

**From Paternal Hegemony to the Ethics of Fraternity:
the Place of Absent Fathers in *Le Jeune Cinéma Français***

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Abstract

In the 1990s a new generation of socially engaged filmmakers came to be known as *le jeune cinéma français*. Many of these filmmakers examined a whole range of social issues, with a particular aim of focusing on the representation of the French family. In these family portraits, the father, both as the traditional head of the family institution and as a stand-in for the State, is notably missing. This thesis inquires into the paternal absence in *le jeune cinéma*, and traces how the paternal crisis is related to the filmmakers' practice of *auteur* cinema.

The *jeunes auteurs*, rather than participating directly in political debate, make a case for cinema as a tool for an ethical engagement with the reality of those left behind by socio-economic change. Drawing on philosophical thinking developed by Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, this thesis discusses the ways *le jeune cinéma* seeks to move away from the oedipal association of the father with the law, and thereby to articulate the recognition of an ethical fraternity as opening up to the care and hospitality towards the Other.

This thesis outlines specific ideals of new paternal models that *le jeune cinéma* proposes. Starting with an Introduction which develops the points made above and sets out the theoretical framework, this study then moves on to consider six emblematic films which alter the way the father is conceived through diverse paternal reconfigurations. Chapter 1 focuses on the figure of postcolonial father in *Bye-bye* (1995), while chapter 2 looks at dysfunctional patriarchy and the phantasmal return of the father in *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?* (1996). Chapter 3 then links the rural dystopia of *La Vie de Jésus* (1997) to its recourse to the paternal. Chapter 4 recuperates the disappearing working-class fathers of *Marius et Jeannette* (1997) by contextualising the film's *famille recomposée*. In chapter 5, we see how *Rosetta* (1999) reconstructs the filial relation as a form of fraternal proximity and becoming-friend. Finally, chapter 6 explores the shift from paternal search to fraternal positioning written in the dynamics between the *auteurs* and the star of *Drôle de Félix* (2000). I conclude that *le jeune cinéma* must be understood as an articulation of changing landscape from paternal hegemony to the ethics of fraternity, and as such it replaces the way the *auteurs* are conceptualised from masters of their own narrative to the rendered vision of alterity and otherness.

For my husband and my son

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Introduction

In the 1990s, a significant number of films released in France came to be known as *le jeune cinéma français*, or the Young French Cinema. It was, above all, a shared interest in society and a distinctive desire to capture its reality that threaded these otherwise divergent films together. The new and, in particular, ‘young’ generation of filmmakers as a prime factor in cinematic innovation was fundamental to the critical construction of the group, hence the use of the word *jeune*. The ‘jeune’ remained, throughout the decade, a matter of ‘sensibilité’ rather than of age, as witnessed in the range of filmmakers’ contributions to what constituted a ‘committed cinema’ (O’Shaughnessy 2010: 39), representing a break from preceding cinematic trends. Coming after a period under the influence of nostalgic heritage dramas and the solipsistic individualism of the *cinéma du look* of the 1980s (Powrie 1997: 7, 78), the emerging directors of the 1990s were seen to mark something quite different and rejuvenating happening in France.

The return of the social in *le jeune cinéma* can be traced back to Eric Rochant’s early features such as *Un monde sans pitié* (1989) and *Aux yeux du monde* (1991), which reflect on the period’s preoccupation with the socio-political dissent of the 1990s generation. In the years revolving around the filmmakers’ political mobilisation of 1997, the social-realist impulse further fuelled the *auteur* traditions of the French cinema to such a remarkable extent that it amounted to the development of an indigenous cinema movement. On 11 February 1997, following the unrest that surrounded the 1996 *Sans Papiers* (people without legal documents) affair, a group of 66 filmmakers signed a petition and protested against the oppressive Debré law. They called for ‘civil disobedience’ by stating that they had housed ‘*sans papiers*’ and they should be charged under the inhumane law as well.

The huge success of *La Haine* (Kassovitz 1995) and its focus on issues related to the notorious *fracture sociale*, or social breakdown, traditionally absent from French cinema screens, opened up wider public perceptions of the shaking-up of France’s cinematic landscape. Several critics speculated on a ‘nouvelle’ *Nouvelle Vague* (Konstantarakos 1998; Hardwick 2008). It was also possible to detect sub-strands within *le jeune cinéma*. On one hand, there were films more readily associated with cerebral *auteur* cinema often set in Paris such as *Comment je me suis disputé... (ma vie sexuelle)* (Desplechin 1996); on the other hand, there emerged a new emphasis on rural and regional identities, as seen in the Brittany-set road movie *Western* (Poirier 1997). However, it became increasingly common to identify the artistic output of *le jeune cinéma* with the latter group, as the unprecedentedly strong presence of the peripheries

(in socio-geographical terms, to name a few: the rural, the *banlieue*, the Nord, the Sud) on French screens testifies itself. As the centre of consciousness moved away from Paris to the margins of society, these films stood at the crossroads of the end of a strong central state as envisioned by Gaullism and the improved autonomy of localised voices. This rejection of hierarchies, whilst opening itself to the vision of France's cultural diversity, also questioned the weakening of the nation's symbolic protection. In a national cinema that traditionally celebrates the notion of nation as *la patrie*, or the fatherland (Vincendeau 1988, Burch and Sellier 1996: 155), a different breed of films witnessed a destabilisation of the relations between national identity and father figures that had been going on during the course of the 1990s. Set in remote northern areas and featuring young, working-class characters facing the aftermath of the decline of industrial society, films such as *La Vie de Jésus* (Dumont 1997) and *Rosetta* (the Dardennes 1995) reflected the achievements of the so-called 'new realism' that aesthetically constituted *le jeune cinéma*. The economic and familial politics of *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?* (Veysset 1997) and *Marius et Jeannette* (Guédiguian 1996) imagined the South of France removed from the traditional images of Pagnol dramas and, by contrast, realised regional insecurity where families and collectives are on the verge of disintegration. The years under Chirac's presidency witnessed a continued debate on how the burgeoning influx of immigrant labour has influenced the alteration in the fabric of French life, which inspired an invigoration in the *banlieue* and *beur* cinema. Films such as *Bye-bye* (Dridi 1995) reflected how questions of ethnic and cultural difference continue to provoke the universalist discourses of French Republicanism, whereas *Drôle de Félix* (Ducastel and Martineau 2000), a utopian comedy and road movie, has given a playful inflection to the social realist text bearing out a number of concessions made in relation to the universalist principle, such as legalisation of same-sex relationships.

This thesis will offer an examination of *le jeune cinéma* through a series of close readings of some emblematic works. The films to be considered include *Bye-Bye*, *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?*, *La Vie de Jésus*, *Marius et Jeannette*, *Rosetta*, and *Drôle de Félix*. It has been mapped elsewhere how an overview of the philosophical and aesthetic debates clusters around the issues of social realism in French cinema of the 1990s (O'Shaughnessy 2007; Grandena 2008). My inquiry is centrally concerned with the paternal absence prevalent in the films of *le jeune cinéma*. In this thesis, questions of absent fathers are considered in relation to the questions of the other, in order to show how the two are inextricably linked. All of the films analysed in this thesis address

characters and backgrounds hitherto considered marginal. And, significantly, they are all marked by the fact that the father, both as the traditional head of the family institution and as a stand-in for the State, is notably missing. The absence of the father is prominent in *le jeune cinéma* to such degree that the films generate critical representation of specific aspects of the society in which they are produced. From the academic and critical response to *le jeune cinéma*, I will concentrate upon the key lines of enquiry that are most pertinent to my interest in the handling of the paternal. My starting point will accordingly take on the critical construction regarding the ‘new realism’ (Powrie 1999: 15), and the vision of the ‘other’ France, or the France of the marginalised and the underprivileged (Konstantarakos 1998: 142). Furthermore, the engagement with the political through the personal, whereby social issues are explored through a subjective approach by the *jeune cinéma auteurs*, will be discussed in this thesis.

In this chapter I shall introduce my concept of the ‘new realism’ as having an ethical implication, envisioning the ‘fatherless state’ of the marginalised parts of France that have been left behind by socio-economic changes. The *jeunes auteurs*, rather than participating directly in political debate, make a case for cinema as a tool for an ethical engagement with the reality of this ‘other’ France, which has been disowned and disconnected from any sense of identity and place. In order to embark on such a discussion, it is essential to define, in my view, what constitutes the ‘paternal’. It should become apparent that my methodological approach to the paternal question is informed by the existing critical work on *le jeune cinéma*, but also by the broader context of contemporary French reality. The fusion of the personal and the political, which is characteristic of the way the political is articulated in *le jeune cinéma*, is framed by the patriarchal nuclear family as an institution. Issues of the family have been foregrounded in much of the academic work on *le jeune cinéma*. Claire Vassé notes how the crisis of the state of the family and filiation in *le jeune cinéma* is explored to reveal that ‘les parents sont absents ou inaptes à transmettre aux générations suivantes repères et valeurs’ (Vassé 1998: 65). In his discussion of the cinematic representation of the family, Phil Powrie observes the virtual inexistence of fathers or central male figures at the core of the disintegration of the family, which constitutes a general trend in contemporary French cinema (Powrie 2007: 298).

My research questions are triggered from a premise that in the 1990s the father was ritually eliminated from society. The collapse of the father as a figure of authority moves the recognition of paternity from the family into the social arena, as has been

articulated by French political and postcolonial discourses. In this chapter I want to elaborate on this ‘social death of the father’, in order to explain how its problematics have impinged upon the fragmented identity politics of *le jeune cinéma*. I will maintain that the demise of the paternal in *le jeune cinéma* represents the failing state, and that *le jeune cinéma* brings a diversity of marginal subjectivities to the fore in order to indicate the socio-economic malaise of the 1990s that has affected French society. Finally I argue that, as filmic response to this paternal crisis, *le jeune cinéma* creates a new father, a reconfiguration of the paternal as a need to reconnect the young, marginalised characters back to society and community. To support this hypothesis, I draw strongly upon the cinematic concept of the *auteur*, as the personal and idiosyncratic vision behind captured reality, to explain how the paternal crisis is related to the filmmakers’ practice of *auteur* cinema. What results will be an examination of the specific ideals of the paternal that the *auteurs* want to create, or even at times adopt themselves. In the process I will pay attention to the challenge that *le jeune cinéma* sets against the traditional role of the *auteur*, by highlighting the responsibility of the directors towards the subjects of their films.

My analytic approach owes a significant debt to paradigms originating from the ethical underpinnings of contemporary theorists, in particular, Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida whose work elaborates the ethical nature of the relation with otherness, or alterity. Through the reading of Levinas’s philosophy, I will affirm that *le jeune cinéma*’s calls for a change in the socio-political geography comes as a corollary of the ethical engagement of the *auteurs* with the ‘other’ France that they represent on screen. In *le jeune cinéma*, the political question of inequality and social exclusion is converted into the ethical imperatives of care and responsibility towards the Other. It is also at this juncture, in the interface between the political and the ethical, that Derrida perceives a seemingly irreconcilable distinction that exists between the ethical subject and the civic one (Derrida 1999: 32). Derrida’s preoccupying question concerns how the utopian concept of hospitality at the opening of ethics can be regulated in political and juridical practice within a society. Bearing this in mind, my approach will return to the paternal underpinning in *le jeune cinéma*, to recall that, by completely emptying out the paternal sphere, *le jeune cinéma* observes a fading of the traditional need for Oedipal struggle in current neo-liberal socio-economic situations. This reinventing of paternal lineage as the locus for responsibility and transmission, consequently, will be the discussion of the concluding part of my introduction.

1. 'New realism', the 'other' France, and the social death of the Father

The 'new realism' as perceived in *le jeune cinéma* cannot be called realist in the classical sense. It is possible to detail the tenets of cinematic social-realist style in *le jeune cinéma*, such as location shooting, a focus on the conditions of everyday life and the frequent use of non-professional actors – tropes reminiscent of Italian neorealism. An emphasis on the real over sleek images of mainstream cinema, as René Prédal dubs the 'cinema of anti-spectacle' in his book *Le jeune cinéma français* (Prédal 2002: 95), fits in with the traditional notions of realism. Having said that, the nature of the 'new realism' of 1990s French cinema reflected the changing landscape of what is considered 'political' in the contemporary context. However, under the heading 'can one characterise a *jeune cinéma* style?', Prédal finds it difficult to place the 'new realism' in a directly political sense (Prédal 2002: 93), although he argues it looks positively outward to reveal 'a striking picture of a France which is in ruins, in economic, human and moral terms' (Prédal 2002: 125). The films of the new realism were largely devoid of the determinism and ideological agendas which characterised the heavily politicised films of the 1970s. Uninhibited by a predetermined theoretical stance as found in other contemporary realist movements, like *Dogme 95*, the 'new realism' openly co-habits with other types of formal approaches such as the fairy tale (*Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?*) and populist romantic comedy (*Marius et Jeanette*). In this sense, Florian Grandena defines 'plural realisms' as the trend of French political films in the 1990s (Grandena 2008: 46). The *jeune* directors often cite Ken Loach as an inspiration (Powrie 1999: 16); yet, the representation of the protagonists in their films veer away from working-class heroism and its virile struggle, opting instead to stay in a perpetual state of anomy and uncertainty, a point poignantly delivered in films such as *La Haine* and *La Vie de Jésus*. As for *beur* and *banlieue* filmmaking, if the former generation's filmmaking articulated intolerance and exclusion in a more explicit manner, the directors of the 1990s, as Carrie Tarr observes, tended to minimise the issue of racism as a plea for integration (Tarr 1997: 74). Meanwhile, specific social issues, such as the much decried 35-hour working week, were filtered through filial melodramas, as found in *Ressources humaines* (Cantet 1999) for example; whereas the fatalistic approach in which AIDS was addressed in *Les Nuits fauves* (Collard 1992) seemed to be falling out of favour by the time *Drôle de Félix* offered its sunny treatment of the issue as just another condition of modern living.

For Claude-Marie Trémois, whose *Les Enfants de la liberté: le jeune cinéma français des années 90* was the first book published on the subject, the post-ideology era of the 1990s meant a cause for celebration. She writes that ‘encore plus individualistes, les Enfants de la liberté [...] se sont empressés de dissoudre leur collectif pour permettre à chacun d’inventer de nouvelles méthodes de combat’ (Trémois 1997: 10). There were critics who were less assured, however, such as Noël Herpe who discerns a ‘closed’ cinema with ‘plutôt le goût de cendres d’une génération arrivée après la bataille’, and yet proceeds to detail the conditions for its existence (Herpe 1998: 31-2). In truth, these contradictions are at the heart of ‘new realism’. Unrestricted by the way the traditional realism is constituted, the ‘new realism’ no longer has the presumption of conveying the objective rendering of reality or serving a collective political project. Instead, the political is anchored in and manifested through the personal. What has been hitherto considered to belong to the private sphere, notably families, comes to the fore. As amply documented, families are re-oriented as a key social benchmark where *le jeune cinéma* films inscribe their desire to comment on social issues. A host of factors shaped the structure of the family as represented in the films of *le jeune cinéma*: the fear of poverty and joblessness as a result of economic uncertainty; the possibility of gay ‘marriage’ as a result of the PACs; mixed-race relationships; the increased rift in the cultural choices made by first- and second-generation immigrants; and the rise of the matriarch as head of the family. All these factors have been conflated into one general assumption that virtually dominates the family narratives of *le jeune cinéma*: the demise of traditional patriarchal authority. It is possible to witness the re-structuring of the family in French cinema as a gendered response, signalling an ascent of women’s autonomy (Sherzer 2001: 230, Vincendeau 2008: 19); reflected in the strong number of female directors who emerged from the 1990s, whose varied styles range from Catherine Breillat’s dissection of sexual discourse to the gritty rural realism of Sandrine Veysset.

These films based in fragile family situations were, above all, *auteur* cinema. Often made on a shoe-string budget, the films were told in subjective, personal narratives with an open ending, where questions were raised rather than answered. Autobiographical families were breathed into the narrative, as seen through Guédiguian’s memory of his own father that underpins the story of disappearing working-class fathers in *Marius et Jeanette* and Veysset’s dedication to her mother of *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?*, a maternal love story set in southern France where she grew up. Although not altogether autobiographical, the films of Dumont and the

Dardenne brothers bear witness to their lived experience of childhood memories (*La Vie de Jésus*) and the changing realities of their hometown (the Dardennes' Liège-set films since *La Promesse*). Ethnicity and sexuality were other key areas in which the *auteurs* asserted their subjectivity, which resulted in the increased on-screen visibility of sexual and racial minorities: the former thanks to directors such as the Ducastel/Martineau duo, Catherine Corsini and François Ozon among others; and the latter in the burgeoning realm of diasporic filmmaking including *beur* cinema¹. In all cases, the social issues addressed in the films are first and foremost filtered through the intimate approach by the *auteurs* towards the subject of their films.

Though certain filmmakers associated with *le jeune cinéma*, such as Olivier Assayas and Desplechin, came from the institutions like *la Fémis* and *Cahiers du cinéma* – often considered as an elite path to becoming an *auteur*, a significant number of directors, including Veysset and Guédiguian, were autodidacts, or, like the Dardenne brothers, came from a documentary-filmmaking background. Many of the critically acclaimed filmmakers were not based in Paris, but came from other regions, as seen by Guédiguian's hailing from L'Estaque and Dumont's association with Flanders. One should also note the emergence of Belgian *auteurs*, testifying to an affinity between directors like Benoît Mariage (*Les Convoyeurs attendant* (1999)) and the Dardenne brothers, both rooted in the strong documentary tradition of Belgium, and the socially-committed, localised filmmaking of the French *jeune cinéma* (see chapter 5). Unlike the long-established trend of French artists with a provincial background who made a career in Paris, as epitomised in the institutional iconography of Paris adopted by the *Nouvelle Vague* directors of the late 1950s (Hayward 1996:139), the filmmakers of *le jeune cinéma* tended to remain in their native town making films inspired by their origin, thus focusing on the description of youth life as marginalised but quite specific to the context of the region. In any case, outlying from the cinephilic saturation of the Parisian critical milieu and literary romanticism in the vein of Rohmer, for example, the *auteurs* of *le jeune cinéma* were more inspired by the sense of urgency that was needed to reflect the seemingly intractable issues of social and cultural exclusion and, as its implicit corollary, the exclusion of what is usually represented on the cinematic screen. On their screens, as Myrto Konstantarakos points out, a preoccupying presence was

¹ 'Beur cinema' is a potentially reductive label threatening to marginalise the Maghrebi-French filmmakers as 'other' in relation to the dominant cultural norm (Higbee 2001: 53), and as such has been rejected by the filmmakers it refers to, for example, Karim Dridi (see chapter 1). The term *beur* is originated from Parisian backslang (*verlan*) for 'Arab', both denoting the negative meanings of Arab in the French imaginary, and a refusal to be trapped in those meanings (Tarr 2005: 3).

made up by the individuals who have been traditionally identified as ‘othered’ bodies by their ethnicity, marginal socio-economic status and lack of cultural capital. In other words, *le jeune cinéma* prioritised what Konstantarakos calls ‘une ‘autre’ France’ (‘the ‘other’ France’): ‘non parisienne, non intellectuelle, une France de “petites gens”, petits commerçants de villes de province sans grand intérêt, classes sociales défavorisées, exclus, chômeurs, S.D.F., produits de la fameuse ‘fracture sociale’; tout un peuple qui n’avait plus sa place sur les écrans français depuis longtemps’ (Konstantarakos 1998: 142).

The envisioning of the ‘other’ France as explored by *les jeunes auteurs* calls for a different paradigm that escapes essentialist stereotypes and views. Although the ‘other’ France at the fringes of society is portrayed as the product and the victim of marginalisation; equally, the foregrounding of the other is complex and nuanced enough to be more than simple reflections of the social, cultural and economic environment. I shall maintain that the repercussion of these films resides in the ethical angle of the *auteur* approach. In order to do this, however, it is first necessary to situate the ‘other’ France within the broader socio-economic fabrics; to elucidate what triggered these *auteurs* to create a universe of, often dysfunctional, nuclear families with fathers notably absent, as their particular vision of the ‘other’ France. The protagonists of *le jeune cinéma* are often young outsider figures who traditionally belong to the working class milieu, but are now excluded from neo-liberal hegemony. In the place left by the decline of the traditionally defined community, they live in the perpetual ‘out’ status of what Michel Wieviorka calls the ‘dualization of society’, where ‘you are either *in* or *out*’ (Wieviorka 1992: 29). This state is often symbolised in the form of spatial exclusions, such as the river Rosetta has to cross on foot to get to her home in the makeshift caravan park or the perpetually half-finished demolition site as Marius’s retreat and workplace in *Marius et Jeannette*. The end of industrial society has led to the break-up of the former hierarchical class structure in favour of a model based on individualism and consumption; leaving a gap, as Max Silverman notes, between ‘those who have the means to ‘go with the flow’, the nomads whose pleasure is derived from the hybrid nature of identity and contingent nature of postmodern life, and those for whom the absence of guidelines and boundaries is a profoundly anxious and fearful moment’ (Silverman 1999: 51).

The post-industrial North, a significant focus for *le jeune cinéma*, became a testing ground for the decline of the strong social relations established in industrial society. The school-teacher narrator in the Pas-de-Calais-set *Ça commence aujourd’hui*

(Tavernier 1999) testifies to a profound nostalgia for the mining community of the past where the work was hard and dangerous but procured a decent life, a social status, and a sense of existence. However, this echo of Republican values is not shared in other films. Overall, *le jeune cinéma* offers more than a wish to protest against the centralising notion of one indivisible Republic as insufficiently sensitive to questions of ethnicity and gender, as debates around the *sans-papiers* and the PACS illustrated; they also highlight their dissatisfaction with the then current state of affairs which endorsed the mercantile demands of the market economy, as exemplified in the public-sector strikes in 1995. In short, drawing on the gender and ethnicity-blindness of Republicanism and the lack of state provision, coupled with the threat of globalisation, *le jeune cinéma* problematises the State as the linchpin. The allusion to the failing State is unmistakable in the absence of the father. Always missing or, if present at all, illegitimate and corrupt (as in the ogre-like father in *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?*), fathers were never given a staying power, let alone a central role, in the representation of the family. The frame of the family itself is presented as an increasingly porous bare bone of social structure, which the characters are forced to hang onto, in a world faced with the disappearance of community.

Paternalism, then, as a Weberian contract of exchange in which the father/State holds power and authority over the members of the household, offering economic support and protection in return, was seen to be crumbling. In the films of *le jeune cinéma*, there is a sense that the nation-state had disowned its own people despite demanding their subordination, which has been encapsulated in the familiar trope of the *bavure policière* in *banlieue* and *beur* filmmaking, for example. Haunting the representations of the family and, simultaneously, standing as the model for national identity, this ‘social death of the father’ was the defining premise that triggered the return of the political in the ‘new realism’ of the 1990s generation. It is worth noting that the whole discourse on national politics, immigration, and economic climate has been rearticulated in this discursive shift. The presidential leadership has been an intrinsic element of the paternalism moulded by de Gaulle in France, yet each presidency was seen to be impaired by the successive ambivalent constitutional settlement (the three cohabitations since 1986) and, as Alistair Cole states, by the ‘mediocre performance of individual Presidents in office’ (Cole 2008: 185). Mitterrand (1981-95), in his later tenure, appeared a rather isolated, solitary individual whose power was on the wane; whereas his successor Jacques Chirac (1995-2007) suffered from a lack of political authority from the early months of his term in office and,

through a stream of political scandal and corruption, his reputation never recovered. The constitutional and political presidential resources that underpinned the mode of the strong presidency in France were seen to be ‘in a state of disuse’ (Cole 2008: 188). This was perceived to go hand in hand with the circumstances of economic liberalism and globalisation, whose neo-liberal consensus was, by the 1990s, taken for granted (Bourdieu 1999: 186). The world of work was indeed actively debated in *le jeune cinéma*. The corporation-like State, now powerless to intervene to protect labour, was intricately bound to the alienation of the father in the family unit, whose non-participation in the economic sphere is in return rendered as a symbolic death, as observed in *Emploi du temps* (Cantet 2001). Another important area facing the State was the issue of immigration. The Fifth Republic’s inability to deal productively with ethnic minorities of recent immigrant origin has been most dramatically manifested in the periodic rioting that occurred in the French *banlieues*; or, as Azouz Begag puts it, ‘la société de l’autre côté’, an imaginative as well as an urban space from which the economic, social and political responsibilities of the French nation-state have been evacuated (Begag 1994: 19). On a more empirical level, the absence or marginalisation of the father figure in films made by second-generation Maghrebi directors was a critical reflection of the relatively lowly, often ill-adapted status of immigrant ‘faceless workers’ within French society, as noted by Aleg Hargreaves in his study of paternal representations of Maghrebi minority culture (Hargreaves 2000: 350).

2. From political to ethical

The preoccupation with the social death of the paternal inherent in *le jeune cinéma* was linked to its dealings with ‘the other’, in the same way that the contemporary conjuncture around the paternal collapse was the sign of the challenge to the autonomy of nation-state and, by implication, to the unity of the self. It is within the context of the areas outlined above – political and economic decentralisation, the changing city and new immigration – that concepts of self and other, of insiders and outsiders, have been re-engaged by the *auteurs* of *le jeune cinéma*. Paternal absence was designated in *le jeune cinéma* as a way of highlighting the end of an overarching frame of the social contract that used to provide employment and welfare. In this absence of the all-encompassing safety net, a new terrain of marginal subjectivities came to the fore. These individuals, detached from collective dynamics such as class, nation or any other kind of fixity – including the homeless, the unemployed, diasporas,

and sexual dissidents – were, as a result, shown to be stripped of all symbolic supports of selfhood, by losing their jobs, their friends, their family or their mind, as in the case of *Seul contre tous* (Noé 1998). Yet, these films do not seem to primarily consider their marginalised subjects as victims vilified by a society-as-perpetrator or donor that asserts its moral or material superiority. Instead they invoke the conditions of a possible counter-image of what it means to be ‘othered’, when there is no longer a social contract available that can count as minimum conditions of value and use, labour and affective work in a given society or community. As Martin O’Shaughnessy points out, the characters of *le jeune cinéma* figure a fragmented rebellion deprived of adequate political articulation as a result of their uprooted status from any sense of fixed identity and belonging (O’Shaughnessy 2007: 99-101). Therefore, their struggles become ‘raw and corporeal’ (O’Shaughnessy 2007: 100). The forever nomadic, restless movement of many *jeune* characters (Rosetta, Félix, Isa and Marie in *La Vie rêvée des anges*, the children in *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?*, Mouloud and Ismaël in *Bye-bye*, and the list goes on) evades containment, and this is what constitutes their true alterity.

Interestingly, a recurrent problem that critics have had with contemporary French films engaging with social issues is that the filmmakers are intrinsically ‘drawn’ to the alterity of others but they fail to be political about it. According to Jean-Pierre Jeancolas the films of *le jeune cinéma* manifest what he calls ‘un réel de proximité’ in which the filmmakers are engaging with fragments of an atomised society that, without the social and ideological frameworks that were strongly present in 1968 for example, are now encountered without being able to make full sense of them (Jeancolas 1997: 57). For Jean-Michel Frodon, the contemporary French filmmakers have forfeited their political focus in favour of ‘the family, but more precisely the links of filiation, parent-child relations’ (Frodon 2005: 74). His ironically titled recent article, ‘*Famille politique*’, criticises the fact that the continuing privilege of the family as the principal, if not the sole, site of the representation of social fragmentation is used in a disabling way because the current political films are precluded from the capacity of imagining other forms of collectivity as active political subjects (Frodon 2005: 74). On the other hand, O’Shaughnessy takes account of the different socio-political terrain in which the young directors of the 1990s are operating. This lack of collective struggle is central to his analysis of films which ‘have to find ways to make political sense from within the fragment itself’ (O’Shaughnessy 2007: 100). Thus, the turn to individual and family-centred stories: moments of confrontation and ethical choices are among the key

features that play a positive political role in contemporary committed films (O'Shaughnessy 2007: 135-6).

It is this critical insistence upon the challenge posed to the political commitment of *le jeune cinéma*, and the importance of paternal death looming large within this challenge, that informs my engagement with the ethical interrogation of the 'other' as the path pursued by the filmmakers themselves. The way the *jeunes auteurs* respond to the alterity of the 'other' France is manifested through their refusal to trap 'the other' within the oppressive logic of sameness and difference. Their desire is to, so to speak, return otherness to 'the other'. This has led to a redefinition of what has been said of otherness in traditional representations, in a way that recalls Levinas's critique of what he calls the system of 'totality', which has predominantly practised a reduction of the other into the self-sameness of being (Levinas 2008a: 21). For Levinas, this totalising system, reducing everything to the same, above all 'appears in the tyranny of the State', with anything not partaking of a functional position within society simply ceasing to exist (Levinas 2008a: 46). Not only does this totality fail to do justice to the other's own existence, but it is also an impossible relationship because the other's subjectivity and my own would be incommunicable if they are both inside my being (Levinas 1987: 42). Attempts at such mastery would lead to fatigue and tragedy (Levinas 1987: 50), a theme that is explored head-on in Claire Denis's *L'Intrus* (2005), loosely based on Jean-Luc Nancy's essay of the same name. Instead Levinas proposes a radical separation that gives the other its own singularity, which is, for him, the basis of the ethical relation.

It is worth noting that the idea of the relationship with the other as fusion is actively contested in contemporary debates. Put to use in a socio-political field, it gives rise to concerns around social exclusion and inequality. Wieviorka, developing the models first outlined by Pierre-André Taguieff (Taguieff 1998), delineates two major logics of racism. The first is linked to the universalising and civilising mission of the modern nation-state, to which the difference of 'the other' is subordinated by reducing 'the other' to the same. The second postulates a particularist form of racism founded on the concept of the essential and absolute differences between groups. In this case, 'the other' is set apart, excluded and, 'in the extreme case', thought to pose a threat (Wieviorka 1995: 43). The conceptual independence of these two axes, however, is not mutually exclusive but is frequently co-present, because 'a logic of inferiorization also entails processes of rejection and setting apart, and, by the same token, a logic of differentiation only take on a racist coloration if its target is not totally external to the culture or community concerned, that is, if it can be included in social relations'

(Wieviorka 1995: 44). When this seemingly intractable problem of ‘the other’, which either has to be fixed for ever or removed completely, raises itself to the political level, it recognises the existence of a more familiar pattern of social relations: that of the interlinking between otherness and inequality. The distinction between the logic of difference and that of inequality can be easily blurred, ‘either by juxtaposing them or by seeking to integrate them into a single political formula: (...) two general orders of problem which the sociologists long since learned not to confuse’ (Wieviorka 1995: 43-44).

The search for a new ethics, *vis-à-vis* ‘the other’, which aims neither to assimilate ‘the other’ to the same or expel ‘the other’ is central to the thinking of Levinas. The terms are reversed. In what he conceptualises as the dwelling *at home* [*chez soi*] which we inhabit, Levinas suggests that it is the other who is always already there, representing a primordial experience before oneself. The other comes to disrupt and challenge my being at home with myself [*chez moi*] and thus engages me into conversation. This calling into question by the other of what it sees as the complacency of the being of the self constitutes what ethics is in its essence, in which ‘my mastery, my virility, my heroism as subject can be no longer virility or heroism in relation to the other’ (Levinas 1987: 72). In *Totality and Infinity*, a key concept in outlining the possibility of an ethical encounter is the relationship of a *face to face*. The face is the way through which the other presents himself, *exceeding the idea of the other in me* (Levinas 2008a: 50) and thus transcending totalising gestures which shrink alterity to our experience of it alone. Precisely because the other comes from this dimension of height and infinity, the presence of the other’s face arouses desire. The other is the desirable, yet this desire is insatiable because the strangeness of the other also escapes one’s grasp. The impact that the other holds upon one’s existence may arouse the ‘uneasiness of the unknown’ because one is never sure what the other will bring with him/her (Levinas 2000: 16). This ‘unknown’ in Levinas, however, is not the negative limit of knowledge. As Derrida explains, this non-knowledge is the element of friendship or hospitality for the transcendence of the stranger, the infinite distance of the other (Derrida 1999: 8). The ungraspable and fundamentally unknowable nature of otherness produces a desire to ‘*receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I’ and, therefore, to be taught by the other (Levinas 2008a:51). It is this ultimately spontaneous gesture of desire for the other that inspired the publication of Luc Dardenne’s diary, *Au dos de nos images* (1991-2005), informing us of the conception of an ethical cinema that invigorates a gamut of film practices within *le jeune cinéma*. His

view of authorship relinquishes the mastery and individualism that have always been implicit in the theory of *auteur*, in which the director is the primary ‘author’.

Sortir. Simplement sortir. Rencontrer quelque chose, quelqu’un, une manière, une surface, un corps étranger, inconnu, je ne sais quoi mais sortir de moi-même, être atteint, touché. Je n’en peux plus d’être à l’intérieur. (Dardenne 2005: 11)

The becoming-*auteur* is to enter into a relation with the other and to appropriate the cinematic space in order to accommodate the other. Levinas underscores the word ‘passivity’, with particular emphasis on the end of the virile and heroic sovereignty. This Levinasian context is aptly related to *le jeune cinéma* of the 1990s: despite belonging to the traditional notions of *auteur* cinema (director-driven and small-budgeted, thus relatively free from the constraint of commercial measures), yet there is no intense search for their own artistic identity on the filmmakers’ part. The *auteur*’s subjectivity becomes at once the host and the hostage of the vision of the other. Thus, for example, the dialectic relation between director and actor was vital to the creative force behind *La vie de Jésus*. This implied that Dumont’s directorial vision served as a blank canvas upon which the real-life non-actors enacted their daily existence, with many of the sequences played out in real time – like the unbearable length of the time the unemployed youths spend sitting on the steps of the city hall amid the excruciating heat of the summer day. This duration finds equivalents in other films as well, such as the whimsical moment when Félix calls for the sun and waits until it reappears at the beginning of his journey, in Ducastel and Martineau’s *Drôle de Félix*. Frequently, improvisation, rather than staging, is the rule considered as a way to accommodate the constantly changing variation of individual alterity of the characters. The much applauded opening sequence of *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?*, featuring children messing about in the haystacks at the barn, presents an impeccable case in this regard. In the same vein, directly integrating the other through image design, as has been consciously pursued in classical *auteur* cinema, is eschewed. The question now becomes how to make cinematic space more hospitable for the characters whose social and economic marginalisation finds its expression through movement and often erratic physicality, as epitomised in the opening sequence of Rosetta’s violent refusal to leave a job in *Rosetta*. Contrary to tracking shots, where the movement of the characters is determined in advance so as to correspond to a precise framing/composition, it is the use of hand-held cameras, predominantly favoured in *le jeune cinéma* that appears to be

dictated by the characters' dislocation and their will to survive. The presence of the 'other' France not just entering into, but *overflowing*, the sphere of the vision of *le jeune cinéma* entails that we, as spectators, are wrapped in the urgency of what is happening before us. Thought is therefore suspended, as there is no time to dwell on reflection. Instead, we receive the meaning of the dramas unfolding through confrontation, thus legitimising the presence of the other.

In Levinas's seminal essay on *Time and the Other* (1987), the other's alterity not only constitutes a transcendent freedom, but also comes in the images of the 'naked face' of destitution and hunger ('the weak, the poor, the widow and the orphan', Levinas 1987: 83). Whilst the *auteurs* desire the freedom of the other, they are also unable to be blind to the appeal that the other imposes with his or her nudity. To hear his destitution and exile crying out for justice – uttering 'you shall not commit murder' – is to posit oneself responsible (Levinas 2008a: 199). 'The Other who dominates me in his transcendence is thus the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, to whom I am obligated' (Levinas 2008a: 215). However, in political idealism, 'the Other' and 'the I' function as elements of an ideal calculus; they receive from this calculus their real being, and approach one another under the domination of ideal necessities which traverse them from all sides. They play the role of moments in a system, and not that of origin (Levinas 2008a: 216). Levinas, however, also notes that 'this world without multiplicity' (Levinas 2008a: 217) loses all social signification because interlocutors renounce their unicity not in desiring one another but in desiring the universal (Levinas 2008a: 217). In my view, desiring one another through personal response is what makes the viewing experience of *le jeune cinéma* both compelling and liberating at the same time. It is because of the compelling degree of intimacy that the *auteurs's* wish to show bodies, gestures and behaviours for what they really are, though without descending into abstraction or behaviourism/pseudo-ethnography. It is also invigorating to witness the way the *auteurs* are freed from the dramaturgy of the decisive class-based, collective struggle. These filmmakers are not afraid to tackle diverse forms and genres drawing on musical influences, star presence and, sometimes, fairy tales. The individual and the personal are capable of counting and acting independently of the universal, which would mould them. In a manner that distinctly resonates with the Levinasian *face to face* relation, the opening up of the cinematic space towards the other does not belong to the order of the political, but to an ethical conversion in which the *auteur's* responsibility towards the other is born. The effect of *le jeune cinéma's* filmmaking calls for a change in the socio-political arena, but this

comes as corollary of the ethical engagement, through which the *auteurs* register the problematics of the ‘other’ France on their screens.

3. The paternal

Having at once desired the other’s freedom and attempted to respond to the other’s destitution, *le jeune cinéma* fulfils an ethical conversion from political discourses of inequality and social exclusion, to the ethical imperatives of care and responsibility towards the other. At this point, one might wonder if, in one’s desire for and responsibility to the other, one has been the site of the host and the hostage in service to the other; how, in the alterity of the other, can one remain ‘I’ without being absorbed or losing one’s self in the other? The question implies that there is still room left to negotiate the appropriate place for the subjectivity of the *auteur*, who is after all, as Paul Ricoeur problematises it, the speaking subject who still retains the initiative in this relation with the other as he is the origin of its saying (Ricoeur 2004: 86). Ricoeur asks questions regarding how to reconcile the passivity, ‘more passive than all passivity’ (Levinas 2008b: 15), pertaining to the reception of responsibility imposed on the self by the other, with the active character of the saying subject of I/the *auteur* as interlocutor. It is Derrida who extends the question to the point of wondering whether absolute, unconditional hospitality does not consist in suspending language, or even the address to the other, altogether; for language by definition is not the other’s own but the one imposed on him by ‘the master of the house, the host, the authorities, the nation, the State, the father’ (Derrida 2000: 15, 135). It is also at this juncture that Derrida perceives a seemingly irreconcilable distinction that exists between the ethical subject and the civic one (Derrida 1999: 32). A preoccupying question in Derrida’s *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* concerns how the infinite, and thus unconditional, hospitality at the opening of ethics can be regulated in a particular political and juridical practice, beyond the familial dwelling, within a society, nation, State, or Nation-State (Derrida 1999: 20, 32, 48).

In *le jeune cinéma*, nowhere is this articulated more poignantly than in the fixation on the theme of parricide². The films structurally pre-carve out any trace of the

² “the scene of parricide is regularly to be found wherever there is a question of foreignness and hospitality, as soon as the host, the one receiving, also commands” (Derrida 2000: 40-1).

paternal sphere from the narrative situation. Hence, the absence of the father figure and the 'fatherless state' is found in its representation of the 'other' France. In the films of *le jeune cinéma*, the French cultural obsession with the meaning of the name of the father is brought to a structural absence, aptly reflecting the current crisis of political leadership and socio-economic sovereignty. These measures are represented through diminishing paternal connotations, which have been traditionally coded as a paradigm for authority and reign. Whilst the ordering figure of the father has been evacuated, however, there remains an emphasis on the family as a site peopled by fragmented, disillusioned individuals. The symbolic link drawn between family and nation, between filiation and national identity, becomes increasingly pertinent when considered alongside two matters. It would be perhaps exhaustive to enlist all the *jeune cinéma* films which feature young wanderer figures as their protagonists. Yet, as Hardwick points out, they are far from the 'time-out' quality of bourgeois idleness: rather, the loitering way of existence is thrust upon them by their marginalisation and uncertainty (Hardwick 2007: 220). These characters, mostly young adults or adolescents and, in some cases, children (as in *Le fils du requin* (Merlet 1993)), are severed from the sense of place and identity, as a result of the changes taking place in a global post-industrial society which put all lower-class families in France under pressure, particularly through unemployment or loss of secure employment. On the other hand, the family situations bereft of the paternal often, and not unproblematically, feature ambivalent mothers who are unfit or unwilling to come out of the patriarchal crisis and therefore to function outside the limit of patriarchal order. Motherhood is tainted with possibilities of betrayal (*Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?*), unwilling to step into place herself in the position of parenthood (*La vie de Jésus*), or just utterly dysfunctional and slothful (*Rosetta*). One should note, however, the reductive silencing of maternal and female space in the largely homosocial universe of *banlieue* films. It is through this alignment of the thematic treatment of the youth and the maternal model that the *jeune cinéma* fleshes out the contours of a new kind of paternity.

To begin, it is tempting to identify in *le jeune cinéma* the figures of the school teacher as a stand-in for the paternal model. (Former) school teachers in *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?* and *Marius et Jeannette* configure caring and educating father figures in the given community. On the other hand, it is no coincidence that Félix's gay partner Daniel works as a teacher: Daniel's cynicism about Félix's journey to find the father he has never known is gradually borne out in the course of the film as Félix will abandon his search in the end. However, it is equally difficult not to see how the link drawn

between the school teacher and the republican mission glides into ‘[une république] qui parle d’égalité et de fraternité’ but which fails to live up to its own promises (Wieviorka 1997: 6). The gas radiator the mother borrows from the school, the symbolic help from the Republic (Grandena 2004: 117), becomes the instrument by which the mother attempts infanticide and suicide in *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?*. Meanwhile the school teacher as zealous missionary of the State in *Ça commence aujourd’hui* (Tavernier 1999) is idealised, nostalgic and ultimately backward.

In order to lay my own ground for discussion in this regard, I wish to turn to the extra-diegetic relations between the *auteurs* and the subjects of their films that go beyond the confines of narrative treatment of paternal absence. The paternal underpinnings that seem to haunt the familial representation in *le jeune cinéma* extend outward, to the complex ties that bind the filmmakers in dialogue with the alterity of their filmed subjects. I will argue through the following chapters that this relation of compassion and openness between director and his/her characters permeates all the films of *le jeune cinéma*. The case of Dumont and his non-actors in *La Vie de Jésus* merits a particular focus. Dumont addresses the spectre of responsibility and support that permeates the relational proximity to his characters, in which a bond is suggested between the two parties. His positioning as *auteur* is invested with a clear sense of his external-diegetic role as paternal figure for his young actors, whose socio-economic situation is aptly reflected in the characters they play (see chapter 4). This is akin to the reality and symbolism of personal filmmaking of political concerns, which is the thesis of *le jeune cinéma*, in that the ethical relationship between self and other gains the upper hand over the ideological treatment.

The filial model offered in the work of Levinas explores the issues that are important to the ways in which the father as the law – the state, the sovereignty, the reign in patriarchal family unit – is replaced by a new dynamic of filiation. It is through the son that the father bears an ethical relation to the future; surviving himself through the body of his offspring, who is engendered by him but still separate from him. In this way the father discovers himself in the son and yet discovers that his son is distinct, a stranger. Although within Levinas’s analysis there is an analogy between death and paternity, fatherhood is no longer the murderous oedipal fantasy. Paternity is a special case of alterity that can inform all other relations. It is the only relation in which the self becomes other and survives. The Levinasian model of paternity suggests that the transcendence of the Other is through the infinite time of paternal fecundity as a site opening up a structure of survival and influence. My application of the model, however,

is particularly influenced by Sarah Cooper's reading of Levinas' theory which differs from the philosopher in conceiving this ethical relation to the future along the filial lines. Cooper, thus, believes that the affirmation of life, of living somehow beyond physical death, and, most pertinently to my point, of the priority of the other in the life of the self, is an important facet of the ethics of influence that can actually suggest a new direction for the future (Cooper 2009: 45).

The *auteur* model of the *Nouvelle Vague* that was the oedipal rejection of the aptly-named *cinéma de papa*, and its championing of the youthful *auteur* over the overbearing studio model in the hands of older generation, is not applicable to *le jeune cinéma*. The *jeune cinéma* narratives are located outside of the understanding of such an oedipal obligation as there *is* virtually no paternal authority to be undermined that has not been systematically pre-carved out in their dealings with the socio-economic malaise of the 1990s, which I have elucidated. We could add another counter-*auteur* model that holds a strong presence in French cinematic imagination and is perhaps epitomised in the *cinéma du look*: the director's self-conscious (narcissistic?) identification with an alter-ego as his self-creation (Leos Carax with his Denis Lavant characters, for example). On the contrary, the *auteur* politics of *le jeune cinéma* is a politics of passivity which entails an ethical reworking of authorial subjectivity, in which the bond, the proximity, of the filmmaker to the Other is not one of identification but of separation and hospitality. It is in this politics of passivity, in the conversion of the subject as the centre of meaning to the subject beholden to the other, that the authorial presence of the *jeune* filmmakers encounters a logic that is at the heart of the ethical responsibility for the Other: the lineage of substitution. Derrida is perceptive of the obscure yet penetrating kinship between the subject as host and the subject as hostage (Derrida 1999: 57), which opens up a re-invention of subjectivity as a potentially paternal substitution. Whether we understand by the role of hostage a guest, given over or received as a substitutive pledge in places of the power and at the disposal of a sovereign, there is a proof of substitution: the passage from the narratives in which the predatory paternal signifiers fade away and give way to a new form of broader filial alliances of living on and transmission.

This re-configuration of the paternal after its own death constitutes, in my opinion, the central achievement of the ethical encounter with the other which is at work in *le jeune cinéma*. This re-configuration, to the degree that it is susceptible to multifaceted actualizations by each *auteur*, opens up a different structure of subjectivity of the self onto the other. The father that *le jeune cinéma* wants to reinstate is thus not a

matter of judicial concept or structure. Instead *le jeune cinéma* attempts to articulate the survival of authorial subjectivity through a recognition of fatherhood that moves us away from the antagonism of the paternal ideology, to the symbol of the father as compassionate. And this is indeed a multifaceted affair, as I shall show in the following discussion of the individual films that will constitute my corpus.

The subsequent chapters provide a survey of six emblematic films which alter the way the father is conceived through diverse paternal reconfigurations. Made between 1995 to 2000, these films span the time-period when *le jeune cinéma* was at its most productive. These films allow me, to a greater or lesser extent, to place the ethical aesthetics of filmmaking presented above in the context of debates on the ways in which the paternal crisis is related to the individual filmmaker's practice of *auteur* cinema. What follows will attempt to outline specific ideals of new paternal models that the *jeunes auteurs* propose, in particular, across the great formal and generic diversity of *le jeune cinéma*. Rather than enshrining an essentialist notion of paternal identity, each film has its own distinctive way of recognizing that what paternity might mean today is multiple, relational and shifting. The grouping of the chosen films not only reflects this achievement but draws attention to the varied and differentialised strategies that each film adopts in its textual operation. Accordingly, my methodologies will vary depending on the film. In a bid to capture the multiple registers of paternal configurations within *le jeune cinéma*, the textual analysis within each chapter will focus on one particular element of the chosen film's functioning. As we shall see, this ranges across as diverse approaches as music, fairy tale, gastronomy, camerawork, *auteur* as sociologist, and star performance.

In Chapter 1, I will focus on the filmic music and soundtrack in *Bye-bye* (1995) and how they are used in the film to reveal the figure of the postcolonial father. The way the music connotes the subjectivity of different generations within the ethnic-minority family will merit particular attention. I will then move on to consider two very different films of rural settings. *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?* (1996) is read as a dark fairy tale in Chapter 2, in order to look at the way that dysfunctional patriarchy gives way to the phantasmal return of the father. Chapter 3 discusses the rural dystopia and its recourse to the paternal in *La Vie de Jésus* (1997), where Dumont's *auteur* positioning is explored with the help of Bourdieu's sociology. The dystopian family visions of these two films will be contrasted with the more idealised *famille recomposée* in *Marius et Jeannette* (1997). In Chapter 4, the revival of local gastronomy recuperates the disappearing working-class fathers in Guédiguian's film

by contextualising the importance of regional food and drink as a key to re-establishing the community. Chapter 5 will explore the cinematography of *Rosetta* (1999) and how the positioning of the camera reconstructs the filial relation as a form of fraternal proximity and friendship. Finally, Chapter 6 will look at the dynamics between the gay *auteurs* and the *beur* star of *Drôle de Félix* (2000). Star performance and the discourse around stardom intervene in the way the film shifts its kinship relations from a paternal search to a fraternal positioning. I conclude that *le jeune cinéma* must be understood as an articulation of a changing landscape from paternal hegemony to the ethics of fraternity and, as such, it demands a new conceptualising of the *auteurs*, from masters of their own narrative to placing their storytelling at the service of a vision of alterity and otherness.

Chapter 1

Musical Perplexities: Paternal Desire and Itinerant Brotherhood in *Bye-Bye*

Bye-bye is a coming-of-age tale of Ismaël and Mouloud, two brothers of North African origin, and their journey, which unfolds through the atmospheric city of Marseille. Made by the Franco-Tunisian director Karim Dridi, the film was somewhat (undeservedly) overshadowed by Kassovitz's hugely successful *La Haine*, which came out three months before. However, *Bye-bye* rather self-consciously distances itself from the emblematic images of French people of Maghrebi descent as epitomised in *La Haine* and other *films de banlieue*, such as *Rai* (Gilou, 1995) and *Etat des lieux* (Richet, 1995), which mainly centre on young male inhabitants of the troubled *banlieue* and focuses on the Maghrebi community primarily as a site of social exclusion. The narrative of *Bye-bye*, on the other hand, foregrounds a sympathetic portrayal of the lived experience of an Arab family in keeping with the contemporary socio-economic and cultural situations in France. The film is set in the popular district of *Le Panier* within the city of Marseille – far removed from the stigmatised *cités* of urban peripheries and the dense forest of low-cost housing projects that surrounds Paris and other major French cities, including Marseille. The familiar trope of Maghrebi-French youth as paranoid *banlieusards* is partly detected, however, as Will Higbee examined in his analysis of the film; yet, it is used in a way that opens up a critique of the reductive stereotypes projected onto the ethnic minority bodies by the dominant society (Higbee 2001: 60). Dridi's insight, forceful and vivid, gets close to the gamut of issues facing French families of North African origin to such an extent that perhaps only an insider's view can be assumed, thus confirming Carrie Tarr's view of the ethnic status of authorship as a significant factor that defines the degree of subjectivity accorded to Maghrebi narrative (Tarr 2005: 98-9).

Bye-bye is interested, above all, in the cultural issues arising within the North African community, where parents, who have settled in France, and their children, who have been raised as French citizens, live together within the same family space. Throughout the film, the family's city apartment serves as a space of different cultural constructions where tension grows between the father's attachment to the *bled* (family home), Ismaël's ambivalence caught in-between France and Africa, and Mouloud's desire to remain in France. In this portrait of intergenerational difference, the place of immigrant patriarchy and how it is perceived within the family, and also in the wider French context, are foregrounded; especially in relation to how paternal aspirations are met with the younger, second generation's own idea of Frenchness. *Bye-bye* thereby tackles head-on the empirical issues that the North African fathers who raise their children in France are expected to deal with: (problematic) father-son relationships,

parental expectations and disappointments, filial rebellion and love are all woven into the Maghrebi family romance of *Bye-bye*. Dridi certainly departs from the silenced figures of immigrant fathers or their victimised images by France's immigration policies that have been accumulated in *banlieue* and *beur* filmmaking (Tarr 2007: 211, 216). As Alec Hargreaves notes when writing on *Vivre au paradis* (Bourlem Guerdjou 1999) and *Le Gone du Chaâba* (Christophe Ruggia 1998), based respectively on autobiographical narratives by Brahim Benaïcha and Azouz Begag, the figure of the Maghrebi paternal and how to represent it have been problematic for *beur* filmmakers. It seems there is a general lack of a proto-father within immigrant narratives, and, as a result, they are faced with the task of 'unearthing and rehabilitating the [Maghrebi] father figure' and addressing it to the majority ethnic audience (Hargreaves 2000: 344).

In this light, cultural references between parents and their children in *Bye-bye* are presented as distinct from each other, but without eclipsing influences that exist between them; thus constituting an essential fact of Maghrebi family life. Therefore, *Bye-bye* raises a question as to what happens when first-generation Arab immigrants, their teenage as well as adult children, and the host nation have to come to terms with different and, at times, incompatible expectations about how to conceptualise what they can call a culture of their own. One way of answering this question is to look at the use of music and the soundtrack found within the film. The music in *Bye-bye*, in my view, creates a strong channel of communication between fathers and sons, between different generations of *beur* youths, and between the ethnic-minority and French-majority population. The musical layers, more than the narrative alone, has something to say about the characters' respective identities and mutual influences. As I shall show, Dridi intermingles the representations of all these French subjects claiming their rightful place in France with a vibrant musical plenitude, where contemporary French *rai* and reggae music takes centre stage alongside 1970s' Serge Gainsbourg *chanson* and classical Arabic music as well as vernacular rap bands. This chapter will untangle the way in which specific genres of music are applied across ethnic and generational lines in *Bye-bye*.

My analysis of the music in *Bye-bye* is informed by Mireille Rosello's writing on *Postcolonial hospitality: the immigrant as guest* (2001a), which consciously builds upon Derrida's concept of hospitality. I take particular interest in the reversibility of *les hôtes* (host and guest), an important ground that Rosello uses to re-articulate the homogeneity at the core of French culture and, therefore, to delineate the multiplicity of cultural points of identification for a settled and native population, who are both the

products of the post-colonial diasporic flow (Rosello 2001a: 18). I will then turn to look more closely at the filial line, found in *Bye-bye*, between fathers and sons. As I shall argue, it is, above all, through paternal desire that the apparently self-evident opposition between the guest and the host is redefined and reinvented across the different generations. My conclusion, however, will reiterate the focus away from paternal discourses, in order to read the formation of fraternal autonomy and how it offers a revisioning of the future for Dridi's Maghrebi family narrative. To explore this point, I will draw on the ethics of paternity as developed by Levinas and turn to the way it is addressed in Derrida's meditation on the friendship of brotherhood.

1.1 From in-between space to being a host

Bye-bye begins in Paris with a scene of a domestic fire accident (the death of the handicapped youngest brother) for which Ismaël (Sami Bouajila) feels responsible. Fleeing to Marseille, Ismaël and his younger brother, Mouloud (Ouassini Embarek), visit their uncle (Benhaissa Ahourari), aunt (Jamila Darwich- Farah) and their family. It is learned that since the tragedy, Ismaël's parents have moved from Paris back to their native Tunisia, and Ismaël has been instructed by his father to send Mouloud back to the Tunisian *bled*. Strongly opposed to his enforced return to a country and culture he hardly knows, Mouloud takes refuge in the flat of Renard (Moussa Maaskri), a local drug dealer of North African origin, to avoid being shipped back to his parents. Meanwhile, Ismaël gets a job at the local shipyard and befriends a white colleague Jacky (Frédéric Andrau), and his girlfriend, Yasmine (Nozha Khouadra). Haunted by the images of the Paris incident, and caught between his attempts to locate Mouloud and their father's demands that they return to *bled*, Ismaël turns to Yasmine for comfort, which inevitably leads to a sexual relationship between them. A local gang of racist thugs, whose leader is Jacky's big brother Ludo (Philippe Ambrosini), threatens the brothers, and Ismaël and Mouloud flee the city at the end of the film.

Drīdi positions Ismaël and Mouloud at varied intersections that highlight the issue of the hybridity of Maghrebi-French subjects. Born and raised in Paris, they travel south to Marseille; the port-city is itself an interface crisscrossing the French Mediterranean heritage and the long-established immigrant history. The two brothers also fit into the traditional categorisation of children of postwar North African immigrants who act as 'mediators' between the parents and the country of residence. The common concept of the second-generation Maghrebi population is that of a bridge

connecting the parents' generation, who came recruited to work in France as culturally incompetent outsiders who kept to themselves (Hargreaves and McKinney 1997: 7-8), and the wider French native community, whose cultural illiteracy in Maghrebi existence did not help to 'appropriate for themselves a space and then speak the language of hospitality' (Derrida 1999: 15-6). However, for Mireille Rosello, this 'in-between two cultures' understanding of the diasporic experience can be problematic. Such an understanding leads the ethnic minority youth to be continually seen as 'occupying the no-man's-land between the perpetual host and the eternal guest; or rather, between hosts who never envisage renouncing their privilege and guests who are never allowed to become hosts' (Rosello 2001a: 91). Instead, Rosello suggests a need for recognition of the consequences of time, in which the situation of the parents (be they immigrant or native) has moved on and changed so much that the guest has become the host and vice versa – 'isn't a guest always implicitly an equal, who would, presumably, reciprocate at a later date, in a different space, at a different time?' (Rosello 2001a: 9, 92-3). The representation of immigrant parents in *Bye-bye* aptly reflects this paradigm shift. Having moved on from the past as settlers in France, as postcolonial economic migrants, they are now in a position to take on the role of hosts. They offer hospitality to their Parisian guests, Mouloud and Ismaël, so that the two feel at home in Marseille.

The colourful city apartment is filled with various choices and negotiations that a family is expected to go through when hosting other guests – such as how long the guests will stay, who will sleep on the sofa and whose room goes to Ismaël and Mouloud. In these moments of Maghrebi family life, however, the resilient mothers take on the role of the host far more successfully than the authoritarian fathers (Rosello 2001a: 65). This includes the scenes with the aunt, vivacious and the heart of family (an antidote to prevalent silencing or absence of female characters in *cinéma de banlieue*), helping her daughters with their English homework, as well as lightening the mood whenever a dispute arises between father and son; and the mute grandmother, who provides solace to the guilt-ridden Ismaël through her silent but warm presence. By contrast, the ups-and-downs of family relationships are conveyed more through the scenes involving male characters. It is, above all, the filial discords between fathers and sons that constitute the central plot line. The fathers in this extended family – both Ismaël's uncle and his own father (whom we hear over telephone conversations) – share in common their longing for the *bled*. Ismaël's father is now back in North Africa, while his uncle nurtures his wish for reverse migration. Yet this paternal aspiration is clearly not shared by their sons, not least the teenage Mouloud and Rhida who have

never set foot in Tunisia and experienced its culture. As a result, the filial bond between fathers and sons are represented as antagonistic: the uncle's strict rules clash with Rhida, his fashionable, hip hop-loving adolescent son; while the big family dinner sequence ends in Mouloud's refusal to talk to his father on the telephone, who insists on his return to the family home.

Amid these stubborn fathers and rebel teenage sons, Ismaël figures a 'softer' (Tarr 2005: 98-9) and more integrated *beur* masculinity in terms of his age, employment state and educational background – a point further compounded by the image and performance of Sami Bouajila as a *beur* actor with a difference (see chapter 6). Yet, at the same time, Ismaël is seen to cultivate feelings for the Tunisian homeland of his parents. This is poignantly conveyed through the series of scenes at the dock where he stares at the openness of the seascape as the ferryboat heads for North Africa. Facing the question of how to define 'home' for the Maghrebi-French subjects living in France, then, Dridi's film affirms a desire to specify what Homi Bhabha calls 'the perplexity of the unhomely', a term that refers to the culturally displaced positioning of transnational migrants, whose 'border and frontier conditions' challenge and re-define the 'sovereignty of national cultures' (Bhabha 1994: 17). In the 'perplexity of the unhomely', cultures identify themselves essentially through their projections of 'otherness' (Bhabha 1994: 17), in such a way that the cultural scenes of Marseille offered in *Bye-bye* present themselves as anything but fixed, Eurocentric assumptions around perceived French national identity. At once chaotic and playful, tensions lived by characters of different generation and ethnicity do not neatly map on to the Maghrebi/particular and the French/universal, but become vigorously supplementary to both of them. Nowhere in the film is this more evident than in the use of music, in which the contemporary French *rai* and reggae music takes the centre stage along with the classic 1970s' chanson and traditional Arab music.

1.2 Musical perplexities

The cultural outlook of Marseille's local districts found in *Bye-bye* is presented as hosting various musical scenes with a flair for African and Arabic tastes. This is palpable from the start of the film. *Bye-bye* is noted for its opening tune, 'Salem Alikoum', performed by Jimmy Oihid. With the powerful reggae rhythm of the tune's intro playing and the evocative opening line, 'Africa, Africa...radio Maghreb', clearly audible, the film begins with an aerial shot of a car driving en route to Marseille and

then shows a medium shot/close-up of Mouloud and Ismaël driving in their Citroën 2CV. They switch off the car stereo upon arrival at their destination and we realise that we have been listening to diegetic music, possibly from their car radio tuned in to one of the Franco-Maghrebi broadcasters of Marseille-area (the second largest home to ethnic minority radio stations in France after Paris (Derderian 1997: 102)). The choice of this particular song to introduce these characters serves as a ‘narrative cueing device’ (Gorbman 1987: 82-89). Oihid’s song identifies the themes that Ismaël and Mouloud will be eventually forced to deal with – such as return to North Africa, acknowledging their Muslim origin and, as the title of the film suggests, being able to say farewell to their situation, a theme which matches the song’s refrain (as well as its title) “Salem Alikoum”, a phrase which signifies both goodbye and hello in Arabic. The song also signals that the boys are physically approaching the spatial setting of the film, Marseille: a city that cross-sections Europe and Africa. Last, but not least, there is the marketing value of the soundtrack to be considered, and, as I shall argue, Dridi’s apparent promotion of Oihid’s music in his film is an outcome of a creative encounter between the filmmaker and the musician, which served as inspiration for *Bye-bye*.

Dridi’s soundtrack boasts a wide variety of artists and styles, and the list of songs ranges from hardcore reggae and rap to a more blended ragga and *rai*, from the now canonical (but then scandalous) Serge Gainsbourg to post-war Arabic music. It is notable that nearly every generation and peer group of characters in the film is accompanied by what may be seen as their own ‘theme music’, accredited with a specific musical genre and singer(s). The aim of my analysis of the music in *Bye-bye* is to explore the way the use of each particular group of musical pieces used becomes the locus that denotes the generation/social group it accompanies. These lines of ‘theme music’ help make sense of the characters, and the different conceptions they have of themselves, by drawing upon our extra-diegetic knowledge of the given musical styles that interact with conceived ideas of what is involved in that genre of music, such as race, national culture and other traits.

I shall first start with the ways *Bye-bye* touches on rap and hip hop music through its narrative and soundtrack. The dominant musical style of *Bye-bye* is reggae with a touch of *rai*, and the film’s soundtrack is largely devoid of pre-existing rap songs. This is unusual for a film released in the year 1995, the year that saw the consolidation of rap music in France (Martinez 2008: 40); especially as the film is set in Marseille, home to buzzing French rap groups like IAM. It is important to note here that blasting rap music is usually associated with young *beur* characters and can be heard on the

soundtracks of many *banlieue* and *beur* films. Although in *Bye-bye*, rap music is relished by the younger (teenage) generation of Mouloud and Rhida, its recorded use is somewhat absent. References to contemporary rap are current in the scene where the two boys teasingly argue over who is the best between IAM and Suprême NTM. The scene reflects the hip hop's role as a key cultural expression of identity readily embraced by young people of an ethnic minority origin (Cannon 1997: 155, Warne 1997: 144). It is also notable that the split of taste in their favourite rap groups denotes the difference of their characters. IAM and Suprême NTM are seen to represent two disparate subgenres of French contemporary rap. The music of IAM, who rap in a more flowing, less staccato style, tends to follow an almost melodic line so that its didactic message, glorifying multiethnic urban youth culture, can be easier to listen to (Cannon 1997: 160, Martinez 2008: 44); on the other hand, Suprême NTM, retaining "hardcore" connotations, are known for their anti-establishment discourse promoting the messages of inner-city ghetto culture that is both fascinating and horrifying (their 1992 single "Nick la police" was featured in the soundtrack of *La Haine*). Accordingly, Rhida's devotion to IAM identifies his character as the more moderate and pacifying between the two; whereas Mouloud's attachment to the more radical NTM foresees the forthcoming danger in his association with Renard and his acts of vandalism to Ludo's car. It also reflects the geographical allegiances – Rhida is from Marseille, as are IAM, and Mouloud from Paris, as NTM.

However, we do not hear any pre-existing rap pieces from these two bands, or from any other recording rap artists, in the soundtrack of the film. The only rap song is the diegetic one composed and sung by Mouloud, entitled 'Beur Pourri'³. Yet, even this is not met with a proper audience response: Ismaël, upon listening to his brother in Rhida's room (walls adorned with the posters of Massilia Sound System, to which Ismaël appears indifferent), first reacts by trying to correct the spelling of the song's written lyrics, which primarily goes against the spirit of hip hop to 'escape the obsession with the written word and find a physical union between a text and its interpreter' (Martinez 2008: 41). Given the film's wide use of other genres of popular music appropriated by contemporary *beur* youths, such as ragga and *rai*, the absence and apparent lack of appreciation of rap in *Bye-bye* appears deliberate. It is also worth noting that French rap music's adoption of popular American idioms and the subsequent appropriation of notions such as the 'paraochism' promoted by IAM, a concept hailing

³ 'a rotten *beur*', and a play on words between *beur* and *beurre*.

multicultural utopia, have been criticised for bypassing negative representation of the realities faced by North African communities (Prévos 1996: 721, Cannon 1997: 152, Martinez 2008: 46.). In this light, *Bye-bye* shows a reluctance to endorse the IAM-style glorification of a multiethnic urban youth culture, which is regarded as one of the aspects that made films like *La Haine* an international success. At the same time, the film resists the pitfall of media reception that associated *banlieues* and ethnic minority youth with hardcore hip-hop subcultures influenced by the American, ghettoised gangsta-style.

The parents' music is, however, the music of their Arabic heritage. Unlike the rap music of Mouloud and Rhida, they are shown accompanied by a pre-existing Arabic song. In the living room, the uncle and aunt watch *Ayza Atgawwez*, an Egyptian film directed by Ahmed Badrahkan in 1952, with their pre-teen daughters and the grandmother. The extract played on screen features the song 'Zamane y'a hob', sung by Farid Al Atrache who also stars in the film. Al Atrache, an instantly recognisable face for anyone who might be presumed familiar with classical Arabic films, was a pan-Arabic singer, composer, *oud* player and actor renowned for his romantic love, as well as patriotic and religious, songs and for his prolific acting career lasting four decades. His dominance became so commonplace that 'the [Egyptian] movie industry would not be what it is if he [Farid Al Atrach] had not helped to build it up' (Danielson 1997: 120). Again, as with the references to rap music, Al Atrache's musical score goes beyond *Bye-bye*'s narrative. It signifies through the association of the music with the film's target audience, including young people of Maghrebi origin who might have presumably acquainted themselves with the music and the cinema of Al Atrache either through their parents' generation or Arabic television channels at home (as exemplified by the daughters in *Bye-bye* watching *Ayza Atgawwez* at home with the family). The audience's knowledge of Al Atrache's celebrity status – hailing from a noble lineage of the Syrian nationalist Al-Atrache family who fought against the French colonial regime⁴ and as a diasporic artist possessing four nationalities (Syrian, Lebanese, Egyptian and Sudani) who repeatedly chose his character's name to be "Wahid", meaning lonely as well as unique – creates an extra-diegetic bond with the narrative of the film. The discourse around the celebrity of Al Atrache is appropriated in *Bye-bye* to provide a critical perspective on the narrative situations of the parents who are associated with his

⁴ Al Farid was born into a royal family of a religious minority clan- Princess Alia and Prince Fahd al-Atrash spearheaded the political struggle against the French mandate regime in Syria's Druze Mountain after World War I. Due to the potential of French reprisals against his family, the Druze leader was compelled to send his family to seek refuge in Egypt (Asmar 1998).

music. Therefore, the legacy Al Atrache established in his adopted countries can be seen as speaking about the lived experience of the first generation Maghrebi diasporas, who have adjusted themselves to France without losing the cultural values of the *bled*. This, in my view, allows us to elide the ‘marginal’ state reserved for the first generation of immigrants in the *banlieue* films of 1990s and, instead, to think of the parents in terms of their faith in prosperity in their adopted country. This can be witnessed in the form of the father’s belonging to the established working class community of Marseille’s maritime industry and the mother’s belief in upward mobility for their children through schooling.

Dridi fashions a musical dichotomy between the parents’ devotion to Arab musical inheritance and the hip hop generation to which Mouloud and Rhida belong. Several oppositions in the film reflect this dichotomy. Mouloud and Rhida are notably absent while the family is entertained by Al Atrache’s performance in the movie. During the filial quarrel, the uncle visibly feels his authority is challenged by his son Rhida, adorned in hip-hop attire (baggy trousers, bold accessories and IAM’s ‘Je Danse le Mia’-logoed t-shirt). The most striking example is the sequence where a funeral is in progress in a relative’s town house, where Mouloud and Rhida take refuge from local racist thugs. Intrigued by the view of the different generations of men and women sitting, exchanging soft conversations and card-playing, Mouloud looks into the gender-segregated first and second rooms; a slow circular point-of-view shot follows Mouloud’s ‘outsider’s’ gaze. The camera then follows his gaze to the third room, where Arabic chanting encircles a corpse laid out on the floor. Mouloud comes to a standstill in front of this traditional rite: an aspect of the Tunisian *bled* where he has never set foot. Mouloud’s expression of utter incomprehension, combined with the fact that he does not enter any of the three rooms, echo what *beur* scholars Azouz Begag and Abdellatif Chaouite suggest as the young *beurs* being pulled apart by two opposing forces: Maghrebi traditions of the mythical homelands of their parents at one pole and the social institutions of France at the other. These ‘two spheres of reference are stacked together, one on top of the other, but do not speak the same language and are often problematic’⁵ (Begag et al. 1990: 47). However, it is also notable that, if the younger children’s and the parents’ music reveal a polarity in their style and artefacts,

⁵ “Ils sont sujets dès leur plus jeune âge à une double aimantation identificatoire: celle de leur famille et celle des institutions sociales (école, télévision...), deux foyers de référence emboîtés l’un dans l’autre mais qui ne parlent pas les mêmes langues, qui sont souvent problématiques.”

Bye-bye binds them into a series of intertextual practices, in which the discourses *around* the musical work – such as the intertextual influence and notions of celebrity, for example – matter more than the musical content.

Ismaël’s music, on the other hand, *does* retain a traditional symbiotic relationship with the film, whose function it is to be integrated within the diegesis of the film world and to enhance the narrative of the film. The music of Ismaël is largely reggae, including a *rai* song. Contrary to the music of other groups/generations that has a limited use, the tunes of Jimmy Oihid extensively accompany Ismaël seven times throughout the film. Five of the songs are composed and written by Oihid, including two of his pre-existing numbers (‘Salem Alikoum’ and ‘Y en a marre’) from his 1991 album titled *Salem Alikoum Algerie*. The opening song ‘Salem Alikoum’, mixing the typical ‘one-drop’ rhythm (with only the third beat of a four-beat measure accented) with African drumming, sets the reggae tone for what follows and, significantly, recurs throughout the course of the film. What merits an investigation is the way the adaptation of this song works as *the* theme music of the film – a ‘leitmotif’ – and also the way Oihid’s musical style as a whole serves for a leitmotivic purpose in the film, both denoting and connoting Ismaël’s inner voices. The use of the song ‘Salem Alikoum’ fits into Claudia Gorbman’s definition of the filmic leitmotif as ‘any music – melody, melody-fragment, or distinctive harmonic progression – heard more than once during the course of a film’ (Gorbman 1987: 26). When the song is heard for the second time on screen, it is performed live by Oihid, who gives a concert performance on the Marseille beach in front of a packed, ethnically-mixed audience. Ismaël, tired of searching for Mouloud who ran away in revolt against his father’s orders to return to Tunisia, drifts into the scene where he is met by Jacky and his girlfriend Yasmine. A night scene filled with an intoxicating use of psychedelic lightings, Oihid’s performance reaches a highly seductive climax as the crowd all chant along the refrain “Salem, Salem Aleikum”. This coincides with Ismaël’s emotional heightening as he realises he can no longer suppress his feelings for Yasmine. It is also notable that Oihid switches freely from Arabic (‘Salem Alikoum’) to French (the following number, ‘Y’en a Marre’), as he does with musical style from reggae to ragga (a reggae subgenre with a more easily recognised dancehall rhythm, often crossing over with other genres such as rap and hip hop and also *rai* (Moskowitz 2006: xiv)). Oihid’s stage performance of ‘Y’en A Marre’ is to be set against the later flashbacks reminding Ismaël (and the viewers) of the fire incident in Paris that caused the death of his youngest brother. Dridi contrasts the images of flames from the incident with images of water, to the

background in which the voluptuous Yasmine as a backing vocalist is seen on stage. The visual contrast, reinforced by the Oihid song, creates a reflection of Ismaël's inner turmoil, which is to be inscribed in the lifestyles of *métissage* in Marseille. If Ismaël's position seems unclear seized between his feelings of guilt for his detachment from paternal authority and from the past, it is Oihid's music as leitmotif that ensures the coherence of his identity.

Oihid incarnates what is at once foreign and French. His music epitomises the aesthetic miscegenation of national cultures and genres that also dominates the cultural scenes of Marseille (another example being his performance at the street wedding of a mixed-race couple). A French singer of Algerian origin, dubbed the 'Algerian James Brown' with 'charisma à la Piaf'⁶, he fuses West-African reggae with the vocal panache reminiscent of *chaâbi*, a traditional Middle-Eastern singing style. Whilst his romantic lyricism self-admittedly borrows from the French chansons of Jacques Brel⁷, Oihid at times allies with more pop-oriented singers of *rai* such as his fellow Algerian, Cheb Khaled⁸. At the same time, Oihid's persona conceptualises what he has left behind in the *bled* of his country of origin. One thing to be noted here is his rather self-consciously reserved stance towards *rai*. Oihid, a eulogist of '*peace and love* plutôt pudique', denounces *rai* on the basis of its swaggering, dissolute and worldly lyrics about drink and women (Simonet 1996: 28); despite the views that see a loose association between his music and the popular genre (Cannon 2000: 167, Gross et al. 1992: 16). Dressed in the Algerian national football team kit, he sings about Palestinians, children, nostalgia for home, and is devoted to the people of Algeria through liaison with charities. Before his debut as a singer, Oihid was an illegal resident in France. His decision to remain in France, surviving by doing odd jobs, and not to 'retourner au bled avant de régulariser sa situation', was reportedly a source of inspiration for Dridi, 'le réalisateur [qui] a entrevu là un début de scénario' on his encounter with the singer (Simonet 1996: 28). Therefore, there is a clear sense that *Bye-*

⁶ Oihid was compared to James Brown throughout the 1990s (Dalhaye 1998), a comparison the singer publicly endorsed (the stage name Jimmy alluding at once to James Brown and Jimmy Cliff). The analogy proves still valid as seen in a recent article 'Punk Bilingue' in *Rock and Folk*, March 2008, No 487. On the other hand, Philippe Vandel, writing in *Actuel* in 1988, presented the then little known Oihid as a 'prodigy' with a 'charisma à la Piaf', comparing Oihid's success story after suffering a childhood illness that led to a fifteen-year period of hospitalisation, during which time he discovered his talent for singing, to that of the famous Edith Piaf (Vandel 1988).

⁷ On his TV appearance on Direct 8, Oihid speaks of how Brel was the most listened-to singer at his childhood home in Algeria and his love of Brel's lyrics, one of which, 'Ne me quitte pas', he performs live in Arabic translation.

⁸ Oihid kicked off his career giving a side performance to Khaled's gala concert at Paris in his debutant period in 1998. The two singers since performed in duo on 'Taratata' on France 2.

bye mobilises a return to Africa as a potential salvation. This is further fuelled by the influx of a Burning Spear ‘root’ reggae song ‘Old Marcus Garvey’ (1975), accompanying Ismaël and Mouloud’s flee from Marseille at the end of the film⁹. Even before that, there is a stunning scene where Cheb Khaled’s poignant *rai* tune ‘Male Hbibti Madjatch’ accompanies Ismaël, who is framed against a ship as it passes out to the Mediterranean sea, but is also visually closed in against the sea after the ship’s passing, between two arms of the jetty. It thus transpires that the reading of the music and celebrity of Oihid as the leitmotif of the film, backed by the fusion with more hardcore reggae and *rai*, suggests an implication that there is room for manoeuvre for Ismaël to negotiate his identity on French soil. As Ismaël’s troubled position as a rather more traditional son to his family in an arena of miscegenation and permissiveness proves, the process of inter-culturation is taken to be rooted in France, whose native culture is by now anything but Eurocentric notions of homogeneity. Perhaps a mutation is already happening to the French national identity and it can be playful, despite racist oppositions, as the film’s rendering of Serge Gainsbourg chanson testifies.

The last group in my analysis is the generation of *Français de souche* which embraces the *Front National*’s nationalist discourse. Ludo, an *ex-légionnaire* who is first seen evicting an African family from an apartment building, is the crop-haired leader of a group of local drinkers and racists, whose key conversations take place in their drinking and card-playing nights at a terraced bistro named l’Olympique – thus, associated with Marseille football culture, celebrated for its adulation of foreign star players that is concurrent with social exclusion of local ethnic minority youth (Bromberger et al. 1993: 123). Having threatened Rhida (“If we see you again, we’ll cut you”, “Algeria is over there, this side is France. So fuck off”), they talk about their sentiments on the issue of what it means to be French, in a way that epitomises their fear of *métissage*. As the conversation goes on, a jaunty chanson is heard diegetically as the bistro puts a record on. The chanson is ‘Aux armes et caetera’, Serge Gainsbourg’s reggae version of the French national anthem ‘La Marseillaise’. Set to the ganja-inflected reggae beat of rhythm masters, Sly and Robbie, it creates an off-hand reconstruction of the anthem. A brief history of the birth of the song and the outrage caused by its release, and subsequent success, merits an investigation. Gainsbourg, an ‘artiste caméléon’ at once reflecting the popular tastes of his time and capable of being a reference for explicit but changing political ideas (Francfort 2007: 31), adopted reggae

⁹ Cannon writes of the film’s use of the 1970s’ reggae that there is a clear sense that Dridi to some extent mobilises its ‘roots’ status and its echoes of earlier struggles (Cannon 2000: 169).

in his concept album *L'Homme à la tête de chou* (1976), before the worldwide success and the grand European tour of Bob Marley. In 1979, he went to Kingston to work with Jamaican musicians and recorded a reggae version of “Marseillaise”, replacing the lyrics of the refrain (which he considered ‘such glorious odes to violence’ of ‘*the* bloodiest song of all time’ (Plantenga 1999)) with the much simplified ‘aux armes et caetera’. The chorus, led by Marley’s fellow musician and wife Rita, was met with moral outrage by his right-wing opponents who regarded the song a profanity to the sacredness of the anthem, ‘inacceptable lorsqu’il s’agit d’un chant viril, le chœur de nymphettes ne peut émettre que des onomatopées’ (quoted in Francfort 2007: 33), and forced him to cancel concerts through bomb threats. The context in which *Bye-bye* uses the song – in the bistro sequence – is not dissimilar to the discourse of nearly three decades ago: that there was something in the liberal-minded singer and in the origin of the African musicians that could not be associated with the entitlement to sing the French national anthem. The chorus line “aux armes et caetera”, clearly audible over the conversation, seems to ooze casual indifference to the self-censored part of the original text. The references to ‘un sang impur’ and, by extension, to Ludo and his pals’ xenophobia fails to recognise the exchange and reciprocity inherent in French national identity.

1.3 Paternity begets brotherhood

As I have shown, the ‘theme songs’ of *Bye-bye* acknowledge the difference of opinions, beliefs and practices that grounds the specificities of each generation: rap references accompany teenage *beurs*; classical Arabic music of diaspora accompanies the (grand-)parental generation; Serge Gainsbourg’s ironic reggae song accompanies the followers of Lepenist ideologies. By placing at the centre of all this musical perplexity, the leitmotif of Jimmy Oihid’s border-crossing, transcultural ‘World Music’, Dridi’s film reads as a plea for tolerance and *métissage*; while, at the same time, voices the price of leaving one’s homeland and relocating to a country where hospitality and its flip-side co-exist. Crucially, this feeling of longing for – but not necessarily belonging to – the place of origin is, above all, reiterated through the filial lines between father-son relationships, where the apparently self-evident opposition between the guest and the host is being redefined and reinvented. This is related to the way Levinas perceives how paternity engenders desire through filiation: it is through the son that the father becomes the other and survives, thereby bearing an ethical relation to the future;

whereas, ‘the son resumes the unicity of the father and yet remains exterior to the father’ (Levinas 2008: 268, 279). For Levinas, ‘the possible offered to the son and placed *beyond* what is assumable by the father still remains the *father’s* in a certain sense’ (Levinas 1987: 36), and, surely, the implication of Oihid’s music – a lament for fading cultures – draws much closer to the *bled*, the land of the father who summons the sons to return, than the filmic narrative appears to do. However, as the film’s conclusion makes it clear, this hardly makes for a reconciliation, not least in the continued conflict of identity and belonging between immigrant fathers (whose lack of egalitarian perspective fails to see the alterity of their children), and the second-generation sons (who may have trouble understanding the parents’ refusal to interpret their settled country as a final destination). Instead, through music, an ethics of filial influence is established: *Bye-bye* provides some resolution by giving Maghrebi fathers the much needed justification for the complexity of their motives and aspirations, behind the years of investment for a better future elsewhere.

Bye-bye both respects this paternal legacy and moves on. The focus, ultimately, lies in the future of Ismaël and Mouloud and how the brothers will negotiate their own positioning. Facing the paternal orders of North Africa and their forced return, on one hand, and their perspective within the Hexagon that places them in a position of exclusion as provoked by Ludo’s xenophobia, on the other, Ismaël and Mouloud find themselves balancing on a tight-rope their trajectory pitted against the two authority systems: the mythical *bled* and the French Republic. Perhaps, not surprisingly, *Bye-bye* suggests that the brothers, wanting to opt out of these paternal discourses, wish for another paradigm altogether. Ismaël and Mouloud operate their selfhood somewhere that is neither the Maghreb nor France, as they search for a new way of life, which ultimately comes in the form of fraternity. It is thus no coincidence that the last music we hear in *Bye-bye* is a highly accentuated flamenco guitar melody, as Ismaël finally takes on brotherly responsibility on his own terms. Ismaël’s fraternal role is now invested with a renewed sense of paternal function towards the younger generation: he concludes not to send Mouloud back to Tunisia; he also decides to flee Marseille, setting off in their 2CV which, as the music suggests, is potentially heading for Spain. ‘[R]ejecting the identities imposed upon them by the third parties’ (Higbee 2001: 62), this defiant ending nevertheless confirms they have outstayed Marseille’s welcome. The pile of suitcases on the back seat of the car suggests the perpetual feeling of uprootedness that Rosello calls the position of ‘neither quite host nor quite guest’, as eternal process of departures and (deferred) arrivals (Rosello 2001a: 114).

Ismaël and Mouloud's departure at the end of the film, relating back to their parents' diasporic experience but taking their own path in a distinct way, is actually layered with a sense of recommencement and possibility. The openness of their voyage as they face the seascape, unbounded this time with no boat for North Africa in sight, suggests that the brothers do have a choice as to how they might live differently. This revisioning of the future is reserved, above all, for the 'place of fraternization' (Derrida 2005: 99). In his reflections on equality and the friendship of brothers, Derrida articulates the notion of the 'obligatory process (...) in the filiation of what is born and what dies. It is the place of fraternisation as the symbolic bond alleging the repetition of a genetic tie. Responsibility must imperatively answer for itself before what is, at birth and at death' (Derrida 2005: 99). Ismaël takes up this challenge, testing the infinite capabilities embodied by the sea. The two brothers will thus know a different outcome, away from the ambivalent feelings cultivated by their father's generation. This is written in the final image, where the waning filial connection between fathers and sons fades out, and gives way to fraternal compassion and responsibility.

In this chapter, we have seen how the figure of the postcolonial father is 'othered' and gives way to fraternity, by examining the ways the filmic music and soundtrack is used to connote the subjectivity of different generations within the ethnic-minority family. The conundrum of the paternal continues in the next chapter, where a different type of paternal dysfunction is considered in relation to rural settings and, above all, phantasmal underpinnings.

Chapter 2

From Realism to Fairy tale: the Place of the Imaginary Father in

Y Aura-t-il de la Neige à Noël?

Sandrine Veysset's *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?* (*La Neige*, hereafter) is a tale of a mother-centered family, where paternity is inherently dysfunctional. The story, inscribed on the backdrop of the southern hinterland, focuses on the resistance of the mother and her children to the treatment they receive at the hands of the exploitative, and often absent, father. An unspecified, yet visibly remote and marginalised, rural province provides the settings for the family community in *La Neige*¹⁰. Giving a voice to the geographically and culturally neglected area of *la France profonde* was Veysset's intention: choosing the rural setting reflects her critique of the French film industry and its unilateral focus on Paris as centre of activity and privileged settings (Vassé with Veysset 1997: 32). For Veysset, the rural makes a case for a family romance as a tool for an engagement which, behind idyllic postcard images, can pose a challenge to the paternalistic republican image of France as still very much a centralised country. Therefore, in *La Neige*, an implicit link is set up between the father as a corrupt proprietor of the farm where the mother and the children live and work together, and the State which is out-of-reach, despite demanding their subordination. An ogre-like figure, the father is rigid and unyielding in his obsession with money and work. As I shall show in this chapter, the paternal in *La Neige* represents what Slavoj Žižek calls the primal 'anal father', embodying an 'excess' of the Name of the Father that has to be eliminated by the maternal (Žižek 2008: 143). The rural, in this respect, becomes a forceful site where paternal power and control is constantly contested from within the family.

On the other hand, dedicated to Veysset's own mother, *La Neige* privileges maternal devotion. The mother provides stubbornly loving attentiveness towards the seven illegitimate children that she has had with the father, while he lives elsewhere with his legitimate family. The idealised 'earth mother' in *La Neige* was seen as a welcome return of the archetypal nurturing femininity (Richou 1996: 58), and, as such, acclaimed as a maternal love story where the seven children are also her 'reward' (Clarke 1997: 57). However, as I shall discuss in this chapter, the mother is an ambivalent figure in *La Neige*. Motherhood, in the absence of viable paternal functions, is tainted with possibilities of maternal abuse and an inability to recognise the alterity of her children. A problematic, rather regressive 'ambiguïté des relations affectives' (Audé 1997: 21) dictates the mother's behaviour and returns her resentment onto herself

¹⁰ *La Neige* was filmed in a location close to Avignon, where Veysset spent her childhood. However, no indication of the place is given within the narrative, which, according to Veysset, was intended to heighten the fairytale feel of the film (Frodon 1996b).

and her children, instead of denouncing the father for his wrongdoings. The mother's complicity with the father also disrupts the image of an unproblematic motherhood, and the extent to which *La Neige* can be exonerated from the 'tedious tales of maternal martyrdom and malice' is questioned by Carrie Tarr (Tarr 1998: 196).

This maternal ambivalence, at once encompassing the maternal myth and idealisation to maternal vilification – mother as killer of her children – is in keeping with the film's formal use, where gritty realism coincides with fairy tale. In *La Neige*, what begins as a social-realist drama exploring maternal resistance to patriarchal threat, finishes in a phantasmal fairy tale that promises again a return of the paternal. Crucially, in this shift of forms, the paternal paradigm changes to reveal a relation of fatherhood that moves away from the association of the father with the law to the symbol of the father as compassionate. Therefore, beneath the apparent promoting of images of motherhood, *La Neige* can be read as a narrative of paternal quest: the oedipal father is rejected from the family as dead and, instead, through recourse to the 'optative' character of the fairy tale (Warner 1994: xvi), fatherhood is associated with promise. This move towards the symbol of the father as responsibility for the future essentially evokes Levinas's thinking on paternity. In *La Neige*, as the final gesture of infanticide and suicide suggests, there is a sense that the father is needed as a defence against a maternal crisis. This eclipse of maternity, inherent in the Levinasian notion of paternity that excludes feminine time (Levinas 2008: 263), however, reveals a more paradoxical relation between the maternal and paternal. Thus, the question is raised as to whether Veysset's film envisages the same degree of responsibility for the maternal function in the family.

Therefore, this chapter traces the problematic terms in which the paternal and maternal lines are inscribed in the shift of forms effectuated in *La Neige* from realism to fairy tale. The first part of this chapter regards the film's social-realist agenda and how it perceives rural motherhood as resisting dynamics at the heart of family. Whether the correlation between the rural and the maternal, and the fact that this can be seen as regressive, compromises the realism of the film, will merit particular attention. The second line of investigation looks at the fairy tale in the film. Fatherhood is thematically re-imagined in the form of fairy tale, effectuating a transformation from an oedipal father, who has to be expelled from the family narrative, to a very different father figure that is a benign and loving paternal. What is at stake in this transformation is the maternal descent from 'fusion' to 'aggression' (Irigaray 2007: 32): two extreme versions of motherhood that both consistently fail to question the way the maternal

functions are predicated by patriarchal imagination. Finally, in the third part of the chapter, I will analyse the last images of *La Neige* and how they saturate the paternal and maternal relation into the texture of the film. The final family picture, as I shall show, reads as an ultimate fantasy of a father who, perhaps, loves like a mother, whereas this claim to the loving imaginary father also represents a claim to the loving mother.

2.1 Mapping out the new realism in *La Neige*

Veysset's quest for realism brings out a quasi-documentary quality in filming her subject matter – an unglamourised representation of country life. The unforced naturalism was regarded as something of a novelty, striking a chord with modern viewers' appetites for a sense of contact with the real in the times of digitalised reproduction (Arild Fetveit 1999: 798). It resulted in an impressive audience measure (829,336 domestic spectators) and prestigious awards (the 1997 *César* for the best first film and *Prix Luis-Delluc* for the best French film of the year). *La Neige* was noted for its focus on the combination of realism and the magical. For example, Landrot writes that Veysset has '*le sens de l'instant. Elle sait capter la seconde précise où la banalité quotidienne se teinte de poésie*' (Landrot 1996: 30). Above all, Veysset's film has provided her with the title of direct heir to 'neo-realist' cinema by Beugnet (Beugnet 2003: 349) and Toscan (Toscan 1996) among others, and the latter compares Veysset to Rossellini and De Sica. The authentic location, the use of largely non-professional, locally cast actors and the use of unpolished cinematography, indeed, recall the desire to 'integrate the reality' of the socially disadvantaged into the cinema, which had been key practices of the Italian neo-realist school of 1940 to 1955 (Williams 1980: 36). Veysset testifies to her own desire to 'show how people really live in the country' (Romney 1997: 16). She wanted the authenticity of place, detail and moment to be '*entièrement vu de l'intérieur, la réalisation fait du spectateur un membre supplémentaire de cette famille*' (Frodon 1996a).

This emphasis on showing 'things as they are' raises important issues about looking at the way *La Neige* is on the borderline between naturalism and realism. The narrative of *La Neige* concentrates on the difficulty of the marginalised child workers and their mother, caused by the polygamous father, and the destructive effect of patriarchal abuse on the family. Whether *La Neige* perpetuates the reality imposed on the mother and the children by the dominating father or challenges its contradiction to

offer a vision of a change is at stake. Williams notes that the notion of realism is necessarily problematic politically because it inevitably draws on pre-existing beliefs about reality, which are themselves ensnared in the dominant ideology (Williams 1980: 11). Realism often crosses over with naturalism, which, as Williams points out, can cause predicaments. Naturalism describes events with great detail but without providing the viewer with a key to understanding them, and thereby denies him/her access to the truth (Williams 1980: 11). The 'truth' in *La Neige* concerns providing an a priori rationale behind the mother's reluctance or inability to escape her situation in the first place: why does she stay with the father despite the exploitative nature of the relationship? Or, why does she allow her children's mistreatment at all?

The film's naturalism defies a clear answer to these questions. There is an echo here of the literary naturalism of the nineteenth-century novel where the transgressive desires of the protagonists are domesticated through the logic of the plot that works to eliminate disturbing elements (Bersani 1976: 63). Veysset insisted on filming over the consecutive seasons of summer, autumn and winter. In addition, weeks of location-based rehearsals were undertaken to encourage the performers to take on as many of the reflexes of the rural labourer as physically possible (Vassé with Veysset 1997: 22-3). The camera style was conceived to accommodate the constantly moving young children, who were non-actors recruited through local casting. All these elements contribute to the film's artless, spontaneous feel. As a result, all the actors, especially the children (Alexandre Roger as Bruno, and Flavie Chimènes as Blandine, the youngest daughter, in particular) and the mother (Dominique Reymond), appear impeccably comfortable on screen. The agricultural activities are depicted depending on the seasons, which further enhance the naturalistic tone of the film. The mother's acceptance of her role is inexplicably, but seamlessly, bound to the rhythms of rural life and the passing of the seasons. This in turn runs the risk of 'naturalising' the family's situation and, more problematically, the paternal cruelty within the family.

However, the refusal to give an overt and transparent explanation is tempered by more 'nuanced' images. A wealth of visual clues and attention to detail determines, or casts a different light on the way the characters' behaviour reads. One of the perpetual images in the film is of the family working in the field. The tomato field is filmed initially from a distance which emphasises the size of the field – bent bodies are lost in the vast expanse of vegetables and exposed to the wind and sun – before the camera closes in on the characters. The isolation of the agricultural workers, deprived of the entitlement to professional solidarity or support, might explain why paternal tyranny is

tolerated within the farm community in the first place. Similarly, the female student worker's incredulous response to the mother having had seven children hints at the situation of the rural of the 1970s, where the second-wave feminist movement remains an alien element¹¹. It is worth noting here Veysset's penchant for the long take and ensemble scenes, which are often used in the film to capture and accommodate the dynamics of a group of people. Beugnet identifies this tendency as one of the defining looks of the 'new realism' of the 1990s, of the films made by young directors, as it reflects the 'drive to portray the individual in context rather than in isolation' (Beugnet 2006: 249). In the ritualistic images of agricultural activity – harvesting carrots and radishes, picking parsley, planting cabbages, chopping fire wood, to name but a few – it is apparent that *La Neige* evokes a certain nostalgia for work and for forms of conviviality. Significantly, Veysset multiplies viewpoints in these group images. By refusing to identify a single definite position from which the viewer can regard the whole film (or a given scene), *La Neige* makes sure that the characters themselves cannot be identified in any final way. This serves to disentangle the family romance, which seemingly takes the father's reign for granted, and changes the way the power structure reads to uncover the latent socio-economic context.

The scene at the fountain conveys the fluid dynamics between the family and other workers. Filmed mostly in a Bazinian deep-focus and long takes, the scene features the occasional close-up of the hands of adults skillfully brushing off soil and rinsing vegetables, while the children collect and deliver them to the storage. Behind this idyllic nostalgia of communal workmanship, however, the scene retains the power relations in the farm between father as employer and mother as employee, which underscores the precariousness of the mother's situation. Unable to secure the sense of existence and social status, which rural labour traditionally used to offer¹², the mother is seen to be treated by the father as no better than any other temporary, thus replaceable, workers. Meanwhile, the fact that the father harbours a predatory interest in a female student worker exhibits his abuse of power and brutal treatment of women. Though the mother's furious accusation manifests her revulsion, tension also erupts within the paternal manipulation that potentially sets up female jealousy and resentment between

¹¹ *La Neige* appears to be set sometime in the 1970s when Veysset was growing up (as suggested by the black-and-white TV and the clothing worn by the characters). However, Veysset wanted to avoid any overt references to period in order to give her story 'une impression d'intemporel, comme dans les contes' (Frodon 1996b).

¹² For example, in the films of Marcel Pagnol, such as the *Marius* trilogy set in Provence, we see the typical view of the rural community where the villagers hold stable identities with regard to their land and their work.

the women. When the sequence ends in a dispute and shows the mother sent off to the field by the father to collect parsley away from the rest, what follows is another important motif – the theme of the money – that is inseparable from the world of work depicted in the film. In the next scene, we see the father giving Jeanne, the eldest daughter, a small sum of secret money for being a good household worker, in contrast to her ‘sulky’ mother. An interior shot filmed in shady lighting, the scene features the transaction of money between the daughter and her father in the way that suggests the ambiguous boundary between tokens of affection and means of sexual exploitation, alluding to his incestuous advances to his daughter later in the film.

By implicating multiple viewpoints in these group images, *La Neige* privileges the socio-economic context over the psychological link. The most striking example takes place in a key scene in the film, in which the mother confronts the father in an open field, and announces her decision to leave the farm with her children. Infuriated, the father threatens to kill them all, then walks away. The sequence then dissolves into an iris encircling the mother who stands alone in the field and carries the baby with a Madonna-like attitude. An unusual moment and the only time it is used in the film, the use of an iris is crucial in two ways. On one hand, the dreamy feel of the iris is contrasted to the more sobering effect of the following scene. The same mother is pushing her cart in a supermarket and picking up consumer goods and groceries, in a way that reminds us of the economic relations that underpin the mother’s inability to leave (Beugnet 2006: 250). The timing of the way these scenes are arranged is important. Chris Darke reads the film as ‘a gradual journey around and then *within* the figure of the mother’ (Darke 1997: 9). The iris, in this respect, is the catalyst that moves the film from a behavioural observation of the mother’s place in her immediate environment to an interior psychology. However, by having carefully arranged the situations of work and rural living beforehand, Veysset prioritises social and economic determinants over psychological ones. We are encouraged to measure her situation first and foremost from a socio-economic point of view. The fact that the only alternative to farm living for the mother and the children would be to live in an HLM in the *cités* (an option the mother clearly does not favour) is foregrounded over the mother’s emotional dependency.

2.2 A fairy-tale

The iris also signals the lapses of time from autumn to winter that leads to the father's withdrawal from the family. The paternal absence marks a momentum in the film's tonal shift that departs from realist elements. The family situation will now take a dark fairytale turn. As the iris closes in, the mother, despite her claim to independence, is represented as isolated and ultimately trapped-in. Her isolation is not only within the diegetic space – the farm land – that symbolises the father's ownership and power, but also by the use of a cinematic style that is normally considered as nostalgic and reflexive. There is a sense that the iris scene reaches for a certain timeless image of *mater dolorosa*, redolent of what Cristina Bacchilega describes as the fairytale iconography of maternal entrapment and suffering (Bacchilega 2001: 12). Veysset, in an interview, describes her film as 'un conte de fées' (Frodon 1996b), and the film abounds in mythical sources that encompass maternal myth and hagiography, to abandonment and mother as killer of her children. As I shall show, this mythic paradigm of motherhood, at once idealised and vilified, raises a further point that transposes the issues of absent father, from the downward descent of the mother's relationship with her children, to fantasies of the paternal revelation and recuperation that occurs in the film.

In *La Neige*, the mother's taking of the unbearable situation is offset by her power to create an alternative, warm, mother-centred family. The seven children and the imaginative games they invent for themselves mark the most magical moments in the film, and essentially evoke the tale of *Snow White*. The pre-credits sequence opens with the children messing about in a haystack. As the camera follows the point of view of the children inside, the warmly lit sequence connects childhood with 'carefree fun, freedom and camaraderie' (Thomas 2001: 82), figured as a key to their resilience that undermines the patriarchal principle represented by the father. Their inventiveness and ability to make something out of nothing is particularly underlined – such as the boats made out of courgettes delivering sweets to Bruno, the eldest son, who guards the irrigation channel. So we see a series of scenes which show how the mother makes the father's harshness and indifference bearable, encouraging their play and bringing magic moments into their lives, as when they do gymnastics on Sunday or watch the summer fireworks. In a wonderful slow motion sequence, the children make their way out in the rain together under a sheet of plastic the mother provided for them. In these scenes,

childhood is essentially presented as embodying a nostalgic time of safety and innocence.

The evocation of childhood is nevertheless presented as being under threat by the separate world inhabited by the adults. The father most palpably represents such a threat. The brutal noise of the father's lorry signals his entrance in the opening sequence. His arrival marks a moment of intrusion and violence, cued by his remarks, 'Alors rien à signaler?', that alert the children. This move of the father to exert himself (literally) as the voice of law and control is to be undermined. His voice is an external diegetic sound and the scene's focus is, instead, on the group of children whose playful image fills the screen, evaporating his words. The status of paternal authority is contested and questioned within the family in this scene and throughout the film. Bruno in particular resents the rigid regime of work the father imposes upon the family. In her own poignant gesture, the mother crushes the houses the children have built from mud herself rather than watch the 'big boots' of the father and his legitimate sons trampling them¹³. The mother and the children are often treated as a group; their resilience and fluidity as a collective is highlighted in their imaginative play and shared meals. These moments, crucially, elude the father's grasp. He is notably absent in such scenes and thus separated from all these qualities.

In the way the father is persistently warded off and invalidated, despite the continued paternal dominance within the family, there is some homology between this father and the paternal figure as 'phantom-like object who does not know that he is dead', as conceived by Slavoj Žižek in *Enjoy your symptom!* (2008). In a chapter entitled 'Why are there always two fathers?', Žižek makes an intriguing link between the change that occurs in the oedipal father and the emergence of a paranoid paternity. As the past symbol of patriarchy recedes and decays, the father has forsaken his symbolic function as guarantor of security and protection. As a result of this, the family is forced to stick with the real father, who cannot convince them of his entitlement to authority anymore (Žižek 2008: 180). This situation, aptly resembling the family drama in *La Neige*, is described by Žižek in terms of a reversal of the original oedipal scenario. Normally, it is the real primal father who is done away with, so that the symbolic paternal function can be established through the next generation. In the reversed version, it is the symbolic function that is destroyed; thereby, setting loose what Žižek calls the primal anal father who is only on the lookout for his own *jouissance* (Žižek

¹³ It is notable that we mainly see the male side of the legitimate family when they are present in the mother's farmhouse. The legitimate wife and daughters are glimpsed briefly in their own household.

2008: 143). So, instead of being symbolically killed as in the oedipal complex, the primal anal father survives and is kept alive in his 'obscene' – and literally off-scene, since his withdrawal from the family, in *La Neige* – dimension (Žižek 2008: 142). This paternal epitomises the phenomenon of the uncanny, which hinders a normal sexual relationship (Žižek 2008: 142). It has a serious effect upon the family in *La Neige*. Halfway through the film, and much to the mother's despair and fury, the father attempts an act of incest with Jeanne on her way home from school. The context in which this happens marks a turning point in the film, and merits further discussion.

During the autumn sequence, the father's isolation from the family is brought out again ('I would stay if I could'). A series of shots are seen through the point of view of the father who gazes from his seat in the lorry. This scene cuts from the warm family sequence inside, where he is typically denied access; to Jeanne leaving the school bus with a boy; and finally, to the scene where Jeanne, weeping, leaves her mother's car that has been driven by the father, while he creeps back to his lorry and departs. The implications of the sequence relates back to the licentious figure of Žižek's anal father. 'Lurking behind' the collapse of the paternal function that he fails to live up to (Žižek 2008: 145), he resorts to the abuse of patriarchal power and threatens the stability of family members involved. This is reified in the scenes of the daughter stumbling back home in tears and the mother's near breakdown in the field. However, because this 'other father' only exists as a 'surplus, or, a stumbling block to the way of the Name of the Father as the bearer of the symbolic Law', his paternity is founded on excess; therefore, he has to be subsumed and to give way to the maternal (Žižek 2008: 180). Žižek's point is useful to understand how the family narrative in *La Neige* can be seen as a process of emptying-out the need for an oedipal structure within the family, in order that the family can grapple with their own reality by eliminating the excessive element of this 'other father'. As a bid for the father's expulsion from the family, the mother cuts off all communication with the father. In order for the family to become autonomous, she will have to make her own choices and face the father's much justified exclusion from the family.

In this attempt to alter the existing paternal paradigm, what is striking about Veysset's portrayal is the insistence that the maternal, too, contorts. The threat to childhood also comes from the mother, as well as the father. Recalling Angela Carter's critique of mythology of motherhood ('myth is a made thing, not a found thing', Carter 1982: 56), maternal motivations expose the fault-lines in the iconic status of the mother-child bond that *La Neige* seemingly promotes but ultimately, in the film's deeper,

invisible structure, demystifies. Veysset's film harks back to the mythic tale of *Peau D'Ane*, the story of a father's illicit desire towards his daughter, with the mother's ambivalence at its core: the dying Queen's wish that the King can only re-marry a woman as beautiful as she, leaves the possibility of father-daughter relationship open beyond the permitted boundaries. Now almost suppressed in western culture because of its threatening potential that comes all too close to reality (Tarr 1998: 194), the tale offers a parallel to *La Neige*, with a particular focus on the maternal role in a narrative that interrogates the abuse of patriarchal power. Just as the absent mother (because she dies early in the story) can be the cause of the father's incestuous act in *Peau d'Ane*, it transpires in *La Neige* that there is a more sinister side to the film's fairytale maternal love story.

Notably, the mother is shown to be gradually losing her ability to maintain her fusional relationship with her children. Veysset's film lacks a substantial scene between mother and daughter that might explore the daughter's post-traumatic feelings (Tarr 1998: 207), after the actual assault itself has been staged rather elliptically. The maternal capacity to support the family's separation from the father is put into question, precisely because this implies the children's separation from the mother, too. That this poses a central problem in securing the children's alterity reminds us of Irigaray's re-thinking of maternal relations, in which she considers the issue, above all, through the complexity of biological reality. The traditionally conceptualised mother-child relation, as either fusion (the foetus as united with the mother) or as aggression (foetus as parasite), is repudiated by Irigaray as culturally determined 'patriarchal imagination' (Irigaray 2007: 32). Instead, in what she calls the 'placental economy' mediating between mother and foetus as two separate beings, Irigaray seeks to maintain the 'ethical character of the foetal relation' that 'belongs to neither one nor to the other' and, therefore, is 'respective of the life of both' (Irigaray 2007: 34-6). The vision of the mother that Veysset creates in *La Neige*, problematically, fails to differentiate her children's subjectivity from her own; thus, raising the ethical issue of the negotiation between the mother's self and the other that is her offspring. In *La Neige*, the maternal function is split into two opposite directions: the initial state of fusion and the later cruelty of infanticide and suicide. Both directions are commonly the case in fairy tales where mothers are either a fairy godmother or an evil stepmother (Warner 1994: 207). Significantly, the two types of motherhood consistently fail to question the role of the father in this picture of family disequilibrium, as I shall show.

In the scene at the forest, where the mother reflects alone on the dim river, the blackness of the cold water seems to mirror her interior self. The sombre lighting and the near absence of sound, meanwhile, accentuate the impression that the mother is returning her resentment onto herself, thus excusing the father of the crime he committed. The eerie feel of the scene evokes a mythical fairytale moment where the surface image is double-edged, which, with hindsight, harbours the mother's ambivalence towards her children. In the next sequence featuring a Christmas feast, the ambivalence of the mother's feeling is compounded when she recounts a dream she had as a teenager – cast in the form of a fairy-tale. In her dream, she met God in a cave of light. She is forced to run a race with an enormously fat woman in order to be let free, but the other woman beats her. God says to her, "You've lost. Your punishment is that you'll have seven children". On a realistic note, this is a *mise-en-abyme*, i.e., a fairy tale within a fairy tale, which encapsulates the weary experience of the mother, burdened by her feelings for her children. On the other hand, however, by attributing being a mother of seven to the will of 'a vengeful, patriarchal God' (Tarr 1998: 206), the dream ascribes the mother's acceptance of her role to an inevitable fate, rather than to a situation of reality that could be changed for the better.

What can be called a 'double bidding for the paternal' is at work in this telltale dream. First of all, a regressive throwback to the narrative of maternal resistance, the tale symbolically recalls the paternal dominion again. The missing father is, therefore, reinstated back into the family. It is fitting that Irigaray notes how the 'chaos of psychosis' – wrought by the proliferation of the two extreme versions of motherhood (idealised fusion and demonised aggression) – leads to a condition in which 'a third term – whether it's called the father, law, Name of the Father, or something else – should facilitate entry into the symbolic' (Irigaray 2007: 36). More significantly, however, somewhere along this re-calling for the father in *La Neige*, the damage done by the abuse of patriarchal functions rub off and lose their gravity. There is a sense in her dream that the missing paternal is recalled, above all, out of necessity; or else, she will wreak havoc in his absence as the film's ending suggests. '[T]he passage of the story about an incestuous father into a healing cult' (Warner 1994: 339) develops in *La Neige*, and effects a very different type of father figure, 'softening and sweetening' the father as perpetrator in fairytale tradition (Warner 1994: 345). So, caused by these not unproblematic maternal motives, this is where the paternal paradigm changes: it is not the malicious patriarchy of old (which has been expelled anyway), but the father of love and benign compassion. The mother's nostalgia for her own father and her personal

history of growing up as an orphan ('my father is my most beautiful childhood memory but I didn't see much of him') aptly sheds a link, between this lost father and the paternal ideal fit for the family's future. Her dream comes at the moment when the deprivation of the family – no electricity and abject poverty – is at its most acute, which leads the mother back to envisaging her own unmet need for a father figure. The dream in this respect unleashes her deep-repressed wish to extricate herself and the children from this paternal crisis altogether. This is actualised in the form of infanticide and suicide at the end of the film.

In the following sequence, the mother borrows a gas heater from a sympathetic teacher at the children's school, and gasses herself and the children as they all sleep. However, when she suddenly wakes up from a tormented dream, she realises that it is snowing outside (fulfilling her children's wish that there would be snow at Christmas, hence the title of the film). She flings the window open, shakes all the children awake and makes them go and play in the snow. Deliberately unresolved, this ending can be interpreted in several ways. Firstly, one might see that the mother really wakes up from a nightmare in which she tried to kill her family. Secondly, she might be still sleeping and dreaming that she is saving her children while, in fact, the family is being suffocated by the gas. Lastly, one might see that she does attempt to commit the murders but wakes up later to realise it is still not too late to save the family. In all of the three versions, the fairytale variation of the 'and it was all just a dream' vision persists invariably. This is further made emphatic by another familiar fairytale component: the whiteness of the snow is omnipresent in the following images, as we shall see.

2.3 Paternal revelation

The film's refusal to end on a tragic note derives from the falling snow, which opens up a new dimension set for a paternal revelation. The snow is used in the final scene above all to saturate the images of childhood enchantment. In the iconography of the snow, its imagery of purity and lost innocence connotes hope for the future and a certain 'awakening' (Soudière & Tabeaud 2009: 624). Indeed it is no coincidence that the gesture of the falling snow, veneering the truth of coming face-to-face with the imaginary father, is the very agent that wakes up the mother from her oblivious sleep and urges her to save the children. At the same time, the snow is a powerful dissimulation that effaces traces and suffocates sound. This 'double symbolism', at

once murderous and affectionate (de La Soudière & Tabeaud 2009: 626), reads as a culmination of the film's fairytale quest for the paternal: the oedipal father is rejected as dead and, instead, fatherhood is associated with promise. This move away from the association of the father with the law to the symbol of the father as compassionate essentially evokes Levinas's thinking on paternity. For Levinas, fatherhood cannot be reduced to law or threats but must be a promise of an open future (Levinas 2008: 254). The paternal relation is therefore characterised not by law-bound recognition, but by an ethical relationship that recognises the father's alterity in which he becomes other and survives (Levinas 2008: 278). In *La Neige*, the paternal relation is first informed by the way the corrupted father – whose authoritarian reign fails to recognise his alterity – meets his own demise from within the family, as a result of the resistance coming from the mother and the children. This is accounted for by the film's realism. From then on, Veysset's film moves to a fairytale stage where paternity is re-imagined as a figure of responsibility who can act as a safety net and, without which, the individual family members fall apart, as seen in the fatalistic way the maternal crisis leads to attempted suicide and infanticide. What allows us to make the assumption that it is the other, 'good father' – and not the old, abusive patriarchy – who can prevent this, above all, resides in the overall mood of the fairy tale, which Warner defines as 'optative—announcing what might be' (Warner 1994: xvi). The 'promise' of 'heroic optimism' that things might change (Warner 1994: xvi) permeates the paternal relation in *La Neige*, rendering the fact that they do not change much in reality of little consequence. Hence the mother's memory of her own idealised father, who in reality has been absent in most of her life.

At this point, then, one might wonder whether Veysset's film envisages the same degree of responsibility for the maternal relation in the family. Or, does the film reserve a more contradictory view on the issue so that in order for the father to be responsible, the mother cannot be? To answer this question, one must note that the film's realism situates the economic power relations between the maternal and paternal as central to the subversiveness in the resistance of the marginalised rural mother. However, the film's progression into fairy tale demarcates it from the signs of maternal ambivalence, as found in her indifference to the daughter's post-traumatic care. Her tell-tale dream that recasts the paternal as the locus of law and order, and her final murderous act, display an inability to secure the family's autonomy and safety. This is a paradoxical paradigm. The way the maternal and paternal line is developed separately and in a dialectic manner in the film can be problematic. It presupposes a mother who

is incapable of reconciling the friction between the drive to break free from dysfunctional patriarchy and her need to reinstate the father. Therefore, in *La Neige*, there is a sense that the father is needed as a defence against the maternal crisis. Perhaps this is not irrelevant to the eclipse of maternity in the Levinasian relation, which promises that paternity will open up to an infinite future, yet excludes feminine time as nonlinear and not social (enough) (Levinas 2008: 263).

It is Derrida in *The Gift of Death*, who addresses these questions through a consideration of female subjectivity. Drawing on the Levinasian concept of paternity as a symbol of responsibility, but struck by the absence of woman in such filial relations, Derrida asks whether ‘the logic of sacrificial responsibility would be altered or displaced, if a woman were to intervene in some consequential manner?’ (Derrida 2008: 76). *La Neige* features a figure of the earth mother who is a giver of life but who also offers a ‘gift of death’, which Derrida equates with the paternal willingness to sacrifice his own life for an other (Derrida 2008: 64). This affirmation of life and living beyond physical death, and of the priority of the other in the life of the self can find a new direction for the future, as found in the final image of Veysset’s film. The borders between the maternal and paternal fade away into the amorphous snow that the children are throwing up at the mother. Standing with a Madonna-like attitude with her baby in her arms, the mother looks down on the snow-fighting children. The window where she stands is becoming obscured and blurred by the snowballs, as the famously melancholic *Tombe la Neige* plays up. The song, bearing out her feelings of vulnerability and yearning in a way that finally comes into contact with her paternal need, signals a way that this final image reads as an ultimate fantasy of paternal identification: a fantasy of a father who perhaps loves like a mother. As the point-of-view shot seen through the maternal gaze makes it clear, this claim to the loving imaginary father is also a claim to the loving mother. The final benign gaze of the mother takes on a new meaning. It suggests that there are various paternal functions, not just the oedipal father who lays down the law, and the family members can alter the oedipal structure to accommodate different paradigms and values of fatherhood.

La Neige, by providing a context which is bound to create the recognition of the other’s alterity, figures an important change in paternal paradigm in *le jeune cinéma*, the conversion from an oedipal to an ethical father. As I have tried to show by tracing the formal shift from realism to fairy tale, Veysset fleshes out a vision of father as future promise and responsibility, while also pointing to disturbing features in the crisis of

paternity. Thus a profoundly ambivalent desire for paternity is coupled, unsurprisingly, with anticipation for social change that can alter the future of the rural family in *La Neige*. This desire to stretch beyond patriarchal modality, as I will show in the next chapter, is further elucidated in *Marius et Jeannette*.

Chapter 3

Local Flavour and Group Effort: *La Famille Recomposée* and the Creation of a New Father in *Marius et Jeannette*

Marius et Jeannette (Guédiguian 1997) is a tale of love lost and found. It chronicles the two forty-something protagonists, Jeannette, a courageous single mother hardened by unemployment, and Marius, a solitary guard dragged down by his past traumas, as they eventually open themselves up to commit to a new relationship. The making of the couple, however, is a group effort. The close-knit community of L'Estaque, the northernmost suburb of Marseille where the story is set, forms the basis of Guédiguian's film. Guédiguian's blend of fond humour and left-wing polemic clearly touched a nerve, not least because of the film's release overlapping with the 1997 election of the parliamentary majority from the socialist party which started up the third period of cohabitation. The multi-awarded film (with the *Prix Gervais* at the 1997 Cannes Film Festival and the *Prix Louis-Delluc*) displays the period's optimism and anticipation for social change, including the application of the 35-hour working week at the time of the film's making. In this light, local flavour and its colourful constructions offer glimpses of Marseille as a site of social transformation that the film at once glorifies and problematises.

Guédiguian as a 'jeune' cinéaste is a proof that *le jeune cinéma* is a matter of *sensibilité* rather than the directors' actual age. A native of L'Estaque and a filmmaker whose previous films are uniquely based in his home-town¹⁴, Guédiguian firmly roots *Marius et Jeannette* in the social realities permeating the everyday lives of the *quartier*. Unemployment, the shadow of Le Pen and the menaces of fundamentalism are part of the economic and political threat, to the seemingly idyllic, sun-filled fishing village made famous by Cezanne in his landscape paintings, such as *L'Estaque* (1883-5). A militant from a young age and involved in the Communist Party until the end of 1970s, Guédiguian is a self-proclaimed 'cinéaste engagé' (Tranchant 1997), and considers his work 'un film bilan d'une culture de gauches, et qui joue de ça' (Coulombe 1998). He is therefore a rarity in French cinema given his filmmaking peers' general reluctance to be categorised with the label of 'social realism', seeing it as rather limiting to the scope of their work (as the case with Dumont, for example, as we shall see in chapter 3). Openly commenting on *Marius et Jeannette* as a 'love-story amongst the poor' (Darke 1997), Guédiguian is grounded in the proletarian identity of the region. Yet, amid the disillusionment that working-class communities face in post-industrial situations, the utopian 're-enchantment', in Guédiguian's own words (Danel 1997) – a theme already evident in the fairytale undertone of the film, which is subtitled 'Un Conte de L'Estaque'

¹⁴ Guédiguian's film on Francois Mitterrand, *Le Promeneur de champ de Mars* (2005) and his World War II drama, *L'Armée du crime* (2009) are the only films that do not feature Marseille or its environs as the main settings.

– depends less on the party-political context, and more on the eclectic mix of taste and personal relationships.

In *Marius et Jeannette*, perfecting an authentic *aïoli* recipe or getting over a defeat of their local football team are at least as important as the matters which seemingly evoke more immediate gravity; in particular, the disintegration of the traditionally defined industrial base. This focus on matters of local taste and convivial activities offers a nod to the way it used to be when a sense of working-class community, and its belief in a revolutionary idealism, was still imagined as tangible. Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli note that Marseille in *Marius et Jeannette* is represented as a city in ruins. Many of the environments shown in the film point to a better past and signify decay (Mazierska and Rascaroli 2003: 85). Similar depiction of dilapidated working-class neighbourhoods finds expression in other *jeune cinéma* films like *Chacun cherche son chat* (Klapisch 1996), for example. On the other hand, *Marius et Jeannette* validates a current in French cinema that looks back to the social-comedy of the 1930s typified by the films of Jean Renoir and Marcel Pagnol, which place their characters within a wider community, thus constituting a nostalgia steeped in a sense of the past (Powrie 2001: 138). The film can be seen as referencing, above all, Pagnol's *Marius* trilogy, not only through the name and setting, but also through its tragicomic format of family drama saturated in the cultural images of Marseille. Meanwhile, the centrality of the courtyard and its leftist politics evoke Renoir's *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (1936), a key film of the Popular Front period whose community spirit pervaded its making (Reader 2000: 287), and which the communal film-making style of *Marius et Jeannette* echoes.

My engagement with the film, in this regard, concerns the representation of a way forward to the uncertain future which the local community of *Marius et Jeannette* is faced with. What this future might involve entwines the social realities of L'Estaque with the 'ethical voyage into the unknown' that Cooper discerns, drawing on the Levinasian understanding of inter-generational relation as a movement towards transcendence and living-on (Cooper 2006: 25). The film is remarkable for its unwavering appetite for food, words and human intimacy, and in Guédiguian's hands, these factors are vehicled as a way of reinventing the community as more adaptable to new economic circumstances. The community's ability to survive is maintained in the film's romance plot, through helping to witness a re-assembling of a couple from the now atomised individuals. This re-animates the courtyard community, where other structures of solidarity are being eroded (O'Shaughnessy 2007: 59). How this is done

will form part of my discussion of the film. I will note that the motif of repairing ‘what has gone wrong’, be it in the city’s decline or in the personal dramas, runs strong in the film. Significantly, this is grounded in the character of Marius: a father who has been damaged and disoriented, who no longer is (or wishes to be) a father. Marius as a non-father, as the most ‘othered’ individual in the film, resonates with Levinas’s ethics of paternity in which the future is articulated in the alterity of paternal relation (Levinas 2008: 269). Marius’s paternal ambivalence, as I shall argue, is reiterated in the way that Guédiguian’s characters are brought together towards reconstituting Marseille as forming a *famille re-composée*, a reconstituted family which transcends the extent of patriarchal modality based on kinship relations, to open up to integrate strangers. As the family is re-founded upon the hospitality towards the other, paternity is re-integrated into this new family. Finally, the role of Guédiguian as the *auteur* is important: Guédiguian practices a ‘regionalist *auteurism*’, where his production team forms a kind of ‘family’ (Powrie 2001: 135-6). As I shall show, Guédiguian’s use of his troupe of repertoire actors, and his own positioning within it, accentuate the ways in which his *famille re-composée* tempers the problematic of fathering differently, in particular, through the reluctant fathers in *Marius et Jeannette*.

3.1 Father(s) as distant memory

Marius et Jeannette begins with a prelude in which a transparent globe floats towards the shore reflecting the road-sign of l’Estaque on the sea water. The accompanying traditional song, ‘Il pleut sur Marseille’, however, is interrupted by the jerky sound of demolition taking place in a disused cement factory. A long-distance shot shows in focus a gigantic red crane at the centre of the site, where the remnants of the concrete buildings are being lifted and piled up. The camera tilts up from the crane, and pans across to reveal a panoramic view over the city and its harbour, until it finally reaches the sight of a sitting man, whose imposing presence and silhouette in striking red (the colour of his jumpsuit) matches that of the crane in the previous scene. It transpires that we have been tracing the gaze of this man, armed with rifle and looking apprehensively down at the demolition site.

This opening sequence establishes a link between the space and the character of Marius on several levels. Firstly, it functionally introduces Marius working as a security guard at the factory. The sequence also relates the city’s economic decline with the crisis of Marius’ identity. The act of self-effacement, carried out by the crane,

points to the status of Marius whose rifle, in fact, has no real bullets. If the dismantling of the cement works points to a past that used to generate a sense of belonging to a place and a social class, but which is now fading away, Marius is the man hired to guard this souvenir of the past – a ruin of the old industrial base. In a place peopled by, as he jokingly remarks, the ‘phantoms’ of a past era, Marius is a solitary figure, inhabiting the desolate site day and night. The dry, dusty and dilapidated effect of the way the abandoned cement factory is filmed is important. Whilst it apparently foreshadows the socio-economic context of the story, it also says more about Marius’s own diminished status: it will be revealed later that his limp is a fake he had to invent in order to get a job as watchman and that he has lost his wife and children in an accident.

Marius et Jeannette is laden with disappearing fathers. For Jeannette, the cement works has a sentimental value as a place where she comes to reflect: it was here that her father met with his death because of an exploding steam-pipe when he was only thirty-six. This can be seen as an autobiographical allusion to Guédiguian’s own father, an Armenian immigrant dockworker at the Marseille harbour who sustained numerous work-related injuries during his working life (Riou 1997). Jeannette’s memories of the death of her father reinstate her grief and resentment: ‘Why is this cement works being demolished? They must have a reason for doing it, but we will never find out. Who has made the decision, and when, to destroy the place where my father died? By what right? People still use cement, don’t they?’. The loss and the diminishing of fathers are indeed key themes of the film. Magali’s father, Jeannette’s first husband, literally vanished from the family one day and was never heard of again. Malek’s father, Jeannette’s second husband of Algerian origin, is fondly remembered by Jeannette for his love-making abilities, yet he was killed by another work-related accident caused by falling scaffolding on his way to buy a packet of cigarettes, hence Jeannette’s vow never to smoke. The only father who *is* present is Dédé, but he is the most politically inept character in the community, constantly taunted for having once voted for the Front National and infantilised by both his wife and neighbours (‘Il est con, ce Dédé’, as they constantly remark) or by his own actions, such as the old illustrated magazines he reads (as a gesture of homage to *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange?*).

Like other Guédiguian films, and in tune with the works of *le jeune cinéma* as a whole (see the discussion on the treatment of children in *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?*, in chapter 2), *Marius et Jeannette* looks at the world of childhood with great sensitivity. The children register a resistance against the social malaise pervading the adult world often in a quite unexpected and inventive way. Malek, for example, responds to Justin’s

lecture on the tensions of multiculturalism, by asking if Justin, an atheist, would then be from Aix-en-Provence since he cannot be a Marseillais being neither a Muslim, Christian nor Catholic. In this light, Dédé, absorbed in his own anxiety facing a strike and redundancy (he is too tired to greet his own children at home), is contrasted to Justin, the philosopher of the neighbourhood who teaches and even dances the farandole¹⁵ with the children. However, the place of the father who is the most weighed down by the anxiety of fatherhood is reserved for Marius. Beneath the image of a bronzed, soft-spoken giant, Marius is a father who has been badly damaged by past traumas of the loss of his family. Marius's pretend limp, something he does not forget to adopt even in a state of drunkenness, points to the extent of self-denial that haunts his positioning as father.

It is symbolic that the father who denies his paternity – therefore, a non-father – is also the most displaced – ‘othered’ – individual in the film. It can help us to understand this paternal positioning and consider the Levinasian thought of the paternal as the Other and as a relation of alterity. Marius's fear of fatherhood and its responsibility structures the film's plot: as it motivates his disappearance at the height of his relationship with Jeannette midway through the narrative. This paternal alienation, however, is kept in balance with the film's insistence on two other distinct relations: the filial substitution, on the one hand, and the motif of repairing and reinvention supplied by the female characters, on the other. I will first draw on the filial relation in *Marius et Jeannette*, and how it configures the future, above all, in the hands of the younger generation. An interesting intertextuality exists between Guédiguian's film and the cinema of Pagnol in the 1930s. The *Marius* trilogy, in particular, has been read by Ginette Vincendeau as a ‘paean to archaic values’, in which the older generation's superiority is reasserted by a narrative weighed down by the presence of overbearing fathers (Vincendeau 2000: 15). Remarkably, in *Marius et Jeannette*, where the fathers are portrayed as distant memories weakened by their self-effacing and precarious social position, the children and the younger generation are vigorously prioritised through various measures. Their continual presence in the frame often results in an emphasis on the adults' obligation to their safety and well-being (Marius's preoccupation with the children keeping away from the demolition site), as well as their education, especially their doing well at school (another autobiographical allusion to Guédiguian's own childhood ‘chantage affectif’ from his parents, who ‘voulaien que j'ai des résultats pour

¹⁵ This scene also points to the film's emphasis on linking the next generation to community traditions.

me soustraire à cette condition' (Rigoule 1997)). The upward mobility of the next generation through the acquisition of scholarly knowledge, something that is antagonised by the symbolic 'Oedipal blockage' from the powerful older men in Pagnol dramas as they regard it disloyal to the socio-regional roots and, by implication, their prerogative (Vincendeau 2000: 20), is rather actively promoted in *Marius et Jeannette* as beneficial to the community's evolution. Thus Malek will become a professor of Arabic and read the text of the Koran, which, as the voice-over narration at the film's epilogue tells us, 'will confirm what Justin has taught him'.

The nature of the filial relation represented in Guédiguian's film resonates with Levinas's idea of the ethics of influence, in which the new possibilities of the future can be achieved only through the relinquishing of paternal authority. The son recognises in the father an 'otherness', a stranger, a radical rupture that opens into infinity (Levinas 1987: 91), so that he might also participate in the realms of the social and the law themselves. The film actually goes beyond a literal interpretation of the Levinasian framework, formulating a recognition of filial dynamics based on the maternal lineage that not only reproduces but also takes us beyond the exclusivity of the father-son model. The centrality of Jeannette as the 'earth mother' (giver of life) and as the main transmitter of parental responsibility takes on a new meaning, in particular, when the operation of sexual difference is considered in relation to the ethical question.

So, taking Luce Irigaray's critique of Levinas as a starting point, the woman's problematic association with the dwelling *space*, as opposed to the unlimited site of *time* occupied by the masculine (Irigaray 1993a: 11), is clearly reversed in the Marius-Jeannette relationship. Unlike Marius, who dwells on the self-dispossessing industrial site left behind by the socio-economic changes, Jeannette reinvents the future so that filial substitution can take place successfully from mother to daughter. Analysing love relations, Irigaray repudiates the metaphor of paternity as ownership and control over the object of desire, seeking instead to maintain an intersubjectivity, the 'relationship of being-two', so that the couple love each other as other and not as a reflection, or reproduction, of the self (Irigaray 2000: 15). It is the relationship of 'two genealogies and not one, transmitted from mothers to daughters and fathers to sons (not to mention crossed genealogies from mothers to sons and fathers to daughters)' that outlines Irigaray's insistence on the refounding of the family on a civil basis (Irigaray 1993b: 16). Symbolised in the coveted silk lingerie which Jeannette and the other women at the courtyard have endless fun buying, but which ends up on Magali's youthful body, the Levinasian possibility of the rupture of linear time (Levinas 2008: 278), which will

secure the future of the community, lies in the daughter, as well as in the son. The senior female characters buoy up Magali's dream of becoming a journalist¹⁶. The (imaginary) distance between Marseille and Paris as the destination for her study is regarded as well worth the journey, despite the much fuss over Jeannette's grief caused by her daughter's leaving. They advise Magali not to forget her roots: the voice-over narration at the film's epilogue tells us that she will later write, as a journalist, how 'the walls of the poor of l'Estaque, painted by Cezanne, will end up on the walls of the rich'.

3.2 Mothers as temporal site of repairing

If paternal alienation is geared towards configuring the future in the hands of the younger generation, it also, perhaps more explicitly, foregrounds the desire of the mother and the maternal space within the socioeconomic context. It is by frequenting the courtyard where Jeannette's house lies, that Marius is brought in touch with the other inhabitants of l'Estaque. In contrast with the large and empty cement works, the courtyard is small, crowded and full of life. Jeannette's house is, at first sight, visibly falling apart: the walls are dingy and the Provençal windows show signs of decay, which might link her house to the cement factory in the process of being demolished. However, on the contrary, this is a place for restoration and transformation. It is in order to redecorate her house that she tries to steal the paint from the factory, an incident that brings Marius and Jeannette close to each other. The motif of sewing up and repairing the tears from the past is consistent in Jeannette's household, in particular, and in the female characters, in general. The first scene introducing us to the neighbourhood courtyard shows an image of Jeannette sitting at her front door and darning a pair of old socks. While one can see this an echo of economic hardship rooted in social realism, a metaphor for will and desire, and a certain initiative for life is also noticeable in the continual acts of repairing and restoring that underline the film's seemingly uninhibited moments.

The forceful, good-humoured women of Guédiguian's film are reminiscent of the female characters in Renoir's social dramas of the 1930s such as *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*. Guédiguian achieves this through reference to the approach of Marx '(qui) disait que ce qu'il préférait chez les hommes, c'est leur faiblesse, et, chez les

¹⁶ Caroline's advice to Jeannette, grieved by her daughter's separation from her, 'il en faut des journalistes issus de notre milieu, sinon ils ne parlent jamais de nous, ou mal', resonates with Guédiguian's own path, who became a filmmaker, 'pour parler d'"eux", parce que, précisément, c'est de là qu'il vient' (Cohen 1997: 57).

femmes, leur force. C'est un peu ce qu'on voit dans le film' (Guédiguian in Tranchant 1997). Women in general in *Marius et Jeannette* are militant and belligerent. Monique tries to make up for her husband's past history of succumbing to the far-Right movement, by urging him to join the strike at work. Her reasoning to the reluctant Dédé, that one should think of the future of one's children ('Putain, Dédé, on a trois enfants. Tu trouve que c'est pour rien?'), is not without a twist of humour, and offers an interesting counterpoint to the films of similar concerns where the wellbeing of their children, instead, drives the fathers to abandon industrial action, as seen in *Billy Elliot* (Daldry 2000). Caroline, on the other hand, is the political conscience of the group and, as a wartime deportee, provides historical perspective to her fierce denunciation of capitalism and globalisation. Her story of love-making in the concentration camp is told in a Brechtian address, direct to camera. The experience recounted in her own words – 'Faire l'amour, ça nous rendait plus fort. C'est comme de rêver... personne peut t'en empêcher' – evokes a tradition of resistance that becomes an allegory for the whole film. It suggests that, threatened with the lack of resources which leads working class communities to vanish or to change beyond all recognition, the only available means left for the affirmation of life amounts to just one thing: desiring each other.

In particular, it is desire between men and women that Guédiguian's film is largely concerned with. Levinas's view of the ineluctability of the desire for the other that is necessary, rather than contingent, is apposite here. Yet this desire is articulated with a new possibility, triggered by the ethical challenge posed by the maternal. In the Levinasian relationship of paternity, it is the son who brings out the enigma of the irreducible otherness in the father and, in so doing, opens up infinite time (Levinas 2008: 268). In *Marius et Jeannette*, however, it is Jeannette, the mother and feminine lover, and not the son, who illuminates the alienated 'other' in Marius as the (non-)father, so that paternal subjectivity can be recuperated and socially maintained for a better future. Recalling Irigaray's notion of civil coexistence based on the relationship between men and women and its accompanying 'recognition by the feminine subject of the alterity of masculine identity' (Irigaray 2000:14), the film's romance plot is one that constructs the taming of Marius as the withdrawn outsider, by the more resilient Jeannette. Romantic propositions are initiated by women as much as, if not more than, by men, as seen in Jeannette's calling for Marius while bathing in the sea. Similarly, her experience of divorce and remarriage make her the more practical, dynamic one in their relationship. As I shall show, though, desiring each other in Guédiguian's film is a group effort. This involves the release of unwavering appetites for food and drink, and for words, in which

the utopianism of desire is intertwined with the sobering introspection of paternal failure.

3.3 Feast and food fight

Marius's second visit to Jeannette's flat offers a memorable sequence. As they paint the house together, Marius whistles 'O sole mio', the famous Italian song about the idyllic romanticism of Mediterranean life, whilst Jeannette hums along. The two are dressed in identical blue jumpsuits. This alludes to the later love-making scene, in which the couple will once again occupy a house in ruins and bring it to life with their presence. The restoring and transformation of their living space is clearly motivated by the sensual dimension of the way the two are filmed here, focusing on the intimate exchange of gazes and the close-up of Jeannette's bare foot relaxed on the floor. From this, the camera pans to outside the open door, to frame the courtyard where another couple, Caroline and Justin, play at a *double entendre* as a pretext for an invitation for a dinner. She prepares her broad beans over *L'Humanité*, and he is seen with *Le Monde Diplomatique*: the former the daily newspaper formerly linked to the Communist Party whose circulation has been in decline, and the latter an intellectual monthly known for supporting the French anti-globalization movement. O'Shaughnessy observes that the two together evoke the continuity of the leftist tradition and its ability to connect past and future (O'Shaughnessy 2007: 60). The political overtone of the *mise-en-scène* notwithstanding, the scene is further animated by an appetising and flirtatious dialogue between Caroline and Justin: "Tu ne peux pas me dire tout simplement que tu ne veux pas passer la soirée seul et que mes fèves te font envie. Tu veux plus coucher avec moi?". The erotic connotation of the food is equally present in the following dinner scene on the terrace at Caroline's flat, where the couple reminisce, over the dish of bean fricassée, about the first time they had sex together.

A more allegorical reading can also be made of this sequence. If the whole sequence combines the intimacy of romance with the film's political message, it also embodies the film's preoccupation with nurturing and restoring. The place rejuvenated by a new coat of paint is, after all, Jeannette's kitchen and dining room. *Marius et Jeannette* abounds in scenes of communal eating and drinking between friends and neighbours. These are staged over wide-ranging locations, including people's homes, the factory yard, an open-air restaurant and a seaside bar. And, as seen in the case above, shared meals are often complemented by verbal exuberance displayed by the

voluble characters. Not only does the film evince the grand display of southern (*méridionaux*) accents and theatricality reminiscent of Pagnol's Marseille trilogy, it also pays homage to René Char, the prolific poet of 'la dure et rare tradition de la pensée du midi' (Camus 2000/1: 193) whose moral message of desire and resistance is not far from the film's own, by staging a recital of his poem. Obviously, Guédiguian's representation of regional gastronomy, such as exotic Mediterranean dishes like *aïoli*, serves to perform and appreciate moments of cultural difference. Culinary values are also an integral part of the social realism of the cinema of Guédiguian who, as Laurent Marie writes, practices a 'volontarisme de la convivialité de table' (Marie 2005: 271). Food and drink – as the debates on how (much) to use garlic as an ingredient, or on the downturn in the production of 'Fischer' beer, exemplify – inscribe connotations of class identities and local roots that are important in imagining the complexity of the Marseillais identity, especially in relation to the national and the global context, as I shall note further on.

In my view, the combination of aspirations for food and for words registers two intertwined functions in *Marius et Jeannette*. First of all, the abundant images of eating and drinking openly flirt with fairytale-like idealisation: they are represented as embodying the 're-enchantment' that Guédiguian aspired to convey. In this light, his film belongs to a cinematic tradition that associates food as ritual with community, as seen in the recent example of *La Graine et le Mulet* (Kechiche 2007) whose settings in the Mediterranean and emphasis on food, in particular fish, are similar to *Marius et Jeannette*. The relationship between Marius and Jeannette often centres around food or its connotations. Routine images in the film show Marius coming down for breakfast or dinner at Jeannette's flat; it is in this kitchen where Jeannette's two children welcome Marius into their household with no fuss. Meanwhile, the close-knit community of her friends and family resembles a Greek chorus (Darke 1997), attentively following the ups and downs of the budding relationship and intervening when necessary, as the lively debate around the *aïoli* recipe exemplifies. The yard of the defunct cement factory is transformed into a space for ensemble gathering, where the *aïoli* feast takes place. The feast is shown in four different stages: food shopping, preparation, tasting and dancing. Marius is seen as being offered hospitality and as being integrated into the community from the first stage, in which Magali gives her blessing to her mother's new boyfriend over the fennels they buy together at the market place. The preparation of *aïoli* is a group affair where men as well as women participate voluntarily. While Justin, Dédé and Marius banter around the proper ingredients for *aïoli* as they mix the garlic and

olive oil in a mortar, their colour-coded costumes (white, blue and red, respectively) are unmistakable. The allusion to the French tricolour hints at the implication that the film's vision of regionalism is symbolic of a wider France. However, at the same time, the universal Republic as represented in the tricolour is grounded in the dishes of *aïoli*, the typical product of Marseille. The particular site of the dismantled cement factory is appropriated and reanimated through the communal feast, and with it, comes a desire to resume the conviviality as a form of collective will and defiance. This is epitomised in the serial close-ups of the characters' laughter as they joke on the prospect of the cement works never being declared a world heritage site despite its magnificence and being in fully working order. The feast's utopian mood is thus rendered wilful, with an awareness of the changing era. When the open yard of the factory becomes a dancing platform for the characters after lunch, the accompanying music switches from the traditional rendition of 'Il pleut sur Marseille' heard at the beginning of the film, to a more modern version.

There is a second function in the film's take on food and words, concerning a trenchant social comment on the viability of the local community's survival. The context of industrial decline and the threat of redundancies loom large in the communal lunch, with two resulting effects. The sense of a social history that must not be forgotten, as Caroline's advice to Magali in her future as a journalist suggests ('Seulement, tu nous oublies pas'), apparently nods to the Old Left imaginary that once gave meaning to the working-class community. It is tempting to read this as an allegory of the nostalgia for the fathers whose history of loss and disappearance the film is all too painfully aware of. It is equally tempting to extend the paternal longing for recourse to an all-encompassing State interventionism, given the film's lament over the demise of the safety net and employment that used to be provided by the Nation State. However, this reading is ultimately overturned by the film. The insistence on localised resistance and thriving on doing things in their own way, so richly enclaved in the matters of local taste such as *aïoli*, is too overwhelming to be passed over. It is useful to remember the *gastronomie française*, inherently evoking regional specialities from the provinces of the hexagon, represents an area where Paris does not speak for the whole of the French nation (Marie 2005: 266). Instead, the way to make their living space more adaptable for the future, especially through, as Justin puts it, '*attachement*' to each other, is of primary concern. The community politics as imagined by *Marius et Jeannette* then comes close to Firat's and Dholakia's notion of the 'pockets of resistance' (Firat and Dholakia 1998: 155) which draws on ignoring authority and indeed insisting

on doing one's own thing. The connotation of garlic, 'the proof that the class system still exists' (Guédiguian in Rigoulet 1997), is indicative. Magali does not like garlic as 'she is going to university', yet the scent of garlic is strong enough that, as Magali remarks, 'the whole of L'Estaque can smell it'. For the garlic is 'un parfum sauvage, et vulgaire. Parce que c'est évident, la cuisine à l'ail est une outrance culinaire, un outrage au bon goût' (Izzo 2000: 158).

The anxiety and doubt facing the increasingly globalised economy is here channelled into another key sequence, which involves booze and a food fight at the seaside bar. The women in Jeannette's neighbourhood initiate their men to investigate Marius's disappearance and where the problem lies. This leads to a massive drinking session. The fairy-tale allusion to the alcohol that reveals the 'magic' truth persists in the delirium of spoken words. The subtle humour regarding the choice of beer – the near impossibility of finding *Fischer* despite this being the local bar, thus underlining the effect of globalisation reaching the most localised areas of everyday life – provokes the patrons, eventually leading to a full blown fight. The facade of this ritualised aggressivity masks nostalgia for the idealistic image of masculinity through fighting and violence, at which point the narrative starts to freeze and spectacle takes over (Neale 1983: 12). The operatic slow-tempered violence, complete with a soundtrack of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, however, plays more like a parodic dissection of the images of masculine codes of behaviour stereotyped in the Western genre¹⁷. The scenes of hitting each other over the head with pictures and bottles are burlesque. What is splintered and torn-apart is not the male bodies, but the seafood, freshly caught off the coast of l'Estaque, traditionally a fishing village. The sight of the gelatinous raw fish and squids thrashing about – prompting a reference to the similarly fishy scenes of Italian neo-realist films such as *La terra trema* (Visconti 1948) and *Stromboli* (Rossellini 1950) – testifies to the prestige of a local industry and its products. The local has two functions here. Firstly, the food fight, hardly threatening although visually exhilarating, serves to demystify the "anxious" aspect of the look at the male' (Neale 1983: 12), because all this is, above all, triggered by a man sitting at the bar who comments on Marius's 'joli cul' as he literally lowers his trousers. His 'gaze' is rather confronted head-on by Justin and Dédé, who insists that they, too, should be looked at and 'enculés', because 'On est

¹⁷ Guédiguian himself mentioned that the fight scene was intended to be a parody of the Western (Frodon 1997). Despite his outspoken disdain for the conventional Hollywood cinema, *Marius et Jeannette* looks to American popular genres for cultural references, including this case and also Monique's mentioning of Hollywood romance as a model for reflecting how a couple should behave. This also relates to *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*, in which Renoir articulates social relations through the production and consumption of, above all, Western and pulp fiction.

tous des pédés..., des nègres, des Arabes, des filles, des Juifs, des Mohicans, des zapatistes..!'. Ultimately, however, the problem with how to look at Marius's bottom – incidentally referred to as an 'apple' by Jeannette in a previous scene – is countenanced by Marius's own words. Marius's drunken, yet poetic, statement delivers a poignant testimony on the fallibility of his paternal condition and on the futility of standing up in the face of changing situations:

'Y a l'art, la manière et la misère.

Et la misère se fout de l'art!

Courber l'échine.

Il n'y a qu'une seule manière.

Baisser son froc, baisser son froc.'

3.4 'Attachement' and living on: *une famille recomposée*

From this denouncement of the paternal position, laid bare by Marius, however, a collective allegiance is forged between the three men (Justin, Dédé and Marius). The sobering conversation in the following scene articulates the second subtext that the local connotations inherent in food and drink involve in the film. The trio lie side by side on the dock of the bay, and share Marius's secret of his past tragedy and how he has 'lost the courage to love' after the loss of his own family. Male bonding is here represented as bound to the space in which it takes place: the sea of l'Estaque. The landscape of the dock, cutting vertically across the frame, figuratively provides an intermediate location, linking the boats to the land. As such, Marius's confession is anchored in the wavering sea water of l'Estaque, and we have already seen the ritualistic images that link the sea with Jeannette (she goes into and emerges from the sea in previous scenes, and her phantasmal daydreaming imagines a romantic union with Marius by the sea). In this scene, therefore, the local geography paraphrases the film's concern of 'desiring each other': the maternal, amniotic space, evoked by Jeannette's association with the water and the sea, inscribes Marius's paternal revelation. By doing so, the film can be seen to hark back to the foundational myth of Marseille as a metaphor of birth and the product of 'un sentiment amoureux' (Rosello 2001b: 29).

Mireille Rosello notes in the city's imaginary the proliferation of 'the couple of Marseillais Adam-and-Eve', the Greek sailor Protis and Gyptis, the daughter of the local king, and how this has long proposed the city's founding 'prototype' as the union

‘between man and woman, and stranger and native’ (Rosello 2001b: 26, 29). Viewed in this regional context, the French nation symbolised in the tricolour images of the three men lying together functions ironically. The Republic is bypassed and then ‘replaced’ by the local (Rascaroli 2006: 101), above all, through matters of regional gastronomy and taste. This recalls Irigaray’s claim that a ‘true concrete universal’ is now dissolved into each individual’s identity (Irigaray 2000:26), as fittingly captured by the French tricolour being fragmented onto each character’s dress code. And then, ultimately, it forms part of this ‘abolition’ of ‘tout ce qui a précédé la rencontre entre un homme et une femme (...), on fait coïncider l’idée de la cité elle-même et le moment de la rencontre’ (Rosello 2001b: 25). Justin aptly rephrases this relation of love as an ‘attachement très fort’. As Justin and Dédé literally try to attach Marius to Jeannette, by binding him up to the bed where she is sleeping, the re-assembling of the couple makes for new possibilities. Dédé now declares his love for and to Monique (‘je ferai toutes les grèves..même celles de la poste et du train!’), as a means of coming to terms with the economic crisis, unemployment and social exclusion. As witnessed in the penultimate scene of the film, ‘Je t’aime’ becomes ‘on vous aime’.

The making of the couples, however, goes beyond the extent of patriarchal modality as the dominant means of desire and marriage. The sphere of the family evoked by coupledness and romance in *Marius et Jeannette* exceeds the readily familiar kinship relations, and functions as a way of spontaneous communal life. This animates the courtyard, where the family is re-conceptualised as a site which will bring Marius’s fallen patriarchy, now a stranger, back in. As a result, Jeannette’s family will be whole or, rather, its inherent wholeness will expand to include him. This paternal recuperation, as Guédigian makes clear, is enabled because family matters are governed by each individual’s subjective choices. The position of parenting becomes substitutable (the education and support the children benefit from Caroline and Justin, the unmarried couple who ‘occasionally’ sleep together without having children of their own). The identity transmission is not just unilateral from parents to children, but also reciprocal between generations (the re-assertion of the forgotten question of working class identity through Magali’s journalism). Jeannette’s position as the matriarchal head of the family negotiates and reinvents the filial relation along the maternal lineage, in the same way that the mixed-race marriage, no longer a source of pathology of miscegenation, extends the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that underpin the membership of a family.

This valuation of substitution and reconstitution rests to a great extent on Guédigian’s credit as *auteur*. The troupe of his actors and production team largely

come from the *métissage* of their parents' generation based in l'Estaque. There is a consensus that they have formed a veritable 'family' in their working as well as personal relationships (Baecque and Toubiana 1997: 61). This influences the family structure of *Marius et Jeannette*. Arianne Ascaride lives with Guédiguian whereas Gerard Meylan, Guédiguian's 'acteur fétiche' (Jauffret 1997) from Spanish-Swiss parentage, is a childhood friend; Malek Hamzaoui, the production director of Neapolitan-Kabyle origin, functions in the group as a little brother to Guédiguian, himself a son of an Armenian father and a German mother (Jauffret 1997). Their real-life collectivism and cinema have merged into each other since Ascaride, Meylan, Jean-Pierre Daroussin, Frederique Bonnal and Pierre Banderet have enrolled in the Paris Conservatoire to study with Antoine Vitez and Marcel Bluwal. A porous network of freewheeling, heterogeneous relationships brought together by ideas and choices, the 'family' as practiced by Guédiguian's troupe inherently transcends a state of natural unity or an instinctual pact. This unity is one that allows mobility and substitutability, by entertaining the possibility of how to negotiate skilfully between different sets of identities, as testified by Ascaride: 'J'ai été la soeur de Gérard, sa femme, sa maîtresse, son amie, c'est mon "fiancé de papier", (...) je tournais ma nuit de noces avec Gérard dans le lit de Malek et Robert me disait: "Mais putain, vas-y, embrasse-le."' (Rigoulet 1997).

The paternal positioning within this *famille re-composée* formulates the problematic of fathering differently. This is perhaps commensurable to Guédiguian's inadvertent role invested with a symbolically paternal relation to his 'family'. Not unlike the reluctant fathers in *Marius et Jeannette*, Guédiguian's disinclination regarding the charge that 'il est devenu notre père' (Meylan quoted in Rigoulet 1997), develops alternate visions of fathering, which cannot function but through an integration into the family. This helps us to view the last shot of the film, above all, as carrying on from where *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* left off. Renoir, the 'father' of the French leftist community filmmaking in the 1930s, delivered compassion and shared responsibility through the famous 360-degree pan of the courtyard performed at the film's climactic moment of the eponymous crime, before concluding his film by framing his couple (Monsieur Lange and Valentine) alone and deserted. The 'horizontal inescapability' (Reader 2000: 295) of the departing couple at the seashore short of the border, instead, lives on through Guédiguian's final vision of the high level road which extends vertically outward. The road, shared by all the community members as they walk into the distance, unites them in proximity. Yet, the road unsettles any

straightforward sense of cohesion, as the voiceover narration recounts the divergent and differing trajectories taken by each one of them. Unabashed happy ending as it may seem, the fairytale optimism is important in *Marius et Jeannette*. It re-orientates the challenges caused by the socio-economic changes, with the ethical engagement of the couples, or, a potential family, who ‘re-enchante’ the context in which they live without recourse to the existing institutions. Gesturing to a new way forward, a spontaneous transformation of the courtyard community is proposed through the relationships between men and women.

In this chapter, I have tried to show how *Marius et Jeannette* brings out a symbolism for the relation that exists between the *auteur* and the paternal, at work within *le jeune cinéma*. Guédiguian’s paternal role in relation to his ‘family’ of actors and crews, above all, points to an inadvertent position of the father that Guédiguian insists can only function through an integration into the ‘family’. This new form of *auteurism* also fits into *La Vie de Jésus*, leading to Dumont’s altruistic interest in the ‘other’ France. Dumont’s paternalistic approach towards his real-life non-actors serves to resonate with his own quest in the film, an attempt to reconnect the disengaged characters into the paternal narrative, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Chapter 4
The Reverse Oedipal Trajectory in *La Vie de Jésus*

La Vie de Jésus (Dumont 1997) is a study of the daily lives of a group of disaffected working-class teenagers. Set in his hometown of Bailleul, a small town in northern France, Dumont's film forms part of the emergence of a 'cinéma du Nord' (Garbarz 1997: 117). With its regional productions set in areas of Northern France and Flanders, the *cinéma du Nord* is now an important sub-trend in the *jeune cinéma* (Bénézet 2005: 163). This traditionally overlooked region has attracted for the *jeune cinéma* a sizeable number of directors across the France/Belgium border. This includes Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne (their Liège-set feature films since *La Promesse* (1996) and *Rosetta* (1999)), Erick Zonca (*La Vie rêvée des anges* (1998)), Benoît Mariage (*Les Convoyeurs attendent* (1999)) and many others. One should also note here the contribution of the well-known filmmaker Bertrand Tavernier (*Ça commence aujourd'hui* (1999)). As a reflection of the realities of northern towns, the *cinéma du Nord* normally conjures up images of bleak wastelands affected by heavy industrialisation, coal mines and post-industrial depression. In this regard, firmly taking root in the red-bricked houses and empty grey roads of Bailleul, a town whose well-established food and textile industries are now in decline, Dumont's work clearly belongs to this body of social-realist *films d'auteurs*. He is admittedly one of the most acclaimed directors in this genre of cinema today (Bénézet 2005: 163), as seen in the French media reception that generally holds the director in high esteem (Ors et al. 2001: 23), critics' view of him as the great hope for the French art-house cinema (Brooks 2007: 6), as well as his multi-award winning international career since his debut as filmmaker.

Dumont's reputation as a 'lofty, dispassionate French *auteur*' (Trilling 2007: 38) crystallises around two factors. First, *La Vie de Jésus* keeps an observational distance from the characters and the narrative on screen, which, despite Dumont's non-judgemental approach to the filmed subjects and his abstention from visual or stylistic interference ('just showing the reality as it is'), often does quite the opposite. It creates a viewing experience that is both detached and potentially judgemental. This tendency coexists with the momentary interludes of almost vivisectionist close-ups of bodily parts – such as hands, faces and genitalia. As a result, the view of 'les primitifs flamands' (Savigneau 1999), 'reduced to animality' and 'one with nature' (Tancelin 2001: 39) persists in his portrait of life in Bailleul. Secondly, it is hard to establish Dumont's 'take' on his disadvantaged protagonists, especially given his aversion to the critical reception that sees what he has done as part of the *cinéma social* (Tancelin 2001: 41). There is a sense of looking through a glass door, or of the more hostile view of 'visite

au zoo', as pointed out by some critics (Brooks 2007: 6; Kaganski 1999; Trilling 2007: 40), which feeds on Dumont's avowed inspiration from the milieu observed through his father's car window as he drove through the impoverished rural communities when on medical visits – Dumont would accompany his father, a doctor, on these visits when he was young. This reminds us, above all, of what O'Shaughnessy terms the voyeuristic pitfall of recent political cinema 'offering up the struggles of the victims of oppression or exploitation for our contemplation, reprobation or horror (O'Shaughnessy 2007: 101). This chapter thereby questions what hold Dumont maintains on these ambiguities: Is *La Vie de Jésus* literally '[un film d']un intellectuel qui s'en va là vas' (Boulay 1997), thus pronouncing upon the conditions of a marginalised part of France that is rarely represented, but ultimately confirming the presumption of social suffering from which the whole project started?; Or, does the film represent a more elaborate cause, using its sociological approach as an instrument to reach out to advance a vision of transformation and change?

The question has implications for other filmmakers who work in similar *auteurist* autonomy (director-driven, relatively low-budget and character-centred films) and who share concerns regarding the socially dispossessed. Therefore, there should be a reason why it is particularly in Dumont's film that the issue of the *auteur's* gaze and its positioning is paramount and potentially more problematic than in the works of directors like the Dardenne Brothers and Zonca, whose thematic vicinity with Dumont from the outset invites a comparison. Despite the shared concerns, however, Dumont's film diverges from the work of the Dardenne Brothers and Zonca in its treatment of 'the real' in a double sense. Firstly, there is a distinct difference in filming style. Perhaps one can broadly generalise the Dardennes' and Zonca's style as accentuating proximity to the filmed subjects, through the use of handheld cameras tracking the characters' movement with an obsessive closeness and the use of sensitive microphones that pick up even the most minute sound of movement and breath. As a result, their cinema largely operates through the sense of direct intervention in the situations faced by the characters (see chapter 5 for a discussion of the Dardenne Brother's cinematography). In contrast, Dumont works in wide-screen format, exclusively using wide CinemaScope lenses, and dialogue is scarce in his film. This generates an effect of a very painterly portrait of life in Bailleul, which draws on the tradition of Flemish landscape painting, as the director admits (Gorin 1999). Therefore, it can be said that, on the one hand, Dumont's cinema is at one remove from the 'immediacy' of the social and the realistic

found in the films of the Dardennes and Zonca, and on the other, that it makes more room for the fixation of the *auteur*'s gaze to be palpable.

Secondly, the high-profile use of (non-)actors by these directors opens a new dimension in the discourse around what is (represented as the) 'real' and what is simulated or fictionalised. The leading players of the three directors have all been awarded at Cannes for their roles at some point in each of the directors' careers. Zonca in *La Vie rêvée des anges* cast professional actors, like the quite well-known Elodie Bouchez (*Les Roseaux sauvages* (1994) and the cult film *Clubbed to death* (1986) and Natacha Regnier, a relative newcomer at the time. On the other hand, in *Rosetta*, the Dardenne Brothers chose Emilie Dequenne, then a drama student with no professional acting experience, but a native of Liège and therefore one step closer to an authentic representation of the social space of the region. However, it is Dumont who took the concept of amateur actors to the extreme, making it clear that they were cast because their real life ostensibly matched their role in the film. For example, David Douche, who played the unemployed Freddy, *was* unemployed at the time of the auditioning; so were the group of actors in the roles of Freddy's friends. Both the Dardennes' and Zonca's films helped kick off or consolidate the acting career for their lead players, but Dumont's non-actors in *La Vie de Jésus* went back to their previous lives in Bailleul after the filming had ended, with none pursuing acting careers. The critics' views were mixed. Jean-Claude Loiseau accused the film of manipulation: to him, the cast members are 'les prisonniers non de leurs schémas mentaux, affectifs, sociaux, mais de l'idée théorique que Dumont plaque sur chacun d'eux' (Loiseau 2000: 3). On a more positive note, however, Guy Austin discerns a challenge against the star industry, a system traditionally seen detrimental to director's autonomy as the sole *auteur* of his product (Austin 2004: 261). Meanwhile, across these quite different views on the issue, the reference to Robert Bresson's notion of actors as malleable models and director as the puppet master persists consistently. Whatever the approach to the issue, all seem to 'reassert the *auteurist* hierarchy' on Dumont's part (Austin 2004: 253), which seemingly sits uneasily with the film's subject matter; that is, a socially and economically deprived class forced to make sense of their situation without much help or resources.

Dumont's insistence on the non-interpretative nature of his actors – that they were only being themselves and there was no performance as such involved on their part – and his emphasis on the bigger picture of the landscape at the expense of the proximity to the characters, however, merits a more careful reading than a platform for

cynicism. Representing on screen ‘an unemployed person who plays an unemployed person’¹⁸ (Ruquier 1999: 13) involves, on the part of the director, a necessary understanding of the patterns of social malaise, depending on the point of view of the subject who suffers from it. In my view, in *La Vie de Jésus*, the ‘smallness’ of the characters, in a way examined by O’Shaughnessy (O’Shaughnessy 2007: 121), is put against the vastness of the Bailleul landscape, so that an observational distance can be created to enable us to identify the causes of this crisis. *La Vie de Jésus* ascribes the pervading delinquency and enervation among the young men to the failure of their masculinity. And, as we shall see, there is a strong evidence in the film that the crisis happens because they are left fatherless and, by extension, without the help of an effective national government. In this regard, a more useful interpretation of Dumont’s position (as a middle-class intellectual *auteur* who takes on the working class milieu) in *La Vie de Jésus* would be one which understands his *auteurist* positioning in relation to the film; in particular, he takes on the role of a scrutinising sociologist. Dumont’s investigating gaze is fixed upon the aftermath of the neo-liberal economy turning into a reality that makes it possible to blame the individual victims for their own hardship, and not the state. The de-industrialised landscape of Bailleul functions as a vision of the social void, foregrounding the issue of where the main characters’ dispositions, such as violence and racism, are formed. Dumont’s approach, therefore, has advantages over a more specific sociological framework, which addresses the tensions between structure (or the lack of it) and agency directly at the level of the individual.

In this light, the work done by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and his team in the influential *La Misère du monde* can be seen to offer an intertextual reference to Dumont’s film. Published in 1993 at the height of the discourse around the issues of the *fracture sociale* and just a few years before the release of *La Vie de Jésus*, *La Misère du monde*, is a study in the experiences of ‘a heterogeneous aggregate of fragmented, isolated poor, “the disadvantaged”’, above all, in their own words (Bourdieu 1999: 184). This imposing book of sociology was a bestseller in France and created a powerful polemic aimed at revealing the conditions of suffering caused by the state and current policies. Mostly transcriptions of often quite lengthy accounts from participating interviewees recorded in live interviews¹⁹, the book’s sensibility, ‘shedding the

¹⁸ ‘[U]ne chômeuse qui joue une chômeuse, c’est pas du jeu! Ca ne relève plus de la performance’. Here, Ruquier attacks the Cannes awards given to the amateur actors of *L’Humanité*.

¹⁹ Distrusting the questionnaire and the logistical statistics traditionally used in a sociological survey, *La Misère du monde* made the sociology more ‘alive’ and accessible with detailed transcriptions of live interviews and discussions with normal people. The English translation runs to 646 pages, of which only 20 or so, in particular the closing

constraints of conventional intellectual production' (Jenkins 2002: xix), bears reference to Dumont's own methodology. Dumont reconstructed a working-class culture in *La Vie de Jésus* first and foremost depending on the experiences of the local youth who virtually enacted the personae of themselves in the film. Similarly, Bourdieu's weighty theme of social suffering and how it structurally propels the descent of individuals, especially those who are 'caught in the contradictions of the social world, which are experienced in the form of personal dramas' (Bourdieu 1998: 1), is vital to understanding why the delinquent male characters in *La Vie de Jésus* behave as they behave, or think what they think. One might also reflect on the polarising ethical question of Dumont reducing his characters to 'animal(ity)' much in the same vein that Bourdieu's use of anecdotal testimonies of his 'unsuspecting' interviewees is often accused of miserabilism for its contents and of being opportunistic for its intent (McRobbie 2002: 131).

In this chapter, I will argue that a more fruitful reading of *La Vie de Jésus* is possible by considering what Bourdieu's empirical investigation has to say about the complexities of social and symbolic forms of exclusion. In doing so, I will ponder the ways that Dumont's uncompromising style can be seen as an attempt to make the audience feel 'what is missing from the picture' and how it relates to the reasons behind Freddy's predicament. The 'missing' father is a central figure in *La Vie de Jésus*: the patriarch has fallen, masculinity is being redefined, the state is useless, and Freddy and his friends are confronted with the challenge of facing futures without the help of their fathers. As I shall show through my analysis of the iconic sequences that epitomise these problems, an implicit desire to recuperate the paternal is at work in Dumont's film. This desire for the paternal found in *La Vie de Jésus* can be seen, above all, to allude to Bourdieu's critique of the 'withdrawal of the state' and his call for the return to a belief in the state (Bourdieu 1998: 6). To begin with, however, I will lay out the points that can be used in reading *La Vie de Jésus* as a cinematic contemporary of the sociology probed in *La Misère du monde*. I will discuss three interweaving points – the methodological, the thematic and the teleological – as a common ground, before I move on to a more detailed analysis of *La Vie de Jésus* to suggest how these points build up to offer a vision of an absent father far more palpably than the film apparently does.

reflection by Bourdieu himself on epistemological and ethical issues, are devoted to what one might recognise as 'academic' sociology.

4.1 Corollaries from the overlapping ground of *La Vie de Jésus* and *La Misère du monde*

Dumont films the daily rhythms of the life of his protagonist, Freddy, in a quasi-ethnographic way, revealing that he is unemployed, suffers from epilepsy and lives with his mother who runs a local bar in Bailleul. Freddy also enjoys riding his moped around the countryside in company with other young men like himself, who have little education and few prospects. His girlfriend Marie, with whom Freddy has frequent sex, works as a cashier at a local supermarket. His spare time is spent divided between playing in a brass band and visiting Cloclo, the brother of one of his friends and who is dying in hospital of AIDS. He is also seen in the same hospital following his own neural treatment of his epileptic condition. Following an Armistice Day parade, Freddy and his gang make racist jokes to drive away the North African family who have been sitting at a table in his mother's bar. Kader, the North African boy from the aforementioned family, begins to follow Marie home on his moped, and Marie eventually reciprocates his interest and the two go out together. The gang pursue Kader and attack him on an isolated country road, leaving him dead from Freddy's repeated kicks to his head. Following his arrest on charges of murder, Freddy flees the police station. He subsequently has a moped accident, leaving him lying alone in a farmer's field.

Dumont appears, understandably, conscious of his methodology in that he deliberately sought out local people whose lives and personalities resembled those of his characters. To find the 'real people' (*'des vrais gens'*) (Tancelin 2001: 39), Dumont posted flyers in bars, arcades, and unemployment agencies and, after some ten months of successive interviews and research, he finally settled on two unemployed youths: David Douche (Freddy) and Marjorie Cottreel (Marie). When asked what the cast of *La Vie de Jésus* took away from the experience, he responded with a sense of uneasiness about the exploitative potential of his approach:

They are proud of the film, very happy to have participated in it, yet at the same time there is something that is beyond them. The film reveals certain things, and I see that they don't always understand them. Cinema contains an incredible degree of manipulation. That doesn't shock me, but I know very well that I am stealing something from them (Dumont quoted in Bowles 2004: 48).

The debate on the degree of manipulation notwithstanding, the question I am concerned with here is the ways how Dumont made the most of the unusual casting situation to the mutual benefit of all concerned. This is also something that Bourdieu took a great deal of care over, wishing to avoid the pitfall of producing an artefact out of the real-life testimonies his interviewees confided to his team. The interviewer/sociologist, in Bourdieu's socio-analysis, has an active role to play. He/she must act as an 'obstetrician' (Bourdieu 1991: 3), to let the participants speak out, and with as minimal intrusion as possible within the editing in order to preserve the self-reflection of social understanding. As a means of achieving this, Bourdieu insists on two things to be incorporated into the sociological imagination. First, he uses *habitus*, a concept he re-elaborated to define the terrain of dispositions and routine unthought-about actions and ideas, a system of distinctive signs that an individual agent develops in response to the determining structures (class, family, education) and the field of social practices they encounter as result of the structures (careers, work experiences). According to Bourdieu, it is not from declared opinions but at the deepest level of *habitus*, the tastes and distastes, sympathies and aversions, fantasies and phobias, etc., which the unconscious unity of a class is forged (Bourdieu 1984: 77). *Habitus* in *La Misère du monde* is thereby articulated in, 'everything that is at once hidden and disclosed, not only in the transcribed discussion but also in the pronunciation and intonation, everything transcription eradicates, from body language, gestures, demeanour, mimicry and looks, to silences, innuendoes, and slips of the tongue' (Bourdieu 1999: 2). Secondly, there is a desire to know as much as possible about the given agent's social conditioning so as to be able to overcome the gaps inherent in the interview situations that take place only for a limited period of time. Therefore the skills of the interviewer and the 'rapport' with their interviewees, many of whom they have known, albeit intermittently in some case studies, over a lifetime, are both taken seriously.

As for his role as film director, a similar assumption is witnessed in Dumont's remark: 'I wanted to confront the real lives, pain, and misery of these young people, whom adult society has virtually abandoned and who no longer have anything to guide them' (quoted in Bowles 2004: 48). Not only did Dumont match his characters and the actors in their social conditionings, such as their job status and education, he also went to great lengths to preserve the evidential values of the site where *habitus* is formed. To ensure that the characters are set in their milieu, the actors appeared on the set the way they normally dressed in everyday life (the costumes worn by the characters were actually drawn from the actors' own wardrobes). Similarly, the original decors of

interior scenes such as local bars and family flats (mostly the actors' own or their acquaintances' in the same village) were filmed untouched, leaving both the set designer and the art director in the crew virtually taskless (Tancelin 2001: 40). More importantly, there is a sense that even the most banal gestures and routine demeanours actually reveal a certain essence of their social being. The sullen, ineluctable look on the prematurely aged features of David Douche as Freddy, for example, is often presented in close-up in such moments when he suffers an epileptic seizure or undergoes mortifying medical treatments in hospital. In the rather iconic images of Douche and his four friends riding mopeds along the deserted roads of Bailleul (which feature in a version of the film's poster), what lingers is the silent glares of the local inhabitants, either leaning against the red-bricked walls of the houses that line the street or sitting on the front steps apparently crushed by the heat and the boredom.

Given only the minimum motivation as to the intention of the scene, the actors were led to 'interpréter à partir d'eux-mêmes' (Mérigeau 1999), without any means to help pre-conceive ideas including a scenario to read in advance (as widely reported, Dumont's actors did not read the script at all). Dumont acknowledges he followed a maieutic method. He had a discussion with the actors just before the start of each shoot with a series of questions devised to let them create their own dialogue and reveal their own autonomy, such as what they think should happen if they came across the same thematic situation in their real life (Tancelin 2001: 60). The local first-time actors were disposed to improvise on the spot, in the urgency of the shooting, strategies of self-representation and adoptive response, so as to deliver up their own truth. The script underwent review and revision many times in order to accommodate the point of views of the actors involved ("En fait, l'important n'est pas que l'acteur arrive au scénario, mais au contraire que le scénario arrive à l'acteur" Dumont in Mérigeau 1999), and eventually turned into something quite different to the original, which was initially in a form 'très romanesque' (Dumont in Mérigeau 1999). While using the dialectic between the interpreter and the dramatic proposition in fiction film is nothing new, as found in the cases of Rossellini to the recent *Dogma* films, what resulted from the practice in *La Vie de Jésus* was something far removed from Bresson's notion of 'model' as a tool to reflect the director's view. Rather Dumont modelled his film after his actors, and not the reverse. In this light, his film draws much closer to the concerns that lie behind the *jeune cinéma*'s desire to create a film as a work of a collective interest, in the way examined by Martine Beugnet (Beugnet 2006: 249). The reality of the participating (non-)actors, whose set of dispositions (or *habitus*) already merged into the

parts they played, permeates the spectacle of the Bailleul landscape. To a certain degree, the filming of their acting on the spot benefited from what is generally counted as modes of documentary filmmaking – such as a long, single take for a whole sequence with a fixed camera without editing or dolly movement and synchronisation.

Consequently, the film demonstrates comprehensive data on the social conditioning of individual discourses, such as social trajectory, body language, slips of the tongue; a better understanding of individual behaviour, which probably would have been unimaginable to assemble in the form of a scenario written by a single *auteur*.

In order that the maieutic, ‘let them interpret from themselves’ technique works squarely within the intention of avoiding artefact and directorial affect, Dumont emphasises the importance of building up an intimate ‘rapport de confiance’ with his actors (Tancelin: 55). This leads us to question to what extent the actors’ response can be taken for granted: do the first-time non-actors show who they really are and what they really feel, or, do they not tend to be more malleable under the exceptional circumstances in which they find themselves (that is, in front of the camera)? In other words, how can one be sure that what is being shown on screen corresponds to the reality of their life, and not to the imagination of the director behind the camera? In this regard, Dumont tends to look for a natural ‘fit’ which exists between the actors’ individual dispositions and his own authorial position:

PT: En fait, ils [les acteurs] écrivent pratiquement les dialogues à partir de l’intention

autant que de l’intuition qu’ils ont de votre imaginaire.

BD: Oui. Mais vous lisez le scénario et vous retrouvez exactement ce qui est écrit. (Tancelin: 60).

BD: Quand je travaille, je crois que c’est moi qui vais vers eux. Je fais ce travail de me réduire vers eux, ce mouvement que probablement fait un acteur vers le personnage. C’est moi qui renonce à des tas de choses pour vouloir ce qu’il est, qui décide, qui dit que c’est bien. Je veux ce qu’il est. [...] Je dois veiller à la *cohérence*, à l’*harmonie*, c’est mon travail. (Tancelin: 64-70, emphasis is mine).

There is a clear sense that the film reaches out for a certain consensus between the director and the actors/characters over what is represented on screen and how to show it. This then leads us to consider the attribution of the key themes in *La Vie de*

Jésus, such as the acts of violence and racism, which the film appears to confine to its disenfranchised white working-class protagonists. During the playing session of their brass band, Freddy and the youths pick on a plump cheerleader to drop her skirt, before they sexually molest her. The sequence is quite distressing not only because of the content of what is shown, but also because, if we follow the logic behind Dumont's pursuit of the 'fit' (between the non-actors' lived dispositions and his intimacy and empathy with them through the characters he stages on the film set), it presupposes a reasonable assumption that this is how the youths would normally assert their male prerogative in the given situation. In the same startling, in-your-face fashion, while other members of his gang are on the lookout, we encounter the extreme close-up of Freddy's face contorted in anger and hatred just before he delivers the last fatal kicks to Kader's head. Previously in the film, Kader and his parents are seen to be more or less driven out of Freddy's mother's *café*: as the North African family leave, one of the brass band musicians tootles a phrase of 'La Marseillaise' on his bugle to the genuine amusement of those who remain (a similarly ironic use of 'La Marseillaise' is discerned in *Bye-bye* in chapter 1). In *La misère du monde*, Bourdieu says it is necessary to bring out everything that results when different or antagonistic visions of the world confront each other 'without forgetting all the distortions that necessarily result from the particular character of their own point of view': 'the *tragic consequences* of making incompatible points of view confront each other, where no concession or compromise is possible because each one of them is equally founded in social reason' (Bourdieu 1999: 3-5, emphasis author's own). Bourdieu refers here to racism or xenophobia as current manifestations of social hatred. Indeed the survey tackles and shows various assumptions of the knowledge of the other on the part of many of the white working-class respondents. In particular, there is also a more recent collective anxiety among these interviewees, that is, their objection to what they see as a now too-liberal state and equal opportunities administered by it, which they see as inherently detrimental to their own access to welfare and forms of social security.

Despite his non-interventionist, showing-the-reality-as-it-happens-in-real-society approach, Dumont does more than merely observe. An indirect call for help can be detected in the way Dumont draws on his demoralised protagonists. As I shall argue, Dumont uses the *mise-en-scène*, to juxtapose Freddy's plight and the absence of the father, which provides a context to his actions. This comes significantly close to Bourdieu's wider sociology that offers a critique of the state's withdrawal from the benevolent paternal role it was reserved for before the arrival of neoliberalist thought's

domination of the public sector. According to Bourdieu, the state's adhesion to neoliberalism began in the 1970s and was made complete in the 1980s under the Socialist government. The state no longer provided the public with the necessary social protection and safety nets, leaving those most vulnerable in a sort of 'social slide downwards' that we witness today (Bourdieu 1999: 186). There is a sense that what Dumont shows in Freddy is this 'social slide downwards' with virtually no brake, culminating in murder and escaping from the police. However, through his *mise-en-scène*, Dumont also shows what is not there: the missing part of the picture, in which the state is useless (no forms of social institutions or authorial agents, except the unpopulated hospital) and what fills in its absence is dysfunctional families devoid of efficient paternal figures.

4.2 The missing father

La Vie de Jésus opens with a close-up of Freddy, his head encased in his helmet and riding his moped with the piercing noise of its modified exhaust. Upon his arrival home, Freddy crashes his moped at full speed on the cobblestones, flinging himself to the ground in the process. He does this ritualistically, examining his self-inflicted wounds with a vague satisfaction each time he rides alone or together with the members of the gang. The gang make a habit of collective loafing about on their rides, and their social activities show an obvious uniformity, such as playing in the brass band and marching along the street (in uniform). It is hard to conceptualise the hold of their bond though, except through the pervading ennui and the group's active exclusion of the other. The essentially isolated individual members, as Brett Bowles points out, fall short of forming parts of a community (Bowles 2004: 50). They are not shirtless teen rebels on mopeds although they look the part; yet, as Joe Hardwick observes, neither do they entirely belong to the loitering figures of 'positive' marginality embodied by Isa in *La Vie rêvée des anges*, for example (Hardwick 2007: 223). Freddy is also further isolated from the group and this is emphasised by his epileptic condition. A vicious circle of collapsing into epileptic convulsions happens three times throughout the film – during winter, spring and summer – intensifying each time in a downward spiral that is punctuated by the test sessions he undergoes at the hospital.

If the hospital represents the form of institutional support Freddy gets, he resents it, finding the whole session, tied by the wires from the automatically functioning

machine like a robot, vain and degrading. Hence he wrecks his moped afterwards. At home, on the other hand, Freddy and his mother wilfully separate themselves from each other so that they do not have to interact. Dumont never shows Freddy's mother in any location other than her tiny café, below the family flat. Most of her attention is attracted by television reports on faraway disasters, such as in Africa; that is, when she is not accompanied by her customary client and friend (the middle-aged bugle player from the band who tootles the national anthem later at the café). It transpires that both the state-level and the familial, especially maternal, sources of help clash with the possibility of constructing any meaningful discourse around the perspective of Freddy's future. This is manifested in the scene where, after a battery of neurological tests at the hospital which Freddy finds humiliating, his mother scolds him for not accepting his disease more gracefully. His deceased father watching him from heaven, as she tells him, would be displeased, to which Freddy retorts flatly, "Stop it! That's bullshit!".

The father who presumably watches over him is a significant reference point in the film. *La Vie de Jésus* describes a society where the patriarchs have fallen. Fathers and the alternative father figures are either already deceased (like Freddy's), ineffective (the detective at the police interrogation) or irrelevant (the bugle musician and Kader's father). In particular, the film implies a crisis in the Weberian notion of paternalism. In Weber's traditional models of patriarchy, the father owes the family the obligation of economic support and protection in exchange for his power over the members of his household (Lerner 1986: 239). In its wider definition, paternalism represents an institutionalised relationship between the state and its citizens (Lerner 1986: 239). The notion is highly problematic in feminist terms, as it marginalises women and maternal relations. In *La Vie de Jésus*, Marie, as an object of desire between Freddy and Kader, is confined to a supporting role in the masculine endeavour to resolve their own paternal crisis. Freddy's relationship with Marie wanes as their increasingly infrequent sex suggests, compounding Freddy's feeling that his masculinity is threatened when Marie dates Kader, the sexual other. Similarly, the maternal relation in *La Vie de Jésus* apparently lacks the resources necessary to help improve Freddy's situation. Families are often indelibly haunted by the absent fathers in *le jeune cinéma*, and this often manifests through the representation of dysfunctional, and even suicidal, mothers: *Rosetta* and *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?*, in particular, present such a case. Dumont's film is no exception. In the scene where the mother walks into Freddy's room to help with his seizure in the middle of his love-making with Marie, there is a sense that his mother keeps him from being a man in his own right. Remarkably, it is the mother's

own words that summons the Name of the Father, inscribing a space for the paternal to revert to. This is not dissimilar to the mother's resorting to the paternal order in *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?*, disguised in a folkloric dream (see chapter 2).

The main focus of *La Vie de Jésus* is, therefore, on young male characters who are left fatherless and, as a result, who are forced to find a path for themselves in the absence of paternal models. The film shows a connection between this failure to provide fatherly responsibility and the ineffective uncaring system of a de-industrialised economy. Individuals are now entirely responsible for his or her own socio-economic trajectory, leaving Freddy and his friends in a condition of unemployment, disease and death (Cloclo dies of AIDS). Bourdieu notes that individuals or groups in social decline endlessly reinvent the discourse of 'essentialist faith in the eternity of natures, celebration of tradition and the past, the cult of history and its rituals', because 'the best they can expect from the future is the return of the old order', from which they expect the restoration of their social being (Bourdieu 1986: 111). In *La Vie de Jésus*, despite the youths' outspoken contempt for their hometown and feelings of rootlessness, they also have an unconscious desire to hold onto an idea of land and nationhood. This nostalgia for a benevolent form of paternalism is submerged, notably, in their brass band practice leading to the Armistice Day Parade and their hanging out around the town hall of Bailleul. However, the most extreme example is the pornographic sex scene between Freddy and Marie with their existence bound by the tall grass in the endless fields surrounding them. Peter Baxter observes that the male characters in *La Vie de Jésus* are severed both from place and from the ideology of nation under which modernity submerged the traditional realities of local identity (Baxter 2001: 72). There is an unspoken resonance in the film that these unruly children resort to violence and apathy because they are left without the guidance of a paternal authority figure.

If the epilepsy and the futility of the social activities left available for Freddy metonymise his alienation, Dumont's *mise-en-scène* wrestles it with a transcendent move in order to suggest that a higher order of re-connection is attainable. There is a desire to reanimate the social ties that bind the disconnected Freddy and the landscape of his town. A desire to reconnect to the paternal looms large in what I would call the motifs of transcendence, which occurs four times in the film.

The first case takes place during Freddy and Marie's chairlift ride. Dumont cuts frequently to their subjective points of view in shot-reverse-shot, suggesting their separate gazes in the conversation ("Do you love me, Fred?", "Sure, I love you"). Then the view of the fields of French Flanders, lying flat and stretched out endlessly across

the screen. These slow images, shot from the different perspectives of Marie and Freddy in cross-cut edits, generate an air of suspense, punctuated by the squeaks and the teeters of the old chairlift. Contrary to Marie who declares the mournful scenery beautiful, Freddy, asked by his girlfriend if it is true that he intends to relocate to Lille, mutters that moving to Lille would not make any difference and 'Bailleul is a hole'. The helplessness of the place that Freddy identifies from the view, ironically reflects his own lack of place in it. However, the landscape that Freddy just despised gazes back at them, as seen in the way the sequence ends. An extreme long shot contemplates the two tiny figures dangling from the high altitude, which is perhaps as faraway as Freddy can be from his dreary reality. The low-angle of the camera, apparently coming from the fields of Bailleul, features a widescreen frame divided by land and sky. What results is a dramatic change in the tone: the two characters are elevated and put into a wider horizon, by an all-seeing gaze that embraces their 'smallness' and incorporates it back to the landscape.

The second incident of the film's transcendent motif follows Freddy's epileptic fit which happens during the gang's ride on an empty by-road that looks like a no man's land. Standing beside the road, the youths verbally bawl at each other and Freddy's body seizes, jerking him to the ground. The scene begins in a medium shot, seen from near eye level. But, as the boys gather around Freddy now lying on the ground, the camera starts to crane up slowly, rocking slightly from side to side as it climbs. After floating over the boys for some tangible moments, the camera finally settles on yet another image of the vast landscape. Again, Dumont's camera acts as an agent, offering a glimpse of the possibility of refastening the ties between the characters and the place they inhabit. In so doing, it gestures towards recuperating what has been missing in the picture and the mark of whose very absence is the pain and the brutality that is witnessed on screen now (the youths' anomy and Freddy's epilepsy) – the lost fatherhood that can act as care and responsibility. The paternal is identified, therefore, as a nexus of social identification for these lost children. The scene alludes to the ideology of a(n imaginary) benign authority whose job it is to accept these male characters by giving them a meaningful framework and symbolic home, as hinted at by the sight of the farm visible in the shot.

A similar effect of reconnecting the characters is created by Dumont's subjective shots of the sky. A scene near the end of the film features Marie and Kader seeking privacy in a park that is also the ruins of a monastery. Finally alone, Marie embraces Kader and asks for his forgiveness. The close-up of Marie's face pressed against

Kader's shoulder is one of the most serene moments in the film, a quiet interlude to be tempered later by the bouts of inevitable violence. Kader looks upward, then, after an eye-line match cut, we see the sky as if through his eyes. The beautifully shot image shows the clouds gliding on a clear blue sky; whereas the duration of the shot, holding still over a few seconds, creates a lasting effect for Kader's gaze fixated on the vista.

This is matched by the final skyward glance in the film, which is Freddy's. He escapes from the police station while still being interrogated by the detective who wonders aloud whether Freddy can be held responsible for the murder. Once again wrecking his moped, he lies rigid on his back, hidden by tall grass of the fields. Dumont's camera stares down at him as the scene begins to darken, leading us to expect another fade. Instead, a reverse point-of-view shot of the sky shows the clouds drifting across the sun. What follows is a series of close-ups, of Freddy's tearful face looking directly into the camera for the first time, of an ant walking across from the leaves to his skin, and of the cracked and grimy thumb of his hand. This is a defiantly unresolved ending. It is uncomfortable to watch, given Kader's victimisation as a necessary prelude to the final reckoning in narrative terms. The effect of this ending somehow divorces the violent acts from Freddy as its perpetrator. Yet, characteristically for Dumont, the landscape gazes back at Freddy again: he is, after all, part of this land and, by implication, the son of his father who, as his mother earlier declared, watches over him. There is a feeling of finitude that, once the link of filiation is revealed and recognised, an investigation of violence at its root can finally be realised. Dumont's gaze burrows further and further until it reaches an essence of Freddy's being, as seen in the final series of close-ups.

A reverse Oedipal trajectory operates in *La Vie de Jésus*. Instead of setting the characters in search of the paternal, it is the revelation of the paternal that rebounds upon the disengaged youth. An all-embracing paternal gaze permeates the Bailleul's landscape, which reveals a lot about Dumont's vision as *auteur* of his film. There is an intimate link between the critique of the state's failure and Dumont's authorial perspective. Yannick Dehée points out that while recent French political cinema addresses a resistance against the challenges of neo-liberalism and the dominance of the global market economy, the filmmakers do not necessarily take a position 'de gauche' (Dehee 279). Dumont, instead, holds a paternalistic bond with his amateur actors who more or less enacted the personae of themselves on the set of his film. Dumont's directorial vision serves as a blank canvas, compounding the real-life non-actors' conflicting point of views. In this light, Dumont's *auteur* positioning bears a

Levinasian ethical relation, in which the other's alterity is prioritised before the subjectivity of the self. His desire to be proximate to his subjects ('c'est moi qui suis venu les chercher, c'est moi qui les désire', Méribeau, 1999) reveals an idea of the *auteur* whose 'aspiration de metteur en scène [est] l'effacement' (Gorin 1999), thus appropriating the cinematic space in order to accommodate the other. As has been shown, Dumont's relationship with his non-actors is vital to his investigation of the social milieu left behind by economic changes. This sociological approach is best seen in the way it reconceptualises the *auteur*. In *La Vie de Jésus*, the *auteur* functions in terms of host and hostage to the visions of the other and, in so doing, changes the paternal model that Freddy and his friends need to resolve the crisis in their masculinity. The film argues for a reworking of paternity that can serve as care and responsibility, where there is a viable paternal relation to care for and reconnect the disaffected children to the changing realities of Bailleul. As I have shown through the reading of the transcendent motifs in the film, it is Dumont's *auteur* commitment and not Freddy's own subjective quest that makes this indirect call for the paternal through the *mise-en-scène*.

Building on the concepts of the relation between the paternal and the *auteur* developed in chapter 3, this chapter has traced how Dumont has found ways for ethical engagement with his (non-)actors, above all, through his paternalistic approach that reconnects the disengaged characters into the paternal narrative. Ultimately, however, paternalism is displaced and, in a word, 'othered' in *le jeune cinéma*. My next film, *Rosetta*, is indeed haunted by phantoms of dead fathers not just due to the lack of father figures, but also through the work of the camera and the fraternal collaboration in filmmaking, as we shall now see in chapter 5.

Chapter 5

The ‘Phantom Friend Returning’: the Place of the Absent Father in *Rosetta*

Rosetta tells the story of an eponymous 17-year-old girl determined to hold down a job and live a normal life in the Liège region of modern Belgium. The film won the Belgian brothers, Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne, the coveted Palme d'Or at the 1999 Cannes Festival. It shook the film world: it seemed that this low-key film about poverty and unemployment as experienced at the margins of society, with unseasoned actors and a minimal narrative, lacked the connotations of 'un film à palmes', as a French reviewer once put it²⁰. The French press, full of polemics over the decision, was further incensed by the three awards made to an equally controversial film, Bruno Dumont's *L'Humanité*, with a similar subject matter and the use of non-professional actors²¹. They declared that Cannes 1999 had been the worst year ever. The subsequent repercussions, however, proved otherwise. The Belgian government, seeing the film as representing a national crisis, promptly passed a bill against teenage under-employment called the 'Rosetta Plan'²². A French article famously argued that the success of the then ongoing 35-hour working week debate of the Jospin government would have to depend on whether *Rosetta* had finally found a job (Joffrin 1999). The Dardenne brothers, like a handful of *jeune cinéma* directors such as Dumont and Cantet, rose to the forefront of international art cinema in the 1990s, and now belong to the small elite circle of double Palmes d'Or winners (with a second Palme d'Or for *L'Enfant* in 2005). The Belgian identity of *Rosetta* was seen as a source of national pride in a country distinguished by biculturalism and linguistic division, which have rendered the idea of national cinema volatile and problematic (Spaas 2000: 7). This national identity is cut short, however, as an undisputed affinity remains between the Dardennes' features, rooted in Belgium's strong documentary tradition, and the socially-committed, localised filmmaking of the French *jeune cinéma*, as witnessed in the critical discussion of their films within writings of, and related to, the *jeune cinéma* (see, for example, O'Shaughnessy (2007), Konstantarakos (1998), Chauville (1998)).

The publication of Luc Dardenne's filmmaking journal, *Au dos de nos images*, reflects the brothers' critique of and dissatisfaction with the film industry. It charts the development of a new aesthetics, which affects the intricacies of the creative process of

²⁰ 'Rosetta: un boulot à tout prix', *La Tribune*, 29/09/99.

²¹ The notorious booing towards the actress prize awardees by the attendants at the award ceremony, although it was reportedly pointed at Caneel in *L'Humanité* in particular, was followed by *Le Nouvel Observateur's* post-Cannes article, 'Cinq mois après Cannes: *Rosetta*, est-il une bonne palme d'or?' (23/09/99), interviewing six prominent figures in French cinema about the issue on a pro-and-con basis.

²² 'Rosetta plan launched to boost youth employment', European Industrial Relations Observatory On-line, <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/1999/11/feature/be9911307f.htm> (accessed July 8, 2010).

their films. The cinematic equivalent of small craftsmanship quietly resisting corporate mediocrity, *Rosetta* is an *auteur* film in its truest sense. This leads to the question of who watches the film: there is no neat answer, but it seems reasonable to assume that the target audience of the film largely consists of educated, middle-class adult viewers who align themselves with art-house cinemas. It also questions the relationship between the spectator and the film's subject, Rosetta. There are at least two obvious dangers in this: firstly we sentimentalise the subject of narrative; secondly, we take over, reduce, and 'orientalise' Rosetta, whose story is not normally represented centrally in our understanding of the world. The film never allows, not for a moment, the camera to capture anything other than Rosetta or her purview: the viewer, thus, has no way to avoid Rosetta – a position that he/she usually avoids in the cinema. With hardly any moment of reprieve from her daily struggles, Rosetta's condition is not visibly alleviated by the end of narrative. The dystopian fixation thus betrays the viewers' ethical purchase in films starring children that usually sees them to have at least *some* form of optimism and hope (for example, the similarly dystopian families in *La Cité des enfants perdus* (Jeunet and Caro 1995), whose orphans are rescued at the end). This partly explains the initial outrage at the film's Cannes release. At the same time, it is easy to be suspicious of intellectual *auteur* filmmakers tackling the exploits of a child labourer and stimulating our sympathy through a voyeuristic observation²³ (Brooks 2006). What is obvious from the film's opening scene, however, is that *Rosetta* sets up an almost violent intimacy between its subject and the spectator: we are directly thrust into her mundane existence without being given any space to make sense of what is going on. This moment of tension fomented exponentially with each passing frame. The result is an unmediated sense of reality, of 'being there', that defies the safe distance of the camera protecting us from what is seen on screen and generates for the viewer 'un sentiment d'enfermement' which makes the spectator react 'en étant fâché, frustré' (Dardenne with Houba 2003).

The real challenge *Rosetta* sets for us, then, is the way the film uses its cinematography quite distinctively to produce a special relation to the spectator. This relation, as I shall argue, is neither identificatory nor distancing. Luc Dardenne speaks of his brother and his desire to break up the image that the spectator has already seen and known (Dardenne 2005: 129), and this manifests through their eschewing of the stable, clichéd images such as shot/reverse-shots, point of view shots or establishing

²³ Brooks writes that, caught between the harsh, social-realist studies of the Belgian underclass and the regular fixtures on the high-glitzy festival circuit, the life of Dardenne borthers can be "a strange, split existence".

shots. The camera in perpetual motion, much like their characters' precarious situation, radically destabilises the viewing position, giving us a sense of 'being with her, but slightly behind her' that Sarah Cooper speaks of when discussing the Dardenne brothers' films (Cooper 2007: 73). On the other hand, the idea of a 'respectable', but voyeuristic, distance implied in realist observation is disturbed, as the film utilises the code and conventions of video image and reality-TV aesthetics. The Dardenne brothers' camera intentionally embodies an 'absent character' in the film (Dardenne with Houba 2003), complicating the relation between the film's subject and its viewer. What Deleuze conceptualises as 'free indirect discourse' is useful here, in the way it searches beyond the distinction between the objective image (i.e. what the camera sees) and the subjective image (i.e. what the character sees): it designates an 'anonymous viewpoint of someone unidentified amongst characters' (Deleuze 2007: 74). Through the position of the 'phantom' character (Dardenne with Houba 2003) that the camera takes up in *Rosetta*, the viewer is made to enter into a relationship, affirming him/herself in Rosetta and siding with her, whilst at the same time distinguishing him/herself from Rosetta. In this chapter, I will engage closely with the ways in which the Dardenne brothers 'make the camera felt' in their film, to investigate why it should matter to us and how it has any bearings on the attempt to understand the film's ethical problematic in the film. *Rosetta* opens amid the hypervigilance required to maintain a job, and tracks her desire to protect (whatever remains of) the social tie. She is forced, by her parents' lack of fight, to fend for herself. In the absence of resource and support that should have been provided by the family, what emerges is a vision of the de-industrialised fringes of society that can neither accept nor afford fatherhood. The intergenerational tension fuels Rosetta's restless flight of movement. I will suggest that this is played out in the game of hide-and-seek that the Dardenne brothers validate between the viewer and Rosetta, particularly through the construction of a fluid, interactive subjectivity between the two parties.

There is a key figure looming in the background of this encounter: the missing father. *Rosetta* is completely devoid of any paternal references, and the paternal lack feels conspicuous considering the fact that the film explores her relation to the family as the only institution of reciprocity and the last preserve of a social life stripped to its bare bones. It is here noteworthy that the filial relation in *Rosetta* is used in a figurative sense, which is on a par with the Dardennes' other feature films (notably *La Promesse*, *Le Fils* and *L'Enfant*). However, unlike these other films, *Rosetta* does not actualise a

figure of the father as a character within the narrative²⁴. The aforementioned metaphor of the ‘phantom’, used by the Dardenne brothers, to refer to the position of camera, is relevant here as it also applies to the nature of the paternal existence in their film (Dardenne 2005: 25, 115). The paternal absence from the screen in *Rosetta*, as I shall argue, is carried over in the form of the ever-tangible eye of the camera to the encounter between the viewer and Rosetta. In my view, the Dardenne brothers’ filmic father is at once implied and concealed, casting an ominous shadow, yet effaced completely at a time when he is most needed. I will maintain this paternal relation from two specific angles. The figure of the father is elaborated as a subject struggling to realise his own subjectivity, hence related to the Dardennes’s ‘making the camera felt’. At the same time, *Rosetta* leaves open the possibility of a different and more fruitful kind of paternal relation in the acknowledgement of a father as a moral agent capable – if only with difficulty – of responsibility. The latter is particularly important to my thesis as it lays an ethical ground for thinking about how the vision of the father might be shaped or reimagined by the Dardennes’ filmmaking.

It has been documented by Cooper that persistent themes such as parent-child relations and forgiveness in the Dardennes cinema are reconfigured as a way of addressing the Other and its alterity, as developed by Levinas (Cooper 2007). Luc Dardenne, nodding to the Levinasian influence on their work, writes indignantly of the contemporary father who has forsaken the principle of transmission and education and who, in the process, has alienated himself (Dardenne 2005: 103). Precisely, it is something that has not yet arrived, a wait for the time of the unknowable ‘other’ to come (‘une attente de l’autre’) where the brothers project their own vision of paternity. The prospect of filial relation other than it is presently, with its emphasis on compassion and care, in my view, helps the audience to recognise the alterity of others without overtly commanding or identifying with them. Lodged in this context, the concluding part of the chapter will bear on the question of how the Dardenne brothers flesh out the imaging of a non-hierarchical, less authoritarian father, capable of functioning outside of what Levinas calls a totalising system (Levinas 2008: 21); and how they negotiate this ideal through the tuning of proximity and distance between their subject and the viewer. Less assured of what is going on in Rosetta’s mind and by allowing an open perception of her fluid identity to come to terms with ours, we become her friend; the

²⁴ Olivier Gourmet’s character, the archetypal father in the Dardennes’ cinema, is Rosetta’s boss and is also a father. His relatively minor role functions outside Rosetta’s family although his only concern with his own son makes a passing reference to *La Promesse*, in which he played an ogre figure.

'ghost' haunting the paternal relation is reborn as something proximate to fraternity; the brothers' positioning as *auteurs* is invested with a clear sense of social mediation. I want to discuss *Rosetta* as a circuit of vibrant identity transmissions linking up and interflowing between the subject, the viewer, the paternal and the *auteurs*; and they do so in recognition of ethical relations founded in the survival and rescue of the other. What follows is my attempt to animate this dynamics. Considering the camera 'being-with' as a way of tracing the disappearance of the father, I shall explore the possible ways in which the family portrayal in *Rosetta* can open up to more affective relations towards the other. By drawing on the concept of friendship as developed by Derrida in his *Politics of Friendship*, I will then move on to delineate the 'becoming-friend' that permeates the relations of all the interlinking subjectivities found within the film.

5.1 Hide-and-seek: ethical suspense

Rosetta (Emily Dequenne) lives with her alcoholic mother in a dismal trailer park. She cannot keep a steady job since there is no job available to her. When she finds a job, her employment is precarious as it often means that she can be sacked at any time. When a young man called Riquet, who had befriended her, falls into the water, she contemplates leaving him to drown in the hope that she might get his job selling waffles. Although she reaches out and saves him, she later succeeds in having him fired and getting his job when another opportunity arises. However, faced with an increasingly difficult situation with her mother, who prostitutes herself for drink, Rosetta's struggle finally exceeds her survival instinct. She phones her boss to say she is not coming to work any more, retires to the caravan and switches on the gas in order to commit suicide, only to find that the bottle is empty. Violently angry and frustrated, she tries to lug another bottle to the caravan when Riquet reappears, circling her on his motorbike. They both stand still, looking at each other in a face-to-face image that closes the film.

The opening sequence of *Rosetta* has the feel of a battlefield. Having just been sacked from the factory job she is desperate to hold onto, she literally hurls herself onto the boss who has fired her, onto a group of workers who try to restrain her, onto the floor, the walls, and finally taking refuge under the machines before getting herself forcefully arrested. The viewer first comes upon Rosetta through a close-up of her back. The images of her taut neck last for some time before the camera reveals her profile close-up. The handheld camera movement literally runs behind Rosetta. Shaky

as her breathing, the claustrophobic long takes lead us through slammed doors into the back room of the factory, where she attacks her boss for firing her when her employment trial period is over. The camera is kept exclusively within close proximity of her. It knows she is in a dash towards something, but, apparently, it does not know where she is heading for: her slamming of the door feels like a physical sensation, causing the shot momentarily to go out of focus due to the extreme proximity of the door to the camera lens. Likewise, tracking shots are often punctuated with gestures (e.g. the same door-slamming) or material objects (e.g. doors, factory machines) that hold the viewer back from a closer access to her presence. As the camera desperately tries to keep up with her pace, two things become apparent in this opening sequence that will resonate throughout the film: firstly, the camera work is structured as a pursuit, and Rosetta's whirlwind body guides and dictates what is seen on screen; secondly, her movements are also what become the limits of the visual frame, hiding from us any clues that can inform us as to how to relate to her character and judge her actions.

The Dardenne brothers' relentless document of a constantly active object exhibits a compositional quality comparable to the kind of images typically produced on video²⁵. What we see stays fairly rigidly within Rosetta's purview, her immediate vicinity, 'her *space*' (James 2003: 24). This sense of directness and lack of distance generally happens in footage shot on video due to the medium's intimacy with its filmed object and its limited capacity in vision, which in turn makes it difficult to allow any extraneous detail. It is tempting to recall the fact that the directors started out as video documentary makers. Their low-budget TV films, made with video equipment throughout the 1970s, covered subjects of strikes and unemployment (*Lorsque le bateau de Léon M. descendit la Meuse pour la première fois* (1979)), Nazi resistance (*Le Chant du Rossignol* (1978)) and Polish exiles (*Leçons d'une Université Volante* (1981)). The cornerstone of their documentary career was the highly influential *Vidéographie* series dedicated to exploring the potential of video while capturing the economic crisis of the Liège region. Running from 1976 to 1986, the weekly show screened documentaries by the Dardennes, Chantal Akerman and Raoul Servais alongside many other experimental works. The emergence of video (a medium dating back to the mid-1970s) marked the mainspring of the socially engaged film- and documentary-making scene in Liège that has landmarked contemporary Belgian cinema (Goodfellow 2003: 26). In *Rosetta*, with the use of the lightweight super-16 camera in the hands of their resident

²⁵ *Rosetta* was filmed on Super 16 mm and printed on the 35mm format.

cinematographer Alain Marcoen, intimacy and authenticity owes much to what generally constitutes the video image look – unstable frame, movement shifting in and out of focus, and the inability to keep the subject within the frame. The Dardenne brothers prefer a position appropriate to the documentary filmmaker: ‘la caméra cherche à suivre, n’attend pas, ne sait pas’ (Dardenne 2005: 18). The apparent desire to appear free from the visible signs of direction, creates a realism that is impulsive and experiential. It is as though the directors have handed the reigns over to Emily Dequenue’s body as Rosetta. The viewers do not know and can not anticipate her journey’s end. The objective of this is:

‘placer le spectateur devant le mystère, l’impossibilité de savoir, de voir’
(Dardenne 2005: 127).

‘Ne pas construire d’intrigue, ne pas raconter, ne pas organiser un développement. Être avec Rosetta, être avec elle et voir comment elle va aux choses et comment les choses viennent à elle. Que les situations viennent, surviennent sans qu’elles soient préparées, comme des événements imprévisibles’
(Dardenne 2005: 68).

As a result, they set up a primordial relation to Rosetta, in which her movements not only escape the control of the filmmakers who fashion them, but also the spectators. Their directorial vision recalls the Levinasian relation of alterity, in which the other is radically irreducible to the perception of the self-same. Levinas calls for a suspension in our tendency to master to the self-same identification the subjectivity of the other, whose difference we should not surpass at all cost. And it is precisely due to the fact that we can never grasp the full meaning of the other’s alterity, that the film arouses our desire to be proximate to it and stay in touch with it. *Rosetta* is a film that reveals very little. Her ‘opacity’ (Powrie 2002) adds to the suspense of what has already happened to her in both the social scale (why did she end up living in a caravan? Where does her obsession with finding a job come from?) and the familial scale (what happened to her tattered family?). The outskirts of the small town where she lives in a caravan is an obscure no-man’s-land that she would prefer not to mention. Her mother is never named, and no psychological background is given as to her alcoholism and her dependency on Rosetta. The father is persistently out of the picture and never spoken about. This feels even more conspicuous when we take the production process of the

film into consideration: the figure of the father went into a series of changes from a considerably substantial part in the original script, to a mere reference point of Rosetta's memory, before being completely effaced in the final stage of shooting (Dardenne 2005: 70, 83, 85). So it is now left to the viewer, to interrogate and make his/her own link as to whether, or how, the paternal existence and the lack of it have bearings on the socioeconomic crisis that Rosetta inhabits (why has her father disappeared? How is his disappearance linked to Rosetta's battle?). In this light, the ethical challenge of the 'mise-en-question de ma spontanéité par la présence d'Autrui' (Cooper 2006: 5) that Cooper discerns in her discussion of contemporary French documentary films also applies to the mode of audience participation encouraged by the film, especially in its utilising of the code and conventions of reality-TV video aesthetics.

Rosetta is a fiction film, nevertheless. The sense of autonomy that Rosetta retains is a carefully constructed one. The appearance of directorial relinquishment belies the reality of over 60 hours of film footage, meticulously performed and filmed in countless takes so that Dequenne attains a certain authenticity in her role and appears oblivious of the camera's presence while acting. The 'edgy' feel of the Dardennes' camera, instead, opens up a question about spectatorial reception and how we as viewers perceive and react to the images constructed as a recording of a spontaneously unfolding event within the conventions of a narrative film. Such an approach, in my view, would have been unthinkable without the enduring effects that the reality-TV handcam aesthetic has had on contemporary audiences. The filmic adoption of the reality-TV format has been a diverse case with popular mockumentaries, such as *Series 7: The Contenders* (Daniel Minahan 2001), as well as arthouse hits, like *C'est arrivé près de chez vous/Man bites dog* (Rémy Belvaux et al. 1992). It testifies to a specific mode of viewer engagement that defies the safe distance of the camera lens protecting us from the actual action and, in doing so, we feel as though we are as close to the action as if we were actually present. The reality is experienced as a kind of imminent death threat, all the more efficiently because the others' lives are at stake and the surviving numbers are limited (Fetveit 1999: 798). The premise of 'kill or be killed' prominent in the format (Fetveit 1999: 798) is put to a use in *Rosetta*, particularly in its staging of the world of market individualism as a battlefield. An 'action hero, not a dramatic heroine' (Austin 2004: 258), the character of Rosetta is imagined as 'a soldier in a war' (Dardenne: 129), whose survival is paramount to the viewer. The daily ritual she goes through in the absence of work conveys the sense of her waging a war against the world. The reality-TV style assignment of the camera is at its most powerful in

what we might call survival time: checking the makeshift fishing lines that she hangs in the muddied lake; carefully changing her 'town' shoes for a pair of rubber-boots that she hides near the edge of the rundown caravan park; sneaking in and out via a fence at the park's rear to avoid being seen coming and going. In these scenes, the camera hovers on her backside as if being pulled on a string by Rosetta. This results in a method that defines Rosetta's subjectivity through the tension between the film's preoccupation with survival, on one hand, and the character's alterity as unknowable, on the other.

Rosetta's position as but one among the reserve army of workers that society can easily replace when necessary, implies that having a job means taking someone else's place. This is a symbolic act of violence tantamount to removing someone's life from the social sphere of existence (O'Shaughnessy 2007: 113), which circulates through her series of jobs and layoffs. When Riquet falls into the water while helping Rosetta retrieve her fishing lines, she sits back watching emotionlessly, only coming to his assistance at the last minute. Our guessing game with Rosetta as to what goes on in her mind (is she contemplating letting him die to take his job?) and what will happen next (will she save him?) generates a sense of suspense because the camera does not show the overarching frame. In *Rosetta*, the symbolic act of killing happens off-screen. Riquet's near drowning, or the unnamed girl unjustly fired after having taken sick leave for her child and whose place Rosetta impassively takes at the waffle factory, are within the diegesis, but they materialise outside the image frame. Their cries for help heard through the 'son hors-champ' 'qui est actif' (Chion 2005: 65, 75), instead, overlap onto the close ups of Rosetta's face. The presence of her face suspends our judgement based on what we see as happening; and this sense is further accentuated with Dequenne's performance style that refuses to give out any clues. The notion of the camera claiming to be a 'window on reality' in a work of realist observation proper (Nichols 1992: 43) is disallowed. There *is* no ideal viewing position which feeds on the essentially voyeuristic distance: what we see is the doggedly persistent close-ups of Rosetta's bodily parts occluding us from seeing further. We almost *feel* her bare stomach while she soothes it with the warmth of a hairdryer at the attack of mysterious stomach pains, until it finally comes to our senses that we only see Rosetta's body because the camera *wants* to stay on it and look at it, and nothing else. Writing on *La Promesse*, Joseph Mai explores the haptic relation that results from the breakdown of the distance between viewer and object viewed, and elaborates on the concept of the 'body-camera' coined by the Dardennes regarding their emphasis on the camera's physical connection with the

subjects (Mai 2007: 137). Mai defines haptic moments as liberation from the constraints of narrative progression, which list the usually overlooked or discarded objects ‘in a temporal and spatial present infused by the past and the future but without the framing of an overarching structure’ (Mai 2007: 137). Mai’s analysis of the haptic plane made tangible and problematic due to disruption in vision, paves the way into my reading of the close-ups of Rosetta’s taut back and her expressionless face, as a ‘substitute skin’ that ‘becomes [her] hide, and that [she] holds before us as a smokescreen’ (Mai 2007: 138), on which the camera is invited to come into contact and read the image. The camera, in this light, is essentially personified and we feel its presence as though it is someone who forms part of the set. Inspired by the Dardennes’ decision to consistently find a ‘bad’ spot for placing their camera (Dardenne with Houba 2003), camera indeterminacy is unavoidable and made tangible. As a result, it produces the effect of ‘making the camera felt’ for the viewer. Rosetta often hides around corners and gazes from behind doors, but the camera does not show what specific desire she might have in that gaze. For example, with her gaze fixed on the waffle van where Riquet works repeating the menial tasks of making and selling waffles: Is she seeking love from Riquet? Or, is she fetishizing his labour? The hovering camera amplifying our curiosity is obviously asking itself the same questions. In a later moment, the camera reveals itself stunned at the anticipation of Rosetta’s betrayal of Riquet. Once Rosetta walks down the factory floor toward the boss, the camera closes in on her back as if it were going to crash into her, before hesitantly turning to her facial close-up, as if it were to dissuade her from telling Riquet’s secret and therefore from committing the symbolic act of murder. This camera subjectivity, tactile and personified, opens up ways in which it can trace the absent father haunting the family picture of *Rosetta*, as I shall now argue.

5.2 For a paternal ‘being-with’ as friendship

The film gives us the vision of Rosetta and the world she sees in her own subjective way. Simultaneously, it sets up another viewpoint of an ‘absent character’ – the camera – which thinks, reflects and transforms Rosetta’s vision of the world onto the screen. In his discussion of the perception-image, Deleuze notes that the ‘being-with’ of the camera consists of more than a simple combination of two fully constituted enunciations between a subjective perception-image and an objective perception-image, one of which would be reporter, the other reported (Deleuze 1986: 74-5). Instead, the

camera-consciousness that has become an ‘autonomous vision of someone unidentified amongst characters’, can carry out ‘two inseparable acts of subjectivation simultaneously, one of which constitutes a character in the first person, but the other of which is present at his birth and brings him on to the screen’ (Deleuze 1986: 74-5). Our oscillation between Rosetta’s own subjectivity and the thinking camera engages us with the sustained balance between, but pertaining to neither of, compelling identification and voyeuristic detachment, as I hope to have shown so far. I will now argue that there is another element emerging in this relation: one which Deleuze viewed to be inseparable from the subject (present at its birth and bringing it to life on the screen) that can be related to the way the film identifies and re-appropriates the paternal through its absence. To ascertain the idea of the father, which has been so central to the Dardennes’ cinema, one is tempted to start from their unique approach to film direction based on brotherly collaboration and openness. Characterising themselves as ‘one person with four eyes’, they co-own their production company, *Les Films du Fleuve*, founded in 1994, and have worked together on every aspect of filmmaking since – the casting, the scripts, the rehearsals, the direction. The professional relationship extends to their cinematographer (Marcoen) and editor (Marie-Hélène Dozo), and sometimes to the same actors (such as Olivier Gourmet). They testify to an exceptional degree of fraternal trust and harmony in interviews, which often makes the critics wonder at the difficulty to picture any two people directing the same sequence without serious tensions developing (see, for example, Wood 2006). As they have admitted, films made by brothers working together ‘undoubtedly involve, somewhere along the line, their father and mother’ (Dardennes 2005).

The family romance in *Rosetta* is an ongoing process whose meanings are unfixed, interrogated, opened. The Dardennes’ filmic children belong to a generation that is severed from the state-secured labour protections enjoyed by their parents, and who are, as a result, forced into entering a world where the daughter acts as the mother’s mother (as in *Rosetta*), and where the father tells his son to call him by his first name and gives him a ring to bind their fraternity (as in *La Promesse*). As seen in a rare moment of familial tenderness in which Rosetta compliments and encourages her mother on her creative sewing in the hope of marketing the clothing she makes, the family is not a priori, but something that must be purchased by participation in the everyday economy. *Rosetta* tracks what it means to make hard bargains to attain a membership of a family. The family residence in the trailer park ironically named Grand Canyon, a place of American wonder and leisure, will inevitably have its gas and

hot water supply cut off whenever the pre-payment is not met. The mother's ongoing state of falling apart obligates Rosetta to constantly search for a job, and, in return, Rosetta tramples on her mother's gesture of gentility – the flowers she has planted outside their caravan home. In this family disorder the Dardenne brothers make the fact of paternity an imaginary source of Rosetta's severance from societal ties. A 'phantom' character (Dardenne with Houba 2003), the figure of the father is constituted as lack, as what is not there. It is therefore what cannot be represented, something in its shape akin to her relation to the social security system, belonging neither to the *allocation chômage*, due to her short employment period, nor to the RSA (*revenu de solidarité active*), as she was not out of work long enough. It also bears on the deadly but invisible, and almost inaudible, smell of gas that Rosetta turns on to kill herself and her mother at the height of her despair²⁶, or on the denouncing of any responsibility to whatever happens to the other residents of the caravan park, declared by the signpost at the caretaker's cabin at its entrance. This symbolic severance from the father besets the Dardennes's sombre vision of family. However, their family portrayal is not so bleak as to be without a glimmer of hope, more than one might think, as I shall argue. The paternal absence, because it exists as lack, opens up a space of possibility in which negotiation, or 'bargaining', can be made with the film's other, more affective aspects in portraying Rosetta's social relations. The most positive of these is the friendship with Riquet, but also, to a minor degree, is the comradeship of the female co-worker who defends Rosetta against the boss's firing of her at the beginning of the film. This enables us to reconsider the attachment of parents and children – understood as vertical transmission and hierarchy – along with the horizontal attachments of friends, co-workers and possibly, as the film's ending would suggest, couples. The notion of the exchange and substitution, required to maintain the functioning of family, is just as relevant in tuning the filial relation into a relationship based on equality and friendship. Crucially, in this re-articulation of family structure, the paternal ghost haunting the film is undeniably linked to another phantom presence in the film, the absent character of the camera as 'being-with'.

The key moment of revelation arises when Rosetta, disillusioned by her mother's continuing drinking problem, trades the caravan park for Riquet's flat where she finds herself tempted to stay for the night. Taking up Riquet's offer of a mattress and visibly relieved at being away from home, she lies down alone and utters words that

²⁶ This is a recurring motif in *le jeune cinéma*, not least in the mother who gasses her children in *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?*.

sound like a prayer: “Your name is Rosetta. My name is Rosetta. You found a job. I found a job. You’ve got a friend. I’ve got a friend. You have a normal life. I have a normal life. You won’t fall in a rut. I won’t fall in a rut. Goodnight. Goodnight.” As the light goes off, the scene cuts into dark. It stands out in many ways. An exceptional Brechtian moment, the scene is notable for the stationary camera positioning and for Rosetta speaking directly to it, at once heightening our sense of the camera as an absent character being there and distancing us from the diegetic space she lies in. Meanwhile, Rosetta is finally given a voice. She addresses ‘you’, thus ‘us’, through the camera. The verbal split between the first and the second person allows the viewers to be brought in to her perspective, without identifying her position necessarily as their own. We, the viewers who have been grappling with her frantic movement from one step behind throughout the film, are for a moment allowed to gaze at her face, out of spontaneity, not of voyeurism. Our opening to alterity through the face-to-face encounter, inherent in Levinas’s ethics of hospitality, is crucial. The mode of viewer engagement here turns the intensity between Rosetta and the phantasmal camera presence back on us: we finally ‘have a job’ and ‘have a friend’. Only this time the ‘job’ means quite a different thing to the murderous engagement as previously shown: it is to be entangled and implicated in her addressing of what is not (yet) there and, thus, what only exists as a lack, as her ‘friend’. Her soliloquy declares a relation to the future that can be different from the way it has been. In this revisioning of the future, one can mark out the line between what the Dardennes share with Levinas and where they diverge from him. In *Totality and Infinity*, it is death and resurrection along the filial line from father to son that constitute time (Levinas 2008: 268). The Levinasian father is potentially the ‘othered’ being *par excellence* in this generational transition that we connect to future time. The Dardennes take up this notion, until the paternal appears condemned to amnesia, as a dead ghost, in *Rosetta*. The brothers then move away from father-centric approaches, in favour of exploring the importance of individuals as equal subjects capable of shouldering their own moral burden, as friends. The survival of Rosetta ultimately comes in the form of rescue offered by the hand of Riquet, as the film’s closure suggests. In Rosetta’s fatherless world, friendship will fill his place.

The Dardennes’ relation of becoming-friend can be engaged closely with Derrida’s meditation on the *Politics of Friendship*. Written at a time when Levinas – Derrida’s teacher, critic, and friend – was dying, *Politics of Friendship* reflects an anticipated sense of loss, which is confirmed in Dardenne’s journal, *Au dos de nos images*, written around and after the news broke of Levinas’s death (recorded in the

journal entry dated on 19/01/1996). The ‘grief’, in Derrida, is carried over in the form of an aporia he uses to begin each chapter of his book, ‘Oh my friends, there is no friend’ (Derrida 2005: ix). It would be difficult to address friends and tell them that there are none, and Derrida calls this a ‘performative contradiction’ (Derrida 2005: 27), which underpins the play of paradox underlying Rosetta’s friendship with Riquet, as I shall discuss further. But first of all, one thing is certain in the saying, that it is a ‘kind of orphaned quotation’ and it figures in a premise that ‘what links democratization to fraternization cannot always necessarily be reduced to patriarchy in which the brothers begin by dreaming its demise’ (Derrida 2005: ix). Alluding to the Levinasian idea of alterity that comes from the dimension of infinity, Derrida’s friendship is marked by difference that is essentially dissymmetrical in its equilibrium. The ‘dissymmetry’ of friendship (Derrida 2005: 249) is understood in relation to time and movement, enveloped in such frontiers between loss and survival, on the one hand, and the passivity of being loved and activity of loving, on the other. Both directions can be traced in connection with *Rosetta*. Firstly, the ‘time’ of friendship offers a way to deal creatively with how a family survives and reconvenes after the loss of the father, which preoccupies the Dardennes. Unravelling the association of brotherhood with friendship and with democracy, Derrida foregrounds the endless responsibility owed to the other as a friend. This relation of friendship inspires the demands for transition from alienation of paternal sovereignty to a fraternal democracy of the future. The bond between the Derridean conception of ‘fratriarchy’ (Derrida 2005: viii) and the *co-auteur*ship of the Dardennes is clear in their intersection with friendship as a primordial condition implied by the very notion of people living and/or working together, as witnessed in their directing style based on cooperation and desire to withdraw from authorial mastery. This convinces us, above all, through the intimacy cultivated between camera, operator, director and actor in making the case for the absent father as accountable to the other, as a ‘being with’. The future arrival of ‘universal brothers’, as Derrida calls for, will be capable of overrunning the present and, in so doing, of being ‘worthy of the eternal father’ (Derrida 2005: 249-50, 284, 285).

The father is resuscitated, but under the condition that ‘the phantom friend returning’ (Derrida 2005: 75) is now re-imagined as a fraternal proximity who loves from afar. And this is put to the test of friendship, where the post-industrial forms of work and employment result in the ‘necessity of having to count one’s friends, to count the others, in the economy of one’s own’ (Derrida 2005: 22), which bears a weighty presence in the Dardennes’ moral tale. The frontier between friend and enemy

constitutes the second direction that Derridean relation of friendship can be traced in connection with *Rosetta*. The ‘job’ and the ‘friend’ Rosetta struggles to have, in the reality of the narrative, are paradoxical terms as she has to deny her responsibility to her only friend to get a job and to connect to society. The triangular positioning in which the three characters – Riquet, Rosetta, and their boss – stand confronting each other in the confined waffle van, compounds this contradiction. But the scene also brings out the asymmetrical condition of friendship where ‘you are better off loving than being loved’, even in the brutality of the economy and the risk of killing (taking a friend’s job) at its stake. *Rosetta* ends in the thin line between enmity and friendship. After resigning from the job, thus committing a symbolic suicide (O’Shaughnessy 2007: 113), she is ready to kill herself. When she finds the gas canister is empty, Riquet arrives in time to help. But help how exactly? Riquet’s angry, growling circling around Rosetta on his motorbike replays her earlier attack at him and their movements together, rolling in the muddy grass, which then seemed an act of love-making. ‘The enemy is then my best friend. He hates me in the name of friendship. (...) The two concepts (friend/enemy) consequently intersect and ceaselessly change places. They intertwine, as though they loved each other, all along a spiralled hyperbole’ (Derrida 2005: 72). The paternal uncertainty as ghost, as moral agent the Dardennes have been striving to give meaning to, is finally opened by Riquet’s final gesture of carrying the gas bottle she cannot manage alone. As Rosetta finally learns to accept help from others and to open herself to it, the place of the father is made transparent as responsibility and compassion towards the other. And if our positioning as viewers remains undecided and left open at the suspension of this hyperbole that closes the film, it is because it is impossible to be Rosetta, to have her alterity as mine: we must only be her friend.

Building on the changing landscape of paternal notions introduced in chapter 2 and developed further in chapters 3 and 4, this chapter has traced the mode of a paradigm shift in the paternal ideals that *le jeune cinéma* proposes, a conversion from paternal hegemony to the ethics of fraternity. We have already seen in chapter 1 that the brothers in *Bye-bye* are faced with the task of filling the place of the absent fathers and moving forwards. This reworking of paternal configurations, as symbolised in *Rosetta* in the form of the *auteurs*’ fraternal autonomy, continues in the next chapter. As we shall see, *Drôle de Félix* reads as a narrative of paternal quest, where Félix’s fraternal positioning can serve as his own paternal model, altering the notion of the

father from a kinship relation based on filial procreation, to a model based on personal identification and choice.

Chapter 6

Two Places for the Paternal: Gay *Auteurs* and *Beur* Star in *Drôle de Félix*

Drôle de Félix (2000) is a film that explores what a multicultural family means in France today. Issues of sexuality and ethnicity are central to the family Félix forges for himself, as he negotiates his gay, HIV-positive, half-Maghrebi identity in his journey through France. It is, above all, Félix's filial quest for the father that leads to a vision of modern-day France as one big happy family. The 'family of choice' (Weston 1991: 38) Félix creates in the process, however, questions and problematises his desire to contact his father. This chapter addresses this paradox inherent in the paternal quest of *Drôle de Félix*. How this informs the way the film treats Félix's homosexual and *beur* identity is the focus of my analysis, which will scrutinise the film on two key axes. On one hand, the work of Ducastel and Martineau reveals a personal and working relationship between themselves as gay partners, co-writers and co-directors, and as political agents engaged in AIDS activism. Ultimately, *Drôle de Félix* is a film of the two *auteurs* that reconstructs their identity ideals through the fictional character of Félix from both a homosexual and an AIDS-aware perspective. Their idiosyncratic standing within the French film industry, notably with *Jeanne et le garçon formidable* (1998), an ambitious musical 'singing out' on current issues such as gays and straights and Act Up militancy, is reprised in *Drôle de Félix*, as they initiate their own vision of the alternative, 'queer' family. On the other hand, as a road movie of self-discovery, *Drôle de Félix* is carried on the shoulders of its leading actor Sami Bouajila, whose casting as Félix lays a new dimension to the paternal narrative of the film. Bouajila's stardom has been rather unique, as it promotes French-Maghrebi cultural heritage as much as it deviates from the traditional images of *beur* masculinity. As a screen persona who has been negotiating his place in France through many films of *le jeune cinéma* since *Bye-bye* (1995), including *Nos vies heureuses* (Maillot 1999) and *La Faute à Voltaire* (Kechiche 2000) among others, Bouajila is arguably the 'fils symbolique' of *le jeune cinéma*, whose name exudes family romance and miscegenation as part of his ongoing filmography. Therefore, his performance can be seen to qualify as an authoring presence in his own right, rendering the family representation of *Drôle de Félix* an even more multi-faceted affair.

The family in *Drôle de Félix* is a culturally and sexually dynamic social fabric that opens up to plurality and difference. Strikingly, during Félix's travel from the North to the South, this is mostly inscribed on the backdrop of the rural south of France, largely in the *Midi* – a quintessentially French canvas rich with film productions, as we shall see in the chapter 3 on *Marius et Jeannette*. The region, particularly 'Provence', has a strong sense of its own identity associated with 'Frenchness', traditionally defined

as the vehicle for the archaic values and nostalgia for strong rule, ‘where the village settles its conflicts *en famille*, paternally reintegrating its prodigals’ (de la Bretèque 1992: 64, 69). These paternalistic assumptions are notably demarcated in Ducastel and Martineau’s vision of the region, as they identify a kinship that emerges outside of heterosexually based family ties. Félix’s homosexuality in this light opens up to formulating a family built on an autonomous community of friendship and love. His ethnic difference, however, is ‘naturalised’ in order to validate his new, predominantly white, family. In this family portrait, the place of the father represents a dilemma that would potentially disrupt the alternative kinship moulded so effectively during the course of the film. The family arrangements in *Drôle de Félix*, it seems, argue in favour of putting aside the traditional patrilineal conceptions: Félix will conclude not to look for his biological father after all. Made two years after the 1997 legislation of the *pacte civil de solidarité*, *Drôle de Félix* takes seriously the social rights granted to alternative forms of unions and contracts including same-sex couples. The effect of a post-PaCS France shows in the way sexual ties and family ties merge seamlessly. The teenager whose homosexual awakening is facilitated by Félix, the railway worker who has sex with him and the old lady who pleasures herself when watching him naked, all bond in the familial terms of ‘little brother’, ‘cousin’ and ‘grandmother’, whilst all of them lead Félix to his reunion with Daniel, his partner.

However, a question arises from Félix’s rather ‘hip’ family regarding how the film perceives the boundaries of its kinship narrative. In her discussion of kinship relations in the wake of the PaCS, Judith Butler argues that the arrangements of alternative kinship, in their bid to appear ‘normal’ and to be approximated in the family form, are seen to be ‘landing the state’s desire’ (Butler 2002: 17). The perspective of the state’s power – to confer or withdraw recognition for forms of alliance (Butler 2002: 16) – meddles in the way that Félix’s new family is constituted. While ostensibly a radical character outside family norms, Félix is ultimately a ‘good sexual citizen’ who never fully explores his difference and queerness in the republican space (Provencher 2008: 53). Murray Pratt thereby traces the film’s investment in the ‘light-hearted gay road movie’, a genre of gay affirmation cinema (Pratt 2004: 91-2), while Carrie Tarr points out the veiling of Félix’s Maghrebi roots that falls short of imagining a truly multicultural family (Tarr 2005: 150). In this light, the paternal positioning of *Drôle de Félix* comes close to the republican agenda of integration with regard to minority politics. It leads to the reading that Republican France *is* the father, enough for Félix to accommodate his difference within the good, loving, ‘legitimate’ family community.

My engagement with the film, then, asks whether it is possible to identify a paternal relation in *Drôle de Félix* that lies outside the republican frame. Félix's desire for the father, in my view, articulates new paternal possibilities that operate in a 'field that does not have legitimacy as its point of reference, its ultimate desire' (Butler 2002: 17). Félix's homosexuality and his Maghrebi origin, in this regard, become a forceful set of terrains for situating the paternal within the alternative French family. Through the prism of sexual and ethnic differences, *Drôle de Félix* cultivates variations on family that depart from the traditional filiation. The family, instead, opens up to strangers and their alterity: Félix relates to his new family members who, in return, embrace him. In this family, as I shall show, the notion of filiation through procreation is displaced and gives way to experimentation and acts of will. The paternal line is reconfigured, above all, through personal identification and choice. How this is done will be explored in relation to two key points: Ducastel and Martineau's *auteur* vision, on the one hand, and the evolution of the Bouajila's star image, on the other.

6.1 Ducastel and Martineau: queering the family

The journey in *Drôle de Félix* follows Félix, a thirty-something homosexual man of half North-African descent, who responds to his job layoff by embarking on a five-day trip from his native town of Dieppe to Marseille in pursuit of his father, whom he has never met. This journey towards the *Midi* is punctuated with several encounters, each announced by intertitles addressed in familial terms: in Chartres, Félix meets his 'little brother' Jules, a gay teenage boy looking for his first date; in rural Auvergne, his 'grand-mother' Mathilde (played by former music-hall star Patachou), a lonely old woman who needs someone to rearrange the furniture in her house; his 'cousin', a railway worker in the Ardèche area; his 'sister' Isabelle (Ariane Ascaride) in Provence, a single mother who spends most of her time ferrying her three young children between their respective fathers; and finally, in Martigues, his 'father', an unhappy and contemplative fisherman, who bears no resemblance – physical or otherwise – to Félix's biological father.

Drôle de Félix is an engagement with questions of paternal roots and French identity asked through road trips and hitchhiking. Ducastel and Martineau choose to work within the genre of the road movie, which is perceived as a foreign, American import rather than an essentially French practice. As Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli demonstrate, European re-workings of the American format use the road as a

structuring motif, and are closely bound up with issues of ‘the variety and differences of European national and regional cultures; the common ‘European identity’, of which migration and travelling are often regarded as an important component’ (Mazierska and Rascaroli 2006: 201). *Drôle de Félix* is no exception. Tracing the shifting nature of what French identity might mean today, the road will lead to an exploration of Félix’s own sense of otherness. Their approach, loose and upbeat, contrasts to the cliché of the harsh Maghrebi life in urban ghettos made dominant in contemporary French *banlieue cinéma*. They also contest mainstream gay representations that Rees-Roberts notes as focusing on the homogeneity of white, middle-class homosexual identity to the exclusion of *beur* men who are predominantly perceived as a heterosexual community (Rees-Roberts 2008: 17). The settings in the *Midi*, on the other hand, attune Ducastel and Martineau’s literacy in French cinema and literature, largely to mark the gap between tradition and actuality. In the opening sequence, Félix, wearing black suit and tie, leisurely rides his bike over the nostalgic jazz of Blossom Dearie’s ‘Tout doucement’. The homage to Jacques Tati’s cinema, especially *Jour de fête* (1949), is obvious. Bouajila’s understated comic skills ‘have distracted elegance similar to Tati’s’ (Mitchell 2001); his character’s travel motto – on foot and hitchhiking only – recalls the indictment of the techno-centred world captured in Tati’s films. Meanwhile, the man-child figure of Félix is as affable and susceptible to the influence of stronger characters as Voltaire’s *Candide*, of which Ducastel and Martineau openly acknowledge the resemblance (‘Félix pourrait être un Candide!’ (Strauss 2000)) in their film which they envisaged as a ‘récit d’apprentissage’ (Strauss 2000).

However, Ducastel and Martineau’s most obvious fascination and frequently cited point of reference is the cinema of Jacques Demy. Ducastel was Demy’s assistant director in what became his last musical, *Trois places pour le 26* (1988). Ducastel’s feature debut with Martineau, *Jeanne et le garçon formidable*, was itself a French musical, a genre that was revived during Demy’s career spanning the sixties but has somewhat sunk into oblivion since. Rees-Roberts situates the film’s ‘self-conscious pastiche of Demy’ within the recent phenomenon of the ‘Demy revival’ from his overlooked status through a strand of French queer cinema, headed by Ducastel and Martineau and Christophe Honoré (Rees-Roberts 2008: 109), and, one could easily add, François Ozon. Ducastel and Martineau’s groundbreaking renewal of the genre duly acknowledges a sense of cinematic filiation. Demy’s particularly French brand of musical genre as *auteur* filmmaking is reclaimed in Ducastel and Martineau’s own status as *jeune cinéma auteurs* but without the ostensible ‘rough edges’ of the

documentary-realist aesthetics of, say, Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne or Sandrine Veysset. The same reputation labelled Demy's affiliation with the Left Bank group of the New Wave cinema of his day. A very personal filial tie was also at work in their relationship and formed part of 'la famille au sens large' (Blottière 2008), whilst Mathieu Demy, the son of the late director, played the role of the 'garçon formidable' in Ducastel and Martineau's own musical. Their status as self-admitted artistic heirs to Demy is well-known (Lalanne 2000) and makes it hardly surprising that the generic heritage of the musical privileged in *Drôle de Félix*, a film of paternal quest, is read like a filial paean to Demy's cinema. At the same time, however, it is tempered by their own reinvention and their subverting of the genre standards set by Demy. Most notably, as I shall discuss, they have opened up the genre to the socio-political domain. Félix sings and dances his way on the road with the occasional help of a furled umbrella, a standard musical prop. His impromptu dance numbers, a melange of disco and Arabic dance, are joyful to watch. The dialogues are sing-songy and whimsical, culminating in the sequence where the ever-optimistic Félix, lying on a *chaise longue* in Mathilde's courtyard, promises her that he can bring back to the sky the sun that has just disappeared behind the layers of black clouds. When he regards the sky whilst humming a tune, "Viens, soleil...viens soleil...", the sun reappears and the sky lightens. The magical, almost child-like quality of the scene transforms the landscape into Demy's signature style of poetry and innocence, which also highlights Félix's own sense of optimism on the certainty of pursuing his identity trip.

Félix's attachment to his native Normandy, and his insistence on being a *Normand* beyond any other of his identities, evokes Demy's famous fixation on his hometown of Nantes, which was never a yearning for rootedness or permanent identity. *Lola* (1961), Demy's first film, was a story of a return to the origin, also a motive behind Félix's oedipal quest. But, 'far from being a stabilizing agent, return is itself a movement towards an impossible end (i.e. the beginning), a transferential flight across substitute love objects rather than a return to the origin' (Lazen 2004: 190-1). In Félix's journey, the geographical point of return he hopes to reach at the end of the journey is Marseille. The Saint-Charles train station as the terminus of his filial search is, not coincidentally, the exact location where Demy shot the opening scene of his last film *Trois places pour le 26*. And it is Daniel, his gay partner, and not his North African father, who awaits Félix at the station. The couple kiss passionately on the deck of a ferry boat in sweeping widescreen cinematography. Their kiss puts an end to Félix's filial enquiry and replaces it with the potentially lasting quality of an openly gay

relationship. It is feasible to read this image of renewed possibilities as a discreet nod to Demy, their queer paternal, during whose career it was an open secret that he was gay and that much of his work told essentially homosexual stories in a heterosexual guise (Colomb 1998: 39-47). '[T]he caution (...) and the reluctance to refer to anything as distinctively homosexual', as Brigitte Rollet and James S. Williams note as a common practice within the French film industry (Rollet and Williams 1998: 196), forms the ultimate measure against which Ducastel and Martineau's filial reinvention is initiated. By tackling same-sex relationships with a frankness that Demy was unwilling or unable to try, Ducastel and Martineau, on their part, set off from their artistic and personal indebtedness to Demy and enact their own trajectory to build new alliances. This happens in *Drôle de Félix*, crucially, outside traditional heterosexual boundaries.

The family that interests Ducastel and Martineau is a non-normative model of a group of unparticular, mostly white, people whom Félix's journey relates to in a familial frame. The new family members' loving relationships with Félix not only defer finding his biological father, but, more significantly for Ducastel and Martineau, compensate for the lack of any identifiable gay community in the film. Félix's difference as ethnic and sexual 'other' is resolved into a family whose meanings are, and should be, unfixed. Daniel is the first of Félix's larger French family to question the purpose of his filial trip. He disregards it because he already knows that 'he [the father] will look like you and me, only darker', thus minimalising the implication of ethnic difference to a matter of physicality without any substantial value attached to it. The senior citizen Mathilde offers Félix an assessment of what a family is from her own life experience: now rejecting her deceased husband and her biological son, she treats Félix as her adopted son (or grandson), having him accompany and assist her in cooking and furniture moving. By doing so, she inserts her view on the arbitrariness of family, which calls into question the suitability of the search for a real father without whom Félix has managed just fine up to now. Most tellingly, in the 'My Sister' vignette, one of the children being distributed to their biological fathers for the weekend insists that any man who is with his mother, including, at that moment, Félix, is one of his fathers. With Ariane Ascaride, the muse of Robert Guédiguian, as the children's mother, the scene hints at the well known fact that Guédiguian's repertoire actors function in an extended surrogate family in his cinema, which in return has dealt with issues of multiculturalism and integration (see chapter 3). The cumulative effect of all these denials of the traditional concept of family amounts to a suggestion that the family is

overrated, and what structures a family is ongoing and flexible, in other words, substitutable.

The seemingly unreserved love and friendship offered by the non blood-related individuals in the film brings us back to the Derridean relation, in which the question of difference and otherness is always already a question of hospitality (Derrida 2000: 9). In *Drôle de Félix*, this concerns how homosexuality is accommodated in the family form, without Félix's gayness and same-sex desire being absorbed into or circumscribed by the heteronormative 'totality'. On the possibility of offering an absolute, 'unconditional hospitality' opening up to and embracing the alterity of the stranger who is at the door of the house, Derrida insists that this 'shaking-up' of the self-same family begins first and foremost by contesting the authority of the father of the house (Derrida 2000: 5). However, Félix is not a parricidal son and has no interest in an oedipal rejection of the father. In the reality of the film, fathers seem to be found nowhere anyway, except in the imposed structures and abstract ideals of the French republican model of the family in the wake of the PaCS. On the contrary, instead, Ducastel and Martineau's work rescues the place of the father from this obscurity, and fleshes out their own vision of the paternal. And they do so precisely by extending and 'queering' the family. On the representation of the sexuality of the family in contemporary French cinema, Kate Ince pinpoints visible signs of changes happening within the universalist conception of the family, notably present in similarly gay- and queer-themed films like *Ma vie en rose* (Berliner 1997) and *Gazon maudit* (Balasko 1995) (Ince 2002: 91). In these films, gay and queer sexualities are incorporated into the family, and 'instead of being accepted, contained and neutralized, difference proliferates' (Ince 2002: 91, 96). Ducastel and Martineau reflect these changes. They also move on from the genre of fantasy as the main domain of the queering of families in the films above. They place their own queer family in a contemporary social drama where the gay social identity is foregrounded.

From the beginning, Félix is established in a stable gay relationship with his school teacher partner Daniel. While his sexual identity is a given, thus eliminating the need to define it in terms of either 'out' or 'in', it fits squarely into what Owen Heathcote calls the 'coming in' narrative, in which

'the 'coming out' narrative can, and perhaps should, also be a 'coming in' – a coming out of the hegemonic, heteronormative, homophobic family while at the same time allowing for a coming in to a more capacious, more accepting and

more empowering, alternative family. (...) The narrative should also question the very need to come out at all' (Heathcote 2007: 107).

Not only is the existence of same-sex desire day-to-day and banal in *Drôle de Félix*, the family unit in the film actually achieves something more radical, as it becomes a springboard for queer fraternity and same-sex adventures. To his 'little brother' Jules, Félix is a responsible big brother escorting him to his first gay bar and transmitting his savoir-faire of gay socialising. Félix and his 'cousin', the unnamed 'cheminot', are comfortable with having safe sex in an open field in broad daylight. The private / public dichotomy around same-sex desire, central to the French republican model of family, is here transcended, and finds its expression in their sexual relationship lived outside monogamy. Casual sex, far from causing anxiety or violence – Félix and Daniel have a solid 'open' relationship – is depicted as a potentially liberating experience. In the next scene they are seen flying Félix's rainbow-coloured kite together. This winks at the two men's awareness of the symbol of gay pride and allows a wider political identity, whilst, as Joseph McGonagle notes, retaining a subtle rejection on the filmmakers' part which 'will not allow Félix to be the standard bearer for any gay community' (McGonagle 2007: 24). Perhaps more interesting effects on the family, when it is faced with the Félix's homosexuality, are charted in the two female characters, both of whom are mothers. Mathilde, in denial of her own heteronormative family, is told by Félix that he is a 'pédé' and is subsequently seen aroused when the naked Félix leaves the door open for her to see, giving an insight into plausible fantasies she might have about him. Contrary to Mathilde, his 'sister' Isabelle appears to be innately aware of Félix's sexuality and shares a bed with him with no qualms. A matriarch whose three children each have different fathers, she puts Félix in charge of her children, having him accompany them and keep the family on the right track during their car journey. They both leave their addresses with Félix and by doing so are eager to seal the affinities of the self-created family for viable, enduring commitment.

The remaining question mark is over paternal sexuality. This, as we have seen above in relation to Ducastel/Martineau and Demy, can be considered along the lines of intertextual mentorship and influence. The filial relation in the film is, above all, to be measured in the context of what Florian Grandena notes as a 'definite step forward' in the representation of same-sex desires and people with AIDS (Grandena 2008: 104). Ducastel and Martineau go beyond the scope of 'the individual, albeit in complex and challenging ways' which Heathcote et al. have identified as a 'gay signature' in French

literature and cinema (Heathcote, Hughes, and Williams 1998: 12). This is particularly evident in the AIDS narrative within the film, which borders between socio-political functions, on the one hand, and personal memory of love and loss, on the other. Whilst the directors do not attempt to register these two approaches as true events from their lives (in terms of actuality), we are nevertheless presented with fragments of their own personal stories and experiences²⁷. This thereby confirms the important ties that bind their interest in AIDS politics and Act Up activism, as well as their artistic and filial memory of Jacques Demy. First of all, Ducastel and Martineau tackle the current HIV/AIDS conjuncture in a matter-of-fact way, with a great lightness of touch. This has a wider implication regarding the changing imagination that AIDS holds in French society. The strict regimen of medication Félix goes through daily is meticulously documented. His illness, shown as but one condition of modern life, makes up some of the funniest comedy moments in the film as its title suggests. On his visit to the local HIV clinic to stock up on his medication, a woman is relieved to learn that after her bitherapy treatment, like Félix, she will be able to turn to tritherapy. Another patient suggests pentatherapy - he stresses his very low rate of T4 cells that has not increased despite his treatment, but also insists on the fact that he is still alive, and in good shape: 'Do I look like a dying man?' The woman then asks, 'I'm still doing a bitherapy...It gives me considerable leeway...After pentatherapy, what would there be?' The inclusion of the sequence shows the historical shift from AIDS to seropositivity and how treatment has changed. José Arroyo describes the film as one of the first to show 'an HIV+ protagonist who is offered the expectation of a future, however delimited' (Arroyo 2001: 47). Félix's daily living with HIV breaks with the traditional representations of the disease as a terrifying, if artistic, death drive moulded in films like *Les Nuits fauves* (Collard 1992) and the more recent *Les Témoins* (Téchiné 2007, also starring Bouajila), both set in the 1980s. In the light of signalling a move forward, *Drôle de Félix* is concerned with life and with living, gesturing towards a potential AIDS narrative that could have a positive outcome.

This indeed happens, above all, through the idea of a chosen family. As seen in another episode, tackling AIDS is presented as a family affair. Félix and his 'grandmother' Mathilde count and compare their own pills while watching their favourite TV soap, to which they are both passionately addicted. As the romance-filled family melodrama, tantalisingly-entitled 'Luxe, Gloire et Voluptée', is overheard, the

²⁷ The directors' commentaries on *Drôle de Félix* include dialogue from both Ducastel and Martineau which confirms that certain scenes are autobiographical.

close-up of the multi-coloured tablets is matched to Ducastel and Martineau's palette of bright colours for the film, which evokes the visual exuberance of Jacques Demy's musical fantasies. The discord and impossibility of heterosexual couples cementing the TV show, actually playing every morning after Félix has slept over at his new family members' houses (watched four times during the whole film), was Demy's favoured theme throughout his work. As seen in the classics like *Les parapluies de Cherbourg* (1964) and *Une chambre en ville* (1982), the theme was 'queered' by means of excessive, colourful and kitschy aesthetic. The queerness is clearly and unreservedly associated with the family's imagination in *Drôle de Félix*. It shares layers of intertext and nuance with, as well as paying homage to the universe of their own queer father, whose gradual progression of illness before the introduction of AZT and combination therapy possibly led to the 'artistic uncertainty' of his later outputs (Melville 2010) such as *Parking* (1985) and *Trois places pour le 26*. Hence the repetitive showing of the scenes combining the televised show – a *mise-en-abyme* standing in for Demy's own fantasy of queering the family – and Félix's taking of his medication that permits him to survive and look forward. As they render their vision of a family queered and AIDS-inflicted, Ducastel and Martineau strive towards creating the place of the paternal. It comes as no surprise then that their ideal paternal is to be reinstated precisely at the point where Félix abandons his search for his natural father. By displacing the notion of the traditional blood related family, the embodied reality of Félix attests that a family may be chosen, and paternal identity need not be exclusively tied to heterosexual procreation. New possibilities of paternity are thereby explored: the figure of the father may be queer and it can be constructed through personal identification. The new alternative family stands in for Demy's own fantasy of queering the family, and indeed exceeds it. Not only can Félix be happy with his homosexuality and HIV-positive status, there is also room for him to negotiate and aspire to the future of his extended family. Félix is a son who may or may not need his father, but he can also be a father himself, or 'papa Félix', as one of the children in the family indeed calls him.

6.2 Sami Bouajila and the filial evolution of *beur* masculinity

There is another place reserved for the paternal in the film, and it regards Sami Bouajila as a 'star' capable of bestowing his persona on the film in his own right. As a *beur* screen image inscribed in the permeability between Maghrebi and French native culture, Bouajila's presence demands that Félix's sexuality be acknowledged in close

proximity to his culture of origin. This above all needs to be addressed in conjunction with Ducastel and Martineau as white *auteurs*. Carrie Tarr points out that the *beur* narratives of white filmmakers evacuate the Maghrebi family through muted treatment of immigrant fathers, framing instead *beur* individuals as isolated and marginalised (Tarr 2007: 213). The eclipse of his racial identity is acute in Félix's name that remains on first-name terms: one never learns his surname, or indeed patronym. Daniel disapproves of Félix's filial search from the beginning of the film. The futility of the reunion with his long-lost father is then brought out over and over again by Félix's new family members who are invariably white. The film's trade-off between ethnic identity and alternative kinship has been criticised by Vinay Swamy as 'subscrib[ing], perhaps inadvertently, to the myth of the Republican ideal of seamless integration into a 'French' melting pot' (Swamy 2006: 62).

In this respect, Bouajila's trajectory as *beur* star prolongs and renews Félix's quest for his father in the film. To explore this point, it is perhaps necessary to articulate whether and in what way Bouajila is qualified as a French star, particularly, in connection with the unprecedented surge of actors of Maghrebi origin in the 1990s. Their roles in the *banlieue* and *beur* cinema have positively outgrown the side roles of underworld gang and drug dealers in the *policier* genre of their first generation, as seen in films like *Police* (Pialat 1985). Yet dominant representations of ethnic minorities in the 1990s still evaded more acceptable forms of socially active roles. A hard-edged muscular masculinity or a streetwise bigmouthed *bavard*, both memorably epitomised in Hubert Koundé's and Saïd Taghmaoui's performances in *La Haine*, conformed to the stigma of stereotyped *beur* masculinity as socially marginal and potentially dangerous. The hugely successful Jamel Debbouze in the similarly themed *Le ciel, les oiseaux et ta mère!* (Bensalah 1999) remains ineffectual despite his macho posturing, and is 'heavily rooted in France's multi-ethnic *banlieues*' (Austin 2003: 135). In a more intricate, *auteur*-oriented vein, Roschdy Zem and Jalil Lespert have been prolific in *le jeune cinéma*, as seen in *L'Autre côté de la mer* (Cabrera 1997), a film about an uneasy relationship between a *pied noir* in Algeria and a French *beur* doctor (played by Zem), and the acclaimed *Ressources humaines* (Cantet 2001), for which Lespert won a César. Lespert's race (half-descendent of Algerian origin) is downplayed in his image in favour of landing ethnically non-marked characters, as with the charismatic Sami Naceri who plays a French cabbie in the popular *Taxi* series.

Bouajila maintains a more coherent French stardom in the sense as has been defined by Vincendeau. French stars, according to Vincendeau, are 'stars without a star

system', who control their own image in the context of French cinephilia, rather than box-office popularity and organised management (Vincendeau 2000). Bouajila's stardom has foregrounded his Maghrebi identity ever since his revelation as a promising *beur* talent in *Bye-bye*, a recognition garnered through film festival circuits. The gay cult status that *Drôle de Félix* has generated further extended his range. He took on 'doing Hollywood' (in *The Siege* (Zwick 1998)), a mid-career excursion emblematic of French stars, as well as his role in *Embrassez qui vous voudrez* (Blanc 2002), an exemplary ensemble alongside some of the biggest names in French cinema. The culmination of his career so far is his award of best actor at Cannes 2006 for *Indigènes* (Bouchareb 2006), and his César for *Les Témoins* (Téchiné 2007). However, Bouajila's stardom owes much to the 1990s, when his career was launched in the two intersecting trends of New Realism and *beur* cinema. He fits the return to social realism in French *auteur* cinema that moves 'away from stardom and towards authenticity and naturalism in performance' (Austin 2003: 139), and is accordingly dubbed as "un *beur* serein" (Youssi 2000), who does "travailler les archétypes et exhiber une autre image" (Lalanne and Peron 2000). On the other hand, the localised, politically specific contexts of his films contribute to his credentials as an actor continually tackling difficult subjects such as diaspora, the *clandestin* and homosexuality in ethnic-minority group.

Above all, in keeping with the general trends of the 1990s that this thesis has highlighted, his films frame social issues first and foremost through structures of the familial and kinship structures. The family romance in these films constructs Bouajila's image at the crossroads of recurring questions: between North African roots and French citizenship; fellow Maghrebi women and native French women; fathers of the North African *bled* and the French *patrie*. Interestingly the choices made by Bouajila weaving through these questions coincide with his socioeconomic mobility. He starts off, above all, as a 'son'. Bouajila's prototype sons are informed by miscegenation and hybrid identity. They range from the opportunistic *banlieue* youth after his white father-in-law's money in *La Thune* (Galland 1991), to the son lost in Marseille's cultural miscegenation in *Bye-bye* (see chapter 1) and of his parents' biological miscegenation in *Drôle de Félix*, to the adopted heir to a white upper-class business family in *En jouant 'Dans la compagnie des hommes'* (Desplechin 2003). His filial status fits the narrative and psychological drive of his young *beur* characters who have to create a place for themselves on screen (Prédal 2002: 138). Bouajila's association with youthful charm and young adulthood still searching for legitimacy and integration, as indeed happens in *Drôle de Félix*, sits to a degree within the 'infantilisation of *beurs*' (McGonagle 2007:

30) as a persistent trend in French cinema. As McGonagle identifies, the children of first-generation immigrants who are represented as ‘forever growing up’, serve better and pose less threat to the French republican narrative (McGonagle 2007: 31). In this light, however, Bouajila is a rather different son. Unlike the largely male homosocial world of *beur* and *banlieue* genres, who still appear tied to their teens and early twenties, Bouajila’s image evolves: he grows out of the proto-son in search (or need) of the absent father. As I shall show, the filial scenario is reiterated into the mixed-race romance. In his capacity to engage adequately in intimate relationships, Bouajila is ‘romantic’, attractive to both men and women. In this light, the uneasy trade-off between adherence to his family and desire for integration generates strong symbolic meaning that goes beyond the narrative of *Drôle de Félix*. Bouajila’s ease and speciality in playing a man involved in interracial relationships delivers the prospect of filial evolution, while its biculturalism challenges the hegemony of French republican value.

In *Nos vies heureuses*, Bouajila plays Ali, a Moroccan student and illegal employee at a brasserie, where Julie (Marie Payen), a suicidal white girl, falls for him. Maillot wrote the part of Ali especially for Bouajila. The lengthier focus on the Bouajila –Payen couple, which outlasts other white-white couples in the film, was Maillot’s intention. He wanted to see the mixed-race couple go all the way to forming a ‘family’ through marriage in a time when ethnically-mixed marital unions were still a rarity (Ardjoum). The warmth and humour of Bouajila’s performance contrasts with the realities of French bureaucratic dealings with legal complications in French-Maghrebi marriage, and offers a critique by highlighting the understanding, cooperative nature of his relationship with Julie/Payen that eventually overcomes the rules and procedures. *La Faute à Voltaire* also situates Bouajila in an idealised picture of a mixed-race couple set against the unpromising reality of homeless shelters, illegal jobs and assumed identities. Bouajila reprises his on-screen image as a sensitive young *beur* man who, despite his own traumas, becomes a healing force for an emotionally troubled white woman, played by Elodie Bouchez. The diptych film chronicles Bouajila’s relationships with two different women, Aure Atika as a mature, down-to-earth Tunisian compatriot under whose spell Bouajila falls, and Bouchez’s emotionally fragile drifter who pursues Bouajila relentlessly. The fact that Bouajila’s attempted marriage with Atika should end in failure and that he should subsequently resort to Bouchez, a quintessential face of *le jeune cinéma* (*La vie rêvée des anges*) as well as embodying a more traditional French cinematic femininity as enigma beyond rationality,

has an implication: to be a successful image of integration into his new-found community, Bouajila needs, not only by narrative strategy but through his screen image, to be viewed as having outgrown his attachment to the culture he left behind, represented by Atika. In fact, the doomed nature of Bouajila's alliance with fellow Tunisian or *beur* women originates from his early works *Les silences du palais* (*Samt el qusur*, Tlatli, 1994) and *Bye-bye* (see chapter 1). In Tlatli's film, his incapacity to commit himself to the woman he loves, a much-debated point on the film's release (Slawy-Sutton 2002: 99), allegorises his severance from his family and Tunisian values.

On the other hand, the white French partners he forms an alliance with represent the image of France he has to learn to love. Beautiful but mentally disturbed, Bouchez is an ambiguous image that provokes caution and frustration in Bouajila as well as hope for a better future. In *Les Témoins* (Téchiné 2007), Emmanuelle Béart is an artistic, free-spirited wife who is not 'made for being a mother', to Bouajila's upwardly-mobile husband who combines being a policeman with looking after their child. *Nos vies heureuses* delicately reveals the gap between official intellectual solidarity (the collective picketing against the *Debré* law) and individual xenophobic prejudice (the disapproval of "*les nanas qui aiment les Arabes*" as well as belittling of Moroccan customs)²⁸. The couple's image in the film is uneven: Julie/Payen is mobile, assertive and in control; Ali/Bouajila appears quiescent, often confined through the frame of hallways, the bedroom and the kitchen. In *Drôle de Félix*, Bouajila, already at a disadvantage in terms of age and social status against the more mature school teacher Daniel, moves in to Daniel's flat after losing his job, thus literally domesticating himself inside his partner's home. Often tamed and domesticated, and hence romanticised, Bouajila is invariably represented as an idealised object of desire. In his heterosexual roles he is a woman's man: his masculinity conforms to the needs and standards of female characters, epitomised in the long-stemmed roses he sells with Bouchez amid the threat and police violence in *La faute à Voltaire*. *Drôle de Félix* obsessively focuses on Bouajila's body, exhibiting his beauty not only for his gay partners (and an admiring audience), but also for other characters in the film regardless of their sexuality, such as Mathilde and the waiters at the restaurant. However, the film's apparent objectification of the *beur* male body is offset by Bouajila's performance as a desiring subject in pursuit of his own ethnic and sexual selfhood and gratification. For example,

²⁸ The surgeon engaged to Julie's best friend Emilie expresses his disapproval on "*les nanas qui aiment les Arabes*" whereas Emilie is previously seen encouraging Julie to plan "*un vrai mariage...un jour*" reducing the fact that the Ali-Julie couple already married in Moroccan custom at Ali's native place, which leads to the break-up of the friendship.

Félix/Bouajila chooses his sexual partners (the ‘cheminot’, but refusing Joules) on his own terms, while also introducing Joules to the *raï* music of Cheb Mami. Similarly in *Change-moi ma vie* (Begeja 2001), Bouajila’s transvestite prostitute, unlike his fellow worker Roschdy Zem who is traumatised by the job, actually enjoys assuming a woman’s identity and working in the traditionally North African district of Clichy. His sexual choices in the 1980s-set *Les Témoins* are fluid and guiltless as a bisexual family man. Throughout his filmography, Bouajila’s sex scenes with white partners are as graphic and realistic as any other contemporary French film and this is a daring move, for the mainstream audience is used to seeing interracial sex scenes usually shied away from, left to the imagination with sound effects, or simply not depicted at all, “as if to do so would be too disturbing. (...) Foreignness and difference are still reacted to with suspicion and rejection” (Sherzer 2001: 234-5).

Bouajila breaks this taboo and confronts dominant representations of miscegenation, without resorting to threatening or exploited images. He can do this, because the *beur* masculinity he delineates is ‘softer’ and refreshingly cerebral. By reviving interracial romance as a trope of permeability of the boundaries of ethnicity, Bouajila registers a rare presence of a wholesome, mature *beur* star capable of bridging the gap between a Maghrebi audience and the mainstream French public. It is telling that Bouajila has been repeatedly used to personify the French ideals of ‘*liberté, égalité, fraternité*’. He would literally read them out throughout his career, first as a young diasporic subject knocking at France’s door in *La faute à Voltaire*, and later as the intellectual father figure he embodies in *Indigènes*. Playing the main thinker among the colonial troops who fought on the French side in World War II, his character in *Indigènes* was partly modelled upon prospective African leaders such as Ahmed Ben Bella and Mehdi Ben Barka, who left the French army disillusioned by its failure to recognise their merit and contribution (Hargreaves 2007: 212).

Crucially, there is a sense that Bouajila’s entry into French stardom compensates what has been generally termed as the collapse of the Maghrebi paternal subject. The figure of the North African father ‘a été tué socialement par le colonialisme, par les guerres, puis par l’émigration. Au lieu de le tuer [comme dans l’Oedipe], ils nous appartient à nous, les enfants, de le faire revivre, de lui faire redresser la tête’ (Yasmina Benguigui, cited in Hargreaves 2000: 343-4). *Drôle de Félix* is symptomatic of a widespread view of first-generation Maghrebi immigrant fathers, seen as ‘faceless units of economic production’ (Hargreaves 2000: 345). Félix’s father had indeed disappeared, leaving no trace but an old photograph and a few personal documents. However, rather

than looking at memories garnered by loss and disappearance perpetually from a (lost) son's viewpoint, Bouajila shifts position, looking at projected place for the paternal to his own advantage. Bouajila incarnates an appealing alternative to offer to this absence or marginalisation of the father prominent in the films by and about young Maghrebis. Symbolically, his fraternal roles are already laden with meanings of fatherhood. Bouajila's performance in *Bye-bye* has at its heart his character Ismaël's attempt to take on brotherly responsibility on his own terms, as he juggles his options between remaining on French soil and returning to North Africa. *Drôle de Félix* can be seen to reflect and extend Bouajila's fraternal positioning in *Bye-bye*, with his relation to his father and his French identity as the crux. Its repercussions are laid out in Félix's sibling relationships, by the way he offers guidance to the rash teenager Joules, and with Isabelle whose children he 'fathers' during their journey together. It builds on his capability of reinventing his trajectory that is pitted against the two authority systems: the French Republic, on the one hand, and his North African roots, on the other. Both are crucially embedded in notions of filiation, yet equally fail to provide a viable paternal model (see Introduction). Facing this 'double' lack of fathers, Bouajila's purpose is not to choose between the two worlds, but rather to explore whether and how they can be reconciled or even left behind, with his bicultural consciousness raised and uncompromised.

Félix may be happy and loved because he decides not to be troubled by his ethnic origin, and to isolate himself from the Maghrebi side of his culture. However, Bouajila's star persona contradicts this reality. Bouajila has been a fatherless son who can also be seen as a new father figure, capable of reintroducing a charismatic form of masculine authority whilst gliding between fully fledged French citizenship and his minority ethnic milieu. He is also capable of challenging heteronormative exclusivity in paternal assumptions. This indeed happens in *Les Témoins* (Téchiné 2007). His well integrated *beur* father in the film is less a sign of the period (the 1980s) than a reflex of the actor's accumulated on-screen image of today, while the sexual freedom of his character supersedes the 1980s-settings with his filmography where heterosexual, homosexual and transgender roles co-exist. In *Drôle de Félix*, his mature stardom starts to show as an actor who formulates his path as a self-conscious mechanism of inclusion and integration. It is superimposed onto Félix's dogged insistence on selecting his route so that it veers away from pro-*Front National* towns, even though it means unnecessary detours.

Félix's final revelation, which comes to him during his encounter with a fisherman as his 'father', is a form of liberation. The self-effacing fisherman, unhappy with his own family, spends his Sunday fishing in the Mediterranean: he uses his way of fishing for the sake of fishing rather than to catch anything to persuade Félix not to look for his father, hinting that Félix's father might not have all the answers as to his absence in his son's life. The whole sequence – set in a still frame, cut off from any worldly noises, and featuring only the water and the two men, the young Félix and the old fisherman, sitting and talking – makes an indirect call for the paternal, whilst nothing associated with Félix's origin becomes ever wholly explicit. So the fisherman finally prompts Félix with *the* question that everyone in the film has been asking: what purpose does his fishing / Félix's quest for the father really serve? Bouajila's trajectory shows that he does not need to look to his father in order to have an identity, as he can serve as his own paternal model. Moreover, the ideal father Bouajila embodies registers the dynamics of differentiation that recognise the plurality and hybridity in one's identity. His paternity survives in differences. It cuts across ethnic boundaries, but also accommodates varied sexual preferences and different sexualities, so that the paternal model he registers is not one father, but a number of father figures who combine variation and experimentation.

Conclusion:
From the Hegemony of Paternity to the Ethics of Fraternity

Le jeune cinéma discussed in this thesis addresses a crisis of fatherhood prevalent on French screens during the 1990s. The family is left fatherless in *le jeune cinéma* and, by extension, without the help of an effective State. The absent fathers of *le jeune cinéma* testify, above all, to the realities of the ‘other’ France, the part of post-industrial society that has been left behind by socio-economic changes. As has been shown, paternity is structurally missing in these films as a reflection of waning patriarchy and, by extension, the decline of the State that was the key factor at the heart of the debates around social exclusion and fragmentation caused by neo-liberal policies of the 1990s, such as the public sector reforms and issues of unemployment including the debates around the 35-hour working week. Facing this political conjuncture, the *auteurs* of *le jeune cinéma* make a case for cinema as a tool for an ethical commitment to those who live in the margins of society, whose perpetual ‘out’ status (Silverman 1999: 49) brings out the issue of how to represent their subjectivity without eclipsing their alterity. It is, above all, in this ethical interrogation of the other that the political discourse of inequality and exclusion is filtered through *le jeune cinéma*. Therefore, on the screens of the *jeunes auteurs* of the 1990s, the call for a change does not belong to the traditional political sphere any more: this comes as a corollary of a more intimate and, above all, ethical engagement between the self and the other, between *auteurs* and their subjects, and in some cases (as in *La Vie de Jésus*) between *auteurs* and their (non-)actors.

A desire to be proximate to the other and to appropriate cinematic space for the other’s subjectivity, combined with the sense of urgency that it was necessary to reflect on the conditions of this ‘other’ France, informs the work of *le jeune cinéma*. My first conclusion is that, in this ethical conversion, the meaning of the *auteur* changes. The traditional definition of *auteurism* – as an idiosyncratic vision behind the captured reality – goes through a re-conceptualisation. The idea of the *auteur* shifts away from a master of authorial vision towards a site of hospitality opening up to the other’s presence on his/her screen. In *le jeune cinéma*, therefore, the *auteurs* become the vision of host and hostage to the alterity of others who dictate the flow of movement and sound, arousing the viewer’s desire. For example, Rosetta’s otherness leads to an open perception of her fluid identity, whereas *La Vie de Jésus* serves as a blank canvas where the characters/actors enacted their real-life personae. The notion of ‘selfless cinema’ that Cooper discerns as a defining trait of contemporary French documentary-filmmaking (Cooper 2006: 8) can speak for the *auteurs*’ positioning in *le jeune cinéma*, particularly, to the extent that they consistently free themselves from visible signs of

directorial manipulations, favouring instead documentary aesthetics and characters' (actors') autonomy rather than *mise-en-scène*. How this reveals the individual *auteur*'s altruistic interest in the 'other' France has been the focus of this thesis. The Dardenne brothers, through their fraternal openness and collaboration, relinquish the mastery and self-identification inherent in the act of directing. Different forms of *auteurism* are also at work, as witnessed in Dumont's paternalistic approach towards his real-life non-actors, resonating with his own film that reconnects the disengaged characters into the paternal narrative. Veysset, on the other hand, deals with how the fixation on paternal longing in *le jeune cinéma* impinges on the representations of motherhood and, as a result, eclipses maternal autonomy. In this light, ultimately, Guédiguian's role in relation to his 'family' of actors and crews – an inadvertent paternal position that Guédiguian insists can only function through an integration into the 'family' – offers a fitting symbolism for the relation that exists between the *auteur* and the paternal within *le jeune cinéma*.

This new type of *auteurism* thereby leads to the second conclusion of my thesis, which shows that the fathers are not so absent as they seem in *le jeune cinéma*, after all. The ethical underpinning in the relationship between *auteurs* and their subjects, instead, serves to fulfil a reworking of paternal paradigms. The films recuperate the fathers back to their narrative in one way or another, through adopting distinctly individual measures. This constitutes the multi-faceted affair of *le jeune cinéma*. Therefore, *Bye-bye* delineates an ethics of filial influence between immigrant fathers and their sons through the use of music and soundtrack, whereas it is the fairy-tale revelation that a benign paternal returns to save from crisis the rural family in *La Neige*. Disappearing working-class fathers are reinstated through various measures, as seen in the cases of *Marius et Jeannette* and *Rosetta*. In Guédiguian's film, it is the rituals of food and drink that reunite the community into a *famille recomposée*, which opens up to reintegrate the fallen patriarchy; while in *Rosetta*'s fatherless world, on the other hand, friendship takes the place of paternity. Both these films feature characters in search of social inclusion who operate outside the frame of the traditional family, and this is epitomised in *Drôle de Félix*. Bearing two places for the father in relation to Félix's gay as well as *beur* identity, the film's paternal references encompass the link between Ducastel and Martineau as gay *auteurs* and Bouajila as a *beur* star. We have seen a very different form of dynamics linking the *auteurs* and the actors elsewhere in *le jeune cinéma*, where the relationship between Dumont and his actors forms the basis of the paternal quest in *La Vie de Jésus*.

In its great diversity in reworking the paternal configurations, *le jeune cinéma* stands as a witness to a fading away of the need for the old, oedipal father, who lays down law and order. My last conclusion, therefore, posits that this waning paternal hegemony makes space for the ethics of fraternity. Fathers in *le jeune cinéma* fail to assume the authority traditionally consigned to the patriarchal fathers: a position aptly adopted by the reluctant fathers in *Marius et Jeannette*. ‘Othered’ and alienated in current neo-liberal socio-economic situations, the forgotten fathers come significantly to a position where they can deliver the ethics of paternity that Levinas defines as a relation of alterity: the fathers in *le jeune cinéma* relinquish their prerogative and, in so doing, are redeemed from amnesia and reconnected to a forward-looking future. What this movement towards ‘infinite time’ (Levinas 2008: 268) might involve, however, takes priority away from the father-centric approaches. Instead, the paternal line gives way to equalising fraternal relationships between brothers and friends. One might well ask whether this fraternisation might include sisters, but that would be another project, retaining a potential that can further expand this thesis. Relations of symbolic, as well as literal, brotherhood permeate the family portraits of *le jeune cinéma*, where there are also other relations prioritised, notably, through resilient motherhood and couple relationships, hetero- or homosexual. This formulates the thesis of *le jeune cinéma*: the conditions of a possible counter image of what it means to be a family ‘at [whose] dead centre is the dead patriarch’ (Powrie 2007: 284).

In this light, my journey through *le jeune cinéma* opens and concludes by tracing the trajectory crossed by Sami Bouajila, a ‘fils symbolique’ whose filial-driven quest for identity weaves through the films of *le jeune cinéma*. His image evolves, growing out of the proto-son searching for the father towards a renewed possibility of brotherhood that replaces failed patriarchy with fraternal love and responsibility, as seen in the films such as *Bye-bye* and *Drôle de Félix*, as well as in the later *Indigènes*. As it seems, coming significantly close to the Derridean notion of the ‘fratriarchy’ (Derrida 2005: viii), the fraternal models promoted in *le jeune cinéma* are laden with the meanings of fatherhood. This can answer why *le jeune cinéma* recuperates the paternal: so that fatherhood can be re-imagined as fraternal hospitality and friendship, as a site opening up to the other’s subjectivity and alterity.

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