campsite along the Lot is Dutch... that's the thing. It's another thing we need to watch out for. We certainly wouldn't go on holiday, personally, to somewhere in Spain where it was all English speaking and Fish and Chips. That's why we go to another country. But not everybody's the same. Some people like the comfort of that.

For their own sake and for that of their clients, Jon and Kay do not want the Lot to acquire the same negative connotations as the Dordogne has in their minds. For them, visiting or living outside of Britain should offer the opportunity to experience difference. The implication is, why else would you travel? As their reference to Spain implies, Jon and Kay do not find similarity appealing. I argue that their discussion of the British in the Dordogne further confirms the rationale behind their decision to migrate.

While other Britons were happy to live in the Dordogne or Spain where life was relatively familiar because of the large British population, Jon and Kay preferred difference. As the Lot was, relative to the Dordogne, less settled by the British, the possibility remained that they could find the different way of life they desired.

However, Jon and Kay also express their awareness that they are complicit within the transformations in the local community. The increasing number of Britons living in the Lot could bring about similar changes to those experienced in the Dordogne. It seems that the migrants' quest for a different way of life could destroy what they seek (cf. MacCannell 1976). Their concerns are similar to those raised in respect to tourism. As Rojek and Urry argue, 'this desire for contrast and escape is increasingly freighted with worries that the impetus for tourism is itself destroying in the possibility of tourism' (1997: 1).

The stereotypes of the British in the Dordogne are not specific to my respondents in the Lot. Although there have been attempts to deconstruct these clichés both from the media (see for example Cassen 2004; Wilson 2004) and academics (see for example Barou and Prado 1995; Gervais-Aguer 2004, 2006), these stereotypes prevail as myth among Britons resident in France more generally. As Barou and Prado found,

At the centre of the meetings we had with those in Brittany and Normandy, the British residents cited to us the case of their compatriots in the Dordogne as an example not to follow. The condemnation of this type of 'colonial' behaviour was for them the best gauge of their will to integrate (1995: 135).²

The flavour of these representations has, it seems, changed little in ten years. Neither, it appears has the response of British migrants; by denouncing the behaviour of others, they imply that they have a more appropriate attitude to living in rural France. The migrants' employment of

² 'Au cours des rencontres que nous avons eues en Bretagne et Normandie, les résidents britanniques nous ont cité le cas de leurs compatriotes de Dordogne comme l'exemple à ne pas suivre. La condamnation de ce type de comportement "colonial" était pour eux le meilleur gage de leur volonté d'intégration.'

stereotypes thus reveals the perception of the lives that they want to project. For example, James and Sian Harvey-Browne told me,

- James I'd say of the English that live in the Lot area that they are more integrated than the English in the Dordogne.
- Sian You know [in the Dordogne] they speak English... You know, you get people who come into the post office and say, 'I want a stamp', and if it's not understood, they say it a bit louder [raises her voice], 'I want a stamp'. And you think, you've just said that... but they [the French] like you to make an effort. I mean, even if you make mistakes, they'll appreciate it.

The emphasis here is on blending in with the local population rather than standing out as British. This level of social interaction is still possible in the Lot while it is no longer possible in the Dordogne or, as their previous quotations show, in Spain. By living in the Lot, my respondents lead distinct lives in contrast to their compatriots in the Dordogne and Spain because they strive to be insiders (cf. Herzfeld 1992). They live in the Lot rather than these other locations because they believe the demise of the local way of life in these areas has meant that integration, and thus the pursuit of a distinctive lifestyle, is no longer a possibility. It seems that the Lot provides the opportunity for distinctiveness while the Dordogne and Spain do not.

The belief that Britons living in the Lot were better integrated than those in the Dordogne was also evident when James and Sian emphasized the absence of organized British clubs, and places and events for expatriates to congregate:

- James They've been fairly discreet... It's [the British population in the Lot] not as obvious as in the Dordogne. They haven't got lots of, like, 'The Lot Bowling Club', or 'The Lot Retired Stockbrokers' Club'...
- Sian ... or 'The Lot Tea Club'...
- James ... or anything, or, 'The English Bridge Club'. It just doesn't exist here as far as I know anyway.
- Sian It's not what we're looking for.

These clubs did exist in the Lot, but they were not publicized to the same extent as they were in the Dordogne. However, the fact that James and Sian did not or chose not to notice them meant that their perceptions of the British living in the Lot assumed particular dimensions. Identifying the disparity between Britons in the Lot and the Dordogne, James and Sian present the Britons in the Lot as distinctive.

My respondents further emphasized that they led distinct lives, when they discussed 'expatriates'. The migrants often described these 'expatriates' as those who, as one of my respondents once remarked, 'like the country, shame about the French'. This was a phrase that I heard time and time again used to refer to other British migrants and their failure or lack of desire to integrate with the local population. Through these representations the migrants reinforce, rather than deconstruct, the link between colonial behaviour and expatriate living and continue to circulate stereotypes. However, in this manner they also distance themselves from these negative associations. For example, they often stated of 'expatriates', 'I don't know what they came to France for', emphasizing that for them, life in the Lot could offer more than what these 'expatriates' sought.

It is apparent that my respondents believe that Britons living in the Dordogne and Spain have destroyed the distinct way of life that may once have been available there. In the migrants' opinions, these destinations have become little more than 'Britain in the sun', as the result of colonial behaviour and the failure to integrate of their compatriots. The Lot, however, still offers a distinctive way of living to the migrants, even though my respondents recognize that this may not be the case for very much longer. As my respondents' accounts stress, living in the Lot, they behave differently to their compatriots elsewhere. In particular, they emphasize that they strive to integrate, to engage with the way of life of their French neighbours.

Encounters with tourists

How the migrants discuss tourists similarly highlights the distinctiveness of the lives led by my respondents. Generally, the migrants describe how tourists disrupt the peace and tranquillity of life in the Lot (cf. Waldren 1996, 1997). For example, they often told me how busy the roads became when the tourists were around, how they had to book their favourite restaurants in advance during the summer months, and that they would not visit certain places during peak season because there were so many tourists. And the tourists had other adverse effects. As Harry once explained, his favourite ice cream cost more in the summer; the local supermarkets raised the price to benefit from increased demand. My respondents in the Lot thus present the tourists as destructive to the way of life available there, just as they do their compatriots in the Dordogne and Spain. However, the tourists are only a temporary threat; at the end of the summer months, they disappear.

The migrants also distinguish themselves from tourists by emphasizing the superficiality of tourists' experiences of the Lot. In this manner, my respondents place at the forefront their own engagements and insider knowledge of how to live in the area. The following quotation from Peter Mayle's autobiographical account of life in Provence provides a vivid and humorous illustration of these contrasts between British residents in rural France and tourists. It seems that living in France is *not* like a holiday:

The greatest problem, as we soon came to realise, was that our guests were on holiday. We weren't. We got up at seven. They were often in bed until ten or eleven, sometimes finishing breakfast just in time for a swim before lunch. We worked while they sunbathed. Refreshed by an afternoon nap, they came to life in the evening, getting into high social gear as we were falling asleep in our salad (Mayle 1990: 85-86).

As Mayle's (1990) presentation depicts, the interaction between migrants and tourists often occurs in the migrants' own home with friends and family who come to stay. Many of my respondents in the Lot told me about their

experiences of having these, sometimes uninvited, guests. As Jon and Kay told me,

We get friends from the UK coming out. They want to eat all day. They want to drink at lunch, which is fine, but we're working. And you can't do it everyday; you've got to keep up with all the bits and pieces that are going on.

This is highly reminiscent of Mayle's (1990) account, with the emphasis on the opposition between work and leisure; while Jon and Kay work, their friends visit them for leisure.

Jon and Kay also implied that they were not like tourists when we arranged to go to the local market together one Friday morning in summer 2004. They stressed that I would have to arrive at their house early. It was the peak of the tourist season and, to avoid the traffic and buy the best produce, we would have to get there before the tourists. This meant being there before eight in the morning. The only other people there at that time, so they told me, were other permanent residents of the town.

In this discussion, Jon and Kay align themselves with other local residents rather than with the tourists. The tourists, too, enjoy the fresh produce from the market, but they do not arrive early in the morning. As Jon and Kay imply, this is because they do not know how to live in the Lot. While for the tourists, the trip to the market is out of the ordinary, for the migrants it is an intrinsic part of life. Once again, my respondents distinguish themselves by highlighting that they participate in the life of rural France. In this respect, their experiences of life in the Lot go beyond the tourist gaze (Urry 1990), as I discuss in the following chapter.

Through their anecdotes, the migrants reproduce the distinction between themselves and the tourists that is evident in Mayle's (1990) account above. It is as though they are saying, to quote the title of Jacqueline Waldren's (1997) article about expatriates living in Mallorca, 'We are not tourists – we live here' (cf. O'Reilly 2000, 2003; Oliver 2002). My respondents often achieve this by establishing an opposition between

'holiday' and 'real life' or 'reality'. Talking about his expectations and subsequent experiences of living in the Lot, David Lomax told me,

When you go abroad, it's on holiday; it's an association that builds up in people's minds, understandably. Abroad equals leisure, equals fun, equals, you know, relaxing... the reality is never, of course, quite like that.

In this quotation, David not only outlines how his life is different to that of tourists, he also rejects the assertion that living abroad is one big holiday, an association that many of the respondents seemed keen to dismiss.

Jon and Kay had a similar opinion of their experiences in the Lot, telling me, 'It's real life isn't it? Like when you go on holiday somewhere and say, "Oh, I'd love to live here". It's totally different when you actually live here'. In fact, they went on to stress that you had to learn a different language to live in the Lot than you needed when you were on vacation. 'Reality' it seems, cannot be experienced when you are on holiday (cf. Urry 1990).

As the above examples demonstrate, the migrants' representations of reality are meaningful because of the relationships that they express within them (Bourdieu 1984: 483). In these cases, reality is presented through the contrast between residence and holiday. As I discuss in the following chapter, at other times, the migrants use this distinction to indicate that they are different from some of their compatriots in the Lot. For example, Jon and Kay told me on another occasion, 'for a lot of English people it's just one big holiday'. They applied this particularly to the retired population who, in their eyes, have the luxury and can afford to socialize, eat, and drink all day.

However, the discovery that living in the Lot is not like a holiday may also act as a deterrent. Within the first two weeks of my fieldwork, Paul Gosden came to the house where I was staying to see Jane Campbell. Jane had helped him and his wife, Isabel, with their French. He had come to the house to tell her that they had decided to return to Britain. They had only lived in the Lot for a short while. It was rumoured that they were not alone;

while I was doing my fieldwork, many of my respondents told me that fifty percent of migrants returned to Britain.³ This was a further way that the migrants implied that they were different; they had managed to overcome the difficulties of living in the Lot, while others had not.

Paul explained to me that he and Isabel were just not happy in rural France. Central to their discontent was the idea that their experiences of life did not bear any resemblance to their memories of holidays in the area. This is clear in the following quotation that stuck in my mind, 'We soon discovered that living in the Lot was not like our holidays here. The log fire did not make itself'. By the end of the winter, I fully appreciated the feelings expressed in Paul's sentence. I had watched everyday as Harry built and tended the fire in the living room, and weekly as he emptied the ash from the grate and carried out the dirty work of cleaning the fireplace. The fire was not purely decorative either; it provided warmth to a house that otherwise relied on a fifty year old central heating system, where the radiators all had plastic containers strategically placed under the pipes to catch the all too frequent leaks. The long and the short of it was that it seemed hard work to maintain the 'idyllic' log fire. It was a long process, which involved going outside in the cold winter air each morning to collect firewood before you could sit back and enjoy. Before my fieldwork, I had never fully appreciated the work that went into maintaining the fire, both to keep it burning at a constant rate, and to keep the fireplace and chimney clean. I suppose that this highlighted that on my previous visits I had always been a tourist, while now I was learning about how to live in the Lot.

Paul's statement also draws attention to the initial inspiration for migration held in common by many of the retirement migrants: their previous holidays in rural France. Some people made the decision to migrate while on holiday; they would glance in the window of the estate agent in passing and, before they knew it, they would be viewing a house, sometimes even

³ I never tracked down the official records for this, nor did I come across any further examples during my fieldwork.

putting down a deposit. Others had based their decision to migrate, as Paul did, on their memories of holidays, a point raised by many other academic studies of the British in France (see for example Buller and Hoggart 1994a; Barou and Prado 1995; Gervais-Aguer 2004; Depierre and Guitard 2006). For example, one sunny day, Lotty Smith and I sat in her garden and she told me how for many years she had taken holidays in France. On each occasion that she had visited, she had felt the desire to move permanently, attracted, as she recalled, to the relaxed pace of life and good food. It was an ambition that she finally fulfilled in 2003.



Figure 6.2: Banner from *Expatica* website (<http://www.expatica.com>)

Although migration often stems from holiday experiences, previous examples demonstrate that those who choose to live permanently in the Lot distinguish their lives from those of tourists. In particular, the migrants stress that they are different to tourists because they know how to live in the Lot. This distinction from tourists seems to be a concern amongst expatriates in general, as indicated by the banner (see Figure 6.2) heading up the *Expatica* website – a site providing news and information for expatriates living in Europe.⁴ The simple words ‘I am not a tourist’, confirm the sentiments expressed in the accounts of my respondents in the Lot.

Finally, those who had settled in the Lot often told me that they were glad that they were not tourists, but still they stressed that they were lucky to live in such a beautiful place. For my respondents, life in the Lot offered them more than tourists could experience. This confirms my argument in chapter three – the migrants simultaneously gaze on and perceive that

⁴ I realize that the term expatriate is, as Fechter (2007) argue, ‘socially contested, politically and morally charged, ambiguous, and is linked to particular notions of ethnicity and class’. However, although my respondents distanced themselves from the term, the *Expatica* website classifies the British in rural France as expatriates. It is their categorization that I refer to here.

they live (and work) in the landscape. A last quotation from Jon and Kay is representative of this point:

It's a beautiful area. There's no doubt about it. We still pinch ourselves when we're driving around doing work, even saying, "Well look! People wait all year to come down for their two week holiday and we've got it all year round".

SELF-AWARENESS AND SOLIDARITY

As my ethnography in the preceding section demonstrates, my respondents in the Lot take great care to distinguish themselves from stereotypes such as those often given to tourists and other Britons living abroad. Most commonly, the migrants reject the idea that they are like expatriates or tourists. This was evident when I had dinner with Martin and Sarah Johnstone one evening. We were joined by some of their British friends who I had not previously met. One couple showed interest in my research, but did not like the terms I used to describe migrants such as themselves. They adamantly stated, 'We are not 'migrants'. We are not 'expatriates'. We are *Sauliaçoise*'.⁵ I argue that their rejection of the categories 'migrant' and 'expatriate', and association instead with a local, regional identity demonstrates their belief that their distinctiveness emanates from their status as insiders of the local community. As Herzfeld (1992) argues, they are different precisely because they feel that they are integral members of the Lotoise population, while others do not. This is how my respondents claim they lead distinctive lives. Therefore, the stereotypes that my respondents use when they talk of their compatriots are revealing not only in what they say about others, but also what they say about the migrants themselves.

Although the stereotypes that the migrants use in their accounts, may at first sight appear self-evident, the particular way they are defined and put into use bears the signature of the migrants as their author. This specific system of classification is organized in concentric circles, with the self as the author at the centre. Closest to the centre are the migrants'

⁵ An identifying label associated with belonging to the local commune, Sauliac-sur-Céle.

compatriots in the Lot, followed by the British residents of the Dordogne, Britons in Spain, and then tourists. The migrants' discussions about the British still living in Britain suggest that they also place them in the outer circle, at a safe distance. How my respondents choose to classify others is therefore a reflection of their self-presentations as 'different', 'not normal', as 'adventurers' and 'pioneers', as fundamentally unlike other Britons.

In my depiction of the degrees to which the migrants believe they are different to others, it seems as though the stereotypes that the migrants employ are discrete. However, as the examples throughout this chapter reveal, the circles at times overlap, and they represent the actors within them using the same characteristics. For example, the British in Spain, and those in the Dordogne are equally characterized as expatriates or are associated with tourists.

The particular categorizations that the migrants make echo those observed by other academics studying forms of lifestyle migration. For example, Jacqueline Waldren (1996, 1997) notes that foreigners permanently resident in Mallorca present themselves as different from the many tourists to the region (cf. O'Reilly 2000). I speculate that this differentiation arises in response to the popular construal of lifestyle migration as tourism. Indeed, the migrants try to sever this link, and move away from what they perceive as a negative association with tourists. Similarly, they reject stereotypes that associate them with colonialism. O'Reilly describes the characteristics of these stereotypes:

... upper-class, colonial style, or lower-class, mass-tourist style expatriates searching for paradise, living an extended holiday in ghetto-like complexes, participating minimally in local life or culture, refusing to learn the language of their hosts, and generally re-creating an England in the sun (2000: 6).

Not only does this definition depict the expatriate as detached from local life and population, it also deprecates the tourist, demonstrating MacCannell's point that, 'the term "tourist" is increasingly used as a

derisive label' (1976: 94). As the ethnographic examples throughout this thesis demonstrate my respondents believe their lives and behaviour are different to those of tourists; they know more about life in the Lot than the superficial engagement of tourists allows. In fact, as I discuss in this section, the migrants often recalled how they had had to teach the tourists the rudiments of how to live in the Lot for the duration of their stay in the area.

Despite these reified presentations of others, just as Brown and Theodossopoulos (2004) state of those who employ ethnic stereotypes and Waldren (1997) argues of classificatory schemes in general, the migrants still engage in friendly relationships with those that they stereotype. In evidence of this point, many of the migrants told me about friends who lived in the Dordogne and Spain, or their interactions with tourists to the area. The migrants' claims to distinctiveness are therefore premised on the relationships with, and therefore first hand knowledge of others. The migrants who ran gîte drew on examples of how they had had to explain to their visitors how to use the compost heap in the garden, or how to separate rubbish for recycling. This information about 'how to live in the Lot' (albeit temporarily in the case of tourists) was often collated in a file somewhere in the gîte for visitors to read through at their leisure. During the summer months, Connie, Harry, and Jane continually reminded me that they knew how to live in the Lot better than their gîte visitors; why didn't the tourists 'get up early to avoid the heat of the day'? Why didn't they 'shut the shutters during the day to keep the heat out of the gîte'?

As the previous example shows, tourists provided my respondents with affirmation of their way of life; in other words, for the British in the Lot, the presence of tourists was a constant reminder that they were different. The role that tourists and other Britons abroad take in the migrants' narratives resonates with Boissevain's argument that the presence of tourists promotes both self-awareness and solidarity among the hosts:

... brought about by the regular presence of outsiders, which automatically creates categories of 'we' and 'they', insiders and outsiders, hosts and guests. By being looked at, examined and questioned by strangers, locals become aware of how they differ from the visitors (1996: 6-7).

Therefore, while the migrants may gain a degree of self-awareness and come to know themselves through migration (see Rapport and Dawson 1998), their recollections, and projections of encounters with tourists are another way that they express their perceptions of themselves.

Specifically, in their comparisons to tourists and other Britons living abroad, the migrants present themselves as a group, the 'British of the Lot'. This is an imagined community, in Anderson's (1983) terms; the migrants do not know all of the other British living in the area, but they claim solidarity with them on the grounds that they all had the same motivation behind their migration: the search for a different way of life.

However, as I argue in the following chapter, this solidarity is fickle as my respondents frequently draw attention to the differences between the groups of Britons living in the Lot. Indeed, in discussions about their compatriots in the same *département* they display more antagonism towards them than they do towards tourists and other Britons living abroad. I argue that this difference in the way they relate to others maps onto the distinctions they draw between insiders and outsiders. They perceive their compatriots in the Lot as insiders. Their narratives thus reveal that the migrants believe they are in direct competition with one another; they all claim that their lives in the Lot are distinctive, but the presence of their compatriots serves as a constant reminder that they are not so different after all. The rivalry that the migrants present in their accounts in opposition to the laid-back way that they relate to outsiders, such as tourists and other Britons living overseas who lead indistinct lives, resonates with Herzfeld's (1992) argument that ambiguous insiders are a greater problem than outsiders. My respondents' talk of tourists and Britons living in other overseas destinations shows that in their minds these others pose no threat to the distinctiveness of the lives they lead.

Instead, drawing on stereotypes, the British living in the Lot say, 'this is what we are not'.

CONCLUSION

The ethnographic examples in this chapter show how the migrants refer to specific 'others', such as tourists and Britons living in other overseas destinations, using stereotypes. The use of these stereotypes by the migrants reveals that, in their perception, these 'others' do not have the knowledge or desire to live a distinct way of life. My respondents emphasize, for example, the superficial engagements of tourists, or portray Britons living in the Dordogne and Spain as not even attempting to live like, or among, the local population, or even destroying the local way of life. While the migrants perceive that tourists and their compatriots in other destinations are distinct from the local population, my respondents want to show that they are different because they belong within the local community. Integration is thus a characteristic of the different way of life that Britons living in the Lot seek. This desire for integration in order to achieve distinction resonates with Herzfeld's (1992) argument that by claiming insider status, distinction is achieved through belonging; a point that is further apparent in the ethnography presented in the following chapter.

A further feature of distinction, revealed through the migrants' use of stereotypes, is their desire to present the Lot as providing a distinct way of living when other locations do not. Therefore, as the ethnographic examples in this chapter reveal, my respondents focus on the changes that British incomers have brought about in the Dordogne and Spain. In particular, they describe how these locations have become anglicized and, therefore, no longer offer a distinct way of life to migrants. This is one way in which my respondents stress it is only in the Lot that they can have the different lifestyle they seek.

By recounting my respondents' classifications of others, I show how the stereotypes they use are significant to them and reveal more about how Britons living in the Lot want to present themselves (cf. McDonald 1997; Herzfeld 1997; Theodossopoulos 2003b). As I argue in chapters three and four, my respondents continue to experience ambivalence following migration. This ambivalence is evident in the way they discuss the landscape and the way they talk about their identity. In chapter four, I also emphasize that this ambivalence stems, in part, from the migrants' recognition that they are complicit in the destruction of the way of life that they seek; they cannot help noticing that their presence in the French countryside encourages changes that fundamentally alter the physical and social landscape of the area. I argue that how they talk about others is also an effort to displace their ambivalence. It is therefore convenient that they present others as 'destructive' and indistinct. How the migrants represent tourists and their compatriots in other migration destinations is a reflection of their awareness that their own presence in the Lot destroys the distinctiveness of the way of life available there. By presenting others as 'destructive', they shift the focus away from themselves, and displace their own ambivalence.

To conclude, the migrants' classifications confirm their beliefs that they lead distinctive lives. They use stereotypes to say, 'this is what we are not'. Tourists and Britons living in other destinations may be 'destructive' in their minds, but they do not pose a threat to the way that the migrants present themselves, and their lives following migration, as distinct. Instead, they confirm the distinctiveness of the migrants' lives because, by using stereotypes, the migrants reveal what they believe they are not. However, as I discuss in the next chapter, their compatriots in the Lot present a much greater challenge to their self-perceptions. As I explain, the British of the Lot differentiate one another by laying claims to 'more' and 'less' authentic lives.

It is evident that the way of life that my respondents lead is a central feature of how they want to be recognized. Therefore, as I have shown in this chapter, the migrants not only claim that they lead a different way of life, but their classifications of others confirm these assertions. Although it manifests itself in a variety of ways, it seems that distinction is a key feature of lives of the British living in the Lot. Indeed, as David Lomax told me,

The interesting thing about the British abroad is that we all do it. We all come out here and like to pretend that we're the only people here... we all like to say, "I hope the British invasion stops soon".

CHAPTER 7: LIVING THE 'REAL' DREAM

In this chapter, I contextualize my respondents' discussions about their compatriots living in the Lot in terms of the broader notion of authenticity. The evaluations and remarks about others that the migrants make resonate with wider discussions that reveal how they understand what constitutes a distinctive life. The different or distinctive way of life that they seek is characterized by a sense of 'authentic living', where they imagine that they have intimate and meaningful engagements with the landscape and members of the local population. As migration alone does not result in the acquisition of this different lifestyle they desire, their narratives of life in the Lot reveal that the pursuit of 'authentic living' persists after migration. I describe in this chapter how the migrants continue to learn about 'authentic living' once they live in the Lot. In this respect, it is evident that over time, their ideas about what constitutes the authentic change, and they realize the journey they still have to make to get to their 'Holy Grail'. Drawing on the ethnographic examples in this chapter, I examine what purpose this quest has for the migrants.

I argue that how my respondents classify themselves and others can be located on a sliding scale of authenticity. Although my respondents do not explicitly describe their lives and those of their compatriots living in the Lot in terms of the authentic, I argue that this is implied in their accounts. For example, in the migrants' representations those who live most authentically – in the sense that they are deemed by their compatriots to have genuine and credible knowledge of how to live in the Lot – are Britons who they deem to have integrated into the local population.¹ My respondents most often categorized the pioneers and children of other

¹ The use of the term integrated here refers not to policy understandings of the term but to how the migrants perceive the integration of others. For some this involves the ability to speak French, while others use different criteria. Ultimately this is an assessment that the migrants use to determine whether another migrant lives a 'real French life'.

migrants in this manner. At the same time, their narratives reveal the belief that they themselves lead more authentic lives than those led by some of their compatriots in other groups. For example, the family and mid-life migrants frequently referred to retirement migrants as not really knowing how to live in the Lot. In terms of the sliding scale of authenticity, it could also be argued that the migrants perceive tourists and British migrants living in other locations, as leading less authentic lives.

Through the ethnography presented in this chapter, I demonstrate that for my respondents living in the Lot, the quest for 'authentic living' is linked to their desires for difference (cf. Abram 1997; Waldren 1997). Their discussions of the degree to which they and others have, so far, achieved their goals, show that the distinctive lifestyle the migrants pursue is about becoming an insider to the local French population (cf. Herzfeld 1992; Waldren 1996). At the same time, echoing Handler and Saxton's (1988) argument, I argue that their authentic experiences of life in rural France put them in touch, once again, with 'real' life and their 'real' selves.

ABOUT AUTHENTICITY

The quest for 'authentic living' evident within my respondents' accounts resonates with the search for 'pure cultures' characteristic of early anthropological enquiries, where anthropologists searched for cultures that were unspoilt by Western influences (Bendix 1997). Subsequent calls for the deconstruction of these presentations of other cultures as authentic have argued that this is necessary because it is a romanticizing, essentialist, and fundamentally racist discourse, which assumes cultural fixity and the possibility of purity (Lindholm 2002; Anonymous 2004; van de Port 2004; van Ginkel 2004). Indeed, as I argued in chapter four, the migrants search for a different way of life is similarly romantic and essentializing.

However, there have recently been efforts to renegotiate a position for authenticity within anthropology. This renegotiation draws on a particular

conceptualization of authenticity resonates with Handler's (1986) definition, whereby authenticity is culturally constructed and functional to those who claim it. As Handler (1986) argues, the 'search for authentic cultural experience ... says more about us than about others' (1986: 2). Handler's statements focussed on the anthropological search for authentic cultures, but I argue that it can be adopted to interrogate the experiences of those who search for 'authenticity' in their everyday lives. Indeed, many recent discussions of authenticity stress that it is a concept people regularly draw on in their daily lives (see for example, Anonymous 2004; van de Port 2004; van Ginkel 2004). As van Ginkel argues that it is time to examine, 'what quests for authenticity *mean for* and *do to* its seekers' (2004: 59). This argument emphasizes that how individuals construct and perceive the authentic in everyday life is important (see also MacDonald 1997a; Anonymous 2004; van de Port 2004). Throughout this chapter I examine the migrants' narratives through this framework of authenticity, questioning what constitutes authenticity in the migrants' lives and the role that the quest for this particular sense of authentic living – identified by my respondents' claims to the knowledge of how to *really* live in the Lot – plays.

Some of the answers to this question may be found in the comparison to the tourist's quest for authenticity (see for example MacCannell 1976; Cohen 1988; Graburn 1989; Urry 1990; Selwyn 1996; Franklin 2003); just as tourists search for the authentic on their travels, the different way of life that the migrants seek has similar traits. For the tourist, experience offers them a contrast to the superficiality of modernity (MacCannell 1976; Urry 1990). Through the quest for the authentic, they seek to find that which is destroyed and lost in modernity (see for example Cohen 1988; MacCannell 1992; Lindholm 2002; Franklin 2003). How the migrants explain the rationale behind their choice to migrate resonates with this interpretation of the quest for authenticity. Their realization that they do not like modern life as they experienced it in Britain impacts on the decision to migrate (see chapters five and six). In this respect, my respondents'

narratives confirm Crang's argument that the quest for the authenticity is, 'at the core of modern subjectivities' (1996: 418).

However, the migrants' search for 'authentic living' also differs from that proposed in the case of tourists. My respondents' quest for 'authentic living', as the ethnography in this chapter demonstrates, is an ongoing and quintessential part of their daily lives. This contrasts with the emphasis that MacCannell (1976) and Urry (1990) place on it occurring outside everyday life:

... the journey and stay are to, and in, sites which are outside the normal places of residence and work. Periods of residence elsewhere are of a short-term or temporary nature. There is a clear intention to return 'home' within a relatively short period of time (Urry 1990: 3).

Through the ethnography in this chapter, I demonstrate that, in respect of this point, the migrants' quest does not resemble that claimed of the tourist. Similarly, it is different to the search for authenticity of second homeowners, who associate authenticity with the second homes that they use for holidays rather than everyday life (Hall and Müller 2004). It is because my respondents have permanently migrated that their quest differs from that of these others. Unlike tourists who experience the authentic through visiting and leisure, my respondents' search for 'authentic living' takes place in their everyday lives, where they both live and work. My research therefore demonstrates the need to examine the quest for authenticity as it occurs in the mundane.

Previous scholars emphasize the impossibility of achieving the authentic. For example, Urry (1990) states that it is only possible to gaze on the authentic, and MacCannell (1976) argues that it is impossible to gain the authentic because the act destroys the authenticity of that sought (cf. Handler and Saxton 1988). I shift the focus of this argument to examine instead what engaging in the process of getting to 'authentic living' does for the British living in the Lot. It is necessary to interrogate this process because, as the ethnography in this chapter reveals, it is a central feature

of my respondents' lives. Their position within this quest for 'authentic living' is implied when they discuss the lives of their compatriots who also live in the Lot.

'GENUINE' FRENCH LIVING

The migrants' discussions of others, who they imply lead more authentic lives than them reveals the characteristics of 'authentic living' that my respondents value. The others that they refer to in this manner are the pioneers and the children of Britons living in the Lot. My respondents particularly emphasize the extent to which these others have successfully integrated into the local population. For example, Trish Greenham described feelings about her daughter, who had moved to the Lot at the age of eleven and was twenty-three when I carried out my research, 'I'm so proud of her, not only how well she's done in her exams and everything, but how her culture's changed. She's French'. Alannah also told me about this same young woman, who had recently qualified as a doctor, explaining that she wished she could integrate into the community to the same degree. However, this focus on integration was even more apparent when the migrants talked about the pioneers. In conversation with migrants living to the east of Cahors, one name surfaced time and time again. It was the name of a British woman now in her seventies, Catherine Duval. I compile the following romanticized account of her migration and subsequent life in France from the stories that a number of my participants told me.

Catherine first came to the Lot as a student during the 1950s when she was in her early twenties. She was studying French at university and stayed in France to teach for a year. By the end of the year, she had fallen in love both with Cahors and a man who lived there. Although she briefly returned to Britain, the pull of the Lot and the man she loved proved too strong and she soon decided to try and make a life for herself in France. She married her sweetheart, set herself up as a professional translator, and had lived in the Lot ever since. Her career and her marriage were a

great success. Her skills as a translator were always in high demand. She had children and then grandchildren. For many years, she was on the committee for the AFGB (*Association France Grande-Bretagne*), but when I carried out my fieldwork, she had recently given up this position.

By the time of my research, Catherine's reputation had reached mythical proportions. She had successfully integrated into the local population – this was an assessment made by other British migrants, based upon her ability to speak French, and the fact that she socialized as easily with the French population as with the British, seeming to bridge the gap between them effortlessly – and many of the migrants upheld her as a role model. Each of them seemed to have a story to tell about her.

Primarily, many of my respondents told me of moments when she had been their saviour. One couple recalled an incident where they had had problems with their car. When they reached the garage, they could not understand the mechanic and vice versa. Fortunately, he knew of Catherine and rang her, requesting that she come down to the garage to act as a translator. The way the couple presented it to me, she came straight down to the garage to help them out, accepted their thanks, and then went home. They wanted to return the favour with a drink or a meal, but Catherine declined. The couple never saw her again.

The accounts of some migrants revealed that they were protective of Catherine. One hot summer day I sat on the terrace of Harry and Connie's house while the *French Times*, a British publication focussing on life in France, interviewed them and Jane Campbell. At some point Catherine's name entered the conversation and Jane expressed admiration for what she had achieved for the British living in the Lot, as well as her success at becoming accepted by the French. The interviewer took great interest; where could she find Catherine? The response was immediate and was the same as the one given to me months earlier: over the years Catherine had been inundated with media attention and now it was time to leave her in peace. This was an interesting reaction as there was no indication that

this respect for her privacy was at Catherine's own request; Jane, Harry, and Connie took it upon themselves to speak in her place.

I argue that both the awe and protection expressed in the migrants' statements about Catherine reveal more about what she signifies to my respondents than her actual character. With their stories, the migrants implicitly present her as living the most authentic life of all their compatriots. As their accounts demonstrate, they admire her ability to speak both French and English, and the opportunities that this presents for her in terms of socialization. Importantly, my respondents' narratives reveal that they perceive Catherine to have successfully adapted to the French way of life, been integrated, and effectively 'disappeared' into the local population; she has transcended her position as an outsider to become an integral member of the local community. This, I argue, is what many of the migrants have as their goal. In this manner, Catherine's life is the blueprint for the 'authentic living' that they strive towards.

LEARNING TO LIVE IN THE LOT

Although the migrants express their ambitions to be integrated members of the local community, their accounts reveal that this is not a straightforward process. Mastery of the art of 'really' living in rural France takes time and experience. As the ethnographic examples in this section reveal, their French neighbours often help the migrants in their endeavour; my respondents learn how to live in the Lot from the locals. However, this is not the only way that my respondents learn about life in the Lot.

Through trial and error, they often discover what works and what does not. Similarly, although it is undoubtedly an advantage, the accounts below reveal that my respondents found that speaking French was not always necessary in order for them to communicate with their neighbours. In these discussions of learning how to live in rural France, my respondents show that how to lead an 'authentic' life is not something on which they

unanimously agree. Therefore, ideas about 'authentic living' are a way that the migrants distinguish themselves from one another.

Learning France

In some cases, the migrants present their experiences and knowledge of how to live in the Lot by showing how much they have learned since living in France. This was particularly evident in their discussions about food. There were, for example, certain British products that were valued and that migrants often brought back when they took trips to visit friends and family still living in Britain. The first time I visited Alannah and Daniel Tapper, I remember sitting down in one of the lounge areas in their house, with a cup of hot, black coffee in one hand, and a McVities™ digestive biscuit in the other. After three months in France, it was a real treat to have a taste of Britain; digestive biscuits are not available in French supermarkets.



Figure 7.1: Advertising banners of two shops selling British products in France

For many of the migrants, return trips to England provided the opportunity to stock up on foodstuffs that they could not buy in France. These included Marmite™, teabags, mango chutney, baked beans, salt and vinegar crisps, and Angel Delight™. However, they could not easily transport other goods. Primary among these was meat, and I often heard people complain that they just could not get bacon or sausages that resembled those back in Britain.² Indeed, returning to England following fieldwork, I remember a

² The way that the butchers cut up animals in France is different to how they cut it up in Britain. This results in the preparation of different cuts of meat. For a detailed diagram of these processes, consult Larousse Gastronomique (Montagne 2001).

friend teasing me as I filled my fridge with sausages and bacon, so much had I missed the taste.

In other areas of France popular with British migrants, British entrepreneurs respond to the demands of the British population. For example, in the Dordogne at the time of my research, there was at least one van bringing goods from Britain, and now there are several permanent shops selling British produce. Many of these offer an online ordering and home delivery service as well as selling on the shop floor (see Figure 7.1). The only evidence I found of a similar enterprise in the Lot was in Figeac, a town to the east of the Lot where it borders the Aveyron. I picked up the advertisement for 'The Corner Shop' from Rodez airport in summer 2005 (see Figure 7.2). The shop claimed to supply frequently sought-after British foodstuffs.

*Venez retrouver ou découvrir les produits anglais (marmelade, bière, thé, biscuits etc)
Dans votre EPICERIE ANGLAISE*

The Corner Shop
The Corner Shop

*Second hand books, and cheddar cheese,
marmalade, baked beans, sausages, etc...*

17 bis rue du Faubourg du Pin
(Route d'Aurillac)
46100 FIGEAC

Tel. : 05 65 34 71 14
Fax. : 05 65 40 95 86
e.mail : thecornershop@wanadoo.fr

Site : <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/thecornershop>




Figure 7.2: Advertising leaflet for 'The Corner Shop'

Living without the comforts of their familiar British food, many of my respondents found locally produced alternatives. Vic and Anne Wilson, yearning for their full English breakfast complete with bacon soon discovered *poitrine*.³ Through their discussions of the locally available substitutes for their favourite British products, I argue that the migrants stress that they live in France rather than between the two countries. As Kay Morris explained,

When we first moved here, we kept saying, 'Oh, I want that from England'. Now we've found alternatives, and substitutes, or as good as, just by looking and finding something... People will say, 'Oh, you must want something from England', 'No'. You know, we've got a life here now.

Over time, the migrants want fewer and, eventually, no supplies from Britain. The contents of their cupboards change. They point out however that other migrants living in the Lot continue to stock up from abroad. As Jon Morris told me,

There's a lorry that comes from Holland that goes around the villages as well... there's a guy I know who was working at a Dutch person's house one day and she wanted some soap powder and she said, "I'm just going across the road to borrow some soap powder. The lorry's coming tomorrow".

The Dutch woman did not want to buy the soap powder, but borrow enough to tide her over until the following day. Similarly, the local Dutch estate agent stocked his office with Dutch goods:

When we bought the house, we bought it from a Dutch estate agent... and everything in there, the tea, the coffee, the sugar, the chocolate bits, everything was from Holland. There was nothing in French.

Ron Stampton told me similar stories about a British man who had a second home in the area. Whenever he visited his house in the Lot, he

³ A finely sliced cut of meat taken from the breast of the pig.

would bring his food from Britain. Ron told me that he thought this was ridiculous, given the quality of the local produce.

Recalling these instances and comparing them to their own ways of living in France, Jon and Ron infer that they lead very different lives to those led by the migrants who lived on imported goods; while they live on what is available locally, others are caught in between France and their country of origin (cf. O'Reilly 2000; Oliver 2002). In this manner, they imply that their lives in the Lot are more authentic, in the sense that they genuinely live in rural France, buying the products that are available to their French neighbours.

The migrants' accounts also reveal that they learn how to live in rural France through their experiences of life there; over time, they grow accustomed to its sights, sounds, smells, and tastes. For example, they describe how my respondents gain knowledge of how to live in the Lot through their direct experiences of the landscape. This is particularly evident in my respondents' discussions of what they could hear in the landscape around their homes. As Pat and Jean Porter told me, they could not hear the local wildlife around their previous home in rural Oxfordshire. In contrast, living in the Lot they stressed that there was little to interrupt these sounds of the local flora and fauna. Indeed listening back to the interviews I carried out with them on the veranda of their house, I heard the sound of the wind rustling the leaves of the trees, the cicadas chirruping in the hot grass, the hum of the bees in the honeysuckle climbing up the wall of their house, and the birds singing in the treetops. As Pat and Jean explain in their narrative, because they can hear the wildlife they believe that they are closer to nature than they were previously.

My respondents' emphasis on the personal relationship that they have with their surroundings, highlights living in the Lot, they do not only look at the landscape, they gradually become acquainted with it (see also chapter four). This perceived proximity to nature led some of my respondents to

develop a greater interest in their environment. For example, Vic and Anne Wilson learned to identify the sights and sounds around them. On my weekly visits, conversations were often interrupted as they pointed out, among other things, the Spotted Woodpecker in the apple tree, or the call of a Redstart. Since living in the Lot, they told me, they had come to recognize the characteristics and sounds of the local wildlife. It is not my intention to suggest that they did not do this in Britain, but I claim that their interest in the Lotoise flora and fauna illustrates their desire for intimate knowledge of their new surroundings. In these cases, they had gained 'authentic knowledge' (Selwyn 1996) about the Lot through their attentiveness to the local landscape.

Learning from the 'locals'

Familiarity with the wildlife alone is not the only way that the migrants indicate they live a 'genuine' French life. Another mark of this is found in their deference to alleged 'local' knowledge. While my respondents may initially have had firm ideas about how they wanted to do things in rural France, they soon realized that in some aspects of life in the Lot, their French neighbours had better knowledge. As Susan Sparrow explained, 'There are people who come down here and think they're better than them and we're not. They [the local French] know far more than we do about living here'. It had, however, taken her a while to realize this herself, as she revealed when she later recalled a story about her and Trevor's early days living in the Lot:

We bought a lot of fruit trees... the old lady next door said, 'What are you doing up there?' I told her we were planting fruit trees and she said, 'You'll get no fruit'. I said, 'Oh well, perhaps', and she said again, 'You'll get no fruit'. So I said, 'Well, perhaps the blossom will look pretty?' 'No', she said, 'You'll get no fruit'... We never had a piece of fruit; she was quite right.

While initially some of my respondents seemed unwilling to concede that their neighbours were right, later they call attention to the knowledge they derive from local actors, to criticize the actions of their compatriots in the

Lot. It seems that the British living in the Lot eventually reach the conclusion that it is the local French who *really* know about life in rural France.

Vic, for example, told me that Harry had been trying to cultivate an English lawn – luscious, green, and close-cut – in his valley floor garden for the past eleven years. Most recently, his endeavour had once again been foiled; the weeds had taken over, and the hot summer sun had burnt what little grass there was left. Harry brought out the weed killer to raze the weeds at the end of the summer, hoping that the following year he would be able to sow new grass seed, or lay turf. In Vic's opinion, Harry would be better off taking stock of the situation around him. Had Harry, he asked me, seen evidence of the French in the area trying to produce such a lawn? The answer was no, Vic continued. The climate was not right for this sort of garden. The local French grew vegetables in their gardens, and maybe a few flowers, but a lawn was a hopeless venture. In fact, most of the local land of any size was used, instead, for agriculture. Furthermore, did I know that grass in France was not the same as grass in England? Those species ideal for lawns were not available in the Lot. Surely, Vic concluded, Harry should take a leaf out of the French book.

Unsurprisingly, Vic had no ambitions for a lawn. The plants in his garden, he was careful to point out, had grown from seeds bought from the local garden centre. In contrast, he told me that his compatriots in the Lot often bought their seeds from Britain.

The implication of Vic's story is that, he, unlike Harry, had learnt by watching his French neighbours and how they lived their lives. As they lived off the land, their knowledge was undoubtedly, in his view, more reliable than that of other Britons living in the area. Furthermore, Vic inferred that while he tried to live a French life, Harry was trying to make his French plot of land into a British garden; in this manner, Vic emphasized the disparity in the lives they led in the Lot, distinguishing himself, a retiree, from Harry, a family migrant.

Harry had his own opinion about his actions in the garden; rather than rely on the knowledge of his neighbours, he told me instead that he drew from his own experiences of the land. In his thirteen years in the Lot he had learnt, through trial and error, what would grow and what would not. The lawn was just another stage in his experiments. I argue that here Harry presents himself as having an intuitive understanding of the land. While Vic's narrative reveals how he simulates the lives of the local population, Harry aligns himself with the locals by emphasizing instead that he has the same mentality as them, the same understanding of how to live in rural France, gained by working on the land. Although they have different perceptions of the right way to live in rural France, both Vic and Harry emphasize that they are learning to live like their French neighbours.

Through their discussions of drinking alcohol, my respondents similarly imply their distinctiveness from migrants in other groups. Wine, the drink emblematic of French identity in the eyes of the British, plays a big part in the daily lives of the migrants. After all, as many of them reminded me time and again, a bottle purchased in a French supermarket would cost twice as much in Britain. As well as contributing to their reasons for moving to France (Buller and Hoggart 1994a; Gervais-Aguer 2004, 2006; Depierre and Guitard 2006), the ready availability and affordability of good quality wine contributed further to the migrants' representations of the Lot as paradisiacal. The link between wine and paradise is common to many of the books about living in rural France (see for example Mayle 1989, 1990; Drinkwater 2001, 2003, 2004; Bailey 2002). Drinkwater for example describes her imaginings of life in France:

A corner of paradise where friends can gather to swim, relax, debate, talk business if they care to, eat fresh fruits picked directly from the garden and great steaming plates of food served from an al fresco kitchen and dished up onto a candlelit table the length of a railway sleeper. A Utopia where liquor and honey flow freely and guests eat heartily, drink gallons of home-produced wine (2001: 7).

Through the association between wine and paradise, the migrants and authors refer, once again, to romantic Arcadian ideals. However, examining the ways that the migrants discuss the consumption of alcohol by themselves and others demonstrates that the way people drink and what it means to them are socially constructed (Douglas 1987). As such, even among the migrants, practices and beliefs about it are diverse.

The migrants' discussions about drinking habits may broadly be split into three categories: what they say about themselves, what they say about other migrants, and what they say about the French. At times, these categories overlap. For example, what they say of the French sometimes maps onto what they say of themselves. Nevertheless, what they say of other migrants is more frequently used in opposition to their self-presentations. As Jon and Kay Morris told me, 'If we drink at lunchtime, we just can't do anything in the afternoon'; their comment was part of a more general discussion about the habits of retirement migrants who, according to Jon and Kay, start drinking at lunchtime. This was not a problem as Jon and Kay continued, but while the lives of retirement migrants were about leisure, they still had to work. Even drinking one glass of wine with lunch interfered with their abilities to continue working so they did not drink until the evening. It seemed that, at least for Jon and Kay 'real' life in the Lot involved both working and living.

Harry also discussed the drinking habits of his acquaintances who were retirement migrants. He told me how they regularly got 'stoned', which he used to indicate that they got very drunk. Harry said they were 'sozzled' daily, starting to drink before lunch, and continuing throughout the day. He knew people who regularly drank a bottle of wine on a daily basis. In his opinion, he had a more moderate approach to alcohol. He told me that this meant he could afford to buy and drink better quality wine than his compatriots. What he implied by drawing attention to these different drinking habits was not only that he had a more responsible attitude towards alcohol, but also that he had respect for the taste of the wine

while others did not. He was dismissive also of his compatriots' purchases of wine *en vrac* (to buy wine in bulk) from local co-operatives. This involved taking five litre plastic containers to the market to be filled from a barrel by the vendor. Harry also instructed me on what to drink when I went to the homes of other migrants that he knew. On one memorable occasion he told me not to touch the rosé; I forgot, and had an enjoyable lunch accompanied by what I thought was a nice and refreshing rosé, tasting very different to the paint stripper that Harry had described.

When Harry went to lunch or dinner at the homes of other people, he always made sure that he took a bottle of wine that he liked with him. Courtesy, he explained, would dictate that his hosts opened the bottle of wine to drink with the meal. I witnessed that he always took a bottle that he was proud to present; it was as though the bottle of wine said something about him. In his own home, Harry never served guests with *en vrac* wine, or his daily table wine (a *Corbière* from a supermarket-bought wine box). Instead, he would serve wine that he had hand-selected from the *cave* (cellar) beneath his house. That he only ever referred to this space beneath the house using its French name was telling, alluding that he lived in a genuine, old French house, as was his habit of discussing the bottle of wine that he served or gifted. Depending on the audience this could take the form of a simple recollection of the name and date; or a more detailed description could ensue, highlighting the flavours of the wine. Equally, when served wine by those who he believed to have similar taste he would always request further information. Notably this was evident when he had dinner with other family migrants.

Connie, Harry's wife, and Jane Campbell explained to me their views on the correct way to consume alcohol. These related to the myths about how the French drink wine. As they assured me, while there is a common British perception that the French drink a lot of wine, this really was not the case. For a start, the French only drink wine with food, while the British are more inclined to binge drink. As I witnessed, Connie and Jane drank moderately and only with meals. At home, they often had a small glass of

red wine with dinner, but passed on the aperitif if there were no guests. What was interesting was the way that Connie and Jane explained their habits to me.

Their neighbour, Thérèse, a Parisian woman in her seventies owned a holiday home next door. This was the largest house in the village and had been built before the French revolution. During her stay each summer, she would invite Harry, Connie, and Jane to the house one evening to take aperitif. Connie and Jane told me that on these occasions Thérèse only took one drink, a scotch and soda, as this was appropriate for a French woman of her age and status in society. Indeed, on the two occasions that I had aperitif with Thérèse and her family, I saw first hand that this was the case. Out in bars in Toulouse and Cahors I also saw women of my own age imitating this behaviour. Connie and Jane aligned themselves with Thérèse by explaining that they drank moderately following the example set by this sophisticated French woman. As with Harry's discussion of drinking habits, this evidence provides some initial confirmation of Bourdieu's (1984) thesis – taste is a social construction with its roots in class – which I discuss later in this chapter. It is interesting that, rather than refer to their neighbours who lived in the village all year round, and undoubtedly had different drinking habits, Connie and Jane chose instead to discuss the practices of a Parisian.

In some cases, this alignment with local French actors was evident in the choices that the migrants made about where to buy their food. Indeed, most of my respondents in the Lot bought certain goods from the market and others from the hypermarket. Most commonly, they would buy fresh, locally produced fruit and vegetables from the market (see Figure 7.3) and pick up bread from the *boulangerie*. The products on the market were, as my respondents explained to me, the fruits of local people's labour and were finite, unlike the products in the supermarket. As Alannah told me one day, 'here everything is local. They're proud of it and rightly so. And I think it's a good thing that vegetables are seasonal'. My respondents also

explained that, as with the food they grew in their own gardens, these local and seasonal products tasted better.



Figure 7.3: a wine stall and fruit stall on the local market

The market attracted all residents of the area – the French *paysans*, the Parisians, the Dutch, and English – as well as tourists. It was an event in the weekly calendar of each village. In order not to miss out on the best produce, as I witnessed, it was important to get to the market early in the morning. Supporting local producers and traders, the migrants imply that they contribute to, and are involved in, the greater community of the Lot. Furthermore, they show that they have learnt how to live in rural France with their actions echoing those of their French neighbours.

Although my respondents in the Lot align themselves with the local French, it is important to recognize that they do not see all their French neighbours in the same way. While generally the migrants do not distinguish between members of the local population, there were odd occasions when they viewed certain French actors unfavourably. For example, David Lomax explained how one morning he had woken up to find a horse in his swimming pool. It had strayed from its pasture and fallen in during the night. Not only was it difficult to get the horse out of the swimming pool, it had torn the pool liner, which had to be replaced. David called the farmer who owned the horse and asked that he pay the cost of the new pool liner; he told me that the farmer had refused to pay.

Connie and Jane talked of the same incident. They told me that the local French did not like this particular farmer because he had collaborated with

the Vichy government during the second world war, while many people in the area had been involved in the resistance movement against the occupiers. Connie and Jane, who could see his farm from their house told me of their suspicions that he was smuggling something in the trucks of hay that originated from his farm, travelled down the valley, and back to the farm again. As they continued, this farmer was not French his family were German. In this manner, they presented him as an outsider to the local community. I argue that how David, Connie, and Jane talk about this farmer reflects their local knowledge, but also shows that they have particular ideas about who counts as a local.

The examples in this section are representative of the way that the migrants align themselves with certain French actors to distinguish themselves from migrants in other groups. Through their appropriation of the authentic lives of others, the migrants, as Handler (1986) argues, renew their sense that they too live authentic lives.

Learning French

The migrants' abilities to speak French were also a source of distinction between them. Most commonly, my respondents would imply that they had a more genuine understanding of how to live in the Lot than their compatriots who did not speak French well. For example, Harry talked about Vic's inability to speak French, a fact that Vic readily admitted. Revealing Vic's inability to linguistically communicate with members of the local population (most of whom could not speak English), Harry called into question the source of the knowledge that Vic endorsed. How could Vic, Harry asked me, possibly understand what his neighbours were telling him, when they could only communicate with one another by waving their arms around?

Harry, who migrated with his wife and two sons in the early nineties, frequently contrasted his life and experiences in France with those of retirement migrants, like Vic, who had arrived within the last ten years. Mid-life migrants similarly distinguished themselves from their retired

compatriots. The following statement from one of my respondents exemplifies this point, 'they come to France, and they don't even speak French'. As Jon Morris told me, this was fine when things were going well, but problematic if anything went wrong. For example, he told me that because he had good French, he had been asked to translate and write letters to the French bailiffs on behalf of some of his acquaintances who could not read or write in French. Without French, some aspects of life in France are extremely difficult for the migrants.

Harry similarly concentrated on the inability of Julian, His friend who was a retirement migrants, to communicate in French. Returning from the golf course once or twice a week, he would share with me the latest *faux pas* committed by Julian in French, or Julian's latest mistranslation of an event. One story particularly stands out in my mind. After playing a round of golf together, Harry and Julian returned to the clubhouse for a quick beer, and saw a French acquaintance sitting there, waiting for his wife to finish her round of golf. Harry and Julian went over to speak with him and discovered that he had not been able to play for a while due to an injury. The man told them in French that he had hurt his back. They wished him well and returned to their table and to drink their beer. Sitting there, Julian, who believed that he spoke and understood French well, began to explain to Harry what had happened to the man. All of a sudden, the French man had not only hurt his back but had also broken it and had to wear a corset-like device to help him to recover. The way that Harry presented this event to me it was a simple case of Julian elaborating on a story that he had not completely understood, partially translating the Frenchman's spoken account but reading his hand gestures and body language incorrectly. Harry, who told me he had perfectly understood what the French man had said, did not correct Julian. In this manner, he shows that he understands French language better than Julian, and thus implies that he has a more genuine understanding of the French population. Importantly, when he discussed the linguistic capabilities of Jane Campbell and Roger

Hardcastle, who migrated around the same time as he did, he only had praise for them.

Other family migrants like Harry also placed emphasis on their ability to speak French. Justine Grange recalled how she first learnt French:

I was lucky because when I was a child, when I was young, in my early teens, we were friends with a French family. So I would be sent, initially, and later I was very happy to come, to this family for holidays... The rule was all day long you had to speak French. They would help you but they wouldn't let you relax that French rule until the evening.

Justine believes that this strong foundation established during her childhood holidays never left her, providing a good basis for her to continue learning French now that she lives permanently in France. As her account demonstrates, on these occasions when she was young, Justine had to live as though she was French. In her opinion, her linguistic ability now facilitates her involvement on the village events committee. Further to this, she believes that her ambitions, 'to be part of the village' have come to fruition because she can speak French. Unlike many of the other Britons in the area, Robert and Justine told me that they regularly socialize with their French neighbours, inviting them round to the house for meals, celebrations, and drinks. Robert equally believed that the ability to speak French was important, but he had struggled with the language and told me, 'I haven't made as much progress as I expected in fifteen years'.

It was evident that Robert and Justine both placed a high value on their language skills and felt that their abilities enhanced their life in rural France. Nevertheless, when I returned in 2005, they told me about some friends of theirs from Hong Kong who had recently moved in to a house ten kilometres further down the Lot valley. Unlike Robert and Justine, their friends did not speak French, but their neighbours had encouraged their involvement in village life from the moment that they arrived. This confirms that linguistic ability is not the only route to social interaction.

It is not only the family migrants, who focus on the importance of linguistic capabilities; Janet Ford, a retirement migrant, also highlighted her ambitions to learn to speak French well. As the following quotation reveals, Janet had very little French but had very specific ideas about how she should sound when she learned how to speak French, 'There's a friend of ours... her French is reasonable from what I can gather... but her French is very English, a very English accent which I don't want... I want to have a French accent'. The friend that Janet referred to was a mid-life migrant. In this case, the emphasis was not on the ability to communicate effectively. Instead, Janet's criticism focussed on her friend's accent, on her inability to sound as though she was French.

These examples represent some of the common ways that the migrants discuss their own linguistic abilities and aspirations for speaking French in contrast and comparison to French language skills of others. However, the assumption central to many of these discussions is that language is a prerequisite for any social engagement with the local population to occur. Furthermore, there is an underlying belief that once the French language has been mastered, friendships with the local French will be forthcoming. While there is some apparent logic to both of these suppositions, there are examples that reveal the ability to speak French does not necessarily translate into obtaining many French friends. Hannah Blunden had made the assumption that she would have no problems making friends because she spoke French well and lived on the edge of a village (rather than in the middle of nowhere, away from anyone). After twelve years, she told me that she had stopped actively trying to make friends with the French people in the locality because her efforts in that direction had not worked. She had tried to make friends by offering English classes, and hoped that people would speak to her in the village shops, but for some reason they did not. Although she spoke to her neighbours, she told me that they were not close. She had, however, managed to make a few French acquaintances through the AFGB. Similarly, Alannah, who also spoke French very well, told me that her, 'only real regret was not having the

French friends' she had imagined in her dreams about moving to France. She and Daniel were overjoyed therefore, when they were invited to the opening of their plumber's *exposition* (exhibition).⁴ They believed that they were the only British residents of the town to be invited to the event; nevertheless, overall they were largely unsuccessful in establishing relationship with other local French actors.

In contrast, and similarly to the case that Robert and Justine recalled of their friends up the valley, Vic and Anne found that the lack of French did not hinder communication with their French neighbours. I witnessed countless interactions between Vic and Claude, his French friend. It was evident that Claude spoke no English and Vic no French, but they did understand one another, gesticulating to accompany their speech. This was similarly the case for Brian and Sally Waites. They had only basic French, but had built up relationships with French people through a common interest – classic cars. As members of the local car club, they met lots of French people and even organized events. Outside of these, they held a party once a year and invited all their (mostly French) friends to the house for an afternoon of eating and drinking together. They too had attended the opening of the plumber's *exposition* and told me, with pride, how they had been the only British people invited.

In order to establish that they have achieved 'genuine' French living, the migrants align themselves both with the local French and other migrants, who in their opinion are closer to the French population. Through the associations that the migrants create between themselves and those others who lead more authentic lives, they distinguish themselves further from their compatriots who they perceive as having less authentic lives. The 'authentic living' that the British living in the Lot seek, is thus characteristically French.

⁴ It may seem strange that a plumber has an exhibition, but in France, a plumber is considered an artisan, a skilled craftsperson. The exhibition would showcase work that, in this case, she had done.

AUTHENTICITY AS DISTINCTION

The migrants' discussions about what they believe to be the 'real' or genuine way to live in the Lot show that they have very confident ideas about what constitutes authentic and inauthentic living (see Nash 1996). However, as the ethnographic examples in this chapter demonstrate, the migrants do not always hold the same ideas about how to live in the Lot, and thus they challenge one another's understandings of how to live an authentic life (cf. Cohen 1988). Despite this lack of consensus among my respondents, I argue that through identifying those who are more and less authentic than them, the migrants invoke a particular notion of authenticity that, as Fine states, equates it to the 'recognition of difference' (2003: 155). Thus, as Handler (1986) and van Ginkel (2004) assert, presenting the authentic in their accounts, my respondents demonstrate that they are distinct. Therefore, locating the migrants' accounts within the context of broader discussions of authenticity brings to light the processes of distinction that they use in their everyday lives. This has resonance with Bourdieu's (1984) argument linking class distinction, classifying practices, and taste.

Bourdieu defines taste as, 'the propensity and capacity to appropriate (materially or symbolically) a given class of classified, classifying objects or practices' (1984: 173). He explains that these tastes are evident in the meanings that people's lifestyles have for them. These can be read from their choices of, 'furniture, clothing, language, and bodily hexis' (ibid 1984: 173). While he identifies both tastes of luxury and necessity, only the former is appropriate in the case of the British migrants living in the Lot due to their position within the British middle class. These 'tastes of luxury' are 'the tastes of individuals who are the products of material conditions of existence defined by distance from necessity, by the freedoms of facilities stemming from the possession of capital' (ibid 1984: 173). In other words, the migrants have the luxury to choose the way that they live; they migrate to find a more fulfilling way of life (cf. Huber and O'Reilly 2004). This includes, for many of the migrants, the necessity of work e.g. they work

the land to produce some vegetables. But paradoxically, this taste for necessity is borne out of luxury; they are able to have this taste only because of their particular situation and their relatively privileged economic position in comparison with their neighbours.

The processes of distinction that Bourdieu (1984) highlights, classify both the self and others. This is evident in how the migrants align themselves with those whose tastes confirm their own, while rejecting those of others on the grounds of vulgarity, in this case their lack of knowledge of how to *really* live in the Lot. They present those who lack this knowledge as less authentic than them. There are others, however, who they perceive to lead more authentic lives than their own, such as the pioneers. They believe that these others have successfully mastered rural French living, and thus imply that they have acquired authentic knowledge of how to live in the Lot.

Within his analysis of class distinction in France, Bourdieu (1984) locates the accumulation of the authentic within the counter-culture. He particularly draws attention to the connoisseur. By symbolic appropriation and material acquisition of unique tastes, the connoisseur presents their tastes as authentic and this is the ultimate mark of distinction (ibid. 1984: 279). Among the material procurements of the authentic, Bourdieu (1984) includes the acquisition of the ' "vielle France" life-style'. What makes this a distinctive practice is the knowledge expressed of the authentic by its possessor. The examples that Bourdieu (1984) gives, such as knowledge about wine, or the process of bottling wine, echo the experiences of the migrants. As is the case for Bourdieu's connoisseurs, the migrants imply that they gain the authentic as a way to present their lives in the Lot as distinctive. Fundamental to these presentations, different as these may be from one migrant to another, is the migrants' belief that they are en route to the 'real' way to live in rural France. As the following example shows, their participation in this process is an intrinsic part of their daily lives.

Bob and Mary Potter lived in the Lot-et-Garonne, a *département* adjacent and directly to the west of the Lot. Their house lay on a dirt road between two hamlets, a huge converted barn on top of a hill; from the house, you could see for miles in every direction. As Bob told me on my first visit, 'they could even see the weather before it hit them'. Their nearest neighbours lived one kilometre away down another dirt track. They were a French family who ran a farm. Bob and Mary had a good relationship with them, one that they had developed over the many years that they had been taking holidays in the area. They told me stories about meals that they had enjoyed with their neighbours and, while we were drinking our aperitif one evening, one of their neighbours dropped by with a pallet of strawberries. Bob told me that it was a common occurrence for their French friends to give them homegrown produce. Importantly, Bob stressed that they always reciprocated.

As they presented it, their neighbours had introduced them to a different way of life. With pride, Bob and Mary recounted to me that in the first year they lived in France, they had raised a pig under the watchful gaze of the framers next door. They saved their kitchen scraps to feed the pig, visited and fed it twice a day, cleaned out the stall that it shared with another pig until, at the end of the year, they had it slaughtered. Following the slaughter, their neighbours showed them how to make sausages and pâté, as well as butchering the meat into the best cuts. Bob and Mary used every part of the pig, giving some away to their friends, but storing most of it in the deep freeze. In Britain they had worked as an accountant and a lecturer, so had not had the opportunity to participate in this process. As they told me, they loved this new lifestyle, revealing their desire to live a 'truly' rural way of life; they were not just enjoying the fruits of the landscape, but were involved in their production. This example clearly shows that Bob and Mary's new lives were about living and working in rural France. To a greater or lesser extent, all the migrants emphasized these aspects of their lives in rural France, highlighting that their quest for

'authentic living', in contrast to that claimed of tourists (see for example MacCannell 1976; Urry 1990), takes place in everyday life.

While Bourdieu (1984) highlighted that the acquisition of the authentic was the quest of the connoisseur I argue that it is in fact symptomatic of a more general middle class condition; claiming a more or less authentic life is how my respondents in the Lot distinguish themselves from one another. As the struggle over the power to define and classify (Bourdieu 1984), distinction is a way that the migrants make claims for legitimacy and authenticate how they live in the Lot. Telling their stories, differentiating and aligning themselves with others, they strive to make their understandings of 'how to live' dominant.

The migrants refer to various characteristics of authenticity when they talk about their lives in rural France. In the process of getting to authenticity, they strive, as Bruner (2005) argues, for verisimilitude, genuineness, originality, and authority. To expand, in their narratives the migrants present the lives they aspire to lead in rural France as 'real', hence verisimilitude. Similarly, they stress that they hope to genuinely live life this way. Nevertheless, they still require some legitimation of their actions, hence their insistence that they live more authentic lives than others. This last action places them in a position of authority to define what is and is not authentic and therefore authenticate their own way of living.

While the migrants' narratives reflect Bourdieu's (1984) argument that class reproduction occurs through processes of distinction, they also show that distinction has a further purpose in the lives of the British living in the Lot. For my respondents, to claim a more a less authentic life links back to the initial decision to migrate. By drawing out distinctions between themselves and their compatriots living locally, they show that they are in the process of gaining a different and distinctive way of living.

CONCLUSION

As the ethnographic examples in this chapter demonstrate, my respondents in the Lot imply that they lead more or less 'authentic lives' than their compatriots in the locality to distinguish themselves from one another. The distinctions that my respondents draw map onto the different groups of migrants I described in chapter two. On the one hand, the narratives of the British living in the Lot emphasize how they aim to live like the pioneers and the children of other migrants. In these cases, the focus is on how well integrated these others are into the local population. On the other hand, the migrants stress how those in other groups do not (yet) know how to live appropriately in the Lot. I argue that, in this manner, my respondents strive to show that their compatriots live indistinct lives. This is similar to how the migrants discuss tourists and Britons living in other overseas destinations (see chapter six).

My respondents' discussions of where they position themselves in relation to those who they believe lead more or less authentic lives reveal their self-presentations. In addition, these presentations give insights into the journey they have made to get to the stage that they are at and how much further they still have to go to reach 'authentic living'. Their narratives thus demonstrate that, even following migration, they remain involved in the process of acquiring the authentic, of learning how to live the 'real' dream. The migrants admit that they were once tourists and had not been fully prepared for how to live in the Lot. However, the ethnographic examples in this chapter show my respondents' belief that, over time, they have learned that living in the Lot can offer so much more than what seems on offer at first sight. Nevertheless, they perceive that there is still a gap between what they experience and the authentic lives led by some of their compatriots.

The migrants' narratives show that the process of acquiring 'authentic living' is central to their lives. Their focus is not on actually achieving their goals, after all, their accounts demonstrate that these continually change,

but on their commitment to the quest of acquiring these. I therefore question what purpose this quest has in the migrants' lives (cf. MacDonald 1997a; Anonymous 2004; van Ginkel 2004; van de Port 2004). The ethnographic examples in this chapter thus shed some light on why the process of getting to the authentic is important to the migrants. Firstly, they employ what they have learned along the way to show how they are different to their compatriots. The migrants' discussions reveal that they often have conflicting beliefs about what constitutes 'authentic living'. The distinctions that the migrants draw are a way to reproduce the middle class (Bourdieu 1984), but their narratives reveal that these distinctions on the grounds of more or less 'authentic living' have outcomes that are more particular.

Specifically, laying claim to more or less 'authentic lives' links to the migrants' desires for a distinctive way of life. To claim 'authentic living' is the ultimate statement; it shows that they have fully achieved the difference that they seek. I argue that this distinctive lifestyle is authentic because, in contrast to life as they experienced it in Britain, they believe it is original and genuine. In particular, life in the Lot offers social harmony, continuity, stability, and order (cf. Selwyn 1996), while they believed that this was no longer possible in Britain (see chapter four). The migrants' quest for distinctiveness therefore resonates with the quest for authenticity, where people search to find that destroyed and lost in modernity (see for example Cohen 1988; MacCannell 1992; Lindholm 2002; Franklin 2003).

Emphasizing that they live within the traditional local landscape is a further way that the migrants highlight that their new lives are distinctive. By showing that they are becoming insiders by genuinely living as their French neighbours do, they stress that they are distinctive because they are like the locals, while others are still outsiders (cf. Herzfeld 1992). The paradox is that the migrants can never escape the fact that they have chosen to live in the Lot; they had the luxury to choose what, for many

others including their French neighbours, is a necessity. It could therefore be argued that the migrants' preoccupation with the authentic is also a response to the ambivalence they feel; they stress their quest for 'authentic living' in response to their concerns that their lives, because of the ambiguous position they occupy, are not authentic (cf. Handler 1986). My respondents thus remain caught up in the process of getting to 'authentic living'. Their efforts to lead more 'authentic lives' reveal that they continually strive to overcome their ambivalence.

For Britons living in the Lot, everyday life reminds them what this new life promises in contrast to their previous experiences of life in Britain. They show, through their classifications of others, what they believe constitutes 'authentic living', demonstrating that they are learning to *really* live in the Lot while others learn more slowly or not at all. They stay in rural France because they believe that eventually, living there they will achieve a distinctive way of living. But, no matter what length of time they live in the Lot, they find that there is always more to learn.

CONCLUSION: WHY THE BRITISH MIGRATE TO THE LOT

In the ethnography I present in the previous chapters, I have shown how the narratives of Britons living in the Lot reveal the motivations behind their decision to migrate. I argue that for my respondents, the desire to escape the constraints that they felt they were under in Britain influenced their migration. At the same time, they imagined that life in rural France offered them the possibility of an alternative way of living where they could define the world and their place within it in their own terms. How the migrants imagine this different lifestyle varies, depending on their position in the life course. But when they arrive in the Lot, they experience feelings of ambivalence that show them that they still have a long way to go before they achieve the different way of life that they desire; obtaining a distinctive lifestyle requires continued effort. It is thus the case that the migrants' aspirations for a particular way of living influence their everyday lives following migration. The quest for a distinctive life is therefore a central feature of their lives in the Lot.

This thesis makes a significant empirical contribution as the first ethnography of the British living in rural France. However, as I explain in this conclusion, it also makes a number of more specific contributions. For example, it highlights the diversity of the British population in the Lot, the characteristics of their feelings of ambivalence, the link between imaginings and experience of life following migration, and the centrality of the quest for distinctiveness (and the role of the authentic within this) in daily life.

DIVERSE LIVES

British migration to France has been conceptualized previously in terms of the diverse motivations influencing the decision to migrate (see for example Buller and Hoggart 1994a; Barou and Prado 1995; Gervais-Aguer 2004, 2006; Depierre and Guitard 2006). However, these earlier studies rarely examine how the migrants' lives in the Lot reflect these disparate rationales. As a result, the diverse lives led by the migrants, once living in rural France, tend to be overlooked. This omission is surprising given that similar studies of other migration destinations emphasize the varied and distinct lives that people lead following migration (see for example King and Patterson 1998; Warnes, King, Williams, and Patterson 1999; King, Warnes, and Williams 2000; O'Reilly 2000).

In contrast to earlier literature about the British living in rural France, my thesis highlights the heterogeneous experiences of life that my respondents had both before and after migration. The way the migrants categorize themselves and other Britons living in the Lot provides initial support of this point. Taking inspiration from the migrants' classifications, I have described my respondents in the Lot as four different groups: the pioneers, the family migrants, the retirement migrants, and the mid-life migrants. Membership of a group depends on the date of the migrant's arrival in the Lot, their employment status in Britain before migration, and their stage in the life course. Members of a group hold in common their aspirations and ambitions for life in the Lot. For example, the family migrants told me how they wanted better lives for their children, while the mid-life migrants explained that migration was an escape from the rat race.

There are many similarities between the lives led by the family migrants and the mid-life migrants. Indeed, unlike the retirees, both groups have to work following migration. As William and Victoria Cardew, mid-life migrants, explained, they needed to work to fund their continued residence

in France. In the early days, they had even returned to Britain to take temporary teaching contracts when money became tight. Now, however, they live and work in the Lot; William runs a small business from home and Victoria works in a local school. Similarly, the family migrants run gîte to provide them with an income. Connie and Harry told me how, when they first moved, all of their energy went into the gîte conversion; they needed to get it up and running as soon as possible because they had very little income. They did most of the renovation work required to convert the annex of their house to a gîte by themselves. As one of their sons told me this effort was exhausting for his parents.

It seems that while work is intrinsic to the lives of the mid-life and family migrants, the retirees have a more leisurely life. This distinction between the retirement migrants and other groups of Britons living in the Lot has implications for the way that lifestyle or leisure migration has previously been understood. Studies of the British in Spain conclude that migrants occupy a liminal space between Britain and Spain, the British and the Spanish (O'Reilly 2000; Oliver 2002). Indeed, the migrants' stories confirm that they too experience this kind of liminality, where they are caught between the lives they led in Britain and the lives they want to lead in France. However, their narratives also show that they try to escape this in-between phase; the extent and success of their efforts depends on which group they belong to.

To expand, retirement migrants are the least likely to officially state their residence in France. Although there are some who are fully legal, paying their French taxes, many of them told me that they were reluctant to make the effort with the bureaucracy because they didn't know how long they would stay in France. As Alannah told me, 'we kind of did what a lot of people do, and kind of pretended we weren't really living here full time'. Retirees made frequent trips back to Britain, watched British television exclusively, and had many of their friends and family to visit throughout the year. Indeed, some of my retired respondents happily told me that they

took what they wanted of the French way of life, while holding onto their Britishness. The combination of their leisurely lives with the maintenance of strong links back to Britain, and not really engaging with the members of the local population, indicates, as Oliver (2002) argues in the case of British retirees living in Spain, that these migrants live in a state of permanent liminality. For the retirees, life in rural France is representative of the desired anti-structure associated with positive ageing. Indeed, as the ethnography throughout this thesis shows, the narratives of these migrants emphasize the independent and active lives that they lead.

In contrast, my respondents who worked had invariably taken care to register themselves within the French system, even though this was often a difficult task. I found no evidence of an informal economy among the British in the Lot, as has been noted in the case of the British in Spain (O'Reilly 2000). Although many of them were self-employed, so were many of their French neighbours in the Lot. And it seemed that if there were appropriate opportunities to work among the French population, they would take them. For example, several of the migrants worked in local schools or worked (from time to time) for the local tour companies. Migrants from the family and mid-life groups also did not return to Britain very often, with many of them telling me that they had no desire so to do; they seldom made this trip more than once a year and it was often to see elderly relatives who could no longer travel. Furthermore, mid-life migrants rarely had British television broadcast into their houses, and while a number of the family migrants did, this was a new commodity for them, and I argue that they did not watch it as frequently as their compatriots, the retirement migrants. The stories of my respondents who migrated as families or during mid-life revealed that, although they might never fully achieve it, they were trying to lead a way of life that they believed to be more characteristically French than British. The following quotation from Sarah Hammond, a mid-life migrant, is representative of the way that they

related this to me, 'We try to do things very French, don't like to try and be too English'.

My respondents' narratives (this was true of migrants in all the different groups) emphasize their efforts to overcome their liminal position; many of the migrants explained that they felt uneasy about their position of having one (metaphorical) foot in Britain and the other in rural France. However, to resolve their feelings that they were neither in France nor in Britain took time and effort. Their narratives thus reveal, to a greater and lesser extent, the persistence of ambivalence in their lives following migration. They present their goal of integration into the local community as how this ambivalence may finally be resolved. My thesis thus provides a unique contribution: I show that while liminality may indeed be a feature of life for the British living in the Lot, it is their efforts to overcome this liminal position that form the central focus of their daily lives.

ACHIEVING A DISTINCTIVE WAY OF LIFE

Insights about how the migrants' imaginings of life in their migration destination influence the decision to migrate and continue to impact on their new lives in rural France, provide a useful starting point to investigate this phenomenon as a cultural process. My respondents imagine the Lot as a traditional rural idyll, the antithesis of the lives they led in Britain (cf. Buller and Hoggart 1994a; Barou and Prado 1995; Waldren 1996; O'Reilly 2000, 2002; Oliver 2002). In their perception, through migration to rural France they can escape the constraints that characterized their lives before migration and gain more control over their lives. The narratives of my respondents in the Lot thus shed some light on the links between their imaginings, the quest for a different way of life, and the migrants' sense of their own agency.

The myth of the rural idyll is prominent in my respondents' expectations and experiences of life in rural France. One feature of my respondents' narratives is particularly pertinent to the way of life that they desire: the

idea of the 'traditional rural community' (Rapport 1993). In their perception, those who have become integrated and settled members of the Lotoise population have successfully achieved the different way of life that the migrants seek. This is 'authentic living' in the sense that it is based on the genuine knowledge of how to live in the Lot that the migrants derive from local French actors. While my respondents living in the Lot initially believed that it would be simple to become part of the community, they soon realized the amount of effort that they would have to invest in the process. The distinctions that the migrants draw between their lives in rural France, the lives they led before migration, and those led by others both in the Lot and elsewhere indicate where they believe they are in the process of achieving this sense of 'authentic living'. These distinctions demonstrate how far the migrants believe they have travelled on this quest, but also reveal how much farther they still need to go until they reach their goal of a different way of life. By describing their progress within their accounts, my respondents present themselves as the authors of their own lives, illustrating how they are in the process of taking control of their futures. While previous studies conclude that lifestyle migration allows the individual to gain greater agency over their lives (see for example O'Reilly 2000; Oliver 2002), I argue that migration is only one part of this process.

Indeed, although the migrants present migration as an escape from life as they experienced it in Britain, in their narratives about life following migration the theme of ambivalence persists. For example, when they discuss the Lotoise landscape (see chapter four), they are keen to highlight that they both gaze on it and live within it. As many of my respondents explained, the scenery was one reason why they had chosen to live in the Lot. At the same time, they would stress that they had some sort of personal engagement with the landscape. They expressed this most frequently as their knowledge of how to live in the Lot, whether this

was the right way to grow vegetables or how to renovate their houses in keeping with the local architecture.

Similarly, when they discussed their attitudes towards Europe, as I argue in chapter five, they demonstrated the tension between their reliance on modernity and their rejection of it. I argue that this reveals that, while they were dissatisfied with modern life as they experienced it in contemporary Britain, if they had a choice, they would have brought certain aspects of their lives before migration with them to rural France. For example, they recognized that they are able to move within Europe so freely because of their position as European citizens. However, once in France, outside of a recognizable modernity, they found it frustrating when things did not work as they expected. For example, they struggled to come to terms with French bureaucracy and expected their switch cards and mobile phones to work as they did in Britain. Leading their daily lives in the Lot, they became increasingly aware of what they valued and disliked about life in Britain. It is thus that ambivalence remained a feature of their lives following migration.

I argue that the migrants' pervading sense of ambivalence is an indicator of the impact of modernity on their lives; the presence of uncertainty within their accounts demonstrates that it is difficult for my respondents to fully escape from modernity. The ways that the migrants emphasize their actions to overcome the ambiguity in their lives clearly demonstrate their perception that it is,

... something not to be trusted and not to be left to its own devices, something to be *mastered, subordinated, remade* so as to be readjusted to human needs (Bauman 1991: 7).

As the ethnography presented in this thesis reveals, through their attempts to overcome ambivalence the migrants continually strive to make sense of how to live in rural France. I argue that the ambivalence that is evident in the migrants' accounts indicates that they are in the process of achieving authenticity and thus resolving their liminality.

The manner in which the migrants distinguish themselves from one another further reveals the complex negotiations involved in the process of obtaining a different way of life. As my respondents' narratives reveal, their classificatory schema change; over time, the migrants learn more about how to achieve their goal of a different way of life. Their understandings of 'authentic living' as it is available in the Lot become more and more refined with experience of everyday life in rural France. Following Geertz (1975), I argue that the shifting boundaries of what the migrants believe to be an authentic and different way of life reveal their continued efforts to exert further control over their lives, and define the world in their own terms. Through this constant re-establishment of agency, they keep their uncertainties at bay, rather than eliminating them. Indeed, this reflects how ambivalence, which Bauman (1991) describes as 'the waste of modernity', can never fully be overcome. In other words, in order to counter the discomfort they feel about their position as modern actors who choose to live in the traditional, the migrants' ideals constantly change and develop, rather than being successfully consolidated. While the migrants aim for a meaningful and authentic life, they never fully achieve this because the horizon is always just beyond their grasp. As a result, ambivalence remains a key feature of their lives even though they live in the Lot.

As Geertz (1975) and Bauman (1991) highlight, it is impossible to fully resolve the ambiguities of daily life; they are symptomatic of the modern world. However, as the ethnographic examples in this thesis reveal, the migrants develop various mechanisms to deal with the persistence of ambivalence in their lives. Indeed, my respondents' quest for the ever-elusive authentic life demonstrates that they often incorporate this ambivalence into the way they understand the world. They achieve this by redefining their aims and goals. In this manner, they develop explanations that account for the contradictions between their imaginings and experiences.

However, their migration is also motivated by their desire for difference. As their narratives demonstrate, the migrants perceive that following migration their lives are more authentic than those they previously led. Through their quest for authenticity, they strive to present the different way of life that they strive towards, and their efforts in this direction, as a credible and convincing alternative to the lives they led in Britain. The endeavour of moving to the Lot thus represents their search for a lifestyle that is understood by them as being distinctive. Examining the distinctions that they draw reveals what in their perceptions constitutes 'real' life, and demonstrates how, over time, their lives increasingly come to resemble this. They thus show why they believe that their lives in the Lot are more meaningful and fulfilling than the lives they led before migration.

'AUTHENTIC' LIVING

Although the 'authentic living' that the migrants imply in their narrative varies, several features are common to their accounts. For example, my respondents predominantly claimed their aspirations for lives that, in some way, resembled those of their French neighbours. This could include their amateur efforts to engage with some subsistence agricultural activities in the proximity of their home. Some of the migrants would also defer to local knowledge of the area and when to plant and harvest their produce. The 'authentic' living that the migrants imply thus has a flavour of originality and genuineness. In this manner, they implicitly claim that their lives are more authentic than the lives they had led in Britain, and certainly more authentic than those led by certain of their compatriots. As I argued in the previous section, claiming 'authentic living' is a way to counter feelings of ambivalence. Through the continual process of distinction and re-evaluation of what constitutes the authentic, the migrants revalidate their quest for a different way of life.

Living in the Lot requires more than just unpacking your bags and settling in; as the migrants' narratives reveal it requires effort to become a member of the local community. Many of the migrants were thus keen to achieve

the notoriety of their antecedents, the pioneers, who they described as having 'disappeared' into the French population. They were similarly in awe of British children who had, as a respondent once remarked, 'become more French than British'. Success at living in France was determined by what the migrants imagined integration to mean. For example, the lives of the pioneers and the children had become indistinguishable from those of the French; they both lived and worked within the local community.

While the family and mid-life migrants had clearly made steps in this direction – some of them worked with the local French and felt that they made a valuable contribution to the community – I argue that the retirement migrants found this more difficult to achieve. However, there was evidence that they too shared these aspirations. For example, Susan Sparrow told me how she taught English at a local primary school to 'give something back to the community', while Vic Wilson explained that, in respect to his garden, he always deferred to the knowledge of Claude, his neighbour who was a farmer. What the migrants' stories invariably show is that over time they gained more knowledge of how to live in rural France. As Susan explained, the local French, 'know far more than we do about living here'. Taking the knowledge from the horse's mouth, so to speak, all my respondents expressed the belief that it was in this manner that they had gained 'authentic' knowledge about how to live.

I argue that the migrants' attempts to acquire the authentic resonate with Bourdieu's (1984) discussion of distinction and Appadurai's (1986) description of the connoisseur. While Bourdieu (1984) presents the acquisition of the authentic as a social practice of a specific fraction of the middle classes, Appadurai (1986) explains how striving for authenticity is central to becoming a connoisseur. In both of these interpretations, the search for authenticity impacts on status discrimination and the political economy of taste. The real battleground is in the question of who has the power to authenticate and legitimate perceptions of what is and is not authentic (Bourdieu 1984; Appadurai 1986). This explains the migrants'

attempts to distinguish themselves from others by employing stereotypes and by claiming practice and superior knowledge of the 'real' way to live in the Lot. Presenting others as indistinct, and on occasion destructive, they displace their own feelings of ambivalence.

Importantly, in their discussions of indistinct others, particularly those living in the Dordogne and Spain, the migrants emphasize that 'authentic living' is uniquely available in the Lot; in their perception, so far the Lot has been relatively unspoilt by incomers and has retained its traditional and distinctive way of life. On the one hand, this is how my respondents claim that an authentically different way of life is available to them in the Lot. On the other hand, however, this representation allows them to emphasize the distinctiveness of their own lives, demonstrating that their decision to migrate to the area was original in the sense that they were breaking new ground. Although I have little evidence to confirm this, I believe that this interpretation could help explain the motivations of other Britons living in rural France. On a recent holiday to the Ardèche, a rural *département* in southeast France, I explained to some British homeowners that it was purported that the Ardèche had a British population equivalent to that of the Lot (Barou and Prado 1995). The response was immediate, 'They [the other British] are not in *our* part of the Ardèche. They must be somewhere else'.

THERE'S MORE TO LIFE

As I outline above, in the case of the British living in the Lot, the quest for authenticity is represented by the pursuit of a different way of life.

However, this does not mean that my respondents believe that they lead authentic lives; it just implies that they recognize that they are heading towards this sublime goal (see chapter seven).

Bourdieu (1984) and Appadurai (1986) emphasize that the acquisition of the authentic is a process, but they assume that eventually the individual achieves their goal. For Bourdieu (1984) this goal is reached once they

have culturally acquired the authentic object – in the case of Britons living in the Lot this is the knowledge of how to live appropriately in rural France – while Appadurai (1986) focuses on how the connoisseur learns to claim the authentic. The ethnographic evidence in this thesis demonstrates that my respondents never stress that they have achieved the authentic. Instead, they present their lives as more or less authentic than those of others; a more authentic way of life is seen to be just out of reach. It is therefore questionable whether they ever manage to escape their ambivalence. The process of gaining authenticity is thus a central feature of the migrants' daily lives.

Keeping in mind the narratives of my respondents in the Lot, I argue that the inconceivability of acquiring authenticity does not impact on the migrants' lives in the way it does, as Urry (1990) argues, for tourists. For Urry (1990), the tourist gaze is a response to the impossibility of finding the authentic 'other'. From this position, the flâneur can only look; they have no agency in the situation. Unlike Urry's tourists, my respondents do have agency; they have some power to define the concept of what is authentic in their own terms.

While the quest for authenticity has been the subject of the anthropology of tourism for thirty years or more, the dominant theoretical frameworks do not provide an adequate explanation for the experiences of the British living in the Lot. Urry (1990) follows Turner (1982) to argue that the search for the 'Holy Grail', the sacred, only happens during leisure time. However, this argument does not explain how those who seek authenticity in their everyday lives (for example my respondents in the Lot) experience the quest for authenticity. The narratives of my respondents therefore displace Urry's (1990) argument that such a quest can only occur outside the mundane. My respondents, as I discuss in chapter six, particularly emphasize that they are not tourists (cf. Waldren 1996, 1997; O'Reilly 2000, 2003; Oliver 2002); their lives in the Lot are about living and working (even if the work is not paid employment), rather than the visiting and

leisure enjoyed by tourists. Work is a characteristic of structure, rather than the anti-structure that is a feature of liminality (Turner 1982). The distinctions that the migrants draw thus show that authenticity has links to liminality; the 'more authentic' is the relatively less liminal. By implying the authentic in their accounts, my respondents strive to show how they resolve their feelings of ambivalence.

In their narratives, the migrants present living and working appropriately in rural France as the way that 'real life' is experienced. This contrasts to MacCannell's (1976) explanation that the search for the authentic only results in the pollution and destruction of the desired object. This argument does not, as Bruner (2005) contends, account for the context in which the authentic arises, failing to recognize its continual social (re)construction. While Bruner (2005) accepts that the perception of the authentic, when understood in terms of credibility, changes over time and is therefore a process, other authors do not pay due attention to the manner in which people approach authenticity. The continual shifts, and diverse representations, of what my respondents imply as authentic suggests that it is necessary to take heed of the process involved in the acquisition of a different way of life; after all, the migrants strive not to achieve an absolute, authentic way of life, but a comparative, *more* authentic life.

LEGITIMATING THE 'REAL' WAY OF LIVING

The question remains however, what does the search for 'more' in their lives do for my respondents? I previously outlined in chapter three how the migrants' individual circumstances made their migration a possibility. This is particularly, although not exclusively, evident when examining their employment status back in Britain. For example, for many of them migration coincided with voluntary redundancy, early retirement, or the radical decision to stop work and break out of the rat race; other events included the death of a partner, meeting a new partner, illness, children leaving home, or the migration of parents. I argue that these transformations, as specific points in their life course, impact on the

migrants' lives in two ways.

The first impact is the way that friends and family responded to how my respondents proposed to deal with the changes in their lives. In particular, the migrants often told me that their friends and family had reacted with astonishment to the news that they planned to move to rural France. For example, as I recounted in chapter three, Jon and Kay told me how shocked their friends were when they decided to break the mould, leave their jobs in London and move to France. Jon and Kay explicitly stated that their news had come as a surprise to their friends, and I had the sense that other migrants similarly believed that their friends and family had not anticipated their decision to migrate. It was as though this 'out of the ordinary' action filled the migrants with exhilaration and with the feeling that they had control over the direction that their lives would follow. In this respect, the reaction of their friends and family contributed to the overall sense that they were gaining more control over their lives.

Secondly, I argue that these transformations made the migrants feel unsure of what the future held for them. This uncertainty brought about the desire to pursue a different way of life (Giddens 1991; Bourdieu 2000). Their narratives reveal that they did not have high hopes for what Britain offered them in their revised circumstances. As I previously recounted in chapter three, Ron Stampton did not fancy the life that his retired neighbours led, preoccupied, as they seemed to be, with cleaning their houses. As was the case for my other retired respondents, his perceptions of others made him uncertain about how life would be following retirement. This was similarly a concern for the family migrants, who realized that without the security of a monthly salary they would not be able to afford to live the way that they had been doing in Britain. For the mid-life migrants, there was also a sense that it would be difficult or impossible to achieve the way of life they had dreamed of if they had stayed in Britain. Instead of succumbing to the inevitable – the future that they were destined to in Britain – my respondents' accounts show instead that they chose to be

proactive. They surpassed what had been on offer to them, took a risk, and moved to France where they imagined that it would be possible to achieve their goals. In this respect, the stories of Britons living in the Lot echo Bourdieu's (2000) discussion of how people can attain a previously improbable, in this case a different and preferable, way of life, by breaking away from what they expect of themselves, and what others anticipate their future holds.

To expand on Bourdieu's (2000) argument, although the individual has some insight into what the future holds, an untimely event, such as redundancy or the decision to give up a job, can result in the individual losing their understanding of their future lives. For example, in the case of a change in working status, without the assurances of the future they had previously derived from employment, the migrants looked for other ways to live. Because they no longer had the constraints placed on them by their employment, they legitimately explored different and alternative lifestyles; without work, the migrants had the space to consider options that were previously unavailable to them.

By no longer fully conforming to their own expectations and those that society holds for them – at least as my respondents present it, it is not the norm for people of working age to choose to give up their jobs, to choose to not apply for new ones, or for retired people to move abroad – the migrants feel able to redefine the world and their position within it.

Evidence of their new sense of empowerment is the way that they present the changes in their working status as a positive choice: they chose to retire, take redundancy, or leave their jobs. However, the events surrounding the changes to their employment are the source of gossip, often accompanied by the suggestion that things are maybe not so clear-cut.

It seems that, as for O'Reilly's respondents on the Costa del Sol, the freedom to be who you want to be acts as a 'double-edged sword' (2000: 81). The idea that someone had not been truthful about their past was

therefore often the source of consternation. For example, Harry told everyone that he took early retirement, while Vic 'discovered' that this was in fact redundancy. I argue that if this was indeed the case, through this small white lie Harry transformed an event that epitomized his uncertainty about life into something proactive, which did not have the same stigma attached to it. However, the fact that others were keen to point out the veracity (or not) of a particular story shows that the migrants are not entirely free to escape 'the shackles of the past' (O'Reilly 2000: 81). It seems that although the ideal is that through migration you can escape the past, that freedom is not always as complete as is imagined.

This last example demonstrates that to claim a way of life that was previously improbable is an inherently risky business. It is risky in the sense that, as Bourdieu (2000) outlines, it requires authentication. In other words, the migrants have to convince themselves and others that they know how to live a *real* life in rural France. Repeatedly telling their stories is the way that they gain recognition and justification of the lives that they have chosen to lead (Giddens 1991). Storytelling thus plays a crucial role in their quest for a different way of life; on some level, they must demonstrate to their friends and family that the lives they lead are genuine. In this manner, they legitimate their sense of how to live.

However, it is not only their friends and families who play a role in authenticating the migrants' ways of living; the local French, at least in the migrants' accounts, also intervene. My respondents would often explain how their French neighbours had told them they were 'not like other Britons living in the Lot'; they were 'more French than British'. As I demonstrated in chapter seven, living like the 'locals' is a metaphor for implying that one leads a more authentic life. However, at times, the migrants' narratives emphasized that there were members of the French population who did not have the knowledge of how to live in rural France that my respondents valued. For example, many of my respondents told me that their neighbours thought they were crazy to want to live in the Lot,

and furthermore, to want to live in an old house; the migrants explained that many French preferred new houses. It is evident that my respondents did not feel that these neighbours posed a threat to their way of life. Many of them remarked that new houses were eyesores on the landscape. I also recall the way that the migrants spoke of a local farmer who had cooperated with the Vichy government during the second world war. In 2004, people were still suspicious of him; he kept away from the local population, and was rumoured to be involved in smuggling operations. Through these representations of others, the migrants reflected their knowledge of the local community to further consolidate their place within it.

The argument that I present here explains how, through migration, my respondents gain the ability to exert control over their lives, augment their agency, and thus pursue their ambition to achieve a different way of life. The route to this is, however, interminable; there is always 'more' to be had from life. As the migrants' accounts reveal, there are always more challenges to be had and, consequently, new explanations and understandings of the authentic to be reached. The quest for authenticity and difference evident in their stories shows that through migration my respondents gain agency to make narratives about who they are and lives they lead. And so, it seems, stories about migration are always in the making.

To conclude, as I have shown in this thesis, the British who migrate to the Lot move in response to their discontent with some aspects of life in Britain. Despite this common theme in their accounts, the contexts in which this sense of discontent arises vary. Therefore, their stories about migration highlight the particular events and motivations that lead up to the decision to migrate. While they initially believe that migration will help them to overcome the constraints they are under in Britain, once they live in the Lot, they soon realize that they continue to feel ambivalent. They strive to displace their ambivalence by presenting tourists, the British in Spain, and

their compatriots in the Dordogne as indistinct and destructive. Finally, they classify themselves in relation to others living in the Lot. They do this in such a way as to place themselves on a scale of 'authentic living'. It is on this scale that they evaluate their lives leading up to and following migration. In conclusion, for my respondents in the Lot, migration is more than a mere change of scenery. Instead, it marks the beginning of the migrants' quest for an authentic and different way of living.

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