

The *sans-papiers*' struggle against exclusion:
politics in the Parisian *banlieue*

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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This thesis addresses the way that 'politics' and 'ethnicity' appear to be mutually exclusive in the French context, where the Republican ideal of citizenship excludes ethnic identity. I investigate the concept of 'social exclusion' and its application to the *banlieues* – built-up suburbs of major cities, in this case Paris, where there is a concentration of non-white residents. The *banlieues* are seen as areas of 'social exclusion' associated with restructuring and deindustrialisation. I argue that 'colour-blind' policies aimed at combating 'social exclusion' ignore a significant part of the lives and identities of *banlieue* residents by denying the enmeshing of 'culture' and 'structure', and disregarding the history of colonialism and migration.

The existence of *sans-papiers* represents one of the omissions of 'social exclusion' policies. They are immigrants, and frequently *banlieue* residents, who have no legal right to be in France. The *sans-papiers* movement fights against the bureaucratic barriers to regularisation that the *sans-papiers* have encountered as individuals. My fieldwork with a *sans-papiers* organisation enabled me to observe and to take part in the interaction between French militants and immigrants from several different cultural backgrounds. The organisation offered an apt site for studying how 'politics' and 'ethnicity' interact in the French context. I give an account of the *sans-papiers* organisation during a six month occupation of an old *Gendarmerie*.

My analysis of the *sans-papiers* movement draws on the theoretical models of Agamben (1998,1999), Badiou (1988) and Žižek (1999). I discuss the emergence of the movement in the context of French universalism. Using interview material, I look at the experience of being a *sans-papiers* in France. In relation to the events of the occupation, I consider the relationship between the *sans-papiers* organisation and the authorities, and the relationship within the organisation between *sans-papiers* and French militants. I investigate group solidarity amongst the *sans-papiers* and the extent to which their voice was heard in public space, particularly in relation to 'the list' of occupants for whom they demanded regularisation.

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Abstract | 2 |
| Acknowledgements | 6 |
| Chapter 1 Globalisation and the dispossessed | |
| The <i>sans-papiers</i> movement | 7 |
| ‘Social exclusion’, ethnicity and universalism | 11 |
| The <i>sans-papiers</i> and the State | 21 |
| Fortress Europe and the <i>banlieue</i> | 27 |
| The abject non-part of universality or ‘bare life’ | 33 |
| Remnants | 38 |
| Formations of class and ethnicity | 42 |
| Methodology | 47 |
| Chapter 2 In and out in Paris and <i>banlieue</i> | |
| Introduction | 52 |
| Part 1 ‘Social exclusion’ theory | |
| The <i>danger communautaire</i> | 58 |
| You will be assimilated! | 62 |
| ‘Estates in exile’ | 67 |
| Part 2 ‘Social exclusion’ policies | |
| <i>Réhabilitation</i> | 69 |
| <i>Accompagnement</i> | 76 |
| Part 3 Key local actors | |
| The Communist Party | 79 |
| Associations | 81 |
| ‘The lads’ | 85 |
| Conclusion | 88 |

Chapter 3 Supplementing a being-in-situation with a Void separating event

| | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Introduction | 91 |
| Talking to Mr Lazarus | 94 |
| Returning to the MST | 97 |
| Away from Lazarus | 103 |
| Reading Badiou through Žižek | 107 |
| Back to Lacan | 110 |
| Conclusion | 117 |

Chapter 4 The *sans-papiers*: individuals and Political movement

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction | 121 |
| Re-reading the <i>sans-papiers</i> event | 126 |
| Living in the occupation | 139 |
| Interviewing the occupants | 146 |
| Personal histories | |
| Dembele | 149 |
| Carlos | 150 |
| Adel | 151 |
| Moussa | 153 |
| Other interviews | 155 |
| From individuals to collective struggle | 156 |
| From collective struggle to individuals (first results) | 162 |
| Conclusion | 164 |

Chapter 5 The politics of the Co-ordination

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction | 166 |
| Public-space, co-optation and bureaucracy | 168 |
| 'Tom and Jerry' politics | 177 |
| Protest and exist | 181 |
| Dossiers and negotiations | 185 |
| The <i>soutiens</i> and the Communist Party | 191 |
| <i>Délégués</i> and interests | 196 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 'The list' | 201 |
| From list to hunger-strike | 205 |
| Hunger-strikers and squatters | 208 |
| The wedding and the mandate | 212 |
| Chapter 6 Ethnicity and group solidarity | |
| « <i>On n'est pas là pour faire du folklore !</i> » | 216 |
| The Moccan kitchen incident | 226 |
| Kitchen Baghdad | 231 |
| Solidarity and merit | 235 |
| The end of the occupation | 240 |
| Epilogue | 245 |
| Chapter 7 Conclusion | 249 |
| Bibliography | 262 |
| Appendix 1 Timeline of <i>sans-papiers</i> movement, the Co-ordination and the occupation | 272 |
| Appendix 2 Conference paper for the MST: The group | 273 |
| Appendix 3 The Analytical Discourse | 279 |
| Appendix 4 The <i>Mairie</i> and the Prefecture – French political institutions and their relationship to the Co-ordination | 285 |

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Chapter 1

Globalisation and the dispossessed

The *sans-papiers* movement

“At 7.56am: immense blows shake the back door. Monsieur Debré’s [Minister of the Interior in 1996] axe blades appear through the splintered wood. The door gives way. A rowdy pack, looking like something out of Star Wars, invade the church. The cops are forced to clear their path by throwing chairs over their heads, one after another, out of the church. Once they have entered, a smell of tear gas spreads out. The nose burns, eyes water.

Fifteen or so cops are in front, in a line, facing the ten hunger-strikers.

The women pack their bags. In the bags they place sarongs [used for tying babies and small children to their mother’s back], utensils and baby-bottles.

The cameras roll, the flashes crackle.

The newspaper journalists promenade, pencil and notepad in hand.

The ‘mass’ begins. Father Coindé reads from the famous speech of Martin Luther King:

“I have a dream.”

A cop snatches away the microphone.

The women explode with indignation. I try to calm them but I can’t.

And Khady:

“So that’s it, France, ‘Land of Sanctuary’? You are worse than the Germans! You plundered and colonised us and that’s what we get in return: tear gas on our children.”

Seeing the women in such a state drives me out of my mind.

Me, who usually calls for calm, I set to insulting the cops:

“Bastards! That’s your democracy, is it? Two thousand CRS [riot police] against three hundred people, tear gas for the children?”...

At the back of the church, with pickaxes, twenty odd *Gendarmes* break through the wooden floor, digging a big hole, in which they bury our

provisions, benches, bags, all sorts of objects. At the moment of leaving, I see the photographers gathered around the hole. I understand the caption to the photograph – “Black Savages” – and the good humanitarian reasons for evicting them, for their own good: “See for yourselves in what state they have left the religious building that welcomed them!”

Sad...

The cops had begun sorting us out: the Whites first, they separated us, grabbing the Whites from the chain. We sat down, holding on to each other. Those that resisted received truncheon blows.

In sorting us out this way, the cops let some *sans-papiers* go. Oh yes! Amongst the Whites, there were *sans-papiers*. Amongst the Blacks who were put in detention at Vincennes, and kept in custody with us, there were French citizens, oh yes!” (Cissé 1999:115-116, my translation)

The moment described above is the eviction of the St Bernard church in Paris in 1996, as narrated by Madiguène Cissé, one of the main spokespersons for the group of *sans-papiers* who occupied St Bernard. This occupation catapulted the *sans-papiers* movement into the media limelight. Previously referred to as *clandestins* (i.e. clandestine, hidden), *sans-papiers* (meaning ‘without papers’) was the term adopted by the St Bernard Collective. They formed a movement for immigrants, living in France without legal status, who wanted to make a stand. A series of anti-immigration measures in the eighties and the early nineties – new laws and increasingly restrictive practices – had left many immigrants without the right to stay in France, even though some of them had been resident for several years. The *sans-papiers* refused to hide away whilst their rights were being eroded and their efforts to get or to renew their papers were being blocked.

Against a rightwing government determined to take a tough stance on immigration, the *sans-papiers* movement gathered momentum. The forceful eviction of St Bernard created a backlash against the Government. The images of riot police axing their way into a church and dragging out those who were inside, claiming sanctuary, caused a public outcry. Even the Socialist Party joined in with the popular support of the *sans-papiers* movement. However, when the Socialists came to power in 1997, they did not “Regularise all *sans-*

papiers!”, as the movement’s slogan demanded. Instead the *Circulaire Chevènement* invited immigrants in irregular situations to make an application for legal status. Applications were then dealt with individually and only about half of those who applied were regularised. Of the dossiers dealt with by the Prefectures¹, there were 81,000 regularisations and 62,500 refusals (Abdallah 2000:100).

It may seem strange to a British observer that a group of illegal immigrants should protest their situation in public and achieve anything but arrest and deportation. According to a ‘British’ concept of immigration, illegal immigrants should not be there at all. However, in the French context, immigration policy has historically dealt with migrants already in France rather than focusing purely on border control. Regularisation after the fact has been a significant feature of post-war immigration: from 1948 to 1958 about 35% of immigrants were regularised and the figure rose to 86% in 1967 (Abdallah 2000:9). The practice of introducing *circulaires*, which adapt immigration law to accommodate immigrants already present in France dates back to 1964 (Abdallah 2000:9). Restrictions on immigration since the seventies have also implicitly constructed an internal quasi-border between official and unofficial immigrants. The reverse process to regularisation, of withdrawing papers from those who have been legally living and working in France, began in 1972, with the *Circulaire Marcellin-Fontanet*, which made having papers dependent on having a job contract. In other words, losing your job meant losing the right to stay in France (Siméant 1998:15).

With this officially sanctioned traffic forwards and backwards across an internal frontier, it is perhaps less surprising that the *sans-papiers* managed to gain recognition in French public space. The St Bernard Collective was not in fact the first group of ‘undocumented migrants’ to achieve results through public

¹ A Prefecture represents the Government in each French *Département*. The Parisian region is made up of several *Départements*, i.e. central Paris, which is subdivided into *arrondissements*, and the surrounding *banlieue* (literally ‘outlying area’) *Départements*. A *Département* is made up of several communes or municipalities each with its own locally elected *Mairie*. There is also an elected body at the level of the *Département*: the *Conseil Générale*. However, the Prefecture and the *Conseil Générale* are separate bodies, with the Prefecture representing the central State rather than being part of local government. Immigrants applying for residence in France pass through the Prefecture in their *Département*.

protest. Siméant points to movements of *sans-papiers* that preceded St Bernard. The first *sans-papiers* hunger-strike, by nineteen Tunisians, came in the same year as the *Circulaire Marcellin-Fontanet* and it sparked off twenty hunger-strikes around France, which led to 50,000 regularisations in 1973 (Siméant 1998:15). In February 1980, seventeen Turks went on hunger-strike after a TV report into their working conditions in the textile industry. The movement spread through various meetings and demonstrations, leading to 3,000 regularisations. Siméant argues that the fear of new hunger-strikes of this sort was partly responsible for the 'great regularisation' of 1981-1983, which regularised 130,000 undocumented immigrants (Siméant 2000:16). Hunger-strikes from April 1991 by 1,500 rejected asylum seekers led to 17,000 regularisations with the *Circulaire* of 23 July 1991 (Siméant 2000:17). The hunger-strikes continued, since 50,000-100,000 people had been refused asylum. However, after the *Circulaire*, the movement lost most of its public support from French militants and it ended with case-by-case regularisations being negotiated at each Prefecture (Siméant 2000:17). Siméant sums up these pre-St Bernard movements by arguing that they had the:

“Same predominance of hunger-strikes, same fear – expulsion – same demand – regularisation of the *sans-papiers* – same type of negotiations with the public authorities, ending up in the same regularisation 'on humanitarian grounds' in the form of a *Circulaire*.” (Siméant 2000:17)

Hence, large one-off regularisations have been achieved in France but they led to an expanding bureaucratic 'no-mans land' in which individual cases are left in limbo, somewhere between deportation and regularisation. Nevertheless, the goal of unconditional regularisation is not as far fetched as it may seem to the British observer. A similar cycle of protests by 'undocumented migrants' has also achieved large one-off amnesties, in the form of mass regularisations, in Italy, Spain and Portugal (Diop 1997:184). Geddes suggests that different approaches to immigration may reflect the differing labour markets in southern European countries, where there is a recognised need for foreign labour regardless of plans for EU-wide immigration control (Geddes 2000:25). In France, the *Circulaire Chevènement* appears to mark a bureaucratic cut-off point, ending general amnesties, especially for unskilled labourers. 'The law of 10 years', established after the *Circulaire Chevènement*, restricts the

regularisation of single, unskilled workers to those who have been continuously present in France for 10 years and are able to prove it. In effect, this law seems to legislate for the permanent 'state of exception' (Agamben 1998:168) of an institutionalised black market labour force.

When I became aware of the *sans-papiers* movement in France, towards the end of 2000, it was struggling against the bureaucratic solution imposed by the Socialist Government. "Case by case, we don't want it!" was one of the first slogans I learned. However, the movement was no longer new or newsworthy. I joined a group that could usually only muster about one hundred activists. The media showed little interest and there were only a few French militants who had remained, continuing the slow struggle to drag a few more regularisations out of the Prefecture.

'Social exclusion', ethnicity and universalism

Although the *sans-papiers* movement is the main fieldwork site examined in this thesis, it is not the only one. The combination of fieldwork sites and the theoretical focus of this thesis developed out of an interest in 'social exclusion'. I wanted to investigate the organisations and people affected by the policy motif 'social exclusion' in France. I planned to study 'excluded' sectors of the population and the agencies aiming to help / control them, especially in relation to the *banlieue* – specific geographic areas viewed as outside, or at risk of falling outside, the norms of the French State.

The European Union uses measures of 'social exclusion' to target corrective funding throughout Europe, with the aim of repairing the fabric of society. This repair work is deemed necessary in the context of economic restructuring, deindustrialisation and globalisation, which have displaced the manufacturing base of European economies and undermined the ways of life of the poorer sectors of society. The focus on France rather than another EU country derives from the early use of the term in France. Following Tournaine's (1981) suggestion that social divisions in post-industrial society can best be understood

by considering who is 'in' and who is 'out', French policy makers developed the term 'social exclusion' for dealing with the problem of those who are 'out'. By 1988 'social exclusion' had been enshrined in EU parlance (Kofaman & Sales 1998). In 1995, Chirac, as a candidate for the Presidential elections, adopted the combating 'social exclusion', as a way of giving rightwing policies a social conscience (Frétigné 1999). I considered that a generic term like 'social exclusion' would be applied differently from one context to another. I expected to find that French readings would relate to historical expectations that residence in France should lead to acculturated citizenship, i.e. assimilation into the Republican 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) of the French nation-state.

Ethnicity and 'race' are taboo subjects in French public space. There is a striking degree of 'racial' segregation in Paris, particularly between white middle class metropolitan areas and the built-up *banlieues*, spreading out from the ring road that circles central Paris. However, the French media, politicians, bureaucrats and professionals all conspire to avoid mentioning the 'racial' dimension in public debate. 'Social exclusion' is itself a conveniently colour-blind term with which to suggest that certain parts of the population ought to be more integrated into French society without referring to the fact that they stick out because they are of non-white immigrant origin. Of course, 'racial' segregation does not go unnoticed by either *banlieue* residents or French society in general. However, Le Pen seems to be the only politician to speak about ethnic difference, which demonstrates that just mentioning ethnicity in the French context is virtually synonymous with his racist and xenophobic popularism. France seems to be caught between, on the one hand, an assimilatory universalism that denies the existence of difference and, on the other, an alarming degree of electoral support for far-Right, racist politics. The ghettoisation of immigrants tends to be either hidden behind the gloss of the universalist ideal of Republican integration or turned into the 'racial' scapegoat for an increasing sense of insecurity amongst white French people, both in the *banlieue* and in some rural areas.

In the presidential elections of 2002, Le Pen created a national and international shock by taking second place in the first round, eliminating the Socialist Prime Minister Jospin. However, Chirac and the Right, along with the media, and the tacit acceptance of Jospin himself, focussed the election almost entirely on the question of crime / insecurity. Whenever *les jeunes* (youths) or *l'insécurité* are mentioned, the socio-spatial segregation of the *banlieue* informs most people's stereotypical image of uncontrollable youths and street crime – they hear *les jeunes* and they see young Arab and black men. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Le Pen rather successfully models himself as a 'man of the people', less disconnected from the reality of people's lives than mainstream politicians. When he dares to mention ethnic difference in public debate, he is appealing to an ethnicised image of the *banlieue* that is already there, created by media images and of concern to 'the French people'.

The attitude of most French commentators is strongly antiracist; they draw on French universalism to argue against racism and even claim that racism is fundamentally anti-Republican. Nevertheless, journalists seem to validate Le Pen's position. Whilst carefully avoiding ethnic terminology, they use words like *jeunes* and *banlieue* as code words for 'race', creating a negative image of ethnic minorities. The media consistently pathologises the *banlieue* and, from TV reports alone, it would be hard to ignore the fact that the *banlieue* is ethnically different from the otherwise almost exclusively white image of France. In the aftermath of Le Pen's success, TV panels of white politicians and white intellectuals tried to analyse the result and come to terms with the shock and the shame of French racism. However, they neither questioned French universalism nor their own legitimacy as commentators on racism. In this respect, Grillo's (1985) comparative observation about the British and French media remains relevant more than twenty years after he wrote it. He argued that British journalists tend to seek the opinion of immigrant 'communities' on issues relating to immigrant populations, whereas in France, "the immigrant voice is represented in the public arena by the French" (Grillo 1985:267).

Besides journalists and politicians, other important actors contribute to the same foreclosure of ethnicity within French public space. As citizenship officially

excludes ethnic identities, official statistics and social policies have to ignore any 'racial' dimension to French society. Intellectuals, professionals and militant activists also tend to promote a strictly non-ethnic universalist ideal, which seems to fly in the face of reality and deny the blatant inequalities confronting many *banlieue* residents. I was particularly confused by the use of ethnic labels; in informal conversation, professionals of both French and immigrant origin used such labels freely but in official contexts they were unacceptable. I made several *faux pas* by using such labels in the wrong setting. For example, when I was volunteering in an association, in a *banlieue* area, I met a visiting funder. In conversation with him, I mentioned a project in Tower Hamlets, describing Tower Hamlets as an area of London that is largely Bangladeshi. This was perhaps a rather crass, stereotypical description but I was not prepared for the look of horror and offence that it provoked from the funder. I thought that perhaps he was shocked because I had referred to a single ethnic identity. After all, the professional I was working with had reeled off a list of all the different ethnic groups in the local area, in informal conversation with me. However, I suspect that it was more to do with the funder being present in an official capacity, which meant that my use of an ethnic label threatened to contaminate the universalism of the French state.

French intellectuals, with the exception of the Tourainian school which I shall discuss in Chapter 2, tend to reject discussions of 'race' and racism with the same universalist principles as the State, even when they are highly critical of the Government. In France, there seemed to be no possible intellectual justification for creating a space in which to discuss black or *beur* identity, even though such terms existed ('black' is said in English, referring to an intercontinental sense of black identity; *beur* derived from *beurre*, meaning butter, i.e. not black but not white either, is an identity created within the North African community). Ethnic markers have neither intellectual nor official validity; 'Black French' would be a complete misnomer and 'French Muslims' is a term that was used to refer to the *Harkis* (Algerians who fought for with the French against Algerian independence, Silverman 1992:4). I did meet one or two students of immigrant origin who, despite being well integrated, were not entirely comfortable with being thought of as 'French'. However, their white

counterparts were dismissive, insisting on magnanimously including them in French universalism. I was tempted to hear these reassurances through the racist double-bind that Fanon experienced in supposedly well-meaning comments like: "You are as civilised as us." (Fanon 1952:91)

An attitude of superior universalism was very much in evidence at the *sans-papiers* Co-ordination where I did most of my fieldwork. As with Grillo's Tunisian workers' strike in 1976, the relationship between *soutiens* (supporters / helpers) and *sans-papiers* reproduced patterns of dependency and subordination prevalent in the rest of French society (Grillo 1985:257). Despite the fact that the *sans-papiers* were a group of immigrants struggling against the French authorities, only the *soutiens* had the necessary competence and contacts to represent *sans-papiers* in the public arena, which they did effectively but on their own terms. The *soutiens* were certainly committed and hard-working in their efforts to regularise the *sans-papiers* but, if anything, they seemed to take the principle of French universalism even more seriously than state Republicanism, with their efforts to 'liberate' a group of illegal immigrants. Within the Co-ordination, the *soutiens* often seemed to represent a militant version of French civilisation, into which the *sans-papiers* should learn to be integrated through being good militants and by surpassing their ethnic differences. There was almost a parent-child relationship between *sans-papiers* and *soutiens*, which had even been formalised as named godparent-godchild relationships during one phase of 'the struggle' (Dubois 2000:28). The *sans-papiers* were not always convinced of the *soutiens'* way of seeing things and were even capable of collectively opposing them on rare occasions but, on the whole, the *soutiens* held the important keys to 'the struggle' and the *sans-papiers*, hoping for regularisation, had little choice but to follow their lead. The effect this had on the politics of the Co-ordination is the main focus of Chapter 5.

The only group of people I got to know who firmly opposed the French model of universal citizenship were 'the lads' who I met on my estate. They regarded the French claim to 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity', which they had been taught in school, as 'bollocks'. Their attitude was probably similar to that of the youths

who whistled during the French national anthem in the France v. Algeria football match in 2001, an incident that Chirac took as a public insult to the Republic. However, they were also a group that tended to be dismissed as 'excluded' and illogical delinquents. Their voice was rarely heard in local organisations or in the media. They tended to hang around in public places on the estate, sometimes getting into trouble with the police. I had interesting discussions with 'the lads', but media stereotypes and the power relationship implied in research / surveillance made it too uncomfortable to use them as an object of study for my thesis. In addition, there did not seem to be any dialogue between 'the lads' and French public space, with which I could compare official and media constructions of the *banlieue*. There may have been rare projects and individuals trying to bridge the gap but, on the whole, professional interventions seemed to involve disseminating French universalist principles, which 'the lads' resented. Nevertheless, 'the lads' were part of a recognised *banlieue* youth culture, represented through films and hip hop music. In some ways, they seemed to celebrate their marginality, although this kind of celebration was easily taken over by the culture industry and mainstream society without ever providing the *banlieue* youth with their own legitimate cultural space. Whilst negative images of *banlieue* youth were surreptitiously ethnic, positive aspects of youth culture could be co-opted or 'integrated' into French society, revealing an implicit assumption that 'good' meant French and 'bad' meant not-French.

The way in which French universalism claims ownership of the positive aspects of youth culture could even be turned against the *banlieue* youth from which it came. For example, M & W, two of 'the lads', pointed out the racism of an advert on TV to me. The advert begins with a youth, listening to hip hop on his personal stereo. He has a hat pulled down over his face, as he walks along a run-down corridor. Suddenly his very correct French mother calls out "A table!" ("Dinner time!"). The youth looks up, and he has blue eyes and blond hair. Then he walks through a door into a smart kitchen done out in IKEA furniture, whereupon the voice-over exclaims "Thank goodness for IKEA!" M & W were disgusted by the advert, arguing that it was racist because it made fun of 'us'. The joke in the advert is that all the initial points of reference connote a *banlieue*

youth, as a symbol of anxiety in French society, but suddenly everything is OK because the youth is blond, blue-eyed, has a French mother and IKEA furniture.

Even when the media image of French society is not monolithic and white, the Republican model of citizenship impels it to reclaim its citizens and their forms of expression, in a way that reaffirms rather than questions the hegemony of French universalism. French universalism tends to re-suture the social fabric by co-opting dissent and assimilating difference. My study of the *sans-papiers* movement is about the success, failure or rather provisional suspension of French universalism in 'excluded' *banlieue* space. The way French public space deals with the questions of immigration and ethnicity is relevant to wider debates about the nation-state, politics and popular sovereignty in the postindustrial era, especially in the European Union, with its supranational institutions and pockets of 'social exclusion'.

I had set out with the goal of studying the French version of 'social exclusion', as the term is applied in the particular historical and cultural context of the built-up suburbs around Paris (the *banlieue*). I wanted to investigate how policies aimed at tackling 'social exclusion' are articulated to the dominant version of the 'social norm' in French society. I guessed this norm would be imposed on 'the excluded', who might have different perspectives on their relationship to French society. In this way, I hoped to be able to critique policy rhetoric, examine more structural inequalities based on class and 'race' and give a voice to the people that the policies are aimed at. However, this approach proved inadequate, when I failed to find any common ground between 'the lads' and local projects. Assuming that the French version of 'social exclusion' was culturally different from the British version, I had attempted to prove that it functions in much the same way, i.e. by imposing a norm that is not shared by much of the population. However, my involuntary suspicion of the 'social norm', whether Thatcherite or Blairite, proved almost impossible to translate into the French context.

In Britain, dissent over the 'social norm' seems commonplace. For example, the JobCentre operates according to an official version of the relationship between the unemployed and the labour market, but many people, both

unemployed and professionals, are suspicious of JobCentre rhetoric. This suspicion has even been immortalised in programmes like *Boys from the Black Stuff* (Bleasdale 1983). Hence, there is common recognition that JobCentre rhetoric can be used to make life harder for the unemployed, whilst claiming to 'help' them back into work. In France, there seemed to be no such suspicion and dissent. Perhaps 'help' for the unemployed was actually less punitive, but I found it strange that efforts to tackle 'social exclusion' were generally taken at face value. Many of the professionals I met were critical of the Government for not doing enough to tackle exclusion but, even amongst experienced workers, I found no trace of cynicism about the over-all goal.

I experienced this lack of common cynicism about 'the powers-that-be' as a gaping hole in my cultural landscape, which led me back to the question of French citizenship. 'Social exclusion' and the 'social norm' relate to notions of membership of society, i.e. citizenship. In Britain, citizenship seems to be loose enough to allow for different identities to co-exist within it, even if there are conflicts and inequalities. On the contrary, the French version of citizenship is considered to be universal and fixed, therefore intolerant of difference. Hence, the expression of identities that challenge the unity of the Republic is considered heretical. Regional differences or differences of class and ethnicity are interpreted as threats to the integrity of the Republic. In this context, my original research project to prise open the gap between the official 'social norm' and what I presumed would be commonplace scepticism was invalidated by this hegemonic universalism.

As one would expect in fieldwork, I was forced to re-examine my premise when I found my expectations challenged. The relativism with which I initially assessed the French context turned out to be part of my cultural baggage. It did not provide a map that corresponded to the territory. Eventually, I was forced to reverse my premise and hypothesis, so that my effort to contextualise 'social exclusion' became a way into the question of French / universal citizenship itself, rather than *vice versa*. As a result, the main focus of the thesis is on universal citizenship and how it renders politics and ethnicity mutually exclusive in the French context. My main fieldwork site is an

organisation that, as part of the *sans-papiers* (literally 'without papers') movement, is made up of immigrants and French militants campaigning for the regularisation of local residents who exist without legal status. I do consider the question of 'exclusion' but from a very different angle from the one originally envisaged; it is less a study of Governmental ways of combating exclusion and more a study of a group of illegal residents fighting against their exclusion by the Government.

The term 'social exclusion', as Levitas (1996) has remarked in her critique of New Labour, implies a 'Durkheimian hegemony', a cohesive society presumed to be in equilibrium and held together by the abstract social morality of 'organic solidarity'. A model of 'social exclusion' based on the Durkheimian model of 'the social' has implications for the more communitarian and multicultural aspects of British society. Not only are inequalities in the labour market obscured by the Durkheimian social equilibrium but ethnic identities are also erased in the universalist myth of assimilation (Back, Crabbe & Solomos 1998:33). From the French perspective, French universalism stands in opposition to 'the Anglo-Saxon model', which allows distinct communities to operate within an unintegrated society, ruled by an amoral and neo-liberal form of capitalism. Commentators like Kepel (1995:275) regard the British approach to 'Equal Opportunities' as inherently racist because they recognise the existence of different ethnicities; within French Republicanism, distinct ethnicities are considered to be logically incompatible with citizenship.

'Social exclusion' in the French context draws on an implicit set of oppositions, which are not immediately apparent in the British context. In France, society is opposed to 'communities', which tend to be viewed as enclosed, divisive, ethnic and traditional: pre-enlightenment forms of social organisation. Membership of 'the social' requires (along with being integrated into the labour market) becoming a universal citizen, therefore not having an identity that is particularistic, ethnic or class-based. The opposite to 'exclusion' is 'integration', rather than 'inclusion', which could imply simply identifying with the national community, whereas 'organic solidarity' requires a more evolved (*évolué*) relationship to society. These oppositions – society v. community; integration v.

exclusion; citizenship v. ethnicity; social v. multicultural; enlightened v. traditional; evolved v. enclosed; and, ultimately, universal v. particular – suggest a confidence in French culture, as representing progress and the enlightenment, which would seem out of place in the British context².

Although the notion of 'integration' was used to replace 'assimilation' because the latter was no longer acceptable, Silverman argues that both terms are used to construct a retrospective national homogeneity (Silverman 1992:92,106). The only difference seems to be that the need for 'integration' to combat 'social exclusion' follows on from an implicit racialisation of immigration, separating older European immigrants from non-European immigrants who cannot be assimilated (Silverman 1992:95). Silverman shows how today's 'France' has been constructed in relation to notions such as 'the ghetto' – a concentration of (certain) immigrants with social problems – and 'the threshold of tolerance' – the assumption that when the immigrant population rises above 10% it poses a problem for French residents (Silverman 1992:96). These notions imply an internal border that reconstructs national homogeneity by labelling areas populated by (those appearing to be) immigrants as outside the national community (Silverman 1992:106). Silverman argues that there is a contradiction at the heart of Republican discourse:

"between the universalism of the Rights of Man and the particularism enshrined in the link between citizenship and nationality." (Silverman 1992:92)

Politicians try to draw lines between legal and illegal immigrants, and between second generation youths and immigrants, but in areas of 'social problems' where most people appear to be immigrants there is a "confusion of frontiers" and a confusion of "illegalism and immigration" (Silverman 1992:139).

Silverman's analysis of French universalism suggests that it can be intolerant of cultural difference, and the 'Durkheimian hegemony' that comes with 'social exclusion' policy contains within it this intolerant universal social norm. New Labour, in adopting the 'social exclusion' policy motif, has also tended to adopt

²This should not be taken to mean that I think the French are backward for not having risen above their modern sense of superiority or that complacent confidence in British multiculturalism is justifiable.

a normative moral agenda, transcending communities and riding roughshod over the more pluralist aspects of British society (Driver & Martell 1997:35). This can be seen, for example, in the way immigrant families have been told to speak English at home.

Balibar's analysis of French intolerance is also relevant. He suggests that France may have simply retained its colonial mission, especially in its approach to immigrant populations, with internal frontiers replacing external ones. He points to a difference between French citizens and French subjects, the latter being in need of:

“the diffusion of a sacred heritage of civilisation: the Rights of Man, the French language and universal secularism. [He continues:] “we withdrew from it [the Empire] *without having accomplished the mission* that we believed to be our duty to fulfil: to liberate all peoples of their ignorance and to teach the religion of French secularism.” (Balibar 1997:391)

By calling it a religion, Balibar undermines French universalism in a way that is virtually blasphemous. Commentators are more frequently caught up in the denial of French intolerance because universalism is held up as an antiracist ideal. The negative aspects of colonial history, when they are referred to at all, tend to be seen as a stain on universalism rather than as the substance of intolerant French universalism.

The *sans-papiers* and the State

There are four areas of literature that could be relevant to studying a group like the *sans-papiers*. They cover: ‘social exclusion’ in relation to the European Union; transnational flows and the informal economy; the abject non-part of universality (Žižek 1999 and Agamben 1999, 1998, 1996); and formations of class and ethnicity. The first two I shall consider briefly as they play a relatively minor role in the thesis. My theoretical questions about the *sans-papiers* movement will be derived mainly from the third approach, using the work of Žižek and Agamben. I shall also discuss possible ways of theorising the processes of identity formation in relation to class and ethnicity, because

towards the end of the thesis I want to be able to reflect on the way the *sans-papiers* came together as a political movement.

Firstly then, the *sans-papiers* could be studied as an excluded group within a European State, in which case the debate would focus mainly on their lack of residence status and social rights. Accounts of exclusion can be separated into those using a 'weak' form of exclusion, which merely acknowledge the existence of exclusion and proposes corrective policies, and those using a 'strong' form of exclusion, which analyse the structural processes that create exclusion (Gamarnikow & Green 1999:111). I use the 'strong' form below to show how policies designed to combat 'social exclusion', which use the 'weak' form, actually reinforce the anti-immigration policies pursued by 'Fortress Europe', actively producing exclusion. I also raise the question of a possible parallel between the *sans-papiers* and the *banlieue*, the former being residents inside the country but outside the French state, the latter being a space deemed 'excluded' within the state.

The debate about 'exclusion' is important to an understanding of how European boundaries are being drawn and how disputes occur as to whether the *sans-papiers* belong inside or outside those boundaries. However, as a way of studying the *sans-papiers* movement itself, such a debate is curiously bereft of useful analytical tools. That the *sans-papiers* take to the streets complaining about their situation is anomalous to both 'weak' and 'strong' forms of exclusion: whether they are part of the *banlieue*'s problems or whether they are the result of global flexibilisation and the informal market. Theories of exclusion are useful for understanding the public debate surrounding the *sans-papiers* movement but they do not offer a way of studying *sans-papiers* political activism itself.

A second theoretical approach to the *sans-papiers* would be to ignore the importance of nation-states altogether and study them as part of globalised scapes (Appadurai 1986). A focus on transnational flows could generate a discussion about the *sans-papiers* as exploited workers or as opportunistic entrepreneurs. An analysis of the structural aspects of the informal economy,

globalisation and flexibilisation (Sassen, Ong 1999, Benton, Castells & Portes 1989, Smith 1987, George 1992, Terray 1999) could be used to frame a study of individual and/or groups of *sans-papiers*, their agency and the socio-economic structures in which they operate. The agency of the *sans-papiers* could be positioned in, compared and contrasted with a neo-liberal model of global capitalism. For example, MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga (2000) examine the 'extra-legal' activities of traders operating between central Africa and Paris. The traders are excluded by the State but they create their own world of illegal or semi-legal trade and commerce (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 10). The authors describe the traders' activities as a silent, hidden revolution but not organised political resistance (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 157).

Analysis of the *sans-papiers* in relation to transnational flows could be used to reflect on the models of globalisation that propose a world dividing into two: an inwards-looking, legal and secure society protecting itself from a dispossessed world of chaos, violence and insecurity (see Hoogvelt's 'involution' 1997, Beck's 'risk society' 1992 or Martin's analogy between flexible capitalism and the immune system, Martin 1994). However, within such an approach formal politics, the State and public space would be relatively insignificant. The barriers to migration could be examined and the perceived threat of contamination from 'undocumented migrants' could be analysed but the emphasis would have to be on *sans-papiers* economic activity, whereas the *sans-papiers* Co-ordination was explicitly a political organisation. Whilst I do not want to suggest that economic activity is not political or *vice versa*, I have limited and incidental information on the activities of the *sans-papiers* outside the Co-ordination. The *sans-papiers* came together as a group to make a stand in the public political arena. They met primarily in meetings, demos and occupations rather than in the workplace, through commerce or through networks of relations based on kinship or wider diasporas. I shall try to draw out some general aspects of the *sans-papiers*' socio-economic circumstances and consider the significance individual *sans-papiers* place on transnational connections, but my fieldwork site came into being specifically as political activism within the French State. Although there were informal aspects of the

Co-ordination that undermines such a narrow interpretation of 'political', the public face of the Co-ordination was geared towards addressing nation-state politics. As this was the declared purpose of *sans-papiers* activity, to which I was offered access as a researcher, I need to find a theoretical framework that allows me to understand the movement on this level.

In France, the state is sometimes seen as a form of protection against or even opposition to globalisation and neo-liberalism. This attitude can be found in Body-Gendrot's reaction to Sassen's analysis of the informal economy. Sassen suggests that a process of casualisation has created a global phenomenon that she calls "the mega-city syndrome" (Sassen 1996:583). She points to the growth of service industries in core countries, leading to conditions:

"characterised by greater earnings and occupational dispersion, by weak unions, and mostly by a growing proportion of unsheltered jobs in the lower paying echelons" (Sassen 1996:590).

Body-Gendrot claims that, in terms of Sassen's model, Paris is only a 'soft' global city since the French:

"manifest strong expectations of the state as accountable for social solidarity and violent discontent ensues when the state does not fulfil that role... [Hence,] the state in France cannot remain passive when market laws transform the economy and cause the destruction of the social fabric." (Body-Gendrot 1996:602)

Body-Gendrot argues that violent protests act "as messages of distress to political decision-makers", with the middle class supporting and joining hard-hit groups (Body-Gendrot 1996:604), so that, via the media:

"the slightest shock wave radiates throughout the national space... [whilst] the traditional role of state intervention and the strong historical and ideological integration of French society [softens the effects of restructuring]." (Body-Gendrot 1996:604)

Hargreaves (1996) disputes Body-Gendrot's claim that violent protest can generate such a positive response in France, and Jazouli (1985), discussing the same period of *banlieue* unrest, argues that French public space co-opted the social movements that originated from the *banlieue*, rather than hearing their messages. However, Body-Gendrot's faith in 'the French exception' (Abdallah 2000) is not unique. The same faith in the integrative power of French public

space has also been applied to the *sans-papiers* movement, as I shall discuss in Chapter 5.

It is no coincidence that the *sans-papiers* movement arose in the French context, as the movement appeals to universalism. In this thesis, I am caught between recognising that French universalism has some real political significance for the *sans-papiers*, and objecting to the perverse intolerance with which it is usually applied: even French militants tend to ‘incorporate’ / assimilate immigrants rather than allow them to speak as immigrants (Grillo 1985:277). In order to analyse the *sans-papiers*’ relationship to French public space, I need a theoretical framework that takes into account the relationship between the State, public space and political activism, as well as global restructuring and migrant flows. Žižek’s (1999) discussion of universalism and the political subject suggests that such a framework is possible. He argues that, in Hegelian dialectics, particularism operates as the unremovable stain, the substance that fills out the form of universalism. Refusing to abandon political universalism, Žižek (1999:224) proposes a model in which the abject non-part of a political system, which has been excluded by the system’s inherent particularism, can undermine and re-invent universalism from within. Žižek (1999:224) specifically points to immigrant workers as the abject non-part of the modern State, arguing that, having no proper place, their claim to universality calls into question the universality of State institutions. Thus Žižek’s approach seems suggest that the *sans-papiers* movement could represent a fundamental challenge to French Republican universalism.

My reading of Žižek played an important part in allowing me to re-focus my research project and conduct fieldwork on the *sans-papiers* movement. Like Žižek, Agamben analyses the underlying assumptions on which nation-states are founded. His discussion of biopolitics points to the political significance of refugees (Agamben 1996). Agamben’s (1998) starting point is the ‘bare life’ – of refugees and other non-citizens – that cannot be reconciled with the underlying philosophy of nation-state citizenship. The ‘bare life’ of non-citizens exists inside the State but is exterior to citizenship, which is nevertheless based on supposedly inalienable and ‘natural’ human rights. For Agamben, this

contradiction creates a biopolitical space, analogous to the concentration camp, whose existence threatens to unravel the nation-state itself. Hence Žižek and Agamben both question the relationship between the nation-state and universalism. A theoretical framework based on their work enables me to discuss the significance of the political space occupied by the *sans-papiers*. Assessing Žižek and Agamben's theoretical approaches in terms of my fieldwork data will be the central aim of this thesis.

Following on from the central question about the political significance of the *sans-papiers* movement, I consider what the implications of a Žižek-Agamben framework would be for the internal structure of the movement. My reading of Žižek and Agamben would suggest that the *sans-papiers* movement operates in a biopolitical space that is inside the State whilst being emptied out of political rights. However, whilst Žižek and Agamben can be used to indicate the kind of space the *sans-papiers* movement speaks from, they seem to avoid commentating on the possible content of a political movement in this space, preferring to announce it as 'the Other' of the State, unknowable and apocalyptic. Therefore to think about what goes on in this space I need to turn to discussions of transnational flows, insofar as they propose ways of analysing processes of de-rooting and re-routing identities.

Discussions on the enmeshing of structure and culture (Brah 1996, Kalra 2000) and the emergence of 'new ethnicities' (Hall 1992, Back 1996) are relevant to my analysis of collective solidarity amongst the *sans-papiers*. I try to indicate a sense of liminal and contingent identity formation that was being negotiated by the *sans-papiers* during the occupation of the old *Gendarmerie*. Whilst State representatives refused to recognise the political existence of the *sans-papiers* movement, dealing with each immigrant in an irregular situation as an individual case, the *sans-papiers* used political solidarity to oppose this process of individualisation. Therefore the way the *sans-papiers* collectively negotiated their individual interests and attempted to generate political solidarity is an important feature of the space in which they operated. The fact that the *sans-papiers* sometimes identified with 'the struggle' suggests at least a tentative process of class or group formation, from which I shall try to deduce possible

theoretical implications. My fieldwork data show that 'the list' was both an effective political strategy for the *sans-papiers* and a form of self-subjectification based on group solidarity.

'Fortress Europe' & the *banlieue*

Geddes examines EU 'social exclusion' policies especially in relation to migrants. 'Social exclusion' is suitably vague and adaptable as an EU-wide policy measure, which allows it to be applied in different ways in different countries (Geddes 2000:167). However, EU 'social exclusion' policy itself excludes Third Country Nationals (TCNs), who are legal residents of EU States but not EU nationals. TCNs are therefore not included in 'the people' of Europe. As non-EU citizens they do not have the same rights of free movement or the same protection against discrimination (Geddes 2000:1). Geddes argues that:

"citizenship of the EU exacerbates the exclusion of TCNs by reaffirming a connection between nationality and rights. The irony of this situation derives from the fact that even though rights of denizenship for legally resident TCNs break the link between nationality and social entitlement in the member states, European integration reinforces the connection between nationality and entitlements." (Geddes 2000:168)

Geddes rejects the notion that 'Fortress Europe' is being constructed by a centralised EU state that is erecting external and internal barriers against immigrants (Geddes 2000:6). However, his conclusions do point to a tendency to exclude migrants from EU-level welfare measures, even if this is the effect of "a series of intergovernmental compromises" (Geddes 2000:8) rather than the malevolent design of supragovernmental institutions. On the question of political representation, Geddes admits that the odds are stacked against migrants, with political rights being derived from nationality of a member state and EU migration policy being:

"focused on efforts by member states to transplant restrictive policies from national to EU level." (Geddes 2000:134)

Geddes observes that organisations representing immigrants and asylum seekers have lobbied the EU about: conditions of entry, residence and

movement within the EU faced by migrants; an EU-wide anti-discrimination framework; and fair asylum policies (Geddes 2000:138). He suggests that there could be an alliance between the EU Commission, which seeks to strengthen supranational institutions, and groups representing migrants' interests, if these groups propose 'European' solutions to 'European' problems (Geddes 2000:136). Geddes argues that the 'democratic deficit' of the EU could actually work in migrants' interests as the Commission is insulated from anti-immigration popularism (Geddes 2000/139). In Geddes' account of the EU approach to 'social exclusion', there is a small niche for the representatives of legal migrants to have a political voice in the EU – by lobbying the EU Commission – but this is not much of a counter-balance to anti-immigration pressures, which seem to unite member states. According to Geddes, on an EU level TCNs have only a small chance of making themselves heard. Therefore it would be unthinkable that a group of illegal immigrants, like the *sans-papiers*, could have any political power.

The building of 'Fortress Europe' does not necessarily rely on a simplistic notion of EU supranational authority, as Geddes assumes. If the effect of the 'fortress' is as exclusionary as Geddes himself acknowledges, the metaphor seems valid even if the fortress is neither impregnable nor the result of a fully centralised construction process. The logic of a fortress that is being constructed in parts and the question of how those parts should communicate with each other may be Kafkaesque³ but, as Shore argues:

“as national barriers within Europe have come down, so the walls separating the EC from the rest of the world have become higher and sharper.” (Shore 1997:249)

Whilst tighter restrictions on entry into the EU have not made Europe's frontiers impenetrable, they have created barriers to citizenship within Europe. Kofman and Sales propose four tiers of European residents:

“white citizens, black citizens, legally resident non-citizens (“denizens”), and illegals – including refugees.” (Kofman & Sales 1992:31, quoted in Shore 1997:250)

³ “the command deliberately chose the system of piecemeal construction. But the piecemeal construction was only a makeshift and therefore inexpedient. Remains the conclusion that the command willed something inexpedient. – Strange conclusion!” from ‘The Great Wall of China’ (Kafka 1931/71: 72).

The *sans-papiers* fall into the last category, 'illegals', but to reflect the struggle faced by the *sans-papiers* this category would have to be sub-divided into those who cannot be deported, having a claim pending for residence or 'temporary leave to remain', and those who have no outstanding legal process or have already been served with 'an invitation to leave the territory'. Likewise, the category of 'denizens', who are legally resident, could be divided into one group that has permanent residency with the right to work and full social rights, but no voting rights or freedom of movement in the EU, and another group with fewer rights, having only 'temporary leave to remain' on humanitarian grounds, such as those granted asylum or the opportunity to pursue medical treatment. There are also full citizens who have lost certain rights: French citizens convicted of crimes cannot vote; British citizens who have 'no bail warrants' issued against them for non-payment of fines would be arrested if they tried to register to vote or claim benefits. On top of this, there are many full citizens who have not lost their political rights as such, but are continuously unable or unwilling to exercise them. Whatever the nuances of these possible sub-divisions however, it is clear that full citizenship is inaccessible to many residents, except through years of living, waiting and pursuing bureaucratic procedures, as almost permanent would-be-citizens. Hence, 'involution' (Hoogvelt 2001/1997) seems to be happening to citizenship within nation-states, whereby the previous expansion of citizenship is being followed by a process of shrinking away.

The norm of labour market integration, which frames national and EU efforts to combat 'social exclusion', includes a system of social rights based on full citizenship. These social rights are directly under threat from restructuring and flexibilisation, but they are also being surreptitiously undermined, as a significant minority of the population is excluded from full citizenship. Whilst EU measures may target 'hard-to-reach groups' such as ethnic minorities, they do little to redress discrimination and racism in the labour market, and nothing to challenge the forms of exclusion officially practised against sub-citizens. In France, foreign residents now have to work for three years before they can receive means-tested unemployment benefit. As in most European countries, foreigners cannot work in the public sector (Morokvasic 1991: 71); all French

public sector workers, including bus-drivers for example, are classed as *fonctionnaires* and have to be citizens. *Sans-papiers* have no right to work and cannot find housing by legitimate means in either the public or the private sector. Nevertheless, they have to work to live and they even send money home to relatives. They may often pay taxes, using false papers, but they have no right to work-related benefits and cannot claim housing benefit. If their employer knows they are working 'on the black', they are likely to be poorly paid.

As Morokvasic (1991) suggests, EU states have a way of universalising their own particularisms, thereby creating hidden barriers to foreigners. In Chapter 5, I shall explore the way the *sans-papiers* were institutionally ignored, using Herzfeld's (1992) theory of bureaucratic indifference towards foreigners who fail to fit into national categories. One example of this indifference is the way that, as Morokvasic (1991:74) points out, receiving states use their own definition of the family to ignore the significance of non-nuclear family ties. The image of migrant women as coming from backward societies has also been used, so that:

"The poorly paid, insecure work these women did, appeared as nothing but a blessing of modern societies and as a means out of their oppressive traditions." (Morokvasic 1991:77)

Morokvasic argues that 'helping agencies', adopting this image of victimised and backward migrant women, often "tend to control migrant women and jeopardize their own initiatives" (Morokvasic 1991:79).

The 'Fortress Europe' critique of EU policies is a useful way of analysing the kinds of problems faced by migrants, both legal and illegal. However, like the EU's own attempt to claim that it is combating 'social exclusion', the metaphor of 'Fortress Europe' does not offer an explanation for a political movement like the *sans-papiers*. It may explain their predicament and what they hope to achieve as individuals by joining the movement, but the means and the context of their political mobilisation remains anomalous inside a fortress, where the *sans-papiers* are a group of people dispossessed of all political rights. If some of the barriers constructed by 'Fortress Europe' are internal, this raises

questions about the kind of political battle that can be waged by a group that are excluded but inside. The questionable status of 'deprived areas', as the spatial representation of 'social exclusion', seems to reflect a similar confusion between inside and outside, included and excluded. In the French context, spatial exclusion is signalled with the term *banlieue*, which has become a stigmatising label (Bachman & Basier 1989) and focus of press sensationalism (Bourdieu 1993: 159). The term *banlieue*, as Scargill points out (1998:139), suggests a liminal space just outside the city walls, excluded from but subservient to the city.

My first experience of the *banlieue*, before I could even name it as such, was the sarcastic glee with which Mr Lazarus⁴ reacted when he heard about the accommodation I had found: "*Vous êtes content? C'est exotique!*" he exclaimed. That he took me for a British Social Anthropologist in search of an exotic tribe was obvious enough, but why a tower block in a built up area should fulfil his projection of my desire was beyond me at the time. Living there did not explain the way he had framed the *banlieue*, although I did have a general sense of exclusion from Paris and bourgeois citizenship. And I felt very white compared to most residents. However, it was initially academic texts, media images and the reactions of other French people, when I told them where I lived, that made me realise that the area could be conceived as exotic and almost outside the French state.

Hargreaves points out that throughout the eighties, certain areas gained reputations as *chaudes* (literally 'hot') or difficult and that by 1991 *banlieue* had become a generally recognised media tag for urban crime and unrest (Hargreaves 1991: 614). Garnier argues that media attention focussed on street crime and threats to public order (1996: 45), echoing Hall et al's discussion of mugging in *Policing the Crisis* (1978). Castells (1983) traces the history of the *Grand Ensembles* or *cités*, the groups of blocks of flats that dominate the demonised image of the *banlieue*. Built in the housing crisis during post-war economic expansion, they housed middle and working class

⁴ He was my ERASMUS exchange supervisor on my first stay in Paris in 1995-96.

tenants who were forced to battle for better living conditions (1983: 95). With middle class tenants moving away, deindustrialisation and the withdrawal of state and private financial support (Scargill 1998: 143, Tavernier 1997), the *cités* became even more of an insult to their inhabitants than they had been originally (Castells 1983: 76). Equating the *banlieues* with poverty in Africa, Castells refers to them as 'black holes' (Castells 2000).

The *banlieue* has become the focus / setting of many French TV documentaries, films, novels and ethnographies (Tavernier & Tavernier 1997, Bourmat, Bertin & Dreano 1995, Kassovitz 1995, Sharma & Sharma 2000, Chimo 1996, Seguin & Taillard 1996, Lepoutre 1997). Some authors exoticise the *banlieue*, while others give a voice to the inhabitants, to debunk the exoticised image. Some seem to speak directly from an emerging *banlieue* subculture and still others seem to play with a self-conscious sense of voyeurism. Whatever the approach, the explosion of these accounts of *banlieue* life testifies to the fascination and anxiety with which French society views the *banlieue*.

The *sans-papiers* are not confined to the *banlieue* but they are more likely to have support networks there, based on kinship, community of origin or just the common experience of being an immigrant. Some sectors of the informal economy are also concentrated in these areas, although many *sans-papiers* also travel outside the *banlieue* to work, especially in the service sector. Nevertheless, the chances of a *sans-papiers* being stopped and having their papers checked is more likely outside the *banlieue*, either in central Paris where anti-terrorist checks are more frequent, or in middle class areas where immigrants stand out more from the local population. Hence, although the problems of the *banlieue* are associated much more with Arab and black youths than with the *sans-papiers*, the *sans-papiers* are still seen by many as the latest wave of immigrants, accumulating in the *banlieue* space, beyond the control of the State: 'the poverty / suffering of the world' (*la misère du monde*, Bourdieu 1993) threatening to swamp French society.

The subject non-part of universality or 'bare life'

Žižek (1999:187), drawing on Rancière's analysis of Ancient Greece, argues that politics proper came into being when the demos, as the excluded non-part, not only demanded a voice or protested, but took over politics itself:

“[The demos], the excluded, those with no fixed place within the social edifice, presented themselves as the representatives, the stand-ins, for the Whole Society, for the true Universality.” (Žižek 1999:188)

He argues that 'the part of no part' unsettles and displaces the ruling order by exposing the particularity of that order's claim to universality. As a result, as in the French Revolution where *le troisième état* claimed to represent the Nation, 'the part of no part' replaces the ruling order.

Applying this today, Žižek opposes what he calls 'post-politics', in which politicians claim to have surpassed old ideological divisions. He gives the example of Tony Blair, 'New Labour' and their 'Third Way' claim to use good ideas regardless of ideology. 'Good ideas' means 'ideas that work' and, therefore, an implicit acceptance of global capitalism as it is (Žižek 1999:199). In contrast, Žižek argues that authentic politics is "the art of the impossible". Using Lacan's notion of 'foreclosure', he suggests that the 'New Labour' approach can actually produce racism towards 'the foreigner', who is the indivisible remainder in a "legal-psychological-sociological network of measures" (Žižek 1999:203):

“This 'postmodern' racism emerges as the ultimate consequence of the post-political suspension of the political, the reduction of the State to a mere police-agent servicing the (consensually established) needs of market forces and multiculturalist tolerant humanitarianism.” (Žižek 1999:199)

In Žižek's model, 'the foreigner' becomes the extra burden from outside, which explains why the State's supposedly comprehensive set of measures, along with the free market, cannot overcome the intolerable effects of social inequality. These are effects that have no political outlet:

“What post-politics tends to prevent is precisely this metaphoric universalization of particular demands: post-politics mobilizes the vast apparatus of experts, social workers, and so on, to reduce the overall demand (complaint) of a particular group to just this demand, with its particular content – no wonder this suffocating closure gives birth to

'irrational' outbursts of violence as the only way to give expression to the dimension beyond particularity." (Žižek 1999:204)

Žižek rejects identity politics in search of a way of universally displacing the 'New World Order': hence his focus on the "inherent exception / exclusion, the 'abject'" and the need to "identify universality with the point of exclusion" (Žižek 1999:224). He argues that multiculturalism is a racism, since it fails to dislodge the "privileged empty point of universality", from which the Other's culture may be appreciated or depreciated. He points out that:

"multicultural respect for the Other's specificity is the very form of asserting one's own superiority." (Žižek 1999:216)

Using the example of the American Civil Rights movement, Žižek claims that the terrain of the struggle has changed. Whilst Martin Luther King fought to expose and remove the "implicit obscene supplement that enacted the actual exclusion of Blacks from formal universal equality" (Žižek 1999:203), today's post-political liberal establishment acknowledges and actively fights against social exclusion. The problem is no longer how to demand the rights to formal universal equality but how to displace its socio-politically skewed claim to universality.

Žižek's solution is to identify with the abject point of exclusion. However, he suggests that this is highly problematic, because of what he calls "the ambiguity of excremental identification" (Žižek 1999:228). Drawing on the Christ-event, "on the identification with the poor figure of the suffering Christ dying in pain between two thieves" (Žižek 1999:229), he points out that Christianity, despite its identification with the 'abject', can nevertheless fully endorse the existing social order by demanding compassion for the poor but opposing rebellion. The crucial question that arises from this is: Who is speaking? Is it the compassionate solidarity of the 'enlightened public' (Žižek 1999:231) or the true victims? For a comparison with the Greek demos, or *le troisième état* in the French Revolution, to work, the excremental identification has to be "the direct statement of *the excluded victim itself* [Žižek's emphasis]" (Žižek 1999:231). If the victims do not make the identification, Žižek dismisses the identification with the 'abject' as a hysterical gesture, a demand that cannot be satisfied, "which fits the existing power relations much better than a modest reformist proposal"

(Žižek 1999:230). Therefore, the two sides of this ambiguity can be distinguished by considering whether the identification with the 'abject' comes from the victims themselves or is just the insatiable demands of an idealistic and well-meaning public. Žižek suggests that we can tell the difference by asking:

"What do protestors who pathetically claim 'We are all immigrant workers!' actually *want*? [original emphasis]" (Žižek 1999:230)

According to Agamben, citizenship or membership of the *polis* in ancient Athens was founded on an exclusion of the body:

"In Western politics, bare life has the peculiar privilege of being that whose exclusion founds the city of men." (Agamben 1998:7)

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben tries to rethink the relationship between the body and politics:

"We must instead ask why Western politics first constitutes itself through an exclusion (which is simultaneously an inclusion) of bare life. What is the relation between politics and life, if life presents itself as what is included by means of an exclusion?" (Agamben 1998:7)

His theory revolves around the enigmatic status of *homo sacer* in ancient Rome: a man who may be killed but not sacrificed, a man who can be murdered with impunity but cannot be brought to trial and executed, a body that is legally outside the law. Agamben argues that constructions of sovereignty must ultimately rely on the space inhabited by *homo sacer* – the potential to operate above the law:

"This sphere is that of the sovereign decision, which suspends law in the state of exception and thus implicates bare life within it." (Agamben 1998:83)

Bare life is hence the indivisible kernel at the heart of political action:

"*Homo sacer* names something like the originary 'political' relation, which is to say, bare life insofar as it operates in an inclusive exclusion as the referent of the sovereign decision." (Agamben 1998:85)

Agamben analyses the modern nation-state, which, since the French Revolution, has been founded on an elision between 'people' and 'nation'. He argues that 'the refugee' highlights a contradiction at the heart of the model of citizenship in nation-states as constructed by modern Western politics

(Agamben 1998:120). Refugees threaten the category of 'citizen' since they raise the question of whether being a 'man', i.e. having access to 'The Rights of Man', is equivalent to or different from being a citizen. 'Men' are born, they have Rights, they become citizens; they have a right to form political associations to defend their rights; they make up the sovereignty of the Nation because they are in it. Divine royal sovereignty shifted, with the French Revolution, to National sovereignty. The subject became a citizen and the bare life of 'the people' became the referent of sovereignty.

However, bare life was immediately isolated from sovereign power. The innocuous juridical origin of the 'blood and soil' basis to citizenship (Agamben: 1998:129) delimits passive and active rights in the modern State. The former are natural and civil rights that involve everyone; the latter relate to public-political matters that imply an exclusion of "women, children, foreigners and those who would not contribute to the public establishment" (Agamben 1998:130). Hence, bare life, by its recognised presence within the State, implies passive rights and is actively represented in the public-political sphere by those deemed capable of being public actors. The inequalities and contradictions repressed within this system of passive and active rights comes unstuck when a form of bare life, without any recognised rights, appears within the State. Refugees, by breaking the limits laid down by nativity and nationality, upset the fiction of the 'man of rights' (Agamben 1998:131), and bare life, usually subsumed within citizenship, appears for a moment, stripped of its inalienable rights, of its right to have rights, whether passive or active. The denaturalisation of refugee populations challenges naturalised notions of citizenship, posing the question of what rights people have outside citizenship (Agamben 1998:132). The dominant response to this challenge has been to try to separate humanitarianism and politics (Agamben 1998:133): to support extra-national humanitarian aid but to depoliticise and to de-citizen those who spill out of nation-state borders. However, Agamben (1998:133) argues that the symmetry between humanitarian organisations and State power belies this distinction.

Agamben suggests that the refugee, representing a crisis in the nation-state and the concept of human rights, is the key to thinking about “a coming political community” (Agamben 1996:159). He argues that with illegal immigration:

“What industrialized countries face today is a *permanently resident mass of noncitizens* who do not want to and cannot be either naturalized or repatriated.” (Agamben 1996:162)

Permanently resident noncitizens – ‘denizens’⁵ – merge with citizens who:

“demonstrate, through an increasing desertion of the codified instances of political participation, an evident propensity to turn into denizens, into noncitizen permanent residents, so that citizens and denizens – at least in certain social strata – are entering an area of potential indistinction.” (Agamben 1996:163)

Like Žižek, Agamben exposes the contradictions at the heart of the modern nation-state but remains caught up in the political universalism on which it was founded. Lazzarato is critical of Agamben’s style of biopolitics, suggesting that Foucault proposed biopolitics as an entirely new form of government (Lazzarato 2002:2). A biopolitics of dispersed governmentality and self-managing individuals would perhaps leave behind the conundrum of sovereignty, ‘the people’ and the nation-state. Such an approach might suggest important insights into the way undocumented migrants are dealt with, but it would say little about the *sans-papiers* movement. Perhaps this movement is an unsynthesised mixture of the new biopolitics and a throw-back to nation-state politics, rather than the symbol of ‘a coming political community’. However, whatever the validity of Žižek’s and Agamben’s universalistic claims, the significance of the nation-state for the *sans-papiers* cannot be ignored; the *sans-papiers* clearly have good reasons for laying a claim to public space. Regardless of the actual revolutionary potential of the *sans-papiers* movement, it seems logical to study it in relation to Žižek’s and Agamben’s questions.

⁵ Agamben applies this term to all those living “in a condition of de facto Statelessness” (1996: 162), regardless of whether they are legally or illegally present.

Remnants

The following *sans-papiers* leaflet appeals to universal ideals and even seems to claim that the *sans-papiers* are a symbolic key to the local area (*Département*):

“The Price of Liberty

They speak of ‘The Rights of Man’, in a land of ‘The Rights of Man’: so, what is it – the price – to be free at last?

Since the 6 June, the *Sans-papiers* of the Co-ordination have been occupying the old *Gendarmerie*... to leave oblivion. But things have not got very far with the Prefecture!

On 26 July, we handed in our first set of 36 dossiers, then on 3 August, a second set of 16 dossiers; each *dépôt* [‘deposit’ / handing-in] is backed up by a rally in front of the Prefecture. But NO REPLY HAS YET BEEN GIVEN, and we continue to live in extreme obscurity.

To regularise the *Sans-papiers*, however, that’s to reveal the true face of our *Département*, it’s to liberate it in liberating them.

Why deny the rights of others, why not respect the struggle of the *Sans-papiers*, why exile these exiles, why refuse them the taste of liberty?

So, French, immigrants, *Sans-papiers* who still live in ignorance and fear, be with us, come and support us!

JOIN US INFRONT OF THE PREFECTURE AGAIN MONDAY 13
AUGUST AT 4.30pm FOR OUR THIRD *DÉPÔT* OF DOSSIERS!

Old *Gendarmerie*, 6 July 2001”

This leaflet does seem to make its appeal to universality from ‘the excluded non-part’. Even if we put to one side Žižek’s suggestion that self-declaring immigrant workers can disrupt the hegemonic consensus, or Agamben’s suggestion that it is amongst refugees that we might find ‘a coming political community’, there remains the theoretical problem of how to enframe such an utterance. According to Spivak (1988), ‘the subaltern cannot speak’, not because subalterns are incapable of talking but because there is no infrastructure that allows them to be heard. Consequently, this thesis is largely a study of the infrastructure that heard, co-opted or silenced the *sans-papiers*

voice. If the communicative gap between hegemony and subaltern is generally unbridgeable, an utterance received from the unspeaking non-part of French society requires some explanation.

There are two ways of questioning whether this is the subaltern speaking. Firstly, one could claim that this voice is not representative of the *sans-papiers* themselves, or rather the abject, silent population of immigrant workers for which the *sans-papiers* movement claims to speak. The *sans-papiers* voice depends on an activist infrastructure created largely by French militants (the meeting ground of *sans-papiers* and French militants is a key theme that runs through Chapters 4, 5 and 6, in an effort to examine how the movement enframes the *sans-papiers*' voice). However, despite the power of the French militants to enframe the movement as they see fit, I want to argue that 'the list', which the *sans-papiers* forced the French militants to accept, is evidence that the movement is not entirely dominated by a French militant agenda.

On the other hand, one could argue that French society has not really heard this voice. The leaflet itself refers to a lack of response from the authorities, speaking of 'oblivion' and 'extreme obscurity' even as it attempts to make itself heard. One leaflet handed out to a few passers-by and quoted in a PhD thesis hardly constitutes a hearing infrastructure; nor do a few regularisations squeezed out of the Prefecture. Representatives of the Prefecture were always careful to insist that they applied the law, even when they made humanitarian concessions. They never accepted 'the list' or the wider demands of the *sans-papiers* movement but were forced to study a set of dossiers and eventually regularise the majority of people on 'the list'. 'The list' and this leaflet are, if anything, only the remnants of an unheard voice: the mark of not being heard. Spivak (1988) precisely points to the significance of such acts of failed communication to prove that the subaltern cannot speak. Agamben (1999), nevertheless, suggests that these 'remnants' of the unspeakable can defy the imposed silence.

Agamben suggests that the contemporary relationship between bare life and politics emerged with the Nazi concentration camp, and he claims that the camp

represents "the political space in which we are still living" (Agamben 1998:163). He points to the way Nazi Germany initially continued Weimar Republic practices of suspending citizens' rights in a state of emergency, but then continued this indefinitely. The camp, he argues, appeared when this "state of exception" (Agamben 1998:167) became a rule (Agamben 1998:169) and bare life emerges as something stripped of citizenship. In the camp, there is an unmediated relationship between bare life and power (Agamben 1998:169).

Agamben argues that this institutionalised absence of citizenship is repeated in the way states handle illegal immigrants (Agamben 1998:174), for example in detention camps for asylum seekers, and that it informs a new stable spatial arrangement within modern society (Agamben 1998:175). The same absence of citizenship produces the 3rd World (Agamben 1998:180), which is dominated by spaces that lack human rights and/or state structures. It also produces stigmatised areas in Western cities, in which the perception of an overwhelming presence of immigrants is constructed as a spatial disjunction between birthright (bare life) and the nation-state (Agamben 1998:175). Bare life re-emerges as demographic surplus and, therefore, as a threat to citizenship and the nation-state.

Agamben's study of the 'remnants of Auschwitz' analyses 'the concentration camp' as the symptom of modern democracy. Agamben cites Primo Levi, a survivor of Auschwitz, who argues that "No group was more human than any other", with victims and executioners creating a grotesque "brotherhood in abjection" (Agamben 1999:17). Without suggesting that there were no crimes or that the perpetrators should not be punished, Levi is interested in a grey zone that exists in the camp, a truth that exists beyond the Law and outside the Trial (Agamben 1999:17). The existence of this grey zone, within the institutions but unrecognised by them, cannot be straightforwardly witnessed. The survivors of the camp are necessarily privileged:

"No one has told the destiny of the common prisoner, since it was not materially possible for him to survive." (Levi in Agamben 1999:33)

The 'drowned' (Levi in Agamben 1999:33) have no story, no face, no thought. The survivors can only speak by proxy for the true witnesses who have been

rendered mute (Agamben 1999:33). Camp jargon referred to someone who had given up – become a staggering corpse – as a ‘Muselmann’ (Agamben 1999:41). As a starving body, the ‘Muselmann’ existed in limbo, between life and death:

“the Muselmann’s ‘third realm’ is the perfect cipher of the camp, the non-place in which all disciplinary barriers are destroyed and all embankments flooded.” (Agamben 1999:48)

In the camp, there is an ‘ethical aporia’, where it is “not decent to remain decent”; the survivors are worse than ‘the best ones’, who cannot survive, and somehow worse than the ‘anonymous drowned mass’ (Agamben 1999:60). The survivor, who has become habituated to “the common necessity of degradation”, experiences a “strange desperation” at the moment of liberation (Agamben 1999:59). The survivor emerges with a sense of shame, like a dreamer not being able to flee from their own nudity (Agamben 1999:105).

“In shame, the subject thus has no other content than its own desubjectification; it becomes witness to its own disorder, its own oblivion as a subject. This double movement which is both subjectification and desubjectification, is shame.” (Agamben 1999:106)

Agamben suggests that, precisely through this abject sense of shame, it is possible to hear the remnants of the unspeakable grey zone. The ‘Muselmann’ cannot speak but the survivor is nevertheless a witness to the muteness of the ‘Muselmann’. Agamben argues that the very impossibility of bearing witness – the non-existence of a language with which to communicate the experience of the ‘Muselmann’ – creates a necessity to speak (Agamben 1999:65), as, in the Lacanian sense, the subject is always fundamentally split by its inability to subjectivise a monstrous otherness within (Žižek 1999:52). A speaker, who shares a common language with other subjects, is only a subject when using this language to signify something completely different from what it says (Lacan 1966:262). Or, as Agamben puts it:

“The authority of the witness consists in his capacity to speak solely in the name of an incapacity to speak – that is, in his or her being a subject.” (Agamben 1999:158)

For Agamben, the witness and the ‘Muselmann’ are therefore joined by an inseparable intimacy, produced by the fracture between the purely receptive passivity of the ‘Muselmann’ and the active passivity of the witness (Agamben

1999:111). Testimony comes from this fracture, from the apparent impossibility to speak, created by the division between 'Muselmann' and survivor (Agamben 1999:157). The camp speaks, as the symptom of democracy, precisely because it contains this incapacity to speak, in which the subject emerges.

Although Agamben's concentration camp model is apocalyptic, the 'grey zone' and the 'permanent state of exception' are useful tools for thinking about the Co-ordination's occupation. The *sans-papiers*, stuck in bureaucratic limbo, occupied an old police station. The occupants took themselves out of their homes and their jobs to join the occupation, where they lived in decrepit conditions, going on endless marches, with three of the occupants eventually going on hunger-strike. Although most of the occupants 'survived', in the sense that they not only lived but eventually got their papers, establishing their existence within French society, they only did so by putting forward their own names as 'the list', distinguishing themselves from the 15,000 *sans-papiers* (non-)existing in the local area. Whilst this thesis cannot claim to allow the *sans-papiers* to speak from their grey zone, it is an attempt to make sense of some of the remnants of the *sans-papiers'* encounter with French public space.

Formations of class and ethnicity

Disconnected from the socio-economic context, efforts to hear the remnants of the unspeakable may sound like an irreverent and/or irrelevant intellectual exercise. It is important to take into account the way socio-economic analyses of globalisation point to a division between global core and global periphery, with the latter being silenced and abject. Hoogvelt's (2001/1997:90) model of 'involution' is one of the models that suggests that globalisation tends towards a division between a socio-political hegemony and dispossessed populations. As the goals of free trade, democracy and reducing the role of the State are pursued on a global scale (Hoogvelt 2001/1997:186), the gap between core and periphery widens, even as 'the core' becomes globalised. Therefore, Hoogvelt argues that whilst capitalism expanded physically and ideologically in previous periods through colonialism and in competition with the Communist bloc, there

is now “a relationship of *exclusion*, rather than of continuing incorporation [original emphasis]” (Hoogvelt 2001/1997:187). Neoliberal economic reform strengthens the internal coherence of global capitalism, which then distances itself from areas that fail to prosper and fail to maintain law and order within the rules of the game. For example, Hoogvelt links neoliberalism to the descent into chaos in many African countries (Hoogvelt 2001/1997:187), showing that economic discipline has had a devastating effect on countries that were already at a structural disadvantage (Hoogvelt 2001/1997:189). As a result, these countries are always treated as already in the wrong, in debt, corrupt, illegal etc. Likewise, migrants coming from these areas are also unavoidably in the wrong place, procedurally incorrect and illegal. Rather than an expansion of the rational procedures that organise global capitalism, the result is an increasing ‘no-mans land’ of regions and populations that have no status within the game, other than as the object of humanitarian charity. As such, they cannot be heard from an official point of view.

Although Hoogvelt (2001/1997:266) points to a ‘politics of place’ as a form of resistance to global capitalism, her model tends to confirm the silence of the dispossessed within the hegemonic global consensus. Like other models of reflexive, flexible, risk-orientated capitalism, ‘involution’ confirms the lack of an infrastructure that could hear the subaltern, hence the theoretical difficulty of representing the agency, the voices, the history and the Political⁶ significance of ‘the others’, in relation to a hegemonic neoliberal world system. Theorists using Foucault’s ‘governmentality’ have also tended to confirm this silence, by examining subjectivity within reflexive capitalism: the self-managing individual, actively learning the disciplinary techniques required by neoliberal ideology (Rose 1996). Whilst this is a useful way of understanding how the global hegemony works, it says little about how it does not work: the unevenness of governmentality in unequal communities (Vincent 2000); the need to articulate

⁶ Politics with a capital ‘P’ is used here and throughout this thesis to point specifically to the public-political arena, primarily that of nation-states. Although nation-states may have had their sovereignty undermined by global capitalism, they still claim to do ‘Politics’ and the *sans-papiers* movement addresses this public arena. Such a narrow interpretation of political activity has been theoretically challenged in anthropology, which tends to focus more on the politics of people’s everyday lives. Whilst I use this wider understanding of politics in relation to the *sans-papiers* movement, I also make use of the typical conception of ‘Politics’, as this was central to the movement itself.

dispersed governmentality with more direct institutional power, especially in 'excluded' areas (Stenson & Watt 1999).

Bourdieu theorises social inequality in terms of *habitus* (the habituated social activities of a particular socio-economic group, Bourdieu 1977) and 'social suffering' (the mismatches between these learnt strategies and the normative, but elitist, ways of gaining social capital, Bourdieu 1993). This approach can be used to focus on the agency of so-called 'excluded' socio-economic groups who, according to Bourdieu (1993), operate within capitalist society but in an unequal relation to the hegemonic consensus. Again, Bourdieu tends to reinforce the silence of these groups since, ultimately, their lack of the right kind of social and cultural capital confirms them in their position of inferiority. For example, Bourgois' (1996) study of crack dealers in East Harlem uses Bourdieu's methodology, contextualising their activities and showing their skills, their ingenuity and their own form of social capital. The street culture *habitus* is, nevertheless, self-destructive and destructive of the local community because a 'search for respect' leads to drug dealing and violence, whilst access to the labour market is too limited and subordinating to be attractive (Bourgois 1996). Despite the complexity of Bourdieu's approach, there remains a theoretical limit to models that define social groups as disadvantaged and then try to understand their viewpoint. Ultimately, such theories can only confirm that these groups cannot speak to the hegemonic consensus because they have been defined that way in the first place.

A different approach (but not one open to the high theorists of French universalism) is to examine cultural difference and changing identities in relation to socio-economic history, thereby showing that through the enmeshing of structure and culture, relatively successful groups emerge in the interstices of transnational flows. These are groups that transcend nation-state boundaries, and even if they have been subjected to colonialism, structural inequalities and discrimination as immigrants, they are not confined to unspeaking obscurity. Chakrabarty (1989) challenges an impression that Thompson's (1964) account of 'the making of the English working class' is somehow a definitive model of working class culture, regardless of ethnicity and geography. Brah (1996) and

Kalra (2000) point to the complex social networks that generate immigrant communities in Britain. Networks of co-operation that rely partly on kinship and a common place of origin but have been built up in combination with colonial history, post-war migration into specific industries, residence in certain areas in the UK. Networks that also affect choices in the types of business and educational projects pursued in Britain.

Such an approach could be applied to the study of different groups of immigrants in France. One significant group, in relation to the *sans-papiers* movement, is West African migrants, specifically from the Kayes region. Daum's (1998:14) study shows these immigrants have created links between France and their homeland. The Kayes region – the west of Mali, also including territory in the east of Senegal and the south-east of Mauritania (Daum 1998:11) – is a concentrated area of French-African migration. Migrants from this area share culture, language and forms of social organisation (Daum 1998:11). They follow the same migration processes, share the same socio-economic difficulties and structure themselves as groups, in France, in relation to the same kinds of living and working conditions (Daum 1998:11). Daum (1998:31) states that almost all of the immigrants from the Kayes region join associations in France: associations which invest in the development of their home region. He points out that the French Government dismisses the development generated by these associations as 'unsustainable' because it depends on finance from abroad, rather than local autonomy (Daum 1998:30). Financial support from Maliens in France is considered 'unsustainable' since, from the official point of view of the French State, immigrants should become French rather than transnational. However, Daum (1998:15) argues that the Malian associations in France represent a form of double-citizenship, which recognises the importance of population movement, enabling immigrants to be active in both the country where they live and their country of origin.

Fiévet's (1999) study of immigrant foyers looks at the living conditions of many Malian immigrants. He highlights the role of foyers as the focal points of immigrant communities but insists that these communities grew up in response to Government policies. Non-European post-war migrants were treated as a

distinct population of single, male immigrant workers. The foyer system was introduced as a kind of French apartheid (Fiévet 1999:41), designed to limit the number of wives and children joining male workers (Fiévet 1999:48). Hence, the myth of becoming French was never equally available to North and West African migrants. Fiévet shows how the Government and foyer authorities have, over the years, through mismanagement, neglect and property speculation, allowed the foyers to become run-down ghettos. Fiévet objects to the way that the poor living conditions have then been blamed on the communitarian tendencies of the residents themselves (see footnote 7, Chapter 2). Hence, both Daum (1998) and Fiévet (1999), without validating 'ethnicity' as such, show processes of transnational community formation, in response to shared socio-economic conditions, patterns of migration and the inequality and discrimination experienced by non-European migrants.

Daum and Fiévet's accounts suggest that Brah (1996) and Kalra's (2000) approach to the enmeshing of structure and culture could quite easily be applied to immigrants from the Kayes region. However, the *sans-papiers* Co-ordination where I did my fieldwork was made up of a group of *sans-papiers* without a common region of origin. The majority of *sans-papiers* were from north Africa, coming from different areas, with different reasons for migration. There were also West Africans, Pakistanis, two Peruvians and, later on, a group of Chinese *sans-papiers*. As a result, my theoretical approach to *sans-papiers* solidarity and their interaction with French public space requires a more tentative conceptualisation of social networks and contingent identities, with a *sans-papiers* group identity only coming into being in the context of the *sans-papiers* struggle itself. Back (1996) and Hewitt's (1986) approach to inter-'racial' friendships amongst adolescents is particularly relevant to a study of *banlieue* youth culture, and I shall use it in this context in Chapter 2. It may also be useful for thinking about the *sans-papiers* movement. The idea of 'neighbourhood nationalism' could be applied to the Co-ordination, especially during the occupation. The process of negotiating a *sans-papiers* space had its special moments that became points of reference in a 'liminal culture', no matter how incomplete. In the process of fighting a political struggle and keeping this 'liminal culture' going, both external pressures on the Co-ordination and internal

divisions threatened to close the space down, as they do in Back's model (1996:246).

The approaches of Brah, Kalra and Back validate culture, but as a socially constructed form of identity, rather than an identity based on biology or pre-Political traditions. Back proposes his model of youth culture in the context of Hall's (1992) call for ways of representing 'new ethnicities'. Whilst recognising the importance of defending 'black rights', Hall (1992) calls for ways of discussing the complex and heterogeneous processes of identity construction, in relation to transnational socio-political contexts. In the French context however, 'black rights', 'ethnicity' and cultural difference are not recognised as a valid ways of decentring universality. Intellectuals such as Badiou (whose work I consider in Chapter 3), Bourdieu, Deleuze and Foucault, whilst constructing opposing theories, all set the question of how to decentre universality from the inside. Žižek (1999) also rejects the 'ethnic' dimension, forcing himself to construct an abject non-part within universality. Whilst this abstract theoretical problematic seems to dismiss cultural ties, which were nevertheless a significant part of the way the *sans-papiers* saw their own lives, it is certainly relevant to the French context, where 'ethnicity' cannot be legitimately politicised in public space. Whilst, during my fieldwork, I was constantly infuriated by the colour-blind French refusal to discuss 'ethnicity', in the context of blatant inequality and segregation, on a theoretical level I was constantly confronted by this philosophical conundrum of how to decentre universality from within universality.

Methodology

I have often found it extremely difficult to work out what fieldwork means to 'methodology'. Statements like 'I did participant-observation' or 'I wandered around for a bit, looking for something to do' are obviously not adequate methodologies. However, anthropologists themselves (or can I say 'other anthropologists' now?) often make deliberately vague statements about fieldwork: 'You wont find out until you get there', 'It wouldn't be fieldwork unless

you had to question all your preconceived assumptions', 'You won't begin to understand your data until you start writing it up'. These informal hints and forewarnings do have some truth to them, although they lack intellectual rigour and suggest that fieldwork is an unknowable rite of passage rather than an academic discipline. As knowing comments about the unspeakable experience of fieldwork, they can sometimes seem like an infuriating cop-out. Personally, I have to admit that, despite thinking that I was ugly enough and cynical enough to cope with fieldwork on my own, I found aspects of my fieldwork quite harrowing, particularly the feeling that I was not doing anything for the first six months. Having been trained in psychiatric nursing and community facilitation, I realised that there was a huge lack of formalised interpersonal support in anthropological fieldwork. By admitting this, some people might see me as needy for wanting this kind of support, others might just say that this kind of thing is not for them, still others might be justifiably critical of psycho-dynamic forms of practice / knowledge. However, not to engage with them at all and to expect people to treat ethnographic fieldwork as a form of 'data collection' is not intellectually rigorous, in my view.

There has been much anthropological soul-searching about the role of the ethnographer, including reflexivity about the symbolic violence of fieldwork (Rabinow 1977), criticism of anthropological writing (Clifford & Marcus 1986) and the feminist assertion that a fieldworker needs to take up a politically positioned perspective (Haraway 1991, Abu-Lughod 1990). These are important issues that any fieldworker needs to take into account. They can raise questions about the validity of an ethnography. For example, I have interpreted my experience of attitudes towards 'social exclusion' as a contrast between French and British society. I expected to find everyday ('British') cynicism about efforts to combat 'social exclusion' but I found an unbridgeable ('French') gap between professionals and 'the lads'. Although I think it is fair to emphasise a difference between French and British attitudes, I am aware that this relies on stereotypes. The same difference could be interpreted according to a bourgeois / working class dichotomy just as easily. 'French', 'bourgeois' and 'civilised' all seem to go together in a set of English prejudices that I tended to fall into after becoming a disillusioned Francophile. The French / British

dichotomy is probably easier for me than the bourgeois / working class one, as claiming that I am culturally British is a lot easier than claiming that I am working class, which would raise all kinds of problems with my own 'credentialism' (Back1996:22). I just hope that I have not pushed the French / British dimension so far that I have given the reader the impression that I think 'French universalism' is a strange, foreign land rather than an uncanny reminder of aspects of British society, which cut through and disrupt 'the Anglo Saxon model' with its complacent multiculturalism.

I failed to gain research access to 'the lads' for a number of reasons but mainly because, despite knowing them from my previous period in France, I was not from the area, could not speak the slang and represented a professional outsider. It may be that my expectation of cynicism was based more on my experience of solidarity with a small group of fellow claimants, in one particular place and time, than on the existence of a widespread British attitude. I had hoped that my experience of unemployment and living on the margins in the UK would allow me more access. However, my role had changed by becoming a paid researcher and this also contributed to my not finding the common ground I took for granted. Regardless of my attempts to debunk this role, I found it hard to get past my institutional status, even though there was no institution there to stop me interpreting my role as I saw fit. In Chapter 3, I discuss theoretical and methodological issues in relation to my failure to research *banlieue* youth culture.

By switching to the *sans-papiers* Co-ordination, I chose an explicit Political fieldwork site that had the advantage of being projected into public space, alleviating my access issues. However, this also means that I focus mainly on Politics, including a fairly macho meeting culture. Likewise, by considering elitist intellectual approaches, I reflect on Political triumphs and defeats rather than grounded intersubjectivity. Whilst I try to explain the importance of intersubjective interactions within the Co-ordination, I am only able to point to a vague 'group solidarity' without giving a strong sense of how this worked or demonstrating who was actively creating it behind the scenes.

In this thesis, I have used a multi-sited approach to ethnography to explore the issue of French universalism. I worked as a volunteer in a local organisation, I hang out with 'the lads', I went to various events and public meetings, interviewed professionals and academics, and took part in the *sans-papiers* Co-ordination (I shall discuss my role in the Co-ordination in the relevant places). However, my range of possible sites was limited by access issues. For example, as a man, it was inappropriate for me to study the interaction and networks between mothers on the estate where I lived, even though this would have been a better way to bridge the gap between the inhabitants and French institutions than the approach I attempted. My choice of fieldwork sites was also influenced by my interest in anti-State Politics and my discomfort with professional settings. The direction of my fieldwork has therefore contributed to a partial perspective built up in relation to issues of access and Political motivations as well as theoretical questions.

I am not, however, entirely happy with merely acknowledging that my account is partial and positioned. I think the production of a thesis by an individual, as 'an original contribution to anthropological knowledge', is stuck in the colonial phase of ethnographic methodology, regardless of reflexivity, positionality and deconstruction. The suggestion that ethnography is not really science (Geertz 1973) is no help either. It does little to change the power relationship between studier and studied, whilst apparently reducing the message conveyed by the studier and the studied to 'local knowledge'. Moreover, the academic discourse demands the same old procedures. I could go on indefinitely about my personal difficulties and the misgivings I have about my fieldwork but I have actually erased many subjective reflections in the process of producing this thesis. I have attempted, but no doubt failed, to deny the 'coevalness' of fieldwork (Fabian 1983). My own opinions – my annoyance at certain research participants and support for others – remain perhaps too obvious. In relation to the Co-ordination, I try to reflect on my position, which was influenced by the fact that I shared a space with the *sans-papiers*, having limited knowledge and experience of the French militants' social circles. My own contact with the *sans-papiers* was based on militant Political support for their cause as well as research goals, hence much of my frustration with the French militants could be

read as jealousy of their power and influence rather than as a reasoned critique of their attempts to control *the sans-papiers* movement. And I feel that I have written this thesis with a left-over desire to act, which can neither be satisfied by academic production nor be satisfactory to academia.

I would argue that it is possible to re-arrange more fundamentally the way ethnographers relate to their fieldwork but only if, as in psychoanalysis, the usual academic hierarchy between knowledge-production and practice is reversed. This would not eliminate the need for scientific rigour but would force us to reconsider the 'object of science' (Lacan 1971). Although I have not used this thesis to take on the whole of anthropology and academia single-handedly, my approach is influenced by psychoanalysis, in the sense that, as Lacan says: "When I treat a case, I raise it to a paradigm" (Regnault 1991:50).

In Chapter 2, I consider efforts to combat 'social exclusion' in relation to *banlieue* youth culture and French universalism. In Chapter 3, I discuss Mr Lazarus' research approach to the *banlieue* and the theoretical and methodological questions raised by Lazarus (1966) and Badiou (1988). In Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I discuss the *sans-papiers* movement in relation to my fieldwork at the Co-ordination.

Chapter 2

In and out in Paris and *banlieue*

Introduction

When I arrived in Paris I stayed one night in a trendy area. I went for an evening stroll, and just around the corner from my hotel there was a night-club that was blasting out some rave tunes into the street. A crowd with a wide age range had gathered. Not just young people but parents with children and even senior citizens wanted to be part of this apparently culturally inclusive expression of trendy music. It was not exactly 'kicking' but everyone was having a nice time, when suddenly a group of *jeunes* (read Arabs from a deprived area) started throwing bottles and crowd barriers at the DJs. The music stopped, the shutters came down rather quickly and the crowd dispersed.

This strange incident stuck in my mind, as much for the nice family atmosphere of appreciative passers-by as for the sudden and unchallenged interruption. Once I had moved into the *banlieue*, I immediately discovered one good reason why the *jeunes* had resented this all-too-civilised appreciation of the latest trend and why they might have vented their anger in Paris. In the *banlieue*, in the evening, there was nothing to do. There was an art cinema and a theatre in my local town centre but not much else. There was a *Maison de la jeunesse* (Youth Centre), which was packed with teenagers on the nights when there was a Hip-Hop gig but nearly empty for most of the shows in the diverse, educational programme. The local council also put on Hip-Hop events occasionally but again, as you might expect with events benevolently organised by the authorities, they attracted only younger teenagers. Hence, despite the fact that some of the top French Hip-Hop bands came from the area, there was no self-organising local music scene. The town centre was dead after 8pm. You could buy take-away food until midnight and there were people in the street, dressed up and passing through, but even the bars were closed.

Of course, there were parties going on if you knew where to look. I went to a French Caribbean night on a nearby industrial estate because a friend of a friend gave me a free ticket. Apparently there was also an African dance venue in a *Quartier* adjacent to mine, which I found out about through Mr Abdou, a Malian friend and a *sans-papiers* militant. The North Africans who I knew in the *sans-papiers* Co-ordination frequently organised parties as well, although these were specific celebrations for the end of Ramadan, the New Year, birthdays, weddings or regularisations. Different cultural groups had their own ways of enjoying themselves, but the youth had a cross-cultural identity, expressed especially through Hip-Hop and firmly located in the *banlieue*. Therefore, the vacant cultural space at the heart of the *banlieue* seemed to underline the absence of their cultural expression.

The art cinema, the theatre and other culturally enlightening, but not very popular, forms of entertainment looked like a misguided and patronising French attempt to civilise the local population. The market, on the other hand, which took over the town centre three days a week, was always heaving with a wide mix of people. They were representative of the area, mainly *beur* and black, wearing a striking array of *banlieue* styles and non-European dress. The vibrancy of this market seemed to exist in parallel with cold and imposing French institutions, as if the shell of the Republican State had been squatted overnight by a new population. Youth culture had grown up in a gap of non-communication between the French State and its immigrant populations, without fitting into either. Groups of youths were out of place: adolescents could be seen briefly gathering at the school gates; young men could always be seen always hanging around the estates.

When I moved to the *banlieue*, I felt self-conscious about being white, especially as I had come to study the 'social exclusion' of the local inhabitants. On the estate, I initially got one or two odd looks and funny remarks, like "Hello, Mr Policeman". Fortunately, I knew several local lads from my previous stay in France and quickly became known, even by youths I did not talk with. Nevertheless, my pre-conceived ideas were challenged in the opposite way to

those of Hyatt who, as an American ethnographer studying council estates in the North of England, confesses that:

“I suddenly realized that, at some level, it was a surprise to me that most of the women whose lives I was attempting to represent were *white*.”
(2001:24)

Hyatt points out that she associated the trappings of poverty with ‘race’ rather than class; she was used to ‘ghetto ethnographies’, written about black poverty in the USA (2001:24). In contrast, I expected ‘social exclusion’ in France to be as much about white working class poverty as about ‘race’. Even if ethnic minorities are over-represented in ‘deprived areas’ of Britain, my preconceived idea of the equivalent areas in France included white poverty. However, in France, at least in the *cités* of the Parisian *banlieue*, white French people were a tiny minority. Although I had stayed on the estate before, I was surprised to realise that ‘social exclusion’ was generally synonymous with the black and *beur* populations of *banlieue* areas.

I was doubly surprised because the way ‘social exclusion’ is used by policy makers in France actively hides ‘race’, creating policies that are systematically colour-blind. ‘Race’ is an officially unacceptable category within the French Republic, and it would seem that this principle is more important than the need to tackle racism. My experience of one organised debate about combating discrimination underlined the extent of denial on this issue. The debate was run by one of the most important anti-racist groups, MRAP (*Mouvement contre le racismisme et pour l’amitié entre les peuples* – Movement against racism and for friendship between peoples), an organisation linked to the Communist Party. The majority of people at the meeting were white, including all the organisers, and my impression was that they were middle class as well. In the discussion about discrimination in both private and social housing, a proposal to create ‘Charters of non-discrimination’ was outlined. I asked how they were going to measure levels of discrimination but no-one was able to respond. I proposed the British ‘Equal Opportunities’ system of recording applicants’ ethnicity and checking that different ethnic groups were treated equally. However, I was told by a member of MRAP that this was out of the question, as: “certain principles of the Republic are untouchable”. In other words, it was impossible to

categorise people according to their ethnicity even for the purpose of monitoring equal opportunities, since this would undermine the Republican ideal of undifferentiated citizenship.

Discrimination is nevertheless prevalent as, apparently, an applicant's ethnicity is often marked in pencil in the margins of their application forms. Reputedly, rightwing housing authorities reject black and *beur* applicants, and leftwing housing authorities attempt to prevent the concentration of specific ethnic groups, a policy of dispersal that is experienced as another form of discrimination by would-be residents. The black and *beur* populations are inevitably concentrated in certain areas, having access only to the lowest levels of the housing market, which the white French population has vacated: the social housing in poor areas and the worst end of the private market. Housing authorities who administer the social housing in poor areas try to restrict the numbers of new black and Arab inhabitants. Their approach is influenced by the 'threshold of tolerance' concept (Silverman 1992:96), which assumes that integration will fail if the concentration of a non-French ethnic group rises above 10% of the local population. In effect, *banlieue* estates have a mainly non-French but wide ethnic mix; they are 'racially' marked without being dominated by a particular ethnic community. Such discriminatory practices may be common knowledge, intermittently emerging in media scandals about particular housing authorities, but there are no statistics to represent the extent of discrimination. Using ethnic labels is actually illegal, as one woman, a representative of the newly elected Socialist Paris *Marie*, pointed out in the meeting.

Later in the meeting the same very correctly spoken, white politician attacked one of the few black people there. He had been introduced as a victim of discrimination but had chosen to widen the discussion by tentatively suggesting that he would prefer to send his children to school in Africa than in the *banlieue*, as *la morale* (morality and discipline) was better in Africa. The representative of the *Marie*, responding in an offended tone, defended the ideal of universal integration through the French school system, claiming: "These are our children!" This statement seemed to ignore the generally acknowledged failure

of *banlieue* schools to fulfil their integrating mission, which means that white middle class parents move away from these areas and, many of the immigrant families that can afford it increasingly send their children to private schools.

From my position, the white politician's use of the possessive pronoun was highly insensitive, considering the heavily 'racially' marked, though ignored, degree of segregation between middle class parts of Paris and 'problem areas', usually but not exclusively the *banlieues*. In Britain, I do not think a white politician would dare to presume that, as a representative of the nation, they could claim that black children belonged more to them than they did to the black community, or even a black child's own parents. In the French context, however, the principle of Republican sovereignty has a social authority that is superior to 'race', ethnicity or group identity. I came away from this debate with very little optimism in the power of French public space to confront racist discrimination, especially as it could not be measured in the first place. Hence, my study of 'social exclusion' in France kept coming back to 'race' and racism as an issue that could not be dealt with or even recognised within the official model of Republican citizenship. The results of discrimination seemed to be all-too-conveniently subsumed within the colour-blind term 'social exclusion'.

This chapter will take the media image of the demonised *banlieue*, introduced in Chapter 1, and attempt to link the *banlieue* youth with French efforts to combat 'social exclusion'. In Part 1, I will try to locate 'social exclusion' within the French context. I will examine the difference between British and French ideoscapes in relation to community and society, explaining the French fear of ethnic identity: the *danger communautaire*. I will then discuss the Tourrainian school's approach to 'social exclusion' in relation to the French Republican model of citizenship and 'deprived areas': 'exiled estates' as one influential study calls them (Dubet & Lapeyronnie 1992).

In Part 2, I will analyse State interventions aimed at combating 'social exclusion' in the *banlieue*. I will consider: firstly, attempts to correct the architectural deficits of the *cités* or *Grands Ensembles* (estates made up of blocks of flats), schemes that have been called projects of *réhabilitation* (rehabilitation); and

secondly, the ideological component of attempts to tackle unemployment, as expressed by the perceived need for *accompagnement* (social guidance). These terms show particularly well the French ethos of integration through 'the social'. 'Rehabilitation' implies that physically improving the layout of the estate will not just improve the buildings but will re-integrate the estate and its inhabitants into French society. The need to 'accompany' those that have been excluded from the labour market implies that it is not just a question of getting a job but that there is a whole social mode of being that an unemployed person can only learn from a well-integrated person. These anti-exclusion projects are aimed largely at young people and, as attempts to get them off the streets and into jobs, they are influenced by a wider moral panic about the failure to integrate the *banlieue* youth into French society.

In Part 3, I will consider several key local actors and groups of actors: the Communist Party, Associations and 'the lads'. The PCF (French Communist Party) is the dominant party in local Politics in the built up *banlieue* areas. I followed their local government initiatives, particularly their attempts to increase participation in local democracy. Associations are non-governmental organisations fulfilling a range of social roles; they bridge the gap between Civil Society and the State. Following the law passed in 1901, Associations allow citizens to constitute organisations for pursuing non-profit goals within society. They range from purely voluntary grassroots organisations that do not seek any funding to predominantly professional organisations. The Associations I encountered usually fell somewhere in between these two extremes, supporting voluntary activity but, at the same time, chasing pots of funding to implement their projects and employ workers.

The group most absent from projects combating 'social exclusion' and yet the group most symbolic of 'social exclusion' are young men, who occupy street corners and the stairwells of housing blocks. I spent some time hanging out with 'the lads', near where I lived, but I tried in vain to find an organisation in which they felt they could express their own view of life on the estate. Therefore, my consideration of policies and projects to combat 'social exclusion' is put in context by my interpretation of 'the lads' and their resistance to

attempts to cure them of their 'social exclusion'. In conclusion, I will consider Back's model of 'new ethnicities' or 'liminal cultures' in relation to the Parisian *banlieue*.

It should be remembered that the vast majority of local residents hardly figure amongst what I have termed 'key local actors'. They were not actively combating 'social exclusion' nor were they labelled a problem within the *banlieue*, like 'the lads'. Nevertheless, they were affected by the generally negative image of their area, and had to cope with the problems of their local environment, as well as their individual difficulties with employment, housing, benefits, identity papers, schooling and the legal system. I can only give an indirect account of the attitude of local residents to debates about 'social exclusion'. The lack of Political participation by many residents was a subject of debate itself. One of the most common themes amongst local residents was the desire to get out of the area, which suggests that many see themselves as stuck in a no-man's-land. Their lack of Political participation may have been linked, as Agamben (1996:163) argues, to a "propensity to turn into denizens".

Part 1 'Social exclusion' theory

The *danger communautaire*

The word 'community' seems to have very different connotations in France and in Britain. In Britain, as Williams (1988:76) argues, 'community' appears to have no negative side. It tends to be idealised from a policy perspective, as a free form of social organisation, and it is easily romanticised as non-bureaucratic, harmonious and holistic. The British love of soap operas reveals a less altruistic but equally enticing image of 'community', with all the backbiting, gossip, betrayal and conflict. A holistic mirage is maintained: the action being strictly contained geographically and/or according to character story-lines. In contrast, there is no such thing as a French soap opera (there is no tabloid press either) and 'community' has generally negative connotations. It is often taken to mean an ethnic or religious *integrisme* (a social group turned in on

itself) that threatens universal citizenship of the Republic. This assumption of a *danger communautaire* forecloses the public-political representation of ethnicity.

Only since 1990 has the official census recorded the number of people who have acquired French nationality along with the number of foreign nationals. There remains a universal goal for all citizens to be equally 'French', and the assumed Frenchness of both 'naturalised' citizens and the children of immigrants props up the model of assimilation. However, this non-ethnic ideal fools nobody. It bears little relation to either lived realities or to 'common knowledge' about the heavily 'racialised' and stigmatised *banlieue cités*. Lepoutre (1997) points out that a *cité* registering 28% foreign nationals can mean that 85% of adolescents at school are of foreign origin or from an overseas *Département*¹. A teacher I interviewed suggested that white middle class parents move away from areas when the number of children at the school gates 'appearing' to be foreign rises above a certain level. By applying the 'threshold of tolerance' concept (Silverman 1992:96) that influences housing policy, middle class parents actually condemn certain areas as zones that fail to be French. A television documentary exposed another strategy for exercising parental choice in school selection: the practice of buying tiny flats in the right catchment areas without actually living in them. Considering that the French school system does not accept the principle of parental choice, claiming to provide an equal education to all pupils, these strategies belie the universalist ideals of the education system.

The French notion of universal citizenship may be in crisis but it remains extremely difficult to challenge head-on. There is little danger of the French adopting the British model of assuming an unproblematic multiculturalism; the 'Anglo-Saxon model' of recognising different ethnic communities within society is regarded as fundamentally racist. Kepel, in his article 'Between society and community', argues from the French perspective that British citizenship, by failing to assimilate foreigners, creates an empty symbolic and Political space:

¹ France has several overseas *Départements*, mainly in the Caribbean: Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guyana.

“expressed in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, and exacerbated by a *‘dimension communautaire’*” (my translation, Kepel 1995:274)

He suggests that the British focus on ‘Race Relations’ leads to ‘race’ being constructed as an “inevitable social object”, both in sociology and legal practice (Kepel 1995:274). He describes ‘Equal Opportunities’ as a corrective racism “to allocate quotas to minorities, defined juridically on the basis of skin colour.” (Kepel 1995:275) Hence, Kepel seems to short-circuit what ‘race’ means in Britain, by arguing that even attempts to combat racism are racist because they objectify ‘race’ as a category of difference.

According to Kepel, one result of Anglo-Saxon liberalism in Britain is that Islamic leaders fill the empty space in British citizenship. They fill this lack of ‘society’ with ‘community’, which implies ethnic division. Kepel argues that Islamic leaders attempt to represent a large heterogeneous group of Muslims as a monolithic anti-Western community. They aim to construct a separate Islamic identity, by reducing cultural interaction with the social environment to a minimum and by stigmatising members of the community who do not subscribe to the *‘logique communautaire’* (Kepel 1995:274-5). French news reports also tend to assume that the British system encourages Islamic Fundamentalism because of its lack of a social order founded on *laïcité* (secularism, for example the way religion is excluded from the state school system). Hence, in France, ‘community’ is constructed as the Other of ‘society’. Like the weeds that threaten to take-over an untended garden, ‘community’ is something hardy and natural that continuously threatens to overwhelm secular civilised society with ethnic division. In opposition to Anglo-Saxon particularism:

“Secularism is the sign par excellence of the rational, progressive, equal, universalist tradition of the French Republic.” (Silverman 1992:111)

Although, as Silverman (1992:4) argues, it would be a mistake to exaggerate the two different models, they are reflected in the people’s attitudes. I found it impossible to talk about ‘communities’ with most French people without provoking utter disbelief or even causing offence. When explaining that I worked in a ‘Community Centre’ in Britain, I learnt to translate ‘Community Centre’ as *Maison de Quartier* (literally ‘Area House’) to avoid making people suspicious. This was after making a cultural *faux pas* at a conference on

International Development. Michel – a French friend who had lived and worked in Ireland – and I were talking to a couple in the lunch break. They seemed friendly and reasonable but we ended up disagreeing, as if we had suddenly discovered that our ways of thinking were totally incompatible. The man was discussing NGOs, arguing that they produced a very patchy kind of international aid. I agreed with him, citing the fundraising game in which NGOs are obliged to participate. However, he made it clear that he was anti-NGOs altogether because they followed fashions. He wanted local people to *cotiser* (pay taxes) towards the provision of public services. I was bewildered by his apparent faith in the social role of the nation-state. It seemed unrealistic and rather Eurocentric to assume that poor countries could and should create European-style welfare states. I tried to suggest that there were huge problems with the welfare state in France and Britain and I questioned the wisdom of just transposing the model to much poorer countries.

We were no longer able to understand each other. The French have an image of Britain as uncompromisingly neo-liberal: Thatcherism has abolished public services and Britain is part of the 'Anglo-Saxon model' of unfettered capitalism, along with the USA. Of course, there is some truth in this but, as a French image of Britain, it meant that any criticism I made of the ideal of public services cast me in the stereotypical role of a neo-liberal Anglo-Saxon Thatcherite.

I tried to defend NGOs, arguing for the need for local participation. Michel backed me up by praising the English model of 'community involvement'. This was his genuine opinion but, as an insider who was all too familiar with the French rejection of 'community', he was also playing devil's advocate. I agreed with Michel, trying to extol the virtues of community participation, but I was just digging myself in deeper. Shock-horror seemed to dawn on our interlocutor, as if he had just realised that we were members of a religious cult trying to brainwash him. Not only were we criticising the notion of public services, we were pushing the idea of communities! We finished our coffees rather abruptly and the couple we had been talking to virtually ran off in a different direction.

For me, this conversation highlighted the different French and British connotations of 'community'. I like to think that I am not uncritical of the uses of 'community' in the British context. I may support the ideas of grassroots involvement and empowering local people in principle but I am also sceptical about how this community-friendly jargon is manipulated in practice. 'Community involvement' is often used as an excuse in Britain for giving out small pots of money to patch up the holes left by dwindling public services. Small organisations then find themselves chasing after those pots of money and burdening themselves with all the auditing bureaucracy that comes with funding. Consequently, only parts of 'the community' with the skills necessary to access the money can redistribute it. 'Community involvement' can become a hollow mantra, with 'community' organisations concentrating on professional credibility and fulfilling the funders' requirements. Hence, I would agree that the apparently benevolent Anglo-Saxon tyranny of community is often used to humanise neo-liberalism. In the above conversation, my thinking nevertheless remained within British cultural limits, where 'community' is a positive reference point, albeit one that needs critiquing. For my interlocutor, this was an anathema and so we were unable to hold a more nuanced discussion.

It is important to note that this cultural miscommunication affects the way 'social exclusion' is articulated in Britain and France. Whilst in Britain New Labour often looks toward 'the community' to help combat 'social exclusion', in France it is impossible to use a 'community' rhetoric since 'society' and 'community' are antagonistic terms. 'Community' is backward, whilst 'society' is modern in the same way that Durkheim (1947) theorises simple societies as having 'mechanic solidarity' and complex ones having 'organic solidarity'. Hence, the principle of modern Republican society is always under threat from 'communities', which are inevitably *enfermé* (closed in) on an ethnic, religious or traditional identity.

You will be assimilated!

To its credit, the Tourainian school does raise the issue of multiculturalism. Touraine's (1981) model of postindustrial society, as divided between those

who are 'in' and those who are 'out', questions the unity of the Republic. It allows for a 'social exclusion' approach to the *banlieue*, such as Dubet & Lapeyronnie's (1992) 'exiled estates'. Wieviorka's (1992, 1998) analysis of racism comes from the same theoretical angle, and Dubet, Kepel, Khosrokhavar and Touraine also broach the issue of ethnicity in edited volumes with titles that translate as *Thinking the subject around Alain Touraine* (Dubet & Wieviorka eds 1995) and *A fragmented society? Debating multiculturalism* (Wieviorka ed 1996). Wieviorka (1996:5), in his introduction to *A fragmented society?*, argues that the question of how to live together with differences is an almost impossible debate to have in France. He points to the abstract universal principles of the Republic and the formal rupture between State and Church – which confines the latter to the private sphere – as responsible for an assimilatory model of citizenship that refuses to recognise cultural difference, or to consider ethnicity or constructions of 'race' at all (Wieviorka 1996:5). Discriminatory practices are ignored and those trying to get out of ghettoised areas and 'social exclusion' must first renounce any *particularisme* before they can operate in the public sphere of egalitarian citizenship (Wieviorka 1996:5, Khosrokhavar 1996:115).

Wieviorka (1996:6) argues that diversity, left unanalysed, is either demonised or ignored by forbidding reflection on cultural difference in defence of a mythic Republicanism. However, Wieviorka *et al* do not affirm or explore diasporic identities that transcend the nation-state, like, for example, Hall (1996, 1992) and Gilroy (1993, 1987). Rather, they seem to make an apologetic attempt to introduce a weak and contained multiculturalism into a monolithic Republicanism, in order to bring the assimilatory model more in line with an undeniably diverse reality.

I would argue that the Tourainian school include a consideration of 'cultural difference' within their analysis of 'social exclusion', whilst being careful not to threaten the Republican ideal. For example, Dubet (1996:112) concludes his discussion of the lay school system by suggesting it should be more tolerant of difference or it will be unable to accommodate the most impoverished pupils. Khosrokhavar (1996:116) argues that the *jeunes* (youth) live their social

disadvantage all the more acutely in relation to an internalised abstract universalism, according to which they have failed to become sovereign and rational individuals. Touraine argues for a form of multiculturalism that does not threaten the unity of French society:

“The idea of a multi-community society must be rejected, whereas multicultural society must be defended.” (Touraine 1996:312)

Wieviorka (1996:41) argues that French policy is more open to cultural difference in practice than can be articulated within Republican discourse. The creation of *zones franches* (reduced taxes on shopping in ‘deprived areas’, which mean that estates usually have basic but cheap supermarkets), ZEPs (Priority Education Zones, giving extra funding to schools in difficulty) and the FAS (Social Action Fund, a statutory body providing funds to help immigrant workers and their families) try to compensate for inequalities. The fact that Wieviorka regards measures designed to help ‘problem areas’ as *de facto* tolerance of cultural difference confirms the degree to which these areas are ‘racially’ marked. Compensations based on this pathologised assumption can be double-edged, for example, schools in ZEPs carry a stigmatising label. Wieviorka argues that whilst focusing on “crime, poverty, social development and educational failure”, State policies are also surreptitiously tackling racism (Wieviorka 1998:142). However, Wieviorka does not consider the possibility that the State may in fact be reinforcing racism by conflating ‘racial’ inequality with ‘social exclusion’. Using ‘social exclusion’ as a euphemism for ‘racially’ marked ‘problem areas’ may thereby play into the hands of racists, who can claim to speak a truth that is surreptitiously acknowledged by the State.

In his analysis of antiracism, Wieviorka questions the appropriateness of militant action based purely on universalism:

“Their intervention becomes perverse when it is exclusively universalist, negating cultural and ethnic particularisms, and when it is done in a context where the universal promises of the Republic are kept less and less: when state schools produce more and more educational failure, when social inequalities in employment, but also in housing, are increasing and victims of these changes are above all of immigrant origin, the Republican discourse of equality and fraternity is, at best, an empty mantra, and is more likely to appear as an ideology in the service of the elites and the dominant groups.” (Wieviorka 1998:144)

This is a perceptive critique, based on detailed research, of the way universalism is preached. Wieviorka is quick to add that radical multiculturalism can be just as perverse because it encourages *communautarisme* (Wieviorka 1998:144), and he concludes that antiracism must work with the tension between identity politics and universalism (Wieviorka 1998:145). As Wieviorka's argument shows, the relationship between the universal and the particular cannot be easily resolved. Whilst the French denial of ethnicity may be intolerant, to insist on identity politics alone would mean abandoning any kind of universalism.

Significantly, Wieviorka's research demonstrates that the antiracism presented to school pupils in France, which completely denies the relevance of 'race', is too out of touch with lived experience and media images (Wieviorka 1998:142). Teachers, who are more often than not white and middle class, tend to insist on a Republican model of antiracism. Pupils who claim any kind of identity other than 'Republican citizen', whether that identity is based on their origins or their local area, are told that it is they who are being racist and intolerant. The *banlieue* youth therefore have no discursive position from which to criticise the endemic racism to which they are subjected. They are caught in a double-bind. To be antiracist they must first identify themselves as Republican citizens, but they experience the imposition of this identity as racism. Hence, Wieviorka takes a bold step by trying to create some room for a recognition of ethnicity.

However, he also implies that the only reason for recognising ethnicity within French debates is that Republican ideals are failing in 'problem areas' associated with immigration. Therefore, even in Wieviorka's approach, the question of ethnicity is ghettoised as broken-down Republicanism. A combination of the spatial containment of 'social exclusion' and the assimilatory model of citizenship means that 'racial' markings magically disappear outside 'problem areas', where everyone becomes equally French. Therefore, the 'social exclusion' approach creates the kind of internal borders that Balibar (1997:391) considers to be reminiscent of the French colonial mission. 'Problem areas' seem to exist in an ethnic twilight, waiting for French enlightenment. They seem almost like satellites of the French State, for a not-

yet-French population, who must be subjected to the civilising mission of French universalism. The Tourainian school do not challenge this impression; they try to discuss cultural difference but only as a way back to the ultimate aim of repairing the Republican ideal. They create an apologetic defence of multiculturalism that risks reinforcing the assumption that where there is cultural difference, there are failed French citizens.

Bertho (1999) rejects the 'social exclusion' approach. His critique of Wieviorka lampoons the idea of multiculturalism and insists on the foreclosure of cultural difference in public politics. Bertho's (1999:4) dismissal of multiculturalism relies on questioning the introduction of the category *immigré* ('immigrant', those who have acquired French citizenship through naturalisation) into official statistics. He prefers the pre-1990 categories, which were limited to just 'French' or 'foreign'. He vilifies the idea of introducing individuals' national and cultural origins into official statistics. This, he argues, would be to hypothesise that a person's *comportement* (behaviour) could be explained in terms of their origins, which would reduce 'the social' to natural and genetic explanations (Bertho 1999:4). As I have argued above, the problem with this kind of defence of undifferentiated Frenchness is that racism as well as 'race' cannot be statistically detected.

It may seem extreme to reject any official recognition of the experience of immigration and/or the experience of being an immigrant in French society as biological determinism, as Bertho does. However, his rejection of even the possibility of thinking about cultural difference is a typical leftwing reaction². Therefore, as an intellectual attempt to introduce alterity in French universalism, Wieviorka's discussion of ethnicity seems to suffer simultaneously from being too weak and too strong. Too weak because it refuses to challenge Republican universalism, promoting ethnicity as just an exceptional consideration in 'problem areas', and too strong because validating ethnicity immediately rings alarm bells for French antiracists.

² Bertho is a member of Lazarus' team (see Chapter 3), who have in fact researched the meaning of the word 'immigrant' for French workers, but, with philosophical gymnastics I shall discuss in the next chapter, they reject any consideration of ethnicity.

'Estates in exile'

The 'social exclusion' concept of *banlieue* youth comes from the same approach that the Tourainian school have created in relation to multiculturalism. In Dubet and Lapeyronnie's (1992:17) study of *Les quartiers d'exils* (literally 'estates in exile'), they argue that class conflict has been replaced by social problems. Fixed social positions, integration through work and a common sense of being exploited have been replaced by the social exclusion of a superfluous part of the labour market, as a result of deindustrialisation (Dubet & Lapeyronnie 1992:27). Dubet and Lapeyronnie point to a sense of shame and personal devaluation that goes with *la galère* (hanging around, delinquency etc). They claim that rage without a social adversary, develops in the space left by class-consciousness (Dubet & Lapeyronnie 1992:122). Riots and conflict with the police cause the 'problems' to be noticed but do not create a new Political actor (Dubet & Lapeyronnie 1992:181). Leaders and representatives are absorbed by institutions (Dubet & Lapeyronnie 1992:227). Anyone who is successfully integrated tends to leave the *cité* (Dubet & Lapeyronnie 1992:226).

Members of the Tourainian school, along with media commentators, assume that the French Republican model creates more cultural integration, despite the problems, than the divisive British approach. This is a dubious assumption, based on an image of American ghettos with absolutely distinct ethnic identities. It does not take into account cultural hybridity in the British context, which is evidence of a two-way cultural interchange that sometimes transcends racism and inequality. In his comparison of Islam in Britain and France, Kepel argues that:

"the cultural assimilation of youths of Muslim origin is certainly very advanced here [in France] but that makes them resent all the more grievously their exclusion from networks of consumption and well-being."
(Kepel 1995:282)

Dubet and Lapeyronnie also argue that *banlieue* youths are profoundly socialised into the majority culture (Dubet & Lapeyronnie 1992:91). Despite some *cités* being almost exclusively reserved for foreign families (Dubet & Lapeyronnie 1992:116), they claim that the way French housing policy has prevented the consolidation of local ethnic groups means that immigrants have

mixed with the native population more than in Britain (Dubet & Lapeyronnie 1992:84).

The argument that *les jeunes de banlieue* (*banlieue* youth) are too well assimilated sounds suspiciously comforting for the antiracist ideals of French universalism. It does not correlate with the way 'the lads' on the estate identified themselves as not 'real-French'. They did resent their 'exclusion from networks of consumption' but they rejected culturally French items of consumption, preferring a *banlieue* idiom with its own style, music and slang. The claim of successful cultural assimilation is too convenient. It may undermine a racist image of *cités* full of foreigners who cannot be assimilated because of their traditional cultures, but it assimilates youth culture. Youth culture in the *cités* is forged in relation to living in France, attending the French school system and speaking the French language, but that does not make it 'French culture' *per se*. Dubet and Lapeyronnie themselves observe that the sense of ethnicity felt in the *cité* is not based on traditional communities but comes from residential segregation, racism from outside and the white, French domination of society (Dubet & Lapeyronnie 1992:28). This sense of ethnicity could be interpreted in relation to Back's (1996) model of 'new ethnicities' or 'liminal cultures', which transcend the racism and inequality of the dominant culture. I shall return to the possibility below. For Dubet and Lapeyronnie, however, even a non-essentialist sense of ethnicity remains a failing, albeit a failing created by poor insertion into French society rather than incompatibility with the French ideal.

I found that being French or being 'real-French', as 'the lads' put it, was a negative category. One of the first things that they wanted to know about me was whether I was 'real-English' and they seemed disappointed to find out that I was, although this still seemed a lot better than being 'real-French'. Two of the lads I knew were white. I do not know if they were of French origin, but both seemed to be part of an anti-French sense of identity shared by 'the lads'. One was nicknamed 'Facheau' and some of 'the lads' would joke that I looked like his brother. Due to unfamiliarity with the language, it took me a long time to realise that 'Facheau' was short for 'fascist'. This nickname hints at a sense of

ethnicity amongst 'the lads' that was not exclusively *beur* or black but was mainly not-white and explicitly not-real-French. White youths were included, but this example of jokingly calling one 'fascist' implies that white society was viewed with suspicion.

The other white guy in the group made his anti-French feelings clear to me one day. I had a short discussion with him about the difficulties I was having sorting out my *Carte de séjour* (temporary residence permit) at the Prefecture. He lent a sympathetic ear to my tale of going backwards and forwards for pieces of paper. I told him how I got told off patronisingly for having made a late claim, after all the delays had been caused by the Prefecture's procedures. He pointed out that it is always like this, explaining that: '*La France, c'est la galère, c'est la merde!*' ('France is a bloody drag, it's shit!').

Dubet and Lapeyronnie argue that *banlieue* youths are not traditionalists but enjoy consumer culture. However, they insist that the *jeunes* are well assimilated into French culture. This is misleading. Amongst 'the lads', I observed a sense of ethnicity that was distinctly anti-French, and a rejection of cultural assimilation. 'Estates in exile' is a dramatic title, which suggests that the *banlieue* has somehow been separated from France. However, it also implies that the youth long to rejoin France, which sets French universalism a challenge without challenging French universalism.

Part 2 'Social exclusion' policies

Réhabilitation

A French *banlieue cité* has striking architecture; it looks nothing like a typical council housing estate in Britain. The *cités*, which are the social housing in France, are estates made up of huge blocks of flats. The official term for social housing is HLM (*Hébergements de Loyer Modéré*, 'accommodation of moderate rent'). Estates with houses are called *pavillons* but they are not social housing. The *pavillons* in my fieldwork area were dominated by 'real-French', probably

working class families who had moved out of the *cités* and bought their own houses. The middle class tended to live in private housing in the town centre but they were in a minority. Generally, the middle classes lived either in Paris itself or in leafy *banlieue* areas, further out and more comparable to the British image of suburbia. French *cités* are beyond the scale of most tower blocks and high-rise estates in Britain. The building I lived in had 13 storeys and 10 separate entrances or stairwells. It was the largest building in the *cité* but the *cité* was made up of about fifteen buildings on a similar scale.

The buildings were known locally as *Bâtiment 1 – Bâtiment 15*, with the exception of one or two that had only a single stairwell and were known as, for example, *Tour 7* (Tower 7). The towers had a reputation for being relatively clean and quiet in comparison to the *bâtiments*. Official addresses consisted of the street number of the stairwell and a street name. The streets or walkways through the *cité* had been named after famous French people, such as literary figures. In the past, however, the buildings had been officially known by number alone. Both professionals and inhabitants continued to refer to the buildings by number anyway. The electricity board still used the flat numbers from the old address format, which combined the *Bâtiment* number with the flat number, producing a daunting four or five figure flat number. A three figure flat number with a street name was a superficial improvement, probably designed to de-stigmatise inhabitants. However, in combination with the postal area, such an address would still ring warning bells to any potential employer or other agency likely to discriminate against *cité* inhabitants. In fact, only a foreigner who had never heard of a *banlieue cité*, like myself when I first moved to the *cité* in 1995, would not be able to read through the improved address system.

The view from my window was dominated by an even larger *cité* in the adjacent municipality, a few minutes walk away. There was an even closer, smaller *cité* in the other direction. Within half an hour's walk, there were three more large *cités*. The *cités* were interspersed with *pavillions*. There were two newer *cités* further out from the town centre, beyond that was an area where office blocks for multinational companies were filling the hole left by moribund manufacturing

and a concentration of decaying private housing, which the local council campaigned against because of sub-standard living conditions.

It was fifteen minutes walk to the town centre from my flat. The town centre was made up mainly of old buildings but was going through a process of gentrification. Around the town centre were several small *cités*. On the other side of the town centre there were at least three other *cités*. There was another area of private housing around the station, which was notoriously insalubrious. The only local factory still running was based here. It processed 'animal flour', animal-based feed, the substance that is famous for the spreading of BSE. When the wind blew in the wrong direction, the greasy stench of unspecified, pulverised animal parts would drift across the town. Middle class inhabitants, worried about their health and offended by the smell, actively campaigned for the closure of the factory. Even the Communist *Mairie* wanted it closed, despite the fact that this would seal the end of local manufacturing.

Most of the *Département* was made up of different sized but similar looking municipalities, although further out some areas were more leafy. Adjacent *Départements* were made up of the same architectural elements: *cités*, new and old town centres, working class *pavillions* and more leafy suburbs. These *Départements* did not have the same reputation or the same concentration of 'problem areas' but they had their *quartiers chauds* ('hot areas', i.e. bad, dangerous). It took 45 minutes on a train going north to get out of the concrete conurbation.

Cités are numerous and widespread. They are not limited to the Parisian *banlieue*; the same style of *cité* was built all over France in the post-war housing crisis. They became known as *cités dortoir* ('dormitory estates') during the period of full employment, as they were built purely to maximise the sleeping space for workers. From the late 70s, however, the *cités* turned into 'problem areas'. As unemployment and the concentration of immigrant families rose, life in the *cité* no longer fitted the original blueprint. The *cités* began to appear increasingly external to French society.

'Rehabilitation projects' were introduced in the mid-90s to improve the *cités*. The term 'rehabilitation' suggests more than a physical make-over; it includes a social dimension and seems to compare *cités* to criminals or insane individuals that need to be rehabilitated into society. A *Télé Cité*³ (5th May 2002) documentary discusses the *réhabilitation* project in one *cité*. It begins with an interview of the architect behind these projects, Roland Castro, conducted by a teenage girl from the *cité*. He describes the project, with that avuncular pride French commentators often exude towards manageable *banlieue* youths who, as unthreatening interlocutors, seem to enhance the Republican ideal. The girl running the interview is black and articulate. She appears to be of West African origin, her style of dress and speech are typical of the *cité*, in a positive way. Castro explains the philosophy of social integration that lies behind architectural improvements, which for him are ingeniously designed to re-socialise the population as well as renovate the buildings. However, he begins to get annoyed when the interviewer suggests that the project has not really changed things very much. The documentary then shifts from the sterile studio space, with Castro tinkering with his scale model of the *cité*, to the *cité* itself.

The interviews in the *cité* are conducted at ground level, in contrast to Castro's god-like perspective. The camera and the interviewer follow a *Gardien* ('caretaker' but, the interviewee argues with pride, the role includes everything from collecting rent to frontline social work). The interviewer then catches up with several residents in the publicly accessible corners of the *cité*. In the background of the interviews or as shots inter-cut with interviewees are bits of graffiti ('Son of a bitch', 'Here we fuck the police'), a burning wheely bin, a burnt out car wreck, some building work going on behind a wire fence and a shuttered shop-front. The interviews are not only filmed outside but they include people greeting each other and a group of lads who just seem to be hanging out together as they would do usually. Two teenage girls complain about being moved out of a larger flat into a smaller one, as part of the 'Rehabilitation project'. Most people talk about the need for mutual respect and dialogue as more important than changing the *cité* physically. At the end, a younger expert

³ *Télé Cité* is a programme broadcast on France 3 and dedicated to *banlieue* documentaries, often made by youth groups.

is interviewed with the *cité* behind him. He stresses the importance of having a consultation process when making changes to the *cité*.

Like Castro with his model, 'rehabilitation projects' are top-down attempts to change *cités*, organised according to Republican notions of 'the social'. For example, they tend to eliminate hidden spaces where youths hang out, whilst creating open spaces that can encourage only the social life that can be conducted in full view. In one such local project, a large block in a *cité* was split in two in order to make the problems associated with that building more manageable, whilst creating a wide thoroughfare between the centre of the *cité* and the outside. This suggests that breaking up large blocks and opening out a *cité* will tackle the enclosed communitarian identity that separates a *cité* from French society. The same ethos lay behind changes in the *cité* where I lived. A housing professional I interviewed expected me to note how much the *cité* had improved when she realised that I had briefly lived in the *cité* a few years earlier. One of the largest buildings had been demolished. On another, the entrance-ways had been moved to the opposite side of the building, facing out of the *cité* rather than into it. The housing professional implied that this had to be done for the good of the residents, despite their resistance. A road had been built, which almost cut the *cité* in two, again with the aim of opening out the *cité* and encouraging the residents to be less enclosed.

Like Castro's interviewer, I could not see much improvement in the *cité*. There was extra space, a few trees and some grass. There was an over-proliferation of children's play areas, which one woman complained about in a local meeting, which took the planners by surprise. These little play areas seemed to be dotted about in any available space, without creating much variety. Sometimes they just seemed to create children's space to obstruct adolescents and young adults. The view from my window was slightly better than before since one of the huge buildings in the adjacent *cité* had been demolished. When I spoke to 'the lads' about the changes, they regarded the period of so-called improvement as the period in which things had got worse for them. One explained, "Before, the *cité* was ours." The entrances to my building had deteriorated insofar as all the front doors had been broken open so that youths could hang around in the

hallway. I assumed that this was a result of the other building having been demolished. *Bâtiment X* had had an underground garage, an ideal space for hanging out, and the kind of *banlieue* space that was notorious for delinquency, drug dealing and even gang rape.

The demolition of *Bâtiment X* had clearly upset some of the inhabitants and not just ‘the lads’, whose space had been deliberately targeted. When I facilitated a youth group using ‘Rivers of Life’ (which involves drawing representations of important life events along a river), two sisters both drew *Bâtiment X* and described the trauma of being rehoused. They were too young to have been ‘hanging out’ at the time and, as they were girls, this would have been unlikely anyway. Nevertheless, they described *Bâtiment X* as having been one big family to them. The housing professional was also not entirely positive about the demolition of *Bâtiment X*, although from a different perspective. She explained that some of the residents had been dispersed around the *cité* but others had been rehoused together in the town centre. She argued that this had just “displaced the problems”.

Residents were consulted in local public meetings about new plans for building works in the *cité*. However, the people who attended these meetings were unrepresentative of the local population. Many were professionals from outside. Most of the residents at the meetings were white. Some of them lived in housing within the *Quartier* (sub-district of the municipality) but not in the *cité* itself. Even active local groups who might have represented a broader spectrum of residents were largely absent. For example, staff and members of an active local immigrant women’s Association were unenthusiastic about attending these meetings. I turned up at one such meeting and was stared at in disbelief by a policeman who had happened to stop and search me previously because I had been in a car with ‘the lads’. In the meeting, there was one professional ‘street educator’ who tried to counter the generally negative view expressed about the youth. However, he was shouted down as someone who did not have to live in the *cité*.

The meeting considered a proposed plan for 'improving' the square in front of the supermarket. The planning officer explained that the supermarket had threatened to leave the *cité* if something was not done to prevent youths hanging around in the square. The police chief explained that the square was also a problem for the police. It was strategically located at the entrance to the *cité*, which meant that one youth standing in the square with a mobile phone could warn all his mates that the police were arriving. The architects showed the meeting plans for turning the square into a car park. After some discussion, these plans were generally accepted. This piece of consultation with local residents created a coalition between the supermarket, the local authority, professionals, the police and white residents against the mainly non-white youths who were seen in public places. It did not create a dialogue between the authorities and 'the excluded'.

An even more glaring example of architectural reforms that use the 'social exclusion' discourse to attack an anomalous group can be seen in the Cuq Report's (Fiévet 1999) approach to African foyers, which currently provide cheap accommodation and food for African workers. These foyers are generally in a very run-down state because their public and private owners have neglected to maintain them. Fiévet (1999) argues that this neglect has been blamed on the residents themselves and used to label them as ghettoised, backward and traditional. The official Cuq Report recommends 'cleaning up' the foyers and turning them into well ordered but relatively expensive housing units of single bedroom 'social' accommodation, thereby ignoring some of the functions the foyers serve for their residents. The residents are men, who live collectively and send money home to their families, as well as contributing to village projects. Hence, communal living and cheap rent are the most important attractions of the foyers. Immigrants' foyers also play a significant role for immigrant communities, as a focal point for those who live in local area. The Cuq report blames the owners' neglect on the residents' communitarianism and turns the latter into pathologised 'social cases', whose way of life needs to be corrected along with their physical environment. This is also a direct example of the discourse of 'social exclusion' being used to ignore international connections; the development projects funded by African workers are dismissed

as communitarian rather than recognised as international solidarity. The foyer issue is very closely related to the *sans-papiers* cause, as many African *sans-papiers* live in the foyers and the foyers were central to the creation of the *sans-papiers* movement.

Garnier's (1996) argument, that the apparently benign goal of combating 'social exclusion' turns into an attack on 'the excluded', through policies designed to eliminate street crime, is born out in practice. The strategy of population control behind these top-down architectural improvements is not of course exclusive to France. The rhetoric of 'rehabilitation' implies a need to address 'problems', which pathologises the *cit *, creating a slippage between the architectural defects of the *cit * and the character of the inhabitants. In the French case, the diagnosis of the *cit *'s pathology seems particularly concerned with the problem of communitarianism. Therefore, the *cit s* are rearranged in order to break up the enclosed mentality of inhabitants.

Accompagnement

In France, the RMI (*Revenue Minimum d'Insertion*, 'Minimum Income for Insertion'), was introduced in 1988 and is basically equivalent to Income Support or Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance. It is totally separate from the unemployment benefit system, which pays those who have been in long-term, full time employment 60% of their previous salary. In France, there seems to be a much greater gap between those that conform to the old model of welfare benefits, based on full employment, and the RMI-ists, who have either been unemployed for several years or have never had a full time job. Under 25's do not receive the RMI at all and, apart from a few special schemes, no-one can legitimately rent a place to live, 'social' or private, without an income three times the rent. Over 40% of RMI-ists in the municipality were living somewhere they do not have to pay rent. With one exception, all 'the lads' I knew, who were about 25, lived at home with their parents. Their cars, often shared between two or three of them, and the public corners of the *cit * were their main areas for socialising.

RMI-ists and unemployed *jeunes* are excluded from a social system in which both social housing and unemployment benefit are linked to a model of full time employment with permanent contracts. Note the *d'Insertion* ('for insertion') in the name of the RMI, stating that the benefit is paid as a stop-gap, pending the recipient's 'reinsertion' into the official model of the labour market. Of course, this model of the labour market no longer represents the reality, in which temporary, part time and informal work are on the increase, regardless of French resistance to flexibilisation. There are various practical schemes to combat the 'social exclusion' of youths and RMI-ists, including government subsidised employment contracts, but one essential component of reinsertion is *accompagnement*, which means that the person to be reinserted needs to be accompanied or mentored by someone who is well 'inserted' in the social life of full time employment. The positive value of this benevolent guidance seems to go unquestioned.

All the professionals I met who commented on unemployment emphasised to me the need for more *accompagnement*. No one, apart from 'the lads', seemed sceptical about the subtext of this social goal. When I tried to suggest that in my experience in Britain 'helping the unemployed in their job search' usually meant hassling them, I was reminded that the Anglo-Saxon model is moralising and punitive, whereas French *accompagnement* meant genuine help and support. Even if there was some truth in this, I found the French attitude stultifying, foreclosing the possibility of criticism. One youth worker told me at length of the absurdity of youth logic, which he illustrated by pointing out a square light switch that certain youths would claim was round, simply because it was square. Adolescents and the unemployed youth who did not accept the dominant norm, were conceived of as illogical and self-destructive.

Many professionals were critical of the State because of the lack of resources available and, on a more qualitative level, some pointed out that the State did not know 'the territory'. I interviewed one experienced professional, Mme Dupont, who had been a 'street educator' and then set up an Association. She called it an *Association d'insertion* and supported the idea of *accompagnement*,

suggesting that youths needed training and guidance to find a job, and that 18 months into a job certain social problems resolved themselves. However, she also pointed out that the Association had to adapt what the funders provided to fit the needs of youths. The projects they ran, especially the driving skills project, were attractive to youths, as well as fulfilling the official goal of socialising youths into the labour market. Hence, this Association was strategically mediating between the youths' point of view and the State's. Nevertheless, Mme Dupont was not cynical about *accompagnement* but regarded this as a genuine form of help. Therefore, I had to conclude that *accompagnement* cannot be dismissed in the French context. Whether it involves genuine dialogue between youths and professionals or not, it represents a cultural limit, a hegemony that cannot be logically challenged.

There were, of course, projects far less in tune with the youth than Mme Dupont's. For example, some of the *Emplois Jeunes* (Youth Employment) schemes seemed to create meaningless jobs. I attended a departmental conference about *Emplois Jeunes*, the subsidised youth employment scheme brought in by Jospin's Government in 1997. The conference was impressive, with shiny documents given out in zip-up briefcases and a buffet luncheon, including wine, served on a barge. The *Emplois Jeunes* initiative encourages Associations to employ youths under thirty. The State pays 80% of the *Emplois Jeunes*' minimum wage. European Social Fund money is used to pay for the *Emplois Jeunes* scheme, which aims to bring unemployed youths back into the labour market.

Many *Emplois Jeunes* are employed as 'public space facilitators', which sounds curiously like 'hanging around', which is usually seen as a problem. Some 'public space facilitators' worked in the *cités*. Others had the unenviable task of riding on buses and keeping an eye on metro stations. Some became school monitors, a job traditionally done by university students. Objections were raised in public meetings since the *Emplois Jeunes* were seen as conniving with adolescent misbehaviour rather than preventing it. A student friend also objected because he felt that students had something educational to offer schoolchildren whereas *Emplois Jeunes* did not. One of the main debating

points in the conference was the exit strategy for the *Emplois Jeunes* scheme. It was unclear whether those reaching the end of their five years would have a professional qualification or improved job prospects.

In general, the spectrum of schemes and projects combating youth unemployment in France was similar to what might be found in Britain. Some small Associations, struggling to get funding, seemed to be effectively mediating between what youths were looking for and Government policies; others seemed more concerned with establishing their credibility. Large-scale schemes with State and European funding were of dubious value to the people they were aimed at, although they were sometimes used to support effective projects. What seems clear in the French context is the way 'the social' functions as a universal set of norms in the combat against 'social exclusion'. *Accompagnement* and 'rehabilitation projects' characterise how citizens should be part of 'the social', in a way that rejects cultural difference and communitarianism.

Part 3 Key local actors

The Communist Party

The Communist Party, which ran the local *Mairie*, has dominated local Politics in working class *banlieues* since World War II. They have traditionally refused to take into account the specific interests of immigrants on the grounds that this would split the French working classes (Abdallah 2000:28). They have even been known to play the race card in order to attract white French working class votes (Hargreaves 1995:180). In my fieldwork area, however, the Communist Party made an effort to attract the votes of citizens of immigrant origin⁴. In the joint leftwing list for the local municipal elections, the Communists invited non-Party members, who were active in local Associations, to take up some of the

⁴ Non-French EU citizens have the right to vote in local elections but non-EU residents do not; the Communist Party campaigned for all official residents to be able to vote in local elections.

PCF quota of the list, as candidates for election. This innovation was publicised as an effort to reflect the “diverse social and cultural origins” of the population.

The Communist Party also supported the *sans-papiers* movement. They remained active in the movement after the Socialist Government had introduced the *Circulaire Chévenement* and the popularity for the cause had died down. The Communists justified this support by arguing that the informal economy undermined workers' rights, although they had previously used virtually the same argument to reject the protestations of undocumented migrants. Another possible reason for supporting the movement was that it gave them a connection with the local immigrant population. The Communist *soutiens* in the Co-ordination, during elections, repeatedly told the *sans-papiers* to remind their families to vote Communist.

The local *Mairie* tried to encourage local democracy. They had created area-forums, where issues such as new building plans could be discussed with the local residents. Each year, the Mayor held several meetings with residents around the town. The *Mairie* had introduced a 'Participatory Budget', which gave residents the chance to examine the local council budget and decide how part of it should be spent. However, the 'Participatory Budget' was dominated by already active groups and individuals, reasonably knowledgeable about public funding. It tended to exclude people who were unwilling and unable to sit through long explanations of how a local budget works. There was also a certain amount of discontent from the knowledgeable participants, who felt that there was not enough time allowed for them to have their say.

The local area meetings and the annual opportunities to complain to the Mayor in person were dominated by white people. The themes in these meetings that generated most feeling were anti-crime, anti-youth, anti-dirt and anti-incivility. White middle and working class discontent, mainly from areas adjacent to the *cités*, seemed to express itself as thinly veiled racism. Le Pen's Front National was not publicly present. It was hardly visible throughout the town, apart from on election billboards, where it had a right to paste its election poster, which were almost always defaced. The FN's percentage of the vote (about 15% on

average) was enough to worry leftwing activists. I only heard one old man in the street being openly racist, and people in meetings clearly did not want to be thought of as racist, but the predominance of white people complaining about non-white people's behaviour created an awkward tension. A young *beur*, who was a youth worker, got a loud round of applause in one meeting because he attacked the small minority of youths who were "*fouteurs de merde*" ('trouble makers' literally 'shit makers', 'chuckers' or 'sprayers'), which allowed the rest of the meeting to feel vindicated. This applause seems antiracist but it demonstrates again the French ideal of assimilation, without ruling out the possibility that a racist rejection of the immigrant population lay behind it.

The Communist Party was struggling to maintain an electoral base in the changing ethno-scape of the *banlieue*. Spokespeople for the *Mairie* tended to emphasise the history of solidarity in the *banlieue* in their attempt to undermine negative media images. Nevertheless, the industrial manufacturing base, on which its class-politics had been based, was gone. The Communist Party, after almost capitulating to the racism amongst 'real-French' voters, was attempting to attract citizens of immigrant origin. However, it was not surprising that the PCF were struggling to adapt, given their past history and the general lack of interest in French Politics shown by the immigrant population.

In a small adjacent municipality, one local Association, launched in reaction to the rising FN vote, had formed a Political group strong enough to oust the Communists from power and take-over the *Mairie*. This scenario was highly unlikely in a larger municipality, where one Association could not have as much local impact. However, Associations were clearly an important and growing form of social and Political participation. Hence, the PCF, in my fieldwork area, were working hard to link themselves with Associations.

Associations

Mme Dupont pointed out that the Communist Party was far from supportive of immigrants' Associations when they first emerged in the *banlieue*. Hence, the

movement originally grew without PCF support. Legally, Associations of immigrants could not formally constitute themselves prior to 1981 as the 1901 law established the right to form Associations for French citizens only. However, from the late seventies, groups of immigrant women in *cités* – based on informal networks of neighbours and mothers meeting at the school gates – began to set up self-help organisations. For immigrants, as ethnic communities, to have a public voice is problematic in French society, as we have seen. Nevertheless, the law was changed in 1981 to allow groups of immigrants to set up their own formal Associations. This was at a time when certain *banlieues*, beginning to be seen as immigrant areas, were being constructed by the media as a social problem. Hence the Government needed new ways of gaining access to the immigrant population, so funding women immigrants' Associations to run projects became an acceptable way of tackling social problems. By supporting them financially, the new Associations could be encouraged to fit in with the French State's aim to integrate immigrants into society. It could even be argued that the trend of supporting women's Associations fitted with an implicit French mission to liberate immigrant women from the perceived oppression of their traditional cultures. As a result of the political trade-off between the State and immigrants' Associations, twenties years later I found a myriad of local Associations in my fieldwork area. They were not all run by and for immigrant women but they fulfilled similar functions, with projects to do with, for example, literacy / language skills, advice work, cooking, sewing, homework support for children, youth projects, health projects, employment training and housing.

Different Associations have different approaches. Some are purely campaigning or cultural groups. Others are exclusively professional, such as an Association of 'street educators' that I visited. This profession has its own specific training, set up in the fifties when Teddy boys were seen as a problem, in order to engage with and to give guidance to youths in the street environment. This Association was not one that had volunteers since the work involved strict confidentiality. Most Associations employed professionals but also relied on volunteers. They bridged the gap between professional agencies and informal networks. As small local organisations, they often employed

people who were either local residents themselves or had a long-term commitment to the Association and the area in which it was based. These area-based Associations were created in the context of unemployment and the youth movement in the eighties, and fears about high FN votes in the nineties. Many were based on networks of immigrant women. They did not seem to reproduce the Republican model of assimilation in the same way as State policy. They used funds available for combating 'social exclusion' but mediated this policy goal in relation to the needs of local people.

The position of one local immigrant women's Association on their youth exchange visit to a West African village seemed to assert a global sense of the social fabric. Their exchange was about citizenship but was also informed by an experience of immigration. They had created links with an Association in a village in southern France, which had already built a link with an African village in Burkina Faso through humanitarian projects. Chahira, who worked at the Association and had previously been involved with the humanitarian projects, was critical of the way these projects had been set up without asking the African villagers what they actually wanted or needed. This had apparently led to some misunderstandings in which, for example, the French volunteers had been surprised to find that the villagers refused to work for free in constructing the well they were being given.

Chahira hoped that the youth exchange project could build communication rather than maintain the established relationship of white people bringing humanitarian gifts without any consultation. Her ideal was for the three youth groups – Parisian *banlieue*, French village and African village – to build relationships that could overcome some of the stereotypes. The project seemed fairly successful in creating friendships between the groups. However, stereotypes of 'problem' *banlieue* youth affected the way the project was enframed from the outside and influenced some of the non-*banlieue* adults involved. For example, I happened to sit next to one of the leaders of the village humanitarian Association during a celebratory African meal, when I visited the French village for a weekend with the exchange group. He pointed out that he had originally opposed the idea of including the *banlieue* youth in the

project since they had so many problems of their own. He did not seem to realise that the assumption that all youths from the *banlieue* were problem children was inaccurate and prejudiced. In fact, the members of the youth group had a long-standing relationship with the Association and had chosen to be involved in educational projects.

Associations may have a local perspective that make their projects more in tune with local people and more accepting of cultural difference. They may positively identify with the experience of immigration and the life of the *cit *. However, insofar as they are funded to combat 'social exclusion', they are limited in the remit they can set for their projects, and are unable to avoid the negative connotations that go with helping 'the excluded'. Michel pointed out that humanitarian trips to Africa were common but that, unlike this particular project, they rarely did anything to challenge stereotypes, either about the *banlieue* or about Africa. French funders were keen on this kind of project because they imagined that *banlieue* youths would feel lucky to be French in the process of giving humanitarian aid to those less fortunate than themselves. On rare occasions, the projects of Associations create dialogue with youths and/or challenge Republican assimilation but they are necessarily caught up in the difficulties of chasing funds and professionalising their activities. Funded projects have to conform with the state's version of 'social exclusion', which starts from the premise that there is a *banlieue* youth problem. Whilst some Associations, based on strong local networks, can create projects that go against the grain of the pathologising view of the *banlieue*, all of them have to translate policies with these connotations into practice.

'The lads'

Despite interesting projects in some Associations, my investigation of 'social exclusion' was continually confronted by an unbridgeable gap between 'the lads' and the meetings. 'The lads' hung around the *cité*, in stairwells or in their cars, smoking spliffs and chatting. I used to hang around with 'the lads' sometimes but I found it strange smoking and socialising in these public places. 'The lads' were helpful to other residents, opening doors for people with shopping or pushchairs. Once I had caught up with an old acquaintance and got to know everyone, 'the lads' were friendly. I was greeted with enthusiasm and got into some interesting conversations. However, I found it difficult to understand the *banlieue* slang, and the idea of studying 'the lads' felt false to me and was not welcomed by them. Three of 'the lads', B,M & W, regularly came round my flat for a few months but, in the end, they seemed to be the ones that showed me least respect. When I tried to explain the research I was doing, 'the lads' saw me as being from 'the social'. One guy remarked jokingly: "You're against delinquency!" implying I was against them hanging around. As a researcher, it was difficult not to be seen as an invasive and judgmental representative of the State. Another person concluded, after an interesting but not necessarily research-driven conversation, that I was just living on a scam like them. I was accepted, but not as a researcher. I had conversations about global politics, negative school experiences and one or two people would explain to me how things worked in France for my benefit, but observing 'the lads' as research objects was not possible.

Back (1996) creates a model of 'liminal cultures', to analyse youth cultures in London, which, in some instances, overcome racism by creating an anti-racist 'neighbourhood nationalism'. This local 'imagined community' is constructed in relation to lived interactions, including those between black and white youths. It can create a space for a liminal culture that banishes white racism and suspends 'black closure'. According to Back, 'black closure':

"is not synonymous with white racism. The impulse that stimulates the owning of black symbols varies. It includes situations where whites are seen to be parodying blacks or where whites take their identification with blackness beyond the limits of black consent." (Back 1996:247)

The idea of 'liminal cultures' and 'neighbourhood nationalism' did seem applicable to *banlieue cité* youth culture, more a result of black-*beur* allegiances than black-white ones. The result is not the same, since it is less a question of banishing the dominant racism that could come between friends, and more a question of making the officially denied, but mutually suffered, racism explicit. As in Britain, allegiances are often formed in the face of an area's stigmatised reputation and in opposition to the injustice and racism of the system. 'The lads' dismissed the assimilatory assumptions of French *égalité* as "*des conneries*" (bollocks). They strongly rejected the social insertion promoted by the State. Other youths were more successful at school and in employment, and therefore less visible in the *cité*. Nevertheless, there seemed to be a strong sense of area identity, expressed notably in the *cité* argot and *verlan* (back slang).

Although I did not directly research 'the lads', spending some time with them and maintaining friendly relations was an important part of learning to live in the *cité*. The following incident relates to my own adaptation to living in the *banlieue*:

One day, I got onto a crowded bus and was standing in front of three *jeunes*, teenage black lads who were of West African origin. They started rustling something behind me, passing a plastic bag backwards and forwards. I wondered if they were taking something from a pocket or from my bag but it was just their own bag. I realised they were just trying to wind me up, so I tried to laugh it off. Then, as I was making an effort to smile and shrug it off, one of them made a comment saying that I enjoyed it. He said I must be a *pédé*, which means something like 'homo' and is a common insult. At this point I let out a loud African tut. It is a screechy noise made by dragging air between teeth and tongue. It is basically the same as the African-Caribbean version but longer and more exaggerated. I took it from an African film I had seen as part of the exchange project. The long exaggerated tuts in the film drew laughs from the audience, many of whom were of West African origin. It is a noise I had heard and thought about in the UK but this was the first time I

ever used it. It was a way of countering the insult, making it clear I was not laughing any more but that what they were doing was too stupid to merit a verbal response. The tut seemed to be completely successful, within the psychological tussle that was going on between these lads and me. They shut-up completely. Looking around, I saw various passengers laughing / smiling, which seemed to really secure my victory.

To unpack my response: I had felt I was being picked on because I was a white person, probably French and not from this sort of 'problem' area. These lads wanted to provoke – to see in me – the French horror of *les jeunes de banlieue*. A French response in this situation would be either fear and avoidance or a lecture on civic duty. Using the tut was a way of making it clear that I was not typically French. The tut is incompatible with French civilising ideals.

Thinking about this little interaction in terms of Back's (1996) discussion of 'black closure' or Hewitt's discussion of white youths talking 'black', it seemed that I had broken all the rules. Appropriating a black term to confront a bunch of black lads that I did not know at all, without my having even negotiated the use of the term with black friends, might seem disrespectful. I certainly would not have tried doing black impressions to get out of a sticky situation with black youths on a bus in Southeast London. In that context it would have seemed racist and provocative.

Maybe I was guilty of a racist parody but, in the French context, the absolute denial of ethnicity seems to be the medium of oppression more than exaggerations of difference. Hence, using an ethnically marked and 'uncivilised' response was a challenge to French values rather than a caricature of the youths' culture of origin. It was not an attempt to join in the youths' *banlieue* idiom. Rather it referred to the West African *bled*⁵, which is considered to be more morally strict than middle class French laxness. Hence, it was also an appeal to the adults present and their potential disapproval of the youths,

⁵ *Bled* means 'country', i.e. not the city, in North African Arabic but the word is used in everyday speech to mean 'homeland' by youths and adults of all origins.

whilst not taking the situation too seriously but dismissing these young lads as just kids playing up.

White residents and rightwing politicians are not the only people who complain about the *jeunes*. Residents of immigrant origin, including fellow youths, criticise the '*voyoucracy*' (*voyou* meaning yob), as one woman termed it. There is a feeling expressed both from inside and outside the *banlieue* that the *jeunes* have taken over an empty public space. *Banlieue* residents who are critical of the French approach suggest that Republican public space, at the same time as barring religious morality through the secular school system, fails to establish any effective authority. The *jeunes* seem to exist in a moral vacuum left between the French censure of any ethnically marked community and the failures of assimilation / integration. Concerns about authority and youth misbehaviour were certainly more frequently expressed by residents than any desire to celebrate youth culture, but French institutions were seen as a cause of the problem rather than a solution.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained the way French universalism underwrites policies aimed at combating 'social exclusion' in a way that excludes 'ethnicity' from public space. I have also briefly explored how local government, Associations and residents deal with cultural difference, as an important part of the *banlieue*, but one that is denied by State institutions. I began by examining the way 'communities' are felt to challenge the cohesion of French society, as illustrated by the notion of a *danger communautaire*. I then explained the Tourainian school's construction of a 'social exclusion' model. I pointed out that, whilst attempting to raise the issue of cultural difference and discrimination, this approach tends to conflate ethnic identity and youth culture with a ghettoised image of broken-down Republicanism. I looked at the way architectural improvements and initiatives designed to tackle unemployment are enframed by the 'social exclusion' model. They tend to focus on the social failings of *cité* inhabitants and the unemployed, suggesting that 'helping' people out of their enclosed communities will allow them to escape the problems of

degradation and unemployment. In the hands of planners and policy makers, 'social exclusion' abandons the Tourainian school's tentative discussion of cultural difference and becomes a way of correcting communitarianism and youth culture. In Part 3, I considered three groups of key actors: the Communist Party, Associations and 'the lads'. I pointed out that the Communist Party, despite previous disregard for the interests of the immigrant population, is now trying to build bridges, recognising a need to reflect the diverse origins of the area. I discussed the mediating role between Associations and State policy, with money and power coming from the State. Associations may attempt to negotiate a common ground with local people but, in order to get funding, they have to function within State policy. Finally, I reflected on my failed fieldwork experience of trying to study 'the lads', who dismiss the French system and resent attempts to 'integrate' them. I found that there is a strong youth culture, built on a sense of shared opposition to French institutions. However, this opposition is only represented in public space by youths hanging around, misbehaving and failing to be 'inserted' into French society. Those that insist on opposing French society are viewed as illogical and destructive.

This chapter has attempted to locate French universalism in the *banlieue*, showing that 'social exclusion' has been used as a way of enframing 'problem areas' without acknowledging that ethnic difference and youth culture challenge the monolithic universality of French society. Before doing fieldwork, I had hoped to find spaces in which I could study how youth culture transcends social divisions, for example through music. However, the absence of an accessible youth scene within the *banlieue* – a space that went beyond the stairwells themselves – forced me to focus on the suffocating French logic of integration and assimilation. Despite the creation of an idiom of *banlieue* music and film that is very successful at a national level, I did not find a local scene where the *banlieue* youth could engage with French society without being co-opted by it. The fact that ethnic difference is fundamentally rejected by official French society seems to have created a situation in which the youths who want to challenge French society can only do so by affirming a cultural division between Paris and *banlieue*, i.e. by reinforcing the geo-social division rather than by transcending it. Whilst prejudice and racism are rife in France, integration tends

to be celebrated by mainstream society as if ethnic differences simply do not exist. In this context, transcending the divisions and ignoring the racism is too easy, and the only strategy left open to youth resistance is to wreck the French ideal of integration, as with the youths who disrupted the happy, mixed, Parisian crowd listening to trendy dance music (the example with which I began this chapter).

This conclusion may seem over pessimistic but it reflects my own fieldwork experience. If I had found a music scene in which local youths could create their own space, the following chapters would have investigated the ways in which *banlieue* youths are able to transcend social divisions. Of course, the fact that I did not find such a scene does not mean that it simply does not exist. Nevertheless, the lack of a substantial night life outside the Parisian centre is a striking feature of the *banlieue*, making it seem like one huge sink estate where there is nothing to do. Moreover, French society is too quick to take the credit for transcending inter-ethnic difference – where ethnic difference is not recognised in the first place, there is no ‘black closure’, no cultural space that white people are only permitted to cross into through an on-going process of negotiation. Hence, white and middle class French society can claim ownership of *banlieue* style, music, film, sports people etc. as if they are quintessentially French successes. The immigrant origins of those involved make their successes appear more rather than less French, as it is French universalism that transcends all differences.

Chapter 3

Supplementing a being-in-situation with a Void separating event

Introduction

This chapter revolves around a piece of research on the *banlieue* that I participated in. It was conducted by Mr Lazarus and his students (see Appendix 2 for the conference paper I produced). As one of my intended fieldwork sites was the role of public intellectuals and I had studied with Mr Lazarus before, I arranged an interview with him early on in my fieldwork. Later on, when I took part in his research programme, I found the way it was organised surprising because the theoretically driven piece of academic research was also part of a course for would-be professionals. In the UK, most courses for social work professionals would probably steer clear of Mr Lazarus' kind of intellectual critique. I joined in as if I was one of the students and I found it useful to be able to reflect intellectually about the *banlieue*, especially given the difficulties I was having establishing fieldwork sites. This chapter is not so much about the piece of research itself as about the reflections on theory and methodology that it provoked.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Mr Lazarus' research methodology is related to Badiou's (1988) theory. Like Žižek and Agamben, Badiou considers the possibility of rupturing universality and nation-state Politics from within. Badiou (1988:115) divides the situation into 'the native structure of presentation' and 'the State metastructure'. This doubled structure means that 'multiples' are presented in the structure and/or represented in the metastructure, they belong and/or are included. Normality is a correspondence between structure and metastructure – the cohesive, harmonious society – but for Badiou (1988:115) gaps in normality are the key to analysis: singularities that are presented but not represented and 'tumours' or State excesses that are representations generated by the metastructure, without corresponding to something that is presented in the situation. A 'singularity' belongs to the situation without being included; the State cannot count it or verify its existence (Badiou 1988:116).

Individuals, who are always to some extent outside 'normality', experience coercion because they are 'included' into society rather than just 'belonging' (Badiou 1988:124). Aspects of peoples lives that are not recognised by the State singularise them. Badiou (1988:194) gives the example of a family with a non-declared or clandestine member. The non-declared individual is neither presented nor represented but his/her family is presented but cannot be represented. Whilst the family is part of society, having a clandestine member cannot be counted by the State metastructure, hence the family becomes a 'singularity', excluded from the social norm.

Badiou's (1988) approach to belonging / inclusion is an interesting way of approaching the problem, although one look at his 550 page volume, full of mathematical / logical formulae would put most people off (being stuck in a tower-block can make you do strange things!). Badiou (1988) creates a dense and complex account of the ontological relationship between Being (in the situation, as it is) and the Event (an anomaly that splits asunder the present paradigm and founds a new subject). Mr Lazarus draws on Badiou, creating a methodology that is not easy to comprehend. The 'singularity' is one of Lazarus' (1996:88) central categories. His methodology aims to elucidate the interior intellectuality of a singularity *in situ*. Mr Lazarus' mantra – "People think!" – refers to the thinking work that people do, which cannot be counted by the State because it comes out of a singularity. Like Žižek, Lazarus (1996:89) reminds us that Politics proper comes from the place that undermines objective universalism. For Lazarus, this place is the singularity and he claims that only when objective universalism is ruptured by the singularity does Politics proper, which is 'rare and sequential' (Lazarus 1996:89), emerge. He cites certain periods of history – France 1792-1794, 1848-1871, Russia 1902-1917 and China 1928-1958 – as periods when Politics temporarily existed, operating from the interior of the void between States (Lazarus 1996:90). Each period corresponds to the 'work of separation' conducted by a militant-theoretician (Saint-Just, Marx and Engels, Lenin, Mao). Lazarus dismisses Politics in the 'functional and consensual' post-1968 State as operating technocratically, according to external referents such as the law and the economy. Hence, Lazarus' study of how "People think!" is tied to high revolutionary Politics.

Lazarus (1996:95) rejects the idea of a Marxist dialectic between the objective material conditions of society and forms of class consciousness, because this creates a general Political mode with reference to an objective exteriority. My conference paper (see Appendix 2) is concerned with the relationship between 'the class' and 'the group', the former being the objective set-up – a list of pupils, a room, a teaching programme, a teacher – the latter interpolating a subjective identity of 'the class'. In an early version of my paper, I called the objective set-up the 'empty group'. However, Mr Lazarus rejected the term 'empty group' because it suggests that there is some kind of *a priori* collectivity that has only to be activated by the right set of circumstances. Hence, it does not require that 'people think' for themselves, since it constructs a pre-determined objective referent explaining why and how the group unites. Mr Lazarus illustrated his position by discussing Sartre's bus queue. Sartre (1976) tells the story of a series of people, standing at a bus stop, who see so many buses go past in the opposite direction that they eventually unite, cross the road, stop a bus and force it to take them in the direction they want to go. Mr Lazarus rejected the way Sartre assumes that there is an underlying collectivity in the bus queue itself, on the grounds that, in the right set of circumstances, the people would automatically unite to pursue their common interest. Mr Lazarus insisted that this had nothing to do with the MST's research since we were researching the interiority of people's thinking, the singularity of that thinking in the particular situation in which it arises. His position is reflected in the work of Badiou who insists that the Void is the unique proper name of irrevocable non-presentation, which can only be examined *in situ* (Badiou 1988:82,87).

I will come back to the question of 'the group' in relation to the *sans-papiers* movement in the latter part of this thesis. This chapter allows me to consider the role of intellectuals and militants, whilst thinking through the theoretical and methodological problematic of studying the 'excluded non-part' or the thinking in the interiority of a singularity. I also want to show how the context of French universalism, in which research and debates take place, influences Mr Lazarus' approach in certain ways. For he rejects any consideration of ethnicity and,

although he argues that “People think!”, he sets the people who think the task of thinking without any identity, meta-theory or access to words that can express their thinking directly. They have to think in a black hole, in the singularity. The aim of Mr Lazarus’ methodology – ‘the finite inquiry’, finite because it is limited by the luck of the encounters – is to record a fragment of the being-in-situation of the situation itself, thereby practically announcing the future with this fragment of an indiscernible trajectory, which has nevertheless been spotted in the field of knowledge (Badiou 1988:435). Having discussed Mr Lazarus’ methodology, I try to compare Badiou’s and Žižek’s theoretical approaches, referring back to Lacan who influences them both.

Talking to Mr Lazarus

I visited the MST (*Maîtrise de Sciences et Techniques* – roughly equivalent to a theory and practice MA programme for would-be professionals), the title of which is ‘*Formation à la connaissance des banlieues*’ (Training in the knowledge of / acquaintance with the *banlieues*), which seemed highly relevant to my research. The secretary arranged for me to meet up with Mr Lazarus. We discussed my thesis. Mr Lazarus was slightly dismissive, pointing out that a British PhD was not really at the same level as a French *doctorat*, but he listened. I tried to explain my theoretical approach, drawing especially on Back’s (1996) concept of ‘neighbourhood nationalism’ to justify the need for an ethnography of the *cité*, as the only way to access the on-going negotiation of an area-identity that could resist media stereotypes and racist discourses. Mr Lazarus was interested enough to take down the reference for Back’s (1996) *New Ethnicities*, although he found it incredible that anyone should use ‘ethnicity’ in a positive sense.

He explained his own position and the research done by the MST. For Mr Lazarus, the theory of social classes or ‘classism’, as he terms it, is no longer of analytical use and so there is a need to understand social situations in a new way. Whilst rejecting the objectivist, demographic approach because statistics tend towards stereotyping, he wants to hold on to the term *banlieue*, despite its

pejorative connotations. It is around this term that much of the stereotyping has been constructed. Mr Lazarus considers the term *banlieue* important because it expresses the crisis of the State and of modernity during the last 20-25 years. The process of deindustrialisation coupled with the State's tendency to push workers out of Paris into *les cités dortoir* (literally estates built just for sleeping in) has created a situation in which the problem *banlieue* can be interpreted as the State's own contradiction. Areas of high unemployment that were designed to be nothing more than workers' dormitories expose the State's institutionalisation of a manufacturing-based labour market whose ongoing existence it cannot guarantee. Examples of excess police violence, such as the incidents when youths were killed by the police, which sparked off most the *banlieue* riots, are examples of the State's excess: its insistence on being represented even where it is absent¹. Hence, Mr Lazarus seemed to support or at least validate the typical youth view that "The *cité* is ours, the police shouldn't come in here," by confirming that the State is absent and wanting to research the internal logic of *banlieue* thinking.

Mr Lazarus explained that the MST – students and tutors together – conducts research into the people of the *cité*, their words and their intellectuality. His approach is based on his own theoretical position, outlined in *Anthropologie du nom* (Lazarus 1996), where he points to the need for an anthropology of the subjective singularity. This rules out the knowledge provided by the State's experts about people. It also rules out a theory of subcultures or any other form of ideological interpolation of people by the State. "People think!", – as I had heard Mr Lazarus say often enough when I sat through his course before – therefore their subjectivity has to be studied within the singularity of the situation in which they think. MST research focuses on the language and lexical repertoire of people *in situ*, in search of the interior intellectuality of the *banlieue*. The goal of the research is to add the Void separating Event to the 'being-in-situation' through an analysis of interview texts.

¹ Absent in the sense that the State's social model of labour-market integration no longer fits the *banlieue*.

According to Mr Lazarus, there are three possible kinds of discourse about an issue like the *banlieue*: firstly that which is enshrined in the laws, administrative procedures and housing policy of the State itself; secondly the meta-theories established by critiques of the State based on political-economy, socialism or urbanism; and thirdly there is(are) the point(s) of view of people themselves (“*le point de vue des gens*”, in French you cannot grammatically distinguish between the people each having their own point of view and their only having one point of view between them). Intellectuals tend to construct a critical perspective *vis à vis* the first kind of discourse, but this generates the second kind of discourse, which Mr Lazarus rejects: the meta-theories that explain people in terms of structural inequalities. He dismisses, for example, Bourdieu’s approach, as Bourdieu assumes that explanative expertise must be provided by the sociologist and explains people in terms of a socio-economic critique of capitalism. Mr Lazarus wants to focus on the thinking of people themselves, from the interior of the situation, and is therefore interested only in the third kind of discourse.

To give an example, Mr Lazarus pointed out that the State often talks about violence in the *banlieue*. This can be treated as a criminal and therefore legalistic problem or it can be explained, using metalanguage, as a symptom of socio-economic deprivation. However, youths themselves do not talk about ‘the problem of violence’, they talk about *bagarres* (scraps), which are part of their everyday lives. *Bagarres* are not a problem in themselves, except when they are ‘serious’, which means that someone was wounded or killed. Mr Lazarus’ point is that violence and *bagarres* are not just different words for the same thing, but are part of two completely different ways of thinking.

Mr Lazarus drew a little diagram to illustrate the end of ‘classism’. He drew two intersecting circles to represent the de Gaullist French State and the people, arguing that the Communist Party had occupied the intersection, ensuring some kind of dialogue between the people and the State, with the dialogue resulting in intellectual metatheories. He then drew a large circle and a small circle completely separate from each other, suggesting that they represented the State and the *banlieue* respectively. Hence, the utter separation between them

called for his own theoretical approach, of studying subjective singularities, as the absence of any dialogue also meant that no meta-theory could bridge the gap.

Returning to the MST

After discussing my research with Mr Lazarus, I read up on some of his work and looked through some of the students' research projects, but I thought that getting on with my fieldwork methodology would be more useful than spending time at the MST. As discussed in Chapter 2, however, pursuing an ethnography of the *cit * proved impossible. I had hung out with 'the lads', volunteered in several Associations and visited many more but, apart from the Association with the youth exchange project, for which I tentatively ran a few participatory sessions, I had not really found a fieldwork site where I could join in as a researcher. I felt that public meetings, visits and interviews did not constitute fieldwork.

Nicole, one of the women from the Association where I was volunteering for the homework club, also happened to be a student at the MST. She had been conducting interviews as part of the MST's research. Nicole's focus seemed to be on rules, law and justice: in her first year she had looked at what school pupils thought of rules, either the institution's or their own; and in her second year she was writing up interviews she had conducted on what youths thought of prison. I had bumped into one of her interviewees whilst hanging around with the lads; he spoke quite highly of her and she seemed to be successfully researching the *cit *, where I had found it difficult to bridge the gap between a bit of hanging around and ethnographical research (her interviewee was the same person who, on the basis of our conversation, concluded that I was just on a scam).

Nicole had found it difficult to convince Mr Lazarus and the MST tutors of the value of her themes. I think this is basically because she was asking interviewees what they thought of the institutions, school or prison, whereas Mr

Lazarus' approach, dismissing the discourse of the State, insists on the singularity of situational thinking and is only interested in the interiority of people's thinking as something radically discontinuous with the State. Mr Lazarus' approach could not be accused of assuming that 'the others' create their own embryonic State, which could unproblematically fit with indirect rule, as did the structural-functionalists. Nevertheless, he seems to create an exoticised version of 'the others', whose thinking is assumed to be something completely different, self-generating and independent of the State that is trying to rule over them.

Despite Nicole's disagreements with Mr Lazarus, she defended the method of interviewing used at the MST, pointing out that the use of open questions was aimed at allowing people to express their own thinking rather than forcing them to fit into the pre-set terms of normal questionnaires. The fact that interviews were not recorded and then transcribed was also interesting, in the sense that the interviewer's role seemed to be to enable the interviewee to produce a written text. Interviewees had the chance to listen back to their own answers and change round or add things, so that the interviewer was not just recording what came out of the horse's mouth, as it were, but was encouraging the interviewee to turn their everyday thinking into something more intellectually coherent.

Balso, one of Mr Lazarus' colleagues, writing about the *sans-papiers* movement, makes a comment that could almost be applied to the interview texts produced and cited in Mr Lazarus' research methodology:

"A clarification is necessary on the subject of the status of the quotations. They are not witness statements. They are public political declarations – leaflets or positions taken in meetings or on demonstrations. They include, therefore, their own argumentation and their own thinking, formulated from the interior of the political situation of fighting for papers and for rights." (Balso 2001:198)

Although, for example, the set of interviews being researched at the MST that year revolved around the teachers' thinking in the school and classroom situation, rather than in an explicit Political struggle, Mr Lazarus' methodology treats the interviewees' utterances like Political statements. Once a batch of

interview texts has been produced, students at the MST are divided into groups with each group focussing on keywords and dissecting the utterances of the interviewees. The groups look for anomalous quotes that do not fit with official thinking. It is as if the interviewees utterances come from politicians speaking in a media spotlight. Like tabloid journalists, the groups consume the texts, decontextualising quotes and examining the minutiae of an interviewee's choice of words to infer a scandalous story based on a reality dreamt up to explain the suspicious implication in the anomalous quote.

I decided to go back to the MST, and the secretary encouraged me to join the students who were researching what teachers had to say about schools and pupils. The first week of the course involved a general discussion about current reforms in education. Mr Lazarus was critical of politicians who wanted to keep the Republican model of the same school for everyone but adapt it to the heterogeneous population: 'the infamous social mixture'. This kind of reform, Mr Lazarus argued, did not involve critiquing the role of education or, for example, recognising the importance of the Algerian War. It meant essentialising cultural difference, creating a reactionary ethnic classification and justifying racist treatment of pupils of immigrant origin. He used this argument to rule out any discussion of ethnicity within our research project.

We then focussed on particular interviews each week. Mr Lazarus performed his own form of textual analysis, linking this up to his theoretical approach and thereby instructing us as to what we should be looking for in our small-group investigations. I found his approach infuriating at times; it was hard to follow and therefore hard to know what he wanted from us. It also seemed to be arbitrary and based on his own personal preferences, making Mr Lazarus the only person who knew how his methodology worked.

In one of the interviews, the teacher talks about two different worlds coming together in school, and the osmosis required between teacher and pupils. Mr Lazarus was particularly interested in this. He argued, 'the two' is nothing other than the shattering of the One and therefore symptomatic of the crisis of the State. For the teacher in this quote, the school was not fulfilling its role and it

was only the possibility of osmosis between her and 'the kids' (with the informality indicating a subjective relationship) in the classroom that could overcome the gulf between the two worlds. Mr Lazarus used this interview to emphasise the crisis of the State, pointing to the resulting uniqueness and unpredictability of each class for each teacher, in their struggle to do their job. It seemed to me that the two different worlds could also imply a 'racially' marked difference especially as the teacher complained of there being too many different *ethnies* (ethnic groups) in one class. This suggestion was ignored of course.

In another text, the teacher, evidently experienced, nevertheless states that she does not know how to bring insolence under control. Mr Lazarus also saw this as expressing a social gulf between teacher and pupils. The teacher could not counter the insolence because it went beyond her comprehension, demonstrating that there were no shared values with which to bring pupils under control. Various teachers spoke of a 'before' and 'after', in which they stated that teaching conditions had changed considerably. Relating this to Bloch's (1997/1993) discussion of how men belong more to their epochs than to their fathers, Mr Lazarus argued that these kinds of statements say little about what really happened in the past. Their significance is that they point to the present-day crisis of the education system and the model of citizenship on which it is based. He suggested a parallel crisis in the categories 'work' and 'worker', arguing that the fact that there are *sans-papiers* who *cotise* (pay tax and national insurance) whilst using false papers renders the State's version of these categories meaningless. In other words, the fact that *sans-papiers* pay taxes without having social rights renders the established relationship between State and 'workers' redundant, leaving 'worker' as an anomalous singularity within State discourse. I struggled to relate Mr Lazarus' 'shattering of the One', crisis of the State, unbridgeable gulf, lack of shared values, crisis in citizenship and crisis of 'work' back to his little diagram of two non-intersecting circles representing the State and the contradictory left-over of the *cités dortoirs*.

During the second part of the afternoon at the MST, we split up into small research groups. In ours, we discussed those questions that related to the

teachers' thinking about the word 'class'. The group tutor, presented us with a list of quotations to think about. We then pulled out various themes that seemed to be emerging from our readings of the interviews and divided these amongst the group, before writing up these themes for presentation at the conference. There were four other major themes that other groups of students were working on: *Collège*, pupil, teacher, work. Each was related to a different section of interview questions, which the students had previously used for the interviews (I had not been involved in the interview process itself). In analysing our themes, we were not limited to our own section of questions but, with 90 interviews to sift through, it was impossible to read everything and most students were happy to just deal with their allocated chunks. This contributed to the decontextualisation of the citations, made it difficult to do justice to the overall intellectuality of any particular teacher, and made it easy to use quotes in ways that did not seem to correspond to their intended meaning.

In our group, we divided the major theme 'class' into four minor themes: rules, authority, ambience and the group. In ones and twos, we prepared papers for the coming conference (I have translated my paper in Appendix 2). The common element was the teacher's attempt to subjectively make the class situation workable. There were two kinds of rules: the institution's rules, and rules for living together. The teacher's authority was based on personal presence rather than official status. The ambience of the class was critical to whether the class worked or not. 'The group' (my theme, Appendix 2) was the teacher's way of subjectivising the class, doing the extra work needed to turn the objective institutional existence of the class into a liveable, subjectively experienced relationship between teacher and pupils. In the conference, Mr Bertho also gave an introduction to our 'class' theme, focusing on the sensitive, singular and unpredictable existence of each class, as expressed in quotes from several teachers.

The conference consisted of the MST students and tutors plus teachers and other interested professionals. Mr Lazarus introduced the conference by explaining what we were doing and the MST's role in general. He argued that professionals working in the *banlieue* were not required to have technical know-

how since they were not dealing with technical questions but with people. The question that therefore arose was that of possible relationships with people, in the context of organisations that might employ MST students as professionals. The MST's first proposition to its students was that 'people think' which, Mr Lazarus insisted, was not self-evident since people were generally thought of today as consumers not as thinkers. Only experts, through formal rationality (*la science*), were reputed to be thinkers. For example, Bourdieu, armed with analytical competence, had set himself up as a mediator between, on the one hand, people and their *misère*² (poverty), and on the other hand, the State and the Government.

Mr Lazarus argued that the statement, "People think!", was not simple, because it was difficult to identify people's own way of thinking, which was absolutely other from formal rationality. He dismissed the use of external ways of explaining how people think, such as Foucault's epistemes that explain radically discontinuous modes of thinking in terms of the relationship between words and things, or Lacan's claim that the unconscious is structured like a language, drawing on linguistics to create a model of the unconscious. Mr Lazarus argued that the way 'people think' can only be studied from within their way of thinking, in other words in relation to what they themselves say about what they think. People's thinking, he argued, deploys itself by pushing at the meaning of certain words, not through direct predicates that are generated in scientific thought³. Scientific predicates require the creation of a metalanguage, whereas people's thinking manifests itself in common-sense language.

The MST's research on teachers had focussed on the key words: *Collège*, teacher, class, pupil and work. Quotations from the interviews had been gathered in relation to each of these words. Mr Lazarus insisted that the origins of each quote played no further part in the analysis. It was not important who

² The reference is to Bourdieu's (1993) *La misère du monde* translated under the title *The Weight of the World*.

³ For example, the statement "The earth revolves around the sun" is a scientific predicate, whereas Galileo's exclamation "And yet it moves!" sticks out by contradicting experienced reality without referring to the heliocentric heresy.

had said what but rather, by taking the statements to be autonomous, Mr Lazarus argued that:

“from collating the quotations, which treat the same key word in one section, we are sometimes able to say what kind of intellectuality this word opens.” (Lazarus 2001:3)

Finally, Mr Lazarus suggested that over the course of the MST’s research, one thing that they had found was that people do not think in relation to a logic of the real, a scientific knowledge of things; instead they take the situation as given and think in terms of its possibilities. In other words, rather than assuming a scientific distance from the situation, from which the expert can analyse cause and effect, people take being-in-situation for granted and think in terms of their capacity to take over the situation eventually (Lazarus 2001:3). Hence Mr Lazarus argues that people think rationally, but in a rationality of the possible: “of what is possible of people’s thought when it is deployed” (Lazarus 2001:3), in order to be able to achieve something in the situation with which they are confronted.

Away from Lazarus

I had three main objections to Lazarus’ approach. The first was his complete rejection of the significance of ‘race’, racism or ethnicity. Several teachers made direct references to the ethnic diversity of their classes to explain the difficulties of finding a common ground and fulfilling their pedagogic functions. One or two interviewees made remarks that sound racist to me, saying that the pupils or their parents “have no culture”. ‘*Culture*’ in French usage is closer to ‘civilisation’ in the English, with a strong Enlightenment implication. There were similar expressions, such as: “they are not cultivated”, “they are savage”. Mr Lazarus’ dismissal of any reference to ethnicity also seemed to me to over-look institutional racism. For example, the French system for training and employing teachers (which is also the same for the police, firemen, postmen or other public service professionals) means that new recruits are assigned to the least requested areas, where they build up points to allow them to move to the area where they want to work. The result is that schools in unpopular areas, like the

Parisian *banlieues*, tend to have a very high turnover of young, freshly trained teachers. In recognition of this problem, the Ministry of Education has recently created a special tier of better paid teachers who sign-up for 5 years in difficult areas.

Admittedly the French have not yet marketised the school system, under the guise of parental choice, but there is the same kind of spatialised segregation. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, those parents who can move out of certain areas that are unofficially 'racially' marked, or they send the children to private schools. There is an increasing number of children of immigrant origin being sent to private schools as well. Everyone seems to try to avoid the stigma of certain areas, which is tied up with socio-economic inequalities. A *Bac* (baccalaureate, school leaving certificate) is of less value from certain areas, despite supposedly being uniform. Measures have been put in place to guarantee pass rates, with the result that universities and other institutions consider that applicants from stigmatised areas have been given their *Bac* without earning it.

In the context of 'racial' segregation within the school system, reflecting, exacerbating and perhaps even functioning as a motor to geographic segregation, it seems fairly self-evident that racism and ethnicity must affect teacher-pupil relations. With a majority of young, white, middle class, French teachers, who only know the *cité* by its media image, trying to teach children from the *cité*, the majority of whom are of immigrant origin, it does not seem too surprising that teachers have problems establishing their authority and finding a common ground. However, Mr Lazarus' method involved rejecting any kind of contextualisation of the interviews, in order to work with what can be said about the utterances of the interviewees themselves. He also rejected out of hand the teachers' own references to ethnic difference because they do not correspond with Badiou's (1988:474) model of the singularity rupturing universalism with a 'Void separating event'.

I am not suggesting that ethnic difference completely explains the situation, and I am certainly not supporting any notion that the problems are the inevitable

result of biological differences. But the mere mention of 'race' or ethnicity seems to have these implications in the French context. Mr Lazarus is by no means the only actor to say "We do not think ethnicity, full stop." The teachers themselves, in their exasperation, display, on the whole, the same colour-blind incomprehension of why the children they are teaching might not identify with them as role models. Racism tends to be portrayed in France as being ignorance, prejudice and non-acceptance of the Other, which is linked to the danger of falling into *communautarisme*. Whereas universal citizenship represents an anti-racist ideal. Hence, the thought that children from the *cités* might experience school as part of the racism of the French State does not have any official or intellectual support – if anything, the children who reject teachers who come from outside the *banlieue* are considered racist.

My second objection to Lazarus' approach is also an objection to the way Badiou (1988) disproves the ontological assumption of mathematics, using formal logic, and then re-establishes an ontological position from which it would be possible to conduct an inquiry into a singularity, by means of an investigation of the utterances and key words used by actors operating in that singularity. I will come back to the theoretical aspect of this question below but, clearly, this is the basis for Lazarus' 'anthropology of the name' and his research methodology of textual analysis on de-contextualised interview quotations. Badiou convincingly disproves the ontology of mathematics (the assumption that mathematics exists as an ahistorical, non-contingent edifice), showing that, as Lacan says, 'there is no metalanguage'. Žižek argues that Lacan's 'there is no metalanguage' is not the same as the deconstructionist rejection of all meta-theorising, which is itself "the position of metalanguage in its purest form" (Žižek 1989:155). Rather than reject meta-theorising, Lacan rejects the privileged position of metalanguage. Badiou and Lazarus appear to turn Lacan's approach upside down. They reject meta-theories but attempt to perch on a philosophically empty ontological position that can traverse existing knowledge looking for a 'Void separating event'. As 'militants' they plan to supplement a being-in-situation with 'the event', thereby undermining the unity of the State.

Badiou (1988) shows that language and metalanguage are inextricably entwined in the process of disproving ontology, but he creates a meta-position out of nowhere from which to study this intertwining. The result is incredibly confusing. Lazarus says that 'people think' and that his approach is not philosophical. But Lazarus gets to decide how 'people think', and his non-philosophical approach is certainly not down-to-earth. Badiou constructs a strategically ontological position, emptied out of all philosophical content, from which to hear the truth from the being-in-situation. But he uses St Paul as the ideal example of a 'militant'. A 'militant' who appropriates the meaning of 'the event' in order to found a Church.

My third objection to Mr Lazarus' approach relates to the feedback he gave me on my conference paper (see Appendix 2). I could accept Badiou's (1988:82, 87) insistence that the Void is unique and must be studied *in situ*, which Mr Lazarus illustrated in his discussion of Sartre's bus stop. However, I could not accept from the evidence of the teachers' interviews that 'the group' was only ever the subjectification of the class by the teacher. If the notion of an empty group implies that people in the same classroom or socio-economic position will almost automatically develop group solidarity in the right circumstances, as Sartre suggests, then perhaps it is better to do away with the notion of an empty group. The idea of a 'Void separating event' is useful because it insists on the radical contingency of a rupture in universality. However, Lazarus insisted that the pupils have no 'group' of their own because, according to Badiou (1998:430), subjectification is a naming intervention. The proper name, which represents the singularity, is both 'the event' in the situation and the generic procedure that it sets in motion (Badiou 1988:431). Subjectification is this splitting in two, in St Paul's case between naming Christ's crucifixion as 'the death of God' and the creation of the Christian Church (Badiou 1988:431). As such, it is only the figure of 'the militant' who, with one foot out of the situation, can subjectify the singularity in a way that ruptures the ruling order. This may sound like the complete opposite of Žižek's claim that the abject non-part must identify with universality for the Event to occur. However, the question of who gets to name the Event, or who gets to explain how the Event gets named, seems more like petty political rivalry than theoretical debate.

In the interviews, certain teachers spoke of a 'group effect', which could be either positive or negative. In other words, there was a suggestion of groups being created, by the pupils themselves, in relation to their common experience of the class / school institution. Mr Lazarus was as dismissive of this possibility as he was of ethnicity. 'The group', he insisted, was the teacher's attempt to impose a subjectivity on the class with which the teacher could re-establish 'normal' institutional relations. I was not convinced, however, I thought the evidence showed that there was another possibility: a group formed despite the class⁴. In this case groups could form despite the institution rather than in harmony with it; 'the group' could be something other than the false event, repairing the institutional *status quo* (perhaps this is just me reserving the right to name the Event like other militant 'splitters'). I shall return to the question of group formation in relation to the *sans-papiers* movement.

Reading Badiou through Žižek

In *L'être et l'événement*, Badiou (1988) argues that the singularity of names and the 'forcing' of the language of the situation represent the chance of hitting on the event, as an opening between two different orders of being. A potential event is something hidden from the normative version of the situation, as guaranteed by the State. When subjects speak the truth of the situation, they have to distort the State's terminology, even though they are unable to spontaneously invent (as in "to boldly go") a new language with which to speak their way out of the State. From the position constructed by Badiou (1988) and Lazarus (1996), proper nouns and the 'forcing' of the language of the situation can be used to point to, to name and to establish 'the event', as a radical break

⁴ The discussion of 'the group' and 'the institutional space' here may be reminiscent of Douglas' (1970) idea of a grid-group graph. However, Douglas says nothing about the relationship between grid (rigid institutions) and group (sense of belonging). She offers a mapping of different societies onto a grid-group chart, in which grid and group are independent axes on the graph. What was at stake in my paper for the MST conference (see Appendix 2) was the relationship between grid and group. I discuss how the teachers subjectivised their classes, turning 'a list' into 'a group' as part of their attempt to create a dialogue between teacher and pupils, a dialogue that is unstable and unpredictable. A more relevant anthropological work would be Fabian's (1983) discussion of the relationship between ethnography and the common ground / coevalness of fieldwork, i.e. making an objective schema out of having been there.

in the ontological coherence of the State. The key to Badiou's (1988:115) analysis is the gap between what has been introduced (is presented) and what is represented in a situation, between what belongs in the situation and what is officially included by the State. By focussing on names and the 'forcing' of the language of the situation, Lazarus is looking for what is presented but not represented in the situation: the anomalous singularities that could be the gateway into a different order of being.

Badiou (1988:117) goes to great lengths to disprove the ontological assumption of mathematics – that there is a universal body of knowledge that has always existed – since this is comparable to the State's assumption that what is presented corresponds, without any gaps, to what is represented, suggesting a natural, normal, stable and harmonious whole. However, Badiou then pulls a very mathematical trick by creating an ontological position from which to observe breaks in the ontological coherence of the State: the staging of the event's undecidability (Badiou 1988:215). By constructing this position mathematically and logically, he sets himself up as a non-philosophical ontologist. It is a bit like a spaceship traversing a black hole. It seems to depend on an imagined position of impunity, in a dimension external to the universe, from which to observe the observable effects of the black hole in cross section and trace them back to the unobservable singularity they imply (using the wide half of a cone to represent the warped space between the event horizon and the point of no return, and then tracing that back to the unobservable apex). I find it a rather annoying approach, like when you are told in maths that there is no such thing as $\sqrt{-1}$ and then there is a whole theory of imaginary numbers based on this $\sqrt{-1}$. Nevertheless, Badiou claims to have constructed a theory that is not only capable of investigating the singularity but also of supporting the subject of the singularity of a situation, as a worm hole into another universe or order of being, which he calls 'the event'.

Žižek (1999) gives a much clearer account of Badiou's (1988) approach than I can, so I will draw on this before posing one or two questions of my own. Firstly, Žižek puts Badiou in the context of those theorists, on the whole French theorists, who were once linked to Althusser but have tried to go their own way

since the collapse of the Althusserian project. Althusser's attempt to explain ideology, as the process through which individuals 'freely' take up their positions in the dominant order, relies on Althusser himself being in a position to avoid ideological indoctrination. Žižek suggests that Althusser, before descending into mental health problems,

“was caught in the vortex of a systematic undermining and subverting of his own previous theoretical propositions.” (Žižek 1999:127)

Badiou, he argues, reverses the opposition that Althusser constructed between science and ideology. For whilst Althusser originally viewed science as the way of standing outside ideology, Badiou regards science, along with the State, as the representational reinforcement of the normative order of things. Whereas, Žižek argues, Badiou's:

“description of the Truth-Event bears an uncanny resemblance to Althusserian 'ideological interpollation'.” (Žižek 1999:128)

Being, for Badiou, is “the ontological order accessible to knowledge” (Žižek 1999:128), whereas, “in a wholly contingent, unpredictable way” (Žižek 1999:129) an Event takes place from time to time. Žižek points to the example of the French Revolution, as do Badiou and Lazarus, to show that the event emerges *ex nihilo* (Žižek 1999:130); it has no foundation in the current order of Being. Hence, the Event which founds a new order of Being is neither predictable or detectable from within the previous situation, but is drawn from the Void, the Truth, the inherent inconsistency of this situation. The subject who intervenes in the Event has to have faith in the Event (Žižek 1999:130) since the order of Being that is founded on the Event can only retrospectively construct knowledge of the Event. French history and modern 'France' itself came after the Revolution, so the 'French Revolution' founds itself as well as the French State (Žižek 1999:137). From within the French Revolution, there is no way of knowing what it means historically or of rationalising its significance in relation to an objectively existing State that has not yet come into Being.

Žižek approves of Badiou's approach to the extent that it supports the idea that “miracles do happen” (Žižek 1999:135), keeping open the possibility of radical Political change that will go beyond anything knowledge and the State can predict. However, Žižek is critical of Badiou's notion of the subject, arguing that

his idea of faith in the Event is too ideological, especially as Badiou draws on St Paul as the ultimate example of faith in the Event (Žižek 1999:141). Žižek argues, drawing on Lacan, that 'the subject' does not exist in a gap in the ontological order but is the contingency that grounds the ontological order; 'the subject' is the Void, the self-effacing 'vanishing mediator', that precedes any gesture of subjectivation (Žižek 1999:158).

"That is the difference between Lacan and Badiou: Lacan insists on the primacy of the (negative) *act* over the (positive) establishment of a 'new harmony' via the intervention of some new Master-Signifier; while for Badiou, the different facets of negativity (ethical catastrophes) are reduced to so many versions of the 'betrayal' of (infidelity to, or denial of) the positive Truth-Event." (Žižek 1999:159).

The advantage of Lacan's version of 'the subject', for Žižek, is that it recognises the importance of the moment 'between two deaths' (symbolic and real), in which 'the subject' is:

"reduced to 'less than nothing', to a formless stain, the embodiment of some unspeakable horror... trespassing the limit of 'humanity' and entering the domain which, in ancient Greek was called *ate*, 'inhuman madness'." (Žižek 1999:161)

Žižek argues that Badiou misses out on this place beyond Truth and Goodness, without which it would be impossible to embrace the Truth-Event because:

"it opens up and sustains the space for the Truth-Event, yet its excess always threatens to undermine it." (Žižek 1999:161)

It is failing to confront this 'subjective destitution' that Žižek sees as the cause of calamities like the Holocaust and Stalinism, since they were attempts "to impose the direct rule of the Truth and/or Goodness." (Žižek 1999:161)

Back to Lacan

There is no doubt that there is a significant difference between what Badiou and Lacan call 'the subject'. For Lacan the subject is 'punctual and fading', whereas for Badiou it is 'rare and sequential' (Badiou 1988:474). What Badiou is interested in is specific occurrences of 'the subject', which act as points of intersection between one paradigm and another: Events that occur in the fields of Politics, science & art, and love, and which, for those involved, change those

fields forever. For Žižek these four generics of truth⁵ are precisely what keep Badiou from reaching the monstrous thing, the core of *jouissance* in which an authentic act does intervene (Žižek 1999:167). However, Badiou states that Lacan's version of 'the subject' is limited to a structural recurrence, with which 'the subject' keeps occurring *encore* (Badiou 1988:472). Whilst Lacan decentres the Cartesian subject, Badiou argues that he remains too tied to the language model (Badiou 1999:473) and that, like Descartes, Lacan thinks that "the subject has to be held in the pure Void of its subtraction" (Badiou 1988:474). Badiou pays homage to Lacan for reminding us that there is such a thing as 'the subject', which makes a modern regime of the Truth possible, but he suggests that what Lacan is unable to do is:

"to suspend the truth radically on the supplementation of a being-in-situation by a Void separating event." (Badiou 1999:474)

With this manoeuvre, Badiou thinks he has broken out, or at least discovered a way of breaking out, of the non-revolutionary limits of language.

In effect, Badiou mirrors Foucault's objection to Lacan's subject, insofar as he constructs a way of recognising that 'the subject' is itself historically contingent. Like Lazarus, he rejects Foucault's meta-category of epistemes; instead what his theory justifies is a kind of freelance, non-State ontological position, emptied of philosophical content, from which to detect 'the subject' *in situ*. Badiou and Lazarus focus on concrete examples of paradigm-shifting events. Their approach seems strangely reminiscent of the structural-functionalist's search for 'embryonic States', albeit ones that will split the State in two rather than fit in with indirect rule.

I found Žižek's reading of Badiou somewhat misleading. Žižek takes Badiou's theory of 'fidelity to the Event' at face value, as ideological faith, when for Badiou it is the basis of a mathematically constructed operation. Even if the investigation is a way of making "the faithful procedure resemble knowledge"

⁵ Science and art count as two but both frames involve individual Events that are disseminated collectively. Love is an individual Event disseminated individually and Politics is a collective Event disseminated collectively

(Badiou 1988:365), Badiou's account of this 'faithful procedure' does not resemble becoming a believer in an already-existing faith.

According to Žižek:

"Fidelity to the Event designates the continuous effort of traversing the field of knowledge from the standpoint of Event, intervening in it, searching for the signs of Truth." (Žižek 1999:135)

However, this search for Truth sounds rather vague and heroic, almost Quixotic, unlike what Badiou actually constructs. For Badiou:

"a procedure of fidelity traverses existing knowledge, from this supernumerary point which is the name of the event." (Badiou 1988:361)

And he indicates a functional relationship between fidelity and the Event (Badiou 1988:258). Hence, he searches for Truth, very clinically, as that which creates holes in knowledge. Žižek also quotes Badiou as stating that:

"it will remain forever doubtful if there was an event at all, except for the intervenor [*l'intervenant*] who decided that he belonged to the situation." (Žižek 1999:135, Badiou 1988:229)

Hence, the reader could be left with the impression that Badiou ultimately argues for 'going native', or at least a positioned political engagement. For if 'people think' and intervention can only occur at the level of belonging, it sounds like objective distancing is impossible. However, Badiou argues that the intervenor is dependent upon the luck of finding an interruption in the law, an interruption that is not of his making and is completely independent of his belonging to the situation:

"Thus the intervenor can at the same time be held entirely accountable for the ordered consequences of the event, and be entirely incapable of boasting of having played a decisive role in the event himself. Intervention generates a discipline, it brings no originality. There are no heroes of the event." (Badiou 1988:229)

When I started reading Badiou, after reading Žižek, I expected to find a theory of belonging and intervention that, without being heroic, accepted that the intervenor loses his meta-position and gets mixed up in the Event. But Badiou does not do this. On the contrary, Badiou's notion of intervention ends up being highly elitist, with 'the militant', along the lines of St Paul (Badiou 1997), playing the significant role in both the naming of the Event and the founding of a new order of Being. Badiou proposes 'subjectivisation' as the accession of 'the two',

which are/is the intervenor in the event-site and the faithful operator (Badiou 1988:431). In other words, the act of 'subjectivisation' involves combining two positions: from the position of the habitant of the situation, intervention can only be based on belief in the Event; but from the ontological position, from which connection and disconnection with the Event can be faithfully detected, the Event exists (Badiou 1988:467). 'The militant' who takes on this role of 'the two' finds himself in a similar way to the way in which the Event finds itself. Hence St Paul's tautological self-affirmation: "I am what I am". Nevertheless, the intervenor makes the Event an Event by having one foot in the situation and one foot out of it, he does not therefore become fully engaged in the situation or mixed up in the substance of the Event itself, which comes back to Žižek's criticism, but from the opposite side. Badiou's 'procedure of fidelity' is in fact too mathematical because it operates as if it were ontologically distinct from the situation.

'Belonging to the situation' is one part of 'the two', but it does not mean anything so naive as being one of 'the people'. It means that only the investigation *in situ* of proper nouns (as singularities within the situation) and the forcing of the language of the situation (as attempts to reach the truth from within the situation), without the mediation of a metalanguage, can reveal a potential Event pushing through the surface, threatening to breach the topological limits of the situation. Badiou's position differs from that of the structural-functionalists because the ontological position he constructs stands outside the State, the colonial regime and positivist science. Badiou, as interpreting intervenor, has to place himself outside the present order of Being, in an ontological position that would be valid if the Event he is looking for came along to validate it. Like $\sqrt{-1}$, his position does not positively exist but can still be used as a place from which to do the calculations. Badiou may call this a 'faithful procedure', but he constructs this as a quasi-mathematical term, which seems to have about as much to do with faith as $\sqrt{-1}$, the 'imaginary number', has to do with flights of the imagination.

It is difficult to say whether Žižek's reading of Badiou really goes astray. For whilst Badiou does seem to avoid the monstrous thing of the Event, he seems

to do this quite deliberately, whereas Žižek sees this as a utopian error. Žižek argues ultimately that Badiou is “the anti-communitarian communitarian”, undermining the order of Being on which existing communities are based, but promoting “the ‘impossible community-to-come grounded in fidelity to the Truth-Event” (Žižek 1999:172). Clearly Badiou would not appreciate being called a ‘communitarian’ but that is not the point; the implication of Žižek’s accusation is that Badiou ultimately proposes a utopian solution based on fidelity to the Truth-Event. However, Badiou’s fidelity is a mathematical operation, not a call for a community of believers. For him, utopia and Truth are important to the Political act, which has to support itself ontologically outside the State, but Politics (*La politique*) is ‘rare and sequential’. Badiou does not call for a Truth-Event community that can do away with all existing metastructures. He criticises attempts to do away with the State altogether:

“The ambivalence of classical Marxist analysis can be summarised by a single trait: thinking that, because it is only in relation to the State that there are representational growths, the State is itself a representational growth. And as a consequence, proposing the revolutionary suppression of it [the State] as a political programme, hence of the end of representation, and the universality of simple presentation.” (Badiou 1999:125)

Badiou points to Lenin and Mao’s post-revolutionary difficulties as occasions where revolutionary events have changed Governments and even the substance of the State apparatus, but where the State, as “the reinsurance of the One” (Badiou 1988:127), does not allow itself to be attacked so easily. Like Žižek’s proposition that the abject non-part can lay claim to universality in a way which decentres universality, Badiou argues that a non-State link between the Void (abject non-part) and the excess (claim to universality) of the situation is the only form of alterity that can rupture the One of the State. Therefore, “politics is the patient look-out for the Void that informs the event” (Badiou 1988:127).

For Lacan, ‘the two’ comes from the ‘us and them’ of the two sexes; he makes one of his puns out of the French word for two: *deux*, which when written *d’eux* means ‘of them’. Hence he argues:

“Love is impotent, even if it is reciprocal, because it is unaware that it is nothing other than the desire to be One, which brings us to the impossibility of establishing an ‘of them (*d’eux*)’ relationship. The ‘of them (*d’eux*)’ relationship who? – two (*deux*) sexes.” (Lacan 1975a:12)

According to Regnault (1997:76), Lacan’s final discovery was that ‘there is no sexual relation’, which comes from the impossibility of ‘the two’ becoming One (Lacan 1975a:79).

For Lacan (1975a:132), love is an event based on the illusion that there can be a sexual relation, an illusion from which a particular interpersonal relationship swings from contingency to necessity, since that particular relationship begins because it appears to be the way to achieve the illusion, and then becomes the only way to sustain the illusion. Nevertheless, the illusion cannot be sustained, even if what would be a sexual relation leaves its traces in the speaking being (Lacan 1975a:132). According to Lacan:

“Love rarely comes true, as each of us knows, and it only lasts for a time. For what is love other than banging one’s head against a wall, since there is no sexual relation?... the chief form of love is based on the fact that we believe her. We believe her because there has never been any proof that she is not absolutely authentic. But we blind ourselves. This *believing her* serves as a stop-gap to *believing in* – something very seriously open to question. God knows where it leads you, to believe there is *One* – it can even lead you so far as to believe that there is *The* [*La*, the feminine definite article implying ‘The woman’, translator’s note], a belief which is fallacious.” (Lacan & the Ecole Freudienne 1982:170)

Love is a transforming event that swings on an impossible illusion – a dotted line, *points de suspensions* (Lacan & the Ecole Freudienne 1982:170) – but it tends to be re-enframed as a false event – ‘The woman’ – when belief in the Event becomes a way of sustaining the illusion. Love is a ‘Void separating event’. Badiou has little to say about this love-Event, as there is no detectable paradigm shift in relation to the field of love, which, for him, is limited to individual achievements individually transmitted. Badiou focusses on art & science and Politics, regarding collectively transmitted transformations as coterminous with the subject itself. Regnault, like Žižek, objects to the way Badiou takes the subject to be the subject of the Event, the rare and sequential transformation of the speaking being, as a result of the Event. Regnault argues

that Lacan's contingent effort to reveal something of the unconscious is based on an impossibility, which:

“uproots the speaking being from the natural order, and is not satisfied by just the fact that he speaks. It must again (*encore*) count itself, as one, with difficulty, because of the division of the subject, and as two, with even more (*encore plus*) difficulty, because of the non-relation.”
(Regnault 1997:76)

He dismisses Badiou's fixing of a meta-position from which to convert the subject into an Event, and reasserts Lacan's *encore* of the subject, which is always punctual and fading (an example Regnault gives of the subject is someone arriving at somebody else's front door and pulling out their own set of keys, only to realise that they do not have the right key⁶).

Regnault argues that Badiou's anti-philosophy, his ontological position emptied of philosophical content, is a misrepresentation of Lacan's anti-philosophy, which emerged in relation to the ideological struggles between Lacan, Foucault and Deleuze at the University of Vincennes (which became Paris 8) (Regnault 1997:62). Hence, Lacan's 'anti-philosophy' was meant as a riposte to Deleuze's *Anti-Oedipus* (Regnault 1997:61) and as an attack on the pedagogic pretensions of the University discourse (Regnault 1997:58). Also, Lacan refers to 'the history of ideas' (implying Foucault, no doubt), in his typically unscholarly way, as “a sad and imbecilic attempt to get round the problem” (Lacan 1974a:5). Regnault states that in its opposition to the universal pedagogy that aims at a generalised Enlightenment, psychoanalysis is concerned with “a few individuals who awaken from the general dream now and then” (Regnault 1997:58). But he insists that, for Lacan at least, who frequently drew on philosophical influences – in this singular awakening from the dream – it can be seen that:

“psychoanalysis and philosophy are lodged, in relation to unconscious thinking, under the same sign.” (Regnault 1997:77)

Both Badiou's (1988) ontological position and Žižek's (1999) attempt to rescue universalism appear to misappropriate the particular awakening. Whilst the analytic situation is specifically set up to listen to the symptom, and Lacan

⁶ Example given during a course entitled 'Le sujet de la science', 1995-96 at Paris 8.

recognises a rare potential for the subject to renew itself, there does not, however, seem to be any justification for regarding this as a model for how the social symptom might transform society. As Spivak (1988) points out, 'the subaltern cannot speak' because there is no infrastructure set up to listen. The particular circumstances in which Lacan encourages the subject to emerge involve constructing the necessary infrastructure; the Analytical Discourse cannot be taken as read (see Appendix 3 for a comparison of Žižek's and Badiou's uses of the Analytical Discourse). Calling forth the voice of the abject substance excluded by the State, as Žižek seems to do, cannot in itself turn the social symptom into something that can decentre and save Political universalism. And although Badiou and Lazarus create a methodology designed to function with 'the two' of the Analytical Discourse, they also end up hanging around waiting for abject social substance to take on a form that can be subjectivised by them.

To use a rather naff imitation of a Žižekian illustration, in the film *Back to the Future* Marty travels into the past and disrupts the meeting of his own parents. He then risks disappearing because this Event has failed to happen, so he has to re-create the Event. Badiou is 'the two' of the eccentric professor, who, split between past and present, invents the time machine and hangs around on the edge of the Event, interpreting its repercussions. Žižek is Marty, who takes the abject mishap of his parents' meeting and turns it into high romance. Between them they transform the Event into a miraculous cliché, before Marty goes back to his own future, which he finds transformed by the romantic ideal he himself has injected into the Event.

Conclusion

This chapter relates to a period of reflection about fieldwork methodology and theoretical approaches that I went through as a result of my not finding, or having my access barred to, the object of study, as targeted in my original research plan. I have discussed the research methodology of Mr Lazarus' MST, which prompted me to think through the Badiou-Žižek debate. This has thrown up several concepts and methodological issues that feature in the

following chapters, even though I did not choose to adopt Mr Lazarus' methodology.

The role of the intellectual-militant, especially in relation to French universalism, is crucial to my study of the *sans-papiers* movement. Who gets to name, to discover, to enframe or to hear the *sans-papiers* is fundamental not only to the impact they have in public space but also to the formation of a *sans-papiers* Political voice within their struggle to get papers. Another important issue is whether the *sans-papiers* are subjectivised as *sans-papiers* by the French militants alone or whether they construct some way of independently subjectivising themselves. I will examine the significance of ethnicity within the *sans-papiers* Co-ordination and the effect on the *sans-papiers* of the French militants' rejection of ethnic difference. I will also attempt to draw out what I saw as group identity / contingent cultural formation, which emerged during the occupation – a six month event in which I took part.

My role as an ethnographer was transformed by shifting my main fieldwork site from the *cit * to the *sans-papiers* movement. Whilst the *cit * is labelled as 'socially excluded', which means that it is frequently subjected to intrusive research, the *sans-papiers* Co-ordination is an explicit public-political movement in which my attentions, as a researcher, were welcomed. This does not mean that the awkwardness of studying 'excluded' people disappeared altogether, but that I had something to offer in return. I could 'pay my way' by validating and publicising the movement, as well as by contributing to 'the struggle': being present on demos, helping with advice work, mucking in with the occupation and using my research expenses to buy supplies. The *sans-papiers* Co-ordination, and my role within it, constructed a makeshift infrastructure that allowed me to do participant-observation and negotiate dialogues with *sans-papiers*.

The occupation, as an Event, created an intersection for me between the generics of truth separated by Badiou (1988:374): Politics, science & art and love. The movement was a Political struggle and, within that struggle, Nabila and I met, conducted research interviews, fell in love and decided to get

married. Our marriage was a Political *action* organised during the occupation. There were also two other high profile weddings between occupants just after the occupation, not to mention all the friendships and fictive-kinship relations that were formed between occupants. The love and politics of the occupation were inextricably linked. Although my role as a researcher was explicit during my fieldwork with the *sans-papiers*, I still found the 'scientific' project difficult to integrate with the living currents of Political activity and interpersonal relationships. I am not sure if the tangential intersection between this ethnography, which is constrained to producing an 'original contribution to knowledge', and 'the event', which was filled out by intersubjective relationships two years ago, counts.

To operationalise Lacan would require some way of implementing the Analytical Discourse outside the Analytical Situation. Towards this end, It could be argued that an ethnographer needs ethnography in the same way that lovers and Political activists need utopian illusions, as 'Void separating events' to swing on. Perhaps anthropology should enshrine Spivak's statement that 'the subaltern cannot speak' as the secret of ethnography, in the same way that Lacan enshrines the statement that 'there is no sexual relation' as the secret of psychoanalysis, which is not a secret that, once revealed, renders the whole project futile, but one which makes it clear that the only way to hear the subaltern / discourse of the Other is to construct a hearing infrastructure.

Lacan (1971) does pose the question as to what form of science could include psychoanalysis. He argues that psychoanalysis is concerned with 'the subject of science' but, rather than the unified subject assumed by Descartes, this subject is internally excluded from its object (Lacan 1971:226). On the basis of this 'subject of science', Lacan proposes that the practice of 'conjectural sciences' can be as rigorous as the 'exact sciences' but he argues that the question of whether psychoanalysis is inside or outside science cannot be resolved without "the question of the object in science as such being modified" (Lacan 1971:228). Hence, if ethnographers were to turn to Lacan, they would first need to consider what form of science and what kind of university would be capable of supporting the Analytical discourse. Not in general, since it is

impossible to guarantee, but as a possibility in particular circumstances. Whilst the debate around feminist ethnography has considered the political engagement of the ethnographer and the possibility of a rigorous but partial and positioned perspective, it has only been able to “shake up the paradigm of anthropology” (Abu-Lughod 1990:27). The goal of data collection and knowledge distribution remains the main priority of academic anthropology, with the practice of fieldwork coming a poor fourth, after the examination process and teaching / learning practice. Without radically changing the academic institution, these priorities cannot be rearranged.

Chapter 4

The *sans-papiers*: individuals and Political movement

Introduction

This chapter looks at what it means to be a *sans-papiers* in France, and locates the *sans-papiers* Co-ordination¹, which was my main fieldwork site, in its socio-political context. The term *sans-papiers* means 'without papers' and, as Mr Lazarus told me, the term is in itself a Political statement. He gave no explanation for this, however, and it was only through fieldwork and reading about the movement that I eventually understood this claim. The highly publicised occupation of the church of St Bernard in Paris by 300-400 African workers in 1996 launched the *sans-papiers* Political movement. The Collective of St Bernard challenged the term 'clandestines', the label the media had previously used for immigrants without residence rights. Their Political stand made it clear that they were not clandestine, not hiding. The movement emphasised that most of its members had lived in France for several years, despite being excluded from the French State – rejected through or lost in bureaucratic procedures. The *sans-papiers* argued that all they lacked was their papers and, against rightwing anti-immigration policies and never-ending bureaucracy, they demonstrated that they were prepared to fight Politically, in the open, for the 'Regularisation of all *sans-papiers*'. Hence, the term *sans-papiers* was introduced as a self-affirming counter-attack to the Political and bureaucratic pressure being put on recent immigrants, which constructed them as irregular and illegal clandestines.

The occupation of St Bernard created widespread sympathy and Political support for the *sans-papiers*. The backlash to the decision to evict men,

¹The occupation of St Bernard was conducted by the St Bernard Collective. The 'National Co-ordination for the struggle for the *sans-papiers*' was created to co-ordinate the movement. Area Co-ordinations were set up under the 'National Co-ordination'. Therefore, 'Co-ordination' implies an on-going organisation relating to a geographic area, whereas 'Collective' implies a finite group. In reality, the centralisation of the movement is sporadic. Collectives are often as on-going as Co-ordinations, Co-ordinations act as if they were Collectives, and independent Collectives refuse to be 'co-ordinated', except for national demos.

women, children and hunger-strikers from the church, using the riot police, played a significant part in bringing down the Government. With a rightwing government in power in 1996, the Left had united in support of the *sans-papiers* but, when the Socialists came to power in 1997, the *Circulaire Chevènement* treated each immigrant's dossier one by one (hence the slogan: "*le cas par cas, on en veut pas!*" – "Case by case, we don't want it!"), regularising only half of the *sans-papiers* who had applied. By 2001, when I became involved with the Co-ordination, the movement was somewhat in disarray, living off past glories, struggling to catch the attention of the media and unable to find enough support to confront the Socialists' betrayal of their election promises.

Initially unaware of the wider Political context and history of the movement, I became involved in the Co-ordination through my attempt to find local immigrants participating in public meetings. I had decided to go to a *sans-papiers* debate at the *Mairie*, one of several public meetings that I attended. *The sans-papiers* debate was different from other public meetings. It broke with the usual format, which involved long verbal presentations followed by question and answer sessions, like an academic seminar. Instead, this debate began with a video of *sans-papiers* describing their experiences, which was followed by some unusually brief speeches. There was a message of thanks from the *sans-papiers* to those who supported the movement and a representative of the *Mairie* expressed the commitment of the Mayor to the *sans-papiers* cause, but there was no intellectual discussion. The meeting ended with the presentation of prizes for a competition to design a logo for the Co-ordination.

Most of the people who attended the *sans-papiers* debate were not white and French, which was extremely unusual. The general ambience was unlike anything I had experienced elsewhere. I noticed that many people were busy greeting friends and the audience were laughing and cheering at the prize giving. In other words, there was a relaxed, friendly atmosphere and no one seemed to be taking the evening's proceedings too seriously. Nevertheless, some poignant experiences were recounted and speakers made serious Political statements referring to universal ideals: the Rights of Man and equality. These were used to explain why French Republican principles demanded the

regularisation of the *sans-papiers*. Speakers also talked of the slavery of the informal labour market. One person pointed out that, whilst colonial subjects who had fought for France had been deemed 'French', their immigrant descendants were unjustly left without papers. Several people noted the scandalous betrayal of the movement by the Socialist Government. A short speech on 'International Solidarity', by a Malian man from a nearby workers' foyer, was unlike any argument I had heard in the UK. He described working as a *clandestin*, then getting papers and working legitimately, whilst all the time sending money back to his family and to his village for projects such as hospitals and schools. This kind of international solidarity is usually demonised as 'economic migration' in the UK and rarely, if ever, announced politically in public space.

The meeting seemed to bring out the radical possibilities of French universalism and, at the same time, actively involve immigrants. Initially I thought the *sans-papiers* movement was outside my research remit, since 'social exclusion', as a Government policy, involves initiatives aimed at disadvantaged residents, whereas the *sans-papiers*, by definition, are excluded from citizenship and official residence. Subsequently, I decided to focus on the universalism of French citizenship, especially in the way it discounted parts of immigrants' lives. The *sans-papiers* movement appeared to be part of the submerged connections between the *banlieue* and the various *bleds* (home countries) of the local population. The fact that I had found a meeting that reflected the ethnic make-up of the local population made it relevant to my research. The majority of the Co-ordination were from North or West Africa, and therefore shared their country of origin with large communities of officially recognised residents. Most of the *sans-papiers* came from ex-French colonies, spoke French and had family and friends who were well established in the local area.

Sans-papiers face difficulties that do not affect legal residents. Without papers it is officially impossible to find somewhere to live, to have a job or to claim social security benefits. In France, everyone is legally obliged to carry identity papers and to produce them if stopped in the street by police. Official papers are also much more frequently required than in the UK; for example renting

somewhere to live requires a long list of papers. Nevertheless, the *sans-papiers*' difficulties were shared, to a lesser degree, by many official residents. All Third Country Nationals have to renew their residence periodically, in many cases annually. This involves three or four visits to the Prefecture, which, when spread out over a year, means that the problem of keeping their residence up to date is a constant concern. Even those who have been resident for most of their lives can become *sans-papiers* if they fail to renew their ten year cards.

In the context of creeping flexibilisation, the informal economy and the stigmatisation of the *banlieue*, the *sans-papiers* are much less 'abnormal' than a stark contrast between ideal French citizens and 'undocumented migrants' might suggest. As suggested in Chapter 2, official French citizens in the *banlieue* also have a "propensity to turn into denizens" (Agamben 1996:163). Those that identify with their ethnic communities are not accepted as citizens; unintegrated youths are seen as problematic; Political apathy signals a general lack of engagement with French citizenship; and those with criminal records actually lose their right to vote. The *sans-papiers* Co-ordination involved the most direct interaction between French public space and immigrants that I experienced. Only something as drastic as being without papers seemed to draw immigrants into the French style of meetings, which required cultural competence and affinities that functioned in an exclusionary way. The Co-ordination was by no means immune to the kind of teacher-pupil relationship between French militants and immigrants observed by Grillo (1985), which I shall discuss in the next two chapters.

Two months after the public debate, I decided to visit the *sans-papiers* Co-ordination's HQ, where people welcomed me by asking if I was a journalist, in a way that implied that they wanted their issue studied and publicised. Hence, my role as a researcher was much more easily negotiated here than elsewhere. At the Co-ordination I sometimes felt uncomfortable or on the outside and, being critical of some aspects of the organisation, my observer role could make my support for the Co-ordination seem ambiguous. However, that initial "You're in!" as I got dragged along to my first *action*, never left me. Whilst I did encounter some suspicion or hostility, I was at least valued as another body on the demos,

as well as someone who might eventually publicise the *sans-papiers* movement. The first day I visited the Co-ordination I was invited to go through to the kitchen where it must have been Lila who offered me mint tea or coffee. I started going on demos and going to meetings regularly. When the occupation began three months later, the Co-ordination took over my life.

This chapter introduces the *sans-papiers* movement and the Co-ordination, whilst the next chapter will give an account of how political tensions were played out in the Co-ordination. Chapter 6 will discuss the intersubjective life of the Co-ordination, especially during the six month occupation of the old *Gendarmerie*. It will also consider the significance of ethnicity within a struggle enframed by French universalism and analyse the occupation in terms of cross-cultural 'group solidarity'.

This chapter considers the different approaches of six writers who have commented on the *sans-papiers* movement, positioning these approaches in relation to Žižek's (1999) analysis of universality and Agamben's (1996) concept of a 'no man's land' of denizenship. The different approaches of Cissé (1999) and Balso (2001) are of particular interest because Cissé underlines the transnational aspect of the *sans-papiers* situation whereas Balso insists, *à la* Lazarus, that the *sans-papiers* are created as a singularity in the interiority of the State. After looking at the literature written about *the sans-papiers*, I introduce my main fieldwork site: the occupation. In the following section, I relate the personal accounts of several *sans-papiers* interviewed in the context of this occupation. I highlight the general socio-economic context, as well as the Kafkaesque bureaucracy experienced by the *sans-papiers*, especially in relation to transnational connections and the internal contradictions of being a *sans-papiers* in France. In the final section, I give an account of the demonstration at which the Co-ordination received the Prefecture's first response to the occupants' dossiers.

Re-reading the *sans-papiers* event

Fassin's (2001) article 'The biopolitics of otherness: Undocumented foreigners and racial discrimination in French public debate' discusses the impact of the *sans-papiers* movement. Fassin argues that the "eruption" of the *sans-papiers* movement undermined the stereotype of 'illegal workers' (Fassin 2001:3). The *sans-papiers*, many of whom had been in France for a long time, often with strong local family connections, had become 'clandestine' for a variety of understandable reasons. Their situations had often been created or exacerbated by the complexities and increasing restrictions of French bureaucracy. When the *sans-papiers* were presented in this light, Fassin suggests that:

"this hitherto distant and illegitimate 'Other' suddenly appeared to be humanly close and socially acceptable." (Fassin 2001:3)

After mentioning this vague sense of the French viewing public feeling humanly close to the *sans-papiers*, Fassin discusses the increasing significance of the 'suffering body', as, proportionately, residence status is increasingly granted on the grounds of the minimal humanitarian consideration of health and illness (Fassin 2001:3). Fassin discusses changes in the criteria for legitimising immigration, which follow a shift away from the post-war demand for regularised immigrant labour (Fassin 2001:5). He shows that a recent trend has seen more people claiming leave to remain because of illness, whilst asylum claims have diminished because they have become too difficult to win (Fassin 2001:4). Fassin makes the point that an illness is easier to prove in a court of law than an asylum claim (Fassin 2001:4). Establishing an illness depends on an expert medical examination of the body, whereas establishing an asylum claim in France has come to depend on providing a piece of documentary evidence, which proves that an individual's life is personally threatened in their country of origin. Of course, such documentary evidence is hard to come by for people who are fleeing the authorities in their country.

Fassin points out the precariousness of residence status when it is based on a humanitarian recognition of an immigrant's illness; if individuals are given leave to

remain in order to receive medical care, their residence status must be renewed every three to twelve months (Fassin 2001:4). Fassin shows that undocumented foreigners are thereby reduced to 'suffering bodies' soliciting compassion (Fassin 2001:5). His account of the increasing significance of the 'suffering body', as an officially recognised category for regularisation, is interesting and valid. However, he slips from an "eruption" in public space to the 'suffering body' without commenting on or analysing the *sans-papiers* as a Political movement. Fassin's focus on humanitarian regularisations due to ill health seems to tie in with Agamben's discussion of medicine and Politics, in which Agamben suggests that doctors' expertise has increasingly given them the right and the duty to make decisions in the "no-man's land of sovereignty" (Agamben 1998:143, 159). Both Fassin and Agamben propose versions of 'biopolitics' to explain the significance of the body or 'bare life', but Fassin's version leaves French citizenship intact, whereas Agamben argues that the appearance of bare life, stripped of citizenship, exposes the very contradictions on which citizenship is based. Insofar as the *sans-papiers* movement projects non-citizens into public-political space, it does seem to negate nation-based citizenship. Fassin remains silent about the *sans-papiers* movement itself, whilst arguing that French immigration politics can be read less pessimistically, as the 'suffering' body provides a minimalist but universal criteria for recognising the rights of undocumented foreigners (Fassin 2001:6).

Dubois (2000) discusses the *sans-papiers* movement in relation to citizenship, but in a way that is also optimistic about the adaptive powers of French universalism. He makes an interesting three-way comparison between representations of African culture in the bicentennial celebrations of the French Revolution, the participation of slaves in the French Revolution itself, and the *sans-papiers* movement. He criticises the "exoticizing and sexist gaze" with which African culture was showcased in 1989, with topless female drummers and African men dressed in colonial uniforms:

"topped by six Senegalese women in blue, white and red gowns – the clearest and most striking representation of the French tricolour in the parade." (Dubois 2000:19)

Nevertheless, Dubois applauds the parade as an attempt to redefine citizenship by including different communities. He tries to reinforce this point by arguing that Africa and the Caribbean are not only present in France today but were fundamental to creation of the Republic (Dubois 2000:20). He argues that developments in citizenship in the Antilles outran the Political imagination of the metropole during the French Revolution itself, with slave insurgents and Republican officials forming an alliance against white planters who were looking to hand the colonies over to the English (Dubois 2000:22). Dubois points out that the part played by black slaves in the French Revolution was forgotten during the period of imperial expansion in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, when white France was portrayed as the sole origin of “the universalist language of rights” (Dubois 2000:23). A process of back-tracking on non-white universalism began during the Revolution itself, as French *philosophes* and administrators suggested that ‘black citizens’ were not ready for universal rights. Condorcet argued that slaves were “incapable of fulfilling the duties of free men” because they had been corrupted by the barbarity of their owners (Condorcet quoted in Dubois 2000:25). Slavery was eventually re-established because “emancipation had taken place too quickly” (Dubois 2000:25). Following the desertion of the sugar plantations by emancipated slaves, one abolitionist administrator forced ‘black citizens’ back to work in the sugar cane fields, arguing that:

“it is to be hoped that careful and severe measures will make them feel the price of Liberty.” (Dubois 2000:26)

Dubois’ (2000) account of the early history of French universalism undermines the Frenchness of French universalism but, unlike Žižek and Agamben, he uses this to reaffirm French universalism. Dubois uses black images to symbolise a French dream of integration, even if he does this more subtly than the grotesque parade he describes. By arguing that slave insurgents ‘universalised’ the idea of rights (Dubois 2000:22), he seems to give universalism a new founding myth, and to argue that it would really work if only it were universal. He condemns colonialist violence as an elitist form of citizenship:

“This complex of inclusion and exclusion, and of the deferral of the application of universal ideas, is the very ‘Republican racism’ which

continues to haunt the contemporary discussion around immigration in France.” (Dubois 2000:27)

Dubois represents the *sans-papiers* movement not as a challenge to French universalism but as the fulfilment of it. He holds up “a Republican godparenting ceremony” in which each *sans-papiers* was presented to the mayor, accompanied by two French citizens, wishing to become the *sans-papiers*’ godparents. This event included African and Haitian music: one of a series of demonstrations that displayed the origins of the *sans-papiers* demonstrators, successfully asserting “cultural particularities in the pursuit of universalist principles” (Dubois 2000:28). In this way, Dubois suggests that a true universalism is emerging in France. He hails the liberalised laws and regularisations of the “new Socialist government elected in the Spring of 1997” as important Political changes (Dubois 2000:29). And he celebrates the French World Cup winning football team as *la République métissée* (‘half-caste’ or ‘multicoloured’) (Dubois 2000:29).

Dubois’ account of slave insurgents protecting the Revolution points to an uncanny period of French history. However, the foreclosure of black citizenship may be an even more fundamental part of French universalism than Dubois is prepared to consider. Žižek’s reading of Hegel’s statement that ‘substance is subject’ (the substance of universality is never absolute but, being subject, it is split and finite, Žižek 1999:89) would suggest that colonial history is the ‘anamorphic stain’ constituting the subject of French universalism. According to Žižek, the universal is inherently divisive, splitting its content between the particular that claims to embody it directly and all ‘other’ content, excluded as merely particular (Žižek 1999:101). The particular content embodying the concrete universal cannot be dismissed as a deferral of universal ideas, since:

“true universality is actualized in the series of concrete determinations perceived by the abstract point of view of Understanding as the obstacle to the full realization of the Universal.” (Žižek 1999:91)

Dubois claims that colonial history is the cause of the crisis in citizenship and national identity, but he argues that studying this history can rescue universal citizenship (Dubois 2000:30). His approach seems to accommodate the *sans-papiers* movement and the French football team all-too-easily into the myth of

Republican universalism. Back, Crabbe & Solomos (1998) discuss the surge of enthusiasm for French 'multiculturalism' in the wake of the diverse origins of the World Cup winning team and point out that Le Pen could still claim it as a quintessentially French victory (Back, Crabbe & Solomos 1998:31). As they suggest, the multi-'racial' French team was the embodiment of the myth of assimilation, "of national transcendence and neo-colonial accommodation" (Back, Crabbe & Solomos 1998:33).

Siméant takes a very different approach to Dubois, arguing that the *sans-papiers* movement is an insignificant anomaly in French public space. She points to the peculiar position of those Politically mobilising for 'papers'. Those in irregular situations are not only excluded from judicial and public space but are outside all legal categories, without the right to be there or, drawing on Arendt, without the 'right to have rights' (Siméant 1998:23). To explain this improbable mobilisation, Siméant builds up a picture of '*sans-papiers* entrepreneurs', by which she means foreign students or Political activists, "the least irregular of the irregulars" (Siméant 1998:433), as she puts it, interacting with certain kinds of French militants. She argues that the hunger strike strategy operates with limited success, creating an apolitical demand for humanitarian intervention from the unequal co-operation between *sans-papiers*, '*sans-papiers* entrepreneurs' and a marginal set of French militants (Siméant 1998:261).

For the most part, Siméant argues that support for *sans-papiers* movements oscillates between obscure marginality and fashionable Political *avant-gardism*, without usually reaching a larger public (Siméant 1998:28). She describes the mobilisations of 'irregulars' as anomalous for three reasons. Firstly, they are heretical (Siméant 1998:26), since their actors refuse the frontiers imposed by the nation-state. Secondly, they are *misérabiliste* (focussing on poverty, misery etc, i.e. drawing on charitable sympathy rather than Political solidarity), since they depend on the humanitarian sympathy that can be generated for those risking their lives through hunger strikes. And thirdly, they are nearly exclusively the affair of the non-parliamentary Left, since supporting the cause of illegal immigrants would be, on the whole, electoral suicide. Hence, Siméant

sees *sans-papiers* movements as heretical and marginal to French Political space, but capable of limited success through *misérabiliste*, apolitical, humanitarian appeals for sympathy.

However, Siméant recognises that the *sans-papiers* movement suddenly became the focus of wider leftwing public opinion in 1996. She argues that this was in reaction to: repressive 'Vichy-ist' laws² introduced by the rightwing government; the physical expulsion of the *sans-papiers* from St Bernard; and the electoral progress of the *Front National* (Siméant 1998:19). According to her thesis, the marginality of the *sans-papiers* was temporarily overturned through a popularised avant-garde presentation of their cause for wider leftwing public opinion, which, in turn, latched onto the movement as an opportunity to attack an already unpopular rightwing government (Siméant 1998:177).

Siméant insists, therefore, on the essential marginality of the *sans-papiers* cause, maintaining that there is and has been a Political consensus against 'clandestine immigration' from the seventies onwards, regardless of the events of St Bernard (Siméant 1998:177).

Siméant argues that the PS (Socialist Party) remained reserved throughout the *sans-papiers* mobilisation. She points out that since the 1980s the PS had counted on about one in four of those voting FN (*Front National*) in the first round switching their vote to the PS in the second round: a part of the popular electorate they were keen to recapture (Siméant 1998:218). Nevertheless, the PS eventually called for the repeal of legal sanctions on 'Lodging Certificates' (see footnote 2), joined the demonstrations in March 1997, and promised in the end to scrap the Debré and Pasqua anti-immigration laws. After their victory in June 1997, the Socialist government proclaimed a return to a principle of nationality based on presence in France and they introduced the *Circulaire*

² A group of young film artists put together a petition defying the threat of legal sanctions against those failing to register the names of foreigners lodging with them. Siméant argues that this petition attracted popular support because the idea of 'Lodging Certificates' has a Vichy-ist connotation. Hence, those protesting against it were not so much in favour of the regularisation of the *sans-papiers* as they were against forms, 'Lodging Certificates' and turning immigrants' hosts into police informers (Siméant 1998:212).

Chevènement without actually abolishing anti-immigration laws³. The *Circulaire Chevènement* was certainly not an acceptance of “*Papiers pour tous!*”, and Chevènement quickly proclaimed that the *Circulaire* would be “generous but firm” (Siméant 1998:218).

According to Siméant, the *sans-papiers*’ cause quickly returned to its marginal position with the Left in power. She cites an article by a leftwing intellectual opposed to the “multiculturalist, relativist, or antiracist” Left, denouncing the ‘hysteria’ of the first petition (Siméant 1998:219). A dismissive scepticism towards the movement emerged after the election, with moderate intellectuals opposing a new petition that directly demanded the regularisation of the *sans-papiers* rejected by the *Circulaire Chevènement* (Siméant 1998:219). Instead of a rightwing government denouncing the “intellectual Parisian Left, disconnected from reality” (Siméant 1998:212), it was the turn of the moderate Left to denounce the ‘angelic’ extreme Left for playing into the hands of the FN (Siméant 1998:220). This time the *sans-papiers* movement was unable to respond as the favourable conjunction of an unpopular rightwing government, an appeal to anti-Vichyist sentiments and the spectacle of hunger strikes with CRS expulsions from St Bernard had passed.

Siméant’s account of the *sans-papiers* movement is based on a detailed piece of research, whereas Fassin and Dubois both use the media impact of the movement as a point of reference, without making the movement itself the main focus of their research. Whilst Fassin and Dubois see the relationship between the *sans-papiers* movement and French universalism as mutually beneficial, Siméant dismisses the movement as a heretical anomaly. Nevertheless, I would argue that Siméant, in Žižek’s (1999) terms, actually appreciates the significance of the *sans-papiers* movement more than Fassin and Dubois, by at least recognising that it as an anomaly. For, if anomalies cannot be dismissed as irrelevant, they threaten to challenge the whole paradigm. They cannot be accommodated into the existing model of French Republican universalism. I

³ The Debré and Pasqua laws had abolished the previous system that automatically entitled children born in France to French nationality even if they had non-French parents. Instead, individuals were offered the option of claiming French nationality when they reached adulthood, which meant that their parents could be denied residence status in the meantime, not being parents of French children.

will come back to Siméant's study of the *sans-papiers* in the next chapter, since she makes a detailed study of how the movement operates.

Terray (1999) analyses the existence of 'foreign workers without official residence', in relation to globalisation and flexibilisation, rather than studying the *sans-papiers* Political movement. He argues that the French state rejects the *sans-papiers* individually but tolerates their existence as a pool of labour (Terray 1999:1). Unlike the black market labour of official residents, *sans-papiers* have no access to state benefits or legal employment (Terray 1999:1). They are therefore forced to work long hours, with no employment, sickness or unemployment rights. Being illegal, they are constantly at the mercy of employers, landlords, the police and the administration (Terray 1999:4). Whilst the *sans-papiers* movement has received some Trade Union support, and individuals can obtain Union help in the regularisation process, the Unions have never defended the *sans-papiers* as workers (Terray 1999:4). *Sans-papiers* can only join Unions as 'unemployed', which, as Terray points out, is somewhat paradoxical considering that many of them work 11-14 hours per day (Terray 1999:4).

Terray argues that 'foreign workers without official residence' represent a form of 'local delocalisation' (Terray 1999:3) sanctioned by the State. Delocalisation is a way of increasing flexibility, using cheaper labour and reducing social costs. It has some disadvantages however: the state GNP gains nothing from salaries earned abroad; long-distance trade incurs its own costs; and only manufacturing industries can be relocated to other parts of the world (Terray 1999:2). A *sans-papiers*, on the other hand, contributes to the national economy, even with a reduced salary and no direct taxes. They are cheap to employ and do not cost anything in terms of standard social welfare (Terray 1999:3). This arrangement seems to suit both the employers and the state; despite official claims, little is done to suppress this sector of the economy (Terray 1999:5). Very few employers have been prosecuted and, of those that have been convicted, only a quarter have gone to prison, the rest only receiving the equivalent of £2,000 fines (Terray 1999:6). Employers are immune to prosecution on the whole because they only employ *sans-papiers* through an

intermediary, and it is usually impossible to prove that the main employer was aware of any irregularities (Terray 1999:6). Hence, workplace inspections only usually hit the workers and the intermediaries. The *sans-papiers* workers are taken to detention centres, have to appear in court and are then deported (Terray 1999:6).

New laws aimed at increasing the state's power to prevent the employment of *sans-papiers* were proposed in 1997 but those measures aimed at the employers – powers to prosecute and the automatic withdrawal of public contracts from offending businesses – were withdrawn, after lobbying from the building trade (Terray 1999:7). The only new measure that did reach the statute books allows the police to enter the workplace on their own, without Department of Employment inspectors, including workplaces that are also workers' homes. Thus the *sans-papiers* were again the main losers.

Terray concludes that the Socialist government's refusal to regularise all the *sans-papiers*, especially unskilled workers, represents a gift to private business (Terray 1999:8). Economists tend to criticise the cost of labour in France – 'the rigidity of the labour market' – especially in relation to the minimum wage. Hence, Terray suggests that it is convenient for French society to create a pool of 'foreign workers without official residence' to keep up with global flexibilisation. The workers themselves suffer from deportations, of which there are 10,000-12,000 per year (Terray 1999:8). Nevertheless, about 300,000 *sans-papiers* continue to live in total insecurity, and, as an entire population, the Government neither can nor wants to deport them (Terray 1999:8). Following the *Circulaire Chèvenement*, Terray reports that workers who had been regularised had found that, to keep their jobs and get proper payslips, they had to do undeclared, unpaid overtime, whilst paying their national security contributions out of their own pockets. Otherwise their employers threatened to replace them with other *sans-papiers*. Members of Terray's Collective declared:

"We are happy to have our papers because it's security, it's what gives us access to social protection etc. Having said that, economically speaking, our situation has actually deteriorated from what it was when we were *sans-papiers*." (Terray 1999:9)

Balso (2001) applies Lazarus' approach to the *sans-papiers* movement.

Entitling her article 'At the heart of the heart of our world', she argues that what is at stake in the *sans-papiers* movement is the demand that the State should recognise that every member of society counts and:

“recognise in the interiority of the nation-state the figure of the worker, including *sans-papiers* workers.” (Balso 2001:197)

She explains that the name of her organisation – 'The Assembly' – expresses two singularities: firstly that it unites collectives of *sans-papiers* workers that have been created in the workers' foyers in the Parisian region; secondly that the organisation refuses the Political role of *soutiens* (militant French 'helpers' who often dominate their collectives) (Balso 2001:197). Balso claims that the *sans-papiers* workers and the militants of 'The Assembly' discuss, reflect on and make decisions together, and then do what they have decided to do together.⁴

Balso makes six statements or 'theses':

1. “The situation of the *sans-papiers* is an interior political question. It is not a question of frontiers, which are in their right place. How they got here, that's their business”. (Balso 2001:198)
2. The *Circulaire Chèvenement* created 'official *sans-papiers*' by setting up a directory of *sans-papiers* and then dividing them into those that can be regularised and those that cannot, with the latter being mainly young people of working age who fall into the category of 'single people without family responsibilities'. Hence, a disproportionate number of those rejected were workers in construction, catering, cleaning, those temping in factories, seasonal agriculture etc, and they were often living in workers' foyers. (Balso 2001:199)
3. “The regularisation of the *sans-papiers*, that's a test of real democracy.” The formal rights of voting, protesting, meeting etc. are inadequate unless the rights of ordinary people are recognised, rights that are formulated in relation to “people as they are, in the situation in which they find themselves, and according to what they think of their situation and what they say about it publicly”. (Balso 2001:201)
4. “Any state policy based on the word 'immigration' and 'integration' is an anti-worker policy and a racist policy.” (Balso 2001:203)
5. “To say that the question of the *sans-papiers* is an internal political question and that the people who are workers here must have rights, is also to say

⁴ In relation to this claim, it is worth bearing in mind the discussion of Lazarus' statement “People think!” and Badiou's concept of the militant in the last chapter, where I showed that in their methodology the intellectual-militant is actually pivotal to both Politics and showing how 'people think'. Without having direct experience of Balso's organisation, I am not sure whether to take her egalitarian claims at face value or not.

that the decision to regularise is not, first and foremost, about legislation, but depends upon political will.” (Balso 2001:204)

6. “A completely different policy / political system is possible – based on the recognition of the rights of foreign workers. If the French government persists in denying these rights, the debate has to be opened up at the European level: on the necessity of a positive right, a right that protects these workers – and no longer a negative right uniquely founded upon repression, exclusion and deportation.” (Balso 2001:205)

Balso’s approach to the *sans-papiers* movement works with the Žižek-Agamben framework. Like Lazarus, Balso rejects the relevance of immigrants’ origins, insisting that the *sans-papiers* must be regarded as foreign workers internally excluded by the French state. By insisting on posing the *sans-papiers* question inside French universalism, Balso challenges the capitalist State to acknowledge its own symptom. Insofar as ‘the market’, by commodifying labour, reduces the worker to nothing, the ‘bare life’ of the worker becomes the essence of ‘man’, “being stripped of everything” (Lacan 1975b:106). The *Cirulaire Chevènement*’s creation of an official category of non-regularised *sans-papiers* institutionalises this ‘bare life’. Balso’s version of the *sans-papiers* movement suggests a contradictory juxtaposition of the State’s ‘Rights of Man’ discourse and the *sans-papiers* worker, as ‘bare life’ without the ‘right to have rights’. Counting the latter threatens the unity of the former.

Balso’s two singularities – the *sans-papiers* collectives being ‘created’ inside the State and the non-distinction between *soutiens* and *sans-papiers* in ‘The Assembly’ – do not, however, fit with Cissé’s description and analysis of the *sans-papiers* movement during the occupation of St Bernard. Cissé (1999) underlines the importance of North-South inequalities in her analysis of the *sans-papiers* movement and, on the question of the relationship between *soutiens* and *sans-papiers*, she recognises the experience, contacts and expertise of the *soutiens* but insists on the importance of the *sans-papiers* leading their own struggle (Cissé 1999:175). She seems to regard the distinction between *soutiens* and *sans-papiers* as indispensable because:

“the *soutiens* were very present, and always ready to take control as soon as they could.” (Cissé 1999:176)

Whilst Cissé insists that the *sans-papiers*' demands were ultimately Political, she argues that the National Co-ordination, during the occupation of St Bernard, managed to avoid being controlled by French organisations, which:

“did not accept that we operated in the single spirit of our regularisation – of all of us – outside of any political distraction or ideal.” (Cissé 1999:178)

Cissé regards the autonomy of the *sans-papiers* in the St Bernard Collective as crucial to the success of the whole movement. According to her, when the National Co-ordination was set up it held General Meetings that allowed *soutiens* from various organisations free expression, but the decision making group was composed entirely of *sans-papiers* (Cissé 1999:177).

Žižek would seem to be on Cissé's side in this debate. As we have seen, he argues that, in order to disrupt universalism from the inside, the act of abject identification has to be: “the direct statement of *the excluded victim itself* [original emphasis]” (Žižek 1999:231). However, Balso uses *sans-papiers* quotations to back up her argument and she points out that they are Political statements that have been:

“formulated from the interior of the political situation of the battle for papers and rights.” (Balso 2001:198)

Hence, the question of who has the right to enframe the voice of the *sans-papiers* – Cissé, Balso, Žižek or whoever – is not easily resolved. It would be wrong to view Cissé as ‘the authentic voice’ of the *sans-papiers*, but I would argue that she must have some advantage in claiming to speak for the *sans-papiers*, having been a *sans-papiers* leader herself. Lazarus and Balso, however, would not accept that Cissé's experience gives her any authority and, since her interpretation of the *sans-papiers* movement is based on a globalisation metanarrative, they would dismiss her arguments as not coming from the interior of the *sans-papiers* situation.

Cissé's (1999) account of the Political significance of the *sans-papiers* movement leads to a discussion of the world beyond the French state. Although Cissé, like most spokespeople for the movement, emphasises the way that *sans-papiers* have been ‘created’ by being pushed into irregular situations, this does not mean that she dismisses the existence of frontiers or the ethnic

and geographic origins of the *sans-papiers*. She argues that the occupation of St Bernard fought to dispel both the image of the frontier-crossing clandestine and that of the refugee as a pitiable object of compassion. She outlines the problems of international debt and North-South inequalities, as well as the complicated bureaucratic procedures that have generated categories of *sans-papiers* who can neither be expelled nor regularised. Cissé challenges European policies that envisage only three solutions to undocumented immigration: repression and expulsion; 'help' to return to the country of origin; and ways to keep populations in their own country to start with (Cissé 1999:232). Demanding the right to regularisation, Cissé points to the *sans-papiers*' contribution to the economy (Cissé 1999:232) as well as arguing that:

"Today's Europe is the result of the collective efforts of all the populations who have lived, worked or fought for it, of all the colonised peoples who have enriched this small part of the world."
(Cissé 1999:235)

One of the crucial aspects of the movement, according to Cissé, was the way the St Bernard collective managed to break away from the specific and humanitarian aspect of their situation, in order to stand-up for universal emancipation (Cissé 1999:216). By attracting the support of the CGT (the largest Trade Union), the *sans-papiers* movement brought about a reversal in French Trade Union attitudes, which had previously followed the lead of the extreme-Right by scapegoating them as the enemies of French workers (Cissé 1999:216). Links were also established with the unemployed and housing movements. Cissé emphasises that the problem of papers is an issue that can be related to the:

"monstrous development of an insecure reserve population in French society and in the world, a dimension of 'flexibility', as businessmen and governments like to say." (Cissé 1999:220)

And like Žižek, Cissé argues against the controllable:

"specificity of struggles (unemployed, employees, badly-housed, *sans-papiers*, *banlieue* youth, women...)" (Cissé 1999:220)

Cissé makes important Political claims for the *sans-papiers* movement; she argues that the 'without rights' imposed their presence in public space (Cissé 1999:222). If she is suggesting that the *sans-papiers* fully established

themselves in public space, she is perhaps over-estimating the long term effect of the occupation of St Bernard. The impact was, nevertheless, significant and Cissé relates this to the presence of Africans in French public space, arguing:

“The fact that the struggle of the *sans-papiers* of France was launched in France by Africans owes nothing to chance.” (Cissé 1999:237)

However, she does not conclude on an optimistic note, pointing to the inevitability of immigration rather than the achievements of the *sans-papiers*. She cites the letter of an African youth, found dead in the landing gear of a plane arriving in Brussels, to illustrate the tragic result of youths seeking an education and a better life in a globalised but divided world. Cissé uses the perspective of a worldwide youth watching the Berlin Wall come down and the ‘multi-coloured’ French team winning the World Cup, to highlight the positive aspirations that arise with globalisation, which make immigration inevitable (Cissé 1999:238). She emphasises the positive economic, cultural and Political aspects of immigration and argues for the right to freedom of circulation (Cissé 1999:238). Hence, Cissé sees the *sans-papiers* movement as operating in the context of global power relations, as well as in the relationship between the State and non-citizens:

“We no longer wanted France to continue to subject us in the same kind of relationships that it maintains with the States of our home countries, relationships made up of exploitation, contempt and paternalism.” (Cissé 1999:38)

Living in the occupation

When I became active in the Co-ordination, in March 2001, the movement was struggling to gain any media attention. The National Co-ordination seemed ineffective. Collectives and area Co-ordinations, run or supported by conflicting groups of French militants, were producing dossiers for their respective groups of *sans-papiers* and campaigning independently for regularisations with piecemeal results. All my time was spent in our area-based Co-ordination and, apart from seeing other Collectives on national demos and hearing the leader of the National Co-ordination speak in our local meetings, I had no contact with the wider movement. After the *Circulaire Chevènement*, our Co-ordination had staged an occupation in a local Church, in co-operation with another Collective.

The two organisations had, however, fallen out. According to Jean-Paul, the occupation was meant to campaign for the regularisation of all the *sans-papiers* rejected by the *Circulaire Chevènement* but the other Collective betrayed the Co-ordination by handing a list of their occupants to the Prefecture. In 1999, the Co-ordination had conducted another occupation in a disused public building, with the support of the Communist Party and the local *Mairie*. There had been a hunger strike and a list. A group of politicians and local activists had negotiated with the Prefecture for the regularisation of the occupants and were still negotiating for the regularisation of the last few two years later during the occupation in which I took part. A few weeks before I began going on demos, the Co-ordination had attempted to occupy St Bernard but this had not been supported by the priest and several *sans-papiers* had been arrested.

The occupation of the old *Gendarmerie* began in June 2001 (see Appendix 1 for the chronology of the *sans-papiers* movement and the occupation). This was three months after I had joined the Co-ordination. I had been taking part in weekly demos, as well as meetings and some general socialising. The occupation gave me the chance to get to know people a lot better. Most of my fieldwork revolves around the occupation, and the interviews discussed in the following section were conducted during and inside the occupation.

I missed the very first day of the occupation. Like most people, I had been told there was going to be *une action coup de poing* ('punch', i.e. sudden) after the demo that day. Plus everyone knew we were preparing for an occupation, but not that it was actually to begin that day. I was on the demo at the Prefecture when Youcef gave me the banner to put in my bag, which was odd. I had to go to a meeting elsewhere and I could not get hold of Youcef or anyone else to give back the banner before leaving, as they were busy re-directing the demo for the *coup de poing*. Hence neither myself nor the banner made it to the old *Gendarmerie* until later that night. Apparently there had been a scary moment when the *sans-papiers*, following Rosa, ran to their unknown destination with the CRS (riot police) hard on their tails. Someone had climbed over the side gate and opened the big front doors. No-one had known, on entering, whether they would be arrested or when they would be able to leave the building.

When I arrived, a meeting was going on in the largest of the outbuildings. It was electing and nominating the Steering Committee, consisting of three *sans-papiers* and two *soutiens*. The first and most obvious obstacle to the occupation was that we had no access to the main building, which was used by an Association of musicians and artists. There were no toilet facilities and the *sans-papiers* had to bed down in the dilapidated outbuildings. The two large downstairs rooms of the main outbuilding became male and female dormitories. There was a smaller building in the yard, which was slightly raised off the ground and had floorboards and lino. This was commandeered by the *délégués* (elected representatives of the *sans-papiers*). It served as a second male dormitory on the first night, after which the front room became the site kitchen, and in the back room there was sleeping space for four or five people. On the first night I slept in the largest outbuilding, in what quickly became the 'African' dormitory. The North African men slept in the kitchen block or moved into the smaller rooms dotted around the site. Several of them moved into the main building a few days later, when we gained access to the ground floor.

The women's dormitory had colourful sheets of canvas – an old piece of art work – covering the floor. It had been a store room; the walls were covered with fairly new looking shelving. It was a lot better than the men's dormitory, which was larger, dirtier and more run down. Most people had a mattress and some bedding, although I ended up sleeping on the floor after staying up late. In the morning, I had a good look round the site, which was over-grown with weeds. There were stairs in the largest outbuilding, which were basically sound. They were in the middle, between the two main dormitories. Upstairs there were more rooms, although not very appealing, apart from a little room straight above the stairwell, with what an estate agents might call a bijou reception area outside the bedroom door. In fact, it was just another dirty run down corner but it looked out over the courtyard through the ivy that covered the building, through a doorway that opened onto a sheer drop. You could close the door or keep it open for the view. Initially, Amirouche moved in here.

Downstairs, there were lots of overgrown nooks and crannies. There was a cell block across the yard from the kitchen building. It had two cells, which were padlocked with huge old bolts and locks. Behind them was what looked like a washroom. You could tell that there were toilets in the cells because their cisterns were on the other side of the wall in the washroom but, despite the need for toilets, it was impossible to get into the cells. Round the back, on the other side, it was very overgrown but there were two or three doors behind the shrubbery. Behind one door was a small room that had been used to store various signs, presumably for the music events that the artists' Association had organised.

Some of the signs were put up around the site. There was an 'Access Forbidden' sign installed over the kitchen door, but the other signs were used in a more humorous way. On the wall of the main outbuilding, facing you as you entered the courtyard from the street, there was a set of authoritative looking signposts that were in fact absurd. There was a 'Cloakroom' sign pointing nowhere in particular. A 'Reception' sign was pointing away from what was the reception, towards the meeting room / garage. And, high on the wall, was the name of the *Département* (i.e. area administrated by the Prefecture). These signs seemed to mock the occupation, announcing only that you were entering an area where signposts were useless. They also seemed to mock the *Département* and the Prefecture. The misleading signposts reflected the truth of the *sans-papiers'* experience of the Prefecture and its bureaucracy. The name of the *Département* hinted that the whole *Département* was in the occupation and that the *Département* had a dubious relation to France and rational governance. It was as if the occupation was claiming to be the *Département* in the way that Žižek suggests that the excluded non-part can claim to be 'the people', thereby challenging the State.

As I continued to explore the doors behind the weeds, right at the back, past the room with the signposts, I pushed my way through to what turned out to be a Turkish style toilet (hole in the floor). I went and reported this find to Yazide, who had been elected to the Steering Committee the night before, and several people helped clear back the undergrowth and make it useable. I tried to switch

on the water but could not find the mains connection. This was not particularly important however, as there was a tap in the yard and a dustbin full of water was placed outside the toilet. My discovery was strategically significant since the artists' Association had begun by refusing us access to the main building, hoping, presumably, that we would simply go away because of the lack of facilities.

After discovering the toilet, I crossed the yard to the garage construction behind the kitchen: a roofed-over and walled, largish tarmacked area, which Carlos, who is Peruvian, and his Colombian friend were clearing up. This was the first time I met Carlos. He seemed a bit suspicious of me initially. In a later discussion with Carlos and Nabila, I shocked them both by telling them that I had been homeless in Britain and lived in conditions as bad as the occupation. For Nabila the conditions were worse than anywhere she had lived and Carlos was shocked because he had thought that all English people were rich. However, on the first full day of the occupation, I just got on with helping Carlos and his friend, clearing out what became the main meeting and dining area.

Whilst I was exploring the buildings, Jalel and the *délégués* were setting up the kitchen. In the meeting room, Carlos, his friend and I had tried to recycle bits of furniture. We had constructed a table out of a door and a couple of trestles we had found. Jalel commandeered this 'table' for cooking in the kitchen. There was also an old table-tennis table that we were able to make secure. There were some plastic chairs that just needed a bit of a wash down to make them useable. Later on, tables and more chairs were brought over from the Co-ordination's HQ. I helped carry the tables across town with a group organised by Youcef. To begin with however, people had to eat off their laps or off the various make-shift pieces of furniture.

Jalel kept a very efficient kitchen for the first two months of the occupation. First thing in the morning there was coffee and hot milk for a *café au lait* (the ratio of coffee to milk is in reverse to English tea and coffee, with a small amount of coffee in a cup full of hot milk) and baguettes with butter and jam. This was prepared early enough for people who were getting up to go to work.

At lunchtime there were sandwiches, especially on days when there was a demo. In the evening there was a hot cooked meal served in the meeting room and, later on, mint tea was served to anyone that wanted one, as people sat and chatted in the courtyard.

After a few days the artists' Association agreed to let us have the ground floor of the main building. We cleared out the little office on one side of the gate-tunnel – the arched passage that ran through the middle of the main building from the enormous front gates to the courtyard. The office was obviously an old guard-post, as it looked out onto the gate-tunnel. It became the reception / office for taking new memberships, and Youcef slept there. At the beginning of the occupation, the front doors were kept open during the daytime and there was a table manned by the *sans-papiers*, giving out information, trying to get passers-by to sign up and support the *sans-papiers*' cause, whilst controlling the door. Opposite the office, on the other side of the gate-tunnel, was the door to the ground floor area that the *sans-papiers* were allowed to move into. Just inside the entrance was a staircase that led to the music Association's offices on the first floor. This is where the *Marie* eventually constructed a steel doorway, when they got rid of the security guards. Behind the staircase was the largest ground floor room, which eventually became the hunger strikers' room. It had windows looking out both onto the road and into the courtyard. Beyond this room there was a series of smaller rooms (two on each side of the building) and a sink area, toilet and bathroom (without a bath) in the middle. Groups of women took the two rooms that had walls and doors. Lila, Mounira and Nabila, all Algerian, took the one on the near left, looking out onto the courtyard and a group of Moroccan women took the one on the far right, with windows opening out onto the street. Zouhir, Antâr and Fayçel took the room at the end on the left, next to the sink area. They re-constructed a partition where a wall had been knocked through. The room on the near right only had half a wall separating it from the large room, until it was partitioned off much later, when the biggest outbuilding had to be evacuated because the ceiling started falling down.

The largest ground-floor room became a male dormitory. I slept here one or two nights and in Zouhir's room early on in the occupation. Réda, amongst others, slept in the large room and, the first night I slept there, he made an effort to see that I was comfortable. I got to know and respect Réda later on but, at the beginning, I felt uneasy sharing a room with people I did not know.

Obviously, sleeping in the occupation was strange for everyone but, rightly or wrongly, the fact that I was an EU citizen and research student rather than a *sans-papiers* influenced the way I felt insecure. It reminded me of the alienation of being a Western traveller in a poor country, where you feel like you are a walking dollar sign. I did not always sleep in the occupation, especially at the beginning. It sometimes felt too odd, as I was not a *sans-papiers* and this was not my struggle. As a researcher, I forced myself to sleep some nights in the occupation. Sometimes this felt false and wrong, but the fact that the occupation was a new experience for everyone and that many of the occupants seemed to welcome my presence encouraged me to continue.

To return to the general layout of the occupation and the sleeping arrangements, amongst the outbuildings there were a couple of very small rooms. Fared took over the signpost storeroom next to the toilet. There was also the little *cellule*, which was at the back of the kitchen building, with its door right next to the meeting area. Apparently Brahim almost spent a night here on the floor but Lila, doing her nightly round, insisted that he go into the main building, where there was bedding. Then Ahmed constructed a bed in the little 'cellule' and stayed there for a while. However, he was one of the people who was regularised out of the blue, soon after the beginning of the occupation. After which, Ahmed offered me the little *cellule*, giving me the key, and I slept there for a while.

Upstairs in the main outbuilding, a group known as 'the Moroccans' (in fact there was a Russian and an Algerian amongst them) moved into the rooms on one side of the staircase. Nabila and Sarah asked Amirouche for the little room above the stairs and he agreed, moving down to the room behind the kitchen, where there was more space since the main building had been opened up. Mounir invited me to move into the room behind the kitchen, with him and

Amirouche, when Salim and Saïd were regularised. I was glad to hand the little *cellule* over to a mother and child, as I had felt rather isolated having my own private room. When Amirouche gave his room to Nabila and Sarah, he insisted on still being able to use the little adjacent area with the view over the courtyard, where he had set up a make-shift table and chairs. It was a discreet spot with a good view, ideal for drinking inconspicuously. Nabila and I also conducted the interviews there.

Interviewing the occupants

The following interviews were conducted two to three months into the occupation, during the summer holiday lull. We had occupied the old *Gendarmerie* since the beginning of June, managing to get a meeting with the *Préfet* in mid-July. The dossiers of the 75 official occupants had been submitted for examination. Not much was happening between late July and early September. The *Préfet* and half his staff, by rotation, were on holiday, as were many of the *soutiens*. I was timid about asking people to do interviews but Nabila cajoled eleven interviewees to take part.

Grillo's account of 'incorporation' (co-optation), which I shall discuss more fully in Chapter 5 was relevant to my experience of the Collective. I shared his exasperation at the paternalistic approach of French militants to immigrants, whereby even those immigrants who were fighting for their rights were treated as needy and powerless. A social worker dismisses Grillo's frustration that immigrants are not given the chance to express their own views:

"The immigrants who speak represent the petite bourgeoisie which also exists among them. As for those who are spokesmen in the unions, he who speaks, when he speaks, it is what he has learnt to speak." (Grillo 1985:257)

Whilst this criticism seems too dismissive, excluding immigrant workers from speaking at all, it is relevant to my interviewees. Réda and Dembele had been students. Adel came from the capital and had left Mali after being involved in the student movement in 1990. Réda, Larbie, Nabila, Mouloud, Maroine and his family came from the Algerian middle classes, whose post-independence

affluence had been brought to a sudden halt by Government-Islamist conflict. Carlos, who was Peruvian (he and his wife were the only Latin American *sans-papiers* in the Co-ordination), came from a poor background but Carlos described his aspirations for a university education that were destroyed when his father went bankrupt and his family lost their home. The only interviewee who had absolutely no bourgeois pretensions and no experience as a spokesman was Farouk, who was the Pakistani, and his was the most difficult interview. He had come to France without being able to speak French and without family or friends to help him. I consider that the fact that he was willing to tell us his story at all demonstrated his own goodwill and the power of the occupation to create some common ground between occupants regardless of class and education. The two outspoken interviewees who could not be dismissed as 'petit bourgeois' were Youcef Haddide and Moussa. Youcef Haddide was the prominent *délégué* of the occupation and Moussa had been a prominent *délégué* during the last occupation: they had both learnt to speak publicly through the movement.

There was a crucial difference between the *sans-papiers* movement and the striking immigrant workers that Grillo (1985) describes. The occupation of St Bernard had established the distinction between *soutiens* (the French militants, literally 'helpers') and *sans-papiers*. Hence, *sans-papiers délégués* (delegates, elected representatives of the *sans-papiers*) had more autonomy than union spokesmen. The *sans-papiers* in our Co-ordination conducted their own meetings, as well as holding General Meetings with the *soutiens*, which meant that *délégués* mediated between the demands of the *sans-papiers* and the power of the *soutiens*. The *sans-papiers* meetings created a forum in which, at least in principle, the *sans-papiers* could independently discuss the movement and their individual concerns. The occupation created an intense space of encounters between *sans-papiers*, which made the interviews possible.

The aim of the following section is to retell several of the interviewee's personal histories, which are both explanations of why people stay in France without papers, and acts of speaking, giving witness to the existence of *sans-papiers*. Before the occupation began and before I had contemplated recording

interviews, one *sans-papiers*, Ahmed, had already interpreted my role as collecting witness accounts (*temoignage*) of the experience of being a *sans-papiers*. One day Ahmed told me a story, in the third person, but clearly about himself. He spoke of a family in Morocco, living in a village, struggling to make ends meet. The parents decide to send their son to France so they can earn some money. They sell the goat, the cow and the mother's gold. The son sets out with 20,000 – 30,000F. The son spends nearly all of the money on an illegal passage. He arrives in France and cannot get papers. He has no choice but to work on the black, for 100F per day instead of 300F. He has to squat a crumbling building or pay to stay with five others in a single room apartment. If he is lucky, he can rent a room in a foyer from a retired man who goes back to *bled* (homeland). Without papers he cannot go forward, without something to show for his voyage he cannot go back home.

Amirouche, an Algerian, told me the story of how he arrived in France. His original plan was to study in France legally. He had obtained a fifteen day tourist visa. He came to France and tried to register as a student but was told that he needed a student visa. He returned to Algeria but could not obtain the student visa. He returned to France on the same visa, which was by this time out of date. He tried to catch a ferry to Britain but was not allowed on the boat. He went back to Algeria again. Then he tried to return to France on the same visa a third time but was unlucky at Marseille. He was put back on the same boat after being locked up for 48 hours. The boat was returning to Algeria via Spain, where he and two others attempted to swim ashore. They were caught and handcuffed for the rest of the journey. Arriving in the western Algerian port of Oran, Amirouche was a long way from home with no money but he managed to make his way back to Algiers by train. A month later, he obtained a ten day visa from the German Consulate and arrived in Paris by plane with two days of the visa left to run. Nevertheless, he got through customs, claiming that he had business in Germany. Once in the airport, he borrowed a phone card off a stranger and phoned his cousin, who came to collect him from the airport.

In very different ways, the accounts of Ahmed and Amirouche both demonstrate that, whilst it might be difficult to enter France physically, it is a lot harder to

become legally resident, leaving open only the 'no man's land' in which the *sans-papiers* live. The personal accounts that follow are retold from the interviews, which all took place in the occupation. I then discuss the political and economic context of the *sans-papiers*' migrations; the ways in which national and European boundaries are challenged by their narratives; and the implications of the term '*sans-papiers*'.

Personal histories

Dembele: Dembele is from Mauritania. He was officially a student in France for three years before his residence rights expired. He lived in France for a further seven years without any official status. When he stopped being a student he tried to claim refugee status, changing his first name from Mohamed to Mamady since those finishing studies are supposed to leave the country. Also, someone who has been a student in France has to be in the country for 15 years to be regularised, as opposed to 10 for non-students⁵. His claim for refugee status was turned down, despite spending his savings of 10,000F on a lawyer.

Dembele describes the difficult situation of being a Mauritanian student in France. Top students can gain a grant to study in France but this lasts only 2 years, as there is no 3rd year in Mauritania. After the first 2 years, he explains, "*Tu te demerdes!*" (you have to get by any way you can / sort your own shit out). While studying, Dembele had to earn enough money to live, but he only had the right to work during the holidays. Moreover, his student card had to be checked by the police. His academic marks were sent directly to the police because he was not allowed to repeat a year. Dembele mentions that several of his friends have had the same difficulties. One friend had been reduced to prostitution: "If I see her, I cry. What a nightmare (*qelle galère!*)!"

⁵ At the time of the occupation Algerian *sans-papiers* also had to prove 15 years of presence in order to be regularised. Since the ratification of the *Troisième Avenant*, however, this has been reduced to 10 years, bringing the treatment of Algerians in line with other nationalities, whilst maintaining certain bilaterally agreed privileges, like allowing the children of Algerian parents born before 1962, i.e. before independence, to claim French nationality.

Dembele suggests that the Mauritanian State has been complicit in creating this situation, which sends top students into an impossible exile. The population of Mauritania is mainly Arab but it has a significant black minority. After the war with Senegal, there was violence against the Senegalese population living in Mauritania. There were deaths in 1989. Mauritanian blacks, like Dembele himself, were sometimes caught in the crossfire. Dembele argues that the State, as an Islamic Republic, is happy to see brilliant black students leave because their absence makes it easier to dominate the region. He invites me to a meeting of Mauritanians to see for myself the number of top students there are in France, with no role in their own country and no possibility of returning to Mauritania.

Carlos: Carlos is 24 and from Peru. He points out that it is a shame to leave your country. His reason for coming to France is economic: to look after his family properly.

When Carlos was three, his father ruined his own business and left the family (mother and six children) in poverty. He grew up in the lowest social class, mixed with all sorts at school, and had no chance of going to university, like 95% of the people from his area. Carlos argues that to live in a small room with your family is not a life. He does not want to condemn his family to a life of poverty. He wants hope for his children; he wants to find a future.

When he was nine, Carlos's father came back and they moved back to Lima. Carlos describes how, at a certain age he realised that his mother was a very special woman. "How did she cope on her own with six children?" he asks. She was a fighter and Carlos wanted to follow her example. When he was 14-15, he was involved in setting up a youth organisation in his area. This was against a backdrop of theft, violence and drugs. However, everyone else in the organisation wanted to spend the money that had been raised on enjoying themselves: parties and trips to the beach. Carlos wanted to do things for the community, for example, to install toilets and bins.

Before his father left, they lived in their own house. Then they rented houses in the country. After they moved back to Lima, his mother got together fifty good people and squatted a piece of land. In Peru, after ten years of squatting a piece of empty land, you have a right to stay (Nabila remarks that this is a bit like the ten year rule for a *sans-papiers* in France). However, the other part of the land, which was cultivated and should not legally have been squatted, was squatted at the same time by a bunch of thieves and, despite struggling and eventually winning the right to stay on their land, it became the worst area in Lima.

Carlos has been in France for six years. He acknowledges that there are people who have to sleep on the street, but he had a brother already in France. Carlos has a house, a family and has always worked. The only problem that not having papers poses for him is not being able to go home to see his family in Peru: to go back without papers means starting again from the beginning. Only rich people in Peru have the right to come to France.

To go home is his greatest wish; he feels imprisoned in France. He questions the ten year rule: "Why does the French government make people's lives hell with ten years of *clandestinité*?" He argues that 'they' (the authorities / Prefecture) know everything anyway but still prevent *sans-papiers* from going home to see their families. "What is their goal?" he exclaims. He acknowledges that there might be an issue of French people needing jobs but points out that this does not explain why *sans-papiers* are obliged to work on the black for ten years.

Adel: Adel is from Mali. He says he came to France because of family responsibilities and economic problems. He points out that Europe and Africa are very different. "In Africa," he argues, "everyone wants to come to Europe". Since he was young, he wanted to come to Europe. His eldest brother came in 1960, two years before Adel himself was born.

Adel points out that he has been in France for about ten years. He put in a claim for refugee status in 1990. This was refused and he became clandestine.

He explains that there were deaths in Mali at the time. The President was a dictator trying to suppress a student movement for democracy, a movement in which Adel had been involved. However, the President-dictator left in 1991 and about forty different Political parties and forty radio stations have subsequently emerged in Mali. Adel explains that there is freedom of speech with the radio, as long as people do not insult the President personally. Hence, Malians can no longer claim refugee status, as there is democracy back home. By claiming refugee status in 1990, Adel gained legal status for a year, renewed every three months, but after that he received a refusal. There are many Malian *sans-papiers* in France in the same position.

Adel made a second claim to be regularised in 1997, with the *Circulaire Chevènement*. This was rejected. His claim went to the *Tribunal Administrative de Paris*, to the *Conseil d'Etat*, where it had to wait, and it is currently with the *Ministère de l'Intérieur*. Adel argues that having to live without papers for 10 years is too much. His younger son, who is 10 years old, was 3 months old when Adel left Mali (Adel showed us his family photos, with his son as a baby and as a 10 year old). His son has never seen him. Adel speaks to his son on the telephone; his son asks, "When are you coming Daddy?" Adel wants to see him but has to wait for his papers.

Adel explains that he has worked in a carpet shop continuously for eight years and is responsible for managing supplies. He left work temporarily to take part in the occupation. His boss had given him the time off and wanted him to come back with or without his papers. With the occupation, Adel had put in a new dossier. Following the advice given to him at the Co-ordination, he had declared that he is married with children, whereas as previously he had claimed to be single.⁶

⁶ The *soutiens* working on dossiers were aware that the Prefecture works on the assumption that all the single men they regularise will bring a wife into France anyway. Therefore, Adel's declaration of his wife was felt to increase the humanitarian grounds for regularising him, without really posing an extra immigration threat.

Moussa: Moussa is 33-34 years old, single and from Niger. Moussa's father is Peul and his mother is Touhreggh (nomadic berbers). The Touhregghs live in all the countries around the Sahara, often as stateless persons. When I ask, Moussa explains that it is normal to wear a scarf-turban where he comes from because of the dust. He has a striking appearance. He is black but stands out from the group of West Africans, being very tall, with a long nose and incredibly long hands.

Moussa came to France because of problems with his commanding officer. He did his obligatory two years National Service in the army, after which he wanted to leave. However, his commanding officer wanted Moussa to continue, as Moussa had been working directly for him. Moussa left anyway. His uncle advised him to leave the country when his commanding officer started to make things difficult. Moussa's uncle helped him with a plane ticket and Moussa crossed the Sahara with some friends in an army Land Rover before flying to Belgium from Algeria in 1992. He arrived in Brussels in his blue *djebella* between 5am and 6am. It was very cold. He did not want to leave the plane. His teeth were chattering. He had to ask a policeman to help him phone his mother, as his fingers were too cold to dial the number.

Moussa claimed refugee status, after going three times to the Prefecture, once at 5am to wait in the queue for a ticket⁷. He was given temporary residence for one month, then three months. This was renewed on several occasions giving him the right to stay in France and work during 1992-93. Then Pasqua, a rightwing Minister of the Interior, came to power and his refugee status was not renewed⁸.

Moussa joined the Co-ordination in 1996, during the occupation of St Bernard. At that time, members of the Co-ordination were unable to join the occupation, which had been limited to the 300-400 members of the St Bernard Collective

⁷ This is the standard procedure. The Prefecture gives out a limited number of tickets each day. Anyone wanting to be seen has to wait several hours in the cold before the doors open at 8.30am. I had to do this myself on several occasions.

⁸ The right to work was also removed from those who did have asylum status .

already inside the church. Moussa was, however, one of the leaders of the Co-ordination's own occupation in 1999, as a result of which he had been regularised.

When asked how his life has changed since getting his papers, Moussa initially argues that he struggled (*galéré*) and suffered without papers but that now, thanks to the true *soutiens*, God and the *sans-papiers*, he has his papers. He explains that he had never worked on the black but had depended on certain *soutiens* who had helped him out. He argues: "I work now, my life is better than before." He no longer has to fear the police and ID checks. Moussa recounts how once at a metro station in the centre of Paris, after being regularised, he had been scared when he saw the police. He had started trembling, forgetting that he had his papers and there was nothing to fear. To explain this, Moussa compares having his papers to having a new suit or shoes, and how it takes time to get used to them. He was not the only person to experience this mistaken fear after getting his papers, which illustrates the constant fear of being found out to which those without papers become habituated. Moussa emphasises that he can now go anywhere, that he will not be deported and that he does not have to face the shame of being taken home in handcuffs with nothing to show for his years in France.

Once Moussa had his papers, he joined a temping agency, working one, two or three days in various places, then three weeks, and then getting a contract with a freight business at a nearby airport. Finding housing is difficult, however, which is why he was a living in the occupation. He explains that his struggle (*la lutte*) continues for housing now. He had an annually renewable residence card that can be eventually changed to a ten year residence card: either with three years' pay slips or after five years without pay slips. However, if you have not worked, there is a risk of being put back on a three month *récépissé* (paper receipt). Moussa explains that he does not have the right to the RMI (roughly equivalent to Income-based JobSeekers' Allowance, see Chapter 2) until he has worked for three years. This was another change introduced by a rightwing Government but not repealed by the Socialists. Originally non-French residents were entitled to the RMI after working for three months only.

When pushed on the question of the difficulties he faced as an *ex-sans-papiers*, Moussa ended up exclaiming that things were actually harder for him with papers. Before he had his papers, he explained, he did not have to justify himself: "I was happier as a *sans-papiers*! It is all too much with papers!" he remarked jokingly, but meaning it at the same time. In the context of the Co-ordination, with everyone fighting to get their papers, it was an extraordinary thing to say. Moussa had had a particular experience of being a *sans-papiers*, getting by with nothing but his good relations with *soutiens*. Nevertheless, he was not the only *ex-sans-papiers* to suggest that the problems really began after regularisation. It was as if being without papers meant being blocked from even beginning, whilst getting papers was only a tentative first step into a whole host of new problems. People had different experiences of being a *sans-papiers*; all wanted to move on, but regularisation was far from being an end to their problems. Moussa's comment was probably based on a mixture of nostalgia and self-mockery, as regularisation was always a huge relief, universally greeted with celebration. However, it does suggest that life without papers, at least for *ex-sans-papiers*, is plagued by insecurity.

Other interviewees: Apart from these four histories, Nabila and I also interviewed several other people. One was Youcef Haddide, a Tunisian who came to France to get on in the world, but got into trouble because of a disagreement with an exploitative boss. He was temporarily in the strange position, after being released on bail from prison, of being a *sans-papiers* forbidden to leave the country. He was then repeatedly refused regularisation because of his criminal record. Youcef Haddide, who was central to the running of the occupation and the Co-ordination, figures heavily in the next two chapters. Farouk told us about claiming refugee status and eventually being refused when the rightwing were in power. He had found it very difficult to get by as a *sans-papiers*. He pointed out that he could not return to Pakistan as, having made claim for asylum against his country, he would be arrested on arrival. Once he had papers, however, he explained that he would be lifted from the black list and be able to travel home freely. Ali T's interview revolved entirely around legal technicalities. He came to France with a legal right to

settle, after marrying in Algeria, but his wife had since made a complaint against him and his dossier was caught in legal limbo. Réda, Larbie, Maroine and Nabila are also Algerian, which, along with the dangers they had faced in their own country, meant that they were in a peculiarly difficult situation *vis à vis* the French State.

From individuals to collective struggle

The personal histories of the interviewees illustrate the economic inequalities that pushed them to emigrate, along with personal and political difficulties. The political and economic factors cannot be disentangled in these examples. All of the interviewees, whether displaced and threatened in their own countries or not, have migrated to France from much poorer countries for economic reasons. Of course, these 'economic' reasons are also 'political', unless we assume that Politics is hermetically sealed within nation-states and deny that the impoverishment and insecurity faced by *sans-papiers* in their home countries has resulted from global inequalities.

In the French context, the distinction between economic and Political migrants, usually flagged in public debate in the UK, is hardly relevant. Gaining asylum status in France is virtually impossible for most people. The French courts demand written proof that an asylum seeker is personally in danger. Political upheaval in their country of origin is not a sufficient threat on its own. Given that someone successfully fleeing persecution is unlikely to wait for written proof that they are personally under threat, the number of successful asylum claims in France is understandably low. As Amirouche, who was invited to apply for Territorial Asylum⁹ expressed it, the French authorities only grant asylum to people who bring their head along in a box. For Amirouche, as for Moussa and Adel, claiming asylum only gave temporary residence rights; their applications were eventually rejected. Many Algerians who had left their country because of

⁹ Territorial Asylum was specifically created to include Algerians threatened by terrorism, as Political Asylum is only applicable to those threatened by their home State. This narrow interpretation of the Geneva Convention, with only State persecution being classed as 'Political', is another reason for the reduced claims for Asylum in France (Fassin 2001:4).

political violence nevertheless refused to apply for asylum, except as a last minute way of resisting deportation. Such claims were either unsuccessful or required several years of enforced exile from Algeria, whereas people usually wanted to be able to move back and forth between the two countries. The first thing every regularised *sans-papiers* wanted to do, once they had enough money for the airfare and the presents, was to go home to visit their families.

Length of time spent in France and degree of integration into French society represented a much more significant claim to residence rights than Political persecution. It should be noted that the *sans-papiers*' cause is not generally portrayed as an argument for opening up the frontiers. The emphasis is placed more on people who have had their residence rights taken away, people who have children in French schools and whose lives are well established in French society. Whilst the rightwing Government had attacked clandestine immigration, the *sans-papiers* movement had mobilised immigrants who felt they were being pushed out of France. The movement has not generally been presented as an attack on 'Fortress Europe' and restrictive borders. It claims to be defending universalism for those already on French soil, without necessarily making a wider critique of the political context of international socio-economic inequalities. Hence, Cissé's (1999) analysis, linking the *sans-papiers* issue to international debt, goes beyond the remit of the movement itself and the Political platform it tries to establish in France.

The distinction between immigrants excluded within French universalism and immigrants who threaten to overwhelm French universalism from the outside, with 'the poverty of the world', seems just as arbitrary as the UK distinction between economic and Political migrants. Those who are not already in French society cannot logically be excluded from universalism, just as those who migrate for economic reasons can still be seen as reacting politically to the inequalities imposed by globalisation. It is clear in the interviews and particularly in Ahmed's story that the *sans-papiers*, like other migrants, move from periphery to centre in flows that are inherent to global capitalism, even if these flows are made illegal by nation-states. The flows reflect colonial history and postcolonial relations of inequality. Most of the interviewees come from ex-

French colonies. Farouk and Carlos are exceptions but they still come from countries colonised by European States.

It is not possible to give an adequate account of Franco-Algerian relations here but Algerian immigration necessarily takes place in the historical context of post-World War II migration, racism in France, the history of Algeria as a French colony 1830 – 1962, and the war of independence won by the FLN (National Liberation Front). Post-independence relations continue to be affected by French intervention in Political challenges to the FLN within Algeria, first from socialist and democratic movements, then from the Islamist movement and also from the Kabyle independence movement. Both Larbie and Réda were suspicious of French attempts to interfere in Algeria. They were uncomfortable about the way they had been questioned by the Prefecture in their applications for asylum. They appeared to have been subjected to interrogation for intelligence purposes whilst having their claims for asylum assessed. They felt that they had been asked to betray their own country to the ex-colonial power. If this was a widespread experience, it may be another reason why Algerians try to avoid asylum claims.

Echoing Sayyid's (1997:19) suggestion that the Mosque is the only public arena not monopolised by the post-colonial State, Réda argues that the FLN blocked the democratic movement by stifling the media, whilst the Islamist movement grew in the Mosque. When the Islamist party looked like winning democratic elections, the FLN could count on French and Western support to stop the elections, which pushed the country into a terrorist civil war. Nabila summed up the complicity, or at least inter-relatedness between the powers-that-be in France and Algeria:

“You see the army everywhere in Algeria. In fact now we have no choice, we have to die. If we stay at home we die, that's clear. And if we stay here, we don't exist, we're completely ignored.”

Nation-state boundaries enforce certain distinctions that do not match people's experiences, especially when these are transnational. Adel explains some of the political dynamics between France and Mali, which make it difficult for the

two Governments to reach an agreement on immigration. Mali, as an ex-French colony, is heavily dependent on connections with, and immigrants in, France. Malian politicians have to defend emigration if they want to be elected. The French State, in contrast, puts pressure on the Malian Government to prevent illegal immigration. Adel tells the story of a 'Charter' (English word used to mean a plane specifically for deporting people) which deported 65-67 Malians in 1986. They were chained to their seats for the five hours flying time and guarded by 27 policemen. Adel had three friends on the plane, all of whom had since returned to France with papers. When it arrived in Bamako the Malians, speaking in *soninké*, urged each other to hit the police. The police told them to speak in French but they replied that they were in Mali now. They waited for everyone to be unchained and then attacked the police and trashed the plane. Adel suggests that this was the end of several of the policeman's careers; they never recovered. The French had to send another plane to bring the police home. The first plane had been wrecked and stayed in Bamako for months. The Malian military had turned up to protect the French police but, in the aftermath, the rioters were not prosecuted. After this incident, deportations were done in small groups. Jospin visited Mali in 1997 to make the peace. Speaking to the Malian parliament, he told Malians to get visas and not come clandestinely. Adel argues that getting a visitor's visa is easy in Mali. Businessmen, who organise the whole journey, can bring as many as five people over each time they come.

Before restrictive immigration laws, Malian immigrants practised a system of rotation, whereby older men returning from France to families and villages were replaced by younger men. However, since residence became difficult to obtain, many Malian immigrants have been stuck in France, as the only ones able to earn the income on which others depend. Malian *sans-papiers* are obliged to wait ten years before they can get their papers and return home, whether to visit or to return definitively. Those that have residence are also forced by the restrictions to stay longer, unless they can pass their identity papers on to new immigrants. Malians, Adel explains, have solidarity: if people need somewhere to sleep they go to the foyer; if they need papers to work they exchange papers between them (many people work with someone else's papers for years).

The Prefecture attempts to clamp down on the practice of swapping papers because immigrants who rotate their identities upset the normative model of individuals being integrated into French society. The Prefecture actually favours immigrants who work with false papers in their own name: the Co-ordination's dossiers showed that those who use false papers and whose pay-slips are in their own name can eventually get regularised after ten years, whereas those that have been caught using someone else's papers are blocked indefinitely. Adel argues that there is an economic motive for this preference for false papers: illegal workers pay taxes (*cotiser*) without having any rights to welfare benefits. The Prefecture conveniently ignores the money coming in from these non-persons. Hence, false papers may be officially forbidden but the taxes are collected and the *sans-papiers* are encouraged to use them.

Adel and Moussa suggest that, since the *Cirulaire Chevènement*, '*sans-papiers*' has become a bureaucratically recognised category. Moussa points out that a *sans-papiers* is known by the Prefecture and is therefore not clandestine. He argues that the *sans-papiers* never were literally 'without papers' since they have their passports and their consulates. Nevertheless, he considers the term *sans-papiers* to be positive because it announces their situation in France. Adel explains that he has been in France for ten years and only been stopped once by the police. As he had not committed any crimes or misdemeanours, once they had checked his record, they released him. They knew he was a *sans-papiers*; a *sans-papiers* is known administratively because they have put in a claim. They have an ongoing case and cannot be deported as easily as someone who is not registered with the Prefecture. Adel's own case had been through every possible legal procedure. He was one amongst many in the occupation who were fighting to have their cases resolved. People like Adel had reasonable claims that fulfilled legal requirements, but had been refused without justification or simply left without a reply.

There is, therefore, a directly Political side to the administrative situation of the *sans-papiers*. Once elected in 1996, the Socialists instructed the *sans-papiers* to put dossiers together for the *Cirulaire Chevènement*. Most people did so.

However, half of those who applied were regularised and the other half ended up, paradoxically, as registered *sans-papiers*. They were neither regularised nor deported but left in a Kafkaesque limbo. When Moussa and Adel point out that they are known at the Prefecture, this is not just because of bureaucratic delays. It is also part of the Political fallout of the occupation of St Bernard. In terms of the different approaches of Cissé (1999) and Balso (2001), discussed above, the interviewees clearly regard their transnational trajectories as significant, which supports Cissé's discussion of international debt. However, at the same time, they have to live the paradox of being created as *sans-papiers* within the French state, which supports Balso's conceptualisation of this 'singularity' as an internal Political question.

Declaring oneself a *sans-papiers* is a Political act in itself. Moussa recognises this when he argues that, during the occupation, the *sans-papiers* should be going to the local market, taking the megaphone and announcing their problem. However, this declaration as a *sans-papiers* goes against the way people have to hide not having papers in everyday life. Ahmed told me of how he had been working for a company that sub-contracted to the municipality. When he told friends in the foyer where he lived that he had just been regularised, they were completely shocked that he had ever been a *sans-papiers*. How could he rent a room in a foyer and work for the municipality and still be *sans-papiers*? Such reactions of shock-horror were the norm when people in everyday social life discovered that someone was without papers. Réda discusses the difficulty of going out with friends, when there is a risk of ID control. He points out the danger of telling a potential girlfriend that you are *sans-papiers*, and he describes how he prefers to avoid old friends because they have all moved on whereas he has been stuck without papers.

The Co-ordination seems to offer some compensation for the stress of living without papers. Nabila suggests that shouting that you are a *sans-papiers* in the streets is a release. Carlos argues that the Co-ordination hides the illegal side of being a *sans-papiers*. The occupation is like a 'family'; it is friendly and pleasurable. Before he liked to go to night-clubs and to buy new clothes, but now he prefers to talk with mates in the occupation. Before he would have

been ashamed to go on a demo, but now he knows he has rights, by which he means the right to complain, to be respected, to be on the street.

Being with other *sans-papiers* may have had some attractions but the Co-ordination also involved hardships. Going out on demos every week was demoralising when there seemed to be no positive results. Taking part in the occupation had to be balanced against working and earning money, which made it impossible for some to remain committed to 'the struggle' (*la lutte*). It was often said in meetings that taking part in 'the struggle' was the only way people could get their papers but the question of when, how and if at all was impossible to answer. There was an ever-increasing doubt that all the effort would lead to nothing and that people were losing months going nowhere.

According to Adel:

"The struggle is not easy. You have to struggle right to the end or you end up in the shit. We have been in this occupation for two to three months and there are people without papers who laugh at us, who say we are tiring ourselves out for nothing. When they see a demo with thirty people drumming and singing they laugh at us. We must struggle. Oh yes, it is hard!"

From collective struggle to individuals (first results)

One night in September, after the summer lull, all the occupants gathered in the old *Gendarmerie* and left to catch the last bus to the Prefecture. The Prefect had promised to give responses to at least some of the occupants' dossiers the following day. The Co-ordination decided to spend the night in front of the Prefecture. The event was announced to the press as '*Une nuit blanche pour sortir des ombres*' (a sleepless night, literally white night, for coming out of the shadows). Candles were lit spelling out 'Regularisation'. Some people played football in semi-darkness, illuminated only by a few street lamps. A group gathered in the metro entrance to keep warm. Others camped down with cardboard and blankets. In the morning we set up the banner and sang our slogans.

Early in the afternoon, one of the *soutiens* collected the results from three months of occupying the old *Gendarmerie* and a gruelling programme of demos, marches and visits to *Maries*. She came back with some very dismal results. Only a few regularisations, the rest refused or without reply, with several referred to other Prefectures. It was like a bomb had struck. After months of stretching everyone's energy and nerves to the limits, we had only succeeded in drawing out a cold, bureaucratic response that pretended to completely ignore our on-going mobilisation and struggle (*la lutte*). The wording of the letter thanked our organisation for "bringing the cases of a number of immigrants in irregular situations to the attention of the *Préfet*". A typical piece of bureaucratic indifference that, at the same time as responding to the *sans-papiers* movement, refused to recognise it as such. It obscured the Political pressure, which had eventually forced a reply, by pretending to remain within the normal cause and effect of bureaucratic processes and legalistic functions. Not that the refusals were in any way explained or justified; in fact some of the "maintained refusals" were completely new dossiers, and the arrogantly officious decisions seemed, as usual, to be highly arbitrary.

Physical fatigue and nervous exhaustion took over. Everyone was gutted. Three people collapsed and had to be taken to hospital by the fire brigade. Another three lay down to launch a hunger-strike. True, some people had been regularised (11, but 2 with conditions, out of 53 replies), which was positive and, on reflection, perhaps all that what was to be expected. But the effect of it all was too traumatic. It meant too much to people's lives. It divided us again into *soutiens*, regularised *sans-papiers*, still waiting *sans-papiers*, refused *sans-papiers* and yet-to-hand-in-a-dossier *sans-papiers*. We sat there, as individuals, suffering from the emotional fall-out until about 4pm. Once the *soutiens* had persuaded the hunger-strikers to at least return to the occupation, we dragged ourselves back.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced the occupation and the Co-ordination as a fieldwork site. I have also discussed some of the different theoretical approaches to the *sans-papiers* movement. Fassin (2001) focuses on the 'biopolitics' of immigration policy, showing that there has been a historical shift in the post-war period from immigrants officially constructed as 'workers' to immigrants as 'asylum seekers' and finally as 'suffering bodies'. As 'suffering bodies', undocumented migrants are given temporary leave to remain on humanitarian grounds, in order to receive medical treatment. The illnesses inscribed in their bodies have become an increasingly significant way of proving a legitimate need to stay in France. Dubois (2000) interprets the *sans-papiers* movement in the context of the exclusionary intolerance of French Republicanism, suggesting that slave insurgency during the French Revolution backs up the *sans-papiers*' claim to French universalism. He argues that true universalism, represented by the slave insurgent, should include the expression of cultural particularities in public-political space. Siméant (1998) insists on the marginal and 'heretical' status of the *sans-papiers* movement, in the context of a consensus opposing 'clandestine immigration'. Terray (1999) points to a convenient connivance between the State and private business, in allowing the existence of a pool of foreign workers in France who have no employment rights, social rights or Political rights. Balso (2001) poses the question of the 'singularity' of the *sans-papiers*, as foreign workers created inside the State, but not counted by the State and thereby denied all rights. Cissé (1999), on the other hand, discusses the *sans-papiers* movement in the context of international debt, flexibilisation and North-South inequalities.

Supporting Cissé's (1999) analysis, the interviewees suggested many transnational connections between the situations they had left behind in their home countries and the situations they were faced with in France. They referred to colonial history and the ongoing if indirect power that France exercises over its ex-colonies. They pointed out the networks of friends, families and communities linking immigrants and their home countries, creating transnational networks that bridge the gap between nation-states. On the other

hand, the interviewees also discussed the contradictory way in which they have been treated inside the French State, validating Balso's approach, although not to the exclusion of transnational connections. Both Carlos and Adel found it incredible that they were expected to work on the black for ten years. Dembele pointed out that, despite winning a scholarship to study in France, his legal position as a student had become untenable because of official restrictions. Adel and Moussa referred to the fact that *sans-papiers* are registered at the Prefecture, which means that they cannot be deported automatically. They have not been regularised but exist in limbo. All the interviewees showed their exasperation with the crazy situation in which they found themselves; an exasperation that had driven them to shouting that they were *sans-papiers* in demos, despite the fact that they were used to hiding this fact in everyday life.

The poor results that the occupants received at the Prefecture after more than three months of occupation demonstrate the difficulties the Co-ordination faced. It is also an example of the stress and dejection suffered by the *sans-papiers* on many occasions. How and why they kept going are difficult questions to answer, for there was no guarantee of achieving regularisations. The incident illustrates the way the *sans-papiers*' struggled to make their collective voice heard with the hope of being regularised, a double process that brought them together in solidarity but individualised them again through the case by case treatment of dossiers. I want to consider how the movement constructs the *sans-papiers* voice and how this voice relates to French universalism. I also want to consider the role of French militants. In the next chapter I study these questions in the specific context of the Co-ordination. I focus on the interaction between the *sans-papiers* and French public space, in relation to two particular arenas: the relationship between the Co-ordination and the Prefecture; and the relationship between the militants and the *sans-papiers* within the Co-ordination.

Chapter 5

The politics of the Co-ordination

Introduction

Grillo (1985:255) discusses a local Communist Party meeting through which several immigrants sat in silence just to present their incomprehensible water bills to the French Party members at the end. This scenario is illustrative of the internal functioning of the Co-ordination; a lot of the *sans-papiers* seemed to sit through meetings, without contributing, in the hope that they would eventually get their dossiers sorted out. Most of the General Meetings were taken up by the *soutiens* (French militants) explaining the Prefecture's position, discussing Political strategy, or even arguing about unexplained differences amongst themselves. Certain *délégués* (elected representatives of the *sans-papiers*) and other key speakers would take an active part in the discussion, but most of the *sans-papiers* were addressed only as an audience and/or classroom of trainee militants. Individuals who made an effort to speak would sometimes just repeat what they what was expected of them. For example, they might urge more people to turn up to demos, which was generally accepted as the best way to improve results.

When there were serious issues of disagreement between the *soutiens* and the *sans-papiers*, the *soutiens* would use the classroom format to explain / impose their superior knowledge and, if this did not work, they criticised the belligerent parties and the *sans-papiers* in general for not conducting the meeting properly. However, if anyone addressed the *soutiens* as 'the organisers' of the Co-ordination, they would be reminded that there was no such thing and that all decisions were taken democratically in the General Meeting. I was often frustrated and critical of the way meetings were run, but I was also impressed by the fact that they ran at all. They not only created a dialogue between French militants and immigrants; they had to deal with the stressful and urgent issue of the *sans-papiers'* (lack of) papers. The meeting seemed to

acknowledge the 'state of exception' (Agamben 1998:167) in which the *sans-papiers* lived, and give them some hope of regularisation. It is not surprising, therefore, that when there was disagreement, feelings ran high and the meetings could get out of hand. Discussions tended to go on for hours, with arguments that were hard to follow and repetitive. The *soutiens* tended to blame long and difficult meetings on the behaviour of the *sans-papiers*, and would sometimes try to tell them off as if they were schoolchildren.

The first General Meeting I attended involved an argument that seemed to be dominated by French knowledge of the debating game. It was supposedly a democratic discussion, but there was more teaching and badgering by French militants than dialogue between equals. Nevertheless, the subject of discussion demonstrated the principle of autonomy, established in the *sans-papiers* movement during the occupation of St Bernard, and the *sans-papiers'* determination to hold onto some degree of this autonomy. One of the French militants, Jean-Paul, objected to the Co-ordination representatives (*délégués*) being elected in the separate *sans-papiers'* meeting (as well as the General Meetings between *soutiens* and *sans-papiers*, there were meetings that were exclusively for the *sans-papiers*). Jean-Paul explained that the *délégués* were representatives of the Co-ordination and should therefore be elected in the General Meeting. He seemed to have the upper hand in the argument, speaking lengthily and authoritatively, but several *sans-papiers* spoke against him. Jean-Paul then threatened to walk out, but he did not get his way. Elections continued to be held in the *sans-papiers* meetings. These were sometimes even more volatile than the General Meetings, but they created an important space for the *sans-papiers* to understand and formulate their own approach to the struggle.

The confrontational meetings were a site of Political struggle, but they also fulfilled an important communication role within the Co-ordination. The issues that were discussed included the official letters of response, such as the one received after the night at the Prefecture that pretended to ignore the occupation but listed the responses to the occupants' dossiers. Such responses had to be interpreted in the context of the painfully long battle for

regularisations, which were dragged out of the Prefecture over the course of the occupation. The meeting also planned and announced the endless timetable of demos. Hence it was used to explain and interpret the Prefecture's position; it was the forum in which to consider the latest response, or lack of response, and to plan actions to improve the situation.

This chapter examines the political tensions that were played out in the Co-ordination. I begin by examining accounts of how the *sans-papiers* movement functions and I look at Grillo's (1985) theory of 'incorporation' and Herzfeld's (1992) analysis of bureaucracy as ways of explaining how the *sans-papiers* voice is silenced. In relation to the role of the *soutiens*, I consider the question that Žižek (1999, 1989) poses as a way of undermining the well-meaning public who claim to speak for the abject non-part: "What do they want?" Then I describe the Co-ordination's interaction with the Prefecture: the movement's status in public space; the tactics employed by the Co-ordination; and the dossiers handed into and meetings held with the Prefecture. I examine the parts played by *soutiens* and *délégués*, in the events I witnessed, and I try to interpret them in the context of 'the struggle'. I use two particular examples to illustrate power relations within the Co-ordination: the failed attempt to launch a hunger-strike at the beginning of the occupation – the hunger-strike lasted only a few days because the *soutiens* forced the hunger-strikers to stop; and 'the list', i.e. making the regularisation of 75 named individuals the primary goal of the occupation, which the *sans-papiers* eventually forced the *soutiens* to accept. Looking at subsequent events, I attempt to understand in general what happened when the *sans-papiers* did not fit in with the *soutiens*' idea of 'the struggle'.

Public space, co-optation and bureaucracy

Both Fassin (2001) and Dubois (2000) draw parallels between the question of racial discrimination in France and the *sans-papiers* movement. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Body-Gendrot (1996) sees social movements, and even urban violence, as messages that French society can hear and to which it responds.

Likewise, Fassin and Dubois seem to have confidence in the integrating power of French society. All three suggest that French universalism can adjust to challenges without being fundamentally displaced. Fassin (2001:6) declares that he is relatively optimistic that French immigration politics has not negated universal Politics. However, this optimism has to be read in the context of French Republican universalism, with its assimilatory model of citizenship. The public space on which his optimism is based is a far from neutral reflection of French society. Fassin's (2001:6) notion of a return to Politics by "the victims and their supporters" ignores the co-optation of protest and unrest by established Political organisations and the well-meaning middle classes. In Žižek's (1999:231) model the sympathetic reaction of French society to protest and unrest is the 'hysterical gesture' of the universal public drowning out the voice of the excluded non-part.

Fassin's (2001) analysis of 'the suffering body', as an abject means of regularisation, does not justify his optimism. Moreover, his account reflects a slippage in French public space, from the *sans-papiers* movement to the 'suffering body', without commenting on or analysing the contradictions between them. The movement fights for the right of all *sans-papiers* to be regularised, but Fassin highlights the common humanity of the 'suffering body', with only compassion-seeking, seriously ill individuals being regularised. By not analysing this slippage, Fassin seems to reinforce it, especially in the way he refers to the movement as an agentless "eruption" in public space (Fassin 2001:3).

Siméant (1998:306) points out that *sans-papiers* hunger-strikes use the humanitarian dimension of 'the suffering body' to actively break through the exclusion from official citizenship. Whilst she argues that *sans-papiers* often have little or no collective power, at least not until the movement already has a significant presence in the public arena, a hunger-strike can create a *rapport de force* (Siméant 1998:350), i.e. it can force the authorities to take notice. The hunger-strike both pushes the issue into the public arena by attracting media attention, and puts direct pressure on the authorities, who do not want to be seen as being responsible for someone's death or serious illness. It also

pushes social networks of *soutiens* into action, even if they are in principle against this form of action.

In contrast to the highly publicised “eruption” of St Bernard, Siméant (1998) creates a profile of *sans-papiers* movements as groups struggling to gain any media coverage; groups made up of individual *sans-papiers* and *soutiens*, using the movement for their own personal ends. Although, at times, her approach seems too cynical, especially in the way she claims that the movement is limited to an apolitical humanitarian appeal, there are aspects of her profile that my own fieldwork experience corroborated. Aspects of the relationship between *sans-papiers* movements and French public space that are less spectacular than the occupation of St Bernard, but say something about the interface between *sans-papiers* and *soutiens* beyond the media spotlight.

Siméant makes the point that within French logic immigrant movements are assumed to be self-dispersing. She quotes Dubet’s circular logic on the subject:

“it is only the progressive process of the installation, integration and assimilation of foreigners that constitutes a collective action driven by immigrants in the name of immigration.” (Dubet quoted in Siméant 1998:37)

In response to a presence felt to be ‘other’, on French soil, integration is the proposed solution, and the problem of immigration is thought to disappear once integration is successful (Siméant 1998:39). Siméant points out that, according to this prevailing logic:

“immigrants would no longer have any legitimacy or interest in making their demands heard, as immigrants, once their difference had disappeared.” (Siméant 1998:39)

In this sense the *sans-papiers* movement fits very conveniently into the French model, since those that identify themselves as *sans-papiers* take on a temporary identity that will no longer apply once they have their papers (Siméant 1998:44). As we saw in the last chapter, the interviewees’ sense of struggle was not limited purely to their temporary (non-)existence as *sans-papiers*. They also referred to struggles in their home countries, struggles getting to France and struggles to live and work once they were regularised.

The temporary aspect of the *sans-papiers* struggle can reinforce the idea that the *sans-papiers*, as immigrants declaring themselves to be immigrants, are pre-Political non-citizens requiring the help and guidance of French militants, who act as the gate-keepers to French society. Siméant (1998:42) recognises that *sans-papiers* movements are not based on 'community' solidarity but on Political networks, dispelling any idea that the *sans-papiers* are 'primitives' acting together on embedded mechanical solidarity (Siméant 1998:44). Nevertheless, she points to the importance of French *soutiens* for taking the *sans-papiers* beyond the limited defence of the group to collective action in Political space (Siméant 1998:109). My fieldwork supports this claim to a certain extent; the *soutiens* wanted to use the occupation to campaign on behalf of all *sans-papiers*, whereas the *sans-papiers* wanted to focus on the regularisation of the occupants. However, I disagree with Siméant's assumption that pursuing the interests of a finite group is apolitical. Although the *sans-papiers* cause needed to be announced in Political space, gaining concrete regularisations was Politically significant.

Siméant scathingly dismisses the idea that the *sans-papiers* have any Political autonomy. She insists that groups of *sans-papiers* are mobilised (Siméant 1998:53) by French *soutiens* and 'immigrant entrepreneurs', who may be *sans-papiers* themselves but, Simeant argues, are not representative of their groups (Siméant 1998:54). She dismisses the claim that *sans-papiers* movements are run 'by and for immigrants' as the self-abnegating posture of French militants, falsely proclaiming themselves to be conscientious supporters with nothing to gain personally from the movement (Siméant 1998:65). In the face of a Political consensus against irregular immigration, Siméant argues that only militant misfits are willing to take up the *sans-papiers* cause (Siméant 1998:360, 430).

Siméant's study of *sans-papiers* movements contradicts Fassin's optimism about the openness of French public space. Her comments about the relationships between *soutiens* and *sans-papiers* suggest that a process of misrepresentation takes place inside *sans-papiers* movements before they even reach the public space. This view is backed up by other commentators.

Abdallah (2000:114) points out with frustration that French organisations cannot cope with self-affirming and self-organising immigrants. Jazouli (1985) traces the history of *banlieue* protest and anti-racist movements, highlighting a pattern of co-optation. Unlike these commentators, however, Siméant tends to reinforce co-optation by insisting that the *soutiens* alone are capable of turning the *sans-papiers* cause into Political action.

In contrast, Cissé and Diop point to the importance of the *sans-papiers* voice in attracting the attentions of *soutiens*. Although Cissé argues that the St Bernard Collective was autonomous, she makes it clear that this was often despite pressure from *soutiens*. For example, she tells how a group of mediators began by trying to work on all the *délégués* (*sans-papiers* leaders) dossiers as soon as the movement had attracted attention, thereby attempting to corrupt the *délégués* into betraying the rest of the *sans-papiers* (Cissé 1999:65). Cissé (1999:65) claims that she had to step in to stop deals aimed at splitting or containing the movement in this situation and on several other occasions. Diop (1997:96, 156) also insists that the movement took off because the *sans-papiers* took control themselves and directly convinced potential supporters of their cause. Diop (1997:151) acknowledges Cissé's role, pointing out that Cissé was frequently under pressure to focus on the regularisation of the occupants rather than efforts to widen the movement from inside the St Bernard Collective. What Cissé and Diop's accounts suggest is the initial importance of a *sans-papiers* voice, which is then closed down from two sides: closed down externally by militant co-optation and internally by the group's demand for concrete results¹.

Grillo's (1985) study of co-optation or 'incorporation' of immigrants' voices within French public space reflects many aspects of the relationship between French militants and immigrants in the *sans-papiers* Co-ordination, despite his study being more than twenty years old. In contrast to French society, immigrants are assumed to "enclose themselves in tribal structures", and their entry into the public arena generally requires the mediation of:

¹ I am drawing a parallel with Back's (1996:246) model of 'liminal ethnicity' here.

“French institutions with French representatives, or immigrant spokesmen incorporated within the French system on that system’s terms”. (Grillo 1985:277)

Hence, Grillo argues that immigrant militants have to ‘evolve’ under French control, and that information about immigrants usually passes through a variety of French ‘messengers’ who, consciously or unconsciously, interpret and transform the voices of immigrants to fit their own agenda (Grillo 1985:273). Grillo argues that Political movements, State institutions and the media all co-opt and transform the voices of immigrants in French public space.

Herzfeld (1992) argues that a process of correcting or excluding cultural anomalies is inherent to nation-state bureaucracies, operating through their universal claims to rational objectivity. He puzzles over the harsh space of ‘social indifference’, which denies common humanity but “coexists with democratic and egalitarian ideals” (Herzfeld 1992:1). The *sans-papiers* seem to exist in this bureaucratic no-man’s land of ‘social indifference’ that Herzfeld’s analyses. Herzfeld argues that modern bureaucracies depend on distancing themselves from an illusory image of tribal anarchy, thereby creating supposedly objective sets of categories. However, belief in the natural universality of these categories can lead bureaucrats and the public “to acquiesce in the humiliation of others – the social production of indifference” (Herzfeld 1992:13).

Herzfeld shows that universal bureaucratic systems of classification are nevertheless constituted out of culturally contingent particularities (Herzfeld 1992:20). Foreigners and other deviants, who fail to fit into the official categories, are subjected to the stereotypes that flourish in “a seemingly empty taxonomic space” (Herzfeld 1992:96). The Durkheimian view of nation-statism subordinates ‘traditional’ identities in order to create rational bureaucratic management, but it must draw on the “symbolic nourishment” of co-opted traditions to create a moral order and a national identity (Herzfeld 1992:35). Herzfeld cites Anderson (1983), whose study of ‘print capitalism’ points to the conceptualisation of nation-states as ‘imagined communities’ (Herzfeld 1992:37). Consequently, the claims of nation-states – to function according to

modern, universal rationality – cannot be taken at face value. They mask racism and the symbolic violence of social indifference.

“At the level of surface form, a pervasive and systematic idiom of belonging and exclusion is used by bureaucrats and citizens alike.” (Herzfeld 1992:70)

Bureaucrats, as the custodians of rational classificatory systems, are the masters of this social indifference:

“Bureaucrats, who hold the power to admit citizens into the national image, also serve as godfathers and patrons who retranslate the homogeneous state back into social terms, and who control the definition of what is or is not the correct form (in both the abstract and bureaucratic senses of the word!).” (Herzfeld 1992:108)

Herzfeld illustrates his argument with examples of cultural clashes between bureaucracies and individuals (Herzfeld 1992:84). He gives an example of one individual, whose French passport had been stolen. She did not seem ‘to fit’ because she had been living in the USA. The police did not believe that she was French because she looked and sounded American, and had been stupid enough to leave her valuables in a car in Paris overnight. They sent her all the way from Paris to the *Mairie* of her home town in central France. From there she was sent to the Prefecture in another town, having been told that she no longer existed. Eventually she found someone who came from a neighbouring village, who took the trouble to work out where the *Mairie* had filed her dossier – under ‘aliens’. The *Mairie* explained that she would have to stay in France for three months before they could give her a new passport. Then when the bureaucrat asked her for an address and realised that she was the niece of the previous Mayor, she exclaimed, “That changes everything!” and gave her a new passport the next day (Herzfeld 1992:153). Herzfeld argues that this individual neither “outwitted the system or went along with the formal procedures” but succeeded by following the unofficial rules of being French (Herzfeld 1992:152). Hence, in the interstices of French universal bureaucracy, inside knowledge, personal contacts and cultural competence can make the difference between existing and not existing.

The following processes, meetings and events that occurred during my fieldwork with the Co-ordination concern the ways in which the *sans-papiers*

voice was heard and/or silenced through the 'social indifference' of the state bureaucracy and the co-optation of the French militants. The approach of the Prefecture was relatively straightforward: they attempted to maintain a stance of 'social indifference' regardless of the Political pressure put on them by the Co-ordination. Even when the bureaucrats did bow to pressure and grant concessions, they insisted on maintaining a front of bureaucratic objectivity. The role of the *soutiens* is not so clear cut. In relation to the *soutiens*, I was continually reminded of Žižek's (1999:230) question "What do they actually want?" Jean-Paul frequently insisted in meetings that he and the other *soutiens* gained absolutely nothing from their involvement with the movement, but neither I nor the *sans-papiers* were convinced. They frequently posed the question "What do the *soutiens* want?" amongst themselves, and there were many possible explanations of the *soutiens*' motives circulating during the occupation. However, it was impossible to work out the truth at the time, and even in retrospect I cannot distance myself enough from my frustration and confusion about the way the occupation was run to make a reasoned assessment.

From an analytical point of view, attempting to unmask the *soutiens*' motives is a futile exercise. A more valid line of enquiry is to consider what role this question – "What do the *soutiens* want?" – played in the Co-ordination. Žižek (1999:230) uses the question in order to dismiss the hysterical gesture of an idealistic and well-meaning public claiming to identify with the abject non-part. When the well-meaning public protest on behalf of the excluded non-part of universality, the question "What do they want?" cannot be answered, and is not meant to be answered, because this angelic protest is the hysterical gesture of insatiable pseudo-radicalism (Žižek 1999:230). However, during the occupation the Co-ordination and the *sans-papiers* movement no longer attracted the attentions of the well-meaning public. As the accounts of Fassin, Dubois and Siméant testify, the well-meaning French public had been content to think that the *sans-papiers* movement had had its day and been triumphantly re-incorporated into universalism. The *soutiens* in the Co-ordination, on the other hand, had continued to struggle with the *sans-papiers* well after the movement had ceased to be popular and idealistic. The idea that the *soutiens* were merely

dragging out the popular hysterical gesture does not adequately explain their practical and effective commitment to the Co-ordination.

Žižek (1989) proposes two possible readings of desire that can be related to what the *soutiens* want. The first would suggest a straightforward process of co-optation, whereby the *soutiens* extend French universalism into their own model of Politics, demanding that the *sans-papiers* inhabit the frame of their fantasy (Žižek 1989:119), as immigrant militants assimilated into 'the struggle'. This way of reading the situation was available to the *sans-papiers* themselves. In this reading, the *sans-papiers* have at least some room to move; they can choose whether or not to fulfil the *soutiens*' fantasy. This is a purely negative freedom, however, with the *soutiens* only relating to the *sans-papiers* when the *sans-papiers* enter their frame of fantasy (Žižek 1989:119). In the second reading, however, Žižek suggests that pushing the fantasy beyond its limits, in this case pushing the fantasy of assimilation into the French Republic beyond the limits of the State itself, splits the idealistic fantasy and the symbolic order (Žižek 1989:122). In this reading, the excessive question "What do they want?" is posed precisely because normality has broken down (Žižek 1989:118); the *soutiens* have gone beyond the limits of imaginable motivations. What they want becomes a fathomless question marking the failure of interpollation (Žižek 1989:121), which puts "in question the Good embodied in the State and common morals" (Žižek 1989:117). In this reading, the *sans-papiers* learn a very different sense of 'the struggle'. One in which, following the *soutiens*' lead, they are released from the State bureaucracy's etiquette and given a platform to struggle for their papers in any way they see fit, with or against the *soutiens*, with or against each other. In this second reading the *soutiens* actually enable the *sans-papiers* to become militants, but they risk the *sans-papiers* turning against them.

'Tom and Jerry' politics

The aim of this section is to discuss French public space in relation to the *sans-papiers* movement. *Sans-papiers*' lives are caught up in a bureaucratic nightmare that denies their existence, and their non-status is a social taboo that they have to conceal. Naming themselves *sans-papiers* and taking to the streets to shout and sing about being *sans-papiers* may follow the French model of Political militancy but it also has a certain novelty for both those who take part and onlookers. Publicly declaring oneself to be *sans-papiers* requires a significant personal and political commitment. However, it is questionable whether the streets, especially within the local *Département*, count as French public space². They may be public places, in which public order has to be maintained, but most of our efforts to demand public attention were officially ignored, limiting them to the momentary effect of the carnivalesque. It was as if the authorities were content to let the *sans-papiers* wear themselves out rather than intervene, which would involve publicly recognising the movement's existence.

The *sans-papiers* seemed to have enough Political support for the authorities to fear the repercussions of heavy handed interventions. However, the movement was not high-profile enough to make its voice heard in French public space, except on rare occasions. The Communist local council supported the Co-ordination, which, along with wider public opinion, acted as a protection against aggressive police tactics. The public transport ticket-controllers would stand back when they saw us coming; travel to demos was free. In certain circumstances we were given a police escort, hence one of the rewritten verses of 'Gululumu metap kish' ('Tell my mother not to cry') went: "*Il faut dire aux flics, la cortège est magnifique!*" ("You have to hand it to the cops, the escort is magnificent!") This jovial and ironic praise of the police escort claims their mobilisation as a success for the movement. Having a police escort represented official recognition by the authorities and was therefore something

² By 'public space' I am referring to the public-political arena rather than just everything that is not private. This includes 'the social', with its acknowledgement of and belief in a Durkheimian organic solidarity. The *sans-papiers* threaten and/or can appeal to 'the social' through public space.

to sing about. More often we would meet the police at certain places, always in front of the Prefecture, but also wherever they wanted to block our passage into significant places, thereby keeping us out of public space. In these situations our response was less amicable; we would shout: "*On veut des papiers, pas des policiers!*" ("We want papers, not policemen!"); or "*Police par tout, justice nul part!*" ("Police everywhere, justice nowhere!")

When I first started going on demos, we would spend about half an hour outside the sub-Prefecture shouting, singing and drumming before doing a little tour of the town, which made onlookers stop and stare. It took me a while to notice the two plain clothes policemen that followed us around. One of them usually checked on the demo at various points, hanging around at a short distance with a walkie-talkie. People would sometimes greet them jovially and they would be friendly in an informal way, as if they were old friends who had bumped into us in the street. There was no attempt to hide the fact that they were watching us, but they avoided official interaction, maintaining an attitude of disinterested observation. They seemed to melt into the scene, so that picking them out gave me a mild surprise of recognition, even though they were not hiding. Everyone just got used to them being there and played the game of not noticing them.

On certain occasions we wound up the authorities deliberately, by forcing the police to respond when they wanted to ignore the demo. At one stage during the occupation, when demos seemed to be getting us nowhere, Youcef Haddide began instructing us to block the traffic in front of the occupation as we returned from the demo. We would hold up the traffic, at an important junction, long enough to cause a significant jam, before stepping aside and chanting slogans to the appreciative and not so appreciative motorists. The Chief of Police appeared one day, just as we had got off the road, and he was clearly agitated about being called to the scene.

The Co-ordination played a cat and mouse game with the Prefecture, attempting to embarrass it publicly by showing that the *sans-papiers* existed, without directly confronting its authority. The *soutiens* were wary about challenging the accepted limits of demonstrations and were careful to avoid

situations where the *sans-papiers* might be arrested. This was understandable, especially as two people had recently been deported after the unsanctioned attempt to re-occupy St Bernard. The Co-ordination craved media attention, but the media generally regarded the *sans-papiers* movement as an old story, and the Prefecture could afford to take little notice of the movement whilst there was no threat of embarrassing public attention.

As a result, the Co-ordination had to think up ways to attract media attention and put public pressure on the Prefecture without endangering the *sans-papiers*. The Co-ordination was, in the same vein, constantly demanding a meeting with the *Préfet*. Getting such a meeting was a significant achievement in Political etiquette, regardless of the results, because it made the Co-ordination visible as a legitimate interlocutor. However, the limited credibility the movement achieved at one moment could be imperiously dismissed the next; the *Préfet* could conveniently forget the Political pressure that had brought him to the negotiating table and reassert the bureaucratic indifference of treating dossiers case by case, through the official procedures. The Prefecture always applied the law, as they pointed out on several occasions. The *Préfet* had options for accommodating the *sans-papiers* movement but they left no mark in political public space. The *Préfet* had important concessionary powers; the dossiers could be read with more or less generosity. Getting a response at all was usually due only to persistent Political pressure. The Co-ordination threatened to embarrass the Prefecture publicly, but tended to achieve just a handful of regularisations, whilst the Prefecture retained its status as a rational and indifferent bureaucratic institution.

Out of frustration the *sans-papiers* movement retaliated against the imposed invisibility by deliberately breaking the rules of sanctioned protest, as the only way to make their presence felt. For example, one day, after repeatedly getting no response from the Prefecture, the demo was led through the adjacent shopping centre. Despite objections from the security guards, this became a regular detour for more than a year. Dogs and extra security guards were eventually brought in to keep the demonstrators out, and when this did not work the police turned out in force to block the demo's passage. The authorities had

tried to ignore the demo passing through the shopping centre, whilst the private security firm had been forced to react to this invasion of the street and 'bare life' into consumer space. The Co-ordination refused to back off until there was a confrontation that forced the authorities to react.

Spontaneous decisions to use the demo in unsanctioned ways tended to create tension and disagreement within the movement. Nevertheless, when the movement was denied public recognition, in the same way that the *sans-papiers* were ignored as individuals, putting irregular bodies in places where they could no longer be ignored seemed to be the only other option. The most extreme form of such protest is the hunger-strike, in which the *sans-papiers* hunger-striker threatens to destroy his biological life if he is not 'regularised', recognised as a person with human rights and granted some kind of official status within the nation-state. It is as if the hunger striking body demands, on behalf of its unrecognised and silenced inhabitant, the right to exist. In this way, the hunger-strike threatens to expose the slippage between citizen-life and biological-life that Agamben (1998) highlights as the founding myth of the nation-state. The authorities may reject the hunger-strike as an illegitimate form of action but, as the weeks go by, they can no longer ignore it. They are forced to react, but in openly opposing it they risk contradicting their own rejection of the hunger-striker's Political rights. How can they claim to have any jurisdiction over the human biological-life that is under threat without accepting that, in principle at least, it belongs to a human being, who must have Political rights as a citizen (or at least a resident with a provisional form of citizenship)?

Of course, the authorities officially refuse to bow to the pressure of the hunger-strike, but they cannot ignore the possibility of being blamed for a human death. If verbal promises are insufficient to persuade the hunger-strikers to stop, they then face a difficult decision. When the hunger-strike enters the critical period, after 40 days, the only option the authorities have left, besides public capitulation or non-intervention, is to evict the hunger-strikers forcibly from the premises they are occupying. This is what caused the public outcry in 1996, and the Socialist Government did not want to be seen to be repeating this rightwing aggression. The hunger-strike seems to be the ultimate argument of

the *sans-papiers* movement and, despite the Co-ordination's efforts to find other ways of generating Political pressure, the hunger-strike remained the surest way of mobilising supporters, attracting media attention and forcing the *Préfet* to react. Siméant's (1998) account of *sans-papiers* movements seems correct insofar as it points to the hunger-strike as the *sans-papiers*' main weapon for forcing their cause into public space. The question is, on a theoretical level, whether, as Siméant argues, the *sans-papiers* movement can therefore be dismissed as a heretical anomaly or whether, as Agamben (1998) puts it, the presence of 'bare life' in public space undermines the concept of citizenship itself.

Protest and exist

The Co-ordination's effort to create public pressure was guided by the *soutiens*, whose power to shield the *sans-papiers* from negative consequences and to negotiate on their behalf dictated the kinds of Political action that were collectively pursued. In the first place, most *sans-papiers* who joined the Co-ordination were looking for their dossier to be sorted out rather than to become active in a Political movement. The ability of the *soutiens* to work on dossiers, along with their cultural competence and personal contacts, was the main attraction of the Co-ordination. The *sans-papiers* were obliged to go on demos and join the occupation in order to have their dossiers dealt with by the Co-ordination. This link between Political militancy and the treatment of dossiers was not, however, imposed solely by the *soutiens*. The whole movement was constructed around this combination of protest and advice work. Collectives that dealt with people's dossiers without applying Political pressure tended to receive unexplained refusals from the Prefecture or no response at all. The *sans-papiers* themselves, especially those with the most experience, put pressure on their peers to be Politically active. Individual *sans-papiers* who just wanted their dossiers dealt with were criticised or even told off in meetings, usually by the *délégués*. The *sans-papiers* were told to be present at demos; even if they put their dossier in at the Prefecture it was only through Political

pressure that they could hope to get a positive response. They were, after all, in “The co-ordination of the struggle (*la lutte*) for the *sans-papiers*”.

I found it hard to believe that putting Political pressure on the Prefecture, which has an essentially bureaucratic role in the regularisation of immigrants, was the most effective way of getting dossiers dealt with. However, it was a mistake to think that advice work alone could have the same results. As Ali Internet remarked to me, “Politics in France operates from the Elysée Palace to the shitter.” My fieldwork did not include professional and voluntary organisations pursuing advice work outside ‘the struggle’ but, amongst the *sans-papiers*, they had a reputation of being able to handle unproblematic cases or being able to gain temporary status on humanitarian grounds for those seeking asylum and those who were ill. The Co-ordination represented a better chance, for many, of actually sorting out their papers and being able to work and to become regularised residents.

Around the central link between dossiers and Political militancy, the Co-ordination pursued a range of activities. The dossiers divided the *sans-papiers* into individuals. They were handed in collectively to the Prefecture as part of a Political protest, but each dossier was compiled individually, detailing a claim to residence, and each dossier was followed up individually. However, dossiers had to be backed up by collective Political pressure, and the situation of each dossier was updated during collective negotiations. The usual method of generating Political pressure was with symbolic gestures addressed to French public space, such as long marches, the night in front of the Prefecture, visits to all the local *Mairies*, and temporary occupations of relevant public buildings, such as the Office of International Migration or the local branch of the Department of Employment. The occupation of the old *Gendarmerie* was also a more symbolic gesture. It was negotiated with the local *Mairie*, who guaranteed that there would be no eviction, and it did not obstruct any public activity. Hence the occupation relied on the stamina of the *sans-papiers* and their willingness to subject themselves to physical hardship. This rather tiring and, when not many people turned up on demos, often demoralising strategy of easily ignored protest was the only way to guarantee the *sans-papiers*’ safety,

whilst pursuing a model of Political militancy. It inevitably generated frustration. For example, Amirouche scathingly criticised the never-ending routine of demos as 'parading the parrots'.

Branching off from the agreed strategy, the *sans-papiers* seemed to have two important kinds of tactic that were employed more spontaneously: one for coping with the boredom, and another for forcing the authorities to react. The first involved singing and drumming and generally giving the demo a carnivalesque atmosphere, which attracted bystanders as well as giving the demonstrators something to do. The second involved pushing at the boundaries of acceptable Political protest, as I have discussed above, and putting *sans-papiers*' bodies on the line. I will give an example of how these tactics combined with the main strategy.

On the day we handed-in the first occupants' dossiers we went to the Prefecture in the morning and decided to pass by the queues for the *Bureau des étrangers* (where people queue up to sort out their residence papers). This was not an acceptable place to protest. Apparently the Prefecture owns the space in front of the *Bureau des étrangers*, and we were not allowed on it; whereas we were allowed to stand on the square in front of the main building of the Prefecture, a few metres from the door³. Our demos usually took place in front of this imposing building block, with the tricolour flying above us on the huge flag pole, and even when there were thousands of demonstrators, the square only felt half full. Having noticed the displeasure we had caused by going past the *Bureau des étrangers*, I proposed that we go there regularly at 8.30am. However, the *soutiens* were unwilling to do this. They did not seem interested in pushing the Prefecture's sensitivity about the *Bureau des étrangers* or in appealing to the large numbers of immigrants who queued there every morning. According to the dominant strategy of protest, the *Bureau des étrangers* was too dangerous and did not address French public space.

³ On one occasion, the demo had to compete for this space with striking Prefecture workers.

Nevertheless, one of the *soutiens*, Robert, decided to take us back to the *Bureau des étrangers* one day, when we were waiting interminably for another promised response to the occupants' dossiers. He had a different approach to most of the *soutiens*. He came on demos the most often, did not compile dossiers and seemed less patronising about how he involved the *sans-papiers* in Political activism. As we walked round to the *Bureau des étrangers* a few of the *sans-papiers* objected, fearing the repercussions of going out-of-bounds, but we all stuck together and hoped that with this surprise action the authorities would not have time to respond. The singing and drumming of the demo attracted attention and was appreciated by people in the queue. We did not stay long enough for extra police to arrive. After a few songs, ending with a rendition of the *sans-papiers'* version of the *Marseillaise*, we returned to the public square. We then stood outside the main building as usual but, having received no response from the *Préfet*, Robert got us to crowd around the front door. The CRS (riot police) came out and lined up in front of us (they usually stood inside, behind the glass). Meanwhile, Mme Muraille, who had been dealing with the occupants' dossiers, phoned up Rosa, who was not on the demo, and, on her request, we pulled back, having been promised a response. Robert requested that the response be handed directly to the demo, which was extremely unlikely to happen, as it involved a formal interaction between the demo and the Prefecture. Whilst waiting for Mme Muraille to respond to this new request (apparently she had not answered when Rosa tried to phone back), the *sans-papiers* started up a new chant of "*Donnez nous une réponse! Débranchez le téléphone!*" ("Give us a reply! Answer the telephone!"). With the relief after the stress of squaring up to the police and the joy of having at least forced some reaction, everyone started waving their mobile phones about and dancing round in a circle, as they chanted this impromptu slogan. Inevitably, Mme Muraille refused to respond directly to the demo but promised that there would be a response in the post the next day. Rosa and Jean-Paul turned up at the Prefecture and, despite the apparent success of the demo, they were furious with Robert, accusing him of being irresponsible. They argued that he had put the on-going negotiations and even the status of the Co-ordination in danger.

Dossiers and negotiations

All foreign individuals who need a *titre de séjour*, i.e. official status for living in France, have to pass through the *Bureau des Etrangers*, myself included. My life in France began with several visits to the Prefecture. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, even my straightforward demand for residence required several visits. I mentioned above the queues outside the *Bureau des Etrangers* and my own enthusiasm for using the demo to target these queues. This was partly because I knew what it was like to stand outside this building for hours, in the freezing cold, first thing in the morning, nurturing a healthy resentment towards French bureaucracy and the French State. Inside, the *Bureau des Etrangers* is an alienating space, with chairs bolted to the floor in a large waiting room area, where applicants wait several more hours for their ticket number to come up. In its advice work role the Co-ordination acted as an advocate for individual *sans-papiers*, mediating their interaction with the Prefecture. Sometimes *soutiens* would accompany *sans-papiers* to the Prefecture. However, the Prefecture often refused to allow the *soutiens* to act as advocates in interviews. The presence of a *soutien* seemed to challenge the normal dynamics between immigrant and interviewer: the unofficial superiority of being 'real-French'.

I found the *Bureau des Etrangers* annoying and unpleasant but, as I eventually left with the right result, I could write it off as a bureaucratic necessity. For a *sans-papiers*, however, the time spent at the *Bureau des Etrangers* is a minor inconvenience compared to the years of waiting and having to get by without papers. After being a *sans-papiers*, finally receiving papers changes everything. 'Regularisation' involves a shift from being barred from rational society to being reborn inside it, in theory able to: take up declared employment; to find somewhere legitimate to live; not to live in constant fear of being arrested and deported; to travel home to visit family; and generally to get on with life, with some minimal rights. Of course, regularisation does not end people's problems but introduces a whole new set. Nevertheless, it is understandable that when a regularised *sans-papiers* came to the Co-ordination with their new

papers, everyone would gather round to scrutinise the sought-after documents, and those who were regularised threw parties to celebrate the event.

I observed advice work sessions at the Co-ordination and even dealt with a few last minute dossiers myself, in the rush to get them ready for collective *dépôts* ('deposit', i.e. handing the dossiers in). Although voluntary, this advice work was conducted in a professional way, largely as it would have been done in non-campaigning organisations. The political position of the movement might have inclined the *soutiens* to push dossiers harder than purely professional advice workers would have done but the same rules of practice applied. Also, as comrades in 'the struggle', the *soutiens* would always address the *sans-papiers* as *tu* rather than the formal *vous* that would be expected in a professional setting. To my ears, this had a strangely colonial connotation. Macey (2000:40) points to his own and Fanon's experience of the way French officials have used the *tu* form in the past to address colonial subjects and immigrants as inferiors. Despite the remaining sense of cultural superiority, such a form of address from an official would be unacceptable today. With the *soutiens* sounding very French and interrogating the *sans-papiers* about their lives, I often found their use of *tu* in advice sessions uncomfortable, even though it was supposed to be based on solidarity rather than superiority. In this situation, *sans-papiers* frequently used the *vous* form, even though they were expected to use *tu*.

The *soutiens* would interview *sans-papiers* confidentially to determine under what criteria they could claim residence status. The *sans-papiers* would then be asked to collect all the relevant papers. For example, they would need two official proofs of presence in France for each of the last ten years if they were demanding the right to stay under the ten year rule; or they would need to assemble photocopies of 'family books' (containing marriage and birth certificates – used in France and ex-French colonies) and the French residence papers of all the other members of their family to demonstrate that their right to a 'family and private life', as defined by European convention, could only be fulfilled by living in France. Each category of regularisation required a specific set of proofs. In reality it was not always clear-cut as to which category the

Prefecture was most likely to accept. There was a general need to prove that every applicant was integrated into life in France and was therefore a potential French citizen. Thus it was always important to include proof of family members resident in France, as it showed that applicants had strong connections in France, even if the right to 'family and private life' was only strictly applied to those who had no close family elsewhere. Advice workers at the Co-ordination were aware of elements that would help a case, and the specific problems that might hinder it, such as criminal convictions⁴, suspicion of using false papers, or being the second wife of a polygamous marriage⁵.

As well as the ten year rule and the 'family and private life' criteria, people who were married to a French person, or to a person resident in France, or who were parents of a French child were also entitled to stay in France. The Prefecture usually insisted that immigrants who married in France return to their country of origin and apply for a long term visa before re-entering. The Pasqua Law of 1994 had withdrawn the right of all children born on French soil to have French nationality, which meant that some parents were refused regularisation until their children reached the age of 13 and claimed French nationality. Immigrants with a permanent work contract approved by the International Office of Migration (OMI) were entitled to residence⁶. Temporary residence status could also be claimed in relation to illness, Political and Territorial Asylum, being a student or having business that necessitated being present in France (e.g. claiming the pension of a deceased husband). There were also specific rights

⁴ The Prefecture has the duty not to regularise people who would be a threat to public order. This is the basis for the infamous *double peine* (double punishment), whereby immigrants convicted of crimes are sent to prison and then, on their release, refused residence rights.

⁵ This model of marriage was actively excluded, on the face of it to protect women's rights, as polygamy is judged to be oppressive and non-egalitarian. However, it was the already 'oppressed' second wives who suffered again at the hands of French bureaucracy.

⁶ The OMI contracts are aimed at professionals. Those working in unskilled and semi-skilled occupations are unlikely to be given permanent contracts. They are also unlikely to find an employer willing to pay the OMI contribution. If they do find an employer willing to give them a contract and are able to pay the contribution themselves, they may still be unable to proceed; like Mr Adel who, despite giving the employer a resignation letter dated several weeks later, and arranging to pay the OMI contribution himself, found that the employer eventually pulled out anyway fearing that the OMI would look too closely at his tax returns.

for people coming from ex-colonies, such as rights for those born on French soil, i.e. before independence, or those who were children of war veterans.

The Prefecture applied these legal categories according to local practice and current Government directives. The *Préfet* also had wide-ranging discretionary powers. Therefore, whilst the *sans-papiers*' dossiers had to fulfil legal requirements, the Prefecture's decision, if they made one, often seemed arbitrary. Turning case histories into dossiers was as much an art as a science, depending on each advice worker's ongoing experience.

Soutiens working on dossiers had invaluable experience of the system and were consequently well placed to question the Prefecture about its practices, knowing both the legal requirements and the difficulties faced by the *sans-papiers* trying to fulfil these requirements. This procedural expertise was often combined with useful personal relationships, contacts with key figures at the Prefecture, which played a significant part in the process. For example, Claire was a friend of the head of the *Bureau des Etrangers* and, until that person moved job, Claire had a lot of personal power since she could contact the Prefecture directly and discuss the progress of specific dossiers. Claire's style of dossier reflected this contact. They were almost like internal memoranda. She collected all the necessary proofs, listed them and made a brief bureaucratic argument for regularisation, which was not addressed to anyone in particular and was not even signed by Claire herself.

Rosa and Jean-Paul, in contrast, built up a working relationship with Mme Muraille, who was the *Préfet*'s secretary. They addressed their letters to the *Préfet* in person and signed them personally, along with the *sans-papiers* in question. Their letters often included several pages of both legalistic and humanitarian argument, couched in the polite etiquette with which one is supposed to address a *Préfet*. Mme Muraille, who received the dossiers on behalf of the *Préfet*, was the perfect diplomatic / bureaucratic face of the Prefecture. When she received the first set of occupants' dossiers, on the landing outside the *Préfet*'s offices, she informed us that the Prefecture would apply the law. She thanked us for the dossiers, acknowledging that individuals

who brought their papers along to the Prefecture in a disorganised fashion were harder to process. In this way she tried to justify accepting the collective *dépôt*, whilst covering herself against any suggestion that the members of the Co-ordination had successfully jumped the queue by using Political pressure. However, her officious gratitude did not explain why other organisations, which had also compiled dossiers, but without applying Political pressure, were being left without any response. Despite her stony approach, Mme Muraille's bureaucratic mask of objectivity sometimes slipped. She was seen on several occasions looking out ruefully from the Prefecture at the demos she tried so carefully to ignore. In person, her manner of officious indifference could also be ruffled by the Co-ordination's misbehaviour, for example, when we had visited the *Bureau des Etrangers*.

With the occupation beginning in June and with all the dossiers handed in by the beginning of August, as I described in the last chapter, the *sans-papiers* received the first disappointing results in September. The Co-ordination had to struggle to get even this negative response. The delegation that went forward from the demos, if it was received at all, usually spoke to a *fonctionnaire* without any powers to negotiate. Although I was never in the delegation for meetings with the *Préfet* or other important negotiations, I did accompany the delegation in several of the meetings with lesser *fonctionnaires*. They usually consisted of a short discussion either downstairs or in an empty room upstairs. After being on so many demos and standing outside wondering what was being said inside, the delegation had a certain mystique to it. It was quite strange and privileged to be walking into the building on behalf of the demo.

On one occasion we were ushered past the door on the landing where Mme Muraille had received the dossiers into a *fonctionnaire's* office. He introduced himself as a secretary to the *Préfet's* cabinet. He remarked that having an English *soutien* was original. He then began the discussion, looking down and flicking at his trousers dismissively, by explaining in a dead-pan voice and a non-committal way that there was no news for the moment, that we had not been expected that day and that the results of the dossiers we had handed in would be sent to us within a month. In response to our initial questions and

objections he made it clear that he did not know what was happening with the dossiers and that he could not predict the *Préfet's* response. He explained that he was only there to listen to us, and he hardly spoke another word until the end of the meeting when he made his response.

The *soutiens* and *délégués*, addressing the *fonctionnaire* as *Monsieur le Secrétaire*, expressed their views and concerns about certain issues. Robert pointed out the difficulty of providing ten years of proof of your (non-)existence as a *sans-papiers*, particularly for Maliens who had claimed asylum in 1990-91, then been pushed into clandestinity in 1994, before being told in 1997 that, if they could prove their continuous presence in France⁷, they could be regularised. Youcef Haddide argued that the *sans-papiers* were prepared 'to go further' if they did not get positive results. Rosa complained about the difficulty of getting OMI contracts and the virtual non-application of Territorial Asylum for Algerians. Mohamed Internet suggested that the Prefecture was virtually forcing the *sans-papiers* to fabricate their proofs, which caused tension amongst the delegation (he was later criticised for suggesting that the dossiers contained false documents). Rosa accused the Prefecture of applying restrictive quotas on immigration on the grounds that the *Département* had too many immigrants already. However, *Monsieur le Secrétaire* pointed out that ethnic quotas are illegal. Rosa also complained generally about the dossiers being blocked, and demanded an official contact at the Prefecture.

After more than an hour of listening, *Monsieur le Secrétaire* gave a careful response. He explained that he did not like receiving people in these circumstances, as he was not in a position to give any proper replies to our questions. He picked up on Mohamed Internet's discussion of proofs, agreeing that the Prefecture operated on a 'notion of doubt' when looking at documents. He said that he would pass our concerns on to the *Préfet* but added that he could only fill out a report and hand it to the *Préfet's* office. The *Préfet*, he explained, is a Political appointee who might choose to ignore his report. Someone remarked that he seemed to have the same problem getting a

⁷ The *Circulaire Chevènement*, as a one off quasi-amnesty, required seven years of presence; the subsequent law requires ten.

response from the *Préfet* as we did. Then the delegation got up and left, with handshakes, whilst insisting that we wanted the results of the occupants' dossiers within the first half of September, and that we preferred to have whatever results were ready rather than wait for all the results to be given at once. The delegation went downstairs and outside to the waiting demo. Rosa tried to make it sound like we had gained an important victory, saying that we had been promised the results in the first half of September. However, having been in on the discussion, the meeting seemed like an anti-climax compared to standing outside waiting, with hope and anxiety, for the delegation to emerge.

The *soutiens* and the Communist Party

The *Mairie* and the Communist Party were a major source of support for the Co-ordination. The Co-ordination's HQ belonged to the *Mairie*⁸. Although somewhat run down, these premises provided an invaluable space for *sans-papiers* to gather, to join the movement, to organise, to socialise, and for the *soutiens* to hold advice sessions. The main meetings were held in the *Bourse de Travail* (local union building), a space booked via the *Mairie*. The *Mairie* and the unions also photocopied leaflets for the Co-ordination. The Communist Party, as the party running local Government, helped protect *sans-papiers* in several ways: individuals with a membership card of the Co-ordination were generally immune from arbitrary arrest and deportation within the *Département*⁹; the demos were usually shielded from aggressive police interventions; and 'negotiated occupations' were protected from eviction.

It was sometimes difficult to know how the Communist Party and the Co-ordination were interacting, especially as I had little access to the Communist Party or the social circles that the *soutiens* moved in. The Co-ordination was not formally affiliated to the Party, but the *Mairie* intervened directly in the running of the Co-ordination on several occasions. For example, during the

⁸ It had a waiting area, small office, two meeting / interview rooms, kitchen and toilet.

⁹ There were many people who joined the Co-ordination and never came on demos or had their dossiers looked at. They seemed to want the card as a stand-in form of ID.

occupation the *Mairie* paid for security guards to guard the part of the building that the occupants were kept from, and eventually installed a steel door and door frame. Individual *soutiens* mediated between the *Mairie* and/or the Communist Party, but this process was not always explicit. Not all the *soutiens* were Communists. Robert was a prominent member of the Alternatives, originally a break-away part of the Socialist Party, and he also had strong Church connections. Albert was linked with a local Association and was critical of the *Mairie* on the question of housing. Marine, who explained what was going on to me in my first few weeks at the Co-ordination, seemed to have as much of a religious as a Political motivation. There were members of *Lutte Ouvrière* ('Worker's Struggle', a large far-Left party) who supported the Co-ordination regularly. There was even a representative of the Anarchist wing of the unemployed movement, who visited the occupation from time to time. Apart from Robert, however, all the influential *soutiens* (Rosa, Jean-Paul, Claire, Chantalle, Hausman) were linked to the Communist Party.

Other Collectives in the movement had *soutiens* with different Political affiliations, and there was rivalry or hostility due to these differences. The Communists were often accused of manipulating the Co-ordination, and their local Government powers could be used to control the movement as well as promote it. On several occasions, where a *sans-papiers* protest was not sanctioned by the Communists, Chantalle could be seen whispering into the ear of the main protagonist, persuading them that it was in their interests to desist. To have a dossier backed up by local Government support must be an advantage. Also, in exceptional circumstances the local Government could offer temporary accommodation to women and children, permanent accommodation to ex-*sans-papiers*, and recommend people for work contracts.

The *soutiens* were the centre of attention when they came to the Co-ordination, constantly being asked for news and advice. In the meetings, their discourse was as much a lesson and a performance as it was a debate. Grillo's (1985:246) anecdote of a striker addressing a meeting 'briefly' and a *soutien* addressing it 'lengthily' reflects a familiar pattern in the Co-ordination. Jean-Paul, for example, loved to lecture the *sans-papiers*. He could make great

speeches. On the radio he took up well over half the airtime devoted to an interview with the Co-ordination, whilst Robert and three *délégués* struggled to get a word in. I almost admired his typically French intellectual droning on, stringing together ever-longer sentences, with a conceptual clarity that always seemed to require one more clause. From my experience of meetings at the Co-ordination, however, which were dominated by those who could most effectively *prendre la parole* (literally 'to take speech'), these ever longer sentences seemed to function as a personal-political strategy for dominating the discussion. It was as if he could win the argument by keeping going the longest and stopping anyone else from speaking.

In one meeting, Jean-Paul decided to lecture the *sans-papiers* on the Greek *polis*. He insisted on the Political significance of the *sans-papiers* movement in his response to *sans-papiers* who argued that they were just there for their papers and did not want to get involved in Politics¹⁰. Jean-Paul argued that in the Greek *polis* the question of who had the right to be a citizen and who did not was quintessentially Political. Jean-Paul's argument mirrored that of Žižek (1999:187), although Jean-Paul seemed to be arguing for his own notion of the Political, rather than expecting the *sans-papiers*, as the abject non-part, to redefine Politics. Switching back from his erudite philosophical argument, Jean-Paul used a more browbeating style, as he badgered the *sans-papiers*: "Get it into your heads that the *sans-papiers* struggle is Political!"

Jean-Paul's position also sounded similar to Žižek's when he argued that the *sans-papiers* were nothing but *sans-papiers*, i.e. that their whole existence was their lack of papers. What was striking about this statement, when used in a concrete context, was that Jean-Paul appeared to belittle the *sans-papiers*, dismissing and insulting the people he was addressing, who, despite their lack of papers, had jobs, families, transnational connections and friendships, and

¹⁰ One *sans-papiers* slogan went '*Arrêtez la politique ! Libérez les sans-papiers !*' ('Stop the politics! Liberate the *sans-papiers*!'). In contrast, Jean-Paul was unashamedly Stalinist. In one conversation, he declared himself to be more Stalinist than the Mayor. We were talking about how the PCF, in the municipal elections, had put forward a series of candidates who were not PCF members but were representatives of various organisations doing local development work (see Chapter 2). Jean-Paul was against this because he believed in a single Party and could not see the point of supporting people who contributed nothing to the Party.

could not be reduced to an absolutely abject identity, defined by their lack of papers. In this respect, Žižek's notion of 'excremental identification' seems like an over-statement of abjection. Even for people who were willing to shout and sing about being the *sans-papiers*, being a *sans-papiers* was only one part of their local and transnational lives. Unlike Žižek, Jean-Paul would also argue that the *soutiens* were more representative of the Co-ordination than the *sans-papiers* since the *soutiens* had been in the movement since it began whilst groups of *sans-papiers* came and went. In this way, Jean-Paul could always dismiss new members of the Co-ordination as *arrivistes*.

Rather than intellectual lectures, Rosa would come out with little storybook explanations for the *sans-papiers*, which made even Jean-Paul wince. For example, to explain 'the struggle' to the *sans-papiers*, Rosa told a parable about several brothers who, after their father had died, spent all his money until it was gone. Then one of them remembered that their father had said that he had buried his greatest treasure in the fields. The brothers proceeded to dig up all the fields without finding anything but, having dug up the fields they decided to plant crops. They had a good harvest and eventually realised that this was the treasure their father had spoken about.

Rosa's story, if a little patronising, could be read as an attempt to inspire the *sans-papiers*. However, it was also a way of dismissing their relevant concerns, given the context in which she was telling the story, where the brothers' search for treasures represented the *sans-papiers* self-interest in their papers, and the work of digging represented how the *sans-papiers* should be working at Rosa's version of 'the struggle' rather than worrying about their individual dossiers.

I first saw Rosa not long before the occupation began. She encouraged or even created the idea of an occupation; it seemed to be her initiative. There was a small group of new members who were keen to become involved in a new action, an occupation being the most obvious way of raising the stakes with the Prefecture. An occupation was proposed towards the end of one meeting but most people had left and the suggestion could easily have been ignored.

However, Rosa took up the idea and arranged a special meeting to discuss it further.

This special meeting was held with about twenty people squeezed into a room at the HQ. It began fairly well, with people discussing what they thought of an occupation. Rosa tried to explain the difference between a 'wild occupation' and a 'negotiated occupation'; the former was dangerous since it could and would be evicted by the police, whereas a negotiated occupation would be agreed with the municipality in advance and would therefore be protected from the police. It seemed clear to me that Rosa was offering the *sans-papiers* a 'negotiated occupation', but when she asked, the *sans-papiers*, one after another, chose a 'wild occupation'. I did not understand why. They argued that a 'wild occupation' was a stronger stance, more likely to produce a result. They may have been right but the result was likely to be arrests and deportations. It was almost as if the *sans-papiers* were trying to guess what Rosa wanted and thought she would favour those who were prepared to take the extra risk of a 'wild occupation'.

At the time I thought that Rosa was making an effort to consult the *sans-papiers*. However, rather than trying to resolve the disagreement or misunderstanding, Rosa and the main *délégués* cut short the discussion. Salim and Youcef cited procedural rules about decisions being taken in General Meetings, and Rosa, Youcef and Salim appointed themselves as the group that would find an appropriate building and decide when to begin the occupation. The meeting was brought to a close and everyone else was instructed to be ready to follow orders when the time came and to be willing to take on the menial tasks of the occupation. I never saw Rosa make another attempt to involve the ordinary *sans-papiers* in the decision-making process. When I tried to suggest in meetings that people were not adequately prepared for an occupation, I was told "Don't worry, there'll be plenty of people who want to join the occupation once it has started."

Before the occupation began, certain rules were laid down by Chantalle, as a *priori* conditions. Control of discipline, the date for ending the occupation and

the date for handing in a list of the occupants to the Prefecture were to be put in the hands of a Steering Committee made up of two *soutiens* and three elected representatives of the occupants. Chantalle expressed concern about the lack of democracy in this arrangement, but pointed out that the occupation would not happen if these conditions were not accepted. Therefore they were accepted, at least temporarily. The *sans-papiers* seemed prepared to go along with anything that would make the occupation happen. Rosa backed Chantalle up, in what was obviously a pre-arranged deal with the *Mairie*. If they accepted these preconditions, Rosa pointed out coyly, the *sans-papiers* would have to decide amongst themselves who would be on the list.

Délégués and interests

In my first few weeks at the Co-ordination I used to hang out in the Co-ordination's kitchen and Kadour especially would include me in the conversation, questioning me and making jokes at my expense, whilst most people seemed slightly wary of addressing a '*soutien*' in such a familiar way. Kadour was a middle-aged Algerian man who was not a *sans-papiers* but he came to meetings and demos. He would make impassioned speeches in the meetings, which annoyed the *soutiens*, whilst most of the *sans-papiers* seemed to enjoy his outlandish performances. He invited me to attend the *sans-papiers* meeting. I took this as a genuine invitation, although it was not Kadour's decision to make. The other people in the kitchen insisted on checking with one of the *délégués*, Salim, who was not impressed at the idea. He pointed out that the Sunday meeting was the *sans-papiers* meeting; i.e. *soutiens* did not usually attend. However, he did not forbid me from coming, and I soon began attending *sans-papiers* meetings regularly. No-one ever objected to my presence and I was allowed to speak if I wanted. I did not speak on the whole, except to ask for clarification on points of order.

Salim seemed to be the main *délégué* who, along with Youcef and Saïd, kept a tight grip on the *sans-papiers*. A lot of the time in meetings was taken up by individuals posing self-interested questions about their own dossiers and being

harangued in return by *délégués* about the need for more mobilisation. The *délégués* pointed out the need to put pressure on the Prefecture, without which no-one would be regularised. The *délégués* thumped this message home week in week out and the *sans-papiers* continued to raise the same issues about dossiers or not being able to get to the demo because of work commitments. Rather than becoming more informed and more committed, the *sans-papiers* just seemed to sit through the haranguing and either get used to it or stop coming.

The *délégués* were elected by the *sans-papiers* to lead the struggle and to negotiate on their behalf with the Prefecture. However, the way the movement worked meant that being a *délégué* came with certain personal advantages as well as responsibilities towards the collective. *Délégués* were more likely to be regularised because they were personally known to the Prefecture. The Prefecture constantly chose to regularise a few leaders of the movement rather than allow it to grow. Another factor separating the *délégués* from the *sans-papiers* was the high turnover of the Co-ordination's membership, which meant that *délégués*, who usually had more experience, were sometimes seen as representing the old members more than the new members. *Délégués* also had a special relationship with the *soutiens*. New *délégués* who proved themselves capable of mobilising and organising the *sans-papiers* had their dossiers dealt with immediately. The *sans-papiers* were aware of the possible advantages of being a *délégué* and tended to become suspicious of the *délégués'* motives, as soon as they had been elected. For their part, the *délégués* had more commitment to and responsibility in 'the struggle', and therefore tended to do the work as it was defined by the *soutiens*.

Despite these factors, a *délégué's* position depended on the popular support of the *sans-papiers* and therefore, to be effective, a *délégué* might have to oppose the *soutiens* sometimes, as well as help them run the Co-ordination. Salim and Youcef played a crucial role in building up a relatively independent solidarity amongst the *sans-papiers* during the occupation. On the basis of this solidarity, the occupants were able to ignore the pressure being put on them by the *soutiens* when it came to insisting on establishing 'the list' of occupants, i.e. the

names of the people whose regularisation was the primary goal of the occupation. The *soutiens* had promised to work on the dossiers and put pressure on the Prefecture for the regularisation of the occupants. However, they wanted to use the occupation to maximum Political effect, by highlighting the plight of 13,000 *sans-papiers* in the *Département*¹¹ and forcing the Prefecture to negotiate on points of law and/or its general application, in order to widen the criteria for regularisation. Hence there was a tension between the Political aims of the *soutiens* and the more direct, concrete and self-centred aims of the occupants, who had committed themselves to the occupation in order to get their own papers sorted out. The *délégués* had to bridge the gap between the different ways in which the *soutiens* and the *sans-papiers* saw 'the struggle'.

Usually the *sans-papiers* had very little leverage over the *soutiens*, who threatened to walk out when the *sans-papiers* did not go along with their version of 'the struggle'. When the *soutiens* seemed to be on the point of abandoning the *sans-papiers*, there were usually *sans-papiers* who would speak in praise of the *soutiens*. This was the case, for example, during the meeting about the first attempted hunger-strike. Within the first month of the occupation, Youcef and several others had launched a hunger-strike but it only lasted a few days. Although Youcef announced it to the press, the *soutiens* denied it. That week there was a packed and tense General Meeting with several *soutiens* who I had never seen before, including Hausman, an assistant-Mayor. It was at this meeting that the *soutiens* suddenly decided to declare their Political allegiances, with most but not all of them being in or linked to the Communist Party. It was an extremely long meeting, to which Youcef was summoned as the spokesperson for the hunger-strikers. The hunger-strike had little support from the other occupants and, when the *soutiens* threatened to abandon the occupation, the hunger-strikers were left isolated, as both the *soutiens* and the *sans-papiers* urged them to stop.

¹¹ The estimate of 13,000 was based on the number of people rejected by the *Circulaire Chevènement*. The figure 15,000 was also used, as an estimate including an increase since 1997.

Using their advantage to the full, the *soutiens* seemed determined to crush the hunger-strike. Youcef tried to set various conditions to giving up the hunger-strike, which were rejected. As a last resort, he tried to threaten the *soutiens* with a new hunger-strike if there were no positive results soon, but this too was rejected as unacceptable. Hausman argued that it was offensive to make threats against the *soutiens*, who were supporting and working for the *sans-papiers*. Like Jean-Paul, Hausman seemed to use the fact that the *soutiens* worked voluntarily as a way of dismissing the *sans-papiers*' concerns and imposing his own agenda. Once the *soutiens* had refused to be responsible for the hunger-strikers and threatened to walk out, and once it was clear that the majority of *sans-papiers* were not prepared to back the hunger-strikers, the *soutiens* had clearly won. However, they insisted on a vote long after Youcef and the hunger-strikers had agreed to stop unconditionally. In the end, the meeting voted unanimously that decisions about *actions* could only be taken collectively in the General Meeting. This may seem a reasonable and democratic outcome, but the disciplinary effort required to have a vote in such a meeting was more significant than the resolution itself. The vote was designed to humiliate the hunger-strikers and to force anyone secretly on their side or anyone contemplating a similar course of action to submit publicly to the power of the *soutiens*.

Youcef had chosen the wrong moment to oppose the *soutiens* and he had done it more as an individual than as a *délégué*. Nevertheless, the reaction of the *soutiens* seemed excessive, in a way that raised questions about their agenda. Youcef and Mounir had started the hunger-strike in response to confirmed refusals of their individual dossiers, which made their position with the rest of the occupants less tenable. The *sans-papiers* did not see the hunger-strike as being in their own interests but, on the contrary, it was especially inopportune as the Co-ordination had a date to meet with the *Préfet*, and would probably have lost this chance to negotiate if the hunger-strike had been formally declared. The hunger-strike would have been disastrous for the *sans-papiers* if it had led to the *soutiens* abandoning the occupation, as they threatened. However, the level of response from the *soutiens*, with the appearance of Hausman and other new *soutiens*, made it very clear that a hunger-strike in the

occupation had attracted their attention. With the occupation having been 'negotiated' with the *Mairie*, it was not so clear that the *soutiens* could abandon it as easily as they threatened. The vote also suggested that, if the *sans-papiers* ever did oppose the *soutiens* collectively, the *soutiens* might have to accept a majority decision. This was a meeting in which the occupants learnt something about the *soutiens* rather than being taught by them.

The question of whether a hunger-strike is a morally acceptable Political weapon played little or no part in the debate, but its unquestionable potential to attract media attention created a charged atmosphere. I remember being shocked at the idea of a hunger-strike initially, but the *soutiens* were clearly used to this form of action, even if they opposed it. In conversation the *sans-papiers* discussed whether or not they were prepared to go on a hunger-strike themselves. One person pointed out to me that it is *haram* (sinful in Islamic religion) to do something that is going to kill you or do you harm. Nevertheless, the *sans-papiers* were not morally outraged. On the contrary, considering the difficulty of their situation as *sans-papiers* and knowing something about the history of *sans-papiers* hunger-strikes, many of the *sans-papiers* accepted this form of protest as inevitable and even admired those who had the courage to do it. The occupants regarded it as the only really effective form of action open to them. Much as the *soutiens* may have opposed hunger-strikes as a 'weak' version of 'the struggle', which could only attract humanitarian compassion, they, like the Prefecture and the media, were unable to ignore the power of the hunger-strike as a Political weapon.

After the meeting, I was talking to Nabila and Sarah, in the little office by the main gates where Youcef lived, about how the *soutiens* had turned out in force, pushed into action by the threat of the hunger-strike, which they were so much against. Youcef listened for a little while and then he exploded. He told us we knew nothing about 'the struggle', that the *soutiens* could never leave the Co-ordination because of their Political interests, and that he had only given up the hunger-strike temporarily as a part of his overall strategy. Hearing Youcef express himself like that made the workings of the Co-ordination much clearer to me. It had been difficult to see from meetings alone that there was an

internal struggle going on between *soutiens* and *délégués*, as *délégués* usually passed on the same message as the *soutiens*. Youcef's anger showed that the *délégués* were involved in a game of courting the *soutiens*' confidence and support, whilst maintaining some kind of control over the *sans-papiers*. His concept of 'the struggle', in this conversation, was no longer the pedagogic mantra "Be numerous [on demos]!", but referred to a positioned struggle to impose the interests of the *sans-papiers* on the *soutiens*, whose own struggle was conducted according to their own Political interests. Youcef was angry at the *sans-papiers* for not having taken his lead in opposing the *soutiens*.

'The list'

Salim was regularised during the first weeks of the occupation, along with a few others whom the Prefecture had decided to regularise independently of any negotiations. This was interpreted in the Co-ordination as an attempt to weaken the occupation by eliminating a few experienced activists. With his papers, Salim was in a position where he had to go looking for work. He could no longer be as active in the movement. He remained a *délégué*, until the next elections, but tended to sit with everyone else in the meeting, rather than behind the table with the *délégués* and *soutiens*, who ran the meeting. Despite his continuing involvement in 'the struggle' and his support for the *sans-papiers*, there seemed to be a perceptible shift in the way Salim expressed himself. He spoke as an advisor, a commentator, a supporter of the *sans-papiers* and an old hand, but not as someone still caught up in the power struggle.

However, he remained at Youcef's side for a while and they initiated the strongest move by the *sans-papiers* against the *soutiens*. The pressure to hand in 'the list' of occupants to the Prefecture had started as soon as the occupation began and it increased with every week that passed. To be on 'the list' seemed to be the *sans-papiers*' primary goal. They felt obliged to stay in the occupation and to go on every demo until 'the list' was handed in. The *soutiens* wanted to delay 'the list'. They argued that the occupation should be used to put Political pressure on the Prefecture in the name of all *sans-papiers*. Privately, they were

also concerned with maintaining the mobilisation of the occupants, which they predicted would start melting away once the list was drawn up. When the Co-ordination finally had an appointment to meet the *Préfet*, the *soutiens* wanted to discuss the criteria for regularisation before any list was handed in. Salim encouraged the occupants, as the *sans-papiers* who were there actively fighting for their papers, to demand that 'the list' be drawn up and their dossiers processed. According to Salim's model of *sans-papiers* militancy, 'the struggle' was always based around a few real dossiers that would be blocked at the Prefecture until enough pressure was mounted to force regularisations. Then more dossiers could be handed in and the whole process repeated. Usually Salim would harangue the *sans-papiers*, telling them they had to be mobilised if they wanted their papers. On the question of 'the list', however, Salim advised the *sans-papiers* to insist, against the *soutiens*' wishes. He urged the *sans-papiers* to speak up in the General Meeting, to stop the *soutiens* dominating the proceedings and to make it clear that the *sans-papiers* were united in demanding 'the list'.

In the General Meeting before the appointment with the *Préfet*, the debate was very heated. Rosa and Jean-Paul walked out long before it had finished, in an attempt to invalidate or at least distance themselves from the decision to hand in 'the list', which looked inevitable. However, in the end, with Claire standing on a table, triumphant above the mayhem, the *sans-papiers* agreed to delay 'the list' until the day after the meeting with the *Préfet*, giving the *soutiens* the chance they wanted to discuss the general criteria for regularisation.

During the meeting with the *Préfet*, according to Rosa, the *Préfet* told her not to bother 'chucking' a list at him, i.e. each dossier would have to be looked at individually. Hence, Rosa seemed to be going back on the previous agreement and suggesting that the *soutiens* would not actually present the Prefecture with a list. The first *dépôt* of dossiers was arranged for four days after the meeting with the *Préfet*. I was involved in the scramble to get the dossiers done and, like the other *soutiens*, I was working up to the last minute. At the time it seemed strange to me that Salim, Youcef and the *sans-papiers* chose this moment to put extra pressure on Rosa and Jean-Paul, who were working flat

out on the dossiers. The problem was that no open list of the dossiers had been made, which was not necessarily caused by anything sinister but could have been a consequence of each *soutien* working individually at home, on their own group of dossiers¹². However, anxiety was running high in the occupation and the thought that the dossiers would be handed in the following morning without 'the list', and without the *sans-papiers* even knowing whose dossiers were ready, must have been unbearable. Rightly or wrongly there was a suspicion that outsiders' dossiers would be included surreptitiously. In the end, Salim advised Youcef, and Youcef phoned up Rosa and Jean-Paul, giving them an ultimatum: either they had to tell the *sans-papiers* whose dossiers would be handed in the next day, or no-one would turn up for the demo. To be left without a demo on the day of a collective *dépôt* was unthinkable. Rosa and Jean-Paul were forced to phone Chantalle and Claire in the middle of the night and report back to Youcef.

The following day Rosa and Jean-Paul were furious. They turned up with their stack of dossiers, saying that they wanted nothing more to do with the *sans-papiers*. Initially, Rosa refused to go upstairs to hand the dossiers in to Mme Muraille. Youcef dragged me into joining the delegation. Finally some of the women from the occupation persuaded Rosa to rejoin the delegation and we all went up to hand in the dossiers. Mme Muraille accepted the dossiers without much ceremony, in the little reception area on the landing. She informed us that the groups working on the dossiers would apply the law, case by case. Later on that day the list of occupants, both those whose dossiers had been handed in and those with dossiers pending, was finally put on the wall for everyone to see. The *délégués* also faxed 'the list' to the Prefecture independently of the *soutiens*.

The Midnight Ultimatum was a rare moment when the *rapport de force* between *soutiens* and *sans-papiers* was in the *sans-papiers*' favour, and the *délégués* were capable of standing-up to the *soutiens* and rallying the support of the *sans-papiers*. The *soutiens*, especially Rosa and Jean-Paul, had committed

¹² Personally, as someone working on the dossiers, I had seen the first working list of occupants, which the *délégués* had drawn up and the advice workers had divided between them.

themselves to the occupation. There had been a meeting with the *Préfet*, after months of getting nowhere, and he had accepted a *dépôt* of dossiers, the responses to which would determine the success of the occupation. The *soutiens* had worked on compiling the dossiers. To be humiliated at that moment by the *sans-papiers* refusing to turn up would have been a fiasco. Moreover, the *sans-papiers* would still have been in occupation, with Rosa and Jean-Paul having publicly lost all control of the movement.

The *sans-papiers* had been kept in the dark too long and needed to know what the *soutiens* were doing on their behalf. The pressure for 'the list' had been building up in the occupation. The *soutiens* had got their way over the aborted first hunger-strike and, by a hair's breadth, they had got the *sans-papiers*' agreement to delay 'the list' until after the meeting with the *Préfet*, but the *sans-papiers* could wait no longer. The occupants had been living with each other for more than a month, which had increased their awareness of what was going on, and generated communication amongst them. Salim was well respected and he encouraged the *sans-papiers* to speak up in meetings and pursue their interests against the wishes of the *soutiens*. Hence the tension culminated in the Midnight Ultimatum, in which the *sans-papiers* forced the *soutiens* to acknowledge 'the list'.

As a statement 'the list' seems to come from what Žižek (1999:188) refers to as 'the excluded non-part', but 'the list' is not a statement like: "We – the excluded non-part – are the nation." It looks more like Siméant's (1998:109) claim that the *sans-papiers* have only a humanitarian appeal and are limited to the defence of the group. However, the occupants' conflict with the *soutiens* over 'the list' shows that a Political solidarity was formed, which did not exist before, in the context of 'the struggle'. In this case, Siméant's model would suggest that the *sans-papiers* struggled Politically to become an apolitical group, which does not make sense. 'The list' testifies to the *sans-papiers*' refusal to remain indefinitely within the frame of the *soutiens*' fantasy. Perhaps it validates Lazarus' (1996) idea of a Politics interior to the situation, in which making explicit, 'counting' the singularity is significant. 'The list' could also be interpreted as one of Agamben's (1999) remnants from the grey zone, tying

together the abject non-part and the survivor as evidence of an incapacity to speak. 'The list' did not mark a change in the way the Co-ordination was run. It did not permanently change the power relations in the occupation or allow the *sans-papiers*' voice to emerge. I shall look more closely at the group solidarity generated amongst the occupants in the next chapter.

From list to hunger-strike

After the Midnight Ultimatum and 'the list', the attendance of most the occupants tailed off, as the *soutiens* had feared. Whilst the dossiers were still being prepared and handed in, Youcef decided to start crossing absentees off the list, which certainly got people back for a moment, creating an extremely tense meeting in which one woman had a fit and collapsed, prompting the first visit by the fire brigade. This was a typical Youcef ploy; he successfully imposed his authority but he annoyed both the *sans-papiers*, who were horrified at the thought of being struck off the list, and the *soutiens*, who were working on their dossiers and were not prepared to delay handing in a dossier as a punishment for absenteeism. Salim was still around some of the time but his interests lay elsewhere, in finding a job, and he had less and less influence on the situation. Immediately after the Midnight Ultimatum, Youcef cracked under the stress. He woke up one morning unable to move his neck and had to be taken to hospital. However, he was supported at this time by several occupants and by Rosa and Jean-Paul who, like the other *soutiens*, always seemed to pay more respect to individual *sans-papiers* who were prepared to oppose them.

Once Youcef had recovered, he took charge of the occupation. On one occasion, the *sans-papiers* were deceived into going on a demo especially for him. Rosa announced in the meeting that there would be a press release about Youcef. She explained that Youcef was representative of a specific category of *sans-papiers*; as he was affected by *la double peine*, i.e. he had been convicted of a crime and spent time in prison, which meant that the Prefecture refused to regularise him on the grounds that he was a menace to the public order. Individual case histories were not, as a rule, discussed in the meeting, but Rosa

told the story of how Youcef had been wrongly convicted of a crime. According to Rosa:

Youcef had been working in a shop on the black and his boss had refused to pay him. Youcef went to the shop with a friend to demand his wages, he stayed in the car whilst the friend went in to speak to the boss. However, his 'friend' then robbed the cash till and left by the back-door. The shopkeeper phoned the police and Youcef, though innocent, was still sitting in the car outside, so he was arrested and imprisoned.

On the basis of this story, Rosa argued, the Co-ordination should make a particular stand over the Prefecture's decision to block Youcef's dossier. No-one objected to the press release but it was not made clear that the next demo was going to be dedicated to Youcef personally.

On the 'Youcef Demo', the *sans-papiers* were issued with placards saying "Regularise Youcef Haddide." Despite Rosa's announcement in the meeting, the placards were unexpected. People were shocked at this blatant favouritism and considered it to be an abuse of power. Some people laughed: it was obvious that Youcef was manipulating the situation in his own interests but being handed the placards declaring the fact was farcical. Most of the men threw the placards away, but a lot of the older women carried them on the demo. It was suggested to me that they could not read and did not know what was written on their placards. Considering how the *soutiens* insisted that the movement needed to be enlarged and should not be just about the 75 occupants, and considering that we always shouted for the regularisation of all the *sans-papiers*, this 'Youcef Demo' was out of keeping with everyone's understanding of 'the struggle'. The placards contravened the collective principles on which the Co-ordination claimed to run. Rosa, Jean-Paul and Youcef got away with it though. There were some objections raised in the following meeting. Rosa tried to defend the demo because Youcef had been victimised by the Prefecture, whilst Robert insisted on the dignity of collective struggle. The objections had no effect, however, as the demo had already happened.

During the summer, the occupation tended to be nearly empty during the day. Doubt and pessimism set in, but a few clung on. Both the staff at the Prefecture and the *soutiens* went on holiday over August. In the occupation there was a social life of people coming and going; for example, there was usually a group of men playing dominoes in the courtyard in the evening. However, many of the *sans-papiers* moved out and went back to work once they knew that their name was on 'the list'. This reduced the over-crowding of sleeping space in the occupation but it left a rather demoralised hard core, who felt they were keeping things going without any help or recognition from everyone else. Nevertheless, the occupation lived on, the demo visited local *Mairies* whilst the *Préfet* was away, and from the substitute delegation new *délégués* emerged. In my view, this summer lull did allow the *sans-papiers* more freedom of expression than usual. For example, Nabila and Sarah composed the leaflets alone, including the one quoted in Chapter 1. Those that were really determined to stick it out came together and found a way of muddling through.

However, when the holidays ended, the *soutiens* took charge of the movement once again. Elections for new *délégués* took place and occupants volunteered to be responsible for various aspects of the occupation, but no effort was made by the *soutiens* to create better communication within the Co-ordination. Rosa and Youcef blocked the idea of creating a *sans-papiers* committee to manage the occupation. In the meeting that took place between the *soutiens* and the new *délégués*, the *délégués* sat and listened to the *soutiens* planning the Co-ordination's strategy and arguing amongst themselves. In the *soutiens'* meeting culture, they seemed content to leave the *sans-papiers* out of the discussion. I sat in silence with the *délégués*, feeling invisible, after having worked at keeping the occupation going all summer. Only Youcef forced his way into their debate. At the end, everyone made suggestions for the title of the press release about the night the occupants were going to spend in front of the Prefecture. Nabila and Réda were volunteered to ring round the press, and Rosa decided that a group of *sans-papiers* would decorate the stall at that year's *Fête d'Humanité* (Communist Party festival). A few days later, in the middle of the night, all the occupants, with their enthusiasm revived by the promise of results, left for the

Prefecture. The results, as I pointed out in Chapter 4, were dismal, and a hunger-strike was launched.

Hunger-strikers and squatters

By this time the *soutiens* seemed to have accepted that the *sans-papiers* had exhausted all other forms of political action. Robert supported the hunger-strikers on a personal level and argued that the Co-ordination should be responsible for looking after them. Jean-Paul vehemently denied that individual hunger-strikers were the responsibility of the Co-ordination. Despite Jean-Paul's attitude, *Médecins sans frontières* were brought in to take care of the hunger-strikers and the *Maire* plumbed in a shower for them (an absolute necessity for hunger-strikers who needed to be able to keep clean as they became weaker). An effort was made to convey, both to members of the Co-ordination and to the media, that the hunger-strike was for all the occupants and for all *sans-papiers*, rather than being three individuals protesting for their own cases. Nevertheless, the hunger-strikers inevitably became the focus of attention and there was a sense in which the occupation revolved around them.

The *soutiens* were prepared to stand by the occupation, as long as the *sans-papiers* accepted that there should only be three hunger-strikers. Originally these were Youcef, Mounir and Yazide, who had begun their hunger-strike in front of the Prefecture. However, Yazide had to drop out after a few days due to ill health. Adel had joined the hunger-strike on the second day, which was probably unofficially encouraged by the *soutiens*, as it meant that there was an African hunger-striker together with the two North Africans (both Tunisian in fact). There seemed to be a surreptitious policy of de-ethnicising the hunger-strike by making sure that there was a mixture of ethnic backgrounds. By insisting that the hunger-strikers were representative of the *sans-papiers* in general, the *soutiens* could frame the hunger-strike as a Political act they were willing to acknowledge.

The hunger-strikers became the focal point of the occupation. Youcef lost weight more quickly than Mounir and Adel because he had continued to lead the demos and had worked at the *Fête d'Humanité*, which he had walked back from as well. He was exhausted and yet, even from his bed, continued to be in charge of the occupation. The hunger-striker's room had been chosen as an accessible space, close to the front door, which meant that it was more comfortable for the hunger-strikers and more accessible to visiting journalists and personalities. However, it also meant that everyone else living in the other rooms on the ground floor of the main building had to pass in and out of the hunger-striker's room to get to their own rooms. The hunger-strikers were next to the main door, which meant that they also acted as door security; every time someone banged on the door they had to get up and answer it. The hunger-strikers were well supplied with water and sugar. They were also equipped with a hotplate for making tea, and a donation tin for other provisions like cigarettes or newspapers. However, this special treatment coming from outside the occupation meant that, inside, they became a redistribution point for bottles of water and lumps of sugar, a hotplate lending service, and an informal credit union. Some people even had the cheek to pop their head round the door just to see if they had a pot of tea on the go.

One incident particularly demonstrates the usefulness to the *soutiens* of having an intermediary like Youcef, although it is an example that came to light because Youcef failed where he usually succeeded. It suggests that Youcef Haddide managed the occupation to fit into the *soutiens'* fantasy of the *sans-papiers* movement, and that when this framing of their desire broke down (Žižek 1989:118), the *soutiens* were unacceptably confronted with the 'bare life' of the occupants. The breakdown came as the result of a series of disputes between Youcef and Zouhir. Youcef was steadily weakening and Zouhir kept arguing with him and challenging the rules of the occupation. On one evening, Youcef and Zouhir were standing in the gatehouse area arguing about the door being locked at night. Zouhir was speaking aggressively and I was concerned about Youcef. Despite his condition, Youcef winked at me as if to say that he was quite enjoying the argument and I left them to it. Another time, however, Youcef was unwilling or unable to get out of bed. Zouhir had smuggled his 'cousin' in

against the occupation policy of no squatters. This policy came directly from the *Mairie*, who were keen to minimise the number of people staying in the occupation. They did not want the occupation to turn into a squat full of people with nowhere else to go.

Zouhir's 'cousin' had already stayed one night and Youcef was adamant that he should not stay a second. Youcef asked me to check if the 'cousin' was in Zouhir's room, which he was. Zouhir had sent him into the courtyard and let him back in through his bedroom window, thereby avoiding the hunger-striker's room. I told Youcef that he was there and Youcef told Zouhir that his cousin had to leave. Zouhir started arguing with Youcef who, admitting defeat for once, phoned Jean-Paul to say he was too exhausted to cope with Zouhir. Jean-Paul spoke to Zouhir over the phone and was apparently abusive about his 'cousin', swearing and telling Zouhir to chuck him out on the street. Zouhir, in a mincing voice, became offended and hurt. Jean-Paul ended up coming round to the occupation in the middle of the night to sort out the problem. He started talking to Zouhir in an aggressive and impatient manner, but after a five minute chat with him outside, Jean-Paul agreed to let Zouhir's 'cousin' stay one more night and left. Zouhir was jubilant, saying to me that Youcef was the problem; half an hour of argument with Youcef got him nowhere but Jean-Paul, being a civilised person, saw reason in five minutes. Mounir and Adel were critical of Jean-Paul though; apparently Youcef had already turned away several people that day and here was Jean-Paul letting someone in, which was not consistent.

Although the Rosa-Jean-Paul-Youcef leadership is an example of a particular *soutiens-délégués* partnership, the incident with Zouhir's 'cousin' illustrates a more general point about this relationship, insofar as the *soutiens* generally expected the *délégués* to organise and to order the *sans-papiers* according to the official decisions taken in 'the struggle'. These decisions were supposedly democratic agreements made in meetings, but the terrain of meetings was heavily skewed in favour of the *soutiens*, both culturally and in terms of Political power. Moreover, the *soutiens* did not always go through the proper channels themselves, and there were important decisions being imposed on the Co-

ordination from outside. The role the *soutiens* expected the *délégués* to play was therefore contradictory, since the *délégués* were responsible for imposing on the *sans-papiers* what was officially their own democratic will. Whilst Youcef was not a popular *délégué* amongst the *sans-papiers*, he was an effective leader, and the success of his dictatorship has to be understood in the context in which he operated.

According to Grillo (1985), French *soutiens* tend to represent immigrants' causes in a way that elides immigrants' own voices and 'incorporates' the immigrants' issues into the *soutiens*' own ideological vision of 'the struggle'. In the Co-ordination there was another side to this process of misrepresentation: whilst the *soutiens* largely controlled the public representation of the *sans-papiers*' cause, they expected the *délégués* to impose this representation of 'the struggle' on the *sans-papiers*. In effect, this meant imposing the 'democratic' decisions that the *sans-papiers* had supposedly made themselves. Hence Youcef was the best *délégué* from the *soutiens* perspective even though his methods were not always popular with the *sans-papiers*.

There was a fundamental contradiction in what the *soutiens* wanted from the *sans-papiers*. The frequently repeated demand that the *sans-papiers* 'be numerous' in 'the struggle' could only be satisfied when 'the struggle' was popular and in the *sans-papiers*' interests. However, the *soutiens*' control over the representation of the *sans-papiers* cause had side-effects that necessarily limited the appeal of the Co-ordination to the *sans-papiers* themselves. The *soutiens* were considered capable of gaining regularisations, but only for those who had been promised some special favour by the *soutiens*, or who already had some leverage, like the occupation, to get their case looked at. Newcomers, who might have taken to 'the struggle' more wholeheartedly in different circumstances, were unlikely to accept the subordinate *sans-papiers* role in the Co-ordination, except when they could see it as a temporary sacrifice towards their own personal regularisation. Whilst this was an effective set-up, it made it unlikely that the movement would expand. Those who joined the Co-ordination quickly became disillusioned with the in-fighting and intrigue that dominated proceedings. Whilst some people were determined to stick with it,

many were driven away. Hence, although there was a constant effort to create a media splash that would expand the movement, the Co-ordination's own internal politics, as well as the Prefecture's way of treating dossiers, seemed to limit the movement's appeal to a finite group, or series of finite groups, of individuals and their dossiers.

The wedding and the mandate

During the hunger-strike, which came at the end of my official period of fieldwork, Nabila and I decided to get married. In conversation, I suggested that we get married in the occupation. One of Nabila's room mates happened to be Rosa's housecleaner, so Rosa received word of our plans and offered to help us turn our marriage into an *action*. We agreed to do this as our lives had been taken over and brought together by the occupation. The wedding invitations were sent out on behalf of the Co-ordination asking people to attend the wedding of Nabila and Saul, who had "met, got to know each other and fallen in love in 'the struggle'."

Rosa arranged for the Mayor himself to perform the ceremony. The date was set, but I refused to get married whilst there was a hunger-strike in progress. Nabila and I wanted the hunger-strikers and Sarah as our witnesses, but this was unacceptable to the *Mairie* unless the hunger-strike ended. At one point it looked like it might have to be postponed, but the wedding actually went ahead. Our wedding day was what would have been the 41st day of the hunger-strike, but Mounir and Adel decided to end their fast so they could attend the wedding as my witnesses. Youcef refused to end his hunger-strike without actually having his papers in his hand, so Nabila asked one of her brother-in-laws to be her other witness.

On the day, the Town Hall echoed with *sans-papiers* drumming and singing. One of my English guests likened the *sans-papiers* to a crowd at a football match. Robert gave Nabila away and managed to steal the microphone for a few minutes to read out a poem he had written for us. The Mayor seemed to

appreciate the occasion, even though we made him late for his next appointment. Rosa used the fact that Sarah was initially delayed downstairs, to replace her in the witness book. The *sans-papiers* filled the *Mairie* with singing and drumming, as well as *you-yous* (celebratory cry made by North African women, particularly for weddings). The wedding cortege was a demo, which made its way back to the occupation, through the town centre, with onlookers beeping their horns as they usually did for wedding processions.

Back at the occupation, Youcef, who was looking very thin, had been setting up the furniture, snacks and drinks ready for the celebratory reception offered by the Co-ordination. After that, we went to the evening reception, where Nabila's sisters took over the organisation. Thanks to Amirouche and the people whose vehicles he had commandeered, we managed to get the food and my family and friends across town. Most of my friends, some of the *sans-papiers* and myself had arrived at the *Mairie* in Amirouche's cousin's works van, which we had jumped out of, suits, white carnations in button-holes and all. However, Amirouche had also drafted in a friend with a smart car, who took care of my family. The band eventually arrived at the reception and the party began in earnest, with Nabila appearing in several amazing costumes throughout the evening. Claire led the speeches, after Rosa and Jean-Paul had stormed out complaining that we were in France not Algeria when Nabila's sisters had forbidden people from having alcohol on their tables. Stef, my English bestman, told a joke about how I used to wear multiple pairs of socks with the holes carefully arranged not to coincide. Then everyone had a go at dancing Algerian style before the impressive cake was produced and eaten, the bouquet – supplied by Chantalle – was thrown and Nabila and I were driven back across town to a hotel just behind the *Mairie*.

Our wedding made the local papers, with headlines of 'For better and for the struggle' and 'For love and for the struggle'. It may have played a part in forcing the Prefecture to negotiate. Mme Muraille remarked on the press coverage as she promised to regularise Nabila as soon as my papers were in order. Mounir and Adel were promised regularisation after the hunger-strike. Youcef continued the hunger-strike. A second 'Youcef demo' was organised to put a

wreath in front of the Prefecture, which enraged Mme Muraille and the Prefecture as they insisted that putting someone's life in danger was just not done. After 52 days, Youcef was put in hospital and threatened to go on 'thirst strike', but he was eventually persuaded against this and began eating again.

Slowly, the Prefecture started handing out regularisations and the end of the occupation seemed at hand. It was at this point that I managed to upset Rosa in a meeting and actually seemed to influence what was happening. Rosa and Jean-Paul were talking in the meeting about 'the negotiations' between the Co-ordination and the Prefecture. However, these 'negotiations' consisted of private phone calls between Rosa and Mme Muraille. Amirouche and one or two others complained about the lack of transparency of the phone calls. I asked to speak and argued that such phone calls were useful for clarifying problems with individual dossiers but could not be called 'negotiations' since there was no mandate for Rosa to negotiate on behalf of the Co-ordination. Rosa was horrified at this and stormed out, saying that no-one had demanded she should have a mandate to do the dossiers in the first place. I was surprised to have actually had such an effect and went to talk to her in the café opposite the occupation. I also apologised in the meeting, saying that we should appreciate the work people do rather than attack each other. Nevertheless, after that Rosa, Réda and Adel started going to see Mme Muraille in person to negotiate over the occupants' dossiers. In the course of these negotiations, several dossiers, including Sarah's, were pushed to one side, as they belonged to new arrivals with no chance of regularisation, but most people were offered some form of regularisation.

Rosa's sensitivity about her 'mandate' suggests another possible breakdown in the *soutiens'* fantasy about the *sans-papiers* movement. With my ongoing support of the occupation and especially after Nabila's and my wedding, my opinion could no longer be easily dismissed. People were interested in me and what I had to say. It was as if I represented a challenge to Rosa's sense of ownership of the *sans-papiers*, as if we were two ethnographers fighting over the same field, upsetting each others' possession of the 'other' (Back 1993:215). Rosa's 'mandate' was undoubtedly based on the work she had

done to make the occupation successful, but along with this there was also an element of personal folklore in her presumption that she could represent the occupants without needing any formal mandate. Rosa would sometimes use the term 'the family', when she talked about her relationship with the active *sans-papiers*. Even Jean-Paul begrudgingly admitted in one meeting, as part of an argument to reassure the occupants that their dossiers would be dealt with first, that the *soutiens* got to know and felt attached to individual *sans-papiers*.

Despite these attachments, there was a definite distance between the *soutiens* and the social life, gossip and opinions of the *sans-papiers*, which made the *soutiens*' 'mandate' vulnerable. The *soutiens* were often aware of the gossip, and wary of unspoken opinions held by the *sans-papiers*. In meetings the *soutiens* would speak to what they thought was silent resistance, demanding that all discussion pass through the meeting correctly. However, the meeting remained the *soutiens*' territory and although the *sans-papiers* watched and learned, it was not always in their interests to express their views in the meeting.

Behind the fantasy of a familial bond between *soutiens* and *sans-papiers*, the unmanageable demands of the *sans-papiers* always threatened to overwhelm the *soutiens*' version of 'the struggle'. As relatively quiet individuals in meetings, the *sans-papiers* did not challenge the frame of the *soutiens*' version of 'the struggle', but their surplus social interaction represented potential opposition. Jean-Paul and Rosa seemed to be extremely sensitive about such opposition, regularly threatening to walk out and abandon the *sans-papiers*. However, the *soutiens* seemed to favour those *sans-papiers* who attempted to make a stand against them in 'the struggle'. In Žižek's (1989:117) terms, perhaps they did not give way on their desire; even when the *sans-papiers* refused to be what they wanted them to be, the *soutiens* continued to treat the Co-ordination as a site of Political struggle.

Chapter 6

Ethnicity and group solidarity

« On n'est pas là pour faire du folklore ! »

Jean-Paul complained in one meeting about some of the culturally specific songs that were being sung on demos, proclaiming: "We are not there [on the demo] to do folklore!". He accepted that there was a 'ludic' aspect to the demos, and acknowledged its validity but he argued that it was dangerous to use communitarian songs. He saw Réda's adaptation of the *Marseillaise* as a real achievement, as it linked the French national anthem and the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity to the *sans-papiers* cause. However, he saw the 'other' songs as at best playful, at worst divisive.

Clearly, using the French national anthem and universal Political principles does have a special effect, coming from *sans-papiers*, as the excluded non-part, demanding the right to exist in France. However, the drumming and singing played a huge part in making the demo interesting for both participants and passers-by, regardless of its ethnic origin. I want to suggest that singing non-French songs was important to the *sans-papiers*' sense of being something more than the Political schoolchildren of the French *soutiens*, and such singing was way of attracting support in our local area. Personally I found singing "*Frère Philippe, frère Philippe*" (Philippe being the *Préfet*) to the tune of "*Frère Jaques*", more uncomfortable than joining in on the Algerian tunes or singing a few words of Arabic, which two occupants, Nacero and Hassni, had adapted to the *sans-papiers* cause. I begin this chapter by investigating my own experience of the demos and the Co-ordination, in relation to Jean-Paul's anti-communitarian stance.

On my first demo a few of us gathered at the Co-ordination, then marched to the tramway, where we got onto a tram without using tickets. Someone gave me a pile of leaflets. My initial reaction was "Oh no, here we go again!" as I remembered my limited but bad experiences of distributing flyers and cold

canvassing, whether commercially, Politically or for community consultation purposes. Nevertheless, I made the effort to give the sheets out to passengers who, for the most part, accepted them. We got off at Stalingrad Avenue and waited outside a church, where a group of supporters was gathering. A friend, Angelique was also there. She had come with a local APEIS (Communist supported wing of the unemployed movement), where she was on a work placement. After a while we were marched off to what turned out to be the Prefecture's employment department. Some demonstrators had managed to go inside the lobby and occupy the building. We stood outside chanting slogans and trying to keep warm. One or two people had put on white coats, the significance of which I did not understand. A slogan had been especially adapted for the occasion and we got into chanting:

*"C'est pas les immigrés, c'est pas les sans-papiers,
C'est le chômage qu'il faut virer!"*

("It's not the immigrants, it's not the *sans-papiers*,
It's unemployment that we have to get rid of!")

We stayed a few hours. Angelique and her colleague left before it was over. I stayed until the sit-in ended. The delegation came out and announced that the officials had agreed to receive the letter we had come to deliver, and to respond. After that we made our way back to the Co-ordination via the tramway.

Apart from the meetings, the *manifs* (demos) were my main experience of the Co-ordination before the occupation. I occasionally sat in the kitchen, where Linda would offer me a coffee or a glass of mint tea. People would insist I sat down and I would feel welcomed but, at the same time, slightly alien. Usually a loud conversation was going on, often in the *Maghrébin* dialect of Arabic. Lila would tell everyone to speak in French for my benefit. I would say "No, it's all right." The conversation would switch to French for a while then back to Arabic.

In the early months especially, but also later on, it was impossible to be fully involved in the conversation; partly because of the language difficulty, partly because I often did not know the subject matter of the conversation, which

could be gossip, information or comparing notes about back home, i.e. Algeria. Moreover, there seemed to be a marked performative aspect to speaking in the discussion, which I tended to shrink from. Of course, this is part of my own peculiar way of relating to people; nevertheless there did seem to be a cultural idiom at play in the way I felt put on the spot when I was dragged into the conversation. It was similar to the way people danced. I do not mean the style of dancing so much as the spectacle. If there was drumming and singing and someone got up and danced, or if someone danced into the room, it was treated as a joking performance. It was quite a macho thing to do, with dancers, usually men, having the nerve and the arrogance to take centre stage. Everyone else would cheer and laugh, whilst the dancer took the risk of making a complete fool of himself. There was a North African style of dancing that went with it but anyone who made the effort to dance would get a cheer.

When we were out on a demo, the singing and drumming frequently prompted passers-by, usually Algerian men, to dance as well. Sometimes this happened on the demo itself, but more often it was on the tram or in the tube station, where people would sing Algerian songs without much chanting of slogans in French. There was a cross-over of Algerian songs adapted to *sans-papiers* themes but, roughly speaking, there was a distinction between the serious business of chanting slogans on the demo itself and the more relaxed moments when people just sang and danced for the hell of it.

In these moments the *délégués* only exercised authority to keep order and get us all to the demo. The *soutiens* were usually just passengers and chaperones. Lila or Ryad the cook, or another skilled drummer would sit down with the djembe and someone would sing into the microphone. The *délégués* rarely prevented the megaphone being used for recreational purposes and many of the *sans-papiers*, especially the Algerians, would clap and join in the chorus. Hence the journey, more often than not the 45 minutes it took to get to the Prefecture, became a performance and a sing-along, which sometimes provoked a bit of dancing as well. Passengers might ignore the music but people frequently turned their heads, smiled and laughed.

When we took the metro to Paris for national demos, there was extra excitement, as we forced open the ticket barriers, chanted in the echoing tunnels and prepared to meet other groups of demonstrators. A space was created on crowded platforms by *sans-papiers* or complete strangers who wanted to wiggle their hips and raise a cheer. Once, we filled up a platform and Saïd, an ex-*délégué* by this point, happened to be on the other platform. Despite the fact that trains could be heard rumbling into the station from both directions, he climbed down, crossed the electrified rails and joined us on the other side, with a triumphant jig and accompanying cheer.

Another time, we had been posted along the route of the town's half-marathon, which passed just outside the occupation. We were ordered to stand hand-in-hand along the route, holding flowers that Jean-Paul had distributed. No-one came past for ages and it was cold. Eventually, the runners showed up with even the Mayor going past at one point and we cheered and chanted to them. By the time the runners came round a second time, our designated formation had disintegrated and most of the *sans-papiers* were crowded onto the traffic island opposite the occupation. There was old lady, dressed in traditional Kabyle clothing – colourful shawl and skirt, lots of red and gold, with little brass discs on the fringe of her head-scarf – who was dancing to everyone's amusement. A couple of times someone handed her the megaphone microphone, a square plastic hand-piece with a button on the side, and the old lady, instead of speaking into it, put it to her ear, which made everyone fall about laughing. Meanwhile, the runners were going by and the slogan chanting had turned to drumming and singing. Many runners waved and smiled and then one, who must have been Algerian, put his arms up and danced, twirling his way past us, getting a cheer and a round of applause for his efforts.

Obviously, the singing and dancing lightened up the demos. For me, it marked a dividing line between the ordinary *sans-papiers* on the one side, albeit the devoted regulars, and the *soutiens* and the *délégués* on the other, who were more serious and more focussed on the Political aims of the demo. The *soutiens* and some of the *délégués* made up the delegations, which meant that they had a very different experience of demos. When you are in a delegation,

you only stay with the demo until you are invited in to speak to an official. You then concentrate on the discussion or negotiations. You may only be vaguely aware, if at all, of whether the demo is making plenty of noise or not. When you rejoin the demo, someone has to explain to the demonstrators what has happened inside and then, perhaps after a final show of defiance, the demo winds up and everyone goes home.

Therefore, from the delegation's perspective, the demo is there as a show of force, to put pressure on officials. More people and more noise generates more Political pressure. Any fights or arguments in public will undermine your position. Apart from that, however, the way people experience the demo is fairly irrelevant, as long as no-one gets hurt or arrested. For the demonstrators, however, they hope for good results and crowd round the delegation when it comes out, but 'the results', if there is any concrete response, are usually disappointing. Without the singing and drumming the demo would be sheer drudgery: turning out again and again, hardly knowing what is going on and waiting for yet another anti-climax.

Some of the *délégués* would stay with the demo and take on the job of animating the slogan chanting. However, joining the delegation is by far the more Politically significant role. Usually, the more influential *délégués* joined the delegation and those who stayed outside passed the job of animating the demo around the regulars and anyone else willing to have a go at leading the chanting with the megaphone. It was important for the *délégués* to lead the chanting on marches or as the demo approached its destination, but once the delegation had gone in it was a question of filling time, with as much noise as people could be motivated to make. In my view, a set of factors came into play here, which were submerged below the surface of the overt Political struggle, but nevertheless affected the success of the demo and the chances of people coming back week in week out. Enthusiasm, morale, sense of humour, musical enjoyment, diversity of repertoire and satiric improvisation all contributed to the carnivalesque or 'ludic' aspect of the demo, as Jean-Paul put it.

The *soutiens* had their own version of the carnivalesque, which had a much clearer Political message, for example: making people wear masks to show that they were denied existence; writing out 'Regularisation' in night-lights during 'The Night for Coming Out of the Shadows'; and laying a wreath in front of the Prefecture during the hunger-strike. These were deliberate Political statements, aimed at an educated audience. Sometimes they had the desired effect; for example, Mme Muraille was annoyed by the wreath laying ceremony. At other times participants just felt a bit silly, like when we all had to stand hand-in-hand with flowers during the semi-marathon, or when we had spelt out 'Regularisation' with hundreds of candles in the empty square in front of the Prefecture in the middle of the night. The word 'Regularisation' was far too long to be legible from the ground. One person sarcastically pointed out to me that it might be effective if the *Préfet* happened to fly over in a helicopter at that moment. These moments of cynical humour about what we were doing contributed to the 'group solidarity' that was being built up, as the *sans-papiers* consciously allowed the *soutiens* to play their Political games, in the hope of concrete results.

Those that made up the most dedicated core of demonstrators were not the most Politically prominent members of the Co-ordination. Nevertheless, they were struggling for their papers and were active in the demo to that end. There was usually an active group of women at the centre of the demo. Lila, for example, was one of the key figures on our demos. She kept the demo going on many occasions. It required a lot of effort to keep turning out on demos. There was usually nothing but disappointment at the end, even though it was ultimately effective. As we prepared for one demo during the occupation, Lila responded to the usual call that we should all assemble behind the banner, by saying: "Not again, we're sick of it!" She was half-joking, as she got ready to go, expressing a typical weary humour about the whole thing rather than seriously objecting.

Moments when the *sans-papiers* expressed what they really felt through the demo had energy and humour to them, which came from a common group experience. The *soutiens* were not excluded from this *sans-papiers* spirit.

Robert would often raise a cheer from the demo and even Jean-Paul got into the swing of things, shouting and singing during the big demos against Le Pen. Not all the *soutiens'* ideas fell flat. The *sans-papiers*, whether enthusiastically or not, would usually make an effort to bring the *soutiens'* ideas to life. On one national march, Rosa made everyone squat down when we chanted "*J'y suis, j'y reste, Je ne partirai pas!*" ("I'm here, I'm staying, I will not leave!"), which became part of our performative repertoire. Members of the Co-ordination enjoyed trying to tell other Collectives behind us to squat down. It was a useful way of pausing when the marchers had to be held up on big demos.

Moreover, squatting down attracted the photographers and called for a big shout when everyone jumped up again.

Nevertheless, with the exception of Robert, the *soutiens* spent relatively little time on the demo and the *sans-papiers* got on with filling out this space with their own ideas and influences. Different people had their own style on the microphone. As I have mentioned, the *délégués* led the chanting on marches. Youcef took the microphone more often than not when we were setting off or arriving somewhere, and he would shout till he was hoarse. When it came to singing, he was not very tuneful: his '*Oh lé lé, oh la la*' was excruciating.

Nevertheless, for sheer perseverance he was the top chanter. Salim was a fairly straightforward slogan chanter as well, but sometimes he would get into improvising on the '*Y'en a marre!*' ('We're sick of it!'). This slogan was originally just '*Travail au noir, Y'en a marre!*' ('Working on the black, we're sick of it!'), with the chanter calling out '*Travail au noir*' and the chorus replying '*Y'en a marre!*'. However, Salim would create a huge list of all the things we were sick of, as we chanted '*Y'en a marre!*' in reply: 'the Prefecture (*Y'en a marre!*), the *Préfet* (*Y'en a marre!*), the dossiers (*Y'en a marre!*), the appeals (*Y'en a marre!*), the lawyers (*Y'en a marre!*), the police (*Y'en a marre!*), the arrests (*Y'en a marre!*), the deportations (*Y'en a marre!*), Vaillon [the Minister of the Interior under Jospin] (*Y'en a marre!*), Jospin [Prime Minister until April 2002] (*Y'en a marre!*), being homeless – *sans abri* (*Y'en a marre!*), being jobless – *sans travail* (*Y'en a marre!*) and being without papers – *sans-papiers* (*Y'en a marre!*). When Salim got into this chant he would close his eyes and, if the drumming was going well, it was a good tune, one of the first that really gelled in our group. Others copied

and added to Salim's improvisation. Ghzella would build it up into a crescendo where we just chanted '*Y'en a marre, Y'en a marre, Y'en a marre, Y'en a marre*' repeatedly. It was interesting to hear people's improvisations and satisfying to keep shouting out that you were sick of it. It was only when we went on a national march and heard other groups chanting the original version, without any improvisation, that I realised how much we had developed this slogan.

In the early days, before the occupation, we used to go to the *sous-Préfecture* (a sub-Prefecture, representing the Prefecture at the municipal level) most weeks. It was only a short walk from the Co-ordination. We would stand there chanting for 30 minutes or so and then do a tour back to the Co-ordination via the busy shopping streets. The chanting was not particularly musical in the beginning. We had a djembe (drum) but it was rare that the drumming matched the chanting. Sometimes people would stop chanting altogether to clap and shout "Yeah... yeah... yeah..." to a climax. Most of the time we stood there chanting '*So, so, so, solidarité, Avec les sans-papiers!*' or some other straight slogan, without much conviction.

Initially, I felt a slight reluctance to chant slogans in the street. It is embarrassing making a spectacle of yourself in spaces that you usually just pass through with shopping bags. Moreover, chanting slogans is a bit like learning Politics by rote; we were the parrots, as Amirouche would say, being taken out on demos to squawk incessantly the few words we had learned. Despite the embarrassment, the participant-observation aspect of fieldwork allowed me to suspend my cynicism enough to take part.

Not everyone was keen on chanting slogans though, and the *délégués* would order people to stop chatting and start shouting and singing. Ghzella frequently told off demonstrators. She had already gained her papers through 'the struggle' and she was an experienced militant. She was also vocal in meetings, telling people off for just sitting around, drinking coffee and chatting in the Co-ordination. One day she halted the demo, told everyone to stop chatting and start chanting and, school teacher fashion, told us we would not be moving a step further until everyone started shouting the slogans. I was not sure whether

the reluctance to chant slogans was just a combination of pride, unfamiliarity and embarrassment or whether there was a deeper resentment or opposition. On being ordered to chant, I noticed one or two of the Africans muttering “*Papiers pour nous!*” instead of “*pour tous!*” (“for us” rather than “for all”), and one or two of the Arabs mocked Ghzella’s anti-socialising stance by shouting “*Cous cous pour tous!*”, meaning “food” or even “a party for all!”

These humorous moments of shared cynicism about what we were doing became part of the demo, expressed in the gusto with which we sang a second meaning into the slogans; for example the “We’re sick of it!” or the nonsensical verse of “We’re all *sans-papiers!*” where we sang about eating spaghetti and ravioli. The problem with demo folklore, from Jean-Paul’s perspective, seemed to be that the singing to and from the demo had an ethnic content, which built up the carnivalesque atmosphere and sometimes spilled out into the demo itself. Perhaps the singing on the tram even generated an implicit anti-French solidarity from the *banlieue* inhabitants around us, regardless of the specific ethnic origin of its content. There were always lots of smiles and interest from passers-by. There were sometimes Africans who clapped or danced to the Algerian tunes. On the demo itself, people joined together and we built up our own demo repertoire, with ethnic influences. The demo depended on the work of everyone involved, it was not simply an:

“asserting of cultural particularities in the pursuit of universalist principles”
(Dubois 2000:28)

Hence, I would argue that the demo was generating a ‘new ethnicity’ rather than contaminating universalistic Political aims with ‘folklore’ or displaying ethnicity as something that can be accommodated in ‘the struggle’.

If there was any anti-French solidarity, it was never explicit. Moreover, the *sans-papiers* demonstrators were not always met with general approval by the local population (i.e. not ‘real-French’). Some drivers were angry when we blocked the road. Public transport passengers sometimes objected to being squashed in by demonstrators. Though this was rare since people were used to over-crowded buses, tubes and trams. There were one or two incidents on demos where a clash with local youths occurred. There did not seem to be

much common ground between *banlieue* youths and *sans-papiers*. One of 'the lads' I knew described the *sans-papiers* as 'scoundrels', and the *sans-papiers* tended to think of *cité* youths as jobs. Nevertheless, on the big anti-Le Pen march, a group of youths caught up with the Co-ordination at one point and we were all singing Algerian songs together. However, this annoyed the *soutiens* since the group of youths were not only standing in front of our banner carrying the Algerian flag but they sang the nationally-specific words, like '*Nous sommes tous des algériens!*' ("We are all Algerians!") instead of '*Nous sommes tous les sans-papiers!*'. Therefore Youcef got rid of them, which spoilt the fun but was probably the right thing to do.

Different ethnic groups faced different sets of bureaucratic problems, but the demo brought all the *sans-papiers* together. The demonstrators never simply 'did folklore', we adapted it and created our own folklore. Making the demo interesting was necessary for attracting the attention of passers-by. Singing, clapping, drumming and doing *you-yous* were means by which the *sans-papiers* transformed a fairly boring set of Political slogans into a carnivalesque performance. Neither Jean-Paul nor anyone else ever criticised these 'ethnic' forms of expression, as long as they were used to promote the universal cause. In fact, for the *Fête d'Humanité* a year on from the occupation, Jean-Paul specifically demanded in one meeting that the *sans-papiers* bring drums and megaphones to do a performance, at which point, I threw his statement – '*On n'est pas là pour faire du folklore!*' – back at him. Jean-Paul's request for a *sans-papiers* performance outside the demo shows that ethnic forms of expression and the display of the *sans-papiers* as ethnic militants attracted the French gaze in an approved way. It fitted into the assimilationist fantasy of Republican universalism, demonstrating that integration could work.

If ethnic expression *per se* was not the problem, as it can be used to enhance the universal ideal, there remain two possible explanations for Jean-Paul's rejection of folklore in the demo. Firstly the *danger communautaire*: the fear that the expression of ethnic particularisms within 'the struggle' will lead to conflict and division, thereby undermining the universal ideal. Secondly, there is the question of *sans-papiers* group solidarity, a solidarity that cannot be

entirely appropriated by the *soutiens* and is even capable of opposing them: a folklore generated by the occupation itself. In this chapter, I examine these two possibilities.

The Moroccan kitchen incident

Cultural differences played a part in the life of the Co-ordination and in the occupation. Individuals sometimes expressed 'racial' prejudices and there were also ethnic inequalities both in the internal politics of the Co-ordination and in the external categorisation of the *sans-papiers* by the Prefecture. Despite being the largest ethnic group of *sans-papiers* in the *Département*, the West Africans were always in a minority in our Co-ordination and there were no black *délégués* immediately before the occupation, although there were prominent West African *ex-délégués*, and the head of the national Co-ordination, who often came to our meetings, came from the Congo. There were some West African *sans-papiers* who expressed reluctance because they viewed the Co-ordination as being run by, and for, Arabs. On the other hand, the Algerians, who were the most numerous and the most exuberant, also felt aggrieved because there was a total blockage on their dossiers (Algerians needed to prove fifteen years of presence in France in order to be regularised, whilst ten years was sufficient for all other nationalities). The Algerians tended to complain that they were the most numerous and the loudest on demos but that it was never them that benefited from the regularisations. Jean-Paul, whilst opposing any division of the *sans-papiers* along ethnic lines, accepted that the Algerians were a special case, requiring specific Political pressure for the signing and ratification of a new Franco-Algerian bilateral agreement ('*le troisième avenant*')¹. In terms of 'the struggle', however, *sans-papiers* and *soutiens* alike rejected ethnic inequalities and insisted on the regularisation of all *sans-papiers* regardless of ethnic origin or colour. Therefore debate about ethnic inequalities was always conducted in relation to a rejection of ethnic

¹ The 'Troisième Avènement' was eventually applied after the end of my fieldwork. It allows Algerians to claim residence after ten years of presence in France, like everyone else.

division. For example, whilst the *soutiens* might have preferred there to be black *délégués*, they rejected any hint of a suggestion that *délégués* represented their different communities rather than all the *sans-papiers*.

The *soutiens*, as guardians of universality, constructed a position from which to judge and correct the ethnic particularisms of the *sans-papiers*, which gave them an inherent advantage in debates where there was any mention of ethnic identities. One such debate revolved around 'The Moroccan kitchen', a kitchen set up inside the occupation by a group of men who were mainly Moroccans and named accordingly. This incident illustrates the relationship between, on the one hand, a loose division into ethnic groups that occurred in the occupation, and, on the other hand, the principle of de-ethnicised universalism enforced by the *soutiens*. The incident occurred when the group of men who were living in rooms upstairs in the main outbuilding decided to move to the washroom space behind the two locked cells in the courtyard.

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, living arrangements followed rough ethnic divisions. For example, there was an 'African' dormitory, which nevertheless was where Farouk, who was Pakistani, Carlos who was Peruvian and an Algerian slept as well. Similarly there was a quiet group living upstairs, mainly Moroccans, although there was at least one Algerian amongst them. A Russian man had slept there as well, until Youcef demanded rent off him as a 'non-occupant', at which point he left the occupation. This group of men sorted out their own food in cramped conditions. They were hospitable and generous about sharing with others. Nabila would often get her morning coffee from them. I had coffee and dates or melon at their place on several occasions. They also offered me *mergaise* (spicy sausages), which I turned down, being vegetarian. Mr Adel was visiting them one evening, when he first told me the story about the Charter plane that had deported a group of Maliens and been ransacked when it landed at Bamako airport. Another night I helped Abdelkarim sort out his proofs of presence in France for his dossier. Whilst this group was known as 'the Moroccans', it seemed unfair to accuse them, any more than anyone else, of 'communitarianism', as Jean-Paul did when they moved downstairs and set up what became known as 'the Moroccan kitchen'.

From the point of view of those who set it up, 'the Moroccan kitchen' was neither a challenge to the occupation's eating arrangements nor an ethnically divisive move. Towards the end of August, they decided to improve their kitchen arrangements by re-arranging the washroom area and moving in there. The only drawback was that it meant openly declaring that they had their own kitchen. The communal kitchen was hardly functioning, by this time, since Jalel had gone on holiday. There were no supplies, apart from what Mounir, Amirouche and I had stashed in the back room. I usually bought breakfast out of my own pocket. There was often an evening meal, but many 'volunteers' ended up producing an inedible, congealed mush of over-cooked, unstrained pasta. Nabila had cooked a very successful chicken curry once, with some help, but this was the exception. You never knew if there would be food or if it would be edible. From the moment people started asking about dinner, it would take a long time to produce. Volunteers had to be persuaded. Someone would usually have to go to the shop (I sometimes ended up going twice in one day). Perhaps there would be a problem with the gas bottle, or last night's washing-up would have to be done first. Hence, by the time dinner was served, if it was served, all the local takeaways might be closed and you could be faced with going hungry or eating a glutinous mush, so no-one could rely on eating from the communal kitchen.

Nevertheless, Youcef objected to the 'Moroccans' opting out of the communal kitchen arrangements and setting up their own kitchen so blatantly. He reported the situation to Rosa and Jean-Paul and, when they came back from holiday, the matter was brought up in the meeting. The *soutiens* insisted that everyone should be using the communal kitchen. The meeting fell into complete chaos as the *soutiens* and Youcef tried to lay down the law, whilst the 'Morroccans', never usually in the limelight, refused to budge. The *soutiens* explained that they were being personally held responsible for safety on site and that they could not allow a second kitchen to exist. If they accepted this kitchen, the *soutiens* argued, everyone would be setting up their own kitchens and there would be no way of ensuring health and safety. Therefore, they wanted 'the

Moroccan kitchen' closed down and they threatened to close the occupation altogether if this did not happen.

Jean-Paul also objected to 'the Moroccan kitchen' because he saw it as being ethnically divisive. To me, this view was absurd; anyone living in the occupation could see that this kitchen was labelled 'Moroccan' because of the loosely ethnically based groupings that made up the occupation. It was not as if the Moroccans had suddenly decided to set up a kitchen exclusively for Moroccans and thereby brought ethnic division to a previously de-ethnicised group of occupants. The *soutiens*, who kept their distance from the day-to-day social interactions of the occupation, may not have realised this but, whether they did or not, they objected to 'the Moroccan kitchen' because it seemed to create an official ethnic division, raising the spectre of 'communitarianism'.

In the meeting, the 'Moroccans' argued that, since the beginning of the occupation, they had contributed to the food kitty even though they had been buying and preparing their own food. Given the demise of the communal kitchen, they now felt justified in going their separate way. I tried to support their case by pointing out that I had eaten 'chez Abdelkarim', i.e. that they were open and hospitable not *enfermés* (enclosed) as the *soutiens* may have thought. However, when the *soutiens* threatened to close the occupation, it frightened many of the neutrals into demanding that 'the Moroccans' back down. But they refused. The meeting descended into complete chaos with people standing up and remonstrating with each other in the middle of the floor, myself included. I was angry. Youcef had manipulated the meeting, using his position as chair to focus on this question, whilst presenting his own skewed version of the situation. The *soutiens* were dominating the discussion with their cultural and Political authority. This was the way the meetings usually functioned but, in this case, my frustration was exacerbated by the way the *soutiens* were pontificating about the life in the occupation in which they did not participate. The way the *soutiens* complained about 'the Moroccan kitchen' exposed just how unrepresentative the meeting could be. They insisted that they were only willing to support the *sans-papiers* if the *sans-papiers* were

willing to overcome ethnic divisions, which implied that the *soutiens* had a civilising mission to teach the *sans-papiers* laic citizenship, like schoolchildren.

On such occasions, when the meeting could no longer be held to order, the *soutiens* would throw their hands up in the air, despairing at the *sans-papiers*' inability to conduct the meeting properly. Hence, 'the Moroccans' were caught in a double-bind: they appeared ignorant for failing to make their case within the debate and, when they stuck up for themselves anyway, they made all the *sans-papiers* look ignorant for not being able to conduct a proper meeting. The *soutiens* seemed to bully 'the Moroccans' with their superior French meeting culture, whilst accusing 'the Moroccans' of being 'communitarian'. When this did not work, the *soutiens* reverted to the trick of threatening to punish everyone, by walking out, if the 'the Moroccans' did not comply.

'The Moroccans' were put under severe pressure not only from Youcef and the *soutiens*, but also from people who were worried about the disorder and wanted to keep the *soutiens* happy. 'The Moroccans' did not buckle, however, and the next day, after the histrionics of the meeting, the *soutiens* seemed to respect the fact that they had stood their ground. All the turmoil in the meeting was forgotten the next day. The *soutiens* visited 'the Moroccan kitchen'. 'The Moroccans' proved their hospitality and had their kitchen inspected. They agreed to get rid of their gas ring and use only an electric hotplate but, apart from that, they were allowed to keep their kitchen.

In reporting the situation to the *soutiens*, the label 'the Moroccan kitchen' became reified as a problem in itself. For those living in the occupation, the label 'the Moroccans' was not a cause of division. It just referred to a group of occupants most of whom were Moroccan. No-one resented them cooking and eating together. 'The Moroccans' were occupants like everyone else and fellow occupants did not expect them to stop being Moroccan just because they were *sans-papiers*. Hence, Jean-Paul's principle that the *sans-papiers* were nothing but *sans-papiers* did not fit the reality inside the occupation. The occupation created lots of new relationships but not by stripping people of their ethnic origins.

I cannot think of any occupants who argued for their right to an ethnic identity within the movement, which would have been unthinkable; the *sans-papiers* themselves rejected ethnic divisions. My point is simply that cultural differences, partly based on ethnic origin, partly built up within the occupation itself, were a part of the everyday life of the occupation. These differences were not, however, impermeable ethnic boundaries. 'The Moroccan kitchen' incident was over and done with once an acceptable arrangement had been agreed but, in the process of writing up the fieldwork, I kept coming back to this incident. It stuck out as an example of the way the *soutiens* misrecognised all signs of ethnicity as ethnic division and made it impossible to challenge this misrecognition without appearing to support 'communitarianism'. It illustrates an important effect of the foreclosure of ethnic identity within French Politics: merely appearing to delineate an ethnic identity is politically indefensible. Given that cultural differences were a part of their everyday lives, this put the *sans-papiers* in a vulnerable position since the *soutiens* could always attack the *sans-papiers* for being 'communitarian'.

Kitchen Baghdad

My decision to belong to the situation (Žižek 1999:135, Badiou 1988:229) and even 'to boast' of playing a part in the events of the occupation may sound dubious to the reader. I was never in the same nightmarish bureaucratic situation as a *sans-papiers*; a fact which enforced a certain rigour on my part, a willingness 'to learn to learn' (Spivak in Hutnyk forthcoming:109). Some people were suspicious of me. Nabila thought I was a spy at one point, but no-one objected to my presence or my determination to stick it out with them. On the contrary, plenty of people insisted that I was 'one of us' and it was even jokingly suggested by several people that I ought to get my name put on the list and my dossier looked at. When Nabila and I were married, my membership of the occupation was official. The fact that my residence in France had expired became a factor in Nabila's regularisation and, in a joking but serious way, Rosa announced in one meeting that Nabila would be regularised when I was

regularised, which caused people to humorously proclaim that I was a *sans-papiers* after all.

The cross-cultural folklore generated inside the occupation seemed to come from the experience of living and struggling together. In relation to general living arrangements, loosely ethnic groups were formed with language and culture influencing people's choice of companions, but occupants were also keen to build cross-cultural links. Carlos, who was the only Peruvian, and myself, as the only Englishman, could only build cross-cultural friendships. Carlos linked up with the West Africans and spent time with Nabila and myself. I linked up with Amirouche, Mounir and Adel. Before the hunger-strike, we lived in the kitchen block and often spent our evenings chatting together. Lila made it her job to look after all the *sans-papiers* in the Co-ordination. She introduced me to Nabila before we became friends. Nabila and Sarah were inseparable during the occupation. At the beginning of the occupation, I played a few games of chess against Salim. I also joined in games of football and dominoes.

For me, the summer months were the most significant phase of the occupation. With the Prefecture and the *soutiens* on holiday, it was left to the *sans-papiers* to keep the occupation going. Some people struggled on despite the difficulties. Nabila and Sarah took over writing leaflets, with less and less supervision from Rosa and Jean-Paul. Mounir became a stalwart of the occupation. Amirouche, Nabila and myself ended up in delegations at the Prefecture and the various *Maries* that we visited. Many of the occupants drifted away but, in the power vacuum, other people became more active. It was often joked that the occupation had become a holiday camp, and one banner on the outside wall read "*Loft sans-papiers*", a reference to '*Loft Story*', the French equivalent of 'Big Brother' that was running at the same time as our occupation. However, whilst French society voyeuristically enjoyed the 24 hour surveillance of a perfectly legitimate group of citizens, the *sans-papiers*' occupation of an old police station was unable to attract media attention. As the 'bare life' of citizens was pinned ever more intimately to their public visibility, the blindfold stayed firmly on for the 'others'.

The occupation lost its initial momentum after ‘the list’ but it kept going. The communal kitchen was hardly functioning. There were no supplies, apart from what Mounir, Amirouche and I had stashed in the backroom. I usually bought breakfast out of my own pocket. There was sometimes an evening meal, but many ‘volunteers’ ended up producing an inedible, congealed mush of over-cooked, unstrained pasta. When I tried to buy supplies for general use, Mounir and Amirouche hid them away and told me not to leave them in the communal kitchen. Stashing the supplies was in fact the only way to keep hold of them. Different groups had their own ways of getting by and it was pointless leaving things in the kitchen because they just disappeared. Mounir and Amirouche made no effort to stop the communal kitchen being looted or to get it restocked. Mr Adel sometimes brought West African food back from the foyer for us and once or twice we went up to the foyer to eat.

Amirouche did not seem interested when I suggested that we needed some organisation. He had his own way of operating, rarely taking any fixed responsibilities but filling all kinds of gaps as he saw fit. For example, he painted a new banner when we started the occupation. Amirouche tried to teach Mounir and myself some words in Kabyle and Mounir nicknamed him after one of his favourite words – *Hwch-hwcho!* – which means dirty, messy or anomalous. Amirouche told me that he had come to France not just to make money but to see the world, to learn, ‘to evolve’ (*évoluer*) as the French say. He was critical of most of the *sans-papiers* who, he argued, wanted to remain enclosed in their religion and traditions. What was the point, he would demand, of coming to France if you were not going to integrate? He sometimes had a condescending attitude towards his fellow *sans-papiers*, for example calling them parrots, to be taken out on demos, which was as dismissive of the *sans-papiers* themselves as it was critical of the way the *soutiens* controlled the Coordination. Amirouche enjoyed hearing my fieldwork reflections and discussing the movement in abstract terms. Despite buying into French notions of integration and ‘evolution’, he was not uncritically pro-French. One day he showed me a quote from Yacine, which translates as: “This sentence is written in French, to say in French, to the French, that we are not French.”

With so many occupants absent, it was proposed in one meeting that a letter should be sent to the absent occupants, Mounir opposed this. He exclaimed: “*C’est la honte!*” (“It’s shameful”). Mounir’s attitude was straightforward: “*On reste ici, on bouge pas*” (“We stay here, we don’t budge”). He rarely spoke in meetings but he took over one General Meeting, repeating this catch-phrase several times, as he refused to be ignored. When the *soutiens* objected to the suggestion that the occupants should just stay in the occupation, Mounir offered to go on a demo to the Prefecture every day, pointing out that this would cost nothing because we travelled without tickets. The most important thing from Mounir’s point of view was that a group of occupants had to keep going no matter what. Once on ‘the list’, he refused to let go. His attitude made it clear that the occupation had achieved some autonomy despite the absenteeism. During one of the Sunday *sans-papiers* meetings, which Rosa and Jean-Paul had begun to attend, Mounir put Jean-Paul firmly in his place. *Soutiens* had never been turned away from *sans-papiers* meetings but Rosa and Jean-Paul were dominating the discussion as they did in General Meetings. Mounir got up on this occasion, and after paying his respects to Jean-Paul he dramatically pointed out that this was a “*sans-papiers* meeting”. Jean-Paul was livid and stormed off.

Mounir had worked as a cook and at times when no-one cooked any communal food, he made something late at night for a few of us, without bothering to cook for everyone. He complained that Amirouche never did the cooking, so Amirouche promised to cook on the evening after we marched all the way to the Prefecture on foot. Mounir and I were lying on our mattresses in the back room, as Amirouche prepared spaghetti. We started chanting “*On veut des spaghettis, pas des raviolis!*” (“We want spaghetti, not ravioli!”) like the slogan “*On veut des papiers, pas des policiers!*” (“We want papers, not policemen!”) in a spontaneous demo against Amirouche. Amirouche produced a pretty good spaghetti bolognaise, which we ate with red wine and with candles on the table. It was moments like these that made things liveable, against a back-drop of no progress being made at the Prefecture and a soul-sapping atomism that was eating away at the occupation.

Mr Adel (I used to call him Monsieur Adel because he called me Monsieur Saul) spent more time with us and ended up moving into the room behind the kitchen with Mounir, Amirouche and I. The first time I met him was when we played in local football tournament, he played up front in a bright green top, Mali's national kit. One day, standing at the main gates to the occupation, Aïssa started jokingly criticising Mr Adel's clothes. He told Mr Adel off for wearing trainers with his trousers, which was absurd because Mr Adel was always immaculately dressed. Mr Adel put to shame the neglected old *Gendarmarie*, in his perfectly ironed trousers and spotlessly clean, white trainers. Mr Adel defended himself, against the criticism, nevertheless, explaining that his trousers were in fact a khaki canvass, which meant that it was OK to put them with trainers. Like Mounir, Adel had put everything else on hold and was fully committed to the occupation and the struggle to get his papers sorted out. Having lived in France for nearly ten years, he was stuck without papers. He had a stable job before the occupation began; he had worked in the same place for 6 years. However, he gave this job up to join the occupation. At the beginning of the occupation he was confident of getting his job back, with or without his papers. By the end of the occupation, however, he had a struggle to find a job because his old boss had moved on in the meantime.

Solidarity and merit

The Co-ordination was structured around 'the struggle' to push the *sans-papiers*' cause into public space. To this end, the *soutiens* and *délégués* passed on an explicit form of solidarity to the *sans-papiers*. The *sans-papiers* were told to reject a humanitarian construction of their situation, as unfortunate wretches begging for kindness, and build solidarity based on a belief in their own rights. In theory, if the message got across, this should have created a group willing to struggle together, to force the authorities to recognise these universal rights. However, no-one took the *soutiens*' message at face value and, from the inside, there never seemed to be this kind of unity, which is perhaps why it sometimes seemed as if there was no solidarity at all. To some extent the situation fits with Mr Lazarus' view (see Chapter 3) that 'the group'

can only be an external act of subjectification; the *soutiens*' ideology of solidarity did not generate an internal 'group solidarity'. Of course, meetings and other communication between *soutiens* and *sans-papiers* were not organised purely to deliver a schooling in solidarity, even if paternalism seemed to underwrite their relationship. The goal of the Co-ordination was the regularisation of *sans-papiers*, not just their education in Political struggle. Nevertheless, there was a significant gap between the *soutiens*' version of 'the struggle' and what the *sans-papiers* learned about 'the struggle'.

For the *soutiens*, 'the struggle' included all the *sans-papiers* (i.e. about 15,000 people in our *Département* alone), if not the working class as a whole, whose social conditions are undermined by the black market economy. Hence, although the *soutiens* were willing to treat *the sans-papiers* at the Co-ordination as a group, as 'the family', on an informal level, this was a means towards representing *sans-papiers* in general. It was the *sans-papiers* themselves who insisted on making 'the group' official, by forcing through 'the list' of occupants against the will of the *soutiens*. The *soutiens* rejected the idea of a struggle limited to a specific group of *sans-papiers*. Therefore, it cannot be argued that the *soutiens* imposed 'the group' on the *sans-papiers*, 'the list' actually challenged the *soutiens*' subjectification of the *sans-papiers*.

In Marx's terms, the *sans-papiers*, outside the Co-ordination, did not share "a mode of production... bringing them into complex interactions" (Marx 2002/1852:100). Without an 'intensive mode of engagement', the *sans-papiers* have no means towards a 'becoming beyond identity' (Thoburn 2003:49). Whilst there are groups of *sans-papiers* who share a workplace or a living-place, with whom there would be a basis for wider solidarity, this was not the case for the all *sans-papiers* who joined the Co-ordination. Most of the occupants were workers but, as workers, they were isolated from each other. They had to give up work temporarily in order to join the occupation. Some returned to work as soon as they could, abandoning the occupation. Several of the occupants, like Adel, withdrew from full time employment in order to commit

themselves to the occupation². The occupants could be described as a lumpenproletarian group made up of jobless, homeless and middle class individuals with enough family support to get by during the occupation. If they were a lumpenproletarian group, tending to maintain identity (Thoburn 2003:54), the question is how they came to create a new identity, as occupants, and leave behind a trace of their Political struggle.

'The list' seems to stick out as an undeniable trace of self-subjectification. Neither the Prefecture, the *soutiens* nor myself chose to define the occupants in terms of 'the list'. Whether through Political activity (demos and meetings) or between-the-acts (eating, sleeping, playing dominoes and gossiping over a cups of coffee), the occupation created a space in which some form of 'group solidarity' was generated. The Co-ordination was itself a liminal space, a site that made complex interactions possible. It was perhaps "the shared experience of oppression" that bound the *sans-papiers* "together sufficiently to organise an uprising" (Hutnyk 2004:144). One question that suggests itself is: an uprising against whom? The occupants fought for 'the list' against the *soutiens* rather than the Prefecture but, of course, 'the struggle' united *soutiens* and *sans-papiers* against the Prefecture. The 'group solidarity' of the occupation was not against the *soutiens*, it was just not the solidarity that they had demanded. Without the occupation, which the *soutiens* made possible, there would have been no 'group solidarity'. The problem, from the *soutiens* perspective, was that even if these complex interactions created a Political awareness that went beyond the active members of the Co-ordination, indirectly touching families, friends and acquaintances, and explicitly uniting all *sans-papiers* through the demand for global regularisation, it only generated an active solidarity amongst the occupants themselves.

Nabila used the concept 'merit', when she became a *délégué*, trying to urge the *sans-papiers* to struggle for their papers. To the *sans-papiers*, it made sense that those that struggled deserved their papers, that good militants 'merit' their papers. Perhaps this concept suggests a 'faithful procedure' (Badiou 1988:365)

²After the hunger-strike, the Prefecture promised to regularise Adel, but only if he had a job contract, ignoring the fact that he had left a job in order to force them to deal with his case in the first place.

but it does not seem to fit with the idea of struggling and creating a *rapport de force* strong enough to prise regularisations away from the Prefecture. However, meriting your papers was not just a wishful way of recognising that fellow occupants were deserving, it seemed to reflect what actually happened. The *délégués* had been responsible for telling the *soutiens* who the active *sans-papiers* were, which had determined who the occupants were, i.e. who was on 'the list' and whose dossiers were being processed. Therefore, the idea that of meriting your papers could directly affect your chances of regularisation. The *soutiens* worked on and negotiated for active militants' dossiers first and foremost. Rosa and Jean-Paul themselves argued that Youcef was the most deserving of the *sans-papiers* because he was the most active militant. In a letter written to the Prefecture, the Communist Party used the fact that the occupants were militants as an argument for their regularisation, on the grounds that it was evidence of integration into French society.

The Prefecture effectively rewarded good militants with regularisation. They did not, of course, officially recognise militancy as a criteria for regularisation but, in the end, they gave way to a few active *sans-papiers* rather than make a stand that might risk arousing wider public sympathy. From the *sans-papiers* perspective, the Prefecture was the ultimate judge of their 'struggle', and occupants claimed that the *Préfet* knew everything that happened in the occupation. Certain *délégués*, especially ones who expressed themselves well in French, were regularised after taking part in meetings with the Prefecture. Mme Muraille, for example, regularised Réda and his brother because Réda expressed himself so well in French. Perhaps it was not directly a recognition of his merit as a militant but it certainly suggested that the Prefecture saw itself as a gatekeeper to French culture. And it was whilst performing a role as a militant, taught to them by French *soutiens* and performed in situations set up by the *soutiens*, that the *sans-papiers* were regularised. Hence, even if it seems incredible that the Prefecture, like some benevolent judge of 'the struggle', might regularise good militants, things did seem to work out that way.

This idea of deserving your papers sounds incompatible with 'class conflict'. Having said that, the *soutiens* never preached 'class conflict'. The terms

denoting conflict used by *soutiens* were: '*rapport de force*' and 'the struggle'. For the *sans-papiers*, 'the struggle' was perfectly compatible with meriting your papers, and related to how much people had suffered and struggled both in the Co-ordination and in their lives in general. Moreover, 'merit' was a useful way of explaining to new *sans-papiers* why they should struggle for the old *sans-papiers*. As happened with 'the list', the activism of some *sans-papiers* dwindled once their dossiers had been handed in. Whether they had to go back to work or just became disillusioned, they left a gap that could only be filled by new *sans-papiers*. Therefore the active old *sans-papiers* had to motivate the new *sans-papiers* to struggle even though the new *sans-papiers* did not yet have dossiers. The concept of 'merit' was a way of justifying this phase shift between old and new *sans-papiers*. It meant that the Co-ordination could continue to put pressure on the Prefecture even if occupants were absent.

'*Rapport de force*' ("relation of force", i.e. creating enough Political pressure to force the Prefecture to give way) was not a term employed by the *sans-papiers* but it was the crucial concept that *délégués* tried to pass on to the *sans-papiers*. There were two senses in which the *sans-papiers* could operationalise this concept: firstly, by contributing to a positive *rapport de force*; secondly, by using it to their advantage. The first sense is compatible with 'meriting'; those that campaign the most merit their regularisation the most. However, in the second sense, the instrumental use of the *rapport de force* seems to involve cashing in the Political pressure generated for concrete gains. In this case, the sense of merit generated through a use of the *rapport de force* has to be limited to the finite group who benefit: the occupants.

Without a sense of merit, the principle of building and using a *rapport de force* was too fluid. The *soutiens* instructed the *sans-papiers* to create a *rapport de force* for 15,000 *sans-papiers*, but this instruction could not be taken at face value. Outside the meeting, the *sans-papiers* had to ask "What do the *soutiens* want?" and whatever explanation they reached, they could not trust the *soutiens* to use the *rapport de force* in the *sans-papiers*' interests. In the second reading of the question "What do they want?", the *soutiens*' desire for a *sans-papiers* movement breaks the frame of the fantasy, leaving the question unanswerable.

With this reading it may be possible for the *sans-papiers* to use the *rapport de force* independently of the *soutiens* but normality and trust break down altogether. It is only by keeping faith with 'the list' and those who 'merit' their papers that solidarity can be renewed. Jean-Paul objected to the idea that the *sans-papiers* could merit their papers, arguing that all *sans-papiers* should have their papers. Nevertheless, for the occupants, 'meriting you papers' worked as a connection between 'group solidarity' and using a *rapport de force* for the benefit of a finite group, a group whose regularisations could be demanded, fought for and achieved together, in other words, 'the list'.

The end of the occupation

The issue of squatters became increasingly important towards the end of the occupation. The *Mairie* wanted the occupation to end and they did not support protests about housing provision for which they were responsible. Non-occupant squatters were banned from the occupation. In practice, some of the occupants had no other housing and despite the policy against squatters there were various non-occupants who were allowed to stay. Moussa, as an ex-*délégué* with papers but no housing was one. There was an unmarried pregnant Moroccan woman who had been thrown out from where she lived and worked as a maid and another woman and her daughter, who were homeless, having recently arrived from Algeria. There were several friends of friends and a group of men who paid for their lodging by going on demos. As the occupation dragged on, those with homes tended to move out, leaving a significant proportion of homeless *sans-papiers*. The occupation lasted six months in total, by the end of which very few of the original occupants slept in the occupation. Those remaining had nowhere else to go.

It was decided to end the occupation in December. The occupants persuaded the *soutiens* to wait until the end of *Ramadam* but the *soutiens* insisted on a set date. As the date approached, it became obvious that there would be problems for people moving out and that there would be resistance to closing the occupation. However, this was never discussed in meetings, though many of

the occupants / squatters were saying privately that they would not be leaving. Across town in a Church building, a *sans-papiers* party was thrown to celebrate the end of *Ramadam*. Robert had organised the room and was there till the end clearing up but he was under the illusion that the occupation would end the following day, as planned. Almost everyone else at the party knew there would be a problem but no-one told Robert.

The following day, Robert and Albert turned up to help clear out the occupation but there was no sign of Rosa and Jean-Paul. Instead Hausman was there, direct from the *Mairie*. Robert was justifiably offended at being betrayed and started ripping down notices and posters. The *soutiens*, with a worker from the *Mairie*, collected the chairs and tables that had been brought from the Co-ordination and loaded them into the van. The *sans-papiers* sat in the room that had been used for the hunger-strike, refusing to budge. They chanted "*J'y suis, j'y reste, je ne partirai pas!*" (I'm here, I'm staying here, I will not leave!"), a *sans-papiers* slogan that they threw back in the faces of the *soutiens*.

Hausman started attacking the *sans-papiers* on the grounds that there were no 'Africans' amongst them; that for six years the Co-ordination had been made up of "*des communautés*", i.e. more than one ethnic group. He accused the remaining occupants of acting as a single *communauté*, i.e. Arabs. He warned that the *Conseil Générale* would be coming soon to take over the building, but the occupants refused to move. Robert was hurt and angry at having been deceived; he reminded everyone of the recent fire in the office and that it was too much of a responsibility to have people staying in the occupation. Hausman pointed out that, two weeks before, the *sans-papiers* had agreed to leave at the end of *Ramadam*. Youcef countered that they had only agreed to leave after *Ramadam*. Robert told them they were no longer part of the Co-ordination. Hausman backed this up, telling them they would take no part in the next delegation at the Prefecture. Lila and Robert sorted out the last of the finances for the musicians the night before. Salim and Youcef called a special *sans-papiers* meeting.

The *soutiens* left the room and continued packing up the occupation. Salim began by pointing out that this situation should have been negotiated with the *soutiens* beforehand, but that now the *sans-papiers* were faced with a difficult decision. The occupation was theirs, but he warned against relying on four or five people to stand alone against the *soutiens*. He reminded the group of what had happened less than a year before at St Bernard, when the Co-ordination had attempted to re-occupy the founding site of the *sans-papiers* movement. Although the *soutiens* had agreed to leave St Bernard, since the priest had refused to accept the occupation, a small group of the *sans-papiers* had insisted on staying and the police had come in wielding truncheons. Several members of the Co-ordination had been arrested and two of them had been deported.

Youcef explained that they had three choices: accept the lifting of the occupation, thereby respecting the agreement that had been made; take on a difficult fight that would need a lot of courage and mobilisation; or, if they had their doubts about being able to do this, attempt to gain certain commitments from the *soutiens* before leaving with their heads held high. Both Youcef and Salim pointed out how unorganised this sit-in was, as no-one had kept the Co-ordination's banners and the *soutiens* taken them down. Salim argued that if the *sans-papiers* were serious about continuing the occupation without the support of the *soutiens*, there had to be a minimum of 20-25 people who were prepared to stay in the building 24 hours a day. Doubt set in amongst those who were there, about how committed they actually were to continuing the occupation in defiance of the *soutiens*. The best course of action seemed to be to demand certain commitments and to threaten a hunger-strike at the HQ if these commitments were not respected, although Youcef suggested that it was better not to mention hunger-strike but to say 'surprise action'. The demands were straightforward: the on-going negotiation of current dossiers, a meeting with the Prefecture, pressure to be exerted by the politicians and a new *dépôt* of dossiers for those who had joined the Co-ordination since 'the list' of occupants.

Robert, Hausman and another Communist assistant Mayor were invited back into the room. Youcef explained that it was a shame that this had not been discussed in the General Meeting, as the situation was critical for the Co-

ordination. He gave the first three conditions for leaving the occupation, missing out the demand for a new *dépôt* of dossiers, then he threatened the 'surprise action'. Hausman exclaimed that it was a shame that Youcef had added this last point, saying that he could not care less about the *sans-papiers*' threats. There was general agreement about the other points. However, Réda raised a question about the on-going negotiations, pointing out that the *soutiens* had failed to make an appeal due the previous Friday. In reply Robert mentioned the need to add elements to dossiers. Reading between the lines, Réda must have been aware by this point that Rosa was leaving to one side the difficult dossiers of certain occupants, especially Algerians, who had recently arrived in France. Despite Mme Muraille granting many individual concessions, these dossiers could not be fitted into her way of 'applying the law'. However, the technical implications of Réda's point were lost in the general anxiety to reach an understanding. One of the *sans-papiers* asked that the Mayor intervene by demanding a meeting with the Prefect. Hausman insisted that the *soutiens* had no control of the *Préfet's* decisions and that the *sans-papiers* had to create Political pressure through 'the struggle'.

Réda added the fourth condition of a new *dépôt* of dossiers. Hausman made the point that handing in a list did not lead directly to regularisations. The decision on a new *dépôt* of dossiers would be made by the *soutiens* collectively, and then it also had to be accepted by the Prefecture. Réda argued that he could not see how they were going to carry on 'the struggle' without a new *dépôt* of dossiers. Hausman refused to guarantee that this would happen. He explained that each dossier had to be completed and worked on, that there were fewer trained *soutiens*, and that those that remained were tired. He complained that the same people were always going to see Claire and that she had had enough. The *sans-papiers* had to take care of the *soutiens* as well, it had to be two-way. They must not give the *soutiens* 'shit' all the time. Hausman argued that the new members had been there for very little time and that people were arriving in huge numbers from Algeria and it was impossible to keep on top of the situation. New laws had to be made. The movement had to be widened; the *sans-papiers* had to be more numerous on demos. Réda

called for a collective decision to be made on a new occupation. Hausman agreed but Robert refused to be involved in any new occupation.

On the whole, the *soutiens* were in agreement with the conditions made by the *sans-papiers*, even though they made no guarantees, as it was the Prefecture who would ultimately decide on any regularisations. Everyone seemed to have come to an agreement. Robert was happy again, saying that he admired the *sans-papiers'* determination to struggle and that he was proud to be with them, which raised a cheer. However, despite the fact that everyone had agreed to lift the occupation, there remained the sticky question of those people who had nowhere to go. The meeting had finished and Robert had already left when Réda approached Hausman to ask discretely whether six men could be allowed to stay another 48 hours. There were two women, one with a child, the other pregnant, that had been promised emergency hotel accommodation by the *Conseil Générale*, but the single men had nowhere to go. On hearing Réda's request, Hausman exploded again, dismissing this question, saying that he had had enough, he was tired and had to go home and eat something.

I became extremely angry at this point, shouting at Hausman that there were people there who had nowhere to go. Hausman turned on me, saying I had done nothing but scribble away in my corner all day and that it was in my interests to shut up now. I yelled back at Hausman that I had been part of this occupation, demanding where the hell he had been. We were both *tu-toi*-ing each other, i.e. using the familiar *tu* form rather than *vous*. As I have pointed out, *tu* was the usual way of addressing comrades in 'the struggle' but in this case it became an aggressive insult. Mr Adel, who had come to the occupation after work, calmed me down, saying "*C'est bon, c'est bon*", meaning "It's OK, you've said what you needed to say, it's been understood." I must admit that I was slightly shocked at the way Hausman had threatened me, presumably in relation to Nabila's regularisation, which had been promised but not yet completely sorted out.

The discussion continued along the lines that the Co-ordination had agreed to lift the occupation, so anyone who remained in the building would be considered

to be a squatter. Someone suggested to Hausman that the Co-ordination was nothing without the support of the *sans-papiers* but he replied that “we” could easily find another group of *sans-papiers*. I remarked that, if they could be replaced at will, the *sans-papiers* were nothing in his view. In the end, the people from the *Conseil Générale* came in to explain that a writ would be served against anyone left in the building and the police would evict them. I loudly pointed out that this process would take more than 48 hours anyway. The *Conseil Générale* proposed to proceed with the eviction order but not to execute it until two days’ time. A false list of occupant-squatters was made and handed in and the discussion was brought to a close.

Someone had brought along a big bowl of *hemis* (made with green peppers and tomatoes, this one was spicy with hot peppers) and Nabila served out sandwiches in one of the side rooms. Hausman came in and someone offered him a sandwich. We exchanged a few words on a more conciliatory note. Once people had eaten and tidied up, everyone had to leave the building except the squatters. Nabila and I went over the road to the café for a while. Then we came back to find that two security guards had been posted on the door, who refused to let us in. We managed to get past them, saying that we were a *soutiens* and a *délégué* of the Co-ordination, which was true. The security guards were both immigrants; Nabila found out that one of them had even been without papers when he first arrived in France, so they ended up being more sympathetic than they were supposed to be. However, there was grim atmosphere in what was left of the occupation. When the two days were up, everyone left. There were three men who still had nowhere to go. Against the rules of the Co-ordination and against the explicit instructions of the *Marie*, they slept in HQ for the following weeks.

Epilogue

After the occupation, my involvement in the Co-ordination was limited to meetings, demos and general socialising. There were parties, organised by those that had been regularised. There were new elections for *délégués* in

which Youcef did not stand since he had become so unpopular he did not have much chance of being elected. Rafik took over from Réda, who was regularised by Mme Muraille. Youcef started causing trouble behind the scenes, but he then started speaking positively in meetings and was eventually reinstated. He was also one of the marchers who joined up with the national Co-ordination to march from Marseille to Paris during the presidential elections. However, this symbolic repetition of the founding of the French State went almost unnoticed as Jospin was defeated in the first round, leaving Chirac and Le Pen. The *sans-papiers* cause was caught up in the wider anti-Le Pen demonstrations.

With Chirac winning both the Presidency and a rightwing majority in the legislative assembly, there was an increased threat of restrictive legislation against immigrants and the deportation of those without papers. The Co-ordination was the most active wing of the *sans-papiers* movement and was therefore able to lead a temporary resurgence of the movement. Nabila and I were in Algeria when the Co-ordination occupied St Marc's for two weeks, hitting the national news and prompting thousands of *sans-papiers* to take to the streets. When we got back, we went on several demos and it was amazing to see the square outside the Prefecture almost full, with thousands of *sans-papiers*. On one demo everyone was putting their names on list and I carried a bin-bag full of lists back to the Co-ordination. There was a huge rush to join the movement, although some people seemed to think that putting their name on any kind of list would lead to regularisation. The queues had been impossible to manage at St Marc's and when membership was re-opened at the *Bourse de Travail* there were huge queues again and one person had to be taken to hospital after nearly losing a finger in the door. Meetings became completely impossible and it was clear that the movement was moving into a new phase, which I was unable to follow, having been recalled by my already over-abused academic timetable.

Despite achieving the long-awaited media coup, the movement quickly lost its spot in the limelight and the Co-ordination failed to keep all the new members actively involved. The occupation of St Marc's had been initiated by a strong group of *délégués*, as well as the *soutiens*. However Youcef and Jean-Paul

managed to get away with nominating themselves to negotiate with the authorities. There were also irregularities in the collection of membership fees and the distribution of membership cards, which led to an unexplainable disappearance of more than half of the money that had been collected from the *sans-papiers*. Old and new *soutiens* were attracted back to the movement but quickly came into conflict with Jean-Paul and Rosa.

The sudden explosion of the movement also exacerbated the problems associated with *communautairisme*. On one demo, Jean-Paul contemptuously introduced me to a group of Pakistanis, who wanted his speech translated into English. I did my best to explain the situation, although I had not been listening to his speech. The West Africans and North Africans were able to learn about the movement from their peers, whereas a large new group of Chinese *sans-papiers*, few of whom spoke French, had no previous experience of the movement to draw on. The scale of the movement created difficulties of communication but the main source of conflict was Rosa and Jean-Paul's refusal to share power, and Hausman's determination to prise the Co-ordination away from them. Chantalle later claimed that the Algerians had excluded the Chinese in a racist way, but the *sans-papiers* involved argued that Hausman had used the Chinese, taking advantage of their recent mobilisation and their relative isolation from the other *sans-papiers*, to try to get rid of Rosa and Jean-Paul.

Several meetings ended in mass fights, with furniture being thrown. Whilst these fights were between the Chinese on one side and the West Africans and North Africans on the other, they seem to have been caused by the divisions between the *soutiens* rather than cultural differences between the *communautés*. The different groups of *sans-papiers* were divided according to the different opportunities of regularisation offered by the *soutiens*. Those that had dossiers with Rosa and Jean-Paul stayed loyal to them, whilst Hausman could count on the support of the Chinese *sans-papiers* because he represented the *Mairie* and promised to organise a new collective *dépôt* for them. Hence, the *danger communautaire*, at least in this situation, resulted

from the re-territorialisation of 'the struggle' by the *soutiens*, as they strategically bargained for the support of different groups of *sans-papiers*.

As a result of the divisions, the Co-ordination split down the middle. Hausman, Chantalle, Robert and what was left of the money, along with the name of the Co-ordination, formed one faction, whilst Rosa, Jean-Paul and most of the active *sans-papiers* had to create their own collective. On a later visit, I was on a demo with Jean-Paul's collective, when, by accident, Hausman's group happened to turn up as well. Hausman's group consisted mainly of French *soutiens* and they were much better equipped, with a new banner, megaphones and drums, whilst Jean-Paul's group were more vocal. In total, however, there were only about a hundred demonstrators. We had campaigned for months with this kind of turn out, during the occupation of the old *Gendarmerie*, but, following the mass mobilisation of St Marc's, this was a disappointing outcome.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the effects of French universalism in the Parisian *banlieue*, with reference to fieldwork conducted in several sites relating to: initiatives aiming to combat 'social exclusion', *banlieue* youth culture, the role of public intellectuals and, principally, the *sans-papiers* movement. I have looked at the rejection of 'ethnicity' in each of these sites and focussed on the difficulties faced by a group of *sans-papiers* trying to make their voice heard in public space. The aim has been to explore the Political engagement of immigrants within French universalism.

I discussed the socio-political context of immigration in France in Chapter 1. The history of immigration in France shows that 'regularisation after the fact' was a constant feature of twentieth century migration (Abdallah 2000:9). When restrictive immigration measures were introduced, from the 1970s onwards, amnesties for irregular immigrants nevertheless continued. These amnesties were prompted by protests and hunger-strikes by immigrants who found themselves unable to achieve regularisation in the context of increasing restrictions. Similar protests and amnesties have also occurred in other EU member states.

In the EU context, irregular foreign workers find themselves at the bottom of a four-tier hierarchy, beneath: citizens who have member state nationality, which entitles them to full Political and social rights, freedom of movement within the EU and protection of their rights by the EU; Third Country Nationals who have residence rights, the right to work and social rights within a member state but do not have full Political rights or automatic freedom of movement and are not classified as EU citizens; and non-residents with temporary leave to remain based on a claim for asylum or a need for medical treatment, who only have access to exceptional social provisions.

In Chapter 1 I also introduced the stigmatised areas known as the *banlieues*, which are often the focus of policies aimed at combating 'social exclusion'. I discussed the influence of universalism within the French concept of 'social exclusion', how it is tied into an almost unquestionable hegemony of 'the social' that excludes any recognition of ethnicity in public space. In Chapter 2 I expanded on this foreclosure of ethnicity in relation to the *danger communautaire*, an assumption that culturally different communities are incompatible with social integration since they lead inevitably to racism and inter-ethnic conflict. Nevertheless, I argued that there is a striking degree of 'racial' segregation between 'real-French' parts of Paris and the *banlieue*. This segregation is common knowledge at an unofficial level but cannot be measured as ethnic categories are officially forbidden, even as measures of discrimination. I explained the way in which 'social exclusion' theory has tentatively examined the question of ethnicity in relation to French universalism but that 'social exclusion' policy has been used as a 'colour-blind' way of focussing on 'problem' areas. Within this 'colour-blind' approach there is an implicit social mission to open out 'enclosed' communities. This mission reflects French intolerance towards cultural difference. Policy makers assume that the 'problem' of 'social exclusion' is due to a lack of integration on the part of *banlieue* residents.

Local Government and local Associations may attempt to bridge the gaps between an immigrant population and French institutions but they have to function within the hegemonic view of society, which assumes that cultural difference should be assimilated into Frenchness. As a result, *banlieue* youth culture is either condemned as a yobbish 'racially' marked street culture, or, when it can be held up as an example of the success of French universalism, it is appropriated and co-opted. I argued that, nevertheless, there is what could be described as a 'new ethnicity' generated amongst *beur*, black and white adolescents, which is expressed in dress-styles, music and film, and negotiated in neighbourhoods through a slang language. In the context of the *banlieue*, I suggested that non-French ethnic markers can sometimes unite residents from different ethnic backgrounds, in an implicit rejection of the model of social integration propagated by French institutions.

In Chapter 3, I used my participation in Mr Lazarus' research project in order to reflect on the possibilities left for opposition and alterity within a universalised social hegemony, once ethnicity, class and group identity are disregarded. Exploring the theoretical work of Badiou, Žižek and Agamben, in Chapters 1 and 3, suggested several concepts: the abject non-part, the grey zone / limbo, bare life, remnants, the question "What do they [the well-meaning public] want?", interiority-exteriority, the militant, the faithful procedure, the Event, the One of the State and 'the two' of separation. I researched the *sans-papiers* Co-ordination in relation to these terms and I shall summarise my conclusions below.

In Chapter 4, I considered the different approaches to the *sans-papiers* movement of several commentators. Fassin (2001) and Dubois (2000) highlight important aspects of the relationship between French universalism and the *sans-papiers* movement. Fassin (2001) shows the increasing importance of 'the suffering body' in immigration law. Dubois (2000) links the *sans-papiers*' claim to universalism, which includes an expression of cultural particularities, with slave insurgents during the French Revolution. Dubois (2000) argues that these insurgents represent a wider version of universalism than has usually been acknowledged within the French nation-state. Fassin and Dubois seem over optimistic about the ability of French universalism to adapt to the challenge of the *sans-papiers* movement, which I have read as a mirroring of the process of appropriation and assimilation associated with French Republicanism. Siméant (1998), on the other hand, argues that the *sans-papiers* movement is a heretical anomaly, confined to the margins of French public space.

The authors that place more importance on the *sans-papiers* movement look at it in terms of: socio-economic trends, the challenge it represents to the nation-state from within and the transnational flows to which it is connected. Terray (1999) outlines the socio-economic context of de-industrialisation and flexibilisation, in which the *sans-papiers* are exploited as an unregulated pool of cheap labour, with Government connivance, especially through the *Circulaire Chevènement*. Balso (2001) and Cissé (1999) develop opposing theoretical

approaches to the *sans-papiers*' Political stance. Balso (2001) argues that the *sans-papiers* should be considered as foreign workers in the interior of the State, with the *Circulaire Chevènement* creating a *de facto* register of the *sans-papiers* who have been refused regularisation. Cissé (1999) points instead towards international debt, transnational flows and North-South inequalities as exterior explanations for the *sans-papiers* struggle.

In relation to these different approaches, I introduced the Co-ordination, as my fieldwork site. In Chapter 4 I put the Co-ordination into the context of the wider *sans-papiers* movement and I used interview material with *sans-papiers* to explore their view of their situation. In Chapter 5 I contrasted Siméant's (1998) analysis of the *sans-papiers* cause with Cissé's (1999) and Diop's (1997) accounts of the St Bernard Collective. Siméant (1998) suggests that the *sans-papiers* cause follows the trajectory of other immigrant movements, disappearing in French public space because being an immigrant is itself seen as a problem that disappears once integration occurs. Similarly, being a *sans-papiers* disappears once regularisation occurs. Siméant (1998) argues that the *sans-papiers* movement can only break into public space with a humanitarian demand, usually with a hunger-strike. She claims that the *soutiens*, and not the *sans-papiers* themselves, give the movement a Political significance. However, Cissé (1999) and Diop (1997) argue that the *soutiens* were attracted to the St Bernard Collective because the *sans-papiers* insisted on speaking for themselves in public space. They suggest that the *soutiens* then tried to appropriate the *sans-papiers*' voice and assimilate it into their own Political agendas.

In order to think about the access the *sans-papiers* have to public space, I considered the work of Grillo (1985), on the misrepresentation of immigrants' voices within French political movements, and of Herzfeld (1992), on the social indifference with which nation-state bureaucracies, created by universalising their own cultural idiom, exclude foreigners because foreigners have incompatible particularities. I then gave an account of the relationship between the Co-ordination and the Prefecture and between the *soutiens* and the *sans-papiers*, drawing out the ways in which the *sans-papiers* were ignored and

silenced, and the ways in which they overcame the Prefecture's indifference and upset the *soutiens'* appropriation of their struggle.

In relation to the theoretical works of Žižek (1999) and Agamben (1998), I examined the events of the occupation of the old *Gendarmerie* in Chapters 5 and 6. With Žižek (1999,1989), I used the question "What do they want?" in the context of the *soutiens'* framing of the *sans-papiers* movement. I suggested that the *sans-papiers'* interpretation of the *soutiens'* fantasy of an immigrant Political movement structured the possibilities open to the *sans-papiers*. In relation to Agamben (1998,1999), I considered the way the *sans-papiers* used their 'bare life' as a Political weapon and I suggested that the *sans-papiers'* insistence on 'the list' is a remnant of their Political struggle, a trace left over after the Prefecture had been persuaded to regularise most of the occupants on humanitarian grounds. With an analysis of 'the list', I questioned Siméant's (1998) dismissal of the *sans-papiers* movement as an apolitical anomaly. My account concurs with Siméant's analysis of *sans-papiers* groups, as controlled by French militants, having limited access to public space and succeeding only in ways that can be officially enframed as humanitarian concessions. However, I argued that the internal Politics of the Co-ordination demonstrates that *sans-papiers* and *délégués* can create their own solidarity and, if necessary, oppose the *soutiens*, albeit on rare occasions. The *délégués* generally imposed the *soutiens'* version of 'the struggle' on the *sans-papiers* but that version continually broke down, creating conflicts in which the *sans-papiers* had as much Political agency as the *soutiens*, even though the *soutiens* had all the advantages: personal power within the Co-ordination, experience and cultural competence in meetings and Political manoeuvring, and Political organisations backing them up.

Returning to the concepts introduced in Chapters 1 and 3, it is clear that the different accounts of Balso and Cissé correspond to the difference between interiority (the challenge from within the nation-state), and exteriority (transnational connections). I have shown that the *sans-papiers* in the Co-ordination are concerned with transnational connections and that Jean-Paul's dictum, that the *sans-papiers* are nothing but *sans-papiers*, is an insult to the

sans-papiers themselves. Calling the *sans-papiers* 'bare life' (Agamben 1998) or hailing their movement an act of 'excremental identification' (Žižek 1999) is theoretically interesting but disturbingly offensive when applied to concrete individuals. These terms would also seem to over-dramatise the Political significance of the *sans-papiers* movement, whilst forcing onto the *sans-papiers* a messianic mission to save Left Politics, a mission they do not necessarily want.

However, Agamben's (1999) notion of a grey zone does seem relevant to the *sans-papiers* experience of their own situation. It fits with the bureaucratic limbo in which they find themselves, driving them to Political action and ultimately to the hunger-strike, which does seem to reduce them to 'bare life' at least on the Political stage. The *Circulaire Chevènement*, with its apparently absurd registration of unregularised *sans-papiers*, also highlights the interiority of the *sans-papiers* to the French state. Whilst it seems inaccurate to deny that the *sans-papiers*' have transnational connections, their situation is produced, in some sense, inside the State. Moreover, the *sans-papiers* movement attempts to access the nation-state's Political arena by addressing the French State from within. This can be seen in the leaflet quoted in Chapter 1, which demands "So, what is it – the price – to be free at last?" These words appear to respond to the words used by the colonial official who hoped that:

"careful and severe measures will make them [emancipated slaves who were forced back onto the plantations during the French Revolution] feel the price of Liberty." (Dubois 2000:26)

It would seem that, with French universalism founded on a colonial mission to teach universal ideals (Balibar 1997:391), the liberty preached is forever deferred until the price of it has been felt by the colonised. Of course this is the price of French liberty: that the colonised have to submit to learning it. The liberty of the colonised therefore must be denied until they have felt it in the correct way. Demanding to know the actual price is an attempt to bring this deferral to an end, to dismiss the implicit moral superiority by crassly offering to pay. The blasphemy of demanding the price of freedom highlights the inequality inherent in deferring it.

This challenge to French Republicanism reflects Žižek's (1999) notion of decentring universality from within. However, even if the *sans-papiers* movement addresses the nation-state from within, this does not necessarily mean that it aims to disrupt the foundations of universality. When Žižek (1999) demands "What do they want?", as a way of dismissing the hysterical gesture of the well-meaning public, he seems to assume that by asking the same question about the excluded victims themselves, the answer will be obvious. For Žižek (1999), the obvious answer seems to be that they, the excluded non-part, want to decentre the nation-state by claiming to be the true 'people'. In the *sans-papiers*' case, however, the answer to "What do they want?" was a lot more straightforward – they wanted their papers. Perhaps this is what Žižek (1999) means though – that the demands of the excluded non-part cannot be dismissed as a hysterical gesture precisely because they are straightforward, concrete and reasonable demands. In which case, the challenge to universality arises because these demands come from the excluded non-part, which cannot be acknowledged without undermining universality.

In order to examine whether the *sans-papiers* movement is an acknowledgement of the excluded non-part, I have tried to examine how *sans-papiers*' demands reach public space. I have considered some of the internal Politics of the Co-ordination in relation to the question "What do the *soutiens* want?", as a question posed by the *sans-papiers*. The *sans-papiers* are excluded from the State but the *soutiens* offer them a way in. The *soutiens* compile dossiers and submit them for examination, they conduct negotiations with the Prefecture and organise a recognised form of Political pressure. Given that this is a possible route out of bureaucratic limbo, the *sans-papiers* are forced to ask themselves what the *soutiens* want in order to keep this route open and make it successful. The *soutiens* therefore have a great deal of power over the *sans-papiers* and can usually ignore them with even more impunity than the Prefecture. Hence the *sans-papiers* are obliged to attract their attention by entering the frame of their Political fantasy. In the Co-ordination this fantasy seemed to mirror the assimilation and accommodation of immigrants inherent to French universalism. However, having said that, the *soutiens* preached 'the struggle' and believed in the *rapport de force*, which had

the effect of pushing the assimilationist fantasy beyond the Good of the humanitarian State and into a confusing realm of manipulation, suspicion and conflict. Within this realm, the *soutiens* still had much more power than the *sans-papiers* but the *sans-papiers* could at least fight back, without coming up against a wall of social indifference.

The end result of the Co-ordination's activities may fit with Siméant's (1998) analysis of the *sans-papiers* cause, with hunger-strikes leading to humanitarian concessions. However, 'the list' demonstrates that within the occupation the *sans-papiers* fought a Political struggle to establish themselves as a group. Siméant's analysis is based on research into pre-St Bernard movements, which did not have the same kinds of Political support and could not tap into the movement's own sense of history. Nevertheless, Siméant (1998) claims that after St Bernard the *sans-papiers* movement returned to the margins from which it came. According to my fieldwork, she is largely right. My study does not show a movement capable of redefining EU citizenship but rather one that is split into small Collectives, each gaining a few regularisations intermittently. 'The list' is only a remnant of the *sans-papiers* struggle.

In my account of the occupation, I have focussed on the Co-ordination's attempts to make itself heard in public space – to attract the attention of the Prefecture and the media. I have also focussed on the internal structure of the Co-ordination in order to investigate the degree to which the Co-ordination's 'voice' came from the *sans-papiers* themselves. It might be argued that the Co-ordination and organisations like it create a dialogue between the State and the *sans-papiers*. The Co-ordination was relatively successful at involving immigrants in public-politics and could even be seen as 'integrating' them into French society, albeit through Political activism rather than Government initiatives aimed at combating 'social exclusion' (it is interesting and perhaps significant that the Co-ordination's form of integration appeared to attract more active participation than the Government's).

In terms of Mr Lazarus' diagram of two intersecting circles representing the working class and the *de Gaulliste* state – with the Communist Party ensuring a

dialogue between them – the *sans-papiers* are clearly further removed from the State than the working class in this depiction of pre-crisis ‘classism’. The State maintained that the *sans-papiers* did not exist or at least should not exist; the *Préfet* ‘thanked’ the Co-ordination for bringing anomalous cases of irregular immigrants to his attention. Whilst a register of non-regularised *sans-papiers* was left over by the *Circulaire Chevènement* and *sans-papiers* can receive advice and medical attention, they exist in bureaucratic limbo. They must wait to be granted a ‘normal’ life with the constant threat of deportation hanging over them. The Prefecture controls and defends the borders of the French state in relation to the *sans-papiers*. It does not need to conduct a dialogue with them since they are not recognised citizens.

The Co-ordination attempts to represent the *sans-papiers* in public space but it is the *soutiens* who frame the *sans-papiers*’ voice by forcing the *sans-papiers* to submit themselves to a process of co-optation and assimilation within the *soutiens*’ version of ‘the struggle’. As in Grillo’s study (1985), immigrants fighting to improve their situation in France find themselves in relationships of subordination within the Political organisations that represent their struggle. In theory the *sans-papiers* had their own autonomy, but in practice they were not only dependent on the *soutiens* to represent them at the Prefecture, the very existence of the Co-ordination depended on the *soutiens* – for premises, a meeting space, advice work, negotiated occupations and protection from arrest both on the demo and in everyday life – so the *sans-papiers* had to operationalise their struggle within the terms offered by the *soutiens*. Without the *soutiens*, they had no infrastructure, even though they had the legacy of St Bernard, the Event that had announced the *sans-papiers* movement in French public space. In relation to this event, the *soutiens* attempted to assimilate retrospectively the *sans-papiers* movement, whilst the *sans-papiers* used it to insist on some degree of autonomy within the movement. The result was a working compromise in which the *soutiens* were able to maintain the fantasy of brokering a dialogue between the State and the *sans-papiers*, whilst the *sans-papiers* could borrow a makeshift infrastructure with which to pursue regularisations.

Despite Jean-Paul's Stalinism, the *soutiens'* support of the Co-ordination was similar to the new approach the local Communist Party was taking with immigrant led Associations, which had been invited to participate in local Government without being assimilated into the Party. The need to make such concessions, in order to broaden the support for the Communist controlled town council, shows that the Communist Party was fighting a battle on two fronts: the battle to make its Political presence felt in the State; and the battle to maintain its local mandate. This second battle involved trying to convince the local population that, despite its track record, the Communist Party can represent the interests of immigrants. Unless it succeeds, the Communist Party itself risks disappearing into the no man's land between the State and *banlieue*. Supporting the *sans-papiers* Co-ordination was therefore part of a wider strategy, and their role within this strategy may have given some leverage to the *sans-papiers* within the Co-ordination.

Having a makeshift infrastructure and some symbolic significance, the *sans-papiers* were sometimes able to challenge the *soutiens'* version of the movement. In order to examine the effect of the *sans-papiers'* voice within the movement, I have examined 'the list' and other moments when the *soutiens'* version of 'the struggle' broke down: the attempted first hunger-strike; 'the Moroccan kitchen' incident; Zouhir's 'cousin' staying the night at the occupation; Rosa lacking a mandate for negotiating on behalf of the occupants; and the last day of the occupation. What I found in all these cases was a process in which the results of conflict were assimilated after the event, a process that resembled the way the *Préfet* granted regularisations but erased the Political pressure that had forced him to negotiate. The *soutiens* also bowed to pressure on occasions but carried on afterwards, business as usual. There was, however, a striking difference in the way conflicts were conducted within the Co-ordination. The Prefecture had to be addressed with diplomatic etiquette and the demo was usually conducted within acceptable limits, even if it frequently pushed at those limits. By contrast, inside the Co-ordination insults, threats, emotional blackmail, dramatic walkouts and shouting matches were all part of the game. Rules and etiquette seemed to be treated merely as optional weapons. In other words, conflict was often performed for everyone to see. As irregular

immigrants addressing the Prefecture, the *sans-papiers* were obliged to be deferential. Within the Co-ordination, however, and especially in their conflicts with *soutiens*, the *sans-papiers* had a Political platform on which to fight.

With conflicts inside the Co-ordination, neither the One of the State nor the makeshift harmony of unity within the Co-ordination could be relied on. The only thing the *sans-papiers* could draw on to guide them in these circumstances was the knowledge and gossip transmitted through interpersonal relationships. I have suggested that within the Co-ordination itself, especially during the occupation, there was an intensive mode of engagement (Thoburn 2003:49) that led to a 'surplus of the social' (Laclau & Mouffe 1985), created in relation to the Co-ordination's activities, i.e. the activities the *sans-papiers* were obliged to pursue in order to satisfy the *soutiens*' framing of their struggle. Coupled with the principle of *sans-papiers* autonomy, established by the St Bernard Collective, the *sans-papiers* were occasionally able to turn this 'surplus of the social' into a Political stance, such as their insistence that the *soutiens* accept 'the list'. This success was not in any way a basis for taking over the Co-ordination or re-arranging the power relations within it, but it did leave its trace. The struggle for 'the list' did not correspond to an ethnic or group identity, it was not an automatic or 'natural' representation of the 'surplus of the social', it was an act of subjectification, naming the regularisation of all the occupants as the goal of the occupation.

Both *soutiens* and *délégués* insisted on 'the struggle' as the only way to achieve regularisations but for the *soutiens* this struggle was on behalf of all the *sans-papiers*. For the *sans-papiers*, whilst they were willing to support global regularisation, this ideal was not enough to justify their own personal commitment to 'the struggle'. They asked: why should one individual or group of individuals struggle for 15,000 *sans-papiers*? Salim's model, whereby the Co-ordination struggled with the Prefecture in order to de-block a number of concrete dossiers, made much more sense to the *sans-papiers*. Therefore they insisted on 'the list'. However, 'the list' had one distinct drawback; once people were on the list mobilisation dwindled away. This version of 'the struggle' created a phase shift between old members of the Co-ordination and new

members. The old members had made it onto a list and had a dossier at the Prefecture, whilst the new ones were waiting for the *soutiens* to compile their dossiers and waiting for a new collective *dépôt*.

It was in this context that, in Chapter 6, I suggested that the concept of 'merit' acts as an internal 'faithful procedure', linking regularisation and commitment to 'the struggle'. Jean-Paul sometimes claimed that the *soutiens* represented the Co-ordination more than the *sans-papiers* because the *soutiens* had been active in the Co-ordination for longer and seen groups of *sans-papiers* come and go. For Jean-Paul, the *soutiens* co-ordinated the ongoing struggle. He dismissed pushy *sans-papiers* as *arrivistes*. Nevertheless, Salim's model of 'the struggle' as a series of lists and Nabila's concept of 'merit' show that the *délégués* were attempting to co-ordinate 'the struggle' internally. They managed the phase shift by demanding solidarity between old and new members of the Co-ordination. The concept of 'merit' works by offering an explanation as to why the old *sans-papiers* are on the list and by promising the new *sans-papiers* the chance to be on the next list. Whether this was fair or not – 'the struggle' was changing too fast to make any guarantees – it gave the new members of the Co-ordination a reason to struggle on behalf of the old members. When 'the list' had been drawn up, the dossiers had been handed in and the mobilisation of the occupants had dwindled, the Prefecture's power to continuously defer its response was difficult to resist. The Prefecture could have eventually defeated the occupants if the Co-ordination had not continued to recruit new members and to maintain the Political pressure. It was not possible to use 'the list' to force old members to continue. This would have set the occupants against each other, which would have been shameful, as Mounir put it.

In effect, this 'faithful procedure' seems to make a cut in the process of splitting introduced by the conflict of 'the struggle'. Without conflict and Political struggle, the *sans-papiers* could not challenge the Prefecture or have any autonomy within their own movement, but once the Good has been split, there is no 'natural' limit to further divisions. Within 'the struggle', a *rapport de force* can be used in different ways for different reasons. Amirouche expressed his

frustration about this by pointing to the way the mass mobilisation a year after the occupation had been opportunistically appropriated by Youcef and Jean-Paul, to the exclusion of the *sans-papiers* and the other *délégués*. Amirouche argued that a *rapport de force* should be built and used against the Prefecture. He objected to the concept of a *rapport de force* being interpreted as a general principle of 'the struggle', thereby justifying all opportunism, including manipulation and infighting. However, the call for unity is problematic in a struggle that is already a split in the State and can only achieve results by splitting itself again. Such unity was possible in the Co-ordination but the occupants could only maintain a minimal degree of solidarity during an intensive period of engagement. Part of the problem was finding a cut off point that can be used to achieve concrete gains without setting off an infinite splitting reaction. With the occupation, it was possible for a group of *sans-papiers* to build a *rapport de force* against the Prefecture and to insist on using it in relation to 'the list'. Therefore 'the list' can be heard as a remnant from the grey zone, which allowed one group of *sans-papiers* to survive. In order to be able to do this, however, they had to pass on 'the struggle' to another group, subjectivising themselves in relation to another excluded non-part.

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Appendix 1

Timeline of *sans-papiers* movement, the Co-ordination and the occupation

1996 Occupation of St Bernard

1997 *Cirulaire Chevènement*

1998 Occupation of a church by the Co-ordination and another Collective

1999 Occupation of old public building by the Co-ordination

2000

Dec – My first fieldwork encounter with the Co-ordination, public debate

2001

Jan – Co-ordination's failed attempt to re-occupy St Bernard

Feb – I started going on demos, to meetings etc.

June 6 – Start of the occupation of the old *Gendarmerie*

July 26, Aug 3, Aug 13 – Dossiers handed in + 'the list'

September 11 – First results, start of hunger-strike

October 20 – Adel & Mounir end hunger strike after 40 days,
Nabila & Saul get married

November 1 – Youcef ends hunger strike after 52 days

Nov 19 to Dec 16 – Ramadan

December 17 – End of occupation

2002

March & April Presidential elections, march from Marseilles to Paris

June – New dossiers handed in

August – Occupation of St Marc's

November – Co-ordination splits in two

Appendix 2 – Conference paper for the MST¹

The group

When reading the interviews, we noticed that the word ‘class’ is often attached to the word ‘group’. I am therefore going to speak about the relationship between the class and the group. We will see, on the one hand, descriptions of an institutional space, without any sign of life. And then we will see how the teacher constructs a subjectivity for the class, as a group. In effect, the class has two dimensions: objective and subjective. The objective dimension is made up of the room, the teacher, the list of pupils and the teaching programme. The subjective dimension is structured within the face to face encounter between the teacher and her/his pupils. To begin with, therefore, I will explore the objective and subjective dimensions of the class, then I will tackle the thinking of the teachers in relation to the subjectivity of the pupils, between them, and finally I will consider how the teachers juggle with the individual and the group in their search for a positive subjectivity between teacher and pupils.

The teachers speak of a class in either objective or subjective terms, or even both at the same time. On the objective side, there are some very hard descriptions: “It’s a list that you get given” (Interview 20, Question 10). It is as if the teachers were trying to put some distance between the class according to the institution and the their own practice with each group of pupils:

“The word class there, well er me I stick to a **group** of pupils **placed in front of me**, that seems more neutral.” (Int 64, Q10)

For another, the class is:

“A **group** of pupils who have a **task X** to do and a teacher who has a well defined role.” (Int 88, Q10)

So, there we have the “task X”, completely objective, but also the role of the teacher, who must swing between a subjective relationship with the group and

¹ Although I was not entirely consistent because I was struggling with the methodology, words in bold are the key words under investigation and related clusters of words. Phrases underlined indicate the action, or sometimes emphatic non-action, of the speaker’s intellectuality.

the objectivity of the task. The negotiation of this equilibrium goes beyond pedagogy. The class:

“In general, it’s a **group** that must learn to live **together** (this is **something extra** that is required of us).” (Int 56, Q10)

And even if the administration knows of this work, it remains, all the same, outside of institutional recognition:

“The teachers who succeed are linked, assigned systematically, or nearly, to classes that are in difficulty and that wears people down... I get paid the same. I will not get promoted, I wouldn’t get thanked.” (Int 11, Q21)

For there is something in the face to face relationship of the class that is unforeseeable and risky, requiring the personal engagement of the teacher.

The class:

“That can be a ‘classe d’âge’ [including older children repeating the year?], a **group** of pupils, a collection of adolescents in front of me, that can be... in any case, it’s never the same thing, in any case, there isn’t one that resembles another.” (Int 64, Q10)

The work on the group seems to be, therefore, a subjectivisation of the class by the teacher. The teacher must establish the class in a singular and personal way. He cannot just automatically start up a virtual model of the potential class, according to official criteria. On the contrary, the way of being of the institution itself requires the teacher to get by in a personal way.

Faced with this requirement, most of the teachers speak of a group, often they actively prescribe the group: “it becomes a little **group**” (Int 20, Q10); “you have to try to interest and cope with [the pupils] **collectively**” (Int 55, Q10); “the **collective** must come first” (Int 63 Q10); “it’s a **group** that must learn to live together” (Int 56, Q10); “you have to end up making a **group** out of it and not a sum of **individualities**” (Int 42, Q10). Nevertheless, the group-class is never certain and, if the teacher succeeds at making a group out of it, this success is singular and unrepeatable.

If sometimes the teachers call for a quasi-holistic group – “it’s an all” (Int 53, Q11), “a little community” (Int 33, Q13), “like a little family” (Int 53, Q11), “a micro-society” (Int 53, Q10) – sometimes they observe something less solid – “it’s a life-space [lieu de vie]” (Ent 53, Q10), “a spirit” (Int 63, Q5), “a soul, an entity” (Int 9, Q17) and “there are classes with whom the mayonnaise never takes” (Int 39, Q10). The teachers seem to search for the group’s moment of possibility in the face to face relationship rather than state it as a *fait accompli*. For one teacher: “It’s like a relationship with a human being, except that it’s a **group**...” (Int 20, Q10), which underlines the search for a subjective relationship with the class by way of working on the group.

In order to explain the need for this working on the group, it is necessary now to consider the subjectivity of the pupils within the face to face relationship with the teacher. According to one of the teachers, the class for the pupils:

“is a lived-in place [lieu de vie] before anything else... you cannot take away this notion of a lived-in place because the exchanges between pupils are constant during class time.” (Int 57, Q13)

According to the teacher with “a **group** of pupils **placed** in front of me”, “it’s... the ambience of camaraderie that counts” for the pupils, and the teacher her/himself prefers “solidarity in a bad sense... to when they are constantly having a go at each other” (Int 64, Q19). Difficult pupils are those that: “are not prepared to learn something or indeed to function in a group” (Int 64, Q22).

The same thing applies for another teacher, for whom there is sometimes a solidarity against the teacher, above all when they refuse “to denounce a classmate” (Int 88, Q19), but the worst thing is when the pupils spend “their time arguing, pestering their classmates and wrecking the session” (Int 88, Q19).

The group dynamic can exist for or against the teachers:

“You can, all the same, have the class **group-effect** as well. You have a **group** who can either be with you when it’s going well, or against you... It can also be a **mob**... you say to yourself that you are alone against everyone [seul contre tous], it can also be that, the perverse effect of the class. (Int 33, Q10)

For another teacher, there are pupils “who use the phenomenon of the **group**, the **mob**, the **crowd** to... distract the class a bit” (Int 53, Q17).

Of course, the pupils are not declaring themselves to be a group but it is the teacher who is trying to establish a positive subjective relationship with the class, by catching hold of the group phenomenon. Sometimes it does not work, and yet without the group it is worse and the possibility of negotiating a subjective relationship disappears altogether. Hence, the subjectivity between pupils forces the teacher to go via the group in her/his search for a way of living with the class.

However, the teachers also value relationships with individuals in the class, which must create almost contradictory demands: to consider the needs of the individual and to find a relationship with the group. On this question, it is necessary to look at the way the teachers articulate the group with the individuals. The subjectivity of the class becomes complex with the teacher’s personality, the subjectivity of the group and the pupils as individuals. Not all the teachers speak of or act in relation to the group and those that do do not do it in the same way. The differences are played out above all at the level of individuals and the links between them. Looking at the following two quotes:

“It’s a **group of individualities**. You have to reach the point where you are taking everyone into account.” (Int 33, Q10)

“It’s a **group of individuals** that you have to try to interest and deal with collectively.” (Int 55, Q10)

A “group of individualities” is not the same here as a “group of individuals”. For one, everyone has to be taken into account, for the other the class has to be managed collectively.

According to the teacher with her/his “group of individualities”:

“A class, it’s 25 individualities to which you have to give something different and you have to manage to deal with an hour of class.” (Int 33, Q10)

It is a group that is at stake, but the teacher adds nothing to the a priori objectivity of the institutional space. For the pupils the class is “a **group** first

and foremost" (Q13), but for her/him "it's things that you see" (Q18). The group is linked to a prescription to take the 25 individualities into account and not to create the group. This is in contrast with another teacher who says:

"We have a tendency not to speak of a class, we speak of a **group**, for we emphasise the **links** they have **between them**... They are **united** at the same time as being very **different** from each other." (Int 31, Q10)

Two teachers seem to create syntheses of the prescription to create a group and the need to care for the individual. According to one, the class:

"It's a **group** of pupils who must become well-knit... It's an alchemical expertise, you have to individualise each element whilst making the **group advance**..." (Int 11, Q10)

For the other the class:

"It's a **group** of apprenticeship to life in society. So it's a **group** where the **collective** must come first, without suffocating the **individual** and where clear and precise rules are indispensable." (Int 63, Q10)

Here is a very complex notion of the group-class: it is a struggle on the one hand against asocial groupings (Q11 the gang, the fraternity, the belonging to a certain neighbourhood), on the other hand against narcissistic atomism (Q19 & Q26). There must be individuals who express themselves but know how "to put the **collective** first", and not "an aggregate of **individualities**" or "a **collection** of clans" (13).

"The role of the teacher, it's to make sure that, at least during the hour of class time, these relationships [of groups, of clans] are not eliminated, but tend towards a single goal: following the course. Working together." (Q19)

And the teacher greets each pupil individually at the beginning of the class, insisting that their membership of the group 'class' is as an individual (Q15).

For these two teachers, the group and the individuals advance together but it is not simply a matter of taking care of each individual who traverses the institutional space. There is rather a process of individualisation, the pupils must be 'individualised'.

To conclude, the group is extra work for the teachers. The prescription to make a group attempts to reproduce the common ground of the class, whilst this is taken for granted by the institutional space. We have noticed a gap, with the teachers, between very objective descriptions of the class and the personal work of each teacher, in relation to each class, through which the teachers search for a subjectivity of the group. Without a positive dynamic of the group, the course and the individual are eclipsed by the inexhaustible life of the class. The teachers try to integrate the subjectivity of the group and the care of the individual and that becomes a process of individualisation of the pupils in the group. Nevertheless, "there are things that you cannot control" (Int 63, Q18) and the subjectivity of the group remains unforeseeable.

Appendix 3 – The Analytical Discourse

I think the debate between Badiou and Žižek comes down to which of them is more successful at pulling Lacan's work into the Political realm. Isn't there something paradoxical about the way in which Badiou constructs a theory of fidelity and yet claims to go beyond Lacan, whereas Žižek rejects this idea of fidelity but actually sticks as faithfully as possible to Lacan? Of course, Lacan himself, in his 'return to Freud' remains faithful to the Freudian Event and refuses to claim to go beyond Freud, even though he goes about psychoanalytical theory in a totally different way. It would seem that the Analytical Discourse is not open to polemical iconoclasm in the same way as the University Discourse; for Lacan, the only way of continuing psychoanalysis is by going back to Freud, not by fixing Freud's position within an academic debate and then challenging it.

On the face of it, Žižek seems more faithful to Lacan than Badiou. However, the one thing Lacan certainly does do is proclaim a Political mission for psychoanalysis. Žižek is good at explaining Lacan in a way that risks fixing Lacan within the University Discourse, and he gives Lacan's work a Political meaning as if this is neither a challenge to Lacan nor a 'going beyond' him. In this sense, Žižek's faith in Lacan seems to be a denial of his own event (secretly he claims to have successfully Politicised psychoanalysis, which is no mean feat considering the fate of the Althusserian project), unlike Lacan's faith in Freud, with which Lacan makes strong personal claims, such as being to Freud what Lenin was to Marx (Lacan 1975a:89).

Žižek criticises Badiou for reverting to the Master's Discourse, as the one who has the power to name the Event (Žižek 1999:164) in which the rest of us have to have faith. Žižek explains that the University Discourse, by already knowing every event as an object of knowledge, explains away the need to recognise the Event. He points out that Lacan takes the side of the Hysterical Discourse, which denies the right of the Master to name the Event, by responding with a never-satisfied "No that is not it at all". The Analytical Discourse avoids the hysterical trap of "being caught in the vicious cycle of permanent failure" (Žižek

1999:165) by affirming the gap between the Event and its symbolisation as positive and productive:

“it asserts the Real of the Event as the ‘generator’, the generating core to be encircled repeatedly by the subject’s productivity.” (Žižek 1999:165)

Badiou does seem to construct a position from which the Master can successfully name a new order of Being, rather than delving into the impossible revolutionary moment that itself suspends the existing order. However, Badiou’s ‘procedure of fidelity’, as we have seen, is much more technically complex than Žižek acknowledges. I would say that Badiou creates the intellectual equivalent of goal-hanging. His theoretical approach suggests a way of hanging around waiting for an Event, whilst perfecting a way of detecting and converting the Event, and therefore appearing to be its Master. Nevertheless, his approach does not simply elevate the figure of the Master, as arbitrarily having the power to name the Event, except by the ruse of being ready to name whatever emerges (Žižek 1999:164). Žižek is no doubt right about the importance of the Analytical Discourse to Lacan but, by merely re-asserting it in the face of Badiou’s apparent abandonment of it, Žižek’s position begs the question of how the Analytical Discourse can operate either in the University or in Politics or in both.

Žižek argues that:

“Lacan’s entire edifice hinges on the fact that a fourth *discursive* position is possible, which is not that of a Master, that of the Hysteric or that of the University.” (Žižek 1999:165)

However, he seems to shoot himself in the foot by referring to ‘Lacan’s edifice’ here, since this ‘fourth position’ is precisely about not making a Temple, not constructing a belief system or a fixed form of knowledge. Lacan’s work is always semi-opaque to the reader, not because of obscurantism, but because it is half-way between writing and speech, as he announces at the beginning of ‘Agency of the letter in the unconscious’. He continues:

“In effect, writing is distinguished by a prevalence of *text*, in the sense that we are going to take this factor of discourse to mean here – which is something that permits here this tightening up that to my taste shouldn’t leave the reader any way out other than their way in, which I prefer to be difficult. This will not therefore be here a piece of writing in my sense.” (my translation Lacan 1966:249)

Lacan adds that he has refrained from giving such a text before now – apart from one which he says is not particularly outstanding, without naming it – because he nourishes his seminars by always bringing along something new and exclusive (Lacan 1966:249).

It may be a little naive to take Lacan's unreadability at face value here, by insisting that Lacan has no theoretical edifice, since he certainly does repeat and develop themes that have coherence, and which Žižek is adept at drawing out. However, as Mitchell suggests, Lacan's discourse was staged as a two-pronged polemic that he directed at his fellow psychoanalysts. Firstly, he speaks to them in relation to his own history of "repeated institutional conflict and ceaseless opposition to established views" (Mitchell 1982:3). Hence, he is difficult to follow without knowing the institutional context of psychoanalysis. On top of this, his mode of attacking other analysts is usually based on "indirect insult or implication" (Mitchell 1982:3) rather than referenced critique. Secondly, Mitchell argues that Lacan felt Freud made too much effort to be easily understood, hence:

"The preposterous difficulty of Lacan's style is a challenge to easy comprehension, to the popularisation and secularisation of psychoanalysis as it occurred most notably in North America. Psychoanalysis should aim to show us that we do not know those things we think we do; it therefore cannot assault our popular conceptions by using the very idiom it is intended to confront; a challenge to ideology cannot rest on a linguistic appeal to that same ideology." (Mitchell 1982:4)

According to Mitchell (1982:4), Lacan attacks humanistic ideology by challenging the notion of an integrated human subject, either as *a priori* or as a valid goal for psychoanalysis. Freud claims that the discovery of the unconscious, which de-centres the human subject, is as earth-shattering to man's view of himself as was Copernicus' heliocentrism, which de-centred the earth astronomically (Lacan 1966:275). Mitchell suggests that Lacan spoke in a way that reflected this de-centring of the self:

"In the sentence structure of most of his public addresses and of his written style the grammatical subject is either absent or shifting or, at most, only passively constructed. At this level, the difficulty of Lacan's style could be said to mirror his theory." (Mitchell 1982:4)

One of the problems with Žižek's work, which Butler picks up on, is that Žižek takes Lacan out of the psychoanalytical realm without really explaining the relationship between this realm and the social realm; Žižek vividly illustrates Lacanian theory with examples from Politics and popular culture but never bothers to explain what Lacanian theory is doing there (Butler, Laclau & Žižek 2000:157). Butler misrepresents Lacan's work as a 'pure theory' of psychic reality (Butler, Laclau & Žižek 2000:157:156), thereby denying the Analytical Discourse altogether, but this denial is perfectly legitimate since the Analytical Discourse depends on a ruse, on the mistaken belief of the analysand in the analyst: the belief that the analyst knows something (*'le sujet supposé savoir'*), which Butler is simply not obliged to take part in.

The Analytical Discourse, in order to analyse the Hysterical Discourse, is always caught up in the practice of negotiating the transference, in which the Master's Discourse of claiming to really know something is never enough. Žižek's failure to address the issue of what happens to the Analytical Discourse outside of psychoanalysis does seem to leave his version of Lacanian theory open to Butler's attack. If we do not believe, via Žižek, that Lacan has a special kind of access to the Truth, what is the basis of Žižek's intervention? Badiou's construction of a 'faithful procedure' from an empty and unsupported ontological position, on the other hand, offers an interpreting intervention to the subject, as the inhabitant of a specific situation, and does attempt to reconstruct 'the two' of the Analytical Discourse independently of the psychoanalytical situation.

Unless it is possible to conjure up the effect of the Analytical Discourse outside the analytical situation, Lacan can simply be ignored. Anyone reading Lacan's work will notice differences between his delivery and the University Discourse. Lacan speaks to his live audience directly sometimes, leaving the reader feeling one step removed from the audience, as if listening to one half of a telephone conversation. Another analogy for Lacan's sessions would be listening to a recording of live jazz improvisation and trying to imagine what it was like to be in that jazz club, at that moment in history. In one seminar, Lacan expresses discomfort at having been regarded as a phenomenon in Nice but, he argues that, to refuse to be this phenomenon when he went to Nice would have been

like enacting the form of negation that constitutes the ego (*Verneinung*).

Nevertheless, he states that 'the Lacanian phenomenon' is the result of:

“having effects on a public that has only listened from very far away, by repercussion, to what I have articulated here.” (Lacan 1974b:92)

And he comforts himself by arguing that this phenomenon is not unique, as it is particular and not universal (Lacan 1974b:93). After berating his followers for the fact that the Lacanian phenomenon is nevertheless unique, up till now, at the level of the analyst, he argues:

“However, it is indispensable that the analyst is two, the analyst who has effects, and the analyst who theorises these effects.” (Lacan 1974b:93)

Hence, despite the difficulties of pinning down the Analytical Discourse, Badiou's 'faithful procedure' does attempt to reconstruct 'the two' of the interpreting intervention, which could be relevant to the role played by the ethnographic fieldworker.

Of course, it would be too simplistic to assume that the analyst has effects as part of his therapeutic practice and then makes his theoretical contribution separately. Therefore, any comparison between anthropology and psychoanalysis would founder on the problem of the discontinuity between the fieldwork and the writing up positions, which Fabian (1983) discusses in *Time and the Other*. According to Lacan – on the contrary to what gets transmitted – there is no impasse between his position as analyst and what he does 'here' (in his seminar) (Lacan 1975a:9). What he says functions as a kind of performance of him being analysed for the benefit of his listeners who, like analysands, have to pay for their own analysis until what they have seems sufficient to them and they are ready to break off the analysis (Lacan 1975a:9), i.e. stop coming to Lacan's seminars. Hence, for Lacan, 'the two' of the Analytical Discourse are/is simultaneous, as the basis of intervening interpretations in his seminars and written work as well as in the analytical situation. It is not possible to draw a parallel between breaking off the analysis and ending fieldwork in order to write. It is only insofar as the ethnographer is still in the field that Analytical theorising is of use. As with Lazarus' (2001) 'rationality of the possible', the thinking in the Analytical Discourse is for deploying rather than producing knowledge.

Badiou's version of Political 'subjectivisation', as the accession of 'the two', goes much further than Žižek towards creating a Political position comparable to the Analytical Discourse. And even if, as Žižek argues, Badiou's 'generics' of Truth categorise the unnameable surplus in a way that blocks intervention in it as a 'fundamental fantasy', Badiou seems to be doing this deliberately, as part of his self-inflicted ontology, in the hope that "unity cops it" (Lacan 1975a:98).

Appendix 4

The *Mairie* and the Prefecture – French political institutions and their relationship to the Co-ordination

1. The *Mairie*

In an urban context, the *Mairie* is the French equivalent of a Town Council. The *Mairie* runs local services like allocating social housing, bin collection, upkeep of primary schools (however, all teachers are national employees). There are 32,000 *Mairies* in France with populations ranging from 7 inhabitants to 2 million for Paris. This large number of *Mairies* is made up largely of small villages unlike the urban *Mairie* in which my fieldwork took place. Each town or village – the municipality / commune – elects representatives to the *Mairie* through local elections. Each political party or coalition of political parties (such as the Socialists, the Communists and the Greens who were the Left coalition government 1996-2001) presents a list of candidates to the electorate. The number of the candidates on each list who win seats at the *Mairie* corresponds to the percentage of votes that are cast for that list in the second round of voting (those lists gaining the votes of less than 10% of the registered voters are eliminated in the first round). The leader of the winning list becomes Mayor. Many Mayors also stand as candidates in the national elections, i.e. if elected they become representatives in the National Assembly, the British equivalent of MPs. Hence they are known as the *Député-Maire* (*député* meaning representative not assistant) because of their dual role as leader of the local council and local representative in the National Assembly.

When there is a coalition of political parties an internal agreement is made between the parties to share out the places on the list and therefore the number of seats each coalition partner will gain in relation to the others. Hence, a Communist stronghold like the one in my fieldwork will present a Left coalition list, but one that is dominated by Communists and led by a Communist Mayor. In other communes, the same coalition may win with a Socialist or Green Mayor.

Communist militants were active in the *sans-papiers* movement, as well as, but not necessarily in co-operation with, other Left and far Left groups. Although at the national level the Communist Party was part of the Government because it was a partner in the Left coalition, on the issue of the *sans-papiers* some Communists opposed the Socialist led government by continuing to demand the regularisation of the *sans-papiers* who had been rejected by the *Circulaire Chevènement* in 1997. At the local level, this meant that the *Mairie* supported the *sans-papiers* movement in its campaign against the Prefecture, which is part of the central state.

2. The Prefecture

There is no British equivalent to the Prefecture. It is the body that administrates each *Département* on behalf of central Government. There are 96 *Départements* in France and these are sub-divided into communes or municipalities each with their own *Mairie*. The commune in this study has a population of about 100,000 and is one of the larger communes in a *Département* of about 1.5 million. There are less than 50 communes in the *Département*.

The Prefect or *Préfet* is a *fonctionnaire* (civil servant) but also a political appointee who heads the Prefecture and acts as a local Governor. Around 90 *Départements* were created straight after the 1789 revolution to reduce the political weight of some regions and reinforce centralism. The design was based on a maximum distance to the Prefecture of a days travel. The role of *Préfet* was created by Napoleon as a way of ruling provincial France. Before 'decentralisation' in 1982-1983, the *Préfet* had direct authority over all local Government budgets and was the executive for the *Département*. After 'decentralisation' *Mairies* and *Conseil Générales* (elected bodies at the level of the *Département*) became full executive bodies with the power to set budgets. The *Préfet* was and is the representative of the Government, directly accountable to the Prime Minister, but the *Préfet* is no longer directly superior to locally elected bodies. He/she can only check the legality of their decisions after the fact (Feltin 2001:1).

The role of the *Préfet* has therefore changed considerably. The *Préfet* is still responsible for administrating immigration, issuing identity cards, registering Associations, organising elections and maintaining public order but has also become a figure of arbitration, co-ordination and Governmental synthesis ('joined up Government' as Blair would put it). He/she is 'a local Prime Minister' according to Feltin (2001:2). According to one *Préfet*:

« *Je représente l'Etat, j'applique la politique du gouvernement, j'anime les services, je reçois les élus, je règle les problèmes de la population, je tranche. Bref, je suis préfet.* » (Feltin 2001:1)¹

Hence, the *Préfet* remains an important figure in French politics. He/she is the local personification of the State. He/she receives dossiers on a wide variety of subjects from a wide variety of local actors, and makes decisions on how to apply Government policy to these dossiers without necessarily passing the responsibility upwards to the relevant Government minister.

The Prefecture operates as a local branch of each Government ministry including the Home Office. Hence, it is to part of the Prefecture (the *Bureau des Etrangers*) that immigrants apply for residence status. For the most part, this operates as a bureaucratic administrative system responding to individual applications but, via the *Préfet*, the process can also be influenced by political pressure. A *Préfet* interprets and applies national immigration laws in each *Département*. He/she has extensive discretionary powers, which allow him/her to grant regularisation on humanitarian grounds to applicants who do not entirely fulfil official criteria.

The *Préfet* holds a position which is both impartial and political. Top politicians are consulted about the appointment of *Préfets* and *Préfets* are often associated with a political label or leaning. However, the *Préfet* is meant to implement Government policy with impartiality. He/she is supposed to be neutral and to act as the guarantor that Government is conducted according to the general public's interest (Feltin 2001:3), i.e. he/she reaffirms that the State's

¹ "I represent the State, I implement Government policy, I am head of services, I meet with elected representatives, I sort out problems experienced by the population, I make decisions. In short, I am the *Préfet*." (My translation)

power is based on the sovereignty of the people. The *Préfet* also controls the National Police and is responsible for maintaining public order. In practice therefore, the *Préfet* has to balance political expediency with the rule of law. He/she is expected to listen to the views expressed by local people and local politicians, but to make decisions that are in line with Government policy, and thereby keep everybody happy or at least avoid too much public protest or other disturbances. As a result, the *Préfet* has a very sensitive, even contradictory role, squaring the circle between State control and popular sovereignty. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the *Préfet's* job is always on the line. If things get out of control, the Government can sack the *Préfet* at a weekly cabinet meeting.² The *Préfet* is an obvious focus for spontaneous protest and organised political pressure.

3. Relations with the Co-ordination

The Co-ordination in my fieldwork represented the interests of *sans-papiers* in one *banlieue Département*. It had a particularly strong relationship with the *Mairie* in the commune where I lived. The *Mairie* provided premises for the *sans-papiers'* HQ. The Communist *Député-Maire* was a supporter of the *sans-papiers* movement and most of the Co-ordination's *soutiens* were from the Communist Party. Although the *Conseil Générale* (elected body for the *Département*) owned the building, it was the *Mairie* that brokered the 'negotiated occupation' discussed in Chapter 5, i.e. the *Mairie* was able to promise the Co-ordination's *soutiens* that the occupation would not be evicted by the police.

The Co-ordination usually addressed its campaign to the *Préfet* because the *Préfet* is the head of the Prefecture, which processes immigrants' claims for residence status. As individuals, the *sans-papiers* were either waiting to hand in a dossier to the Prefecture, waiting for a decision from the Prefecture or appealing a decision already made by the Prefecture. By campaigning for a meeting with the *Préfet* and insisting on handing in the dossiers collectively, the

² Even if everything goes well, *Préfets* only stay in one *Département* for two years and nine months (Feltin 2001:3).

Co-ordination forced the *Préfet* to become involved in what would otherwise have been a purely bureaucratic set of decisions. The *Mairie* played an important part in helping the Co-ordination build a political platform from which to demand the *Préfet's* attention. Also, elected representatives from the *Mairies* and the *Conseil Générale* were sometimes directly involved in negotiations between the *Préfet* and the Co-ordination. As elected representatives, they had some leverage – a mandate for representing the interests of local people – and they could argue that the *sans-papiers* issue had not been properly resolved, especially in our *Département*. The degree of overt support offered by the elected representatives when the Co-ordination was dealing with the Prefecture was, however, inconsistent. It was only when success seemed to be in sight and the *Préfet* had actually granted the Co-ordination an audience that the politicians wanted be involved.

The *Préfet* seemed to do his best to ignore the Co-ordination but he could only afford to do this when the media were also ignoring the *sans-papiers* and when there was no direct threat to public order. When the Co-ordination could no longer be ignored, the *Préfet* could use his discretionary powers to regularise some of the militants but he had to be careful about the repercussions. It was not in the *Préfet's* interests to encourage people to join the Co-ordination and to become activists as a way of getting their papers. Also, his decisions could affect the way dossiers were dealt with generally in the *Département*, which is what the *soutiens* and the elected representatives wanted. If the *Préfet* made any general concessions, these could have implications for Government policy.

From the Government's perspective, the *Préfet* is a useful intermediary. Although he/she represents administrative neutrality, the post allows the Government to tweak policy locally: either the *Préfet* him/herself can implement policy in a different way or the *Préfet* can be replaced. The Government can appoint a harsh or a more amenable *Préfet* without actually changing Government policy. When things go wrong and the *sans-papiers* start attracting attention, the Government can change the *Préfet*, making it look like an administrative problem that could be handled better rather than a failure in their policies.

**TEXT BOUND
INTO
THE SPINE**