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Johnston, Cristina (2005) *The use of the spoken word in contemporary French minority cinema, with specific reference to banlieue and gay cinema (1990-2000)*. PhD thesis.

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**The Use of the Spoken Word in Contemporary French
Minority Cinema, With Specific Reference to *Banlieue* and
Gay Cinema (1990-2000)**

Ph.D. thesis. Submitted by Cristina Johnston.
University of Glasgow, Department of French
September 30th 2005

Abstract

This thesis seeks to analyse the ways in which the spoken word is used in two French minority cinemas – *cinéma de banlieue* and gay cinema – between 1990 and 2000, in order to express an engagement with the complex, layered, and fractured identities of France's citizens in the late twentieth century. This analysis contributes to broader considerations of representations of minority groupings in contemporary France as they were played out, over the decade under examination, against an ongoing debate regarding the relevance of French republicanism to the realities of French society.

This analysis will be conducted through three prisms which correspond to the three central chapters of the thesis: ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. These three areas of analysis were chosen because the particular aspects of individual and collective identity with which they engage embody the three central challenges to contemporary republican values which have emerged in 1990s debates. This thesis will further suggest that all three of these 'challenges' find their expression in each of the bodies of film studied here, which in turn illustrates the complexities of the dialogue between Republic and minorities.

Each chapter will present a detailed examination of a series of onscreen verbal exchanges drawn from four key films, with supplementary reference to other works from the two genres studied here. These examinations will be placed against the socio-political backdrop of 1990s France in order to highlight their specific relevance to broader ongoing debates regarding the nature of French republicanism as critically interpreted.

The first chapter will focus on verbal exchanges through the prism of ethnicity, and specifically on conflictual verbal encounters, as illustrated, in particular, in *Hexagone* (Chibane, 1994), *La Haine* (Kassovitz, 1995), *Rai* (Gilou, 1995), and *La Squale* (Généstal, 2000). The second chapter will shift focus to examine constructions of gendered identities in four key films, namely *Gazon maudit* (Balasko, 1995), *Douce France* (Chibane, 1995), *Ma 6-T va crack-er* (Richet, 1997), and *Belle Maman* (Aghion, 1999), concentrating on verbal exchanges around parent-child relationships. Analysis in the final central chapter will be conducted through the prism of sexuality, examining onscreen exchanges involving friends and lovers in *Pédale douce* (Aghion,

1996), *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!* (Bensalah, 1999), *Le Derrière* (Lemercier, 1999), and *Drôle de Félix* (Ducastel and Martineau, 2000). These three central chapters will pave the way to an attempt, in the conclusion, to come to terms with the central question raised throughout the thesis: Does the use of the spoken word in gay and *banlieue* cinema examined in these pages merely reaffirm the identity of separate communities, or does it rather function as a site for construction and reconstruction?

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Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning. No sources other than those acknowledged in the bibliography have been used.

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank my supervisors Prof. John Campbell, Dr Peter Davies, and Dr Ramona Salazar-Ferrer for their insightful and helpful feedback, advice, and support. Thanks also to the French Department at Glasgow University for all their help, particularly in the final stages of the project, to Bill Marshall for good advice and support along the way, and to Dougal Campbell for sanity and his passion for French.

I am grateful to the Carnegie Trust for the scholarship without which I would not have been able to embark on this project.

Many thanks to the following for various random thesis-related acts of human kindness: Florian Grandena for an unending stream of suggestions, advice, and general warm-hearted encouragement; Phil Powrie, David Wagner, and Martin O'Shaughnessy for kindly providing copies of articles and films; Alison Saunders, Michael Syrotinski and Margaret Jubb at Aberdeen University for bearing with me; Ahmed Cherifi for patiently answering ignorant questions from a non-Arabophone; Frédéric Martel for having taken the time to talk to me about republicanism; Timo Stoll, Tobi Ross, Steve Haddon, Cécile Camart, and Katia Feltrin for fending off (with good humour) last-minute questions about prisms and newspapers; and to Michaëlle Petit, Niels Henriksen, Sophie Feltrin, Valérie Chesnay, Solenn de Royer, Marion Bernard, Fiona Barclay, and Alain Dodeler for all their help but also for having reminded me there was more to life than the thesis.

Particular thanks, for their unwavering kindness, to John and Elisabeth Campbell, Owen Evans, and Catriona Cunningham, and to Sandra Kaiser for having believed in the project from the beginning.

I am grateful to my parents, Jim and Marinella, for their help, support, and encouragement over the past years, and to my sister Tania for having had the good sense to leave the hemisphere during the final stages of this project.

And finally, I would like to thank Kerri Woods for everything. For having been convinced (and for having convinced me) that I could do this, for love, support, advice, and encouragement, for patient, insightful feedback, for time, and for assorted geometrical musings, impromptu trips, and a better cup of coffee than I could ever make.

Abbreviations

ANPE	Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi
CNRS	Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique
CRS	Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité
EHESS	Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales
FEMIS	Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Métiers de l'Image et du Son
HLM	Habitation à Loyer Modéré
IDHEC	Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques
INED	Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques
INSEE	Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes
PACS	Pacte Civil de Solidarité
RATP	Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens
SNCF	Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français
SNEG	Syndicat National des Entreprises Gaies
UDF	Union pour la Démocratie Française
UMP	Union pour un Mouvement Populaire

Chapter 1

Introduction

The 1990s marked an interesting period at the intersection between developments in French cinema history and evolutions of metropolitan French society. 200 years after the French Revolution and its proclamation of a universal citizen, two minority cinemas – *cinéma de banlieue* and gay cinema - came to the fore to express an engagement with the realities of the complex, layered, fractured identities of France's citizens in the late twentieth century. The aim of this thesis is to analyse the ways in which this engagement was expressed, specifically through the onscreen use of the spoken word in these two bodies of film, and the contribution this makes to a broader representation of minority groupings in contemporary France.

This analysis will be conducted through three distinct, yet overlapping, prisms which correspond to the three central chapters of the thesis: ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. I will refer to aspects of the relevance of each of these framing devices in the sections which follow below, and give a full and detailed analysis of their salience, in relation to both cinema and society, in the initial stages of each of the central chapters.¹

This introductory chapter will, firstly, offer a justification of the use of the spoken word onscreen in terms of its contribution to both (French) Film Studies and broader theoretical considerations of identity construction. Discussion of the former will include a brief examination of the specific status accorded to cinema within French culture, whereas the latter will allow for an elaboration of the strands of critical thought which have informed the thesis. I will then offer a justification of the two bodies of film chosen to represent contemporary French minority cinema, in both cinematic and broader societal terms. This will include working definitions of both *cinéma de banlieue* and gay cinema in the present context. The discussion of the genres' relevance with relation to 1990s French society will introduce the key underlying concept of French republicanism and will initiate an analysis of the films' representation, through the spoken word, of the complexities of the notion of minorities within this framework. This section will include a brief overview of

¹ On ethnicity, see page 42-46, on gender see page 89-97, and on sexuality see page 133-145.

contemporary debates on what I shall term traditional French republicanism. These debates will be taken up again, in more detail, in each of the central chapters in order to outline the relevance of each prism to this broader, evolving backdrop. The final sections of the introduction will set out the structure of the three central chapters and, in particular, will identify the four films that will form the core focus of analysis in each chapter.

1. Minorities: Numerical and Theoretical

At the very outset it is necessary to justify the contention that ‘minority’ is, in fact, a term which is of relevance to a contemporary metropolitan French context. Clearly, minority groupings can be defined in purely numerical terms. For example, the empirical existence of a Maghrebi-French minority can be demonstrated by drawing on the statistical results of surveys conducted by organisations such as INSEE.² However, a merely statistical approach overlooks the vexed question of the status accorded to minority groupings within the French Republic, insofar as these groupings are viewed as having an influence or an effect on broader societal structures and developments. This question is very much a live issue, as the recent debate on *le voile islamique* has shown.³ While it is self-evidently not possible, in a work such as the present, to embark on a study of Article 1 of the Fifth Republic’s constitution (incorporating as it does the *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen* issuing from the Revolution), whether that be the complex jurisprudence attached to it, the history of reactions to it, or the many questions it continues to raise, it can be said uncontroversially that the famous constitutional requirement for all citizens of the Republic to possess ‘l’égalité devant la loi’ has been interpreted in two broadly different ways.

² Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes. National organisation, which comes under the authority of the Ministry for Finance and Industry, and which collates and distributes data regarding French society and economy.

³ In September 1989, the headmaster of a secondary school in Creil, in the Oise *département*, sent home three female Muslim pupils because they refused to remove their headscarves. Later that year, the Conseil d’Etat ruled that religious symbols were not incompatible with the French principle of *laïcité*, unless they were ‘ostentatoires et constitu[aient] par là, un acte de pression, de provocation, de prosélytisme ou de propagande’ or ran the risk of disrupting ‘l’ordre ou le déroulement des cours dans l’établissement’ (Sylvie Bernard, ‘La Laïcité en question’, accessed online at <http://www.br-online.de/wissen-bildung/collegeradio/medien/franzoesisch/laicite/hintergrund/> on June 11th 2005). The debate rolled on throughout the 1990s, intensifying in the post-September 11th climate, and culminating, on February 10th 2004, in a law banning ‘conspicuous signs of religion in public schools.’ (Source Judith Ezekiel, ‘Magritte meets Maghreb: This Is Not A Veil’, *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 47 (July 2005), 231-243.)

On the one hand, there is a strict interpretation of republicanism, and Article 1 in particular, which recognises no cultural difference on any grounds and, indeed, which envisages any such difference as a threat to the cohesion of the nation:

American-style fragmentation (ethnic or otherwise) appears as the ultimate threat when a differentialist ideology replaces universalist principles.⁴

Among the most vocal supporters of this 'traditional republicanism'⁵ is Régis Debray who issued 'the classic statement of traditional republicanism'⁶ in a 1989 article in *Le Nouvel Observateur*⁷ and, later that year, in his book *Que Vive la République*.⁸ In the latter, Debray articulates a view of French republicanism as being threatened by the social realities of contemporary French society, referring to 'the victory of "the dictatorship of particularities."' ⁹ More recently, Debray has expressed this view thus:

Diversité des couleurs locales, oui, mais dans l'unité supérieure d'une nation, d'une langue, d'un même Code civil et pénal. La République connaît mais ne reconnaît pas tout ce qui tend à morceler, séparer, démanteler la communauté civique. [...] Elle respecte les folklores et les cultures, mais elle soumet à la loi commune *ce qu'on appelle ailleurs les "minorités"*. [...] La République française est composée de citoyens, non de communautés. [My emphasis]¹⁰

While Debray does recognise the role played by diversity in the construction of France as nation-state,¹¹ he stresses the crucial role played by the abstracting of individuals from their 'particularities' in order that they become, and be viewed as, citizens of the Republic, equal in status in the eyes of the law in strict accordance with Article 1. He also draws a clear, and somewhat disparaging, contrast between French republicanism and other models of citizenship in which particular 'minorités' are granted recognition, arguing that such recognition ultimately leads to a disparity between individuals:

⁴ Eric Fassin, 'Same Sex, Different Politics: "Gay Marriage" Debates in France and the United States', *Public Culture*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2001), 217.

⁵ Jeremy Jennings, 'Citizenship, Republicanism and Multiculturalism in Contemporary France', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (2000), 585. It is the type of position described here which I will refer to throughout this thesis as 'traditional republicanism'.

⁶ Jennings, *op. cit.*, 585.

⁷ Régis Debray, 'Etes-vous démocrate ou républicain?', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, November 30th-December 6th 1989, 49-55.

⁸ Régis Debray, *Que Vive la République* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1989).

⁹ Debray, quoted in Jennings, *op. cit.*, 585. Jennings quotes Debray in English.

¹⁰ Régis Debray, *La République expliquée à ma fille* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1998), 7.

¹¹ 'La République s'est toujours nourrie de diversité.' Debray, *op. cit.*, 28.

Tu commences par le droit à la différence et tu finis par la différence des droits.¹²

Debray is by no means isolated in this traditional interpretation of the doctrine of French republicanism. Indeed, the position he holds also finds its expression, for example, in a number of reports published by the governmental body, the *Haut Conseil à l'Intégration* during the 1990s which spoke of the risks inherent in a communitarian model.¹³ Indeed, more recently, this rigid interpretation of republicanism and the centrality of Article 1 can be said to have won out in the French political arena with the most recent developments in the ongoing *affaire du foulard* and the introduction of legislation in May 2004 banning pupils in state schools from wearing visible religious signs.¹⁴

On the other hand, however, there is also a body of thought which seeks to work towards a renewal or a renegotiation of French republicanism in order to ensure its relevance to the realities of contemporary French society. This view has been articulated by a number of figures in the political and public arena, resulting in a belief that 'la France doit se repenser.'¹⁵ According to the sociologist Michel Wieviorka:

Le modèle français de la République est de moins en moins opératoire, ses valeurs d'égalité et de solidarité ne s'appliquent plus que difficilement.¹⁶

¹² Debray, *op. cit.*, 28.

¹³ See Jennings, *op. cit.*, 583 for a fuller discussion of these reports in the context of post-1989 debates on French republicanism.

¹⁴ The legislation applies to signs of all religions and prohibits 'les signes et les tenues qui manifestent ostensiblement une appartenance religieuse' (Source Ministère de l'Éducation, *Bulletin officiel*, no. 21, May 27th 2004, accessed online at <http://www.education.gouv.fr/bo/2004/21/MENG0401138C.htm> on September 20th 2005). The *Bulletin officiel* clearly depicts the implementation of the legislation in terms which serve to strengthen traditional republicanism: 'La loi du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics, marque la volonté très largement partagée de réaffirmer l'importance de ce principe indissociable des valeurs d'égalité et de respect de l'autre. Elle témoigne de la volonté des représentants de la Nation de conforter l'école de la République.' (*Bulletin officiel*, *op. cit.*) It is worth noting that Debray was a member of the Stasi Commission, appointed by Jacques Chirac in July 2003 in order to consider 'la mise en œuvre [...] du principe de laïcité inscrit dans [la] Constitution.' (Debray, *Ce Que Nous Voile Le Voile. La République et le Sacré* (Paris: NRF/Gallimard, 2003), 7) The Stasi Commission's findings were crucial to the implementation of the legislation in May 2004.

¹⁵ Jacky Dahomay, 'Peuple(s) ou population(s)?', *Libération*, December 13th 2002.

¹⁶ Michel Wieviorka, 'La face cachée d'un mythe', *Libération*, December 30th 1996.

Wieviorka's aim is not to offer a single possible route for French republicanism to follow, but rather to encourage a lively and open debate on its contemporary evolution and reinterpretation which he considers crucial to a broader renewal and revitalisation of the political sphere in 1990s France. However, he is clear that the social realities which have resulted in this debate should be understood as 'une mutation':¹⁷

Ces différences traduisent une mutation et signifient l'entrée dans un nouveau type de société, dans de nouveaux problèmes, débats et conflits sociaux; elles expriment la formation d'acteurs qui s'ébauchent, qui peuvent être tentés par le communautarisme, mais qui aussi veulent être reconnus, se créer comme sujets de leur propre existence.'¹⁸

Wieviorka thus recognises the need to 'reconcile the debate on multiculturalism with the debate on social exclusion and inequality.'¹⁹ He and others who argue in favour of a renegotiation of 'traditional republicanism' signal the possible development of a pluricultural French republicanism:

Ne sommes-nous pas tous des métis, Noirs, Juifs, Arabes, Blancs, qui constituons la chair du monde? Voilà pourquoi nous plaidons pour une République plus généreuse, plus universaliste donc plus libératrice.²⁰

'Traditional republicanism' can thus be understood in relation to a renewal of French republicanism which takes into account the changing realities of contemporary French society, and the debate can be followed throughout the period dealt with in the present thesis.

This context is crucial. While the understanding of 'minority' in this thesis is informed by aspects of the work of Deleuze and Guattari,²¹ Pierre Bourdieu,²² and Judith Butler²³ in particular, the closer definition of the term used here is inspired specifically by the ways in which I understand the work of these theorists to be in

¹⁷ Wieviorka, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ *Idem.*

¹⁹ Marcello Martiniello, 'Wieviorka's View on Multiculturalism: A Critique', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 5 (September 1998), 913.

²⁰ Jacky Dahomay, 'Pour une nouvelle identité républicaine', *Le Monde*, April 4th 2005.

²¹ And in particular Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'Postulats de la linguistique', in *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1972-1980), 95-139.

²² And more specifically Bourdieu's work *Ce Que Parler Veut Dire. L'Economie des échanges linguistiques* (Paris: Fayard, 1982).

²³ Particularly Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, [1990] 1999).

dialogue with ongoing debates on French republicanism as I discuss below, and specifically in relation to notions of the crucial link between identity and language.

Minority groups are thus understood to be entities of which full understanding can only be gained in the context of their relationship with either a numerical majority or a culturally or politically dominant societal norm. This is not to suggest that the minority is permanently in a weakened position, nor that it is necessarily subordinate to the majority/norm. It is rather a question of focusing on the interdependence of the minority/majority or minority/norm relationship. Clearly, in cultural, political, and linguistic terms, the minority gains much of its sense of identity from its relationship with and divergence from established patterns or norms. It makes little sense to talk of a minority or to refer to, for instance, 'minority literatures' or 'minority cinema' if there is no norm against which to offer such a categorisation. Equally, however, the majority/norm only exists as such insofar as there are alternatives against which one may establish its status as such. The minority can thus be said to be both constituted by and constitutive of the tandem within which it is placed.

Centrality of the Spoken Word to Minorities: Negotiatory Intersections

The interest, for me, of drawing on the work of these theorists in particular, stems from their examination of these central concepts not only in broadly cultural or societal terms, but also, specifically, from their acknowledgment of the centrality of language, and crucially of *discourse*, to the construction and recognition of minority cultural identities or relations. To quote Bourdieu:

Ce qui circule sur le marché linguistique, ce n'est pas "la langue", mais des discours stylistiquement caractérisés, à la fois du côté de la production, dans la mesure où chaque locuteur se fait un idiolecte avec la langue commune, et du côté de la réception, dans la mesure où chaque récepteur contribue à produire le message qu'il perçoit et apprécie en y important tout ce qui fait son expérience singulière et collective.²⁴

Bourdieu here clearly identifies the role played by the individual speaker in engaging with 'la langue commune' and adapting it to his or her own requirements. However, he also highlights the role played by the speaker's interlocutor, in further developing

²⁴ Bourdieu, *op. cit.*, 16.

the meaning of the words by adding a personal interpretation of them drawn simultaneously from their experience as individual subject and as member of a collective group.

This insight has inspired, and explains, the central thrust of the present work. Rather than treating the use of the spoken word in minority cinema as something inaccessible to non-community members or as something which seeks to become, or serves as, a method of exclusion whereby the minority is perceived as inevitably 'Other', this thesis will seek to show that, in fact, it serves to demonstrate an engagement with the language of the society within which the minority concerned is embedded, as well as an engagement with the terms of the evolving debate on French republicanism. This engagement, however, is equally dependent upon an active role being played by interlocutors. A reviewer may, for instance, select a specific term used in a particular film, and either explain its meaning or simply begin to use it within 'standard' (journalistic) discourse, thus bringing it from a minority-based context into the realm of Bourdieu's 'langue commune'.

Throughout the thesis, media coverage of the individual films studied will be drawn on and used to further illustrate an interaction between minority groupings and mainstream society. However, this focus on, for example, journalistic (p)reviews, interviews with directors and stars, or articles describing and analysing aspects of the 'making of' process, is also informed by the growing influence of reception studies on film studies,²⁵ and the very recent extension of this influence to French film studies.²⁶

²⁵ American academic Janet Staiger has been particularly influential in the popularisation of reception studies in relation to film and cinema, drawing on aspects of literary reception studies (the writings of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco in particular) but expanding the terms of research in order to render them relevant to an examination the 'circulation of discourses from texts through [cinema] audiences.' (Tomas Kemper, 'Received Wisdom: Three Reception Studies', *Jump Cut. A Review of Contemporary Media* 46 (accessed online at www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc46.2003/kemper.staiger/index.html on March 1st 2006)). See, for instance, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (New York: NYU Press, 2000) or *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1992).

²⁶ To date, there has been very little academic research carried out in the field of French film studies which takes, as its starting point, a reception studies-based approach. There is some evidence of an increasing focus on audience studies (see footnote 44) in French film studies over the past five years but, overall, 'research in French cinema [...] still focuses principally on textual and contextual analysis.' (Darren Waldron, 'Incorporating Qualitative Audience Research into French Film Studies: The Case of *Gazon maudit* (Balasko, 1995)', *Studies in French Cinema*, vol. 4, no. 2 (September 2004), 121.) This focus would appear to be changing with, for example, a major research project being undertaken by Dr Lucy Mazdon at the University of Southampton examining 'perceptions and articulations of French cinema within British culture from 1930 to the present' (source: advertisement

Spectators bring identities (consciously or unconsciously constructed) and interpretative strategies and tactics to the cinema. These schemata, social formations, psychological, and sociological dynamics form the subject of reception analysis.²⁷

Due to the privileged status of cinema within French national culture,²⁸ where I have chosen to focus on the intertextual relationship formed between the film text and its viewers, I have examined this primarily as it is negotiated and expressed through media coverage. However, this is not to deny the impact of other aspects of this inter- and indeed extra-textuality on the meanings which emerge from the corpus under examination here, nor indeed on the ways in which these meanings interact with each other, thus engaging in a broader renegotiation of aspects of French republican identities.

What this thesis sets out to analyse is the ways in which the specific minority groupings under study use the spoken word in order to modify language usages ‘du dedans’.²⁹ In other words, although it is necessary to select specific minority cinemas upon which to concentrate a body of research, these bodies of film will not be examined in isolation: they will be examined in terms of how they make use of the spoken word in relation to a ‘langue commune’ and, by extension, as an engagement with the majority/norm against which they are defined.

It is with this theoretical framework in mind that the analyses of verbal exchanges in the three central chapters will be conducted. However, my approach is also informed by strands of sociolinguistic analysis and, in particular, the notion that:

to understand issues of identity and how they affect and are affected by social, political, and ethnic divisions, we need to gain insights into the communicative processes by which they arise.³⁰

for research assistantship on the project featured on www.jobs.ac.uk in February 2006). While the present thesis is informed by elements of research which feed into, and from, reception studies – and references to media coverage in particular – its intention is not to analyse the reception of the chosen corpus in a broad cultural sense. Rather it examines the interaction between the use of the spoken word in these films and constructions and renegotiations of individual and collective identities.

²⁷ Kemper, *op. cit.*

²⁸ See page 23 for further discussion of this privileged status.

²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *op. cit.*, 119.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

In their introductory chapter to *Language and Social Identity*,³¹ Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz further state that while:

we customarily take gender, ethnicity, and class as given parameters and boundaries within which we create our own social identities [, ...] the study of language as interactional discourse demonstrates that these parameters are not constants that can be taken for granted but are communicatively produced.³²

Clearly, it would be ludicrous to suggest that, away from the world of cinema, there is a limited number of studies of language (use, production, dissemination...) in relation to minority cultures or, indeed, more generally in relation to the construction of social identities. However, such studies either tend to focus on written cultural forms (such as notions of translation, national literatures, or the relationships between minority and majority language usage) or to take the form of empirical sociolinguistic/ethnographic research conducted on the ground, examining such linguistic phenomena as code-switching, for instance, or, in a contemporary French context, the use of *verlan* (backslang), particularly against an urban or suburban backdrop. While such techniques arise in many of the verbal exchanges to be analysed here, the aim of this thesis is to apply this analysis, not in order to conduct an *in situ* ethnolinguistic study of language usages in the *banlieues* or in a predominantly gay area, such as the Marais district of Paris, but, more specifically, to the use of the spoken word in the two identified strands of contemporary French minority cinema.

2. Cinema as *Audio*-visual Medium: A Visual Bias With Some Audio Exceptions

Although cinema is clearly not only a visual medium, but an *audio*-visual medium, much of the focus in film studies has been traditionally placed on the ‘visual’ half of this term. Studies have been dedicated, for instance, to visual representations of specific minority groups onscreen,³³ visual signifiers (semiotics of cinema and structuralist critiques),³⁴ and the notion of ‘the gaze’,³⁵ with the latter influenced by

³¹ John J Gumperz and Jenny Cook-Gumperz, ‘Introduction: language and the communication of social identity’, in *Language and Social Identity*, ed. John J Gumperz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1982] 1997), 1-21.

³² Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, *op cit.*, 1.

³³ See, for instance, Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film* (London: Routledge, 1990), and Mark A. Reid, *Redefining Black Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

³⁴ See, for instance, works by Christian Metz such as *Essais sur la signification au cinéma* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1968-1972, translated as *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*) or *Le Signifiant*

and intersecting with both psychoanalytical and feminist critical frameworks. Other analyses have been inspired by a genre theory approach,³⁶ or have concentrated on national cinemas, with studies in which language of expression is but one facet of analysis among many.³⁷ This is not to deny the existence of some studies which have placed the focus on questions of sound in film, but these often concentrate on the development of sound as technology, for example, examining the economic or aesthetic imperatives which led to its broad implementation;³⁸ or else, more recently, offer examinations of translation or subtitling practice.³⁹ In such fields, the work of French author Michel Chion stands out as offering a particularly interesting and useful theoretical discussion of the 'audio' aspects of the audiovisual medium.⁴⁰

Visual Bias in French Film Studies

These observations hold true across film studies generally but also, more specifically, in relation to (metropolitan) French film studies where there is a dearth of academic material specifically examining issues related to sound and/or dialogue onscreen. For example, recent studies have focussed on the key role played by specific genres within French film production (for instance, the heritage film⁴¹ or popular comedy⁴²),

imaginaire: psychanalyse et cinéma (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1977, translated as *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*).

³⁵ See, for instance, Norman K. Denzin, *The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur's Gaze* (London: Sage, 1995); Richard Dyer, 'Don't Look Now: The Male Pin-Up', in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, eds. John Caughie, Annette Kuhn, and Mandy Merck (London: Routledge, 1992); and the two works by Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (London and Bloomington: BFI/Indiana University Press, 1996) and *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

³⁶ See, for example, *Horror: The Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich (London: Routledge, 2002); Annette Kuhn, *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema* (London: Verso, 1990); *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science-Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn (London and New York: Verso, 1999); and Andrew Spicer, *Film noir* (Harlow: Longman, 2002).

³⁷ See, for example, Ruth Barton, *Irish National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004), and Bill Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema* (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).

³⁸ See, for instance, Richard Abel and Rick Altman, *The Sounds of Early Cinema* (Bloomington and Chesham: Indiana University Press/Combined Academic, 2001); Stephen Neale, *Cinema and Technology: Image, Sound, Colour* (London: Macmillan Education, 1985); and Dietrich Scheunemann, 'The Project of Sound, on the Transition from Silent to Sound Cinema', in *Orality, Literacy and Modern Media*, ed. D. Scheunemann (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996).

³⁹ See, for example, Martine Danan, 'Subtitling: Multiculturalism or Commodification of Culture?' In *Comparative Literature Now: Theories and Practice: Selected Papers*, eds. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, Milan V Dimic, and Irene Sywenky (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999), 763-773; Fotios Karamitroglou, *Towards a Methodology for the Investigation of Norms in Audiovisual Translation: The Choice between Subtitling and Revoicing in Greece* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000).

⁴⁰ See, for instance, the works by Michel Chion, *Le Son au cinéma* (Paris: Editions de l'Etoile, 1992), or *La Voix au cinéma* (Paris: Editions de l'Etoile/Cahiers du cinéma, 1993 [1982]).

⁴¹ See, for instance, James F. Austin, 'Digitizing Frenchness in 2001: On a "Historic" Moment in the French Cinema', *French Cultural Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (October 2004), 281-299; Phil Powrie,

or on schools or groups of directors within French cinema (from the *nouvelle vague*⁴³ to the cinema of the 1990s IDHEC generation⁴⁴), or, indeed, on aspects less related to cinema as art form than as industry (the role played by Canal + in the financing, production and distribution of films, for example, or the relationship between the State and French film⁴⁵). In terms of doctoral research projects, Phil Powrie's recent study of thirty years of theses in French cinema⁴⁶ confirms these trends with, for example, 60 theses examining the New Wave (either as a movement or in relation to particular directors), 24 focusing on aspects of film theory (with thirteen on Bazin alone), but only three on aspects of sound (music and soundtrack studies) produced in the mid-1990s. Powrie does note 'a marked increase'⁴⁷ in studies focusing on silent cinema but makes no reference to a significant body of work which takes as its focus a study of dialogue onscreen.

An essential motivation for this thesis, therefore, has been the perceived need to look past onscreen *visual* representations (of cultures, genders, spaces...) in order to concentrate on how these representations are furthered through the use of *sound* and, more specifically, through the *dialogue* of the films concerned. Clearly, however, just as a great deal of academic research conducted in the field of (French) film studies can be accused of this visual bias, so too do attempts to focus more closely on the 'audio' aspects risk operating a conversely blinkered approach. The very notion of film as a manifestation of an audio-visual *tandem* underlines the interdependence of these distinct, yet overlapping, elements.

'Heritage, History and "New Realism": French Cinema in the 1990s', in *Contemporary French Cinema: Continuity and Difference*, ed. Phil Powrie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1-21; *Idem*, 'Music in the French Heritage Film', in *European Film Music*, eds. Miguel Mera and David Burnand (Aldershot: Ashgate, due for publication in August 2006).

⁴² See, for example, Sue Harris, "Les Comiques font de la résistance": dramatic trends in popular film comedy', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, Vol. XXXV, No. 1 (January-April 1998), 86-99.

⁴³ See, for example, Michel Marie, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School*, trans. Richard Neupert (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003); Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

⁴⁴ René Prédal, for example, in *Le Jeune Cinéma français* (Paris: Nathan, 2002).

⁴⁵ See, for example, Laurence Creton and Anne Jäckel, 'A Certain Idea of the Film Industry', in *The French Cinema Book*, eds. Michael Temple and Michael Witt (London: BFI, 2004), 209-220.

⁴⁶ Phil Powrie, 'Thirty Years of Doctoral Theses on French Cinema', *Studies in French Cinema*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2002), 199-203 (accessed online at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/crif/sfc/downloads/thesescom.doc> on September 10th 2005). Powrie's article refers to British, Canadian, French, and US-based theses.

⁴⁷ Powrie, *op. cit.* This 'marked increase' refers to the fact that, since 1990, seven theses have been completed on aspects of silent cinema, compared to only 'a couple of theses focusing directly on the silent cinema in the list of completed theses (1981 and 2001)'.

As such, throughout this thesis, particular focus will be placed on specific quoted extracts from the onscreen dialogue of films in the chosen corpus. However, I will also point towards the many ways in which ‘purely’ visual aspects of the films studied interact with their ‘audio’ counterparts, discussing, for instance, the impact on the construction of ethnic identities which is achieved through the use of voice-over,⁴⁸ the importance of the physical backdrop against which selected dialogues are played out,⁴⁹ and the ways in which the physical appearance of chosen characters has a central role to play in the construction of meaning through verbal interaction.⁵⁰ Overall, therefore, while the central focus is placed on the use of the spoken word and the contribution this makes to engagements with, and renegotiations of, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, the ‘audio’ here will not be entirely divorced from the ‘visual’. Rather the interdependence of the tandem will be emphasised throughout.⁵¹

3. Questions of Authenticity

In some of the films which form the corpus of this project, there is substantial use of linguistic improvisation and ad-libbing, often on the part of non- or semi-professional actors. However it must also be recognised that the majority of the works examined are scripted and edited, and that the use of the spoken word in the final ‘product’ is as much the result of a conscious process and design, as is the visual aesthetic of the work. The dialogue of the final screen version is almost entirely the result of an extensive process of fine-tuning, often involving the director, actors, script-writers, and other members of the crew, and cannot, as such, necessarily be equated with the ‘spontaneous’ utterances of members of minority communities in everyday situations. This production process, however, cannot allow the finished work, by some fundamentalist literalism, to be in some way ignored or undervalued: in that case, it would become impossible to examine the witness of any written or spoken act that was subjected to an editing process, or any other such ‘intervention’. Indeed, while questions can rightly be asked about the authenticity of dialogue involving minorities

⁴⁸ See, for example, my discussion of Slimane as primary narrative voice through voice-over in *Hexagone* on page 61-64.

⁴⁹ See discussions of *banlieue* dialogue reaching the *Champs-Élysées* in *La Squale* on page 76-79 or the effect of physical location on the chosen language of expression in *Rai* on page 80-85.

⁵⁰ As is the case in Léa’s birthday song to Nicou in *Belle Maman*, discussed on page 106-111.

⁵¹ Although it lies outwith the scope of the present work, it is worth noting that there is further scope for an examination of the ways in which the ‘visual’, the ‘audio’, and indeed the ‘verbal’ are embedded in each other by examining, for example, the use of graffiti as a means of inter- and extra-diegetic communication (as in *La Haine*, for instance).

onscreen, one could also highlight the problematic nature of the authenticity of more 'straightforward', traditional sociolinguistic research on the ground. Linguistic field-workers may well spend a substantial period of time living with the subjects whose idiom they are studying, attempting to become as unobtrusive as possible in order to maximize the chances of observing informants' language in a 'pure' form. Nevertheless, surely questions will always remain as to just how 'unaware' the subjects really are, just how unselfconsciously they express themselves, and to what extent they play up to the expectations of the researcher.⁵² This scientific 'double blind test', in the field, does not, and cannot, exist. In this context, therefore, one safeguard is not to rely on one single work, but to establish a corpus that reflects different approaches: this is another reason for the method chosen in this present thesis.

While taking into account such questions of authenticity, therefore, this work seeks to examine and thus question the use of the spoken word in contemporary minority film production. It will be seen to provide valuable evidence in relation to the precise focus of this thesis, namely the representation of minority cultures through the spoken word set against a contemporary French backdrop. It will be further argued that the usefulness of such a project stems precisely from the specific nature of film and its role in contemporary French culture.

4. Privileged Status of Cinema in French Culture

The very nature of cinema as a medium means that it is a privileged site and source of interaction between minority groupings and other parts of society, whether this refers to the mainstream or, indeed, to other minority groups. The importance of cinema is particularly clear within a French cultural context, due to the privileged position it occupies in contemporary French culture and the column space and air time dedicated

⁵²For a useful analysis of the problematic nature of this relationship, see David Lepoutre, *Cœur de banlieue. Codes, rites et langages* (Paris: Poches Odile Jacob, 2001). Lepoutre lived for two years in the Quatre-Mille housing scheme in La Courneuve, in the northern Parisian suburbs. He taught in a nearby secondary school and his experiences there formed the basis of his doctoral research which he completed in 1996 and which was published as *Cœur de banlieue*. Lepoutre prefaces his study of the verbal and physical codes of the *banlieue* with a discussion of 'l'ambiguïté et la difficulté de cette relation qui s'établit entre l'ethnographe [...] et l'informateur, méfiant, fuyant et réticent, voire franchement hostile, ou à l'inverse confiant, coopérant, rarement indifférent et jamais dupe, en tout cas, de cette relation intéressée et sans échange équitable.' (Lepoutre, *op. cit.*, 11)

to it in media coverage and analysis.⁵³ If cinema is seen as a potential channel for dialogue by its very nature, then it can also be viewed as a means of allowing members of minority groupings to gain a voice which can be heard – dependent, of course, on distribution of the films – throughout society. This stance should not be read as an idealisation of what will be taken to be either gay or *banlieue* cinema in this thesis. ‘Contemporary French minority cinema’ is not automatically produced, directed, scripted or acted by members of the groups concerned. There is no suggestion, either, that lower budget minority works will gain an audience beyond a specific geographical, or indeed social, area. However, given the place and status of cinema and discussions of it in contemporary French culture and media from local press to national television, its potential as source of dialogue deserves examination. On this basis, it is manifest that film plays a significant role in the development of linguistic (and indeed visual) representations of minority groups.

The multiple distribution and screening channels open to film also mean that the researcher can examine media coverage, not only surrounding the initial cinema release of a film, but also, in many cases, its first, second, third or subsequent television screening, and its release on video or DVD. Reviews, interviews, more in-depth articles relating and comparing the individual film to other works by the same director or with the same star or set in the same geographical location or (allegedly) forming part of the same cinematic school, are all available to the researcher and, thanks to the development of online media archives,⁵⁴ ever more accessible.

This wealth of available material extends the area of research in a useful and productive way. Rather than limiting an examination of the dialogue of a particular film to an interpretation of possible representations constructed, it becomes possible to see, from the language used and picked up on by reviewers and critics, which elements of a particular representation are being retained. It then becomes possible to

⁵³ In mainstream written press outlets, for example, the national daily newspapers *Libération* and *Le Monde* dedicate between 4 and 8 pages of their mid-week editions to detailed coverage of the week’s new cinematic releases.

⁵⁴ Websites such as www.bifi.fr, www.bnf.fr, www.forumdesimages.fr, www.imdb.com, and www.lefilmfrancais.fr, for example, were used extensively in preparation of this thesis.

follow the progress of these terms in media coverage, from initial usages in inverted commas, to italicised usages, to their apparent integration into everyday newspeak.⁵⁵

Clearly, it is not only in the relationship between film scripts and media coverage of cinema that such changes are apparent. Indeed, recent work on audience studies in relation to French cinema would demonstrate that this, in fact, emerges from a far more complex network of cultural relations.⁵⁶ However, overall, what emerges from these preceding sections is, firstly, the primacy of cinema within a broader French cultural framework, secondly, the potential for cinema to act as site and source of engagement with broader societal issues, and, thirdly, the important role played by the spoken word, in the construction of social and minority identities, but also as an under-examined area of French film studies.

5. Why *Banlieue* and Gay Cinema?

The decision to centre on *cinéma de banlieue* and gay cinema stems, in cinematic terms, from specific shifts in French cinema over the course of the decade studied here. On the one hand, the 1990s saw the development of *banlieue* cinema as a recognised genre, particularly from the mid-1990s onwards.⁵⁷ On the other hand, the decade bore witness to an increased visibility of homosexualities onscreen, illustrated by the presence of gay and lesbian characters in mainstream films,⁵⁸ as well as

⁵⁵ Henriette Walter, in an interview on the topic of 'les mots de banlieue' describes this process: 'Si ces mots sortent du groupe créateur, traversent les faubourgs, et si l'un d'entre eux devient l'usage pour d'autres catégories sociales, c'est qu'il commence à être intégré. Dans ce cas, les médias en général, les journalistes et les publicitaires en particulier, jouent le rôle de diffuseurs. Ils utilisent d'abord le mot avec des guillemets. Et puis, selon le succès rencontré, les guillemets s'effacent peu à peu.' (Walter interviewed in Philippe Pierre-Adolphe, Max Mamoud, and Georges-Olivier Tzanos, *Tchatche de banlieue* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 1998), 126.)

⁵⁶ For recent work in the field of audience studies with specific reference to French cinema, see Jean-Michel Guy, *La Culture cinématographique des Français* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 2000); Sue Harris, 'The Decline, Fall and Rebirth in Cinemagoing', in Temple and Witt, *op. cit.*, 256-264; Waldron, *op. cit.*, 121-134.

⁵⁷ A number of key *banlieue* films were released in 1995: *La Haine* directed by Mathieu Kassovitz, *Etat des lieux* directed by Jean-François Richet, and *Douce France* directed by Malik Chibane, for instance. Thierry Jousse offers a very useful account of the emergence the *banlieue* film in 'Le Banlieue film existe-t-il?', *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 492 (June 1995), 36-39. It is worth noting that French historian Michel Cadé has also written about the evolution of the Parisian urban landscape in 1980s cinema. However, this work is not limited to *banlieue* fictions but also includes films set wholly within the Parisian centre. (See Michel Cadé, 'Le Paris des années 1980,' accessed online at http://www.forumdesimages.net/fr/alacarte/htm/ETUDE/PARIS_ANNEES_80/PARIS_ANNEES_80.htm on September 19th 2005)

⁵⁸ This is not to say that the presence of gay or lesbian characters in French films is, by any means, a recent phenomenon. Indeed, a history of gay characters could be traced through from the 1930s onwards with such films as *Club de femmes* (Deval, 1936) or *Hôtel du Nord* (Carné, 1938) and with

through individual 'gay films' which cross over from predominantly minority reception to more mainstream box office success.⁵⁹

What Is *Banlieue* Cinema?

It must first be understood that neither '*banlieue* film' nor 'gay film' is an unproblematic label. Both have been the source of much critical discussion, and their precise definition remains fluid.⁶⁰ With regard to *cinéma de banlieue*, Thierry Jousse, in *Cahiers du cinéma*, wrote:

Si l'on voit tous ces films les uns après les autres, on comprendra qu'ils ne constituent pas du tout un mouvement esthétique et que chaque démarche est rigoureusement différente. [...] Mais tous ces films ont pourtant en commun [...] d'inventer de nouveaux personnages, loin des codes trop rigides du cinéma français et de leur donner la parole; dans le meilleur des cas [...] l'architecture des films naît entièrement de ces personnages et de leur langue.⁶¹

What binds these films together into what was, in 1995, still an emergent genre, is, in Jousse's view, a desire to give voice to a particular set of hitherto under-represented figures in contemporary French society. Jousse does not deny that other films had already dealt with issues arising from contemporary suburban living – he refers, for instance, to *Laisse béton* (Le Péron, 1983) or to *De Bruit et de fureur* (Brisseau, 1988) – but, in the rapidly growing genre, he sees a new movement and a new evolution in politically aware cinema:

such much more recent cult performances as Michel Serrault's 'Zaza Napoli' in *La Cage aux folles* (Molinaro, 1978). However, a clear shift in trends can be witnessed in the 1990s as is discussed by Gérard Lefort and Olivier Seguret in 'Le Cinéma met la pédale gousse,' *Libération*, September 2nd 1996 where they declare 'le thème gay' to be in cinematic vogue.

⁵⁹ The most obvious example of this trend is Cyril Collard's *Les Nuits fauves* released in 1992 with 2,811,124 *entrées* in cinemas by 2000 according to www.lefilmfrancais.fr (accessed on September 19th 2005) and 15.8 million viewers for cinema and television combined (source Guy, *op. cit.*, 274). Another example would be *Gazon maudit* (Balasko, 1995) which I discuss in detail on pages 98-99 and 114-118. Throughout the thesis, I will refer to box office figures in terms of 'entrées.' I use this label to refer to numbers of tickets purchased, and do not assume it refers to the number of people who went to see the films, since this assumption does not take account of cinema-goers who may have seen the same film several times.

⁶⁰ While some writing on post-1990 French cinema accept the label (see, for instance, Carrie Tarr's recent *Reframing Difference. Beur and Banlieue Filmmaking in France* (Manchester and New York: MUP, 2005)), others are more critical of its relevance (for example, Will Higbee, 'Hybridity, Space, and the right to belong: Maghrebi-French identity at the crossroads in Karim Dridi's *Bye-Bye*', in *France on Film. Reflections on Popular French Cinema*, ed. Lucy Mazdon (London: Wallflower Press, 2001), 51-64).

⁶¹ Jousse, *op. cit.*, 37.

Le cinéma, malgré les limites qu'il a trop souvent tendance à s'assigner aujourd'hui, possède encore les moyens d'être absolument contemporain, à partir du moment où il cadre, éclaire, enregistre des corps, des langues, des mouvements inédits.⁶²

Since Jousse published his article, *banlieue* film has become a genre recognised by both critics and cinema-goers alike. Furthermore, it has spawned its own subgenres with, for instance, a series of 'banlieue on the beach' films⁶³ which take *banlieue* characters out of the physical backdrop of the HLM⁶⁴ estates and setting them against a regional landscape. *Banlieue* film has become synonymous, on the one hand, with the physical setting of the suburbs of large French conurbations (Paris, Lyon, and Marseille in particular), and, on the other hand, with a focus on a particular type of central character. In other words, male,⁶⁵ generally between their mid-teens and early 30s,⁶⁶ and often unemployed, involved in delinquency or otherwise depicted as entangled in conflict with society. Consequently, *banlieue* cinema tends to be associated with an examination of the social issues associated, in the popular imagination, with *banlieue* life, such as unemployment, petty crime, immigration or clashes with figures representing the authority of *la République française*, such as police officers, for example.

Despite these common threads of concern with contemporary social issues, the authenticity of *banlieue* film remains open to challenge. Does a director need to have had some first-hand experience of *banlieue* living in order to be able to offer a more authentic vision? Does the background of a director like Fabrice Génystal (*La Squale*, 2000), born and raised in a Parisian housing scheme, then employed at a secondary

⁶² *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶³ See, for instance, *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère !* (Bensalah, 1999) in which a group of friends from Seine-Saint-Denis win a holiday to Biarritz, or *Total Western* (Rochant, 2000), set in a centre for juvenile delinquents from the *banlieues* in the rural Aveyron region in the South of France. The description of this sub-genre which has emerged from *banlieue*-located *banlieue* films was inspired by a description of *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!* read in the French magazine *Télérama* in which the journalist Cécile Mury referred to the work as 'banlieue à la plage'.

⁶⁴ Habitation à loyer modéré. The French equivalent of council flats.

⁶⁵ There are some notable exceptions to this gender bias which I discuss in the central chapters of this thesis. However, overall, even as *banlieue* cinema has evolved, male characters have continued to take prominence.

⁶⁶ This focus on younger characters in *banlieue* films can be interpreted as an illustration of how 'the "youth question" in general, and youth culture in particular, have come to be seen as indexes of the condition and direction of wider society.' (Sue Widdicombe and Robin Wooffitt, *The Language of Subcultures: Social Identity in Action* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995))

school in the Parisian suburb of Sarcelles,⁶⁷ give him a more authentic take on screen representations of the *banlieues* than does, for example, Mathieu Kassovitz's,⁶⁸ son of the established Hungarian-born French television director Peter Kassovitz? While an answer to such questions lies outwith the scope of this thesis, the underlying assumption will be that films exhibiting the characteristics listed in the previous paragraph – namely, setting, character, topical issues – can be considered as forming a crucial part of the broad categorization of *banlieue* cinema. Each of the three central sections of the thesis will attempt to make clear, through brief plot summaries and/or references to specific characters, how the individual films selected for core analysis fit into this category.

What Makes A Gay Film?

Such questions also arise in attempts to categorise films as forming part of 'gay cinema'. While it may be clear that *banlieue* films frequently address a specific set of socio-political issues (usually either set against or recently, and temporarily, removed from the backdrop of high-rise housing schemes), it is difficult to formulate a precise set of characteristics which could be considered as being at the basis of 'gay cinema'. Lefort and Seguret, in their analysis of the growing mainstream popularity of gay films, encapsulate the argument thus:

Le film à homosexualité serait-il en conséquence un genre nouveau? Dans la logique du tiroir-caisse, la réponse est momentanément positive. D'un point de vue esthétique et politique, la réponse est encore en chantier.⁶⁹

There is no one particular type of physical setting or location which seems to be particularly characteristic of 'gay films'. While there may be a marked tendency to set them against an urban backdrop, one could then think of examples such as *Drôle de Félix* (Ducastel and Martineau, 2000) or *Pourquoi pas moi?* (Giusti, 1999), in which the setting is more rural than urban.⁷⁰ Similarly, while certain issues regularly crop up in 'gay films' – gay parenting, for instance, same-sex partnerships, or homophobia –, these need not form the core focus of the works. In addition, while there are grounds

⁶⁷ See pages 50-52 and 76-78 for a more detailed discussion of *La Squale*.

⁶⁸ See page 48-49 and 65-75 for a more detailed discussion of Kassovitz's film *La Haine*.

⁶⁹ Lefort and Seguret, *op. cit.*

⁷⁰ Indeed, in the former, the eponymous hero, in his journey across France, explicitly avoids major cities. For a more detailed discussion of the film see pages 151-153 and 174-176.

for drawing parallels between *banlieue* cinema and contemporary political film, ‘gay films’ (even those in which questions related to ‘gay issues’ are addressed) would not necessarily be considered as engaging in any political sense with the topics referred to. Although the gay characters themselves, again, tend to be younger figures (characters in their 20s and 30s), just as we find in *banlieue* films, this is by no means a general rule. Indeed, a particularly interesting aspect of contemporary gay cinema is the shift away from youth towards a consideration of older gay and lesbian characters, as is the case, for instance, with the lesbian couple of Nicou and Brigitte in *Belle Maman* (Aghion, 1999) or Catherine Deneuve’s central lesbian character Marie Leblanc in *Les Voleurs* (Téchiné, 1996).

For the purposes of this project, ‘gay cinema’ is used to describe films in which a central role is played onscreen by gay or lesbian characters. They need not necessarily be the central characters as such, but their role will either be key to plot advancement or contribute significantly to the further development of the central characters. It will also become apparent that the themes raised in the verbal exchanges studied in ‘gay cinema’ will serve, firstly, as a cinematic commentary on the evolution of identity in the realm of sexualities over the course of the 1990s in France, but will also engage with aspects of the analysis offered in this thesis through the two other prisms used here, namely ethnicity and gender.

Key Film Texts: *La Haine* and *Les Nuits fauves*

This approach can perhaps best be illustrated by reference to two films released in the first half of the 1990s and representative, in many ways, of gay film and *cinéma de banlieue* respectively: *Les Nuits fauves* (Collard, 1992) and *La Haine* (Kassovitz, 1995). The former depicts part of the life of an HIV+ bisexual man, while the latter concentrates on a day in the life of three youths living in a housing scheme on the outskirts of Paris.

Les Nuits fauves

It is important to understand how these two films illustrate the key role played by cinema production and media coverage in the broader linguistic representation of minorities. *Les Nuits fauves* is a biographically-inspired work and its director and principal actor, Cyril Collard, died of an AIDS-related illness only a few days before

the film was to win four *César* awards (for Best Editing, Best Film, Best First Work, and Best Female Newcomer for its central female protagonist Romane Bohringer).⁷¹ Rather predictably, Collard's death increased media coverage of the work,⁷² helping to transform it from a relatively low-budget film which might never have made it out of the *cinéma d'art et d'essai* circuit, to a far more mainstream audience. The film's massive box office success in turn meant that the issues it tackled – sexuality, and more specifically, male bisexuality, a particular sexual lifestyle, questions of AIDS and HIV – were aired in the French press, and coverage of the film was not limited to straightforward reviews, but extended to a far broader debate of the 'issues' raised.⁷³ Indeed, expressions of this expansion of the film's subject matter into the realm of wider societal debates can also be found in coverage of the film outwith metropolitan France. Writing in *Sight and Sound* in June 1993, around the time of the release of *Les Nuits fauves* in the UK, Simon Watney, for example, took the opportunity to summarise the ineptitude with which successive French governments faced the arrival of HIV and AIDS. Taking the film as its point of departure, Watney's article takes to task the 'neglect', 'mismanagement', and 'continued inaction'⁷⁴ of official, governmental responses to AIDS and HIV in metropolitan France:

France has painstakingly created a catastrophic HIV epidemic, which at the same time is widely regarded as natural and inevitable. [...] This is what the late Hannah Arendt meant by "administrative massacre." And this is the context in which *Les Nuits fauves* was produced and received.⁷⁵

La Haine

Although there was no such biographical link upon which media focus could be placed in *La Haine*, its release and subsequent success at the Cannes Film Festival, coincided with a period during which the 'question' of *banlieue* living and, more particularly, issues related to so-called 'second and third generation' immigrants and

⁷¹ The film was released on October 21st 1992. Collard died on March 5th 1993 and the *César* ceremony in question was held on March 8th of the same year.

⁷² Simon Watney likened the effect of Collard's death on reception and analysis of *Les Nuits fauves* to the casting of 'a cloud of cultural beatification.' (Watney, 'The French Connection', *Sight and Sound*, June 1993, 24)

⁷³ See, for example, a series of articles published under the title 'Les Artistes et le Sida', *Le Monde*, April 30th 1992, including Colette Godard and Michel Guerrin, 'Créer en état d'urgence' and Danièle Heymann, 'Rencontre avec Cyril Collard.'

⁷⁴ Watney, *loc. cit.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

their place within French society, were at the media forefront.⁷⁶ The event which sets the 24-hour ball rolling in *La Haine* is the accidental but fatal police shooting of Abdel, a Maghrebi-French youth, during civil unrest. In the mid-1990s, around the time of the film's initial cinema release, a number of such fatal *bavures* occurred,⁷⁷ primarily involving young males, often of non-metropolitan French origin, either killed while in police custody or during altercations with police officers. The combination of social factors underlying the film's plot, contributed to its huge box office success, and led to a string of articles in the written press, not only about *La Haine* itself, but also, more broadly, about the issues it was seen to be raising in relation to life in contemporary urban France.

6. Media Debate

Both films take as their central characters members of what are understood here to be 'minority' communities in 1990s France, and analysis shows the dialogue of each to be highlighting the specificities of the spoken word in relation to members of 'minority' communities as we will see in Chapters 2 (Ethnicity) and 4 (Sexuality) in particular.⁷⁸ However, it is not only through verbal exchanges onscreen that these films lend themselves to in-depth study and interpretation. Rather, each contributed to a political and media dialogue surrounding minority groupings in 1990s France owing to its popular success and the intense media coverage and debate it inspired. It is firmly within the context of this broader societal debate that the verbal exchanges of such films are analysed here. Clearly, *Les Nuits fauves* and *La Haine* are, to an extent, exceptional cases, precisely because of the 'fortuitous' circumstances surrounding their release, and it is true that other individual films dealing with similar issues have not provoked such intense discussion or, indeed, achieved such box office success.

⁷⁶ For a detailed discussion of the film see Chapter 2.

⁷⁷ Research carried out by Maurice Rajsfus has shown that between 1981 and 1985 there was an average of 3 deaths per year. In 1986, the year in which the then Prime Minister Jacques Chirac stated publicly that the government was willing to 'couvrir la police si par malheur un accident arrivait', there were 8 deaths. From 1988 to 1993, these figures fell again to 5 per year but then, again under Charles Pasqua as Interior Minister, in 1993 alone, there were twice as many. These heavy-handed police blunders were often followed by, or indeed arose during, periods of unrest and demonstrations in *banlieue* areas (Vaulx-en-Velin near Lyon in 1990, Mantes-la-Jolie near Paris in 1991, Paris itself in 1993, etc.) which, in turn, served to focus the debate on the inhabitants of the *banlieues* and the vexed question of suburban living conditions in contemporary France. (Source Maurice Rajsfus, *La Police et la peine de mort* (Paris: L'Esprit frappeur, 2002; quoted by Pierre Tévanian, 'L'Insécurité dont on ne parle pas', September 27th 2004, accessed at http://lmsi.net/impression.php3?id_article=312 on September 2nd 2005)

⁷⁸ I use *La Haine* as a core film in the second chapter, while reference is made to aspects of *Les Nuits fauves* in the fourth chapter.

Nevertheless, *Les Nuits fauves* and *La Haine* do serve to illustrate the ways in which linguistic representations of minorities can, via media coverage, filter through from an onscreen depiction to French society as a whole, and thus engage with broader ongoing debates.

Increased Minority Audibility

It is precisely this onscreen engagement with media and political debate which also underlies the choice of *banlieue* and gay cinema as the focus of this thesis and which serves to demonstrate the particular relevance of the minority groupings considered within a contemporary context. This method of proceeding should by no means be equated with a suggestion that neither minority existed before the beginning of the period dealt with here (1990-2000). However, the existence of each grouping has become the focus of media and public debate in many new ways over recent years, beginning with the arrival in power of François Mitterrand's Socialist government in 1981, but culminating in the socio-political backdrop of 1990s France.

Coverage of the *banlieues* in French media outlet has increased substantially since the early 1980s⁷⁹ and, owing in part to the social and ethnic make-up of the *banlieues* in question (not to mention public prejudices regarding the inhabitants of these areas), it encompasses discussions related to immigration, unemployment, crime, gender relations in contemporary France, and the secularism of the post-colonial Republic:

By the early 1980s, dominant media discourses had begun to consolidate the notion of the *banlieue* as a 'problem', and *banlieue* youths as, for the most part, ethnic minority youths linked to crime and violence. The 1995 bombings orchestrated by Khaled Kelkal (an isolated [Islamic] fundamentalist terrorist from a *banlieue* in Lyon), reinforced the idea that the *banlieue*, home to a large proportion of the Muslim population of France, was also a recruitment ground for terrorists.⁸⁰

The *banlieues*, and interpretations of the *banlieue* 'problem' as primarily rooted in immigration and ethnicity, has been a permanent feature of media debate since the *Marche des Beurs* in 1983. It may not immediately be clear why the so-called *Marche des Beurs* should be viewed as a turning point in coverage of *banlieue* issues in

⁷⁹ Keith Reader identifies 1981 as the year in which 'the *banlieue* became the focus for a more widespread anxiety.' (Keith Reader, 'After the Riot', *Sight and Sound*, November 1995)

⁸⁰ Tarr, *op. cit.*, 6.

modern France, particularly since the ethnic mix of *banlieue* inhabitants is far broader than that which would come under the 'Beurs' label.⁸¹ However, it seems reasonable to suggest that its underlying motivation was a response to what have subsequently been considered *banlieue* issues in French media and political debate.

The march was originally called the *Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme*, rather than the *Marche des Beurs*, and it originated with the police shooting of Toumi Djaïdja during disturbances in the Minguettes housing scheme on the outskirts of Lyons. From his hospital bed, Djaïdja conceived the idea of a peaceful protest march across France to bring the problems faced by 'second and third generation immigrants' to wider public attention. The march left Marseille on October 15th 1983 and, by the time it reached Paris on December 3rd, public interest and media coverage had increased greatly. This interest was fuelled not only by a growing interest in the question of *banlieue* life, but also, more specifically, by the murder of a young Algerian murdered by supporters of the extreme right-wing Front National, and thrown from a train between Bordeaux and Ventimiglia. Shortly before this, the alliance right-wing parties had formed the extreme right-wing Front National in order to win the mayoral election in Dreux, and this combination of circumstances meant that, when it reached Paris, the protest march brought around 100 000 people into the streets.

In the motives for this demonstration, lies a summary of the issues which are seen as representing the '*banlieue* problem' in contemporary France: racism, inequality, the disillusionment of *banlieue* inhabitants who find themselves on the margins of French society, police repression, and the rise in strength of the extreme right in France particularly since the mid-1980s. None of these issues were resolved over the course of the 1980s, but rather they have remained a source of social conflict and of intense political, public and media debate since then. Indeed, they gained renewed prominence in the 1990s through the prism of broader debates on French republicanism as discussed below. Media and political discussions now encompass

⁸¹ *Beur* is a verlanised term (taken from *Arabe*) which refers to Maghrebi-French individuals, in other words individuals of Algerian, Moroccan, or Tunisian origin. Of the 1,611,008 immigrants (individuals not born in France, but resident there) in Paris in 1999, 466 608 came from the countries of the Maghreb, whereas, for example, 568 049 were born in other European countries. (Source *Atlas des populations immigrées en Ile-de-France*, accessed online at www.insee.fr on August 7th 2005)

not only those topics referred to above, but also include the question of the recognition of Islam within a secular French State, a tension which has been expressed most clearly through heated controversy over whether Muslim women should be allowed to wear the veil (*hijab*) in French schools, as discussed earlier.⁸²

As for the choice to include the gay community in the joint focus of this project, its importance in broader French terms can be charted in much the same way as can its centrality to wider societal debates, particularly since the beginning of the 1990s. The one key issue which has focused extensive media, public, and political attention on the gay community in France has been the question of same-sex partnerships, which has been a source of controversy throughout the 1990s. In 1991, the first proposal was drawn up for a form of contract⁸³ which could be entered into by same-sex couples but it was not until 1997 that the Socialist *Garde des Sceaux*,⁸⁴ Elisabeth Guigou, declared that the implementation of the law was ‘un engagement que nous avons pris et que nous tiendrons.’⁸⁵ From then until the implementation of the law creating what was eventually called the PACS (*Pacte civil de solidarité*), a great deal of media and public debate focused on the issues raised and placed the spotlight, to a large extent, on the gay community in France (despite the fact that the law, in fact, applies to unmarried straight couples as well as to same-sex partnerships).⁸⁶ This coverage included many debates and discussion programmes in mainstream media outlets and brought questions related to the day-to-day existence of gay and lesbian couples in France to the centre of debate.⁸⁷

⁸² The question of the secularity, or otherwise, of metropolitan France is one which lies outwith the direct focus of this thesis. It is, however, worth reiterating that such issues are fundamental to broader debates on reinterpretations of traditional French republicanism and the links between republicanism and secularism.

⁸³ The proposed contract underwent a number of name changes over the course of the 1990s, from PIC (Pacte d’Intérêt Commun), to CUC (Contrat d’Union Civique), to CUCS (Contrat d’Union Civique et Sociale), before legislation was voted and the PACS (Pacte civil de solidarité) was established in November 1999. The PACS enables non-married couples, regardless of the gender of the partners, to enter into a legally recognised partnership that offers a number of rights and responsibilities. The detail of the various versions of the contract included in this paragraph is drawn from an article published in *Libération* on February 11th 1998 (Blandine Grosjean, ‘La Vie hors mariage ne sera plus hors la loi’).

⁸⁴ Minister for Justice.

⁸⁵ Elisabeth Guigou, quoted in Grosjean, *op. cit.*

⁸⁶ See pages 92-97 in Chapter 3, and pages 137-145 in Chapter 4, for a more detailed discussion of the debates raised.

⁸⁷ The daily newspaper *Le Monde* published a special 16-page supplement explaining the arguments for and against the PACS and including the full wording of the proposal (‘Pour ou contre le PaCS’, October 10th 1998). Progress of the law through the parliamentary system regularly made front page news over an 18-month period. See, for example, front page spreads from *Libération* on February 11th

The PACS serves as an illustration of a growing mainstream awareness of, and interest in, the existence of the community. While it has been suggested that this apparent rise in general public awareness of gay issues in fact stems, at least in part, from an overlap between gay culture and youth culture,⁸⁸ the reasons behind it are of little importance when one considers the coverage it is accorded across mainstream media outlets that extend far beyond magazines or television programmes consumed by a mainly younger audience. It is clear that, while we are dealing here with a minority in numerical terms, the gay community is more important in the current context insofar as it represents a minority which has increasingly found itself engaging in a dialogue with mainstream French society. Furthermore, this increased dialogue, as well as focusing on the specific issues detailed above, also intersects with broader, ongoing debates on the nature of French republicanism and the challenges to its traditional interpretation which both gay and *banlieue* issues are seen to represent. It is to this topic that I shall now turn.

Minorities in the Republic?

A number of issues need to be addressed before a discussion of any topic relating to the notion of 'minority' groupings may be taken forward. These questions become particularly salient when such analysis is being undertaken against the specificities of a contemporary French backdrop because of the republican ideology implicit in that context. This is not to say that metropolitan France can necessarily be equated with republicanism in any straightforward sense but rather that interpretations of the fundamental principles which lay at the basis of *la République française* as founded in 1789 are, in contemporary France, an ongoing source of debate. Indeed, in the face of challenges from the shifting social and cultural realities of the nation-state, its founding ideology has been thrown into question, not least through the debates related to gay and *banlieue* groupings described above. These debates have divided political and popular opinion in France: the specific intersections between them and our three

1998 ('Une Réforme pour la vie à deux') or on October 11th/12th, 1998 ('Le Pacs rejeté à l'Assemblée'), or again *Le Monde's* front page from October 10th ('Etes-vous pour ou contre le PACS?').

⁸⁸ See, for instance, the article by Pascale Krémer and Jean-Michel Normand, 'L'Apparition d'un marketing ciblé sur fond de communautarisme', *Le Monde*, June 28th 1997, in which the authors assert that there is a 'succès grandissant' which is encountered by 'une "sensibilité gaie" dans plusieurs franges de la population: codes vestimentaires, musiques, modes de loisirs originellement estampillés 'gay' se diffusent, surtout chez les jeunes'.

core prisms of analysis will be examined in greater detail in the introductory stages of my central chapters.⁸⁹ What follows here is a brief summary of the terms of the debate as it has evolved over the period studied here.

Martel's 'tentation communautaire'⁹⁰

In 1996, French sociologist Frédéric Martel published a comprehensive history of gays and lesbians in France from 1968 to the year of publication.⁹¹ While providing an important resource for those working in the field of gay and lesbian studies, Martel also offered, in the 1996 epilogue to his work,⁹² a critical engagement with the traditional republican framework by which it was informed, setting forth a position which was opposed to the imposition of an American-style community-based model of society.

Pour parvenir à une meilleure intégration des minorités et des populations vulnérables et pour lutter plus efficacement contre l'exclusion, nos démocraties modernes connaissent une tentation communautaire.⁹³

Martel argues that this 'tentation communautaire'⁹⁴ should, on the one hand, be recognised as a trend existing in 1990s France. However, he further maintains that it should, at the same time, be viewed as a stepping stone towards a more productive model of broader societal identity construction, rather than a positive end goal to be achieved by the particular minority groupings concerned. The explicit focus of Martel's research is the lives and histories of gay people (and indeed primarily male homosexuals), and while his considerations in the epilogue highlight the question of the existence – or nascent existence – of a homosexual community, he draws parallels with other minority communities which may also be said to exist in contemporary France. His position, as expressed here, can thus be read as resolutely pro-republican

⁸⁹ See, for instance, pages 43-46, 91-97, and 137-145.

⁹⁰ Frédéric Martel, *Le Rose et le noir. Les Homosexuels en France depuis 1968* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1996), 398.

⁹¹ Martel, *op. cit.*

⁹² Martel's own view of the situation changed between the 1996 edition and the subsequent re-edition of the book in 2000, and he has accordingly rewritten the final stages, including the epilogue discussed here. I refer to the 2000 edition in more detail in the conclusion of this thesis but argue that the arguments put forward in the first publication are still of relevance insofar as they encapsulate the type of pro traditional republicanism stance characterised on pages 12-14 of this introduction.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 398.

⁹⁴ *Idem.*

in a traditional, anti-communitarian stance, arguing against the recognition of cultural difference on an individual or collective level.

In part, Martel's concern surrounding this 'tentation communautaire' stems from his contention that 'la logique communautaire mène quasi nécessairement à la logique identitaire',⁹⁵ which he views, in turn, as being at odds with the founding principles of French republicanism. While Martel is eager for those who feel the need for such a movement to have the freedom to fight for it, he also seems keen to ensure that the limits and ambiguities of such struggles be drawn to the fore.⁹⁶ He is keen to avoid, at all costs, what he views as an attempt to transfer the American model onto the French Republic, and his criticism of this model is scathing,⁹⁷ arguing that, had the 1970s gay movement and, later, AIDS activists in France acted differently,⁹⁸ there may well have been 'une victoire française d'assimilation (la société intègre les individus mais ne reconnaît pas les groupes) sur le modèle américain communautaire'.⁹⁹ The value judgement inherent in Martel's description is clear from his subsequent remark to the effect that America is a 'société qui cultive sa propre fragmentation au bénéfice de communautés juxtaposées'.¹⁰⁰

The notion of fragmentation will not be used negatively here, as it is by Martel. Instead, this thesis will seek to ask whether the 'fragmentation' at issue necessarily leads to breakdown, or can be read as a sign of positive and constructive transition.

Dialogue, Mediation, Negotiation

Paradoxically, perhaps, this notion of a possible positive outcome for fragmentation has its origins in Martel's 1996 epilogue. However clear Martel is that his own preference does not lie with an American model of society structured around minority communities, his discussion in the earlier epilogue does offer a constructive approach

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 403.

⁹⁶ 'Si je reste persuadé que ceux qui ressentent la nécessité d'un mouvement identitaire doivent se battre pour cela, comment se dispenser de souligner les limites de ce combat et ses ambiguïtés.' (Martel, *loc. cit.*).

⁹⁷ Eric Fassin, in his writings, makes it clear that the American model is seen by traditional republicans to present 'the ultimate threat' to French republicanism (Fassin, *op. cit.*, 217)

⁹⁸ I.e. where the former are concerned, had they not 'imported' such notions as coming out from the American model. Martel, *op. cit.*, 399.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 404.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 406.

to the topic. Indeed, even in the 1996 edition, his work can be read as positing a positive solution to the ongoing debate on the relevance of republicanism to a contemporary French context. Martel's analysis leads him to equate community with ghetto, suggesting, for example, that what may be regarded by some as the positive process of 'coming out',¹⁰¹ is in fact an expression of Foucauldian power relations which, although having the appearance of a voluntary, empowering act on the part of the person, in fact still forces him/her into processes of confession, thus placing the individual in the position of dominated, rather than dominating.¹⁰²

However, Martel is clear throughout that this risk is not a necessary component of the model but rather stems, at least in part, from the tendency on the part of those involved – individual members of the minority groupings concerned – to opt for either a 'communautarisme défensif' or a 'communautarisme offensif'.¹⁰³ Neither path lends itself to any kind of integration or assimilation within broader society,¹⁰⁴ but both options tend, in Martel's view, to highlight difference to the exclusion of the norm, i.e. difference as particularism which demands recognition, whereas others argue for equality through difference and an expansion of the terms of traditional French republicanism to encompass this notion.¹⁰⁵ He is, however, open to the suggestion that dialogue between communities or between minorities and majorities may, in some way, offer a solution to the problem, and he is keen to point out that universality and identity should not be opposed in too sweeping or simplistic a manner:

[L]a plupart des individus se situent néanmoins sur des positions qui sont des combinaisons de particulier et de l'universel [...]. En outre, il est certainement possible d'envisager une position intermédiaire, restant précisément à définir – sinon à inventer –, qui combinerait multiculturalisme avec défense de l'Etat républicain.¹⁰⁶

This thesis will draw on the assumption that such combinations are, in fact, viable in a contemporary context and that it is precisely this discursively produced 'position

¹⁰¹ I discuss a series of verbal exchanges which focus on the disclosure of an individual's sexuality on pages 172-176.

¹⁰² Martel, *op.cit.*, 399. This model, in turn, is reflected in the type of minority/majority binary I seek to avoid here in order to demonstrate the contingency of the oft-posed equation between minority and dominated or subordinate party.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 403.

¹⁰⁴ See Martel, *op. cit.*, 399.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Jacky Dahomay, *op. cit.*, which I will refer to in more detail in the Conclusion.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 404.

intermédiaire' which could be seen as being occupied, not only by the gay community which is the focus of Martel's project, but indeed by any minority grouping within metropolitan France. Indeed, if the fragmentation of French republican society so feared by Martel is to be construed positively as I aim to do in this thesis, it will be through dialogue between those communities that are now seen as divided by ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (corresponding to the three prisms of analysis into which this thesis will be divided). Cinema's contribution to this dialogue lies in its specificity as an interface and simultaneous site and source of interaction between minority and mainstream, by increasing public awareness and thereby strengthening bonds between individuals and the groups of which they consider themselves to be members within society.

7. Prisms of Analysis: Structure of the Thesis

In order to conduct the type of analysis set out in this introduction, the verbal exchanges studied will be framed through three distinct prisms – ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Each prism corresponds to one of the central chapters. In broad terms, these three areas of analysis have been chosen because the particular aspects of individual and collective identity with which they engage can be seen as embodying the three central challenges to contemporary republican values which have emerged in 1990s debates.¹⁰⁷ In his examination of gender identity within a contemporary Republican framework, Maxime Foerster points out that, while the founding principles of the Republic may indeed have been truly universal in their aims, the French State has, in practice, failed to live up to its founding theories.¹⁰⁸ Although Foerster is particularly interested in the challenges to the Republic which have been perceived to have been represented by the question of the role of women in society, and, more recently, the place of sexual minorities, this thesis will attempt to show that his observations could also usefully be extended to apply to the position of ethnic minorities living in France today. It may be tempting to assume that questions of ethnicity are dealt with

¹⁰⁷ It is for this reason that I have chosen not to use class as a prism of analysis in the current thesis, although I recognise that it is a framing device used by many working in the field of contemporary French film studies (see, for instance, the work of Martin O'Shaughnessy on political fictions, such as 'The return of the social in contemporary French cinema', in *Modern and Contemporary France*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (May 2003), 189-203 or Will Higbee's articles on 1990s and post-2000 French film cited throughout this thesis).

¹⁰⁸ See Maxime Foerster, *La Différence des sexes à l'épreuve de la République* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003).

primarily in *banlieue* film, leaving representations of gender and of sexuality more the focus of gay cinema. However, this thesis will further suggest that all three of these ‘challenges’ find their expression in each of the bodies of film studied here, which in turn illustrates the complexities of the dialogue between Republic and minorities. I will thus also draw together the analyses garnered through these distinct prisms in order to comment more fully, in the final stages of the conclusion, on the representation of the citizen which emerges and the contribution this makes to a depiction of minority groupings in contemporary France.

Each of the three chapters will first contextualise the questions to be addressed, illustrating their specific relevance to broader ongoing debates regarding the nature of French republicanism as critically interpreted in 1990s France. It will then provide a summary of the four core films selected for specific analysis, including an introductory and explanatory narrative of each. Finally, there will be an analysis of specific verbal exchanges from the four core films, with frequent reference in footnotes to similar scenes to be found across the genres. Further to the initial prism of analysis, each chapter will examine a specific type of verbal analysis within the corpus.

The first chapter will focus on verbal exchanges through the prism of ethnicity, focussing specifically on conflictual verbal encounters, as illustrated, in particular, in *Hexagone* (Chibane, 1994), *La Haine* (Kassovitz, 1995), *Rai* (Gilou, 1995), and *La Squale* (Généstal, 2000). The second chapter will shift focus to examine constructions of gendered identities in four key films, namely *Gazon maudit* (Balasko, 1995), *Douce France* (Chibane, 1995), *Ma 6-T va crack-er* (Richet, 1997), and *Belle Maman* (Aghion, 1999), concentrating on verbal exchanges around parent-child relationships. Analysis in the final central chapter will be conducted through the prism of sexuality, examining onscreen exchanges involving friends and lovers in *Pédale douce* (Aghion, 1996), *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!* (Bensalah, 1999), *Le Derrière* (Lemercier, 1999), and *Drôle de Félix* (Ducastel and Martineau, 2000). These three central chapters will pave the way to an attempt, in the conclusion, to come to terms with the central questions raised throughout the thesis. Does the existence of ‘minority’ groupings in contemporary France represent a threat to the cohesion of the Republic by seeming to challenge its centralizing, integrationist tradition? Or, on the other

hand, could this pluriculturalism not be taken as demonstrating the Republic to be 'le régime politique le plus *queer* qui puisse exister'?¹⁰⁹ Does the gay and *banlieue* cinema we will examine in these pages merely reaffirm the identity of separate communities, or does it rather function as an ideal site for construction and reconstruction?

¹⁰⁹ Foerster, *op. cit.*, 10. For the present project, the use of the term 'queer' here should not be taken as applying solely to the realm of sexuality; rather it refers more broadly to political, societal, or cultural movements which challenge the hegemony of a presupposed norm.

Chapter 2

From *bleu, blanc, rouge* to *black, blanc, beur...* and back again: Verbal Constructions and Expressions of Ethnicity in French Minority Cinema

Banlieue popular culture, especially film, bears witness to the complexity of contemporary identities.¹¹⁰

The first prism of analysis I will use here is that of ethnicity, and more precisely the ways in which ethnic identities are constructed, challenged, and renewed through verbal exchanges in the corpus of films under examination. Given that the focus of this thesis falls equally upon *banlieue* and gay cinema and that there is some degree of overlap between these two, it would have been possible to choose examples from the latter category of films for analysis in this chapter. However, I have selected four works from the *banlieue* film genre, since, as I illustrate below, it often focuses so explicitly and in such a significant and wide-reaching way on the questions and issues at stake here. Reference will be made, in footnotes, to parallel verbal encounters in gay films.

As I will illustrate below, there is to be found, throughout *banlieue* cinema, a tendency for identities to be constructed or expressed, at least in part, through conflictual verbal encounters and exchanges, and it is this trend which will form the backbone of the analysis here. The evidence presented in this chapter will demonstrate that, as well as expressing dissatisfaction with the *status quo*, the use of conflictual verbal encounters as the main expression of ethnicity onscreen in fact serves to engage with broader debates on the terms and definitions of contemporary French republicanism.

The analysis of the dialogue of the four key film texts selected for this chapter will centre around the two primary types of conflict referred to in the introductory stages of this chapter before moving towards a conclusion which will draw these strands

¹¹⁰ Erin Schroeder, 'A Multicultural Conversation: *La Haine*, *Raï*, and *Menace II Society*', *Camera Obscura* 46, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2001), 145. It is important to note that Schroeder emphasises her view that a reading of *banlieue* films should not be limited to one concentrating on racial and ethnic identities, but rather that it should engage with broader issues relevant to contemporary French republican society.

together into a broader consideration of conflictual verbal expressions of ethnicity across *banlieue* cinema. The structure of the chapter will be as follows. Firstly, in the introductory sections, I will discuss, on the one hand, the relevance of language to constructions of ethnic identity and, on the other hand, the relevance of ethnicity within the broader contemporary French republican framework. The second section of the chapter will be dedicated to an examination of the four films which will form the core of the analysis. This will lead on to a section detailing the relevance of an examination of conflictual encounters in *banlieue* cinema, in particular, followed by a description of the two specific types of encounter upon which analysis will be based, namely, schematically described, ‘*banlieue* versus the Republic’ and ‘intergenerational.’ The remaining stages of the chapter will then be divided between analyses of verbal encounters in a number of scenes which exemplify *banlieue*/Republic conflicts, on the one hand, and intergenerational conflicts on the other.

1. Language, Ethnic Identity Construction, and French Republicanism

Recognition of the role that language plays in constructions of ethnic identity is well-established within both sociolinguistic and cultural theoretical frameworks. As Roxy Harris and Ben Rampton make clear in the introduction to their collection of ‘argumentative dialogues’¹¹¹, *The Language, Ethnicity and Race Reader*:

Language, ethnicity and race have been taken together in discussions that focus on long-term historical processes and on wide-ranging global ones, they have featured together in accounts of state policy and institutional practice, they have figured in analyses of the fine-grain of how individuals interact with one another face-to-face, and they have been key issues in attempts to describe how individuals think.¹¹²

Clearly, therefore, language has a key role to play in the construction and expression of ethnic identities, a role which has an impact not only within individual speech communities, or within the boundaries of the nation-state, but also in a transnational and globalised context. The contribution this chapter makes to the overall development of the thesis lies in its expansion of a study of linguistic developments of ethnic identity to encompass an examination of this phenomenon through the highly

¹¹¹ Roxy Harris, and Ben Rampton (eds.), ‘Introduction’, in *The Language, Ethnicity and Race Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

¹¹² Harris and Rampton, *op. cit.*, 2.

popular, and influential, medium of cinema. As stated in the introductory chapter, examinations of onscreen representations of minorities (including ethnic minorities) have tended – and this trend continues – to focus on visual depictions, leaving the question of the role played by the spoken word and by dialogue largely unexplored.¹¹³ By looking at dialogue in *banlieue* and gay films, it is this specific area which I will examine here, engaging at once with broader frameworks of minority/mainstream relations and their extension to the domain of ethnicity, and with the particularities of cinema as *audio*-visual medium and, as such, its privileged potential as channel of mediation between minority and mainstream, and indeed back again.

Questions related to ethnicity and their impact on redefinitions of ‘Frenchness’ (immigration, for instance; the right to French citizenship; or the rise of Islam in France) are particularly salient in contemporary evaluations of metropolitan French republicanism. On the one hand, such issues have played an increasingly prominent role in media, political, and public debate and discourse since the early 1980s, and most acutely since 1989 and the first *affaire du foulard islamique*, coinciding, as it did, with the bicentennial celebrations of the 1789 Revolution. A good deal of public and media debate surrounding this *affaire* centred on the question of the rise of Islam with ‘the *hijab* [...] constructed as a dire threat to this [republican] identity and the ban [viewed] as a bulwark against Islamic fundamentalism.’¹¹⁴ The significance of both debate and ban was more wide-reaching in that it served to exemplify broader concerns regarding the position of immigrant, and ex-immigrant, populations in France:

[E]n projetant sur cet événement mineur, d’ailleurs aussitôt oublié, le voile des grands principes, liberté, laïcité, libération de la femme, etc., les éternels prétendants au titre de maître à penser ont livré, comme dans un test projectif, leurs prises de position inavouées sur le problème de l’immigration.¹¹⁵

The types of issue raised here have also, over the same period of time, found their way into popular culture, through the (problematic) development first of *beur* cinema

¹¹³ See Introduction, pages 19-22.

¹¹⁴ Ezekiel, *op. cit.*, 231.

¹¹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, quoted in Dominique Vidal’s review of *L’Affaire du foulard islamique* by Saïd Bouanama, in *Le Monde diplomatique*, November 2004, 35 (Accessed online at <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2004/11/VIDAL/11691> on June 11th 2005).

in the 1980s, then of *banlieue* film from the early 1990s onwards,¹¹⁶ and more recently with discussions of a strand which can be positioned at the intersection between *beur* and *banlieue* cinemas, which Bluher terms ‘hip-hop cinema.’¹¹⁷ In terms of this “spilling over” into popular culture, it is also important to bear in mind the interweaving of film, other media (and press coverage in particular), and political discourses, and the combined effect these features have on the development of broader considerations of minority groupings,¹¹⁸ and ethnic minorities more specifically. To quote Jeremy Jennings:

[T]he political malaise that has afflicted France since the late 1980s [...] has served to push the issue of (legal and “illegal”) immigration towards the top of the political agenda[.] ...Thus, if France now experiences lower levels of immigration than it did at the beginning of the [twentieth] century, there exists *a greater awareness or acknowledgement that France is a multi-ethnic society characterised by considerable cultural diversity.* [My emphasis]¹¹⁹

The aim of the later sections of this chapter which examine specific verbal exchanges from the four core films chosen will be to demonstrate that this facet of identity construction in *banlieue* cinema is based on conflicts. However, these conflicts will not be examined solely in negative terms related to their potential to lead to destruction, but rather I will aim to analyse them as encounters and exchanges which combine to construct a challenge ‘du dedans’¹²⁰ to the republican model, to ‘reformulate the republican model from within the republican paradigm.’¹²¹

¹¹⁶ I discussed the disputed generic term *banlieue* cinema in the Introduction (see pages 26-28). With regard to *beur* cinema similar debates are ongoing as to the usefulness of the term, particularly in relation to questions of authenticity and authorial intention since *beur*, while having entered common parlance, is not a universally accepted term, even by some of those it is used to describe.

¹¹⁷ See recent work by Dominique Bluher for an interesting discussion of the notion of ‘hip-hop cinema’, for instance ‘Hip-Hop Cinema in France’, *Camera Obscura*, Vol. 17, No. 46 (2001), 77-97.

¹¹⁸ For evidence of the ways in which issues related to gender in the *banlieues* spilled over from cinema to media coverage and vice versa in the late 1990s, see page 141 and my discussion of so-called *tournantes*.

¹¹⁹ Jennings, *op. cit.*, 575-6.

¹²⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *op. cit.*, 119.

¹²¹ Jennings, *op. cit.*, 589.

2. Corpus: *Hexagone*, *La Haine*, *Rai*, and *La Squale*

Firstly, however, it is necessary to identify the four films whose dialogues will form the basis of the analyses offered in this chapter and to provide a brief discussion of each on a number of levels. As I have discussed above, while the focus of this thesis falls equally on both *banlieue* and gay cinema in 1990s France, the core texts studied in this chapter will be drawn solely from the former.¹²² The four films at the heart of this chapter are *Hexagone* (Chibane, 1994)¹²³, *La Haine* (Kassovitz, 1995)¹²⁴, *Rai* (Gilou, 1995)¹²⁵, and *La Squale* (Généstal, 2000)¹²⁶ and it is hoped that the spread of release dates (from February 1994 to November 2000 for metropolitan France) will show that the arguments put forward do not only apply to an iconic *banlieue* film such as *La Haine*, but can be taken to describe *banlieue* cinema as a genre, and, beyond this, viewed as a comment upon wider discussions of the position of ethnic minorities within contemporary French society.

Hexagone

Taking the films chronologically, Malik Chibane's *Hexagone* was released in 1994 and is set, and was filmed, in the Parisian suburb of Goussainville¹²⁷ where Chibane had lived for most of his life. *Hexagone* focuses on a trio of friends of Maghrebi origin – Ali (Karim Chakir), Staf (Hakim Sarahoui), and Slim (Jalil Naciri) – 'whose daily lives are occupied with questions of unemployment, passing time, drugs, and relations with friends, girls, and their parents.'¹²⁸ Staf and Slim are trying to find work, while Ali, whose role is less prominent than that of the other two, studies

¹²² It is important to note that analyses in the other two central chapters will focus on examples from both bodies of cinema and that reference will be made, in the current chapter, in footnotes, to examples from gay cinema where relevant.

¹²³ *Hexagone* was given a positive reception by the critics. In terms of box office figures, its success was limited insofar as it was seen by 16 219 people during the 18 weeks of its release in Paris and 40 545 people across France. However low these figures may seem, it must be borne in mind that this was an independently financed film and was released in only one cinema in Paris. (see David-Alexandre Wagner, 'Films de banlieue et engagement personnel: une comparaison de l'engagement dans *Le Thé au harem d'Archimède*, *Hexagone* et *La Squale*', in *Cinéma et engagement*, eds. Graeme Hayes and Martin O'Shaughnessy (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), 332.

¹²⁴ *La Haine* was released in May 1995 and, in total, has had 1,978,328 viewers across France. (Tarr, *op. cit.*, 216)

¹²⁵ Released approximately a month after the highly successful *La Haine*, *Rai*'s box office figures are decidedly more modest with 126 419 viewers across France. (Tarr, *op. cit.*, 216)

¹²⁶ Popular and critical reception of *La Squale* was mixed, although its release was accompanied by a high degree of media hype. It was released on 20 screens in Paris but only attracted 40 400 viewers, of whom half saw the film during the first week of its release, and 58 000 viewers throughout France. (Wagner, *op. cit.*, 332)

¹²⁷ In the North-Eastern suburbs of Paris, in the Val d'Oise.

¹²⁸ Bluher, *op. cit.*, 86.

computing at university. The film follows the friends from apartment to apartment, from job centre to street corner, and highlights the monotony of the trio's daily routine. Tension is brought into the plot, firstly, through Staf and Slim's relationships (Staf is just beginning a relationship with 'a blond, and white, "French" Frenchwoman,'¹²⁹ Annick (Corrine Colas), while Slim is involved with Staf's younger sister, Nacéra (Faiza Kaddour), unbeknownst to Staf) and, secondly, through a plotline involving Slim's drug-addicted brother Samy (Farid Abdedou) who fatally overdoses at the end of the film.

In aesthetic terms, *Hexagone* has the look of an amateur début film, somewhat unsurprisingly since it was shot, on a very low budget,¹³⁰ in Garges-la-Gonesse, by a first-time director working with a predominantly non-professional cast and crew.¹³¹ Although Chibane, in interviews, has spoken of his desire to offer something of an antidote to the image of the *banlieues* constantly offered by the media,¹³² he has also made it explicitly clear that at least part of his intention with *Hexagone* was to 'rappeler que ces cités et leurs habitants font bien partie du paysage français':¹³³

Les jeunes d'ici sont beaucoup plus profondément français qu'ils ne l'imaginent. [...] Le regard de la plupart des autres Français sur les Maghrébins retarde.¹³⁴

Chibane's desire, with *Hexagone*, was to 'rendre visible culturellement sa génération de beurs et beures de banlieue parisienne'¹³⁵ and the influence of this film on subsequent *banlieue* productions can be seen, for instance, in the words of Madj

¹²⁹ Bluher, *ibid.*

¹³⁰ 600 000 French francs initial budget (source Pascal Mérieau, 'Hexagone, de Malik Chibane, Si Loin, si proche', *Le Monde*, February 3rd 1994) and the film's release (two years after filming was completed) was helped by the support of FEMIS (now the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Métiers de l'Image et du Son) and funding from Bernard Tapie, then Ministre de la Ville, which meant that it could be transferred from 16mm to 35mm for general release (source Bernard Philippe, 'Hexagone, de Malik Chibane, De la cité au ciné', *Le Monde*, February 3rd 1994). Karim Chakir had played a small role in a television production in 1990 (*Taggers*, a television film directed by Cyril Collard), but none of the other main actors had appeared on screen before.

¹³¹ Bluher, *op. cit.*, 81, 82, and 93. Chibane was the president of a Goussainville-based association, Idriss, which specialised in 'le soutien scolaire et l'organisation des loisirs' and was inspired to direct the film by the death of a friend from an AIDS-related illness. (source Bernard Philippe, *op. cit.*)

¹³² See, for instance, Bernard Philippe's article 'Un long-métrage dans les cités de Goussainville. Les jeunes de la banlieue nord "tournent" sur eux-mêmes', *Le Monde* 22nd April 1992.

¹³³ Philippe, *op. cit.*

¹³⁴ Chibane cited in Philippe, *op. cit.*

¹³⁵ Wagner, *op. cit.*, 333. Wagner explains in a footnote to this quote that the expression 'rendre visible culturellement' is used by Chibane in a leaflet which accompanied the video of *Hexagone*.

Benaroudj, co-screenwriter of the 2002 *banlieue* film *Wesh Wesh qu'est-ce qui se passe?* (Ameur-Zaïmèche, 2002):

Il faut avoir en tête que quand on a commencé à écrire le film, *La Haine*, *Ma 6-T va crack-er* ou *Raï* n'étaient pas sortis. Il n'y avait que *Hexagone*, de Malik Chibane, ou *Le Thé au harem d'Archimède*¹³⁶ de Mehdi Charef.¹³⁷

La Haine

In comparison, Mathieu Kassovitz's second feature-length work¹³⁸ *La Haine* has a far more polished aesthetic, released in strikingly harsh black and white. Like *Hexagone* it also focuses on a trio of central characters. However, whereas all three of Chibane's central characters are of Maghrebi origin, in *La Haine* we have a *black, blanc, beur* [black, white, Arab] structure, adapting the symbolism of the French tricolour to the social and ethnic realities of metropolitan France. Kassovitz follows 24 hours in the lives of Hubert (*black*, played by Hubert Koundé), Vinz (*blanc*, Jewish, and played by Vincent Cassel), and Saïd (the *beur* character played by Saïd Taghmaoui), 24 hours which follow on from a night of rioting in the three youths' home housing scheme – the *Cité des Mugets*, the film itself was shot, in part, in the Parisian suburb of Chanteloup – following a police *bavure* in which a 16-year-old youth of Maghrebi origin, Abdel, had been fatally injured. As well as the more general tensions provoked by the *bavure*, we also learn that a police gun has been lost during the riots, and we soon discover that it is in the possession of Vinz. It is obvious from the outset that *La Haine* is racing towards a dramatic destructive climax, and the undercurrent of tension, threat, and violence intensifies right up to the final scene which sees Vinz – and presumably Hubert, although we do not see his body – shot by police.

La Haine has achieved a level of critical and popular acclaim¹³⁹ which has eclipsed Chibane's *Hexagone*, and indeed most other *banlieue* films. Presented in the official

¹³⁶ Predating *banlieue* film by almost a decade, the popularity of Charef's film, released in 1985, can be seen, not only in terms of the critical awards it received (Prix Jean Vigo, Prix de la Jeunesse at Cannes, and the César for Best First Film), but also in terms of its box office figures, with 175 000 viewers in Paris alone. (see Wagner, *op. cit.*, 332)

¹³⁷ Interview with Madj Benaroudj given to www.monsieurcinema.tiscali.fr cited in Wagner, *op. cit.*, 333.

¹³⁸ His full-length directorial début came with *Métisse* released in 1993.

¹³⁹ Following its screening and success at Cannes, around 260 copies of *La Haine* were in circulation in French cinemas, although its producers had initially thought that only 50 copies need be produced.

competition at Cannes, *La Haine* earned Kassovitz the Best Director prize and went on to win *Césars* for Best Editor, Best Film, and Best Producer, as well as being nominated, again, for Best Director and Most Promising Young Actor for its trio of stars (Cassel, Taghmaoui, and Koundé).¹⁴⁰ Its privileged status as an iconic *banlieue* text continues to the present day with the release, to celebrate the film's tenth anniversary, of a new DVD,¹⁴¹ and renewed media coverage, not only of the release of the DVD, but more generally of the film's impact.¹⁴²

Rai

In many ways, the success of *La Haine* overshadowed the release of Thomas Gilou's *Rai* in the same year. As is the case in *Hexagone* and *La Haine*, *Rai* presents us with a small group of central protagonists, rather than a single central character, and again the action follows the relatively mundane day-to-day existences of its characters, as we watch them hang around their housing scheme, go to nightclubs, and sit around in various apartments. As Erin Schroeder puts it, 'we spend much fairly inconsequential time with groups of youth'¹⁴³ and, as in *Hexagone*, tension is frequently expressed in relation to drugs and women. The most prominent of the core group of central characters (all of whom are, as in *Hexagone*, of Maghrebi origin), Djamel (Mustapha Benstiti), has fallen in love with Sahlia (Tabatha Cash) and is eager to offer her a new beginning, but is then disappointed by her (she sleeps with one of his friends) and his previously calm, mature nature turns to an expression of frustration and rage directed against the police.¹⁴⁴ At the same time, Djamel's brother, Nordine (Samy Nacéri), like Slim's brother in *Hexagone*, is a drug addict, who owes large sums of money to his dealer and ends up being shot by a policewoman who (mistakenly) believes him to be armed, in a climax reminiscent to the infamous ending of *La Haine*. Like Chibane –

(Source Pascal Mérieau, 'Les Jeunes de Chanteloup ne se sentent pas trahis par *La Haine* de Mathieu Kassovitz', *Le Monde* June 6th 1995)

¹⁴⁰ Although the three central roles were played by professional actors, around 300 bit parts in the film were recruited by Kassovitz's casting director and his assistant in the Parisian suburbs through adverts on the radio, in schools, and via word-of-mouth, and all of the extras were inhabitants of the Chanteloup-des-Vignes housing scheme where half of the film was shot. (Source Pascal Mérieau, 'Comment Mathieu Kassovitz a recruté les acteurs de *La Haine*', *Le Monde* June 1st 1995)

¹⁴¹ The re-released 10th anniversary edition DVD also included new subtitles, audio commentary from Mathieu Kassovitz, and 'After the Riot', an essay on the film by Keith Reader, *op. cit.*

¹⁴² See, for instance, Serge Douhaire's article '*La Haine* est toujours là' in *Libération*, Friday June 3rd 2005 in which he states 'Dix ans plus tard, la fracture sociale s'est aggravée et *La Haine* revient clamer sa rage en DVD dans une édition à la hauteur de son statut culte.'

¹⁴³ Schroeder, *op.cit.*, 148.

¹⁴⁴ The film ends with Djamel leading a group of youths to the local police station with the clear intention of destroying it.

and, to a lesser extent, Kassovitz – Gilou also chose to involve *banlieue* inhabitants directly in the making of his film. As he explained at the time:

I scoured drama schools and acting classes and I didn't find anyone with enough authenticity to do it. So I auditioned for people from the *banlieue*. It was incredible. People were just naturals. Some told me every day in their normal lives they had to act a certain part so it came easy to them.¹⁴⁵

Like *La Haine*, *Raï* also received a degree of critical acclaim, albeit on a lesser scale than Kassovitz's slice of *banlieue* living, winning the Golden Leopard at the 1995 Locarno Film Festival, in Switzerland, and earning a Special Prize at the same festival for Nacéri's depiction of Nordine. Overall, however, *Raï* was considered a less significant work, with a degree of scorn poured on the significance of its social comment due, at least in part, to Gilou's decision to cast Tabatha Cash (an ex-porn star) in the central female role.¹⁴⁶

La Squal

The final film which will feed into our analysis of the construction of ethnic identities in French minority cinema is *La Squal*, directed by Fabrice G  n  stal and released in 2000 amid something of a media storm provoked by the brutality of the film's initial sequences which include a scene of gang rape, and subsequent branding of the female victim, instigated by the film's main, male, black character Toussaint (Tony Mpoudja). The film focuses, in many ways, on questions of revenge and justice, focussing on the central characters of gang leader Toussaint and newcomer D  sir  e (the *squal* [shark] of the title, played by Esm   Lawson),¹⁴⁷ who claims to be the illegitimate daughter of Souleymane, the *cit  *'s most infamous, quasi-mythical (it is with a letter "S" that Toussaint brands his victims), ex-inhabitant. D  sir  e becomes a member of a smaller girl gang, falls for Toussaint, and has a brief relationship with

¹⁴⁵ Taken from 'Nouveau French Cinema Exposed' by Paul Myers in *Straight No Chaser* 34 (1995), as quoted in Schroeder, *op. cit.*, 156. In English in the text.

¹⁴⁶ Jean-Michel Frodon, for instance in an article entitled 'Le Jeune Cin  ma Fran  ais conna  t un renouveau prometteur', in *Le Monde* of June 29th 1995 singles out other *banlieue* works of the 1995 *cuv  e* as worthy of praise (*La Haine*, for instance, and *Etat des lieux* by Jean-Fran  ois Richet) for their incisive social comment but argues that *Raï* and others in the same vein, 'prennent [...] "le social" comme d  cor, sinon comme pr  texte folklorique pour y imposer leurs m  canismes de fiction plut  t que de se mettre    l'  coute de ce qui se pass  .'

¹⁴⁷ In an interview with the youth magazine *Phosphore*, G  n  stal explained that the term *squal* is generally masculine (*un squal*) and is used to refer to petty criminals. 'On dit "un" squal, en principe, pour designer un lascar, la racaille.' Florence Monteil, "'J'ai voulu montrer le machisme violent et concret'", *Phosphore*, December 2000, 11.

him during which she falls pregnant. Toussaint, however, is also attracted to another, far quieter, inhabitant of the *cité* in the shape of Yasmine (Stéphanie Jaubert), with whom he also manages to have the beginnings of a relationship but who witnesses him being physically and sexually assaulted by another man in revenge for the initial rape. Yasmine is also later raped by Toussaint. Désirée, who is witness to this final rape, attempts to stab Toussaint, but fails and is then physically assaulted by him, before he escapes. Désirée decides to wreak vengeance on Toussaint, by setting him up. She steals drugs from a hideaway he had previously showed her, stashes them in Toussaint's bedroom, and ensures, first that the "rightful owners" of the drugs are caught by the police, and then that Toussaint's fellow gang members believe him to be responsible for their capture. Toussaint is eventually fatally stabbed by the gang member who had previously been his constant sidekick.

For some critics, *La Squale* represents a breakthrough, at least in gender terms, within the broader genre of *banlieue* cinema, insofar as one of its two central characters, the *squale* of the title, is a young black woman, and in that it recognised the phenomenon of girl gangs in some *banlieues* in the late 1990s. Given the general exclusion of women from the narrative of *banlieue* films throughout the 1990s, other than in their roles as sisters, mothers or sexual conquests, this shift in gendered focus did, indeed, represent a novel approach. I would, however, argue that the film still does not merit being heralded as quite the break from misogyny it was portrayed as representing in some quarters,¹⁴⁸ beginning, as it does, with a graphic depiction of gang rape and ending with the central female character, pregnant by Toussaint, speculating on the unborn baby's future (or otherwise) and stating that, if it is a girl, she will keep it, whereas if it is a boy, she will abort. I would strongly question whether this merits the positive descriptions of the film as a site of feminist counter-attack.

In an interesting parallel with the director of the first film chosen here, *Hexagone*, Fabrice Génystal was also a first-time director, raised in a housing scheme in Pantin. Before turning to film-making, Génystal taught in a secondary school in the Parisian suburb of Sarcelles, but gave up his post within *l'éducation nationale* to make *La*

¹⁴⁸ Witness, for example, Benjamin Barthe's article in *L'Humanité* under the headline '*La Squale*, un point de vue féminin sur le monde des cités', with the subtitle 'Banlieue, les meufs contre-attaquent' *L'Humanité* on December 2nd 2000 (accessed online at <http://www.humanite.presse.fr/journal/2000-12-02/2000-12-02-235682> on June 8th 2005).

Squale,¹⁴⁹ although, interestingly, the film was made with the support of the Ministry for Education and some of Généstal's pupils.¹⁵⁰ The film triggered wide-scale media debate, as was discussed in the introductory chapter, particularly surrounding the issue of "les tournantes"¹⁵¹ and earned its director a nomination for the *César* for Best First Work. Whereas Chibane and Kassovitz, in particular, selected specific, recognisable *banlieues* as the backdrop to their films, Généstal shot *La Squale* on location in a number of Parisian housing schemes, constructing what he describes as 'une cité imaginaire, où rien, pas un élément architectural, pas un souvenir des villages d'avant les cités, ne vient racheter la misère matérielle et esthétique.'¹⁵²

In order to ensure that the focus of analysis here remains as sharp as possible, I have chosen to centre the examination on these four films which represent different stages in the development of the genre of *banlieue* cinema. However, this should not be taken as an indication that the comments made in relation to these works and the constructions/expressions of ethnic identity to be found in them, could not equally be applied to other works of French minority cinema. Peripheral references will be made throughout to other films, in particular other examples of *banlieue* cinema, in which similar linguistic phenomena are to be found and in which these uses of the spoken word contribute to the construction of similar challenges to traditional republican understandings of "Frenchness".

3. Ethnic Identity Construction Mediated Through Conflict

As I described in the introduction to this chapter, there is a marked tendency, throughout *banlieue* cinema, for identities to be constructed or expressed, at least in part, through conflictual verbal encounters and exchanges. Academics and critics alike, whether writing about the genre of *banlieue* cinema or about individual works exemplifying it, have highlighted this constant presence of conflict, confrontation, or

¹⁴⁹ Frédéric Chambon, 'La Squale, une fiction militante pour alerter l'opinion', *Le Monde* November 29th 2000.

¹⁵⁰ Jacques Mandelbaum, 'Le film *La Squale* n'est plus interdit aux moins de seize ans', *Le Monde* September 11th 2000.

¹⁵¹ Slang term for gang rapes which seeped into media coverage around the release of the film. For more detailed discussion (see page 141).

¹⁵² Thomas Sotinel, 'Deux rencontres frappantes avec des filles des villes', *Le Monde* November 29th 2000.

the potential for conflict or confrontation to erupt, and its importance to the overall depiction of minority groupings is clear across writings on *banlieue* film.

In his review of Jean-François Richet's 1997 *banlieue* film *Ma 6-T va crack-er*, Jacques Mandelbaum refers to Richet's first work, *Etat des lieux* (1995) as 'un petit film insurrectionnel prometteur'¹⁵³ and criticises the 1997 film for its relentless conflict: 'Pas une scène ne s'achève sans tourner au baston.'¹⁵⁴ In his review of *Etat des lieux*, Mandelbaum's colleague at *Le Monde* had explicitly referred to one particular scene in the film which contains a 'grand moment d'amour sous forme d'engueulades'¹⁵⁵, making it clear that tension underlies every other emotion in this key *banlieue* text.¹⁵⁶ In his description of the ending of *La Haine*, Pascal Mérieau refers to the moment 'où la violence des attitudes et des mots rattrape les personnages et leur éclate au visage,'¹⁵⁷ this tension which has underscored the preceding 90 minutes of film. Jean-Michel Frodon, in his review of the film, refers to its 'parades de séduction et [ses] rituels d'affrontement'¹⁵⁸ [my emphasis] and, many of the reviews and articles published around the film's US release tied together the film's constant depiction of tension, confrontation, and conflict, with its questioning of ethnicity and ethnic identities in contemporary France.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ Jacques Mandelbaum, 'Ma 6-T va crack-er. Film français de Jean-François Richet', *Le Monde* May 17th 1997.

¹⁵⁴ Mandelbaum *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁵ Jean-Michel Frodon, 'Un jeune réalisateur et son interprète renouent avec le cinéma "engagé"', *Le Monde* June 15th 1995.

¹⁵⁶ It is worth noting, as a further reflection on the complexities underlying the *banlieue* film label, that Richet, the film's co-creator alongside Patrick Dell'Isola, does not consider it a "*banlieue* film", and indeed questions the very relevance of the term: '*Etat des lieux* n'est pas un film "sur la banlieue", c'est un film sur un ouvrier qui habite en banlieue. Je ne connais pas de film sur la banlieue, *Hexagone* est un film sur la deuxième génération d'immigrés maghrébins; *La Haine* sur les bavures policières.' (quoted in interview conducted by Jean-Michel Frodon and published in *Le Monde* on June 15th 1995 under the title 'Jean-François Richet et Patrick Dell'Isola "Il ne faut pas compter sur le milieu du cinéma."') While it is clear that Richet's explicit centre of interest lies in class struggles in contemporary urban France, I would nevertheless argue that the broad sweep of issues related to life in the *banlieues* to be found in his work, and the others he cites, does serve to draw them together usefully under the banner of *banlieue* cinema. Indeed, later in the same interview Richet describes the film he had then just started making (which would go on to become *Ma 6-T va crack-er*) as being 'vraiment sur la banlieue, la réalité de la violence, la présence des armes.'

¹⁵⁷ Mérieau, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁸ Jean-Michel Frodon, 'La dernière parade de ceux qui vont mourir', *Le Monde* May 30th 1995.

¹⁵⁹ See, for instance, Roger Ebert in the *Chicago Sun Times* who writes that the combination of ethnic origins of the three central characters 'have been singled out by age, ethnicity and appearance as probable troublemakers' (Review of *La Haine* published April 19th 1996). According to Edward Guthmann in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 'In Paris, the most idealized city in the world, African and Middle Eastern immigrants are marginalized, stuck into housing projects and harassed by cops.' ('The City of Light Shows It Has A Dark Side', published April 5th 1996) Guthmann goes on to describe the film as 'an in-your-face shriek.' Even reviewers who were less than positive about the film overall, like

And far from simply being a reflection of the news media's tendency or desire to focus on expression of social turmoil or conflict in *banlieue* cinema, this highlighting of the parallel strands of confrontation and ethnic identity construction, and the mediatory relationship between the two is also apparent in academic writings both on the genre as a whole, and on individual films. Lucy Mazdon, for instance, in the introductory essay to her edited collection *France on Film*, explains the significance of the *banlieues* in the French popular imagination as follows:

A significant proportion of [the *banlieues*'] inhabitants are from immigrant backgrounds and unemployment and poverty is rife. A number of violent clashes between young people and police erupted in the 1980s and as a result they now tend to bear popular connotations of violence and crime.¹⁶⁰

Naomi Greene, in her consideration of the ways in which Paris has been represented in French cinema from 1964 to 2004, and the ways in which these evolving representations correspond to an evolving understanding of Paris as a representation of France as a whole, states that *banlieue* cinema symbolised a break from 'vague allusions to contemporary woes'¹⁶¹ which were to be found in other 1980s and 1990s films. This break moved *banlieue* film explicitly towards 'an unrelenting look at one of the most pressing issues confronting the nation: the cluster of social problems – racism, violence, crime, – social disaffection – associated with France's so-called "immigrant" communities.'¹⁶² Sharma and Sharma, writing specifically about ethnicity in *La Haine*, describe the film as the 'depiction of a savage and sanguinary 24 hours in the lives of three racial minorities of France,'¹⁶³ suggesting that the film's opening credit sequence, for instance, 'seeks to connect [...] acts of resistance and rebellion to wider post-colonial struggles against racist state terror and social injustice.'¹⁶⁴ All of the above – and numerous other illustrations could have been cited from other academic works on *banlieue* film – make reference, on the one hand, to

Barbara Shulgasser writing in the *San Francisco Examiner*, picked up on the fact that the film 'is about violence in the projects outside Paris' and criticise the film for not allowing its central Jewish character, Vinz, to 'express his anger in a way that has something to do with French culture.' ('*Hate: Garçons in the hood?*' published April 5th 1996)

¹⁶⁰ Lucy Mazdon, 'Introduction', in ed. Mazdon, *op. cit.*, 3.

¹⁶¹ Naomi Greene, 'Parisian Images and National Transformations', in eds. Temple and Witt, *op. cit.*, 254.

¹⁶² Greene, *ibid.*

¹⁶³ Sanjay Sharma, and Ashwani Sharma, "'So Far So Good..." *La Haine* and the Poetics of the Everyday', *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2000), 104.

¹⁶⁴ Sharma and Sharma, *ibid.*

the constant thread of conflict which is present across the genre and, on the other hand, to the ways in which expressions of this conflict could/should be read as dissatisfied comment on the current make-up of metropolitan French society.

Similarly, Will Higbee, in his recent article on Mathieu Kassovitz's first three feature length works,¹⁶⁵ makes explicit reference to these films' engagement with 'contemporary socio-political debates of ethnicity, racism, exclusion, delinquency and violence',¹⁶⁶ and his extended discussion of *La Haine* in the same article suggests that:

In many ways, the most controversial aspect of *La Haine* is not the mise en scène of social exclusion, nor the representation of ethnicity and 'race'; rather, it is the theme of violence that runs through the film.¹⁶⁷ [my emphasis]

Rather than separating *La Haine*'s representation of ethnicity – or indeed that to be found across *banlieue* film as a genre – from the presence of a 'theme of violence', it is the contention of the current chapter that the two are inextricably linked. In other words, I argue that violence or, at the very least, conflict, provides a site and a source for the construction of complex contemporary ethnic identities for *banlieue* inhabitants as depicted onscreen. Furthermore, I argue that this construction is to be found against the specificities of the contemporary French republican backdrop and that, rather than simply viewing conflict as the primary means of expression open to disenfranchised *banlieue* youths, it in fact should also be considered as a way for those same youths to negotiate a place for themselves within the Republic. I do not disagree with Higbee's assertion that the 'destructive form of violent protest'¹⁶⁸ enacted in *La Haine* can, indeed, 'be seen as an attempt by the young inhabitants of the *cité* to acquire a semblance of power and autonomy over their own lives,'¹⁶⁹ but I do argue that this stance does not take the debate far enough.¹⁷⁰ Instead it continues to

¹⁶⁵ *Metisse*, *La Haine*, and *Assassin(s)* (1997), which, viewed together, Higbee refers to as Kassovitz's 'fracture sociale' trilogy. See Will Higbee, 'The return of the political, or designer visions of exclusion? The case for Mathieu Kassovitz's *fracture sociale* trilogy', *Studies in French Cinema*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2005), 123-135. Thanks to Phil Powrie for an advance copy of this article.

¹⁶⁶ Higbee, *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁷ *Idem.*

¹⁶⁸ *Idem.*

¹⁶⁹ *Idem.*

¹⁷⁰ It should be noted here that Higbee comes close to realigning these strands when he highlights the fact that the violence in *La Haine* is 'also typically directed towards the police as the embodiment of the state' (Higbee, *ibid.*) but the terms of his argument remain those of a conflict between centre and

contain it within established tropes and binaries, namely viewing marginalised youths in constant relation to their dissatisfaction with a societal *status quo*.

Categories of Onscreen Conflictual Verbal Encounters

Firstly, I will examine verbal conflicts which emerge between *banlieue* youths (predominantly, but not exclusively, male and of either Maghrebi or black origin) and representatives of republican authority, in the shape of the police, and ANPE¹⁷¹ employees in particular. The second type of conflict to be examined will be intergenerational and centred on questions of the difficult construction of ethnic identities which emerge in the four films chosen, most often between children and parents or grandparents. The analyses offered will not, as I have already indicated, take this rethinking of ethnic identities in such conflictual terms as a necessary indicator of a battle raging between the minority grouping and the dominant mainstream group, but rather as a sign that a negotiatory dialogue has been established, witnessed, and in some cases developed, through the medium of cinema, between the minority and the mainstream. While:

The idea of multiculturalism [can be] understood as a threat on the horizon, ready to fragment national identity into unrecognizable and irretrievable pieces, [...] the signifier *banlieue* also works at another level, when it refers to the many forms of cultural *production* that *originate in or address* what are recognisable as *banlieue* cultures.¹⁷²
[My emphasis]

This chapter seeks to demonstrate, through detailed analysis of onscreen verbal encounters, that, as well as expressing dissatisfaction with the *status quo*, the use of such exchanges as the main expression of ethnicity onscreen in fact serves to engage with broader debates on the terms and definitions of contemporary French republicanism. Just as *banlieue* youths' use of such slang techniques as *verlanisation* is viewed by some sociolinguists as a true engagement with standard French,¹⁷³ the

periphery, dominant and marginalised, rather than this being a step towards a redefinition or a re-expression of terms.

¹⁷¹ Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi: the French equivalent of British Job Centres.

¹⁷² Schroeder, *op. cit.*, 143.

¹⁷³ See, for instance, Boris Seguin and Frédéric Teillard, *Les Céfrans parlent aux Français* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1996). Others, such as Azouz Begag, for instance, have argued the opposite and asserted that this, in fact, represents a further contributory factor to the marginalisation of *banlieue* youths. (See Begag, 'Violent Changes. The *Beurs* and the *banlieues*', in *Black, Blanc, Beur: youth language and identity in France*, ed. Farid Aïtisselmi (Bradford: Dept. of Modern Languages, University of Bradford, 2000).)

evidence suggests that this undercurrent of conflict in particular relation to expressions of ethnicity be viewed as a meaningful engagement with France as nation-state and French republicanism as the dominant ideology of that nation-state with a view to adapting understandings of both to the realities of contemporary French society.

***Banlieue* versus the Republic?**

The first type of conflict central to the analysis offered here comes between *banlieue* members and figures of (republican) authority and it is this particular conflict which presents perhaps the most explicit challenge to the republican model. A number of factors common to *banlieue* films were identified in the introductory chapter, ranging from a focus on previously marginalised characters to the use of a particular (sub)urban backdrop as the setting for these works. There is, however, in the detail of a great number of films which can be classed under the *banlieue* film banner, another element which forms something of a *leitmotiv*, namely the inclusion of scenes in which one or more of a film's central characters comes into contact with a figure of authority who can be read, firstly, as a representative of the societal mainstream and, secondly, within the context of French cinema, as symbolising the values of French republicanism.

These authority figures range from police officers to schoolteachers to employees of state job agencies,¹⁷⁴ and their role as a trigger for the expression of conflict,¹⁷⁵ most

¹⁷⁴ As well as the examples focussed on here, examples could also have been drawn from other *banlieue* films. In *Etat des lieux* (Richet, 1995), for instance, the central character is also interviewed by an ANPE employee but becomes so frustrated by the bureaucracy and endless questions that he ends the interview by farting at the interviewer. In Richet's later film *Ma 6-T va crack-er* there is a series of scenes in which characters come into conflict with teachers and other school officials, but also in which some of the older characters are stopped and searched by police officers. In *La Squale*, as well as the scene I will discuss in more detail in this chapter, there is also an earlier heated encounter between the central male character and two members of staff (one male, one female) at the school from which he has been expelled. Examples can also be found in some of the gay films which form part of the corpus here, as in *Belle Maman*, which sees one of the central characters, Léa, mistakenly arrested for selling drugs to a minor and arguing with the police officers who are responsible for the paperwork surrounding her release.

¹⁷⁵ While the exchanges I will focus on here are structured around conflictual verbal exchanges, it is worth noting, in passing, an exception to this rule which emerges in another *banlieue* film, *Petits frères* (Doillon, 1999). The central characters here are substantially younger than in any of the other *banlieue* films I focus on (early teens, rather than late teens to early 30s) and the film includes a scene in which one of the group of central characters has a conversation with a police officer during which he asks the latter what one needs to do in order to become a 'flic.' The officer responds and talks him through the various stages and, when the boy recounts the conversation to his friends, he is impressed by the good

frequently around the pole of ethnic identity, is clear not only across the genre, but also in relation to broader ongoing debates around questions of ethnicity and republicanism. Jennings, in his discussion of republicanism and citizenship, dismisses arguments according to which the Republic 'is no longer a regulative ideal of significance in French politics'¹⁷⁶ and quotes Sudhir Hazareesingh in his explanation that 'there are "many important areas of French public life in which the legacy of republicanism [is] still potent."' ¹⁷⁷ Jennings further refers explicitly to 'ministerial pronouncements, especially in the areas of education and immigration'¹⁷⁸ in which 'the rhetoric of the Republic is frequently audible.'¹⁷⁹ And this rhetoric is audible not just in the confines of media and political debate on the "*banlieue* question" but also within *banlieue* cinema where central characters 'are constantly juxtaposed to the threatening *français-de-souche* white establishment, the signifier *par excellence* of France's mainstream population.'¹⁸⁰

The current section will examine a number of scenes taken from three of the four films focussed on here: a scene in *Hexagone* which sees Slim and Staf interviewed for job placements at their local ANPE; a number of scenes involving Vinz, Saïd, and Hubert and members of the French police force, but crucially a police interrogation scene involving Saïd and Hubert, in *La Haine*; and a short scene from *La Squale* in which Désirée and her friends bring conflict to the relative calm of a make-up store on the *Champs-Élysées*. The choice to focus attention on this relatively small sample of films should not, however, be taken as an indication that such conflictual encounters are, by any means, isolated occurrences.¹⁸¹ Rather, the focus on these particular

manners of the officer and the respect with which he treated him, 'il m'a sorti des mots du dictionnaire, oh là là là là.' Ordinarily, however, encounters between *banlieue* youths and representatives of the Republic onscreen do not result in such peaceful, positive exchanges.

¹⁷⁶ Jennings, *op. cit.*, 576.

¹⁷⁷ Jennings, *op. cit.*, quoting from Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), 65.

¹⁷⁸ Jennings, *op. cit.*, 576.

¹⁷⁹ Jennings, *ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Valerie Orlando, 'From Rap to Raï in the Mixing Bowl: *Beur* Hip-Hop Culture and *Banlieue* Cinema in Urban France', *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2003), 403.

¹⁸¹ I could, for instance, have examined the scenes from *Ma 6-T va crack-er* in which the younger central characters are brought before a representative of the *vie scolaire* offices at their school or in which the older characters are stopped, searched, and questioned by police officers; or, in a slightly lighter tone, any one of a number of scenes in *Le Plus Beau Métier du monde* (Lauzier, 1996) in which Gérard Depardieu plays a schoolteacher transferred from a quiet provincial secondary school to a *college* in the Parisian *banlieue*. There is also a scene in the fourth of our key films here, *Raï*, which I will return to in the section of this chapter dedicated to intergenerational verbal conflicts, in which first Nordine, and then Djamel, are arrested.

scenes will provide the clearest indications of the ways in which ethnicities are challenged, defined, and redefined first and foremost in relation to a republican norm and the representatives thereof.

4. The ANPE in *Hexagone*

The first scene I want to focus on involves the characters of Staf and Slim in *Hexagone* and sees the pair attending interviews at their local ANPE office in an attempt to gain some form of employment. Prior to their interviews, the pair had been given fake letters of reference written by their friend, Ali, who has a ready supply of official headed writing paper from all sorts of companies and businesses which subsequently went bust. Staf and Slim are interviewed separately and their interviews take quite different turns but we can still observe a number of parallels, particularly in relation to the contribution the verbal exchanges make to our overall impression of the ethnic identities of the two young men and, more specifically, their place within mainstream (employed) French society. While the ANPE interviewers may not represent such a striking visual symbol of the Republic as the uniformed police officers in *La Haine*, for instance, and while the ANPE office itself may not represent such a recognised 'site for the inculcation of republican values'¹⁸² as does the school, the institution itself is nevertheless an inextricable part of the republican structure.¹⁸³ Staf and Slim do not try to find work through private job agencies, but opt for the *Agence Nationale de l'Emploi*, a body which operates under the auspices of the French *Ministère de l'Emploi*, so the very location of their interviews is testimony to their desire to access the working mainstream of society through the most official and most republican of avenues.

Staf has decided, before the pair even reaches the office, that he wants to find work at Disneyland, not Disneyland Paris in Marne-la-Vallée, but Disneyland Florida, as he explains to his female interviewer. Ali has written a letter for him stating that he has experience working for an import-export company and that he speaks fluent English so the interviewer decides to put his language skills to the test and asks if he would mind if they were to conduct some of the interview in English. Staf accepts but falls

¹⁸² Jennings, *op. cit.*, 579.

¹⁸³ Azouz Begag, among others, for instance, has referred to 'le travail' as one of the 'piliers de l'intégration' in contemporary France. (Begag, Lecture at Alliance Française de Glasgow, April 22nd 1999)

flat at the first hurdle and is unable to understand, let alone respond to, the simplest of questions.¹⁸⁴

Discursive Position and Narrative Voice

Slim is interviewed at the same time as Staf, by a male employee, and is equally unsuccessful, although the viewer is left to feel a degree of sympathy for his predicament¹⁸⁵ and distaste at the lack of respect he is shown by his interviewer. At the start of the interview, the employee barks questions at him, in a manner which is reminiscent of encounters in other *banlieue* films involving police officers and *banlieue* youths.¹⁸⁶ Rather than inviting Slim to explain what kind of work he is looking for, or what type of experience he already has, the interviewer simply issues brusque questions ('Vous avez un diplôme? Une expérience professionnelle?')¹⁸⁷ to which Slim gives no verbal response, but simply hands over the appropriate sheets of paper. Given that the viewer, at this stage, has identified Slim with the voice of the off-screen narrator, this silencing is particularly significant. Tarr argues that the purpose of the voice-over is:

[T]o establish a discursive position emanating from the *beurs* themselves, which directly addresses the spectator as someone sympathetic to the *beur* predicament [...], opening up the possibility of dialogue between spectator and speaker.¹⁸⁸

Tarr further suggests that 'Slimane asserts his subjectivity through his appropriation of the soundtrack and his ability to comment on and express his feelings.'¹⁸⁹ Overall, in her analysis of the ANPE scene (and of a parallel ANPE scene in the earlier *Le Thé*

¹⁸⁴ It is worth noting the irony of Staf's desire to work at the American Disneyland within the broader context of depictions of *banlieue* youths onscreen, since it can be read as placing him within a broader transnational context than the centre/periphery binary within which *banlieue* characters are typically constructed. In so doing, Chibane offers his audience a complex depiction of contemporary ethnic identity, at once constructing Staf as Maghrebi-French, rather than 'français-de-souche', but also transcending the former label and placing the character within a web of Franco-American relations and prejudices. It is interesting to compare Staf's apparent enthusiasm for American culture here with the anti-Americanism of the Souad and Farida's father in *Douce France* (see pages 123-126).

¹⁸⁵ Slim is also the voice of the offscreen narrator, used particularly at the start and at the end of the film, offering his view and feelings about the lives he and his friends lead. This perhaps contributes to the empathy felt for him by the spectator, as we feel we have been given more of an insight into his life.

¹⁸⁶ See, for instance, the scene in *Ma 6-T va crack-er* in which Djéff and JM are stopped and searched by a group of officers.

¹⁸⁷ *Hexagone* (Chibane, 1994).

¹⁸⁸ Tarr, *op. cit.*, 56.

¹⁸⁹ *Idem*.

au harem d'Archimède), Tarr points towards the potential for 'empowerment'¹⁹⁰ in *Hexagone*, highlighting the fact that Slim and Staf 'devise strategies to overcome the disadvantages they face'¹⁹¹ and situating these within a film which, in her words, can be read as 'an assertion of *beur* claims to citizenship, *à part entière*, regardless of ethnic difference.'¹⁹²

Dispossession of the Narrative Voice

It is worth noting, however, that Tarr does not comment on the initial silencing of Slim in this scene and the inevitable loss of 'discursive position' to which this leads. Neither does she comment on the fact that he is silenced by a white, male representative of officialdom and only regains his voice when he manages to find a female, *beur* employee to listen to him, thus, arguably, reinforcing the gendered discursive hierarchy we find within most *banlieue* films.¹⁹³ I argue that, at least in part due to the previous use of voice-over, any silencing of the character of Slimane will be noticed by the spectator and will represent a silencing of the 'discursive position' of his character but also, by extension, of all *beur* characters depicted onscreen. In terms of a relationship between the *beurs* here and the French mainstream, it is worth noting that Slimane is not silenced in response to a rival gang member or an older relative as we may see in other *banlieue* films, but that this scene fits a pattern which we will see emerging across the genre of *banlieue* film. In other words, previously vocal central characters are dispossessed of their narrative voice by figures who symbolise the values of the republic – police officers in *La Haine*, as we will see; female staff in a bourgeois shop on the *Champs-Élysées* in *La Squale*; and civil servants [*fonctionnaires*] working for the ANPE here in *Hexagone*.

'J'ai du monde, là':¹⁹⁴ Irrelevance Within A Discursive Hierarchy

Within a few seconds of Slim's interview beginning, the telephone rings and the ANPE employee becomes involved in a long, and heated, exchange with the caller (presumably, from what we hear of the conversation, his wife or partner), without first

¹⁹⁰ *Idem*.

¹⁹¹ *Idem*. These 'strategies' include the procurement of falsified documents and Slim's success in convincing a female *beur* employee to interview him later.

¹⁹² *Idem*.

¹⁹³ See next chapter for full discussion of verbal constructions of gender in *banlieue* and gay film.

¹⁹⁴ *Hexagone*, *op. cit.*

having explained to Slim that the interview will be interrupted for a few minutes. Given the location of the interview – namely within the official confines of a government agency –, one would expect precedence to be given to official business, over private or personal matters. However, the interviewer here overturns expected protocol and transforms his interviewee into a silenced witness to a private conversation. The interview began with Slim simply handing over other people's words – in the form of letters of reference – rather than uttering his own and now we find the initial aggressive questioning replaced by a dialogue from which Slim cannot escape. The interviewer does not, for instance, ask him to wait outside for a few moments. The phone conversation is of no relevance to Slim's interview, and, in broader terms, is of equally little relevance since it relates to plans for a family trip to visit parents-in-law, whereas Slim is an unemployed young man, not single but with a girlfriend who has to be kept secret for reasons of culture and traditional expectation.

It is not until the very end of the phone call that the interviewer mentions to the caller that he is, in fact, dealing with a client and, throughout the whole exchange, he offers only the briefest of cursory apologies to Slim, first just after the phone rings and then again after he has hung up:

Employee: [Phone rings. He picks up.] Allô? Chérie. [To Slim] Excusez-moi. [To caller] Tu les as vus? Oui, ben moi, je sais ce qu'elle dit, la météo. Ouais. Elle annonce un temps pluvieux, orageux, avec des tempêtes de neige au-dessus de mille mètres. Ouais, c'est ça. T'as bien compris. Des tempêtes de neige au-dessus de mille mètres. Tu rappelles et puis t'annules. Oui, c'est ça. OK. Oui, chez tes parents. J'ai du monde la, hein. Je suis en plein travail. [Shouts] Je suis en plein travail. Oui. [Hangs up. To Slim.] Excusez-moi. Je suis désolé. On en était où?¹⁹⁵

Slim is placed, not so much in a position of powerlessness here, but rather in one of total insignificance, as the ANPE interviewer conducts his conversation with an absent third party as though Slim were the absent body. The 'Excusez-moi' at the start of the call is a mere verbal formality and the interviewer awaits no sign, verbal or otherwise, from Slim to indicate that he gives his permission for the conversation to

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

continue in his presence. In this way, the power accorded to the ANPE employee by virtue of his professional role is highlighted and it is made clear that it is he alone who is able, first, to determine the course of the interview, issuing questions which do not require – or indeed seem to expect – verbal responses from his interviewee, and then to choose the points at which Slim is permitted to make a contribution to the exchange.

When the interviewer eventually decides to inform the caller that this is possibly not the most appropriate time to have the particular conversation, he does so in a way which further undermines Slim's position, not by explaining that he is with 'un client' or even 'un jeune homme' but simply 'du monde,'¹⁹⁶ a faceless, genderless, anonymous description which serves to construct Slim as a mere facet of the interviewer's work, rather than as an individual. In this way, by constructing Slim's role as that of passive third party, the employee displays his authority over him. Since the call seems to be unexpected and the situation is not deliberately constructed to belittle Slim, it could be argued that this was not his intention, but he remains, nevertheless, in a clear position of superiority. Although Slim is, in fact, a grown man, in his 20s, he is reduced here to the status of a passive and metaphorically absent figure, with more power granted to the faceless and unheard caller, and the three characters form a clear verbal hierarchy within which Slim possesses the least verbal autonomy.

As we have mentioned above, following this unsuccessful interview, the ANPE scene concludes with Slim finding a *beure*¹⁹⁷ employee in the same office and persuading her to interview him. While we have already seen Staf make a fool of himself in his interview, in part thanks to his lies about his fluency in English, and in part when he attempts to salvage the situation by chatting up his interviewer, Slim is more mature and more successful, succeeding in getting the female employee interested in his dossier.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁹⁷ There is some disagreement over the appropriate feminine form of the masculine *beur* with some opting for *beure*, as I do here, and others choosing, for example, *beurette*. (On this topic, see Sylvie Durmelat, 'Petite histoire du mot *beur*: ou comment prendre la parole quand on vous la prête', *French Cultural Studies*, Vol. 9, Part 2, No. 26 (June 1998), 191-207.

¹⁹⁸ As discussed by Tarr, *ibid*

Silencing the *Beur* Voice in *Hexagone*

In order to understand this scene's contribution to an overall impression of the ethnic identities of the central characters, it must be analysed within the broader framework of the film's narrative which focuses, more generally, on questions of unemployment and poverty faced by the Maghrebi youths of the *banlieues*, on the cultural recognition of minority groupings, and on the *cité* as a space of exclusion, enacted in ethnic terms.¹⁹⁹ In his brief discussion of the use of language and dialogue in *Hexagone*, David Wagner picks up on the fact that the film's script is a mixture of 'argot et verlan mâtinés d'arabe des années 90 dans le milieu arabe à Goussainville.'²⁰⁰ He further argues that this combination is marked geographically, temporally, and ethnically, to such an extent that it was deemed necessary to provide a glossary with the initial video release of the film.²⁰¹

With all this in mind, it becomes clearer just what the significance of the ANPE scene is in relation to the ethnic identities of Slim and Staf and their positions within a broader mainstream French republican context. As discussed above, the symbolism of the silencing of Slim, in his initial interview, is clear – the young *beur* narrative voice is silenced by that of white republican officialdom, representing a loss of subjectivity in both individual and collective terms. Furthermore, given the specific geographic, temporal, and ethnic qualities of the dialogue of the rest of the film highlighted by Wagner, it is crucial to note that these qualities too are silenced in this scene, as both Staf and Slim switch to more standard French, and then as Slim is rendered voiceless. Finally, we find an overlap here with constructions of gender in minority film which we will go on to discuss in more detail in the next chapter but which, briefly, tend to see male *beur* characters conforming to a patriarchal vision of gendered relations, contradicted by the silencing of Slim here.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ See Wagner, *op. cit.*, 319, where he offers a table highlighting the central themes which emerge in *Le Thé au harem d'Archimède*, *Hexagone*, and *La Squale*.

²⁰⁰ Wagner, *op. cit.*, 329.

²⁰¹ Wagner, *ibid.*

²⁰² It is worth contrasting Slim's interview and the way in which his interviewer silences him by taking the phonecall from his partner, with a similar scene in *Le Derrière*. One of the central gay characters in the latter, Francis, works as a proctologist and is shown, in his surgery, examining a rather unpleasant growth on the anus of a white, middle-class patient. The patient is standing, with his trousers round his ankles, leaning over a bed for the examination, when the phone rings and Francis conducts a private conversation with his partner Pierre. It is during this phone conversation that Francis discovers that his partner of ten years in fact has a 'son' and that this 'son' has now appeared on the scene. Just as Slim's

5. Astérix and the Police... in *La Haine*

In contrast to the almost exclusively Maghrebi central characters in *Hexagone*, as we have already discussed above, *La Haine* centres on a tri-ethnic structure of *black, blanc, beur* and yet it has been argued that ethnicity is not the primary, or indeed the privileged, focus of the film. Kassovitz himself has asserted that the film is not an engagement with questions of ethnic or racial identity in contemporary France, but rather an examination of the problematic relationship between the French police and *banlieue* youths,²⁰³ inspired by the death in police custody of Makomé Bowole, a 16-year-old Zairian:

Le problème n'est pas entre les Arabes et les flics ou entre les Noirs et les flics, mais entre les mecs des quartiers et les flics... Ce n'est pas une question de race ou de couleur, mais bien une question sociale, économique et générationnelle.²⁰⁴

More recently, Higbee has suggested that the film should be viewed within a wider *fracture sociale* trilogy encompassing *Métisse*, *La Haine*, and *Assassin(s)*, within which ethnic and racial identities are important but where, in *La Haine*, 'individual ethnic difference is largely subordinated *within* the trio in relation to their position as a collectively excluded underclass'.²⁰⁵ Higbee clearly states that 'this does not mean that racism is simply elided from the diegesis of *La Haine*'²⁰⁶ and indeed goes on to discuss some of the scenes which will be included in the current analysis. However, he nevertheless argues that the depiction of violence which underscores the entire film is more controversial and he relates this violence, not explicitly to ethnic tensions, but to socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions.²⁰⁷

While it is undeniable, firstly, that the plot of *La Haine* is largely driven forwards around the explosive poles of police versus *banlieue* youths²⁰⁸ and, secondly, that the

interviewer eventually cuts the conversation short by saying 'j'ai du monde, là', so too does Francis here finally decide to cut his call by telling Pierre, 'on verra ça à la maison, ce soir. Je suis occupé, là.'

²⁰³ The oppositional nature of this relationship is underlined, for instance, in the film's opening credits in which Kassovitz divides the lists of names of actors into 'Cité' and 'Police'.

²⁰⁴ Quote from Kassovitz taken from Gaillac-Morgue, 'La Grande Peur du prolétariat qui a hanté les fantasmes bourgeois tourne aujourd'hui à la grande peur des cités', *Match de Paris*, May 1995, quoted in Tarr, *op. cit.*, 72.

²⁰⁵ Higbee, *op. cit.*

²⁰⁶ Higbee, *ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Higbee, *ibid.*

²⁰⁸ It is worth noting that this hostility between the *banlieues* and the police is by no means only a feature of *banlieue* cinema, but also permeates other strands of contemporary urban cultures, such as

violence that erupts here does so against a more multi-ethnic backdrop than that of *Hexagone*, for instance, I argue that there is still a good deal of research to be done to address specifically the ways in which the verbal expressions of conflict and violence here are an attempt at a renegotiation of position within a republican framework. Much useful and productive analysis exists of some of the individual scenes I will examine here²⁰⁹ and, in some cases, analysis of more than one scene is drawn together. However, overall there has been no attempt to offer a sustained examination of the combined impact on expressions of ethnic identity against the republican backdrop which can be found across these individual scenes. This lack is particularly curious since almost all commentators (from media reviews to academic studies) have commented on Kassovitz's central *black, blanc, beur* trio while there has been little attempt to more explicitly engage with a discussion of the effects of the verbal encounters here between *black, blanc, beur* and *bleu, blanc, rouge*.²¹⁰

Police Interrogation

There are numerous key scenes in *La Haine* in which verbal conflict emerges between *banlieue* and republic expressed most clearly around a focus on ethnic identity but, for the sake of depth, rather than breadth, of analysis, I will first concentrate here on the police interrogation scene involving Hubert and Saïd, and then combine this with shorter examinations of the similarities between the ways in which ethnic identities are constructed and challenged in an earlier scene on the high-rise rooftop, in the scenes in the *banlieue commissariat*, and in the scenes in Astérix's flat which precede the central interrogation scene. What will emerge across all of these exchanges is the way in which, although the action of the film focuses on a recognisably multiethnic trio, the individual ethnic identities of the three are constantly challenged and questioned. These challenges and questions stem explicitly from representatives of the republic, in the shape of the police for most of the scenes considered, but also in a

rap music and *bandes dessinées*. See Mark McKinney, 'Framing the *Banlieue*', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Spring 2004), 113-126.

²⁰⁹ See, among others, Tarr, *op. cit.*; Higbee, *op. cit.*; Schroeder, *op. cit.*; Sharma and Sharma, *op. cit.*; Johann Sadock, 'L'Origine dévoilée du discours sur la violence et sur les relations interethniques dans le cinéma de Kassovitz', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (January 2004), 63-73.

²¹⁰ It should be noted that Tarr, *op. cit.*, begins to address this lack and 'argues that films by directors of Maghrebi descent challenge and reframe the symbolic spaces of French culture' (quote from back cover of *op. cit.*).

more surprisingly intertextual, metanational form through the character of Astérix.²¹¹ It will also become clear that, while in *Hexagone*, the challenges to ethnic identity retain a relatively non-violent conflictual form, here in *La Haine*, the verbal encounters are more violently charged.

The interrogation scene takes place in a nameless Parisian police station, and involves Saïd and Hubert, on the one hand, and three non-uniform police officers on the other. The two youths have been arrested outside the flat of Astérix, an acquaintance of Saïd's who owes him a small sum of money and, although Vinz was also there when they were stopped by police, he manages to avoid arrest, first simply because he has white skin and is thus able to initially deny all association with his friends, and then by knocking over one of the officers and running away. Saïd and Hubert are forcefully stopped and searched and then taken to the *commissariat* when the officers find a small quantity of cannabis resin in their possession.

Discursive Hierarchies

It is worth noting, first and foremost, that, as in *Hexagone*, Saïd and Hubert's contribution to the verbal exchange which ensues is limited, most obviously, by their position within the discursive hierarchy which is expressed through the choice of words and phrases on both sides. This hierarchy is reinforced in a very physical manner, as Saïd and Hubert are handcuffed to chairs in the middle of the room throughout the scene, while two of their interrogators are able to walk around at will, choosing the position from which they question or insult them, and while the third, more passive, and apparently disapproving, officer, is also seated, although clearly not restrained in any physical sense. The most violent of the three officers often stands behind the detainees while he talks to or about them, as well as when he chooses to resort to physical violence, ensuring that neither Saïd nor Hubert can have any choice in the position from which they respond. Indeed, for instance, when Hubert begins to slump in his chair after a particularly brutal 'Shanghai Squeeze',²¹² the officer is able to kick him roughly back into an upright and more attentive position.

²¹¹ I should make clear at this point that the character named Astérix is not an animated figure who appears in the film but rather a human character, played by François Levantal.

²¹² In this context, this refers to a particularly brutal manoeuvre which involves the assailant clutching the victim under his/her arm and squeezing while simultaneously twisting his/her head around.

It is also vital to note, as has been frequently overlooked until recently, that, although Kassovitz may be placing the narrative of his film within a simplified binary opposition between police and *banlieue*, this binary is complicated in ethnic terms, across the scenes we will go on to examine here, but most clearly in this interrogation scene, quite simply by the ethnic mix of interlocutors used. Kassovitz does not straightforwardly present us with an ethnically diverse set of *banlieue* characters opposed to an exclusively white republican police cast, but rather he engages with complexities of French national identities within the mainstream by showing not only white, but also recognisably *beur*, police officers. In the present scene, it has been noted, for instance, that the most passive officer is white. However:

Ce qu'on n'a pas dit, [...] c'est que le policier qui mène cette scene de torture, est un acteur identifiable comme "arabe" en France.²¹³

The officer concerned is not only 'identifiable comme "arabe"' on the basis of the actor's other film roles,²¹⁴ but also because Kassovitz himself, in the commentary for the film's French DVD release, 'refers to this character (played by Zinedine Soualem) as the "beur cop".'²¹⁵ Sadock places the 'beur cop' within a wider context of mixed ethnic identities in the police force throughout the film, referring, for instance, to the Maghrebi officer who gets Saïd out of custody earlier, or the black officer with an Antillais accent who refers to Saïd as the head of the gang in the earlier hospital scene,²¹⁶ arguing that 'Kassovitz cherche apparemment à nuancer son discours contre la police.'²¹⁷ Higbee, on the other hand, offers two possible interpretations:

The *policier rebeu*'s brutality either suggests that here "race" is not the issue [...] or else it indicates that a much more complex series of post-colonial power relations are at work: the *beur* cop adopts the schizophrenic position of the white racist/colonial oppressor, and attacks the "Arab" youth in order to negate or repress the powerlessness associated with his own Maghrebi origins beyond the interrogation room.²¹⁸

We will see that a closer linguistic analysis of this scene supports the second of Higbee's interpretations and I argue that, as we will see from an examination of the

²¹³ Sadock, *op. cit.*, 67. The actor in question is Zinedine Soualem.

²¹⁴ Perhaps most notably as Djamel, in *Chacun cherche son chat* (Klapisch, 1996).

²¹⁵ Higbee, *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Sadock, *op. cit.*, 67.

²¹⁷ Sadock, *ibid.*

²¹⁸ Higbee, *op. cit.*

scene, the power relations are, at least in part, complicated by the introduction of questions of physical and social maturity which Higbee himself (unwittingly?) hints at, but does not pursue, when he refers to the officer attacking the Arab 'youth'.

Institutional *Tutoiement*

Linguistically, one of the most striking elements in the interrogation scene is what might be referred to as the 'institutional *tutoiement*' employed by the interrogating officers. Clearly, there is a difference in meaning produced by the choice of the *tu* or *vous* form in verbal exchanges:

Vous can have two functions: to address more than one person, and as a polite form of address to one person when there is a certain "social distance" between the speaker and the addressee. *Tu* is used only to address one person when there is no social distance between speaker and addressee.²¹⁹

However, there are also specific circumstances in which a "marked" use of *tu*²²⁰ is selected, meaning that 'the expected use of polite *vous* [...] is not met, and the actual pronoun form used is *tu*.'²²¹ One such example of this would be in police interrogation where:

Police [...] use the *tu* form, but suspects are expected to reciprocate with the *vous* form. *The effect produced is one of domination.*²²² [My emphasis]

Here in *La Haine*, the interrogating officers consistently use the *tu* form while addressing the detainees, thus placing Saïd and Hubert in a position of inferiority within the conventions of standard French language usage, but also placing them in a more symbolic position of inferiority in terms of their status as 'other' (*banlieue* youth, on the peripheries of a Parisian centre) versus the 'norm' of the republic, as embodied by the police. Not only does the *tu/vous* divide signal a division between polite and impolite discourse among adults, but the *tu* is also associated with the comparative youth or immaturity of the addressee, and it is this aspect that Higbee

²¹⁹ Roger Hawkins, and Richard Towell, *French Grammar and Usage* (London: Arnold, 1996), 47.

²²⁰ Hawkins and Towell, *op. cit.*, 49.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*

refers to, but fails to develop, in his analysis of the ethnic mix of officers in this scene.²²³

At the same time as the *tutoiement* is being employed to address Hubert and Saïd, the most violent, *beur* officer also narrates his behaviour to the passive third officer,²²⁴ telling him what one should do in order to ensure that the situation does not get out of hand and, again, in these exchanges, he uses the *tu* form:

Officer: Après tu t'arrêtes juste quand il faut. Surtout, faut...
 contrôle, tu vois. [...] C'est comme ça. Surtout apres tu
 relâches. Le plus dur, c'est de t'arrêter à temps.²²⁵

It is this patronising *tutoiement* of the third, passive, officer which serves further still to emphasise the sheer powerlessness of Saïd and Hubert, and, indeed, a parallel could be drawn with the male interviewer and Slim in *Hexagone* in terms of the imposed insignificance of narrative voice which is executed here. Firstly, the oft-cited *black, blanc, beur* trio has been symbolically weakened by the removal of Vinz from its ranks, thanks, at least in part, to the fact that he is not a member of a visible minority, and, while some have referred to the film's construction of 'multiethnic alliances',²²⁶ I argue that there is, in fact, still a very clear distinction between the way in which youths of visibly different ethnic origins are treated onscreen. Secondly, this silencing of the tripartite narrative voice is strengthened further still by the interrogating officer's decision to objectify Saïd and Hubert by using them as visual examples of what to do in interrogation situations but narrating his own actions to the passive third officer as though they were abstract instructions, without a present victim. The most active of the three officers present highlights his position of ultimate power by controlling the physical position of those he is questioning. However, he also exercises control and asserts his own (and, by extension, republican) authority by using the *tu* form and by symbolically transforming an unwilling onlooker (the third

²²³ Again, useful parallels can be drawn between this institutional *tutoiement* and that used in the 'stop and search' scene in *Ma 6-T va crack-er*.

²²⁴ Onscreen, this third officer seems at the very least uncomfortable at the behaviour of his colleagues. In the published version of the script, he is described as being visibly ashamed to be a police officer at this point: 'On peut voir [qu'il] a honte d'être flic.' Gilles Favier and Mathieu Kassovitz, *Jusqu'ici tout va bien...* (Paris: Actes Sud, 1995), 125.

²²⁵ *Le Haine* (Kassovitz, 1995).

²²⁶ Orlando, *op. cit.*, 403.

officer) into a player within a narrative of violence, playing on the ambiguity of *tu*, as paradoxical marker of both solidarity and domination.

Networks of Ethnic Identities

The domination exerted through this institutional *tutoiement* is further heightened by a series of verbal strategies employed by the two active interrogating officers and these serve to draw the viewer's attention, once more, to the ethnic mix of characters onscreen. Interestingly, the strategies adopted appear to differ on the basis of the particular ethnic origin Saïd and Hubert are, individually, assumed to represent, suggesting, further still, that Kassovitz is not presenting us here with a simple *cité* versus police, *banlieue* versus republic binary, but that the network of identities involved is far more complex, and that individual ethnic minorities are accorded differing status within the republican framework. We have already seen, as discussed above, that Vinz, primarily on the basis of his skin colour, had managed to escape arrest,²²⁷ and now we see that even within the reduced *black, beur* partnership there is a distinction which is explicitly seen to be in operation in relation to the youths' relationship to France as nation-state.

Officer: [To Hubert] Ramasse avec tes pieds. Toi, dans ton pays, on ramasse tout avec les pieds, hein? [...] Faut pas te faire mal, j't'dis. Calme-toi.²²⁸

We, as viewers, have seen, in the introductions to the individual characters, a poster advertising a boxing match in which Hubert was fighting and which clearly gave his name and the country he was fighting for as 'France'. However now, in the racist orders given by the officer, our attention is drawn to the assumption that his country of origin cannot be France, presumably on the basis of the fact that he is black. The officer uses the *tu* form, he emphasises Hubert's lack of agency in the present circumstances (he is still handcuffed to the chair and unable to move far enough to pick anything up), and he resorts to the most basic of racist insults, firstly, by telling

²²⁷ Although it should be noted that Vinz does not simply represent white, working-class youth, rather, very specifically, white Jewish working class youth and, as such, it is not sufficient to dismiss his escape solely on the basis of his skin colour.

²²⁸ *La Haine*, op. cit.

Hubert to go back 'home' and, secondly, by making it clear that, wherever '[son] pays' might be, it is a land of primitives who still use their feet to pick things up.²²⁹

In relation to Saïd, doubt is also thrown on his national identity but in a slightly different way. The two active officers have the youths' ID papers and one begins to read from them, asking 'Hubert? C'est lequel Hubert?'²³⁰ The most violent of the three twists Saïd's face, asking if he really looks like he would be called 'Hubert', the implication being that 'Hubert' is a French-sounding name, whereas Saïd does not fit the visual mould for someone who was 'français-de-souche.' The other officer then reads from Saïd's ID card, explaining 'Non, celui-là, il s'appelle Saïd',²³¹ to which the more violent officer responds, mockingly, by asking Saïd – and yet by no means soliciting any form of response – if it is a French name and telling him that it is very pretty. Given that the police officers have the two youths' ID cards, they will also know exactly where both were born (presumably on French soil) and their mock questioning of Saïd here serves to give the viewer an indication of the position occupied by *beur* youths within the republic.

In other words, we are dealing here with 'second/third generation immigrants'²³² and through the officers' scornful, 'C'est français, ça?',²³³ we are given a clear indication that neither Saïd's place of birth, nor his place of residence, nor his language of

²²⁹ It is interesting to note that, while expressions of racism such as these play a more prominent role in *banlieue* films, they are also to be found underlying exchanges in some of the gay films which form part of the current corpus. In *Belle Maman*, for instance, which I will examine in the next chapter, one of the central characters, Léa's partner, is black and, when Léa's ex-husband first sees him, his prejudice is evident as he tells his (and Léa's) daughter, 'elle se fait sauter par King Kong.' In *Le Derrière* which I will return to in more detail in the third of the central chapters, again, one of the central characters, Pierre's partner, is also black. When the couple visit Pierre's sister and brother-in-law, the latter makes reference to traditional dishes of the Caribbean making Pierre's partner Francis feel more at home. Pierre remarks 'il n'y a pas plus parisien que Francis' and Francis himself later complains about 'l'autre qui me prend pour la Compagnie Créole.'

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² It should be noted that the terms 'second-generation immigrant' and 'third-generation immigrant' are, in themselves, problematic, since they raise the problem of the feeling of belonging or exclusion encountered by those to whom they are deemed to refer. Given that an 'immigrant' is a person who has moved to a country other than that of his or her birth to settle there, it is difficult to see why someone born in France should still, two or three generations on, have the label 'immigrant' attached to them. To quote an article published in the 'Débats' pages of *Le Monde* in 2000, and referring to the ways in which the Front National has been able to impose its categories of thought on public debate in France: 'Qu'on se souvienne [...] de l'ubuesque moment où, via l'expression 'deuxième génération', la migration devint héréditaire en France!' (Anne-Sophie Perriaux, 'Le Racisme tel qu'on le compte', *Le Monde*, March 28th 2000.)

²³³ *Ibid.*

expression is sufficient to earn him a place within the republic, but rather that his first name is enough to mark him as different.²³⁴ This in turn serves to highlight the ways in which, rather than adapting to the realities of the ethnic make-up of contemporary France, the republic can be viewed as stagnating, attempting to ensure that citizens adapt to its strict values, rather than opening to redefinitions and renewals. It is perhaps not surprising that this conflict is expressed around the first names of the characters here, particularly if one considers the following:

National decrees such as the 1888 Decree sought to “grant immigrants the same type of civil status as French nationals” with the understanding that these immigrants would adopt “new Christian name[s]” in order to adhere to the “logic of republican law [that struggled] to eliminate all traces of origins.”²³⁵

Well might Orlando argue that:

Beur and *banlieue* filmmakers and rap artists [today] contest the legacy of colonialism, the civilizing mission, and decrees such as that of 1888 which they maintain are still present in the psyche of the French nation.²³⁶

Verbal Marginalisation

Considered in isolation, this interrogation scene can be read as an indictment of institutional racism on the part of the French police force, as well a broader comment on the marginalisation of *banlieue* youths of ‘visibly’ non-metropolitan French ethnic origin. However, when considered in tandem with other, shorter scenes, the comment it offers on the question of a redefinition or renegotiation of ethnic identities within the republic becomes clearer still. If we examine, for instance, the scene towards the beginning of the film, in which a group of youths (slightly older than Vinz, Saïd, and Hubert, but known to them and joined by them during the scene) have gathered on the rooftop of a high-rise block, not to cause trouble, but to listen to music, chat, and eat *merguez*. The gathering is interrupted by the arrival of an official delegation with a police escort – the delegation presumably includes the local mayor, since its arrival is

²³⁴ Slightly later in the film, when Saïd and Hubert have been released from custody, there is another scene in which first names are connected with ethnic identity and perceived national belonging. The trio reunite and steal a credit card which they attempt to use to pay for a taxi ride. The taxi driver, however, refuses to accept the card when Saïd hands it over because it belongs to someone called ‘David’ and the driver, on the basis of Saïd’s appearance, assumes that this cannot be his name.

²³⁵ Orlando, *op. cit.*, 399, quoting Noiriel.

²³⁶ Orlando, *op. cit.*, 399.

heralded on the rooftop by an anonymous character shouting ‘Nique sa mère au maire’.²³⁷ Some of the police officers make their way to the rooftop and order the youths to return to ground-level, but the youths, led by Nordine, Saïd’s elder brother, refuse and tension mounts.

There is a distinct visual opposition here between the three police officers shown and the youths they are trying to order back to the ground – the first officer is substantially older and uniformed, the second officer we see (who will eventually shoot Vinz in the final scenes of the film) is plain-clothed but wears a baseball jacket with ‘Notre Dame’ emblazoned on the back, and the third officer is, like the most violent of the three interrogators, played by a recognisably Arab actor. Again here, tension is created verbally by the use of the *tu* form in the police officers’ speech to Nordine. However, there is clearly strength in numbers and in territory here, and Nordine is not only able to object explicitly – he tells the third Arab officer, for instance, ‘tu me connais pas, tu me parles pas comme ça’,²³⁸ suggesting that the officer should not assume any solidarity on the basis of perceived ethnic origin –, but also has sufficient agency within this setting to control his friends and to silence them.

If we then add to this another scene in which Saïd is released from custody, having spent a brief period in the local police station after being arrested at the hospital where Abdel (the youth whose shooting triggered the initial riots) is being treated, we are again given an indication of the complexity of identities being constructed and challenged here and again we are given this against a clearly symbolic republican backdrop. Immediately after Saïd’s arrest, the third Arab officer from the rooftop arrives at the hospital and drives Hubert and Vinz to the police station to collect Saïd. In the car, he and Vinz argue over respect and status and the respective roles of police and *banlieue* youths in the shooting of Abdel. *Tutoiement* is used throughout but the officer reprimands Vinz for his lack of respect and repeatedly voices his reprimand by saying, ‘Tu me parles pas comme ça, tu me parles correctement.’²³⁹ The implication here is evidently that there are particular linguistic conventions Vinz is expected to

²³⁷ *La Haine*. It is worth noting, in passing, that this play on words here illustrates the type of verbal engagement with standard French that Seguin and Teillard refer to, *op. cit.*

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

honour on the basis of societal status. Similarly, once Saïd has been released, he and Hubert shake hands with the officer but Vinz refuses and, again, the officer's response centres upon a right to speak or to enter dialogue:

Officer: Tu m'adresses plus la parole, t'as bien compris?²⁴⁰

On the one hand, then, we have the white (Jewish) member of the trio showing the least respect to the Arab police officer, and, on the other hand, we have the same officer warning Saïd that this is the last time he plans to help him, arguing that there is no longer the possibility of dialogue between him and the *banlieue* youths, and that any officer who arrives in the *banlieue* is unlikely to last more than a month. Saïd's reaction is clear:

Saïd: Et un Arabe dans le commissariat, il tient pas plus d'une heure.²⁴¹

These scenes involving *banlieue* youths in direct verbal conflict with police officers and, by extension, with the upholders of republican authority are perhaps to be expected in *banlieue* film and, while contributing to the construction of a complex web of ethnic identities and striving towards a reconsideration of the definitions of the republic, they fit into an expected pattern and conform to establish binaries. There is, however, one final scene here which breaks this mould and which is worth mentioning here, in passing, because of the originality of the contribution it makes to these same ethnic identities.

A Cameo by Astérix the Gaul

The scene in question occurs in the centre of Paris, rather than in the *banlieue*, and immediately precedes the brutal interrogation scene. The reason for the trio's trip from the suburbs into the heart of Paris is in order for Saïd to try to claim back money owed to him by a character called Astérix. Without wishing to, or indeed having space to, develop this strand in any considerable depth, I nevertheless think it is vital to point out that one of the first characters the youths meet when they arrive in Paris is an intertextual reference to the most French of cartoon characters, Astérix the Gaul. We have, then, the *banlieue* other, represented by a multiethnic trio (white Jewish,

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Maghrebi, and black), arriving in the established centre (Paris) and looking for Astérix, who turns out to be a drug dealer, and who enters into a game of Russian roulette with the only white member of the trio. While it may seem, on the surface, that *La Haine* pits established ethnic categories against the established norms of the republic, in fact there is a good deal more complexity of ethnic identity contained within the film's many layers.

6. La Blondasse et les Renois – *La Squale*

The final scene I want to examine in this section comes from the most recent of the films focused on here, namely *La Squale*. The central characters of *La Squale* are roughly divided into two gangs, one male and one female, and the short scene under consideration here involves four of the female central characters, including the *squale* of the title. The four are seen emerging from a *métro* station on the *Champs-Élysées*, instantly recognisable because they emerge against the backdrop of the *Arc de Triomphe*, a clear symbol of Paris and the preservation of the republic.²⁴² There are a number of important differences between this scene and those we have so far discussed. Firstly, the *banlieue* characters involved are all women; secondly, the ethnic mix of *La Squale* differs from both *Hexagone* and *La Haine* in that the two central characters, Toussaint and Désirée, are black, rather than Maghrebi as is the case in most other *banlieue* films; and thirdly, although this particular scene sees *banlieue* inhabitants coming to the 'centre', this does not lead to a loss of agency on their part as witnessed in *La Haine* and in many other earlier *banlieue* films. One final difference comes in the form which is taken by the republic here. The conflict does not involve official representatives of republican values in the shape of police officers or ANPE employees, but rather we are faced here with a different kind of republican symbol – the (female) employees of Marionnaud, a cosmetics store on the *Champs-Élysées* which Désirée and her friends 'gleefully invade [... briefly challenging] the white middle-class occupation of the city centre.'²⁴³ In short:

²⁴² A parallel emerges here between the *Arc de Triomphe* in *La Squale* and the *Tour Eiffel* in *La Haine*, as instantly significant symbols of the Parisian centre.

²⁴³ Tarr, *op. cit.*, 120.

La Squalle is unusual in focusing on the way in which the city is (fleeting) empowering for young ethnic minority women, rather than on its exclusion of young ethnic minority men.²⁴⁴

Verbal Objectification

The scene itself only lasts a few minutes but in it the viewer is given yet another clear indication of the ways in which *banlieue* youths are considered to be other, not only to the centre as represented physically by Paris, but also to the expected ethnic composition of the national centre. All the shop's other customers are white women, and the employees who have to try to deal with the troublemakers are also all white women. Désirée and her friends make clear, in their comments to each other (spoken loudly enough for everyone in the store to hear), that they perceive a true division between themselves and the other people in the shop, and that this division operates primarily on an ethnic level.

Firstly, they are insulting in the ways they address the employees of the shop. The girls, with only one brief exception, use the 'tu' form throughout, whereas the replies from the sales assistants are given in the more polite 'vous' form:

First girl:	Hé! T'aurais pas des échantillons gratuits, là?
Assistant:	Je suis tout de suite à vous, mais je m'occupe d'abord de madame. ²⁴⁵

Furthermore, they objectify one female assistant by referring to her as 'celle-là',²⁴⁶ 'that one', while another white employee is called 'la blondasse',²⁴⁷ first reducing her to nothing more than a reference to her hair colour – with all of the national and gendered stereotypes associated with blondes – and then adding the pejorative suffix '-asse' to compound the insult. As the three look around the products on offer in the shop, it becomes apparent that most of them are adapted to white skin tones and is, as such, of little use to them:

Friend:	Putain, il y a vraiment rien pour les Renois ici.
Désirée:	Franchement, t'as vu?
[The two girls try out various shades of make-up]	

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *La Squalle* (Généstal, 2000).

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Désirée: Tu sais comment ça s'appelle? Porcelaine!²⁴⁸

Désirée proceeds to put make-up on her friend's face, deliberately choosing shades that emphasise the fact that the products on sale are not at all suitable for black women, until one of the shop assistants enquires whether she can help in any way and the situation descends into chaos:

Assistant: Je peux vous aider?

Friend: [Turns round with exaggerated make-up and flutters her eyelashes] Vous me trouvez comment?

Assistant: J'ai une crème plus ambrée qui mettra davantage en valeur votre carnation brune.

Désirée: Attends, elle est en train de nous traiter de cannibales, là [...] Sale raciste, va!

2nd Assistant: Ecoutez, c'est un malentendu, Valérie n'a pas voulu vous blesser.

Friend: On t'a parlé, la blondasse?²⁴⁹

The girls then wreck the shop, pulling products down from the shelves and scattering them, dropping lit cigarettes in a bin, and shouting at the assistants, before running back outside. On the one hand, they have deliberately sought out the conflict – when they stop in front of the shop window, Désirée declares that they have struck the jackpot – but, on the other hand, their comments also underline the fact that the shop and its products, in the symbolic heart of Paris, are of no use to these outsiders who have arrived from the suburbs.

Engaging with France Past and Present

During the scene discussed above, Désirée and her friend further highlight their scorn by adopting a fake black African accent to mockingly exchange their views on the make-up they try. There is an awareness, in the juxtaposition of *verlan* (*les Renois*) and the faked accent, of the complexities of black identities and an ability to challenge stereotypes through conflict, but also to self-refer in a potentially empowering manner. Désirée does not say that there is nothing there for 'les Noirs' or indeed 'les Blacks' but instead opts for the verlanised *Renois*, which (to return to Wagner's point in relation to the temporal, geographical, and ethnic specificity of language in *Hexagone*) has a similar effect here, not only situating *La Squale* as a Parisian

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

banlieue film, but siting Désirée and her friends as contemporary, urban women within that framework. At the same time as this juxtaposition emphasises their place in a contemporary context, however, the use of the exaggerated black African accent also has connotations of slavery and metropolitan France's colonial history,²⁵⁰ which again serves to heighten the tensions between the white employees of the *Champs-Élysées* branch of Marionnaud and the three young women from the *banlieue*.

7. Intergenerational Verbal Conflict: Multiple 'Identity Magnet'²⁵¹

Young Beurs are pulled apart by two opposing forces: family obligations and Maghrebian traditions lie at one pole and at the other are the social institutions of France. These "two spheres of reference are stacked together [...] but do not speak the same language and are often problematic."²⁵²

The second primary site and source of conflict which emerges in *banlieue* film does so between generations, generally within a family context, either between children and parents, or between children and grandparents. This conflict is often particularly marked verbally, especially in earlier *banlieue* films, by the use of two different languages (typically standard French and Arabic), sometimes subtitled, but not always. Although the quote above makes explicit reference to the situation faced by young *beurs*, they are, by no means, alone in their struggle between what Begag and Chaouite have termed a 'double identity magnet'. I argue, however, that, while there is some use in this term insofar as it encapsulates the dilemma of a search for self within a broader framework of conflicting and opposing identities, the implicit binary (*double identity magnet*) fails to do justice to the complexities of the identities under construction.

²⁵⁰ An interesting parallel to this scene can be found in François Ozon's black comedy *Sitcom* (released in 1998) which falls under the category of 'gay cinema.' The film centres on a white upper-middle-class family whose lives are thrown into darkly comic chaos by a series of incidents and revelations. Towards the beginning of the film, the family invites their newly employed maid for dinner and she brings her husband, Abdou, who is black. The father talks about Africa and begins to 'explain' colonialism to Abdou who promptly interrupts him and begins to rectify some of the factual errors the father had made, thus reappropriating historical discourse and shifting power relations between the interlocutors by demonstrating that he has more knowledge of French (and indeed European) history than the father.

²⁵¹ Orlando, quoting Begag and Chaouite, *op. cit.*, 406.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

The previous section can be said to have addressed some of the issues surrounding one of these 'spheres of reference', namely the codes and practices of the social institutions of the republic. The current section will examine Begag and Chaouite's other 'sphere of reference' as its influence is expressed through intergenerational conflict onscreen. In order to do so, I will focus primarily on the fourth of the films selected for closer analysis in this chapter, Thomas Gilou's *Raï*, but will make reference, when relevant, to similar scenes or incidents in *La Haine*. As with our previous discussion of conflicts between representatives of the republic and *banlieue* youths, the decision to focus on this relatively narrow choice of scenes, taken from only two films, should not be read as an indication that these works are unique in exemplifying a preoccupation with this issue.²⁵³ Rather, again, it is felt that a detailed analysis of this kind will allow us to offer a more in-depth examination of the questions raised, and will be of particular interest since *Raï* has, until recently, been overlooked in literature on *banlieue* cinema.²⁵⁴

I agree, to an extent, with Tarr that *Raï*, while bringing to the forefront the specific problems faced by 'second/third generation immigrants' of Maghrebi origin, 'does so in a way which, however unintentionally, plays into racist stereotypes of an alien immigrant culture spawning an irresponsible, violent youth culture.'²⁵⁵ However, I argue that an analysis of the intergenerational verbal conflicts in the film still has an important role to play in a broader understanding of the complexities of ethnic identities as they are challenged and renegotiated through the medium of *banlieue* film.

Arabic and French in *Raï*

What is particularly interesting in *Raï* is the decision to include scenes which involve either particular groups of characters onscreen conversing in Arabic (subtitled) or

²⁵³ I could, for instance, have examined the scenes between the character of Felix and his Jewish grandfather in *Metisse* (Kassovitz, 1993 - while this may not, overall, fit the pattern of straightforward *banlieue* cinema, Felix is a white, working-class, Jewish *banlieue* youth and it is through his character that Kassovitz gives us a depiction of the lives of another distinct ethnic group living in the *banlieues*); or I could have examined the apparent lack of conflict between Toussaint and his mother in the scenes in their living-room/dining-room in *La Squale*.

²⁵⁴ Two recent exceptions to this are Erin Schroeder's parallel analysis of *La Haine*, *Raï*, and the American film *Menace II Society* (*op. cit.*) and Tarr, *op. cit.*, in which she compares and contrasts *Raï*, *La Haine*, and *Etat des lieux* (pp 75-8).

²⁵⁵ Tarr, *op. cit.*, 78.

specific characters speaking Arabic (again, subtitled) while characters of another (younger) generation reply in French. Before we begin to examine some of these scenes in more detail, it is worth noting that the very fact that there are scenes involving an older character (in *Rai*, this older character is Djamel and Nordine's mother) speaking Arabic with younger characters responding in French and that dialogue being possible is, in itself, an indication that Begag and Chaouite may be simplifying the situation when they talk of a '*double* identity magnet', or at the very least when they appear to construct their two 'spheres of reference' as mutually excluding.

One final point that needs to be made before we can move onto our analysis is related to the relevance of this intergenerational verbal conflict to a challenging or renewing of the republic, hinted at in Begag and Chaouite's reference to the 'social institutions of France'. Although we, as viewers, are not often given an explicit account of the origins of the families we see onscreen, we can assume, following patterns of immigration in France over the past half century, that the central characters depicted were born on French soil and, as such, have French citizenship, whereas their parents, and grandparents, particularly in the case of Maghrebi families, were born outside metropolitan France and presumably moved there between the 1950s and 1970s as economic migrants. As such, given the French republican model's reliance on integration and assimilation to an existent system, rather than the explicit renegotiation of that system and the potential for paradigm shift that would signify, we not only have the relatively straightforward model of intergenerational conflict here, but also a symbolic conflict which arises between modes of integration, between characters born within metropolitan France and those born outwith its boundaries. That such an intergenerational conflict should then impact on the ethnic identities of its products, of whichever generation, is then clear.

The scenes I will look at from *Rai* involve the central character Djamel, his elder brother Nordine (a drug addict who is shot by police at the end of the film), and their mother. Whereas a good deal of the film (in common with many other *banlieue* works) is shot in external locations, the scenes involving these three characters (or combinations thereof) are exclusively interior scenes, either in their family home, or in other apartments in the *cité*. This in itself indicates an initial source of division,

insofar as Djamel and Nordine's direct encounters with representatives of republican values take place in public spaces,²⁵⁶ whereas their verbal ties with a (mythical) 'homeland' come within the physical confines of the family home. This division is also evident in the scenes in *La Haine* which focus on questions of intergenerational conflict and which centre, there, on divisions between generations in Vinz's Jewish family. While Vinz, Saïd, and Hubert are outside, the main oppositional force they encounter is that symbolised by representatives of the republic, from the riot police in the *cité* to the police officers who arrest them in a Parisian street. However, in one of the few interior shots we see, we are given a brief glimpse of Vinz's relationship with his (large) family as his grandmother berates him for not attending synagogue.

To return to *Raï*, the first scene in which we have a bilingual intergenerational dialogue involves Djamel and his mother and takes place, not only within the home, but actually in the mother's bedroom, with her lying in bed, and Djamel sitting at her bedside. Djamel has just returned home to find his brother lying in the doorway of their flat in a drug-induced stupor. He carries Nordine into his bedroom and then goes through to speak to his mother. Throughout this exchange, Djamel speaks French, while his mother replies in Arabic, and there is no indication that either has any problems of understanding. Given the apparent mutual intelligibility of the languages in which they choose to express themselves, what are we, as viewers, to make of the bilingual nature of the scene? And what is the significance, in terms of the film's expectations of its audience, of the fact that it is the Arabic which is subtitled into French, but not the French which is subtitled into Arabic? Admittedly, this would have meant that all French dialogue in the film would have needed to be subtitled into Arabic but, by only subtitling one character's words here, it immediately ensures that they are doubly marked as other, first aurally to the non-Arabophone viewer, and secondly visually by their onscreen translation. Symbolically, then, Arabic is marked not as a language spoken by people living in France, and understood by (at least some) French citizens without any apparent difficulty, but as a foreign language, constructing standard French, and standard French alone, as the language of the republic. While this may seem a relatively obvious point to make here, in relation to

²⁵⁶ Nordine, for instance, is arrested in a cinema. When he is shot towards the end of the film, it is because police have been called to the estate because Nordine has gone onto the rooftop of a high-rise block and has been shooting cars and pedestrians on the pavements below, and the shooting takes place outside one of the blocks, the most public of *banlieue* spaces.

Arabic, there are two further points to make. Firstly, in subsequent scenes, when insults are delivered in Arabic by *banlieue* youths to their peers, there is no subtitling or translation of their words. Secondly, this strategy of subtitling was also used, somewhat more controversially, in *Etat des lieux* where the director opted to subtitle some of the passages in urban slang, in order to ensure that they were easier to follow for non-slang speakers, but effectively subtitling a version of French for other French speakers.

It is through the subjects addressed in the dialogue of this particular scene that we come closer to an understanding of the symbolic nature of the division between the generations, and between the home and the republic, as, for example, Djamel's mother is insistent that he take a talisman and place it in his brother's wallet to protect him against evil (namely his addiction to drugs). The mother has been given the talisman by a *marabout*, a traditional healer who, within some Islamic communities, is considered to have magical powers, and the talisman in question is a small, folded sheet of paper, written in Arabic which Nordine will then keep in his wallet. While Djamel sees Nordine's drug addiction as part of a social, but also a personal, problem, something his brother has to be cured of by being removed from the *banlieue* and given an opportunity to live outside a context in which drugs are relatively freely available, his mother remains faithful to the customs and traditions of another society and culture and believes that a curse has been put on her eldest son by someone who is jealous of her for having had the good fortune of having two sons. The contrast between socio-cultural reality and tradition here is inescapable²⁵⁷ and is only heightened by Gilou's decision to divide the dialogue here between French discourse about the *banlieues* and the difficulties of coming off drugs within that context, and Arabic discourse about tradition, rivalries, curses, and healers. On this basis, it is easy to see why Tarr views the film as feeding into 'racist stereotypes of an alien immigrant community'.²⁵⁸ However, this would be to ignore the underlying conflict which is being said to exist between the 'spheres of reference' impacting on the lives of *banlieue* youths and resulting precisely from their multiethnic origins: a

²⁵⁷ It is also interesting to note that, when Nordine is arrested later in the film, one of the arresting officers finds the talisman in his wallet and unfolds it, assuming that it will contain drugs, and is then bemused by its content, clearly lacking the cultural awareness which would allow him to recognise it for what it is.

²⁵⁸ Tarr, *op. cit.*, 78.

‘homeland’, now one or two generations removed, a republic which subtitles the experience of part of its population, and an emergent group of citizens which has yet to find its place, ‘urban immigrant communities in France [...] carving out their own identities and championing their [...] right to be different’.²⁵⁹

There are two further important scenes involving the mother, both centring, once again, on questions of tradition and cultural experience of tradition. In the first, Djamel’s mother has learned of his relationship with Sahlia and, apparently of her own accord, pays a visit to Sahlia’s mother to agree the terms of their relationship and to celebrate it. This entire scene takes place indoors, in Sahlia’s mother’s living-room, with Sahlia present in the background, but with the two mothers conversation being held in Arabic, subtitled throughout. The Arabic in this scene is consistently subtitled, with the exception of when Djamel’s mother asks permission to ‘pousser des youyous’, in other words to issue the jubilant onomatopoeic *youyou* cry associated with celebration, in some Arab cultures.

A number of strategies are being employed which serve to underline the delicate nature of the position of individuals of the generation of Djamel’s mother within the (linguistic) framework of the republic. This entire scene is concerned with a possible binary conflict between modernity and tradition, represented by the problematic relationship between Djamel and Sahlia, on the one hand, and their respective mothers’ apparent desire to view that relationship not in terms of its complexities but as a simple and straightforward route to marriage, on the other. Djamel and Sahlia speak to each other in French, converse with their peers in French, and yet their mothers both speak Arabic within the home and maintain the traditions, at least symbolically, of the ‘homeland’, an Arabic which is understood by the children’s generation but subtitled for the viewing public. This subtitling, however, still assumes a degree of cultural, if not linguistic, knowledge, on the part of that same viewing public, insofar as they are expected to understand Djamel’s mother’s request when she asked to be allowed to give the *youyou* cry, and to recognise its significance when it follows without subtitled explanation or translation. On the one hand, then, we have a marking of the Arabophone mothers as fundamentally other to a Francophone

²⁵⁹ Orlando, *op. cit.*, 397.

metropolitan French context, but, at the same time, we have an implicit recognition, through subtitling, of a degree of expected cultural awareness on the part of a metropolitan French viewing audience, in that they are expected to recognise and understand the cultural specificity and connotation of the *youyou* in the present circumstances.

‘Ici, on marche en baskets...’: Verbal Spheres of Reference

The second scene, which I will not discuss in any great detail here, comes towards the end of the film, after the shooting of Nordine, and again involves Djamel and Nordine’s mother, but this time with an anonymous group of women of her generation, all speaking Arabic to each other and all trying to console her on the loss of her eldest son. Djamel arrives in the flat to find the women gathered there, crying and speaking loudly, and his feelings of loss and guilt seem to be compounded by his cultural and linguistic isolation in this context, perhaps most clearly illustrating the ways in which *banlieue* characters can be said to be torn between diverse ‘spheres of reference’. The processes of mourning his mother and her peers are engaged in here exclude Djamel, in gendered terms, but also in linguistic and cultural terms, and he feels forced to leave the family home and to return to the public space which is now associated with the killing of his elder brother. All of this in almost total silence for Djamel, but with the sounds of his mother and her peers as aural backdrop, a clear illustration of what Orlando explains as follows:

[T]he traditionalism which often goads the children of immigrant communities. Habitually this traditionalism is viewed by the Beurs’ parents as the only way to hold onto memories of a homeland to which they will never return. For their children, reference to the ‘homeland’ is mythical, having become “deformed by a heritage that suffers from a de-valorization [of] its imagery” because it is so far removed from the Beurs’ field of reference.²⁶⁰

It is particularly worth considering these three scenes from *Raï* involving mothers and sons, in the context of another scene from the same film, this time involving Djamel and Nordine and their absent father, which takes place on the rooftop shortly before Nordine is shot. Thus far, the viewer has seen Nordine as something of a lost cause who does little to endear himself to either the off-screen audience, or indeed his

²⁶⁰ Orlando, *op. cit.*, 405.

onscreen family. Here, however, we hear him talk, for the only time in the film, about his experience of life, and what, in his view, has led him to the position he now finds himself in, and it is interesting to note that Nordine here makes explicit reference to the conflicts and divisions which exist between the mythical 'homeland' and the contemporary national republican frame of reference when he says, for instance, addressing the absent father:

Nordine: Arrête de nous dire qu'en Algérie tu marchais pieds nus,
ici on marche en baskets et on a le cœur gelé.²⁶¹

Whereas before it was left up to the viewer to extrapolate, at least to a degree, a conflict which might arise between the generation and aspirations of the youths' mother, on the one hand, and their own, on the other, this conflict is now made explicit with a direct contrast between the past life in Algeria the youths' father clearly spoke about, and their reality in twentieth century urban France. And yet again, it is far from sufficient to consider this conflict in purely binary terms. It is not simply a case of Nordine saying that life in Algeria is no longer relevant to them, but that his parents need to understand that there has been a move to a new national and cultural context and that this move is now permanent and no longer the transient state they may once have thought it was. While these strands, too, underlie Nordine's words, a closer reading shows that they are more complex. He pleads with the absent father to stop talking to them about a reality they do not know and certainly do not experience, and he signals the fact that they are anchored in a very different world through reference to the symbolic difference in footwear (*pieds nus* as opposed to *les baskets*). However, Nordine's words do not construct a straightforward modernity versus tradition binary, since he rounds off his plea by adding, 'Et on a le cœur gelé'.²⁶² There is a physical reality to which he seeks to draw the absent father's attention, but there is also an underlying cultural or social reality which seems equally important and which signals that they are not yet happy with the position they find themselves in within the new republican framework.

Overall we see here, in these scenes focusing on intergenerational verbal conflict, further indication of the need for a renewal or renegotiation of the terms and

²⁶¹ *Raï* (Gilou, 1995).

²⁶² *Ibid.*

definitions of republicanism in the contemporary context, specifically around the poles of ethnic identity, but not restricted to a metropolitan French versus immigrant other binary. Rather, as we see here in *Rai*, and can see examples of in other *banlieue* films, Begag and Chaouite's 'spheres of reference' encompass at once a 'homeland' (mythical or mythologized), a somewhat rigid contemporary French metropolitan republican framework, and the specificities of individual subjectivities emerging against an intrinsically multiethnic backdrop, schematically divided between 'traditional' home and 'modern' public space, but in fact demonstrating a far more pluralist reality than the republican model is yet ready to admit.

8. Conclusion

Overall then, we can draw a number of strands together here to gain a clearer understanding of the ways in which these conflictual verbal encounters serve to construct and challenge ethnic identities, and the extent to which they contribute to a questioning or a challenging of some of the assumptions at the heart of French republicanism. In relation to exchanges involving *banlieue* youths and representatives of the Republic, the conclusions drawn are threefold. Firstly, we have seen that there is often a silencing of minority subjectivities by representatives of the republic, either through the conventions of official exchange, or through the violent subversion of these same conventions. Secondly, we have established that discursive hierarchies exist, which evolve around tropes of ethnic identity, but which cannot simply be said to slot into existent binary oppositions of *black, blanc, beur* versus *bleu, blanc, rouge* but rather which require a far wider-ranging reconsideration of these oppositions and a repositioning on the basis of the realities of contemporary French republican society. Thirdly, and finally, we have seen in this section, that there can also be a move on the part of *banlieue* inhabitants to stake a claim verbally for a position within French society, whether through self-reflexive choice of descriptors or an awareness, and ability to engage with, a republican French past and present.

There are clear overlaps between these themes and those we see emerging in the sections of the chapter which analyse intergenerational conflict, particularly through the construction of a more complex network of ethnic identities, on all sides, than existent binary models may lead us to anticipate. The hybridity which thus emerges could therefore be seen as leading towards a renegotiation of the French republican

model to accept within its discursive (and, by extension, more broadly socio-cultural) limits, a 'French other' and the paradox inherent in this term, no longer placing the figure of the other outside the confines of the national in linguistic, social, or any other terms, but rather placing it within, modifying and challenging 'du dedans'.

The next chapter will examine a series of verbal exchanges taken from both *banlieue* and gay *corpora* through the second prism of analysis used here, namely gender and the construction of gendered identities, and will focus on questions of linguistic constructions of gender, specifically in relation to this trend towards renegotiation or renewal of the republican model. The analysis offered in the following chapter will focus on exchanges which take place around parent-child relationships with particular regard to the representation onscreen of gendered family relations.

Chapter 3

Genders and Verbal Exchanges in Contemporary French Minority Cinema

The second prism through which it is important to consider the representation of onscreen minorities through the spoken word is that of gender. This chapter will examine the ways in which gendered identities are also portrayed, renewed, and renegotiated across the same bodies of film. In the introduction to their 2001 edited volume on *Gender and French Cinema*, Alex Hughes and James S. Williams make clear from the outset the importance of 'situating gender-related analysis as central to contemporary critical work on representation'.²⁶³ In light of this, and given the significance to this thesis of questions of representation²⁶⁴ and depiction of minority groupings through the spoken word in film, it is clear that gender cannot be overlooked as a prism for analysis. However, it is also crucial to make clear that the focus will be very much on both genders, rather than focussing primarily on men or women.

1. Gendered Minorities

For Tarr and Rollet, in the introduction to their consideration of French women's cinema in the 1980s and 1990s, the founding supposition is that 'women (in itself a heterogeneous category), experience different sets of social relations and discourses which potentially inflect their cinematic production.'²⁶⁵ While this observation may well be accurate, if brought into dialogue with Deleuze and Guattari-inspired views of minority/mainstream relations,²⁶⁶ it becomes apparent that the very difference Tarr

²⁶³ Alex Hughes, and James S. Williams, 'Introduction', in *Gender and French Cinema*, eds. Hughes and Williams (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), 1.

²⁶⁴ It is important to note that my understanding of the notion of 'representation' in the present context is informed by Judith Butler's discussion of the two, apparently contradictory, extensions to the term, namely, 'on the one hand, [...] as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy [...] and] on the other hand, [...] the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true [about a particular category].' (Butler, *op. cit.*, 3). While Butler's remarks were made with reference to the representation of women, they can be usefully applied across minority groupings to encompass considerations of representations in terms of ethnicity, gender, or sexuality.

²⁶⁵ Carrie Tarr, with Brigitte Rollet, *Cinema and the Second Sex*. (New York and London: Continuum, 2001), 8.

²⁶⁶ In any case, it is clear from the most recent census data available for metropolitan France that neither gender represents a minority in any significant numerical terms – of a total population of 60 561 200, 29 424 051 were men and 31 137 149 women. (Source Institut national d'études démographiques

and Rollet highlight makes sense only in relation to the norm from which it is said to differ, namely, in this case, men and men's cinematic production. It is, therefore, my intention in this chapter to examine the ways in which both genders are challenged, constructed, and negotiated through the use of dialogue in minority cinema, examining the ways in which challenges to the one impact upon the other, 'form[ing] the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject.'²⁶⁷

As the cinematic statistics which Tarr and Rollet cite make clear, there remains disparity between contributions and outputs of men and women within the French film industry.²⁶⁸ However, it is my contention that this disparity is better addressed in academic circles by an insistence upon the *interdependence* of gendered identities. The central notion of cinema as a site of verbal exchange, interaction, and relations will thus be strengthened, and the chapter will point towards ways in which, as with ethnic identities, cinema is used as a site of negotiatory discourse between minority groupings and a republican mainstream model around questions of gendered identities and their interactions with other categories of identity:

Gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities.²⁶⁹

The question of gendered identities as constructed through dialogue in minority cinema is particularly relevant in contemporary French cinema, and, by extension, contemporary French society, for a number of reasons, not least because of the ways in which it interacts with broader questions of a redefinition of French republicanism.

The chapter will be structured as follows. The initial two sections will focus, firstly, on considerations of intersections between gender and French republicanism in general terms before then offering a more detailed examination of these intersections against the 1990s socio-political backdrop in France. The second part of this will

(INED), data from January 1st 2005, accessed at www.ined.fr/population-en-chiffres/france/ on August 7th 2005) Within the metropolitan French 'population étrangère', numbers are equally balanced, with 2 166 318 men and 2 139 776 women in 1999. (Source INED, *op. cit.*)

²⁶⁷ Hughes and Williams, *op. cit.*, 3.

²⁶⁸ For instance, films directed by women represented only 6.4% of total French cinematic output for the 1980s and 13.7% in the 1990s. (Tarr and Rollet, *op. cit.*, 3, quoting figures from the Centre National de la Cinématographie, relating to films over 59 minutes in length)

²⁶⁹ Butler, *op. cit.*, 6. (see pages 39-41 for explanation of the choice of three specific prisms of analysis in the current thesis)

allow for a discussion of political issues such as the PACS and the debate on parity, and more theoretical notions such as filiation and the so-called symbolic order. I will then give a brief summary of the four films which form the core focus of analysis in this chapter, namely *Ma 6-T va crack-er*, *Douce France*, *Gazon maudit*, and *Belle Maman*. These summaries will be followed by an explanation of the specific type of verbal exchange to be examined throughout the chapter, in other words exchanges focussed on or involving parent-child relationships. The remaining sections of the chapter will be dedicated to detailed examinations of these verbal exchanges, examining such issues as, for instance, gay parenting, bilingual motherhood, and the use of gendered insults. I conclude from these analyses that we see emerging from exchanges in these films a complex and multilayered representation of gender within onscreen minority groupings, similar to the fragmented representation of ethnicity which emerged in the previous chapter.

Gender and the Republic

Hughes and Williams explain the relevance of gender debates to the French context and, perhaps more interestingly, vice versa, in terms of the broad theoretical framework with which they engage.²⁷⁰ They do so by highlighting the contribution made by Simone de Beauvoir to modern thinking on gender in her paradigmatic text *Le Deuxième Sexe*²⁷¹ and her influential assertion that ‘on ne naît pas femme, on le devient’,²⁷² whereby she clearly suggests a distinction between anatomical sex and categories of gender which are constructed and challenged socially. Hughes and Williams then discuss the contribution made more recently in Judith Butler’s work, which simultaneously engages with both de Beauvoir and a far broader sweep of French critical thinkers from Lévi-Strauss to Lacan to Foucault to Derrida, in order to re-examine the sex/gender distinction. Butler suggests, for instance, that anatomical sexual difference may, in fact, be as culturally, socially, and discursively constructed as gendered identities.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ See Hughes and Williams, *op. cit.*, 1-4.

²⁷¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (Paris: NRF/Gallimard, 1949).

²⁷² Beauvoir, *op. cit.* (See page 191 in the Conclusion for a discussion of the ways in which de Beauvoir’s assertion has been used, in a modified form, in more recent debates on French republicanism)

²⁷³ See Butler, *op. cit.*, in particular Chapter 1 ‘Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire’, p10-11: ‘If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender.’

This relevance, however, is by no means limited to the question of gendered identity construction within broader critical debates but is of specific significance in a contemporary context and with particular reference to questions of French republicanism as construed through recent political and academic debates. As was mentioned in the previous chapter and in the introduction, questions surrounding the place of ‘second/third-generation immigrants’ in France (as elsewhere in Europe) have brought with them, among other issues, a concentration on the question of gendered relations within ethnic minority communities. This concentration has been expressed, in relation to ethnic minorities, and by extension to the *banlieues*,²⁷⁴ through the *affaire du voile* which is viewed by some as a feminist issue²⁷⁵ or through media focus on the disaffection (*malaise*) felt by *banlieue* youths,²⁷⁶ of Maghrebi origin or otherwise, or again through media attention being paid to intergenerational conflicts around such poles as tradition versus modernity, for instance. Similarly, in relation to *banlieue* communities onscreen, there has been a definite bias in favour of male central characters, with girls and women excluded entirely, or at least significantly, from the onscreen narrative.²⁷⁷

2. 1990s Socio-political Debates in France: Parity and the PACS

In the second half of the 1990s, questions of gender have been a frequent feature of media, political, and popular debate in France in response to a number of specific political and societal issues:

The political climate of the mid to late 1990s was [...] marked both by the revival of specifically feminist (or feminist-inspired) discourses, thanks to the campaign for political parity and debates about the

²⁷⁴ 37% of all ‘immigrés vivant en métropole’ live in the Ile-de-France region and, of these, the highest concentration is to be found in the north-eastern part of the area, as well as in the northern *banlieues* of Paris. (Source ‘Ile-de-France à la page’, report published by the Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes (INSEE), November 2004)

²⁷⁵ Although I can see the logic of this position, particularly with regard to the earlier stages of this debate from 1989 until the mid-1990s, I feel that it is unhelpful with regard to the most recent legislation on this issue which, despite being reported most frequently in terms of a ban on the *hijab* or *tchador*, in fact place a prohibition on the wearing of all visible religious signs and, as such, can no longer be reduced to a debate on gender relations within Islam.

²⁷⁶ There is an abundance of press material on this topic. To take but one regular mainstream written press outlet, see, for instance: Robert Sole, ‘La Hantise de “l’été chaud”’, *Le Monde*, June 11th 1991; Jazouli Adil, ‘Société banlieues: un an après’, *Le Monde*, January 3rd 1992; Frédéric Chambon, ‘Les Banlieues en rupture’, *Le Monde*, September 28th 2000.

²⁷⁷ There are some exceptions to this trend, in *La Squale*, for instance, or *Douce France*, which will be discussed in the current chapter, but, overall, *banlieue* films have placed young men at the centre of the narrative, with women given only peripheral roles.

feminisation of work titles, and by the growing recognition of gays and lesbians, in particular through the campaign for the PACS.²⁷⁸

Again, I argue that this revival of 'feminist-inspired discourses' serves not only to place increased focus on issues related to women in French society, but also to highlight questions of genders and the possibility of a redefinition of relationships and interactions between the genders in France today. The campaign for *parité* within political spheres, for instance, does indeed highlight the imbalance in numerical terms between male and female representatives at all levels of French politics.²⁷⁹ However, as Butler argues:

The effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms.²⁸⁰

It is surely not sufficient to lay blame for this at the door of some form of universal patriarchal bias, but rather the form and expression of such biases need to be analysed against their specific contexts and in relation to both genders' participation therein. Similarly, the linguistic debates on the gender-specificity of certain work titles in metropolitan French, while highlighting the absence of women in high-level positions in many workplaces, could equally open out into a more inclusive discussion of gendered roles within the workplace and, indeed, at home with, for instance, a debate on conditions of paternity/maternity leave.

The final issue mentioned by Tarr and Rollet above is that of the PACS and the increasing visibility and recognition for sexual minority groupings within France. This issue brings the debate closest to the terms of examination relevant to this thesis, namely, on the one hand, the use of verbal exchanges to depict aspects of minority identities onscreen and, on the other hand, the ways in which these verbal exchanges represent an interaction with renegotiations of contemporary French republicanism.

²⁷⁸ Tarr and Rollet, *op. cit.*, 7.

²⁷⁹ Public and parliamentary debates on the issue of gender parity in the political sphere were held throughout the 1990s, culminating in the parity constitutional reform bill which 'promotes equal access to electoral terms of office to men and women', a bill which was voted for by 745 deputies and senators, with only 43 against. (Source: Yolande Cohen, 'Gender Parity and Women's Politics in France: new and old cleavages, from mother's allowances to the parity law, 1932-1990,' Working paper delivered at the 'New Cleavages in France' conference, 9th-12th October 2003, at Princeton University and accessed at <http://www.princeton.edu/~jjun/webs/PIIRS/papers/YolandeCohen.pdf> on August 20th 2005)

²⁸⁰ Butler, *op. cit.*, 19.

While the previous chapter took, as its focus, sites of verbal conflict between individual minority group members and representatives of republican authority. The focus of the current chapter will shift to an examination of the ways in which gendered identities are constructed (and challenged) around interpersonal verbal exchanges within family structures.

The family is conventionally the site of the formation of identity, the place where the child achieves a sense of self according to whether or not s/he feels loved and valued, and a sense of identity in relation to others, in particular in terms of gender, sexuality, class and ethnicity.²⁸¹

In keeping with the thrust of their study, Tarr and Rollet see this formative process as a justification for particular focus being placed on identity construction for girls and women within the family context.²⁸² I agree with their assertion that this, therefore, renders onscreen depictions of family relations a particularly interesting locus of analysis. However, I argue that the family is equally a 'site' of identity formation for both genders and, as such, I will examine the ways in which verbal exchanges contribute to constructions of, and challenges to, gendered *identities*, rather than one particular gendered identity. It is a focus which, for instance, when adopted by Higbee in his work on the films of Laurent Cantet, places 'the emphasis on the family as the site of wider social crisis'²⁸³ and is used as a lens through which to examine 'masculinity-in-crisis'²⁸⁴ and father-son relationships.

Filiation and A Symbolic Order

My approach thus brings Tarr and Rollet's underlining of the crucial role played in gendered identity constructions by the onscreen family into dialogue with the broader gender and family-oriented debates which gained prominence over the second half of the 1990s in particular and which revolve around the key notion of *filiation*. This concept, according to sociologist Eric Fassin, has become the 'cornerstone'²⁸⁵ of

²⁸¹ Tarr and Rollet, *op. cit.*, 25. (See page 39-41 for an explanation of the three prisms of analysis chosen here.)

²⁸² They explicitly highlight the family as the 'problematic site of the production of femininity' for young girls. (Tarr and Rollet, *op. cit.*, 25)

²⁸³ Will Higbee, "'Elle est où, ta place?'" The Social-Realist Melodramas of Laurent Cantet: *Ressources humaines* (2000) and *Emploi du temps* (2001)', *French Cultural Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2004), 235.

²⁸⁴ Higbee, *ibid.*

²⁸⁵ Fassin, *op. cit.*, 215-232.

rhetoric in public discourses on the PACS and in the wider debate it has provoked regarding the evolution of family structures in France²⁸⁶ because, in Fassin's view:

[f]iliation structures the human psyche (as a symbolic link between parent and child) and at the same time culture itself (as consanguinity complements affinity).²⁸⁷

Rather than following Tarr and Rollet when they describe France as 'a society where issues relating to gender inequalities and sexual difference have been persistently *obscured* by discourses on Republican universalism inherited from the French revolution,'²⁸⁸ [my emphasis] this chapter will show how these issues, which come to the fore through the verbal exchanges studied here, in fact, *interact* with these discourses, highlighting discrepancies between republicanism in its 'inherited'²⁸⁹ form and a renewed and renegotiated form which would be more appropriate as an expression of the values of contemporary France. This is not to deny that, in some formulations, French republicanism and debates relating to gender or sexual difference are at odds.²⁹⁰ However, just as the conflictual exchanges examined in the previous chapter illustrated that both 'republican identity' and 'minority identity' are, in fact, at once fractured and complex in relation to ethnicity, so too will the present chapter's focus on interpersonal verbal relations within onscreen families demonstrate that similar fractured identities exist in the domain of gender.

As is suggested by Tarr and Rollet's reference to a republicanism 'inherited from the revolution', the analysis in this chapter does, indeed, involve consideration of more traditional expressions of republicanism. However, it does so only insofar as these can then be shown to be in need of renewal or, at the very least, a degree of renegotiation, and insofar as traditional expressions of republicanism, as Foerster suggests, are themselves 'parasités [...] par une autre idéologie qui lui est antérieure et antithétique:

²⁸⁶ Debate has, for instance, broadened to encompass such issues as gay parenting and the right for gay and lesbian couples to adopt.

²⁸⁷ Fassin, *op. cit.*, 225.

²⁸⁸ Tarr and Rollet, *op. cit.*, 5.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ Arguments for the apparent incompatibility of French republicanism and debates relating to gender or sexual difference were advanced during the parity debates of the 1990s by, for example, Elisabeth Badinter who believed that parity would 'introduce an element of distinction in the concept of citizenship'. (Source Cohen, *op. cit.*) However, Fassin, for instance, has claimed that it is possible for debates on parity and same-sex unions to be expressed in terms which are not in contradiction with the universalism of French republicanism, by 'relying on the language of equality and discrimination (rather than of sexual difference)' (See Fassin, *op. cit.*, 230).

la différence des sexes.’²⁹¹ Foerster’s interpretation brings into play this anterior and antithetical notion which represents the ‘ordre symbolique’²⁹² which, in turn, was evoked during public, media, and political debates on the PACS and the series of gender and family-related issues it was seen to carry in its wake. Perhaps the most vocal opponent of the PACS was sociologist Irène Théry²⁹³ who frequently turned to this notion of an ‘ordre symbolique’²⁹⁴ – and the duty (as she saw it) of French law to uphold this order – in her public arguments against the proposed legislation,²⁹⁵ not least because, in her view, ‘filiation without sexual difference would [...] undermine a symbolic order that is the very condition of our ability to think and live in society.’²⁹⁶

As the above summary implies, questions of gender, republicanism, family structures, and *filiation* are central to French public and political debate through the 1990s and, as will be demonstrated in the analysis offered in this chapter, the prominence of such topics found its echo in onscreen representations of the very minority communities who were at the core of the debates. This chapter also shows how this debate about gender relations and, in particular about same-sex partnerships ‘with the sacralisation of filiation [that they] reveal, open[s] onto a wider array of minority issues, including not only feminist but also ethnic politics in France’²⁹⁷ – so much so indeed that it would be fair to view it as ‘a debate about the nation.’²⁹⁸ And insofar as the nation at the centre of the debate is contemporary France, then it is also a debate about contemporary French republicanism.

²⁹¹ Foerster, *op. cit.*, 10.

²⁹² Foerster, *op. cit.*, 50.

²⁹³ Irène Théry is a researcher at the Ecole de Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris who, in 1998, produced a report for the government on changes in the family structure which was frequently cited in debates on the PACS legislation. (Irène Théry, *Couple, filiation et parenté aujourd’hui* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1998).)

²⁹⁴ See, for instance, Jacqueline Remy, ‘Non au mariage bis des concubins!’, *L’Express* October 2nd 1997 (accessed online at <http://www.lexpress.fr/info/societe/dossier/homos/dossier.asp?id=422535> on September 20th 2005) in which, in response to the question, ‘Un “contrat” juste pour les homos... N’est-ce pas les enfermer dans le ghetto du communautarisme?’, Théry replied: ‘A travers le CUS, certains prônent l’indistinction en droit parce qu’ils souhaitent que les différences s’expriment dans les mœurs et la culture. Moi, je prône le contraire: reconnaître les différences dans l’ordre symbolique et, dans les mêmes quartiers, permettre à tous de s’asseoir aux terrasses des mêmes cafés. Il ne faut pas, sous prétexte de républicanisme, céder à la tentation moderne de la désymbolisation.’

²⁹⁵ See, for instance, the interview published with Théry in *L’Express, op.cit.*, in which she declares: ‘Le droit a une fonction instituante très importante dans l’ordre symbolique’. Later in the same interview, she declares herself in favour of the recognition of ‘les différences dans l’ordre symbolique.’

²⁹⁶ Fassin, *op. cit.*, 229. Théry is quoted in English in Fassin’s article.

²⁹⁷ Fassin, *op. cit.*, 232.

²⁹⁸ Fassin, *ibid.*

3. Corpus: *Gazon maudit*, *Douce France*, *Ma 6-T va crack-er*, and *Belle Maman*

While the central examples in the previous chapter focussed on works from *banlieue* cinema, the present chapter will examine *banlieue* and gay cinema in more direct parallel, working towards a clearer understanding of how such parallel analysis contributes to an examination of French minority cinemas in a broader sense. Closest attention will, again, be paid to a central group of four films, with frequent reference being made to other works from both bodies of cinema. Once again the films' release dates will span the period under examination here and this spread (from February 1995 to March 1999 for metropolitan France)²⁹⁹ will demonstrate the ways in which such different films have contributed to, interacted with, and reflected wider societal debates on questions of family structures and relations in contemporary France. This, in turn, will illustrate the ways in which such debates have been framed so as to relate, on the one hand, to questions of a contemporary reformulation of French republicanism, and, on the other hand, to discussions of the challenges posed to French republicanism by the specificities of particular minority groupings. The four films I will focus on here are: *Gazon maudit*,³⁰⁰ *Douce France*,³⁰¹ *Ma 6-T va crack-er*,³⁰² and *Belle Maman*.³⁰³ The equal division between *banlieue* (Chibane and Richet) and gay films (Balasko and Aghion) demonstrates that questions of gendered identities are of relevance across French society, rather than being the specific domain of interest of one or other minority group.

²⁹⁹ Although the key film texts used here were released in the second half of the period studied here, I will make reference in footnotes to relevant verbal exchanges in pre-1995 works from both *banlieue* and gay cinema.

³⁰⁰ A huge box office success in France, *Gazon maudit* has sold close to 4 million tickets in French cinemas since its release in February 1995 (see Darren Waldron, 'Fluidity of Gender and Sexuality in *Gazon maudit*', in ed. Lucy Mazdon, *op. cit.*, 65), with 600,000 *entrées* in the first week of its release on French screens (*Ibid.*, 77).

³⁰¹ Released in metropolitan France in November 1995, Chibane's second feature can only boast 18,273 *entrées* (see Tarr, *op. cit.*, 215) but, as with his earlier work *Hexagone*, it must be remembered that *Douce France* was independently financed by Alhambra Films and, despite the low viewing figures for its French release, the film was positively received at the Locarno Film Festival, Switzerland, where it received its début screening, and won the Jury's Special Prize at the Namur International Festival.

³⁰² Richet's second feature was released in May 1997 and has registered 69,534 *entrées*, 20,000 more than his 1995 début *Etat des lieux*. (Source www.lefilmfrancais.fr, accessed August 2005)

³⁰³ Released in March 1999, Aghion's comedy was a box office success with 1,257,317 *entrées* (source www.lefilmfrancais.fr, accessed August 2005).

Gazon maudit

The first of the four films to appear, Josiane Balasko's comedy *Gazon maudit*, was released in February 1995 and was an instant box office success.³⁰⁴ Set in Southern France, the film revolves around a variation on the *ménage à trois* that frequently features in French bedroom farce. Loli (Victoria Abril) is a Spanish housewife and mother, devoted to her husband, Laurent (Alain Chabat), who is a womanising, misogynistic estate agent with a string of mistresses. The situation changes when, one day, a garishly coloured van breaks down outside their family home. Enter Marijo (played by Balasko), a Parisian butch lesbian who instantly falls for Loli. The plot proceeds through a series of twists and turns as Loli first decides to pursue her attraction for Marijo, but then decides that she misses her husband who, in the meantime, has apparently realised the error of his previous ways. Loli eventually suggests a compromise which sees the trio sharing a house together, with Loli sleeping with Marijo three nights a week, Laurent three nights a week, and alone on Sundays. It is only a matter of time before Loli's timeshare partners crack and Marijo leaves, but only after having convinced Laurent to sleep with her, with the explicit desire to fall pregnant. The film ends with Laurent and Loli travelling to Paris to find Marijo, and the trio once again living together after the baby has been born. It is unclear from the final scenes of the film precisely who is sleeping with whom, and further ambiguity is added by the suggestion that Laurent, thus far hetero *par excellence*, has fallen for a male client, Diego (Miguel Bosé).

Despite the lack of realism inherent in such a narrative (and particularly in its resolution), *Gazon maudit* is very much '[un] film-phénomène de société',³⁰⁵ an original commentary on evolving values in contemporary French society, in particular with regard to gendered relations, sexual stereotypes, and gay parenting, which I return to in more detail later in this chapter. Emma Wilson describes it as a 'ground-breaking comedy',³⁰⁶ and credits it with having allowed 'lesbianism [to enter] the French mainstream';³⁰⁷ Brigitte Rollet sees the film in similarly ground-breaking ways terming it 'the first ever lesbian comedy',³⁰⁸ and commenting on the ways in

³⁰⁴ 'The second most popular French film of 1995', according to Waldron, *op. cit.*, 65.

³⁰⁵ Luc Le Vaillant, 'Profil. Josiane Balasko', *Libération*, March 2nd 1996.

³⁰⁶ Emma Wilson, 'Identification and Female Friendship', in eds. Hughes and Williams, *op. cit.*, 258.

³⁰⁷ Wilson. *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ Brigitte Rollet, 'Unruly woman? Josiane Balasko, French Comedy and *Gazon maudit*', in Powrie, *op. cit.*, 132.

which Balasko 'transgresses social and sexual taboos and places the audience on her side';³⁰⁹ and Darren Waldron has written of the ways in which the film 'confronted mainstream audiences with an explicit portrayal of a lesbian relationship, previous depictions of which had largely been veiled.'³¹⁰ Such apparent daring on the part of a filmmaker is all the more surprising when one considers that the film was co-produced by the French television channel TF1, although it has also been noted by some that Balasko's choice of co-stars goes some way towards redressing this balance. Abril is known primarily for her work with innovative, and often outrageous, Spanish director Pedro Almodovár, and Chabat, at the time of the film's release, was mainly associated, in the popular imagination, with the satirical television series *Les Nuls*.

Douce France

Later the same year, Malik Chibane released his second directorial feature *Douce France* which, although typical of *banlieue* films in terms of its subject matter and physical setting, also breaks the mould in two significant ways. Firstly, and of particular relevance for the current chapter, alongside the two male central characters Moussa (Hakim Sarahoui) and Jean-Luc (Frédéric Diefenthal), Chibane places equal emphasis on two female characters of Maghrebi origin, Farida (Fadila Belkebla) and Souad (Seloua Hamse). While a degree of criticism was levelled at Chibane for the reductive way in which he depicted these two female characters,³¹¹ it is nevertheless important to note just how unusual this split focus is in terms of *banlieue* film as a genre, not least when one compares it to other *banlieue* works released in the same year such as *La Haine* or *Rai*. The second way in which *Douce France* differs from other *banlieue* films comes with Chibane's decision to make one of his central characters, Moussa, the son of a *harki*, a group which remains very much on the margins of the margins in terms of French immigrant society and French cinematic production, including *banlieue* cinema.

³⁰⁹ Rollet. *ibid.*

³¹⁰ Waldron, *op. cit.*, 65.

³¹¹ Pascal Mériageu, for instance, in his review of the film describes the depiction of these two characters as 'déplaisants à force d'être sommaires' and criticises Chibane for having offered viewers a simplistic vision of 'deux sœurs ennemies finalement réunies dans une même volonté de prendre la vie du bon côté.' (Mériageu, 'La vie en banlieue selon Malik Chibane', *Le Monde*, November 23rd 1995)

While *Hexagone* was set in Chibane's own home suburb, Goussainville, the action in *Douce France* shifts to the Parisian suburb of St Denis but retains the same setting in time, namely early 1990s France. The film begins with Moussa and Jean-Luc as chance witnesses to the robbery of a jewellery store. From the tramway which crosses the suburb, they see the perpetrator throwing something (as it transpires, the jewellery he had stolen) into a bin as he flees from police. The pair seizes the opportunity as a way to break from the poverty which stifles their ambition, removing the loot from the bin and selling it on themselves. They use the money they make to buy a café which Moussa continues to run as a café for half the day, but which Jean-Luc transforms into an office for his one-man law firm for the other half of the day.

At the same time as it follows the fortunes of Moussa and Jean-Luc, the film also concentrates on the two sisters, Farida and Souad, whose paths cross those of the two male protagonists. Farida is a practicing Muslim who wears the *hijab*, distributes food to those poorer than herself, and holds fast to the traditions of her faith, while her sister Souad cuts her hair short, goes out with men, and works at the local fast food restaurant despite the complaints of their father. Moussa meets and falls in love with Farida, only to find that his mother has organised an arranged marriage for him with Myssad, a woman from his Algerian *bled*,³¹² while we learn that Jean-Luc has previously had a relationship with Souad and is keen to win back her affections. The film ends with reconciliation between Farida and Souad, as they help Myssad escape from her wedding day, arranging for her return to Algeria, and with Farida deciding to discard the *hijab*. We are not given any indication as to what will happen to Moussa now that the arranged marriage has fallen through in this way.

Ma 6-T va crack-er

Two years later, in 1997, Jean-François Richet released his second feature-length work as director, *Ma 6-T va crack-er*, a hard-hitting *banlieue* drama which was given a 16 certificate on French screens.³¹³ There is little in the way of a linear plot structure in *Ma 6-T*, with the action focussing on two gangs of male youths in Richet's own

³¹² Home region or village.

³¹³ Indeed, the film was withdrawn from general distribution in France over fears that it would lead to widespread unrest in the *banlieues* (Source Tarr, *op. cit.*, 110), although Richet himself has defended the film's use of violence in interviews, claiming that it is melancholic, rather than glorifying. (See, for instance, Anne Boulay and Didier Péron's interview with the director published in *Libération's* supplement on the 1997 Cannes Film Festival, on May 17th 1997.)

home suburb of Meaux. The first group still attends secondary school, while the second is slightly older, in their 20s, 'linked by the fact that [a member of each] Djéff and Arco (played respectively by the director and his co-writer [Arco C. Descat]) live in the same flat'.³¹⁴ A number of conflicts erupt, with the main members of the younger gang being suspended from school in the early stages of the film, and the older gang members repeatedly running into trouble with the police. The trigger for the violent clashes which eventually erupt between *banlieue* youths and CRS riot police is the police *bavure* which results in the death of Malik, one of the younger gang members. It is worth noting from the outset that the narrative focus of *Ma 6-T* is almost exclusively male, with no female central characters. Women, to a large extent, exist only as the content of discussions, usually sexual in nature, between male youths, to such an extent that Tarr describes the film as 'a male-centred fantasy of revolution in the *banlieue*',³¹⁵ and 'an over-extended, reactionary image of phallic masculinity in the *banlieue*.'³¹⁶

While *Gazon maudit* and *Douce France* (and *Belle Maman* as we shall see below) try, in different ways, to engage with a mainstream audience, I agree with Tarr's assertion that Richet's violent and chaotic Marxist vision of the *banlieues* serves more to alienate:

[T]he lack of differentiation between individual protagonists, or between criminal violence and violence against the police, means that there is little possibility of establishing identification or sympathy for a mainstream audience.³¹⁷

However, it is also precisely because of the film's uncompromising and unsubtle political stance (not to mention the fact that it was presented at Cannes in 1997) that it received substantial media coverage at the time of its release and thus, although viewing figures are low compared to those of its generic forerunners, its subject matter and (aesthetic and political) presentation still found their way into the columns of mainstream media outlets such as *Le Monde* and *Libération*.³¹⁸ Just as Richet's first, and equally hard-hitting, feature, *Etat des lieux*, had ensured him a series of

³¹⁴ Tarr, *op. cit.*, 101.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

³¹⁸ Tarr herself dedicates more space to an individual analysis of *Ma 6-T va crack-er* than she does to *La Haine*, *Rai*, or *Douce France*.

interviews and profiles in cinema and mainstream press, so too did the release of *Ma 6-T*. Its screening at Cannes led to a similar string of articles in which the director was able to discuss the problems of the *banlieues* and the Marxist solutions he saw to them.³¹⁹

Belle Maman

The final film that will form the core of the analysis here is Gabriel Aghion's 1999 comedy *Belle Maman*, with its all-star cast including Catherine Deneuve and Vincent Lindon. Like *Gazon maudit* in 1995, *Belle Maman* proved to be another example of the potential for gay comedies to encounter mainstream cinematic success, strengthened here, not only by the impressive cast, but also by the combined script-writing talents of the director Aghion and his co-writer, Danièle Thompson:

Thompson a su relier son propre univers de comédie burlesque à celui de Gabriel Aghion, porté, ici, comme dans *Pédale douce*,³²⁰ à une satire plus aiguë qu'on n'a voulu le voir de certaines mœurs modernes.³²¹

Reviews of the film at the time of its release highlighted, as can be seen in the quote above, the film's successful mixture of existent French comedic genres (burlesque, the bedroom farce) with acerbic social comment. Equally significantly in terms of the current chapter, it contains possibly the first onscreen reference to the PACS in mainstream French cinema³²² and it represents an attempt to bring minority issues to a mainstream audience on a number of levels.

The film begins at the altar with Antoine (Lindon) and Séverine (Mathilde Seigner) about to tie the knot. The ceremony is interrupted by the late arrival of an attractive older woman who turns out to be Léa (Deneuve), the 'belle maman' of the title, separated from Séverine's doting father Paul (Jean Yanne) and living on a Caribbean

³¹⁹ See, for instance, François Devinat's profile piece published in *Libération* on July 2nd 1997, Boulay and Péron's interview referred to above, or Péron's review of the film published in *Libération* on May 17th, 1997.

³²⁰ Aghion directed *Pédale douce* in 1996 and the film was also a major box office success, as we will discuss in the next chapter on 'Sexualities'. (See pages 146-148)

³²¹ Jacques Siclier, 'Belle Maman', *Le Monde*, June 4th 2000.

³²² The film was released in March 1999, and it was not until October 13th 1999, that the PACS won its final vote of approval from the French parliament. Since its inception, around 40,000 couples have signed PACS (Source: INED figures for 2004 accessed at www.ined.fr/population-en-chiffres/france/ on August 25th 2005), although it is legally impossible for INED to find out how many of those couples were same-sex.

island with her black partner Grégoire (Idris Elba), and who, quite literally, turns Antoine's head. The plot is structured around Antoine's dilemma and his desire to win over Léa, but there are a number of parallel plot strands which draw the viewer's attention to a series of peripheral characters including Antoine's alcoholic mother Josette, Léa's lesbian mother Nicou (Line Renaud) accompanied by her senile partner Brigitte (Stéphane Audran), and Pascal, Antoine's best friend who is married but who comes out halfway through the film and introduces Antoine to his partner, Franck. As with *Gazon maudit*, a complex stability seems to have been reached by the end of the film with a string of new partnerships having been forged.

4. Parent-child Verbal Exchanges in the Four Core Films

Given the importance of Fassin's notion of *filiation* already mentioned, in its examination of specific types of verbal exchanges drawn from family-based relations, this chapter focuses on gendered identities as constructed and challenged through dialogue between parents and children in four core films.³²³ The decision to centre on this type of exchange stems both from the broader debates which served as a backdrop to the films' releases in France and from the frequent use of family structures as sites of exchange in both *banlieue* and gay cinema. The former have been discussed in detail in the previous sections, but evidence of the latter can be found in both academic engagements with the bodies of cinema concerned and in mainstream media coverage of the films focussed on here.

In his review of *Belle Maman*, Gérard Lefort, for example, describes the film as a 'jeu des 7 familles'³²⁴ and continues with the family metaphor to describe the twists and turns of the film's plot:

[L]e jeu classique des sept familles brouille toutes les cartes, au point d'inventer une huitième famille nettement plus inédite: le gendre tombe amoureux de sa belle-mère le jour de son mariage, la belle-mère

³²³ Constraints of space mean that I have chosen to focus solely on parent-child verbal exchanges in this chapter but a good deal of useful insight into gendering can also be derived from an examination of verbal relations between siblings or between grandparents and grandchildren, not only in the four films featured here, but indeed across the two bodies of film chosen. See, for instance, the relationship between Nicou and Séverine in *Belle Maman*, but also that between Ludo and his grandmother in *Ma Vie en rose* (Berliner, 1997) or between Félix and his symbolic 'grandmother' in *Drôle de Félix*. For sibling relationships, see, for instance, *Ma 6-T va crack-er* and *Etat des lieux*.

³²⁴ Gérard Lefort, 'La désunion fait la force', *Libération*, March 10th 1999. (Accessed online at www.liberation.fr on August 23rd 2005)

est nettement plus accro au grand Noir balèze qu'aux mémoires d'une belle-doche rangée, la grand-mère est gouine, la belle-fille n'est pas la moins folle, et, à défaut d'un polichinelle dans le tiroir, il y a plus certainement un pédé dans le placard.³²⁵

From the above it is evident, not only that the family structure is crucial to the film's narrative, but also, more specifically, that this family structure is, in itself, expanded and extended to encompass new forms of filiation. This, in turn, demonstrates that, while the family may well be at the core of much contemporary political debate in France, its structures are in evolution and its definition in need of a degree of renegotiation.

In a profile of Jean-François Richet published on the release of *Ma 6-T*, François Devinat makes frequent implicit, and explicit, reference to the influence of family relationships on Richet's cinematic output overall. Putting to one side a barbed allusion, in the first paragraph, to the fact that Richet, at 31 years of age, still lives with his mother,³²⁶ Devinat makes further detailed reference to Richet's family background, and in particular the lack of a father figure during his childhood, and asks whether this could have led to what he describes as the director's 'mutisme intérieur.'³²⁷ In common with Devinat, who suggests that Richet sought alternative family ties in his own life,³²⁸ Carrie Tarr highlights a continuation of this trend in the narrative framework of *Ma 6-T va crack-er*:

The film suggests that the younger boys turn to their elder brothers as role models rather than to parental or other authority figures. Parents are notably absent from the diegesis.³²⁹

While it is necessary to be vigilant when drawing parallels between comments made about a film's director and the influence they may or may not have on that director's work, Richet himself has followed other *banlieue* directors in making such links explicit when talking about his films. Just as Malik Chibane chose to film his first

³²⁵ Lefort, *ibid.*

³²⁶ '*Etat des lieux*, premier long métrage qui l'a tiré de la mouise, mais pas encore des jupes de sa mère chez laquelle il est toujours domicilié.' Devinat, *op. cit.*

³²⁷ 'Premier de trois enfants. Mère secrétaire. Père inconnu au bataillon, rayé de la carte du Tendre. "Je ne veux rien savoir de lui." Est-ce cette absence [...] qui cramponne Richet à son mutisme intérieur?' Devinat, *op. cit.*

³²⁸ 'Celui qui cimente ses frères de rage et de rap, desperados appointés de l'horreur économique de la cité de Beauval et d'alentour', *ibid.*

³²⁹ Tarr, *op. cit.*, 101.

film, *Hexagone*, in his home suburb of Goussainville, so too did Richet opt to set his first two works in his home suburb of Meaux and, as Higbee has highlighted, a number of the film's features aim to deliberately blur the distinctions between film and reality:

The improvised dialogue of *Ma 6-T va crack-er* often appears as a more personal reflection on life in the deprived *banlieue*, with the non-professional actors (who themselves originate from Meaux) investing their own emotions and experiences of life in the *cité* into the diegesis.³³⁰

Tarr goes on to tie the depiction of families, and specifically the parent-child relationship, to be found in *Ma 6-T* to broader issues of social exclusion, with specific reference to representations of masculinity, and it is these comments which I develop in the later stages of this chapter:

There are moments of respite in the violence when a more sympathetic image of masculinity damaged by social exclusion and dysfunctional families struggles to surface. At several points, the film shows the youths sitting around talking about their lack of communication with their parents.³³¹

The centrality of family structures have also been pinpointed as a site and source of exchange within the narratives of the other two core films examined in this chapter. In *Gazon maudit*, for instance, attention is drawn to the fact that the character of Marijo seduces an apparently happily married housewife, thus disrupting a traditional family home, while, at the same time, resolution in the diegesis rests, at least in part, in another family being created with Marijo's pregnancy.³³² In *Douce France*, which is centred around family relationships between Moussa and his mother, between the two sisters Farida and Souad, and between the sisters and their parents, attention has been drawn to the fact that the family thus serves as a symbolic structure for the opposition between the traditions of the parents and the children's desire to carve out new identities within the structures of contemporary France.³³³

³³⁰ Will Higbee, 'Screening the "Other" Paris: Cinematic Representations of the French Urban Periphery in *La Haine* and *Ma 6-T va crack-er*', *Modern & Contemporary France*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (May 2001), 205.

³³¹ Tarr, *ibid.*

³³² See, for example, Waldron's article in Mazdon, *op. cit.*

³³³ See, for instance, Tarr's discussion of the film, *op. cit.*, 80-4, in which she describes the end of the film as showing 'the young women clearly rejecting the traditions and values of their parents insofar as they affect their lives as women.' (81)

This chapter therefore examines a series of verbal exchanges which take place between onscreen family members – fathers, mothers, daughters, and sons – in each of the four core films and demonstrates a number of related points through these combined analyses. Firstly, it will show the family to be a key site of the construction of gendered identities in the two bodies of film under consideration. Secondly, by considering these constructions and the challenges posed to them against the backdrop of broader minority, gender and family-oriented debate in 1990s France, it illustrates the ways in which these evolving onscreen gendered identities have their part to play in wider socio-political discussions. And thirdly, through this interaction between onscreen gendered identities in family settings and contemporary debates which came to prominence in metropolitan France in the 1990s, I will show how these same gendered identities, in fact, represent similarly fractured and complex identities to those established in the previous chapter's examination of ethnicity onscreen. And these fractured gender identities, through their interaction with debate, will be shown to engage with questions of the relevance of republicanism to the contemporary French context and the need for a renegotiation of its terms in view of the realities of modern-day France.

5. Parents and Children in *Belle Maman*

The set of verbal exchanges I examine here either occur between parent and child or revolve around a parent-child structure, and include sons, daughters, mothers, and fathers in a number of different constellations from both the gay and *banlieue* films under consideration. In-keeping with the themes of the broader societal debates which formed a backdrop to the release of these works, I examine the gendered identities which emerge in both 'straight' and 'gay' parent-child relationships.

'Tu m'as été mon père et ma mère à la fois':³³⁴ Parent-child Verbal Relations (Nicou and Léa)

In many ways, the most striking examples of verbal interactions between and around parents and children come from the most recent of the four core films, *Belle Maman*, with its unorthodox combinations of *belles-mères*, *beaux-pères*, *beaux-fils*, and *belles-filles* which result in a refreshing and contemporary interpretation of gendered family

³³⁴ *Belle Maman* (Aghion, 1999).

relations in late 1990s France. Starting, for instance, with Léa, it seems clear, from the very title of the film, that her role as *belle-mère* is particularly significant since it is her arrival at the wedding which throws Antoine into a state of confusion. However, while a number of interesting features arise in verbal exchanges between her and her daughter (and involving her ex-husband, Paul), more significant still is her role as daughter to a lesbian mother in the shape of Nicou. Given *Belle Maman*'s status as a clearly mainstream film, it is interesting to note that the relationship between mother and daughter is in no way problematised here, but rather is taken for granted as part of the narrative.³³⁵ Whereas, as shall be discussed later, the possibility – and indeed the reality – of lesbian parenthood in *Gazon maudit* is founded in conflict and dependent upon a complex, non-traditional family structure, Nicou and Léa's relationship appears to be one which has been wholeheartedly accepted by each party. And whereas lesbian parenthood is only part of the final resolution in *Gazon maudit* and, as such, only has the briefest of onscreen existences, Nicou and Léa both have key roles to play throughout *Belle Maman* and, as the following analysis of verbal exchanges between the two shows, they emerge as strong and positive female characters.

The first half of the film is set in Paris where the various family members have gathered first for Séverine and Antoine's wedding, and then for the birth of their daughter, Pauline.³³⁶ However, the setting then shifts to the Caribbean island where Léa, Grégoire, Nicou, and Brigitte live, and where they have organised a party to celebrate Nicou's 70th birthday. Léa's gift to her mother comes in the form of a song which she has written and sings to her during the celebrations and it is the lyrics of the song which provide a clear, if brief, and positive analysis of gay parenting, from the child's point of view. Ordinarily, the use of music in the soundtracks of the films

³³⁵ This unproblematic daughter-lesbian mother relationship can be contrasted, for instance, with the daughter-gay father relationship in *Le Derrière* (Lemercier, 1999), which we will discuss in more detail in the following chapter on sexualities. Neither of the parental relationships of *Le Derrière*'s central character Frédérique could be described as unproblematic. Her mother's death (pre-diegetic) prompts Frédérique to seek out a biological father she has never known and who, it transpires, is gay and living with his partner in Paris. Frédérique's drunken imitation of her late mother's bossiness implies that they did not have an entirely happy relationship and the only way she seems able to get to know her father is by disguising herself as a young gay man and pretending to be his long lost homosexual son.

³³⁶ It is interesting to note that Séverine's relationship with her father, Paul, is presented in as positive a light as Léa's with Nicou. The father-daughter bond is shown through frequent conversations between the two, the high degree of trust placed by the one in the other (Séverine knows, for instance, that her father visits prostitutes and, rather than objecting, simply mocks him gently), and, most significantly, Séverine and Antoine's decision to call their baby 'Pauline.'

studied in this thesis would not form part of the overall analysis. However, in this particular scene in *Belle Maman*, the lyrics of the song are, within the narrative, written by a character, and very clearly performed by her character for the attention of another character and, as such, replace a straightforward (unsung) verbal exchange which could have conveyed the same information. As such, they merit inclusion here on the same basis as other scripted exchanges.³³⁷

The song begins with a reference to Nicou's youth which builds a sharp contrast with the image of masculine lesbian femininity³³⁸ we see in the film:

Drôle de vie autre temps t'étais jeune, t'étais belle
Tu portais même des jupes et des porte-jarretelles.³³⁹

While criticism may be levelled at the film by some for its depiction of Nicou as a butch, cigar-smoking, vulgar-joke-telling dyke, this particular couplet, sung by daughter to mother, indicates that this particular sexuality is a development of her later life. The lines quoted above lend themselves to different interpretations. They may, on the one hand, be seen as suggesting that Nicou was straight, before 'becoming' a lesbian, insofar as the reference to skirts and suspender belts describes a stereotypical vision of heterosexual femininity.³⁴⁰ On the other hand, the lines could be read as a clear indication that 'butch' is only one possible mode of performance for Nicou and was preceded by other ways of living her sexuality. Whichever interpretation one favours, what is particularly interesting in terms of the lines' reflection on the parent-child relationship under scrutiny here, is that Léa recognises her mother, through this couplet, firstly as having had an existence prior to motherhood, secondly as a sexual being, and thirdly as having made a conscious decision to enter into parenthood.

³³⁷ The key difference, for the purposes of this thesis, rests in the scripted nature of the lyrics and their complete inclusion within the diegesis. I have not, for example, studied the lyrics of the song 'Marcia Baila' by Les Rita Mitsouko which forms the backdrop to a song and dance routine involving many of the characters in the earlier stages of *Belle Maman*.

³³⁸ I will return to a more detailed discussion of the verbal constructions of heterosexual, gay, and lesbian identities in the following chapter.

³³⁹ *Belle Maman*.

³⁴⁰ This vision of femininity is one which also emerges in an early scene in *Gazon maudit* which sees Laurent scolding Loli for not having realised that Marijo is gay and Loli retorting that her husband's view of heterosexual femininity is dependent upon breasts and suspender belts: 'De toute façon toi, si une femme n'a pas les nichons comme ça [...] et des porte-jarretelles.' (*Gazon maudit*)

The following lines strengthen the feeling that Nicou's lesbian parenthood was very much the result of a deliberate and proactive decision-making process, and they contain implicit recognition from Léa that her mother chose her father on the basis of a number of criteria:

Tu l'as choisi bien grand, bien blond,
En somme, le parfait étalon.
Tu ne lui as pas menti à ce pauvre garçon
Tu lui as dit, franchement, moi je préfère les gazons.³⁴¹

Critics of gay parenting would doubtless seize on the element of small-scale genetic engineering involved in the selection of a tall, blond father. However, the daughter voicing this vision of her own conception seems to transmit no such judgement, but rather compliments her mother's honesty and frankness in making clear to him that his role was to father a child to a lesbian mother. Clearly, this is a somewhat idyllic and idealised impression of the decisions involved – it should be borne in mind, for instance, that the celebrations which prompt the song are for Nicou's 70th and that, since Léa is supposed to be around fifty, this progressive approach to gay parenting would have taken place in the immediate post-war years, well before the PACS debates and the like brought the issue to the social fore. Nevertheless, Léa is presented as a sympathetic, strong central character, her mother is presented in equally positive terms, and the mother-daughter relationship is seen to be close with a clear bond between the two women. The implication is thus that Léa has not emerged as such a strong personality *despite* an 'alternative' conception and, presumably, childhood, but rather *because* of it. Furthermore, critics of gay parenting who may object to the apparent presentation of this conception in terms of elements of choice on the part of the mother can be countered by the next line from the song in which Léa voices Nicou's straightforward request:

Fais-moi juste un enfant, fille ou garçon.³⁴²

No preference for a boy or a girl, just the desire to have a child, and the apparent willingness to take on the responsibilities that entails, regardless of other factors. And above all, a desire for the heterosexual interlude to serve as nothing more than

³⁴¹ *Belle Maman*.

³⁴² *Ibid.* Similarly, in *Gazon maudit*, when Marijo makes it clear to Laurent that she will leave if, and only if, he sleeps with her, she expresses the condition thus: 'Cette nuit, tu me fais un enfant', not expressing a preference for a boy or a girl.

procreation, since ‘tout de suite après tu as remis ton pantalon.’³⁴³ This is in clear contrast with – or even contradiction to – the initial reference to Nicou’s younger self in skirts and suspenders and, just as the earlier references to traditionally gender-specific items of clothing evoke a particular representation of womanhood, so too does the reference to trousers here imply a stronger masculine element, at least in terms of the traditional associations. And it is precisely these traditional gendered associations which the song – and, as is discussed throughout this chapter, each of the four core films – puts into play and begins to question. Viewers see Nicou as a butch dyke³⁴⁴ but her daughter, in an admittedly condensed account of her life, makes reference to more traditional femininity, to the deliberate choice to become a parent presumably resulting from some form of maternal instinct, and to a return to a lesbian identity, symbolised by ‘ton pantalon.’³⁴⁵

The questioning of traditional gendered roles as enacted within family structures is developed in the rest of the song as Léa recounts Nicou’s own vision of their relationship from its earliest stages:

Tu m’as prise dans tes bras, écoute-moi ma Léa
On oublie tous ces cons et appelle-moi ‘papa’.³⁴⁶

While the initial lines of the song present a trouble-free view of gay parenting, there is an indication here that there were, indeed, those who disapproved of the situation (*ces cons*) and the implication is that the problems resulted, at least in part, from Nicou’s perceived masculinity. However, she then voluntarily appropriates this masculinity and instructs her child to call her *papa*, taking on a paternal role but, as Léa goes on to explain, in fact engaging with both traditional gendered parental roles since:

Tu m’as été mon père et ma mère à la fois.³⁴⁷

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ Her own partner, in the film, describes her as a ‘grosse gousse’ and ‘le cigare.’

³⁴⁵ Earlier in the film, a rather interesting Freudian slip from Antoine in a conversation with Léa suggests that this image of masculinity is one which is also present in the minds of other characters: ‘Vous pourriez dire tous les gros mots de la terre, vous ne ressembleriez pas à un homme... enfin, je veux dire, à votre mère.’ Arguably, the way in which Antoine mis-speaks here indicates a confusion between sex, gender, and traditionally gendered role.

³⁴⁶ *Belle Maman.*

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

There is a constant criss-crossing in this short song between images of femininity and masculinity, not only around the references to items of clothing, but also, as the song progresses, explicitly in relation to gendered parental roles. Nicou's instruction to Léa 'appelle-moi "papa"'³⁴⁸ can be read as a form of performative in an Austinian sense since, within the context of their family relationship, the instruction amounted to Nicou's positioning of herself in that role.³⁴⁹ I am not arguing here that it is sufficient for individuals to declare themselves either 'mother' or 'father' in order for their child to recognise that identity. However, implicit in the lyrics of the song is an acceptance, on the part of the child, of the dual role played by Nicou, insofar as she was simultaneously father and mother in Léa's eyes. And it can certainly be argued that the inclusion of this mixing of gendered roles, and the deproblematisation thereof, in such a mainstream comedy contributes to a broader societal discussion around gay parenting debates, offering a positive interpretation of the family relationships which might result from it and an examination of gay parenting in inter-gender terms, encompassing aspects of both masculinity and femininity.

'Fuck les tabous, fuck la famille':³⁵⁰ Pascal, Nathalie, Franck, and Gay Fatherhood

The presentation of gay parenting is not limited, in *Belle Maman*, to the relationship between Nicou and Léa, but is extended to include Antoine's best friend Pascal who, at the beginning of the film, is married to a woman but who, roughly an hour into the film, announces to Antoine that he is, in fact, gay and in love with a man called Franck. Pascal's coming-out scene is relatively prolonged³⁵¹ and begins with an account of how he vomited on his wife in bed which formed something of a

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.* This is in sharp contrast to Marijo's words in the final scenes of *Gazon maudit* where she constantly refers to Laurent as 'papa' when talking of him to their baby. However, there is a parallel to be drawn, again from *Gazon maudit*, with a remark made by Marijo's friend when Laurent and Loli come to find the former in Paris. The friend looks the couple over disdainfully and asks, 'c'est ça, le géniteur', thus reducing Laurent's role from fatherhood to mere begetter of child.

³⁴⁹ In order for such a declaration to become a reality, a series of other criteria would need to be fulfilled and the statement is very much context-dependent. However, this is in keeping with Austin's discussion of performatives in his Lecture I where he states: 'It is always necessary that the circumstances in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, appropriate and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker or other persons should also perform certain other actions, whether 'physical' or 'mental' actions or even acts of uttering further words.' (JL Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975))

³⁵⁰ *Belle Maman*.

³⁵¹ It lasts approximately six minutes in total. Lefort, in his review of the film, highlights the scene and describes it as 'une scène d'outing, si longue et émouvante par sa durée même.' (Lefort, *op. cit.*)

‘déclic’.³⁵² As the scene reaches its crescendo, Pascal makes it clear that he wants Franck to become part of his life but that that life includes his children and includes his fatherhood, the implication being that paternity and male homosexuality are by no means incompatible in his mind. However, while he says that he wants to introduce Franck to his children (‘faudra que je le présente à Nathalie et aux enfants’),³⁵³ when Antoine then explains what is going on, he states:

Pascal est pédé. [...] Il aime Franck, Franck l’aime [...] fuck les tabous,
fuck la famille.³⁵⁴

In other words, there is obviously a particular type of family set-up which Pascal is seen to be eschewing, despite his own unambiguous statement that he wants to bring Franck into that life, rather than adapting his own lifestyle as father to some form of family-free gay existence. If Léa’s serenade to her mother plays with gender norms and roles within a parent-child relationship in such a way as to allow the viewer to see a trans-gender³⁵⁵ parental figure emerging, then Antoine’s statement here alludes to a parallel evolution in what is referred to by the notion of ‘la famille.’ The family structure Antoine sees Pascal’s new relationship distancing him from is one of traditional gendered roles with the binary pairing of mother and father, whereas Pascal’s desire to build a relationship which would include both him and Franck in the upbringing of his children is one which shifts the gender balance of parenthood from an exclusively male-female domain, to one in which multiple constellations of genders are conceivable.

The final sequences of *Belle Maman* indicate that, just as Léa accepted, without question, her lesbian mother, so too does Pascal’s child accept his father’s new partner. The film ends at the celebration of another wedding – this time between Séverine’s father and his new bride, an ex-prostitute – with the offspring of the various wedding guests observing their comings and goings and commenting upon the relationships which have been cemented – or broken – over the course of the film.

³⁵² *Belle Maman*.

³⁵³ *Ibid*.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

³⁵⁵ I do not use the term ‘trans-gender’ here in a technical or medical sense, to indicate an individual who has undergone some form of gender reassignment, but rather a figure whose symbolic roles cross genders, identifying alternately with traditional interpretations of masculinity and femininity, but identifying exclusively with neither. In other words, a vision of genders which is allied with the working definition of ‘queer’ used in this thesis.

- First child: [Referring to Paul] C'est mon papy qui s'est marié avec une pute.
- Second child: C'est ma mère, j'te signale.
- First child: [Referring to Séverine] C'est ma maman, elle a rencontré un camionneur.
- Third child: C'est mon papa, il est pas camionneur, il est traiteur-livreur à domicile, il rêvait de rencontrer une intellectuelle.
- Second child: C'est une femme qui ne sait pas faire la cuisine.³⁵⁶

The children's' comments remain equally straightforward and naïvely honest with each wedding guest that appears. Nicou appears alone:

- Second child: C'est la maman de ma maman. Elle avait une fiancée mais elle est morte.³⁵⁷

The granddaughter here is clearly portrayed as having inherited the strength of character of her mother (Léa) and grandmother, but it is also interesting to note that no comment is made on her use of the word 'fiancée' to describe the relationship between Nicou and Brigitte. When Pascal and Franck appear, Pascal's son quite simply states: 'Papa, lui, il a trouvé un homme,'³⁵⁸ with no apparent awareness of the shift in traditional gendered relationships his words imply and confirming Pascal's own implicit view, given during the coming-out scene, that there is no contradiction between parenthood (*papa*) and male homosexuality:

- Pascal's son: Papa, lui, il a trouvé un homme.
- Second child: Ils vont se marier?
- Pascal's son: Non, ils attendent le PACS.
- Second child: C'est quoi, le PACS?
- Pascal's son: Pacte civil de solidarité.³⁵⁹

Not only is there no contradiction here between parenthood and homosexuality, but there is also no natural gendered constellation which would represent a married couple. Once again, I argue that this contributes to a far more complicated vision of gendered relationships within families than might be expected in such a mainstream production, and one which certainly plays up to the potential of the mainstream to offer accessible, subversive satire.

³⁵⁶ *Belle Maman*.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid*.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

6. *Gazon maudit*: The Mother, the Father, and the Lesbian

This potential for accessible subversion via the mainstream is further highlighted, according to some readings,³⁶⁰ by Josiane Balasko's highly successful *Gazon maudit*. An examination of a number of key verbal exchanges in this film, on the one hand, shows how they offer a complex web of gendered relationships within a family while, on the other hand, demonstrating the ways in which these same exchanges can be, and have been, read as strengthening a norm, rather than offering a challenge. Visually, the gendered identities of the three central characters – the Spanish housewife Loli, her lothario husband Laurent, and the Parisian lesbian Marijo – are conveyed by means of well-worn onscreen clichés. Loli, for instance, is first shown at home, looking after her young son, doing housework, and the first thing the audience hears her say is a warning to her son not to smash a frame which contains a photograph of her and her husband. The audience immediately notices the heavy Spanish accent and the combination of this with such a strong sense of superstition (she warns her son that he would bring seven years of bad luck if he were to smash the frame) could arguably be seen as a link between this maternal figure and those to be found in *banlieue* films,³⁶¹ with one foot in an allegedly more traditional cultural origin and the other in a contemporary French setting.³⁶²

However, far from being limited to the aesthetic representation of Loli, this constructed connection between her and images of traditional maternal femininity is also conveyed through her early verbal exchanges with her son Julien and Marijo. Marijo's van breaks down outside Loli's house and, when Loli offers her coffee, Marijo accepts and lights up a cigarillo. Julien immediately voices his disgust with a clear-cut, 'ça pue,'³⁶³ and, when Marijo offers one to Loli, the latter seems embarrassed as she explains, 'mon mari n'aime pas, il est comme mon fils.'³⁶⁴ The implication here is that Loli, as traditional housewife, conforms to gendered stereotypes and obeys her husband's wishes, while recognising the privilege of her

³⁶⁰ As I will discuss later in this section, Lucille Cairns, for instance, reads the final scenes of the film as, in fact, confirming the norm of the traditional family set-up. See Lucille Cairns, 'Gazon maudit: French National and Sexual Identities', *French Cultural Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 26, *op.cit.*

³⁶¹ The figure of the mother in Gilou's *Raï*, for instance, as examined in the previous chapter.

³⁶² The use of traditional iconography to construct the notion of a family home becomes important later in the film when, for instance, Loli becomes aware of Laurent's infidelities and finds that he had been stashing packets of condoms in the drawers in their son's bedroom.

³⁶³ *Gazon maudit*.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

son, as male child, to voice the same restrictions. The film focuses upon a challenge to this patriarchal family model, but a challenge which is embodied by an alternative femininity, one which will be brought into conflict, not only with the son, as here, but also, as soon as he arrives home shortly after this scene, with the husband/father figure.

The dialogue of the film continues to posit Loli's femininity as unproblematically traditional throughout the early stages of the film but she becomes increasingly angered, on the one hand, by the behaviour of her husband and, on the other hand, intrigued and attracted by Marijo. Laurent has arranged for his colleague, Antoine, to call him at a specific time to allow him to pretend that he has to go and resolve a work-related problem while, in fact, meeting one of his mistresses. Loli is furious and chooses to ask Marijo to stay for dinner as revenge. The ensuing scenes serve to offer at least the beginning of the representation of a femininity which no longer entirely fits within the traditional, patriarchal framework. As the film cuts between shots of Marijo and Loli dining and images of Laurent with his mistress, the juxtaposition between the dialogues of the two scenes is particularly interesting. On the one hand, Loli and Marijo discuss infidelity within a relationship, as Marijo recounts having found her partner in bed with another woman, and Loli responds:

Moi aussi, ça m'est arrivée, une poufiasse... mais une fois, ça peut arriver.³⁶⁵

At this point Loli is evidently still blissfully unaware of her husband's multiple infidelities (*une fois ça peut arriver...*)³⁶⁶ and, as such, is still conforming to the stereotype of the good little wife, waiting at home until her husband comes home. On the other hand, however, Laurent tries to persuade his mistress to hurry up since he has to get back home to his wife ('ma femme m'attend').³⁶⁷ The mistress mocks him for thinking that his wife is just waiting patiently and Laurent responds, somewhat surprisingly, 'tu laisses ma femme en dehors de tout ça.'³⁶⁸ I argue that the way in which Laurent leaps to his wife's defence here compounds the initial view of Loli as

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

the traditional, stay-at-home wife, dependent on her husband, regardless of his extra-marital behaviour, for protection.

Gender Subversion in *Gazon maudit*

These more traditional depictions of gender and gendered relations, however, soon begin to shift and both the representation of femininity and that of masculinity are challenged and renegotiated over the course of the film. Loli is attracted to Marijo and begins a relationship with her which Laurent quickly discovers. The traditional housewife thus enters into a sexual relationship with a butch lesbian and, while some have critiqued this as conforming to yet another stereotype in the shape of the butch-femme binary,³⁶⁹ I argue that this view fails to recognise the degree of gendered subversion implicit here, regardless of the recognisability, or otherwise, of this particular pairing. Cairns is correct when she asserts that the film continues to posit marriage, and more significantly a patriarchal family, as a norm.³⁷⁰ However, I argue that she undervalues the inescapable subversion of this norm created by first constructing the central maternal figure, through iconography, but also clearly through dialogue, as a traditionally feminine woman, only to then show that this is not incompatible with an attraction towards another woman. Just as *Belle Maman* constructs both of its gay parents (Nicou and Pascal) as figures emerging at the intersection of complex, layered gender identities, so too does *Gazon maudit* posit a representation of maternal femininity which intersects and engages with sexuality and with a criss-crossing of traditional masculinities and femininities.

Cairns argues that the film fails to live up to the promise of this potential for subversion because it reverts to the patriarchal family structure in the latter stages of the narrative. There is evidence, however, to suggest an alternative *dénouement*, one that offers a reading which brings it in line with the overall analysis offered here and which suggests that the minority films being studied in the current chapter in fact work together to illustrate the complex gendered identities to be found in contemporary French society. Loli eventually decides to return to her husband, after a

³⁶⁹ See, for instance, Cairns's assertion that 'the mainstream audience is reassured by the familiar visual code of representation – the butch-femme dyad.' (*op. cit.*, 227)

³⁷⁰ See Cairns, *op. cit.*, particularly 235.

period with Marijo, because, according to Laurent, 'elle a envie d'une vie normale.' Marijo accepts her decision but places one condition on her departure:

[To Laurent] Cette nuit, tu me fais un enfant.³⁷¹

After an initial stunned silence, Laurent agrees and the pair sleep together, with Marijo first lying flat out on the bed and saying she will just accept 'la position du missionnaire', then informing Laurent 'eh oui, je suis vierge.'³⁷² As luck would have it, this one heterosexual interlude in Marijo's life is enough to get her pregnant and towards the end of the film Loli and Laurent travel to Paris to find her.³⁷³ The shock of their arrival brings on labour in the heavily-pregnant Marijo and, after the baby is born, audiences see Marijo back in Loli and Laurent's family home, nursing her baby, and being given a kiss on the cheek by Loli.

It appears that, close to the end of the film, the heterosexual family has undergone extension rather than demolition. Its appendage is the extra mother; the husband/father figure which is its traditional cornerstone³⁷⁴ is still firmly in place, even fêted by all. It could even be argued that Loli's sexual involvement with Marijo was a mere dalliance serving as a strategy of revenge against her womanising husband, and that the film positions homosexuality as an available choice for fully socialised heterosexual family members rather than as anything more destabilising. By the end, the temporarily dislocated heterosexual family has been restored to its 'natural' order, with its ability to accommodate extension and appendage simply serving to reiterate its perennial strength.³⁷⁵

Although Cairns complains that *Gazon maudit* constructs identities and relationships in terms of existent binaries, to the exclusion of a more interwoven, radical representation, it is my assertion that her own argument serves to strengthen an over-

³⁷¹ *Gazon maudit*.

³⁷² *Ibid*. Although I argue that, overall, *Gazon maudit* presents a complex vision of gendered relationships, it does, nevertheless, contain a number of sexual stereotypes of the sort I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter. It is worth noting here, however, that Marijo's own assertion that she is a virgin, despite being sexually active with other women, panders to a vision of lesbian sexuality as somehow sex-less. This view is strengthened within the film's narrative by a comment made by Laurent's best friend Antoine. When Antoine learns that Loli is having a relationship with a woman, his view is that she is doing so because she is 'une femme fidèle'. The implication here, again, is that lesbian sex is incomplete and, therefore, cannot really be considered as adulterous.

³⁷³ They find her dj-ing in a women-only lesbian nightclub to which Laurent has some difficulty gaining access.

³⁷⁴ I argue, in passing, that there is an inconsistency present in this argument, but one which is not the focus of the current analysis and, as such, not one I will develop in any great detail. Suffice to say that it is unclear how criticism can be levelled at the traditional family structure while, at the same time, suggesting that its 'cornerstone' is the father figure, given that it often seems that the bedrock figure of such traditional families is, in fact, the stay-at-home mother.

³⁷⁵ Cairns, *op. cit.*, 233.

arching vision which continues to see family structures in these very terms. It is unclear how the 'heterosexual family'³⁷⁶ can be seen as having been restored to anything even approaching 'its "natural" order'³⁷⁷ when that order suddenly includes a father and two maternal figures involved in a complex series of attractions and relationships. Can the gendered identities presented here really be as recognisable as Cairns suggests if they are depicted within such an unusual, or at the very least atypical, family constellation? I would argue that they should be considered against their particular contextual backdrop and that, rather than arguing for a family including a father and two mothers within one family home as a straightforward 'extended' heterosexual family, the picture painted is, in fact, more complex.

Marijo does, indeed, 'repeatedly direct the child's attention to its father: "Regarde, c'est papa [...] Au revoir papa [...] C'est papa qui s'en va."'³⁷⁸ However, while this particular gendered family role may be being constructed in a relatively unproblematic fashion, the audience is given no indication as to what role Loli will play in the same child's life and how the child will be positioned in relation to the two female, maternal figures in the household. Bearing in mind the comments made by the woman in the nightclub where Marijo works in Paris, describing Laurent as the child's 'géniteur'³⁷⁹ and Loli as 'la femme de la vie'³⁸⁰ of Marijo, it seems undeniable that this final scene including the trio of central characters, rather than reinforcing the 'perennial strength'³⁸¹ of a heterosexual family unit, in fact leaves the set up open to a much more complex, challenging interpretation.

7. Parent-child Verbal Exchanges in *Banlieue* Cinema

While such alternative interpretations of family structures and the gendered relationships at work within them may be an unsurprising feature of gay cinema, similar shifts and transitions are to be found in *banlieue* cinema, contributing to an illustration of the broad evolution of genders through the prism of family living in contemporary France. Critics and academics have commented on the ways in which traditional family structures are depicted in *banlieue* films, namely with a focus on

³⁷⁶ Cairns, *ibid.*

³⁷⁷ *Idem.*

³⁷⁸ *Gazon maudit*

³⁷⁹ *Idem.*

³⁸⁰ *Idem.*

³⁸¹ Cairns, *ibid.*

patriarchal family hierarchies haunted by a father figure who may physically be either absent³⁸² or present,³⁸³ but whose symbolic presence is felt by other family members. This traditionally gendered family structure is compounded in many *banlieue* films by the focus on families of non-metropolitan French origin – most often Maghrebi –³⁸⁴ and the alleged phallocentricity of these particular family units. My argument here is that this alleged phallocentrism overlooks the complexities of gendered relations in onscreen *banlieue* families, regardless of their ethnic origin, and, by extension, simplifies representations of *banlieue* living in the popular cinema-going imagination.

I do not deny that the fathers, as depicted in many *banlieue* films, conform to stereotypes of patriarchal heads of family, nor, indeed, that the depictions of mothers also frequently lapse into such clichés. However, I argue that any account that focuses solely on these aspects of the depiction of gendered identities does so to the exclusion of other features which, if given equal consideration, would contribute to a vision of genders in *banlieue* families which is as challenging as that constructed in gay cinema.

***Douce France*: Bilingual Mothers and Disappointed Fathers**

While many *banlieue* films focus primarily on the younger male central characters, maintaining parents as background, peripheral figures glimpsed only in a small number of scenes, *Douce France* breaks with this mould by featuring a number of central scenes involving verbal exchanges between parents and both male and female children.³⁸⁵ Of the four central characters, it is only Jean-Luc whose parents are never

³⁸² This is the case in Gilou's *Raï*, for instance, as discussed in the previous chapter.

³⁸³ See, for instance, the following discussion of *Douce France*.

³⁸⁴ This tendency to focus on families of non-metropolitan French origin can, at least in part, be explained in relation to the realities of French social housing policy from the 1970s onwards as described, for instance, by Higbee: 'The onset in the mid-1970s of deindustrialisation in the urban periphery accentuated [the] sense of alienation and exclusion. Those with the means to do so moved away, replaced by the recently arrived families of post-war immigrant workers – most notably those from North Africa.' (Higbee, 'Screening the "other" Paris', *op. cit.*, 198.) This should be counter-balanced, however, with statistics published by INSEE in 2004 which state that while 37% of France's immigrant population resides in the Ile-de-France area, numbers of immigrants from the countries of the Maghreb and numbers from EU countries are approximately equal (457 300 from the EU, 466 600 from the Maghreb in 1999). (Source INSEE report 'Ile-de-France à la page. Les immigrés franciliens: une population qui se diversifie', *Mensuel* no. 242, November 2004)

³⁸⁵ Higbee describes the *banlieue* as portrayed onscreen as 'the site of disenfranchised male youth of non-European immigrant origin,' referring specifically to the gender balance in *Ma 6-T va crack-er* as a representation of 'the *cit * [...] as a gendered space, focusing almost exclusively on the experiences of male youth within the disadvantaged urban periphery.' (Higbee, *op. cit.*, 199)

seen, whereas the mothers and fathers of each of the three other central figures play a significant role in the dialogue and in the development of the diegesis. These scenes also offer an onscreen depiction of the ‘sacralisation of filiation’³⁸⁶ discussed by Fassin, demonstrating the complexities of the notion when considered as an intersection between questions of ethnicity and gender in contemporary France.

Bilingual Motherhood, Cultural Belonging, and Old Currency

Somewhat surprisingly for *banlieue* films, the first parent we see onscreen is the mother of Farida and Souad. This is unexpected not only because of the rarity of the focus on younger female protagonists, but also because normally the knock-on effect of this imbalance tends to be the total absence of mothers of female characters from the narrative.³⁸⁷ Here, however, the young women’s mother is featured from the third minute of the film onwards. Her first words are an attempt to stop an argument between her daughters and they come in a mixture of French and unsubtitled Arabic which overlaps with the considerations of Begag’s ‘double identity magnets’ discussed in the previous chapter. Farida and Souad’s relationship is portrayed as antagonistic from the very beginning of the scene and they argue, first, over clothes they accuse each other of having borrowed and then over matters of tradition and nationality:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Souad: | J’ai la permission de la Farida d’entrer dans sa chambre? |
| Farida: | Pour quoi faire? |
| Souad: | Pour récupérer un de <i>mes</i> pulls acheté avec <i>mes</i> sous que <i>tu</i> mets tout le temps. |
| Farida: | A ce propos, je voulais dire, évite de prendre mes sous-vêtements. |
| Souad: | T’inquiètes pas, p’tite sœur, je me lave. Il y a pas que ceux qui font la prière qui sont nickels. |
| [...] | |
| Farida: | Tu sais, si tu veux jouer les Françaises, apprends au moins leur langue. Il y a pas que les cuisses qui s’ouvrent, il y a aussi les esprits. |
| [...] | |

³⁸⁶ Fassin, *op. cit.*, 232.

³⁸⁷ In *Rai*, for instance, discussed in the previous chapter, Sahlia’s mother does appear onscreen but only very briefly and the maternal figure who features most prominently – and, even then, occupies far less screen time than the parental figures in *Douce France*, is the mother of Nordine and Djamel. The quasi-total absence of female figures from the narratives of *La Haine*, for example, means that there can be no depictions of onscreen mother-daughter relationships here.

Mother: [In French] Vous allez arrêter de vous disputer maintenant. [Switches to Arabic]³⁸⁸

A few moments later, we again see an argument erupting between Farida and Souad – this time over the latter's job working for the fast food restaurant chain Quick – and, once again, their mother tempers the exchange with a mixture of French and unsubtitled Arabic. The following exchange is taken from the end of the scene in question and illustrates the frequency of the switching from one language to the other:

Souad: [About Farida] Elle est fatigante, en ce moment.
 Mother: [First speaks Arabic, then switches in French] Dis-moi, à quelle heure tu quittes, ce soir?
 Souad: [...] Je fais deux services aujourd'hui. Au revoir.
 Mother: [Replies in Arabic]³⁸⁹

As with the bilingual exchanges between Nordine, Djamel, and their mother in *Raï*, these exchanges between Farida, Souad, and their mother, with their mixture of French and Arabic, also serve to indicate that dialogue is possible between and across the two implicit 'spheres of reference'. As in *Raï*, these bilingual interruptions in *Douce France* also indicate that both children, although presumably metropolitan-French born, understand the Arabic dialect spoken by their mother and that all three parties are used to exchanges in which there is a degree of code-switching from one language to another without loss of intelligibility.

Whereas the use of Arabic by Nordine and Djamel's mother in *Raï* serves to emphasise the strength of her connections with the mythical 'homeland', the switching between French and Arabic by Farida and Souad's mother indicates a far more complex culture of belonging.³⁹⁰ Firstly, although unsubtitled, there is no indication from the responses of the daughters that the mother's words are, in any way, simply expressions of 'homeland' traditions or beliefs as was the case in *Raï*. Secondly, and more significantly, what the mother says in French during the first ten minutes of the film clearly suggests a sense of belonging which is rooted in the customs of France as much as it is 'other' to them.

³⁸⁸ *Douce France* (Chibane).

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁰ Furthermore it is interesting to note that the actress (Saïda Bekkouche) playing the mother here in *Douce France*, has also had roles to play in a number of other significant *beur* and *banlieue* films such as *Le Thé au harem d'Archimède* (Charef, 1985), *Raï*, and *Le Gône du Chaâba* (Ruggia, 1998).

The argument scenes are followed by an encounter between the mother and a salesman trying to sell spy holes for the front doors of the flats in the apartment block. When the mother opens the door, the young, white salesman's immediate response is to ask whether she speaks French and to say that, if she does not, he has men who speak all manner of other languages associated with ex-French colonies (*le wolof, le peul*). The mother's response is striking:

Tu étais pas déjà né quand je vivais dans cet immeuble.³⁹¹

In grammatically incorrect French, the mother expresses a long-standing connection not only with metropolitan France on a national level, but a far more deep-rooted local connection with the specific apartment block. Hers is not a recent immigration, nor has it proved to be a period of transition. The salesman is in his mid to late twenties, so the mother is clearly suggesting that her presence on French soil started more than two decades earlier. Clearly, the irony here is manifold: the salesman bases his query as to whether another language may be required on the physical appearance of the woman, she takes offence at the suggestion and when she responds in French which is comprehensible but not 'grammatically correct',³⁹² her response seems to suggest that her own long-term presence in the block establishes her as a more 'senior' French citizen than he is, given his later birth date. While Chibane can be criticised, to an extent, for constructing a relatively obvious binary opposition between the modern sister (Souad) and her traditional counterpart (Farida), the figure of the mother gives an indication of the underlying complexities of both these identities.

The expression of the mother's feeling of belonging is not limited here to the reference to the length of time she has lived in the flat, but is compounded later in the same conversation by a reference to money. The salesman continues his pitch, trying to convince her to purchase one of the spy holes, and eventually tells her the price. Again the mother's response is striking and unexpected, as she asks 'Ça fait combien en anciens?',³⁹³ in reference to the *anciens francs* which were French currency until

³⁹¹ *Douce France* (Chibane).

³⁹² We also discover, in this same scene, that the mother is illiterate and, later, that Moussa's mother is, innumerate.

³⁹³ *Douce France*. It is far less remarkable, for example, when Léa, in *Belle Maman*, asks the same question because there it is interpreted as an indication of her belonging to a particular generation of

the conversion to *nouveaux francs* in 1960. Once more, this indicates that the mother's 'sphere of reference' encompasses elements of the evolution of France as a nation and that the terms of reference which are significant to her are, at least in some domains, those of the 'host' nation, alongside those of the mythical 'homeland'.

Interesting, and unexpected, parallels can be drawn here between Nicou and the mother of Farida and Souad in *Douce France*, insofar as both are presented as mothers but also as beings with an existence which precedes their parenthood and with a strong and complex sense of self. In the case of Nicou, this complexity is manifest in the parallel references to images of traditional masculinity and femininity which exist in tandem in Léa's description. Where the mother of Farida and Souad is concerned, these complexities are at the crossroads between ethnicity and gender, insofar as they are expressed in direct response to assumptions made by a white salesman on the basis of his expectations of what he takes to be a traditional Maghrebi housewife. Instead of conforming to the gendered stereotype, the *mère Malouf* stakes her claim on her own specific French identity which may well include aspects of non-metropolitan French cultures – as witnessed through her previous use of Arabic with her two Francophone daughters – but which is also deeply rooted in the developments of her country of domicile. And if these are the complexities inherent in the figure of the mother, then it becomes clear that, despite the rather simplistic binary constructed between modernity and tradition through the figures of Farida and Souad, their subjectivities are, in fact, also rooted in the more complex, hybridised identity of their mother.

Disappointed Fatherhood and Cultural Belonging

The complexities in the depiction of Farida and Souad's mother can be contrasted with the relationship between Souad and her father which seems, in many ways, to conform more straightforwardly to the expectations of gendered family relationships. As described, briefly, above, Souad is portrayed as the more 'modern' or 'integrated' sister and one of the primary ways in which this is shown is through her decision to work in a local fast food restaurant. Her father wholeheartedly disapproves of this choice and makes frequent pejorative references to her work. Early in the film, we see

French citizens, whereas in *Douce France*, it is not only a generational marker, but is also an unexpected marker of national belonging.

Souad walking past her father's place of work on her way to deliver an order of fast food and it is clear, from his shouted comments, firstly that he feels it is inappropriate for Souad to be working for an American-influenced fast food company and, secondly, that he deems it particularly inappropriate for a daughter to be impacting in this way on the work of a father:

Mais t'as pas honte, ma fille, d'enlever le pain à la bouche de ton propre père avec des casse-croûtes américains?³⁹⁴

Much later in the film, Souad returns home from a late shift at the restaurant and incurs the wrath of her father. He has blocked the front door of their flat shut with a chair and he accuses her of hanging about (*traîner*). Souad retorts 'je ne traîne pas, je travaille',³⁹⁵ but her father is unconvinced and slaps her, following which Souad decides to leave the family home to live on her own. She meets Jean-Luc not long after leaving and explains to him that she does not want to enter into a relationship with him because 'je viens de quitter mon père.'³⁹⁶

There are a number of features which it is important to analyse in these exchanges between, and about, Souad and her father and, once again, gendered identities intersect with ethnic identities. Firstly, both the depiction of the Maghrebi father, and the expectations he appears to have for his daughter, conform to stereotypes of father-daughter relationships and to a traditionally patriarchal family hierarchy. In the extract quoted above ('Mais t'as pas honte...'),³⁹⁷ the father himself places verbal emphasis on the pair's respective roles as father and daughter. He does not simply say, as he could have, 't'as pas honte de m'enlever le pain à la bouche',³⁹⁸ but rather chooses to underscore the hierarchical family structure and the expectations implicit therein by addressing Souad as 'ma fille',³⁹⁹ and by referring to himself in the third person not only as 'ton père' but 'ton propre père.'⁴⁰⁰ His disapproval of Souad's employment is also based on the fact that it takes her away from the family home and releases her from his paternal control, and it is obvious that he considers her late night shifts as an

³⁹⁴ *Douce France*.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

opportunity for her to loiter away from home, rather than as a consequence of the type of environment in which she works.

This overarching paternalistic attitude clearly has an impact on the way in which Souad views her own relationships with other men, but also her own attempt to construct a subjectivity. When she tells Jean-Luc that she has just left her father, she goes on to explain, 'c'est pas pour vivre avec un autre homme.'⁴⁰¹ The implication here is that Souad, on the basis of the lived experience with her father, considers cohabitation with a man – be he partner or father – to imply a degree of imposed control and a restriction to her agency. It is evident, therefore, that the father-daughter relationship here conforms, in gender terms, to traditions of patriarchy from the standpoint of the father,⁴⁰² but that the daughter rebels against these structures, firstly within the family home – by continuing to work despite her father's complaints – and secondly by choosing to leave home.

However, the traditional patriarchal father-daughter relationship depicted here also intersects, as mentioned above, with the ethnic identity of the father figure, expressed through the implicit anti-Americanism in the comments above ('des casse-croûtes américains').⁴⁰³ Souad in fact works for the fast food chain Quick, which was founded, not in the US, but in Belgium in 1971, and is now based predominantly in Belgium, France, and Luxembourg.⁴⁰⁴ However, the symbolism of fast food clearly ties in with American cultural identities and alleged imperialism, and it is this betrayal that Souad's father criticises. Given the complex layering of Souad's mother's identity in gendered and ethnic terms, there initially appear to be two possible interpretations of the father's disapproval, two different types of anti-Americanism he could be voicing. Firstly, as a traditional, Maghrebi patriarch, his sentiment could be interpreted as Arab anti-Americanism with its basis in a dissatisfaction, across the Arab world, with American policy in the Middle East. However, his anti-Americanism could equally be interpreted as part of a specifically French tradition

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰² It is worth noting that Souad's father, at one point, implies that his life would have been made easier had he had a son, rather than two daughters ('Pourquoi cette punition?... que des filles, même pas un garçon', *ibid.*).

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁴ Source www.quick.be/fr/about.asp, accessed on August 29th 2005.

which ‘has repeatedly played a central role in constructions of French identity.’⁴⁰⁵ Indeed, the fact that this anti-Americanism is initially expressed in relation to culinary traditions can be read as emphasising its status as a French, rather than an Arab, feeling since:

American cultural successes seem specifically marked to undermine France’s most beloved traditions – McDonald’s versus the bistro, Hollywood versus cinema, belligerence versus diplomacy.⁴⁰⁶

The fact that Souad’s father goes on to ask, rhetorically, ‘ça n’aura pas suffi de bombardier Bagdad’⁴⁰⁷ lends force to the former interpretation. However, his comments remain ambiguous and allow for an interpretation with one foot in two distinct, but overlapping, national and cultural camps.⁴⁰⁸

‘Ta mère, ta race’: Gendered Family Insults and Sacralised Filiation in *Ma 6-T va crack-er*

Alongside these complex and layered gender identities, there is also to be found, in almost every *banlieue* film which forms part of the present corpus, a particular linguistic feature which may be seen to engage explicitly with Fassin’s notion of the ‘sacralisation of filiation’.⁴⁰⁹ This feature is particularly prominent in the dialogue of Richet’s *Ma 6-T va crack-er* in which ‘parents are notably absent from the diegesis.’⁴¹⁰ While parents are, indeed, absent from the diegesis, they are still referred to in exchanges between other characters and it is worth highlighting, for example, a scene in which members of the elder gang, discussing the unjustified (in their view) incursion into *banlieue* territory by the police, explicitly connect the inappropriateness of police presence to the sacred status of the family. Their objection seems not to be to police intervention *per se*, at least not in this scene, but specifically to the ensuing loss of face which they suffer: ‘C’est pas beau là. Devant la famille et tout là.’ Clearly

⁴⁰⁵ Seth Armus, ‘Anti-Americanism’, in *France and the Americas. Culture, Politics, and History*. Vol. 1, ed. Bill Marshall (Oxford and Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 75.

⁴⁰⁶ Armus, *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷ *Douce France*.

⁴⁰⁸ It is worth noting, in passing, that Lemercier, in *Le Derrière*, makes reference to anti-French stereotypes held by some Americans. Frédérique-Frédéric, in the first meeting with Pierre, needs to go to the toilet and tries to go to the ladies’ only to be kicked out by an irate American tourist, shouting ‘fucking French pervert’ and pointing to the sign on the door.

⁴⁰⁹ Fassin, *op.cit.*, 232.

⁴¹⁰ Tarr, *op. cit.*, 101.

the family still has an impact and is still viewed, despite its diegetic absence, as a focus for respect.

The verbal feature in question depends on this respect for certain family roles and is what I describe as the parallel sacralisation and vilification of female figures through insults which make specific reference to their place within family structures. It differs from the verbal exchanges discussed so far in this section since it rarely, if ever, takes place within a parent-child conversation, but it is closely linked to the questions of gender (and indeed ethnicity) which are the focus of this chapter. The phenomenon in question is the construction of the insult 'nique ta mère' or 'nique ta sœur' which are both clearly dependent upon the figure of the mother or, indeed, the sister. I refer to a parallel sacralisation and vilification through such insults because, on the one hand, the figure of the mother/sister is clearly objectified through them while, on the other hand, being raised to almost sacred status and viewed as a figure who is inviolable and should be respected.

Perhaps the most striking usage of a variation of the basic insult in the four core films for this chapter comes in a scene involving members of the school age gang and their basketball coach during a training session. Tempers become steadily more frayed as the training session progresses, as scuffles break out and the coach tries to keep a degree of control over the proceedings and insists on the fact that basketball should not be a contact sport. One youth in particular becomes involved in a series of small but brutal fights with other players, from whom the coach physically prises him away. The scene ends with a violent stream of abuse between the youths who are being physically held apart, the series of insults issues all being based on the 'nique ta mère' paradigm:

First youth: Lâche-moi, bâtard.
Second youth: On va niquer ta mère.
Coach: On se calme, calme-toi. On se calme.
First youth: Ta mère, je la baise, ta mère, je la baise, fils de pute.
Lâche-moi.⁴¹¹

While, in this case, the focus is placed exclusively on the maternal figure but other examples could have been chosen in which the figure at the centre of the insult would

⁴¹¹ *Ma 6-T va crack-er*, Richet.

have been the sister with little perceptible difference in the force, or otherwise, of the insult on the basis of the central figure chosen. The threat issued by the second youth in this exchange is ostensibly directed, not towards his immediate opponent, but rather towards his mother and the symbolic position that both youths see her as holding. Were it not for an implicit recognition of the respect due to this traditionally gendered role, the insult here would lose its force, but both youths appear to acknowledge the implicit inviolability of the maternal figure and the coach certainly recognises the insult as a potential trigger for further violence.

What is particularly striking here (and in other similar exchanges which are to be found across *banlieue* films) is the complex representation of gendered parenthood which emerges. The misogyny of the insults is undeniable⁴¹² but can be viewed in both negative and positive terms in relation to the view of gender it offers. In negative terms, the insult implies the sexual possession of its addressee's mother and, as such, contains sexual violence of a verbal nature which serves to construct women, through the symbolic figure of the mother, as objects possessed through sex. The fact that these insults are issued here by male youths of school age only contributes to this because of their sexual immaturity.

However, at the same time as the mother/sister is being objectified, there is also an inescapable implicit recognition on the part of the insulter that the mother/sister should be a figure worthy of respect. The force of the insult resides in the fact that it targets symbolic female figures who, within the hierarchy of the traditional family structure, should be respected, and indeed protected by their sons in particular. The impact of the insult is thus to be observed on three distinct levels. Firstly, there is a misogynistic sexual violence directed towards an absent⁴¹³ female figure. Secondly, there is an implicit accusation of weakness targeted towards the sons, insofar as they are powerless to stop the symbolic violence. And thirdly – and this is where the

⁴¹² I have found no cinematic examples in which the insult would be transformed to become 'nique ton père' or 'nique ton frère', but rather it appears to be uniquely directed towards female family members. There are, however, examples to be found in the lyrics of some French punk and rap. (See, for instance, 'I'feu nique sa mère et son père' in 'Numéro 10' by Booba, <http://taniadu29.skyblog.com/> accessed on September 20th 2005)

⁴¹³ I have found no examples in the corpus of films studied here in which such insults would be used when either the mother or the sister in question was actually present onscreen during the scene. Indeed, quite often, as here in *Ma 6-T va crack-er*, the mother being insulted is not even a character within the diegesis.

parallel sacralisation and vilification meets Fassin's argument – the insults, when focussed on the figure of the mother, become, by extension, allegations of impurity of family name or bloodline.⁴¹⁴

Intersecting 'Spheres of Reference'⁴¹⁵

It is this final level of insult which is most significant in the current context, since it exists in a body of films which the evidence adduced here shows (undeniably) to be constructing complex and fractured gendered (and ethnic) subjectivities, and it is this inherent paradox which has been overlooked in critiques of these films and of *banlieue* cinema. The parents in *banlieue* films are not simply torn between Begag's binary 'spheres of reference' but rather emerge from the intersection of these spheres. Onscreen mothers and fathers in *banlieue* works can, indeed, be analysed in terms of their adherence to the perception of a traditional Maghrebi family structure or as dysfunctional families, in a contemporary sense, but neither of these analyses alone can encompass the complexities of the gendered identities which emerge. The complexity which is expressed here through 'nique ta mère' type insults brings into dialogue considerations of complex gendered subjectivities from the earlier stages of this chapter, with reference to Fassin's discussion of consanguinity and filiation,⁴¹⁶ and to the discussion of fractured ethnic identities in the previous chapter.

The initial 'nique ta mère' is frequently followed by a parallel 'nique ta race' which serves to underline the symbolism of the maternal figure representing alleged purity of 'race'.⁴¹⁷ The paradox, therefore, lies in an encounter between the complexities of gendered identities discussed above, in terms of plural intersections of gender and ethnicity around tropes of tradition, modernity, and integration, and an implicit purity

⁴¹⁴ Fassin, *op. cit.* An interesting parallel can be drawn here with an insult directed towards Moussa in *Douce France*, when an acquaintance goads him by saying 'vous êtes bien des harkis, de père en fils, dans la famille.' *Harki* is the term used to refer to Algerians who fought on the side of the French during the Algerian War of Independence and means 'traitor' in Arabic. The implication in the insult here is that the 'treachery' of one generation can be transmitted to the next, from father to son. Whereas the 'nique ta mère' insults are based, in part, on the sons' symbolic inability to protect the mother, here it is the honour of a family name which is being damaged.

⁴¹⁵ Begag and Chaouite quoted in Orlando, *op. cit.*, 406.

⁴¹⁶ Fassin's discussion of consanguinity and filiation, in turn, intersects and engages with the terms of socio-political debate in mid to late 1990s France.

⁴¹⁷ Consider, for instance, in *Louise (Take 2)* (Siegfried, 1998), the line 'je lui nique sa mère, tu comprends? Je lui nique sa race', which encapsulates the jump from mother to race.

of belonging which underlies the frequent usage of 'nique ta mère' type insults.⁴¹⁸ It is not the sexual violence in itself which is deemed to be most offensive, either by insulter or insulted party, but rather the implicit allegation it brings with it regarding the purity of the maternal figure and, by means of the frequent jump from 'mère' to 'race', the parallel denigration of ethnic belonging. And this is clearly paradoxical when considered alongside the intersecting gendered and ethnic identities discussed above. On the one hand, onscreen mothers, as in *Douce France*, for instance, are represented as emerging from an overlap between cultures and the focus of the narrative of such films is often on the impact that this overlap has on the children's generation. On the other hand, through these insults, they are constructed as figures of 'pure', unsullied, origin. It is not the hybridised maternal identity discussed above which is being tarnished through these insults, but rather, ironically, a mythically pure maternal identity, viewed as the safeguard of tradition and a culture of origin.

Furthermore, symbolically, the mother figure is to be protected, otherwise the insults would have no force, but, specifically, she is to be protected *by* the son *from* sexual possession which clearly feeds into established patterns of patriarchal family hierarchies. Regardless of the presence or absence of the father figure, the son, within this traditionally gendered set up, takes on the role of family protector and *ersatz* patriarch. So, at the same time as we find, in some *banlieue* works, evidence of the complexities of gendered identities as witnessed through the prism of family relations, we also have the frequent usage of insults which serve to strengthen a more traditional view of the gender relations in operation within a family. However, rather than taking this usage and viewing it, alone, as straightforward evidence of sexism within onscreen *banlieue* families, I argue that it is vital to consider it alongside other facets of the representation of gendered identities and to analyse it as but one part of a complex web of intersecting identities.

⁴¹⁸ Other examples could have been examined here which would have contributed to this analysis. In *Raï*, for instance, there is a scene involving three of the central characters and a relatively light-hearted exchange (certainly compared to the violence of the exchange highlighted here in *Ma 6-T va crack-er*) composed primarily of insults directed towards the mother of one of the characters, including, for instance, 'ta mère couche avec deux Renois.'

8. Conclusion

Drawing these strands of analysis together, it becomes clear that, within contemporary French minority cinemas, a complex, hybridised set of gendered identities is emerging. These intersect with each other, but also with questions of ethnic identities, as discussed in the previous chapter, and sexualities, as I will demonstrate in the following chapter. The decision to examine the verbal exchanges which result in these layered identities through the prism of family structures, and more specifically parent-child relations, stems from two principal factors. Firstly, as Tarr and Rollet have highlighted, it emerges from an understanding of the family as a key site of identity formation, a notion which feeds into the chapter's family-based verbal exchanges as they contribute to the construction of gendered identities. Secondly, the family is recognised as, to use Higbee's description, 'a site of wider social crisis'⁴¹⁹ and, as such, its onscreen depiction in films made in mid and late 1990s France can be read as an interaction with, or a reflection of/on, contemporary debates in social, political, and cultural spheres. This can further be demonstrated by the presence, in the films examined here but also across other examples of both gay and *banlieue* cinema, by the presence of families in which conflicts, and indeed resolutions, arise which are directly related to ongoing public debate. *Belle Maman* and *Gazon maudit* offer different answers to questions surrounding gay parenting, but also, by extension, challenge the terms of definition applied to what Cairns describes as 'heterosexual families.' *Ma 6-T va crack-er* and *Douce France* offer complex readings of parent-child relationships when, on the one hand, questions of gender intersect with questions of ethnicity and, on the other hand, when the social crisis enacted through the prism of the family is related to the perceived social deprivation of the *banlieues*.

It is through the positioning of the family as a 'site of wider social crisis' that the analyses offered in this chapter engage with the broader, over-arching question of a challenge to, or renegotiation of, French republicanism in its contemporary form. The previous chapter demonstrated that France's 'citoyen à l'état brut'⁴²⁰ is, in terms of ethnic identities, in fact a fractured subjectivity within the current republican framework. The current chapter demonstrates how, in terms of gendered identity, the same citizen is equally fractured, highlighting the need for a negotiatory discourse to

⁴¹⁹ Higbee, *op. cit.*, 235.

⁴²⁰ Foerster, *op. cit.*, 15.

emerge which would allow *la République* to rephrase its republicanism in order for it to remain relevant to an evolving society. The debates of the 1990s family structures, filiation, and what it is to be French demonstrate that republicanism, as it is traditionally understood and expressed, is not yet able to account for the difference which makes up the contemporary republic.

Le message républicain est parasité depuis l'origine de son fondement par une autre idéologie qui lui est antérieure et antithétique: la différence des sexes.⁴²¹

This difference, and the symbolic order which it is seen both to imply and to represent, is an illustration of the need for a renegotiation of republicanism in relation to contemporary gendered identities, as much as it is required in relation to ethnic identities and, as the following chapter will show, sexual identities. The symbolic order Foerster describes is one which, through its use by anti-PACS campaigners such as Irène Théry, brought it into dialogue with questions of contemporary French citizenship and, by necessary extension, contemporary French republicanism, and meant that it gained currency within public and media debates over the second half of the 1990s in particular.

La mystique de la différence des sexes qui s'articule sur un double impératif: le féminin et le masculin doivent être hermétiques et complémentaires, toujours dans l'irréductible différence et l'obligatoire mixité.⁴²²

The examples discussed in this chapter, however, demonstrate that, in fact, gendered French identities demonstrate a series of far more complex interweavings than this symbolic order allows for and, as such, they indicate that the order, in and of itself, is of questionable relevance.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 50.

Chapter 4:

Sexualities – Verbal Constructions of Sexualities in *Banlieue* and Gay Cinema

The first chapter of this thesis examined the ways in which ethnicity and ethnic identities are expressed, challenged, and renegotiated through the use of dialogue in *banlieue* and gay films against a 1990s French republican backdrop. The second chapter then moved this analysis on to a consideration of onscreen challenges to, and expressions and renegotiations of, gendered identities within the same contemporary republican framework. This third and final chapter will take this analysis on to another level and examine the ways in which verbal exchanges in *banlieue* and gay cinema are used in the domain of sexualities, analysing the ways in which heterosexualities and homosexualities are constructed onscreen through dialogue. Just as there were points on which considerations of gendered identities overlapped with those of ethnic identities, so too will there be a degree of interweaving here, primarily, although not exclusively, between genders and sexualities.

Once again, this chapter will illustrate the ways in which cinema is used as a primary site of negotiatory discourse between a republican model and particular groupings within it, demonstrating the ‘intersections’⁴²³ between the current core topic of sexualities and other areas of study, such as gender or ethnicity, with a view to a detailed analysis of these ‘discursively constituted identities’.⁴²⁴ This interweaving is present, not only in terms of the critical framework with which this thesis engages, but also, firstly, with regard to the socio-political issues which will form the backdrop to analysis in the current chapter, and secondly within the onscreen verbal exchanges highlighted in later sections of the chapter where, as will be illustrated, questions of identity around tropes of sexuality are frequently tied to notions of gendered identities. Understood as an engagement with broader debates on the relevance of republicanism in its current form to the realities of contemporary France, the links posited between considerations of sexuality and those of gender, in particular, are clear. To quote Foerster:

⁴²³ As Butler describes them. See Butler, *op. cit.*, 6.

⁴²⁴ Butler, *Ibid.*

Des femmes sous la Révolution française, nous passons aux homosexuels des années PACS. Toujours la France, toujours la République, toujours la différence des sexes.⁴²⁵

Over the course of the period under examination here, broader societal debates on topics related to sexuality have, frequently been voiced through parallel considerations of, for instance, gender in/equality or questions of ethnic belonging. However, sexualities and sexual identities, in and of themselves, have also spawned complex and wide-ranging debate in French political, media, and cultural arenas. This chapter will focus, primarily, on the specificity of these debates to questions of sexuality, while still making reference to the 'intersections'. In other words, the onscreen construction of identities in the realm of sexuality is worthy of scrutiny, not only where it intersects with other dimensions of identity construction, but also in its own right.

The chapter will be structured as follows. I will first give a brief summary of representations of sexualities in French cinema over the course of the 1990s. The second section will then examine political and public debates around topics related to sexuality in 1990s France, with reference, for instance, to disclosures of the homosexuality of politicians at all levels, increased visibility of gays and lesbians in French society, and representations of *banlieue* sexuality through mainstream media. This will be followed by a section containing brief summaries of the four key films examined in the chapter, *Pédale douce*, *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, *Le Derrière*, and *Drôle de Félix*. I will then outline the specific type of verbal exchange which will be used as a framing device in this chapter, namely verbal encounters involving friends and lovers. The remaining sections of the chapter will include detailed analyses of verbal exchanges from the four core texts, with relevant references throughout to other films from the corpus. These sections will examine, in particular, stereotypes and prejudices with relation to sexuality onscreen and scenes in which the sexuality of characters is disclosed, voluntarily or otherwise. What will emerge will be further evidence of identities, viewed here through the prism of sexuality, as fragmented and multilayered.

⁴²⁵ Foerster, *op. cit.*, 47.

1. Sexualities Onscreen

Representations of sexualities have always been present in cinema and have been the focus of much study within analyses of cinematic theories and practices, and I do not argue here that, in French cinema of the 1990s, concentration on aspects of identity construction in the realm of sexualities is, in itself, original, either in historical terms, or indeed in relation to French as a national cinema. However, I do argue that the form which this focus has taken over the period studied here is particularly interesting, firstly because of the ways in which it engages with broader socio-political and socio-cultural debates in contemporary France and, secondly, since it also feeds into an ongoing consideration of the need for a renegotiation of French republicanism. In both cases, the focus on sexualities is particularly interesting in the two bodies of cinema examined here, namely gay cinema and *cinéma de banlieue*.

In September 1996, *Libération*'s film critics Gérard Lefort and Olivier Seguret declared: 'le thème gay est à la mode.'⁴²⁶ They did not mean that it was necessarily new for cinema to occupy itself with homosexuality but asserted that, with a handful of notable exceptions, gay films had, until that point in time, remained the exclusive preserve of film festivals and a certain independent cinema. What they were commenting on was a trend which they perceived to have emerged from 1995 and heralded by the worldwide release of the hugely successful *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Elliott, 1994), whose success anticipated, in their view, 'une vague qui allait bientôt déferler sur le cinéma commercial.'⁴²⁷ In other words, gay film was shifting from being a predominantly minority-interest body of film to one which was acceptable, indeed even sought after, by mainstream audiences. Indeed Lefort and Seguret posited tentative links between this increased acceptance and wider shifts in mainstream societal attitudes:

Au chapitre des hypothèses vaguement socio-culturelles, il est probable que cet épanouissement massif et voyant accompagne une réelle explosion de la fameuse visibilité gay et l'installation de la communauté homo dans un mode de vie moins clandestin.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁶ Lefort and Seguret, *op. cit.* It is worth noting here that, while the authors use the Anglo-American spelling 'gay', the Gallicised form 'gai/e' is also sometimes used with the same meaning.

⁴²⁷ Lefort and Seguret, *op. cit.*

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

I will return later to questions of increased visibility of homosexuality and of its impact, but it is interesting to note that the authors here speak of a gay community and seem to be suggesting that this community is becoming a more integrated part of French society. As such, and given the republican antagonism raised by the very mention of communities within France, it is clear that, over the period referred to here, the representations of members of that community onscreen will be of particular relevance to a study of minority identities within a French republican context.

However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that it is only in terms of an increased visibility of aspects of homosexuality⁴²⁹ that sexuality has become a core topic of research in relation to 1990s French cinema, or indeed, more specifically, within studies of French cinema as a reflection of, or engagement with, a broader societal context. On the contrary, homosexuality represents only one prism through which the onscreen construction of identities in the realm of sexualities and desire can be – and, over recent years, has been – usefully addressed. Considerable coverage, in both media and academic contexts, has been devoted, for instance, to the question of depictions of AIDS and HIV in recent French cinema, particularly from the early 1990s onwards and with the release of Cyril Collard's *Les Nuits fauves* which I discussed in the introduction. Obviously, I am not suggesting that AIDS and HIV are of relevance solely within the field of sexuality.⁴³⁰ However, onscreen engagements with the topic have been framed, predominantly, through sexual relations, either as means of transmission of the virus, or as the main reason for a character's HIV status posing problems in his or her life within the films' narrative.⁴³¹

⁴²⁹ I use the description 'aspects of homosexuality' here advisedly, since I am aware that the representations offered onscreen can never give a complete picture of all gay and lesbian life in contemporary France, just as depictions of heterosexuality offer only aspects thereof and not a comprehensive review of all its different facets. I am also aware of the criticism that can be, and has been, levelled at some of the depictions of homosexuality examined here on the grounds that they pander to cliché or fail to engage with the complexities of the subject matter. While I understand the basis of some of this criticism, I argue that there is still substantial worthwhile research to be conducted in this area.

⁴³⁰ Indeed, following the *scandale du sang contaminé* under President Mitterrand, there are perhaps few European countries where this is more poignant. The scandal saw French health authorities, in the early to mid 1980s, delaying the implementation of HIV tests on blood for transfusions, leading to numerous cases of infection through transfusions using contaminated blood supplies.

⁴³¹ Onscreen examples include not only *Les Nuits fauves*, but also *Jeanne et le garçon formidable* (Ducastel and Martineau, 1998) or *N'Oublie pas que tu vas mourir* (Beauvois, 1995). References to AIDS and HIV are also to be found in two of the films analysed in this chapter. In *Pédale douce*, we learn that one of the two gay central characters is HIV-, while the other is HIV+, and in *Drôle de Félix*, the central character is also HIV+ and undergoing tritherapy. In terms of academic research devoted to

Towards the end of the 1990s, a further aspect of sexuality emerged within French film which, again, points towards the salience of the topic for this thesis, namely the depiction of female sexuality and female *hetero*-sexuality in particular.⁴³² The key film texts which crop up most frequently in academic discussions of this developing trend do not fall under either the gay or the *banlieue* banner and, as such, will not be focussed on here, but the issues raised in these films and in the work done around them will be of relevance and feed into the broader debates engaged with in this chapter.⁴³³ Crucially, this indicates the need, when considering the ways in which identities are constructed onscreen in relation to sexuality, to recognise that just as plural ethnic and gendered identities must be examined in order to reflect a renegotiation of the terms of contemporary republicanism, similarly a spectrum of sexualities must be considered, rather than positing one particular sexuality as a norm and that within which others must be assimilated. And it is in relation to the issues discussed, in brief, in the preceding paragraphs, along with those raised by the discussion of the socio-political backdrop which follows, that the analysis offered in this chapter will engage with this broader framework.

2. Sexuality in 1990s France

As well as these developments in cinematic terms, evolutions in 1990s French society also meant that sexuality became a frequent feature of media and political debate. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the 1990s debate on the development of what was to become the PACS legislation was framed, firstly, in relation to gendered relations and symbolic order, and, secondly, as will be illustrated below, in terms of

the topic, useful examples include Alex Hughes, 'AIDS-video: Representing the Body in Guibert's *La Pudeur ou l'impudeur*,' in Hughes and Williams, *op. cit.*: 209-226, and D. Rudelic-Fernandez *et al*, 'Cinematographic Fiction and HIV prevention: evaluation of the campaign '3000 scénarios contre un virus,' *French Cultural Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1998), 351-365.

⁴³² It is worth noting, however, that the director Catherine Breillat has, since the early 1970s, produced a series of films which deal specifically with aspects of female sexuality and heterosexuality in particular, such as *Le Soupirail* (1974), *Une Vraie Jeune Fille* (1976), *36 Fillette* (1988), and *Romance* (1999).

⁴³³ The film texts I refer to here are, in particular, *Baise-moi* (Despentes and Trinh Thi, 2000) and a series of films directed by Catherine Breillat including *Romance* (1999) and *A Ma Soeur!* (2001). Academic articles on these texts are growing in number but particularly useful examples include: Sophie Bélot, 'Baise-moi: from a political to a social female friendship film', *Studies in European Cinema* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2004), 7-17; Liz Constable, 'Unbecoming Sexual Desires for Women Becoming Sexual Subjects: Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and Catherine Breillat (1999)', *MLN* 119 (2004), 672-695; Lisa Downing, 'French Cinema's New "Sexual Revolution": Postmodern Porn and Troubled Genre,' *French Cultural Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2004), 265-280; Judith Franco, 'Gender, Genre and Female Pleasure in the Contemporary Revenge Narrative: *Baise-moi* and *What It Feels Like For A Girl*,' *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2004), 1-10.

an interaction with broader debates on French republicanism. However, the hotly contested emerging legislation also clearly brought into play questions of sexuality and led to a greater awareness – desired or otherwise – of the presence of gays and lesbians within French society, in large part due to many of its opponents' desire to view it as legislation specially designed for gays. As a result, alongside the more theoretical debates engendered by the development of this legislation, there emerged a number of crucial practical factors which placed sexuality, and homosexuality in particular, at the forefront of much political and media discussion.

For instance, the homophobia which was present in some quarters in opposition to the PACS led to a climate, in the late 1990s, in which media focus was placed on the sexuality of individual politicians at every level of the French political establishment. Philippe Meynard, then deputy mayor for the rural village of Barsac in the Gironde region,⁴³⁴ came out in 1999 in an article published in his local newspaper, *Sud Ouest*, stating that '[son] homosexualité n'est qu'un secret de Polichinelle à Barsac'.⁴³⁵ A fortnight later, he attended the summer conference of his party, the UDF,⁴³⁶ and demanded that its then president, Philippe Douste-Blazy, explain the homophobia present in some of the speeches given in the *Assemblée Nationale* by UDF députée Christine Boutin.⁴³⁷ In 2000, the UMP⁴³⁸ député Jean-Luc Romero was forced to come out publicly as gay following threats that he would be outed,⁴³⁹ and, a year later, Nasser Ramdane, a communist politician elected in the Seine-Saint-Denis area was outed by fellow militants from the Parti Communiste Français.⁴⁴⁰ The most prominent examples of openly gay French politicians can be found in the period from the late

⁴³⁴ Meynard is now mayor of Barsac. (Source http://www.barsac.fr/fr/barsac/conseil_municipal.html, accessed on September 23rd 2005).

⁴³⁵ Quoted in Joël Métreau, 'Coming-out à l'UDF. La Force tranquille,' *Têtu*, October 1999, 43.

⁴³⁶ Union pour la démocratie française summer conference held in Risoul, in the Hautes-Alpes. Source Métreau, *op. cit.*, 43.

⁴³⁷ Although Boutin maintained that she was not homophobic, many of her statements during the debates on the PACS indicate the contrary to be the case as, for instance, she asserted that homosexuals find 'à l'origine de leur situation [...] une souffrance.' In her book, *Le Mariage des homosexuels*, she further claimed that 'toutes les civilisations qui ont reconnu et justifié l'homosexualité comme un mode de vie normal ont connu la décadence.' (Both quotations taken from Fiammetta Venner, 'Christine Boutin est homophobe,' *Têtu*, October 1999, 48-49.)

⁴³⁸ Union pour un mouvement populaire.

⁴³⁹ It is interesting to note, in the case of Romero, that disclosure of his sexuality and subsequently of his status as HIV+ have not hindered his political career. Indeed, in December 2004, he was named director of the Collectif Sida Grande Cause Nationale for the year 2005 which aims to increase awareness of AIDS and HIV in France. (Source www.jeanluc-romero.com, accessed September 2nd 2005)

⁴⁴⁰ Thomas Doustaly, 'Un Jeune Elu outé,' *Têtu*, October 2001.

1990s to the present, with the coming out of Bertrand Delanoë, current mayor of Paris, during an interview on the television channel M6,⁴⁴¹ and Jean-Jacques Aillagon, ‘premier ministre de la République “officiellement” gay’,⁴⁴² who, shortly before being appointed Minister for Culture, spoke about his sexuality in an interview in *Le Monde*.

For some, and indeed in particular for many republicans, such matters have no place in the public arena, but arise in the ‘private’ half of the sacred private/public division at the heart of some interpretations of republicanism. After all, as Stychin has pointed out:

Republicanism depends upon a belief in citizenship as a national project in which individuals *in fact* will transcend their particular affiliations, towards full and foundational membership in a wider community of citizens. This, in turn, requires the preservation of a clear differentiation between the public and private spheres. Cultural difference must be privatised in order to preserve a universalist, liberal, neutral vision of the Republic and the citizen within it.⁴⁴³

However, it is my argument here that, by evoking republican values as a reasoning either behind or against the PACS legislation, politicians and the media alike brought questions of sexuality into the public sphere. What is beyond doubt, as will be illustrated, is that the issues raised here spill over into onscreen representations, as will be illustrated in later analysis of verbal exchanges in the core films.

Sexuality has become a key component of much socio-political debate in 1990s France not only through media coverage of these voluntary coming-outs and enforced ‘outings’ but also, more generally, in relation to broader questions of gay and lesbian visibility. From the annual Gay Pride⁴⁴⁴ marches – the largest of which is held in Paris,⁴⁴⁵ although smaller versions take place the length and breadth of France – to issues related to gay marketing, substantial media coverage has been dedicated to the

⁴⁴¹ On November 22nd 1998. (Source www.media-g.net accessed on September 22nd 2005)

⁴⁴² Thomas Doustaly, ‘Jean-Jacques Aillagon’, *Têtu*, June 2002.

⁴⁴³ Carl F. Stychin, ‘Civil Solidarity or Fragmented Identities? The Politics of Sexuality and Citizenship in France’, *Social and Legal Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2001), 352.

⁴⁴⁴ The official title of these marches is ‘Marche des fiertés lesbiennes, gaies, bis et trans’ but, for the sake of brevity here, I will refer to them as ‘Gay Pride.’

⁴⁴⁵ The number of people taking part in the marches varies greatly depending on the source of the figures but, to give an indication of their popularity, according to figures released by the Paris *préfecture*, the 2005 march saw 550,000 people marching. These numbers have increased dramatically since the early 1990s when, for example, in 1994 only 10,000 people took part in the march (Source Hervé Morin, ‘Le Carnaval du sida’, *Le Monde*, June 21st 1994.)

reporting of life in France's gay community.⁴⁴⁶ The national daily newspaper *Libération*, for example, dedicates its front-page spread to the Paris Pride march every June⁴⁴⁷ and has published supplements to the daily edition of the paper analysing the political backdrop of Pride in more detail.⁴⁴⁸ As well as this type of media coverage, the popularity of Gay Pride has also led a number of well-known organisations within France to reconsider their marketing strategies in order to specifically target those wishing to attend the march. The Parisian transport network (RATP), for instance, issued special pink *métro* and bus tickets, similar to *Paris visite* passes, during the Pride weekend in 1997, while the SNCF, the same year, offered a 30% reduction in tariffs for those travelling to Pride.⁴⁴⁹ France has had its own gay trade union, SNEG,⁴⁵⁰ since 1990, campaigning primarily, but not exclusively, on issues related to AIDS and HIV and homophobia in the workplace, and, since October 2004, an exclusively gay television channel, Pink TV, broadcasts in France (and in Belgium), describing itself as 'destinée aux gays, filles et garçons, et à tous ceux qui ont envie d'une télé différente.'⁴⁵¹

Some of the media coverage of the above over the course of the 1990s, and indeed to the present day, has been underscored by a questioning of the very notion of the existence of a gay community, but some has also taken its existence as a given within the socio-political and socio-cultural make-up of contemporary France. *Le Monde's* two-page spread devoted to issues related to gay identity and community in France offers prime examples of both these trends, together with the paradoxes inherent in media discussion, when it talks, for instance, about how 'la culture gay se dilue, se brouille en s'universalisant.'⁴⁵² Overall, the examples cited above, and the coverage they received in both gay and mainstream media outlets, show how central questions of sexuality have become to French social politics over recent years.

⁴⁴⁶ This key notion of 'community' is one which I will return to in more detail in the conclusion of the thesis.

⁴⁴⁷ See, for instance, its front page on 20th/21st June 1998 with the headline 'Le Jour le plus gay'.

⁴⁴⁸ Each year's Gay Pride march has a particular theme, usually political or politicised, which it attempts to bring into the public arena. In 1999, for instance, this broad theme was homophobia and *Libération* published an 8-page supplement entitled 'Le Réveil homophobe' publicising the issues. Most recently, in 2005, the theme of the march was 'Couples et parentalité: l'égalité maintenant.'

⁴⁴⁹ See Krémer and Normand, *op. cit.*, 11.

⁴⁵⁰ The Syndicat National des Entreprises Gaies, created in 1990, 'une association de promotion et de soutien pour toutes les entreprises s'adressant à la clientèle gay and gay-friendly ou ayant à leur tête un dirigeant gay.' (Source www.sneg.org/fr accessed on September 13th 2005)

⁴⁵¹ 'Pink Tv: La Liberté, ça se regarde' on www.pinktv.fr, accessed on September 13th 2005.

⁴⁵² Krémer and Normand, *op. cit.*

Heterosexuality

From the above, it could be argued that this centrality of ‘sexuality’ is, in fact, a centrality of *homo*-sexuality specifically. I will argue against this position below, but will first show how issues related to other sexualities, and crucially *hetero*-sexuality, have in fact also been foregrounded, particularly in the latter part of the 1990s. With regard to interpretations of contemporary heterosexuality in France, it is at this point that debate frequently, if not always, intersects with allied concerns and analysis regarding ethnic identities in contemporary France, as well as continuing to overlap with parallel debates on gendered identities. These multiple intersections occur because of a media problematisation of youth heterosexuality within the *banlieues*, revolving around a series of *faits divers* and wider on-going debates. In an article entitled ‘Recherche sur les viols collectifs: Données judiciaires et analyse sociologique,’ CNRS⁴⁵³ researcher Laurent Mucchielli explains his own interest in the subject as follows:

Cette recherche est née d’une interrogation face à la médiatisation aussi intense que subite de ce que les journalistes ont appelé “tournantes”, reprenant à leur compte une expression argotique. Le comptage annuel de la fréquence des occurrences de l’expression “viol collectif” dans les titres des dépêches de l’Agence France Presse [...] met en évidence le phénomène. Alors que de 1990 à 2000, les viols collectifs n’avaient occasionné qu’un volume de 1 à 7 titres [...], en 2001 l’expression “viols collectifs” ainsi que celle, nouvelle, de “tournantes”,⁴⁵⁴ apparaissent au total à 50 reprises.⁴⁵⁵

In the current context, there are a number of points which it is important to note here. Firstly, Mucchielli’s interest was piqued specifically by the coverage of the phenomenon of gang rapes in the media, and, in taking 2001 as his key year, he situates his work firmly in a post-*La Squale*⁴⁵⁶ context. In other words, the media reporting he refers to is, at least in part, that which surrounded the release of the film

⁴⁵³ Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.

⁴⁵⁴ Josette Rey-Debove and Alain Rey in the *Petit Robert*, 2003, p. 2643, record the first use of *tourmente* in this sense circa 1995.

⁴⁵⁵ Laurent Mucchielli, ‘Recherche sur les viols collectifs: Données judiciaires et analyse sociologique.’ *Questions pénales*, Bulletin d’information, January 2005, XVIII.1, accessed online at www.cedisp.org/IMG/pdf/QP_01_2005.pdf on July 24th 2005.

⁴⁵⁶ See pages 50-52 and 75-78 for a more detailed discussion of this film.

and the flow of real-life accounts of “tournantes”,⁴⁵⁷ similar to those depicted in Généstal’s film and which occurred in the *banlieues*. In particular, he observes:

L’analyse du contenu de ces articles de presse fait ressortir une version dominante présentant ce phénomène comme largement nouveau, en pleine expansion et propre à un lieu et une population donnés: les “jeunes de cités”, c’est-à-dire les jeunes “issus de l’immigration”. Cette vision s’inscrit en effet dans le cadre plus large du débat sur l’“insécurité” et “les banlieues”, amplifié encore par le thème des violences faites aux femmes et par la peur de l’islam.⁴⁵⁸

Secondly, Mucchielli’s concern here is with a particular form of urban *hetero*-sexuality and, as such, his analysis intersects with questions of ethnicity and gendered identities, analysing one specific aspect of sexuality against a resolutely contemporary French backdrop. This reference to the decidedly contemporary context of the debate also means that it feeds into other, broader, questionings of French national identity, with *banlieue* youths still being *other-ed* in media coverage but now being considered other not only in terms of ethnic identity, but also within the realm of sexuality. It is also worth noting that the intense media coverage of this particular enactment of heterosexual violence has coincided with a wider press – and indeed cinematic – interest in overlaps between gender and sexuality in the *banlieues* with a number of articles, across mainstream media outlets, focussing on the alleged phenomenon of the *bandes de filles* or ‘girl gangs’, like the one seen in *La Squale*.⁴⁵⁹ The combined result is that, rather than being a period in which *homo*-sexualities dominated the media agenda, it is in fact sexuality in general which has become a factor of media and political debate, frequently framed in terms of, or related to, broader concerns regarding national republican identity.

⁴⁵⁷ One figure who became particularly prominent and who recounted her own experiences of *tournantes* in the *banlieues* of Paris was Samira Bellil. Bellil was raped on three occasions in a housing scheme in the Val d’Oise and, as well as giving many press interviews, wrote *Dans l’enfer des tournantes*, an account of her experiences. Bellil died in 2004. (See, for instance, Alexandre Garcia, ‘Un témoignage sur “l’enfer des tournantes” dédié aux “frangines de la galère”’, *Le Monde*, October 25th 2002 and Pascale Robert-Diard, ‘Samira Bellil’, *Le Monde*, September 9th 2004)

⁴⁵⁸ Mucchielli, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵⁹ See, for instance: Jean-Michel Décugis, ‘Les “crapuleuses” de Marseille’, *Le Figaro*, September 2nd 1998; Marie d’Aufresne, ‘La cruauté des “pestes” de Montbéliard’, *Le Figaro*, September 19th 1998; Marc Pivois, ‘Toulon: les gaminettes détroussaient les “bourgeoises”’, *Libération*, August 22nd 1998; Emmanuelle Maurel, ‘Les adolescentes de plus en plus violentes’, *Le Parisien*, August 28th 1998; Florence Couret and Sophie Lauret, ‘La violence se décline au féminin pluriel’, *La Croix*, August 25th 1998. Numerous other examples can be found across media outlets at both national and local level.

From Sexuality to Sexualities: 'Straight'-forward Republicanism?

Following the model adapted in the previous two chapters, rather than focussing on expressions of one particular sexuality through the dialogue of the corpus studied here, I argue that it is more interesting, and more productive, to analyse different sexualities through the prism of similar critical frameworks.⁴⁶⁰ Indeed, such an approach is vital to the underlying topic of analysis here, namely 'minority cinema,' as it represents broader questions of minority/mainstream relations in contemporary France and how these impact upon – and, in fact, are embedded within – debates around and challenges to republican discourse and values. To take one example, in the mid to late 1990s, extensive media and political coverage in France was dedicated to questions of expressions of homosexuality, focussing, for instance, on the application of the PACS to gay and lesbian couples, the growing popularity of annual Gay Pride marches in France, and issues related to gay parenting. In the face of this 'visibilité homosexuelle',⁴⁶¹ many participants in the debates in political, media, and other cultural fora, expressed their views in terms specifically related to the underlying principles of French republicanism, framing the debate as one surrounding the assimilation of homosexuals to a universalist French republican model.⁴⁶²

However, I argue that there is an inconsistency inherent in such framing which, once highlighted, illustrates the importance of broadening the field of analysis to encompass, not only expressions of *homosexuality*, but also expressions of other sexualities, in particular *heterosexuality*. Implicit in the political and media debates referred to above, is a consideration of the question as to whether homosexuals, seen either as individuals or as a community, should be assimilated within the republican model. Opponents of the PACS, for instance, argued against it, in many cases,

⁴⁶⁰ This follows the approach taken, for instance, by Carrie Tarr in 'Gender and Sexuality in *Les Nuits fauves* (Collard, 1992)', in ed. Phil Powrie, *op. cit.*, 117-126, in which Tarr argues that 'Collard's exploration of homosexuality [...] is closely interwoven with and, arguably, subordinate to the heterosexual narrative of Jean's passionate love affair with Laura.' (*op. cit.*: 119)

⁴⁶¹ Frédéric Martel, *op. cit.*, 399.

⁴⁶² One important example of this tendency would be the 1996 edition of Martel's *Le Rose et le noir*, in which the author takes a firmly anti-communitarian stance with regard to the possible existence of a gay community in France. Media coverage of the book's release continued this republican debate on community existence (or otherwise) with, for example, *Le Monde* turning a full page of its edition of 14th/15th April 1996 over to the debate. Numerous other examples abound. In 1997, when Paris played host to the annual Europride march, *Le Monde*, again, dedicated a double-page spread to articles on gay human rights and gay marketing (see *Le Monde*, p 10-11, June 28th 1997). For evocations of republican values by both opponents and proponents of the PACS during debates in the *Assemblée Nationale*, see Stychin, *op. cit.*

because they saw it as pandering to the particular, insofar as they viewed the legislation as having been written with a specific group in mind, rather than the blank canvas which is the representative citizen of the Republic :

[For opponents, the PACS] will *encourage* a ghetto mentality because the PACS is specifically designed for the gay community.⁴⁶³

Addressing the *Assemblée Nationale* on June 8th, 1999, Henri Plagnol,⁴⁶⁴ declared to his fellow *députés*:

Avec le PACS, vous remettez en cause la frontière. [...] Vous obligez à rendre publics des choix de vie privés. [...] Et vous le faites singulièrement pour la communauté homosexuelle.⁴⁶⁵

My argument here is that viewpoints which consider the assimilation, or otherwise, of homosexuals to the republican model, rather than arguing in terms which are true to the universalist spirit they often express, in fact serve to demonstrate that the republic of which they speak was always already heterosexual. Their *citoyen* is not a truly blank canvas, devoid of all and any individualism, a citizen with a direct relationship to the nation-state. Rather, implicit in their model of citizenship is a specific view of sexualities, namely one which requires homosexuals to assimilate and sees challenges to republicanism as voiced by gay citizens as proof of their difference. Foerster ties this problem back to the question of a symbolic order, as discussed in the previous chapter :

Autant la Révolution française, au moment de la République naissante, nous a paru révélatrice du déni de l'universalisme en maintenant pour les femmes leur assignation au féminin, autant la problématique de la reconnaissance juridique du couple homosexuel, en fin de cinquième République, maintient les homosexuels sous le joug de l'ordre symbolique.⁴⁶⁶

Foerster's view engages with a far broader historical period than lies within the scope of this thesis, but the decision here to focus, not specifically on verbal expressions of gay identity, but rather a plurality of sexualities, stems, in part, from a belief that,

⁴⁶³ Stychin, *op. cit.*, 362.

⁴⁶⁴ Member of the right-wing Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF) party in the Val-de-Marne.

⁴⁶⁵ Stychin, *op. cit.*, 357. Stychin quotes Pagnol in English in his article. The original French text used here was taken from www.assemblee-nationale.fr/cr/leg11/html/19990267.asp (accessed online on September 22nd 2005).

⁴⁶⁶ Foerster, *op. cit.*, 49-50.

implicit in talk of republican universalism is a *prise de position* in ethnic, gendered, and sexual terms which, in turn, further serves to illustrate why it is worthwhile discussing challenges to and renegotiations of republicanism within the contemporary French context. Not to examine these would be to posit a view of difference which unquestioningly takes, as its base assumptions, the speaker's own peculiarities as representative of a position of 'sameness' or 'identity' from which to analyse 'the other/s', without recognising that the 'same' is, in fact, also a subjective entity.

3. Corpus: *Pédale douce*, *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, *Le Derrière*, and *Drôle de Félix*

Following the approach adopted in the previous two chapters, the current chapter will examine questions of sexualities and sexual identities as they emerge through verbal exchanges in a core group of four films, drawn primarily from gay cinema (three of the four works) but with one example taken from *banlieue* cinema. Once again, the core films will be taken from across the time period under examination here, with release dates ranging from 1996 to 2000, and again frequent reference will be made to other works from both bodies of cinema, in order to demonstrate that the phenomena examined are not limited to the four central examples, but are to be found across the genres. The spread in release dates will allow for a consideration of the development of verbal representations of sexualities against an evolving social, political, and cultural backdrop in contemporary France, and, crucially, will allow for an examination of the issues raised against the broader framework of a renegotiation of republicanism in the present French context. Just as the previous chapters have demonstrated the ways in which onscreen verbal interactions engage with this evolving climate with regard to both ethnicity and gender, so too will the current chapter offer illustration and analysis of the interactions between sexualities both onscreen and off in contemporary France. The four films which will form the core of the analysis here are: *Pédale douce* (Aghion, 1996),⁴⁶⁷ *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta*

⁴⁶⁷ On its initial release in metropolitan France on March 27th 1996, Aghion's comedy *Pédale douce* was a huge box office success with a total of more than 4 million *entrées* across France since its release (source www.lefilmfrancais.fr, accessed on September 11th 2005). *Pédale douce* was more popular, on its initial release, than the American animation comedy *Toy Story* (Lasseter, 1995). The two films were released in the same week in France and both got off to extremely lucrative starts with around 140,000 viewers each. Both remained popular during the ensuing month but it was *Pédale douce* which proved more popular with the French cinema-going public. (Source Michel Pascal's 'Box Office' articles in the French news weekly *Le Point*, between April 6th and June 11th 1996).

mère! (Bensalah, 1999),⁴⁶⁸ *Le Derrière* (Lemercier, 1999),⁴⁶⁹ and *Drôle de Félix* (Ducastel and Martineau, 2000).⁴⁷⁰ Of these four Aghion's, Lemercier's, and Ducastel and Martineau's fall most easily into the category of gay films,⁴⁷¹ while Bensalah's work forms part of what I describe as the '*banlieue* on the beach'⁴⁷² sub-genre. This mixture of *banlieue* and gay films will serve to demonstrate the ways in which issues of sexualities and sexual identities simultaneously feed into and emerge from broader debates regarding minority communities in contemporary France, rather than being the exclusive preserve of debates concerning one particular minority grouping or another. It will also show, again in keeping with the approach adopted thus far, how any questioning of topics in relation to minority groupings in turn impacts upon considerations of the mainstream.

Pédale douce

Taking the four core films in chronological order, Gabriel Aghion's *Pédale douce* was released in late March 1996 and, during the first month of its release, held its own, in terms of ratings, against such competitors as the Disney-backed, Oscar-winning *Toy Story*, the French heritage film *Beaumarchais L'Insolent* (Molinaro, 1996), and, perhaps most ironically, *The Birdcage*, an American remake of Edouard Molinaro's smash hit 1978 gay comedy *La Cage aux folles*.⁴⁷³ Just as the narrative of Aghion's later work *Belle Maman* (discussed in the previous chapter) relied on a number of

⁴⁶⁸ Although Bensalah had directed a comedy short entitled *Il y a du foutage de gueule dans l'air* in 1996 with many of the same actors), *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!* (released on January 20th 1999), was his first feature-length work. It has attracted more than 1 million *entrées* across France. (Source www.lefilmfrancais.fr, accessed on September 11th 2005).

⁴⁶⁹ Released on April 28th 1999, stand-up comedienne Valérie Lemercier's second outing as director (her first was with *Quadrille* in 1996) may have been less of an overwhelming box office hit than films such as *Pédale douce* or *Belle Maman* (872,747 *entrées* according to www.lefilmfrancais.fr on September 11th 2005) but, as will be illustrated below, its impact in both mainstream and minority media outlets serves to demonstrate its impact across French society, particularly in relation to questions of gender and sexualities.

⁴⁷⁰ Directed by Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau, *Drôle de Félix* is the least commercially-successful of the four core films examined here, with 82,632 *entrées* since its release on April 19th 2000. However, it should be borne in mind that, unlike the three other films examined in the current chapter, it did not benefit from the financial backing of the national French television channel TF1 but was co-produced by Les Films Pélleas, Arte France Cinéma, and Pyramide Productions.

⁴⁷¹ It should be noted, however, that *Drôle de Félix* deals as much with questions of ethnicity as with issues related to sexuality.

⁴⁷² For a more detailed discussion of the emergence of the sub-genre, see page 26 of the introductory chapter. See also Cristina Johnston, 'The *Banlieues* Go On Holiday: French *Banlieue* Cinema Meets the Regions', paper given at European Cinema Research Forum, University of Leeds, July 2nd 2005.

⁴⁷³ Probably the most successful gay French comedy to date, *La Cage aux folles* has attracted over 5 million viewers in France alone since its release in 1978. (Source www.imdb.com on September 11th 2005)

twists and turns, so too is the plot of *Pédale douce* somewhat convoluted, dependent on a series of misunderstandings, and so too does Aghion's earlier work boast an all-star cast. Adrien (Patrick Timsit), a gay banker who is 'out' to his friends, but closeted in his workplace, is involved in the final stages of an important business deal. His boss, Alexandre Agutte (Richard Berry), invites Adrien and spouse to a business dinner with him and his wife, Marie (Michèle Laroque). Rather than coming out, Adrien invents a wife for himself in the shape of his best friend, Eva (Fanny Ardant), a straight woman who runs a renowned gay restaurant (Chez Eva) which is staffed and frequented by a gamut of gay, cinematic stereotypes. Also invited is Adrien's colleague, André Lemoine (Jacques Gamblin) who, it soon transpires, is also gay and closeted. From this initial business dinner, the film takes a number of farcical turns, as Alexandre instantly falls for Eva and attempts everything he can to get her. Unfortunately, in the process, Alexandre's wife mistakenly believes that, instead of covering up a heterosexual affair, he is, in fact, trying to conceal his own homosexuality and a good deal of the film's humour comes from verbal exchanges in which interlocutors are very much talking at cross purposes.

When the film's popularity led to its re-release, billboard posters advertising it proclaimed 'déjà deux millions de Français en sont folles',⁴⁷⁴ playing on a particular depiction of male homosexuality, namely that of the *folle*, but also playing on the double meaning of the word *folle*. On the one hand, it is the feminine form of *fou*, in reference to the film's huge success and the fact that 2 million French people had already been to see it. However, on the other hand, 'deux millions de Français' should have been followed by a masculine plural (*fous*), and I argue that the use of *folles* here hints at one of the ways in which this mainstream comedy has contributed to the awareness of one particular facet of homosexuality:

⁴⁷⁴ While an examination of the advertising campaigns for the films in the current corpus lies beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worth noting that such interaction between film text, advertiser, and both actual and potential viewers lies at the heart of a broader reception studies-based approach. Within this framework, as Barbara Klinger has described, analysis is suggested 'of one of the major social dimensions of reception: how certain types of textual response are motivated by forms directly associated with defining the text as product – what Heath refers to as "epiphenomena".' (Klinger, 'Digressions at the Cinema: Reception and Mass Culture', *Cinema Journal* 28, no. 4 (Summer 1989), 5) These 'epiphenomena' span 'such exhibition materials as posters, ads, and trailers, as well as an extensive array of intermedia coverage which features pieces on stars, directors, and the making of films.' (Klinger, *loc. cit.*)

La France décripée? Tout se passe comme si, dans la rue comme sur les écrans, les gouines et les pédés faisaient de moins en moins peur et de plus en plus rire. D'ailleurs simultanément, une palanquée d'enquêtes d'opinion semble enregistrer une légère décripation de la société française sur ces points, ce que la promo de *Pédale douce* a parfaitement su intégrer: pour la relance du film, les pubs sur abribus proclamaient: "Déjà deux millions de Français en sont folles"⁴⁷⁵

Clearly, the film could equally be criticised on these grounds since it could be read as equating homosexuals with risible *folles*, rather than explicitly presenting this as but one possible gay identity among many. Indeed, the following quotation from a review of the film published in *Le Point* illustrates that, in many ways, it is the stereotypical content of the film which has been noted by some critics:

Banquier le jour, drag-queen la nuit, telle est la vie d'Adrien, qui troque attaché-case et costume trois-pièces contre paillettes, bijoux et perruques dès qu'il a quitté son très respectable bureau. Se protégeant du qu'en dira-t-on grâce à sa copine Eva, qui joue les épouses dans les dîners de travail, le vernis des apparences craque le jour où son patron tombe amoureux de sa "fausse compagne" et la suit dans des endroits interlopes où l'attendent des hommes en cuir, des fessées et autres bagatelles...⁴⁷⁶

However, as I will argue below, the film's contribution to the wider considerations of renegotiations of republicanism within the sphere of sexualities is, in fact, more subtle, and, as Gérard Lefort and Olivier Seguret, writing in *Libération* put it:

Sans enfler exagérément le caractère crucial de *Pédale douce*, son humour folle et ses audaces laissent rêveur.⁴⁷⁷

Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!

Released three years after *Pédale douce*, Djamel Bensalah's *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!* takes a far more light-hearted approach to questions of *banlieue* living than

⁴⁷⁵ Lefort and Seguret, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷⁶ Michel Pascal. 'C'est gay, c'est épatant.' *Le Point*, March 30th 1996. (Accessed online at <http://www.lepoint.fr/cinema/document.html?did=80226> on September 5th 2005) The reviewer's desire to equate male homosexuality with cross-dressing clearly illustrates prejudice and lack of cultural awareness on his part. While all of the elements listed in this brief extract from the review do, indeed, appear in the film (sequins, wigs, leather, and so on), there are omissions from the list which would have demonstrated a slightly more complex image of human sexuality.

⁴⁷⁷ Lefort and Seguret, *op. cit.*

any of the other *banlieue* films examined in previous chapters.⁴⁷⁸ Youssef (Jamel Debbouze), Stéphane (Stéphane Soo Mongo), and Christophe (Lorant Deutsch), three school friends from the Seine-Saint-Denis *département*, win the first prize in a video reportage competition by filming an interview-to-camera with Mike (Julien Courbey), another friend of theirs they pretend has a record of drug taking and dealing. Their film is praised at the award ceremony by the mayor who compliments the three budding film-makers for their report's 'honnêteté, finesse et réalisme remarquables'⁴⁷⁹ and the boys win an all-expenses-paid trip to the seaside resort of Biarritz, where they are later joined by Mike. Only for a few minutes at the beginning of the film is the action set in the Parisian suburbs and most of the action is set against the backdrop of the seaside holiday resort. The film thus 'draws its humour from the displacement of the *black-blanc-beur* male group typical of the *banlieue* film'⁴⁸⁰ into an alien and potentially hostile setting.'⁴⁸¹ The boys find themselves in a rented apartment next-door to a group of girls and, rather predictably, a good deal of the film's plot is taken over by their (predominantly failed) attempts at seduction and general clumsiness (sometimes, but not always, misogynistic) where women are concerned. To use Christophe's own summary when they arrive at their destination: 'Plage, meufs, baise.'⁴⁸²

Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère! sets itself up very much as a light-hearted response to the issues of the *banlieues* and adopts neither the stark black and white brutality of *La Haine*, nor the hand-held docu-fiction feel of films like *Etat des lieux*.⁴⁸³ Despite the overall light-heartedness, there are nevertheless hints at the tensions tackled in

⁴⁷⁸ Bensalah himself has spoken about the way in which his film can be seen as a response to Kassovitz's *La Haine*, offering a more 'honest' view of *banlieue* youths: 'Je trouve la Haine artistiquement incroyable, très bien réalisé. Si on le prend comme un divertissement, alors il est excellent. Maintenant il ne faut pas lui accorder un soupçon d'intérêt sociologique et anthropologique. Je ne dis pas que mon film est plus exact mais il est plus honnête. Même si je crois que Kassovitz est honnête quand il fait son film, mais il raconte une histoire qu'il aurait pu transposer ailleurs. Ça ne raconte en rien ce qu'est la banlieue.' (Bensalah, Interview conducted by Alix Tardieu, April 1999, at <http://www.ecran noir.fr/entrevues/entrevue.php?e=17> accessed on September 20th 2005)

⁴⁷⁹ *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, Bensalah.

⁴⁸⁰ As well as using this *black-blanc-beur* trio at the centre of its diegesis, the film also makes reference to one specific example of *banlieue* cinema, namely *La Haine* (see pages 48-49 and 65-75), in its initial minutes during which intertitles appear onscreen giving time and location, a technique mimicked from Kassovitz's work.

⁴⁸¹ Tarr, *Reframing the banlieue*, *op. cit.*, 106.

⁴⁸² *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸³ However, it is worth noting that the boys take their camcorder with them to Biarritz and there are brief sequences within the film's narrative which result from their attempts at hand-held filming.

other *banlieue* films. Youssef, for instance, falls for Lydie, one of the boys' neighbours and, when he asks her whether she is from 'Paris Paris ou Paris banlieue',⁴⁸⁴ Lydie replies: 'C'est ça, ce qu'on appelle le sens aigu de l'observation des jeunes beurs en banlieue?'⁴⁸⁵ The issues of ethnic prejudice and insularity re-emerge later when the pair argue following Youssef's discovery that Lydie is Jewish. He tries to talk his way out of his own apparent anti-Semitism by accusing her of never having 'franchi le périph' de [s]a vie.'⁴⁸⁶ However, on the whole, the tone remains comic and there are certainly none of the *bavures*, riots or outbreaks of violence encountered in earlier, more conventional, *banlieue* films.

Le Derrière

Released only a few months after *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, Valérie Lemerrier's second feature-length work as director, *Le Derrière*, made an impact in both mainstream and minority media outlets. Oliver Seguret, in his review published in *Libération*, described the work as 'une comédie ambiguë et subtile'⁴⁸⁷ but also asserted that the film played an important role in the history of cinema:

[L]e malaise, c'est une vraie, une grande question de cinéma. Que cette question soit posée à l'occasion d'une comédie ne fait qu'en accuser le tranchant.⁴⁸⁸

And while Seguret and others were praising Lemerrier's audacity in the mainstream media, the gay monthly magazine *Têtu* published an eight-page article dedicated to the film, which included an extended interview with the director.⁴⁸⁹ It was not, however, the interview itself which raised eyebrows but the fact that the magazine chose to make Lemerrier their cover-boy, rather than their cover-girl, using a very realistic photo-montage of Lemerrier's face on a male body.⁴⁹⁰ The reason behind such praise and such playfulness on the part of *Têtu* lies in the premise of *Le Derrière*.

⁴⁸⁴ *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, op. cit.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁷ Olivier Seguret, 'Le Derrière est culotté', *Libération*, April 28th 1999.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁹ Thomas Doustaly, 'Valérie Lemerrier: Les Garçons aiment les filles seules', *Têtu*, May 1999, 36-43.

⁴⁹⁰ The photographs were taken by Jean-Baptiste Mondino and the interview was billed, on the magazine's front cover, as 'Interview transgenre. Lemerrier est un garçon.' *Têtu*, May 1999.

Frédérique Sénèque (played by Lemerancier herself), a rather gangly bourgeoisie country girl, has just lost her mother and, while going through her mother's belongings, comes across a photograph of her father, whom she has never met. She finds out where he lives (Paris) and decides to seek him out, staying, initially, at the house of a gay friend while she tries to establish contact. It quickly transpires that Frédérique's father, Pierre Arroux (Claude Rich) is, in fact, also gay and living with his partner (Francis, played by Dieudonné), and Frédérique decides to pretend to be a young gay man, finding that her father is much more interested in her as Frédéric, his long-lost son:

Frédérique devient Frédéric, avec un "c" donc, accent de Montpellier
top ridicule et total look sympathique bloqué en 1993.⁴⁹¹

Arroux takes Frédéric-Frédérique under his wing but still tries to keep him/her at a distance in some contexts since, although he is out in his private life, he maintains a façade of implicit heterosexuality in his very public work as curator of the Très Grande Galerie. Inevitably, a series of misunderstandings and farcical situations arise but all ends well. Frédéric is uncovered, quite literally, as Frédérique but only towards the end of the film when she has won the affections of not only her father, but also his partner. The film plays, to a great extent, on stereotypes of male homosexuality, but also, more unusually, on the prejudices which are to be found within the gay community itself, rather than simply constructing homophobia as a heterosexual problem:

Sur ce squelette qui pourrait aussi bien virer au drame qu'à la pantalonnade, Lemerancier a bâti un film subtil, compliqué, retors, qui présente aussi l'originalité de s'attaquer à un thème passionnant et inexploré: le vache ostracisme dont le milieu gay parisien et branché fait preuve à l'égard des folles de province, baptisées "coiffeuses" et autres "pétasses", garçons ringards que l'œil perfide de la faune élue décline instantanément.⁴⁹²

Drôle de Félix

The final film which will form part of our core quarter in the current chapter is *Drôle de Félix*, a somewhat alternative variation on the road movie, written and directed by Jacques Ducastel and Olivier Martineau. The Félix of the title is a young HIV+, gay, Maghrebi man (Sami Bouajila) who, at the start of the film, is made redundant from

⁴⁹¹ Thomas Doustaly, review of *Le Derrière*, *op. cit.*, 43.

⁴⁹² Seguret, *op. cit.*

his job in the Channel port of Dieppe where he lives with his partner Daniel (Pierre-Loup Rajot). Despite the potential for doom and gloom apparent in the plot summary, *Drôle de Félix* in fact offers a positive and uplifting treatment of the issues dealt with, and the directors:

provide audiences with a subtle [...] portrayal of a character of North African origin [...], consciously choos[ing] to challenge the representation of fictional Maghrebi characters in contemporary French cinema.⁴⁹³

Shortly after he loses his job, Félix comes across a box of letters from his father,⁴⁹⁴ whom he has never met, and he undertakes a journey across provincial France, from Dieppe to Marseilles, where he believes his father may live. This journey is both physical and metaphorical, ‘an invitation to engage with questions of identity,’⁴⁹⁵ with Félix discovering new regions of his country, but also meeting new people and constituting something of a ‘surrogate family’⁴⁹⁶ symbolised through the film’s division into five clear segments introduced by extra-diegetic intertitles: ‘Mon Petit Frère,’ ‘Ma Grand-mère,’ ‘Mon Cousin,’ ‘Ma Sœur,’ and finally ‘Mon Père’. The ‘father’ he finally meets is not, in fact, his biological father and the film ends with Félix rejoining his partner in Marseilles and the couple embarking on a ferry together.

Of the four films examined here, *Drôle de Félix* is the least successful in terms of viewing figures and box office takings, and it seems to have suffered commercially from the fact that it is not immediately classifiable as either straightforward gay film or *beur* cinema. Rather, the writer-directors consciously combine aspects of both bodies of film, but also draw on other recognisable cinematic genres – the road movie, contemporary political fiction, hints at musical cinema⁴⁹⁷ – and, rather than offering audiences an opportunity to consider onscreen depictions of *either* sexuality *or* ethnic identity, in fact interweave the two. This mixed approach meant that the film’s

⁴⁹³ Florian Grandena, ‘Identities in Ducastel and Martineau’s *Drôle de Félix*,’ paper given at M/M/LA Annual Convention, Saint-Louis, November 4th-7th 2004. I am grateful to the author for a copy of this paper.

⁴⁹⁴ It is interesting to note the parallel here between *Drôle de Félix* and *Le Derrière*. The letters Félix finds were, in fact, addressed to his mother who has recently died, and whose belongings he must sort through.

⁴⁹⁵ Tarr, *op. cit.*, 147.

⁴⁹⁶ Grandena, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹⁷ The first film Ducastel and Martineau directed was *Jeanne et le Garçon formidable* (1998), a musical about AIDS and HIV, very much in the tradition of the musicals of Jacques Demy, and indeed starring Demy’s son, Mathieu Demy, as the ‘garçon formidable’ of the title.

reception, in both popular and critical terms, was not straightforward. A review of the film published in the gay monthly *Têtu* built the film up by saying that it encapsulated ‘la recette d’un film fait pour nous’⁴⁹⁸ but claimed that the film’s political correctness rendered it passionless.⁴⁹⁹ At preview screenings, audiences expressed concerns about the scenes which show two men kissing, whereas the directors themselves had anticipated far more general problems:

Les premières fois qu’on a montré *Drôle de Félix*, les gens ont eu du mal à accepter les baisers entre les acteurs... Il y a eu une vraie crispation là-dessus. Moi, je m’étais plus posé la question de comment on représente un homme séropositif, un chômeur, un beur, c’est-à-dire en essayant de tirer le personnage des stigmates classiques.⁵⁰⁰

However, I argue that, in the context of this thesis, these criticisms and difficulties in reception⁵⁰¹ testify to the complexities of the contemporary French minority identities being constructed across the bodies of film studied here. A good deal of interesting and useful research has been conducted on individual aspects of the construction of these identities. However, as is demonstrated here, a more in-depth analysis of the ways in which these identities intersect and engage with a French republican identity in onscreen verbal exchanges, illustrates the need for a renegotiation of that French republican identity to ensure its relevance to the complex layered realities of contemporary France.

4. Friends and Lovers: Verbal Exchanges and the Construction of Sexual Identities

Following the model adopted in both the preceding chapters, the verbal exchanges which will be focussed upon here will be of a specific type. In the chapter on ethnicities, the focus was on exchanges between representatives of the republic and individual *banlieue* inhabitants, while analysis in the chapter on gendered identities

⁴⁹⁸ Thomas Doustaly, ‘Triste Félix’, *Têtu*, April 2000, 20.

⁴⁹⁹ Doustaly, *op. cit.*, criticised the directors for having ‘écrit un scénario politiquement surchargé (un ultra minoritaire – chômeur, pédé, arabe – traverse la France) sur un personnage sans passion.’

⁵⁰⁰ Jacques Martineau. Interview with Ducastel and Martineau conducted by Florian Grandena in Paris on October 4th, 2002. Thanks to Florian Grandena for a copy of the transcript of this interview. The entire transcript can be found in Florian Grandena, ‘Political Fictions in Contemporary French Cinema,’ unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nottingham Trent, submitted October 2004.

⁵⁰¹ The directors have also spoken of the problems caused by the marketing of their film, both in France and in the US, with distributors in the former keen to distance the work from ‘gay cinema’ and those in the latter actively playing on the gay interest of the film. (Source, interview conducted by Florian Grandena, *op. cit.*)

was conducted through the prism of parent-child verbal exchanges. Here, in order to examine onscreen constructions of identities in the realm of sexualities, attention will be turned to verbal exchanges which centre on particular forms of relationship, involving various constellations of friends and lovers. In keeping with the framework of the thesis, analyses will be offered, not on the basis of one particular sexuality (namely heterosexuality) being constructed as a norm, but from a standpoint according to which all sexualities are problematised or in crisis, and thus subject to challenge and analysis.

As has been the case in previous chapters, the decision to focus on verbal exchanges which emerge onscreen between these specific types of interlocutors can be justified, not only in terms of the content of the dialogue itself, but also, firstly, in relation to specific issues connected to sexuality – and intersecting with questions of gender and ethnicity – of particular salience in 1990s France and, secondly, because of the ways in which these exchanges can be shown to reflect an engagement with the evolving debate on French republicanism. Rather than examining solely conversations between lovers, I argue that it is useful to also examine the ways in which identities are constructed in relation to characters' sexualities within their friendships and a broader peer group. While it might be argued that constructions of sexualities are particularly relevant within the context of a sexual partnership, I would underline the fact that, in many of the films studied not only in this chapter, but across the thesis, there is, in fact, no successful sexual partnership as such, and yet talk of sexuality remains very much at the narrative forefront.

In *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, for instance, the characters 'alternat[c] between bored afternoons on the beach and vegging out in front of the television, [and...] devote their energy to *trying* to pick up girls.' [my emphasis]⁵⁰² Neither of the central gay characters in *Pédale douce* is involved in a successful sexual relationship: the audience first sees Adrien leaving the bedside of a blonde young man after a one-night stand, promising he is going to bring back croissants (but, in fact, leaving for work) and we only see him flirting throughout the film, while André's persistent

⁵⁰² Chris Darke, Review of *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, *Sight and Sound*, November 1999. (Electronic version accessed online at www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/reviews/details.php?id=239 on May 17th 2002)

attempts to seduce an attractive colleague are thwarted. The central straight characters, Eva and Monsieur and Madame Agutte, become embroiled in a complex relationship built on misunderstandings with a successful resolution only hinted at in the final minutes of the film, after the breakdown of the Aguttes' marriage.⁵⁰³ While the two other films discussed in detail in this chapter do offer examples of more successful relationships, they nevertheless do so against a multi-layered backdrop of partnerships and friendships, rather than focussing solely on the couples in question. In *Le Derrière*, for instance, Frédérique's initial transformation to Frédéric is assisted by three gay men, her friend Marc and two of his friends, while Pierre and Francis, although in a long-term relationship, have both had affairs and are frequently accompanied by a close female friend who pretends to be Pierre's partner for official occasions. And, although the eponymous hero of *Drôle de Félix* is involved in a stable relationship with Daniel, Carrie Tarr describes how, in each of the film's five *vignettes*, he 'prov[es] himself to be the perfect companion/lover.'⁵⁰⁴

The remaining sections of this chapter will offer analysis of a series of verbal exchanges between onscreen friends and lovers in the four core films and will thus illustrate a number of related points. Firstly, the combined analyses will demonstrate the importance of the onscreen construction of identities in the realm of sexualities in relation to the key issues raised by the evolving socio-political backdrop discussed earlier in this chapter. For instance, I will examine a number of scenes which revolve around the disclosure, enforced or voluntary, of a character's sexuality (usually *homo*-sexuality), as well as studying scenes in which there is a discussion of stereotypes of sexuality, be this in relation to homophobic prejudice or cliché-d depictions of macho heterosexuality. I will also analyse a number of scenes in which terms of self-description used by gay characters are of particular relevance insofar as they can be read as pointing towards an onscreen positing of the existence of a gay community.⁵⁰⁵ The second point that these combined analyses will highlight is the interaction

⁵⁰³ A parallel can be drawn here between the final scene of *Pédale douce* and the final stages of *Gazon maudit* (see page 114-118). Where Balasko included shots of Loli, Laurent, and Marijo apparently having set up a family unit together, Aghion ends his film with the baptism of Eva's son (Alexandre is the father but has had no involvement in the child's life until that moment) and Eva, Alexandre, Adrien, and son driving off in a car together.

⁵⁰⁴ Tarr, *op. cit.*, 148.

⁵⁰⁵ This key question of 'community' is one which is of relevance in relation to sexuality, but which can also be applied to considerations of other facets of identity construction in cinema and in the body of French cinema under examination here.

between the content of the onscreen dialogue in these films and the broader debate surrounding a renegotiation of the terms of French republicanism. This will clearly be particularly relevant in view of the evocation of republicanism by both sides in many of the debates engendered by questions regarding the sexualities of the *citoyen*.

5. 'Une Belle Image de macho...':⁵⁰⁶ Stereotyping Heterosexuality

The first scenes I will examine here involve verbal exchanges during which stereotypical pronouncements associated with sexualities are made and which involve situations where these stereotypes and prejudices take, as their object, aspects of both heterosexuality and homosexuality. In the early scenes of *Pédale douce*, Adrien is close to clinching an important deal with the *Banque d'Europe* but, before the deal can be closed, his boss, Alexandre Agutte invites him to dinner. Nothing out of the ordinary occurs until Alexandre calls his wife to ask her to add an extra setting and the audience, having already established that Adrien is gay,⁵⁰⁷ discovers not only that his boss does not know, but also, more importantly, that he assumes him to be straight and married.

Alexandre: Vous venez avec votre épouse, bien entendu.
Adrien: Bien entendu. Faut juste que je l'épouse... euh, que je l'appelle... que j'appelle mon épouse.

Alexandre, although a little surprised by Adrien's flustered response, apparently considers this to have been a genuine slip of the tongue and remains convinced that Adrien is happily married until after the dinner. The initial invitation scene continues with parallel telephone conversations between Alexandre and his wife, on the one hand, and Adrien and a bemused Eva, on the other hand, and, later that evening, Adrien arrives at Chez Eva, the gay restaurant owned by his would-be spouse. Furious to discover that Eva is not yet ready, but is storming about the restaurant in a silk dressing gown and thick wig, Adrien instructs her to remove the wig, telling her it makes her look like a transvestite. In response, Eva tears the wig from her head, accuses Adrien of wanting her to play the brow-beaten wife and suggests:

⁵⁰⁶ *Pédale douce*, Aghion.

⁵⁰⁷ The film kicks off with Adrien leaving a male lover, as discussed above, but the title credit sequence further emphasises his homosexuality as he changes into his work clothes in an open-top car, singing along to 'Pourquoi je suis pas un garçon,' by Mylène Farmer.

Eva: Tu pourras me donner un œil au beurre noir, si tu veux,
ça devrait te faire une belle image de macho.⁵⁰⁸

The implication here is clearly that it will not suffice for Adrien to simply play an average and unremarkable married man, but that he will need to perform a version of hyper-masculinity in order to pass as straight for the evening. This suggests, from the outset, that what is involved here is not a simple gay/straight binary, but rather that sexual identities are presented as necessarily more complex and more layered. The mere presence of a 'wife' at Adrien's side is not enough since the image of masculine heterosexuality he is aiming for is one of traditional patriarchy, at least in Eva's view. Adrien himself further contributes to this depiction of himself as a virile male by telling Alexandre that they have four children.

Flowers for Madame Aimard

This self-presentation is further confirmed the day after the dinner. The evening came to a rather abrupt end when Eva, sick of the hypocrisy of the hostess's sister, reels of a list of the things she loves and hates, ending by saying, 'je préfère dîner avec des travestis qu'avec des cafards.'⁵⁰⁹ The sister slaps her, Eva leaves, only to be followed by Alexandre who stops her in the stairwell and kisses her. The following day, Adrien is at home, calling Eva, when the doorbell rings and, on the interphone, someone asks for 'Madame Aimard.' Adrien says that is him⁵¹⁰ and takes delivery of a large bouquet of flowers from Alexandre, not for him but for his 'wife.' Whereas Eva, on the other end of the phone, is delighted and wants to know what the flowers look like, Adrien's response is far more surprising:

Adrien: Oh le mufle... quel goujat, ce mec, il pense que ma
femme va se prostituer pour un contrat [...] pour qui il
me prend?⁵¹¹

Again, here, an image of a particular brand of patriarchal heterosexuality emerges.⁵¹² Adrien is not offended on Eva's behalf, and does not seem to consider how she might feel, but rather automatically switches back to thinking of himself as a specific type of

⁵⁰⁸ *Pédale douce, op. cit.*

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁰ I will return to this scene and Adrien self-identifying as Madame Aimard in more detail below.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁵¹² We are reminded here of the sequence in Molinaro's *La Cage aux folles* in which Serrault's 'Zaza' tries – somewhat unsuccessfully – to perform a similarly macho version of heterosexuality and is taught, for example, to swagger *à la* John Wayne by his partner Renato (Ugo Tognazzi).

straight man, or at least what he perceives as being a type of straight man. The insult that Adrien feels stems from the assumption he thinks Alexandre is making about him. Two interpretations as to the precise nature of this insult seem possible. On one reading, Adrien could be offended that Alexandre does not think he would have the authority to control his spouse or, indeed, to clinch important deals on his own merits. On another reading, Adrien's offence could be caused by Alexandre's assumption that he (Adrien) would have married a woman 'like that,' one who would be unfaithful to her husband. On either reading, we gain an insight into Adrien's vision of heterosexuality as expressed within the context of a married couple. His 'heterosexuality' is one in which, within the couple, the roles of husband and wife are well-defined within a broadly patriarchal framework.

Blurring the Boundaries: Heterosexual Fatherhood and Part-time Homosexuality

This rather limited image of heterosexuality is further emphasised in the final stages of the film when Eva is waiting to have an abortion while a frantic Adrien tries to convince her not to terminate the pregnancy but to have the child and allow him to raise it with her. Eva is adamant ('je veux pas de môme, sans père, sans famille, un malheureux de plus')⁵¹³ but it is when Adrien exclaims to the nurse that the child is his, that the earlier interpretation of heterosexuality is further strengthened:

Adrien:	C'est mon enfant!
Eva:	Ne l'écoutez pas, c'est un hystérique, vous ne voyez pas qu'il est pédé comme un phoque?
Nurse:	C'est vrai?
Adrien:	Oui.
Nurse:	Alors vous n'êtes pas le père. ⁵¹⁴

There is clearly no possible overlap in the nurse's mind between fatherhood and homosexuality. In other words, a father is necessarily straight and this 'hysterical', self-identifying gay man could not possibly, in any way, claim fatherhood of the unborn child in question. Just as Adrien's own earlier outbursts constructed married family life as fundamentally heterosexual in a traditional, patriarchal sense, so too

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

does the nurse's straightforward dismissal of Adrien's claim to paternity underline that particular image of heterosexuality.

This view of heterosexuality, however, is complicated not only in the light of both societal and cinematic developments discussed in the previous chapter, but also even within the narrative of *Pédale douce* itself where the audience is not faced with a coherent set of sexual prejudices but rather a juxtaposition of stereotypes. These range from the patriarchal heterosexuality illustrated above, to hints at more blurred divisions between sexual identities and, in fact, apparent contradictions within Adrien's own vision of sexuality with regard to gender and family. The blurring is particularly apparent in two exchanges between Adrien and André which contradict the hard and fast divisions between hetero- and homo-sexuality constructed in the exchanges examined above. For a large part of the film, André attempts to seduce Cyril, a handsome colleague who, although he eventually becomes a little more relaxed with some aspects of André's sexual identity, nevertheless remains resolutely attracted to women. André brings him to Chez Eva and introduces him to a curious Adrien:

Adrien: Pédale?
André: Douce... Hétéro... cool.
Adrien: Ça veut dire quoi, il se fait baiser le dimanche?⁵¹⁵

Although Adrien mocks André's choice of description, there is nevertheless a clear suggestion here that, in fact, the divisions between sexual identities may not be as well-defined as Adrien's behaviour at other times leads the audience to believe. In other words, at least in the wishful thinking of André, there is the possibility that some individuals cross the boundaries and do not remain strictly within one category or another. Adrien himself underlines this point later when André sees the object of his affections kissing a woman and forlornly sighs, 'j'ai bien peur qu'il ne soit dramatiquement hétéro.'⁵¹⁶ Adrien's response is at once straightforward and complex:

Adrien: Il n'y a pas d'hétéros, il n'y a que des mecs mal
 dragués.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁶ *Idem.*

⁵¹⁷ *Idem.*

However, in the final lines of the film, he then goes on to contradict this position, in relation to Eva's son. In the final scene, discussed above, when Eva, Alexandre, and Adrien drive away from the baptism, their son is shown in the backseat of the car putting on make-up. It is Adrien who seems most shocked and declares, 'pédé, mon fils? Ah ça, jamais!'⁵¹⁸ Thus, within the depiction of a single gay character, we find expressions of the rigidity of identities within the realm of sexuality expressed through exaggeratedly masculine heterosexuality, apparent disdain for the notion that, in fact, boundaries between sexualities may be porous, then the assertion that, in truth, all men would be gay if they had the chance, and finally a clear indication that, just as fatherhood presupposed heterosexuality for the nurse, so too does childhood presuppose specific interpretations of sexuality. Clearly there is here an indication that, for all its mainstream presentation, *Pédale douce* nevertheless, at the very least, hints at a more complex construction of sexual identities.

Heterosexuality in *Banlieue* Films: 'Plage, meufs, baise'

A similarly stereotypical vision of masculine heterosexuality emerges through much of the dialogue in Bensalah's *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et...ta mère!* as the central characters try, unsuccessfully for the main part, to seduce female holiday-makers in Biarritz. It is common-place, across *banlieue* cinema, to find scenes in which male *banlieue* youths talk about would-be sexual conquest and perform a version of heterosexuality which is both misogynistic and predatory. Without necessarily going to the physically violent extreme to be found in *La Squale*, numerous other examples can be highlighted ranging from Saïd's unconvincing discussion of women's underwear in *La Haine* to Malik's attempts to chat up the ANPE employee in *Hexagone*.⁵¹⁹ However, given the overall lightheartedness of tone evident in *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, the stereotypical depiction of one particular version of heterosexuality, for all its similarities with other works from the genre, remains less aggressive,⁵²⁰ and the director, in part through character development, but also in part

⁵¹⁸ *Pédale douce*, *op. cit.* It is worth noting here, in passing, that, in Aghion's later film *Belle Maman*, Nicou, talking about her grand-daughter's sexuality, exclaims, 'elle sera gouine comme moi, plus tard, ça saute de génération, comme le diabète!' Clearly, just as questions of gendered identity intersected with debates on filiation, a further point of intersection emerges with regard to identities in the realm of sexuality.

⁵¹⁹ Other examples can be found in *Etat des lieux*, for instance, or in the *banlieue* comedy *Le Plus Beau Métier du monde* (Lauzier, 1996).

⁵²⁰ Although Tarr talks of the characters' 'casual misogyny' (*op. cit.*, 107), I argue that it is also undermined in many of the film's key scenes and is not left entirely unchallenged.

specifically through dialogue, succeeds in mocking this performance of urban heterosexuality.

For instance, although their first words on arrival at the seafront would seem to construct the central characters as typically macho *banlieue* youths ('plage, meufs, baise'),⁵²¹ the reality soon proves a little different and, for all their macho posturing, they suffer from 'a lack of funds and sexual know-how.'⁵²² An argument erupts between Youssef and Christophe when the former accuses the latter of never having had any kind of sexual relationship with a woman – 'tu sais pas comment ça marche physiquement une meuf dans sa tête'⁵²³ – and challenges him to chat up a girl who happens to be sitting in a nearby café. As the scene unfolds, a whole series of stereotypes associated with sexuality, but also with nationality, or at the very least, place of belonging, emerge. The chat up scene is filmed as a semi-fantasy sequence as Christophe pictures himself as a debonair 1950s Hollywood actor type, complete with sharp suit and smoky bar as backdrop. From a linguistic point of view, what is particularly interesting here is that the dialogue switches to English, with Christophe speaking with a heavy French accent, his words being mistranslated in the French subtitles as he describes himself as 'hyper sensible.'⁵²⁴ Bensalah plays with the language of heterosexual seduction here on two distinct levels as the spoken dialogue and written subtitles diverge more and more, to such an extent that, when the girl says her name is 'Christelle', the subtitles call her 'Peggy.' Youssef and Stéphane make a cameo appearance in Christophe's fantasy sequence, watching the proceedings and clearly dismayed that their friend is about to succeed in his challenge but expressing their dismay in a way that, once again, plays on the national and regional contrasts:

Youssef: [With a very thick French accent] Shit, he's going to fuck her, the arsehole. It's not good.⁵²⁵

There is evidently an amusingly sharp contrast between this account of events and Christophe's 'tact et beaucoup de classe,'⁵²⁶ but, by extension, also between a 1950s

⁵²¹ *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, op. cit.

⁵²² Tarr, op. cit., 107.

⁵²³ *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, op. cit.

⁵²⁴ *Idem.*

⁵²⁵ *Idem.*

⁵²⁶ *Idem.*

suave sophisticate's approach to heterosexual seduction and that of a late 1990s *banlieue* youth.

A number of stereotypes combine here and there is an immediate sharp contrast between the boys' previous references to women – expressing their 'shared anxieties about their sexuality, emphasised by their sexist comments and sexual slang'⁵²⁷ – and the suave, gentlemanly method adopted, albeit it in fantasy mode, here by Christophe. Bensalah is clearly hinting at a contradiction between the vision of heterosexuality which the boys perform within their peer group and that which they adopt in their own sexual fantasies. It is also interesting that the *banlieue* youth's reference in terms of seduction techniques is not modern, but harks back to a different era, suggesting more innocent times as he tells his friends he will succeed thanks to 'du tact et beaucoup de classe.'⁵²⁸ The scene reverts to the reality of the situation and the audience sees that Christophe has, indeed, managed to strike up a conversation with the girl but, in order to do so, has had to lie about his origins, and those of his friends. Instead of telling her that they are all from Seine-Saint-Denis, he explains that he is in Biarritz filming Youssef and Stéphane, 'deux jeunes d'une cité'⁵²⁹ taken out of their natural environment. The girl, rather predictably, is unconvinced by Christophe's story, but what is particularly interesting is to consider that, in order to have a chance at successful seduction, Christophe feels the need to distance himself, first from his country (symbolised through the use of English in the fantasy sequence) and then from his home *banlieue*.⁵³⁰

Unchallenged *Banlieue* Heterosexuality?

The fourth of the central male characters in *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, Mike, on the other hand, remains resolutely bound to the conventions of male *banlieue* heterosexuality as depicted onscreen⁵³¹ and, unsurprisingly, is no more successful as a result. The boys are on the beach, with Youssef and Stéphane arguing, but Mike has the camcorder and suddenly begins shouting about a particularly attractive female bather he has spotted:

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁸ *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*

⁵²⁹ *Idem.*

⁵³⁰ This scene can be compared and contrasted with pro and anti-Americanism we have already discussed in *Douce France* and *Hexagone*.

⁵³¹ The registration plate of his car, for instance, makes this abundantly clear: 069 NIK 93.

Mike: Regardez la bombe là-bas, les mecs, elle est pas mortelle?⁵³²

He continues to shout about the woman, annoying the others to such an extent that Youssef and Christophe decide to tell him that, not only do they know her, but she is, in fact, a prostitute and that he just needs to go up to her and ask the price. Clearly, this type of exchange falls under the category of 'casual misogyny'⁵³³ discussed by Tarr in reference to the film. It is equally clear, however, that Mike's sexism is constructed in such an extreme fashion as to render it utterly absurd and, as such, to undermine it, and that his friends' reactions also contribute to this undermining. For the audience, it is clear that Youssef and Christophe's tale has no bearing in reality – they claim to have had a threesome with the woman, whom they say they met at a nightclub, but the audience has already seen ample evidence of the boys' inability to succeed in their relations with women. However, Mike seems blind to their mockery and takes them at their word, eventually marching over towards the woman and her companion (convinced the latter is, in fact, her pimp) declaring 'je vais la bouillave grave.'⁵³⁴ Needless to say, the ensuing scene makes it clear to the audience, should any further clarification have been necessary, that Mike has been utterly unsuccessful as he is shown, with his friends, in his car, complaining about having been attacked by the woman's friend.

6. Prejudice Within Sexualities: 'Les coiffeuses contre la rue de Valois' in *Le Derrière*

It is not just in relation to heterosexuality that a number of stereotypes are expressed, challenged, and brought into dialogue across the four films examined here, but also with regard to homosexualities. And again, just as the above examination of depictions of heterosexuality combined stereotypes from within and outside the target group concerned, so too are examples of stereotypes with regard to homosexuality to be found within onscreen gay exchanges and in dialogue between gay and straight characters in both bodies of film. However, the key examples I will examine in detail here are taken from Lemercier's *Le Derrière* in which a significant part of the film's humour derives from the director's engagement with the bitter rivalries and

⁵³² *Idem*.

⁵³³ Tarr, *op. cit.*, 107.

⁵³⁴ *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, *op. cit.*

stereotypes found within a broad gay community in contemporary France. As *Têtu's* reviewer remarked when considering Frédéric-Frédérique:

Les préjugés esthétiques de son papa sont plus forts que son sentiment communautaire. La rencontre de deux clans, les coiffeuses contre la rue de Valois, va être sanglant. [...] En y allant franco sur nos rapports avec les filles et sur la méchanceté de certains pédés entre eux, Lemer cier ne nous fait pas exactement du charme: elle se fout même carrément de notre gueule.⁵³⁵

The 'coiffeuses' of the above quote does not refer, literally, to hairdressers, but is a pejorative term used by some, trendy Parisian gay men to describe a particular type of effeminate gay man from the provinces of France.⁵³⁶ It is clear not only from this particular review, but also from the accompanying interview with Lemer cier, and, as I argue below, from some of the verbal exchanges in the film, that the question of intra-minority prejudice and stereotype is of relevance here. Just as Bensalah's *banlieue* comedy engages with and uses stereotypical depictions of what is perceived to be *banlieue* heterosexuality, so too does this particular gay comedy highlight, and to an extent challenge, stereotypes related to homosexuality in French cinema, but also, by extension, due to the film's success, with a mainstream audience.

Much of the humour from these stereotypes is physical or visual, as when Marc and his friends add the finishing touches to Frédérique-Frédéric's outfit in the shape of socks rolled up and placed in the crotch of her/his trousers, or when s/he finds her/himself locked in the embrace of a dancing, leather-clad customer in the club the four go to. However, a good deal of the humour also emerges in verbal exchanges between the characters and contributes to a complex, layered construction of sexualities. Indeed, it is in response to the interest of the leather-clad man in the club that the first, clear indication of prejudice within the gay community emerges. Rather than viewing him simply as another customer, Marc and his friends feel obliged to save the drunken Frédérique-Frédéric:

⁵³⁵ Doustaly, review of *Le Derrière*, *op. cit.*, 43.

⁵³⁶ The irony is emphasised in the final scenes of the film when Frédérique returns to her family home in Normandy where Pierre and Francis visit her. The latter have a conversation with the (straight) stable manager who tells Pierre about the rumours which had circulated about him: 'Il y en avait même un qui avait dit que vous étiez pédé à Paris.' In this way, the intra-community prejudice is placed against the backdrop of stereotypes from outwith the community.

Marc: T'imagines? On n'aurait pas été là, t'aurais fini au sous-sol avec cinq mecs en cuir, t'aurais eu l'air fine.⁵³⁷

Based on the physical appearance of the man in question, and the associations this evokes in their minds, Marc and his friends assume that the man's homosexuality will be enacted in a particular manner. Obviously, on one reading, this may well be the case, since, visually, he does conform to a particular look which, in turn, in the popular imagination, connotes a specific form of sexuality (leather, S&M). However, on another reading, the brief scene also points towards prejudice on the part of Marc and his friends about people who, for the mainstream, form part of the same 'community.' The encounter may not be dealt with particularly subtly here, but it nevertheless serves to illustrate one of the broader problems with this very notion of 'community' which is used in so much of the recent debate on issues related to sexualities and it is this which Lemercier sought to illustrate:

Dans cette communauté, les gens n'aiment pas être tous mis dans le même sac.⁵³⁸

Discrimination, Prejudice, and Masculine/feminine (Self-)description

The stereotypes continue to unfold in relation to Frédérique-Frédéric as the film progresses, particularly once s/he goes to live with Pierre and the disgruntled Francis who variously describes 'him' as 'une vraie follasse,'⁵³⁹ 'la lopette,'⁵⁴⁰ and 'une gourde,'⁵⁴¹ none of which are positive descriptions of gay men and all of which indicate his distaste, not to say disdain, for Frédérique-Frédéric's particular brand of homosexuality. Francis places the blame for Frédérique-Frédéric's appearance and demeanour fairly and squarely at Pierre's door:

Francis: C'est pire que ce que tu disais, c'est une vraie follasse.
 Pierre: J'y suis pour rien, moi.
 Francis: Si, justement [...] père absent, le fils dans les jupons de sa mère, il n'y a que ça dans le Marais.⁵⁴²

Francis's armchair psychoanalytical approach to the 'causes' of homosexuality is further strengthened by Pierre's words later in the film, the first time he sees

⁵³⁷ *Le Derrière*, Lemercier.

⁵³⁸ Doustaly, interview with Lemercier, *op. cit.*, 38.

⁵³⁹ *Le Derrière*, *op. cit.*

⁵⁴⁰ *Idem.*

⁵⁴¹ *Idem.*

⁵⁴² *Idem.*

Frédérique-Frédéric dressed as a woman. Instead of realising the truth of the situation, Pierre assumes that his son has taken his effeminacy one step further and has decided to start cross-dressing and, rather than demonstrating any kind of solidarity for a member of another sexual minority, he castigates his 'son':

Pierre: En plus tu as mis la robe de ta mère... un garçon qui
 met la robe de sa mère, tout le monde sait à quoi ça
 correspond.⁵⁴³

Pierre's words here at once combine prejudices with regard to effeminate gay men and transvestites,⁵⁴⁴ and they do so by relying on the type of vulgarised psychoanalysis Francis had earlier expressed, thus suggesting, once again, a degree of homophobia present even among gay men.

Overall the scenes discussed above, taken from three of the four core films from this chapter, indicate that, while French society, through media and political debate, was engaging with topics closely related to sexuality, and often specifically related to stereotypical attitudes towards individuals based on their sexuality, so too was a portion of French cinema contributing to the same debates. Although, as stated earlier, this focus on sexualities is not, in itself, a novel aspect of film studies or practice, I have shown here that the complex identities which emerge in these scenes, constructed, in part, through and against the prejudices expressed onscreen, not only reflect broader societal attitudes, but, in fact, on some readings, question and challenge them.

Masculinity, Femininity, and Sexualities in *Pédale douce*

The second series of verbal exchanges concerning onscreen depictions of homosexualities involved the appropriation of gendered terms, either in voluntary self-description, primarily by gay men, or as derogatory labels used to exert a degree of verbal violence regardless of a character's true onscreen sexuality. Examples of this tendency abound, not only in the gay films focused on in the current chapter, but

⁵⁴³ *Idem*.

⁵⁴⁴ It is worth noting that, in the scene from *Pédale douce* in which Adrien tries to get Eva ready for their business dinner with the Aguttes, he instructs her to remove her wig because 'ça fait travelo' – a comment which, as here, served only to blur boundaries between sexualities and gendered identities further still.

indeed across a wider body of gay cinema, and, in relation to sexuality, are also to be found in films from other genres, including *cinéma de banlieue*. As will be shown in the exchanges analysed below, however, the usages and effects of the terms are, to a large extent, context-dependent and can range from an expression of solidarity to one of disdain or even hatred.

In Aghion's *Pédale douce*, all of the gay characters repeatedly use traditionally feminine terms to address and describe each other, in particular within the context of the evenings spent at Eva's restaurant. I am not talking here about the use of slang terms which refer to particular types of homosexuals through feminine nouns, such as *tapette*, *pédale*, or *folle*, although, as has been discussed above,⁵⁴⁵ advertising for the film on its re-release made interesting use of the latter term, as adjective, as did much media coverage of it.⁵⁴⁶ Rather, what I refer to here is a more general tendency for a complex redistribution and reappropriation of gendered terms which points towards a multi-layered interweaving of gender, sexuality, and desire, as Butler suggests.⁵⁴⁷ As discussed above, when Adrien receives a bouquet of flowers addressed to 'Madame Aimard', his initial reaction is not to assume that there has been a mistake or a misprint in the delivery note, but rather to assume that he is the Madame Aimard in question and that one of his gay friends has sent them. Within this private sphere, there seems to be no concern or surprise on his part at the use of a feminine, rather than a masculine, form of address to refer to him.

It is significant that the implications of the usages of such terms, throughout the film, are dependent on the context within which they are used and the interlocutors concerned. André and Adrien, after meeting at Alexandre's business dinner and becoming friends, regularly refer to each other in private conversations in their workplace, or at the restaurant, using feminine terms of endearment, adjectives, and nouns. For example, the day after Alexandre has discovered that the pair are gay, they call each other in their respective offices, commiserating since Adrien is convinced his sexuality has just ruined his chances with the deal he was trying to seal:

Adrien: On est foutues.

⁵⁴⁵ See page 147.

⁵⁴⁶ Referring, for example, to its 'humour folle' as in Lefort and Seguret, *op. cit.*.

⁵⁴⁷ Butler, *op. cit.*

André: T'en fais pas, ma poule, t'es une gagnante.

Adrien: On n'est plus si fraîches, ma fille.⁵⁴⁸

Both men are voluntarily choosing these terms of self-description and, through them, draw complex connections between their chosen performance of sexuality and their individual masculinity/femininity. Again, Aghion can be accused here of a certain lack of subtlety insofar as no distinction is drawn onscreen between such usages of feminine terms between gay men and many similar verbal exchanges involving Rocky, a transvestite customer at Eva's restaurant. However, despite the lack of subtlety in presentation, Aghion nevertheless highlights a specific tendency which exists within some groups of gay men. He does not do so in a particularly complex manner, but verbal exchanges such as the one quoted above do bring, to the four million people who went to see *Pédale douce*, a vision of gay men switching the gender of their self-description to suit themselves and their circumstances.

At the same time, however, it is made clear in the film that positive usage of these terms is very much dependent on context and on the agreement of the interlocutors. When André cowers after accidentally hitting a burly fellow customer in Eva's restaurant, he is delighted when the man tells him not to worry, calling him 'ma p'tite pomme,'⁵⁴⁹ because it is being used as a term of endearment and recognition, indicating solidarity. However, when André sees Alexandre in the restaurant and, in the heat of the moment, mistakenly assumes he is there because he, too, is a closeted homosexual, his 'le patron est une patronne'⁵⁵⁰ earns him a brutal assault by his boss. Similarly, the audience is made to feel extremely uncomfortable when, towards the final stages of the film, Adrien wreaks revenge on Alexandre by persuading an S&M fan in the restaurant that his boss is 'un ex-séminariste, branché flagellation.'⁵⁵¹ Alexandre finds himself tied up in the private backroom of the restaurant, lying across the man's knees being told, 't'aimes ça, hein, ma p'tite salope.'⁵⁵² On neither occasion does Alexandre accept the feminine term of description and, in both instances, an audience associating him with a particular version of traditional masculine

⁵⁴⁸ *Pédale douce*, Aghion.

⁵⁴⁹ *Pédale douce*, *op. cit.* In *Ma Vie en rose*, Alain Berliner's Franco-Belgian comedy which focuses on a 7-year-old boy who is convinced he will become a girl, the boy's grandmother also refers to him as 'ma petite pomme' and, again, we see an example of the ways in which gendered terms of affection are used.

⁵⁵⁰ *Idem.*

⁵⁵¹ *Idem.*

⁵⁵² *Idem.*

heterosexuality is made to feel uncomfortable and, as a result, made aware of the need for such terms to be agreed on and accepted by interlocutors before they gain positive connotations.

‘Allez les filles, au Victory’:⁵⁵³ Masculinities, Femininities, and Sexualities in *Le Derrière*

Similar tensions arise in *Le Derrière*, but here they are exposed as problematic between gay men. While Aghion constructs a picture within which all of the gay men depicted, regardless of individual characteristics, use feminine terms of positive self-description at some point, Lemercier develops her analysis of the prejudices which exist within the gay ‘community’, at least in part, through the use of and disdain for feminine terms with, broadly speaking, the ‘coiffeuses’⁵⁵⁴ using language more peppered with feminine terms. Marc constantly refers to Frédérique-Frédéric as ‘ma puce’, regardless of whether she is passing as gay man or straight woman. Once the initial transformation is complete, he and his friends take her to a gay bar, announcing ‘allez, les filles, au Victory.’⁵⁵⁵ Within this context, Marc’s use of ‘ma puce’ allows them to avoid Frédérique-Frédéric being outed as a straight woman and the implication is clearly that feminine terms of description would not be out of place or unusual within that specific context.

The *bourgeois* Pierre and Francis, on the other hand, only use them as terms of insult, as when Francis describes Frédérique-Frédéric as ‘une vraie follasse’, for instance, and they certainly do not use feminine epithets as terms of affection or description for each other. Indeed, towards the end of the film, when Francis has discovered that Frédérique-Frédéric is, in fact, rather more straightforwardly Frédérique, he, in confusion, refers to the character as ‘elle’ in a conversation with Pierre who immediately chastises him – ‘tu vas pas commencer à tout mettre au féminin’⁵⁵⁶ –, thus clearly identifying the tendency as one adopted by some gay men but one he wishes to distance himself from. Whereas Marc and his friends are happy to refer to each other with masculine or feminine terms, Pierre pours scorn on this approach and, as such, constructs his own identity as a gay man in solely masculine terms.

⁵⁵³ *Le Derrière*, op. cit.

⁵⁵⁴ Doustaly, op. cit.

⁵⁵⁵ *Le Derrière*, op. cit.

⁵⁵⁶ *Idem*.

Interestingly, however, again in the later stages of the film, Francis takes Frédérique-Frédéric out for a drink to a gay bar and the audience discovers that, although Pierre may despise the use of feminine terms by some gay men, his partner, while not using the technique within his own couple, does, nevertheless, come into contact with it at some points in his life. Frédérique-Frédéric and Francis sit at the bar and the barman, who obviously knows Francis, asks ‘Qu’est-ce qu’elle veut, celle-là? Qu’est-ce qu’elle boit?’⁵⁵⁷ Naturally, Frédérique-Frédéric does not respond, terrified that her cover is about to be blown, and looks around to see which woman he might be referring to. It is only when Francis explains to him/her that it is s/he whom the barman is addressing that Frédérique-Frédéric relaxes and realises, amid a little flustered confusion, that ‘elle’, in this case, was in fact a gay man. Again, the boundaries between sexuality and gender are blurred and the constructions of sexual identities offered here become more complex than might be expected in a mainstream comedy.

Later in the same scene, Francis has a run-in with a man whom we discover to have been a jilted lover, and who warns Frédérique-Frédéric to keep ‘his’ distance:

Jilted lover: Il va s’amuser avec toi pendant deux mois, et après il va retourner à son mari.⁵⁵⁸

It is interesting to note, firstly, the lover’s use of the term ‘mari’ to refer to Pierre, establishing Francis’s couple based on the more traditional model of marriage. Despite the film’s release in the year following the inauguration of the PACS legislation, the implication here is not that Pierre and Francis have conducted some form of gay marriage ceremony: rather the term is used to refer to a partner in a stable male relationship.⁵⁵⁹ However, equally interesting is the barman’s amused response to the heated altercation:

⁵⁵⁷ *Idem.*

⁵⁵⁸ *Idem.*

⁵⁵⁹ Examples of the term being used in this way can be found, not only in fictionalised depictions of gay life, but also in terms of self-description used in gay media outlets, as, for example, in Doustaly’s review of *Le Derrière* (*op. cit.*) when he refers to Daniel as Félix’s ‘mari.’ The similarities between the two couples seem clear, both are depicted as middle-class, relatively affluent, stable partnerships, although, in both cases, this notion of stability can be read as carrying within it the acceptance of infidelity, as the audience learns that both Pierre and Francis have had lovers in *Le Derrière* and as Félix has sex with a man he meets on his travels across France, before meeting up with Daniel once

Barman: Qu'est-ce que tu veux, ta belle-mère est une salope [...]
C'est pas maintenant que ça va changer.⁵⁶⁰

Just as the previous chapter illustrated how much of the blurring and fragmentation of gendered identities is expressed within the structures of the onscreen family unit, so too does a similar fragmentation and blurring emerge here, but this time within the realm of sexual identities. Francis and Pierre, talking to each other, resolutely use feminine terms to describe gay men only in a negative way, as terms of insult, rather than solidarity. However, the audience learns here that, in some aspects of his life, Francis engages with the very enactment of homosexuality that he scorns in his conversations with his 'mari', and he takes no offence at being described as Frédérique-Frédéric's 'belle-mère' or at Pierre being described as his 'mari.' Neither does he seem perturbed, throughout this scene, by the more general use of feminine terms by the barman; and, indeed, he seems amused when Frédérique-Frédéric does not realise that they are being used to address him.

Once again, the vision of sexualities being constructed onscreen, particularly through these verbal exchanges, comes across as being multi-layered and complex, as it intersects with questions of gendered identity, but also clearly indicates that characters can represent a number of different interpretations of sexuality, not all of which are, at all times, coherent or compatible. My argument is that it is these apparent contradictions and juxtapositions which best reflect the complexities of contemporary reflections on sexuality in late twentieth-century France and demonstrate an attempt, on the part of film-makers, to engage with them, whether simply by depicting one particular stereotype or, more often, as described above, by constructing characters in which stereotypes collide. It is not simply a case, for example, of gay men using feminine terms to refer to themselves positively, with straight people (men in particular) using the same terms as insults. There is more than a straightforward binary swap between feminine terms for gay men and masculine terms for lesbians in

again. Clearly, the parallels drawn here between male homosexuality and sexual infidelity or promiscuity can be read as pandering to popular prejudice, but the topic seems more complex than this since it is presented in both minority and mainstream productions, while also making its way into the issues dealt with, for instance, in the pages of magazines like *Têtu* (See, for example, Yann Le Goff, 'Tous infidèles?' *Têtu*, March 2002, 72-80).

⁵⁶⁰ *Idem*.

operation,⁵⁶¹ but rather the exchanges analysed above demonstrate a far greater level of complexity.

7. Coming-out

The final series of verbal exchanges I want to examine here surround the phenomenon of the disclosure, explicit or implicit, of a particular character's sexuality, and specifically his or her *homo*-sexuality. The analysis of two key scenes in this section will further demonstrate the ways in which the core films selected here provide examples of an engagement with a broader evolving societal backdrop and raise issues related to the sexuality of the republican *citoyen*.

'Finalement vous en êtes?':⁵⁶² Ambiguity and Sexual Identities in *Pédale douce*

In *Pédale douce*, during the initial business dinner sequence, there is no explicit coming out with regard to Alexandre; indeed, André makes it quite clear that their boss does not pay enough attention to those around him to notice if any of his colleagues are gay.⁵⁶³ Nevertheless there is here an indirect coming out scene involving André and Adrien. The trio arrive at the Aguttes' home together and, throughout their first conversation, silence and pauses within the dialogue are used so as to introduce an element of ambiguity, making it unclear, initially, exactly who is aware of what as far as sexual identities are concerned:

André:	Alors finalement vous en êtes...
Adrien:	[Says nothing but looks stunned]
André:	Du dîner, je veux dire. ⁵⁶⁴

Adrien's shock stems from ambiguity inherent in André's question. Is he simply observing that Adrien has been invited to the dinner at the last minute, that his

⁵⁶¹ Indeed, I have found no examples in the films studied for this thesis of lesbians self-identifying by using masculine terms. However, in the insults addressed towards them, there are frequent references to perceived masculine qualities, or indeed lack thereof. In *Gazon maudit*, for instance, Laurent threatens Marijo and then goads her when she does not respond by saying 'les couilles te manquent?' One important exception comes in *Belle Maman*, where Nicou compliments Séverine's courage (Séverine takes to the stage at Nicou's party after Léa has won the crowds with her song to her mother) by calling her 'couillue'.

⁵⁶² *Pédale douce*, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶³ André to Adrien: 'Rassurez-vous, vous êtes insoupçonnable, moi, ça fait 5 ans que je joue à l'hétéro, je me demande pourquoi, M. Agutte ne regarde personne.' Here, as in several other occasions within the narrative of the film (when André younger colleague asks, for instance, 'ça ne vous fatigue jamais de faire les folles?'), explicit references are made to sexuality as a performance.

⁵⁶⁴ *Pédale douce*, *op. cit.*

presence there was not a foregone conclusion, or is he rather hinting towards knowledge of the truth of Adrien's sexuality and indicating that he does not believe the constructed façade of marital bliss? The rest of the brief sequence makes it clear that the second reading is more accurate:

Adrien: Je vous présente ma femme, Eva.
André: Oui, bien sûr...
[André and Eva exchange greetings]
André: Qui ne connaît pas Chez Eva?⁵⁶⁵

By making reference to the restaurant, André at once outs himself, but also makes clear that he is aware of the realities which underlie what is being presented as a married couple. Adrien tries to maintain an air of what he considers heterosexual respectability by introducing his 'wife' to his colleague, only to then have this performance of heterosexuality undermined by a reference to a gay locale, phrased in such a way as to make clear to all three characters that the significance of the reference to Chez Eva would be understood primarily by homosexuals. This is further emphasised later in the film when Alexandre takes Eva out for a meal, still believing her to be Adrien's social worker wife. The waiter who serves them recognises Eva and, when Alexandre introduces her, he repeats André's 'Qui ne connaît pas Chez Eva?'⁵⁶⁶ but, this time round, the reference is lost on the hyper-heterosexual Alexandre, thus further emphasising the importance of common points of reference in the construction of the sexual identity of Adrien and André.

Indeed, Alexandre's blissful lack of awareness of the sexuality of those around him becomes increasingly apparent throughout this scene as Eva tries to provoke him into a discussion of homosexuality. Her aim is to establish his opinion of gay men, but also to try and instil in him the thought that, in fact, he may be wrong in his preconceived ideas of those around him. Alexandre's responses to Eva's provocation primarily serve to display his homophobia but he also demonstrates his naïveté by misinterpreting Eva's intentions:

Alexandre: Attendez, qu'est-ce que vous êtes en train de me dire?
Que vous préférez les femmes?⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁵ *Idem.*

⁵⁶⁶ *Idem.*

⁵⁶⁷ *Idem.*

Eva is quick to correct him and explains that she was just trying to imagine ‘votre tête en apprenant qu’un de vos collaborateurs en était...’⁵⁶⁸ Just as in the earlier conversation involving Eva, André, and Adrien, so too do we find ambiguity in the turns of phrase used, as Eva’s words mean nothing to Alexandre until she completes her sentence with a series of slang expressions used to describe male homosexuals, ‘du bâtiment, de la jaquette, [...] homo, pédale, inverti...’

Asserting Sexualities: Félix and His ‘Grand-mother’ in *Drôle de Félix*

A different treatment of coming out is offered in Ducastel and Martineau’s *Drôle de Félix*, in which the eponymous central character seems, overall, more concerned with questions of ethnic identity, than with those related to his identity in relation to sexuality:

La crise identitaire de Félix est principalement liée à son ethnicité, et c’est donc d’abord l’importance du lien de sang dans la construction de son identité que le personnage interroge.⁵⁶⁹

Félix’s sexuality is not presented as in any way problematic within the diegesis. Indeed, by the end of the film, having ended his journey without meeting his biological father, ‘l’identité gay de Félix et son couple [finissent] par primer sur son histoire familiale et ses liens de sang.’⁵⁷⁰ Nevertheless, in the section of the film entitled ‘Ma grand-mère’, Félix does find himself in a position where he has to assert his sexual identity in more direct, discursive terms than at other stages. Whereas the rest of the film sees him living his homosexuality as suits him – sharing a home with his partner Daniel, trying to impress the teenager he meets, having sex with his ‘cousin’ in the fields of provincial France –, the very context of this sequence means that he cannot perform his sexuality in this way, but must rely on a more discursive construction thereof.

Félix falls asleep on a bench in a sleepy country town and is woken by an old woman who instructs him to help her carry her shopping home and then bullies him, albeit harmlessly, into spending a little more time in that particular small town than his

⁵⁶⁸ *Idem*.

⁵⁶⁹ Florian Grandena, ‘Affirmation de l’identité gay dans les films d’Olivier Ducastel et Jacques Martineau,’ paper presented at FSAC/ACEC conference, Université de Montréal, March 3rd-5th, 2005. Thanks to Florian for a copy of this paper.

⁵⁷⁰ Grandena, *op. cit.*

plans would normally have allowed. The old woman, Mathilde, seems pleased to have company and takes the opportunity to talk about her past, recounting how she fell for a much older man and was heartbroken when he left her, deciding thereafter to marry the first man who asked, ‘*banalement et bêtement*.’⁵⁷¹ It is after a report on the television news that the coming out scene occurs, and it highlights, once again, the crossover within the narrative between questions of ethnic and sexual identities. Earlier on his journey, Félix witnessed an assault on a young Arab man, but did not intervene, claiming to Mathilde that the police would not believe him anyway. The news report announces the death of the victim and Félix is racked with guilt. Mathilde cannot understand why he did not intervene or at the very least report the incident and asks if he has something to hide from the police:

Félix: J’ai piqué une voiture pour épater un gosse.
 Mathilde: Un gosse?
 Félix: Oui, il était amoureux de moi.
 Mathilde: Amoureux de vous? Un garçon?⁵⁷²

Initially, Félix is unaware that Mathilde is not simply asking for confirmation because she has not heard correctly, but is genuinely disbelieving and unable to reconcile homosexuality with her vision of Félix. He, in response to her final questions above, flippantly responds, ‘*Oui, j’suis pédé*’⁵⁷³ and is shocked when Mathilde exclaims: ‘*Oh non! Pas vous!*’⁵⁷⁴ Félix is taken aback and repeats that he is, indeed, gay, but Mathilde still seems unconvinced:

Félix: Comment ça, pas moi? Oui, j’suis pédé.
 Mathilde: J’en ai connu, des homos, m’enfin... pas vous.
 Félix: Mais oui, puisque je vous le dis.⁵⁷⁵

Particularly significant here is Félix’s final statement, which makes clear that, if he voluntarily self-identifies as gay, then there is no further way, in his view, for Mathilde to counter his words. In fact, for Félix, the very conversation seems absurd since, from the outset, he clearly identified his own sexuality and, from that point onwards, it makes little sense for anyone to argue the contrary. This exchange makes clear the centrality of self-identification to questions of sexual identity but also plays

⁵⁷¹ *Drôle de Félix*, Ducastel and Martineau.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*

⁵⁷³ *Idem.*

⁵⁷⁴ *Idem.*

⁵⁷⁵ *Idem.*

with audience expectations. Instead of having a straight character who is mistakenly assumed to be gay, and thus protests his heterosexuality, audiences have, here, an openly gay character who has to protest his homosexuality in similar terms.

Once again, I argue that these scenes between Félix and his 'grand-mother', or again between André and Adrien, Alexandre and Eva in *Pédale douce*, demonstrate the ways in which the films reflect and engage with developments within French society as a whole, while, at the same time, pointing towards a complex depiction of sexuality, particularly with regard to the question of public/private spheres and the ways in which this intersects with considerations of republicanism. In some ways, the description of these scenes as 'coming out' sequences is simplistic, since the audience is not presented straightforwardly with a gay character revealing his homosexuality, in Foucauldian confessional mode,⁵⁷⁶ to a straight character. Rather, strategies of coming out are used to highlight prejudice, to underline the role played by solidarity and recognition within minority identities, and to emphasise the discursive nature of identities in the realm of sexuality, rather than maintaining these solely in the realm of physical acts.

8. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the ways in which verbal exchanges in the core films chosen, which in themselves form a representative sample of gay and *banlieue* cinema, demonstrate a reflection of and engagement with the broader societal context within which they emerge with specific reference to issues related to sexualities. The initial stages of the chapter, by offering an analysis of the key developments in this domain in mid and late 1990s France, sets up the practical and theoretical issues with which the films will engage. These include, once again, debates surrounding the PACS legislation, but also related questions of discrimination on the basis of sexuality, the construction of a particular version of macho, masculine heterosexuality within urban and suburban contexts (and, by extension, constructions of female sexuality onscreen and off against the same backdrop), and the coming out/outing phenomenon which emerged particularly in the final years of the decade. All of these

⁵⁷⁶ Martel, *op.cit.*, 399.

issues find their reflection in the films studied here and, indeed, more generally across the genres chosen as examples of minority cinema in the French context.

Analysis of the dialogue has concentrated on exchanges which occur between friends and lovers, not focussing simply on the latter and maintaining identity construction within the realm of sexual relations, but rather positing sexual identity as more complex and as it intersects with other facets of identity construction. On a practical level, this also allowed for analysis of the many characters and films in which, for most of the diegesis, there is no successful sexual relationship to speak of and yet identities are constructed and challenged with regard to characters' sexualities, as in both *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, for instance, and *Pédale douce*, for instance. With the exception of the pre-titles sequence in *Pédale douce*, neither Adrien nor André is shown with a sexual partner and yet it is clear that they are being constructed as performing a certain vision of homosexuality which, thus, emerges as much from their behaviour and words, as it does from their sexual practices. It is this notion of sexuality as potentially something more than a simple accumulation of sexual acts which also links back to the societal context within which the films considered here were released.

Overall what emerges from the preceding analyses of verbal exchanges, is a vision of identities in the realm of sexualities demonstrating complexities and interweaving patterns similar to those encountered through examinations of gendered and ethnic identities in previous chapters. The films selected as the core corpus here reflect evolutions in French society with regard to sexuality over the mid and late 1990s, and each of these three interlinked developments relating to ethnicity, gender, and sexuality feeds into a broader debate on the relevance of French republicanism, as traditionally expressed, within a contemporary context. They can be read as highlighting, once again, the fact that the republic's *citoyen* is not a blank, universalisable canvas in the traditional sense, but rather the concept of *citoyenneté* contains, implicit within it, preconceptions of sexuality, just as it contains an implicit notion of gender and ethnicity. This, in turn, brings the argument back to the position held, for instance, by Foerster when he suggests that, in fact, in its original

conception, French republicanism does, indeed, contain the potential for the queerest of political regimes.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁷ See Foerster, *op. cit.*, 10.

Chapter 5:

Conclusion

1. Verbal Exchanges and Identity

The aim of this thesis has been to offer an analysis of the use of the spoken word in two bodies of French 'minority' cinema - namely gay cinema and the so-called *cinéma de banlieue* - from 1990 to 2000 inclusive. Through this analysis and its focus on onscreen verbal exchanges, I have sought to examine the contribution thus made to the depiction of minority groups in contemporary France. As explained in the introductory chapter, this decision to focus on the use of dialogue in film stems, in part, from the fact that important and specific aspects of cinema as an *audio-visual* medium have not yet been sufficiently recognised. In other words, this work has sought play a role in redressing a certain bias towards the 'visual' aspects of this description in Film Studies, and, indeed, specifically French Film Studies.

The decision to focus on *verbal* exchanges in the corpus selected here did not, however, stem solely this particular status of film, simultaneously audio and visual. It also had its source in the perceived need to analyse verbal exchanges in film in the context of the current events to address issues of identity within contemporary French society, particularly as concerns minority groupings. Central to my consideration of these minorities as represented onscreen has been the question of identity which, in turn, plays a vital role in many of the strands of critical and cultural theory upon which my analyses rest. Language has necessarily come into the consideration of most, if not all, contemporary questions of identity as they relate to, engage with, and challenge aspects of the societies within which identities emerge. 'Talk itself is constitutive of social reality,'⁵⁷⁸ and it is in view of the key role played by language in both individual and social identity construction that I chose to centre my analyses of the onscreen depictions of minorities in France on verbal exchanges.

We have to talk in order to establish our rights and entitlements. [...] Communicative resources [...] form an integral part of an individual's symbolic and social capital.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁸ Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, *op. cit.*, 3.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 5. The authors rely, here, on Bourdieu's examination of language and/as social capital which I discussed in the Introduction.

Challenges to the French Republican Model

Clearly, questions of 'rights and entitlements' are of central importance to minority groupings. However, they are not unproblematically so, and, in relation to the contemporary metropolitan French context, they simultaneously raise a series of complex and unresolved questions. These concern relations (discursive, cultural, political or otherwise) between the minority and the mainstream which, in the case of France, is also, crucially, explicitly republican. French republicanism, as it is traditionally understood,⁵⁸⁰ is based on the fundamental notion of *le citoyen* as an abstract individual who enters into a direct relationship with the State, which is not mediated through any aspects of sub-State-level identity. In theory, the resulting ideology, which lies at the heart of French political and national identity, considers all citizens to be equal and precludes any possibility of discrimination against an individual on the basis of any 'distinguishing feature', such as, for instance, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality. In practice, however, as the recent debates referred to throughout this thesis have demonstrated, there is a widespread and growing debate as to the relevance of this founding ideology in a social, political, and cultural climate very different to that of 1789. In other words, there is a social reality, played out in such domains as ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, which demands a renegotiation of republicanism in order for the ideology to remain of relevance to *le citoyen*. As this thesis has sought to demonstrate throughout, an important realm in which this social reality is played out is in cinema.

My argument here has not been that the onscreen verbal exchanges analysed offer proof of the need for French republicanism to be discarded in favour, for example, of the oft-cited and much-dreaded American model. Rather, I have sought to illustrate and to examine the ways in which the verbal depictions of citizens constructed through these bodies of film engage with the broader political and cultural debate. This verbal interaction shows minority groupings within a contemporary French context and, crucially, points to the fragmented subjectivities which can be seen to emerge in members of these groups as they attempt to reconcile difference with republican universalism.

⁵⁸⁰ See pages 12-16.

This debate is being actively pursued in contemporary France. Jacky Dahomay, writing in *Le Monde*, in April 2005, offered an interesting analysis of ‘les paradoxes du républicanisme français’⁵⁸¹ and suggested that there is a key question which needs to be posed in order to work towards ‘une nouvelle identité républicaine’:⁵⁸²

Pourquoi ne pas se demander [...] ce qui, dans la tradition républicaine même, pose problème et qui empêche à (*sic*) des citoyens français de se sentir pleinement français?⁵⁸³

Dahomay’s article engages explicitly with France’s post-colonial history, but the question he poses can be extended to other groups: they too find themselves physically located within metropolitan France, while simultaneously having denied to them a full sense of belonging to the republic on the basis of a particular aspect of their identity. The verbal exchanges studied in the three central chapters of this thesis can thus be understood as offering a series of responses to Dahomay’s questions. For they suggest ways in which it might be possible to envisage ‘une unité citoyenne française qui n’exclue [*sic*] pas la différence culturelle.’ The question has been summarised concisely in these terms:⁵⁸⁴

We customarily take gender, ethnicity, and class as given parameters and boundaries within which we create our own social identities. The study of language as interactional discourse demonstrates that these parameters are not constants that can be taken for granted but are constitutively produced. Therefore to understand issues of identity and how they affect and are affected by social, political, and ethnic divisions we need to gain insights into the communicative processes by which they arise.⁵⁸⁵

Cultural Difference and Identity: Discursive, Performative, and Republican

The question of ‘cultural difference’ which is raised by Dahomay and many others, and which lies at the heart of much contemporary debate on a reframing of French republicanism, thus brings us back to the role played by language in identity construction. The analyses of onscreen verbal exchanges offered in the three central chapters here are conducted through three key prisms of identity construction, namely ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. These prisms, in turn, reflect the three most

⁵⁸¹ Jacky Dahomay is a philosophy teacher at the Lycée Baimbridge in Pointe-à-Pitre and member of the Haut Conseil à l’Intégration. Dahomay, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁵ Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, *op. cit.*, 1.

prominent areas in which broader socio-political and socio-cultural debate has evolved in contemporary France. They also represent the three areas in which the most conflict with regard to French republicanism emerged in the 1990s. However, as far as their relationship with verbal practices is concerned, the role played by each of these prisms is equally significant.

The discursively performative nature of identity construction referred to by Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz but also developed by theorists working outwith sociolinguistics, such as Judith Butler, means that, when set against a French republican context, attempts to construct one's identity in terms of gendered, ethnic, or sexual difference will necessarily be in opposition to the abstract universalism of the founding republican ideology. As a result, through the verbal exchanges analysed in this thesis, we see emerging the model of fragmented *citoyens* who, in expressing their cultural difference, places themselves at odds with the traditional republican ideology.

La France, qu'elle le veuille ou non, est devenue profondément multiculturelle. Elle doit le prendre comme une richesse qui ne peut contredire l'universalisation de la vie publique. La France s'est créolisée, en quelque sorte, s'est métissée.⁵⁸⁶

Again, Dahomay's terms emerge from the field of post-colonial theory. In line with the focus of this thesis, they can be expanded to encompass difference on a wider and more varied scale, including ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Since the social reality of contemporary France is multicultural, or rather pluricultural, as such it is plurivocal, with individual citizens expressing difference in a series of key sites of identity construction. However, rather than positioning these citizens as the republic's 'other', the exchanges examined here demonstrate the ways in which their expressions of difference can be equated with an attempt and a desire to renegotiate the terms of those forms of traditional French republicanism in a manner that challenges the existent binary between assimilated and 'other'.

2. Language, Identity, and Ethnicities Onscreen

The first chapter has taken as its focus verbal constructions of ethnic identity in four films (*Hexagone*, *La Haine*, *Rai*, and *La Squale*). It has done so by examining sites of

⁵⁸⁶ Dahomay, *op. cit.*

verbal conflict which can be schematically categorised as ‘*banlieue* versus the republic’⁵⁸⁷ and ‘intergenerational.’ Three key aspects of ethnic identity construction have emerged through the scenes and exchanges examined under the first heading: silencing of ethnic voices, discursive hierarchies, French past and present.

Silencing Ethnic Voices

Firstly, I have examined scenes in which Maghrebi central characters find themselves dispossessed of their narrative voice by representatives of the republic, such as police officers or interviewers at the national job recruitment agency, the ANPE. Such losses of ‘discursive position’⁵⁸⁸ equate to the representation of a loss of agency in both individual and collective terms, as is particularly evident in *Hexagone*, when one of the central characters, Slim, is interviewed at his local ANPE office. Slim provides the offscreen narrative voice at regular intervals through the film, so when he is silenced by his interviewer, the film is literally deprived of its Maghrebi narrative voice.

Discursive Hierarchies

Such silencing contributes to the construction of discursive hierarchies, a second key aspect of ethnic identity construction. This process is further strengthened by what I refer to as ‘institutional *tutoiement*’,⁵⁸⁹ namely exchanges in which the *banlieue* character, more often than not of non-metropolitan French origin, is referred to using the ‘tu’ form by a representative of republican authority. This verbal technique is clearly used in the police interrogation scene featured in *La Haine* when Saïd and Hubert, two of the three central characters, are arrested in Paris and subjected to police brutality before being released. Throughout the interrogation, the officers use the ‘tu’ form to refer each young man, whereas both Saïd and Hubert, insofar as they are given any opportunity to respond, do so using the more polite, respectful ‘vous’ form. Here it was argued that while *tutoiement* can express solidarity and comradeship, it is used in this scene as a clear expression of domination and a means for the interrogating officers to exert their power over their captives. Thus, by extension, it represents a republic which places these citizens in a subordinate position

⁵⁸⁷ The four core films examined in this first chapter were all part of *cinéma de banlieue* but the conclusions reached with regard to the construction of ethnic identities can be expanded to apply to minorities as depicted in gay cinema, as I demonstrated in a number cross-references included in footnotes to the chapter.

⁵⁸⁸ Tarr, *op. cit.*, 56.

⁵⁸⁹ See pages 69-71.

within a discursive hierarchy. However, it was also stressed that, although a summary reading of this verbal practice could suggest a straightforward binary between the republic and its subordinate 'other', such an interpretation is, in fact, complicated by the 'visible' non-metropolitan French origin of one of the interrogators. I have argued throughout that analyses of the debates and issues raised in this thesis which attempt to reduce them to simple binaries, in fact fail to do justice to the multilayered complexities of contemporary French identity.

French Past and Present: Staking A Claim

One final facet of ethnic identity construction emerges from the exchanges examined under the '*banlieue* versus the republic' heading. The films studied in this chapter, and *La Squale* in particular, offer a vision of characters who explicitly stake a claim for a position within French society through their self-reflexive choice of descriptors⁵⁹⁰ and through a discursive engagement with France past and present. The most striking example of this is to be found in a scene taken from *La Squale* in which the central character Désirée and her friends run amok in a Champs-Élysées cosmetics store. The girls insinuate, not only that the white sales assistants are racist, but also that the producers of the items on sale have a particular image of the ethnicity of their customers since there are no products suitable for black women on sale. The girls' engagement with both a French past and a French present is shown to be at its clearest when they mock the sales assistants by imitating a stereotypical black African accent (obviously a nod to France's colonial past) while continuing to use contemporary *verlan* to describe themselves.⁵⁹¹

Si la République n'a pas été esclavagiste, elle a été colonialiste, et ce passé colonial, mal pris en compte dans l'espace public, est ce qui taraude encore l'intégration des Français originaires des ex-colonies. Contrairement à l'esclavage, nous n'avons plus affaire là à une mémoire historique, mais à une mémoire vivante dont il est difficile de faire le deuil.⁵⁹²

This particular scene taken from *La Squale* offers an illustration of the verbal expression of this 'mémoire vivante' of France's colonial past while simultaneously

⁵⁹⁰ A variation on this technique emerges in the films examined in the third central chapter which I will discuss below.

⁵⁹¹ They call themselves *Renois*, the verlanised term for *Noirs/es*.

⁵⁹² Dahomay, *op. cit.*

verbally constructing one of its self-identifying products as an enmeshed part of contemporary France through Désirée's use of 1990s urban French slang techniques.

Identity Magnets and Spheres of Reference

Such parallel expressions of historical and contemporary belonging also feed into the main aspect of ethnic identity construction to emerge in the verbal exchanges examined under the heading of 'intergenerational conflict.' Begag and Chaouite, in their work on youths of Maghrebi origin in metropolitan France, refer to the concept of 'double identity magnets'⁵⁹³ to describe the ways in which the individuals concerned find themselves torn between, on the one hand, 'family obligations and Maghrebian traditions'⁵⁹⁴ and, on the other hand, 'the social institutions of France.'⁵⁹⁵ However, drawing on my analysis of Désirée's verbal attempt to stake a claim for the reappropriation of her own position within a French past and a French present, I argue that such binary divisions (implicit in the reference to a 'double', rather than a 'multiple', identity magnet) fail to engage with the complexities of social realities. This is further demonstrated by the analyses which I offer in the second half of the first chapter with its focus on intergenerational verbal exchanges and the multilayered ethnic identities which emerge.

Focussing on a number of exchanges taken from *Raï*, but incorporating references to other *banlieue* works, I have shown here that Begag and Chaouite's 'double identity magnets' would, in fact, better be described as 'multiple spheres of reference.'⁵⁹⁶ In this way, they encompass the mythical or mythologized 'homeland', the somewhat rigid political and social structures imposed by traditional French republicanism, but also the specificities of individual subjectivities which emerge against a multiethnic and multicultural backdrop and which intersect with parallel considerations of identity in relation to gender, for example, and sexuality. For instance, the analysis of the ways in which both Arabic and French are spoken in the family home shown onscreen in *Raï*, demonstrated the apparent divisions being constructed between Maghrebi traditions (represented through the mother's almost constant use of Arabic and

⁵⁹³ Quoted in Orlando, *op. cit.*, 406.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁶ Begag and Chaouite use the term 'spheres of reference' but tie it to the notion of a binary opposition between poles of identity construction.

explicit references to customs of her homeland) and her son's use of French to respond and his explicit engagement with the contemporary French society in which they live. However, this division was also shown to be more complex than such a schematic binary analysis would suggest. For instance, the sons' ability to respond to their mother's Arabic in French indicates that their position within metropolitan France need not necessarily be equated with a complete loss of tradition. There is room within these identities for verbal expressions of multiple belonging and cultural diversity within subjectivities.

Verbal Representations of Ethnicity Summarised

Overall, then, what I have demonstrated in the analyses of scenes in which ethnic identity constructions come to the fore through verbal exchanges, is the representation onscreen of a fragmented ethnic self which is engaged in processes of transition. Rather than representing ethnic identities whose role is to be assimilated to a traditional French republican model, these films illustrate a dialogue which constructs the possibility of 'integration in and through differences',⁵⁹⁷ but which also implies a challenge to and a renegotiation of the traditional model. This challenge is articulated through a form of negotiatory discourse which allows the citizens depicted onscreen to construct ethnic identities which allow for a multiplicity of positions within a single subjectivity, simultaneously French and 'other' or, more precisely, 'others'. The verbal exchanges analysed here also show, however, that this implicit multiplicity of cultural belonging results in fragmentation of self when it is brought into conflict with a rigid interpretation of French republicanism and it is this which points towards a need for renegotiation of the latter.

3. Language, Identity, and Genders Onscreen

The second central chapter has examined in detail a number of onscreen verbal exchanges through which gendered identities are constructed, challenged, and questioned. In order to construct these analyses in terms which stress their significance both as reflections of the 1990s French socio-political background and as recognised in academic and critical work which has focussed on them, I have chosen

⁵⁹⁷ Homi Bhabha, Lecture given at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, August 28th 2005. Professor Bhabha spoke as part of the Royal Scottish Academy's Lecture series entitled 'Nations: How they behave and what they're for in the 21st century.'

to operate a framework which has allowed me to select crucial scenes from the four core films. While the focus of Chapter One was first on '*banlieue* versus the republic' conflicts and then on intergenerational verbal conflicts, the second chapter analyses exchanges which take place within onscreen families, and specifically around parent-child relations. The roots of the decision to concentrate on this type of verbal exchange lay in three distinct, but overlapping, areas.

Parent-child Exchanges and the Socio-politics of France

Firstly, in terms of the French socio-political backdrop against which the films studied were released, questions of family structures and ties have been seen to play a prominent role, particularly, but not exclusively, in debates on gay parenting. Secondly, these same questions of family structures form an important part of the broader, ongoing reinterpretations of French republicanism, particularly through the notion of filiation which I have discussed in detail, with particular reference to the work of Eric Fassin. Thirdly, the narratives of many of the films from both genres studied in this thesis often centre on questions of family, not only in terms of their impact upon constructions of ethnic identities, as I have discussed above, but also by representing an engagement with challenges to both the traditional family structure and traditionally gendered roles within it. In the introductory stages of this second chapter, I have brought these three elements into dialogue with a more broadly established idea, that of the importance of the family as a site of gendered identity construction. Whereas past studies have done this in order to examine constructions of one gender, this work sought to present analyses of the ways in which verbal exchanges within onscreen families contribute to a broader examination of a plurality of gendered identities.

The analyses in this chapter have again been drawn from four core films (*Ma 6-T va crack-er*, *Douce France*, *Gazon maudit*, and *Belle Maman*). Following the pattern established in the preceding ethnicities chapter, I have demonstrated that the gendered self which emerges through the dialogue of these films is also subject to a fragmentation and a hybridisation. A clear illustration was also given of the ways in which the three prisms of analysis chosen in this thesis (ethnicity, gender, and

sexuality combine to provide a more complex, multilayered construction of identities as a network of intersecting 'parameters and boundaries'.⁵⁹⁸

Verbal Exchanges and Gay Parenting

The verbal exchanges analysed in this chapter have been shown to engage at once with political and cultural debates distinctive of 1990s France and with broader, ongoing critical debates on the performative nature of gendered identities. I examined, for example, a number of scenes, taken from mainstream films, in which verbal exchanges focus on the topic of gay parenting from a number of perspectives and, in so doing, offer challenges to traditional models of gendered identities and relations within families. In *Belle Maman*, for instance, I have offered detailed analysis of the lyrics of a song that Léa sings to her lesbian mother Nicou as a birthday gift. Through these lyrics there emerges a clear representation of successful gay parenting. Implicit within that lies a recognition of the mother's subjectivity as a woman, an explicit engagement with critics of gay parenting, and an examination of parenting as 'trans-gender' in the sense that it can be seen as transcending traditional gendered divisions and producing hybridised gendered identities which encompass aspects of masculinities *and* femininities. Parental roles, which are traditionally divided in binary terms, thus become enmeshed as these aspects intersect. Verbal exchanges analysed across this film testify to an evolution of the traditional family structure. This still has the option of including a mother-father binary, but now also opens out to other constellations of gendered identities.

Belle Maman is not the only film in the chosen corpus that deals explicitly with the topic of gay parenting: an analysis of a number of verbal exchanges taken from *Gazon maudit* underpinned the interpretation already suggested. Here the audience is initially presented, visually and verbally, with a trio of central characters who conform to clear-cut gendered identities: the macho, masculine patriarchal father/husband (Laurent), the maternal and domesticated mother/wife (Loli), and the butch, masculine lesbian (Marijo). These gendered identities are, however, constantly challenged and undermined throughout the course of the film. For instance, a challenge to the patriarchal family model is expressed through the 'alternative'

⁵⁹⁸ Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, *op. cit.*, 1.

femininity of Marijo, and as Loli's femininity and maternal instinct are shown to be not only compatible with, but indeed active verbal components of, a more complex gendered identity. Here, a number of key verbal exchanges are used to demonstrate the ways in which masculinities and femininities are renegotiated through the film's dialogue.

Intersections of Ethnic and Gendered Identities: Filiation

The analysis in this chapter was not, however, limited to verbal exchanges inspired by the question of gay parenting. The chapter also sought to show the different ways in which gendered identities, as well as intersecting with questions of sexuality, are also shown to be in dialogue with constructions of ethnic identities onscreen. It did this primarily through an examination of a series of verbal exchanges taken from *Douce France* and *Ma 6-T va crack-er*. These presented two different approaches to *banlieue* cinema which offer an important view of the complexities of gendered identities and relations in onscreen *banlieue* families. Just as it is possible, in analyses of ethnic identity constructions, to focus on binary representations (assimilated/other, for example), so too it proved possible to read the content of the verbal exchanges examined here as depicting gendered relations and identities within *banlieue* families which result from traditional models of the family unit and, by extension, the gendered identities of its 'component parts'. In contrast, and following the model adopted in my chapter on ethnic identity construction, the second half of this chapter sought to demonstrate the ways in which the gendered identities constructed here in fact present a challenge to the traditional model, insofar as they are both complex and multilayered.

The combined analyses of these scenes once more point towards a fragmentation of identities, this time in the realm of gender. *Douce France*, for instance, again illustrates the importance of multiple identity magnets, within both parental and filial generations, with ethnic and gendered identities intersecting. Here as in *Rai* we also find scenes here in which a mixture of French and Arabic is used, but here the latter is left unsubtitled without inhibiting or preventing the representation of dialogue between the generations. On the contrary, the presence of unsubtitled bilingual scenes indicates that all participants in the exchanges are used to verbal encounters in which code-switching is the norm. This consideration intersects with constructions of

gendered identities specifically through the use of the spoken word by the mother of the two female central characters. The mother is indeed shown as capable of switching between Arabic and French, but, through her contributions in the latter, she constructs a complex picture of gendered ethnic belonging which contradicts, as I have illustrated, the traditional image of onscreen Maghrebi matriarchy which is the subject of much literature on *banlieue* cinema. It is also through a focus on a type of insult aimed, in particular, at the figure of the mother⁵⁹⁹ that further evidence emerges which points towards the complexities of gendered identities and which bring the analysis back, once more, to an explicit engagement with the ongoing socio-political debate which has centred on filiation in 1990s France. The insults concerned are those constructed around the basic model of ‘nique ta mère’: a detailed analysis showed that they demonstrate both misogyny and sacralised filiation.⁶⁰⁰ In other words, we have seen how *banlieue* sons at once construct the traditionally gendered mother as respected but dominated figure. This analysis becomes particularly salient when considered in tandem with, for instance, the multiple cultures of belonging expressed by the mother in *Douce France*.

Verbal Representations of Gender Summarised

It is important to reiterate in summarising the analysis presented in my chapter on gendered identities, that gender here is used as a prism through which to frame my examination of the contribution of the spoken word to depictions of minority groupings in two genres of 1990s French cinema, informed, in particular, although not exclusively, by my readings of Maxime Foerster, Eric Fassin, and Judith Butler. My analyses draw on their theoretical considerations of non-numerical minority/mainstream relations, and also take account of such notions as filiation and symbolic order, central to much 1990s socio-political debate in France. In terms of verbal practices, I also hope to have shown an awareness of the performative nature of identities, and of gendered identities in particular, from which a number of factors can be seen to have emerged. Firstly, evidence was demonstrated of the ways in which gendered family roles are renegotiated in the films chosen as the core texts in this chapter, particularly through the varied depiction onscreen of gay parenting, from the

⁵⁹⁹ However, it should also be noted, as I have done in the body of the chapter, that similar insults are also applied to sisters onscreen.

⁶⁰⁰ This is a reference to the description used by Eric Fassin in his article, *op. cit.*

perspective of both parent and child. Secondly, I examined the ways in which constructions of and challenges to gendered identities intersect with ethnic identities, particularly in Maghrebi families in *banlieue* cinema where the traditional parental roles are highlighted and interrogated in the light of more complex cultures of belonging. Finally, the chapter offered an analysis of insults based on the 'nique ta mère' model which express a simultaneous sacralisation and vilification of parent-child relationships.

4. Language, Identity, and Sexualities Onscreen

This chapter sought to analyse the ways in which verbal exchanges contribute to the depiction of minority groups in contemporary France through the medium of cinema with relation to sexuality. What emerges through these verbal exchanges, is a complex and hybridised sexual self which both represents and challenges traditional readings of sexualities, and, in this way, points towards another layer of challenge to traditionally interpreted visions of French republicanism.

Becoming A Citizen: Challenges to Republicanism From Within

My analysis in this chapter is based on an interpretation of onscreen verbal exchanges in the corpus which was inspired, in part, by Maxime Foerster's work on gender, sexuality, and republicanism. The author suggests that, while the founding principles of French republicanism contained within them the potential for a truly egalitarian ideology, they have, nevertheless, been subjected to interpretation from historical standpoints informed by other ideological frameworks and, crucially, the notion of a symbolic order with relation both to gender and, Foerster asserts, sexuality. Foerster refers to republicanism's potential for subversion through universalism⁶⁰¹ and, in this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate the ways in which verbal constructions of identity in the realm of sexualities point, again, towards a fragmented self but also underline the positive potential of this fragmentation, if combined with a renegotiation of republicanism, insofar as it might permit *le citoyen* 'à devenir ceux que l'on est.' Within readings on each of the three prisms of identity construction selected here, variations on this theme of 'becoming that which one is' are expressed. Foerster here talks of individuals becoming those that they are, thereby indicating cultural diversity

⁶⁰¹ 'La subversion promise par l'universalisme,' Foerster, *op.cit.*, 12.

within an individual. Dahomay⁶⁰² describes integration as being of importance to all French citizens 'car on ne naît pas citoyen, on le devient.'⁶⁰³ And the model upon which both base their assertion comes, of course, from Simone de Beauvoir's 'on ne naît pas femme, on le devient' in *Le Deuxième Sexe*.⁶⁰⁴

The analysis in this chapter focuses again on four key film texts (*Pédale douce*, *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, *Le Derrière*, and *Drôle de Félix*), although it makes frequent reference to other films from both genres. An examination of the verbal exchanges illustrates once more the ways in which a negotiatory discourse emerges between a republican model and minority groupings. As is to be expected, this analysis also foregrounds the points of intersection between constructions of identities in the domain of sexualities, and those of gendered and ethnic identities. It also highlighted a central point, the ways in which the two genres studied reflect and engage with broader socio-political and socio-cultural debates in 1990s France. The debates I refer to here include not only those which I discussed in my consideration of genders (the PACS legislation, in particular), but also a broader societal engagement with the question of increasing gay and lesbian visibility in contemporary France and considerations of urban (hetero-)sexualities.

Friends and Lovers, Private and Public

The verbal exchanges upon which this chapter focuses centre around friends and lovers. In this way, I have sought to demonstrate the ways in which sexualities are constructed simultaneously in the private and the public sphere, thus illustrating a crucial point of intersection with debates on republicanism. In this context, it seemed important to ensure that the construction of identity in the realm of sexualities was analysed not only as dependent upon physical acts, but also as a discursively produced and performed identity. The verbal exchanges that I have analysed are grouped together under three broad headings: Sexual stereotyping, terms of self-description,

⁶⁰² Dahomay, *op. cit.*

⁶⁰³ Dahomay here echoes Régis Debray, writing in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1989 where he stated 'pas plus qu'on ne naît laïque on ne naît républicain: on le devient.' (Debray, *op. cit.*)

⁶⁰⁴ Beauvoir, *op. cit.* All three of these formulations, whether related to gender, sexuality or ethnicity, point towards a progressive and performative construction of identity, but all three also imply the existence of a norm within which 'others' seek to find their place without losing their individuality. I argue that all three also highlight the fragmentation of self this causes, but do so while positing the constitutive nature of this very fragmentation insofar as it engages with broader debate.

and coming out/outing. This tripartite structure was aimed at demonstrating, firstly, how the exchanges reflect and engage with the broader societal debates, and, secondly, that the ways in which sexualities are depicted onscreen are of relevance across the two genres and, as such, play a key role in the onscreen verbal depiction of minority groups.

Verbal Stereotyping of Sexualities

In order to examine the ways in which sexual stereotyping is used, questioned, and undermined, I have first analysed a number of exchanges taken from *Pédale douce* and *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, a gay film and a *banlieue* film respectively. What emerges from the exchanges I analyse in these two films is, firstly, a stereotypical view of male heterosexuality, which intersects with considerations of gendered fatherhood, for example, examined in the second chapter. This view of heterosexuality is one which is firmly anchored in a traditional patriarchal model – illustrated, for instance, in *Pédale douce*, by Adrien's desire to underline his (fake) heterosexuality by emphasising the number of children he has fathered. However, it is also challenged within the narratives of the films insofar as audiences are faced with a juxtaposition of contradictory stereotypes which lead to a questioning of the very nature of sexual identity. Again in *Pédale douce*, for example, while Adrien's own performance of heterosexuality is macho to the point of absurdity and seems to reveal a belief, on his part, in a clear division between gay and straight, subsequent verbal exchanges involving him and his gay friend and colleague André blur these boundaries and suggest far looser constructions of sexualities. As well as showing how these exchanges underline the porous nature of the boundaries between sexual identities, I have also illustrated, using examples from *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!*, the ways in which sexualities intersect with ethnicities as, for example, when the character of Christophe distances himself first from his mother tongue, then from his place of origin (and, by extension, the traditional onscreen depiction of male *banlieue* heterosexuality), in order to chat up a young woman in a café.

The following analysis of a cluster of scenes taken primarily from *Le Derrière* then exemplified verbal expressions of stereotypes with regard to homosexualities. Scenes from this film deserved attention because the stereotypes which emerge here do so within what would generally be termed as 'a gay community'. These scenes in fact

serve to illustrate the complexities which underlie identities in the realm of sexuality, with a plurality of subjectivities emerging. Reviews of the film in gay media outlets made explicit reference to this notion of prejudice within an allegedly unified community,⁶⁰⁵ while the ongoing socio-political backdrop constantly focussed on the challenge presented to traditional republicanism by this notion of a gay community. What emerges onscreen is evidence not simply, once again, of fragmented subjectivities, but of this fragmentation occurring both in relation to a sexual (and republican) norm within which they are supposed to be assimilated, and in relation to the very 'community' within which the republic fearfully positions them in the terms of this debate. This is particularly evident in the exchanges I analyse when Pierre, the central gay father, verbally rebukes his partner Francis for having used the feminine to refer to Frédérique-Frédéric, clearly associating this particular linguistic practice with a sub-group of homosexual men with which he does not wish to be identified.

Reappropriation of Gender Specific Terms

The second group of exchanges I have analysed in this chapter develop an examination of the very technique Pierre criticises Francis for employing, namely the appropriation, with both negative and positive connotations, of gendered terms, particularly by gay men. What became clear in these analyses was the fact that the implications of such terms ranged from expressions of solidarity and positive recognition – for instance, when André consoles a distraught Adrien, using a series of feminine nouns ('ma poule', 'une gagnante')⁶⁰⁶ – to expressions of disdain or even hatred – such as when Francis, for example, refers disparagingly to Frédérique-Frédéric as 'une vraie follasse.'⁶⁰⁷ I argue that from these exchanges there emerge complex structures by means of which individual position themselves, and are placed, in relation to the posited 'community'. I further argue that this does not necessarily undermine the notion of republicanism, insofar as the exchanges analysed demonstrate differences in levels of belonging which can co-exist within individuals

⁶⁰⁵ 'Les préjugés de son père sont plus forts que son sentiment communautaire,' for example, in Thomas Doustaly's review of the film in *Têtu*, *op.cit.*

⁶⁰⁶ *Pédale douce*, *op. cit.*

⁶⁰⁷ *Le Derrière*, *op. cit.*

without it necessarily following that individuals can only be considered in virtue of their demonstration of some feeling of solidarity towards a 'community.'⁶⁰⁸

Coming-out Scenes

Finally, I have analysed a series of exchanges based around the disclosure of a character's homosexuality. I have sought, throughout the chapter, to ensure that my consideration of sexuality did not become a consideration of any one particular sexual identity to the exclusion of others. However, given the backdrop of late 1990s France in which a number of politicians either came out voluntarily or were outed, thereby raising questions of the application of the private/public divide to sexualities. It was important to stress here the fact that these topics were also central to some of the verbal exchanges, particularly in gay films. The exchanges upon which I focus on are taken from *Drôle de Félix* and *Pédale douce* and I argue that they offer further illustration of the intersections between onscreen representations of minorities and a broader French societal backdrop. Overall, these scenes show a complex interlacing of the private and the public, which again engages with the precepts of the traditional republican *citoyen*, but they also give further, clear indication of the discursive nature of identities in the realm of sexualities, as characters self-identify or are identified with particular sexual identities and try to reconcile these with their public and private selves.

Verbal Representations of Sexuality Summarised

Throughout this chapter focussing on identities as they are discursively constructed in the realm of sexualities, we see emerging further evidence of the fragmented nature of the *citoyen*, as sexuality intersects with aspects of gender and ethnicity. I illustrated the ways in which sexualities are constructed through stereotype both within and outwith 'communities' and across different sexualities, and the ways in which these stereotypes can be highlighted but also challenged through cinema. I then considered

⁶⁰⁸ My view here is inspired by Frédéric Martel's first model of community, as described in the 2000 edition of his book *Le Rose et le noir*. Whereas Martel, in the first edition of the study, was vehemently opposed to what he viewed as an American model of community, by the 2000 edition he had tempered his position to include a discussion of three levels of community: 'la communauté de destin,' 'la communauté de fait,' and 'la communauté pour soi.' The first of these explicitly involves 'quelque chose comme une conscience commune à nombre d'homosexuels et d'abord une mémoire collective commune mais aussi la conscience d'un dialogue plus complexe avec l'environnement familial et social.' It is this type of community which I refer to here.

the ways in which there is a reappropriation of sexuality through language in the form of self-identification, before moving on to examine the notion of 'coming out' which serves to illustrate the ways in which these sexual identity constructions enter into a dialogue with traditional republican considerations of public and private spheres, pointing towards a complex blurring of the two.

5. General Conclusion: Ethnicities, Genders, Sexualities

Overall, then, what emerges from the analyses offered across the three central chapters is a vision of the individual as a fragmented self. This context is not to be understood in a 'simply' post-modern sense, but rather, in the context of gay and *banlieue* cinema in 1990s France, specifically as a reflection of, response to, and engagement with ongoing debates regarding the nature of French republicanism in a contemporary context. The individuals presented onscreen are depicted as complexly fragmented creatures insofar as verbally constructed aspects of their identities express particularities which cannot be expressed within a framework in which French republicanism is traditionally understood but must be assimilated in order to result in a universalisable *citoyen*, wiped of all traces of difference and thus equal to all others.

Negotiatory Discourse Emerging From Within Republicanism

However, I argue that the notion of difference which the complex and fragmented self implies is primarily to be understood when set in contrast to the republican model offering a universalisable identity and that, within this model, despite republicanist claims to the contrary, there exist what I would term identity equations. In other words, the *citoyen* is not a blank canvas, but rather encompasses a series of normative assumptions about, for instance, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality which are necessary in order to make sense of the very notion of cultural difference. I argue that what emerges from the onscreen depiction of these different identities is, in fact, not an incoherent juxtaposition of individual and collective particularities, nor a communitarian model which seeks to supplant traditional republicanism. On the contrary, the onscreen verbal exchanges analysed here testify to a negotiatory discourse which, while seeking to highlight the failings of republicanism to retain relevance in the face of changing social, political, and cultural realities, does so in order that republican definitions and values may be challenged and renegotiated so that its relevance be reclaimed.

Dahomay, for instance, does not seek an alternative *to* republicanism, but an alternative *within* it,⁶⁰⁹ while French sociologist Michel Wieviorka refers to ‘une République qui parle d’égalité et de fraternité’⁶¹⁰ but which fails to live up to its own promises. And I argue that this brings us back to Foerster and his assertion that republicanism holds within it the potential for ‘le régime politique le plus *queer* qui puisse exister’⁶¹¹ and a ‘Marianne travaillée de l’intérieur.’⁶¹² While this usage of ‘queer’ may still be problematic within standard French⁶¹³ and Foerster’s imagery may be a little too radical for some, its reflection can be found in more mainstream political, critical and media discourse. His vision of Marianne as representing a republic challenged from within echoes Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of challenge emanating ‘du dedans’ and Butler’s comments, in relation to representations of gendered identities, that ‘a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the old.’⁶¹⁴ More recently, Dahomay has suggested that a solution to the problem of republican integration can be found only if :

Nous tentons de comprendre les paradoxes du républicanisme français
et la nature des antinomies qui le travaillent.⁶¹⁵

Only then will the fragmented selves depicted in the films studied here find coherence and unity within and through difference. French republicanism, as traditionally understood, is thus invited to consider its ambivalences and paradoxes and to recognise the contemporary period as one of ‘transition rather than transformation.’⁶¹⁶

The contribution made by these onscreen verbal exchanges to a broader depiction of minority groups in contemporary France is thus, in itself, complex and multilayered, but results in a negotiatory discourse which seeks to posit intersections of discursively constructed and performed identities as a positive engagement with contemporary republicanism.

⁶⁰⁹ Asking, for instance, whether ‘une autre politique d’intégration républicaine’ is possible. Dahomay, *op. cit.*

⁶¹⁰ Wieviorka, *op. cit.*

⁶¹¹ Foerster, *op. cit.*, 10.

⁶¹² Foerster, *op. cit.*, 94.

⁶¹³ The word ‘queer’, for example, did not yet appear in the 2003 *Petit Robert*.

⁶¹⁴ Butler, *op. cit.*, 112.

⁶¹⁵ Dahomay, *op. cit.*

⁶¹⁶ Bhabha, *op. cit.*

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Filmography

Gay

1. *La Cage aux folles* (Molinaro, 1978)
2. *Le Fils préféré* (Garcia, 1994)
3. *Les Roseaux sauvages* (Téchiné, 1994)
4. *Pas Très Catholique* (Marshall, 1994)
5. *Gazon maudit* (Balasko, 1995)
6. *Chacun Cherche Son Chat* (Klapisch, 1996)
7. *Les Voleurs* (Téchiné, 1996)
8. *Pédale douce* (Aghion, 1996)
9. *Ma Vie en rose* (Berliner, 1997)
10. *Mauvais Genre* (Bénégui, 1997)
11. *Alice et Martin* (Téchiné, 1998)
12. *Ceux Qui M'aiment Prendront Le Train* (Chereau, 1998)
13. *Folle D'elle* (Cornuau, 1998)
14. *L'Homme est une femme comme les autres* (Zilbermann, 1998)
15. *Jeanne et le Garçon formidable* (Ducastel and Martineau, 1998)
16. *Sitcom* (Ozon, 1998)
17. *Belle Maman* (Aghion, 1999)
18. *La Nouvelle Eve* (Corsini, 1999)
19. *Le Derrière* (Lemercier, 1999)
20. *Drôle de Félix* (Ducastel and Martineau, 2000)
21. *Le Placard* (Veber, 2001)

Banlieue

22. *Laisse Béton* (Le Péron, 1983)
23. *Le Thé au harem d'Archimède* (Charef, 1985)
24. *De Bruit et de fureur* (Brisseau, 1988)
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27. *Douce France* (Chibane, 1995)
28. *Etat des lieux* (Richet, 1995)
29. *Krim* (Bouchaala, 1995)
30. *La Haine* (Kassovitz, 1995)

31. *Raï* (Gilou, 1995)
32. *Clubbed to Death (Lola)* (Zauberman, 1996)
33. *Le Plus Beau Métier du monde* (Lauzier, 1996)
34. *Assassin(s)* (Kassovitz, 1997)
35. *Ma 6-T va crack-er* (Richet, 1997)
36. *Un Frère* (Verheyde, 1997)
37. *Le Gône du Chaâba* (Ruggia, 1998)
38. *Louise (Take 2)* (Siegfried, 1998)
39. *Augustin, Roi du Kung Fu* (Fontaine, 1999)
40. *Le Ciel, les oiseaux et... ta mère!* (Bensalah, 1999)
41. *Petits Frères* (Doillon, 1999)
42. *La Squale* (Généstal, 2000)
43. *Total Western* (Rochant, 2000)
44. *Voyous, voyelles* (Meynard, 2000)
45. *Yamakasi – Les Samouraïs des temps modernes* (Zeïtoun/Seri, 2001)
46. *Wesh Wesh qu'est-ce qui se passe?* (Ameur-Zaïmèche, 2002)